

Summarising the evidence

# **MEN'S INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Research summary



Australian Government

Australian Institute of  
Family Studies

**RESPECT  
VICTORIA**



# Men's intimate partner violence against women

This research summary was developed by Respect Victoria. It draws on an evidence review undertaken by Elizabeth Watt, Charlotte Bell, Liz Eggins, Lorelei Hine and Brigette Gilbert (ANROWS) in 2022 as part of the Summarising the evidence project.

Visit the [Summarising the evidence project page](#) for the accompanying context brief, as well as information about the scope and aims of the project.

Respect Victoria gratefully acknowledges the work of the Australian Institute of Family Studies and all authors in conducting this work.

Domain	Summary of research
<b>Definition</b>	Intimate partner violence is defined as violence, abuse or aggression perpetrated by a person against their current or former spouse, partner or date.
<b>Behaviours</b>	Intimate partner violence includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• physical violence (including assault or threat of assault)</li> <li>• sexual violence (including assault or threat of assault)</li> <li>• emotional and psychological abuse</li> <li>• controlling behaviours including financial abuse and coercive control, and stalking.<sup>1,2</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Prevalence</b>	<p><b>How to read these data</b></p> <p>Data on intimate partner violence comes from a range of sources. Data collection methods, study samples and methods of analysis vary. Unless indicated otherwise, data for different groups of women (e.g. migrant and refugee women, older women) should not be directly compared. This evidence summary includes data on children’s exposure to intimate partner violence perpetrated against their mother or female caregiver. These data illustrate that when men use violence against women, children can also experience this violence along with the associated impacts on their development and well-being. More recently in policy and practice, children have been recognised as victim-survivors of violence in their own right. As such, the inclusion of children’s experiences of violence in this review is premised on the recognition of children as victim-survivors of intimate partner violence and not intended to suggest that children’s exposure to violence constitutes a lesser form of family violence.</p> <p>The best source of data on the nature and extent of intimate partner violence in Australia is the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Personal Safety Survey (PSS), with the most recent data available from 2021-22.<sup>3</sup> The survey provides reliable estimates of the prevalence and patterns of violence experienced by women at the population level. However, data on perpetrator characteristics are limited, and only gender and relationship to perpetrator are collected. Furthermore, the size of the sample limits the ability to ‘drill down’ into these findings, meaning men’s intimate partner violence estimates are not available for some groups of women (e.g., the number of women with disability who have experienced intimate partner violence by a male partner).</p> <p><b>Physical and sexual violence by a male intimate partner<sup>1</sup></b></p> <p>In 2021-22, almost 1 in 5 women (18%) had experienced physical violence perpetrated by a male intimate partner since the age of 15, and more than 1 in 10 (11%) had experienced sexual violence by a male intimate partner.<sup>3</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of data collection, the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ definition of ‘intimate partner’ includes “current partner (living with), previous partner (has lived with), boyfriend/girlfriend/date and ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend (never lived with).” Data on

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 1.4% of women experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a male intimate partner: 0.8% experienced physical violence and 0.8% had experienced sexual violence.<sup>3</sup>

Current and past intimate partners are the single largest category (56%) of known perpetrators of sexual violence in Australia.<sup>4</sup>

One study found that in a 12 to 24-month period, 6% of men reported perpetrating physical aggression against a woman.<sup>5</sup>

### **Emotional abuse by a cohabiting partner<sup>2</sup>**

In 2021-22, almost 1 in 4 (23%) women had experienced emotional abuse by a cohabiting partner since the age of 15.<sup>5</sup> No data are available on the gender of the perpetrator.

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 3.9% of women had experienced emotional abuse by a cohabiting partner.<sup>3</sup>

Analysis of 2016 PSS data found that when examined by type of abuse (i.e. controlling social behaviours, controlling financial behaviours, and threatening or degrading behaviours), the most common form of emotional abuse women had experienced since the age of 15 was threatening or degrading behaviours.<sup>6</sup>

### **Stalking by a male perpetrator**

Almost 1 in 5 (19.1%) women have experienced at least one incident of stalking by a male perpetrator since the age of 15.<sup>3</sup>

### **Intimate partner homicide**

In 2019-20, 36 women were murdered by an intimate partner – on average, 1 woman every 10 days. All perpetrators were men.<sup>3</sup>

Between 2010 and 2018, 240 women were killed by a male intimate partner. Of these, 59 (24.6%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience violence perpetrated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous men: 1 in 7 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women who were killed by a male intimate partner were killed by someone who did not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>7</sup>

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violence experienced by a previous partner includes partners who were violent during the relationship, after the relationship ended, or both.

<sup>2</sup> Emotional abuse data are only available for cohabiting partner relationships, not other intimate partner (i.e., boyfriend/girlfriend/date) relationships.

	<p><b>Severity of violence</b></p> <p>Intimate partner violence significantly impacts women’s mental and physical wellbeing, and is the leading contributor to death, injury and illness for women aged 18-44.<sup>8</sup></p> <p>Research suggests that men’s intimate partner violence is more severe than violence against women perpetrated by other male perpetrators. In 2016, when women who had experienced physical violence (by any perpetrator) were asked about their most recent experience of physical assault, those who were assaulted by their male partner were more likely to be physically injured in the incident (58%) than those whose most recent incident was perpetrated by another known male such as a friend or family member (45%) or a male stranger (29%).<sup>4</sup></p> <p>In 2020-21, almost 12 women a day were hospitalised for violence perpetrated by a spouse or domestic partner.<sup>9</sup> While data are not available on perpetrator gender, gendered patterns of intimate partner violence suggest that most (if not all) perpetrators would be men.<sup>9</sup></p>
<p><b>Victim survivor and perpetrator profile</b></p>	<p><b>Victim-survivor profile</b></p> <p><i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women</i></p> <p>Research investigating the prevalence of intimate partner violence towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women estimates that they are 2.5 times more likely to have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner than non-Indigenous women. This equates to an estimated 3 in 5 (65%) Indigenous women and girls over the age of 15.<sup>8,10</sup></p> <p>Research conducted in 2018-19 found that 14% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women had experienced physical and/or threatened physical harm in the last 12 months. Of the women who knew the perpetrator of the most recent incident, over half (52%) reported the perpetrator was a current or previous intimate partner.<sup>11</sup></p> <p><b>Disability</b></p> <p>Women with disability are at heightened risk of experiencing intimate partner violence compared to women without disability. In 2016, more than 1 in 3 (36%) women with disability reported experiencing intimate partner violence since the age of 15, compared to 1 in 5 (21%) women without disability.<sup>4</sup> More than 1 in 3 (37%) women with disability have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner since the age of 15.<sup>4</sup> The risk of experiencing intimate partner violence is increased further for women with certain types of disabilities. More than half of women with cognitive impairments (52%) and psychological impairments (51%) have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15, while 1 in 3 women with sensory and speech impairments (38%) and physical impairments (37%) have experienced intimate partner violence.<sup>12</sup></p>

### **Trans and gender diverse people**

Trans and gender diverse people experience high rates of intimate partner violence, with trans women and transfeminine people impacted by unique oppressions such as transmisogyny. *Private lives 3*, Australia's largest national survey of the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people, found that more than half (52%) of non-binary participants had experienced verbal harassment from an intimate partner, followed by 46% of trans men and 42% of trans women. Around 1 in 3 non-binary (36%) participants and trans men (31%) had experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner, followed by 17% of trans women. More than 1 in 4 non-binary (28.5%) participants and trans men (26.7%) had experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, followed by 23.6% of trans women.<sup>13</sup>

*Private lives 3* does not report on the gender of perpetrators against these findings. However, it does report that more than half (57%) of participants who reported ever having experienced IPV stated that in the most recent relationship where they had experienced violence, the perpetrator was a cisgender man; 34.5% reported 'cisgender woman'; 3.4% non-binary; 2% trans woman and 2% trans man.

### **Age**

Personal Safety Survey (PSS) data from 2016 show that women aged 25-34 are slightly more likely than other age groups to have experienced partner violence (perpetrator gender not specified) in the last two years (4.4% compared with 4.1% of women aged 35-44, 2.7% of women aged 18-24, and 2.6% of women aged 45-54). Women aged 55 and older were the least likely to report experiencing partner violence in the past two years (1.2%).<sup>4</sup>

### **Migrant and refugee background**

There are no reliable estimates of the prevalence of violence experienced by migrant and refugee women in Australia due to survey limitations such as an under-representation of women who do not speak English.<sup>14,15</sup> One survey of 1,392 self-identified migrant and refugee women in Australia found that 1 in 3 (33%) had experienced at least one form of domestic and family violence (DFV) (this includes physical and sexual violence, controlling behaviours, and violence towards others and/or property). In this study, the perpetrator was most often a current or former partner.<sup>14</sup>

This report found that 40% of surveyed temporary visa holders had experienced DFV, along with 32% of Australian citizens and 28% of permanent visa holders. Temporary visa holders experienced unique forms of DFV such as migration-related controlling behaviours. This included threatening to have the respondent or their children deported, threatening to withdraw sponsorship, threatening to prevent family members from accessing visas or travelling to Australia, and tricking or coercing them to return to their country of origin.<sup>14</sup>

	<p>It is important to note that these findings cannot be used to estimate the true prevalence of violence against migrant and refugee women, as the study sample was not representative of the wider population.<sup>14</sup></p> <p><b>Children</b></p> <p>Children are also victim-survivors of men’s intimate partner violence against women. The 2016 PSS found that half (50%) of women who reported experiencing violence from a current partner also reported that their children had seen or heard the violence.<sup>4</sup> This finding highlights children’s experiences as victim-survivors of men’s use of violence.</p> <p>When asked about their experience of violence before the age of 15, one in 10 men (10%) and one in 8 women (13%) had witnessed violence against their mother by a partner.<sup>4</sup></p> <p><b>Perpetrator profile</b></p> <p>Data on the demographic characteristics of men who perpetrate intimate partner violence are not available.</p>
<p><b>Settings</b></p>	<p>Information on the settings in which intimate partner violence is perpetrated is limited. However, when women who had been physically or sexually assaulted by a male perpetrator (any relationship, including intimate partner) were asked about the most recent incident of violence, the most common location of the assault was their own home.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that most violence occurs in private, residential settings.</p> <p>Intimate partner violence can also be perpetrated online. Online violence includes a range of behaviours including digital dating abuse (i.e. harmful and abusive technology-facilitated behaviours including threats, humiliation, sexual coercion, monitoring and control that occur in dating relationships or when using dating apps) and technology-facilitated abuse that occurs in the context of family violence.<sup>16</sup> Digital dating violence may occur as isolated instances or as a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours, while technology-facilitated family violence is typically part of a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour. One study of 527 young people found that within the previous 12 months, 56.1% of women had experienced at least one form of digital dating abuse.<sup>17</sup> No data are available on the prevalence of technology-facilitated family violence.</p>
<p><b>Researchers’ indication of factors associated with violence</b></p>	<p>The socio-ecological model is a useful analytical frame to understand what drives the gendered patterns and high prevalence of men’s violence against women. This approach considers violence as the outcome of interactions among many elements across all levels of society, including among and between individuals and in personal relationships, in organisational and community dynamics, systemic and institutional factors, and broader societal dynamics.</p> <p><i>Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (second edition)</i> uses a socio-ecological approach to</p>

conceptualise the underlying gendered drivers of men's violence against women in Australia.<sup>18</sup> These include:

- **Condoning of violence against women.** This includes widely held beliefs attitudes and social norms about gender and other sociodemographic/identity characteristics including race, ethnicity, age, class, disability and sexuality; social norms and legal, institutional and organisational structures and practices that justify, excuse, trivialise or dismiss violence against women.<sup>18-20</sup>
- **Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.** This includes structural and normative barriers to women obtaining positions of leadership, meaning that men have greater control over power, resources and decisions, specifically over policies and laws that directly impact women; social norms about masculinity and gender relations in cisgendered, heterosexual relationships.<sup>18,21-23</sup>
- **Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.** This includes: 'falsely promoting rigid distinctions between the skills, attributes and characteristics of women and men, in a way that positions 'masculine' traits as having higher social value than 'feminine' traits', creating gendered power relationships; conforming to, reinforcing, promotion or sanctioning behaviours that are associated with dominant forms of masculinity.<sup>18,24-27</sup>
- **Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance and control.** This includes:
  - male cultures that use sexism or homophobia to build social connection
  - settings where men come together that exclude or outnumber women
  - men seeking approval from other men by embodying dominant norms and stereotypes to 'prove' their masculinity.<sup>18,28-31</sup>

Gender inequality and sexism intersect with other forms of discrimination and oppression including racism, colonialism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia to drive men's intimate partner violence against diverse groups of women including women with disability, older women, trans and gender diverse people, lesbian, bi+ and queer women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and migrant and refugee women.<sup>18,32-35</sup> These intersecting oppressions 'create systems of structured inequality, characterised by the unequal distribution of power, wealth, income and social status' and increase the probability of men using violence against them.<sup>18</sup> For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, historical oppression and the ongoing impacts of colonisation at the collective level is a foundational driver of violence, intersecting with gendered and patriarchal factors to drive high levels of violence against them.<sup>33</sup>



### **Reinforcing factors associated with intimate partner violence perpetrated against women by men**

A number of factors reinforce the likelihood of men's violence against women, including: condoning of violence in general, experience of, and exposure to, violence, factors that weaken prosocial behaviour, and resistance and backlash to prevention and gender equality efforts.<sup>18</sup> Research suggests other factors that may reinforce the prevalence and severity of intimate partner violence include high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage<sup>36</sup> and cultures of masculinity that endorse excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>37</sup>

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# Further reading

All resources from Summarising the evidence can be found on the [project page](#).

## Research summaries

- Adolescent violence in the home (E Campbell & L Wall)
- Child maltreatment: a snapshot summary (D Higgins & G Hunt)
- Intimate partner violence perpetrated against women by men (Respect Victoria)
- Intimate partner violence perpetrated by women against men (M Salter & D Woodlock)
- Online violence and harassment perpetrated against women (B Harris)
- Non partner sexual violence (A Quadara)
- Sexual harassment occurring in the world of work (S Charlesworth & C Deen)
- Violence perpetrated against older people by another family member or carer (E Stevens, R Kaspiew & R Carson)

## Context briefs

- Summarising the evidence: Exploring what we know about drivers of violence against women, family violence and other forms of gendered violence - Project overview
- Summarising the evidence: Adolescent violence in the home
- Summarising the evidence: Child maltreatment
- Summarising the evidence: Elder abuse
- Summarising the evidence: Online harassment and abuse against women
- Summarising the evidence: Women's intimate partner violence against men
- Summarising the evidence: Work-related sexual harassment

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## Acknowledgement of Country

Respect Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal peoples throughout Victoria as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we rely. We proudly acknowledge the Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria and their ongoing strength in practising the world's oldest living culture.

We acknowledge the significant and ongoing impacts of colonisation and commit to working alongside Aboriginal communities to effect change. We recognise the ongoing leadership role of Aboriginal communities in addressing and preventing family violence and violence against women, and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate these forms of violence from all communities.

## Victim survivor acknowledgement

Respect Victoria acknowledges the significant impact of family violence and violence against women on individuals, families and communities, and the strength and resilience of the children, young people and adults who have, and are still, experiencing this violence. We pay our respects to those who did not survive, and to their loved ones.



Respect Victoria is the state's dedicated organisation for the prevention of family violence and violence against women. Our vision is a Victorian community where all people are safe, equal and respected, and live free from family violence and violence against women.

To achieve our vision, we lead and support evidence-informed primary prevention and act as a catalyst for transformational social change. Primary prevention aims to stop violence from occurring in the first place, by changing the culture that drives it. We drive coordination and effectiveness of the prevention system. We build and promote primary prevention knowledge and evidence. We keep prevention on the public and policy agenda. We guide prevention wherever Victorians live, work, learn and play. We raise awareness that violence against women is preventable and influence community conversations to fuel social change.

We are an independent voice, with functions, powers and duties enshrined in legislation.