

ISSUES PAPER

DOMESTIC & FAMILY VIOLENCE



Domestic and family violence (DFV) occurs across all ages, socioeconomic and demographic groups, but predominantly affects women and children with one woman murdered by a current or former partner each week in Australia.¹

Coercive control

Coercive control is a form of domestic violence where perpetrators aim to take away their partner's autonomy and freedom through intimidation by isolating them from family and friends, humiliating them, and controlling their movements and decision making. While coercive control does not always involve physical violence, it is a common factor in intimate partner homicides.

Homelessness and income inequality

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children in Australia.² Income inequality and lack of available housing are strong contributory factors to the prevalence of relationship violence, as women often have to stay in destructive relationships because they cannot afford to live on their own income.

People with disability

People living with disability or long-term health conditions are at increased risk of violence in their relationships. People with disability are already vulnerable and the perception that they are powerless can mean that they are subject to manipulation, violence and abuse.

SNAPSHOT ILLAWARRA SHOALHAVEN

- In 2020 there were 1,376 reports of 'Recorded criminal incidents of Assault' – (domestic violence related) in the Illawarra/Shoalhaven area⁵

Domestic Assault Rates by LGA in 2020 (per 100,000) ⁶ :	
Wollongong	310
Shellharbour	328
Shoalhaven	436
NSW	395

- More than half of the women presenting to key local supported accommodation and homelessness service, SAHSSI, were victims of domestic abuse in the Illawarra Shoalhaven area.⁷
- Illawarra Women's Health Centre provided more than 900 DV related client contacts in 2020.⁸
- KPMG research found the cost to the Australian economy of domestic and family violence in 2015-16 was \$22 billion per year. This equates to approximately \$279 million per year in the Illawarra.⁹

1. Illawarra Women's Health Centre Annual Report 2019/20

2. SAHSSI Annual Report 2019/20

3. 2020 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

4. 2019 Law and Justice Foundation of NSW

5. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2020

6. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2020

7. SAHSSI Annual Report 2019/20

8. IWH Annual Report 2019/20

9. KPMG The cost of violence against women and their children in Australia 2016



Children

Children are being exposed to domestic and family violence both as victims and witnesses. 68% of women who had children in their care when they experienced violence, reported that the children had seen or heard the violence.³ This exposure can impact on children's health, wellbeing, education and relationships, and can have significant impacts on employment, relationships and housing outcomes in the future.

Health and mental health

The long-term impact of domestic and family violence on the health of women and children include mental health problems, suicide, reproductive health problems, an increased risk of chronic illness and pain, and a higher likelihood of drug and alcohol use and smoking.

Legal and economic impact

Domestic and family violence victims are 10 times more likely than others to experience legal problems, including a wide range of family, civil and criminal law issues.⁴ The cost to the economy due to the impacts of DFV resulting in increased demand on health, mental health, justice and policing, housing and social security is significant and increasing annually.

Perpetrators

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence are at a high risk of reoffending. Even when victims leave, perpetrators often reoffend after forming relationships with new partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in programs which combat the impact of pornography and promote the development of healthy, respectful relationships.
- Invest in community education campaigns which improve understanding, including that domestic abuse is more than physical or sexual assault. Invest in targeted campaigns for LGBTIQI+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse people, those with a disability, and young people.
- Invest in evidence-based perpetrator programs which are aimed at long term, sustained behaviour change.
- Provide greater support so that women and children can stay safe in their own home.
- Increase investment in crisis accommodation and support services for women and families escaping violence where staying home is not an option.
- Invest in specialist, trauma-informed and trauma specialist responses to sexual assault and domestic and family violence including specialist community legal assistance.
- Investigate the use of restorative justice measures in cases of domestic violence.
- Establish a Domestic and Family Violence Trauma Recovery Centre which focuses on the emotional, mental and physical impacts of trauma. This Centre must be funded long-term to offer a trauma sensitive approach that enables recovery from DFV trauma and helps to break the intergenerational cycle of violence.
- NSW Government to work with other states and territories to develop a nationally consistent definition of domestic violence.