



5. 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.”ⁱ

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

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

- domestic violence, family violence, wife-battering, intimate violence, intimate homicide, femicide
- sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, marital rape, gang rape, date rape, acquaintance rape, indecent assault, sexual harassment, sex-based harassment
- child abuse, child sexual abuse, paedophilia, incest
- homophobic violence, hate crime, lesbian-bashing, elder abuse
- genital mutilation
- enforced prostitution
- enforced sterilisation, enforced abortion, killing of unwanted female babies, enforced motherhoodⁱⁱ

The extent of violence against women

Violence affects many women, of all ages and backgrounds. The most recent Australian data come from the national Personal Safety Survey (PSS)¹ conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics during August to December 2005. The survey of 16,500 Australian adults by the Australian Bureau of

Statistics in 2006 found that one in 20 women (5.8%), or over 440,000 women, were the victims of violence in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Of these women:

¹ Funding for the women's component of the 2005 Personal Safety survey is provided through the National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault and Partnerships Against Domestic Violence - Australian Government initiatives administered by the Office for Women (OfW). The male component was funded by the ABS. The survey provides an extensive range of data.

- 4.7% (363,000 women) experienced physical violence (including physical assault, attempted assault, or the threat of assault).
- 1.6% (126,100 women) experienced sexual violence (including sexual assault, attempted assault, or the threat of assault). Over two-thirds (39.9%) of Australian women report experiencing at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 15.

The survey found that 40 percent of women have experienced at least one incident of violence since they were aged 15. As well:

- an estimated 779,520 women (10%) have been physically abused before the age of fifteen,
- 956,602 women (12%) have been sexually abused before the age of fifteen,
- 29% of women (2, 243, 600) have experienced physical assault after the age of 15, and 17% (1, 293, 100) have experienced sexual assault.

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.

Women are most likely to be physically or sexually assaulted by a man who is known to them:

- One third (34.3%) of women who reported physical assault by a man in the 12 months prior to the survey were assaulted by a male family member or friend,
- 37.8% of women reported assault by a male current or ex-partner.
- In 78.2% of incidents of sexual assault against women, the perpetrator was known to the victim.

The majority of violence against women occurs in their own homes. Of those women physically

assaulted by a man in the 12 months prior to the survey, 64% said it had occurred in a home.

A national survey of 6,600 women by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2004 found that in the past 12 months, ten per cent of Australian women experienced at least one incident of physical and/or sexual violence by a man. And, over their lifetime, 57 per cent of women reported experiencing at least one incident of physical or sexual violence. Of these women aged 18 to 69, just under half had experienced physical violence, and one-third had experienced sexual violence.

Similar findings come from an earlier national survey in 1996 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These and other surveys consistently find that 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. (See Fact Sheet 9, Facts and Stats, for more.)

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.ⁱⁱⁱ If we want to focus on the economic cost, Access Economics estimated in a 2004 report that the total annual cost of domestic violence is \$8.1 billion, in terms of costs to the victim, others affected by the violence, and the community.^{iv}

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).^v 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.

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

ⁱⁱ Amnesty International 2004. *It's in our Hands – Stop*

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

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

^v Access Economics (2004) *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy*. Canberra: Office of the Status of Women, Australian Government.

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