

Violence against women: Prevalence and impacts

Definition

The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women 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

Prevalence

Violence against women (VAW) is an under-reported crime. As such, the statistics available on VAW are likely to be an underestimate of the true extent to which violence against women occurs. Even so, available research highlights some alarming and concerning statistics around the prevalence of VAW in Australia.

For Australian women aged 15 years and over:

- One in three have experienced physical violence
- One in five have experienced sexual violence
- One in four have experienced emotional abuse from a partner
- One in five have been stalked²

Health, social, economic and cultural impacts

VAW has profound impacts for women and their children. VAW (in particular, intimate partner violence) is the leading cause of premature death, disability and illness for women aged 15-44 years in Victoria³.

An overview of some of the health, social, economic and cultural impacts of violence against women, for women's health, safety and wellbeing, is presented in the table below.

Health impacts

Mental, emotional and psychological health⁴

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| ▪ Traumatic and post traumatic stress disorders | ▪ Eating disorders |
| ▪ Anxiety | ▪ Self harm |
| | ▪ Suicidal ideation |

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

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2012, *The Personal Safety Survey, 2012*, Cat. No. 4906.0, ABS, Canberra.

³ VicHealth, 2004, *The health costs of violence: Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence*, VicHealth, Melbourne.

⁴ The Royal Women's Hospital, 2012, *Family Violence – Information for Women*, The Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne.

Health impacts

- Depression
- Substance dependency (including tobacco and alcohol use, illicit and prescribed drug use)
- Flash backs, sleeping problems and nightmares
- Panic attacks

Physical health⁵

- Brain injuries
- Chronic disabilities
- Bruises
- Fractures
- Lacerations and tears
- Homicide - a woman is killed in Australia by a current or former partner nearly every week⁶

Sexual and Reproductive health⁷

- Unplanned pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- Abortion/terminations (illegal and legal)
- Problems in getting pregnant
- Gynaecological disorders and complications
- Pregnancy complications
- Heavy periods and period pain

Social, cultural and economic impacts⁸

- Social isolation
- Financial dept
- Lack of financial resources
- Unemployment
- Employment difficulties
- Limited/no access to cultural/spiritual supports
- Insecure housing
- Homelessness - one in five women seeking supported accommodation does so in response to violence in the home⁹
- In 2009, VAW and their children cost the Australian economy around \$13.6 billion¹⁰
- Australian businesses lose at least \$500 million a year due to the impacts of intimate partner violence¹¹

⁵ Kramer, A, Lorenzon, D & Mueller, G, 2004, *Prevalence of intimate partner violence and health implications for women using emergency departments and primary care clinics*, Women's Health Issues, 14, pp.19-29.

⁶ Dearden, J, & Jones, W, 2008, *Homicide in Australia: 2006 – 07 National Homicide Monitoring Program Annual Report*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

⁷ The Royal Women's Hospital, 2012, *Family Violence – Information for Women*, The Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne.

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⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008, *Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2006-07*, SAAP NDCA Report Series 12, Canberra.

¹⁰ The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, 2009, *Background paper for A Time for Action: the National Council's Plan for Australia to reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*, FaCHSIA, Federal Government, Canberra.

¹¹ Henderson & Associates, 2000, *Impacts and Costs of Domestic Violence on the Australian Business Sector*, Brisbane City Council, Queensland.