

## Children - Key Literature

### Australia

**Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Personal Safety, Australia, 2016*, ABS cat no. 4906.0 (2016).**

This release presents information from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 2016 Personal Safety Survey (PSS).

The survey collected detailed information from men and women about their experiences of violence since the age of 18, as well as experiences of current and previous partner violence, stalking, physical and sexual abuse and harassment, abuse before the age of 15, and general feelings of safety.

Approximately 50% of women 'who had children in their care when they experienced violence by a current partner reported that the children had seen or heard the violence'. Further, almost 70% of women who had children in their care when they 'experienced violence by a previous partner reported that the children had seen or heard the violence'. Further, approximately 60% of men 'who had children in their care when they experienced violence by a previous partner reported that the children had seen or heard the violence'. See Tables 17-18 for further detail.

**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia (Report, 2018)*.**

This report usefully compiles and summarises current statistics on family violence, domestic violence and sexual violence from multiple sources. Its key points are:

- > women are at greater risk of family, domestic and sexual violence;
- > some groups of women are more vulnerable to all three types of violence (in particular, women who are Indigenous, young, pregnant, separating from a partner or experiencing financial hardship and women with disability);
- > children are often exposed to the violence;
- > the three types of violence are leading causes of homelessness and adverse health consequences for women and create significant financial cost; and
- > family violence is worse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The report also identifies important gaps in the current research on family, domestic and sexual violence.

No or limited data is available on:

- > children's experiences, including attitudes, prevalence, severity, frequency, impacts and outcomes of these forms of violence;
- > specific at-risk population groups, including Indigenous Australians, people with disability, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, including those in same-sex relationships;
- > the effect of known risk factors, such as socioeconomic status, employment, income and geographical location;
- > services and responses that victims and perpetrators receive, including specialist services, mainstream services and police and justice responses;
- > pathways, impacts and outcomes for victims and perpetrators; and
- > the evaluation of programs and interventions.

**Bromfield, Leah, et al, 'Issues for the Safety and Wellbeing of Children in Families with Multiple and Complex Problems: The Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence, Parental Substance Misuse and Mental Health Problems' (National Child Protection Clearinghouse Issues Paper No 33, Australian Institute of Family Studies, December 2010).**

This literature review cites statistics from a US study, the statistics were collected from household census data from over 20,000 households (G. Fox and M. Benson 'Violent men, bad dads? Fathering profiles of men involved in intimate partner violence.' In R. Day & M. Lamb (Eds.), *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement*. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2004)):

- > 37% of children were accidentally hurt during domestic violence;
- > 26% of children were intentionally hurt during domestic violence;
- > 49% of mothers were hurt protecting children;
- > 47% of perpetrators used the child as pawn to hurt mothers;
- > 39% of perpetrators hurt mothers as punishment for children's acts;
- > 23% of perpetrators blamed mothers for perpetrators' own excessive punishment of children.

**Brown, Thea, Samantha Bricknell, Willow Bryant, Samantha Lyneham, Danielle Tyson and Paula Fernandez Arias, *Filicide offenders* (Australian Institute of Criminology Report No. 568 February 2019).**

Report abstract:

Filicide is the killing of a child by a parent or parent equivalent. Between 2000–01 and 2011–12, there were 238 incidents of filicide in Australia involving the death of 284 children. This paper examines the characteristics of custodial parents, non-custodial parents and step-parents charged with the murder or manslaughter of their children.

Offender circumstances and characteristics differed according to the offender's gender and custodial relationship with the victim. As filicide is difficult to predict, intervention strategies should focus on families with multiple risk factors and address the needs of parents as well as those of children at risk.

**Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Children and Young People's Unique Experiences of Family Violence* (Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tasmania, 2016).**

This report provides a number of findings on children and young people's unique experience of family violence. It notes that effects of family violence on children and young people can have a detrimental effect on their development, as well as their physical and mental wellbeing. Their experience is a form of 'complex trauma' – 'which describes both children's exposure to multiple, chronic and prolonged developmentally adverse traumatic events, and the substantial long-term impact of this exposure'. Further, '[m]any children and young people who have experienced FV display high levels of self-efficacy and resilience; it should not be assumed that their potential to succeed is lessened compared to those who haven't experienced FV or that they will grow up to be perpetrators themselves'. There is a need to improve the ways information is gathered on children's experiences (p.4) and to understand their specific needs (p.5).

**Flood, Michael, and Lara Fergus, *An Assault on Our Future: The Impact of Violence on Young People and Their Relationships* (Report, The White Ribbon Foundation, 2008).**

Reporting statistics drawn from the National Crime Prevention Survey (2001) this paper reports that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother than other young people (42%, compared to 23% for all respondents) (p11).

**Hart, Amanda, 'Children Exposed to Domestic Violence: Undifferentiated Needs in Australian Family Law' (2004) 18 *Australian Journal of Family Law* 170.**

This article points out that children may find it difficult to disclose violence because of a fear of not being believed and the possibility of making the situation worse. The article notes that children need to be included in determinations of what is in their best interests (p174).

This comprehensive state of knowledge paper is the first of a three part mixed-methods research project addressing parenting and abuse tactics. This paper presents the current state of knowledge on parenting in the context of DFV by examining the following four research questions:

- > What is the prevalence of DFV among parents?
- > How does DFV impact on parenting capacity?
- > What are the methods and behaviours that perpetrators use to disrupt the mother---child relationship?
- > What interventions exist to strengthen and support a positive and healthy mother--child relationship?

This review identifies that DFV may impact negatively on women and children and the parenting capacity of both perpetrators and victims is affected. Altered mother--child relationships may occur due to deliberate undermining of the mother's parenting, and children are often used by perpetrators as tools to abuse mothers and exert control and coercion (p 2).

The report points out that violence does not end when couples separate. It specifically identifies the legal system as a tool of abuse used by perpetrators, and that poor understanding by legal professionals can heighten the risks for women and children (p 2).

Although there is limited information on the parenting style of abusive fathers, abusive men as fathers have been characterised by researchers and victims as authoritarian, under-involved, self-centred and manipulative. These men also engage in high levels of substance abuse. Children exposed to partner violence in the home by their father/stepfather are at heightened risk of child maltreatment including child sexual abuse (p 2).

The report suggests that supportive care includes improved understanding and collaboration between child protection, family law, and domestic violence advocacy services (p 2).

The report also identified issues with forced contact through court:

- > Shared parenting can leave mothers and children exposed to continuing abuse (p 26).
- > Post-separation matters, including negotiation of property, parenting and child support can be used by abusive ex-partners to maintain power and control (p 27).
- > Women feel pressured by lawyers to agree to co-parenting arrangements even though children's safety may be at risk, or make decisions in an environment of fear, pragmatic concern, and family ideology (e.g. perpetrators playing on guilt about "breaking up" the family) (p 28).
- > Awareness amongst court staff in screening for family violence and safety concerns still remains

problematic, despite legal and policy reform (p 28).

**Humphreys, Catherine, 'Domestic Violence and Child Protection: Challenging Directions for Practice' (Issues Paper 13, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2007).**

This paper presents a discussion about the relationship between domestic and family violence and the child protection response. It identifies that children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous backgrounds are at particular risk of experiencing domestic violence.

**Mertin, Peter, and Philip Mohr, 'Incidence and Correlates of Post-Trauma Symptoms in Children from Backgrounds of Domestic Violence' (2002) 17(5) *Violence and Victims* 555.**

This study examined the incidence and correlates of post-trauma symptoms in 56 children of mothers who had been residents in women's shelters in Adelaide, South Australia. The most frequently endorsed symptoms among this sample of children were being troubled by distressing thoughts, conscious avoidance, hypervigilance, and sleep difficulties. Twenty percent of children met the criteria for a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Children meeting full PTSD criteria scored significantly higher on measures of anxiety, depression, and dissociation.

**Powell, Anastasia and Suellen Murray, 'Children and Domestic Violence: Constructing a Policy Problem in Australia and New Zealand' (2008) 17(4) *Social and Legal Studies* 453.**

This article discusses the relationship between domestic violence responses, child protection responses and family law responses, where a child witnesses or experiences domestic violence. It identifies that (p467):

'Where domestic violence responses, child protection responses and family law responses collide, a mother may simultaneously be constructed as being responsible for protecting her children from the influence of an ex-partner's violence, in need of support and protection herself, and responsible for facilitating the other parent's contact with children.'

'Similarly, children may be simultaneously constructed as primary 'victims' in need of protection from exposure to parental violence, as secondary victims who can be protected from exposure to a father's violence by supporting/protecting the mother, or as 'witnesses' of parental conflict who will benefit most from equal contact with both parents. Domestic violence itself is understood differently throughout these contested discourses...'

**Richards, Kelly 'Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence in Australia' (2011) 419 *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* 1.**

This paper presents a helpful overview of relevant literature. It identifies that children who live in homes characterised by violence between parents, or directed at one parent by another, have been called the 'silent', 'forgotten', 'unintended', 'invisible' and/or 'secondary' victims of domestic violence.

It summarises the research that demonstrates that witnessing domestic and family violence can involve a broad range of incidents, including the child:

- > hearing the violence;
- > being used as a physical weapon;
- > being forced to watch or participate in assaults;
- > being forced to spy on a parent;
- > being informed that they are to blame for the violence because of their behaviour;
- > being used as a hostage;
- > defending a parent against the violence; and/or
- > intervening to stop the violence.

It summarises research on the impact of domestic and family violence on children in the aftermath of violence including:

- > having to telephone for emergency assistance;
- > seeing a parent's injuries after the violence and having to assist in 'patching up' a parent;
- > having their own injuries and/or trauma to cope with;
- > dealing with a parent who alternates between violence and a caring role;
- > seeing the parents being arrested; and
- > having to leave home with a parent and/or dislocation from family, friends and school.

**Sety, Megan, 'The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review' (Report, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, 1 August 2011).**

This review identifies that:

- > Children experience serious emotional, psychological, social, behavioural and developmental consequences as a result of experiencing violence.
- > Infants and young children are especially at risk.
- > Perpetrators often attack or undermine the mother-child relationship and use children in committing

violence, such as threats to harm the children.

- > Children continue to be at risk from the effects of violence during and after parents' separation.
- > Children experience significant risks in shared parenting arrangements when the arrangement involves substantial shared time with the violent parent.
- > The evidence shows that false allegations of domestic violence and child abuse are rare. There is, however, evidence to suggest that perpetrators often deny or minimise their use of violence.

**Tomison, Adam M, 'Exploring Family Violence: Links Between Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence' (National Child Protection Clearinghouse Issues Paper No 13, Australian Institute of Family Studies, June 2000).**

This article reviews the research about the relationship between domestic violence and various forms of child maltreatment. In particular it points to the high proportion of cases of emotional abuse of children identified by child protection workers in families where there is domestic and family violence and to the mild association between presence of domestic violence and a higher than expected proportion of children sustaining injuries. Pages 8-9 of this article discusses the variety of ways a child may be exposed to domestic violence, including as a hostage to ensure the mother's return home and forcing a child to watch assaults.

## International

**Edleson, Jeffrey L, 'Children's Witnessing of Adult Domestic Violence' (1999) 14(8) *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 839.**

In this foundational article, the author reviews 31 research articles published since 1989. As a result of the review, the author attempts to 'expand common definitions of how children witness adult domestic violence by showing how children not only see violence but also hear it occurring, are used as part of it, and experience the its aftermath' (p16). A variety of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive-functioning problems among children found to be associated with exposure to domestic violence. The author identifies factors that appear to moderate the impact of witnessing violence (eg whether the child was also abused, child gender and age and time since last exposure to violence).

**Finkelhor, David, et al, 'Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey' (2009) (Oct) *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* 1.**

This Bulletin discusses the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, the first comprehensive nationwide US survey of the incidence and prevalence of children's exposure to violence. Conducted between January and May 2008, it measured the past-year and lifetime exposure to violence for children age 17 and younger across several major categories: conventional crime, child maltreatment, victimization by peers and siblings, sexual victimization, witnessing and indirect victimization (including exposure to community violence and family violence), school violence and threats, and Internet victimization.

The study found (inter alia) that children who were exposed to one type of violence, both within the past year and over their lifetimes, were at far greater risk of experiencing other types of violence. For example, a child who was physically assaulted in the past year would be five times as likely to also have been sexually victimized and more than four times as likely also to have been maltreated during that period. Similarly, a child who was physically assaulted during his or her lifetime would be more than six times as likely to have been sexually victimized and more than five times as likely to have been maltreated during his or her lifetime.

**Jane E M Callaghan et al, 'Beyond "Witnessing": Children's Experiences of Coercive Control in Domestic Violence and Abuse' (2015) *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (online).**

This article investigates children's experiences with domestic and family violence (DFV), through interviews with 21 children who have been victims of DFV (p 7). The results indicate that children are aware of patterns of coercive control, and the impacts of such abuse (pp 10-3). Such experiences result in an increased sense of constraint, which children may develop specific strategies to cope with (pp 14-6).

Significantly, the article raises children's direct agency in coping with, and responding to, DFV, highlighting the inaccuracy of treating children as merely passive witnesses (pp 17-20). Accordingly, the authors recommend that professional responses to DFV better recognise children's agency, moving beyond perceptions of them as passive witnesses, and tailor strategies for children as direct victims (pp 22, 23-4).

**Jofre-Bonet, Mireia, Melcior Rossello-Roig, Victoria Serra-Sastre, *The Blow of Domestic Violence on Children's Health Outcomes* (City University London, London School of Economics, 2016).**

This study examines the effect of domestic violence on children's health outcomes. Drawing results from the UK Millennium Cohort Study, the authors found that 'there was a strong negative externality of household violence on children's health outcomes'. Children living in a household where there was domestic violence appeared to be between 55% and 61% less likely to have their health rated as Excellent'. This paper 'not only sheds light on the negative impact of domestic violence on children's health but provides a robust quantification of this effect'.