Domestic violence and family violence: Setting the context

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Patterns of violence are highly gendered – that has significant implications for theory, policy development and program delivery.
AIC Conference
Family Violence, Drug and Alcohol Use in Rural and Remote Communities

New data the Personal Safety Survey 2005 (ABS 2006)

Physical Assaults in the last 12 months
• 0.4 % of all males who were assaulted, were assaulted by a current or previous partner
• 31 % of females who were assaulted were assaulted by a current or previous partner

Physical Assaults since the age of 15 years
• Men were more likely to be assaulted by a male stranger (71% of those who were physically assaulted)
• Women were more likely to be assaulted by a male previous partner (44% of those who were physically assaulted)
Women’s reporting to the police

- Physical assaults by a male – reporting increased from 19% in 1996 to 36% in 2005
- Sexual assaults by a male – reporting increased from 15% in 1995 to 19% in 2005
Children witnessing physical assaults

• 49% of men and women who experience violence by a current partner had children in their care –

• 27% (60,700) of these said that children witnessed the violence
Sexual assault in the last 12 months

- 1.6% of women
- 0.6% of men

Sexual violence (assault & threat) since 15yrs

- 19% of women
- 5.5% of men
Child abuse and sexual assault

• Similar proportions of men (10%) and women (9.4%) had been physically abused before age 15 yrs

• 12% of women and 4.5% of men had been sexually abused before age 15
• We need to recognise the intersection of gender with other social categories and how this shapes women’s vulnerability to and experiences of violence.

• the risk of violence against women is not uniformly distributed

• women have differential access to social and legal resources with which to deal with that violence
Rural and remote area

- the prevalence of domestic violence and family violence in rural and remote areas is high.

- the rates of domestic homicides, that is, those committed by a current or former spouse or de facto of the victim, are substantially higher in rural areas

- rural communities are not homogeneous and that there are marked differences between and within rural communities. Women’s needs will differ.
Factors that compound difficulties for rural women who experience violence include:

- geographic isolation;
- the lack of public transport;
- the lack of crisis accommodation;
- the lack of financial support;
- the prevalence of guns;
Cont.
• a perception that violence must be physical;
• uninformed workers;
• the normalisation of violence;
• fears of breaches of confidentiality if violence is disclosed;
• complicated financial arrangements in farming families; and,
• a reluctance to leave the farming lifestyle.
Burden of Disease

Intimate partner violence has wide-ranging and persistent effects on women’s physical and mental health.

- It contributes 9 per cent to the total disease burden in Victorian women aged 15–44 and 3 per cent in all Victorian women.

- It is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44, being responsible for more of the disease burden than many well-known risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.

VicHealth (2004)
There is an emerging consensus that:

- It is a problem best addressed within a human rights, legal and health framework, through the development of multi-level strategies across sectors.

- Although its causes are complex, factors in our social, economic and cultural environments play a significant part. Addressing these factors can help to prevent the occurrence and consequences of intimate partner violence.

- Significant among these factors are the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women.
Some pressing issues:

• Putting *sexual assault* more firmly on the agenda as part of DV and FV
• **Access to justice**
• Thinking *cross-jurisdictionally* and across categories
• Co-ordinated responses *across traditional legal categories*
• **Beyond the short term**
• Engaging with *international* issues
• The *limits of the criminal law*