

The media plays a powerful and important role in influencing community perceptions and understanding of social issues, including those surrounding family violence.

This resource was developed as a part of the Family Violence in the News pilot project, undertaken in the Grampians Region of Victoria. The Media Toolkit provides practical information and advice to support the reporting of family violence by media professionals. It is designed to reflect current views and understanding of family violence based on input from a large range of players drawn from the family violence support sector, and the media, and, perhaps most importantly, from women who have experienced family violence in the past.

Family Violence in the News: A media toolkit provides current

Family Violence *in the News*

A Media **Toolkit**

2nd Edition



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This document is designed to provide information to support media reporting of family violence.

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Family Violence in the News A Media Toolkit 2nd Edition

Family Violence in the News: A Media Toolkit continues to be a valuable document to assist media reporting of family violence.

Thank you to the Office of Women's Policy and the Grampians Integrated Family Violence Committee for providing funds for this toolkit update.

We particularly appreciate, acknowledge and thank the members of the Advisory Committee for the EVAs Media Awards: Celebrating Media Contributions to Eliminating Violence Against Women for their expertise and contributions to the update.

We are pleased to have an opportunity to update contacts, research sources, and facts and statistics about family violence. We also recognise and hope that a full revision will be possible in the near future.

Vicki Lee Thomas,

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May 2011

Family Violence *in the News*

A Media **Toolkit**

The media plays a powerful and important role in influencing the community's perceptions and understanding of social issues, including those surrounding family violence.

This resource was developed as a part of the *Family Violence in the News* pilot project, undertaken in the Grampians Region of Victoria. The 'Media Toolkit' provides practical information and advice to support the reporting of family violence by media professionals. It is designed to reflect current views and understanding of family violence based on input from a large range of players drawn from the family violence support sector and the media, and, perhaps most importantly, from women who have experienced family violence in the past.

Family Violence in the News: A Media Toolkit provides current contacts, research sources, facts and statistics, and suggestions about issues to consider when reporting family violence.

It is hoped that this resource will be embraced by media professionals in their day-to-day work and, ultimately, serve as an important tool to assist in the ongoing battle against family violence in our communities.

Vicki Lee Thomas
Project Consultant, *Family Violence in the News*
December 2004

Organisations represented on the Family Violence in the News Project Reference and Management Groups:

- Grampians Region Family Violence Prevention Network
- The Courier
- University of Ballarat
- Domestic Violence & Incest Resource Centre
- Domestic Violence Victoria
- No To Violence
- Victorian Community Council Against Violence
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- The Age and Fairfax Group
- Dreamcoat Publicity
- City of Ballarat
- Central Highlands Community Legal Centre
- Centre Against Sexual Assault (Ballarat)
- Women's Resource, Information and Support Centre

Foreword – why a media toolkit?

I clip stories of incidents of domestic and relationship violence on a regular basis: 'Access visit turns tragic'; 'Woman bashed'; 'Police called'; 'Siege underway'; 'Children killed'; 'Murder-suicide'. The stories are mostly snippets. They rarely grow into anything that justifies analysis - after all, there are so many; so few end up in court. I'm a journalist, a former news editor and an editor on mainstream newspapers and magazines. I was also a victim, you see.

This crime is the greatest cause of murder of women and children in Australia. Yet it's given less coverage and thoughtful media attention than many other social blights - road rage, drugs, gangs. But behind those snippets on relationship violence, you have to wonder what misery and harm our citizens endure. Chief Commissioner of Victorian Police, Christine Nixon, reports that 25% of her State's police force's resources - funded, of course, by taxpayers - are spent on dealing with relationship violence. Then factor in this: 90% of incidents of assault go unreported, even though one in four Australian women will experience physical violence in their lives and 60% of them will have children in their care at the time, which establishes a shocking cycle for abusers and abused.

Beyond the statistics of physical violence, there is unquantifiable menace. Women and children around us are living lives ruined by other sinister forms of violence including social alienation, denigration and deliberate economic deprivation.

I am among the ugly statistics and I and my family have lived in fear of our lives. When I wrote about this, the response was an avalanche. More than a year on it still comes; that's how great the hunger for information among victims is.

As media, surely we need to report relationship violence for what it is: cruelty; assault; murder. As this media toolkit shows (see *Media reporting of family violence – a snapshot*, page 1.) we could be accused of doing a shameful job of it. This is a more widespread, more devastating scourge than the AIDS epidemic, yet it continues to attract a fraction of the media coverage. The difference is that this is a crime. The shame of it is that it carries through to the children who learn, of course, from their closest role models. The victims are among our viewers, listeners and readers - they need to hear about it, they need the full reports and the analysis. It helps them to understand and to act.

This resource, *Family Violence in the News*, is an easily accessible compilation of facts and research. I wish I'd had this media kit when I started my own story. It's well researched and a cool-headed look on a shocking subject. I commend it to you,

Deborah Light (2005)

In 2011 all Deborah's statistics and comments, sadly, are still relevant.

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Despite the fact that partner violence is the most common form of assault in Australia, recent research reveals limited media coverage of family and domestic violence.

Media reporting of family violence – a snapshot

There are few studies documenting family violence coverage in the Australian media. This section is based on two studies: *Desperate Lovers and Wanton Women: Press Representations of Domestic Violence* (Evans, 2001) and *Family Violence Reporting: Supporting the Vulnerable or Re-enforcing Their Vulnerability* (Thomas & Green, 2009).

Desperate Lovers and Wanton Women outlines the findings of a sample study of coverage of family violence by *The Age*, *The Herald-Sun* and *The Australian* newspapers over a six-week period. *Family Violence Reporting* examines coverage in the same three newspapers, plus that in two Victorian regional newspapers, i.e. *The Courier* (Ballarat) and *The Latrobe Valley Express* (Traralgon). The latter study was based on a fifteen-week collection of newspaper articles.

The two studies employed similar methodology which examined both case-specific (n=53/211) and ‘general information’ (n=21/126) articles. The large majority of case-specific articles related to males using violence against females. Thomas and Green used The Australian Media Alliance’s *Journalist Code of Ethics* and the Dart Center Australasia’s *Quick Tips: Covering Domestic Violence* to support their analysis.

Despite the studies occurring eight years apart, the following findings were common to both studies.

Language / Headlines

- There was widespread use of the term *domestic dispute*, implying equal power between those involved and giving the impression that the violence was of a private nature.
- In a small number of articles and significant numbers of short reports (‘briefs’), ‘witty’ or facetious headlines were used to attract reader attention, having the effect of trivialising the actual violence.
- Headlines / reports often exhibited gender bias in terms of the language used, information sources and respective portrayal of males and females.

Sources

- Stories drawn from court reports often sourced information from the defence when the accused was male; the prosecution when the accused was female.

Content

- Articles often sensationalised abuse.
- Inappropriate and irrelevant detail was occasionally reported for the purpose of generating humour.
- A number of the articles appeared in the ‘briefs’ of newspapers, minimising the impression of the seriousness of family violence. Very few of the case-specific articles reported as ‘briefs’ during the research period were followed up with extra coverage.
- Commonly, reports explained circumstances that preceded incidents of family violence, suggesting that the violence constituted justifiable behaviour given the circumstances and could therefore be excused. Examples include relationship breakdown, jealousy, a partner wanting to divorce, child-custody disputes, demanding workloads and/or other professional pressures and financial interests.

“Limited coverage of incidents of domestic violence not only emphasises the private nature of such abuse, but also leads readers to subscribe to the myth of its rarity.”

“Usage of the term ‘domestic dispute’ disguises the violence and conjures up images of a marital tiff that has got out of hand.”

"About domestics, you know, husband shoots wife, commits suicide, well they're a dime a dozen now, like the car crash. You don't run them." [reporter]"

Grabowski & Wilson, 1989

- Portraits of perpetrators as seemingly 'good guys', with descriptions of hobbies and devoted relationships were reported. Female victims, conversely, were sometimes portrayed as 'bad girls', commonly inferring that they were promiscuous. *This supports the common tendency to transfer blame to females who were victims of violence, at least partially exonerating males who used violence against females.*
- The relationship between offender and victim was often not mentioned. *This reinforces perceptions of random violence against women versus the more significant risk of abuse at the hands of associates, intimates and family.*

Common Beliefs and Stereotypes

- Alcohol was commonly inferred to be the cause of male violence towards women, as were disagreements and arguments.
- 'Spurned lovers' and 'love made him do it' myths were often supported by the press.
- Perceptions that women who remain in abusive relationships deserve to be abused were highlighted without any exploration or explanation of the reasons why women remain.
- Limited coverage or explicit identification of family violence serves to further the belief of its rarity, despite statistical evidence to the contrary.

Placing Family Violence in Context

- Reports failed to relate individual experiences of family violence to the broader societal issue. They did not include statistical or expert information to support an understanding of the magnitude of the problem.

Other Findings

The following were also findings of Ms Evans' study:

- Neutral language, e.g. 'gunman', was used in headlines rather than drawing attention to the fact that the report concerned family violence.
- Females who were victims of male violence were usually identified in the context of a familial relationship, e.g. 'wife'.
- Males who used violence against women were described in a professional context, e.g. 'soldier', 'detective'.

Thomas and Green found:

- Specific ethnic groups, especially Indigenous Australians and people of the Muslim faith, and cases from overseas received a disproportional amount of attention; identifiers such as "criminal" and "bikie" were used in reporting. *Both have the effect of blaming specific cultures and minimising the perception of the problem in mainstream Australia.*
- Opportunities to explore and explain known risk factors and warning signs were consistently missed.
- Contact numbers for relevant support agencies were not included in any of the reports.
- Only rarely was there mention of community or government responsibility regarding prevention or support for those experiencing family violence.
- The primary source of reports about specific cases of family violence was the criminal justice system, with the majority related to homicides / deaths.
- Traditional criminal justice system players were the usual sources chosen rather than family violence experts, resulting in poor understanding of the context of family-violence crimes.

This research highlights a number of issues in the coverage of violence against women, including:

- *Quantitatively, reports appear to reflect societal trends. For example, reports of violence perpetrated by males against females are far more prevalent than those covering violence perpetrated by females against males.*
- *Qualitatively, the reports around male versus female perpetrator / victim relationships contain significant differences.*

Reporting Family Violence

“...portrayal [of violence against women] is tied to an ideology that reflects cultural myths and patriarchal assumptions about the proper role and behavior of women. By presenting stories of violence against women as separate isolated events, the news media reinforces the idea that the violence was an isolated pathology or deviance. Maintaining this mirage of individual pathology, the news media denies the social roots of violence against women and absolves the larger society of any obligation to end it.”

Carll, E., *News portrayal of violence and women: Implications for public policy* 2003

Issues to consider when reporting family violence

The media plays a powerful role both in reflecting and shaping public opinion and is, therefore, vitally important as a tool to be used in addressing the problem of family violence. The focus of news reporting provides a window into our community and has the capacity to influence public policy. It can be argued that for a particular crime to become a major public issue, it is often sufficient for the media simply to declare it to be one (Grabosky, P. and Wilson, P. 2001). Ignoring family violence maintains the power of those who perpetrate such abuse by further isolating their targets.

Careful use of language is important in reporting family violence. In commentary or feature writing it is best to avoid labelling individuals as victims, survivors, perpetrators – opting instead for more specific language, e.g. woman who has been a victim of family violence. (However, if an individual featured in a report has a preference for a particular term, it is appropriate to use that term.) Perhaps the most important consideration in reporting family violence is that of accuracy. Refuse to justify, glamorize, sanitize or normalize violence, specifically violence against women.

Things to consider when reporting on family violence:

Label family violence “family violence”.

- Avoid calling family violence a ‘relationship problem’, ‘domestic dispute’, ‘troubled marriage’ or any other term that minimalizes the violent behaviour.
- Be explicit about the relationship between the parties concerned.

Contextualize the story.

- Provide information about the prevalence, incidence and impact of family violence.
- Emphasise the need for a comprehensive and co-ordinated community response to overcome the problem.

Be aware of how source selection will shape the story.

- Include interviews with experts and explain family violence crimes as one means for the person perpetrating the abuse to maintain power and control over their partner/child/other family member.
- Avoid using sources that have a close relationship with the person perpetrating the violence, or sources that are not well informed about the crime and those involved.
- Seek comment regarding the impact that violence has on those who are the target of abuse. Give those who have experienced family violence a voice.

Acknowledge that family violence is *not* a private matter.

- Report consequences of family violence and highlight the fact that family violence impacts on our community regarding, for example, neighbourhood and workplace safety, the health system, economic productivity and on children.

Give priority consideration to the *safety and confidentiality needs* of those who have been victims of family violence.

- Ask if it is safe to use real names or other identifying information.
- Mention the value of ‘safety planning’ for women who feel that they are at significant risk of family violence.

Consider running editorial comment or feature articles alongside reports of family violence.

- Alert your audience to the prevalence of and realities of family violence, the affects on individuals and the community, and to the existence of support services for both those perpetrating and experiencing family violence.

Things to avoid when reporting on family violence:

Avoid treating family violence crimes as unusual or bizarre. They are not.

- Do not report family violence as an inexplicable, unpredictable tragedy.
- Include statistics about the prevalence of family violence.
- Illustrate the warning signs of an abusive relationship. Convey the fact that family violence is a pattern of behaviour that often escalates when a woman is trying to leave, or has left, an abusive relationship.
- Look into prior history and let the story evolve. In most cases, a bit of research will reveal a pattern of controlling behaviour.
- Talk with police, check criminal history and court records for intervention orders.

Do not focus on the behaviour of the woman/child who has been violated.

- Responsibility for abuse rests with the person perpetrating the violence.
- Do not imply that the person who suffered the violence could have done something to prevent it, or that the person perpetrating the violence was in any way justified in their behaviour.
- Treat those who have been victims of family violence, and their families, with respect and dignity.
- Focus on how communities can hold those perpetrating violence responsible for their crimes and how to improve safe options for those experiencing family violence.

Do not assume that some cultures or ‘classes’ are violent and others are not. Family violence crosses all lines of race, class, age, sexuality and culture.

Avoid either minimalizing or sensationalizing family violence.

- Be thoughtful with the use of language – e.g. is the report about a “domestic dispute” or an “assault”?, a “relationship problem” or “family violence”?
- Refrain from using clichés, reporting salaciously, or attempting to be clever or humorous.
- Avoid sterilizing the facts.

In reporting court cases, avoid reporting in such a way as to suggest that the defence case is ‘truth’.

Within the context of the strict codes surrounding court reporting, attempt to represent both allegations and defence arguments strongly.

Avoid offering excuses for violent behaviour or perpetuating commonly held beliefs that are untrue.

- Behaving violently is a choice. It is not ‘caused’, nor excused, by the over consumption of alcohol, justified anger or high levels of stress.
- Violence is violation and is unacceptable (and often criminal) even when feeling angry or frustrated. Interestingly, many men who use violence against their female partner do not behave violently towards others who may anger and/or frustrate them.
- Those who use violence are solely responsible for their actions.

Women’s Wisdom

The following suggestions about reporting family violence were offered by a generous and articulate group of women who had experienced, and recovered from, family violence.

“This reads like: ‘It was a flowery, nice day. Whoops! Somebody got shot!’”

Participant in Project Focus Group – women who have experienced family violence

Do...

- place responsibility explicitly with the person who has perpetrated the violence
- give those who have experienced family violence a voice, seek comment regarding “shamefulness”, “barriers” to reporting and/or seeking assistance
- treat those affected and their families with dignity
- report women’s allegations strongly
- educate public about the range of reasons charges may be dropped
- report on family violence regardless of the status of the man who perpetrated the violence
- balance statistics that might deter women from leaving/seeking help to leave a violent relationship with information about the positive aspects of not living with family violence
- make a value judgement – men’s use of violence against women “is a sin”
- label assault “assault”

Don’t...

- report half the story; report inaccurately; don’t use ‘creative license’ (women found information contained in many of the articles we discussed were confusing in terms of facts)
- blame victims
- minimise violence; don’t use terms like “crime of passion”, “dispute”, “incident”; be careful with the use of the term “domestic”
- report accused’s defence as truth
- report “salaciously”
- use clichés
- report only extreme cases
- sterilise facts
- sensationalise stories
- remain silent (re television reporting of family violence)
- assume (or report) that because a court case is dropped that the accused is innocent
- accept violence as ‘normal’ ‘ok’ – “everyone is in denial”
- perpetrate myths, e.g. “alcohol myth”
- suggest that the occurrence of family violence is “bizarre”
- report family violence cleverly or with humour – this style is “very dangerous”
- question the intellect of a woman living in a violent relationship
- feel sorry for the man who ‘lost it and behaved out of character’

Why report family violence?:

- “because it happens”
- to increase community awareness
- to help other women who are experiencing family violence understand that “it’s not only me”
- to educate people about family violence
- because media reporting influences public opinion and perception
- because media reporting influences community consciousness

What should be reported about family violence?:

- “the reality”
- both sides of the story -- equally
- information aimed at educating the public about family violence
- insights into hurdles that women face in gaining help and safety
- where women who are experiencing family violence can get help

Who should be consulted to inform media reporting of family violence?:

- ‘experts’ in the field of family violence
- family violence literature
- those affected
- police media person, police academy regarding the legal position of “the victim”
- question views held by neighbours/acquaintances – they may be ignorant of what happens behind closed doors, they may be “affected by myths”



Understanding Family Violence

“In many relationships, acts of cruelty were carried out on the women, the children in the family (as primary and secondary victims) and on family pets. Humiliation, cruelty, jealousy, isolation from friends and family and the infliction of emotional, sexual or physical pain were common experiences.”

Bagshaw, D. & Chung, D., *Women, Men and Domestic Violence* 2002

What is family violence?

Family violence occurs when one family member, in past or previous relationships, uses violent and intimidating behaviour to control or dominate others. Such violence is an abuse of power, and is always perpetrated by the more powerful member of a relationship against a less powerful member in order to gain control. In the vast majority of cases, family violence is perpetrated by men against women and children.

There is much discussion, debate and, indeed, confusion about the appropriate term to use to describe family violence. 'Acceptable' and popular terms have changed over time with increased understanding and the introduction of new terminology. Examples of terms used at different times and by different players include *battered women*, *partner abuse*, *intimate partner abuse*, *gendered violence* (or *gender-based violence*), *violence against women* (to describe family violence as well as other forms of violence against women) and *domestic violence*. There are strengths and weaknesses to each of the various terms used. The term *family violence* is used throughout this resource. The term *family violence* has been chosen because it describes violence that occurs between members of a family regardless of their relationship (e.g. parent/child, across generations). This term, also, is preferred by indigenous communities because it more accurately reflects kinship ties and the impact on all members of a family (Office of Women's Policy 2002). It is important to note that violence can be greatest during and post separation and does not only occur within the context of the home environment. There are huge personal and community costs to family violence - it is not only a private matter.

Working definitions of family violence include:

"Family violence is any behaviour that in any way controls or dominates a family member that causes them to fear for their own, or other family member's safety or wellbeing. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic abuse and any behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of that behaviour." (*Family Violence Protection Act 2008*, Victorian Government, 2008).

"While only certain behaviours and actions defined as family violence are criminal offences, the approach, as enshrined in the Family Violence Protection Act, is guided by the tenet that any form of family violence is unacceptable and action can be taken whether it be criminal charges or civil protection, or access to services and support.

In Victoria, this means we understand family violence to include violent, threatening, patterned and repeated use of coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate partner relationships. This can include not only physical assaults but an array of power and control tactics, direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, property damage, social isolation and behaviour which causes a person to live in fear.

We also understand family violence to include violence between people in a range of family and family-like relationships. As well as violence between current and separated intimate partners, including those in same-sex relationships, abuse and violence in our community also occurs amongst family members and others in family-like relationships. It can include violence by young people against their parents or other family members, abuse of elderly people by family members, abuse of people with a disability by their carer and abuse of men. The Family Violence Protection Act ensures that the diverse nature of families are recognised and provided with protection by recognising and reflecting the perspectives and realities of community within Victoria including Indigenous communities." (*A Right to Safety and Justice: Strategic Framework to Guide Continuing Family Violence Reform in Victoria 2010-2020*, Office of Women's Policy, 2010).

"Fear is the common key element in violence against women. It is often the most powerful weapon used by the perpetrator to control his victim."

Domestic Violence Advocacy Service n.d.

“Most women experiencing partner abuse report that the physical violence is the least damaging part of the suffering: it is the relentless psychological abuse that cripples and isolates the women.”

Hegarty, K. et al, *Domestic violence in Australia: definition, prevalence and nature of presentation in clinical practice* 2000

Types of family violence

Violence in relationships is any pattern of behaviours used by one person to establish and maintain power and control over their partner or another person in his/her family.

Violence therefore includes a range of behaviours, some of which attract criminal sanctions, and some of which are not illegal, but still harmful to the victim. In keeping with this understanding, the No To Violence – Male Family Violence Prevention Association describes family violence as “violence and controlling behaviour” to describe all behaviour which people would regard as violent, abusive or controlling.

Such behaviours include:

verbal abuse – includes any verbal comments that are intimidating and disrespectful. This can include constant put-downs and comments that the individual is inferior and/or ridicule of any aspect of a woman’s being, such as her body, her beliefs, occupation, cultural background, skills, friends or family. Threats of violence and violent verbal outbursts, such as shouting, also constitute verbal abuse.

emotional abuse – includes any behaviour that misuses psychological and emotional factors in the relationship, in order to manipulate or intimidate the other person. Abusive emotionally controlling behaviour does not accord equal importance and respect to another person’s feelings and experiences. This behaviour belittles the other person, resulting in lowered self-esteem over time.

social abuse – all behaviour which limits, controls or interferes with a woman’s social activities or relationships with others. Social abuse may involve the constant monitoring and control of an individual’s activities, outings and friendships, resulting in isolation from friends and other family members.

spiritual abuse – behaviour which denigrates a woman’s religious or spiritual beliefs and preventing her from attending religious gatherings or practising her faith. It also includes harming or threatening to harm women or children in religious or occult rituals.

economic abuse – involves the control of the use and availability of money and/or control over a woman’s participation in the workforce.

“Economic deprivation...included complete control of all money..., no access to bank accounts, inadequate ‘allowances’ given to women and, if they worked, women’s wages were used for all household expenses... the perpetrator controlled all access to food, with food being locked in cupboards and, in some instances, women and children going hungry.”

“Verbal attacks on women focussed on their intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and a wife. Women were commonly referred to as ‘stupid’, ‘slut’, ‘whore’, ‘fat’, ‘ugly’ and a ‘lousy mother’.”

“Emotional abuse involved attribution of blame and guilt to women for problems in the relationship; constant comparisons with other women,...emotional withdrawal,... and withdrawal of any interest and engagement with the partner.”

“...means by which women were socially isolated included being moved to new towns or to the country, where they knew nobody.... In some cases, women were physically prevented from leaving the home.... Other forms of abuse included control of transport, control of keys and stalking.”

"...physical abuse included a wide range of intimidating behaviours other than hitting such as: driving dangerously in the car, smoking in the house when the woman has a serious respiratory condition, the destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, physical assault of the children, locking the victim out of the house on cold nights without any clothing, and sleep deprivation."

"Sexual abuse ranged from sexual pressure and coercion, comments about women's unattractiveness, forcing women to take part in various degrading and pornographic sexual acts, and penetrative rape."

physical assault – behaviour that involves attacks on or threats of attack on one's physical safety and integrity. Physical assault can include punching, slapping, spitting, pulling hair, kicking, throwing or destroying property, and being threatened or assaulted with a weapon. It includes harming or threatening to harm children, relatives, pets or possessions and, ultimately, physical assault can result in murder.

sexual assault – includes all sexual behaviour (or threats of such behaviour) without consent between adults. Sexual assault of children includes any activity of a sexual nature in which an adult or older person involves a child or adolescent.

Sources:

Bagshaw, D. and Chung, D., *Women, men and domestic violence* 2000 (quotes)

Commonwealth Government of Australia, *The facts: Violence* n.d.

"There is a simple answer to why abusers do it, and it isn't drink, or money worries, or uncontrollable anger. It is power. The reasons women tolerate it are more complex but start with their perceived responsibility to make relationships work, and range to inertia after self-esteem and resolve have been broken by years of abuse."

Deborah Light, *Breaking the silence* 2003

“...news stories regarding domestic violence murders often reinforced myths and inaccuracies about domestic violence by implying victim-blaming or perpetrator-excusing attitudes, blaming the act on cultural or class differences, and reinforcing the idea that the fatal violence came out of the blue as opposed to being the culmination of a history of violence and controlling behaviors.”

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, *Covering domestic violence: A guide for journalists and other media professionals* 2002

“Many myths surround domestic violence. In small communities in particular, the mythology can be very strong and prevailing. People often hold strong views and make judgements without having any personal experience or understanding of the situation. As a result of these judgements, women and children can be denied access to the services and assistance they need, to which they have a legal right.”

Domestic Violence
Advocacy Service,
It's not love – it's violence n.d.

Common beliefs about family violence

There are many unfounded common beliefs surrounding family violence. These are prevalent in all areas of our community – from people who have perpetrated and/or experienced family violence, through to elements of the police and judiciary system. False beliefs and stereotypes are so commonly held that many people are unaware of their own assumptions and ignorance about the realities of family violence.

Belief:
Family violence is rare.

Reality:
Thirty-eight percent of the adult female population have experienced one or more incidents of physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 (ABS 1996). Women are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence than to violence in any other context and are overwhelmingly more likely than are men to be the victims of this form of violence. It is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44 (VicHealth 2004).

Belief:
Family violence is just physical violence.

Reality:
Women who have experienced family violence confirm the prevalence of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, social and financial abuse (often in combination), as well as other intimidating or controlling forms of abuse, such as stalking, sleep deprivation or driving a car too fast. They also describe patterns of extreme cruelty that often develop in long-term, violent relationships, with 'strategies' of abuse becoming more diverse over time (Bagshaw, D. and Chung, D. 2000).

Belief:
Women are provocative; women 'ask for it'.

Reality:
No woman wants or asks to be abused. Family violence is a human rights issue. Men who use violence choose to do so in order to exert personal power and control.

Belief:
Alcohol causes family violence.

Reality:
There is no evidence that alcohol is the cause of domestic violence. In a study on the causes of violent behaviour (Wallace, A. 1993), it was concluded that men use alcohol abuse as an excuse for their violence. Another study (Domestic Violence Advocacy Service n.d.) reports that some men who are drunk are still able to direct their punches to places on a woman's body where the bruising will not show, indicating a degree of control and considered intent.

Belief:
Stress, either within the home or outside, causes family violence.

Reality:
People who are under stress and violent towards their partners at home are rarely violent towards people outside of their home.

Belief:

‘Normal’ men do not abuse their partners. Men who behave violently towards their partners are ‘monsters’.

Reality:

Family violence occurs in *all* social classes, in *all* age groups and across *all* cultures and communities. It occurs within marriage and defacto relationships, between family members, couples who are separated or divorced, and even within shared households. Friends, acquaintances and colleagues are often surprised to learn that someone they ‘know’ has behaved in such a way.

Belief:

Women experiencing violence should leave/end the relationship.

Reality:

Many women who live with violence do not want the relationship to end – only the violence. There may be any number of barriers to leaving, including:

- concern about providing for their children
- social isolation
- emotional commitment and/or dependence
- low self-esteem
- financial dependence
- fear of reprisal
- fear for their lives, and that of their children
- belief in change
- partner’s need
- shame
- lack of knowledge, especially for migrant women, many of whom are unfamiliar with Australian systems and may not speak English
- external factors, including unhelpful police response, lack of transport, poor financial status, unavailability of emergency and long-term affordable housing, inadequate support (personal and/or professional), pressures from family and community attitudes

Belief:

Family violence is a private affair.

Reality:

Although ‘family’ engenders the concept of privacy, ‘crime’ is in the public domain. In addition to family violence crimes, there are other, very real, costs borne by the community as a result of family violence. Significant economic costs are incurred by the health, criminal justice, employment, welfare and income support sectors. The damage to individuals affected by family violence can result in an inability to contribute to the ‘social capital’ of the community in which they live.

“The psychological effects for both women and children include loss of self-esteem, loss of faith in one’s own perception of reality, constant fear of attack, fear of self-assertion, depression, feelings of shame, self-blame, failure, powerlessness and worthlessness. Women also experience watching the effects on their children. A woman may feel or be unable to protect her children, and this can have some serious effects, including damage to the relationships between her and her children.”

One of the most insidious effects of family violence is the damage it can do to a woman’s perceptions over time, so that she becomes habituated to the behaviour, seeing it as normal or as something she deserves.”

No To Violence website n.d.

Family violence – those most at risk

“Everyone is at risk – some are more at risk.”

(Quote: Ruth Turvey; Women’s Resource, Information & Support Centre 2004)

Family violence is found in *all* social classes, in *all* age groups and across *all* cultures and communities. There are, however, some characteristics and/or demographics that are more frequently associated with family violence in terms of both perpetrating violence and the experience of victimization. It is no surprise that there is a strong relationship between those individuals and groups who lack power in a more general sense and those at a higher risk of experiencing family violence. It is important to be aware of these groups with a view to targeting information, education and support.

Women

The biggest risk of being subjected to family violence is being a woman. Family violence is based on the belief that a power imbalance exists because of gender, i.e. men hold a position of power.

- Statistics across the nine years of the Victorian Family Violence Database consistently demonstrate that family violence is overwhelmingly a crime against women with nearly 80% of adult victims of family violence (police data) and aggrieved family members (courts data) being women; 20% were male.
- Analysis suggests that for adult female victims, it is highly likely that the perpetrator will be male. However, it is more difficult to predict the gender of the perpetrator against male victims as a larger proportion of perpetrators of family violence against males is also male.
- Comparative analysis of men’s and women’s violence identifies that men’s violence is six times more likely to inflict severe injury and is more humiliating, coercive and controlling. Women’s violence is more likely to be expressive in response to frustration and stress rather than purposeful with the intention to control and dominate.

Source: *Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 4: Nine Year Trend Analysis, Measuring Family Violence in Victoria 1999 - 2008, Department of Justice, 2009.*

Children

In homes where violence occurs, children are at high risk of suffering psychological and emotional abuse, whether or not they are the primary target of the violence. There is evidence to suggest that exposure to abuse results in similar psychological and physical illness as that of children who are directly abused (Taft, A. 2002).

The *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2005*, reports that 61% of women who had experienced violence by a previous partner reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship. Over a third of women (36%) who had experienced violence by a previous partner said that their children had witnessed the violence (ABS, 2006).

The 2001 Australian Institute of Criminology study, *Young Australians and Domestic Violence*, reports that up to 25% of young people surveyed had witnessed parental violence against their mother or step-mother.

The findings from the Australian component of the 2002/03 *International Violence Against Women Survey* (Mouzos, J. and Makkai, T. 2004) reveal that 18% of women surveyed had been physically abused as a child by a parent.

Children suffer the negative consequences of family violence even if they are not physically present when the violence occurs. The Victorian Government framework, *Family Violence: Risk Assessment and Risk Management*, emphasises that exposure to family violence has long-term psychological, emotional and behavioural consequences for children and young people, including anger, trauma, sadness, shame, guilt, confusion, helplessness and despair. (Family Violence Coordination Unit, 2007).

“Exposure to violence between parents results in higher levels of physical and psychosomatic disorders, behavioural problems, post-traumatic stress and poor educational achievements in children and young people...”

A. Taft, A Centre for the Study of Mothers’ & Children’s Health, La Trobe University 2002

Impairment of the Mother’s Parenting Capacity

“Women’s ability to parent their children can be drastically eroded in situations of domestic violence....This scenario may be fuelled by ongoing or intermittent criticisms from the abusive partner. The woman may be called a ‘hopeless’ mother and housewife or labelled as ‘mad’, ‘stupid’ and ‘incapable’ of making the right decisions for the children. Lack of mobility, finances and independence will contribute to her lack of agency as a mother.”

Wyndham, A. 1998

Young women

Younger women were more likely to experience violence than older women. The *Personal Safety Survey, 2005*, reports 12% of women aged 18-24 experienced at least one incident of violence, compared to 6.5% of women aged 35-44 and 1.7% of women aged 55 and over in the 12 months prior to the survey (ABS, 2006).

Domestic or family violence was the second most frequently given reason for young women under the age of 25 years accessing national Australian Homelessness Services (17% of support periods) (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2010).

Pregnant women

Of women who had experienced violence by a previous partner since the age of fifteen, 59% were pregnant at some time during the relationship. Thirty-six percent of these women, reported that violence had occurred during a pregnancy and 17% had experienced violence for the first time when they were pregnant (ABS, 2006).

Women experiencing violence during pregnancy often obtain minimal or late antenatal care. They are at increased risk of having poor weight gain, anaemia, infections, or preterm labour; of bearing a low birthweight infant; and experiencing postnatal depression. They are also more likely to engage in behaviours harmful to health, such as smoking, drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, and substance misuse (Astbury, J. et al 2000).

Rural and regional communities

Women living in rural communities often face considerable disadvantage. Disadvantages include social and geographic isolation, poor access to appropriate services and support networks, lack of transport and safe accommodation, difficulties in maintaining confidentiality and limited access to interpreters. In smaller communities, the high profile of the perpetrator may further disadvantage women experiencing family violence (Victoria Police, 2010).

There is a higher *rate* (versus number) of women from non-metropolitan regions seeking assistance from police and courts than in metropolitan regions (Department of Justice, 2009).

Guns are often more accessible in rural communities and in some circumstances this can increase women's vulnerability. Family violence literature points to the threat or actual use of firearms as a significant reason that women do not risk fleeing or seeking help (Domestic Violence Victoria, 2006).

About Australia's Regions (Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics 2003) reports that rates of family violence were highest in very remote Australia, followed by remote and outer regional localities. Major cities had the lowest rates of family violence.

Indigenous communities

Indigenous Australians are over represented in all forms of violent crime in Australia. Some remote Aboriginal communities are especially affected by high rates of family violence (National Crime Prevention Program 2001). Consultations conducted by a Queensland Government Task Force revealed that the level of violence in indigenous communities is much higher than openly acknowledged or reported, and that injuries sustained are more serious than in non-indigenous communities (Queensland Government 1999).

Barriers to getting help in rural areas include:

- variable police response
- access to transport
- access to money
- access to safety
- community attitudes in small towns
- access to services

"The majority of women murdered by their current or former intimate partners are either estranged, separated or in the process of leaving the relationship."

Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2002

“The Wallace study of homicides in NSW found that nearly half (46%) of women killed by spouses were separated, or in the process of separating, at the time.”

Domestic Violence Advocacy Service website n.d.

Indigenous Australians are seven times more likely to be victims of homicide than non-Indigenous Australians, regardless of gender. For more than four consecutive years (2003 – 2008), the rate of female Indigenous victimisation has increased, with domestic homicides the claiming highest percentage of victims (73%) (Virueda & Payne, 2010).

In Victoria, there has been a partnership created between the Government and Indigenous people to address violence, including the high rates of family violence, through the *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a Safer Future for Indigenous Families and Communities 10 Year Plan* (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria & Department of Planning & Community Development, 2008).

Women separated from their partner

Separation and divorce do not guarantee women’s safety from a violent relationship. Often this is the time of greatest risk. A NSW study (Domestic Violence Advocacy Service n.d.) reports that 46% of men who killed their spouses were separated from them. The Australian Institute of Criminology reports that 28.8% of intimate homicides in Australia between 1 July 1989 until 30 June 1996 concerned female victims that were separated from the offender (Carcach, C. and James, M. 1998). Further evidence is presented in the *Women’s Safety Survey, 1996*, which reports that while 42% of women surveyed experienced violence by a previous partner, nearly seven percent of women surveyed reported that violence occurred only after the relationship had ended.

Women are at greater risk of physical assault from a previous or separated partner than a current partner. In the 12 months prior to the *Personal Safety Survey, 2005*, 15.7% of women experienced physical assault from a current partner while 22.2% experience physical assault from a previous partner (ABS, 2006).

Women with disabilities

Women with a disability who are experiencing family violence are ‘triple disadvantaged’ – as women, as people with disabilities, and as people experiencing violence (Victorian Women with Disabilities Network, 2008). As well as women with disabilities experiencing intimate partner violence and violence by other family members, they also face high rates of violence from paid and non-paid carers. ‘Family’ or ‘domestic relationship’ as related to women with disabilities must reflect these diverse types of domestic relationships.

Compared to non-disabled women, women with disabilities:

- experience violence at higher rates and more frequently;
- 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; and
- experience violence at the hands of greater numbers of perpetrators.

Source: Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, *Getting Safe Against the Odds: A Guide for Service Providers on Supporting Women with Disabilities*, 2008).

Women with disabilities who report violence are more likely to be disbelieved and the impact of the violence is more likely to be underestimated (Victoria Police, 2010).

Elder abuse

It has been estimated both overseas and in Australia that between 2% and 5% of people aged 65 years and older are at risk of, or have experienced some form of abuse (Westthorp et al 1997). Those experiencing elder abuse are more likely to be female; the most common type of abuse is financial and usually accompanied by psychological abuse.

The increasing risk of abuse to older people is insidious and easily concealed. Such abuse can occur in a range of relationships and environments. Research has found that close relatives, often sons and daughters, are most likely to be the perpetrators (Victoria Police, 2010). Under the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 a family member also can include a paid or unpaid carer who may be regarded as being like a family member to the person.

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)

There are few studies concerning family violence experienced in Australia by people of non-English speaking backgrounds. Research suggests, however, that there is a high representation of overseas-born males who have committed partner homicide than would be expected from their numbers in the general community (Astbury, J. et al 2000). Although in couples who migrated together, the abuse began prior to immigration, the stresses associated with migration may compound the problem. At particular risk are Asian women sponsored by non-Asian men and Middle Eastern women brought to Australia for arranged marriages to Middle Eastern men already residing here.

Poor English language proficiency has been identified as a risk factor for family violence and is perceived as a barrier to understanding the type and location of available services. Obtaining translating services for access to social and government support systems is a further impediment (Department of Justice, 2009). Other barriers to CALD women disclosing family violence potentially include physical and cultural isolation, minimal knowledge of the legal rights of women experiencing family violence, and little knowledge about support services or refuges. The concept of sexual assault within marriage may differ between cultural groups. Perceptions of police and/or the response expected from the police and justice system is varied and may discourage migrant women from seeking assistance.

Violence in same-sex relationships

Research suggests that domestic violence occurs in same sex relationships at similar rates as in heterosexual relationships. Motivations, patterns and personal effects are similar to those in heterosexual relationships. Differences that show up in same sex domestic violence include 'outing' being used as a form of control, increased likelihood of HIV being a factor, gender and community beliefs that downplay the reality of abuse, difficulty in identifying the perpetrator, and lack of appropriate services (Gray, B. 2004).

Additionally, the Victoria Police *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* reports that same-sex partner abuse may involve:

- Telling a partner that no-one will help them because police and justice system are homophobic.
- Telling a partner that they will not be believed because homosexuals do not rape or abuse their lovers.
- Threatening the partner that they will not be able to socialise within the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender and Intersex community any longer if they disclose the violence

Source: Victoria Police, *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence 2nd Edition*, 2010.

“Nationally and internationally there is a consensus among researchers that women identified as having a ‘disability’ experience violence and abuse at a much greater rate than the rest of the population. Compounding the problem, women with disabilities who are victims of violence have traditionally been disbelieved or disregarded.”

(DVRCV, 2008)



Parents

Parents / step-parents also are at risk of family violence. Data recorded in the Victorian Family Violence Database has consistently shown around 13% of family violence incidents recorded by police, and nine percent of aggrieved family members in finalised intervention order applications through the courts involved a child / step-child as a defendant against their parent / step-parent (Department of Justice, 2009).

Police have three main functions in responding to family violence:

- *Provide safety and support to those involved*
- *Identify and investigate incidents of family violence and prosecute persons accused of criminal offences arising from family violence*
- *Assist in the prevention and deterrence of family violence in the community by responding to family violence appropriately.*

*Victoria Police, Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence
2nd Edition, 2010*

What is the legal response to family violence?

Many forms of family violence are criminal, including:

- physical violence
- sexual abuse
- threats
- stalking
- property damage
- homicide

Other forms of family violence, whilst not criminal, are unacceptable and may constitute grounds for seeking an intervention order against the person perpetrating the violence.

Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence 2nd Edition

The 2nd Edition of the Victoria Police *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* reflects significant changes in the Victorian integrated family violence system, legislative change through the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 and the continuing strengthening of police response to family violence.

The aims of this Code of Practice are to:

- Increase the level of safety for all victims of family violence, particularly women and children.
- Provide early intervention and disruption to break the cycle of family violence.
- Hold perpetrators of family violence accountable for their behaviours by laying of criminal charges where appropriate, including for contraventions of Family Violence Intervention Orders and Family Violence Safety Notices; and by increasing successful prosecutions.
- Minimise trauma experienced by families during the process of police intervention.
- Support affected family members to stay safely in their own homes where it is their wish to do so.
- Encourage reporting of incidents of family violence.
- Achieve good practice through an appropriate, consistent, transparent and accountable response to and investigation of family violence.
- In partnership with other agencies, government and non-government, support an integrated response to family violence.

Source: Victoria Police, *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence 2nd Edition*, 2010)

The Family Violence Protection Act (2008)

The *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)* is the principal piece of legislation used in Victoria to protect people from family violence. Its purpose is to protect those affected by family violence or stalking by a member of their family or household, or someone with whom one has had a close relationship, by enabling them to obtain an intervention order which restrains the behaviour of the abusive family member in some way.

The process of obtaining an intervention order is a civil one. However, it is a criminal offence to breach an intervention order. It should be noted that this Act is not intended to be used *instead* of relevant parts of the Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) where there is enough evidence to secure a conviction, but alongside it to provide protection from future family violence.

The purpose of a family violence intervention order is to:

- ensure the safety of the affected family member; or
- preserve any property of the affected family member; or
- protect a child who has been subjected to family violence committed by the respondent.

An intervention order may prohibit or restrict a person (the respondent) from:

- committing family violence against the protected person;
- behaving offensively towards the protected person;
- approaching (or going near) the protected person;
- attending at premises where the protected person lives, works or frequents;
- being at a particular location;
- following the protected person;
- contacting or communicating with the protected person;
- damaging property owned by the protected person; and/or
- arranging for another person to do what the respondent is not allowed to do as stated in the order.

An intervention order may also:

- direct the respondent to participate in prescribed counselling, or
- suspend or cancel any firearms licence, permit or authority or weapons approval or exemption held by the respondent.

Source: *Family Violence Intervention Orders*,
<http://www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au>

‘Family member’ includes:

- a spouse or domestic partner
- an ex-spouse or domestic partner
- parents
- children
- any person who is or has been a relative (through past and present marriages and de facto relationships, and blood relations)
- any person who is or has been in an intimate personal relationship (e.g. boy/girlfriend, including same-sex partner)
- a guardian (of children under 17)
- any person regarded as ‘like’ a family member (eg a carer of an elderly person or person with a disability)

Source: *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)*

Children and Young Person’s Act 1989

The *Children and Young Persons Act 1989* is the main instrument of protection for children suffering harm as a result of physical injury, sexual abuse or damage to their intellectual development. Children may also be included on a parent’s intervention order, or may be issued an intervention order in their own right under the *Family Violence Protection Act (2008)*.

When any family violence incident is reported to Police they are required to take compulsory action based on risk assessment and risk management.

Actions include:

- Ensuring safety of the aggrieved family member and any children;
- Pursuing criminal or civil legal options;
- Referring all parties to appropriate services.

(Victoria Police, 2010)

The meaning of family violence in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* includes behaviour that is:

- physically or sexually abusive;
- emotionally and psychologically abusive;
- economically abusive;
- threatening;
- coercive;
- in any other way controls or dominates a family member and causes that family member to feel fear for the safety and wellbeing of that family member or another family member; and
- behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, the above behaviours.

Statistics and Contacts

“The type of violence is not the primary factor determining long-term outcome. More important predictors are the duration of violence, its severity and frequency. The cumulative impact of exposure to multiple adverse experiences (eg, violence, psychological or sexual abuse, substance misuse) in childhood is predictive of adverse health outcomes in adult life.”

Astbury, J. et al, *The impact of domestic violence on individuals* 2000

Statistics on family violence

"We will never really know how much domestic violence exists in the community. This is because social sanctions prevent open discussion of the issue, and because the problem shows itself in various ways."
(Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, *Women, men and domestic violence* 2000)

Women's Safety

The *Women's Safety Australia* study, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and published in 1996, was the first national survey to collect data on the incidence and prevalence of family violence using a representative sample of 6300 Australian women. This study defined violence as any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault which were considered offences under criminal statutes in each state or territory. As such, *the data is limited in reflecting women's experiences of other forms of abuse, e.g. emotional, social, financial, etc.* The survey was repeated in 2005 within the *Personal Safety Survey* (ABS, 2006).

Key findings of the 2005 national survey include:

In the 12 months prior to the survey:

- 4.7% of the adult female population experienced physical violence
- 1.6% of the adult female population experienced sexual violence
- 5.8% of the adult female population experienced violence (components don't add to the total because some women experienced both physical and sexual violence)
- Of those women who had experienced violence:
 - 26.4% were aged 18-24
 - 27.5% were aged 25-34
 - 22.1% were aged 35-44
 - 14.6% were aged 45-54
 - 9.5% were aged 55 or over
- Of those women who were physically assaulted, 37.8% were assaulted by a current and/or previous partner
- Only 36% of women who experienced physical assault by a male reported it to the police; 19% reported sexual assault
- Of those women who were physically assaulted by a male, 64% of incidents occurred in a home

Since the age of 15:

- 39.9% of women experienced violence; 29% experienced physical assault, 17% experienced sexual assault
- 2.1% of women experienced current partner violence
- 15% of women experienced violence from a previous partner
- Of those women who were physically assaulted, 46% were assaulted by a current and/or previous partner

Women were more likely to have been sexually abused than men; 12% of women had been sexually abused before the age of 15 compared to 4.5% of men.

From these results it was estimated that 1.5 million women in Australia have experienced sexual violence and 2.6 million women have experienced physical violence.

Police and Court Statistics

- Victorian Police received 33,918 reports of incidents of family violence in 2008-2009. This reflects a 45% increase between 1999-2000 and 2002-03, a further 11% increase between 2002-03 and 2007-08, and again a 7.1% increase on 2007-08.
- Police data indicates that the main perpetrators (50%) of family violence against adult female victims are current domestic partners. The three partner categories (current domestic partners, former domestic partners and intimate partners) combined comprise approximately 80% of all family violence incidents recorded by police involving adult female aggrieved family members.
- Two out of five aggrieved family members report to police that the family violence has been occurring for more than two years.
- More than one-third of aggrieved family members who were very fearful of the perpetrator did not have an active intervention order in place. More than 40% of incidents where the violence was reported to be getting worse also did not have an active intervention order in place.
- There were 15,035 original intervention orders for which there were 36,114 aggrieved family members in Victorian courts in 2007-2008.
- Court data indicates approximately 35% of finalized intervention orders were against current partners and 26% against former partners. Eighty percent of finalized intervention orders are comprised of those against current and former domestic partners, and intimate personal relationships combined.

Source: *Department of Justice, Victorian Family violence Database Volume 4: Nine Year Trend Analysis, Measuring Family Violence in Victoria 1999-2008, 2009*

Homicide Statistics

- Fifty-two percent of the 260 homicide incidents in Australia in 2007-08 were domestic homicides involving one or more victims who shared a family or domestic relationship with the offender.
- Intimate partner homicides comprised the largest proportion of domestic homicides (60%) in 2007-08.
- Most Australian homicides in 2007-08 occurred in a residential location (70%) - most often the victim's home (53%), but occasionally in the offender's home (8%) or some other person's home (9%).
- Seventy-eight percent of the 112 female victims of homicide in 2007-08 were killed by an offender with whom they shared a domestic relationship whereas male victims were more likely to have been killed by an acquaintance or stranger (84%).
- In 2007-2008 domestic homicides, the cause of death was 43% from stab wounds; 19% from beatings; 12% from strangulation/suffocation and 10% from gunshot wounds.

Source: *Virueda & Payne, Homicide in Australia: 2007-08 National Homicide Monitoring Program Annual Report, 2010*

Indigenous Statistics

- *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (2008) reports 41% of Indigenous people in remote areas and 14% of those in non-remote areas reported that family violence was a neighbourhood problem.
- Of all Indigenous female homicides, the domestic homicide category has the highest percentage of victims (Virueda & Payne, 2010).
- The majority (68%) of all Indigenous homicide victims were killed in a domestic homicide, the most common sub-category being intimate partner homicide (Virueda & Payne, 2010).
- In 2003-04, one in four female clients seeking SAAP assistance because of domestic and family violence was Indigenous (Tually, S. et al, 2008). http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/synthesis_report08/Documents/synthesis_report2008.pdf
- Indigenous females sought Supported Accommodation Assistance Program assistance in 2006-07 to escape family violence at the rate of 45 per 1000 population, a rate of fifteen times greater than for non-Indigenous females. (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2009)
- In 2003-04 Indigenous females were hospitalised for family violence-related assaults at 35 times the rate of non-Indigenous females (Trewin & Madden, 2005).

Homelessness Services

- In 2008-09, domestic or family violence was cited as the main reason for seeking assistance from Australia's homelessness Services: in 49% of support periods provided to females with children; in 40% of support periods provided to unaccompanied females aged 25 and over; and in 17% of support periods provided to unaccompanied females aged under 25 years (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2010).
- In Victoria in 2008-09, domestic or family violence was cited as the main reason for seeking assistance from homelessness services in 55.6% of support periods provided to females with children; in 38.2% of support periods provided to unaccompanied females aged 25 and over; and in 20.3% of support periods provided to females alone aged under 25 years (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2010).
- There has been a 51.5% increase in the support periods provided for family violence by Victorian homelessness services over nine years from 13,300 in 1999-00 to 20,150 in 2007-08 (Department of Justice, 2009).

Women's Health

- In a study conducted in Melbourne in November 1993 and February 1994, questionnaire responses from women attending general practitioners revealed that 28% of women surveyed had experienced either physical or emotional abuse within their current relationship in the previous year. (Mazza, D., Dennerstein, L., and Ryan, V. 1996).
- Intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15-44. It is responsible for more of the disease burden than high blood pressure, smoking or obesity (VicHealth 2004).
- The influence of abuse can persist long after the abuse has stopped; the more severe, the greater its impact on women's physical and mental health; the impact over time appears to be cumulative (VicHealth 2004).
- Of the human intent injuries associated with family violence admitted to the emergency departments in Victoria's public hospitals, adult females were more than twice as likely to have multiple injuries as were adult male patients (Department of Justice 2009).

Children/young People and Family Violence

- In 2002-03, it is estimated that 263,800 Australian children were living with victims of domestic violence, and that 68% of these children had witnessed domestic violence (Abused Child Trust, website n.d.).
- *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 4* reports that in 2007-2008 police officially recorded 2,367 children as victims of family violence; 21,836 were present at family violence incidents and 15,399 children were identified as aggrieved family members in finalised intervention order applications at courts (Department of Justice, 2009).
- The number of children recorded as aggrieved family members in finalised applications for an intervention order continued to increase from 2004 figures, reflecting both a change in court reporting procedures where children were previously likely to be included on their mother's intervention order, and an increased awareness of the need to protect children separate from a parent at risk (Department of Justice, 2009).
- Forty-nine percent of men and women who experienced violence by a current partner reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship. An estimated 27% said that these children had witnessed the violence (ABS, 2006).
- Sixty-one percent of persons who experienced violence by a previous partner reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship and 36% said that these children had witnessed the violence (ABS, 2006).

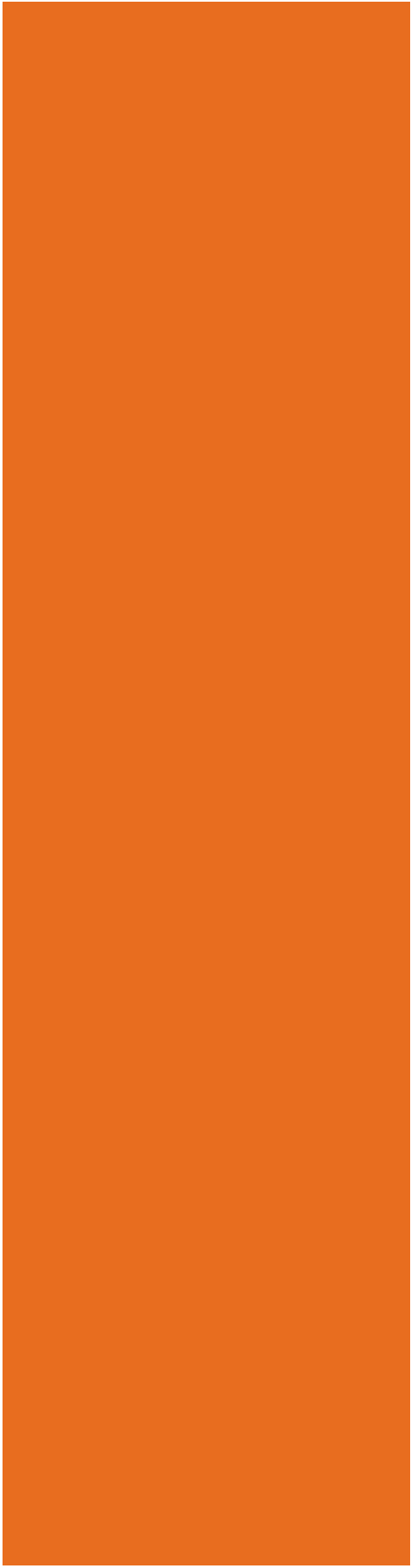
Cost of Family Violence

- The total lifetime cost of domestic violence is estimated to be \$224,470 per victim experiencing domestic violence in 2002-03, or \$4,570 annually per victim who has ever suffered domestic violence.
- Total annual cost estimate of domestic violence in 2002-03 was \$8.1 billion.
- The largest contributor to the cost of domestic violence is pain, suffering and premature mortality (\$3.5 billion).
- The largest cost burden of domestic violence – \$4.0 billion – is estimated to be borne by victims.
- The second largest burden of domestic violence -- \$1.2 billion – is on the general community.
- The estimated total cost to the perpetrators of domestic violence (2002-03) is \$555 million.

Source: Access Economics and Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2004

- Violence against women and their children is estimated to have cost the Australian economy \$13.6 billion in 2008-09.
- The estimated cost of violence against women and children to the Victorian economy in 2008-09 was \$3.4 billion.

Source: National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children, 2009



*“One of five women
report being subjected to
violence at some time in
their adult lives.
It is the leading
contributor to death,
disability and illness in
Victorian women
aged 15 > 44.”*

VicHealth, *The health costs of violence* 2004

Where to find family violence facts and statistics

This section contains details about where to access key family violence information sources. For the most up-to-date information, use the resources listed below as well as the contacts listed in the 'Contacts' sections of the toolkit.

Key Sites

National

Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse
www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au

National Child Protection Clearinghouse
www.aifs.gov.au/nch

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault
<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa>

Australian Bureau of Statistics
<http://www.abs.gov.au>

Australian Institute of Criminology
<http://www.aic.gov.au>

Victoria

Department of Justice
www.justice.vic.gov.au
Follow links – Courts and Tribunals – Magistrates' Court

Victoria Police
www.police.vic.gov.au
Follow links – Statistics – Victoria Police Crime Statistics – Family Incident Reports

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
<http://www.dvrcv.org.au>

No To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association
www.ntv.org.au

Topics Papers available on the Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse website include:

- Adolescent violence towards parents
- Australian prevention programs for young people
- Australian statistics
- Battered woman syndrome
- Child protection
- Economic costs
- Family Law
- Human rights
- Perpetrator programs
- Research & evaluation of interventions with women
- Routine screening
- Trends in interagency work
- Women's physical health

Key Resources

Australia

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Key Journals

- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Newsletter, published quarterly online and in hardcopy.
- Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV), quarterly newsletter.

Electronic Journals (available online through the Proquest database)

- *Journal of Family Violence*
- *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*
- *Violence Against Women*

Deborah Light's story in the June 2003 Edition of the Bulletin, 'A Big Ugly Secret', has touched many people who have been affected by family violence, as evidenced by the letters of response to the story. Deborah's story can be accessed at:

<http://www.colinfleming.com.au/content/cfc-resource-0008.pdf>

Some warning signs of family violence:

- *jealousy*
- *controlling behaviour*
- *quick involvement*
- *unrealistic expectations*
- *isolation*
- *blames others for problems or feelings*
- *hypersensitivity*
- *cruelty to children*
- *cruelty to animals*
- *use of force during sex*
- *rigid sex roles*
- *Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personality*
- *past battering*
- *breaking or striking objects*
- *using force during an argument*
- *always speaking on behalf of partner*
- *denial/minimisation of frequency and extent of violence*

NSW Health, *Policy and procedures for identifying and responding to domestic violence* 2003

Family violence – contacts

Contact information to include with your stories to help your readers

It is highly recommended that articles about family violence include contact information for family violence crisis services, for the benefit of readers that may be experiencing family violence personally. The Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria and Men’s Referral Service provide access to crisis and ongoing family violence support services across Victoria. The following contacts are suggested to supplement articles/stories as relevant:

Victoria

In emergency situations or immediate danger call Police on 000.

Women needing help or referral to local women’s services and/or the statewide high-security refuge system can call the Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria on 1800 015 188.

Men concerned about their behaviour at home can call the Men’s Referral Service on 1800 065 973 (free call regional Victoria); 9428 2899 (Metropolitan Melbourne) or access information at www.mrs.org.au

Children/young people needing help can call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800.

People who have experienced sexual assault can call the Sexual Assault Crisis Line on 1800 55 1800.

National

For confidential help and referral in Australia call the National Sexual Assault, Family & Domestic Violence Counselling Line on 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732).

Contacts for media comment by family violence experts

For comment on **family violence issues for women** contact:
Fiona McCormack, *Domestic Violence Victoria* – Peak body for family/domestic violence services for women and children in Victoria:
Ph. 9921 0823/0828; 0409 937 800

For comment on **male violence prevention** contact:
Danny Blay, *No To Violence* – Peak body for male family violence prevention in Victoria: Ph. 9428 3536; 0417 690 311

For **interviews with survivors** of family violence contact:
Jane Ashton, *Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service*: Ph. 0419 328 938

For comment on **violence against women crisis services, including refuges** contact:
Deb Bryant, *Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service*:
Ph. 9928 9611; 0437 544 594

For comment on **sexual assault issues** contact:
Carolyn Worth, *South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault*:
Ph. 9928 8741; 0414 538 275

For comment on **violence against women with disabilities** contact:
Keran Howe, *Women with Disabilities Victoria*: Ph. 9664 9317/9340; 0408 808 676

For comment on **family violence issues for women, training and resources** contact:
Virginia Geddes, *Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria*:
Ph. 9486 9866; 0432 337 859

For comment on **VicHealth research and health strategies for preventing violence against women** contact:
Jane Gardiner, *VicHealth*: Ph. 9667 1319; 0435 761 732

Support Services

- Include contact details for people in immediate danger or in emergency situations.
- Include contact details for crisis & referral services in family violence stories as relevant to your story.
- Check details before publishing contacts in case they have changed.

Contacts for information about family violence

The following are potentially useful contacts for reporters to discuss family violence issues as they arise. Many of these services are able to provide speakers and/or workshops for education and training events to increase understanding and awareness of family violence.

Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS) Victoria

Provides assistance to ATSI victims of family violence and sexual assault and works with families and communities affected by violence.

(03) 9244 3333; Freecall 1800 105 303

<http://www.fvpls.org>

Action Centre

Provides general and sexual assault counselling, referrals and medical services for young people.

1800 013 952

CASA Forum

Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault

www.casa.org.au

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Provides training, educational resources, and information and referral to services statewide.

(03) 9486 9866

TTY (03) 9417 2155

<http://www.dvrcv.org.au>

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard

Provides telephone counselling for lesbians and gay men, referral to face to face counselling and other services.

Melbourne (03) 9663 2939; Regional Victoria & Tasmania 1800 184 527

<http://www.switchboard.org.au>

INTOUCH Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence

For immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence and for information about family violence in culturally diverse communities.

(03) 8413 6800

<http://www.iwdvs.org.au>

National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au>

Follow link >Subject Area>Women>Publications & Articles>Reducing Violence

No To Violence Male Family Violence Prevention Association

Provides information about working with men who use abusive behaviour.

(03) 9428 3536

<http://www.ntv.org.au>

VicHealth (03) 96671333

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>

Victims Support Agency

Provides information, help and referral in dealing with the effects of a crime (8.30 am to 5 pm Monday – Friday).

1800 819 817

www.justice.vic.gov.au/victimsofcrime

Victorian Office of Women’s Policy

<http://www.women.vic.gov.au>

Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Services Victoria

(03) 9928 9600

www.wdvcs.org.au

Women’s Information and Referral Exchange

Provides telephone counselling, advice and referral for women.

1300 134 130

www.wire.org.au

Women’s Legal Service Victoria *Provides legal advice and referral.*

1800 133 302

TTY 9642 0334

Women’s Safety After Separation

<http://www.ncsmc.org.au>

Women’s Services Network (WESNET)

<http://www.wesnet.org.au>

Women with Disabilities Victoria

(03) 9664 9317

<http://www.wdv.org.au>



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Family Violence in the News A Media Toolkit 1st Edition

Acknowledgements

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