

VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO PERPETRATION DATA

Response to questions taken on notice

10 September 2024

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How do we increase the visibility of perpetrators [so that they are not invisible to the system at the time of committing homicide]?

Research conducted as part of the *Pathways to Intimate Partner Homicide* project shows that there are two main patterns of perpetration that lead to a perpetrator of intimate partner homicide not being visible to family violence or criminal justice systems until murdering their current or former partner: fixated threat (high coercive control) and deterioration / acute stressor. Here we have provided a short summary of each of those patterns, as per the findings of the *Pathways* report:

- **Fixated threat** refers to someone who is jealous, highly controlling, and abusive in their relationship(s), but relatively well functioning in other areas of life, and therefore not picked up by police, social, or family violence services. Homicide is used to gain or re-gain control over their current or former partner. Ensuring that ‘fixated threat’ perpetrators are visible in systems requires coercive control to be well understood, recognised and taken seriously both by people working in family violence, legal, health, police, and justice systems, but also in the wider community. People defined by the term ‘fixated threat’ who are not known to the criminal justice system are often known to friends, family and potentially others in the community, so there is an urgent need to build awareness and skills in community so people know what to do if they see these patterns emerging among the people and relationships in their life. Separation/relationship breakdown, and times of conflict within relationships are times of high risk for homicide and/ abuse; conversely they are also opportunities for intervention and safeguarding to reduce the risk of further or escalating violence.
- **Deterioration/acute stressor** refers to someone who uses violence usually for the first time when they have experienced a significant life stressor, which might include trauma, climate disaster, addiction, or financial distress. The relationship in question is usually not physically violent up to this point. Increasing understanding of the link between these stressors and family violence perpetration, and that experiencing stress is not a valid excuse for being violent or lashing out, offers an opportunity to identify and divert people at risk of using violence from this trajectory. Services providers who interact with people at these points of high stress should be offered training and other capacity building activities to ensure that they can recognise and respond to the risk of violence. This includes, for example, financial and essential service staff, disaster response workers, housing workers, and people who deliver addiction counselling. Data linkage – for example to identify when someone is experiencing multiple stressors (e.g. housing, income, disaster) – may also assist in identifying risk. This type of offending also highlights the need for

primary prevention that focuses on men and masculinities, particularly looking at the links between hegemonic masculinities, mental wellbeing, coping with stress, and the normalisation of violence in response to strong emotions.

More information about the Pathways project can be found on the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) website:

<https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide/>

It is important to note that while there are identified trajectories that place people at greater risk of using fatal violence (as outlined above) no 'one type' of person uses domestic, family and sexual violence. Rather, family and gendered violence is a social issue present in all parts of our community. Pursuing greater visibility of people who are at risk of using or already use violence is critical to intervening and this could be greatly supported through enhanced coordination of data collected and shared across the DFSV system, for example, via men's behaviour change program providers and courts. On this point, the recently released research, *Engaging in Change*, funded by the Victorian Government and completed by Monash University made relevant findings and recommendations. This study was led by our Chair, Professor Kate Fitz-Gibbon in her capacity as an academic at Monash. You can access the Final Report here: <https://doi.org/10.26180/26046856.v1>

It is also important to recognise historical and current issues of over-surveillance and over-policing, based on stereotypes that often relate to class, race, sexual orientation and gender identity, and other identity characteristics. Efforts to better understand violence perpetration and improve visibility must also take into account the safety, dignity, and privacy of people and communities who are already oppressed. Data collection must have the explicit purpose of understanding intervention points to effectively change behaviour, to ensure risk visibility, and to encourage help seeking behaviour, rather than simply to criminalise. This is particularly important given the high rates of recidivism among those who serve prison sentences. Whole of system reform to improve visibility must be designed in partnership with marginalised communities.

Can you please share the Man Box research?

An invitation to the launch of *Willing, capable and confident: Men, masculinities and the prevention of violence against women* was shared with the Committee Secretariat on 23 August 2024. This report was launched on Friday 30 August 2024 at the Wheeler Centre and online and was extremely well received by sector, government and community attendees alike.

A copy of the report can be found on the Respect Victoria website:

<https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/executive-summary-willing-capable-and-confident>

[Regarding a perpetration survey] Part of your submission talks about a sample size large enough. Do you have any ideas in terms of figures, at a national and at a state level, for what a large enough sample would look like?

Calculating sample size involves statistical considerations of purpose and intended analysis, as opposed to a specific number that would meet the definition of 'large enough'. Such considerations include:

- **Effect size.** Effect size in the population involves an approximate sense of the extent of the behaviour we are trying to measure, which in turn provides an estimate of how many people we would need to sample to reliably and accurately measure the effect.

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) sample of 19,000 people nationally provides a sufficient sample size for analysis of population-level estimates of attitudes. However, every person responding to the survey will have an 'attitude' that can be measured (i.e., the effect size is large). To measure a *behaviour*, such as perpetration of domestic, family and sexual violence, consideration should be given to the possible range of those sampled who may report use of violent behaviours. Given there is currently no national data on perpetration of domestic, family, and sexual violence, it would be necessary to estimate rates of perpetration from currently known rates of people's experience of violence. For example, if 30% of Australians have experienced domestic, family, and sexual violence, we could assume a range of perpetration between 20% and 40%.

The scope of the definition of what we are trying to measure in the study will also impact the required effect size, and in turn, sample size. A more narrow definition of perpetration that includes only behaviours meeting the definition of intimate partner violence will have a lower effect size, and therefore require a larger sample size, than a broader definition which includes behaviours meeting the definition of all domestic, family and sexual violence, including coercive control.

- **Confidence level and margin of error.** These are standard statistical considerations that need to be estimated in advance for any study aimed at estimating prevalence rates. Larger sample sizes reduce error; therefore each percentage of error we wish to reduce in our estimates will increase the sample size. This is a precision versus resourcing consideration. Given that the study would be the first of its kind, the topic is highly sensitive, and the results would likely be high profile, we would advise prioritising reducing error to the lowest acceptable margin (3% as opposed to 5%).
- **Level of geographical analysis.** Ideally, a national study would allow for national as well as state-level and even sub-state level (e.g., region or LGA) estimates. Including state and sub-state level estimates would require a larger sample size (taking other considerations discussed here into account). Geographical estimates should be considered in tandem with planned intersectional analysis (below), in that an insufficiently diverse sample (including with regard to geographical spread) will limit the reliability of any sub-state modelling or estimates.
- **Intersectional analysis.** Falling under analysis planning, each additional layer of planned group-based analysis will increase the required sample size. For example, accurately measuring perpetration amongst a particular age group **and** gender increases the required sample size more than planned analysis of gender **or** age estimates. These calculations continue exponentially if further layers of analysis are planned (e.g., age **and** gender **and** ethnicity).
- **Plans for data cleaning and exclusion.** There may be concerns that even an anonymous survey measuring self-reported behaviours using sensitively phrased questions would still produce underestimates of perpetration due to social desirability bias. One method to reduce this possibility is to ask participants at the conclusion of the survey if they have lied in any of their responses, and exclude their data from the analysis if they indicate they have. Though this method introduces other concerns (such as erasing the data of serious perpetration), it would increase confidence in the study. If adopted, this method would need to be included in sample size estimates (i.e., allow for removal of at least 5% of participants and build this into the sample size at the outset). As outlined in our submission, expert and rigorous survey design would also increase reliability of the data and reduce the risk of underestimates.

It is also important to consider **data sovereignty and community control**. We note that plans to measure and report data on perpetration of violence amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

and communities should only be conducted with Indigenous leadership and data governance, in line with the National Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data. Similarly, plans to measure and report data on perpetration by LGBTQIA+ and people with disability must include national, state, and local guidance by researchers, experts, organisations, and community members who belong to and represent these communities. Perpetration statistics, especially being the first of their kind in the nation, will be both sensitive and high profile, and adverse effects of inaccurate or insensitive reporting devoid of community input and contextualisation may harm communities who already experience high rates of violence and discrimination.

What data gaps have been identified by the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform, and what are the opportunities for future investment in data collection?

We appreciate the Inquiry's interest in the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform.

Current status of the Platform:

- Currently there are 39 data sources in the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform (Data Platform).
- Data presented via the platform is from 2009 to 2022 and includes administrative data, surveys and one-off published reports. The biggest datasets are from the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) and NCAS.
- The Data Platform includes Victorian level datasets (not at LGA level) that are not widely published. For example, PSS and NCAS data has Victorian disaggregated data that may not be found in other public reports.
- Data is obtained from data custodians that include: the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Melbourne University, ANROWS, Victorian Public Sector Commission, Department of Social Services, Department of Justice and Community Safety.
- Data sources range in frequency – some are monthly (e.g., ABS Labour Force), annually (e.g., the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey) or every 4 years (e.g., NCAS & PSS).
- Data is updated annually mid year, dependent upon the availability of new datasets. The latest update occurred in July 2024.
- The updates in the last two years (2023 and 2024) have included: HILDA, 2021-22 PSS and 2021 NCAS, ABS Census, ABS Labour Force, Australia's Gender Equality Scorecards, CSA Family Violence Data, National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, Victorian Public Sector Commission, National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study

Sexual violence data:

- The main data on sexual violence in the Data Platform comes from the PSS and is therefore focused on experiences of victimisation. The data is all Victorian data for women aged 18 years and over:
 - Latest dataset is from 2021-22.
 - The following are some items contained in the Data Platform:
 - Experienced sexual violence by an intimate partner since age 15,
 - Experienced physical/sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member since age 15
- The Data Platform also has data from the 2020 Private Lives 3 survey:
 - E.g. LGBTQIA+ Australians who have ever experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner.

The Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform is useful to government, the prevention sector and communities because it:

- facilitates access to up-to-date prevention data in the one place,
- contains Victorian level data (not LGA level) that may not be publicly available elsewhere (notably NCAS, PSS). The Victoria data is also often disaggregated, and
- is framed and aligned to Victoria's Free from Violence Strategy Outcomes Framework.

The Platform can be used to address the drivers of violence against women and family violence. For example:

- To illustrate the depth and breadth of violence as a social problem (e.g. statistics on sexual assault and harassment, safety).
- To show changes in attitudes towards violence and where more, concerted prevention efforts are needed (e.g. NCAS tells us that while we are seeing positive progress in a number of areas, a concerning number of people still don't think violence is a problem in their own communities, or that they think violence is acceptable in certain circumstances).
- To illustrate gains in gender equality in both the private and public domains (e.g. who is doing the housework and childcare, etc).
- To provide some lenses into intersectionality, for example data on who is the subject of race-based discrimination.

Gaps and limitations

- The only data included which provides an indication of prevalence of perpetration is from the Personal Safety Survey (PSS), by proxy of victim-survivors' reports. It is Victorian data where women aged 18 and older have reported experiencing sexual/physical violence and it is disaggregated by perpetrator type (e.g., Father/Mother, Brother/Sister, Intimate Partner). Given this data is drawn from victim-survivor reports and there is significant evidence about under-reporting of violence for a range of complex reasons, it does not provide an accurate picture of the prevalence or nature of perpetration, nor the personal motivations or opportunities for intervention. It also does not account for perpetrators with multiple victims and serial perpetration, hence an accurate measure of the number of perpetrators cannot be gleaned from this data set alone. Below is an example of the measure:
 - E.g. PSS 2021 data is women 18+ who experienced physical/sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member since age 15, by perpetrator type
- There is also some data from the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (2021) that shows older Australians that have experienced violence perpetrated by a family member and disaggregated by their relationship to the perpetrator (e.g., Son/Daughter, Partner/Spouse). However, this is a once-off study.
- The Data Platform has identified data gaps: e.g. the Data Platform is framed around the Free from Violence Outcomes Framework (four outcomes and 26 indicators) – There are currently four indicators that do not have any data against them (see table below). Further details on gaps and limitations of the Data Platform are outlined below.
- Over the course of its operations, Respect Victoria has worked with Ministers from the Prevention of Family Violence portfolio to understand and address these data gaps and seek to ensure the Platform evolves to best meet the needs of government, the sector and to inform the community.

Data gaps - detail

Legend

Tier 1: Direct measure of the indicator available

Tier 2: Proxy/indirect measure of an aspect of the indicator available

Tier 3: Indicator not currently measurable

Outcomes and indicators

OUTCOME 1 Victorians hold attitudes and beliefs that reject gender inequality and family violence	1.1 Increased awareness of what constitutes violence
	1.2 Increased recognition of significant impact of violence on victim survivors
	1.3 Increased awareness and understanding of the extent and impact of gender inequality
	1.4 Increased culture of challenging gender inequalities, across all settings and life stages
	1.5 Decrease in attitudes that justify, excuse, minimise, hide or shift blame for violence
	1.6 Increased visible rejection of violence by public and community leaders and in media
OUTCOME 2 Victorians actively challenge attitudes and behaviours that enable violence	2.1 Decrease in sexist and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours
	2.2 Increase in organisations and institutions with systems to support people who challenge sexism and discrimination
	2.3 Reduced reports of everyday stereotypes and sexism
	2.4 Increase in bystanders feeling supported to challenge sexism and discrimination
	2.5 Increase in positive bystander behaviour in the face of sexism and discrimination
	2.6 Increased confidence among men and boys to challenge their peer group when faced with disrespectful or hostile attitudes towards women
OUTCOME 3 Victorian homes, organisations and communities are safe and inclusive	3.1 Increased feelings of safety for people where they live, work, learn and play
	3.2 Increase in people feeling able, safe and willing to report violence
	3.3 Increase in the number of people who feel safe reporting discrimination and bullying
	3.4 Reduction in people subject to family violence
	3.5 Reduction in women subject to violence
	3.6 Reduction in the prevalence of experiences of violence by particular groups
	3.7 Increased confidence in the systems and structures dedicated to preventing violence
	3.8 Increased number of organisations and institutions who model and promote inclusive behaviour
OUTCOME 4 All Victorians live and practise confident and respectful relationships	4.1 Increased understanding of what constitutes healthy, supportive and safe relationships
	4.2 Reduced exposure of young people to violence
	4.3 Decrease in prevalence of reported sexism, sexual harassment and gendered bullying
	4.4 Decrease in acceptance of bullying or controlling behaviour
	4.5 Increased competence in interpersonal conflict resolution
	4.6 Reduction in experiences of discrimination

Additional Notes

Tier 1:

- Data is drawn from already existing datasets that are known to underrepresent certain groups in the community including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically

diverse people, people living in low-income households, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse people, people with disability, older people, and children and young people.

- The absence of data for specific cohorts is due to a range of factors including:
 - design of the data instrument/survey i.e., the questionnaire not asking for certain demographic information. This is a recent criticism of the 2021 Census of Population and Housing which does not ask detailed questions about respondents' gender and sexuality
 - survey sample size (i.e., demographic data is collected but small sample size restricts the extent to which the findings can be disaggregated with sufficient reliability and validity)
 - not adequately sampling people from diverse communities, and/or
 - ethical considerations regarding the collection of data from specific groups making data capture complex and costly (e.g., children and young people).