



Women's Rights Fact Sheet

5 minutes is all it takes

To learn more about Women, Violence, Homelessness and Poverty

What are human rights?

Human rights are commonly understood as being rights that are essential to all human beings. The concept of human rights acknowledges that each individual is entitled to enjoy her or his rights without distinction as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. They protect individuals and groups against actions that interfere with their fundamental freedom and human dignity. Rights include: access to education, paid employment, health care, food and housing; the right to participate in culture and security of person.

Why do we need to talk about rights for women?

It is recognised by the United Nations and the broader international community that due to some social structures, traditions, stereotypes and attitudes about women and their role in society, that women experience disproportionate levels of discrimination and violence and do not always have the opportunity and ability to access and enforce their rights on the same basis as men.

What is a human rights treaty?

A human rights treaty can loosely be compared to a contract. It is an agreement which establishes international standards for the protection and promotion of human rights under international law and is entered into by countries. When a country signs up to a treaty they assume obligations to introduce those standards into domestic laws, policies and programs. The United Nations monitors the implementation of treaties and encourages governments to comply fully with treaty obligations. If a country fails to live up to their obligations they can be held liable under international law. A treaty may also be known as an international agreement, protocol, covenant or convention.

What is CEDAW?

CEDAW stands for *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* and is a human rights treaty which was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and came into force 3 September 1981. There are now 187 countries across the international community who are signatories to this treaty. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is responsible for monitoring the implementation of this treaty. 187 countries agree violence against women is preventable and is a global priority.

CEDAW specifically addresses the rights of women and girls including the right to vote and stand for election, equal rights to education and training, equal access to health care, equal rights around the rituals of marriage, reproductive rights, protection from discrimination in the workplace and equality before the law.

What CEDAW does not contain is an explicit reference to violence against women; however the CEDAW committee has issued a general recommendation which states that violence directed against a woman because, she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately is recognised and addressed as discrimination under CEDAW. It is recognised that when women experience violence, a range of their rights are violated.

The main purpose of CEDAW is to address the historical inaction of governments on issues important to women and establishes an agenda for action to end discrimination. Australia has signed *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) which means Australia is legally bound to put the provisions of this treaty into practice and incorporate it into Australian law.



www.thewomenscentre.org.au

nqcws@thewomenscentre.org.au

Violence Against Women

Violence against women is also referred to as gender-based violence and is a worldwide pandemic of devastating proportions. One out of every three women will experience some form of violence in their lifetime and one in five women will experience some form of sexual assault. Violence against women crosses all social, economic, cultural, religious, and political borders. Violence against women knows no geographical bounds; it is a problem in every country in the world.

It is one of the least visible but most common forms of violence, and one of the most insidious violations of human rights. It has serious impacts on the health and wellbeing of those affected, and exacts significant economic costs on communities and nations.

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” (UN 1993).

Violence against women is recognised by the UN as a violation of women's rights and a violation of their entitlement to freedom as a human being, with particular concern for equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity in political, economic, social, cultural and civil life (UN 1993).

If we look to domestic laws in the State of Queensland the Preamble of the Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012 clearly states:

“Living free from violence is a human right and fundamental social value” and that “domestic violence is a violation of human rights that is not acceptable in any community or culture and traditional or cultural practices can not be relied upon to minimise or excuse domestic violence.”

Specific forms of violence against women include but are not limited to:

- **physical abuse:** slapping, hitting, kicking, strangling, hair pulling, pushing and beating
- **sexual abuse:** rape and other forms of sexual coercion, unwanted sexual advances or harassment, forced prostitution and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation
- **emotional abuse:** name calling, playing mind games, intimidation, belittling, humiliation and put downs
- **economic abuse:** preventing a woman from getting and or keeping a job, controlling family finances, not providing her with enough money to pay for essentials such as food, clothing, medications and utilities bills
- **controlling behaviours:** isolating a woman from her family and friends, monitoring movements, or restricting access to information, assistance and other resources
- **intimidation:** smashing things, destroying property, abusing pets and displaying weapons.

There are negative health consequences as well as significant financial impacts for women who have experienced domestic and family violence which can continue to affect women for a considerable period of time. This places such women in a position of long-term economic vulnerability that can cast a shadow over the remainder of their lives.

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

“Gender based violence both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims. It encompasses a wide range of human rights violations ... Any one of these abuses can leave deep psychological scars, damage the health of women and girls in general, including their reproductive and sexual health, and in some instances, results in death.” The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2007



www.thewomenscentre.org.au

nqcws@thewomenscentre.org.au

Homelessness and Poverty

Women and children who experience domestic and family violence frequently lose a sense of having a 'home' even before the relationship ends. This is because women's sense of safety and belonging can be destroyed if they feel unsafe and are unable to conduct life normally at home. They may be unable to relax and invite friends and family around, carry out work or hobbies, go to bed at the time they want, cook the food they like, or have money to buy things for themselves and their home. Children can feel frightened and constrained; and may not receive the attention they need, or be able to have friends around to play or sleepover.

Domestic and family violence are the single largest drivers of homelessness in Australia and affect a diverse group of women and children. For the March 2012 quarter the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection results clearly showed domestic and family violence was the most common main reason women and children presented at specialist homelessness services seeking support.

Women often have a house but can't live there because it is not safe for them and their children.

Women and children who are subjected to domestic violence are vulnerable to homelessness in two ways: first, because violence disrupts and violates the sense of safety and belonging that is associated with the home and second, because when women and children make the decision to leave a family violence situation, they are usually required to leave their homes. Relationships with family and friends are often severed in the process, and women can face social isolation, emotional trauma and acute economic disadvantage.

When women are forced to leave their homes they inevitably become poorer and their housing conditions deteriorate as they struggle to access private rental accommodation or public housing where, in both cases, demand is far greater than available supply.

Therefore, it is important to highlight that violence is a strong push factor which significantly contributes to women and children becoming homeless and subsequently forced into poverty. Poverty has traditionally been defined as inadequate economic resources such as having enough money to pay for food, shelter, education and other basic necessities. However, poverty is also a state of having a lack of security, a limited range of available choices and not having a voice. It is not unusual for women to feel a sense of deep inner homelessness and develop feelings of not being worthy, feel like they are no longer valued and begin to believe they have no real control over their life and situation. Poverty disempowers and strips women of their dignity, liberty, security and freedom and a lack of resources can deny them the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty.

Not only can violence force women and children into poverty, poverty itself can make it harder for women to find avenues of escape from an abusive relationship. While economic independence does not shield women from violence, having access to economic resources can enhance women's capacity to make meaningful choices. A woman who is economically dependent on her partner may see no viable way of supporting herself and her children.

Violence against women is a human rights violation that devastates the lives of women and children and places them at risk of homelessness and poverty.

Fears of poverty and financial insecurity are pivotal in women's decision making about leaving an abusive relationship.



www.thewomenscentre.org.au

nqcws@thewomenscentre.org.au

Act or Do Nothing? What can you do? A lot actually.

Philanthropy, in the form of small acts of giving, can assist to provide the basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. By giving simple personal and household items you could be creating the opportunity for a women living below the poverty line to access education, find a job, keep her children at school, or see the world as a better place. We are not exaggerating when we say that your small donation could be the opportunity that changes someone's life.

- Donate money to The Women's Centre to enable important programs such as Playgroup to continue. \$20 pays for a fruit platter while \$100 covers the cost of our Early Childhood Worker for three hours. Donations can also support the costs of therapeutic group work for women who have experienced domestic and family violence.
- Put together care packs in bags for women and children and drop them off at The Women's Centre. Include good quality items such as bottles of shampoo and conditioner, soap, body wash, deodorant, face wipes, moisturiser, toothbrush and toothpaste, underwear, non-perishable food items, baby wipes, nappies and cuddly toys and activities for children.
- At the beginning of each school year purchase a back to school pack containing: pencils, rulers, and other appropriate stationery items and if you can include a gift card to assist with purchasing items like shoes, socks and school uniforms and drop it in to The Women's Centre.
- Donate boxes of nappies in all sizes.
- Donate gift vouchers and movie tickets to support our Christmas hamper and gift giving efforts this year.
- To end the silence about violence start conversations by learning three facts and then coming up with an opening question such as ... "Did you know that 1 in 3 women experience violence in their lifetime?" "Did you know domestic and family violence are the single largest drivers of homelessness in Australia?"
- Men can take a stand against violence and wear a white ribbon on November 25 as a personal pledge that demonstrates they do not excuse violence against women. Men can also visit the My Oath Campaign website and swear! (www.myoath.com.au)
- Talk about violence against women at work and find out if your work place has a Domestic Violence Policy? See Everyone's business: *A guide to developing workplace programs for the primary prevention of violence against women* for a policy template http://whv.org.au/static/files/assets/e58154fe/Everyones_Business_guide.pdf
- Contact The Women's Centre and ask for our one page Fact Sheet on **Thursdays in Black** a day where people around the world are invited to wear black as a symbol of strength and courage, representing our solidarity with victims of violence, and demanding a world without rape and violence. Thursdays in Black T-Shirts are available for sale.

Ending violence against women is part of the struggle to ensure safety and justice for all

References

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012. Specialist Homelessness Services Collection: March quarter 2012. Cat. no. HOU 265. Canberra: AIHW.

Campbell, R. (2011). *The Financial Cost of Domestic and Family Violence*. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse. Sydney: The University of New South Wales.

Evans I 2007, *Battle-scars: Long-term effects of prior domestic violence*, Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research, Monash University, Melbourne.

R Alexander, 'Women and domestic violence', in P Eastal, ed., *Women and the law in Australia*, Butterworths, Chatswood, N.S.W., 2010, p. 152, viewed 14 February 2011, <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fjmart%2F158210%22>

UNFPA (2007). "Ending Widespread Violence Against Women." <http://unfpa.org/gender/violence.htm>



www.thewomenscentre.org.au

nqcws@thewomenscentre.org.au