

Scoping Violence Against Women in Australia

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Aim of Presentation

- Provide a guide to the prevalence of violence against women in Australia
- Examine issues for specific groups of women
- Discuss some impacts of violence for women and children
- Provide you with some information about what you can do

What is violence against women?

UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) definition:

"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result 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 in private life"

Includes:

- physical abuse
- sexual abuse
- psychological violence
- non-spousal violence
- sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere

Why does violence occur?

Feminist perspective is that:

- Founded in our society's privileging of men over women
- The beliefs of some men in rigid gender roles and stereotypes of men and women
- A belief of the rights of men to dominate and control women

Difficulties in identifying prevalence

- Violence against women remains a hidden crime often shrouded in secrecy and shame, collusion and cover-up
- Low levels of reporting and the reticence of women to agree to police charging offenders make it difficult to obtain reliable statistical information

National reports

- 48% of Australian women report experiencing at least one incident of physical violence, over their lifetime
- 34% of report experiencing at least one incident of sexual violence, over their lifetime
 - Mouzos & Makkai 2004, Australian component of the International Violence Against Women survey

How does violence affect different women?

Younger women

People often assume that domestic violence happens to older women or women with children or those in longer term relationships

Younger women

Most victims of domestic violence are aged between 20 and 30 years old

So, younger women are at greater risk than older women

Witnessing violence

- A national study of young people found that around one quarter of young Australians witness domestic violence
- This study also found that:
witnessing domestic violence is the most significant predictor for young people becoming violent in their own relationships
(Indermaur 2001)

Dating violence

Over a third of all boys and girls who had been in a dating relationship had experienced some form of physical violence in one or more of these relationships

Violence is prevalent in young people's relationships

Attitudes of young men

- Young men are more tolerant of violent behaviour in relationships than young women
- 37% of young men and only 12% of young women agreed with the statement:

“men should take control in relationships and be [the] head of the household”

Indigenous women

- Indigenous women suffer higher rates of more serious violence than other women

For example:

- In a police study in Western Australia, they were found to be victims of homicide up to ten times more often than non-Indigenous women and the violence is more serious

Indigenous women (cont'd)

In a national survey of women:

- 20% of Indigenous women reported physical violence in the preceding 12 months, compared with 7% of non-Indigenous women
- 12% of Indigenous women reported sexual violence, compared to 4% of non-Indigenous women

(Mouzos & Makkai 2004, Australian component of IVAWS)

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

- 7.5% of women from a non-English speaking background experience violence from their partner during their relationship
(ABS 1996)
- Women from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds face significant barriers in getting help:
 - Language barriers
 - Cultural and family pressures to keep the family together
 - Lack of understanding of the legal system
 - Lack of residency status and a fear of being deported
 - Religious beliefs

Women with disabilities

Researchers have found that compared to non-disabled women, women with disabilities:

- experience violence at higher rates and frequently are at a significantly higher risk of violence (between 2 and 12 times that of women without disabilities (Mulder 1995)
- have considerably fewer pathways to safety
- tend to be subjected to violence for significantly longer periods of time
- experience violence that is more diverse in nature
- experience violence at the hands of greater numbers of perpetrators

(WWDA 2007)

Lesbian women

A recent NSW study revealed that although the prevalence of violence in current lesbian relationships was low, the levels of abuse reported in previous lesbian relationships was very high with the highest levels occurring in the following categories:

- Humiliation 46%
 - Controlling-jealous behaviour 45.5%
 - Physical violence 36.5%
 - Social isolation 31.7%
- (Farrell and Cerise 2006)

What are some of the impacts of violence against women?

“Domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44 “

VicHealth 2003, *The Health Costs of Violence*

Direct health impacts for women from violence

- Injuries from assault
- Chronic health problems eg irritable bowel syndrome
- Increased unintended pregnancies
- Terminations
- Low birth weight babies
- Higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS

Direct health impacts for women (cont'd)

- Higher rates of depression and anxiety
- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Mental illness
- Abuse of alcohol and drugs
- Self harm
- Suicide

Contribution to homelessness

For many women and children domestic violence will be a route to long term homelessness, poverty and danger

Homelessness

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) report on Australian Supported Accommodation Assistance Program found that:

Domestic violence was the reason for accessing SAAP services for:

- 49% of women with children
- 40% of unaccompanied women aged 25 years and over

Women's fear of violence

ABS Public Safety Survey (2006)

- Only 15% of women feel safe using public transport alone after dark
 - 25% did not use it because they felt unsafe
- 61% of women felt safe walking in their local neighbourhood after dark
 - 5% did not do so because they felt unsafe

Women's fear of violence

Women's experiences and perceptions of violence significantly affect their sense of well-being and degree of confidence in their own safety

Impacts on women in the workforce

- Women often have to cease regular activities due to the abuse
- Women may have to take sick leave from work because of harm sustained
- Abused women earn less than women who do not suffer abuse, even after controlling for other factors that affect earnings (WHO 2005)

Children affected by domestic violence

ABS (2006) *Personal Safety Survey*:

- 61% of women who had experienced violence by a previous partner had children in their care
 - 36% said children had witnessed the violence
- 49% men and women who had experienced violence by a current partner had children in their care
 - 27% said the children had witnessed the violence

Implications for children

Children who witness actual or threatened violence against their mothers can suffer in a number of different ways including:

- higher levels of aggression and anxiety
- lower self esteem
- behavioural problems
- developmental problems
- lost school time and poor school performance
- adjustment problems
- bullying and excessive cruelty to animals

Estimates are that in 30-60% of cases of domestic violence, there is also child abuse (Edelson 1999)

Domestic violence impacts for children

These effects, in turn, impact on children's relations with their peers, on their educational attainment and on their own mental health

(Australian Family Court Family Violence Strategy 2004-2005)

What can you do?

- Get your university involved in **16 Days of Activism** to stop violence against women
Commences 25 November
- Nominate **White Ribbon Day** ambassadors from your university
See <http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au/>
- Establish university policies around zero tolerance for violence against women

What can you do?

- Establish links with local domestic violence and sexual assault services, and women's health services
- Make information available at your university for people experiencing violence and abuse
- Support people who report violence and abuse

What can you do?

- Contact the Clearinghouse for more information:
www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au

Or phone
(02) 9385 2990