

Domestic violence: long term impacts

Findings from a national survey of domestic violence victims have uncovered the devastating legacy it imposes on the day-to-day lives of Australian women long after the cycle of violence ends.

A recent study in Australia conducted by Professor Suzanne Franzway, Associate Professor Sarah Wendt, Dr Nicole Moulding and Dr Carole Zufferey at the University of South Australia, and Professor Donna Chung at Curtin University in Western Australia has looked at how domestic violence impacts on women's lives over time. The study examined three central aspects of everyday life – housing, employment and mental health.

Researcher Associate Professor Sarah Wendt says “The effects of violence and abuse don't just end when people escape the relationship and now we are hearing about how this impacts on women's lives later, particularly on their health and wellbeing, working and personal lives. We know how often the police are called to domestic violence situations and that refuges cannot cope with the number of women and children seeking support, but we know much less about the longer lasting impacts of domestic violence”

In addition, Professor Donna Chung from Curtin University says “domestic violence can damage women's mental health as well as their housing and employment situations, things we all need but perhaps take for granted. Our study has found that the majority of women reported that they did not regain the levels of mental health, the quality of housing or the employment status, which they had achieved before their experiences of domestic violence”.

The researchers used a national online survey to ask women about their housing, employment, and mental health before, during and after experiencing domestic violence. 658 women completed the survey.

The findings show:

- 96.8% of the violent partners were male.
- Domestic violence was experienced for a range of 1-7 years with an average time of 3.25 years.
- 82.4% reported they were not currently experiencing domestic violence.
- 50.9% of respondents reported experiencing domestic violence after separation from violent partners and continued for an average of 3 years.

Women reported experiencing multiple types of abuse:

- 98% emotional/psychological abuse
- 94% social abuse
- 92% physical abuse
- 79% financial abuse
- 65% sexual abuse
- 32% spiritual abuse



Following are specific statistics and quotes for Employment, Housing and Mental Health

Employment:

- At the time of completing the survey, women were most highly represented in the low income ranges with 40% earning under \$30 000 and 14% earning \$30 -39 000pa.
- 2/3 of the sample indicated domestic violence made it difficult to keep a job.
- 30% could not continue in their place of employment because of safety reasons.
- 67% reported they had *not* continued in their place of employment because of domestic violence. Full time employment decreased and part time and casual employment increased.
- Unemployment increased from 9.4% - 26.4%.

Employment quotes:

"The more capable and educated I became the greater the domestic violence. Without domestic violence I would have a stable career"

"I had to get an intervention order. This has affected the types of shifts I can do as a nurse. It makes me very, very tired."

Housing:

- 42.2 % reported having to make a significant move because of domestic violence – geographical location, interstate, overseas.
- During domestic violence 50.8% owned their home, however, after leaving domestic violence only 13.4% owned their home, currently 37.1% owned their home (most being sole owners).
- Straight after leaving the violence, 46.9% of participants lived in temporary dwellings (which includes caravans, shelters, staying with friends, cars or parks). Specifically 33% stayed with family and friends which highlights the importance of support from friends and family and 9.7% women's shelter (not a usual sample as many studies gather perspectives of women in services). 26.7% went straight to a rental property.
- 67% said their housing costs have increased post violence.
- Women managed to purchase their own homes (often due to housing settlements)- but at a much greater housing risk due to increased costs of rent/mortgages/ cost of housing security (alarms, locks), damage, paying debts of ex-partners, lower wages and frequent moves dues to safety concerns, affecting women and their children's sense of belonging to place and community.

Housing quotes:

"My ex-partner now lives in my home where he physically threw me out. I have lost most of my possessions."

"My furniture is in storage. I'm living out of a backpack. Moving interstate again tomorrow."

"Property damage from him and because the place was in my name it is held against me in finding rentals."



Mental Health:

Prior to the domestic violence, 13% of the women were diagnosed with mental illness whereas:

- 42.7% diagnosed with mental illness during domestic violence
- 44.2% diagnosed with mental health after domestic violence (most depression and anxiety).
- 84% consulted a health professional

- 70% of women rated their emotional well-being as 'good' prior to domestic violence,
- 90% rated their well-being as 'very poor to poor' whilst experiencing violence from their male partner.
- 65% rated their well-being as very poor – poor straight after leaving the violence
- 57% currently rate their mental health as fair to good indicating the women didn't fully recover to the level of mental well-being before the violence started.

Mental Health quotes:

"I am not the same person.....the trauma of the relationship has left me a different person...it has absolutely shattered me."

"I was no longer able to believe anything to be true. Every belief, thought, feeling was totally questionable."

Contact for interview

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