

## Women's Rights Fact Sheet

# » 5 minutes is all it takes To learn more about violence against women

**'Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.'**

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, 8 March 2007



The impacts of violence against women are felt by all Australians, directly or indirectly, through their families, communities and the broader social and economic landscape, and are a significant cost driver across different systems including homelessness, child protection, health and justice.

Violence against women can result in social, psychological, health and financial consequences that have profound impacts on the quality of life of people directly affected by it. For many the consequences of violence may be felt for many years and may require ongoing support. In addition to the direct effects on victims, their children, their families and friends, employers and co-workers, there are also significant flow-on effects that impact local communities and reach wider society. These effects may include direct or indirect economic costs such as the costs to the community of bringing perpetrators to justice; the costs

of medical treatment and support; the costs of housing services for victims; and productivity loss due to absence from work. However, given that a substantial proportion of violent incidents go unreported, it is difficult to measure the true extent of these impacts.

Specific forms of violence against women include but are not limited to: physical violence; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; verbal abuse and intimidation; economic and social deprivation; damage of personal property; and abuse of power. Violence against women and in particular domestic violence is the ongoing pattern of behaviour by one partner to control the other through fear, such as the use of violent and threatening behaviours, and occurs between people who are in, or have been in, an intimate relationship.

Behaviour associated with violence against women may range in intensity and frequency from relatively minor incidents to serious offences that may occur once or have a cumulative effect over the course of time.

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations (UN) in its *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* as:

*"any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life"*

The following is a list of potential violent acts and behaviours but is not an exhaustive list.

**Physical assault and abuse:** actual or threatened, causing pain, injury and/or fear that can be a single incident or a series of incidents that are located on a continuum of behaviours and can include:

- » direct assault on the body (strangulation, shaking, eye injuries, slapping, pushing, spitting, punching, or kicking)
- » actions leading to disablement or murder
- » use of weapons including objects
- » assault or neglect of children
- » sleep and food deprivation.

**Sexual assault and abuse:** can be actual or threatened, and can be a single incident or a series of incidents that are located on a continuum of behaviours from sexual harassment to life-threatening rape perpetrated by an

intimate partner, ex-partner or other known or unknown person. The following is a list of potential sexual assault and abuse acts but is not an exhaustive list:

- » rape
- » marital rape
- » indecent assault
- » any form of pressured and unwanted sex
- » any form of sexual degradation or humiliation
- » non-consensual sexual acts
- » causing pain during sex
- » assaulting genitals
- » forcing or coercing a person to have sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease
- » making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly (including taking explicit photos and or videos)
- » sexting and distributing digital images taken without consent
- » forced viewing of pornography
- » sexual harassment
- » stalking.

**Psychological abuse:** involving manipulative behaviour to coerce, control or harm and can include:

- » denying a person's reality
- » unfairly blaming a person for adverse events or making them feel they are a problem
- » constant comparisons with other people, which work to lower confidence and self-worth
- » driving dangerously with the intent to incite fear or cause harm to another person
- » making threats regarding custody of, or access to, any children
- » acts intended to control an individual
- » asserting that the police and justice system will not assist, support or believe the victim should they seek assistance or report abuse.

**For individuals in same-sex relationships:** abusive partners can rely on homophobia or heterosexism as a tool to control their partner. This type of abuse can involve 'outing' or threatening to 'out' their partner to friends, family, police, church or employer, telling their partner that:

- » they will lose custody of their children as a result of being 'outed'
- » the police or the justice system will not assist because the legal justice system is homophobic
- » the abusive behaviour is normal within gay relationships and convincing the abused partner that they do not understand lesbian or gay relationships and sexual practices because of heterosexism (Chan 2005).

**Emotional abuse** can include:

- » blaming a person for all of the problems in the

relationship

- » constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth
- » emotional blackmail.

**Verbal abuse:** actual or threatened, in private or in public (including through electronic means) and can include:

- » acts designed to humiliate, degrade, demean, intimidate, or subjugate
- » threat of physical violence
- » swearing and verbal attacks that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity.

**Economic abuse:** actual or threatened, including:

- » deprivation of basic necessities
- » seizure of income or assets
- » withholding or controlling, against a person's will, their access to money, food, clothes and personal items such as car keys, phone or personal identification documents, for example passports and birth certificates.
- » unreasonable denial of the means necessary for participation in social life
- » control of money or financial resources/information, including:
  - preventing access to bank accounts;
  - providing an inadequate 'allowance';
  - not allowing the victim to seek or hold employment; and
  - using all wages earned by the victim for household expenses.

**Social abuse:** actual or threatened, through forced isolation from family or friends and can include:

- » control of all social activity
- » deprivation of liberty
- » deliberate creation of unreasonable dependence
- » systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends to alienate them
- » instigating and controlling the move to a location where a person has no established social circle or employment opportunities
- » forbidding or physically preventing a person from leaving the home and meeting people.

**Property damage** actual or threatened, including:

- » damage to an individual's personal or shared property
- » damage to the property of children, friends and/or parents
- » violence towards pets.

**Harassment or stalking** actual or threatened, such as:

- » constant phone calls/texting to a workplace or home
- » repeated visits to a workplace or home

**“We all know in our heads and our hearts that every woman is entitled to a life free of violence. Let’s make that a reality”**

Nicole Kidman  
UNIFEM Goodwill Ambassador



- » bullying
- » monitoring and surveillance
- » cyber-stalking.

**Spiritual abuse** actual or threatened, denial and/or misuse of religious beliefs or practices to:

- » force victims into subordinate roles
- » misuse of religious or spiritual traditions to justify physical violence or other forms of abuse.

Violence against women is never caused, invited or deserved by the victim. Everyone has the right to live safe and free from violence, regardless of what they do or say.

Research and statistics tell us that the perpetrators of violence against women are mostly men. However, the majority of men are not violent towards women and find violence against women; against their daughters, against their mothers, against their sisters abhorrent. But one of the most significant barriers we have is that too often violent behaviour against women is met with silence by other men. This means every single man has an active role to play in stopping violence against women.

This fact sheet has been adapted from:

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Defining the Data Challenge for Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence, Australia 2013: A conceptual Data Framework*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.