

Violence against women: A gendered problem

Violence against women is gendered in nature; the root causes of violence against women are gendered (gender inequity), the patterns of perpetration and victimisation are gendered (women are overwhelmingly victims/survivors and men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators), and the impacts of violence affect women and men differently.

The language of Violence Against Women

The terminology used to describe the problem of violence against women varies across the prevention sector, and is often context-specific. For the most part, the *Preventing Violence Together* Partnership uses the term ‘violence against women’, in our regional plan and formal documentation.

The partnership draws on the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and defines it as:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life¹

A brief summary of the various terms used across the sector and a rationale for why we use the term ‘violence against women’, is provided below.

Domestic violence

- Term used historically to denote violence that occurs in the home
- The term can sometimes be used pejoratively to minimize the violence, i.e. it is a ‘domestic’ issue, rather than a crime and human rights violation
- The gendered patterns of perpetration and victimization remain unchallenged

Family violence

- Used frequently throughout the sector, and reflects the legal currency of the terminology (it is the term used in legislation pertaining to family law matters, including violence)
- The term ‘family violence’ can also encompass violence perpetrated against extended family members, for example the elder abuse of a grandparent
- It is important to note, that family violence is the preferred term for violence within Aboriginal communities. It is also the terminology used in *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families*, the ten year state government plan to redress violence in Indigenous communities

Intimate partner violence

- Refers to violence that occurs between people who are, or were formerly, in an intimate relationship
- This term overlaps with the term ‘family violence’

¹ United Nations General Assembly, 1993, United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, United Nations General Assembly, Geneva.

- Again, the term ‘intimate partner violence’ does not explicitly acknowledge gendered patterns of perpetration and victimisation

Rationale for the term, ‘Violence against women’

- Explicitly acknowledges that women are the predominant victims/survivors of violence
- Acknowledges the gendered nature of violence; violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately²
- It allows a focus on other forms of violence that form part of the broader ‘web’ of violence that women experience - at the individual, relationship, community, and societal level.
- Encompasses other forms of violence against women, such as trafficking of women and sexual exploitation.
- It is the terminology drawn on in the present state and national prevention of violence against women plans

The differences in women’s and men’s experiences of violence

While both women and men experience violence and are capable of inflicting violence, it is important to recognise the differences in the violence experienced by women and men. Notably, both women and men are most at risk of violence from men.

Risk of violence³

Men are most at risk of violence from other men

Men are most at risk of violence from men they do not know

Men are most at risk of experiencing violence in a public space

Women are most at risk of violence from men

Women are most at risk of violence from men they know

Women are most at risk of experiencing violence in their home

Impact of violence

Violence has a profound impact on all victims/survivors. However, women are far more likely than men to:

- be sexually assaulted
- fear for their lives due to enacted violence or the threat of violence
- experience physical injuries
- experience psychological harms, including mental health problems
- experience post-separation violence from their former partner
- require medical attention or hospitalisation
- experience repeated violence in intimate relationships
- be killed by their intimate partner or former intimate partner^{4 5}

² United Nations General Assembly, 1979, *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, United Nations, Geneva.

³ Flood, M, 2006, ‘Violence against women and men in Australia: what the personal safety survey can and can’t tell us’, *DVIRC Quarterly*, 4, pp.3-10.

⁴ VicHealth, 2007, *Preventing violence before it occurs: a framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*, VicHealth, Melbourne.

⁵ Mulrone, J & Chan, C, 2005, *Men as victims of domestic violence*, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, NSW.