

**The Effectiveness of Legal Protection in the Prevention
of Domestic Violence Among Young Australian Women:
REPORT TO THE CRIMINOLOGY RESEARCH COUNCIL**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The main aim of this study is to inform policy and practice on the effectiveness of legal protection and other factors in preventing repeated violence to young women by their partners
- Women were selected for the study from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health. Potential participants were those women aged 18 to 23 years who in 1996 indicated they had ever been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse.
- A total of 1396 of these women were selected for interview and 674 (51%) were successfully interviewed using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) procedure in 1998.
- The interview was designed to allow women to provide detailed data through a series of closed-ended questions. These data included history of violence, nature of relationship, partner characteristics and help sought. Data were collected with respect to four reference time points: the time of interview, 3 months before interview, 6 months before interview, 12 months before interview.
- Of the women interviewed, 493 had been in physically violent relationships.
- Most young women had left the violent relationship. Only, 19% were in a violent relationship currently; the other 81% had separated from the violent partner.
- Of the 493 women who had been subject to physical violence by a male partner, 117 (24%) of the women were no longer in a current relationship of any type and 376 women were in a current relationship with a legal or defacto spouse or had a current boyfriend.
- In the year before the interview, 80 women had experienced violence by a current or ex-partner.
- Nearly half the women (45.4%) had been subject to serious violence within the most recent violent relationship. Three quarters of young women had been subject to violence at a 'medium' level of severity (kicked, bitten, slapped, hit with the fist, hit with something else that could hurt). Half of the women had been subject to serious violence (beaten, choked, attempted or threatened shooting). Only a small percentage (12%) of the young women had been subject to a single incident of minor violence (pushed, grabbed, shoved, something thrown at them that could hurt them).
- Injuries, which included bruising, were not uncommon - 72.4% of women suffered some sort of injury. Some young women suffered injuries such as broken or fractured bones, burns, broken teeth or miscarriages.
- Almost one-third (24%) of women interviewed had sought legal intervention in an attempt to stop physical violence by their partner.

- Women were most likely to contact police with or without simultaneous application for protection order. It was relatively rare for young women to only apply for a Protection Order. Overall, 48% women only contacted the police for help, 7% only applied for a Protection Order, 31% contacted police combined with seeking a Protection Order at the same time and the remaining 14% had sought help from both legal avenues sequentially, sometimes months later.
- Within the group of women who sought legal protection, there was a significant improvement after legal protection compared to the three-month period beforehand.
- There was a significant reduction in severity of violence after legal protection. There was no change in the level of violence for 63 (44.4%) of the 142 women who sought protection. The level of violence increased for 6 (4.2%) of the women, and decreased for the remaining 73 women (51.4%).
- Regardless of legal protection, violence had ceased in the last 12 months for most young women. There was no difference in cessation of violence between women without legal protection compared to those with legal protection, when all types of legal protection were taken together. There are two important factors to bear in mind when considering this overall result:
 - The relationship between legal protection and reduction of violence differed depending on the type of legal protection used. The benefit was greater if women sought an order than if women only contacted police. Violence ceased for more women, and was less severe in type for more women after they sought an order than after only contacting the police. There were more women who did not experience change in violence after police than after an order.
 - Women who sought legal protection may be distinct in important ways from those who did not. Women who sought legal help were more vulnerable in terms of the partner's behaviour or the relationship, rather than underlying socio-demographic differences. Women who sought legal help were more likely to have children. Their partners or ex-partners were more likely to have been violent in other situations or had been in trouble with the police in other ways. The women were more likely to have been subject to more severe types of violence, to have been injured and more seriously injured, and to have seen a nurse or doctor for their injuries. Women who didn't seek legal protection were more likely to be single and have never cohabited with the violent partner. Overall results above may reflect important differences in action and outcome for different subgroups in the community.
- There was a significant association between separation and repeated violence. Women who had separated from the violent partner were far less likely to indicate they had experienced repeated violence in the reference period compared to women who stayed with the violent partner. The association between separation and reduced likelihood of ongoing violence remained significant whether or not women had legal protection.

Note: The comparisons presented in this report have not been adjusted for underlying differences in severity of violence or other relationship or demographic characteristics between groups. Further analyses to adjust for these factors is presently underway.

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2. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a large national study on the history and pattern of violence over time in the lives of young women in Australia who experience physical violence by their partners, and their use of legal avenues to prevent repeated violence. In particular, the study is an examination of changes in violence following legal protection (reports to the police or court protection orders) compared to other strategies women use to prevent repeated violence. The young women in the study are women living in the community, rather than women in an experimental setting. The comparison group of women without legal protection comprises a large sample of young women drawn from the community who are living in a violent situation that is not identified through the usual sources.

Domestic violence is a criminal issue of public concern. It is only in the last 20 years that domestic violence has been addressed in our society (Smith, 1989) and in that time it has become apparent that this is a significant and widespread problem in Australia and overseas (ABS, 1996; Mirrlees-Black, 1995; Ferrante et al, 1996; Rodgers, 1994; Zamitz 1994; Roberts et al. 1993; Bates et al. 1994; Smith, 1989; O'Donnell & Craney, 1982; Okun, 1986; National Committee on Violence Against Women, 1993). Further, the physical and social implications of this problem are profound (Keys Young, 1998; Mazza et al, 1996; Taft and Head, 1995; Roberts et al, 1993; Bates et al, 1994; Bullock & McFarlane, 1989; Newberger et al 1992; Saunders, 1994; Dutton et al. 1993).

The first large scale national representative survey of the prevalence of violence experienced by women in Australia was published in 1996. The survey found that 23% of women who had ever been married or lived in a defacto relationship had experienced violence by their partner during the relationship and 3% of women in a current relationship had experienced violence by their partner in the last 12 months (ABS, 1996). Forty-eight percent of women subjected to violence by a partner had been injured as a result. Violence by a partner was particularly common for young women, whose risk of partner violence was 3-4 times higher than the risk for women overall. Limited data are available on violence by boyfriends where young women are likely to be disproportionately represented. These data show that injury by boyfriends is relatively high; 56% of women assaulted by a boyfriend were injured in the last incident, compared to 31% of women assaulted by married or defacto partners (ABS 1996). National studies overseas also report that domestic violence has its highest incidence among young women (Rodgers, 1994; Mirrlees-Black, 1995; Bachman and Saltzman, 1995). The literature indicates that violence mostly begins within the first few years of a relationship, the incidence is higher in the first few years and the first few years are reportedly the most critical for spouse killings (Rodgers, 1994; Matka, 1991; Wallace 1986). Pregnant women are also a group at high risk of violence from their partners, and the violence may begin during pregnancy (ABS, 1996; Rodgers, 1994; Gielen et al., 1994; McFarlane, 1993). Women in rural areas have also been reported to be at higher risk of violence (Yellowlees and Kaushik, 1992) and may have less opportunity to seek or obtain help.

Women who are assaulted by their partners use many strategies to try to deal with the situation - they call the police, they seek help from the courts, doctors and other health services, they discuss the problem with their family and friends, they leave their homes and they leave the violent relationships (Zamitz 1994, Egger and Stubbs 1993, Kantor and Straus 1990, Gelles and Cornell 1990, Pagelow 1981, Strube and Barbour 1983). Despite the prevalence and seriousness of violence as an issue for young women, there

are virtually no quantitative national data on the nature, course and consequences of violence experienced by young women, nor their use of legal protection or other courses of preventive action or factors which might predict their use of legal protection.

In Australia and overseas, women are encouraged to report partner violence to the police and these reports are increasingly common (Zamitz, 1994, Matka, 1991; Ferrante et al. 1996; Bonney and Kery, 1991). An alternative legal avenue available is a court protection order. In USA, Protective Orders appear less favoured by policy makers than police intervention and may even be conditional on separation from, and non-contact with, the offender (Stubbs, 1994; Sherman et al 1992; Trimboli and Bonney, 1997). In Australia, however, protection orders are available to anyone who fears future violence, regardless of their relationship with the person they fear (Model Domestic Violence Laws, 1997; National Committee on Violence, 1993; Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Egger and Stubbs, 1993; Ferrante et al. 1996). Protection Orders appear to be increasingly used in Australia and it has been suggested that women may be applying for orders more often than they report domestic violence to police (Ferrante et al, 1996; Egger and Stubbs, 1993).

Despite this situation, there are apparently no population data on use of protection orders, nor on the comparative benefits of protection orders versus reports to the police. There is also very little research which compares outcomes for women who do not seek legal intervention to those for women who do (Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Egger and Stubbs, 1993).

A few studies have assessed the outcome for women who use the courts, others have looked at police intervention, although, as mentioned, usually without a comparison group. Studies which have assessed the outcome for women who take out protection orders (Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Egger and Stubbs, 1993; Beilin 1983; Chaudhari and Daly, 1992; Fischer 1992) found a reduction in violence following the order. However, since they did not use a comparison group it is difficult to determine the extent to which this reduction can be attributed to the order. The literature indicates that violence may attenuate over time even without legal intervention. A longitudinal study in USA found that there was no recurrence of violence in the following year for a substantial proportion of abused married women (Feld and Straus, 1990). The proportion of women who were not assaulted in the follow-up year ranged from 33% to 58%, depending on the severity of the previous violence. Data from the 1978-1982 National Crime Surveys in USA were analysed to obtain estimates of recurrence of violence (Langan and Innes, 1986). Results showed that less than half the women who did not call the police (41% of married and 27% of separated or divorced women) were assaulted in a six month period after the 'initial assault' (this includes rape, robbery, simple assault and aggravated assault). However, crime surveys such as these have been criticized as poor sources of information about domestic violence (Johnson and Sacco, 1995; Ferrante et al, 1996; Mirrlees-Black, 1995; Bachman and Taylor, 1994), so those results should be considered with caution.

One study in the USA compared outcomes for women with protection orders to those for women without orders (Grau et al. 1985). This study found no significant difference in subsequent violence between the two groups. However, the comparison group was not representative of those women in the community who experience domestic violence but do not seek help. All the women in the study were participants in a special Family Violence program and nearly three-quarters of those with protection orders had obtained them as a result of their participation in this intervention program. The results, therefore, may not be generally applicable to women in the community, even in the United States. A telephone survey of clients by the San Francisco Cooperative Restraining Order Clinic

also found no difference between women who had obtained an Order with those who had not. However, several methodological problems have been identified in this study, including use of different definitions of outcome for the two groups (Trimboli and Bonney 1997).

Another study, also undertaken in USA, was a randomised controlled trial of mandatory arrest in cases of misdemeanor assaults (Sherman et al. 1992). This study showed that repeated violence was reduced if suspects were arrested, compared to on-site mediation by the police or enforced separation for eight hours. Replication trials have since reported complex findings, suggesting that "threat of arrest" may be more effective than arrest and that there may be interaction effects between different subgroups and different police responses (Sherman 1992; Gelles and Loseke 1993; Buzawa and Buzawa 1992; Dunford, Huizinga and Elliott 1990; Langan and Innes 1986). There are as yet no data to assess this strategy in the Australian setting. In any case, these experiments do not provide any information on cases that do not come to the attention of police. The experiments can provide data on differences in effectiveness of the police responses but not on whether calling the police was better than not calling them.

Much violence against women by their partners does not come to the attention of the police, courts or other authorities. This is a serious limitation to existing data on the effectiveness of protective strategies (Roberts et al. 1993; Egger and Stubbs, 1993). It is estimated that, in Australia, only 6% of women abused by their current partner (and 35% of women abused by a previous partner) reported the last incident to the police (ABS, 1996). There appear to be no data on the proportion of women who take out protection orders. Most women do not tell their doctor about the abuse and rates of detection by doctors appear to be very low (Roberts et al, 1993; Stark et al. 1981; Goldberg and Tomlanovich, 1984; Burris and Jaffe, 1984; Esteal, 1990). Even when women do report the violence to their general practitioner, they may not receive an appropriate and helpful response (Roberts et al. 1993; Plitcha, 1992; Taft and Head, 1995).

Similarly, other courses of action, such as separation, may not help women. Although there is evidence that domestic violence continues for years for many women (Smith, 1989; Saunders, 1994; Dutton et al, 1993) leaving the relationship may not necessarily achieve the best outcome for women. It has been reported that the most compelling reason that women stay in violent relationships is fear of the consequences if they leave (Matka 1991). Separated women do represent a high proportion of women seeking legal protection (Matka, 1991). Some studies have reported that separated women are at higher risk of partner violence, and are more likely to be subject to severe violence and injury, than women who stay in a relationship with a partner who is violent (Gelles and Cornell 1990, Rodgers 1994, ABS 1996, Bachman and Saltzman 1995. Wilson and Daly, 1993). In Australia, 51% of women assaulted by a man since 15 years of age (and 3% assaulted in the last 12 months) were assaulted by a previous partner, whereas 16% (and 2% respectively) were assaulted by a current partner (ABS 1996). Similarly, 65% of women assaulted by a previous partner were injured in the last incident, compared to 31% of women assaulted by a current partner (ABS 1996). From these findings, it has been argued that separation is associated with violence and separated women are at higher risk than women who are not separated. This may be misleading since it is not clear from these data what the causal relationship is – whether separation followed violence or vice versa. There is a little time-related population data available in the literature. These data suggest that violence is less common after separation and separation may be protective. A Canadian survey in 1993 found that violence occurred after separation for only 19% of separated women (Johnson and Sacco 1995). Violence only began after separation for 3% of women; it increased in severity for 7% of women (Rodgers 1994). Similarly, extrapolated data from the 1996 Australian Women's Safety

Survey indicate that violence occurred while the couple was separated for 16% of women with a violent previous partner (Trimboli and Bonney 1997). Overall, these limited data suggest that although separation is clearly a period of danger for some women, separation is less dangerous than staying in the relationship for most women. The research to date does not provide good comparative data on this action for young women. Furthermore, there are no population data in the literature on whether the outcome is modified if legal protection is combined with separation, compared to either action alone. Lack of comprehensive data impedes the development of evidence-based policy and practice in prevention of partner violence at an early stage. It is important to have data which reflect the population of abused women in the community upon which to base policy and planning for the better management, referral and secondary prevention. The study presented here attempts to fill many of these gaps in our understanding of domestic violence.

The main aim of this study is to inform policy and practice on the effectiveness of legal protection and other factors in preventing repeated violence to young women by their partners. The primary focus of the study is physical rather than emotional or psychological abuse. The study involves a large national community-based sample of women aged 18-23 years who reported in an omnibus style survey (conducted in 1996) they had experienced violence by a partner at some time. Importantly, women living in rural and remote areas are well represented in this sample.

The objective of this research is to describe factors associated with relationship violence in the lives of young women, the course of violence over time and the actions taken by these women. The study focuses on the women's use of legal protection to prevent repeated violence and the outcome of this action in terms of changes in the violence they experience. The comparative outcomes for women who do not seek legal protection will provide stronger evidence of a causal relationship between legal protection and subsequent outcome than previous studies on legal protection alone.

3. STUDY HYPOTHESES

Among women in Australia aged between 20 and 25 years in 1998 who have been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse,

1. The use of legal protection is related to the severity level of violence experienced and demographic and relationship factors.
2. There is a reduction in repeated violence towards women who seek legal protection (police or court protection order) compared to women who do not.
3. The association between legal protection and reduction of violence differs depending on the type of legal protection used.
4. There is a difference in repeated violence when women use a combination of separation and legal protection compared to separation alone.
5. Separation from the violent partner is associated with repeated violence.

4. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

1. Physical violence

Physical assault or physical force intending to hurt, measured operationally using items based on items J3-J13 from the 1993 Canadian Violence Against Women Survey (Statistics Canada, 1993). The definition in the current study excludes emotional or sexual abuse.

2. Severity Level of Violence

Defined in accordance with the three groupings used in the 1993 Canadian survey. For legal reasons, being shot or being stabbed were asked as general questions but not in relation to a specific partner.

Level 1 includes

- 'thrown anything at you that could hurt you'
- 'pushed, grabbed or shoved you in a way that could hurt you'

Level 2 includes

- 'slapped you'
- 'kicked you, bitten you or hit you with his fist'
- 'hit you with something else that could hurt you'

Level 3 includes

- 'beaten you up'
- 'choked you or tried to choke you'
- 'threatened or tried to shoot you'

3. Threats

Includes threats of violence and other forms of intimidation, harassment and stalking behaviour. Items are compiled from the 1993 Canadian survey, 1996 Australian survey, Pitzner and Drummond, 1996; Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Kelsey Hegarty, 1997 personal communication.

4. Injury

Types of injuries as specified in 1996 Australian Womens Safety Survey. Burns were added as an injury type. Penetrative injury/stab/gunshot wound were not specifically mentioned for legal reasons. Minor injury includes bruising, scratches and cuts. Serious injury includes broken teeth, broken or fractured bones, burns or miscarriage.

5. Partner and ex partner

Person in an emotionally intimate relationship including legal marriage, defacto relationship or boyfriend. If there had been more than one violent partner, the most recent violent partner was identified as the subject.

6. Legal Protection

Types of legal protection - Woman applied for a protection order, woman contacted police, someone else contacted police, police applied for a protection order on behalf of the woman (if the police were contacted).

Data were also collected on attendance at the court hearing, protection order granted, breach, arrest.

5. STUDY METHODS

The study involved a structured questionnaire administered using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) procedure. The interview was designed to collect a large amount of quantitative data on relationship and demographic characteristics, characteristics of violence and injury, characteristics of violent partner or ex partner, legal and other help sought, and further details of the legal pathway, if applicable. For women who had sought legal protection from the police or courts, the severity and frequency of violence in the period following the (most recent) legal action were compared with the period prior to taking this action. Women who did not seek protection orders or police assistance provided a comparison group to allow the effectiveness of legal protection to be assessed in terms of changes in violence over time.

5.1. The Sample

The sample for the study was drawn from the youngest cohort of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH). The ALSWH is a national study of three cohorts of women – young women aged 18-23 years, mid-aged women aged 45-50 years, and older women aged 70-75 years at the time of baseline data collection in 1996. The study aims to examine the biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors that affect the physical and mental well-being of women in Australia.

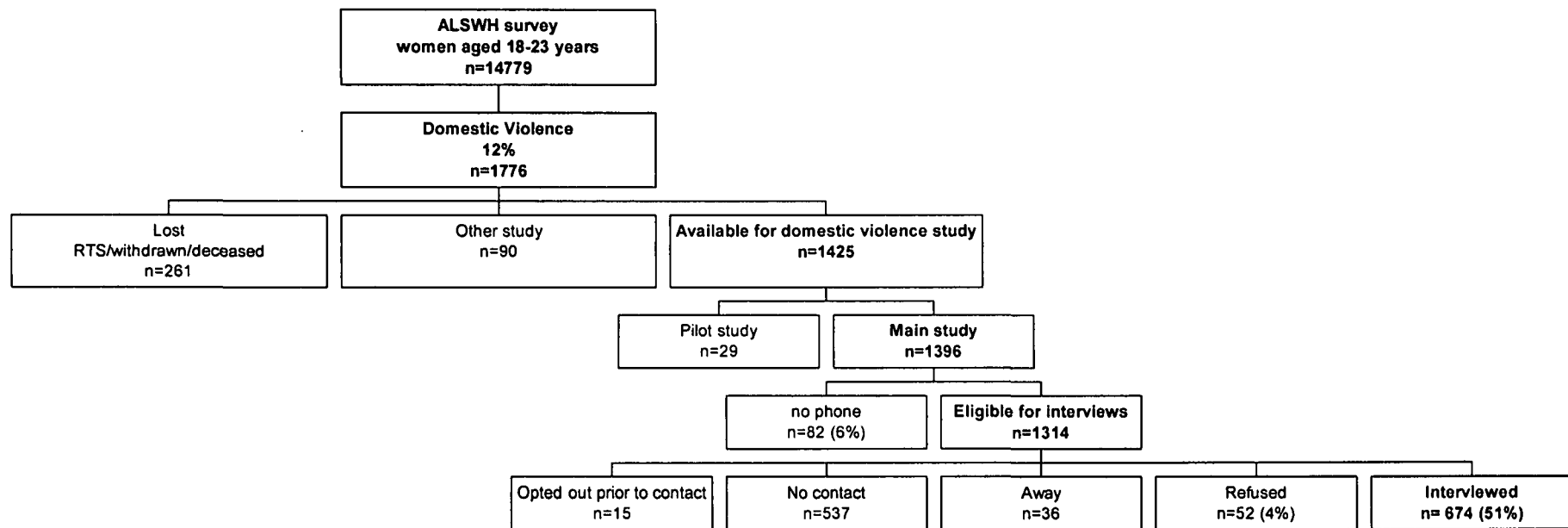
The ALSWH cohorts were recruited using the Health Insurance Commission (Medicare) data-base as the sampling frame. Women in the three age groups were randomly selected from all parts of Australia. Women in rural and remote areas were selected in twice the proportions of the populations living in these areas to compensate for the smaller populations. A total of 14,779 women in the young cohort (41% of the sample) completed the baseline questionnaire, which was a postal self report survey, and agreed to be contacted for future surveys as part of the longitudinal study.

Women who did not respond to the mailout of the baseline survey could not be personally contacted. Statutory restrictions on the use of the Medicare data-base required that the identity of the selected women remains unknown to researchers unless women responded and agreed to participate.

Comparison with the 1996 Census indicates that the study participants were broadly representative of the national population of women in this age group in terms of their demographic characteristics (see Appendix 1).

A total of 1776 young women answered "yes" to the question in the ALSWH baseline survey: "Have you ever been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse?" Of these women, 351 could not be included in the sample for interview in the current study - 261 had been lost to follow-up or withdrawn from the ALSWH study prior to sample selection, and another 90 women were ineligible as they had been randomly selected for inclusion in another study (unrelated to violence). Twenty-nine women from the remaining 1425 women were interviewed in the pilot study and hence excluded from the main interview study (see below). The sample for interview in the main study comprised the remaining 1396 women (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Contact and Participation



5.2. Recruitment for Interview

A letter informing women of the study was sent to all 1396 eligible women. The letter was general in content in case another person read it (see Appendix 2). A freecall telephone number was provided in the letter for the women to ring for additional information or if they wished to opt out of the telephone interview. Women who had no contact telephone number recorded were sent another letter about the study and asking them to call the freecall number to arrange a convenient time and contact telephone number for an interview.

Routine tracing procedures were applied in those cases where the letter was returned to the study office. These procedures include telephoning the woman on her last recorded contact telephone number and any secondary numbers provided to the study office. Where this contact attempt was unsuccessful the electronic telephone white pages were searched to locate women with the same name and general area of residence. All these people were contacted in attempt to locate the participant.

Unless the woman had notified the study team by post or telephone of her intention to opt out of the study she was telephoned by trained interviewers. Interviewers were provided with all telephone numbers recorded for the woman on the ALSWH study database (home, business, mobile phone) and instructed to attempt all numbers listed if the woman could not be located on her home number. Up to ten contact attempts were made for each woman in the sample. Attempts to contact women were distributed over a range of days and times, including weekdays, weekends, days and evenings. The interviewer recorded any new contact details on the database if the woman had moved and the household was able to give details of where she could now be contacted.

5.3. The Interview

The interview schedule was developed by Margrette Young. The schedule and the interviewing process were based on previous published research (Johnson and Sacco, 1995; Ferrante et al, 1993; ABS, 1996; Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Straus and Gelles, 1990) and on information generously provided by other researchers specifically for the development of this study. These researchers provided information on issues, experiences and solutions which arose in previous surveys on domestic violence in Canada and Australia (personal communication with Holly Johnson, Julie Stubbs, Frank Morgan, Robyn Waddington, Maelisa McNeil, Roseanne Bonney, Lily Trimboli, Don Weatherburn, Lucy Bates, Kelsey Hegarty).

The current study was carried out in the context of previous disclosure of a violent relationship in the 1996 ALSWH study, and consent for ongoing contact for follow-up studies. This context in itself meant that the survey was less intrusive than random digit dialling. The survey process was guided by principles of the safety and well-being of women being interviewed. The design of the interview and the training of the interviewers were aimed at encouraging candid responses to the questions and reducing the risk of emotional distress. As stated by the Canadian researchers, "these issues were not only important from an ethical point of view, but also with regard to collecting reliable information (Johnson and Sacco, 1995). The interview schedule was developed to be sensitive to constraints which may apply when surveying women about violence in a household setting and the possibility that the abusive man may be living there or that children may be present when the woman is telephoned. Women being interviewed were

given choice, control and information. As well as choice about participation or not, choice of the extent of participation was built into the design of the interview schedule. Progress checks were included in the schedule at various points to check if a woman wanted to continue. Women were advised that the interview was completely voluntary, that they could stop at any time if they wished to stop, that they didn't have answer any particular question if they didn't want to answer and that there were no right or wrong answers. Participants were not compelled to disclose information to any question.

Adopting methods from the 1993 Canadian CATI model, the interview was designed to allow women to provide detailed data through a series of closed-ended questions. Most questions required only a "yes" or "no" answer or a number. Women were not asked to describe or rank the violence. Participants were not compelled to disclose information to any question - "Don't know" and "refused" were acceptable answers.

At the outset of the interview, each woman was given a freecall number that she could call later if she was interrupted or had to hang up for any reason. The interview schedule included sets of lead-in questions to orient women and provide time for some familiarity and rapport to develop between the interviewer and the woman before the questions about violence. The interview schedule was organized into well-defined sections with an introduction preceding the questions. The introductions were direct statements regarding the content of the coming section and explained why the woman's participation was valuable but allowed her to opt out. The order of the sections was such that women were progressively introduced to more sensitive issues. This approach reduced the element of surprise. General questions about relationships were asked first; these were non-threatening and also established reference data on current relationship status, relationship duration etc. Questions about public safety followed. Questions about threats preceded questions about physical violence.

Eight questions were used to measure physical violence by an intimate male partner, based on the 1993 Canadian Violence Against Women survey. The Canadian survey was based on the Conflict Tactics Scale, but modified in important respects (Johnson and Sacco, 1995; Straus, 1990). The current interview schedule used modifications adopted in the Canadian model; for example, "that could hurt you" was added to relevant questions (Johnson and Sacco, 1995). The question on sexual assault was not included in the current study and the question on threats to hit was included in the lead-up questions (rather than those quantified as physical violence). The question on shooting was limited to "threatened or tried to shoot", rather than "threatened to or used a gun or knife" (as in the Canadian survey). Shootings or stabbings were not mentioned in reference to a specific partner for legal reasons.

Questions on violence commenced with more minor acts such as 'pushing'. Women experiencing more serious violence, such as being beaten or choked, have probably also been subject to less serious acts such as pushing and hitting (Straus and Gelles, 1990). Therefore it is unlikely that a woman subject to more serious assault would answer "No" to these questions. Respondents who didn't disclose any incidents of abuse in the first set of two questions (Level 1) were asked "has he been violent towards you or physically hurt you in any other way?" Women who responded that there was no abuse in any other way did not proceed to the specific questions on more severe types of violence. The same process followed the set of three Level 2 questions. This method avoided asking a series of questions describing increasingly severe forms of violence that were not relevant to the woman's experience.

Data were collected on:

- history of current relationship; history of past relationships; partner characteristics;
- the frequency and severity of violence and injury over three time periods (3 months immediately before to the interview, three- six months before the interview, and the last 12 months);
- violence during separation, pregnancy, co-habitation
- whether legal protection was sought (and if so when) and type of legal protection;
- violence and/or harassment after seeking legal protection;
- severity and frequency of violence and/or harassment in the three months after seeking legal protection
- presence, frequency and severity of violence and/or harassment in the three months before seeking legal protection;
- where relevant, attendance at hearings, granting of Orders, breaches, arrests and legal help sought by perpetrator;
- other actions taken or help sought; socio-demographic and health information.

The interviews were conducted by New South Wales Health Survey Programs, NSW Health Department. This survey agency was chosen in view of the corporate experience conducting telephone interviews on sensitive health-related topics. NSW Health Survey Programs signed a confidentiality contract that covered any and all information and material pertaining to this survey. Margrette Young liaised with NSW Health Survey Programs staff on behalf of the research team to develop and pilot test the CATI program, train interviews and monitor interviewing progress.

Development of the CATI program instructions was guided by awareness that an interview which is insensitive to earlier responses can give a respondent the impression that her answers have fallen on deaf ears. Care was taken to minimise this problem. Pre-programming instructions were incorporated into the interview schedule so that automatic review of answers guided the schedule and questions were consistent with a woman's previous answers. In this way, women were asked questions that were relevant to their different circumstances. Programming of the CATI instructions was complex since the data being collected were extensive and we were at pains to ease respondent burden. The staff and management at NSW Health Survey Programs were instrumental in helping to design a sensitive interview schedule.

5.4. Selection and training of Interviewers

All interviewers were women because of the nature of the subject. They were selected by the manager of NSW Health Survey Programs from existing members of the interview team. They were selected on the basis of their previous interviewing experience, demonstrated ability to interview on sensitive topics, their communication skills and their ability to handle target groups who were difficult to interview. They came from a broad range of work, educational and cultural backgrounds and a range of ages was represented. Interviewers were paid by the hour, not by the interview. All interviewers had been trained in standard interviewing techniques. Potential interviewers selected for this study were provided with an additional half-day session specifically on domestic violence to increase their knowledge of, and sensitivity about, domestic violence issues and the situations, difficulties and attitudes women in these circumstances might face. The training session was conducted by an experienced trainer/counsellor in domestic violence. She was an accredited trainer (NSW Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Education Centre) who had worked on the 24-hour crisis line and had also worked in

domestic violence policy and advocacy. The training session was interactive. During the session, trainees asked questions, expressed any concerns and discussed issues that might arise and appropriate responses. A second half-day was spent working through the draft interview schedule with the supervisor and the researcher. Interviewers discussed any and all issues they wished to raise regarding the interview and contributed to development of the wording and flow of the draft interview schedule. Interviewers were free to withdraw from working on this particular survey, for any reason whatsoever, after the training session or after working through the interview schedule with the supervisor and researcher. No questions were asked regarding their withdrawal and they were not penalised in any way regarding work on other surveys. Interviewers who chose to continue with the survey were encouraged to talk to the supervisor at any time. A debriefing session was held at the end of each day's interviews during which they could discuss anything that was troubling them as a result of doing the interviews. Interviewers were instructed to contact the supervisor at any time if they needed to. The supervisor or manager was on hand during interviews and a mechanism was in place so they could be called immediately during an interview if necessary. Emergency telephone numbers for police were in place in each telephone booth in case of a violent situation during the interview. Interviewers had a list of freecall telephone numbers for 24 hour counselling services and contact numbers for free legal advice and advocacy services for abused women so they could offer concrete assistance if the need arose. The lists contained relevant numbers for each State and Territory. Interviewers were instructed not to take on the role of counsellor. Referring women to support services addressed the need to respond if a woman was distressed during the interview without compromising the role of the interviewer or risking inappropriate counselling by the interviewer. In every case, in a 'wrap-up' session at the end of every interview, information was given to each woman about services which provided help to abused women and how to get such help.

5.5. Pilot-testing

The wording and flow of the draft interview schedule were refined through pre-testing with six young women recruited through personal contacts and women's refuges. Some of these women had experienced severe levels of violence for a relatively long time. These women provided feedback on the appropriateness and acceptability of the items and the mode of administration. The pre-testing process began with a one-to-one session on the purpose of what we were doing and frank input was requested. This briefing was followed by a "field test" of the telephone interview. The feedback discussion followed immediately after the telephone interview and was in person rather than over the telephone. The respondent and interviewer (the researcher) were in separate rooms for the telephone interview but the rooms were in the same building so that the personal feedback discussion could easily follow the interview.

None of the women in the pre-testing sessions found any of the questions pertaining to the main variables (severity and frequency of violence and injury, separation, legal protection, perpetrator characteristics, socio-demographic characteristics) intrusive or offensive or had difficulties with them. Some suggestions were made to improve the flow of the questionnaire.

There were three main changes that occurred after the pre-testing. The question on "what were the barriers that stopped you getting help from the police or the court" was changed to "Its really hard for a woman to know what to do in these situations where her

boyfriend or partner is physically aggressive to her. What do you think might stop a woman from taking out an order or contacting the police about it?" The change was made because women said they didn't feel good when they tried to think about why they didn't get help. The re-phrasing made it less personal and they were more able to think about it without being critical of themselves. The draft questionnaire included a question on whether or not the violent partner talked to anyone about his violence. After feedback that the men did talk to their friends freely about it but in a boasting manner, this question was changed to whether or not he saw a counsellor about his violence. A third refinement was in the injury questions. In the Canadian survey, a woman was asked to name her injures; in this survey, we adhered to the 'yes' or 'no' type of answer and read the injury types. We avoided unnecessarily asking questions about more severe forms of injury by using the same check process as was used for increasingly severe types of physical violence. After asking about bruises, cuts or scratches, a woman was asked if she was injured in any other way. Only women who said 'yes' to this were asked about more severe injuries.

After pre-testing, the recruitment process, CATI programming instructions and the draft questionnaire schedule were pilot-tested. There were 50 women were in the pilot-test sample; 29 women from the main ALWSH young cohort and 21 women from the ALSWH young pilot sample. Women interviewed in the pilot test included women who had been in a range of situations, some of them quite complex and with varied experiences of violence and injury. The pilot also included women who had sought legal protection so it provided a good test of the interview schedule and experience for the interviewers.

The main changes that were made as a result of the pilot test were refining and correcting some of the branching conditionals in the CATI program. The CATI instructions directed the sequence of questions depending on previous responses and combinations of previous responses. Some questions were not asked of some women because they were not relevant to their circumstances. For example, a woman was only asked whether she and her partner were separated when he was violent after legal protection, if the woman had answered "yes" to previous questions on legal protection, violence after legal protection and separation.

A change was also made to the information about sources of help as a result of the pilot test. During the telephone interview, some women did not disclose physical violence by a partner. We had a policy of providing information about potential sources of help at the end of all interviews. This sounded odd if a woman had not disclosed physical violence during the interview so we modified the text for these women to ask them if they would like information about health services to help women in domestic violence in case anyone they knew ever needed it.

5.6 Participant safety

Women's safety was a paramount consideration in the design of the survey instrument and the conduct of the study. Throughout the process, care was given with regard to the situation of women being interviewed, difficulties women might have disclosing these

experiences and difficulties interviewers may have as a result of hearing personal accounts of violence. The following measures were undertaken to protect the women:

- All women contacted had already agreed to be contacted for further research as part of the ALSWH.
- All women contacted had previously informed ALSWH that they had been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse.
- Women were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all information would remain confidential.
- Women were forewarned of the interview.
- The letter informing women of the interviews was carefully designed to avoid mention of violence.
- Women had opportunity to opt out prior to receiving the interviewer's telephone call.
- Each woman's identity as the study participant was verified before the start of the interview.
- Call backs were not made if someone else refused on a woman's behalf.
- At the outset of the interview, every woman was given a freecall telephone number that she could use to call back in the event she was interrupted.
- No callbacks were made to a respondent's household if the interview was interrupted unless the woman made an appointment beforehand.
- A more convenient time for the survey could be arranged if necessary
- Most questions were designed to require only "yes", "no" or numerical responses to protect the woman if she was overheard by someone else during the interview. "Don't know" or "refused" were coded as potential answers. There was an open question at the end of the interview to give women a chance to add anything they might wish to tell us.
- The interview schedule was divided into well-defined sections with introductions on the content. There were progress checks before sections on threats, physical violence and injuries so the respondent could choose whether or not she wanted to continue.
- The schedule included measures to reduce participant burden by having skip sequences to avoid unnecessarily asking about increasingly severe forms of violence or injury.
- Interviewers and their managers were experienced in health surveys on sensitive topics and with a range of different types of people.
- All interviewers were female and specific training in domestic violence issues was given to interviewers by an accredited trainer.
- Interviewers were instructed not to take on the role of counsellor. Women were given the contact number of a domestic violence counselling service if they were distressed during the interview.
- If women did not disclose physical violence by a partner or expartner, they skipped to general demographic and health questions. They were given contact numbers of sources of help for women in domestic violence in case anyone they knew needed assistance at any time.
- All other women were given information about counseling and health avenues of help in their State or Territory at the conclusion of the interview in case they needed assistance.

- The interviewer checked if a woman was able to get help for herself and interviewers were able to offer to ring a service on behalf of a woman if she couldn't get help for herself.
- In the event of actual violence occurring during an interview, interviewers were to tell the woman that they were getting help and ringing the police. Interviewers had emergency police contact numbers in their booth and a mechanism was in place to immediately signal the supervisor or manager.

5.7 Ethics Approval

The interview schedule and procedure were approved by The University of Newcastle, Human Research Ethics Committee.

5.8 Statistical Analyses

Characteristics of women eligible for interview and the rest of the cohort, and of interview participants and non-participants, were compared using chi-squared tests. Similarly chi-squared tests were used for sub-group comparisons within the group of participants. Fisher's exact test was used for two-way contingency tables with small cell frequencies ($n < 5$). The significance level was set at $p = 0.05$, except in cases where multiple comparisons were undertaken to compare groups on a range of demographic and relationship characteristics. In these cases a significance level of $p = 0.005$ was used to avoid finding a significant difference due to chance alone (Type I error). McNemar's test was used to compare presence and severity of violence before and after protection.

Outcomes for women who did and did not seek legal protection were compared using Chi-squared tests. To make this comparison, retrospective data were used to classify the women according to whether they had sought protection or not. Three reference time points were used. First women were classified according to whether they had or had not sought protection more than 12 months before the interview, and the two groups were compared on the presence or absence of violence in the twelve months leading up to interview. These comparisons were repeated for women who had and had not sought protection more than six months before the interview, and again for more than 3 months before the interview.

6. RESULTS

6.1. The eligible sample

The characteristics of the 1396 women who reported they had ever been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse and who were eligible to be interviewed were compared with the remainder of the women in the youngest cohort of the ALSWH (see Table 1). Proportionally more women who had been in a violent relationship lived in rural and remote areas. Women who had been in a violent relationship were more likely to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander origin. Women reporting a violent relationship were also more likely to be in a defacto relationship, or separated from their partner, and were more likely to have children or to have been pregnant at the time of the baseline survey. Women in the violence group were also more likely to be unemployed or doing unpaid home duties and much less likely to be students, had lower educational qualifications, and worked in lower status occupations. They were also

more likely to regularly need help with daily tasks because of disability or long-term illness ($X^2=10.9$, $df=1$, $p=0.001$).

The relationships demonstrated here may be inter-related (for example, relatively more young women in the rural and remote areas are married and have children than women of the same age in urban areas). Multivariate analysis is currently being undertaken to adjust for these factors.

6.2. Participation in the interview

A flow-chart depicting the selection, contact of women for the study and their participation in the interview is shown in Figure 1. Of the 1396 women selected for interview, 82 had no telephone available and excluded from the interview list. Of the remaining 1314 women, 674 (51%) were successfully interviewed. The main reason for not interviewing women was that they could not be contacted ($n=537$). In addition, 15 women (1%) opted out of the study prior to telephone contact, 36 women (2%) said they would be away at the time of the interviews, and for a further 52 women (4%) participation was refused when telephone contact with the woman or the household was made. Among households where contact was made ($n=777$), the response rate was 87% ($n=674$).

The 674 women who participated in the interviews were compared with the remainder of the eligible sample (Table 2). There was no significant difference between participants and non-participants in area of residence, State/Territory, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander origin, or marital status. Non-participants were more likely than participants to have children. Non-participants were also more likely to have no formal educational qualifications, and less likely to have the Higher School Certificate; they were less likely to be in paid employment; more likely to list their occupation as home duties, and more likely to have never had a job. Of those who were employed or studying for an occupation, participants were more likely to have higher status occupations than non-participants.

Table 1
Characteristics of women ever in a violent relationship and the remainder of the ALSWH cohort

| Characteristic | | Eligible sample ever in a violent relationship * | | Remainder of cohort | |
|--|--|--|------|------------------------|------|
| | | N=1396 | % | N=13003 | % |
| Area of Residence: | Urban | | 48.3 | | 56.3 |
| | Rural | | 46.2 | | 40.1 |
| | Remote | | 5.5 | | 3.6 |
| $X^2=37.3$; $df=2$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| State/Territory: | New South Wales | | 29.7 | | 28.9 |
| | Victoria | | 21.7 | | 26.1 |
| | Queensland | | 23.9 | | 21.2 |
| | South Australia | | 8.3 | | 8.1 |
| | Western Australia | | 10.3 | | 9.3 |
| | Tasmania | | 3.7 | | 3.6 |
| | Northern Territory | | 1.0 | | 0.8 |
| | Australian Capital Territory | | 1.4 | | 2.0 |
| $X^2=18.3$; $df=7$; $p<0.019$ | | | | | |
| Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin | Yes | | 4.2 | | 1.7 |
| | No | | 95.8 | | 98.3 |
| $X^2=44.5$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| Highest Educational Qualification: | | | | | |
| | Did not complete secondary school | | 7.7 | | 2.3 |
| | School Certificate | | 25.5 | | 12.8 |
| | Higher School Certificate | | 42.1 | | 55.1 |
| | Trade | | 4.8 | | 2.5 |
| | Certificate/Diploma | | 14.5 | | 15.6 |
| | University degree | | 4.8 | | 11.0 |
| | Higher degree | | 0.5 | | 0.8 |
| $X^2=389.4$; $df=6$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| Employment: | Full-time paid work | | 32.3 | | 33.4 |
| | Part-time paid work | | 19.6 | | 20.1 |
| | Home duties | | 16.8 | | 5.9 |
| | Unemployed | | 11.9 | | 7.0 |
| | Unable to work (illness or disability) | | 1.2 | | 0.5 |
| | Student | | 18.1 | | 33.0 |
| $X^2=335.4$; $df=5$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| Main Occupation: | Professional | | 19.7 | | 33.9 |
| | Para-professional | | 3.3 | | 3.4 |
| | Manager/administration | | 7.9 | | 8.5 |
| | Trade | | 7.1 | | 4.8 |
| | Clerk/sales/service/other | | 48.5 | | 42.0 |
| | Manual/machine operator | | 6.7 | | 4.6 |
| | Never had a job | | 6.7 | | 2.8 |
| $X^2=156.7$; $df=6$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| Marital Status: | Married | | 9.6 | | 8.9 |
| | Defacto | | 22.3 | | 12.3 |
| | Separated/Divorced/Widowed | | 3.5 | | 0.6 |
| | Never married | | 64.5 | | 78.2 |
| $X^2=251.1$; $df=3$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| Number of children: | | | | | |
| | One or more children | | 23.6 | | 7.8 |
| | No children | | 76.4 | | 92.2 |
| $X^2=354.9$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |
| Pregnancy: | Pregnant (at baseline) | | 6.0 | | 2.5 |
| | Not pregnant | | 90.9 | | 96.0 |
| | Don't know | | 3.1 | | 1.5 |
| $X^2=74.5$; $df=2$; $p<0.001$ | | | | | |

* excludes 380 women in ALSWH cohort who had ever been in a violent relationship but not eligible for selection for this study

Table 2
Characteristics of women participating in the interview and the remainder of the eligible sample

| Characteristic | | Participants | | Remainder of eligible sample | |
|---|--|--------------|------|------------------------------|------|
| | | N=674 | % | N=722 | % |
| Area of Residence: | Urban | | 49.2 | | 47.5 |
| | Rural | | 46.1 | | 46.3 |
| | Remote | | 4.8 | | 6.2 |
| $\chi^2=1.55$; df=2; p=0.46 | | | | | |
| State/Territory: | New South Wales | | 30.7 | | 28.8 |
| | Victoria | | 22.6 | | 20.8 |
| | Queensland | | 23.1 | | 24.8 |
| | South Australia | | 9.4 | | 7.3 |
| | Western Australia | | 8.6 | | 11.8 |
| | Tasmania | | 3.7 | | 3.6 |
| | Northern Territory | | 0.6 | | 1.4 |
| | Australian Capital Territory | | 1.3 | | 1.5 |
| $\chi^2=8.7$; df=7; p=0.27 | | | | | |
| Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin: | Yes | | 3.1 | | 5.3 |
| | No | | 96.9 | | 94.7 |
| $\chi^2=4.01$; df=1; p<0.05 | | | | | |
| Highest Educational Qualification: | | | | | |
| | Did not complete secondary school | | 4.5 | | 10.7 |
| | School Certificate | | 23.1 | | 27.9 |
| | Higher School Certificate | | 48.4 | | 36.2 |
| | Trade | | 3.7 | | 5.9 |
| | Certificate/Diploma | | 14.4 | | 14.6 |
| | University degree/Higher degree | | 6.0 | | 4.7 |
| $\chi^2=37.2$; df=5; p<0.001 | | | | | |
| Employment: | Full-time paid work | | 34.0 | | 30.6 |
| | Part-time paid work | | 21.9 | | 17.5 |
| | Home duties | | 11.8 | | 21.5 |
| | Unemployed | | 9.2 | | 14.6 |
| | Unable to work (illness or disability) | | 1.4 | | 1.0 |
| | Student | | 21.7 | | 14.7 |
| $\chi^2=40.4$; df=5; p<0.001 | | | | | |
| Main Occupation: | Professional | | 23.6 | | 15.8 |
| | Para-professional | | 4.3 | | 2.2 |
| | Manager/administration | | 8.1 | | 7.7 |
| | Trade | | 6.3 | | 7.9 |
| | Clerk/sales/service/other | | 47.3 | | 49.8 |
| | Manual/machine operator | | 5.9 | | 7.6 |
| | Never had a job | | 4.6 | | 8.9 |
| $\chi^2=24.23$; df=6; p<0.001 | | | | | |
| Marital Status: | Married | | 10.3 | | 9.0 |
| | Defacto | | 19.7 | | 24.7 |
| | Separated/Divorced/Widowed | | 2.5 | | 4.4 |
| | Never married | | 67.4 | | 61.9 |
| $\chi^2=9.6$; df=3; p=0.02 | | | | | |
| Number of children: | | | | | |
| | One or more children | | 18.1 | | 28.7 |
| | No children | | 81.9 | | 71.3 |
| $\chi^2=21.1$; df=7; p<0.001 | | | | | |
| Pregnancy: | Pregnant (at baseline) | | 4.9 | | 7 |
| | Not pregnant | | 91.3 | | 90.5 |
| | Don't know | | 3.7 | | 2.5 |
| $\chi^2=4.1$; df=2; p=0.13 | | | | | |

6.3. Physical violence by current partners

Of the 674 women interviewed, 181 reported they had never experienced physical violence by a boyfriend, male partner or spouse (see Figure 2). The ALSWH question used to select the study sample did not specifically ask about physical violence; it referred to a violent relationship with partner or spouse. No further data were collected from these women.

Of the remaining 493 women who had been subject to physical violence by a male partner, 117 (24%) of the women were no longer in a current relationship of any type and 376 women were in a current relationship with a legal or defacto spouse or had a current boyfriend. One woman was in two relationships at the time of interview.

Ninety-four of the 376 women currently in a relationship/s had been assaulted by their current partner. The circumstances were complex for two of these women. They had been assaulted by both their current partner and an ex-partner, but most recently by an ex-partner. The other 92 women had been assaulted most recently by their current partner.

Of the 94 women currently in a violent relationship, over half ($n=52$, 56.5%) had been separated from their partner at some time. Further, 71 of these 94 women had been in at least one previous violent relationship, for 21 women this violent relationship was their first and only relationship, and the remaining two did not provide any further information.

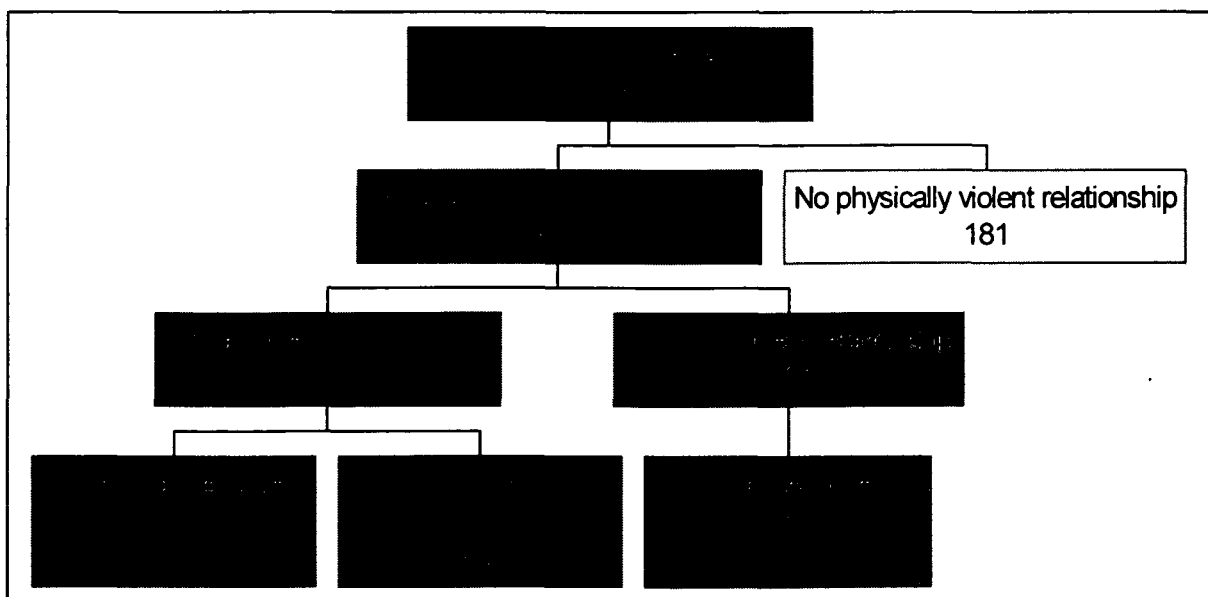


Figure 2
Physical violence in relation to current partner for the 674 women interviewed

6.4 History of violent relationships

Of the 493 women who had been subjected to physical violence by a partner, 94 women (19%) had had two violent partners since they were 16 years old, 28 women had three, 2 women had four, and 1 woman had five violent partners. Most women (n=368) had only ever had one physically violent partner.

6.5 Relationship characteristics of women in physically violent relationships

Of the 493 young women 80% had lived with a boyfriend or partner at some time (see Table 3). The median age when women first lived with a boyfriend or partner was 18 years (with interquartile range values of 17 and 19 years). At the time of interview, 47% were married or in a defacto relationship. A further 26% had a boyfriend but were not married or living with their boyfriend – they were classified as single. The category 'separated' refers to women who were separated at the time of interview and had not formed another relationship. The woman in two current relationships was not asked about marital status of the relationships. Nearly 29% (n=141) of women had children. Twenty-five percent (n=34) of the 141 women with children did not have a current partner. Of the remaining 105 women, the woman's current partner was the father of her child/children in 72% of cases. Of the 375 women with one current partner, the current partner had children from another relationship in 10% (n=37) of cases. Thirty-four women (7%) were pregnant at the time of the interview.

Table 3
Characteristics of Women in Physically Violent Relationships
N=493

| Total number of relationships | No. | % |
|--|-----|------|
| 1 | 23 | 4.7 |
| 2 | 101 | 20.5 |
| 3 | 144 | 29.2 |
| 4 | 87 | 17.6 |
| 5 or more | 138 | 28.0 |
| Total number of cohabiting relationships | | |
| 0 | 96 | 19.5 |
| 1 | 227 | 46.0 |
| 2 | 136 | 27.6 |
| 3 or more | 34 | 6.9 |
| Marital status | | |
| Married | 81 | 16.4 |
| Defacto (live together) | 149 | 30.2 |
| Occasionally live together | 15 | 3.0 |
| Single (not living together and not married) | 130 | 26.4 |
| Separated | 117 | 23.9 |
| More than one current relationship | 1 | 0.1 |
| Number of Children | | |
| None | 352 | 71.4 |
| One | 90 | 18.3 |
| Two | 45 | 9.1 |
| Three | 6 | 1.2 |
| Pregnant (at time of interview) | | |
| Yes | 34 | 6.9 |
| No | 459 | 93.1 |

6.6 Most recent violence within a relationship

In the year before the interview, 80 women had experienced violence by a current or ex-partner (See Table 4).

Table 4
Most recent violence within a relationship

| | Current violent relationship N=92 | | Past violent relationship N=401 | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|
| Most recent violence: | N | % | N | % |
| Within the past year | 46 | 50.0 | 34 | 8.5 |
| More than one year ago | 46 | 50.0 | 367 | 91.5 |

6.7 Characteristics of physical violence

Nearly half the women (45.4%) had been subject to serious violence within the most recent violent relationship – they were beaten, choked or threatened with being shot. Nearly three-quarters of them had been subject to medium severity of violence – slapped, kicked, hit with fist or something else that could hurt (see Table 5).

Table 5
Severity of violence experienced by women within the most recent relationship
N=493

| Level | No. | % |
|--|-----|------|
| 1 thrown something at her that could hurt her or pushed, shoved or grabbed her | 471 | 95.5 |
| 2 slapped, kicked, bitten, hit with fist or something else | 353 | 71.6 |
| 3 beaten, choked or threatened or tried to shoot her | 224 | 45.4 |
| 4* shot or stabbed | 36 | 7.3 |

* the perpetrator of level 4 violence was not identified

The data in Table 5 also show that there is nearly always minor physical aggression present when more serious violence occurs. For 61 women (12.4%) there had only ever been one single incident of violence.

Violent relationships ranged in duration from one month to 9 years (Table 6).

Table 6
Duration of most recent violent relationship
N=492*

| Duration of Violent relationship | No. | % |
|----------------------------------|-----|------|
| Less than one year | 115 | 23.4 |
| 1 to < 2 years | 111 | 22.6 |
| 2 to < 3 years | 96 | 19.5 |
| 3 to < 4 years | 74 | 15.0 |
| 4 or more years | 96 | 19.5 |

* one woman is omitted due to data entry error

A high proportion (n=357, 72.4%) of the women had been injured by their partners (Table 7). Of the 357 women injured, 88 (24.6%) saw a doctor or nurse for their injuries and 57 women (16.0) had been seriously injured, some more than once. Repeat injuries of the same type had occurred for 40% of women whose bones had been broken or fractured, 35% of women who had been burned and two women who had had a miscarriage.

Table 7
Injury
N=493

| Type of Injury | No. | % |
|---------------------------|-----|------|
| Any Injury | 357 | 72.4 |
| Serious injury | | |
| Broken or fractured bones | 44 | 8.9 |
| Burned | 11 | 2.2 |
| Teeth broken | 8 | 1.6 |
| Miscarriage | 11 | 2.2 |

6.8 Factors associated with remaining in a violent relationship

Characteristics were compared for 92 women currently in a violent relationship and the remaining women who were no longer in a violent relationship (Table 8). For women who were no longer in the violent relationship, the relationship was shorter (with almost 50% lasting less than two years), they had more non-violent relationships, fewer previous violent partners, and more likely to have experienced more severe levels of violence.

Table 8a
Comparison of relationships for women with current violent relationships
and past violent relationships*

| Relationship Characteristic | | Current violent relationship N=92 | | Past violent relationship N=401 | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|------|
| | | N | % | N | % |
| Duration of relationship: | <1 year | 3 | 3.2 | 111 | 27.9 |
| | 1 to <2 | 11 | 11.7 | 100 | 25.1 |
| | 2 to <3 | 11 | 11.7 | 84 | 21.1 |
| | 3 to <4 | 14 | 14.9 | 60 | 15.1 |
| | 4 to < 5 | 16 | 18.1 | 20 | 5.0 |
| | 5 years or more | 37 | 40.4 | 23 | 5.8 |
| Severity of violence: | Level 1 | | | | |
| | Level 2 | 57 | 61.9 | 296 | 73.8 |
| | Level 3 | 29 | 31.5 | 195 | 48.6 |
| | Level 4 | 3 | 0.7 | 33 | 8.2 |

Table 8b
Comparison of relationships for women with current violent relationships
and past violent relationships*

| Relationship Characteristic | | Current violent relationship N=94** | | Past violent relationship N=399 | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|--|------|------------------------------------|------|
| | | N | % | N | % |
| No. of non- violent partners: | 0 | 41 | 43.6 | 13 | 3.3 |
| | 1 | 27 | 28.7 | 89 | 22.3 |
| | 2 | 10 | 10.6 | 121 | 30.3 |
| | 3 or more | 16 | 17.1 | 176 | 44.1 |
| No. of other violent partners: | 0 | 21 | 22.3 | 347 | 87.0 |
| | 1 | 50 | 53.2 | 44 | 11.0 |
| | 2 or more | 23 | 24.5 | 8 | 2.0 |

* the data presented have not been adjusted for other factors that may influence the outcome.

** includes 2 women who have a current violent partner, but for whom the most recently violent partner is an ex-partner. For all other analyses these women are classified according to their most recently violent ex-partner.

6.9 Sources of help other than legal protection

More young women confided in a friend or someone in their family than anyone else. Nearly 20% of young women had not talked to anyone about the violence before the interview.

Table 9
Help sought by young women from sources other than police or courts
N=493 women

| People young women talked to about the violence | % Yes |
|---|-------|
| Friend | 70.0 |
| Family | 50.3 |
| Neighbour | 5.7 |
| Anyone else | 10.3 |
| No one | 19.1 |
| Other services young women went to for help | |
| Hospital, doctor or other health centre | 18.1 |
| Counsellor or telephone crisis help | 24.5 |
| Legal help | 7.7 |
| Financial help | 2.2 |
| Housing or refuge | 3.0 |
| Anyone else | 3.2 |
| No one | 60.2 |

6.10 Use of Legal Protection

Almost one-third of women interviewed had sought legal intervention in an attempt to stop physical violence by their partner (Table 10). Women were most likely to contact police with or without simultaneous application for protection order (See Figure 3).

Table 10
Number and Percentage of women experiencing physical violence within a
relationship who sought legal protection
N=493 women

| | N | % |
|--|------------|-------------|
| Sought legal protection | 142 | 28.8 |
| Type of legal protection sought | | |
| Applied for Protection Order | 75 | 15.2 |
| Woman contacted police * | 100 | 23.1 |
| Someone else contacted police* | 73 | 16.9 |

* 61 women with one incident of minor severity (Level 1 violence) were not asked these questions

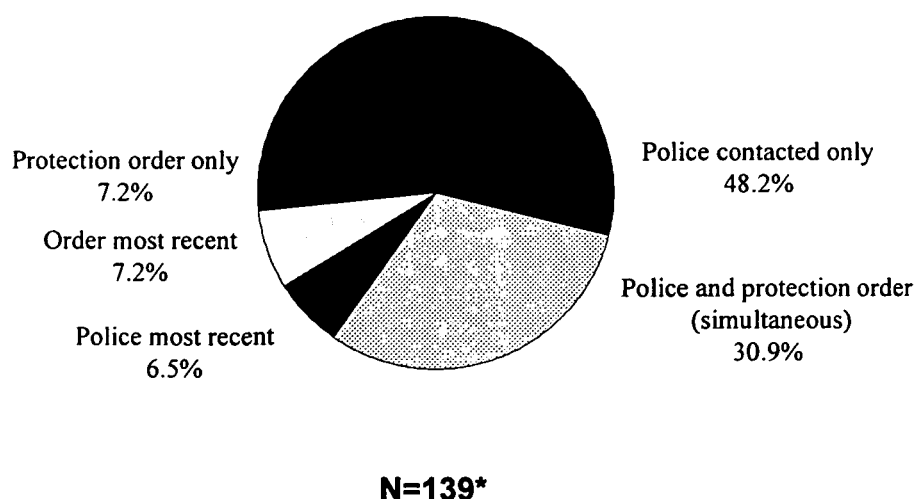


Figure 3
Various combinations of legal protection sought
 *3 women with minor violence only are omitted from this chart

6.11 Factors associated with the use of legal protection

None of the socio-demographic factors measured was statistically associated with the use of legal protection (see Table 11). The use of legal protection was associated with the maximum level of violence experienced within the relationship, and with injury. Women with children were more likely to seek legal protection. Women were more likely to use legal protection if they were in a defacto relationship and less likely to seek help if they had never lived with their violent boyfriend. Characteristics of the perpetrator were significantly associated with women's use of legal protection. Women were significantly

more likely to seek legal protection if (to the woman's knowledge) the partner had previously been in trouble with the police, or violent in other situations (Table 12).

Table 11
Socio-demographic factors associated with seeking legal protection*

| Sought legal help | | | |
|--|---------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Area of residence: | No = 351 % | Yes=142 % | |
| Urban | 49.1 | 46.8 | $\chi^2 = 3.5$; df =2; p= 0.17 |
| Rural | 44.3 | 50.4 | |
| Remote | 6.6 | 2.8 | |
| State/territory: | | | |
| NSW | 29.7 | 28.4 | $\chi^2 = 4.96$; df =7; p=0.67** |
| Victoria | 23.1 | 19.1 | |
| Queensland | 22.6 | 29.1 | |
| South Australia | 8.9 | 11.3 | |
| Western Australia | 9.7 | 7.8 | |
| Tasmania | 3.4 | 2.8 | |
| Northern Territory | 0.9 | 0.0 | |
| A.C.T | 1.7 | 1.4 | |
| Paid work in the last 12 months: | | | |
| Yes | 80.6 | 77.5 | |
| No | 19.4 | 22.5 | |
| Occupation: | | | |
| Manual work | 12.7 | 14.5 | $\chi^2 = 4.5$; df =7; p=0.105 |
| Sales and personal service | 32.9 | 38.2 | |
| Clerk, reception, secretary | 27.2 | 17.3 | |
| Trade | 6.7 | 7.3 | |
| Para-professional (incl. police, technician) | 4.2 | 1.8 | |
| Professional (incl. Teacher, nurse) | 10.6 | 10.9 | |
| Manager | 2.8 | 5.5 | |
| Other | 2.8 | 4.5 | |
| Highest educational qualification: | | | |
| School certificate | 11.0 | 18.8 | $\chi^2 = 9.36$; df =4; p= 0.053 |
| Higher school certificate | 26.6 | 21.8 | |
| Trade | 9.0 | 8.3 | |
| Diploma | 37.9 | 42.1 | |
| University degree | 15.5 | 9.0 | |
| Studying in the last 12 months: | | | |
| Yes | 42.7 | 43.0 | $\chi^2 = 0.002$; df =1; p= 0.96 |
| No | 57.3 | 57.0 | |

* the data presented have not been adjusted for other factors that may influence the outcome.

** p-value approximate only due to small numbers in some categories

Table 12
Relationship factors associated with the use of legal protection

| | | Sought legal help | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|
| | | No=351 % | Yes=142 % | |
| Maximum level of severity of violence: | | | | |
| | Level 1 | 32.2 | 12.7 | $X^2=43.9$; $df=2$; $p<0.001$ |
| | Level 2 | 31.9 | 19.0 | |
| | Level 3 | 35.9 | 68.3 | |
| Injury: | | | | |
| | No | 32.8 | 14.8 | $X^2=16.4$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$ |
| | Yes | 67.2 | 85.2 | |
| Serious Injury: | | | | |
| | No | 92.7 | 78.9 | $X^2=17.9$; $df=1$; $p=0.001$ |
| | Yes | 7.7 | 21.1 | |
| Saw doctor or nurse for injuries: | | | | |
| | No | 56.4 | 50.0 | $X^2=27.4$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$ |
| | Yes | 10.8 | 35.2 | |
| | Not injured | 32.8 | 14.8 | |
| Type of relationship: | | | | |
| | Married | 5.7 | 4.9 | $X^2=19.2$; $df=3$; $p<0.001$ |
| | Defacto | 41.9 | 63.4 | |
| | Occasionally live together | 4.0 | 2.1 | |
| | Single, never lived together | 48.4 | 29.6 | |
| Current violent relationship: | | | | |
| | Expartner | 80.3 | 83.8 | $X^2=0.8$; $df=1$; $p=0.37$ |
| | Current partner | 19.7 | 16.2 | |
| Have children: | | | | |
| | No | 76.4 | 59.2 | $X^2=14.6$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$ |
| | Yes | 23.6 | 40.8 | |
| First violent relationship: | | | | |
| | Yes | 73.6 | 75.4 | $X^2=0.05$; $df=1$; $p=0.812$ |
| | No | 26.4 | 24.6 | |
| First relationship: | | | | |
| | Yes | 4.8 | 4.2 | $X^2=0.09$; $df=1$; $p=0.778$ |
| | No | 95.2 | 95.8 | |
| Age of partner: | | | | |
| | Less than 24 years | 26.5 | 26.8 | $X^2=5.5$; $df=2$; $p=0.06$ |
| | 24 – 26 years | 37.6 | 27.5 | |
| | More than 26 years | 35.9 | 45.8 | |
| Trouble with police: | | | | |
| | Yes | 46.7 | 69.0 | $X^2=20.7$; $df=2$; $p<0.001$ |
| | No | 43.0 | 23.2 | |
| | don't know | 10.3 | 7.7 | |
| Violent in other situations: | | | | |
| | Yes | 47.6 | 63.4 | $X^2=12.6$; $df=2$; $p<0.002$ |
| | No | 41.3 | 24.6 | |
| | don't know | 11.1 | 12.0 | |

6.11.1 Severity of violence and type of legal protection sought. Overall, the women were more likely only to contact the police than to take out an order or to do both (see Figure 4). However, there was a slightly different pattern among women subjected to the most serious level of violence. Over 80% of women who contacted police and applied for a Protection Order together had been subject to the most serious level of violence. Descriptive data are presented below (see Figure 4) for information but statistical tests are not provided since numbers in many of the cells are small.

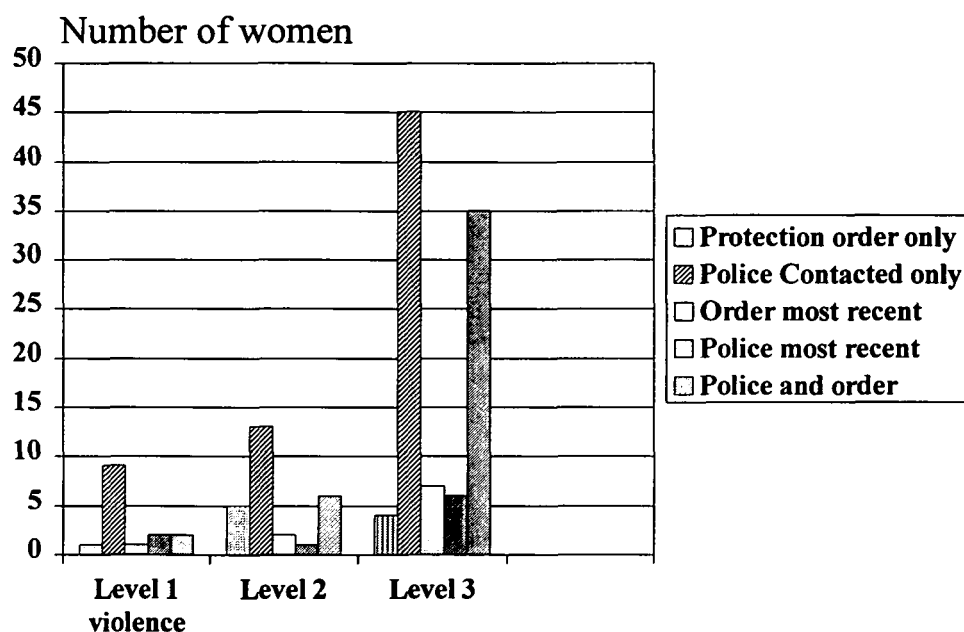


Figure 4
Various combinations of legal help sought

6.12 Reduction in violence associated with legal protection

6.12.1 Physical violence after legal protection

Within the group of women who sought legal protection, there was a significant improvement after legal protection compared to the three-month period beforehand. There was no physical violence after they sought legal protection for about half (49.2%) of the women who had been subject to physical violence in the three months beforehand. Three women were assaulted after they sought legal protection although they had not been physically assaulted in the three months immediately before seeking legal protection.

Table 13
Violence after legal protection, compared to 3 months before seeking protection - Numbers of women

| Violence 3 months before Legal Protection | Violence after Legal Protection | | |
|---|---------------------------------|-----|-------|
| | No | Yes | Total |
| No | 6 | 3 | 22 |
| Yes | 59 | 61 | 120 |
| Total | 78 | 64 | 142 |

Shaded cells indicate no change in violence
(McNemar's test for repeated measures, $X^2=50.6$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$)

Note: There is variation in the time since women sought legal protection so the time period between legal protection and interview varies in length within the group.

6.12.2 Change in severity of violence after legal protection.

There was a significant reduction in severity of violence after legal protection. There was no change in the level of violence for 63 (44.4%) of the 142 women who sought protection. The level of violence increased for 6 (4.2%) of the women, and decreased for the remaining 73 women (51.4%).

Table 14
Change in severity of violence after legal protection

| Maximum severity of violence 3 months before legal protection | Maximum severity of violence after legal protection | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| | 0 no physical violence | Level 1 thrown something at her that could hurt her or pushed, shoved or grabbed her | Level 2 slapped, kicked, bitten, hit with fist or something else | Level 3 beaten, choked or threatened or tried to shoot her | Total |
| 0 | n 19 | n 2 | n 0 | n 1 | n 22 |
| Level 1 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 13 |
| Level 2 | 21 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 30 |
| Level 3 | 29 | 2 | 9 | 37 | 77 |
| Total | 78 | 9 | 15 | 40 | 142 |

Shaded cells indicate no change in violence
McNemars test for paired data, $X^2=59.3$, $df=6$, $p<0.001$

Note: The time period after legal protection is varies in length.

6.12.3 Relationship status and change in violence following legal protection

Cessation of violence after legal protection was the same whether or not women were currently in the relationship with the violent partner or had separated from him (Table 15).

Table 15
Relationship status and change in violence.

| Relationship with violent partner | Violence after Legal Protection | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------|--------|------|
| | No=78 | | Yes=64 | |
| | N | % | n | % |
| Expartner | 66 | 84.6 | 53 | 83.8 |
| Current partner | 12 | 15.4 | 11 | 17.2 |

$X^2=0.08$; $df=1$; $p=0.77$

6.12.4 Cessation of physical violence towards women who had sought legal protection compared with those who had not.

One hundred and twenty one women had sought some form of legal protection (police/order) at least 12 months before the interview. These women were just as likely to experience cessation of violence as women who did not seek legal protection (Table 16). However, it should be noted that the comparisons in Table 16 have not been adjusted for underlying differences in severity of violence or other relationship or demographic characteristics between the two groups of women.

Table 16
Cessation of physical violence towards women who had sought legal protection compared with those who had not

Table 16.a.

| Legal protection more than 12 months before interview | Violence ceased in the 12 months before interview | | | | | |
|---|---|------|---------|------|--------------|------|
| | Yes = 413 | | No = 46 | | Total = 459* | |
| | n | % | N | % | n | % |
| Yes | 110 | 90.9 | 11 | 9.1 | 121 | 26.4 |
| No | 303 | 89.6 | 35 | 10.4 | 338 | 73.6 |
| $X^2=0.168$, $df=1$, $p=0.69$ | | | | | | |

* 30 women were excluded from this comparison because they had not been subject to physical violence more than 12 months before interview. An additional four women were excluded because of uncertainty about the date of legal protection. They had sought legal protection more than once and it was unclear whether the first time was more than 12 months ago or within the last 12 months.

Table 16.b.

| Legal protection more than 6 months before interview | Violence ceased in the 6 months before interview | | | | | |
|--|--|------|---------|------|--------------|------|
| | Yes = 434 | | No = 48 | | Total = 482* | |
| | n | % | N | % | n | % |
| Yes | 118 | 90.1 | 13 | 9.9 | 131 | 27.2 |
| No | 316 | 90.0 | 35 | 10.0 | 351 | 72.8 |
| $X^2=0.000$, $df=1$, $p=0.99$ | | | | | | |

* 10 women were excluded because they had not been subject to physical violence more than 6 months ago. One additional woman was excluded because it wasn't clear whether the first time she had sought legal protection was more than 6 months ago or not.

Table 16.c.

| Legal protection more than 3 months before interview | Violence ceased in the 3 months before interview | | | | | |
|--|--|------|---------|-----|--------------|------|
| | Yes = 462 | | No = 26 | | Total = 488* | |
| | N | % | N | % | n | % |
| Yes | 129 | 94.2 | 8 | 5.8 | 137 | 28.1 |
| No | 333 | 94.9 | 18 | 5.1 | 351 | 71.9 |
| $X^2=0.099$, $df=1$, $p=0.75$ | | | | | | |

* 4 women were excluded because they had not been subject to physical violence more than 3 months ago. Another woman was excluded because it wasn't clear whether the first time she sought legal protection was more than 3 months ago or not.

6.13 Differences in type of legal protection used

The relationship between legal protection and reduction of violence differed depending on the type of legal protection used. There were significant improvements, whichever legal avenues women used. However, important differences were observed depending on the type of legal avenues women used.

6.13.1 Combined legal protection - police together with application for Protection Order.

The majority of women in this group (70%) had been subjected to level 3 violence (the most severe level of physical violence) in the three months before they sought legal protection. Overall there was a highly significant reduction in violence after women sought help from both sources together. There were no instances where women were subject to more severe types of violence after legal protection compared to before. For 33% of women, there was no change in prevalence or severity of violence following legal protection. Violence was reduced after legal protection for 67% of women. There was no physical violence at all after legal protection for 58% of women (all but 3 of these women had been physically assaulted in the 3 months immediately preceding legal protection). A further 16% of women were subjected to less severe violence after legal protection. It is worth noting that the greatest change in violence after legal protection was apparent for women who had been subject to the most serious violence. Twenty-one of the 30 women subjected to Level 3 violence experienced a reduction in severity of violence after legal protection, and 50% of them reported cessation of violence. Nevertheless, 9 of the 14 women who experienced no change despite legal protection were women who had been subjected to level 3 violence.

Table 17
Change in violence for women seeking both
Police and Order

| Maximum severity of violence 3 months before legal protection | Maximum severity of violence after legal protection | | | | |
|--|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| | 0 n | Level 1 n | Level 2 n | Level 3 n | Total n |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Level 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Level 2 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 8 |
| Level 3 | 15 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 30 |
| Total | 25 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 43 |
| McNemars test for paired data, $X^2=29.0$, $df=6$, $p<0.001$ | | | | | |

Shaded cells indicate no change.

Note: Observation periods for before protection and after protection may not be of the same duration.

6.13.2 Only contacted Police.

Most of the young women who sought protection were in this group. Overall there was a highly significant reduction in violence after women sought help from police only (Table 18). However, contacting police alone did not result in changes as beneficial as contacting police together with applying for an order. Four (6%) of the women who contacted police were subjected to more severe types of violence afterwards and three of these women were subject to the most serious violence after they contacted the police. There was no change in prevalence or severity of violence following legal protection for half the women (51%) who contacted police. Violence was reduced after contacting the police for only 43% of women. There was no physical violence after legal protection for 51% of women (n=34) but it should be noted that 12 of these women had not been subject to physical violence in the 3 months immediately preceding legal protection. A further 7 (10%) women were subject to less severe violence after they contacted police.

The least change in violence after contacting police was apparent for women who had been subject to the most serious violence. There was no change for 65% of women subject to Level 3 after they contacted police; violence ceased for only 19% of these women. Further, 20 of the 34 women who experienced no change despite contacting police were women who had been subject to level 3 violence.

Table 18
Change in violence for women who only contacted Police

| Maximum severity of violence before legal protection | Maximum severity of violence after legal protection | | | | |
|--|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| | 0 n | Level 1 n | Level 2 n | Level 3 n | Total n |
| 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 13 |
| Level 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Level 2 | 12 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 16 |
| Level 3 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 20 | 31 |
| Total | 34 | 4 | 7 | 23 | 67 |

McNemars test for repeated measures, statistic=21.7, df=6, p=0.001

Shaded cells indicate no change.

Note: Observation periods for before protection and after protection may not be of the same duration.

6.13.3 Only applied for Protection Order

There were only ten young women who applied for a Protection order and did not contact police as well so statistical comparisons were not performed. The data are presented below for information, although they must be considered with caution due to the small numbers of women. There was no violence for 90% of women after they applied for a protection order. There was no increase in severity of violence after women applied for an Order.

Table 19
Change in violence for women who only applied for Protection Order

| | | Maximum severity of violence after legal protection | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Maximum severity of violence 3 months before legal protection | | 0 n | Level 1 N | Level 2 n | Level 3 N | Total n |
| 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Level 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Level 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Level 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 10 |

Shaded cells indicate no change.

Note: Observation periods for before protection and after protection may not be of the same duration.

6.13.4 Protection Order and police sequentially.

A few young women sought help from both the police and the courts at different times (months or even more than a year later). Presumably they subsequently tried the second legal alternative because the first one did not put an end to the violence. There were ten women who contacted the police and subsequently applied for an order. There were nine women who applied for an order and then contacted the police at a later date. Again, statistical comparisons were not undertaken because of the small numbers but the data are presented below for information.

The pattern for women who applied for an Order most recently is similar to that for women who only applied for an Order. No women experienced an increase in severity of violence after they applied for the order. There was no violence after the order for eight of the ten women; there was no change for the other two. In contrast for women who contacted police most recently, there was no reduction in severity of violence and no cessation of violence. There was no change after (most recent) legal protection for any of the women.

Table 20
Change in violence for women who applied for Order most recently

| | | Maximum severity of violence after legal protection | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Maximum severity of violence 3 months before legal protection | | 0 n | Level 1 n | Level 2 n | Level 3 n | Total n |
| 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Level 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Level 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Level 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| total | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 |

Shaded cells indicate no change.

Note: Observation periods for before protection and after protection may not be of the same duration.

Table 21
Change in violence for women who contacted police most recently

| | Maximum severity of violence after legal protection | | | | |
|--|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Maximum severity of violence before legal protection | 0 n | Level 1 n | Level 2 n | Level 3 n | Total N |
| 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Level 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Level 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Level 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 1 | 2 | 0 | 6 | 9 |

Shaded cells indicate no change.

Note: Observation periods for before protection and after protection may not be of the same duration.

6.14 Separation and Violence.

All but 40 of the 493 women interviewed had separated from their most recent violent partner at some time. Data on the occurrence of violence during the relationship compared to when they were separated are presented in Table 22. Violence was far more likely to occur during the relationship than during separation. Moreover, onset of violence after separation was reported by only 6% of women. Further, the pattern of violence during the separation and non-separation periods was the same whether women had remained separated or had returned to the violent partner ($X^2=2.71$, $df=2$, $p=0.26$).

Table 22
Percentage of women experiencing violence
when separated by current Relationship status

| | Current relationship status with most recent violent partner | | | |
|--|--|-------------------|----------------|-----------|
| | Separated N=401 | Together N=52* | Total N=453 | P-value** |
| No violence when separated | 66.1 | 75.0 | 67.1 | |
| Violence both when together and when separated | 27.9 | 17.3 | 26.7 | |
| Violence only when separated | 6.0 | 7.7 | 6.2 | 0.26 |

* 40 women who had never separated from the partner were excluded

** Chi square test

There was a significant association between separation and repeated violence. Women who had separated from the violent partner were far less likely to indicate they had experienced repeated violence in the reference period compared to women who stayed with the violent partner. The association between separation and reduced likelihood of

ongoing violence remained significant whether or not women had legal protection (Table 23).

Table 23
Percentage of women and relative risk of repeat violence by relationship status for three time periods

| Reference point (time before interview) | Relationship status at reference point | % repeat violence | Relative risk | 95% CI | P value* |
|---|---|----------------------|------------------|-----------|----------|
| 12 months before interview N=463 | Separated | 5.7 | 0.15 | 0.09-0.25 | 0.001 |
| | Current | 37.8 | | | |
| 6 months before interview N=483 | Separated | 5.3 | 0.16 | 0.09-0.26 | 0.001 |
| | Current | 33.3 | | | |
| 3 months before interview N=489 | Separated | 2.0 | 0.09 | 0.04-0.20 | 0.001 |
| | Current | 21.6 | | | |

*Chi-square test

Table 24
Percentage of women and relative risk of repeat violence in last 12 months by relationship status, for women with and without legal protection

| | Relationship status 12 months before interview | % repeat violence | Relative Risk | 95% CI | P value |
|---|--|----------------------|------------------|---------------|---------|
| With legal protection N=121 | Separated | 3.9 | 0.10 | 0.03- 0.31 | 0.001* |
| | Current | 38.9 | | | |
| Without legal protection N=338 | Separated | 5.3 | 0.15 | 0.08- 0.27 | 0.001+ |
| | Current | 36.4 | | | |

* Fisher's exact test due to small cell size

+ Chi-square test

7. DISCUSSION

This study provides detailed observational information on the history of domestic violence for a large group of young women. Importantly the study allows the change in violence to be compared for groups of women who did and did not obtain various forms of legal protection. A major finding of the study is that physical violence had ceased for most of the young women who were in a violent relationship. However no significant difference was found in cessation of violence between women who had or had not sought legal protection. Violence ceased for a similar number of women with legal protection as it did for women without legal protection who may have used other strategies to protect themselves from repeated physical violence.

The interpretation of this finding is, however, limited by the observational nature of the study. Women use a variety of strategies to try and protect themselves from further violence by a partner and legal protection is one of the avenues young women may take. In this study, which is not a controlled experiment, the comparative element comes from examining patterns of domestic violence to women who did or did not seek legal protection for whatever reasons. The study was not designed to intervene or control strategies women used, nor to control the police response to those strategies as in the mandatory arrest experiments in the USA. Young women themselves determined the

strategies they used and the timing of their actions. Similarly, police and courts determined their response to women seeking help from them. Data on violence was obtained retrospectively from the date of interview.

The main limitations are the possibility of confounding and recall bias. Women who obtained legal protection were different from the others on a number of demographic and relationship factors. Women who sought legal help were more likely to have children, to be subject to more serious violence, to have been injured and injured more seriously, and to have violent partners who have been in trouble with police or violent in other situations. The analyses presented in this report do not adjust for these differences, and further analysis is currently underway. A randomised controlled trial would control for these sorts of differences but ethical concerns preclude the use of this method.

A further limitation is participation bias, women in lower socio-economic groups were not proportionally represented among the interview participants. The outcome might be worse for women with lower socio-economic circumstances and the study results might therefore underestimate ongoing violence and breaches of legal protection by violent partners of these women. Moreover, we recognise that the term 'domestic violence' is appropriately restricted to systematic abuse and control (rather than isolated incidents of minor aggression) and further, that abuse and control may be enforced using psychological and emotional means in addition to physical violence (Hegarty and Roberts, 1998). Additional data on psychological abuse, control and harassment have been collected in the study and will be examined in further analyses. Nevertheless, it is likely that the women in our sample are at the more extreme end of the violence spectrum. A high proportion of women in the sample had been subjected to the more serious types of violent acts, compared to the population (ABS, 1996).

Almost one third of the women who had experienced violence sought legal protection. There was a wide variation in the length of time since women had sought legal protection; some women had sought legal protection years before the interview, some only months before. There were significant reductions in violence after women contacted the police or applied for an order or did both, whichever legal avenues women used. After legal protection, there was a change for the better for about 65% of the young women who sought protection from police or applied for a Protection Order or both. There was a reduction in severity of violence for 10% of women and there was no violence at all after legal protection for 55% of women who had sought legal protections.

After legal protection, violence was reduced for the majority of women but important differences were observed in changes in violence depending on the type of legal avenues women used. Reduction of violence was more apparent when women both contacted the police and backed up this action by applying for a Protection Order at the same time ('police and order' group), contrasted to women who only sought help from police ('police only' group).

There were only 10 young women (7%) who only applied for a Protection Order. This information is in itself important for policy and planning for avenues of legal protection in the case of domestic violence. The results on changes in violence after women apply for a Protection Order must be considered with caution due to the small number of women in this group. They are presented here because they may give rise to further research on differences in effectiveness depending on legal avenues used. The results observed are consistent with the study by the NSW Bureau Crime Statistics and Research showing that physical violence ceased for at least six months for nearly all women who were granted an Order.

Independent of legal protection, women who had separated were far less likely to report repeat violence. This finding is important in view of the current controversy regarding the outcome of separation. In fact, few of the women were still in violent relationships at the time of the interview. Either the relationship had ended, or there had been no recent violence by that partner. Eighty-one percent of the women were separated from the violent partner, and 18% of the relationships were of less than one-year duration.

These results cannot easily be compared to other studies. Other studies have looked at reports to police or protection orders only, not both. More importantly, most previous studies on the effectiveness of legal protection have not been able to comment on the course of violence for women without legal protection as they did not include a comparison group (Sherman, 1992; Dunford et al, 1990; Egger and Stubbs, 1993; Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Stubbs and Powell, 1989). Two studies of protection orders that did include a comparison group found no difference between women with and without Orders (Grau et al 1985, San Francisco Cooperative). In those studies, participants were drawn from a special program, not from the community. Violence ceased for less women in those two studies (33-69% of women) than in the current study (90-91%). The USA randomised controlled trials on police intervention could show whether police responses varied in their effectiveness; however, without a non-intervention group, they couldn't say whether calling the police was better than not calling the police (Sherman, 1992). Further, it is possible that police intervention may have made things worse; in the absence of a comparison group, this is unknown. The USA studies found that recurrence of violence in the first 6 months after police intervention varied from 19% to 41% of cases, depending on the police response and depending whether the measure was arrest or victim report. As the researchers note, this level of change may have been observed in a non-intervention group.

Differences in outcome between the treatment groups in the USA studies of mandatory arrest attenuated over time (Sherman, 1992). The researchers noted that six months was not long enough for follow-up as a relatively large proportion of men re-offended in the second six to twelve months, particularly in the arrest group (referred to as 'backfire' effects). Results of the current study showed that, overall, legal protection did not make things worse for women; the outcome twelve months after legal protection was not worse than the outcome in the no-legal protection group.

Based on evidence to date in Australia, it is reasonable to expect that, if violence were to recur after legal protection, it would have recurred within this twelve-month time period (Trimboli and Bonney, 1997; Stubbs and Powell, 1989). The finding that violence did recur after legal protection for a proportion of women is similar to that reported in studies by Stubbs and Powell, Grau et al, Sherman et al and Dunford et al but worse than that found by Trimboli and Bonney.

The study found greater prevalence of domestic violence for young women with a profile of lower socio-economic characteristics. Even at this early stage in their lives, young women with children, less education, lower status occupations or who were unemployed, doing unpaid home duties or never had a job were more at risk of partner violence than women without children, with better education, higher status jobs or employment. Previous studies overseas across women of all ages have found that lower socio-economic status is associated with greater likelihood of partner violence (Devery 1991; Zawitz 1994; Mirrlees-Black, 1995; Straus and Gelles, 1990; Ferrante et al, 1996; Sherman, 1992). To our knowledge there are no previous quantitative population data on this issue regarding young women. A previous study has also reported that abuse was more common in cohabiting relationships than in dating or married couples (Stets and Straus 1989).

Differences in socio-economic status did not appear to disadvantage women regarding their perceived access to legal protection. Women with less education and lower status occupations were just as likely to seek legal protection as women with higher educational qualifications and work status, or at least they were not discouraged any more than women with higher educational qualifications and work status. There are few data on this aspect in the literature although a regional analysis of protection orders suggested higher rates per population in lower socio-economic areas (Matka, 1991) and that economic power influences a woman's likelihood of leaving a violent partner (Pagelow, 1981).

We found that, although women in rural and remote areas were more at risk of violence by partners (as indicated previously in the literature by Yellowlees and Kaushik 1992), legal protection appeared to be as accessible to them as to women in urban areas. Similarly, no significant differences between States and Territories were found in young women's use of legal protection. This suggests that, although police services are organised on a State rather than Federal basis and relevant legislation in States and Territories differs, (Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee 1997), these differences do not affect use of legal protection by young women. The sample sizes were not sufficient to examine the outcome after legal protection for each State and Territory.

Previous studies have consistently found that reporting violence to police was associated with severity of violence and extent of injury (Kantor and Straus, 1990; Devery, 1991; Ferrante et al, 1997; Rodgers 1994). These studies were not age specific. The findings of the current study add age-specific information to this body of knowledge and cover both types of legal protection available in Australia. Young women who were seriously assaulted or injured were significantly more likely to seek legal intervention. They were more likely to combined protection from police with court protection if they were subjected to serious types of violence. Nevertheless, 47% of young women who were seriously injured by their partner broken or fractured bones, broken teeth, burns, miscarriage) did not seek legal protection at all.

History of relationships did not influence use of legal protection. The young women who were novices in relationships were just as likely to seek legal protection as women who had other relationships for comparison. Similarly, women who had no previous experience of violence in a relationship were not more or less likely to use legal protection than those who had been in a similar situation before. Women were significantly more likely to seek legal help if they knew the perpetrator had some sort of history; for example if he had been in trouble with the police for other things or he had been violent in other situations.

8. CONCLUSION

The results of this study have very important and positive implications for young women who are experiencing violent relationships. The messages are that violence does not have to continue, that separation is an effective alternative, that legal avenues can provide protection.

A co-ordinated approach that involves police, courts and court mandated programs to examine behaviour change and options for the relationship at this early stage in young people's lives may be the best way to combine the benefits of the different strategies (Pence et al, 1996). It is recommended that young women are informed of the current study's findings on benefits and outcomes of different strategies so they can make the most informed choice for their circumstances. Services should also be informed of the study findings so that policy and practice is based on available evidence to date. The finding that Protection Orders are not as well used as reports to police, even though the outcome after Protection Orders is better, highlights the importance of public dissemination of information about relative benefits of different types and combinations of legal protection.

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SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS FOR YOUNG-AGE RESPONDENTS (N= 13442) AND OF THE GENERAL POPULATION (N= 683145)

[illegible]

Aboriginal/Torres Strait Island

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| No | 99.0 | 99.0 | 97.5 | 96.7 | 91.4 | 77.9 | 98.4 | 97.9 |
| Aboriginal | 0.9 | 0.9 | 2.2 | 3.0 | 7.4 | 20.7 | 1.4 | 1.9 |
| Torres Strait Is | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

COB: Country of Birth

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Australia | 87.7 | 80.1 | 96.5 | 92.5 | 96.6 | 88.8 | 89.8 | 83.0 |
| United Kingdom | 2.2 | 3.4 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 0.4 | 2.9 | 1.9 | 3.1 |
| New Zealand | 1.5 | 2.0 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.6 | 2.5 | 1.4 | 1.9 |
| Other Europe | 1.7 | 2.2 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 1.4 | 1.8 |
| Asia | 4.5 | 5.8 | 0.4 | 1.0 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 3.5 | 4.7 |
| Others | 2.4 | 6.4 | 0.6 | 2.8 | 0.8 | 4.0 | 2.0 | 5.6 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Present Marital Status

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Married/Defacto | 17.2 | 10.5 | 27.1 | 13.4 | 44.0 | 20.2 | 20.1 | 11.4 |
| Separated | 0.7 | 0.7 | 1.1 | 0.9 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 0.8 | 0.8 |
| Divorced | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.4 |
| Widowed | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.1 | 0.3 |
| Single | 82.0 | 88.1 | 71.7 | 85.0 | 54.8 | 77.6 | 79.0 | 87.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Present housing situation

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| House | 74.7 | 78.8 | 74.3 | 78.8 | 70.2 | 73.7 | 74.5 | 78.7 |
| Flat/unit/apartment | 20.5 | 16.6 | 19.2 | 12.1 | 21.4 | 9.8 | 20.2 | 15.5 |
| Caravan/tent | 0.5 | 0.5 | 1.2 | 2.0 | 3.6 | 5.6 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| Other | 4.4 | 4.1 | 5.3 | 7.2 | 4.8 | 10.9 | 4.6 | 4.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |



<<DATE>>

<TITLE> <INITIAL> <NAME>
<ADDRESS1>
<ADDRESS2>

<ID>

Dear <Title> <Name>

Last year you were kind enough to complete a survey for the Women's Health Australia project, which was very important to help get a better picture of the lives and health of young women. Since then, you would have received a newsletter giving you some feedback and survey results.

We would like to interview you as part of a study on social experiences and health of young women. It is a phone interview which will take between 20 and 25 minutes, at a time that's convenient to you. The interview is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time if you wish. Your answers will be completely confidential. The results will be part of a post-graduate research study done by Margrette Young, together with Julie Byles and myself, to provide national statistics on young women's issues and hopefully to help provide better services and information for women.

If you are happy to do this, you don't have to do anything. We'll ring you in the next few weeks to arrange a time that suits you.

If you do not want to take part, please make a free call to the WHA office on 1800 068 081 and tell us.

If you have any queries, call the WHA researchers on the free call number. Leave a message if we are not there and we can call you back if you like.

We hope you will take part.

Best wishes,

Annette Dobson

Annette Dobson

The University requires that you be informed that if you have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, you may give it to the WHA researchers, or if an independent person is preferred, to the University's Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Branch, Chancellery, University of Newcastle, 2308 Telephone (02) 49 216333.