



## Women are more likely to be the victims of domestic violence

**More than 1 in 4 (27%) of women have experienced violence, emotional abuse, or economic abuse by a cohabiting partner since the age of 15** <sup>1</sup>

- Nearly 1 in 4 (27%) women experienced partner emotional abuse;
- More than 1 in 6 (17%) experienced partner violence (physical and/or sexual);
- 1 in 6 (16%) experienced partner economic abuse. <sup>2</sup>
- A national survey of domestic violence service providers in 2020 found even more clients sought their services during the COVID-19 pandemic. <sup>3</sup>

## We have the solutions, we need to invest in them

Life Course Centre researchers highlight the need for systemic, institutional change to address lingering gender inequalities (causes), rather than only focusing on perpetrators and victims after an incident (symptoms). In Australia, institutionalised gender divisions of labour in the home and at work continue to disadvantage women. <sup>4</sup>

**We can ensure that poverty is not the inevitable outcome of violence. Anti-Poverty Week says the keys to unlocking poverty for women and their children leaving violence are adequate income support above the poverty line and safe and affordable housing.**

We have heard from the testimonies of women provided for the **550 Reasons to Smile** campaign initiated by Single Mother Families Australia of how the full Coronavirus Supplement of \$550 per fortnight provided to DSS working age payments in 2020 literally transformed their lives. For some, it meant having enough to leave a situation of violence.

“**The supplement has been life-giving. I left family violence 6 years ago and rebuilding after this has been a long struggle. This supplement has sped that up. And it's meant seeing my kids have the things they need (very little support from their father). The result - a brighter future of continuing health... and more possibilities in regard to work and creating long term self-sufficient security.**” <sup>5</sup>

- The full Coronavirus Supplement meant poverty rates for sole parent families reduced from 39% to 17% according to ANU research commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Social Ventures Australia. <sup>6</sup>
- ACOSS is calling for payments to be increased to at least the current pension rate and to add supplements for single parents and people with disability. <sup>7</sup>
- Single Mother Families Australia has called for an upfront payment of at least \$6000 for women seeing income support after leaving violence; for the removal of any waiting periods for assistance and returning Parenting Payment Single to pension levels.” <sup>8</sup>
- A July 2021 report for the Everybody's Home campaign found a Federal Government investment of \$7.6B would build 16,800 additional social housing units provide immediate economic benefits of \$15.3 billion and create 47,000 new jobs. <sup>9</sup>
- The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, correctly states “women and children should not face poverty and exclusion when leaving violence” but beyond reviewing JobSeeker in each Budget there is no commitment to increase income support for women leaving violence. <sup>10</sup>



## Evidence shows violence increases financial hardship

The Life Course Centre undertook analysis in 2021 for Anti-Poverty Week which shows the direct association between an experience of violence or abuse and a subsequent experience of financial hardship.

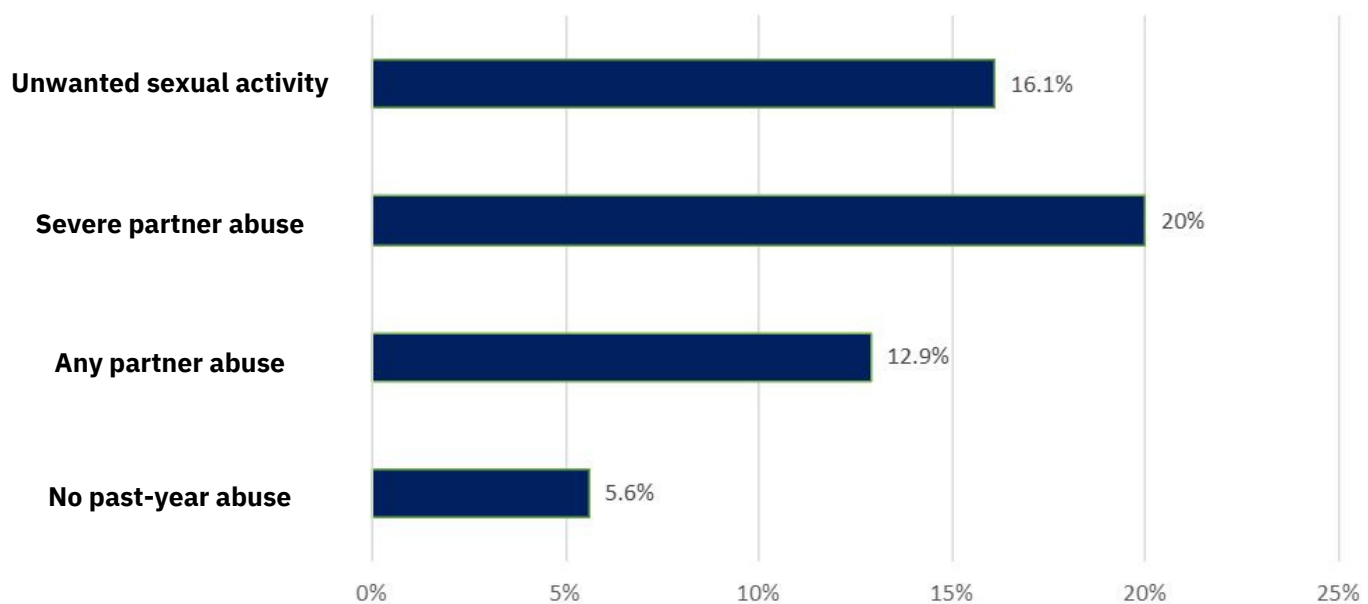
**Looking at young women aged 20-28 they found:**



1 in 5 experienced financial hardship in 2017 if they had been the victim of severe partner abuse in past year. This was more than triple the rate of financial hardship experienced by women who had not been the victims of severe partner abuse in 2016. (20% vs 5.6%).<sup>11</sup>

Financial hardship was experienced by around 13% of women who had been the victim of any partner abuse in the past year and 16% for those who had been the victim of unwanted sexual activity in 2016, compared with 5.6% of women who had not been victims of abuse or unwanted sexual activity.<sup>11</sup>

### Rates of moving into financial hardship amongst young Australian women by past-year abuse



The Life Course Centre analysis also shows in 2019 over 60,000 women aged 15-24 years experienced moderate-to-very high levels of financial hardship AND violence in the past year and that women are 3 times more likely than men to have experienced this.<sup>12</sup>

## Living in poverty can increase the risk of violence

Violence impacts women in all communities and across all income levels but women on low incomes are more likely to be affected. Our Watch lists **socio-economic inequality** and **discrimination** as 1 of the 5 contributors to making violence worse.

**When women have lower social or economic status and power, or they are treated as less worthy of respect, they are more likely to experience violence.**<sup>13</sup>



# FAST FACTS

## Women, Violence and Poverty



- Research from the Life Course Centre found young Australian women (aged 21-28 years) in financial hardship are more than 3 times as likely to report being the victim of past-year severe partner abuse: 9.3% compared with 2.9% for those not experiencing financial hardship. The rates were also around double for any partner abuse or unwanted sexual activity. <sup>14</sup>
- Rates of violence are higher for groups that face multiple forms of discrimination, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, older women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including women on temporary visas, and those in the LGBTIQ+ community. Women from refugee backgrounds are particularly at risk of financial abuse and reproductive coercion. <sup>15</sup>

### ...and poverty can deter women from leaving

#### Low-income women are often deterred from leaving simply because they don't have the money.

- Australian Women Against Violence Alliance and the ACTU have estimated that, on average, it costs \$18,000 for a victim/survivor to leave a violent relationship and establish safety. This includes costs associated with reallocation, safety upgrades and legal and medical costs. <sup>16 + 17</sup>

**Lack of money is also a powerful factor in perpetuating violence –around 1 in 5 women returned to violent partners because they had no financial support, or nowhere else to go.** <sup>18</sup>

## What are some of the reasons for increased poverty after abuse?

### Women often leave with little or no money and even debt

Women often leave a relationship with very little and many have to surrender their home, the majority of their personal belongings, and financial savings when they leave the abusive relationship.

- Women who leave are likely to go into debt, either from the cost of leaving or to financial abuse from the perpetrator who may have access to their accounts. <sup>19</sup>
- As one mother noted “I value my life more than anything. He made it clear he would kill me if I tried to apply for a property settlement.” This is consistent with the findings of a study which identified that women were much less likely to gain any financial settlement from the partnership where violence had been a factor. <sup>20</sup>



Financial abuse is far too prevalent in Australia with 1 in 6 women experiencing partner economic abuse. <sup>21</sup>

**“ Women who have lived with a violent partner are more likely than other women to experience financial difficulty, and many women experience poverty as a result of family violence... A range of factors can exacerbate victims' experience of financial insecurity—among them difficulty obtaining child support payments, tenancy problems, a lack of control over household finances, and credit, utility and car-related debt incurred by the perpetrator. ”**

- The Victorian Royal Commission into Domestic Violence <sup>22</sup>



## Income support for women leaving violence is inadequate

**“Poverty is a key factor in prohibiting recovery from violence, and that our current social safety net, child support arrangements and even the family court are at times, however unintentionally, facilitating this.”**

- Council for Single Mothers and their Children <sup>23</sup>

**When women leave violence they need to recover from trauma, find housing and stabilise their children. During this time they often need to rely on income support payments which are below the poverty line.**

- Anti-Poverty Week welcomes the 2023 Federal Budget decision to increase the eligibility for Parenting Payment Single from the youngest child turning 8 to 14. However, these payments are still inadequate. In 2019-20, ACOSS/UNSW found 72% of Parenting Payment Single recipients were at risk of living in poverty. <sup>24</sup>

**Anti-Poverty Week analysis finds that while 80% of all Australian single parent families are female, more than 95% of the poorest single-parent families, those who rely on Parenting Payment Single, are headed by women. <sup>25</sup>**

- The 2020 report of the HILDA Survey found “single-parent families have, since 2010, had the highest poverty rate of all the family types” and “that between 2016 and 2018 poverty among single-parent families increased from 15% to 25%.” <sup>26</sup>
- 2022 analysis of HILDA found single parents were twice as likely to be caring for a child with disability– 16% compared with 8% of partnered parents. <sup>27</sup>
- The Melbourne Institute survey Taking the Pulse September 2022 confirmed that among single-parent households with children....almost 64% have sought out cheaper food options, compared with 56% of all Australians. <sup>28</sup>
- In Anti-Poverty Week 2022, our partners the Life Course Centre found the risk of financial hardship for single mothers is at least double that of partnered mothers. This has been the case for the past 20 years. The proportion of single mothers in financial hardship has not dropped below approximately 30% in the past 10 years, (2010-2020), except for a brief period when the Coronavirus Supplement was paid. <sup>29</sup>

A 2018 report on social security and family violence from Economic Justice Australia found **“many clients reported a sense of the social security system having failed them when they most needed support”**. <sup>30</sup>

## Child support needs reform and non-compliance is far too high

- While the original child support scheme was designed to work in the best interest of the child, subsequent reforms have eroded its benefits.
- The Department of Social Services estimates at least \$1.8B is owed in outstanding child support debts, excluding debt in private collect arrangements or debts that have been written off. <sup>31</sup>
- Single Mother Families Australia and Anti-Poverty Week have called for an independent inquiry into child support compliance. <sup>32</sup>



## Pathways out of poverty - study, training, jobs - are impeded by long-term impacts of violence

- The Victorian Royal Commission into Domestic Violence concluded that “The trauma of family violence can result in poor mental and physical health outcomes, increased risk of clinically-significant depression and anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of self-confidence, isolation and, for some, the misuse of alcohol and drugs.” <sup>33</sup>
- Six diseases were causally linked to exposure to partner violence: depressive disorders; anxiety disorders; alcohol use disorders; early pregnancy loss; homicide and violence (injuries due to violence); and suicide and self-inflicted injuries.
- Domestic violence is also associated with controlling behaviour which may include restricting women from leaving the home to attend education or training classes or participating in employment. This in turn leads to lower self-confidence and self-esteem, further inhibiting employability skills and pathways out of poverty from employment.
- Domestic violence can lead to a family moving home, and losing not only social supports, but also networks that lead to employment. It can also lead to a loss of job opportunities due to the need to move to cheaper housing.
- Only 50% of mothers were working at the time the violence took place and only 40% post-separation according to analysis undertaken by Dr Anne Summers for her report The choice: violence or poverty, 7/7/22. She found that post-separation, although 60% were employed, 50% relied on government benefits as their main source of income and 82% received government payments for at least part of their weekly income. <sup>35</sup>

## Affordable housing is too hard to find

**The Federal Government has recently committed to new resources for social housing which is welcome, but while the housing crisis continues to drive increased homelessness, a significant funding boost is needed to cope with this unprecedented surge in demand. Australia has the means to end homelessness, we just need the will.**

Kate Colvin, CEO, Homelessness Australia <sup>36</sup>

**Family and domestic violence should never end in homelessness, yet it is the main reason women and children leave their home.** <sup>38</sup>

*Overstretched and overwhelmed: the strain on homelessness services* report released by Homelessness Australia in August 2023 found:

- Between April 2020 and March 2023 rents rose by 40% by early 2023 vacancy rates were at a record 1% low.
- Homelessness services are unable to meet surging demand for homelessness support and,
- in 2021-22, 80% of those turned away were women and children, and 31% were under 18.
- The number of people using a homelessness service increased by 7.5 per cent between December 2022 and March 2023. Three in four people using homelessness services in March 2023 were women or children. <sup>37</sup>

**You would think that if you flee family violence, there would be a refuge place and safe accommodation you can afford – the reality is much bleaker. Refuges are mostly full. Women have to delay leaving refuge as they can't find housing so the next woman coming into refuge can't get a place.** <sup>39</sup>



**The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032, released in October 2022 recognises the importance of housing to women and children leaving or attempting to leave violence yet no new funds were committed in the First Action Plan released in August 2023. <sup>40</sup>**

The July 2021 report by Equity Economics for the Everybody's Home campaign, estimated that the lack of long-term social housing is leading to 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners and 9,120 women a year becoming homeless. <sup>41</sup>

“ The current response to family violence largely assumes that women will leave their home when family violence occurs. For those who must leave, homelessness and housing systems cannot guarantee a safe place to stay or a permanent home that is affordable. For those who remain at home, monitoring of the perpetrator is inadequate. ”

- The Victorian Royal Commission into Domestic Violence <sup>42</sup>

Produced by Anti-Poverty Week as part of its **Fast Facts** series. Data correct as of 11 September 2023

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2 in 5 Australians have experienced physical or sexual violence, 15/3/23.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2 in 5 Australians have experienced physical or sexual violence, 15/3/23.
3. National survey of 362 domestic family violence agencies and individuals by Queensland University of Technology Centre for Justice conducted from early June until the end of August 2020 which found 62% reported increases in the number of clients accessing their services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 67% reported new clients seeking their help for the first time during the pandemic. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/206624/>.
4. Life Course Centre submission (2020). Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, Australian Government, House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, July 2020.
5. Parents receiving the Coronavirus Supplement dreading cuts at the end of September, 9/9/21 and Results of September 2020 survey conducted by the National Council of Single Mothers & Their Children
6. Ben Phillips and Vivikth Narayanan, Financial Stress and Social Security Settings in Australia, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, April 2021.
7. Ben Phillips and Vivikth Narayanan, Financial Stress and Social Security Settings in Australia, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, April 2021.
8. ACOSS 2021-22 Federal Pre-Budget Submission, February 2021.
9. National Council for Single Mothers & their Children submission #397 to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Family Law System, January 2020. Note also Parenting Payments are higher than JobSeeker and also have a more generous income test so more earnings can be retained.
10. National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032
11. Life Course Centre, Understanding the links between violence, poverty and women, August 2021.
12. ibid
13. Our Watch - Doing nothing does harm
14. Life Course Centre, Understanding the links between violence, poverty and women, August 2021.
15. Multiple studies on domestic violence.
16. ACTU Media Release 28 July 2022, 10 days paid Family & Domestic Violence leave... union campaigning
17. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Report of Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, *Financial Support* 8.115, March 2021.
18. 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (2017) cited by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) in evidence to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.
19. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Report of Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, March 2021
20. Quote from her PhD research cited in Dr Elspeth McInnes, Poverty in Australian Society and the Relationship to Gender, 29/3/15. Australian Institute of Family Studies study by Sheehan & Smyth 2000.
21. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2 in 5 Australians have experienced physical or sexual violence, 15/3/23
22. Royal Commission into Family Violence, Summary and Recommendations, March 2016
23. Council for Single Mothers and Their Children submission 114 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence.
24. Davidson, P; Bradbury, B; and Wong, M (2023), Poverty in Australia 2023: Who is affected? Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report no. 20. Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW Sydney.
25. 2021 Census shows changing face of Australian families, 28/6/22: 1,068,268 lone-parent families, of which four out of every five (858,656) of those parents were female. DSS Demographics, September 2021: 234,967 Parenting Payment Single recipients, 223,784 or 95.2% of whom were female.
26. 2020 Hilda Survey, 19/11/20. It also found that using the Material deprivation measure, "Single-parent families have the highest rate of deprivation when comparing across family types" (over 20.6% deprived of 3 or more items in 2018 compared with 6.3% for all households.). When looking at persistent material deprivation (materially deprived in 2014 and 2018), single parents are also highest.
27. Professor Roger Wilkins, "The declining wellbeing of Single Parents in Australia in the 21st century", UNSW Seminar 10/5/22.
28. Melbourne Institute: Applied Economic & Social Research Taking the Pulse September 2022: Australians using various measures to deal with the rising cost of living.
29. Anti-Poverty Week, Still Too Much Child Poverty in the 'Lucky' Country, October 2022.
30. Economic Justice Australia, How well does Australia's social security system support victims of domestic and family violence?, 2018
31. Department of Social Services submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Nature and Extent of Poverty in Australia February 2023, submission #12.
32. National Council for Single Mothers and Their Children submission 141 to Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, Australian Government, House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs.
33. Royal Commission into Family Violence, Summary and Recommendations, March 2016.
34. AIHW 2020 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/health-impacts-family-domestic-and-sexual-violence>
35. The Choice: Violence or Poverty, Anne Summers 7/7/2022
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38. Equity Economics, Nowhere to Go, 12/7/21 plus AIHW "At 42% domestic violence is the major reason people present to specialist homelessness services in Australia."
39. Kate Colvin, Everybody's Home Spokesperson, cited in SMH, Government urged to build 17,000 homes for domestic violence victims to fix 'shocking' situation, 12/8/21.
39. National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-23, Oct 2022
40. Equity Economics, Nowhere to Go, 12/7/21.
41. Royal Commission into Family Violence, Summary and Recommendations, March 2016.