

## Family and domestic violence in Australia 2025: is enough progress being made?

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### Key insights

- Up to 2.3 million Australian women report some form of emotional abuse since the age of 15.
- Around 17 per cent of women in Australia have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their cohabiting partner since the age of 15.
- Rising counts of FDV-related homicides invite questions on whether Australia is making enough progress to reduce the incidence of femicide.
- Rising police reporting rates are alarming but could also reflect better police processes, greater public awareness, and improved legal protections for IPV victims.
- Governments must commit sufficient resources and ensure better coordination of policy to achieve the National Plan target to end gendered violence within a generation.
- Consistent collection of detailed FDV data over time and across state jurisdictions is essential if we are to learn more about the drivers of intimate partner violence and reduce IPV prevalence.

### Family and domestic violence in Australia

Family and domestic violence (FDV) is one of the most pervasive and significant social, health and welfare challenges in the society we live in, not just in Australia but across the world.

Reports of femicide or violence against women are tragically all too common, and yet such reports only hint at the scale of the problem, with most instances of abuse still going unreported.

The impacts of family and domestic violence on victims and their families and loved ones are profound, life changing – and in some tragic cases, life-ending. But despite an ever-greater public awareness of the crisis of violence against women, and growing calls for action, prevalence rates in Australia remain unacceptably high.

This BCEC Federal Election research brief takes stock of the current incidence and changing nature of family and domestic violence in Australia. The brief reflects on the impacts of FDV,

and explores what businesses, governments, families and communities are doing – and what they should be doing – to affect change.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) manifests in multiple forms, from physical or sexual violence through to psychological or emotional abuse, controlling behaviours, and economic abuse.

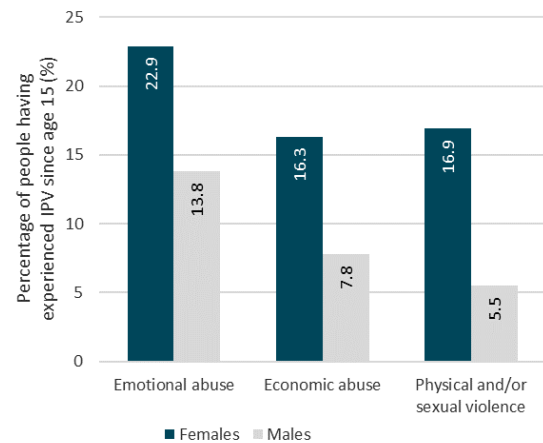
Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definition:

- Physical or sexual violence relates to the incidence, attempt or threat of physical or sexual assault by force, intimidation or coercion, with the intent to harm or frighten.
- Emotional abuse refers to behaviours intended to control or restrict a person's actions, causing emotional harm or fear.
- Economic abuse relates to behaviours or actions that are aimed at preventing a person from access economic resources, causing them emotional harm or fear.

Up to 2.3 million Australian women report experiencing some form of emotional abuse since the age of 15 according to recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey (PSS). This translates to nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of the female population (Figure 1).

And 1.7 million women (17 per cent) have endured physical or sexual violence from a cohabiting partner at some point in their adult lives.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Figure 1:** Share of people who have experienced IPV since the age of 15 by type of violence



**Source:** Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Data from Personal Safety Survey 2021-22

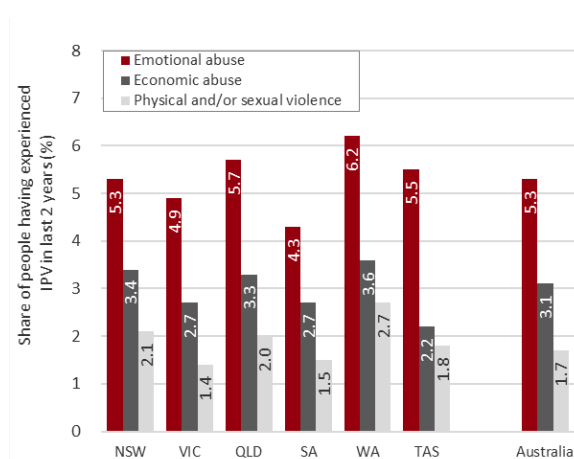
Men also experience physical and/or sexual violence, albeit at a much lower rate (5.5%). Around 14 per cent of men have experienced partner emotional abuse since the age of 15.

### Does the incidence of intimate partner violence vary across states and territories?

The relative prevalence of different forms of intimate partner violence are maintained when looking at state-comparative PSS data over the past two years, with emotional abuse presenting as the most common type of partner abuse. This is the case across all states, with rates of abuse ranging from 4.9 per cent in Victoria to 6.2 per cent in Western Australia (Figure 3).

Rates of physical and/or sexual violence over the course of the past two years range from 1.4 per cent in Victoria to 2.7 per cent in Western Australia. Nationally, around 1.7 per cent of women experienced physical or sexual violence over the past two years, with 1.1 per cent of women faced such violence in the last 12 months.

**Figure 3:** Share of women who have experienced IPV in the past 2 years, by type of violence and state



**Source:** Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Data from Personal Safety Survey 2021-22

Nationally, 3.1 per cent of women report experiencing economic abuse over the past two years, but the prevalence of economic abuse varies substantially across Australia’s states and territories. South Australia reports the lowest prevalence rate at 1.5 per cent while Western Australia reports the highest rate at 3.6 per cent.

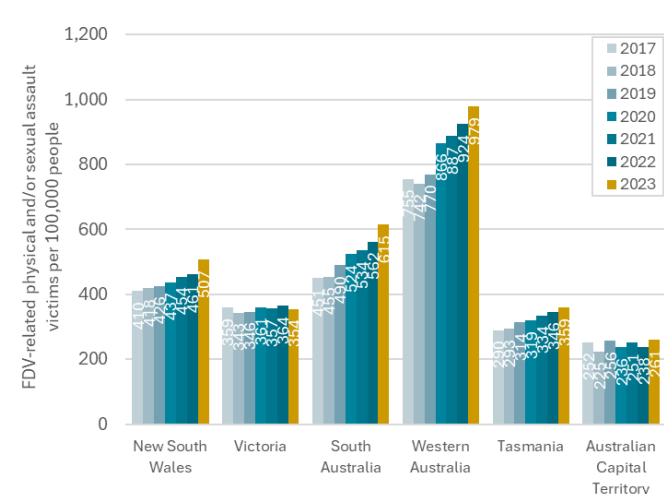
### Police reports of FDV-related assaults has been rising strongly over time

The ABS collate police data on recorded crimes across states and territories, to the extent that such data are available from each jurisdiction.

These data reveal a general, and substantial, increase in the volume of reports to the police of FDV-related physical and/or sexual assaults across most states since 2017 (Figure 4).

Western Australia shows the highest overall rates of FDV-related police reports, at 979 reports per 100,000 in 2023 – an increase of 30 per cent since 2017. Reported violence rates have risen strongly in New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania, with relatively stable rates in Victoria and Tasmania.

**Figure 4:** Recorded police reports of FDV-related assaults, selected states: 2017 to 2023



**Notes:** FDV-related assaults include assault resulting in serious injury, common assault, and sexual assault. Information on FDV assaults for Victoria is accessed from the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency, with all others based on ABS sources. Assault data are not reported to ABS for Queensland. Northern Territory is excluded due to lack of comparability of counts of FDV incidents.

**Source:** Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Data from ABS Recorded Crimes - Victims (Table 30); Victoria Crime Statistics Agency (2021) Criminal incidents visualisation (Table 3).

The number of FDV-related police reports should not be taken to reflect the true incidence of intimate partner violence.<sup>3</sup> Personal safety fears, shame or embarrassment, a lack of trust in the police and judicial systems, concern about not being believed, and not wishing the perpetrator to be arrested, each lead to the low reporting rates.

However, the rise in the rates of reported violence may also reflect improvements in reporting, with

people who experience intimate partner violence feeling less fearful, less stigmatised, or more able to report such incidents to the police.

This may reflect better police processes in engaging with people who report incidents of partner violence, better legal protections for IPV victims, and a greater deployment of resources. Public awareness campaigns, education programs, and media coverage, may also be helping victims to recognise abusive behaviours, and feel more empowered to report abuse.

We are not able to differentiate what exactly may be at play in the patterns of increased rates of reported violence here. Interesting, the PSS data suggests that reported rates of physical violence and emotional abuse have fallen significantly between the 2016 and 2021-22 PSS surveys, whereas the incidence of sexual violence shows far less of a decline over time. However, it is important to keep in mind that PSS was conducted over the COVID-19 period and the decrease in survey reports of violence may potentially be linked to fears of retaliation from partner who may have been present in the household at the time of the survey.

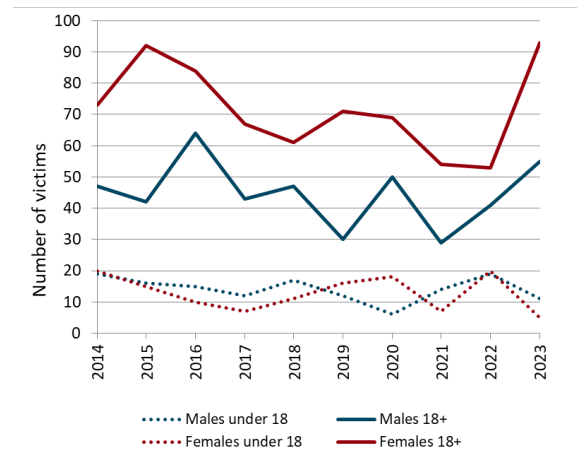
Consistent collection of detailed data on FDV incidence over time and across states is essential if we are to learn more about drivers of intimate partner violence and reduce its prevalence.

### FDV destroys lives

Exposure to FDV has severe and far-reaching consequences for survivors. Existing evidence highlights the profound harm that IPV inflicts on women’s health<sup>4</sup> and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, IPV imposes significant economic burdens on societies through lost income, reduced productivity, increased expenditures on support services, and negative effects on human capital formation.<sup>6</sup> Beyond these impacts, however, FDV not only severely disrupts women’s lives, but, in some cases, leads to the tragic loss of life.

Femicide—the gender-related killing of women and girls — is a tragically persistent issue in Australia. As Figure 5 shows, a total of 93 women aged 18 and above were victims of FDV-related femicide and related offences in 2023. This represents a 75 per cent increase relative to 2022.

**Figure 5:** Number of victims of FDV-related homicide and related offences by gender and age



**Notes:** Homicide and related offences include murder, attempted murder and manslaughter. Excludes driving causing death.

**Source:** Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Data from Recorded Crime – Victims 2023

While adult men are not immune to such tragic forms of FDV, the numbers suffering FDV-related homicide or other offences is considerably lower. In comparison, gender differences in exposure to FDV-related homicide and related offences for the under-18 population are negligible.

An emerging body of work demonstrates the effectiveness of programs that empower at-risk victims with the information and tailored safety plans needed to make lifesaving choices.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that, on average, femicide victims have high rates of engagement with police prior to their deaths, underscoring the potential for femicide prevention through the integration of risk assessments and enhanced criminal justice interventions for these cases.<sup>8</sup>

The contrast between rising counts of FDV-related homicides with growing international evidence of successful programs inevitably raises questions on whether Australia is making sufficient progress in protecting potential femicide victims.

### Patterns of coercive control

FDV advocates are increasingly concerned about the prevalence and impacts of *coercive control*, defined as patterns of ongoing and repetitive controlling behaviour to intimidate and force contact with a current or ex intimate partner.

In addition to physical violence and intimidation, such coercive activities often include economic abuse, systems abuse and stalking behaviours.<sup>9</sup>

Economic abuse is an increasingly important concern in the context of family and intimate partner relationships. It occurs when someone's access to financial resources is restricted or controlled, leading to emotional harm or fear.

Up to 16 per cent (1.6 million) of Australian women and 7.8 per cent (745,000) of men report lifetime experience of economic abuse. This can include creating ongoing financial obligations or running up debt in the victim's name.<sup>10</sup>

Systems abuse is where legal, administrative and regulatory processes are mis-used in a vexatious or intimidatory manner that force ongoing contact with the perpetrator and cost the victim money, time and stress. This can include family violence orders, family court proceedings, Centrelink, child support and child protection activities.<sup>11</sup>

Police, lawyers, counsellors, judicial officers and administrators need to be increasingly aware of how legitimate bureaucratic and legal processes can be misused in a vexatious manner. They need to question the intent of proceedings, look for and become aware of patterns of activity that identify coercive control.

In a similar vein, the Australian Taxation Office is currently working on processes to identify economic and systems abuse within tax systems.

Technologically-facilitated abuse and coercive control is another area of concern that has evolved rapidly in recent years.<sup>12</sup> This can include monitoring personal devices (such as the victim or their children's phones and computers), the use of tracking devices or AirTags, audio and visual recording, harassment on social media, accessing accounts without permission, impersonating a person, publishing private information ('doxing') and sharing sexualised content without consent.

The 2021-22 Personal Safety Survey found that over half of the adult population has experienced technologically facilitated abuse, while 1 in 5 women and over 1 in 15 men have experienced stalking since the age of 15.<sup>13</sup>

Digital tracking and stalking are now creating huge challenges for FDV shelters and women's refuges. Secure locations can be easily compromised, putting staff and other clients at risk of harm.

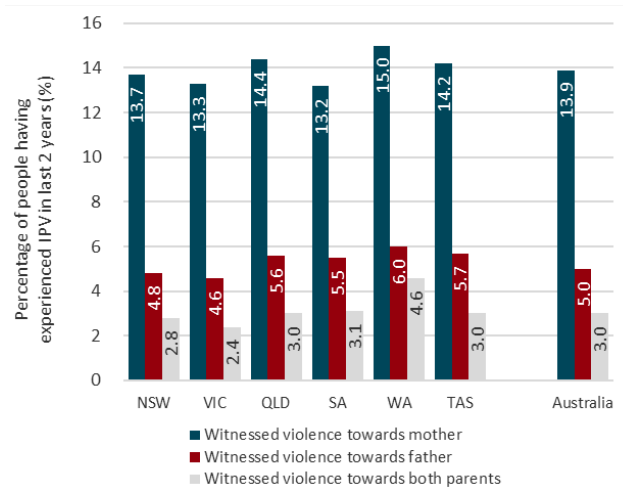
Services are now needed to scan vehicles and belongings and to clean devices and accounts as part of the process of safety risk management.

### Intergenerational effects of FDV

FDV has a profound and negative impact on the wellbeing of children in the household by affecting their health<sup>14</sup> and developmental<sup>15</sup> outcomes. Australian evidence shows that parental IPV has large, long-lasting negative effects on children's health.<sup>16</sup> A higher incidence of IPV is associated with a lower chance that parents report their child to be in excellent or very good health, and an increase in the likelihood that the child is diagnosed with an ongoing medical condition.

Partner violence can also damage children's behaviours in later life. The intergenerational transmission of violence is one of the key features of observed patterns of IPV.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 6:** Share of people who have witnessed violence towards their parents before age 15



**Source:** Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Data from Personal Safety Survey 2021-22

Confronted with these consequences, it is particularly alarming to see the high prevalence of individuals who have witnessed violence towards their parents before the age of 15 (Figure 6). Nationally, nearly 14 per cent of Australians have witnessed violence towards their mother.

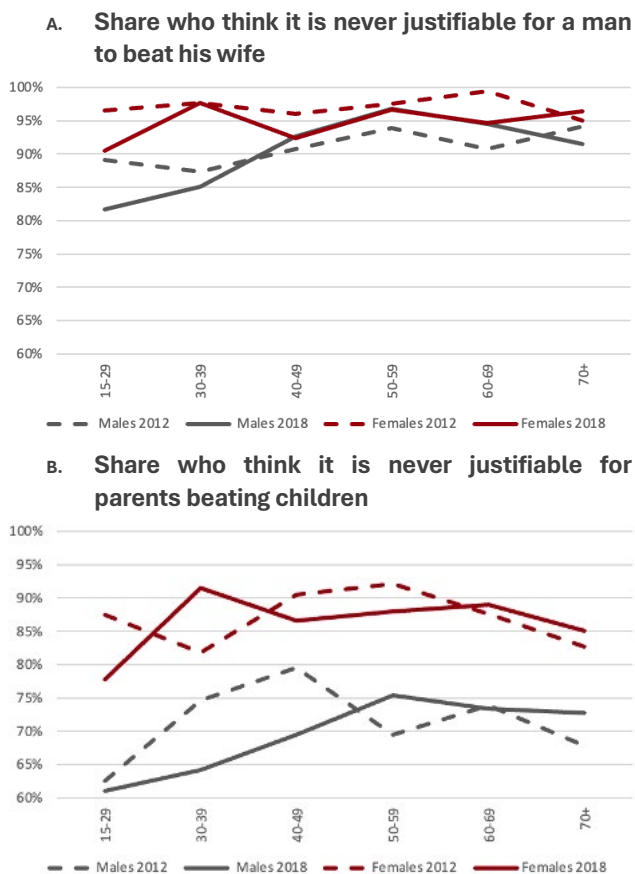
The share of individuals having witnessed violence towards their mother before the age of 15 range from 15 per cent in Western Australia to 13.2 per cent in South Australia.

Research also highlights the co-occurrence of FDV and child sexual abuse. Women who have been victims of child sexual abuse are more likely to experience intimate partner sexual violence in later life.<sup>18</sup> Children living in a household where they are exposed to FDV are also at higher risk from co-occurring child sexual abuse.<sup>19</sup>

### Attitudes to IPV by gender and age

Another factor explaining violence is how acceptable it is considered. Attitudes to IPV are an important predictor of IPV incidence globally.<sup>20</sup> In Australia, the share of individuals who believe wife beating can never be justifiable is reassuringly high, and higher among females compared to males (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Share of people who think FDV can never be justifiable by gender and age cohort**



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | World Values Surveys 2012 and 2018

However, a non-negligible share of males believe that wife beating may be justifiable, especially at younger ages. Only 82 per cent of 15–29-year-old males in 2018 shared the belief that wife beating can never be justifiable. Reassuringly, beliefs

improve with age, which suggests that life experiences and learning improve attitudes to IPV.

FDV is not limited to IPV. Violence is also perpetrated against other members of families, including children. Tolerance towards parents beating children is surprisingly high, especially among young males. As of 2018, only 61 per cent of 15–29-year-old males believed that parents beating children can never be justifiable. This, to an extent, may be due to normalisation of own exposure to parental violence through childhood. For males in older cohorts, this share goes up to over 70 per cent. These numbers highlight the need for efforts to address FDV to focus on all members of families including children.

### Why does FDV happen?

Social sciences have proposed several frameworks to explain IPV.<sup>21</sup>

Theories of instrumental violence construe violence as a way to control women’s resources. In line with these theories, evidence suggests that women are at a higher risk of experiencing violence shortly after the receipt of welfare payments<sup>22</sup> or after joining the labour force.<sup>23</sup>

Theories of expressive violence, on the other hand, suggest that violence may be a source of utility to some and is used to relieve frustration. For example, research shows that losses in major sporting events can lead to an increase in IPV due to heightened emotional intensity.<sup>24</sup>

Australian evidence suggests that women who earn more than their male partners are subject to a 33 per cent increase in partner violence and a 20 per cent increase in emotional abuse – a finding that is in line with the idea of male backlash.

Exposure reduction theory predicts that IPV increases with the amount of time violent couples spend together – a prediction well supported by increases in prevalence of IPV during COVID-19.<sup>25</sup>

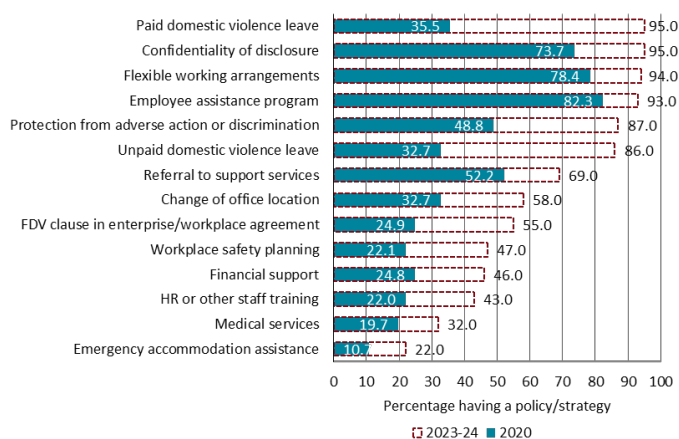
### What are businesses doing to support workers experiencing FDV?

All members of our community have a role to play in mitigating FDV, and encouragingly, there has been a positive shift in workplace policies that address the issue. More companies now offer support to employees experiencing FDV, with the range of specific policies also rising substantially.

For example, just over a third (36 per cent) of Australian companies offered paid family and domestic violence leave in 2020 (Figure 8). This share has risen to 95 per cent in 2023-24.

There has also been a significant increase in the share of organisations offering protection from adverse action or discrimination, from 49 per cent in 2020 to 87 per cent in 2023-24.

**Figure 8: Company policies to support employees experiencing FDV: 2020 and 2023-24**



Source: Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre | Data from Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)

### Current government strategies to support people experiencing FDV

The Australian Government has invested over \$4 billion in women’s safety and delivering the 10 year [National Plan to End Gender Based Violence](#)<sup>26</sup> since its launch in 2022, including \$534.5m for six years announced in the mid-year economic and fiscal outlook (MYEFO) for 2024. All Australian state and territory governments committed to the National Plan and two 5-year [action plans](#) via a series of national cabinet meetings during 2024.<sup>27</sup>

The National Plan creates a national framework to coordinate investment and guide actions across states and territories with the aim to end violence against women and children within a generation. It is structured across domains of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery & healing.

The National Partnership Agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses was extended in September 2024 until 2029 with \$337m in Commonwealth funding and matching state and territory commitments.

The [National Access to Justice Partnership Agreement](#) 2025-30 was also signed in September 2024, with commitments of \$3.9b over five years, including \$833m for Community Legal Centres, \$276m for Women’s Legal Services and \$367m for FDV Prevention Legal Services.

[Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices](#) is the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family safety plan being developed by SNAICC (the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) at the direction of National Cabinet to address the high rates of family violence experienced by Aboriginal women and children. It links directly with the relevant Closing the Gap targets and strategies. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet commissioned a rapid review of prevention approaches called [Unlocking the Prevention Potential](#) released in August 2024.

This informed National Cabinet discussions of ongoing priority action areas funded in MYEFO 2024, including responding to high risk and serial perpetrators of FDV (\$82.4m over four years) and support for children and young people who have experienced violence (\$81.3m over six years).

There is a strong focus on the education of children and young people as a means of prevention. A [Consent Policy Framework](#) has been developed with additional resources for Consent and Respectful Relationships Education in schools via a federation funding agreement with all states and territories (\$77.6m across 2024-28) and a \$40 million [Consent Can’t Wait campaign](#).

There is an emerging concern that online platforms are having a damaging impact on the attitudes of boys and young men toward sexual violence, providing \$34.8m for early intervention counselling for young men and boys with adverse childhood experiences and elevated FDV risk.

### Summary

There is greater community awareness and concern about the impacts of intimate partner violence as well as evidence of shifting attitudes to gendered violence across generations.

Australian governments recognise IPV as a policy priority and are pursuing coordinated and evidence-based strategies to address high prevalence rates and related harm.

At the same time, frontline FDV services express concern that significant numbers of women and children are still being turned away from services.

New and emerging threats arising from technologically facilitated stalking and abuse are a major concern and significant work is required to get ahead of the curve of increasing potential for harm to devise systems for identifying, stopping and preventing growing harm.

There is also a growing cohort of young men in Australia whose views of gendered violence and male entitlement are being shaped by social media and exposure to violent pornography, contributing to rising rates of harmful sexual behaviours and radicalisation.

There remain significant challenges in aligning policies, legislation and regulation across jurisdictions and sharing data to deliver aligned and consistent approaches to prevent abuse or evasion of justice crossing borders.

Early evaluation data from the National Plan provides evidence of shifting attitudes, giving momentum for efforts to end gendered violence.

Education, prevention and early intervention are rightly identified as priorities. However, state and Federal governments must commit sufficient resources towards awareness raising and outreach activities, and ensure better policy coordination, if Australia is to achieve the stated National Plan target of ending gendered violence within a generation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Globally, around 26 per cent of women aged 15 and older are estimated to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their intimate partner at least once in their lifetime, according to data from the World Health Organization.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (2021), *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence of non-partner sexual violence*.

<sup>3</sup> The share of FDV-related incidents reported to the police is known to represent a small fraction of the true FDV incidence, for a range of reasons, from fear of retribution and personal safety, through to concern on the part of the person making the report of not being believed. Only a quarter of female respondents to the 2016 PSS reported FDV incidents to the police.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, J. C. (2002). Health consequences of intimate partner violence. *The Lancet*, 359(9314), 1331-1336.

<sup>5</sup> Santos, C. (2013). Costs of domestic violence: a life satisfaction approach. *Fiscal Studies*, 34(3), 391-409.

<sup>6</sup> Duvvury, N., Callan, A., Carney, P., & Raghavendra, S. (2013). Intimate partner violence: Economic costs and implications for growth and development. World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>7</sup> Koppa, V. (2024). Can information save lives? Effect of a victim-focused police intervention on intimate partner homicides. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 217, 756-782.

<sup>8</sup> Koppa, V., & Messing, J. T. (2021). Can justice system interventions prevent intimate partner homicide? An analysis of rates of help seeking prior to fatality. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(17-18), 8792-8816.

<sup>9</sup> Beckworth, S., Lowe, L., Wall, L., Stevens, E., Carson, R., Kaspiw, R., MacDonald, J., Mcewen, J., Willoughby, M. & Gahan, L. (2023). *Coercive Control Literature Review: Final Report*. La Trobe. Report.

<sup>10</sup> JCCFS (2024). *Financial abuse: an insidious form of domestic violence*. Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services. Parliament of Australia.

<sup>11</sup> Reeves, E. (2018) *Systems Abuse*. Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre.

<sup>12</sup> eSafety Commissioner (2023) *Technology-facilitated abuse: family, domestic and sexual violence literature scan*, Canberra: Australian Government.

<sup>13</sup> AIHW (2024) *Family Domestic and Sexual Violence*.

<sup>14</sup> Bhuller, M., Dahl, G. B., Løken, K. V., & Mogstad, M. (2024). Domestic violence reports and the mental health and well-being of victims and their children. *Journal of Human Resources*, 59, 152-186.

<sup>15</sup> Anderberg, D., & Moroni, G. (2020). Exposure to intimate partner violence and children's dynamic skill accumulation: Evidence from a UK longitudinal study. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36(4), 783-815.

<sup>16</sup> Bharati, T., Mavisakalyan, A., & Vu, L. (2024). Intimate partner abuse and child health (No. 1413). GLO Discussion Paper.

<sup>17</sup> Ehrensaft, M. K., & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J. (2021). Intergenerational transmission of intimate partner violence: Summary and current research on processes of transmission. *Handbook of interpersonal violence and abuse across the lifespan: A project of the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan (NPEIV)*, 2485-2509.

<sup>18</sup> Cox, P. (2015). *Sexual assault and domestic violence in the context of co-occurrence and re-victimisation*. ANROWS.

<sup>19</sup> Campo, M. (2015). *Children's exposure to domestic and family violence: Key issues and responses* (CFCA Paper No. 36). Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>20</sup> Heise, L. L., & Kotsadam, A. (2015). Cross-national and multilevel correlates of partner violence: an analysis of data from population-based surveys. *The Lancet Global Health*, 3(6), e332-e340.

<sup>21</sup> Hsu, L., & Henke, A. (2022). Intimate partner violence. *Handbook of labor, human resources and population economics*, 1-23.

<sup>22</sup> Hsu, L. C. (2017). The timing of welfare payments and intimate partner violence. *Economic Inquiry*, 55(2), 1017-1031.

<sup>23</sup> Heath, R. (2014). Women's access to labor market opportunities, control of household resources, and domestic violence: Evidence from Bangladesh. *World Development*, 57, 32-46.

<sup>24</sup> Card, D., & Dahl, G. B. (2011). Family violence and football: The effect of unexpected emotional cues on violent behavior. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 126(1), 103-143.

<sup>25</sup> Hsu, L. C., & Henke, A. (2021). COVID-19, staying at home, and domestic violence. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 19(1), 145-155

<sup>26</sup> See <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/meeting-national-cabinet-7>