

# Building the case for action: using statistics and Research



Violence against women is a serious, prevalent crime. Evidence shows that it is also preventable. In addition to raising awareness about the roles councils can take in preventing violence against women, using sound evidence will help build a strong case for action.

## Key statistics

- In Australia, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical violence, with 1 in 5 experiencing sexual violence, since the age of 15<sup>i</sup>.
- In Australia, 1 woman a week is killed by her partner or ex-partner<sup>ii</sup>.
- Victoria Police attended more than 60,826 family violence incidents, equating to 167 homes a day in 2012/13<sup>iii</sup>.
- In Victoria, the cost of violence against women to the economy was estimated at \$3.4 billion in 2008/09<sup>iv</sup>.
- Intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and disease for Victorian women aged 15-44<sup>v</sup>.
- The health impacts of violence against women include anxiety, depression, brain injury, chronic disability, fracture and breaks, unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, self-harm and suicide<sup>vi</sup>.
- The broader social and cultural impacts include financial debt, unemployment, family breakdown, homelessness and social isolation<sup>vii</sup>.
- 1 in 4 children and young people have witnessed violence against their mother or step-mother<sup>viii</sup>, which can result in serious behavioural, emotional and mental health issues, physical ill health and delays in cognitive and other areas of development<sup>ix</sup>.



## Tips on using statistics and research effectively



Current statistics can be used as a powerful call to action when presented correctly. Consider the following:

- In written or visual materials, reference the original data source.
- Familiarise yourself with the source and find out what it is trying to convey.
- Be well-informed about your data source and why the research was undertaken.
- Be ready to respond to audience questions by considering what might be asked and preparing some answers.
- Have published resources on hand for people to review. This may help them to understand the issue in greater depth.

### Common myths about violence against women

#### Myth 1: Women are just as violent as men

1 in 5 Australians believe that men and women are equal perpetrators of violence in the home<sup>x</sup>. In fact, most violence in the home is committed by men. 95% of men and women who have experienced violence since the age of 15 have experienced this violence at the hands of a male perpetrator<sup>xi</sup>.

#### Myth 2: Women need to modify their behaviour in order to avoid violence

All women and girls deserve to live free from violence, fear and intimidation (as do all men and boys). The responsibility for violence lies with the perpetrator, not the victim. Preventing violence against women is not about women needing to change what they say or do, or how they present themselves.

#### Myth 3: If she wanted the violence to stop, she would just leave

It can be extremely difficult to leave a violent relationship. Women often fear that leaving will result in an escalation of violence, to themselves, their children or their pets. Unfortunately this fear is often justified as evidence shows that violence can get worse just after leaving a violent relationship<sup>xii</sup>.

Important practical considerations, such as where the woman (and her children) will live, what will happen to her pets after she leaves, how the children will get to school or childcare, and how to access finances and support can make leaving extremely difficult. In addition, sometimes a partner will use fear and intimidation to try to stop a woman from leaving.

#### Myth 4: Violence against women is caused by alcohol and drugs, mental health problems and poverty

Research shows that the most significant factors leading to violence against women are the acceptance of sexist and violence-supportive attitudes and the unequal distribution of power between men and women<sup>xiii</sup>. These factors can contribute to the frequency and severity of violence, but are not the cause.

#### Myth 5: Rates of violence against women are exaggerated

Violence against women is vastly under-reported in Australia. Only around 20% of women who have experienced sexual assault and just over 35% of women who have experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator go on to report the incident to the police<sup>xiv</sup>.

#### Myth 6: Violence is much more likely to happen in other cultures

Violence happens to women from all walks of life and is perpetrated by men from all socioeconomic groups and cultural backgrounds. However, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who are experiencing violence can face particular challenges, including language barriers, lack of social support and isolation.

- i ABS, 2013, *Personal Safety Survey*, Cat. No. 4906.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.
- ii Chan & Payne, 2013, *Homicide in Australia: 2009/10 National Homicide Monitoring Program Annual Report*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- iii Victoria Police, 2013, *Crime Statistics Official Release 2012/13*, Victoria Police, Melbourne.
- iv Office of Women's Policy, 2012, *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children*, Victorian Government, Melbourne.
- v VicHealth, 2004, *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease Caused by Intimate Partner Violence: A Summary of Findings*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.
- vi The Royal Women's Hospital, 2012, *Family Violence – Information for Women*, The Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne.
- vii AIHW, 2008, *Australia's Health*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008, Canberra.
- viii Flood & Fergus, 2008 *An Assault on our Future: The Impact of Violence on Young People and Their Relationships*, White Ribbon Foundation, Sydney.
- ix Flood & Fergus, 2008.
- x VicHealth, 2010, *National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women: A Summary of Findings*, Melbourne.
- xi ABS, 2013.
- xii Dobash & Dobash, 2009, *The Murder in Britain Study: Broadening the Analysis on Intimate Partner Violence*, Australia Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
- xiii VicHealth, 2007, *Preventing Violence Before it Occurs: A Framework and Background Paper to Guide the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women in Victoria for Action*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.
- xiv ABS, 2013.



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