

3.16 Family and domestic violence

Why this measure is included

The negative effects of exposure to family and domestic violence on children and young people have been well identified by researchers worldwide.^{217 218}

Some of the psychological and behavioural effects of exposure to family and domestic violence can include depression, anxiety, trauma symptoms, antisocial behaviour, mood problems, school difficulties and a higher likelihood of substance abuse.²¹⁹ Other research has identified eating disorders, early school leaving, suicide attempts and violence as possible consequences of exposure to family violence.²²⁰

There is a growing body of evidence about the effects of witnessing family and domestic violence on children and young people. While the child themselves may not be the subject of the violent behaviour, the existence of violent behaviour in their household has been shown, for a significant proportion of children, to cause trauma.

This can have effects on the child's coping mechanisms and sense of self, can cause a state of hyper-vigilance and in some cases can manifest as post-traumatic stress disorder.²²¹ Not all children and young people witnessing domestic violence exhibit trauma symptoms;²²² regardless, every child or young person has a right²²³ to live free from violence in any form.

Table 3.56: Number of family and domestic related incidents attended to by police: number and in per cent, Western Australia, 2008–09 to 2012–13

	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13
Number of distinct incidents	32,336	33,155	35,867	41,587	46,827
Number of distinct incidents where at least one child* is present	16,178	16,584	18,532	22,107	23,832
% of incidents where at least one child* is present	50.0	50.0	51.7	53.2	50.9

Source: Data provided by WA Police, Business Intelligence Office 2014, custom report (unpublished)

* A child or young person aged 0 to 17 years.

Notes:

1. Statistics are based on the date the offence was reported to police, not the date the offence is alleged to have occurred; and is for the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2013.
2. The term "distinct incidents" refers to all family and domestic related violence incidents with one or more verified offences reported to or becoming known to police and resulting in the submission of an incident report. Whether the incidents resulted in a charge is not a factor in this count.
3. Statistics include both general incidents (where no valid offences have been committed) and crime incidents (where one or more valid offences have been committed).
4. A 'family and domestic related incident' is an incident where there is a family and domestic relationship between the parties involved. A family and domestic relationship is defined by WA Police as including intimate partners or immediate family members.

Table 3.57: Number of family and domestic related violence incidents involving victims aged between 0 and 17 years: in per cent, by Aboriginal status, Western Australia, 2008–09 to 2012–13

Financial year	Number of distinct incidents	Number of incidents by Aboriginal status					
		Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal		Unknown	
		Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
2008–09	1,061	353	33.1	638	59.7	77	7.2
2009–10	1,044	326	31.1	633	60.5	88	8.4
2010–11	1,114	324	28.9	699	62.4	98	8.7
2011–12	1,250	365	28.9	736	58.2	163	12.9
2012–13	1,701	529	30.9	843	49.2	342	20.0

Source: Data provided by WA Police, Business Intelligence Office 2014, custom report (unpublished); percentages calculated by the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA based on data provided by WA Police.

Notes:

1. Statistics are based on family and domestic related violence incidents only.
2. Statistics are based on the date the offence was reported to police, not the date the offence is alleged to have occurred; and is for the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2013.
3. Statistics only include incidents where the victim's age is known.
4. Victim's age is based on the date the offence was reported.
5. Victim's Aboriginality is based on the victims' ethnic appearance, and is a subjective opinion of the recording officer.
6. A victim may be involved in multiple incidents, therefore a victim may be counted more than once. As a result, the total 'Number of incidents by Aboriginal status' will not equate to the 'Number of distinct incidents'. Accordingly, care should be exercised in the interpretation of the provided statistics as well as the percentages derived from those statistics. An incident will be counted more than once if two or more victims of the same incident are of different Aboriginality. Therefore, the 'Number of incidents by Aboriginal status' figures will not equate the 'Number of distinct incidents' in column 2 of Table 3.57.
7. A 'family and domestic violence incident' is an incident involving an offence against the person (ie. homicide, historical sexual assault, recent sexual assault, domestic assault, deprivation of liberty, robbery (business and non-business), threatening behaviour and excludes non-domestic assault offences; and where there is a family and domestic relationship between the parties involved. A family and domestic relationship is defined by WA Police as including intimate partners or immediate family members.

What is this measure?

Despite recent improvements in data collection²²⁴ about family and domestic violence in the community and, in particular, children and young people's exposure to it, data remains limited. One of the main reasons is that family and domestic violence is generally under reported.

As a result, any data that is available must be seen as an indicative measure and cannot reflect the full extent of children and young people's exposure to family and domestic violence.²²⁵

The data for this measure has been provided by WA Police. It shows the number of family and domestic related incidents attended to by police and the number of incidents at which a child or young person aged 0 to 17 years was present. The data is available for the period 2008–09 to 2012–13.²²⁶

Also provided is information on the number of family and domestic related violence incidents involving victims aged 0 to 17 years. This data has been disaggregated by Aboriginal status and is available for the period 2008–09 to 2012–13.

In addition, Australian data from the *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2012*²²⁷ and a national survey of 5,000 young people aged 12 to 20 years²²⁸ has been included.

Commentary

Data from WA Police shows that in 2012–13, 51 per cent of family and domestic related incidents had a child or young person aged 0 to 17 years present. This proportion has remained fairly stable over the past five years. In absolute terms however, the number of incidents involving a child or young person has increased from 16,178 in 2008–09 to 23,832 in 2012–13 (Table 3.56).

The number of family and domestic related violence incidents involving victims aged 0 to 17 years in WA has increased from 1,061 in 2008–09 to 1,701 in 2012–13. This represents an increase of more than 60 per cent over the five-year period.

Aboriginal children and young people are significantly overrepresented in family and domestic violence incidents: In 2012–13, around 31 per cent involved Aboriginal children and young people²²⁹, 49 per cent involved non-Aboriginal children and young people, and in 20 per cent of incidents the Aboriginal status of the child was unknown (Table 3.57).

The *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2012* conducted by the ABS found that 1.5 per cent of women and 0.6 per cent of men experienced violence by a partner during the last 12 months.²³⁰ 61 per cent of the women who experienced violence by a previous partner had children in their care when violence occurred. Almost one-half (48%) of women who experienced violence by a previous partner said that their children had witnessed the violence.²³¹

A national survey of 5,000 Australian young people aged 12 to 20 years found that 23 per cent of participants had witnessed physical domestic violence against their mothers. The survey also found that Aboriginal young people were significantly more likely to have experienced physical domestic violence between their parents with a rate for male to female violence of 42 per cent (compared to 23 per cent for all respondents).²³²

Strategies

Western Australia's Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022: Creating Safer Communities, Government of Western Australia

- First Phase: Sustaining change – strengthening the foundation and supporting further reform (2013 to 2016).
- Second Phase: Consolidating change – recognising achievements and assessing results (2016 to 2019).
- Third Phase: Achieving change – continuing reform beyond the life of the strategy (2019 to 2022).

The strategy's primary outcomes to 2022 are:

- Prevention and early intervention – individual attitudes and behaviours within the community reflect that family and domestic violence in any form is not acceptable
- Safety for victims – adult and child victims are safe and kept free from harm through timely and accessible services
- Accountability for perpetrators – perpetrators are held accountable for their actions and are actively supported to cease their violent behaviour.



Further information is available at www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Documents/WA%20FDV%20Prevention%20Strategy%20to%202022.pdf

Want to know more?

Research, reports and articles

The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse reviews and disseminates evidence-based research on the causes, effects and ongoing impacts of domestic and family violence. In 2014, the role of the Clearinghouse will be transferred to the new National Centre of Excellence. More information is available at www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/home.html

Responses to Family and Domestic Violence in Western Australia

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support is the leading agency responsible for family and domestic violence strategic planning in WA. Further information about key strategies and initiatives is available at www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/FDV/Pages/FamilyandDomesticViolence.aspx

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2012–2020, Council of Australian Governments

Through six broad strategic areas, the intention of this plan is to reduce sexual assault and family and domestic violence. The plan is available at www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/national_plan.pdf

Youth Say No, Government of Western Australia

The Youth Say No website is provided by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support and provides information on the possible impacts of family and domestic violence on young people. It also details what a child or young person can do if they are subject to family and domestic violence, or want to help someone who is subject to family violence. Further information is available at www.youthsayno.wa.gov.au

Other information

WA Police information on family and domestic violence is available at www.police.wa.gov.au/Yoursafety/Familyviolence/tabid/895/Default.aspx

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support's information on services and policies is available at www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Pages/Home.aspx

The Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services is a state-wide peak organisation which facilitates and promotes policy, legislative and programmatic responses relevant to women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence. A range of links and information is available at www.womenscouncil.com.au/

