

Summarising the evidence

WOMEN'S INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN

Research summary



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Family Studies

**RESPECT
VICTORIA**



Intimate partner violence perpetrated by women against men

This research summary draws on an evidence review undertaken by Michael Salter and Delanie Woodlock (University of New South Wales) in 2022 as part of the *Summarising the evidence* project. The summary was developed by Respect Victoria in consultation with the evidence review authors.

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 |
|--|---|
| Definition | Intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetrated by women toward men points to a spectrum of behaviour from a threat, to a single slap or punch, to injurious physical violence, to homicide. This summary refers to heterosexual women and heterosexual men in violent intimate relationships. |
| Behaviours | The main type of violence reviewed in this research summary, relates to IPV including physical, sexual and psychological abuse as well as controlling behaviours such as financial abuse. There were also articles that studied female perpetrators of intimate partner homicide as well as coercive control and intimate terrorism. |
| Prevalence | <p>The prevalence of this violence against men declines with severity, such that the majority of acts of women’s violence as measured in research are predominantly low-level and non-injurious.^{1,2} Women’s IPV against men typically occurs in the context of men’s IPV against women.</p> <p>The study of IPV generally is fraught with a lack of consensus regarding IPV definitions and prevalence measures. Therefore, there is inconsistency in the evidence regarding the prevalence and nature of female perpetrated IPV against men. Ambiguities in prevalence data are further compounded by gendered differences in responses to IPV studies. Australian statistics from the 2016 Personal Safety Survey show that 7.8% of men have experienced at least one incident of abuse (including threats of abuse) by an intimate partner since the age of 15 years, with 92% of those perpetrating the abuse being female.³ The abuse measured is not specifically coercive control and violence and is defined as any incident that involves the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault experienced by a person since the age of 15 years.</p> |
| Victim survivor and perpetrator profile | <p>Women’s IPV against men has a range of motives, including expressing frustration or aggression, self-defence against attack, and in some cases, coercion and control.^{4,5} Women’s IPV against men typically occurs in the context of men’s IPV against women. In the case of women’s injurious violence against men, research indicates that it is primarily a form of self-defence against a violent male partner.⁵ Women’s IPV against men is described under three forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situational couple violence includes verbal aggression and physical violence but does not include patterns of control and entrapment.⁶ This scenario is characterised by occasional incidents of violence that are less likely to be injurious, lacks a controlling or fearful dimension, and generally does not continue after separation. • Intimate terrorism is characterised by abuse and violence as part of a pattern of control, intimidation and fear. • Violent resistance refers to women’s self-defensive or retaliatory use of violence in the context of violence by the male partner. This is a common scenario in which women use violence and overlaps considerably with the scenarios described above.⁷ |

Female perpetrators of IPV are frequently affected by alcohol and drugs which suggests a disinhibiting element is present.⁸

Women's IPV against men differs significantly from women's experience of IPV victimisation, namely that control is a comparatively unlikely motive for women's IPV,^{1,6,9} women rarely commit sexual IPV against men¹⁰ and seldom engage in behaviour such as strangulation, all of which are identified risk factors for domestic homicide.¹¹

In recognition of the differences between female-perpetrated and male-perpetrated IPV, some scholars have recommended the use of the term 'women who use force' rather than IPV in instances of female perpetration.^{12,13} They emphasise that women's use of physical violence in relationships often represents an effort to take temporary control of erratic and abusive behaviour by male partners. Women are therefore using force to assert personal autonomy rather than using violence to exercise authority and power. This distinction between force and violence recognises the important gendered differences in the contexts, patterns, motives and impacts of IPV.¹⁴

Researchers' indication of factors associated with violence

The most commonly found factor for a male being a victim of female-perpetrated IPV is being a perpetrator of IPV. This was found in most studies that examined male victimisation, including domestic homicides.

Other factors relating to being a male victim of female-perpetrated IPV include:

- high rates of alcohol and drug use⁸
- being exposed to and experiencing PV as a child
- having a history of child abuse, including physical and sexual abuse.

Other factors noted as risks relating to being a male victim survivor include:

- being aged between 18 to 44 (or younger)
- having high educational attainment¹
- being from lower socio-economic groups and having a disability.¹⁵

Factors relating to female perpetration of IPV against males include:

- being subjected to child sexual and physical abuse
- being exposed to and experiencing IPV as a child.

Other factors noted as risks relating to female perpetration include housing and employment instability.¹⁶

References

1. Hester M, Jones C, Williamson E, Fahmy E, Feder G. Is it coercive controlling violence? A cross-sectional domestic violence and abuse survey of men attending general practice in England. *Psychology of Violence*. 2017;7:417-27.
2. Holmes SC, Johnson NL, Rojas-Ashe EE, Ceroni TL, Fedele KM, Johnson DM. Prevalence and Predictors of Bidirectional Violence in Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence Residing at Shelters. *J Interpers Violence*. 2019;34(16):3492-515.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Personal Safety, Australia, 20162017. [Available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>].
4. Birkley EL, Eckhardt CI. Anger, hostility, internalizing negative emotions, and intimate partner violence perpetration: A meta-analytic review. *Clin Psychol Rev*. 2015;37:40-56.
5. Bowen E, Mackay J. Towards evidence-based treatment of female perpetrated intimate partner violence and abuse. 1 ed: Routledge; 2019. p. 123-38.
6. Johnson MP, Leone JM, Xu Y. Intimate terrorism and situational couple violence in general surveys: ex-spouses required. *Violence Against Women*. 2014;20(2):186-207.
7. Boxall H, Dowling C, Morgan A. Female perpetrated domestic violence: Prevalence of self-defensive and retaliatory violence. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology; 2020.
8. Belknap J, Larson D-L, Abrams ML, Garcia C, Anderson-Block K. Types of Intimate Partner Homicides Committed by Women: Self-Defense, Proxy/Retaliation, and Sexual Proprietariness. *Homicide studies*. 2012;16(4):359-79.
9. Carlsson L, Lysell H, Enander V, Örmon K, Lövestad S, Krantz G. Socio-demographic and psychosocial characteristics of male and female perpetrators in intimate partner homicide: A case-control study from Region Västra Götaland, Sweden. *PLoS one*. 2021;16(8):e0256064.
10. Kolbe V, Büttner A. Domestic Violence Against Men-Prevalence and Risk Factors. *Dtsch Arztebl Int*. 2020;117(31-32):534-41.
11. Szalewski A, Huff-Corzine L, Reckdenwald A. Trading Places: Microlevel Predictors of Women Who Commit Intimate Partner Homicide. *Homicide Studies*. 2019;23(4):344-61.
12. Kertesz M, Humphreys C, Ovenden G, Spiteri-Staines A. Women who use force: Final Report. Volume 1 – Executive Summary, Positive Shift Program, Evaluation of Positive Shift, and Practice Framework. Melbourne: University of Melbourne; 2020.
13. Larance LY, Miller SL. In Her Own Words: Women Describe Their Use of Force Resulting in Court-Ordered Intervention. *Violence Against Women*. 2017;23(12):1536-59.
14. Warren A, Martin R, Chung D. Women who use force: Final Report. Volume 2 – International Literature Review. Melbourne: University of Melbourne; 2020.
15. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia: Continuing the National Story. Canberra: AIHW; 2019.
16. Theobald D, Farrington DP, Ttofi MM, Crago RV. Risk factors for dating violence versus cohabiting violence: Results from the third generation of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. *Crim Behav Ment Health*. 2016;26(4):229-39.

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 Kaspiw & 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

Suggested citation:

Salter M and Woodlock D. Intimate partner violence perpetrated by women against men. Melbourne: Respect Victoria.; 2023.



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.