Domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia: an overview of the issues

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Executive summary

• The World Health Organization (WHO) describes the levels of violence experienced by the world’s women as ‘a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action’.

• In Australia, domestic, family and sexual violence is found across all cultures, ages and socio-economic groups, but the majority of those who experience these forms of violence are women. However, it is not possible to measure the true extent of the problem as most incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence go unreported.

• The information available on the prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia is derived from surveys. The 2013 Australia-wide survey on personal safety conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) found that many men and women experience at least one encounter with violence in their lifetimes. The survey showed that men are far more likely to experience physical violence at the hands of a stranger but the majority of women experience physical violence by someone known to them—usually an intimate partner or family member. Both men and women are more likely to experience physical violence than sexual violence but women are much more likely to experience sexual assault in their lifetime than men.

• The social and economic costs of violence against women are considerable. In 2009 the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (NCRVWC) estimated that violence against women and their children, including both domestic and non-domestic violence, cost the Australian economy $13.6 billion.

• The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the over-arching government programs designed to reduce violence against women nationally. However, it is the state and territory governments that have the law enforcement responsibilities in relation to policing and prosecuting instances of domestic, family and sexual violence.

• Reducing violence against women has been a priority for both Coalition and Labor governments for many years. The most recent Government initiative is the National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children (National Plan) endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2009. The National Plan set a framework for social change and proposed the introduction of sweeping changes between 2009 and 2021 to be implemented through a series of four three-year action plans over 12 years.

• The move towards better integrated, multi-agency responses and coordination across all levels of government through the National Plan has been received favourably by most stakeholders and is viewed as making significant progress in terms of reducing the levels of violence experienced by women in Australia.
Acknowledgement

This paper updates a previous Parliamentary Library publication—L Mitchell, *Domestic violence in Australia—an overview of the issues* (2011). A significant amount of the valuable research provided in the earlier paper has been retained in this update.
Glossary

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS)
Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP)
Gender-based violence (GBV)
International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS)
Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV)
Multipurpose Household Survey (MPHS)
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSISS)
National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (NCRVWC)
National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP)
Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV)
Introduction

In 2013 the World Health Organization (WHO) published the first systematic international review on the prevalence of violence against women. During the course of the review the authors analysed and collated data from around the world, including Australia, on the prevalence of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. The review found that violence against women is a significant public health problem and a violation of human rights that affects more than one third of all women globally. The review concluded that the prevalence of violence constitutes ‘a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action’.1

In Australia, domestic, family and sexual violence is widespread across all cultures, ages and socio-economic groups and the majority of those who experience these forms of violence are women. The most recent data on personal safety found that many men and women experience at least one encounter with violence in their lifetimes. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) survey estimated that in 2012, 49 per cent of men aged 18 years and over and 41 per cent of women aged 18 years and over had experienced some form of violence since the age of 15. Men were far more likely to experience physical violence at the hands of a stranger. However, the majority of women experienced physical violence by someone known to them—usually an intimate partner.2

While both men and women were more likely to experience physical violence than sexual violence, those who did experience sexual violence were much more likely to be women—around 4 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women had experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. Of those who experienced sexual violence (both men and women), the majority reported that the perpetrator was known to them.3

This research paper updates several previous Parliamentary Library publications on the levels of violence experienced by women in Australia.4 The paper includes an overview of research on the prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence, at risk groups and the costs of violence against women to communities and to the economy. Limited comparisons of the levels of violence experienced by men and women are included where relevant.5 The paper also includes an overview of policy approaches designed to prevent violence against women.6

Defining violence against women

The United Nations 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 deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’.7

For the purposes of its 2012 Personal Safety Survey, the ABS defines violence as ‘any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault experienced by a person since the age of 15’.8 In this context, physical violence includes physical assault and/or physical threat and may involve the threat or intent to harm or frighten a person. Sexual violence includes sexual assault and/or sexual threat.9

Generally, the most pervasive form of violence experienced by women in Australia is violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member (commonly referred to as domestic or family violence) and sexual assault (by an intimate partner or someone other than a partner).10

3. Ibid.
5. For more detail on the levels of violence experienced specifically by men see ABS, Personal safety survey Australia 2012, op. cit.
6. For further information on support services (or emergency contacts) see Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Ltd. (ANROWS), Get support, ANROWS website, accessed 28 July 2014.
8. ABS, Personal safety survey Australia 2012, op. cit. For further detail on definitions see the introduction of the survey and the glossary.
9. Ibid.
Domestic violence may include physical, sexual, financial, emotional or psychological abuse. Emotional or psychological abuse may include a range of controlling behaviours such as the use of verbal threats, enforced isolation from family and friends, restrictions on finances and public or private humiliation.\\(^{11}\)

Family violence is usually a broader term referring to violence between family members as well as intimate partners. It is often the preferred term used in the context of violence experienced in Indigenous communities, involving a variety of kinship and marital arrangements.\\(^{12}\)

Sexual assault is an act of a sexual nature carried out against a person’s will through the use of physical force, intimidation or coercion. It can refer to a broad range of behaviours that may include sexual threats, assault with an object, enforced prostitution or enforced sexual activity with a perpetrator or their acquaintances.\\(^{13}\)

While some groups of women are more at risk of experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence than others, these forms of violence occur in all Australian communities and across all socio-economic groups. The underlying causes are complex and not fully understood, but there is general agreement that gender inequality is a key determinant of violence against women.\\(^{14}\)

**Prevalence**

When defining domestic, family or sexual violence the ABS distinguishes between ‘prevalence’ and ‘incidence’. ‘Prevalence’ estimates the number of people who have experienced domestic, family or sexual violence in the relevant population within a specified time period, while ‘incidence’ measures the number of reported incidents of domestic, family or sexual violence that have occurred within a specified time period.\\(^{15}\)

As most incidents of domestic, family and sexual violence go unreported it is not possible to measure the true extent of the problem. However, prevalence estimates show that domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia is widespread and that the majority of those who experience these forms of violence are women.\\(^{16}\)

Other available statistics show that a woman is more likely to be assaulted in her home by a male partner than anywhere else or by another party.\\(^{17}\) The majority of female homicide victims are killed by an offender with whom they share a domestic arrangement and women are over-represented in intimate partner homicides.\\(^{18}\) Most women also do not report their experiences of violence to police and they are even less likely to report violent incidents to police when the perpetrator is a current partner.\\(^{19}\)

The information on the prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia is derived from surveys that include the ABS Personal Safety Surveys in 2005 and 2012, the Australian component of the International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS) conducted in 2002–03 and the ABS Women’s Safety Survey 1996.\\(^{20}\)

Other related statistics are more limited; for example, the ABS releases ‘Recorded crime—victims’ data, derived from administrative systems maintained by state and territory police. While this includes information on sexual assault and the relationship of offenders to victims, it does not include analysis of data related to other forms of domestic violence.\\(^{21}\)

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11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
The 2012 Personal Safety Survey provides the most up to date figures on domestic, family and sexual violence.\textsuperscript{22} The survey estimates are based on interviews with 13,307 women and 3,743 men (17,050 in total) aged 18 years and over who were living in private dwellings across Australia. The survey contains information about violence experienced by men and women since the age of 15, as well as in the 12 months prior to the survey. It also provides detailed information about men's and women's experience of current and previous partner violence, lifetime experience of stalking, physical and sexual abuse before the age of 15, emotional abuse and general feelings of safety.

In its findings, the survey estimated that:

- 49 per cent of men (4,148,000) and 41 per cent of women (3,560,600) had experienced some form of violence since the age of 15
- women were more likely than men to have experienced physical assault by a male in their home. An estimated 62 per cent of women compared to 8 per cent of men experienced their most recent incident of physical assault by a male in their home
- similar proportions of women and men (67 and 68 per cent) had not been in contact with the police after their most recent incident of physical assault by a male
- women were more likely than men to be subjected to violence by a partner—17 per cent of all women and 5 per cent of men had experienced violence by a partner since the age of 15
- both men and women were more likely to experience physical violence than sexual violence, however, women were much more likely to have experienced sexual assault than men. An estimated 17 per cent of women and 4 per cent of men had experienced sexual assault since the age of 15
- men and women who had experienced sexual assault since the age of 15 were more likely to have been assaulted by someone they knew rather than by a stranger. An estimated 15 per cent of women had been sexually assaulted by a known person compared to 4 per cent who were assaulted by a stranger
- women were more likely than men to have experienced emotional abuse by a partner since the age of 15—25 per cent and 14 per cent respectively, and\textsuperscript{23} women were more likely to have experienced an episode of stalking during their lifetime—19 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men.\textsuperscript{24}

Previous key surveys included the 2005 Personal Safety Survey which provided information on women's experiences of violence and updates data from the 1996 ABS Women's Safety Survey. For the first time, the 2005 survey also collected information on men's experience of violence. Data was collected through personal interviews with approximately 11,800 women and 4,500 men (16,300 in total) in all states and territories.\textsuperscript{25} The International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS) was conducted across Australia from December 2002 to June 2003. A total of 6,677 women aged 18 to 69 years participated in the survey and provided information on their experiences of physical and sexual violence.\textsuperscript{26}

**Risk factors**

As discussed earlier, domestic, family and sexual violence occurs across all ages, cultures and socio-economic groups.\textsuperscript{27} However, research shows that some women are at greater risk of experiencing these forms of violence than others.\textsuperscript{28} For example, exposure to child abuse or violence as a child, alcohol or drug dependency issues,
financial or personal stress and lack of social support are all strong correlates of violence against women. Some women are also more vulnerable to violence, or less able to leave violent relationships, based on factors such as age, Indigenous status, location, disability, ethnicity, and English language ability.

**Alcohol and drug use**

Analysis of the Australian component of the IVAWS found that one of the strongest risk factors for intimate partner physical violence was behavioural, with the involvement of alcohol and drug use often leading to higher levels of aggression by perpetrators. The research noted that ‘abusive males with alcohol or drug problems inflict violence against their partners more frequently, are more apt to inflict serious injuries, are more likely to be sexually assaultive and are more likely to be violent outside the home than abusers without a history of substance abuse’.

Easy access to alcohol is also a significant risk factor for domestic and family violence, particularly in Indigenous communities. A longitudinal analysis of alcohol outlet density found a relationship between alcohol availability and domestic violence. Packaged liquor outlets that sell alcohol for off-premise consumption were particularly strongly associated with domestic violence.

In the 2012 Personal Safety Survey, an estimated 53 per cent of women who had been physically assaulted by a male (in the past twenty years) reported that alcohol or drugs had been involved in their most recent incident. In the 2005 survey, 49 per cent of women who experienced assault by a male in the preceding 12 months stated that alcohol or drugs had contributed to the most recent incident.

Other research has similar findings—for example, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) found that 41 per cent of all incidents of domestic assault reported to the police between 2001 and 2010 were alcohol related. This percentage varied, however, from a low of 35 per cent in Sydney, to a high of 62 per cent in Far Western NSW.

At the most serious end of the spectrum, many intimate-partner homicides include the involvement of alcohol. Between 2000 and 2006, 44 percent of intimate-partner homicides were alcohol related. The majority (87 per cent) of Indigenous intimate-partner homicides were alcohol related. The most recent National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report, *Homicide in Australia 2008–09 and 2009–10*, found that alcohol consumption (by either party) occurred in 47 per cent of all homicide incidents.

**Child abuse**

Estimates from both the IVAWS and Personal Safety Surveys suggest a relationship between the experience of violence as a child and subsequent victimisation as an adult. The IVAWS found that women who experienced abuse during childhood were one and a half times more likely to experience violence in adulthood than those who had not experienced abuse during childhood.

The 2012 Personal Safety Survey also noted this correlation, finding that 32 per cent of women who had experienced abuse before the age of 15 also experienced violence by a partner since the age of 15 compared to 13 per cent of women who had not experienced child abuse. Data from the 2005 survey indicated that both

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34. ABS, Personal safety survey Australia 2005 (reissue), op. cit., p. 29.
38. Mouzos and Makkai, op. cit., p. 87; 78 per cent of women who experienced abuse during childhood also experienced violence in adulthood. By comparison, of women who did not experience childhood abuse 49 per cent experienced violence in adulthood.
men and women who experienced child abuse before the age of 15 years were at greater risk of partner violence as adults (since the age of 15). People who experienced childhood physical abuse were more than twice as likely to experience partner violence as those who had not experienced physical abuse as a child.40 Those who experienced childhood sexual abuse were three times more likely to experience partner violence than those who had not been sexually abused as children.41 An analysis of the 1996 Women’s Safety Survey found that history of violent victimisation, whether as a child or as an adult, predicts future victimisation.42

**Pregnancy and separation**

Women may be vulnerable to violence during pregnancy and separation. For women who experienced partner violence since the age of 15, more than half (54 per cent) reported experiencing violence by a previous partner during pregnancy; a quarter (25 per cent) experiencing domestic violence for the first time while they were pregnant. Some 22 per cent reported experiencing violence by a current partner during pregnancy; 13 per cent for the first time.43 A WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence found the prevalence of physical violence during pregnancy to range from 1 per cent to as high as 49 per cent in some parts of the world (prevalence rates in Australia were estimated at 2 per cent).44

Analysis of the 1996 Women’s Safety Survey revealed that women who were separated were more likely to experience violence than married women.45 These findings reflect the stressful nature of separation itself. It may be the case that violence follows separation, or the decision to separate is due to violence in the relationship. International studies indicate that leaving a violent partner may increase the risk of more severe, or even fatal, violence.46

**Younger women**

The White Ribbon Foundation points to gender roles and relations as a key factor in young women’s vulnerability to violence in relationships—inexperience, age differences in relationships and lack of access to services compound the problem.47

In the 2009 National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence against Women, young people had a strong understanding of the criminal nature of domestic violence. However, they were less likely than older respondents to understand complex aspects of violence in relationships such as the range and seriousness of behaviour that constitutes domestic violence, if and when it can be excused and who is most likely to have this experience. They were also more likely than older people to agree with some misconceptions about sexual assault, for example that it is usually perpetrated by strangers.48

An earlier research project on young people’s attitudes to, and experiences of, domestic violence, surveyed 5,000 Australians aged 12 to 20 years.49 Researchers found that young men, those with lower socioeconomic status and Indigenous people were more likely to hold pro-violence attitudes. Further, pro-violence attitudes were greatest in the youngest age group (12 to 14 years) and decreased with age.50

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40. ABS, *Personal safety survey Australia 2005*, op. cit., p. 38; 24 per cent of those who experienced child physical abuse also experienced violence by a partner. By comparison, of those who did not experience child physical abuse 10 per cent experienced violence by a partner.
41. Ibid; 30 per cent of those who had experienced child sexual abuse also experienced violence by a partner. By comparison, of those who had not experienced child sexual abuse, 10 per cent experienced violence by a partner.
45. Coumarelos and Allen, op. cit.
ABS and IVAWS data indicates that younger women are more likely to have recently experienced violence than older women. The 2012 Personal Safety Survey found that 13 per cent of women aged 18 to 24 years had experienced violence in the 12 months prior to the survey, a rate decreasing with age to less than 2 per cent of women aged 55 years and over.\(^51\) The 2005 survey found a similar proportion of young women (12 per cent) experienced at least one incident of violence in the previous 12 months.\(^52\)

Crime victimisation data from the ABS 2009–10 Multipurpose Household Survey (MPHS) also indicate that the risk of physical assault decreases with age.\(^53\) While IVAWS employed broader definitions of violence, the pattern was the same: younger women were victimised disproportionately.\(^54\) Current intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months was highest for women aged 15 to 24 years (5 per cent), dropping to 1 per cent of women aged 55 to 69 years.\(^55\)

Earlier research found that about one in three young people aged 12 to 20 years who had had a boyfriend or girlfriend, reported physical violence in their personal relationships. Reports of such physical violence increased with age to 42 per cent of women aged 19 to 20 years. While rates for men were similar, women were at least four times as likely to have been frightened by the experience. Young women also reported sexual assault at almost five times the rate of young men—14 per cent compared to 3 per cent—with figures highest amongst women aged 19 to 20 years (20 per cent).\(^56\)

**Indigenous women**

‘Family violence’ is generally the preferred term in Indigenous communities, as it encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support.\(^57\) Indigenous family violence may not only occur behind closed doors, it may often take place in public and can involve a number of people. Indigenous women may be more likely to fight back when confronted with violence than non-Indigenous women.\(^58\)

In 2002, the Council of Australian Governments commissioned the production of a series of ‘Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage’ reports that included a focus on violence in Indigenous communities. The 2011 report noted that Indigenous women and children were more likely to experience violence than any other section of society and that violence was so prevalent in some communities that it was regarded as an inevitable part of life.\(^59\)

However, there are significant deficiencies in the availability of statistics and research on the extent and nature of family violence in Indigenous communities. What data exists suggests that Indigenous people suffer violence, including family violence, at significantly higher rates than other Australians.\(^60\) In addition, a high proportion of violent victimisation is not disclosed to police and rates of non-disclosure are higher in Indigenous than non-Indigenous communities.\(^61\) Many of the reasons for non-disclosure are shared with the wider community, but there are reasons specific to Indigenous communities:

- fear of repercussions and consequences, particularly in small, interconnected and isolated communities where anonymity cannot be maintained

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51. ABS, Personal safety survey Australia 2012, op. cit.
52. ABS, Personal safety survey Australia 2005 (reissue), op. cit., p. 6.
55. Ibid., pp. 57.
56. Indermaur, op. cit.
• fear and distrust of police, the justice system and other government agencies. Many Indigenous people experience anxiety when they are compelled to engage with police and welfare agencies.

• cultural considerations and coercion—the interconnectedness of Indigenous society and the rules and obligations that are part of it may also operate against disclosure; factors such as shame and responsibility for maintaining families may lead to Indigenous women internalising their suffering, and

• lack of awareness of or access to support services. 

Indigenous people experience violence at rates that are typically double or more than those experienced by non-Indigenous people, and this can be much higher in some remote communities. Indigenous women in particular are far more likely to experience violence, and to endure more serious violence than non-Indigenous women. For example, BOCSAR data from 2001–2010 indicate that the rate of domestic assault reported to police is more than six times higher for Indigenous women and more than four times higher for Indigenous men when compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) 2008 provides estimates of physical violence (actual and threatened) in the Indigenous population, information on whether the perpetrator was known or not (for example, partner, sibling, neighbour) and details of any physical injuries sustained. Almost one in five Indigenous Australians aged 18 years or over reported they had experienced violence in the previous 12 months. Both Indigenous men and women were more likely to report physical or threatened violence compared to non-Indigenous people – men were 1.6 times as likely and women 2.5 times as likely. One in four people also reported that family violence was a neighbourhood or community problem, with higher rates in remote areas (37 per cent) compared to non-remote areas (21 per cent). As highlighted above, the actual rate of violence is likely to be much higher than these reported figures suggest.

In summary, while the availability of statistics and research on the extent and nature of family violence in Indigenous communities is patchy, recent statistics summarised by Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) show that Indigenous women face much higher risk factors than other women:

• Indigenous people are two to five times more likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous people
• Indigenous women are five times more likely to be homicide victims than non-Indigenous people, and
• Indigenous women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised than non-Indigenous people.

Women living in rural and remote areas

While there is some evidence that women living in rural and remote areas are more likely to experience domestic violence, the picture is far from clear. Domestic violence may be less likely to be disclosed in rural and remote areas due to the ideology of self-reliance, and informal sanctions and social control. Researchers also point to narrowly constructed notions of masculinity that emphasise traditional gender roles and the physicality of rural men’s labour, plus patterns of alcohol consumption, as risk factors pertinent to rural and remote areas. A 2000 literature review concluded that where comparable data exists, they indicate that there is a higher reported incidence of domestic violence in rural and remote communities than in metropolitan settings, with remote communities experiencing the highest rates.
In a study of domestic assaults reported to the police in NSW from 2001 to 2010, 19 out of the top 20 NSW Local Government Areas (LGAs) for domestic assault were rural or regional LGAs. The top five LGAs were all remote—Bourke, Walgett, Moree Plains, Coonamble and Wentworth. It should be noted however, that four of these five LGAs have large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations (20 to 30 per cent, with the fifth at around ten per cent) and as previously discussed, Indigenous people are much more likely to experience violence.

Women in rural and remote areas may also find it harder to seek help or leave a violent relationship. Factors such as access to services, a perceived lack of confidentiality and anonymity, stigma attached to the public disclosure of violence and lack of transport and telecommunications may compound the isolation already experienced as part of domestic violence abuse. There is overlap between the rural and remote and Indigenous populations; many of the same issues apply and support services face unique challenges in meeting diverse needs.

The ABS 2010 General Social Survey also provides some information on people’s experience of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months. It suggests that people (aged 18 years and over) who usually lived in regional or remote areas were slightly more likely to experience violence than those living in major cities—12.2 per cent compared to 9.5 per cent.

**Women with disabilities**

The full extent of violence against people with disabilities is unknown, but it is estimated that women and girls with disabilities may be twice as likely to experience violence as those without disabilities. Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to physical, sexual and psychological violence due to their situation of social and cultural disadvantage, and increased dependence. There are particular forms of abuse that are unique to people with disabilities, such as removal of an accessibility device, withholding medication and threatening institutionalisation. Adults with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities are particularly at risk of sexual assault and exploitation. When the abuser is the main carer, individuals suffer neglect, isolation and intense vulnerability to abuse; it may be impossible for them to get help.

The 2012 Personal Safety Survey found the rates of women with a disability experiencing violence in the 12 months prior to the survey were similar to those of other women (6 and 5 per cent respectively). However, the nature of the survey, and the likelihood that people with more severe types of disabilities could not participate without assistance, means that this rate is likely to be an underestimate. Additionally, the survey excluded people living in non-private dwellings, such as institutions.

When analysing violence by disability type, the 2012 survey found those with a psychological disability were twice as likely to have experienced some type of physical and/or sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the survey (12 per cent compared to 6 per cent). The 2010 General Social Survey also found that experience of
physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months was more likely among people with a core activity restriction (17 per cent), compared to those with no disability or long-term health condition (10 per cent).  

More detailed data on domestic violence against people with disabilities in Australia is lacking. A 2003 study examined the nature and extent of violence against women with disabilities who accessed services for family and domestic violence in Western Australia. By far the most common perpetrators of violence against these women were male partners, accounting for 43 per cent; with a further 11 per cent experiencing violence by a female partner.

**Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

Migration is currently the key driver of Australia’s population growth—approximately one third of the Australian population are overseas-born (32 per cent as at November 2013) and at the time of the 2011 Census, 20 per cent of the population had at least one overseas-born parent. Drawing conclusions regarding the nature and extent of domestic violence or sexual assault in selected culturally and linguistically diverse communities is difficult as studies and surveys have produced mixed findings. However, when such violence does occur, research findings indicate that culturally appropriate service provision gaps lead to access issues and lower rates of reporting. Migrant and refugee populations are diverse, and cultural values and immigration status increase the complexities normally involved in domestic violence. Immigration can also cause social and cultural dislocation and intensify domestic violence.

In the 2012 Personal Safety Survey, Australian-born women were more likely to report experiencing violence since the age of 15 than those born overseas (44 and 33 per cent respectively). Similarly, the IVAWS indicated that women from English-speaking backgrounds reported higher levels of physical, sexual and any violence compared to non-English speaking background (NESB) women over their lifetime. However, it is possible that personal, cultural, religious and language factors may have resulted in NESB women who had experienced violence not participating in the survey, or those who did participate being less likely to report incidents of physical and sexual violence or openly discuss such information with survey interviewers. This would be consistent with findings that women from culturally and linguistically diverse community backgrounds are less likely to report domestic violence to police or access mainstream services.

**Financial stress**

Domestic violence cuts across social and economic boundaries but the data on the effect of education, employment status and income are mixed. The IVAWS found that experience of current intimate partner violence during the previous 12 months varied little according to education, status or household income. However, ABS data suggests that women reliant on government pensions and allowances as their main source of household income were at increased risk of violence by a previous partner over their lifetime. A more recent longitudinal study explored the relationship between personal or financial stress and women’s experiences of...
violence. The 2013 study found a correlation between higher levels of financial stress (together with lower levels of social support) and a higher risk of physical violence or victimisation. While suggesting these measures may be more useful in predicting a women's potential to experience physical violence, the study made it clear that further research was needed to adequately analyse this relationship.98

**Reporting**

In terms of identifying violence as a crime, there is differentiation between strangers and partners. The IVAWS found that stranger-perpetrated incidents were perceived as ‘crimes’ (42 per cent) more often than incidents by intimate partners (26 per cent). Only one in ten women (11 per cent) who experienced violence by a current husband or partner considered the most recent incident to be a crime compared to almost four in ten women who experienced violence by a former husband or partner (38 per cent). For women who experienced violence by a current boyfriend, 18 per cent considered the most recent incident to be a crime compared with 22 per cent who experienced violence by a former boyfriend.99

Using ABS data, the BOCSAR found that less than half of all respondents who had experienced a domestic assault in the previous 12 months reported the incident to the police. Older people and those who were married were less likely to contact the police, as were people who experienced assault that did not involve weapons or serious injury.100

Women appear to be particularly reluctant to report violence by current partners. Researchers have noted that women seem better able to identify Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV) by a previous, rather than a current partner. They may feel confused, loyal and forgiving about a current partner. A more accurate assessment of the violence might emerge on leaving the relationship, with the passage of time and the benefits of safety and hindsight.101 The 2012 Personal Safety Survey found 80 per cent of women who experienced some type of violence by their current partner (for example, physical or sexual assault) had never reported this to the police, compared to 58 per cent of women who experienced violence by a previous partner.102 In terms of sexual assault, 83 per cent of women did not report the most recent incident by a male perpetrator (known or unknown) to police.103

Few women who experienced violence sought help from a specialised agency. In one study only 16 per cent of women who experienced intimate partner violence contacted an agency such as a shelter, crisis centre or hotline, counsellor or women’s centre.104 However, those who had experienced violence from some other male (not their partner or previous partner) were even less likely to seek assistance from one of these agencies, with only 9 per cent making contact with any kind of specialised agency.

Women are more likely to talk to someone they know about their experience of partner violence than they are to tell police or staff at a specialised agency. The 2012 Personal Safety Survey found 74 per cent of women had told someone about a violent current partner and 93 per cent had told someone about a previous partner. For around two thirds of these women, the first person they told about their experience was a friend or family member.105 Of women who had contacted police about their most recently violent (previous) partner, about half (50 per cent) had a restraining order issued. However, 58 per cent of those women experienced further violence.106

**Attitudes to domestic, family and sexual violence**

Attitudes towards domestic, family and sexual violence can strongly influence reporting behaviours.107 Misconceptions and assumptions on masculinity, sexuality, violence and sexual assault can present barriers for

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100. Gretch and Burgess, op. cit.
103. Ibid., Table 17.
104. Mouzos and Makkai, op. cit., p. 100.
106. Ibid., Table 26.
both men and women in terms of gaining recognition and understanding, disclosing information and accessing the justice system after experiencing physical or sexual assault.\(^{108}\)

Since the 1990s, there has been a profound transformation in public awareness about this problem in many countries.\(^{109}\) In Australia, one of the most extensive national studies on attitudes to violence against women was the National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence against Women 2009.\(^{110}\) Comparison of the findings from this survey with data from an earlier study conducted for the Office of the Status of Women in 1995 also revealed some positive changes in attitudes:\(^{111}\)

- there was greater recognition of the range of behaviours which constituted domestic violence
- almost all people agreed that domestic violence was a crime (98 per cent in 2009, up from 93 per cent in 1995) and
- most people (81 per cent) reported that they were willing to intervene in domestic violence situations.\(^{112}\)

However, the survey found that a lack of understanding on why women stay in violent relationships was common and a significant number believed that domestic violence was excusable in certain circumstances—18 per cent of the general community sample and 45 per cent of the respondents from selected culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds sample. Further, 22 per cent of the general community sample and 59 per cent of the culturally and linguistically diverse sample believed that domestic violence was excusable if the perpetrator ‘truly regrets’ what they have done.\(^{113}\) Findings from the survey suggested that length of residence in Australia has an impact on reducing tolerance levels for violence-supportive attitudes.\(^{114}\) Survey researchers also found that being male and having low levels of support for gender equity or equality were the strongest predictors for holding violence-supporting attitudes.\(^{115}\)

In 2013 the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, the Social Research Centre and the University of Melbourne embarked on an update of the National Community Attitudes Survey.\(^{116}\) On 17 September 2014, the findings of the third survey were released.\(^{117}\) The report found that understanding of, and attitudes towards, violence against women had remained fairly stable since the last survey. Many still believe violence can sometimes be excused; there has been an increase in the number of Australians believing that rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex; nearly 8 in 10 have no understanding of why a woman might not feel able to leave a violent relationship; and more than half agree that women often fabricate cases of domestic violence. Also of concern was a decrease in knowledge of where to turn to for help.\(^{118}\)

Importantly, survey researchers again found that people with low levels of support for gender equity or equality were more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes. While there were high levels of support for gender equity in the workplace, almost 30 per cent of those surveyed were supportive of male dominance in relationships. In contrast, demographic factors such as age, country of birth and socio-economic status had only a limited influence on attitudes.\(^{119}\)

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110. AIC, The Social Research Centre and VicHealth, op. cit.


113. Ibid., pp. 37, 46; The selected culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds sample was drawn from first and second generation members of the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities.

114. Ibid., p. 57.

115. Ibid., p. 54.

116. Department of Social Services (DSS), *National community attitudes survey*, DSS, website. Note: White Ribbon Australia and Youth Action NSW have also launched a survey of young people’s attitudes to domestic and family violence to be conducted in 2014, see White Ribbon Australia, *Have young people’s attitudes towards violence changed since 1999?*, White Ribbon Australia, website, accessed 30 June 2014.


119. Ibid.; Powell, op. cit.
Police responses

Since the mid-1980s increased attention has been focused on the role of police in intervening and preventing domestic violence. The police and criminal justice systems in Australia are commonly criticised for not treating domestic violence matters seriously enough. The police response is not only vital for the immediate safety of the parties involved but also conveys an important social message about the way in which violence against women and children is regarded by society.

The NSW Ombudsman’s 2006 report, Domestic violence — improving police practice, highlighted significant improvements since an earlier review of policing domestic violence in 1999 but also focused on the need for further reforms in three critical areas: enhanced support for people experiencing domestic violence, better cooperation between police and other agencies with key responsibilities and more effective frontline policing responses. In 2011, the NSW Auditor General echoed these concerns about the lack of coordination between agencies in order to provide a lasting solution for all involved.

The Australasian Policing Strategy for Preventing and Reducing Family Violence was launched by police commissioners across Australia in November 2008 in order to prioritise policing strategies on this issue. The strategy aims to ensure that responses by Australasian jurisdictions are based on more consistent policies and practices—it outlines priorities for action to improve information and intelligence sharing between police, as well as between partner agencies.

While legal reforms of the late 1980s and 1990s strengthened police powers to deal with domestic violence, the trend towards pro-arrest policies has only relatively recently begun to influence operational policing in Australia. In general, Australian police agencies have adopted policies that promote arrest as the primary intervention where there is a belief on reasonable grounds that an offence has been committed.

At the same time there has been a shift towards collaboration with a broader range of partner agencies to provide referral and support. For example, the Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission found that police officers believe that the complex social and health issues involved in domestic violence mean that police can only be effective when working in conjunction with other community agencies.

A good example of these changes, which draws heavily on programs developed overseas, is the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) which is a proactive, multi-agency approach to family violence in the ACT. The ACT has a pro-arrest, pro-charge policy on domestic and family violence and such cases are fast tracked through the courts. The FVIP integrates the activities of the police, prosecution, courts and corrections, and coordinates with other key agencies, such as domestic violence advocacy services. The FVIP showed substantial increases in the arrest rate for domestic violence, from 6 per cent in 1993 to 30 per cent in 2003–04. There was a 464 per cent increase in the number of family violence matters handled by the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) over the eight years from 1998–99 to 2005–06. In addition, the
percentage of successful convictions increased from 76 per cent in 2003–04 to 85 per cent in 2007–08. While a review published in 2012 recommended some refinements to the program, it reaffirmed that the coordinated approach of this program constituted ‘key good practice’. Safe at Home, the Tasmanian Government’s response to family violence, is another example of an integrated criminal justice response to family violence where safety is considered paramount and the first point of contact is through the police. This program represented ground-breaking reform when it was initiated in 2004. An independent review of Safe At Home found four key strengths of the program:

• increased public awareness of family violence
• improved legal recognition for family violence—both in the seriousness and the criminal nature of this type of violence
• police take responsibility for pressing charges, giving some prospect of respite from the offender, and
• greater clarity of police procedures has led to increasing confidence of their role and their responsibilities in family violence situations, as well as overall improvement in police response.

During the first three years of Safe at Home the total incidents attended by police increased, before declining marginally. Between 2004–05 and 2006–07 the average number of family violence incidents per month increased from 279 to 310 (11 per cent), decreasing to 284 in 2007–08. There was an approximate four-fold increase in the total number of new applications for family violence related orders from 2003–04 to 2004–05 (69 orders to 294 orders). The number of new applications then declined in 2005–06 (to 222 orders) and was relatively steady across the following two financial years.

In Victoria, the Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence was introduced in August 2004 to improve police responses to family violence incidents and encourage community confidence to report these offences to police. In 2004–05, approximately 18 per cent of reported offences were family violence related. Since then this figure has risen steadily and in 2013–14, offences arising from family incidents accounted for approximately 42 per cent of all crime against the person offences. Support agencies argue that the figures are starting to reflect the true extent of the problem in the community due to increased reporting of traditionally under-reported crimes.

At present, comparisons across jurisdictions are very difficult. There are differences in how domestic violence is defined and categorised both between, and within jurisdictions, and police data is also limited in their descriptions of the outcomes of incidents reported. To know whether there are changes in practice and in outcomes over time, there is a need to develop indicators of police performance that are both practical and useful. Researchers have identified a number of performance indicators that could be used by police to measure their effectiveness in responding to and reducing family violence. Several of these are included in the Australasian policing strategy for preventing and reducing family violence, for example:

134. Safe at Home, website, accessed 3 July 2014.
137. Ibid, p. 79. In 2003–04, the only order available to the courts was a Restraining Order. Police Family Violence Orders and Family Violence Orders (issued by the court and sought in cases which police assess as high risk) became available in 2005 under the Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas).
142. Rollings and Taylor, op. cit., p. 5.
143. Ibid.
• a recorded increase in the number of family violence incidents reported
• a recorded increase in the amount of successful family violence prosecutions processed by the courts, and
• the development of better working relationships between the police and family violence support services.144

Despite recent reforms in Australia and other comparable countries, many argue there has been relatively little progress in the handling of violence against women, particularly in terms of sexual assault.145 Certainly the results of the 2012 Personal Safety Survey seem to indicate a continuing reluctance by women to report incidences of intimate partner violence to police.

Social and economic costs

Homicide

The most comprehensive data collection on homicide in Australia which provides details of victims, offenders and the circumstances of incidents, comes through the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) at the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). Of the 185 domestic homicides recorded between July 2008 and July 2010, 66 per cent were classified as intimate partner homicides.146

Three in every five Australian homicides during this period occurred in a residential location (61 per cent)—the majority in the victim’s home. Domestic homicides accounted for just over half (53 per cent) of these incidents.147 This suggests the most likely scenario for the homicide of an Australian woman is at home at the hands of an intimate partner.

Health

Domestic violence has severe and persistent effects on physical and mental health. Using burden of disease methodology, VicHealth determined that domestic violence was the leading risk factor contributing to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years.148

Physical injury is common as a result of domestic violence. Two in every five women in the IVAWS who experienced intimate partner violence reported that they were injured in the most recent incident of violence.149 The most common types of injuries were bruises and swelling, cuts, scratches and burns. However, 10 per cent suffered broken bones or noses, 6 per cent sustained head or brain injuries and 6 per cent internal injuries. Some 29 per cent of those who sustained injuries were injured badly enough to require medical attention and 30 per cent of women felt that their life was in danger in the most recent incident. This was more likely for incidents involving previous partners (35 per cent) than for current partners (15 per cent).150

The health consequences of domestic violence can endure long after the violence ceases.151 The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health found that women who have experienced domestic violence rate their health as poorer and use health services more frequently than other women, even after they are no longer exposed to the violence.152

The effects of domestic violence also have a cumulative impact on a person’s mental health.153 One analysis of ABS data examined associations between mental health and gender-based violence (GBV), including intimate partner physical violence.154 Lifetime prevalence of intimate partner physical violence, measured by the

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144. Australasian policing strategy on the prevention and reduction of family violence, op. cit., p. 4.
147. Ibid., p. 11.
149. Mouzos and Makkai, op. cit., p. 53.
150. Ibid., pp. 54–56.
151. I Evans, Battle-scars: long-term effects of prior domestic violence, Centre for Women’s Studies and Gender Research, Monash University, Melbourne, 2007, pp. 5–6, viewed 3 July 2014.
question: ‘Were you ever badly beaten up by a spouse or romantic partner?’ was 8 per cent. Women who experienced GBV reported a higher level of severity and co-morbidity of mental disorders, increased rates of physical disorders, greater mental-health related dysfunction, general disability and impaired quality of life. Women who had experienced GBV also reported higher rates of past suicide attempts.

Domestic violence also has a detrimental impact on the mental health of men who experience it. Some suggest that the stigma associated with experiences of domestic violence may be particularly marked for men and that they experience significant psychological symptoms. Domestic violence is also associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and suicidal ideation.155

**Children**

Children and adolescents living with domestic and family violence are at increased risk of experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse.156 Researchers also identify domestic and family violence, parental substance abuse and parental mental health problems as the factors most commonly associated with child abuse and neglect.157 Families in which parents present with these problems often live with multiple disadvantages and it is difficult to isolate the impact of any single factor.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that domestic violence has an impact not only on adults, but also on children who may witness the violence. Children witnessing, or being exposed to domestic violence has been increasingly recognised as a form of child abuse, both in Australia and internationally.158 Forcing a child to live with sustained violence against a primary caregiver constitutes both emotional and psychological abuse.159

Research on children exposed to domestic and family violence indicates that there are a range of impacts that such children are likely to experience, among them:

- mood problems including depression
- anxiety
- trauma symptoms
- increased aggression
- antisocial behaviour
- lower social competence
- temperament problems
- low self-esteem
- the presence of pervasive fear
- loneliness
- school difficulties
- peer conflict
- impaired cognitive functioning, and
- increased likelihood of substance abuse.160

Researchers note that such social, behavioural, cognitive and emotional effects may also have a lasting impact on education and employment outcomes.161

There are a number of difficulties associated with assessing the extent of children’s exposure to domestic and family violence. Prevalence rates vary and under-reporting is likely due to fear surrounding potential loss of custody and other complex issues. The 2012 Personal Safety Survey found that 54 per cent of women who had experienced violence by a current partner had children in their care at the time and 31 per cent said that

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160. Richards, op. cit.

children had witnessed the violence.162 From the IVAWS, excluding the women who indicated that they had no children living with them, over a third of women who experienced intimate partner violence reported that their children had witnessed a violent incident (36 per cent).163 An earlier study found that 23 per cent of young people aged 12 to 20 years had witnessed violence against their mother or step-mother; this increased to 42 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) young people.164

**Homelessness**

Domestic violence remains one of the leading causes of homelessness, accounting for 32 per cent of all clients receiving assistance from specialist homelessness services in 2011–12.165

Some researchers consider that domestic violence-related homelessness differs from other forms of homelessness, as the women affected are more likely to cycle in and out of homelessness compared to those in the broader homeless population.166 Many women in abusive relationships return to the perpetrator of the violence and try to reconcile. The 2012 Personal Safety Survey found that more than one third (37 per cent) of women who had experienced current partner violence had temporarily separated during the relationship and of these, 52 per cent had moved away from home.167

Housing is critical for survivors of domestic violence. In a study of women’s economic wellbeing during and following domestic violence, women nominated finding safe, affordable, appropriate accommodation post separation as their single biggest concern.168 Costs associated with leaving the family home were substantial, including relocation and storage costs. Women’s housing difficulties also had flow on effects for other aspects of their financial situation. Trying to find accommodation is time consuming and stressful and must necessarily take priority over other needs, such as education and employment.169

Domestic violence is also a factor in youth homelessness. The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness found that family breakdown and conflict, including domestic violence, were common factors precipitating homelessness.170 In a longitudinal study of Melbourne homeless young people, aged 12 to 20 years, researchers found one third of young people left home because of family violence, which in most cases had occurred over a long period of time.171

**Economic**

At a national level, the costs of domestic violence are substantial. In 2009 the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (NCRVWC) estimated that violence against women and their children, including both domestic and non-domestic violence, cost the Australian economy $13.6 billion.172 The report argued that without action, an estimated three-quarters of a million Australian women will have experienced violence by 2021–2022. Based on this level of reporting, the estimated cost to the Australian economy would be around $15.6 billion, with domestic violence accounting for $9.9 billion of this figure.
(including $3.9 billion attributable to pain, suffering and premature death). In an earlier report, Access Economics estimated the cost of domestic violence in Australia during 2002–03 at $8.1 billion, including $3.5 billion in costs attributable to pain, suffering and premature mortality.

On an individual level, domestic violence creates complex economic issues for women and their children and disrupts their lives over the short and long term. Regardless of their prior economic circumstances, many women experience financial risk or poverty as a result of domestic violence. These difficulties hamper their recovery and capacity to regain control over their lives. Domestic violence directly affects women’s financial security in key areas of life: debts, bills and banking, accommodation, legal issues, health, transport, migration, employment, social security and child support.

Gaining and maintaining paid work is pivotal in creating a secure financial future for both those who have experienced domestic violence and their families. However, participation in employment can be seriously undermined by ongoing abuse and its subsequent effects. For example, Australian researchers found that some women had not been allowed to work while in a violent relationship and found it difficult to enter or re-enter the workforce post separation. These findings are echoed in overseas studies, which highlight how domestic violence not only acts as a barrier to education, training and employment but can also escalate when survivors seek or participate in such activities. In order to maintain control over their partners, abusers may interfere with women’s efforts to become self-sufficient.

Women affected by domestic violence are also more likely to have a disrupted work history and to work casually or part-time than women with no experience of violence. In short, women escaping and experiencing domestic violence are often the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in the labour market. Some researchers argue that the dominant approaches to domestic violence in Australia have been crisis oriented and focused on providing accommodation, welfare assistance, and emergency support services to women and children without looking towards job search and training to facilitate financial security independent of social service agencies.

**Government responses**

The Commonwealth Government is responsible for the over-arching government programs designed to reduce violence against women nationally and it also provides the funding for several statistical surveys that include estimates on the levels of violence experienced by women across the country. Through its national initiatives, the Commonwealth sponsors state and territory government cooperation in the development and implementation of best practice models for addressing and preventing this form of violence. However, it is the state and territory governments, not the Commonwealth Government, that have the law enforcement responsibilities in relation to policing and prosecuting instances of domestic violence and each has its own laws and policies for responding to violence against women.

Government responses to domestic violence take different forms including preventive programs, support for victims/survivors and their families and law enforcement. Each jurisdiction in Australia has in place a variety of laws, programs and policies responding to, and attempting to prevent domestic violence. Each jurisdiction funds its own programs and systems, but there are also some Commonwealth Government funded programs operating in the states and territories, for example supported accommodation. However, most programs and services aimed at preventing domestic violence and supporting the victims/survivors are administered by states and territories through their community service/human services and health departments along with police, attorney-general and other agencies.

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173. Ibid., p. 66. The NCVWC estimates included six other cost categories: health, production, consumption, administrative and other, second generation and transfer costs.


175. Ibid.

176. Ibid.


Building on the women’s refuge movement of the 1970s, Australian Commonwealth, state and territory governments have pursued policies on violence against women since the 1980s. In 1988, the Hawke Labor Government’s National Agenda for Women aimed for an ‘Australia which is free from violence in the home.’ The Hawke/Keating Government’s National Committee on Violence Against Women ran for three years from March 1990 and delivered the National Strategy on Violence Against Women. The Hawke/Keating Government also made contributions internationally, recognising violence against women as a human rights violation. In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously passed the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Within a year of taking office in 1996, the Howard Coalition Government convened the National Domestic Violence Summit, which resulted in the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) initiative. PADV was the Coalition Government’s response to domestic violence, until it was replaced by the Women’s Safety Agenda in July 2005.

**National plan to reduce violence against women**

In May 2008, the Rudd Government established the National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (NCRVWC) to advise on measures to reduce the incidence and impact of violence against women and their children. In a background paper the National Council concluded that there was considerable scope for greater cooperation and collaboration between the Commonwealth Government and the states and territories in developing a unified, national approach to one of Australia’s most pressing social issues. The main challenges it identified were:

- existing systems to deal with domestic violence were fragmented
- gaps between policy intent and implementation
- failure to invest in primary prevention
- inadequate funding of services
- responses not tailored and accessible
- lack of evidence regarding what works in prevention, services, legal responses and early intervention and
- inadequate monitoring and reporting.

The NCRVWC’s *Plan of Action* set a framework for social change and proposed the introduction of sweeping changes between 2009 and 2021.

The Commonwealth Government released its response to the NCRVWC report in April 2009 and announced that it would invest $42 million immediately to address urgent recommendations. These included the establishment of a new national telephone and online counselling service ‘1800 RESPECT’ for Australians who have experienced or are at risk of physical or sexual violence; the implementation of ‘Respectful Relationships’ programs in schools and other youth settings; the development of ‘The Line’ social marketing campaign targeted at young people and parents; research on perpetrator treatment and the greater harmonisation of national and state and territory laws.
Later in 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*. The National Plan was to be implemented through a series of four three-year Action Plans over 12 years.

The First Action Plan, *Building a Strong Foundation 2010–2013*, was to include a range of Commonwealth Government, state and territory initiatives and six national outcomes:

- communities are safe and free from violence
- relationships are respectful
- Indigenous communities are strengthened
- services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence
- justice responses are effective, and
- perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account.

The Commonwealth Government committed a further $44 million in August 2010, including:

- $3.75 million over three years for Community Action Grants
- $8.8 million over three years to provide support for frontline workers, such as allied health, child care and paramedics, to better assist clients who have experienced violence
- $4.8 million over three years for projects to improve services for women with children who are experiencing domestic and family violence
- $6.9 million over four years to establish a National Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence against Women; and
- $14.5 million over four years to conduct the Personal Safety Survey and a National Community Attitudes Survey to ensure that there is accurate and up-to-date information about the prevalence of violence against women in the Australian community and to track the impact of the National Plan on a four-year cycle.

In 2011 the Commonwealth Government committed to an expansion of primary care projects, a national register for domestic and family violence orders, funding for fighting alcohol and drug abuse in Indigenous communities and an anti-family violence project through the Child Support Program in the Human Services portfolio.

In September 2012, COAG’s Select Council on Women’s Issues released the *National Implementation Plan for The First Action Plan: Building a Strong Foundation 2010–2013* which outlined how the Commonwealth and state and territory governments would lay the groundwork for the delivery of the key priorities of the plan.

On 27 June 2014, the Second Action Plan, *Moving ahead 2013–2016*, was released by the Abbott Government. This Plan acknowledges the latest statistics from the 2012 Personal Safety Survey and expresses concern at the continuing levels of violence experienced by women in Australia. It reports on progress to date—such as the establishment of the Australian National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS), the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and Children and *The Line* social marketing campaign. However, the Second Plan expressly aims to build on progress by increasing community involvement, intensifying the focus on diverse communities and improving perpetrator-based responses and programs. Accordingly, it includes five national priorities:

- driving whole of community action to prevent violence
- understanding diverse experiences of violence
- supporting innovative services and integrated systems
- improving perpetrator interventions, and

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continuing to build the evidence base. Some of these priorities eventuated from community feedback gathered during the consultation process conducted in early 2014. Most of the submissions received during this process were very positive about the First Plan but many argued that there had not been enough involvement of community groups, particularly those from Indigenous and culturally diverse backgrounds, and that progress had been too slow. These concerns appear to have been acknowledged in the Second Plan.

Additional concerns that an independent body should be established to monitor and evaluate the plan also have been acknowledged. The National Plan includes a commitment to a series of three year evaluations over its 12 year lifespan. On 3 June 2014, Health Outcomes International (engaged by the Government to develop an evaluation plan) released its report, National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022: Evaluation Plan. The report recommends that an independent expert be engaged at each evaluation phase to collate evaluation reporting, conduct consultations with key stakeholders and evaluate ‘flagship activities’.

**Funding**

Reducing violence against women has been a priority for both Coalition and Labor governments for many years. However, funding for women’s safety initiatives is not usually specifically identified in the federal Budget—historically only a total figure for women’s programs and initiatives is provided.

In the 1984–85 Budget, the Commonwealth Government instigated the practice of publishing a women’s budget document assessing the impact the Budget was likely to have on Australia’s women, often including some additional detail on women’s safety initiatives and funding.

The previous Government’s Women’s Budget Highlights (2013–14) noted that since April 2009 the Labor Government had committed over $86.0 million specifically to initiatives under the National Plan. This funding was comprised of commitments of $42.0 million made by the Prime Minister in April 2009 and $44.5 million over four years made during the 2010 election campaign. A detailed breakdown of some, but not all, of this funding has been identified in recent women’s budget statements. Funding identified in the 2013–14 Budget included:

- $5.2 million to be provided over five years for the establishment and operation of the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children
- $7.6 million previously committed over three years to continue and extend the DV-alert training program for health and allied health workers to improve skills (recognise, respond and refer)
- $28.5 million to June 2017 previously committed to continue and expand 1800RESPECT telephone and counselling service, and
- $3.0 million over three years previously committed to create a dedicated research stream on perpetrator interventions through the National Centre of Excellence to reduce Violence against Women and their Children.

In the 2014–15 Budget, the current Government did not produce a women’s budget statement for the first time since 1984, therefore no detailed violence against women funding breakdowns are available. Prior to the...
September 2013 election, the only Coalition funding commitment specifically identified for violence against women initiatives was the provision of $1 million over four years to the White Ribbon Foundation.\(^\text{205}\) Historically, the Commonwealth Government’s primary agency funded to advance the status of women through its programs, services and funding of women’s organisations is the Office for Women—established originally as the Office for the Status of Women (OSW) within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) by the Whitlam Government. Under the previous two governments it was located within the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) but the office returned to PM&C after the September 2013 election.\(^\text{206}\)

Under the Abbott Government, the Office for Women continues to provide leadership on three priority areas for women, including safety for women. However, it is the Department of Social Services (DSS) which now administers all of the programs and services relating to reducing violence against women and their children, including the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*, women’s safety programs, and support for people involved in human trafficking. As a result, the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* is now administered under the ‘National Initiatives’ component of Program 2.1 Family and Communities, which was allocated $28.7 million in the 2014–15 Budget.\(^\text{207}\)

**Conclusion**

The drivers behind the levels of violence experienced by women are complex, posing huge challenges to all governments and all societies. For many years the research has indicated a need to improve data collection; to conduct further research on the direct and indirect social and economic costs of violence against women; to provide effective early intervention and education programs; to improve on the evaluation of these programs; and to develop long-term integrated government and community responses.\(^\text{208}\) The move towards better integrated, multi-agency responses and coordination across all levels of government through the National Action Plan is viewed by most stakeholders as very positive step. A greater evidence base, in terms of what works in violence prevention, is necessary for further progress.

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\(^{206}\) OSW was moved from PM&C to FaHCSIA in November 2004 by the Howard Government.


\(^{208}\) Carrington and Phillips, op. cit.; and Phillips and Park, op. cit.