

Research Brief

The Temporal Context of Family Violence in Victoria

Introduction

Key changes into the handling of family violence cases in Victoria emerged from the 2015 release of the national report of the *Coalitional of Australian Government Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children* (COAG 2015), the 2015 inquest findings into Luke Batty's death (Coroners Court of Victoria, 2015), and the 2016 state-led Royal Commission into Family Violence. These reports and recommendations highlighted the importance of rethinking responses to family violence, including increasing education and training, improving police incident responses, enhancing family violence screening practices, and increasing information sharing between support and criminal justice agencies. In addition, the reform of the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF; now Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework, see McCulloch et al 2016) in Victoria has elicited change regarding the prioritisation and process of risk identification, assessment and management.

Increases in reporting?

In this research brief, we examine whether intimate partner violence reporting patterns have been affected by policy changes emerging after the COAG report and the Luke Batty Inquest in 2015. The data used is officially-reported IPV incidents committed by a current or former partner that were reported to Victoria Police. Figure 1 illustrates the number of IPV incidents reported in Victoria by calendar year. This shows that rates of intimate partner violence, as reported to police, increased steadily across the study period.

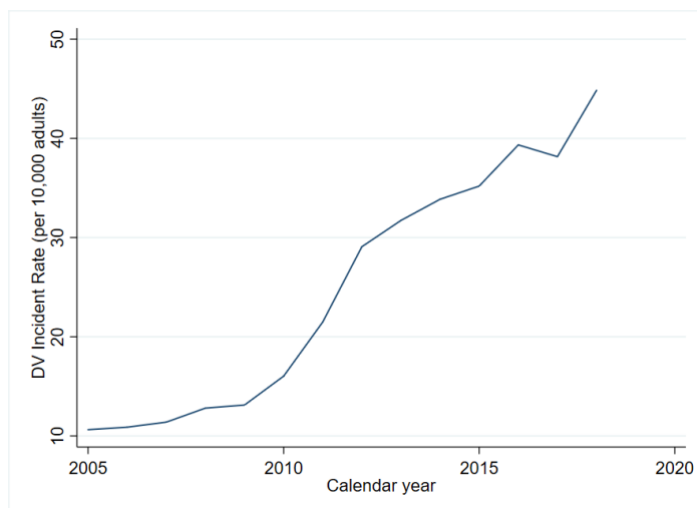


Figure 1: Overview of incidents per year

To examine this trend, we employed a time series intervention analysis. As informed by the selection order criteria, we used a lag of 1 in the model (AIC=5.17) to control for temporal autocorrelation with the previous year. The resulting graph is presented in Figure 2.

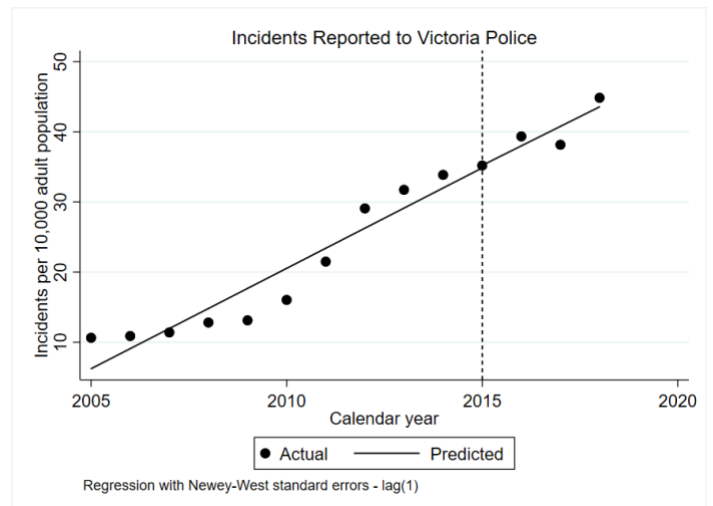


Figure 2: Time series analysis of incidents

Findings

The model shows that the starting level of the rate of intimate partner violence incidents in Victoria was estimated at 3.35 per 10,000 population. This rate increased significantly every year prior to 2015 by 2.86 incidents per year ($p < .001$). In the first year of the intervention, there was not a significant change in the number of incidents reported to Victoria Police compared to the previous year. Further, since the introduction of policy and legislative change in 2015, the number of incidents continues to increase at a rate of 2.78 incidents per year ($p < .001$).

Ongoing needs

Much evidence from Victoria, and in Australia more broadly, has highlighted the ongoing and escalating prevalence of family violence. With an estimated cost of \$5.3 billion in Victoria in 2015-2016, and estimates of over 160,000 victims in one year alone (KPMG, 2017), there has been significant public and political attention devoted to addressing family violence in recent years. 2015 and 2016 saw the beginning of a transformative reform agenda for family violence policy and practice in Victoria. Analysis of the number of incidents reported to Victoria Police show that the number of incidents has risen steadily from 2005 regardless of changes implemented at that time. There are many possible explanations for this increase, including that individuals may feel more comfortable in reporting violence because of recent changes to policy and practice and a subsequent increased confidence in the system and awareness of supports. While it is unclear whether the change is a result of the frequency of incidents occurring or the

percentage of offences that are being reported to police, there is a consistent and ongoing need to address the inevitable underreporting of incidents and to continue to support those victims that do report their victimisation.

References

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