

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE

Family violence is any behaviour or act perpetrated against a family member that causes harm or distress and includes financial, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect.

Family violence encompasses other commonly used terms such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence and elder abuse. While anyone can be affected by family violence, it is predominantly, but not exclusively, perpetrated by men against women and children. It is considered a major safety, health and wellbeing issue with the impacts on victim-survivors including death, serious injury, disability, complications during pregnancy and birth and mental health issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significant implications for those experiencing or at risk of family violence. Evidence suggests that movement restrictions and stay-at-home measures are placing additional pressures on families and reduce victims' ability to seek help. A recent survey of 166 family violence practitioners suggests an increase in both the incidence and severity of family violence in Victoria during the pandemic. Most respondents (59 per cent) reported that the pandemic had increased the frequency of violence against women, while half (50 per cent) reported an increase in the severity of violence. Alarming, the number of first-time family violence reports had increased to 42 per cent of practitioners surveyed.

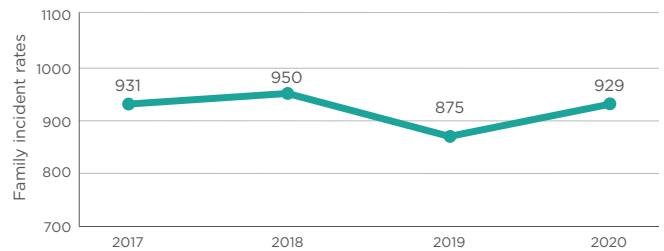
How are we tracking?



Family violence incident rate

From 2016-17 to 2019-20, family violence incident rates within City of Melbourne have fluctuated between approximately 875 and 950 cases per 100,000 population. It is a concern that the most recent data indicates that the rate of reported family violence incidents are at 929 cases per 100,000 residents, a 5.8 per cent increase from the previous year. As a key health and wellbeing issue for all levels of government, ongoing investment and work is needed to reduce rates of family violence in the community.

While the family violence incident rate has remained relatively steady in recent years, these do not account for potential increases in family violence due to COVID-19, with reports of domestic violence services experiencing surges in demand. This is reflective of experiences internationally, with some jurisdictions noting unexpected growth in domestic violence incidents.



Key

City of Melbourne

Figure 1. Family incident rate in the City of Melbourne, 2016-17 to 2019-20

Source: Crime Statistics Agency

Demographic characteristics of affected family members and other parties

Victorian data shows that women are disproportionately victim-survivors compared to men. From March 2019 to March 2020, three quarters of recorded affected family members were female, with the remaining quarter men. Conversely, men made up three-quarters of reported accused perpetrators.

It is important to note however, that family violence can be experienced by anyone and in any kind of relationship. This includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people, older people, people with disability, Aboriginal people, children and young people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In addition to the gendered drivers of family violence, additional drivers include structural inequality and discrimination including colonisation, historical trauma, racism, ageism, geographic location and homo, trans and biphobia. Different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation, which can amplify barriers to reporting violence or seeking support when experiencing violence.



LGBTIQ

Rates of intimate partner violence in the LGBTIQ+ communities is equal to, or higher than, the general population.

1 in 3 LGBTIQ+ Australians report having been in a relationship where their partner was abusive.

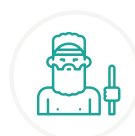
Rates of sexual and physical abuse are higher for trans and gender diverse males (62 per cent), and females with intersex variations (43 per cent).



Older people

Family violence perpetrated against older people is referred to as elder abuse. Based on international data, it is estimated that up 14 per cent of older people experience elder abuse.

In Victoria, over 90 per cent of perpetrators of elder abuse are relatives – a child, grandchild, sibling, partner or other close relative.



Aboriginal communities

Aboriginal women in Victoria are 45 times more likely to experience family violence than non-Aboriginal women.

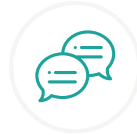
Experiences of family violence in Aboriginal communities are deeply rooted in the complex history of colonisation and the violent dispossession of land, culture and children and the intergenerational trauma this has caused.



Children and young people

Family violence also includes behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear, witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of violence. It is estimated that 1 in 6 women and 1 in 9 men experience physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15.

Resulting trauma from directly experiencing or witness family violence can affect children's behaviour, cognitive development and emotional and psychological wellbeing.



People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

While there is limited data on their experiences of family violence, research suggests that people from diverse and culturally linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are at greater risk of family violence. Recent arrivals, refugee and immigrant women are particularly vulnerable due to language and cultural barriers disclosing violence, and identifying and accessing supports. Victim-survivors whose visa status is linked to their partner may also be less likely to seek help.



People with disability

People with disability are 1.7 times more likely to have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a partner, compared with people without disability. 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men with disability have experienced emotional abuse from a partner.



How is the City of Melbourne responding?

- ▶ The **City of Melbourne Gender equality statement of commitment** outlines the goal of eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls and persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in public and private spaces.
- ▶ In May and June 2020, the City of Melbourne, in partnership with Women's Health West, offered targeted support for women and children experiencing or at risk of family violence during the physical distancing and lockdown measures.