

Chapter 2

Effects of domestic and family violence

2.1 Our Watch described domestic and family violence as having 'rippling effects':

It impacts on individuals and relationships as well as on organisations, communities and the broader society.¹

2.2 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (National Council), in its 2009 Background paper to the National Plan, also described the broad-ranging effects of domestic and family violence:

This violence damages the health and wellbeing of women and their children. It also affects communities, disrupting community and intra-familial relationships, isolating people from social networks, encouraging negative norms and perpetuating social exclusion. Violence also places a large burden on the national economy through the cost of health, support and justice services and the loss of human capital.²

2.3 This section of the report discusses the health and financial consequences of domestic and family violence for victims, including children, as well as the economic and social impacts on the broader Australian community.

Effects on health

2.4 A number of submissions referred to the findings of a 2004 study by VicHealth which assessed the health impacts of 'intimate partner violence' on women:

[I]ntimate partner violence is all too common, has severe and persistent effects on women's physical and mental health and carries with it an enormous cost in terms of premature death and disability. Indeed it is responsible for more preventable ill-health and premature death in Victorian women under the age of 45 than any other of the well-known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.³

1 *Submission 141*, p. 11 (Attachment A). Note: Our Watch was known as the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and their Children prior to 5 September 2014. This report uses Our Watch throughout to reflect the updated name – although its submission is published under the Foundation's name on the committee's website.

2 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, *Background Paper to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*, (March 2009), p. 36.

3 VicHealth, *The health costs of violence: measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence. A summary of findings*, 2004, p. 8, available at: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-health-costs-of-violence (accessed 12 January 2015). See also Women with Disabilities, *Submission 50*, p. 13; Women's Health Victoria, *Submission 60*, p. 3; White Ribbon Australia, *Submission 94*, p. 2. See also Dr Mayet Costello, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 2.

2.5 The Australian Women's Health Network detailed the health impacts of 'gender-based violence' on women:

The direct health consequences...include depression, anxiety and phobias, suicidal behaviours, physical injury, a range of somatic disorders and a variety of reproductive health problems. Women who have been exposed to violence report poorer overall physical health than those who have not, and there is evidence that the health impact of violence can persist long after the abuse has stopped.⁴

2.6 The National Council noted Australian studies showing that 'women who have experienced partner violence have poorer health and use health services more frequently than other women, even after they are no longer exposed to the violence'.⁵ However:

...studies show that health improvements are possible – particularly when women are no longer exposed to the violence, have received appropriate medical and emotional counselling support and have suitable social supports in place.⁶

2.7 In terms of specific health consequences, a number of submissions commented on the psychological impacts of domestic and family violence. For example, Women's Centre for Health Matters provided the following statistics on the mental health impacts of domestic and family violence:

Access Economics estimates that in Australia, nearly 18% of all depression experienced by women and 17% of all anxiety disorders experienced by women are related to domestic and family violence. Other known mental health impacts of domestic and family violence include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), problematic substance use, and other stress- and trauma-related disorders. Women who have experienced domestic or family violence are at much greater risk of attempting suicide than women who have not.⁷

2.8 The National Council described the 'cumulative impact' on the mental health of victims:

Many women describe the long-term psychological impacts of emotional, verbal, social and economic abuse as being more devastating. Women who have experienced partner violence are also more likely to suffer mental

4 *Submission 4*, p. 13.

5 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, *Background Paper to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (March 2009), p. 39.

6 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, *Background Paper to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (March 2009), p. 40.

7 Women's Centre for Health Matters, *Submission 101*, p. 6.

health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, self-harm tendencies and suicidal thoughts.⁸

2.9 Similarly, Women with Disabilities Victoria emphasised the long-term psychological impacts of domestic and family violence:

Long periods of anxiety, insecurity, low self-esteem, social isolation and lack of control over home life result from domestic violence. Psychological impacts on children are compounded by disrupted education and parental relationships. Such psychosocial risks accumulate during life and increase the chances of poor mental health and premature death.⁹

2.10 The Domestic Violence Prevention Council (ACT) referred to the trauma suffered by domestic and family violence victims:

Women and their children are often forced to leave their homes to escape domestic and family violence, and can experience extensive trauma – they are physically, emotionally and psychologically affected by not only the loss of their homes but also disruption to their social connections, and their children's schooling and friendships.¹⁰

2.11 Submissions also referred to the impact of domestic and family violence on reproductive and sexual health.¹¹ Children by Choice outlined the negative sexual and reproductive health consequences for women who are victims of intimate partner violence, including unintended and unwanted pregnancy, abortion and unsafe abortion, and pregnancy complications.¹²

2.12 Children by Choice observed that where reproductive coercion¹³ leads to a pregnancy unwanted by the female partner, then there may be either pressure to carry the pregnancy to full term, or prevention from accessing abortion.¹⁴ The submission states:

Continuing a pregnancy to become 'co-parents' can further entrench a connection between the woman and the perpetrator, which may continue

8 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, *Background Paper to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (March 2009), p. 38.

9 *Submission 50*, p. 13.

10 *Submission 100*, p. 5.

11 See, for example, Family Planning NSW, *Submission 18*, p. 5; Women's Health West, *Submission 21*, p. 10; Women's Centre for Health Matters, *Submission 101*, p. 6.

12 *Submission 34*, p. 3.

13 Reproductive coercion refers to a range of male partner pregnancy-controlling behaviours [including]: birth control sabotage such as throwing away contraception and the intentional breakage of condoms; forced sex; refusal by their partner to use condoms; being threatened with consequences if they use birth control; and prevention from obtaining birth control.

14 *Submission 34*, p. 4.

regardless of the context of the relationship itself and can become a tool for further manipulation through family court proceedings.¹⁵

2.13 The joint submission of Inner Melbourne Community Legal and the Royal Women's Hospital noted that pregnancy is a particularly high risk time for women:

...research shows that violence significantly impacts pregnant women. Studies have found between 4-9% of pregnant women are abused during their pregnancy and/or after the birth. In a study conducted of 399 pregnant women at the [Royal Women's Hospital], it was found that 20% of the women surveyed did experience and continued to experience violence during their pregnancy. A survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that 20% of women who experienced violence by a previous partner during the relationship stated that the onset of violence occurred during pregnancy.¹⁶

Impacts on Children

2.14 In its submission, Victoria Police commented specifically on the number of children exposed to domestic and family violence:

Nationally, 1 in 4 children are exposed to family violence. The impacts are seen across our health systems, social support services, child wellbeing and development, and most devastatingly, in our homicide statistics.¹⁷

2.15 The submission from Victoria Police noted the children do not need to be present when the violence occurs in order to suffer negative consequences:

Victoria Police data show that in approximately a third of family incidents reported to police children have been present, however, children do not need to be physically present when violence occurs to suffer negative consequences. Living in an environment where violence is the norm is extremely damaging, and whether or not they 'see' the violence is not critical.¹⁸

2.16 Save the Children provided the following information on the presence of children at domestic and family violence incidents:

The Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce estimated that children were present at 80-85 per cent of domestic violence incidents, and that in 50 per cent of these cases, the child was also injured during the incident. This can have far reaching consequences given a developing brain is most vulnerable to the impact of traumatic experiences during childhood; exposure to extreme trauma will change the organisation of the brain, resulting in difficulties in dealing with stresses later in life.¹⁹

15 *Submission 34*, p. 6.

16 *Submission 16*, pp 5-6.

17 *Submission 92*, p. 3.

18 *Submission 92*, p. 6.

19 *Submission 90*, p. 6.

2.17 Save the Children stated that the impact of domestic and family violence on children is underestimated and largely misunderstood:

Domestic violence can have profound negative impacts on children, including psychological and behavioural impacts (e.g. depression, substance abuse, school difficulties), health and socio-economic impacts (e.g. domestic violence continues to be the leading cause of homelessness for children) and the intergenerational transmission of violence (e.g. 'children's exposure to domestic violence may result in attitudes that justify their own use of violence and boys who witness violence are more likely to approve of violence').²⁰

2.18 Other submissions also highlighted the issue of the intergenerational transmission of violence. For example, the Australian Women's Health Network referred to work by VicHealth indicating that boys who witness domestic and family violence are at a greater risk of becoming perpetrators as adults.²¹

2.19 Similarly, Victoria Police commented on the factors that make it more likely children will become perpetrators of violence themselves:

Children and young people may also be perpetrators of violence and this can be largely due to issues such as being a previous victim of family violence or having witnessed violence in their home, mental health issues, bullying or alcohol and drug abuse.²²

Financial impacts

2.20 The effect of domestic and family violence on a victim's financial security, particularly in terms of maintaining employment and having access to suitable accommodation, were highlighted by witnesses and in submissions. The Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV) described financial security as a 'major issue' for women living with abusive partners and after they leave the relationship. DVRCV referred to research which found:

[T]he experience of domestic violence significantly contributes to poverty, financial risk and financial insecurity for women, sometimes long after they have left the relationship.²³

2.21 The submission by WIRE Women's Information focused specifically on financial abuse and its impact on women trying to leave abusive relationships:

A woman leaving a financially abusive relationship is likely to have few financial resources; in many cases, she will have debts accrued by her ex-partner and face immediate difficulties finding and maintaining secure accommodation and providing the basic essentials for herself and her children...if she has been prevented from working or studying during her

20 *Submission 90*, p. 5.

21 *Submission 4*, p. 13. See also Save the Children, *Submission 90*, pp 5-6.

22 *Submission 92*, p. 6.

23 *Submission 123*, p. 9.

relationship, it may be difficult to find work, as she may lack qualifications and experience – or the qualifications and experience she does have may no longer be relevant. Importantly, women in this situation often have little experience of managing their finances and limited knowledge of their financial position within the relationship.²⁴

2.22 WIRE Women's Information also outlined some long term financial implications for women leaving situations of domestic and family violence:

Women with a history of domestic violence can be reluctant to pursue their financial entitlements through the legal system post-separation for a variety of reasons: they may be fearful of their former partner and choose safety over property; they may lack confidence; feel they do not have the necessary skills; be daunted by the costs involved in legal proceedings and they may be unaware of their financial entitlements under the law. Women who have experienced family violence, including financial abuse, are more likely to do poorly in financial settlements compared with those who have not...These factors can result in a lifetime of financial hardship for many women and their children.²⁵

2.23 Ms Patricia Kinnersly, of the Women's Health Association of Victoria, spoke of 'hearing stories about women who were managing just to keep it together', and gave the following example:

Recently I spoke with a woman who came into our service who was working two part-time jobs, low-paid jobs, and doing a [certificate IV qualification], so that she could put herself in a better position into the future. She had one child and was paying rent. The loss of one of her jobs...had reduced her income by \$60 or \$70 a fortnight. It was putting her bang into that stress and she was starting to consider whether she would bring somebody else into the house to rent, and she was worried about that because she is a single woman with a child, or would she have to do something like move home to her parents and then she would not be able to do the jobs that she was currently doing. Whilst there are some notions of what poor people do and do not do, there is this point where they are just managing and so even that \$50, \$60 or what have you just tips them into that red zone and makes them more vulnerable.²⁶

2.24 Ms Rosie Batty, who was named the 2015 Australian of the Year for her work as a family violence campaigner following the murder of her son, Luke, at the hands of her ex-partner, explained the financial pressure that a person may find themselves under once they have left a violent relationship:

[Y]ou are really struggling as single parents a lot of the time and that places pressure on both parties because, when you do separate, your financial position is always weakened. Again, there is that other form of abuse that can then encroach where [your ex-partner] does not pay. You are bringing

24 *Submission 40*, p. 3.

25 *Submission 40*, p. 3.

26 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 35.

up children on your own and you are compromised financially. You are under pressure by Centrelink to go and get a job. We are hearing about job snobs from the government in that perspective, when really we do not have family-friendly jobs out there.²⁷

2.25 The Commonwealth Government already has two programs in place to help address the financial issues experienced by women and those in low income families. The Women's Money Toolkit is a free online resource to provide women, including those dealing with family breakdown, with financial advice and support.²⁸ Additionally, \$63.4 million has been committed to fund three microfinance schemes to help low income individuals and families gain greater control of their finances.²⁹ Other levels of government also provide support of this nature. The New South Wales Government's Start Safely subsidy is just one example.³⁰

Employment issues

2.26 The importance of being employed, as a means of a victim of domestic and family violence ensuring their financial security, was highlighted to the committee.³¹ Ms Veronica Black, National Coordinator Organising and Development, Finance Sector Union of Australia (FSU), referred to the complexity of the interaction between domestic and family violence, and a victim's employment:

It is incredibly important for women to be able to maintain their economic independence in order to give them the best chance of being able to escape from a violent situation, but at the same time experiencing domestic violence increases your chances of having difficulties at work that come about as a result of absenteeism, excessive sick leave, impact on performance and so on that might be occurring at the time that you are experiencing that violence. As well as that, while the workplace can be an important source of information and support that victims of domestic violence may not be able to access in other places, it can also be a place that is unsafe because even if you have left the home, if you are still in the same workplace and your partner or ex-partner knows where that workplace is, then sometimes that violence can be brought into the workplace either physically or through ongoing stalking and harassment at work.³²

27 *Committee Hansard*, 12 September 2014, p. 14.

28 Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, 'New online tool empowering women to take control of finances', Media Release, 25 May 2014.

29 Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, 'Microfinance investment to help transition Australians from welfare to work', Media Release, 11 June 2015.

30 NSW Government, *Submission 140*, Attachment 1, p. 26.

31 See, for example, ACTU, *Submission 46*, p. 4.

32 Ms Veronica Black, Finance Sector Union of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 48.

2.27 Ms Jodie Woodrow, of RiSE Queensland, shared with the committee how domestic and family violence affected her employment:

I had to stay on welfare because of the number of occasions I had to go to court. If you expect a woman to make an application to go through court and go through 12 mentions before she even gets to trial—in my case, it was four years, two Family Court report writers and multiple appointments—you cannot expect her to work at the same time. So we have to question [how] we expect women to be employed and deal with crises at the same time. In my case, my perpetrator would sabotage my attempts to go to work. He would slash my tyres. He would let down the air in my tyres. He would throw away the car keys. My boss got pretty sick and tired of me ringing up and saying I can't come in, so I had to leave my job. I ended up on welfare because of that.³³

2.28 The ACTU's submission noted the inclusion of a domestic violence leave entitlement in enterprise agreements is assisting some victims to maintain their employment:

Paid domestic violence leave is designed to assist victims of domestic violence to remain in paid employment, support them through the process of escaping violence and to promote safe and secure workplaces for them and their work colleagues. The leave is based on an employee[']s need, for example, to attend court appearances and related appointments, seek legal advice, and make re-location arrangements.

Paid domestic violence leave recognises that it is largely women, who, as a result of the violence, have broken employment histories, are in low paid jobs and can least afford to take unpaid leave at a time where financial security is critical.³⁴

2.29 Ms Veronica Black, FSU, provided the committee with two examples of workers accessing domestic and family violence leave which enabled them to maintain their employment while they were dealing with violent incidents:

We had a member from the National Australia Bank contact us to say that she could not go to work. She had had a very violent incident with her ex-partner. She had an [apprehended violence order] out against him. He had taken off with the car and she needed to move—and she needed to move straightaway and therefore would not be able to attend work. We were able to talk to her about the fact that there was a new enterprise agreement that had provisions for access to leave and how to go about accessing that leave. She then sent through the relevant information to the bank and the bank came back and said, 'You should take the time that you need in order to relocate and to make sure that you and your family are safe.'...

A member with the Westpac group was in contact with an advocate...and said: 'I need to resign. How much notice do I need to give. Can you assist me to not work out my notice?' When we started talking to her about what

33 *Committee Hansard*, 6 November 2014, p. 41.

34 *Submission 46*, p. 5.

was happening, we learned that her ex-partner had continued to be so violent that the police had been patrolling her street on a regular basis. It had got to the point where they said: 'We just cannot guarantee your safety anymore. We recommend that you move. Do not tell anyone that you are moving. You need to move interstate. Do not tell your kids in case he shows up at the school and they mention it to him.' She was trying to pack at night, once the kids were asleep, in a way that hid the boxes and things so that the children would not see that anything was going on. She thought her only choice was to resign and that she would not be able to give any notice. But, after we spoke to her about the work we had been doing with Westpac and the policies that had been implemented within that organisation, we spoke to Westpac on her behalf. They have granted her a month's leave to relocate and they have also said that they would do anything within their power to find another position for her near to where she ends up, wherever that might be. They showed a great understanding of the fact that they will probably not know that until the last possible minute.³⁵

Committee view

2.30 The committee supports the need for victims of domestic and family violence to be able to access appropriate leave provisions which assist them to maintain employment and financial security while attending necessary appointments such as court appearances and seeking legal advice.

Recommendation 1

2.31 The committee supports victims of domestic and family violence having access to appropriate leave provisions which assist them to maintain employment and financial security while attending necessary appointments such as court appearances and seeking legal advice. The Commonwealth Government should investigate ways to implement this across the private and public sector.

Homelessness

2.31 The likelihood of domestic and family violence leading to homelessness was emphasised by a number of submissions. For example, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, stated:

Domestic Violence is the single biggest driver of homelessness for Australian women. According to Homelessness Australia 55 per cent of female clients and 25 per cent of all clients who present to specialist homeless services cite domestic violence as their reason for leaving their home. For women, the intersection between domestic violence and homelessness is influenced by a range of factors. Women's prolonged experiences of intimate partner violence, which is largely perpetrated within the home, "erodes the sense of safety and sanctuary that underscores the concept of home life and when women choose to leave a situation of violence, this primarily comes at the heavy price of them having to leave their homes." In addition to this, there is a lack of adequate and affordable

35 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, pp 49-50.

housing throughout Australia. This is resulting in increased rates of housing stress as well as increased homelessness amongst women, who are disadvantaged by gender inequalities in employment and income.³⁶

2.32 Our Watch referred to data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare from specialist homelessness services for 2011-12:

- One-third of clients had experienced domestic or family violence.
- The majority of these (78 per cent) were female and one-fifth were less than 10 years of age.
- Over four times as many females as males reported domestic and family violence as the reason for seeking assistance.
- Of the female clients reporting domestic and family violence as a main reason, 63 per cent were aged between 18 and 44.³⁷

2.33 The National Council described homelessness caused by domestic and family violence as different from other forms of homelessness:

In many cases, the perpetrator remains in the home and many women will cycle in and out of homelessness as they return to the perpetrator and the family home, often because of financial constraints and limited crisis services.³⁸

2.34 Ms Mirjana Wilson, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Crisis Service, told the committee that even where a victim remains in their own home, the financial stress of mortgage repayments and running a household may still lead them to homelessness.³⁹ Homelessness is discussed further in Chapter 10.

Impacts on male victims

2.35 While much of the evidence was focused on the impact of domestic and family violence on female victims, the committee did receive some evidence in relation to the impacts on male victims.

2.36 The One in Three Campaign quoted from the findings of a study conducted in 2010 by researchers at the Psychology Department of Edith Cowan University:

The data suggest[s] that male victims of intimate partner abuse and their children suffer a range of consequences, such as psychological distress (including psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety

36 *Submission 62*, pp 17-18.

37 *Submission 141*, pp 12-13.

38 The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, *Background Paper to Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (March 2009), p. 45.

39 *Committee Hansard*, 15 October 2014, pp 4-5. Note: affordable housing and homelessness is discussed further in chapter 10.

disorders), suicidal ideation, impaired self-concept (in particular around one's sense of masculinity), and loss of work.⁴⁰

2.37 The researchers noted that despite these impacts, men were reluctant to disclose the abuse or seek help:

The reasons for this are complex. The major factors appear to be men's denial of what is happening; their fear that they will not be believed, and their fear that even if they are believed they will not be assisted or will be blamed for the abuse. Participants believed that men would find it easier to seek help and disclose the abuse if there were greater public acknowledgement that males can also be victims of abuse, if there were appropriate services for men, and if they were confident that they will be given effective help.⁴¹

2.38 Dr Elizabeth Celi also described to the committee some of the impacts on male victims of domestic and family violence:

[T]here is a lot of shame in this issue and a lot of embarrassment already that they are in this position, and they have not received public education that certain psychologically abusive behaviours by their female partner—or even by other men in their lives—are actually abnormal and unproductive, and can have an effect on their mental and emotional health. Not having that information, they do not have a gauge of what is normal and when it becomes abnormal and unproductive. So it will take a while for men to actually feel competent to report their experience.

The other factor we need to consider is the social health aspects for men, where people disbelieve or invalidate their experience. That is a form of re-victimisation. For someone who is already receiving mental and emotional abuse, social abuse or financial abuse, it is a very insidious and difficult-to-gauge thing. To then be disbelieved, or invalidated or told to 'suck it up' et cetera further inhibits their ability to report it. So it is easier actually to deal with it by yourself.⁴²

Economic impacts on the community

2.39 A 2009 study by KPMG, commissioned by the Commonwealth, states that violence against women, including domestic and family violence, cost the nation

40 *Submission 23*, p. 13. The study referenced by One in Three was commissioned and published by the Men's Advisory Network (MAN) and undertaken by three researchers from the Edith Cowan University's Psychology Department. It was based on a sample group of 15 self-identified male victims of domestic and family violence, as well as five 'significant people in the lives of such men' and eight providers of services to male victims. See Emily Tilbrook, Alfred Allan and Greg Dear, *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men* (2010).

41 *Submission 23*, p. 13.

42 *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2014, pp 47-48.

\$13.6 billion each year.⁴³ This figure was expected to reach \$15.6 billion in 2021-22, if extra steps were not taken.⁴⁴

2.40 Ms Veronica Black, of the FSU, provided the following evidence on the cost of domestic and family violence in the workplace:

Some research conducted by RMIT for the domestic violence clearinghouse project estimates that it cost around \$1.5 billion per annum to Australian employers in staff turnover, absenteeism, lower productivity and so [on] in the workplace.⁴⁵

2.41 Australian Women's Health Network described as 'enormous' the financial cost to the community of violence against women:

This takes into account the cost of public and private services to victims, perpetrators and children, the costs in terms of lost productivity (including sick leave, 'presenteeism', access to employment support services, replacing staff and lost unpaid work)...Other costs include counselling, changing schools, child protection services, increased use of government services, and juvenile and adult crime[.]⁴⁶

Conclusion

2.42 The many areas outlined above highlight the high cost of domestic and family violence not only to the individuals involved and their children but also the wider community and economy. In later chapters of this report the committee discusses measures to prevent these impacts and interventions to lessen impacts on victims.

43 National Council, *The Cost of Violence against Women and their Children*, March 2009, p. 34; see also Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 2.

44 Department of Social Services, *Submission 57*, Attachment 1 (National Plan), p. 2.

45 *Committee Hansard*, 4 November 2014, p. 51.

46 *Submission 4*, p. 13. The Australian Women's Health Network states that 'presenteeism' is a term which describes 'distraction, lack of concentration and underperformance at work. In other words being physically present at work but in all other ways absent'.