



Research Brief *Key Terms of Family Violence*

Introduction

This research brief provides an overview of key terms - intimate partner violence, family violence, dating violence - and presents a brief overview of prevalence.

Background

The key terms associated with intimate partner or domestic violence can be contextualised in terms of Australia's changing legal, cultural and policy landscape. Over the past 30 years the entrenched understanding of domestic and family violence as private affairs (Murray & Powell 2009: 538) outside state intervention (VLRC 2006) has shifted both culturally and legally. By 2006, all states of Australia had named and criminalised domestic or family violence and implemented initiatives targeting Indigenous family violence (Murray & Powell 2009). Additionally, during this time the Government implemented The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women, which aims 'to reduce all violence in our communities', recognising that 'whatever the form violence takes, it has serious and often devastating consequences for victims, their extended families and the community' (Australian Government 2009). These changes indicated a shift in the perceptions towards domestic violence in Australia.

Intimate Partner/Domestic Violence

While there are conflicting definitions and conceptualisation of violence within intimate relationships (Braaf & Meyering 2013), intimate partner or domestic violence can be defined as any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past domestic or intimate relationships. These behaviours are not exclusively physical assaults but also include emotional and psychological abuse and controlling behaviour (Department of Human Services 2011). Direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour that causes a person to live in fear are all categorised as domestic violence (Department of Human Services 2011).

Additional definitions emphasise the 'systematic abuse of power in an intimate relationship where one partner is controlling and the other partner is intimidated and lives in fear' (Day et al. 2010: 2). These terms, domestic or intimate partner violence, have been critiqued for not encapsulating violence committed by family members against other family members beyond the spousal or intimate relationship (Murray & Powell 2009). For this reason the more inclusive term family violence emerged (Murray & Powell 2009).

Family Violence

The term family violence recognises that violence is not only perpetrated by intimate partners but also family and community members (Murray & Powell 2009). It refers to the behaviours defined above, however, it broadens the scope of the individuals targeted for abuse to include children, siblings, parents and other extended relationships where the perpetrators are not 'part of the physical household but are part of the family and/or are

fulfilling the function of family' (Family Court of Australia 2004-2005: 3).

An additional driving factor behind the term family violence is the need to accurately capture the nature of violence experienced by Indigenous people. Family violence in an Indigenous context includes not only physical, emotional and sexual violence, but also spiritual and cultural violence committed in families (Cripps & Davis 2012). Additionally, family violence in an Indigenous context acknowledges the impacts of violence on individual victims, extended families, kinship networks and community relationships (Cripps & Davis 2012: 1). However, some argue the term family violence diminishes acknowledgement of Indigenous women's experiences of violence at the hands of their intimate partners (Greer and Laing 2001: 14).

Dating Violence

An additional category of intimate partner or domestic violence is dating violence, which refers to violence experienced by young people in dating relationships (Indermaur 2001). While there is limited research on the nature of dating violence in Australia (Sety 2012: 1), some of the main studies have found that young people are reticent to disclose violence or seek help (National Crime Prevention Study 2001).

Prevalence

While we acknowledge that men experience intimate partner violence and family violence, women are consistently more likely to experience physical, emotional and fatal violence at the hands of an intimate partner or someone known to them. The ABS 2012 Personal Safety Survey (based on interviews with 13,207 women and 3,743 men aged 18 and above) found that an estimated 62% of women compared to 8% of men experienced their most recent incident of physical assault by a male in their home. Additionally, 17% of women had experienced violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15. These findings extend to emotional abuse. Women are more likely (15-25%) than men (14%) to have experienced emotional abuse at the hand of a partner since the age of 15. These findings are consistent with previous years.

The ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey indicated that in 46% of physically violent incidents reported by women, the perpetrator was a current or previous partner. 21% of women who had been sexually assaulted reported the perpetrator was a previous partner (ABS 2006). Prevalence is also acute for Indigenous women, who are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised for a family violence related assault than non-Indigenous women (AIHW 2006).

However, definitions used in surveys have been characterised as narrow and limited due to low levels of reporting (Chung 2013). Intimate partner homicide refers to a homicide where the perpetrator is a current or former partner. During 2005-2006, approximately two-thirds of all women who were murdered were killed by their husband or live-in partner, of the 113 incidents involving female victims, over half followed domestic disputes (Davies & Mouzos 2007). Between 2008 and 2010, 66% of the 185 domestic homicides recorded intimate partner homicides: women are consistently overrepresented as victims (Chan & Payne 2013: vii). In 2015, a current COAG communiqué reported approximately one woman a week has been murdered by an

intimate partner (COAG 2015).

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2006, Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Canberra: AIHW.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2006, Personal Safety Survey 2005. Commonwealth Government of Australia. Cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2012, The Personal Safety Survey, 2012, Cat. no. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra: ABS.
- Australian Government 2009, The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women: Immediate Government Actions, Canberra.
- Braaf, R & Meyering, I 2013, 'The gender debate in domestic violence: the role of data', Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, Issues Paper 25, pp. 1–22.
- Chan, A & Payne, J 2013, Homicide in Australia: 2008–09 to 2009–10, National Homicide Monitoring Program Annual Report, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.
- Chung, D 2007, 'Making meaning of relationships: young women's experiences and understandings of dating violence', Violence Against Women, vol. 13, no. 12, pp. 1274–1295.
- Chung, D 2013, 'Understanding the Statistics about Male Violence Against Women', White Ribbon Research Series, no. 5. pp. 1–12.
- Council of Australian Governments [COAG] 2015, COAG Communique, viewed 24th May 2015.
- Day, A et al. 2010, 'Integrated responses to domestic violence: Legally mandated intervention programs for male perpetrators', Australian Institute of Criminology Trends & Issues in crime and criminal justice, no. 404, pp. 1-8.
- Davies M & Mouzos J 2007, 'Homicide in Australia: 2005–06 national homicide monitoring program annual report', Research and public policy series, No. 77. Canberra: AIV.
- Department of Human Services [DHS] 2011, What is family violence?, viewed 19th June 2015.
- Greer, P & Laing, L 2001, 'Pathways to Safety: An Interview about Indigenous Family Violence with Pam Greer, Indigenous Training and Development Consultant', Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, Issues Paper No. 5.
- Indermaur, D 2001, 'Young Australians and domestic violence'. Australian Institute of Criminology Trends & Issues in crime and criminal justice, no. 195, pp. 1–6.
- Memmott P, Stacy R, Chambers C & Keys C 2001, Violence in Indigenous communities. Canberra: Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.
- National Crime Prevention Study 2001, Young people and domestic violence: national research on young people's attitudes to and experiences of domestic violence, report. Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Barton.
- Sety, M 2012, 'What do we know about dating violence among Australian adolescents?' Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, Thematic Review Paper 4, pp. 1–8.
- Victorian Law Reform Commission [VLRC] 2006, Review of family violence laws: Report. Melbourne: VLRC.

Author: MGFV team (2016)

For further inquiries: arts.monash.edu/gender-and-family-violence