

WHITE RIBBON



5. Violence against women: Facts and figures

Compiled by **Dr Michael Flood**, Research Fellow, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, Health Sciences Faculty, La Trobe University (August 2008)

Overview

Anywhere from one-quarter to one-third, and even up to one-half, of Australian women will experience physical or sexual violence by a man at some point in their lives, as nationally representative surveys have found.

In the last year, **between five and ten per cent** of Australian women experienced at least one incident of physical and/or sexual violence by a man.

What is Violence Against Women?

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as:

“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”¹

In simple terms, violence against women is violence ***“directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects a woman, disproportionately.”²***

There are many kinds of and names for violence against women:

o Domestic violence, family violence, wife-battering, intimate violence, intimate homicide, femicide

o Sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, marital rape, gang rape, date rape, acquaintance rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, sex-based harassment

o Child abuse, child sexual abuse, paedophilia, incest

o Homophobic violence, hate crime, lesbian bashing, elder abuse

o Genital mutilation

o Enforced prostitution

o Enforced sterilisation, enforced abortion, killing of unwanted female babies, enforced motherhood³

The data

Recent national data on violence against women in Australia comes from two major surveys:

The ***Personal Safety Survey***, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (a national survey of 16,400 adults in Australia aged 18 and over) (ABS 2006).

The Australian component of the ***International Violence Against Women Survey***, conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology (a national survey of 6,677 women in Australia aged 18-69) (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

Australian women’s lifetime experience of violence

The ***Personal Safety Survey*** provides data on Australian women’s lifetime experiences of violence (since the age of 15). In Australia:

- Close to half of all women (40%) have experienced violence since the age of 15;
- Just under one third of women (29%) have experienced *physical assault*;
- Nearly one in five women (17%) have experienced *sexual assault*;
- Nearly one in six women (16%) have experienced violence by a current or previous partner in their lifetime;
- Since the age of 15, one third of women (33%) have experienced inappropriate comments about their body or sex life, one quarter (25%) have experienced unwanted sexual touching, and one in five (19%) have been stalked (ABS 2006).

¹ General Assembly Resolution 48/104 (20 Dec 1993: 2)

² Amnesty International 2004. It’s in our Hands – Stop Violence Against Women: 4

³ Excerpt from Notes to accompany the presentation: Flood, M (2002) Involving Men in Ending Family Violence. Paper to Unravelling the Complexities of Family Violence: A Holistic Approach, Coffs Harbour, 7-8 March.

The Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* finds that:

- Nearly two-thirds (57%) of Australian women report experiencing at least one incident of physical violence or sexual violence by a man over their lifetime. Just under half (48%) have ever experienced physical violence, and one-third (34%) have experienced sexual violence.
- More than one in ten women (12%) who has ever had a boyfriend or husband has experienced sexual violence from a partner in their lifetime. Between 5 and 7% have been forced into sexual intercourse, and a further 3-4% have experienced attempted forced intercourse.
- One quarter (24% of women) have experienced unwanted sexual touching over their lifetime (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

Australian women's experience of violence in the last 12 months

The *Personal Safety Survey* also provides data on Australian women's experiences of violence over the last year. In the last 12 months:

- Over one in 20 women (6%, or close to half a million women) were the victims of violence;
- One in 20 women (5%) experienced physical violence (including physical assault, attempted assault, or the threat of assault).
- Close to two per cent experienced sexual violence (including sexual assault, attempted assault, or the threat of assault);
- Of all women in Australia, over 70,000 women (about 1%) experienced violence by a male current or former partner in the past year (ABS 2006).

The Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* finds that in the past 12 months:

- 10% of Australian women reported experiencing at least one incident of physical and/or sexual violence by a man (including violence by male partners or ex-partners, male friends and acquaintances, work colleagues, and strangers);
- 8% experienced physical violence, and 4% experienced sexual violence (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

Patterns and risks

Where and whom

Women are most at risk of violence in the home and from men they know:

- The most common location for physical assaults to occur for women is in the home;

- Among women physically assaulted in the last 12 months, the most frequent category of perpetrators was male current or previous partners, and the second most frequent category was male family members or friends (ABS 2006).

Young women

Young women are at greater risk of violence than older women:

- 12% of women aged 18–24 years experienced at least one incident of violence, compared to 6.5% of women aged 35–44 years and 1.7% of women aged 55 years and over (ABS 2006: 6).
- 30.2% of sexually active Year 10 females and 26.6% of sexually active Year 12 females have ever experienced unwanted sex (Smith *et al.* 2003).
- One in seven girls and young women aged 12 to 20 (14 per cent) have experienced rape or sexual assault (National Crime Prevention 2001).

Significantly, the survey found that women who have been sexually or physically abused as children are approximately twice as likely to experience partner violence later in life.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience higher rates of violence than other women:

- There are substantially higher rates of interpersonal violence in general, and violence against women in particular, in Indigenous communities (Memmott *et al.* 2001);
- The Australian component of the *International Violence Against Women Survey* finds that:
 - 20% of indigenous women experienced physical violence in the last 12 months, compared to 7% of non-Indigenous women.
 - Three times as many Indigenous women as non-Indigenous women experienced an incident of sexual violence in the last 12 months (12% versus 4%) (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).
- Despite representing just over 2% of the total Australian population, Indigenous women accounted for 15% of homicide victims in Australia in 2002-03 (Mouzos & Segrave 2004).
- Various state-based studies find that Aboriginal women experience rates of domestic violence between 5 and 45 times higher, and rates of sexual assault 16 to 25 times higher, than among non-Aboriginal women (Lievore 2003).

Intimate homicides

- Intimate partner homicides account for one-fifth of all homicides in Australia. Of these, four out of five involve a man killing his female partner.
- In 2005-06, 59 women were killed by their male partners or ex-partners.
- Typically, women are killed in the context of a history of domestic violence (Davies and Mouzos 2007).

The impact of violence

Violence has a profound and damaging impact on its victims and on the community as a whole. When women are physically assaulted by male partners or ex-partners, or forced into sex, or constantly threatened and abused, this leaves deep physical, and psychological, scars.

A study by VicHealth in 2004 found that, among women under 45, intimate partner violence contributes more to their poor health, disability, and death than any other risk factor, including obesity and smoking.⁴ If we want to focus on the economic cost, KPMG estimated in the 2009 Time for Action report that the cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy is estimated to be \$13.6 billion in 2008-09 and, if there is no reduction in current rates, it will cost the economy an estimated \$15.6 billion by 2021-22.⁵

Violence against women has long-term effects on men's and women's relationships, on their children, and on communities.

What about violence against men?

While this campaign focuses on violence against women, it is important to acknowledge that men too are often the victims of violence. Many of the victims of murder, manslaughter, and serious physical assaults are male.

Men are much less likely than women to be subject to violent incidents in the home and are more likely to be assaulted in public places. Violence against men is far more likely to be by strangers and far less likely to involve partners or ex-partners. Of all the violence men experience, far less is represented by domestic violence (less than 1 percent, versus one-third of violent incidents against women).⁶ Boys and men are

most at risk of physical harm, injury and death from other boys and men, but small numbers are subject to violence by women.

This kit focuses on the prevention of violence against women and takes for granted that all forms of violence are unacceptable and supports efforts to end it.

Sources used

- ABS (2006) *Personal Safety Survey Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics (Cat. 4906.0).
- Davies, M., and J. Mouzos (2007) *Homicide in Australia: 2005-06*. National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) annual report, Research and Public Policy series, no. 77, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- Lievore, D. (2003) *Non-reporting and Hidden Recording of Sexual Assault: An International Review*. Report prepared by the Australian Institute of Criminology for the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Memmott, P., R. Stacy, C. Chambers, and C. Keys (2001) *Violence in Indigenous Communities*. Canberra: Crime Prevention Branch, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.
- Mouzos, J., and T. Makkai (2004) *Women's Experiences of Male Violence: Findings from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, Research and Public Policy Series, No. 56.
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- Smith, A.M.A., P. Agius, S. Dyson, A. Mitchell, and P. Pitts (2003) *Secondary Students and Sexual Health: Results of the 3rd National Survey of Australian Secondary Students, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health*. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.
- Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021. KPMG (March, 2009)
- Young, M., Julie Byles, and Annette Dobson. (2000). The effectiveness of legal protection in the prevention of domestic violence in the lives of young Australian women. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 148, March. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

⁴ VicHealth (2004) *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*. Melbourne: VicHealth.

⁵ KPMG (March, 2009) *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*

⁶ Ferrante, A., F. Morgan, D. Indermaur, and R. Harding (1996) *Measuring the Extent of Domestic Violence*. Perth: Hawkins Press.

Other studies

- **One in five Australian women (21 per cent) has been forced or frightened into doing something sexually that they did not want to do.**

SOURCE: 2002 Australian Study of Health and Relationships, a national survey of 20,000 adults aged 16 to 59 years.

PUBLICATION: de Visser, Richard O., Chris E. Rissel, Juliet Richters, and Andrew E. Grulich (2003) Sex in Australia: Experiences of sexual coercion among a representative sample of adults. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 27(2), April, pp. 198-203.

- **28.5 per cent of women had experienced some form of domestic violence (physical, sexual or emotional) during their lifetime; 5.5 per cent of women had experienced severe physical abuse in the past year at the hands of a partner; and 11.8 per cent of the women had experienced rape or attempted rape between the age of 16 and the time of the survey. Regarding abuse in childhood, 8.9 per cent of women had experienced physical abuse, 42.3 per cent had experienced non-contact sexual abuse, and 35.7 per cent contact sexual abuse.**

SOURCE: Melbourne Women's Midlife Health Project – a longitudinal, population-based study of 438 Australian-born women conducted over nine years.

PUBLICATION: Mazza, D., L. Dennerstein, C.V. Garamszegi, and E.C. Dudley. (2001). The Physical, Sexual and Emotional Violence History of Middle-Aged Women: A Community-Based Prevalence Study. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 175.

- **28 per cent of women have experienced either physical or emotional abuse within their current relationship in the previous year.**

SOURCE: Melbourne study of women attending general practitioners.

PUBLICATION: Mazza, D., L. Dennerstein, and V. Ryan. (1996). Physical, Sexual and Emotional Violence Against Women: A General Practice-Based Prevalence Study. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 164(1).

- **23.3 per cent of women report a history of domestic violence.**

SOURCE: Survey of people attending the emergency department of the Royal Brisbane Hospital in Queensland.

PUBLICATION: Roberts, G.L., B.I. O'Toole, J.M. Lawrence, and B. Raphael. (1993). Domestic Violence Victims in a Hospital Emergency Department. *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol. 1595, September.

For further information

Please refer to the White Ribbon Report: *An Assault on Our Future: The impact of violence on young people and their relationships.*

<http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au/Resources-49.aspx>