



## 10. Facts and Stats

The first national data on the incidence and prevalence of violence against women in Australia were provided by the Women's Safety Australia study,<sup>i</sup> using a representative sample of 6,300 Australian women.

The Women's Safety 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). In the 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. Because of this, 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.<sup>ii</sup>

The second source for national data is the survey carried out in 2004 by the Australian Institute of Criminology as part of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS). This is a national survey of 6,677 women aged 18-69.<sup>iii</sup>

The most recent national data come from the ABS Personal Safety Survey, based on interviews with 16,500 Australian adults and released in 2006.<sup>iv</sup> There have also been other surveys carried out in Australia, in various states and territories as well as Australia-wide.

### Prevalence of violence

Violence against women continues to be a serious social problem within our homes, workplaces and communities, affecting the lives of many Australians each year.

The 2006 ABS survey found that over two-thirds (39.9%) of Australian women report experiencing at least one incident of physical violence or sexual violence since the age of 15, comprising an estimated 3,065,800 women. 29% of all women (2,243,600 women) have experienced physical assault, and 17% (1,293,100) have experienced sexual assault.<sup>v</sup>

Similarly, the 2004 AIC survey found 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.

In the last year, one in 20 women (5.8%), or over 440,000 women, were the victims of violence, according to the 2006 ABS survey. 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).

Similarly, the AIC survey found 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.

We also know that particular groups of women are at heightened risk of violence;

- For young women, the risk of violence is 3 to 4 times higher than the risk for women overall.<sup>vi</sup> The 2006 ABS survey found that 27.2 per cent of women aged 18-24 had experienced an incident of physical assault in the last 12 months, compared to 12 per cent of women aged 45-54.
- Aboriginal women are significantly more likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>vii</sup>
- Regardless of factors such as age and ethnicity, one report suggests that women with disabilities are assaulted, raped and abused at a rate of between 2 and 12 times greater than women without disabilities<sup>viii</sup>.

### Impacts on women and children

In homes where domestic violence occurs, children are also at high risk of suffering physical and emotional abuse;

*During pregnancy*<sup>ix,x</sup>: 42% of women who reported violence, also reported experiencing violence during pregnancy, with almost half of these women (20%) stating that violence occurred for the first time while they were pregnant. Abuse during pregnancy can cause foetal injury or death, placenta abruption, failure to receive adequate antenatal care and heightened maternal and foetal stress.

As *'indirect' victims* of physical injury: For example, a child may be hurt when attempting to protect their mother or when struck by a weapon

or thrown object; infants can be hurt if being held by their mother when the abuser strikes out.

*As victims of emotional and psychological trauma:* Although many children living with violence may not observe the abuse, they are generally aware that it is occurring. The abuse impacts on their psychological well-being and manifest in behavioral and health problems.

- 61% of women who reported violence by a current partner had children in their care at some time during the relationship.<sup>2 3</sup>
- In 32% to 53% of families where women are beaten, their children are also beaten by the same perpetrator.<sup>xi</sup>
- A Western Australian study reported one third of children having been hit by their fathers while trying to defend their mothers.<sup>xii</sup>
- 90% of children present in violent homes have witnessed the violence perpetrated against their mother.<sup>xiii</sup>

### Lethal violence

- 20.8% of all homicides involve intimate partners (with an average of 76 intimate homicides each year).<sup>xiv</sup>
- In almost half of spousal homicides, there is a clear history of preceding violence.
- Three-quarters of homicides between intimate partners or ex-partners involve a male offender and a female victim.<sup>xv</sup>
- On average there are 35 assaults before formal assistance is sought by a victim.<sup>xvi</sup>

### Economic costs

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.<sup>xvii</sup>

Pain, suffering, and premature mortality associated with domestic violence costs at least \$3.5 billion per year. A further \$4.6 billion is lost because of related costs;

- Private and public health costs associated with treating the effects of DV on the victim, perpetrator, and children;
- Production costs: absenteeism, lost productivity related to use of sick leave, distraction and lack of concentration, underperformance, poor workplace relationships, access to employment support services etc., replacing staff, lost unpaid work, etc.
- Second generation costs to do with counselling, changing schools, child protection, increased use of government services, juvenile and adult crime, etc.

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<sup>i</sup> Mouzos, J & Makkai, T (2004) *Women's Experiences of Male Violence Findings from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)* Research and Public Policy Series No. 56 Australian Institute of Criminology.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse  
<sup>iii</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Women's Safety Australia*.

<sup>iv</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) *Personal Safety Survey Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics (Cat. 4906.0).

<sup>v</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) *Personal Safety Survey Australia*.

<sup>vi</sup> Young, M., J. Byles, & A. 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.

<sup>vii</sup> Mouzos & Makkai (2004) *Women's Experiences of Male Violence*.

<sup>viii</sup> Mulder 1995, cited in Strategic Partners (2003) Phase 1 Meta-evaluation report Domestic Violence: Working with men. Pirion Printers Canberra.)

<sup>ix</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Women's Safety Australia*.

<sup>x</sup> Laing, 2000

<sup>xi</sup> Edelson 1995

<sup>xii</sup> Blanchard, Molloy & Brown, 1992

<sup>xiii</sup> Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force, 1988

<sup>xiv</sup> Mouzos (2000) *Homicidal Encounters*.

<sup>xv</sup> Mouzos (2000) *Homicidal Encounters*.

<sup>xvi</sup> Culture Shift 2000 Partnerships for Prevention Community Participation Project

<sup>xvii</sup> Access Economics (2004) *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy*. Canberra: Office of the Status of Women, Australian Government.

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Women's Safety Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics (No. 4128.0).