

The effect of domestic violence on children in Australia

Children's exposure to family, domestic and sexual violence adversely affects their future health, wellbeing, education, relationships and housing outcomes.⁽¹⁾ Currently, there is no comprehensive data on children's experiences of violence and no national report on the causes of death for all Australian children under the age of 18.⁽²⁾

The following statistics are the current as of November 2021.

1 in 6 women
(16% or 1.5 million) and
1 in 9 men
(11% or 992,000) were physically and/or sexually abused before the age of 15.⁽¹⁾

1 in 4
children are exposed to domestic violence.⁽³⁾



Between 2016-17 and 2017-18, the Australian Institute of Criminology's (AIC) National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) recorded 30 victims of filicide (killing of a child or children under 18 by a parent or parent-equivalent) accounting for 16% of all domestic homicides.⁽¹⁾

Three diseases linked to child abuse and neglect are depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, suicide and self-inflicted injuries. For the Australian population in 2015, child abuse and neglect contributed to 788 deaths (0.5% of all deaths) or 2.2% of the total burden of disease and injury.⁽¹⁾

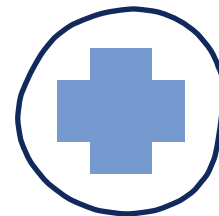
628

hospitalisations of children aged 0-14 for injuries due to abuse (including assault, maltreatment and neglect) in 2017-18.

Of the 495 hospitalisations where a perpetrator was specified, **65%** (321) related to family violence with **47%** (231) of perpetrators recorded as a parent.⁽¹⁾



418,000
women and
92,200
men who had experienced violence from a previous partner said the children in their care had witnessed this violence in 2015.⁽⁵⁾



5,000
hospitalisations of young people aged 15-24 due to assault in 2017-18. Of these cases, **24%** (1,200) were perpetrated by a family member.⁽¹⁾

Approximately 2.5 million Australian adults (13%) experienced abuse during their childhood; the majority knew the perpetrator and experienced multiple incidents of abuse.⁽⁴⁾

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Health impacts of family, domestic and sexual violence 2020
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019
3. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2011, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics – Census 2016
5. Australian Bureau of Statistics – Personal Safety Survey 2016
6. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Child Protection in Australia 2019-20
7. ALHW Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020
8. Australia's children 2020
9. Australian Institute Family Studies 2015 – Children's exposure to domestic and family violence

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In 2019-20:

54%

(26,400 children) of substantiated cases of emotional abuse, including witnessing violence between intimate partners and adults, was the most common primary type of abuse.⁽⁸⁾

3.1%

of all Australian children (174,700 children or 31 per 1,000) received child protection services.

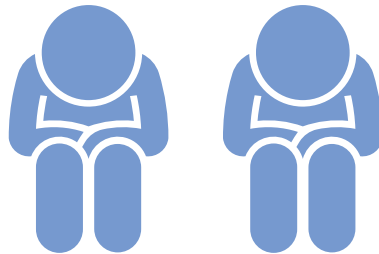
Infants aged less than 1 were most likely (38 per 1,000) to receive child protection services.⁽⁸⁾

Young people exposed to domestic and family violence are more likely to:

- suffer from depression
- be homeless
- abuse drugs and alcohol
- engage in risk-taking behaviours
- experience or use violence and be controlling and manipulative in relationships.⁽⁹⁾

22%

(11,000 children) of cases, neglect was the primary type of abuse, physical abuse in 14% (6,900 children) and sexual abuse in 9.2% (4,500 children).⁽⁶⁾



Studies show that living with domestic violence can cause physical and emotional trauma to children and young people in the following ways:

- ongoing anxiety and depression
- emotional distress
- eating and sleeping disturbances
- physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomachaches
- find it hard to manage stress
- low self-esteem
- self-harm
- be aggressive towards friends and school mates
- feel guilt or blame themselves for the violence
- have trouble forming positive relationships
- develop phobias and insomnia
- struggle with going to school and doing school work
- use bullying behaviour or become a target of bullying
- difficulty concentrating
- find it hard to solve problems
- have less empathy and care for others.

Family and domestic violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia.

In 2019-20, 119,200 Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients had experienced family and domestic violence, equating to 41% of all clients.⁽⁷⁾

In 2017-18, almost half of children (45% or 29,600) receiving specialist homelessness services accessed these services for interpersonal reasons such as domestic and family violence or family breakdown.⁽⁸⁾

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Health impacts of family, domestic and sexual violence 2020

2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019

3. Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse 2011, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children: A Literature Review

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