

Fact sheet 1.

Violence against women



Introduction

This series of 12 fact sheets has been developed by Our Watch in conjunction with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and all state and territory local government associations. We acknowledge and thank all representatives for their input and guidance into their development. In particular, we acknowledge the generosity of the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) for sharing resources they have previously created as a basis for the development of these fact sheets.

These fact sheets provide an overview of and introduction to the role that local government can play in the primary prevention of violence against women. They are relevant for councils and council staff at various stages of their prevention work. For more detailed information about the role of council in prevention, visit Our Watch's [Prevention toolkit for local government](#). At times, language and concepts that are specific to the work of preventing violence against women, and gender equality are used. For more in-depth definitions of these and other relevant terms, see the glossary of terms on page 133 of [Change the story](#).

What is violence against women and how prevalent is it?

The term 'violence against women' encompasses different types of violence, including domestic and family violence, intimate partner violence, sexual

harassment and sexual assault. It includes physical, sexual, financial, social, emotional, psychological, spiritual and technological abuse, and stalking. Non-physical abuse is common, but can be harder to recognise, and is often not well understood. See ABC Everyday, ['Explaining coercive control in abusive relationships'](#) and Relationships Australia, [What is coercive control?](#)

Violence against women is far too common. It has widespread and significant effects for women across all communities. On average, one woman a week is killed in Australia by her intimate partner or ex-partner (while others are killed by men who are not intimate partners), and approximately four in five victims killed by an intimate partner are women.¹ Homicide is a tragic and visible aspect of violence against women, but the issue goes much deeper. In Australia, police deal with a family violence matter on average every two minutes². In addition:

- 1 in 3 women report experiencing physical or sexual violence, or both, from a man they know
- 1 in 4 women has experienced emotional abuse by a partner
- 1 in 2 women has experienced sexual harassment
- 1 in 5 women has experienced sexual violence.³
- Intimate partner violence is the greatest health risk factor for women aged 18 to 44 and contributes more to the burden of disease than any other risk factor.⁴

¹ Fitz-Gibbon, K., & Segrave, M. (2021, 1 March). [A woman is still being killed each week in Australia. We need federal leadership](#). *Guardian*.

² Blumer, C. (2015, 5 June). [Australian police deal with a domestic violence matter every two minutes](#). ABC News.

³ ANROWS. (2018). [Violence against women: Accurate use of key statistics](#).

⁴ Ayre J., Lum On, M., Webster K., & Moon, L. (2016). [Examination of the burden of disease of intimate partner violence against women: Final report, 2011](#). (ANROWS Horizons, 06/2016). ANROWS; Webster, K. (2016). [A preventable burden: Measuring and addressing the prevalence and health impacts of intimate partner violence in Australian women](#). (ANROWS Compass, 07/2016). ANROWS.

We say that violence is gendered because the patterns of perpetration and victimisation differ between genders. In addition, 95% of violence experienced by people of any gender is perpetrated by men.⁵

Fact sheet 6 contains suggestions for where to find up-to-date statistics on the prevalence of violence.

What are the impacts of violence against women?

Violence against women has significant and ongoing impacts on individuals, families and communities. Children can be impacted by family violence even before birth, and early exposure to family violence can cause lifelong physical and mental health issues.⁶ Victim-survivors of violence can experience a raft of physical, psychological and financial impacts, some lifelong. While not all women will experience violence in their lifetime, most live with the daily threat of violence, and are taught, as girls, how to avoid being victims of violence. For more information about some of the impacts of violence against women, see:

- Our Watch's Prevention in Action website – [What is violence against women?](#)
- ANROWS – Fast facts – [Impacts of family, domestic and sexual violence](#)
- ANROWS poster displaying [how intimate partner violence affects quality of life](#)
- a wheel displaying [how violence affects children](#).

How does gender inequality drive violence?

[Change the story](#) is Australia's shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women. It identifies that gender inequality creates the social context in which violence against women occurs. There are four types of gender inequality that are linked to higher levels of violence against women. These are known as the **gendered drivers (causes) of violence**. For more information on the role that gender plays in violence, see Fact sheet 3 and watch the [Change the story video](#).

Gendered violence isn't the same for everyone

While gender inequality drives the widespread violence experienced by Australian women, not everyone experiences this in the same way. Other inequalities and power imbalances affect how different women experience violence and whether they have access to adequate supports. This is linked to discrimination in the forms of colonialism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and classism. Because of this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities and trans women are more likely to experience violence and the violence they experience is likely to be more severe.⁷ Prevention work must be intersectional and consider the diverse lived experiences and inequalities experienced by different women. Watch a short explanatory video on '[what is intersectionality](#)' and the importance of intersectional approaches to equality work.

The gendered drivers of violence against women

Driver 1.

Condoning of violence against women

Driver 2.

Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life

Driver 3.

Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity

Driver 4.

Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control

⁵ Diemer, K. (2015). ABS Personal Safety Survey: Additional analysis on relationship and sex of perpetrator. University of Melbourne.

⁶ Davey, M. (2015, 14 July). [Family violence can affect children even before birth, Royal Commission told](#). *Guardian*; Murdoch Children's Research Institute. (2021, 21 April). [Children exposed to intimate partner violence twice as likely to have poorer language skills and mental and physical health](#). Institute News.

⁷ Our Watch, [Quick facts](#).

