

Women's Rights Fact Sheet

» 5 minutes is all it takes

To learn more about women, violence, homelessness and poverty

When a woman is abused by her spouse, partner or other known or unknown person not only are her rights to life, liberty and security of person violated, but her rights to education and training, freedom of expression, freedom of movement and the right to participate freely in the cultural life of the community are often compromised or violated as well.

Violence against women can also be 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.ⁱ 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. *"Gender based violence both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women*

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.ⁱ

ⁱ United Nations. (1993). op cit.

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."ⁱⁱ

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"ⁱⁱⁱ.

Domestic and Family Violence is a crime and *The Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* (Qld) provides legal protection from violent relationships. The preamble 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

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

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations. (1993). *Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women*. New York: United Nations.

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006) Personal Safety Survey 2006.

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



- » **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 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^{iv}.

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.

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. The Specialist Homelessness Services Collection quarterly results consistently show domestic and family violence are the most common reason women and children present at specialist homelessness services seeking support^{vi}.

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 being forced into poverty and subsequently becoming homeless. 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 poverty and homelessness.

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

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

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

^{vi} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2013). *Specialist Homelessness Services Collection*. Canberra: Australian Government.