

# Reporting on Domestic Violence

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# 1 How to Report on Domestic Violence

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Domestic violence is a serious problem in Australia. When you're reporting on domestic violence, you can help readers, listeners and viewers to see it as an important issue that everyone can take action on. Remember: you can report on this issue in a way that informs, educates, and contributes usefully to public dialogue.

## **Name it**

Always use the term 'domestic violence' when it applies. Using language like 'domestic dispute', 'volatile relationship' or 'bashing' minimises and trivialises a violent situation. Plus, if your audience consistently comes across this term they will get a better understanding of the extent of the problem.

## **Safety comes first**

Ensure that you report on the issue in a way that doesn't compromise the survivor's safety. This might involve leaving out some details about what occurred in order to protect the survivor's anonymity. This may also affect the way you use images or identifying features in a story. At times you may need to avoid using a survivor's name, hide facial features, or remove town names. Wherever possible check with a survivor to see what they consent and feel safe to disclose. If that is not possible, consider whether what you print might put them at risk.

## **Know the law**

Be aware that there are certain legal parameters that outline what you can and can't report in a situation where a protection order of some kind has been issued, or where there are children involved. See [Resources](#) for more information about this.

## **Violence is never acceptable**

The perpetrator is always solely responsible for a violent situation. Avoid using language or framing the story in a way that suggests the survivor of violence was in any way to blame for what happened to him or her.

## **Domestic violence is serious and life-threatening**

It is never appropriate to report on domestic violence in a way that sensationalises or trivialises it.

## **Acknowledge that this crime has both a victim and a perpetrator**

Domestic violence is sometimes reported with headlines like 'Woman assaulted', or with stories that focus only on what happened to the survivor. This can make it seem like violence is something that 'just happens' to women. Emphasise that someone perpetrated this violence, and that it was a crime.

**Take the emphasis away from ‘stranger danger’**

Most violence against women is perpetrated by somebody known to the survivor. Where there’s a relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator, acknowledge it (if you are able to). Get the balance of stories right, over-reporting, or giving greater prominence to stories about attacks from a stranger compared to domestic violence misrepresents the problem.

**Use sensitivity and good judgement when reporting survivors’ stories**

The emotional impacts of domestic violence often include feelings of intense shame and vulnerability. Make sure you do all you can to report on domestic violence in a way that upholds the survivor’s right to dignity, remembering that there might be trauma associated even with an incident that occurred many years ago. When interviewing survivors, give them as much time as possible to tell their story, check with them a couple of times to ensure you have consent to disclose elements of their story, and where possible, give them the opportunity to review copy.

**Contextualise the story with statistics**

Use local, national, and (where appropriate) international statistics on domestic violence to frame the story.

**Domestic violence has a significant gendered dimension**

Acknowledge that domestic violence is not just a one-off incident – it occurs in a broader context in which power and resources are distributed unequally between genders, and in which women are much more likely to be victims of violence than men.

**Humanise the story with appropriate terminology**

Where possible, and only where consent has been given, refer to the survivor of violence by name. If that’s not appropriate, be as specific as you can – for example, ‘woman who has been a victim of domestic violence’. The term ‘survivor’ is also used for people who have experienced domestic violence in the past.

**It is important to include information about available support options for people who have experienced domestic violence. You should always include numbers for local support services where possible.**

**Call on community experts for comment**

Don’t just rely on the police or the judiciary for comment when reporting on domestic violence. Community experts on domestic violence will be able to put the issue in context. See [Resources](#) for a list of services in your State or Territory.

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**As well as the contacts for local support services, always list the following tagline at the end of the story:**

If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732

or visit [www.1800RESPECT.org.au](http://www.1800RESPECT.org.au)

In an emergency, call 000.

# 2 Facts & Figures

Since the age of 15

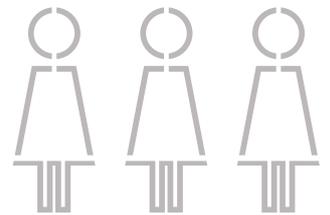


has experienced **physical or sexual violence** by a current or former partner



who had experienced **physical assault** by a male perpetrator experienced the most recent incident in their home

Since the age of 15



## WOMEN

has experienced **emotional abuse** by a current or former partner

Of women who have experienced violence by an ex-partner



experienced **MORE THAN >1** incident of **violence**



had **children** in their care when the violence occurred

## The Problem of Data

Because most people who experience domestic violence do not report it to the police, recorded crime statistics cannot tell us exactly how many people live with it. The most comprehensive data we have comes from the Personal Safety Survey, which collects data about the nature and extent of violence experienced by both men and women. Population surveys are designed to be representative samples from the whole of population. However, more work needs to be done to capture more targeted data, particularly on population groups that may be at more risk or more vulnerable to violence, such as prisoners, homeless people, young people and new migrants.

Every community in Australia feels the social or economic impact of domestic violence in one way or another.

In Australia:

- One in 3 women has experienced some kind of physical violence in her lifetime.<sup>1</sup>
- One in 6 adult women has experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner. This compares to 1 in 19 men.<sup>2</sup>
- One in 4 women has experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.<sup>3</sup>
- Australian women are most likely to experience violence in their home, at the hands of a male current or ex-partner: 36% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence from someone they know,<sup>4</sup> 15% have experienced violence from an ex-partner,<sup>5</sup> and for 62% of the women who had experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator, the most recent incident was in their home.<sup>6</sup>
- Domestic violence is a vastly underreported crime. Of women who had experienced violence from a current partner, 39% had never sought advice or support,<sup>7</sup> and 80% had never contacted the police.<sup>8</sup>
- Of women who have experienced violence by an ex-partner, 73% experienced more than one incident of violence,<sup>9</sup> and over half had children in their care when the violence occurred.<sup>10</sup>
- 89 women were killed by their current or former partner between 2008-10. This equates to nearly one woman every week.<sup>11</sup>

## At-Risk Groups

Domestic violence can happen to anyone. However, some people are more at risk than others, and it can be harder for people who are marginalised in some way to get help.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely to be admitted to hospital for family violence-related injuries.<sup>12</sup>
- Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities can face significant difficulties, including a lack of support networks, language barriers, socio-economic disadvantage and lack of knowledge of their rights and Australia's laws.<sup>13</sup>
- Women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence and the violence can be more severe and last longer than for other women. A recent survey with service providers estimated that 22% of women and girls with disabilities, who had made contact with service provider respondents in the previous year, had been affected by violence.<sup>14</sup>
- Women living in rural or remote areas also seem to be at higher risk of experiencing domestic violence.<sup>15</sup>

# 3 Impacts of Domestic Violence

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The impacts of domestic violence are varied, profound, and can be long-lasting. Survivors may continue to need support years after the violence has finished. It also has a range of consequences for families and communities, and ultimately for society.

## Health

- Intimate partner violence has been identified as the leading contributor to death amongst women aged 15-44 in Victoria — a greater risk than high blood pressure, smoking, and obesity.<sup>16</sup>
- As well as leaving survivors with serious physical injuries, domestic violence -can lead to mental health problems and intellectual disabilities, including acquired brain injury and traumatic brain injury.<sup>17</sup>
- Violence against pregnant women can lead to miscarriage, later trimester bleeding and infection, abdominal trauma and death.<sup>18</sup>
- There is evidence that there are both short- and long-term impacts (including disability) for unborn children whose mothers experience violence during pregnancy. This includes foetal death, foetal fractures, low birth weight and injury.<sup>19</sup>
- Acts of sexual violence can also occur within intimate relationships. Sexual violence can cause pain and injury, infections, fertility problems, unwanted pregnancy, or even miscarriage.<sup>20</sup>

## Mental Health

- There are many studies which show that domestic violence has serious impacts on survivors' mental health. It can lead to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, and other stress and trauma-related syndromes.
- In Australia, it is estimated that nearly 18% of all depression experienced by women and 17% of all anxiety disorders experienced by women are associated with domestic or family violence.<sup>21</sup>
- Children who are exposed to domestic violence are also more likely to experience these impacts.<sup>22</sup>
- Survivors of domestic violence are more likely to have problems with alcohol, to smoke,<sup>23</sup> and to use non-prescription drugs.<sup>24</sup>
- Women who have experienced domestic violence are at much greater risk of attempting suicide than women who have not.<sup>25</sup>

## Economic Impacts

- Domestic violence is a huge economic burden for the nation. Recent projections estimate that domestic violence will cost the Australian economy \$9.9 billion in the year 2021-22, if system responses do not change.<sup>26</sup>
- The largest proportion of the economic burden of domestic violence is borne by survivors –\$4 billion in 2002-03.<sup>27</sup>
- This includes costs associated with homelessness, loss of employment, and healthcare linked with domestic violence.<sup>28</sup>
- Without intervention, it's estimated that the health-related cost of domestic violence in Australia will rise to \$445 million in 2021-22.<sup>29</sup>
- Domestic violence cost Australian businesses \$175.2 million in 2002-03, with employee absenteeism, permanent loss of labour, and employee death all contributing factors.<sup>30</sup> Without any effective intervention, this figure has been projected to rise to \$456 million in 2021-22.<sup>31</sup>

## Homelessness

- One in 3 people accessing specialist homelessness services cite domestic and family violence as the reason for needing assistance – it's the most common reason given. The majority of these people are women (63%) and children (19%).<sup>32</sup>
- 42% of women approaching homelessness services report that domestic or family violence is the reason they're seeking help.<sup>33</sup>
- What's more, nearly 90% of people using homelessness services report that they grew up with conflict in the home. This suggests that childhood exposure to domestic violence is a major risk factor for homelessness later in life.<sup>34</sup>

# 4 System Responses to Domestic Violence

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## Legal

People who commit acts of domestic violence can be prosecuted according to State and Territory law under various offences. Consequences for successful prosecution for a domestic and family violence offence may include a fine, a good behaviour order, the completion of court-mandated programs to address use of violence in relationships, periodic detention or a prison sentence. Domestic Violence Orders (or Protection Orders, or Apprehended Violence Orders) can also be issued to protect survivors from future violence. See [Resources](#) for links to information about protection orders in different States and Territories.

## Community

1800RESPECT is the National Sexual Assault, Domestic and Family Violence Counselling Service. They are able to provide phone and online counselling, information and support, as well as referral to local support services.

Each State and Territory has a range of local services that provide support for survivors of domestic violence, such as legal and court support, emergency or short- to medium-term housing, counselling, support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors, referral to health or mental health services, and much more. See [Resources](#) for a list of State and Territory peak bodies for survivors of domestic violence.

## Government

Australian Governments have responded to domestic and family violence on a policy level in a range of ways. The key national document that deals with domestic and family violence is COAG's *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. Many State and Territory Governments also have their own strategies or plans that target violence against women and children. Other Government documents – for instance health strategies (such as the 2009 National Women's Health Policy) and crime prevention documents – also deal with domestic and family violence.

# 5 Definitions

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The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2012–2022* defines **‘domestic violence’** as “acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal.”<sup>35</sup>

This behaviour can take many forms. It may involve:

- Physical violence
- Controlling who you see or what you do
- Emotional abuse such as insults, manipulation, threats
- Financial abuse, such as controlling access to money
- Stalking or other kinds of harassment
- Sexual violence, including coercion
- Other forms of behaviour that are used to control you, make you afraid, or to diminish your sense of self-worth.

Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of sex, sexuality, gender identity, or any other marker of identity. However, statistically, men are the majority of perpetrators and women and children are the majority of survivors.<sup>36</sup>

## Similar Terms

**‘Intimate partner violence’** is used to refer to kinds of violence (physical, sexual or psychological) that occur within the context of an intimate (a close, romantic, though not necessarily sexual) relationship, such as a marriage, a de facto partnership, or other kinds of less formal relationships. It happens in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

**‘Family violence’** is a broader term which is used to acknowledge violence that happens within a broader network of family and community members – for example, violence that occurs within extended kinship and family relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner defines ‘family violence’ as: “any use of force, be it physical or non-physical, which is aimed at controlling another family member or community member and which undermines that person’s well-being.”<sup>37</sup>

**‘Violence against women with disabilities’** is a human rights violation resulting from the interaction of discrimination based on both gender and discrimination against people with disabilities.<sup>38</sup> In other words, women with disabilities experience the same kinds of violence experienced by other women (including domestic or family violence), but also experience violence that results from their position as a person with a disability in a society that fails to ensure that they have equal access to resources and opportunities.<sup>39</sup>

**Violence against women** is any act of gender-based violence that is likely to lead to harm or suffering to women, whether it happens in public or behind closed doors.<sup>40</sup> ‘Gender-based’ means that the violence disproportionately affects women more than men (on the whole), that it occurs in a broader social context where power and resources are distributed unequally between men and women, and that the violence reinforces that gendered power imbalance.<sup>41</sup>

# 6 Resources & Further Reading

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## Statistics

Australian Bureau of Statistics – Directory of Family and Domestic Violence Statistics, 2013:  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4533.0~2013~Main%20Features~Home%20page~1>

Australian Institute of Criminology:  
[http://www.aic.gov.au/crime\\_types/violence/domestic.html](http://www.aic.gov.au/crime_types/violence/domestic.html)

## Research

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety:  
<http://anrows.org.au>

## Commentary

Our Watch:  
<http://ourwatch.org.au>

## Legislation

ACT  
 Domestic Violence and Protection Orders Act 2008  
 see 'Part 13: Public access and publication':  
<http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2008-46/current/pdf/2008-46.pdf>

NSW  
 See Crimes (Domestic and Personal Violence) Act 2007 – Section 45  
 'Publication of names and identifying information about children and other persons involved in apprehended violence order proceedings':  
[http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/capva2007347/s45.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/capva2007347/s45.html)

NT  
 See Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007 – Section 26 'Prohibition on publication of personal details': [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nt/num\\_act/dafva200734o2007300/s26.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nt/num_act/dafva200734o2007300/s26.html)

QLD  
 See Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989 – Section 82  
 'Restriction on publication of proceedings': [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/qld/consol\\_act/dafvpa1989379/s82.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/qld/consol_act/dafvpa1989379/s82.html)

SA  
 See Intervention Orders (Prevention of Abuse) Act 2009 – Part 5, Division 1, 33 'Publication of report about proceedings or orders':  
<http://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/LZ/C/A/INTERVENTION%20ORDERS%20%28PREVENTION%20OF%20ABUSE%29%20ACT%202009/CURRENT/2009.85.UN.PDF>

## TAS

See Family Violence Act 2004 – Part 4, Section 32 ‘Restriction of publication of names of parties, &c.’: [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/consol\\_act/fva2004158](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/tas/consol_act/fva2004158)

## VIC

See Personal Safety Intervention Orders Act 2010  
– Part 6 ‘Restriction on Publications of Proceedings’:  
[http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol\\_act/psioa2010409](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/psioa2010409)

## WA

See Restraining Orders Act 1997 – Section 70 ‘Information on Identity of Certain Person Restricted’: [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol\\_act/ro82a1997200/s70.html](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/wa/consol_act/ro82a1997200/s70.html)

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- 2 Ibid. Table C: Experience of Partner Violence Since the Age of 15.
- 3 Ibid. Table 15: Experience of Partner Emotional Abuse, Type of Partner.
- 4 Ibid. Table A: Experience of Violence Since the Age of 15, Relationship to perpetrator by broad perpetrator type groups.
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- 6 Ibid. Table 19: Experience of Assault Since the Age of 15, Location of most recent incident of assault by type of assault and sex of perpetrator.
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- 8 Ibid. Table 25: Experience of Current Partner Violence Since the Age of 15, Police Involvement.
- 9 Ibid. Table 22: Experience of Partner Violence Since the Age of 15, Frequency of Violence.
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- 19 Ibid.
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