

6. Preventing Violence Against Women

What is violence against women?

Violence against women is any act of gender based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or in private life.¹ Violence against women is not only or always physical. It includes psychological, economic, emotional and sexual violence and abuse, and a wide range of controlling, coercive and intimidating behaviours e.g. stalking.²

Violence against women occurs across the whole community; however certain groups of women experience much higher rates of male violence than others. These vulnerable groups include women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, women in rural and remote areas, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women.³

Family Violence encompasses all forms of domestic and intimate partner violence and is the preferred term used in Victoria by services and government.

What are some of the individual impacts of violence against women?

Violence against women and their children takes a profound and long-term toll on women and children's health and wellbeing, on families and communities, and on society a whole.⁴ Exposure by children to violence against women is a recognised form of child abuse that causes significant harm on them, with potential impacts on attitudes to relationships and violence, as well as behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning, social development, and – through a process of 'negative chain effects' – education and later employment prospects.⁵

Intimate partner violence contributes to more premature death, disability and illness in women aged 15 to 44 than any other preventable risk factor.⁶ Intimate partner violence has wide-ranging and persistent effects on women's physical and mental health.⁷ The greatest of these is mental illness – anxiety and depression – which make up 58% of the disease burden resulting from violence.⁸

Family violence against women is the single largest driver of homelessness for women,⁹ a common factor in child protection notifications,¹⁰ and results in a police call-out on average once every two minutes across the country.¹¹ One-third (34%) of the clients seeking support from homeless services reported they had experienced family violence.¹²

Above all, violence against women is a fundamental violation of human rights, and one that Australia has an obligation to prevent under international law.¹³

What are the economic costs of violence against women?

The combined health, administration and social welfare costs of violence against women have been estimated to be \$21.7 billion per year, with projections suggesting that if no further action is taken to prevent violence against women, costs will accumulate to \$323.4 billion over a thirty year period from 2014 - 15 to 2044 - 45.¹⁴

What causes violence against women?

Although violence against women has no single cause, there is substantial evidence that higher levels of violence against women are consistently associated with lower levels of gender equality in both public life and personal relationships.

Within this broader context, Our Watch's national evidence based primary prevention framework titled - *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women*

and their children in Australia - identifies four specific, **gendered drivers** of violence against women including:

1. condoning violence, particularly by excusing or trivialising it, or 'blaming the victim';
2. men's control of decision-making, and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships;
3. rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity; and
4. male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.¹⁵

Given the evidence, Victorian councils are increasingly acknowledging their role in the prevention of violence against women, particularly given their involvement in creating healthy and safe communities. Our Watch advocates for addressing the deep seated drivers of inequality, including rigid stereotypes and the unequal value afforded to women and men, as key to preventing men's violence against women.

Other factors such as harmful use of alcohol or condoning of violence in general interact with or reinforce gender inequality to make violence against women worse, but do not drive violence against women in and of themselves.¹⁶

Gender inequality

Gender inequality is the key driver of violence against women as outlined above. This persistent inequality is widespread across Australian society, industry, and culture, where there is still a 23.1% gender pay gap.¹⁷ Fifty percent of women report experiencing discrimination due to pregnancy, parental leave, or return to work.¹⁸ In addition to this, there continues to be low levels of female representation in elected positions and executive leadership.

Women also retire with just over half the superannuation savings of men. The most recent assessment completed in 2011-2012 showed that the average balance at the time of retirement was \$105,000 for women and \$197,000 for men.¹⁹

Gender inequality in Monash

In 2011/12 there were 914 'Family Incidents' reported by police regions and Local Government area in Monash, this number has increased in the 2015/16 period to 1,343 reports in Monash.²⁰

In 2013, 45% of Monash residents held low levels of support for equal relationships between men and women which was represented by 'low gender equality in relationships score'.²¹

This compares poorly against the State level where 35.7% of Victorians held low levels of support for equal relationships between men and women.²²

Sexual assault

The sexual offences indicator quantifies acts, or intent of acts, of a sexual nature against another person, which are non-consensual or where consent is proscribed (i.e. the person is legally deemed incapable of giving consent because of youth or temporary/permanent incapacity). This includes rape, indecent assault, sexual offences against children, and other sexual offences.²³

Violence against men

All violence is wrong, regardless of the sex of the victim or perpetrator. But there are distinct gendered patterns in the perpetration and impact of violence.

For example, both women and men are more likely to experience violence at the hands of men, with around 95% of all victims of violence in Australia reporting a male perpetrator.²⁴

While men are more likely to experience violence by other men in public places, women are more likely to experience violence from men they know, often in the home.²⁵

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey estimates that 5.3 per cent of men (that is, one in 19) have experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a current or previous partner since the age of 15²⁶

The overwhelming majority of acts of family violence and sexual assault are perpetrated by men against women, and this violence is likely to have more severe impacts on female than male victims.²⁷

How prevalent is violence against women?

Violence against women is now recognised to be a serious and widespread problem in Australia, with enormous individual and community impacts and social costs.

This significant social problem is *preventable*. To prevent violence against women we first need to understand it.

National Context

The following basic statistics help demonstrate the prevalence and severity of violence against women:

- On average, at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia and the majority of homicides (58%) are classified as intimate partner.²⁸
- One in three Australian women has experienced physical violence, since the age of 15.²⁹
- One in four Australian women has experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.³⁰
- One in four Australian women has experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner.³¹ One in five Australian women has experienced sexual violence.³²
- Women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner.³³
- Women are five times more likely than men to require medical attention or hospitalisation as a result of intimate partner violence, and five times more likely to report fearing for their lives.³⁴
- Of those women who experience violence, more than half have children in their care.³⁵
- Violence against women is not limited to the home or intimate relationships. Every year in Australia, over 300,000 women experience violence – often sexual violence – from someone other than a partner.³⁶
- Eight out of ten women aged 18 to 24 were harassed on the street in the past year.³⁷
- Young women (18 – 24 years) experience significantly higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women in older age groups.³⁸
- There is growing evidence that women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence.³⁹
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience both far higher rates and more severe forms of violence compared to other women.⁴⁰

State Context

In Victoria in 2015-16, police responded to 78,012 family violence incidents with children present in 25,754 of these cases. Charges were laid in 30,960 incidences. Almost 80% of reported family violence victims in Victoria are women.⁴¹

In 2015, the Victorian Government recognised the impacts that family violence has on the Victorian community and instigated a Royal Commission into Family Violence, the first in Australia (and worldwide). The Royal Commission into Family Violence found that gender inequality is one of the key drivers behind family violence.⁴² It identified that the large majority of victims—75%—are women and that to effectively address and end violence against women, then we must begin by addressing gender inequality.⁴³

Action on gender inequality is urgent. Family violence costs the Victorian economy more than \$3.4 billion per year. Closing Australia's gender employment gap – including the pay gap and number of women in the paid workforce – would boost the GDP by 11 per cent.⁴⁴

In 2016 the Victorian Government subsequently committed to implementing all 227 recommendations made by the Royal Commission and on 5 December released the *Safe and Strong - A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy- Preventing Violence Against Women Through Gender Equality* which aims to address inequality, sexism and violence against women in all its forms. The reforms and initiatives detailed in this Strategy include:

- A Gender Equality Act;
- A new agency dedicated to preventing family violence before it starts;
- Reviewing laws against sexist advertising and gender based hate speech;
- Gender audits across government and the public sector to create inclusive and flexible workplaces;
- Scholarships to encourage young and emerging women leaders;
- Gender equality programs in grassroots sporting clubs;
- HERPlace – a women's heritage centre;
- Hosting the first all women trade delegation to China; and
- Promoting women's cultural activities, art and media.⁴⁵

The Victorian Government provided \$9 million to women and gender equality initiatives in the *Victorian Budget 2016/17*.⁴⁶

Regional and Local Context

Sexual Assaults

Sexual assault is both a consequence and a reinforcer of the power disparity existing between men and women and children. One in five women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 years.⁴⁷ The impact of sexual assault and family violence on the lives of victim/survivors is multi-faceted and complex. It includes emotional, social, psychological, legal, health, spiritual, economic and political consequences.⁴⁸

Refer to Table 1: Monash Sexual Offences Reported Incidences for a summary of the number of victim reports received in 2014 and Table 2: Monash Sexual Offences Rate (per 10,000).

Table 1: Monash Sexual Offences Reported Incidences

Sexual Offences Reported Incidences					
The number of victim reports received in the year period 2014.					
Monash		Metro East Average		State Average	
F	78	F	81.9	F	61.4
M	24	M	24.3	M	15.1
				All	38.3

Source: Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, Family Violence Affected Family Members by LGA and sex, January 2014 to December 2014, 2014

Table 2: Monash Sexual Offence Rate (per 10,000) details the number of victim reports received for Monash in the year period 2014 per 10,000 persons.

Table 2: Monash Sexual Offences Rate (per 10,000)

Sexual Offences Rate (per 10,000)					
The number of victim reports received in the year period 2014 per 10,000 persons.					
Monash		Metro East Average		State Average	
F	4.61	F	5.8	F	10.2
M	1.42	M	1.7	M	2.6
				All	6.4

Source: Crime Statistics Agency Victoria, Family Violence Affected Family Members by LGA and sex, January 2014 to December 2014, 2014

Together for Equality & Respect (TFER)

A review of local data demonstrates that violence against women in the Eastern Metropolitan Region is unacceptably high. In the financial year of 2011-2012, Victoria Police recorded 5,818 incidents of family violence in the Eastern Metropolitan Region including the seven municipalities of Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse and Yarra Ranges.⁴⁹

Together for Equality and Respect (TFER) is a regional Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women (PVAW) in Melbourne's East. Women's Health East (in partnership with inner eastern local governments, community health services, Primary Care Partnerships and Eastern Community Legal service and others) has coordinated the development of this Strategy which includes the case for action in the primary PVAW, explains the causation and evidence for primary PVAW prevention. Building on this knowledge, and developed through a collaborative and consultative process, this document provides a vision for the future of the Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Monash City Council

Monash City Council has a strong and long-term commitment to the prevention of violence against women and the promotion of gender equity and has identified preventing violence against women as a key strategic health and wellbeing priority.

Monash Council was the lead partner in the *Generating Equality and Respect Program*, an innovative three year prevention of violence against women partnership program.

The program was implemented from 2012 - 2015 with a partnership between Council, Link Health and Community and Vic Health. This program aimed to prevent violence against women before it occurs by building communities, cultures and organisations that are gender equitable and promote

equal and respectful relationships between men and women through addressing the underlying drivers of violence against women.⁵⁰

Further information about the Generating Equality and Respect program can be found at:
<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/search/generating-equality-and-respect-resources>

In November 2015, Monash Council endorsed Monash's Gender Equity Strategy (2015-2020). This Strategy builds upon and formalises Council's longstanding commitment to promoting gender equity and preventing violence against women. Achieving gender equity is critical to improving the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities and is a core principle of a fair, safe and inclusive community.

The Gender Equity Strategy (2015-2020) is accompanied by an action plan with over 60 actions for the first two years across a number of departments within Council and the establishment of a Gender Equity Advisory Committee. The role of the Gender Equity Advisory Committee is to provide Council with advice on improving gender equity within the Monash community, to actively encourage women's full and equal participation in community life and the implementation of the Gender Equity Strategy.

Support Services

If you are in need of urgent police assistance call '000'.

For sexual assault and family violence counselling service call 1800 RESPECT /1800 737 732 - 24/7 phone and online service.

Or the Eastern Domestic Violence Service on 9259 4200, 9am-5pm Monday-Friday.

6. Preventing Violence Against Women – Reference List

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