



## **Australian Statistics on Domestic Violence** \*

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### **Introduction**

The first national data on incidence and prevalence of domestic violence using a representative sample of 6300 Australian women was provided by the *Women's Safety Australia* study (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 1996). Prior to this, data was only available from self-selected samples (e.g. phone surveys or service usage).

The ABS study measured the incidence of physical and sexual violence against women (18 years and over) during the 12 months prior to the survey and over their lifetime (since the age of 15). For the purposes of this survey, violence was defined as any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault (ABS 1996, p. 2). Such incidents were defined as actions considered to be offences under criminal statutes in each state or territory. Accordingly the data does not reflect the entire picture of women's experiences of domestic and family violence as it does not record other forms of abuse (emotional, social, financial etc.) that occur in tandem with acts of violence. Key results from the study indicate:

- 23% of women who had ever been married or in a de-facto relationship, experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship (ABS 1996, p. 50).

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- 42% of women who had been in a previous relationship reported violence by a previous partner (ABS 1996, p. 51).
- Half of women experiencing violence by their current partner experienced more than one incident of violence (ABS 1996, p. 54). Injuries sustained in the last incident were mainly bruises, cuts, and scratches, but also included stab or gun shot wounds, and other injuries (ABS 1996, p. 55).
- 12% of women who reported violence by their current partner at some stage during the relationship, said they were currently living in fear (ABS 1996, p. 51).
- Women who experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner were significantly more likely to experience emotional abuse (manipulation, isolation or intimidation) than those who had not experienced violence (ABS 1996, p. 51).
- 35% of women who experienced violence from their partner during periods of separation (ABS 1996, p. 57).
- Younger women were more at risk than older women, with 7.3% of women aged 18-24 years having experienced one or more incidents of violence from a current partner in the previous 12 month period as compared to 1.2% of women aged 55 and over (ABS 1996, p. 50).

## **Why do we need statistics?**

Current and accurate data concerning domestic violence is required to ensure that:

- Governments are informed about the seriousness of domestic violence and the need for appropriate funding levels to services.
- Policy makers ensure that provisions are made for victims of domestic violence and guidelines are set out for service providers to respond in a sympathetic and informed manner.

- Services understand how those affected by domestic violence will access services and which services they are more likely to go to for supportive interventions.
- Programs are developed to respond to areas of highest need.

## **Sources of data on domestic violence**

- Population surveys
- National and state crime surveys
- Data Collection Projects
- Police records: callouts to incidents of domestic violence
- Courts data: applications for protection orders  
final orders granted by the court  
breaches of protection orders  
criminal charges (assault, homicide)  
conviction rates
- Emergency accommodation: Numbers of women and children accessing refuges and numbers turned away
- Child protection services data: Number of matters where domestic violence is an identified issue
- Health data: Hospital admissions  
Presentations to Emergency Departments  
Community health services  
Routine screening

## **How accurate are statistics in representing the true incidence of domestic violence?**

Statistics can, at best, be an indication of minimum levels of domestic violence for a number of reasons.

### ***Barriers to disclosure***

Women experiencing domestic violence are more likely to deal with the issues themselves or talk to family and friends rather than seek outside support due to barriers such as fear, isolation, lack of support and shame. This is supported by findings in the report, *Against the Odds: How women survive domestic violence* (Keys Young 1998), which found that:

- Less than 20% of women interviewed had had contact with domestic violence crisis services while they were in the abusive relationship.
- About 25% of women had contact with the police while they were in the abusive relationship.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Women's Safety Australia* survey found similar results:

- Only 4.5% of women who were physically assaulted contacted a crisis organisation.
- 19% of women who were physically assaulted in the previous 12-month period contacted the police.
- 42% gave the main reason for not contacting police after the last incident that they wished to deal with it themselves.
- 58% of women physically assaulted in the previous 12-month period discussed their experience with a friend or neighbour.

### ***How domestic violence is recorded***

Whether abuse is actually recorded as domestic violence will depend on how domestic violence is defined. For example, if domestic violence is largely

recorded in terms of physical abuse, many women who experience sexual abuse or abuse of a psychological nature will remain undetected.

Criticism has also been levelled at research methodologies that narrowly categorise domestic violence. For example, studies using one of the most commonly used research tools, the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus & Gelles 1986), have been criticised for a number of reasons. Bagshaw and Chung (2000) argue that the CTS:

- gives no consideration to the meaning or intent of acts of violence;
- makes no distinction between attack and defence;
- does not include many violent acts associated with domestic violence, such as burning, suffocating, squeezing, spanking, scratching, sexual assault and many forms of psychological, social and economic abuse.

Researchers and policy analysts have recognised the need for a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the collection of data concerning family violence. Currently, a number of ongoing data collection projects have been initiated to ensure a more accurate knowledge base about this violence within the Australian community (e.g. Northern Territory Data Collection Project, Victorian Family Violence Database, and NSW Child Death Review Team).

## **What other statistics have been recorded?**

### ***Domestic homicide***

The first detailed study examining intimate partner homicides within the Australian context was undertaken by Alison Wallace in 1986. She found that nearly one quarter of all homicides in NSW occurred between spouses. The Australian Institute of Criminology study analysing homicides in Australia between 1989 and 1999 found that:

- 20.8% of all homicides involve intimate partners. This represents approximately 76 homicide incidents within Australia each year.

- Over three-quarters (76.9%) of these intimate partner homicides involved a male offender and a female victim.
  - Of these homicides, 65.8% occurred between current spouses or de-facto partners, whilst 22.6% occurred between separated/divorced spouses or de facto partners.
  - 10% occurred between current or former boy/girlfriends, and
  - 2% occurred within same sex relationships (Mouzos 2000, p. 115).

In almost half of spousal homicides, there is a clear history of preceding violence (Morgan 2002, p. 26).

Differences occur with respect to domestic homicides occurring within particular communities. For example:

- Indigenous women are far more likely to be killed by their partner than non-Indigenous women. Just under half of all Indigenous homicides occur as a result of a domestic altercation (Mouzos 2001, p. 5). See section on Indigenous women for further information.
- Filipino women living in Australia are almost six times over-represented as victims of homicide, compared to other women (Cunneen & Stubbs 2002, p. 160).

### ***Children and Young People exposed to domestic violence***

Children are exposed to domestic violence by witnessing violence and abuse, intervening to protect their mother, being present in a household filled with violence and terrorising behaviours as well as being directly abused themselves.

Children are often present when there is violence and abuse being perpetrated against their mother. The *Women's Safety Australia* (1996) survey found that:

- 38.3% of women experiencing violence from a current partner said that children had witnessed the violence.

- 45.8% of women who experienced violence by a previous partner said that children in their care had witnessed the violence.

Police data collected by the Victorian Family Violence Database reported that just over 45% of family violence incidents (1999-2000 & 2000-2001) had one or more children present (VCCAV 2002, p.12). Approximately 55% of those seeking assistance from Victorian SAAP Services (1999-2000) because of domestic violence had one or more children accompanying them (VCCAV 2002, p. 12).

It has been suggested that the rate of children's exposure to domestic violence is higher than the figures above, as research with children and young people indicates that they have a higher level of awareness of the violence than their mothers report. Children do not have to directly witness or be involved in violent episodes in order to be affected.

More recent research published by National Crime Prevention, *Young Australians and Domestic Violence* (2001), found that up to one-quarter of young people (aged 12-20 years old) in Australia have witnessed an incident of physical domestic violence against their mother or stepmother. Witnessing male to female parental violence ranged from 14 per cent for those living with both biological parents to 41 per cent for those living with their mother and her partner.

Children also experience domestic violence when intervening to protect their mother. One third of children in a Western Australian study conducted by Blanchard, Molloy and Brown (1992), were hit by their father while trying to defend their mother or stop the violence.

### ***Coexistence of domestic violence and child abuse***

In addition to exposure to domestic violence, it is estimated that in 30% to 60% of families where domestic violence is a factor, child abuse is also occurring (Edleson 1999). Child protection agencies acknowledge that domestic violence is not always identified as a presenting problem but, once intervention and or investigation is undertaken, it is commonly identified as an

issue. In NSW, the Child Death Review Team (2001) found that, in 18 out of the 19 cases reviewed where the death occurred as a result of physical abuse and neglect, there was a background of domestic violence (2000-2001).

The Northern Territory Data Collection Project (commenced in 1994) compiles data on incidents of domestic violence with the cooperation of 31 organisations within the Territory (who fill out data collection forms) and the police computerised information system. The 1999-2000 Data Collection project recorded that:

- 1,787 children and young people were exposed to domestic violence from July 1999 to June 2000.

This data also showed:

Type of violence child/young person exposed to	Number of incidents	%
Physical	1220	68
Emotional/psychological	1485	83
Sexual	171	10
Economic	567	32
Social	663	37
Spiritual or cultural	488	27

Total no. of types of violence is greater than no. of incidents as young people experienced more than one type of violence.

(Adriaansen & Jacob 2001, Attachment 5, p. 12)

In addition to data collection projects, a small number of Australian studies have also examined this issue. Notably, Stanley and Goddard (1993), researchers based at Monash University, Victoria, conducted a study examining twenty families (cases randomly selected within one Community Services Office in Victoria) where child abuse had been reported. They found that within the 20 cases, physical violence between adult partners occurred in 60% of the families. Children experienced the following forms of abuse within this context (recorded as confirmed or suspected):

<i>Physical</i>	<i>Sexual</i>	<i>Psychological</i>	<i>Neglect</i>
15	12	19	18

Goddard and Hiller (1993) surveyed 206 cases of child abuse, and found that domestic violence occurred in 40% of the sexual abuse cases and in 50% of the physical abuse cases.

In a Brisbane study, Cadzow, Armstrong and Frazer (1999) interviewed 151 women 7 months postpartum and found domestic violence to be a significant risk factor for child abuse.

### ***Young peoples' attitudes to domestic violence***

In addition to quantifying the incidence of children and young people's exposure to domestic violence, the National Crime Prevention (2000) study, *Young People and Domestic Violence*, interviewed 5000 young people aged 12-20 years of age about their attitudes to domestic violence. The study revealed:

- 92% believed domestic violence to be either very or quite serious
- One in twenty considered forcing a partner to have sex, throwing things like plates at each other and regular slapping or punching to be part of "normal conflict" rather than "domestic violence".
- 37% of males and 12% of females agreed with the statement "men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household".

### ***Pregnancy***

- Of women surveyed by the *Women's Safety Australia* study who experienced violence by a previous partner, 42% experienced violence during the pregnancy, with half of these women stating that violence occurred for the first time while they were pregnant (ABS 1996).
- 29.7% of women presenting to an antenatal clinic at a Brisbane hospital disclosed that they had experienced abuse over their lifetime and that 80% of abusers were current or ex partners (Webster 1994).

Other studies report similar findings but caution that many women experiencing problems as a direct consequence of violence do not disclose this important history. In many cases the available data does not make it possible to distinguish whether partner abuse directed towards the pregnant woman is a continuation of abuse or specific to the period of pregnancy. With the introduction of screening tools within health settings, including antenatal clinics, it may be possible in the future to more accurately assess this.

Both adolescent women and Indigenous women appear at increased risk of experiencing violence during pregnancy. A number of studies clearly show enormous health consequences for women experiencing violence during pregnancy. For example abused pregnant women experience:

- Higher rates of serious mental disorder, harmful drug and alcohol abuse (Roberts et al. 1998).
- Higher rate of genital tract infection, pap smear abnormalities and anaemia (Quinlivan & Evans 2001)
- Severe levels of violence, such as being pushed, shoved, slapped, (23.5%) and kicked, bitten and hit with a fist (13.2%) (Webster 1994).

### ***Indigenous women***

Indigenous women experience violence at far higher rates than non-Indigenous women.

- Indigenous women are the victims of homicide at a rate that is 10 times greater than the rate for non-Indigenous women (Strang 1992).
- Based on offences reported to police in Western Australia, Indigenous women are 45 times more likely to experience family violence than non-Indigenous women (Ferrante et al. 1996).
- 69% of assault cases against Aboriginal women were carried out by the spouse or partner (Aboriginal Justice Council 1999).

Comparing violence towards spouses between Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal communities in Western Australia, Ferrante et al. (1996) found

that 39.5% of Indigenous women experienced serious assaults as compared to 7.5% of non-Aboriginal women.

According to Indigenous author and researcher, Judy Atkinson, there have been more deaths of Aboriginal women through assault than there have been deaths of Aboriginal people in custody. Atkinson supports her statement by referring to data highlighting the death of five women within the Cape York Peninsula area where no charges were laid (Lucashenko 1997, p. 154).

Reasons for the higher rates of Indigenous family violence have been reviewed. The Northern Territory Data Collection Project report highlighted that Indigenous Territorians generally conduct their lifestyle and activities in the “public arena” and accordingly, when altercations do occur within a family, violence may be harder to conceal and more likely to be drawn to the attention of external support services. The *Violence in Indigenous Communities* report (Memmott et al. 2001) also refers to multi-causal factors that explain higher rates of violence within Aboriginal communities. Historical circumstances, the loss of land and traditional culture, the disempowerment of traditional elders, breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law, entrenched poverty and racism are clearly factors underlying the use of violence.

### ***Women from non-English speaking backgrounds***

Little research has been undertaken which analyses the incidence of domestic violence experienced by women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

- 7.5% of women born in non-English speaking countries had experienced violence by their partner during the course of their relationship (ABS 1996, p. 56). Data concerning women from non-English speaking backgrounds should be viewed as conservative estimates as the literature identifies many barriers that prevent immigrant and refugee women from accessing services.

- 13.1% of women in SAAP funded services during 1999-00 were women from a non-English speaking background (AIHW 2000).
- As stated previously, Filipino women living in Australia are almost six times over-represented as victims of homicide compared to other women (Cunneen & Stubbs 2002, p. 160).

### ***Women with disabilities***

Women with disabilities represent 16% of the adult female population of Australia. Despite this, there is a lack of data directly relating to women with disabilities and domestic violence.

- Overseas studies have found that women with disabilities, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or class are assaulted, raped and abused at a rate of between two and twelve times greater than women without disabilities (Mulder 1995).
- 5% of domestic violence incidents involved victims with a disability (NT Data Collection Report 1999-2000).

### ***Gay and Lesbian domestic violence***

Data on domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships in Australia is almost non-existent. McQuarrie (1995, p. 39) states, 'although no research has ever been done, guestimates suggest that up to 25% of same-sex relationships could be affected.' Others have also commented that prevalence rates are not dissimilar to those in heterosexual relationships. Papers from the First National Conference on Violence and Abuse within Lesbian Relationships (Irwin 1997) highlighted that it has been difficult to talk about violence within relationships within the lesbian community, let alone the broader community, and that there is little documented evidence available.

The NSW Police Service *Out of the Blue* report (Thompson 1995) provided details of the experiences of violence of gay men and lesbian through a survey administered at Mardi Gras Fair Day in 1994:

- 5% of lesbians and 5% of gay men who responded to the survey, stated they had experienced domestic violence within the previous 12 months.
- Barriers to reporting incidents to the police were highlighted with many reporting that there was little they thought the police could do.
- Results also indicated that lesbians expressed higher fear levels about sexual assault and domestic violence than gay men and that they were twice as fearful of experiencing domestic violence than the general female population.

### ***Older women***

In recent years more research is focusing on the incidence and impact of domestic violence on older women. Typically, older women are low users of support services and thus, less likely to report violence.

- According to the ABS *Women's Safety Australia* (1996) data, 2.1% of women aged between 45-54 experienced physical or sexual violence by their partner in the previous 12 months (ABS 1996, p. 50).
- Of women born 1935-45 who are participating in the Melbourne Women's Longitudinal Health Study (Duncan 2002, p.19), 5.5% had experienced physical violence from their partner in the last year.
- 29.6% of women aged 50-69 years participating in a Melbourne General Practice study experienced physical and/or emotional abuse by their partner in the last year (Mazza et al. 2001, p. 200).

### ***Rural women***

With better recording mechanisms, data concerning domestic violence in rural and remote communities is slowly emerging. A National SAAP data collection report during 1997-98 calculated the following rates of domestic violence for females over 15 years per 1000 population:

Capital city	4.29
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Other metropolitan centre	4.39
Large rural centre	9.95
Other rural area	6.18
Remote area	20.86

(WESNET 2000, p. 4)

SAAP data also indicated that 11% of domestic violence clients in remote areas obtained restraining orders. This figure represents half of the national average of domestic violence clients who obtained orders, who were currently in SAAP services (WESNET 2000).

- 54% of all reported incidents in WA occurred outside the Perth Metropolitan area. However, only 24% of applications for restraining orders came from these areas (Ferrante et al. 1996).
- In comparison, higher rates for Apprehended Violence Orders granted in 2000 in NSW were in non-metropolitan areas (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2000).

In a report for the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, 'Domestic Violence in Regional Australia', the authors state, "Whilst there is no difference in overall homicide rates, a significantly higher proportion of overall victims in rural and remote areas are female spouses killed in domestic violence related incidences" (WESNET 2000, p. 8).

## **Where can I find statistics about domestic violence in each state or territory?**

### ***AUSTRALIA***

#### **Australian Bureau of Statistics**

*Women's Safety Australia*

[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/5e3ac7411e37881aca2568b0007afd16/b62deb3ac52a2574ca2568a900139340!OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/5e3ac7411e37881aca2568b0007afd16/b62deb3ac52a2574ca2568a900139340!OpenDocument)

*Special Article - Violence Against Women (Year Book Australia, 1998)*

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs%40.nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25682000192af2/0b565c403b0a0356ca2569de0025631c!OpenDocument>

## **Young People and Domestic Violence**

*National Research on Young People's attitudes and experiences of domestic violence: Fact Sheet*

[http://sgeag001web.ag.gov.au/www/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentPersonal/7A674D876AFB335ECA256B4300042518/\\$file/no10\\_factsheet.pdf](http://sgeag001web.ag.gov.au/www/rwpattach.nsf/viewasattachmentPersonal/7A674D876AFB335ECA256B4300042518/$file/no10_factsheet.pdf)

## **AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

urbis keys young 2001, *Evaluation of the ACT Family Violence Intervention Program Phase II: Final Report*, ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety, Canberra. See our Research & Resources database #1156.

## **NEW SOUTH WALES**

### **NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research**

*Apprehended Violence Orders granted in 1998. NSW Criminal Courts - Local Courts*

[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocsar1.nsf/pages/lc\\_2000\\_avo](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocsar1.nsf/pages/lc_2000_avo)

### **Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program**

*Statistics from 1997/98 and 1998/99*

[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lc/dvlink.nsf/pages/cap\\_stats](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lc/dvlink.nsf/pages/cap_stats)

## **NORTHERN TERRITORY**

### **Northern Territory Government Domestic Violence Strategy**

*Data Collection Project Report 1999 -2000*

<http://www.owp.nt.gov.au/dcm/owp/pdf%20files/DOMESTIC.PDF>

## **QUEENSLAND**

### **Office of Economic and Statistical Research**

*Queensland Crime Victimization Survey 2000*

[www.oesr.qld.gov.au/data/publications/crime\\_pub/cvs2000/cvs2000.pdf](http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/data/publications/crime_pub/cvs2000/cvs2000.pdf)

### **Department of Families, Queensland Government**

*Families Information Gateway*

[www.families.qld.gov.au/faminfogate/current/communitysupport/tab\\_domviol\\_ord.html](http://www.families.qld.gov.au/faminfogate/current/communitysupport/tab_domviol_ord.html)

[www.families.qld.gov.au/communitycare/dv.html](http://www.families.qld.gov.au/communitycare/dv.html)

## **SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

### **Central Violence Intervention Program**

*Annual Statistics*

[www.salvationarmy.org.au/cvip/statistics.asp](http://www.salvationarmy.org.au/cvip/statistics.asp)

## **TASMANIA**

### **Women Tasmania**

*Infosheet No. 11 – Shelter Usage and Domestic Violence Crisis Service Contacts*

[www.women.tas.gov.au/resources/information/infosheets/domviolence.html](http://www.women.tas.gov.au/resources/information/infosheets/domviolence.html)

## **VICTORIA**

### **Victorian Community Council Against Violence**

*Victorian Family Violence Database: First Report.*

[http://www.vccav.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/Downloads/\\$file/First\\_Report\\_20Revised.pdf](http://www.vccav.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/Downloads/$file/First_Report_20Revised.pdf)

### **Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre**

*Statistics*

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~dvirc/Statistics.htm>

## **WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

### **The Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia**

[www.law.ecel.uwa.edu.au/crc/publications/books/dv.htm](http://www.law.ecel.uwa.edu.au/crc/publications/books/dv.htm)

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