

Fact Sheet: Family violence and homelessness

Family violence is violent or threatening behavior or any other form of behavior that coerces or controls a family member or that causes that family member to be fearful. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)ⁱ

Family violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Victoriaⁱⁱ. More than one third of women accessing homelessness services do so because they're fleeing family violence.ⁱⁱⁱ

The statistics^{iv}

- 55% of all women *with children* who accessed specialist homelessness services said escaping violence was the main reason for getting help^v
- Poverty and financial hardship are issues for 32% of women escaping family violence^{vi}
- Family violence is often hidden. Only one third of women ever report violence^{vii}

The relationship between family violence and homelessness is complex, as it's often underpinned by a range of factors such as gender inequality, socioeconomic disadvantage, mental illness as well as poor access to income support and housing^{viii}. Although family violence occurs in same-sex relationships and can happen to men, the overwhelming number of victims are women (at the hands of a male partner/family member).

Not all women who experience family violence will become homeless. Some have greater access to financial and social resources, such as income and housing. Women who have fewer of these resources are more likely to need help from homelessness services, demonstrating how homelessness caused by family violence is also underpinned by other issues such as poverty.

Many women experiencing family violence will have to get help from homelessness services because they lack the financial resources needed to secure housing. For example, a controlling partner may have withheld his wife/partner's access to finances and/or not allowed her to work outside the home, therefore limiting her ability to secure an income. Sometimes a woman may not have a housing history which makes it harder to rent, and in other cases women have to leave quickly and simply don't have time to prepare.

Many women who experience family violence are not 'houseless' – they have houses, but they can't be safe in them because the perpetrator lives there too.

The program '[Safe At Home](#),' is premised on the idea that the person using violence should be removed from the home, making it safe for the woman to remain. Operating around Australia, staff use tactics to keep women safe in their homes ranging from changing locks, to communicating with neighbours to avoid



periods of homelessness for women and children experiencing family violence. Safe At Home is an example of how policies and service providers are changing the approach to family violence and homelessness.

Especially in cases of long term abuse, women can struggle to find their feet due to a lack of confidence, feelings of helplessness, fear and often a lack of finances.

About family violence

Women are overwhelmingly the victims of family violence, with 1 in 6 women having experienced actual or threatened physical or sexual violence by a partner.^{ix} Further, 1 in 3 will experience physical violence in their lifetime and Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to experience family violence than other Australian women^x. Family violence includes but isn't limited to:

- Physical violence, sexual assault and other sexually abusive behavior;
- Economic abuse;
- Emotional and psychological abuse;
- Stalking;
- Kidnapping or deprivation of liberty;
- Damage to property or an animal (the victim doesn't have to own either);
- Behaviour by the person using violence that causes a child to be exposed to the effects of any of the above^{xi}

ⁱ ABS(a), 2009, *Conceptual framework for family and domestic violence*

ⁱⁱ Australian Government (2008) *The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness*, White Paper, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Government (2008)

^{iv} For more information [see PDF](#)

^v Spinney, 2012, *Home and Safe? Policy and Practice Innovations to Prevent Women and Children who have experienced Domestic & Family Violence from becoming Homeless*

^{vi} Womens Services network, 2004, *Domestic Violence*

^{vii} Bowen et al, 2002, *Evaluating Probation Based Offender Programmes for Domestic Violence Perpetrators: A Pro-Feminist Approach*. The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice 41 (3): 221

^{viii} Robinson, C & Searby. R (2006) *Accommodation in Crisis: Forgotten Women in Western Sydney*, UTS Shopfront monograph series no.1 Sydney

^{ix} ABS(b), 2007, *Personal Safety Survey*

^x Spinney, 2012

^{xi} ABS(a), 2009, *Conceptual framework for family and domestic violence*