

## Women

'The biggest risk factor for becoming a victim of sexual assault or domestic and family violence is being a woman.' [National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009]

Prompted by growing academic, government and community attention to the range of complex issues associated with domestic and family violence, Australian researchers have considered the gendered nature of this form of violence. Claims that domestic and family violence is gender-equal or gender-neutral [Flood 2006] are consistently refuted by empirical research demonstrating that, while sometimes women are violent in their intimate relationships, overwhelmingly it is men who are more likely than women to be violent towards their partners [Bagshaw & Chung 2000].

The nature and consequences of men's violence are significantly different from women's violence, in particular: men's violence is more severe, and is more likely to inflict serious injury, to involve the exercise of coercive control, and to cause fear [Bagshaw & Chung 2000]; women are more likely than men to experience actual or threatened physical or sexual violence or emotional abuse by a partner [ABS PSS 2016]; women experience much higher levels of violence and emotional abuse by former partners than by current partners [ABS PSS 2016]; and women are more likely to be killed by current or former male partners than by anyone else [Cusson & Bryant 2015]. The data also indicate that although more rare, when women do kill their male partners, there is a history of domestic violence by the male partner in more than 70% of cases [Bagshaw & Chung 2000]. Further research explains that the gendered framing of domestic and family violence recognises that this form of violence occurs within the wider context of social and economic disadvantage and inequality experienced by women in relation to men, which may mean that for some women multiple factors may intersect so as to heighten their vulnerability [Murray & Powell 2009].

Recent research and statistical analyses verify earlier studies. One in five Australian women and one in twenty Australian men experience violence by their cohabiting opposite-sex partner [ABS PSS 2016]. In 73% of cases where a woman is the victim of homicide, the current or intimate male partner is the perpetrator/offender [Cusson & Bryant 2015]. Women are also more likely than men to experience **emotional abuse** by their partner and are more likely to experience anxiety and fear as a result [ABS PSS 2016]. Where women are the perpetrators of violence against their partners [Swan & Snow 2002], they are also likely to be the victims of violence or sexual abuse by their partners and to be acting in self-defence, or to be suffering **mental** or physical ill health as a consequence [Hester 2013].

In Australia, legislation, judicial bench books, and government reports [ALRC/NSWLRC 2010] have drawn on available research and recognise that while men can be victims of domestic and family violence and sexual assault [ABS PSS 2016], the overwhelming majority of these behaviours are perpetrated by men against women, and that the most significant risk factor in this context is being a woman [Diemer 2015]. These resources also recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young women and women with physical or mental disabilities are overrepresented as victims.