



Understanding Family and Domestic Violence Evidence Paper

Supporting a safer future for all Australians



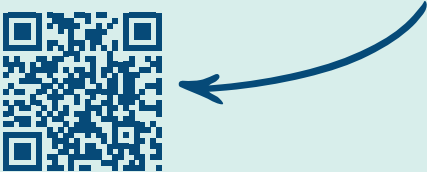
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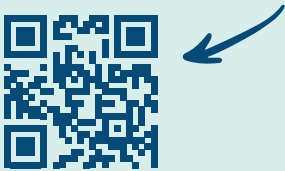


About Relationships Australia Victoria

Relationships Australia Victoria is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with more than 75 years' experiencing providing high quality, effective family and relationship support services. Our services and programs include counselling, family dispute resolution (mediation), family violence services, relationship education programs, mental health services, trauma support services, workplace services, and professional development and training.

Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Visit www.rav.org.au or scan the QR code for more information.



We're committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We pay respect to First Nations Peoples of Victoria as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways. We acknowledge the pain caused by colonisation including disconnection from land, loss of life and freedom, and the forced removal of children.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma. We recognise those who had children taken away from them.

A note about photos in this report

We use some stock photos in this report and advise that they are for illustrative purposes only. No association between the person/s pictured and the subject matter of the report is intended.

First Nations peoples should be aware that this report may contain images of people who have since passed away.

Acronyms and initialisms

AVITH	Adolescent violence in the home
IPV	Intimate partner violence
MBCP	Men's behaviour change program
RAV	Relationships Australia Victoria

**If we are to prevent future^{///}
generations experiencing family
violence, now is the time for
additional investment in this work.**





Executive summary

Family violence (also called family and domestic violence) is a serious and pervasive issue in Australian society. The family violence offender rate is at a record high and support services consistently experience strong demand. While there is stability or improvement on some measures of prevalence, family violence remains common in Australia.

All Australians should be safe within their intimate and family relationships. Much more work needs to be done to meet this goal.

The consequences of family violence for victims and victim-survivors are wide-ranging and severe. They include injury, disability, poverty, homelessness, physical and mental ill-health, and death.

Family violence most commonly comprises intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetrated by men against female intimate partners. Women are greatly over-represented as victims of family violence. However, anyone can experience family violence, including men and boys. All victim-survivors of family violence deserve compassion and timely access to effective support services.

Many Australian children also experience family violence. Family violence affects children's health, wellbeing, development and schooling, and is the leading cause of children's homelessness. There is considerable overlap between the issues of parental partner violence, child maltreatment and filicide.

Family violence is associated with structural, social and ideological factors, including power differences between men and women, and between other groups in society. Coercive control is a common factor, particularly for violence perpetrated by men against female intimate partners. There is a heightened level of risk leading up to, during and immediately after separation, when expectations of control are challenged.

The perpetration of IPV is also associated with a wide range of individual variables, regardless of their contribution relative to sociopolitical factors. They include psychological, pathological and socio-economic variables. This understanding points to the need for family violence prevention efforts to address a broad range of individual risk factors, as well as social determinants.

Children are victim-survivors in their own right, even when violence is directed at another family member.

First Nations peoples experience disproportionate incidence and severity of family violence, including against First Nations women by men who are not First Nations men. This reflects factors including intergenerational trauma stemming from colonisation, dispossession and forced child removal; poor practices from frontline services; mistrust in these services; and challenges in accessing services for those living in regional or remote locations.

Family violence disproportionately affects members of other vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees, and people with disability. Sexually diverse and gender diverse people also experience family violence at similar or higher rates to those who identify as heterosexual and cisgender.

Rates of IPV are highest during adolescence and young adulthood. Young people's use of violence is conceptually different from adult-perpetrated violence, requiring specialised responses.

Abuse of older adults, including by family members, is also a significant problem. Physical assaults and murders of older people by family members have increased. The ageing of Australia's population, compounded by ageism and widespread financial strain, is likely to amplify this issue.

Technology has increased the capacity for people who use violence to monitor and control intimate partners and other family members. Meanwhile, online influences (including those which make up the 'manosphere') promoting misogyny and violence have considerable reach, especially among adolescents and young men.

Australia must tackle the problem of family violence before it begins (primary prevention), as well as after perpetration and victimisation (early intervention, recovery and response).

This response must occur across the spectrum of individual, social and political levels. Promoting gender equality remains an important part of primary prevention, and strategies aimed at young people are particularly important.

All Australians should be safe within their intimate and family relationships. Much more work needs to be done to meet this goal. Ending family violence requires individual changes not only by people who use violence, but also changes in communities more broadly, as well as significant investment by government in services that prevent and respond to violence.



Contents

1. Introduction	06	1. Causes, predictors and trajectories	30
1.1 Defining the problem	07	1.1 Gender inequality	31
1.2 Terminology	09	1.1.1 Sexism	31
2. Prevalence	10	1.1.2 Masculinity	31
2.1 Vulnerable populations	11	1.1.3 The 'manosphere'	33
2.1.1 First Nations peoples	11	1.2 Psychosocial factors in intimate partner violence	34
2.1.2 Migrants and refugees	11	1.2.1 Coercive control	34
2.1.3 People with disability	12	1.2.2 Separation	36
2.1.4 Sexually diverse and gender diverse communities	12	1.2.3 Grievance-fuelled violence	36
2.1.5 Younger and older people	12	1.3 Characteristics of adults using violence	37
2.1.6 Intersectionality	12	1.3.1 Trauma	37
2.2 Change over time	14	1.3.2 Mental ill-health	37
2.3 International context	15	1.3.3 Alcohol and drug use	37
3. The role of gender	16	1.3.4 Gambling	38
3.1 The dominant pattern	17	1.3.5 Patterns of offending and interactions with the justice system	38
3.2 Differences in male and female violence	17	1.3.6 Physiology and pathology	38
3.3 Other kinds of family violence	18	1.4 Protective factors against the use of intimate partner violence	39
4. Consequences of family violence	20	8. Responding to family violence	40
4.1 Hospitalisations resulting from family violence	20	8.1 Prevention and early intervention	41
4.2 Deaths resulting from family violence	21	8.1.1 A gender equality approach to prevention	41
4.2.1 Intimate partner violence homicides	21	8.1.2 The impact of primary prevention	42
4.2.2 The role of family violence in suicide	22	8.2 Behaviour change interventions	43
5. Children and young people's experiences of family violence	23	8.2.1 Tailoring of behavioural interventions	44
5.1 Children as victims in their own right	24	8.2.2 Fathers who use violence	44
5.2 Risk factors	26	8.3 Legal and policing interventions	45
5.3 Filicide	26	8.3.1 Reporting and policing	45
5.3.1 Filicides in a family violence context	26	8.3.2 Protection orders	45
5.4 Young people's use of violence	27	8.3.3 Charges and prosecution	46
6. Abuse of older adults	28	9. A future free of family violence	47
		References	48

1. Introduction

Victorians continue to witness an alarming number of family violence incidents. In April 2026, Victoria Police reported attending more than 160 family violence call-outs in a single area of Melbourne in just one week, for offences against partners and family members including threats to kill, property damage, conduct endangering life, intervention order breaches and armed robbery.¹

Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV) holds considerable expertise in family violence, particularly within services supporting victim-survivors, and behaviour change work with men who use violence.

In 2025, RAV published its first family violence specialist report, a Family Violence Position Paper, summarising data and research on the prevalence, causes and consequences of family violence. It canvassed key flashpoints in academic and public discussion of family violence issues, and provided an organisational response to these data and issues.

In 2026, we have reviewed and updated this work to include the latest available data and new research evidence. This *Understanding Family and Domestic Violence Evidence Paper* is intended to support awareness and knowledge about family violence in our organisation and across our sector, including for those working in programs that are not specific to family violence, and in our community more broadly.

This paper reflects RAV's understanding of family violence and appropriate responses to this complex problem.

1.1 Defining the problem

The focus of this paper is family violence, rather than violence against women, gender-based violence, or sexual violence, all of which are also important topics and valid ways of delineating social problems.

There are numerous definitions of family violence and terminology differs according to jurisdiction.² Although ‘family and domestic violence’ or ‘domestic and family violence’ are used in other Australian jurisdictions, we use the term ‘family violence’ in keeping with the Victorian Government’s preferred terminology, and have adopted a definition from Victorian statute law.³ Statistics used in this paper are national, except where indicated otherwise.

Family violence is behaviour towards a family member that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive; that is threatening or coercive; or that in any other way controls or dominates the family member, and causes them to fear for their own safety or wellbeing or that of another person.⁴

Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs in the context of current or previous intimate relationships. An intimate partner may be a current partner, previous partner, boyfriend/girlfriend/date, ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, regardless of whether the relationship was ever cohabiting.⁵

Family violence and IPV can take many forms:

- Physical abuse is behaviour that causes or threatens physical harm or deliberately prevents safety. It can include physical neglect of someone reliant on care, and harming or threatening harm to pets or possessions.⁶
- Sexual abuse is actual or threatened sexual contact without consent, or sexual coercion. It includes image-based abuse and reproductive coercion (e.g. controlling contraception, or preventing or forcing termination of pregnancy).⁷
- Emotional or psychological abuse involves words or deeds that cause mental harm, including verbal abuse, intimidation, humiliation, emotional blackmail and gaslighting. It can also include the impact of other forms of violence.⁸

- Economic or financial abuse includes controlling someone’s access to finances, withholding financial support, hiding financial information, taking someone’s money or benefits, or taking out loans or accounts in someone else’s name. It can also include restricting access to other resources, such as housing, food, transport, study or employment.⁹

Family violence can take other forms which are not separately identified in the definition above. These include:

- stalking and intimidation (repeated and unwanted contact or monitoring)
- technology-facilitated abuse (the use of digital technology to harass, control or intimidate)
- systems abuse (manipulating legal or social support systems to control, threaten or harass)
- spiritual or religious abuse (denigrating someone’s beliefs; using religion to control, instil fear or justify abuse; or preventing someone from practising their religion)¹⁰
- cultural abuse (insulting someone’s cultural identity, preventing participation in cultural practices)
- social abuse (limiting or controlling someone’s social activities or relationships).¹¹

Behaviours and experiences may fall into more than one of these categories, none of which are mutually exclusive.

Family violence rarely comprises a single incident. Rather, it is a pattern of behaviour that often includes multiple tactics, and which can escalate over time (see ‘7.2.1 Coercive control’).¹²

A close-up photograph of a woman holding a baby. The woman's face is partially visible, showing her ear and cheek. The baby is wearing a blue and pink striped shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus sunset or sunrise sky. A white text box with a blue border is overlaid on the image.

**Governments, service providers
and community responses must
meet the needs of all Australians
who experience family violence.**

1.2 Terminology

In keeping with Victorian usage, we use ‘family violence’ to cover both family violence and IPV, even though IPV can include violence from an ex-partner who is no longer, or never was, considered ‘family’.

Family violence is the broader term and includes violence between all family members or in family-like settings – including violence by parents or guardians against children, by children and young people against parents or siblings, and towards older adults. The term allows for violence which may occur across extended family networks, and as such may be preferred by First Nations peoples.¹³

The Victorian Government and peak bodies now refer to ‘adults using family violence’ to distinguish adult perpetration from youth violence, which are very different issues (see ‘5.4 Young people’s use of violence’). National and other sources used in this paper refer to ‘perpetrators’. This paper uses both terms, depending on the context and source material under discussion.

In referring to people who have experienced family violence, this paper uses the widely accepted term ‘victim-survivor’, which asserts that people can survive violence and acknowledges that some do not identify as victims. However, since the consequences of family violence discussed in this paper include death, ‘victim’ is also used.

We acknowledge that this paper often uses binary language in discussing men and women. These categories are important to the discussion of family violence, which is strongly gendered; however, we recognise that they do not capture the experiences of all people.

.....
Anyone can be affected by family violence, including those whose experiences are not captured using binary language.¹⁴

2. Prevalence

Family violence occurs across all ages, genders and socioeconomic circumstances.

Existing data sources do not capture the full extent of family violence in all its forms, especially for some subgroups of the population.¹⁵ Nevertheless, population surveys, recorded crime data and measures of service demand all indicate that family violence is common and represents a significant problem in Australian society.

The Personal Safety Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is the best source of national, population-wide data. Last conducted in 2021–22, this survey indicates that approximately 20% of adult Australians have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member since the age of 15. Women (27%) are more than twice as likely as men (12%) to have experienced these kinds of violence. Similar proportions of Australians have experienced violence, emotional abuse or economic abuse by a cohabiting partner.¹⁶

In 2024, at least 2 in 5 assaults recorded by police in each Australian state and territory were related to family violence, as were 39% of recorded homicides and related offences.¹⁷ In 2024–25, people who had experienced family violence were the largest group seeking specialist homelessness services, comprising 40% of all clients.¹⁸

Family violence services are experiencing high demand, which exceeds capacity.

Many services are operating waitlists. Recent data indicates 'a sector struggling to keep up under current funding models'.¹⁹ Services report workforce shortages and high staff vacancies, contributing to workforce fatigue, burnout and attrition. The need to manage demand places pressure on services to reduce case management support periods, creating a point of stress for practitioners with constrained ability to meet the needs of victim-survivors.²⁰

2.1 Vulnerable populations

Rates of family violence are high overall but even higher for certain groups in Australian society. Family violence can disproportionately affect people belonging to vulnerable groups in the community.

Although much of this paper generalises across groups, or differentiates by gender only, reflecting the emphasis of the literature, experiences of violence and of support-seeking may be quite different across communities. Vulnerable groups are often under-represented in survey data. As recognised by Australia's policy framework, the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32 ('National Plan'), 'data disaggregation is limited and we lack the evidence to understand the experiences of certain communities'.²¹ The Consultation Paper on the Second Action Plan under this framework expands the number of priority populations that need to be better understood, and asserts the need for tailored research and support to ensure the needs of diverse groups – those described below, and others – are met.²²

2.1.1 First Nations peoples

First Nations peoples of Australia experience disproportionate incidence and severity of family violence, reflecting factors including intergenerational trauma stemming from colonisation and dispossession, inadequate and/or culturally inappropriate practices from frontline services, mistrust in these services, and challenges in accessing services for those living in regional or remote locations.²³ This contributes to the over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care.²⁴ At the same time, a high proportion of violent victimisation among First Nations peoples is not reported to police, partly due to fear of institutional harm by White systems, including forced child removal.²⁵ Significant levels of violence are perpetrated against First Nations women and children by men who are not First Nations.²⁶

Two-thirds of First Nations people aged 15 and over who experienced physical harm in 2018–19 reported that the perpetrator was an intimate partner or family member.²⁷ First Nations women have much higher rates of hospitalisation from family violence than non-Indigenous women, while First Nations peoples are over-represented as both victims and offenders in IPV homicides.²⁸ First Nations women comprised a quarter of female IPV homicide victims between 2010 and 2018.²⁹

The disproportionate victimisation of First Nations women is a priority focus of the National Plan.³⁰ The Plan recognises that First Nations women and children often experience inadequate responses from services, police and courts, including through racism and victim misidentification.³¹

1 in 4

female IPV homicide victims between 2010 and 2018 were First Nations women.²⁹

2.1.2 Migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees to Australia, many of whom come from cultures with different norms and laws, are particularly vulnerable to family violence. This is for multiple reasons, including that these groups are more likely to be dependent on family members for residence and support, have restricted access to government services, and face language and/or cultural barriers in reporting violence.³² One study found that 1 in 3 migrant and refugee women had experienced family violence, with temporary visa holders particularly likely to have their status used as a means of control or abuse.³³

1 in 3

migrant and refugee women have experienced family violence.³³

2.1.3 People with disability

People with disability experience higher risk of all types of violence in comparison to people without disability. Violence against people with disability also tends to be perpetrated by a greater range of people, including by carers and guardians, in both family-like and institutional settings.³⁴

In 2016, experiences of violence from an intimate partner or parent since the age of 15 were more common among adults with disability (21% and 5.2%, respectively) than those without disability (13% and 3.0%, respectively), and highest for those with severe or profound disability (29% and 6.7%, respectively).³⁵ Adult women with disability are more likely than those without disability to experience emotional or financial abuse from a cohabiting partner.³⁶

2.1.4 Sexually diverse and gender diverse communities

Australian and international surveys suggest that people who identify as sexually diverse or gender diverse experience family violence and IPV at rates that are similar to or higher than those who identify as heterosexual and cisgender.³⁷ In the large Victorian sample surveyed for the 'Private Lives 3' study in 2019, 43% of participants identifying as sexually diverse or gender diverse reported having experienced IPV, while almost 4 in 10 participants reported ever feeling abused by a family member.³⁸ Sexually diverse and gender diverse communities are among the priority groups identified in the National Plan.³⁹

Members of these communities may face abuse throughout their lives because of their gender or sexual identity, including from family members. While IPV exhibits similar dynamics regardless of gender or sexuality, sexually diverse and gender diverse groups are vulnerable to additional threats from people using violence, for example, to 'out' their sexual and gender identity, history or HIV status.⁴⁰ IPV within these communities is not well-recognised, and policy and practice responses are underdeveloped. Therefore, victim-survivors may also face increased risk of isolation, and difficulty accessing services that are primarily designed to support cisgender heterosexual women.⁴¹

2.1.5 Younger and older people

The likelihood of family violence is also determined by age and dependency. Rates of IPV are highest during adolescence and young adulthood (see '5.4 Young people's use of violence').⁴² Meanwhile, older people are particularly vulnerable to other forms of family violence (see '6. Abuse of older adults').

2.1.6 Intersectionality

All victim-survivors' experiences of family violence are different. The experience and impact of family violence may be amplified when multiple forms of disadvantage intersect, and this impact can be less visible and less well understood than the impact on any single group.⁴³ Multiple challenges also intersect to create additional barriers to securing safety, including remoteness, socio-economic disadvantage, financial instability, homelessness, and mental health or alcohol and other drug issues.⁴⁴

Commonly, gender inequality overlaps with other structural and system forms of discrimination. For example:

- For First Nations women, the effects of family violence are compounded by the ongoing effects of colonisation, including displacement from Country and kin, intergenerational trauma and racism.
- Refugees and migrant women experience violence that is both gendered and racialised.
- Sexism and ableism compound to drive high levels of family violence against women with disability, who experience the same forms of family violence as other women, but face additional risk of neglect, exploitation, discrimination, segregation and exclusion.
- Rigid gender norms and heteronormative assumptions promote violence against people who identify as sexually diverse and/or gender diverse.
- Among older people, ageism contributes both to the risk of family violence and greater difficulty accessing help from services.⁴⁵



**Members of vulnerable groups
can be disproportionately
affected by family violence.**

2.2 Change over time

Measuring the prevalence of family violence, let alone change in prevalence over time, is not straightforward.

Trends may differ depending on which indicators are used. For example, counting family violence incidents or people with experience of family violence is not the same as measuring severity, which may be better assessed using family violence hospitalisations or deaths (see '4.1 Hospitalisations resulting from family violence' and '4.2 Deaths resulting from family violence').

Interpretation of trends adds another layer of complexity. Paradoxically, increased incidents, experiences or arrests can indicate success in tackling family violence, because victim-survivors are better able to report it. This makes it difficult to judge whether efforts to reduce family violence are 'working'. Similarly, improved social awareness of family violence can shape perceptions that the problem is increasing, regardless of whether this is the case.⁴⁶

Data from the most recent ABS Personal Safety Survey are now dated, but suggest improvement on several measures, with decreases in the 12-month prevalence rates of IPV and cohabiting partner violence experienced by adult women, and in emotional abuse experienced by both men and women, between 2016 and 2021–22.⁴⁷ Among Australian states and territories, Victoria has shown the most consistent reduction across most forms of violence, following system reform and sustained investment in responses to family violence.⁴⁸

However, caution must be exercised in the use of statistics from 2021–22, given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, particularly in Victoria, at this time.⁴⁹ The pandemic resulted in first-time or escalating violence for many women, and stay-at-home orders made it more difficult to disclose experiences of violence in the home.⁵⁰

Further, the Personal Safety Survey cannot demonstrate decline for some high-risk population groups because it does not reach enough people from these communities.⁵¹

Across Australia, the number of offenders proceeded against by police for at least one family violence related offence increased by 8% between 2023–24 and 2024–25. The resulting rate of 403 family violence offenders per 100,000 persons aged 10 years or over is the highest family violence offender rate recorded since the national time series began in 2019–20.⁵²

Of further concern is a statistically significant increase in experience of sexual violence by women, over a longer, 10-year period.⁵³ Family violence-related sexual assaults recorded by police doubled in the decade to 2024.⁵⁴

403

family violence offenders per 100,000 persons aged 10 years or over.⁵²

100%

increase in family violence-related sexual assaults recorded by police between 2014 and 2024.⁵⁴

2.3 International context

Family violence, and in particular violence against women, is a global problem.

It is estimated that 60% of women and girls who were intentionally killed worldwide in 2023 were killed by an intimate partner or other family member.⁵⁵ There is international concern about an apparent increase in sexual violence and IPV, particularly among younger people.⁵⁶

The World Health Organization's 2018 estimates demonstrate regional variation in the lifetime exposure of ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years to physical and sexual IPV. Exposure is lower in Australia than in less developed countries, but above the average for high-income countries and areas.⁵⁷

60%

of women and girls intentionally killed worldwide in 2023 were killed by an intimate partner or other family member.⁵⁵

Australia can and must do better in its efforts to reduce family violence.



3. The role of gender

Attention to family violence, and particularly to IPV, has primarily focused on heterosexual relationships in which perpetrators are mostly men, while victims are mostly women.⁵⁸ This reflects the fact that family violence most often comprises IPV perpetrated by men against women.

Family violence may manifest in a range of different familial or kinship relationships ... However, in the overwhelming majority of cases domestic and family violence is perpetrated by a man against his current or former female intimate partner.⁵⁹



3.1

The dominant pattern

Family violence has a disproportionate impact on women.

IPV is the most common form of violence experienced by women, and women are greatly over-represented as victims of injury and death resulting from family violence (see '4.1 Hospitalisations resulting from family violence' and '4.2.1 Intimate partner violence homicides').⁶⁰

Meanwhile, men are over-represented among adults using violence. Of the 97,800 family violence offenders proceeded against by Australian police in 2024–25, almost 4 in 5 (78%) were male.⁶¹

A national study published in 2025 provided the first longitudinal data on the use of IPV among Australian men. Around 1 in 3 men reported having used IPV as an adult by 2022, up from 24% who had reported use by 2013–14.⁶² Emotional abuse (32%) was the most common form of IPV used, followed by physical violence (9%).

Some commentators argue that the problem of male violence in general is a more appropriate focus than family violence or 'violence against women', since men are most often perpetrators of violence, family or other, whether victims are male or female.⁶³ (In 2024–25, 83% of all male homicide victims and 84% of all female homicide victims were killed by a male primary offender.)⁶⁴ However, shifting the focus to predominantly male violence, rather than predominantly female victimisation, still requires gendered explanations and strategies (see '8.1.1 A gender equality approach to prevention').⁶⁵

3.2

Differences in male and female violence

When considering men's and women's use of violence in the home, it's important to account for both motivation and impact.

Studies measuring a broad range of behaviours used in the context of couple conflict have suggested that similar proportions of men and women use violence in the home.

Women's violence against men is often retaliatory or defensive.⁶⁶ While there is no acceptable level of violence, the 'situational' or 'expressive' kind of violence that shows 'gender symmetry' tends to occur at the lower end of the scale in terms of severity, and differs from control-motivated 'instrumental' violence that is a feature of much male violence against female intimate partners.⁶⁷ The injury rate for assaults by men is many times greater than the injury rate for assaults by women; women's injuries are more serious and carry greater risk of death.⁶⁸

The lesser severity of violence by women against male intimate partners does not make it inconsequential.⁶⁹ Regardless of the differences from men's use of violence, women's capacity for intimate violence must be acknowledged, including the experiences of women in lesbian couples.⁷⁰

3.3 Other kinds of family violence

While gendered understandings of violence in families and intimate relationships remain vital, this lens can prevent recognition of abuse that does not fit the dominant pattern.⁷¹

Boys and men also experience victimisation and harm from family violence, albeit at lower rates than girls and women. Personal Safety Survey data from 2021–22 shows that 1 in 8 Australian men reported experiencing family violence or IPV from the age of 15 years.⁷²

Men may experience IPV perpetrated by male, female or non-binary partners. IPV is also perpetrated by female partners in non-heterosexual relationships.⁷³ Among sexually diverse and gender diverse Victorians who reported ever experiencing IPV in 2019, 56% described the perpetrator as a 'cisgender man', while 38% reported 'cisgender woman'.⁷⁴

There are gaps in understanding female violence against male or female intimate partners, and IPV in sexually diverse and gender diverse communities.⁷⁵ A heteronormative bias is problematic for male and queer victim-survivors who may not recognise their own experiences of violence, and for services that may not be equipped to respond to them appropriately.⁷⁶

It is important, particularly for those delivering services, to recognise that family violence presentations do not always fit the dominant paradigm.

All victim-survivors of family violence deserve compassion and timely access to effective support services. This acknowledgement must exist alongside an understanding of the important differences in the ways that men typically use and experience violence in intimate and family relationships, compared to women.

Outside of IPV, gender differences in victimisation of other forms of family violence can be much less stark. For example, a 2020 prevalence study of older adult abuse showed a small but statistically significant difference in the proportion of women (15.9%) and men (13.6%) who reported experiencing any form of abuse. However, when variables explaining the likelihood of abuse were ranked in order of importance, gender ranked tenth after variables including social support, age, disability status, marital status and others.⁷⁷

 Gender matters, but it is not the only thing that matters.⁷⁸

Although much of this paper concerns gender-based violence, see '5. Children and young people's experiences of family violence' and '6. Abuse of older adults'.

All victim-survivors of family violence deserve compassion and timely access to effective support services.



4. Consequences of family violence

There are wide-ranging and severe consequences of family violence, which include injury, disability, poverty, homelessness, physical and mental ill-health, and death.⁷⁹ For women aged 18–44 years, IPV is the top risk factor contributing to illness and death.⁸⁰

Aside from injury and increased mortality, there are physical health consequences (e.g. alcohol and drug addiction,⁸¹ increased reproductive disorders and poorer pregnancy outcomes for women),⁸² psychological consequences (e.g. depression and post-traumatic stress disorder)⁸³ and economic consequences (e.g. decreased income and unemployment).⁸⁴ We know that only some of these consequences are captured in Australian data. Further, the impact of family violence extends beyond individuals to affect families, communities and our whole society.⁸⁵

Family violence injuries can be lifelong, including permanent disability and traumatic brain injuries.⁸⁶ Mental health consequences can also be lifelong (see '5.1 Children as victims in their own right'). Trauma, particularly when it is complex or cumulative, often persists unresolved. This is for multiple reasons, including stigma and poor service system accessibility.⁸⁷

4.1 Hospitalisations resulting from family violence

Half of assault hospitalisations (50% or 9,300) in 2023–24 were due to family violence.⁸⁸

In 62% of these hospitalisations, the perpetrator recorded was a spouse or domestic partner; in 39% the perpetrator recorded was a parent or other family member. The hospitalisations counted relate to more severe (and mostly physical) experiences of family violence.⁸⁹

Three-quarters (76%) of family violence hospitalisations were for women. The family violence hospitalisation rate for females was more than 3 times as high as for males (52 per 100,000 females, compared to 17 per 100,000 males). This rate has increased over the 12 years for which data are available, though is below its peak in 2019–20.⁹⁰ A total of 6,751 Australian women aged 15 years and over were hospitalised because of a family violence assault, about three-quarters of whom had been assaulted by an intimate partner. By comparison, IPV accounted for about one-third of male family violence hospitalisations.⁹¹

4.2 Deaths resulting from family violence

Family violence can be fatal. In 2024–25, approximately one-third (34%) of all homicides were ‘domestic’, making domestic homicide more common than acquaintance homicide (26%) or stranger homicide (16%). Intimate partner homicides were the most common form of domestic homicides, accounting for just over half (51%) of domestic homicides, or 17% of all homicides.⁹²

4.2.1 Intimate partner violence homicides

A significant proportion of IPV homicides occurs in the context of family violence; that is, there is an identifiable history of abuse – not always physical – between the parties. Between 2010 and 2018, 311 homicides between intimate partners were preceded by an identifiable history of family violence, or 1.5 per 100,000 people over the age of 15 years.⁹³ This is likely to be an undercount of the true incidence of IPV homicides, given the high proportion of violence that is not disclosed or reported.⁹⁴ Victoria recorded 1.0 IPV homicides per 100,000 population aged over 15 years.⁹⁵

Incidents of IPV homicide decreased from 0.27 per 100,000 in 2023–24 to 0.21 in 2024–25, after increasing in the previous 2 financial years.⁹⁶ This represents a return to the longer-term trend: the female IPV homicide rate decreased by 70% in the 36-year period to 2024–25, and the male IPV homicide rate by 63% (see Fig. 1).⁹⁷

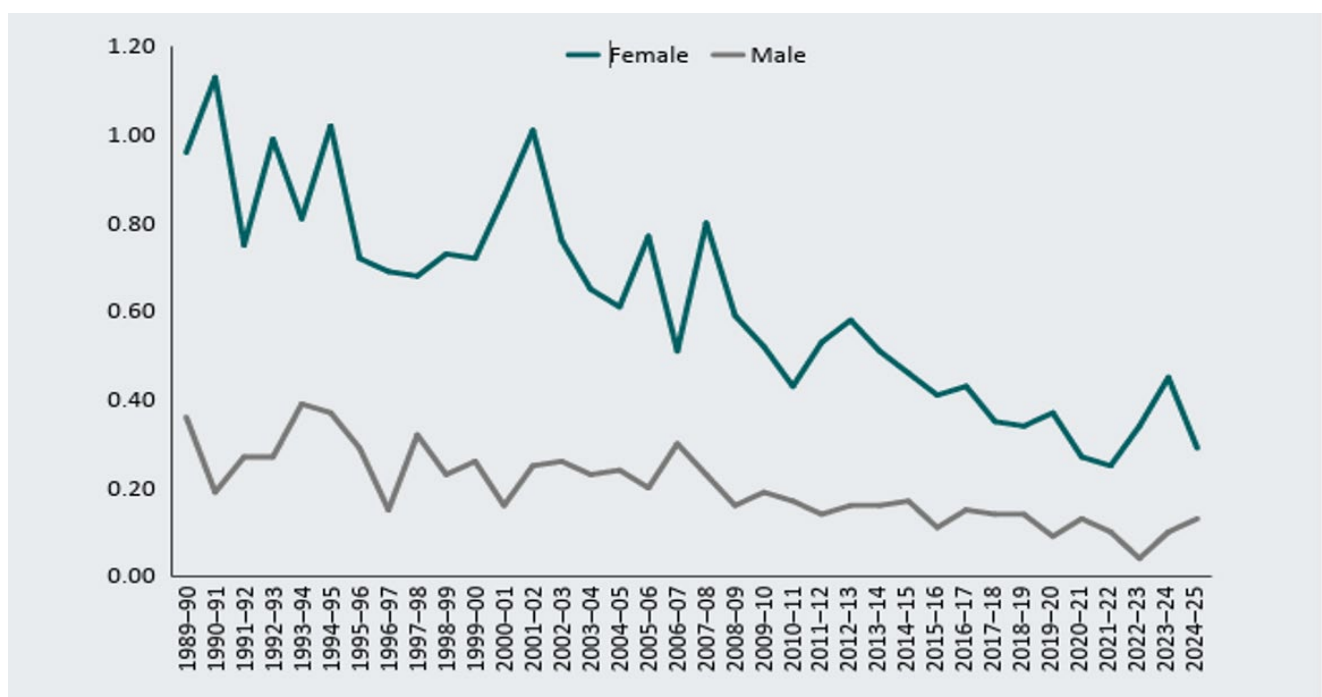


Figure 1: Incidents of IPV homicide by victim sex, 1989–90 to 2024–25 (rate per 100,000 population aged 18 years and over)

Source: Bricknell and Miles, 2026, p. 10 [ref. no. 64].

4.2.1.1 Gendered patterns

In Australia and globally, while males are consistently more likely than females to be both victims and offenders of homicide more broadly, females are greatly over-represented as victims of intimate partner homicide.⁹⁸ In 2024–25, 7 in 10 IPV homicide victims in Australia were female, which is below the long-term average of 76%.⁹⁹ The killing of female intimate partners is termed ‘femicide’, acknowledging the gendered nature of lethal family violence.¹⁰⁰

The rate of female victimisation as a proportion of all IPV homicide victimisations has increased over time,¹⁰¹ while the rate of male victimisation has declined. This may be due to improved ‘escape routes’ for women experiencing IPV, which have increased the likelihood that a woman will leave a violent relationship before resorting to violence herself.¹⁰² Around one-fifth of IPV homicide cases in a family violence context between 2010 and 2018 involved a female offender killing a current or former male partner. In 71% of these cases, the female partner was also the primary IPV victim.¹⁰³

While public discourse tends to focus on lethal family violence inflicted on young mothers, older adult family homicide is also gendered.¹⁰⁴ Improved data on family violence homicides of older women and exploration of the unique vulnerabilities of older women are needed to bring attention to this issue.¹⁰⁵

7 in 10

IPV homicide victims in 2024–25 were female.⁹⁹

4.2.2 The role of family violence in suicide

It is estimated that, across Australia, people with experience of family or sexual violence are 4 times as likely to die by suicide as those without.¹⁰⁶ An analysis by the Victorian Coroners Court of all suicides which occurred in the state between 2009 and 2016 found that the deceased had experienced family violence in approximately 1 in 4 cases. Although there were many more male suicides than female suicides in this period, evidence of family violence was identified in a higher proportion of suicides among females (28%) than males (23%).¹⁰⁷

Suicide is a risk among both victims and perpetrators of family violence. The Victorian Coroners Court data relates to suicides where the deceased was a perpetrator of family violence, a victim of family violence, or both. A majority (65%) of males were in the perpetrator-only group, compared to 16% of females. Most females (62%) were victims only, and were more likely to have experienced violence from their intimate partner, whereas male victims were more likely to have experienced violence from other family members.

Subsequent research studied 12 Victorian coronial investigations between 2019 and 2024 into women’s suicides where a history of family violence was identified or suspected. The study highlighted the devastating impact of family violence on women’s mental health and suicidality, as well as specific forms of IPV including coercion to suicide, and the potential for perpetrators to manipulate mental health struggles and suicidality.¹⁰⁸

International research confirms that IPV is a strong determinant of suicidality in women, increasing risk two- to five-fold.¹⁰⁹ The mental health impact of family violence victimisation often stems from continuous traumatic stress and the experience of coercive control (see ‘7.2.1 Coercive control’), with sustained fear and hypervigilance leading to exhaustion, isolation and feelings of hopelessness.¹¹⁰

The connection between family violence and suicide is often missed due to the under-reporting of family violence, and due to other presenting factors in suicides.

Consequently, suicide is an often-overlooked dimension of family violence. These studies show that the count of lives lost to family violence is much higher than figures based on homicides alone would suggest.¹¹¹

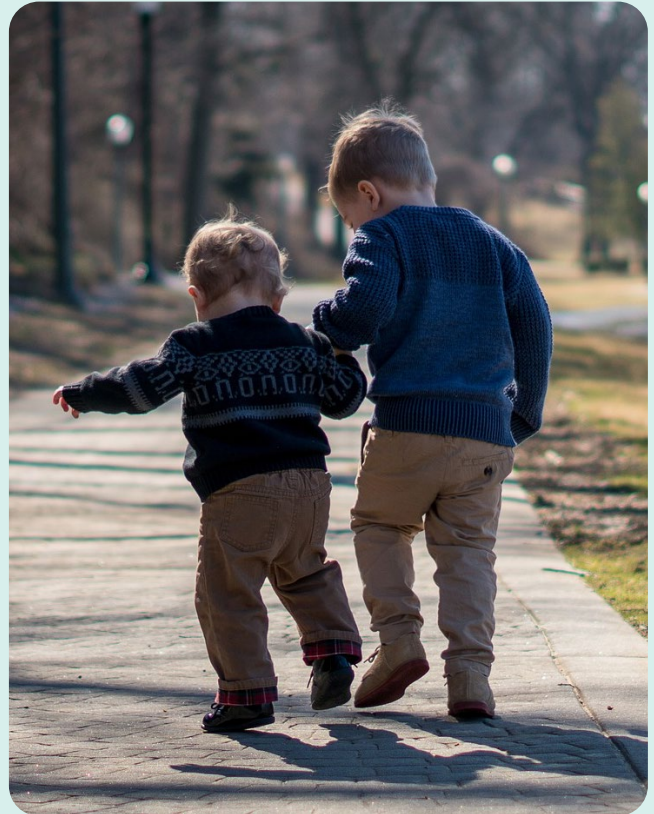
5. Children and young people's experiences of family violence

Significant numbers of Australian children experience family violence.¹¹²

According to the Personal Safety Survey, around 2.6 million adult Australians (13%) reported having witnessed partner violence towards a parent before the age of 15.¹¹³ The Child Maltreatment Study suggested this figure may be much higher.¹¹⁴

In Victoria, children are present at about one-third of family violence incidents.¹¹⁵ Across family violence incidents attended by Victoria Police in 2025, children represented 8.6% of 'affected family members' (i.e. victims, or those harmed the most).¹¹⁶

Unborn children are also at risk of family violence, particularly since violence in intimate partnerships is known to increase during pregnancy and the early post-natal period.¹¹⁷ Women who experience abuse during pregnancy show higher rates of pre-term labour and miscarriage, and babies may be injured by physical assaults.¹¹⁸ Family violence during pregnancy is linked to lower birth weights, lower rates of breastfeeding and decreased maternal attachment to the baby. Pregnant women can face additional barriers to seeking help or ending a relationship, as they may be financially vulnerable or fear violence against their child before or after birth.¹¹⁹



5.1 Children as victims in their own right

In situations involving family violence, children may be exposed to, or forced to watch or participate in abuse, or may intervene in an effort to stop violence, and may be the intended or unintended victims of assault or murder themselves.¹²⁰

Children are increasingly recognised as victims of family violence in their own right.¹²¹

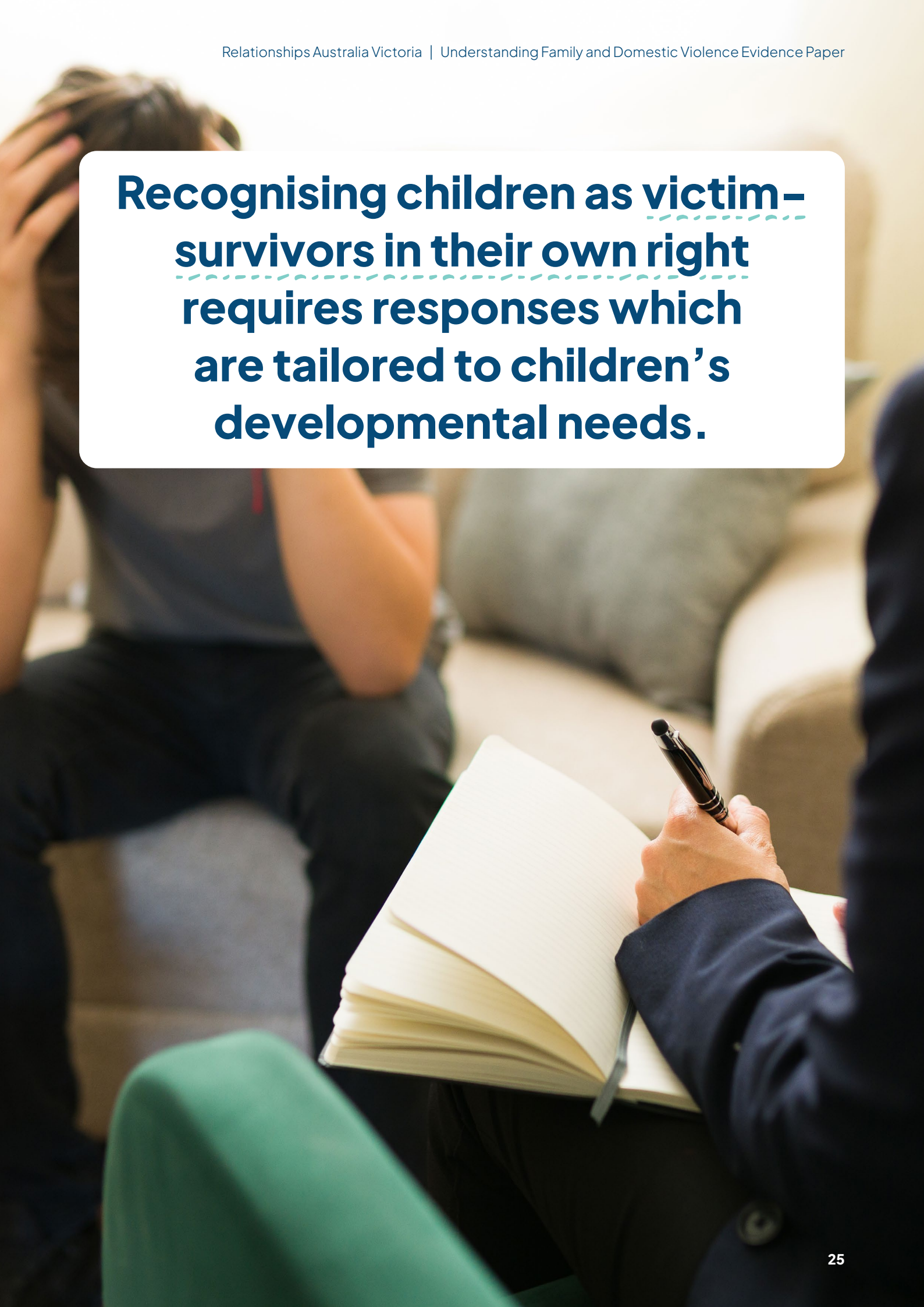
Exposure to family violence is counted as 1 of 5 forms of child maltreatment – in fact, it is the most common form.¹²² In some jurisdictions and frameworks, including Victoria, family violence is recognised as a form of child abuse.¹²³

Family violence affects children's physical and mental health, development and schooling, and is the leading cause of children's homelessness in Australia. Experiencing family violence has long-term consequences for a child's perceptions of the world, with lifelong implications for wellbeing and relationships, as well as participation in education and employment.¹²⁴

Most women killed by intimate partners are mothers.¹²⁵

Parental intimate partner homicide has particularly severe psychological, social and physical consequences for surviving children, including post-traumatic stress, attachment difficulties, weight and appetite changes, and deterioration in academic outcomes. Most surviving children have also been exposed to prior violence at home.¹²⁶

Recognising children as victim-survivors in their own right requires responses which are tailored to children's developmental needs. Children and young people demonstrate a range of responses to violence, including both internalising (e.g. anxiety, depression, withdrawal) and externalising behaviours (e.g. hyperactivity, impulsivity, aggression), which can be pathologised (e.g. as mental illness) unless violence is recognised as the root cause.¹²⁷



Recognising children as victim-survivors in their own right requires responses which are tailored to children's developmental needs.

5.2 Risk factors

Family violence involving children often occurs alongside disadvantage and multiple other risk factors.¹²⁸

International studies show that family violence often co-occurs with other forms of child maltreatment, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse.¹²⁹ Parental alcohol, drug and mental health issues are also often associated with violence.¹³⁰

Since separation increases the risk of family violence (see '7.2.2 Separation'), children are also particularly at risk of experiencing family violence during and after parental separation.¹³¹ A majority of separating parents who report emotional or physical abuse in their relationship also report that their children have seen or heard the abuse.¹³²

5.3 Filicide

Among the most shocking family violence incidents are those in which children are killed.

Since 1989–90, the rate of filicide – the killing of a child or children by a parent – has mostly remained steady, despite the overall rates of homicide and domestic homicide trending downwards.¹³³ However, the 13 filicides in Australia in 2024–25 is lower than the average of 17 each year over this period.¹³⁴ Filicide is perpetrated against boys and girls equally.

5.3.1 Filicides in a family violence context

There is considerable overlap between filicide and IPV; and, further, between filicide in a family violence context and child abuse.

A high proportion of filicides occur within a family violence context – that is, where there is an identifiable history of child abuse, IPV or both. Among the family violence filicides that occurred in Australia between 2010 and 2018, there was a history of IPV in 9 out of 10 cases and a history of child abuse in 8 out of 10 cases.¹³⁵

Across the 2010–2018 cases, the proportion of male perpetrators was 60% considering all filicides, rising to 68% when focus was restricted to family violence contexts. Most offenders were the biological parent of the victim (40% were the father, and 30% were the mother). A majority of offenders experienced mental health issues (56%) and/or alcohol and other drug issues (55%), while many (44%) had experienced childhood family violence themselves.¹³⁶ While not diminishing responsibility, these factors are associated with greater use of violence more broadly (see '7.3 Characteristics of adults using violence').

There are recognised differences in filicide perpetration based on gender of offender. Most female offenders have experienced family violence, most often IPV. In filicides that took place in family violence contexts, men were 97% of primary IPV perpetrators.¹³⁷ The high rate of IPV preceding filicides indicates that efforts to reduce IPV should also consider risks for children of either or both partners.¹³⁸

9 in 10

family violence filicides that occurred in Australia between 2010 and 2018, involved a history of IPV.¹³⁵

5.4 Young people's use of violence

Children and young people who experience violence may engage in violence themselves in retaliation or as a learned behaviour, including while they are still young.

The use of violence by young people is conceptually different from adult-perpetrated violence, and requires specialised responses; otherwise, responses risk criminalising young victim-survivors and perpetuating a cycle of violence.¹³⁹

A specific form of family violence involves young people using violence against parents, carers or other family members. Adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) is a pattern of behaviour displayed by adolescents who attempt to dominate, coerce and control others in their family. It may refer to the behaviour of children aged 10–12 years up to 17 or 25, depending on the legal or clinical context.¹⁴⁰ Victorian research suggests that mothers are most often the primary target of violence, followed by younger siblings.¹⁴¹

Approximately 10% of family violence incidents in Victoria involve an adolescent offender, although this figure may include young people diagnosed with significant cognitive impairments, or who are also victim-survivors of violence. Overall, AVITH is likely under-reported, as parents are often reluctant to report their own children, and may blame themselves or minimise violence as adolescent misbehaviour.¹⁴²

The use of IPV by young people is distinct from AVITH and distinct from IPV more broadly. Appropriate responses to this issue are particularly important given that the prevalence of IPV is highest during adolescence and young adulthood (see '2.1.5 Younger and older people'). It is estimated that 1 in 3 young people in an intimate relationship experience violence, yet there are few youth-specific interventions available.¹⁴³

Young people using IPV require specialised and trauma-informed interventions to disrupt violent attitudes and behaviour before they become entrenched.¹⁴⁴

There are significant efforts underway to develop resources for practitioners working with young people, including specialised practice guides for children, adolescents and young people.¹⁴⁵

6. Abuse of older adults

The abuse of older adults includes any action or neglect which causes harm or distress to an older person, and which occurs within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust.¹⁴⁶

Family relationships are key among such relationships, and more than half of all perpetrators are family members, including spouses and ex-partners.¹⁴⁷

With age, people become more likely to experience emotional and financial abuse, as well as specific forms of abuse such as restrictions on movement or social contact, control over medical care or medication, control over access to or use of technology, or manipulation via Power of Attorney.¹⁴⁸

Most older people experiencing abuse do not seek help or advice.¹⁴⁹

Abuse of older adults is likely to be underestimated, as victim-survivors may be reluctant to disclose their treatment by a family member, or may be dependent on the perpetrator for their care.¹⁵⁰

Older people are more likely to experience less visible forms of violence such as neglect, emotional and financial abuse.¹⁵¹

In 2020, the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study found that around 1 in 6 older people living in the Australian community had experienced abuse in the past year, most commonly psychological abuse (12%), neglect (3%), financial and/or physical abuse (each 2%). Women and those with poor health or disability were more likely to experience abuse.¹⁵²

The Prevalence Study excluded those living in institutional settings and those living with impaired cognition, and there are other known gaps in evidence on the abuse of older people.¹⁵³ Studies using smaller samples suggest that all forms of abuse are experienced more often by older First Nations, sexually diverse and gender diverse respondents. The differences in apparent prevalence are primarily driven by greater experience of psychological abuse by older members of these communities.¹⁵⁴

Due to a birth rate that has decreased over many decades, older adults make up an increasing proportion of Australia's population, and the large 'baby boomer' cohorts are now aged over 60. These demographic changes, combined with ageism and financial pressures, are likely to exacerbate the abuse of older people in our society.

As Australia's population ages, abuse of older adults is likely to increase.¹⁵⁵



The consequences of abuse for older people can be particularly severe, and recovery may be more difficult. Consequences include depression, cognitive decline, social dysfunction, financial ruin and displacement from the home, injury, hospitalisation and premature mortality.¹⁵⁶ Family violence is the primary reason for older women seeking specialist homelessness services in Australia.¹⁵⁷

The National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study found that perpetration by family members was highest for financial abuse (64%), neglect (60%), psychological abuse (55%) and physical abuse (50%). Adult children are the most common perpetrators of elder abuse overall, but patterns vary by type of abuse. For example, psychological, financial and physical abuse are most often perpetrated by adult children, but children and spouses/partners are equally likely to perpetrate neglect.

Sadly, several indicators suggest that physical abuse of older adults perpetrated by family members has increased. The rate of family violence assaults of people aged 65 years and over has increased across Australian jurisdictions in the 10 years to 2024.¹⁵⁸ While the homicide rate has decreased overall since 1989–90, the rate of parricide – the killing of a parent – has not.¹⁵⁹

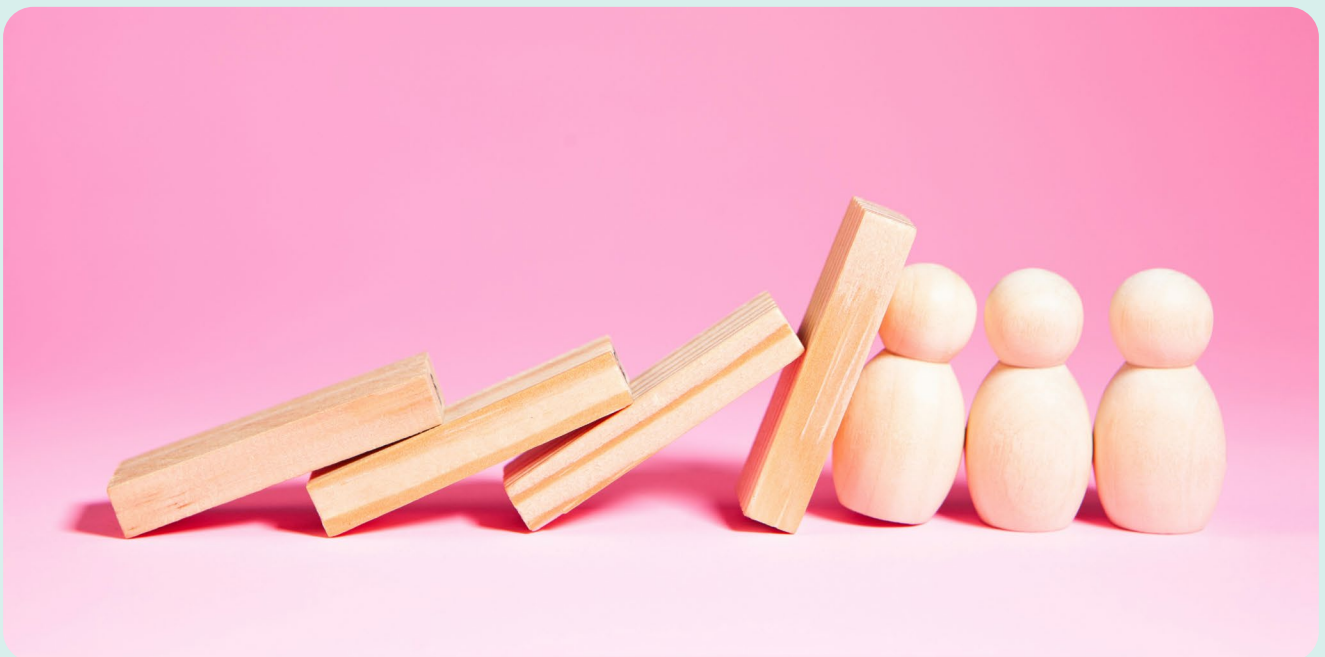
In 2024–25, there were 20 parricides in Australia, making this the most frequent type of domestic homicide after IPV homicides. This was the highest number of parricides recorded since 1989–90 and almost double the average over the 35-year period.

Studies identify social support and healthy relationships with family members as key protective factors against abuse and neglect of older adults.¹⁶⁰ The National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study showed that all types of abuse were reported at higher rates among older adults who had less frequent contact with family and friends.¹⁶¹ Relationships Australia's 2024 Relationships Indicators Survey confirmed that social connection was associated with older people experiencing lower relational distress and feeling greater safety in disagreeing within the most important relationship in their lives.¹⁶² This suggests that social connection and community participation should be central to abuse prevention strategies.



1. Causes, predictors and trajectories

Many forms of violence experienced disproportionately by minority groups reflect differences in power according to factors including gender, age, ethnicity and sexuality. Similarly, family violence is associated not only with individual characteristics of offenders and victims, but with broader structural, social and ideological factors.¹⁶³



1.1 Gender inequality

Since family violence is most often perpetrated by men against women, it is often understood as a manifestation of gender inequality.¹⁶⁴

In particular, violence in intimate heterosexual partnerships is distinct from other forms of violence because it occurs in the context of gender-based, institutionalised power asymmetry, reflecting women's historical subordination to men in society and within heterosexual partnerships.¹⁶⁵

While IPV is most often investigated at the individual level, cross-national comparisons suggest that women's economic equality and independence at the wider level reduces family violence.¹⁶⁶ Comparing across countries, traditional beliefs about gender roles are predictive of sexual IPV victimisation, and economic gender inequality is associated with higher frequency of physical IPV victimisation. Meanwhile, attitudes more favourable towards gender equality are related to lower rates of psychological IPV.¹⁶⁷

1.1.1 Sexism

At an attitudinal level, sexism supports beliefs that justify violence, and at the behavioural level, it links to aggression and violent behaviour towards women.¹⁶⁸

Individuals with sexist attitudes are more likely to blame female victims for IPV, and male IPV offenders show a greater propensity to blame victims than other men. Victim-blaming attitudes are strongly related to the acceptability and perceived severity of IPV against women.¹⁶⁹

Over 1 in 3

Australian men aged 18–30 years agree that men should use violence to get respect if necessary.¹⁷²

1.1.2 Masculinity

The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to a cultural ideal which promotes the dominance of men and the subordination of women, and which shapes the attitudes and practices of men, in particular.¹⁷⁰ In many societies including our own, this ideal has served to legitimise violence and to associate masculinity with control. While hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily involve violence, many of the traits associated with it are also risk factors for family violence perpetration.¹⁷¹

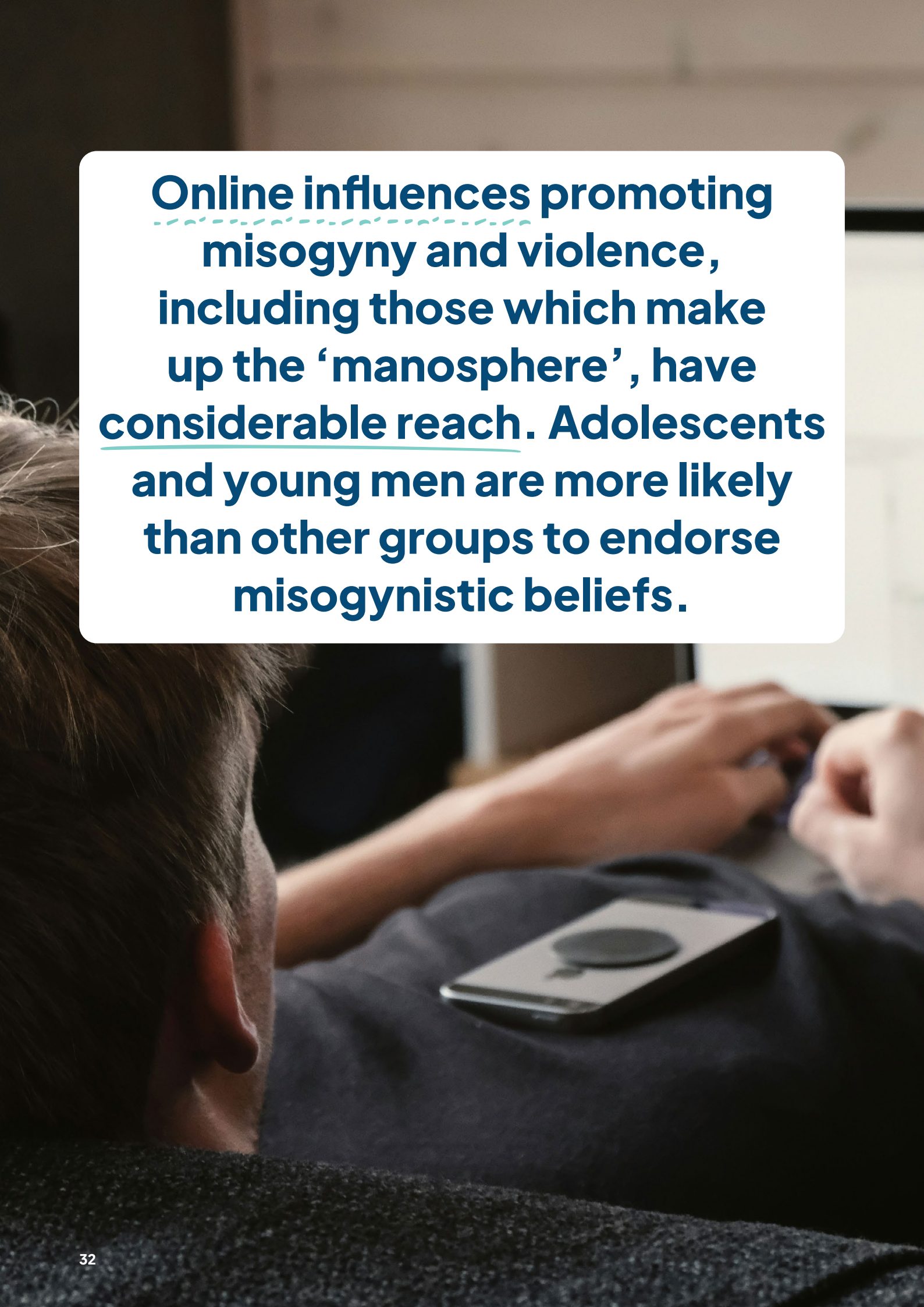
The 'Man Box' has been used to describe a set of beliefs across society that create pressure on men to behave in certain ways.¹⁷² The Man Box 2024 study of more than 3,500 Australian men found that almost 4 in 10 felt pressure to conform to 'rules' that represent a form of masculinity which is tough, unemotional, socially and sexually dominant, and requires men to be primary income earners. While most men did not personally agree with these rules, about one-quarter endorsed them. Over one-third of men aged 18–30 years, and nearly one-quarter of men aged 31–45 years, agreed that 'men should use violence to get respect if necessary'. Men who agreed most strongly with Man Box rules were more likely to have perpetrated violence, to be supportive of violence and to have consumed violent pornography.

A 2026 study focused on adolescents aged 13–17 years showed that misogynistic attitudes, and acceptance of violence against women, were also pervasive in this age group.

These attitudes were associated with particular online environments, including pornography and the 'manosphere'.¹⁷³

Around 1 in 3

teenage boys expressed misogynistic attitudes, mistrust of women and support for 'traditional' gender roles.

A background image showing a person from behind, sitting at a desk and using a laptop. A smartphone is resting on their lap. The text is overlaid on a white rounded rectangle in the upper left.

**Online influences promoting
misogyny and violence,
including those which make
up the ‘manosphere’, have
considerable reach. Adolescents
and young men are more likely
than other groups to endorse
misogynistic beliefs.**

7.1.3 The ‘manosphere’

References to the ‘manosphere’ have become common in recent commentary about misogyny (hatred of or discrimination towards women) and its consequences, which include violence in family and other settings.

The manosphere includes websites, podcasts, social media channels and other online forums through which influencers and commentators discuss men’s rights and contemporary issues facing men and boys. These platforms promote a binary understanding of gender and endorse traditional ideas about masculinity and gender roles.¹⁷⁴

More extreme voices in the manosphere promote misogyny and male supremacy, often alongside far-right politics. The manosphere overlaps with other hate-based movements such as homophobia and xenophobia. It perpetuates a view that men and boys have become victims of feminism and minority rights movements – and of multiculturalism too, for white men and boys – such that they are now discriminated against in education, healthcare, employment and family law. The manosphere encourages men and boys to reclaim their ‘rightful’ place in society.¹⁷⁵

Some voices in the manosphere endorse violence against both women and other men as behaviour that is ‘natural’ for ‘real men’, and necessary to gain respect and assert authority. Men are encouraged to be controlling and physically dominant over female partners. At the same time, it is argued that women fabricate allegations of sexual violence and that society is over-sensitive to casual misogyny, as well as homophobia, transphobia and racism.¹⁷⁶

Manosphere and anti-feminist views among Victorian men who have used family violence have been documented by behaviour change practitioners.¹⁷⁷ Boys and men who engage with manosphere influencers are more likely to normalise controlling behaviour and to support victim-blaming in the context of sexual violence.¹⁷⁸

The reach and impact of manosphere ideology should not be underestimated. Manosphere groups are hosted on mainstream platforms (e.g. Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat) and instant messaging apps (e.g. WhatsApp) and influencers often have large followings. The algorithms used by many of these platforms ensure that the same voices and ideas are repeatedly pushed and reinforced. Misogynistic content, including that which encourages violence, is thus normalised, monetised and otherwise rewarded.¹⁷⁹

Young people are particularly susceptible to the impact of the manosphere and to misogynistic and extremist ideologies, being at a developmental stage when peer and external (including online) influences are particularly powerful.¹⁸⁰ Intervention in the early years to promote gender equality and respectful relationships is essential to counter the impact of the manosphere, since influences in childhood and adolescence have the potential to shape attitudes and behaviours throughout youth and into adulthood (see ‘8.1.1 A gender equality approach to prevention’).

1.2 Psychosocial factors in intimate partner violence

The gender paradigm is important to understanding the most common form of family violence perpetrated by men against female intimate partners. However, it is insufficient to explain IPV perpetrated by men against men, women against women or women against men.¹⁸¹ Defining IPV according to patterns of coercion, power and control can help us to understand abuse in ways that transcend gender and sexuality.¹⁸²

1.2.1 Coercive control

Coercive control is a pattern of controlling and manipulative behaviours within a relationship.¹⁸³ Within abusive intimate relationships, this pattern of behaviour creates fear and denies the other person their freedom and autonomy.¹⁸⁴ Coercive control is not a discrete type of violence but rather provides context for abusive behaviours, and is increasingly understood as a dynamic underpinning most family violence.¹⁸⁵ An Australian study found that more than half of women who had recently experienced acts of coercive control (e.g. jealousy and suspicion of friends, constant insults, monitoring of movements and financial abuse) had also experienced physical abuse, while 30% had experienced sexual violence.¹⁸⁶

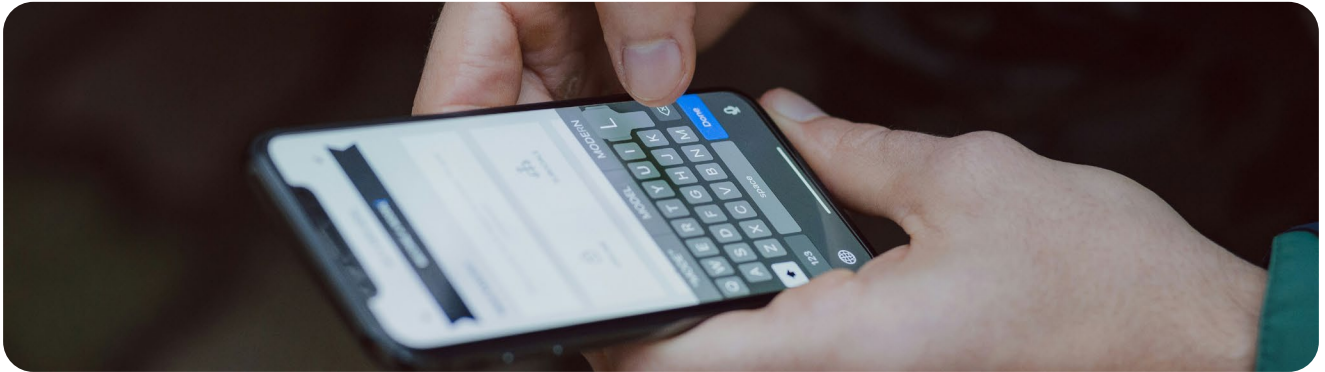
Coercive control is particularly prevalent in relationships where there is an imbalance of power. Most often, this imbalance is gendered.

The gendered nature of controlling behaviour is attributed to the way in which some men have internalised expectations of dominance. Violence may follow when these expectations are challenged.¹⁸⁷

The dynamics of coercive control are illustrated by the range of abusive behaviours used by men who ultimately kill an intimate partner. A majority have used emotional/psychological abuse, physical abuse and social abuse, with large minorities also using stalking, financial abuse and sexual violence.¹⁸⁸



Most domestic abuse is not just a series of consequential incidents, but an unrelenting system of entrapment of the victim by the perpetrator... [Coercive control] often continues long after the relationship is over and is a consistent dynamic preceding almost all domestic homicides.¹⁸⁹



Controlling behaviour can be subtle and individually tailored, isolating the victim-survivor and making the abuse difficult to detect.

Perpetrators may also engage in systems abuse, whereby they manipulate legal, child protection, social service or other systems to their advantage; for example, by making false reports to child protection or baseless applications for protection orders.¹⁹⁰ Australian government data reported in 2026 revealed the extent to which the child support system is weaponised to cause financial abuse.¹⁹¹

Technologies which enable communication and access from almost any location, such as mobile digital devices, location tracking devices and wi-fi, have increased the reach of people who use violence and their ability to monitor and control intimate partners and other family members.¹⁹² So too has the 'internet of things', which describes the enormous network of objects and everyday items, such as 'smart' home appliances, that have network connectivity and can collect and exchange data with each other.¹⁹³

The effects of coercive control are pervasive and cumulative over time. The impact on victim-survivors can be physical, social, financial or other, but is almost always psychological, producing chronic fear and hypervigilance, and undermining self-confidence and self-worth.

The fear and entrapment caused by the use of coercive control are often effective in preventing victim-survivors from seeking or receiving help.

Compounding this, coercive control is not always recognised and understood by service systems or within society more broadly.¹⁹⁴

In 2023, all Australian governments collaborated to develop and endorse National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence. These principles recognise that a clear and consistent understanding of coercive control is crucial to responding effectively to family violence.¹⁹⁵ Some states now have specific legislation criminalising coercive control, while others address coercion under family violence laws. The Victorian Government introduced legislation to criminalise coercive control in August 2026, which, if passed, will come into effect in 2028.

1.2.2 Separation

IPV and coercive control do not end with the end of a relationship.¹⁹⁶ In fact, the period leading up to, during and immediately following separation involves a heightened level of risk of family violence, particularly for women, and particularly when women seek to leave relationships.¹⁹⁷

Rates of IPV towards separated women are high, and violence by ex-partners tends to be more serious.¹⁹⁸ This is consistent with the understanding that abusive men are most likely to perpetrate violence when their sense of control over an intimate partner is breaking down.

The risk of IPV homicide increases when women leave abusive partners, which is important to understanding why some women remain in abusive relationships.¹⁹⁹ Among Australian IPV homicides between 2010 and 2018, actual or intended separation was a feature in 58% of cases where a male killed a female intimate partner.²⁰⁰

1.2.3 Grievance-fuelled violence

Grievance is a common motivation for severe acts of IPV.²⁰¹ Male IPV perpetrators who kill or attempt to kill their partners often display a 'morbid jealousy', due to the victim's actual or perceived infidelity or re-partnering, and/or a sense of betrayal due to the victim's intention or decision to end the relationship and refusal to reconcile.²⁰²

Another core motivation is a challenge to the perpetrator's sense of control, usually in the form of separation initiated by the victim, and often exacerbated by the victim seeking sole or primary care of children, initiating division of assets or child support, and/or re-partnering. In the case of intact relationships, the challenge to the perpetrator's sense of control may come from the victim achieving some level of autonomy from the perpetrator (e.g. a new job or friendship).²⁰³

A grievance is subjective and may stem from actual injuries, imagined wrongs and/or mental illness.²⁰⁴ In the minds of perpetrators, their feelings of betrayal, abandonment and loss of control provide sufficient justification for acts of violence including murder; indeed, many believe they are the victims. Violence is inflicted to punish the victim and to reassert control.²⁰⁵

Research points to similarities between grievance-fuelled IPV and grievance-fuelled violence in other arenas (e.g. terrorism and political violence).²⁰⁶ Often these are also lone-actor, targeted forms of violence, motivated by an individual's sense of injustice, rejection or victimisation, and a desire for revenge. There is a significant co-occurrence of violent extremism, misogynistic attitudes towards women and IPV.²⁰⁷ Rates of psychopathology are higher than average among both intimate partner homicide offenders and perpetrators of other grievance-fuelled violence (see '7.3.2 Mental ill-health').²⁰⁸

These insights have led to arguments that models of grievance-fuelled violence prevention, which have been established to respond to individuals displaying warning behaviours and signs of severe mental illness, should be applied to the issues of IPV and homicide.²⁰⁹ The 2026 Australian Fixated Grievance Perpetrator Intervention Pilot, funded by the Australian Government and led by Swinburne University of Technology, aims to identify and intervene with people holding grievances against partners or family members, that may lead to violence.²¹⁰

1.3 Characteristics of adults using violence

Attention to the individual characteristics of people who use violence can be seen as underplaying sociopolitical factors that support violence, or ‘explaining away’ problematic behaviours that are endemic. Nevertheless, the perpetration of IPV, in particular, is associated with a wide range of individual variables, regardless of their contribution relative to sociopolitical factors.

Studies have also demonstrated linear relationships between certain individual variables and the severity of IPV. These include victimisation during childhood, personal distress, low income and substance use.²¹¹

1.3.1 Trauma

Early exposure to sexual abuse and parental IPV can increase the risks of both victimisation and perpetration of family violence in adulthood.²¹² Exposure to partner violence in a family of origin increases a young person’s risk of experiencing intimate violence (both perpetration and victimisation), while supportive relationships with peers and parents reduce the likelihood that a young person will experience IPV.²¹³

Trauma can induce hyper-arousal, fostering a constant sense of threat.²¹⁴ In working with men using violence, it is important to address trauma, and the connection between men’s experience of victimisation and their violent behaviour, without reinforcing or validating perpetrators’ victim-identification, and while still promoting personal responsibility and agency.²¹⁵

There is a complex interplay between trauma, harmful substance use, mental health issues, gambling and violence against women and children.²¹⁶

1.3.2 Mental ill-health

The Australian, longitudinal Ten to Men study highlights the importance of men’s mental health in explaining and preventing IPV. Men who reported depressive symptoms in 2013–14, particularly when those symptoms were moderate or severe, were more likely than others to have started using IPV by 2022.²¹⁷ Men who perpetrate severe, chronic partner abuse often exhibit longstanding antisocial behaviour and emotional dysregulation.²¹⁸ At the extreme of family violence offences, research points to a link between mental ill-health and intimate partner homicide.²¹⁹ Among 235 Australian perpetrators of femicide sentenced between 2007 and 2016, nearly half (46%) had a history of mental illness.²²⁰

1.3.3 Alcohol and drug use

The use of alcohol and other drugs does not cause or excuse violence. However, while alcohol use is neither necessary nor sufficient for violence to occur, alcohol use is a globally consistent risk factor for IPV. Alcohol reduces the capacity to self-regulate or to de-escalate conflict, lowers inhibitions and impairs judgement, increases risk-taking and potentially increases victims’ dependence on a violent partner.²²¹

The relationship between alcohol use and IPV is significant, and the effect size for the relationship between male IPV offending and both alcohol and drug use is strong.²²² The odds of an abusive man perpetrating partner violence increase substantially on days when alcohol is consumed.²²³ Over 60% of Australian male IPV homicide offenders between 2010 and 2018 engaged in ‘problematic’ drug and/or alcohol use in the lead-up to or at the time of the homicide; one-quarter used both.²²⁴

1.3.4 Gambling

A 2018 study of a representative sample of Australian adults found that people engaging in harmful gambling of any severity (low-risk, medium-risk or 'problem' gamblers) were more than twice as likely to experience family violence and to perpetrate family violence, accounting for demographic differences.²²⁵ For low-risk gamblers, this relationship held even after also accounting for psychological distress and the use of alcohol and other substances. For medium-risk or 'problem' gamblers, this relationship was weakened, suggesting that psychological distress and substance use may be more important than harmful gambling in explaining family violence.

1.3.5 Patterns of offending and interactions with the justice system

Family violence offending often forms part of a broader pattern of offending, and often starts young.²²⁶ Relative to other adolescent offenders, adolescent family violence offenders are much more likely to become adult family violence offenders, and to reoffend more frequently.²²⁷

Among Australian men who killed their female intimate partners over a 10-year period to 2016, more than 70% had at least 2 previous interactions with police, the legal system or child protection.²²⁸ Over 20% had engaged with at least one support service, most commonly a counselling or mental health service, underlining the importance of screening for risk of perpetration as well as victimisation.²²⁹ Many perpetrators of IPV homicide already have convictions for family violence against the victim or a previous partner, and/or other crimes.²³⁰

Over 70%

of men who killed their female intimate partners between 2006 and 2016 had at least 2 previous interactions with police, the legal system or child protection.

1.3.6 Physiology and pathology

Some variables are physiological or pathological in nature. There are genetic factors associated with aggressive behaviour which are more common in men with histories of violence; specifically, variations in the gene related to the metabolism of certain neurotransmitters, and in the serotonin transporter gene.²³¹ While genes may play a part in explaining family violence, it is likely to be a small part; a twin study found that heritability accounted for 16% of variance in physical IPV.²³²

Hormonal factors may also play a part. Studies suggest that perpetrators of IPV have higher testosterone/cortisol ratios, and also experience greater increases in cortisol following exposure to a stressful event.²³³ It is thought that the testosterone/cortisol ratio moderates the relationship of antisocial and personality traits and anger expression, and may explain why certain personality traits are associated with a high risk of becoming violent.²³⁴

Finding that male IPV perpetrators differ from other men in terms of anger, hostility and attribution (the tendency to attribute partner behaviour to negative intent), Hamberger et al. argue that:



Study of psychopathology and psychological processes does not excuse the batterer for bad behavior. Rather, it may increase professionals' understanding of abuse and ways to prevent and end it.²³⁵

1.4 Protective factors against the use of intimate partner violence

The longitudinal Ten to Men study shows that social support and paternal affection are protective against IPV use by men.

Men with higher levels of social support in 2013–14 were 26% less likely to be using IPV by 2022, compared to men with lower levels of social support. Meanwhile, men who strongly agreed that they received affection from their father or a father figure during childhood were 48% less likely to use IPV compared to men who strongly disagreed.²³⁶



**Social support and
strong family relationships
are protective against
family violence.**

8. Responding to family violence

There are divided opinions on how to stop family violence, reflecting different theories and perspectives on the roots of the problem.

Family violence interventions may be categorised as follows.



Primary prevention ('prevention') works across the whole population in aiming to change the social conditions (i.e. attitudes, norms, structures) that enable family violence.



Secondary intervention (or early intervention) involves targeted efforts to prevent recurrence or escalation where there are early signs of violence, or to educate people to recognise and respond to these signs, and includes efforts to reduce the likelihood of violence in high-risk groups.



Finally, *tertiary intervention* (or response and recovery) includes support for victim-survivors and children during or after they have experienced violence, and interventions to stop further violence, including work with people using violence.²³⁷

RAV is committed to working at each of these levels. Our prevention and early intervention programs include educational groups for parents (e.g. Circle of Security Parenting™, Tuning in to Kids®) and children (e.g. early matters), as well as our Respect and Connect relationships education program in schools. These programs help children, young people and families develop emotional intelligence, communicate well and manage conflict in healthy ways.

Our response and recovery work includes men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs), women's support groups and family violence counselling. Our Family Safety Model supports the family members of clients in our men's family violence programs. These programs involve skilled safety, risk and needs assessments, extensive individual support, and referrals to other support services as required.

We believe this work is vitaly important, however, we know that no single program is sufficient.

8.1 Prevention and early intervention

Prevention efforts tackle the problem of family violence before it begins.

Prevention must occur across the spectrum of micro to macro levels, from strengthening individual knowledge and skills, to engaging and educating communities, to influencing policies and legislation.²³⁸ The Ten to Men study has policy implications for prevention work, recommending that efforts to reduce men's use of IPV should include 'programs that promote the importance of social support as well as good quality relationships between fathers and their sons'.²³⁹ RAV has developed dedicated resources for fathers about family relationships and connecting with children.²⁴⁰

A 2024 evidence review found that 'multi-component prevention work is more impactful than single component interventions' in reducing violence against women, suggesting that a 'saturation model' involving coordinated, multi-component, place-based approaches, implemented with adequate intensity, can achieve population-level change.²⁴¹ This approach has been used in the Victorian regional city of Ballarat following a spate of family violence homicides in 2024.²⁴²

8.1.1 A gender equality approach to prevention

Since gender inequality is a factor underlying much family violence, promoting gender equality is an important part of primary prevention.

Initiatives include educational programs and media campaigns aiming to increase awareness of family violence, encourage reflection on gender attitudes, and interrupt connections between ideas about masculinity and gendered violence.²⁴³ The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey showed significant increases in attitudinal rejection of gendered violence and gendered inequality as of 2021, compared to previous years.²⁴⁴

Because the exposure of children and young people to sexual violence and IPV can increase the risk of both victimisation and perpetration in adulthood, strategies aimed at young people are particularly important.²⁴⁵ Programs training young people to recognise different forms of violence and their underpinnings in myths, power structures and traditional gender roles can improve gender-equitable attitudes and reduce gender-based violence.²⁴⁶ Long-term, consistent prevention programs beginning in the primary school years are most effective.²⁴⁷

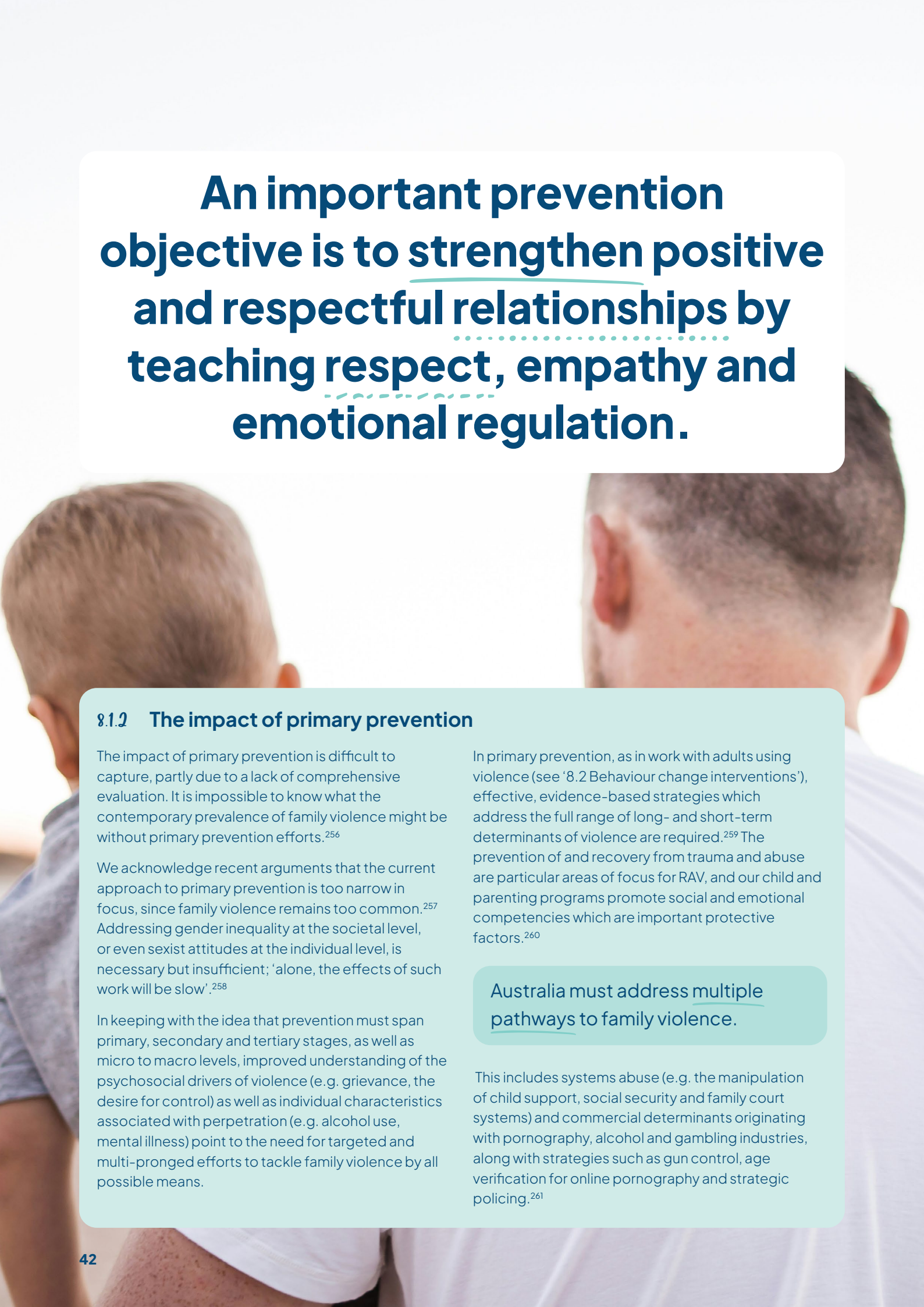
Gender equality is a core foundational principle of RAV's primary prevention work in schools, and of all our relationship and parenting education programs. Strengthening positive and respectful relationships by teaching respect, empathy and emotional regulation is, in itself, an important prevention objective.²⁴⁸

Discussion of male violence against women can be alienating to some who may feel that all men are maligned by this focus, as reflected in the 'not all men' retort to online conversations about gender-based violence. The framing of prevention strategies in terms of gender equality can meet with resistance, and in some cases aggressive backlash.²⁴⁹

Men do not conform to a single model of masculinity, nor 'perform' masculinity in the same way across different contexts;²⁵⁰ therefore, prevention work must capture these complexities and avoid essentialist, gender binary approaches.²⁵¹ More recent contributions to public debate challenge a universal focus in the prevention of violence against women, and seek a more targeted approach, recognising that most boys and men are not at risk of hurting anyone.²⁵²

Nevertheless, all men can play a role in responding to violence or discrimination when they see it, and work to encourage such 'bystander intervention' can be considered a primary prevention strategy (see '8. Responding to family violence').²⁵³ While it is important to engage rather than alienate men in violence prevention, it also remains essential to identify gendered harm, so that this harm can be addressed.²⁵⁴

Men, as well as women, benefit from efforts to reduce men's violence against women. Men stand to gain freedom from cultural expectations of dominance, including those which associate masculinity with violence.²⁵⁵



An important prevention objective is to strengthen positive and respectful relationships by teaching respect, empathy and emotional regulation.

8.1.2 The impact of primary prevention

The impact of primary prevention is difficult to capture, partly due to a lack of comprehensive evaluation. It is impossible to know what the contemporary prevalence of family violence might be without primary prevention efforts.²⁵⁶

We acknowledge recent arguments that the current approach to primary prevention is too narrow in focus, since family violence remains too common.²⁵⁷ Addressing gender inequality at the societal level, or even sexist attitudes at the individual level, is necessary but insufficient; 'alone, the effects of such work will be slow'.²⁵⁸

In keeping with the idea that prevention must span primary, secondary and tertiary stages, as well as micro to macro levels, improved understanding of the psychosocial drivers of violence (e.g. grievance, the desire for control) as well as individual characteristics associated with perpetration (e.g. alcohol use, mental illness) point to the need for targeted and multi-pronged efforts to tackle family violence by all possible means.

In primary prevention, as in work with adults using violence (see '8.2 Behaviour change interventions'), effective, evidence-based strategies which address the full range of long- and short-term determinants of violence are required.²⁵⁹ The prevention of and recovery from trauma and abuse are particular areas of focus for RAV, and our child and parenting programs promote social and emotional competencies which are important protective factors.²⁶⁰

Australia must address multiple pathways to family violence.

This includes systems abuse (e.g. the manipulation of child support, social security and family court systems) and commercial determinants originating with pornography, alcohol and gambling industries, along with strategies such as gun control, age verification for online pornography and strategic policing.²⁶¹

8.2 Behaviour change interventions

MBCPs are group interventions which aim to achieve change in the behaviour of men who use violence by holding them accountable and responsible for their violence.²⁶²

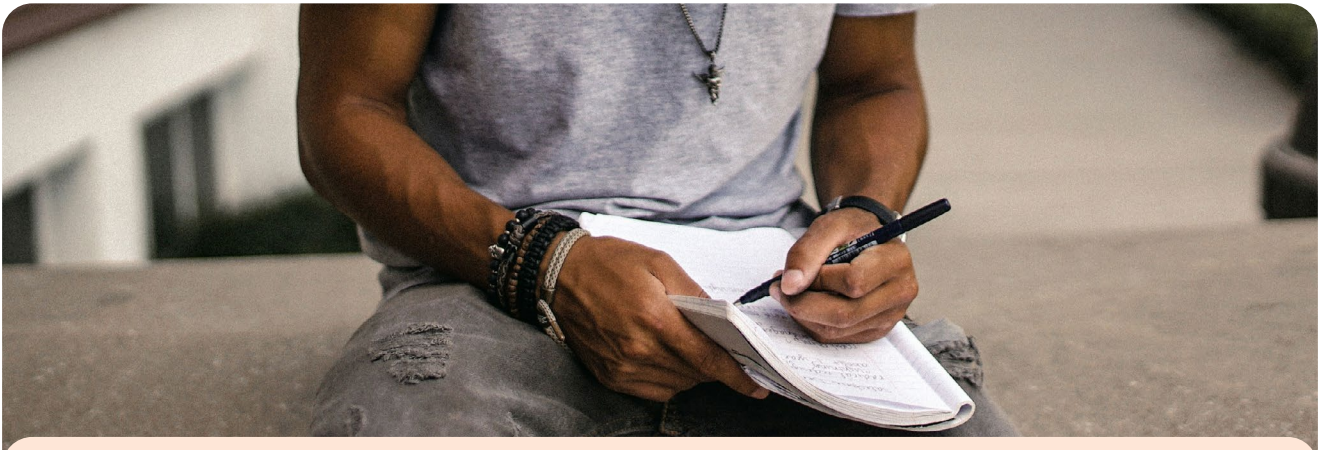
Psychoeducational and psychodynamic approaches, as well as approaches based on cognitive behavioural therapy, are common elements often used in conjunction with one another.²⁶³

Many Australian MBCPs, including those offered by RAV, are partly underpinned by narrative therapy, through which men are invited to identify the beliefs and ideas from which violent and controlling behaviours stem.²⁶⁴

An openness to men's stories, while still emphasising women's safety and men's accountability, can reduce resistance and help men find the internal motivation for change.²⁶⁵

While many MBCP evaluations report positive changes for participating men on measures including improved attitudes and accountability, the link between accountability and the safety of women and children has proved difficult to demonstrate.²⁶⁶ Multi-site evaluation methods suggest that programs situated within a wider community response can improve the safety of most women.²⁶⁷

RAV offers MBCPs involving group work addressing gendered norms, as well as case management and individual post-MBCP support sessions. We support the view that more rigorous and nuanced MBCP evaluation is needed. MBCPs are an important component of Australia's response to family violence. However, MBCPs are just one tool among the many required to address family violence.



Dear past self,

I am writing to you from the last week of the program that I have attended. I want to tell you about my experience and the important lessons that I have learned, which I hope will help you in your life as well.

...Through the program, I learned to identify my triggers and to develop healthy coping mechanisms. I learned how to communicate effectively with my family and how to express my emotions in a healthy way. I learned to take responsibility for my actions and to recognise the impact that my behaviour has on others. Most importantly, I learned to respect the boundaries of others and to never use violence as a means of control...

... I want you to know that there is hope and that change is possible.'

— A letter from an RAV MBCP participant

8.2.1 Tailoring of behavioural interventions

There are strong arguments for programs aimed at men using violence to be matched to the characteristics of attendees and tailored to more specific perpetrator issues, demographic cohorts and cultural groups.²⁶⁸ The 2015 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence found that programs in Victoria were not sufficiently broad, diverse and/or tailored, leading to trials of case management and community-based interventions targeting specific groups. The positive evaluation of these trials suggests that good practice combines individual and group work; addresses accountability using a trauma-informed approach; provides a holistic, wrap-around service; and allows flexibility for men with different needs and/or at varying stages of change.²⁶⁹

8.2.1.1 Cultural background and refugee status

The content of interventions in culturally and linguistically diverse communities should:

- address the social and economic conditions of diverse groups of men
- be culturally relevant, acknowledging racism and men's experiences of changing gender dynamics
- address culturally specific supports for violence and gender inequality, drawing on local resources including male community and religious leaders.²⁷⁰

Although minimum standards and practice guidelines for behaviour change programs address the importance of responding to cultural diversity among program participants, there are few culturally specific MBCPs in Australia.²⁷¹ RAV is proud to offer a Vietnamese MBCP, delivered in language, and acknowledges the need for more such culturally specific interventions.

The effective engagement of men from refugee backgrounds must not only account for the intersection of gender inequality, structural disadvantage and culture, but also experiences of trauma, living through armed conflict, loss and forced displacement.²⁷²

8.2.1.2 Multi-issue treatments

There are also strong arguments for interventions to address co-occurring issues, including mental health and substance use, that may contribute to the frequency or severity of family violence.²⁷³ In particular, we acknowledge the push for greater attention to the role of alcohol in family violence, and the recommendation that alcohol reduction strategies be integrated into existing behaviour change curricula.²⁷⁴ Currently, few group-based IPV prevention curricula address alcohol.

Strategies to address alcohol-related violence must operate at the policy and community levels, as well as at the individual level.²⁷⁵ Examples include stronger alcohol regulation, and linking violence prevention work with drug and alcohol support groups.

8.2.2 Fathers who use violence

Fathers who perpetrate family violence often have poor parenting skills and are more likely than other fathers to use physical forms of discipline. They are likely to have a poor understanding of child development, to hold unrealistic expectations of their children, to show anger towards their children, and to use the same tactics of abuse against both their partner and children.²⁷⁶

At the same time, fathering can be a motivator for change among men who use violence, and some men with their own experience of abuse and trauma are motivated by a desire to father differently from how they themselves were fathered. Arguments that behaviour change interventions should capitalise on this incentive can be controversial when the motivation does not always extend to partners, or to the children of other men (e.g. step-children).²⁷⁷

8.3 Legal and policing interventions

The contact that most IPV homicide offenders have had with ‘the system’ is interpreted to mean that their offences, and the deaths of their partners or ex-partners, were preventable.²⁷⁸ However, legal and policing interventions, like behavioural interventions, report mixed results in terms of their impact in reducing family violence.

A survey of separated adults conducted to support the 2024 review of Australia’s Family Relationships Services Program found that only a minority were satisfied with family law service responses to safety concerns and family violence.²⁷⁹ Separated adults were most likely to feel safe using counselling, mediation or dispute resolution services and least likely to feel safe using a court. These data support RAV’s goal of ensuring access to family dispute resolution, with appropriate safety measures, for as many clients as possible.

8.3.1 Reporting and policing

97,800

offenders were proceeded against by police for family violence-related offences, in 2024–25, most commonly assault and breach of violence and non-violence orders.

Family violence offenders represented one-quarter (28%) of all offenders nationally.²⁸⁰

Despite the size of these figures, family violence is ‘chronically underreported’, including in Victoria.²⁸¹

Official reporting is low regardless of gender.²⁸² Although reporting in Australia has increased substantially in recent years,²⁸³ many family violence incidents are never known to police.²⁸⁴ Victim-survivor reporting to police is associated with reduced offending and does not appear to increase offender retaliation.²⁸⁵ However, victim-survivors may not report incidents for several reasons, including ‘because they perceive the events to be private or trivial, feel embarrassed, or fear reprisal from the perpetrator’.²⁸⁶

8.3.2 Protection orders

Protection orders appear to improve victim-survivors’ perceptions of safety and are associated with a small but significant reduction in severe re-victimisation, suggesting that they can reduce the severity of violence (including de-escalation to non-physical forms) rather than reducing prevalence.²⁸⁷

However, there are no protection orders in place in many relationships with a history of violence, including in a majority of cases where a male offender kills a female partner.²⁸⁸ There are complex reasons for this. First, a criminal justice response is only triggered where family violence incidents are reported, and reporting is low. Second, there are known challenges in identifying the person most in need of protection through family violence orders.²⁸⁹ Third, police investigations and court proceedings (family, civil or criminal, including applying for intervention orders) can trigger escalation of violent behaviour and increase risks to partners and children.²⁹⁰ There is evidence that victim-survivors consider such proceedings, including intervention orders, a strong indicator of risk.²⁹¹

8.3.3 Charges and prosecution

Even where protection orders are in place, police do not always enforce breaches and may decide not to charge. Charges are more likely in more severe cases of family violence, where the offender has a prior history of family violence, and where there is an ongoing relationship with the victim-survivor.²⁹²

Victim-survivors do not always want police to lay charges, for reasons including:

- fear of or ongoing commitment to the perpetrator
- preferring the perpetrator to receive help rather than punishment
- financial dependence on the perpetrator
- wanting to shield children from criminal proceedings or from being without a parent
- previous negative experiences
- an expectation that prosecution will be unsuccessful.²⁹³

Even when charged, perpetrators may be released on bail. Nearly 1 in 5 male IPV homicide offenders in the decade to 2016 was on bail or parole at the time of the murder or manslaughter, raising concerns that the bail system is failing victims of family violence.²⁹⁴

Finally, the overall rate of prosecution in family violence matters is low.²⁹⁵ Several international studies find a lower prevalence of court convictions and incarcerations for men who kill intimate partners, compared to men who kill other men.²⁹⁶



Almost 1 in 5

male IPV homicide offenders in the decade to 2016 was on bail or parole at the time of the murder or manslaughter.²⁹⁴

9. A future free of family violence

Family violence is a major and challenging social problem. It is also an appallingly common problem, affecting many Australians.

Following an alarming spike in 2023–24, intimate partner homicides decreased in 2024–25, as did filicides. However, other indicators suggest that Australia is far from its target of ending family violence:

- The family violence offender rate reached a record high (see '2.2 Change over time').
- Improved measures revealed that half of all hospitalisations for assault are due to family violence (see '4.1 Hospitalisations resulting from family violence').
- The Child Maltreatment Study indicated disturbing rates of exposure to family violence among Australian children (see '5. Children and young people's experiences of family violence').
- At the extreme of abuse of older people, parricides reached a record high (see '6. Abuse of older adults').

Family violence is strongly gendered, with women greatly over-represented among victims, and men over-represented among those who use violence. Family violence also disproportionately affects people belonging to vulnerable groups in the community. All victim-survivors of family violence deserve compassion, understanding and access to effective services with adequate resourcing.

No single intervention is sufficient to end family violence, and much more work is currently required at individual, community and policy levels. Gender-based approaches to family violence have dominated for several decades in prevention and intervention work, alongside policing and legal responses. Efforts to promote gender equality remain crucial to counter the influence of the 'manosphere' and the associated rise of misogyny.

A wide variety of complementary approaches may be required to address a broad range of social and economic determinants. For example, improved understanding of the psychosocial drivers of violence (e.g. grievance, the desire for control) as well as individual characteristics associated with perpetration (e.g. alcohol use, trauma) point to the need for intensive and tailored efforts to tackle risk factors for perpetration.

While well-resourced response and recovery services are essential given the current prevalence of family violence, it is far better to tackle the problem before it begins. Efforts to strengthen family relationships, social support and gender equality are vitally important to prevention and early intervention work with children and adults alike.



If we are to prevent future generations experiencing family violence, now is the time for additional investment in this work.

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