
Family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Summary

- Family violence is a serious problem among Aboriginal communities around Australia
 - Family violence (also called Domestic Violence) takes many forms: it can be physical, sexual, psychological, economic, spiritual, or legal abuse.
 - All forms of family violence are illegal and unacceptable.
 - Anyone may be abusive, including your partner, siblings, grandparents, step-parents, cousins, nieces and nephews, and carers.
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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience both far higher rates and more severe forms of **family violence** compared to **other women**.

It is important to acknowledge that family violence is not a traditional aspect of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures.

“From an Aboriginal perspective, the experience of family violence must be understood in the historical context of white settlement and colonisation and their resulting (and continuing) impacts: cultural dispossession, breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law, systemic racism and vilification, social and economic exclusion, entrenched poverty, problematic substance use, inherited grief and trauma, and loss of traditional roles and status (**Aboriginal Affairs Victoria 2008**).”

Family violence is worse in Aboriginal communities

Family violence is a serious problem for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around the nation. Available statistics show that:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are between two and five times more likely than other Australians to experience violence as victims or offenders.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are five times as likely to experience physical violence, and three times as likely to experience sexual violence, than other Australian women in the previous year.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women.
- According to the Australian Productivity Commission, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are twice as likely to die as an outcome of family violence compared to other Australian women.
- Family violence is a major contributor to children being removed from their families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over nine times as likely to be on care and protection orders and ten times more likely to be in out of home care than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Without intervention, the cost of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, is estimated to be \$2.2 billion in 2021-22, including costs associated with pain, suffering, premature death and health costs.
- Family violence is a greatly underreported crime.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have lower reporting rates than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and are known to face specific and additional barriers to reporting.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are five times more likely to be victims of homicide than other Australian women. More than half (55%) of these homicides are related to family violence.

(**Source: Ourwatch - Reporting on Family Violence in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Communities**)

Possible consequences of Family violence

Family violence can cause physical and psychological harm, particularly to women and children. It can pass from one generation to the next. – Some children experience family violence are more likely to be violent themselves and become violent adolescents due to learned behaviour and a feeling that their world needs controlling.

Family violence can affect physical and mental health, and lead to social and community issues, including homelessness.

Some of the physical effects for victims of family violence include:

- physical injuries
- sexually transmitted diseases
- pregnancy complications, miscarriage and maternity-related depression

The mental health effects are also significant, and include:

- depression
- anxiety disorders
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- self-harm
- substance abuse
- suicidal tendencies.

Some victims of family violence also die.

Socially, family violence weakens family and community structures. Victims of family violence may find it difficult to go to school or get a job, or they may turn to crime. Most Aboriginal women in prison have experienced some form of family violence.

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders often live in tight knit communities, the whole community can be affected by family violence. 'Community depression' comes from a shared sense of shame, despair, demoralisation and hopelessness.

Family violence has many causes

Family violence is worse in Aboriginal communities than other Australian communities for many reasons, but cultural factors play a huge role. European contact destroyed many Aboriginal communities, and the effects are still being felt.

Frustration and stress can lead to violence in any community, but Aboriginal communities face particular stressors, such as:

- loss of land and traditional culture (some cultural practices lessened interpersonal violence)
- breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law
- lack of respect within families, and from younger generations towards Elders
- loss of identity
- racism.

A range of other issues may also contribute to family violence:

- high rates of imprisonment
- poverty and financial problems
- unemployment
- poor health
- lack of education
- single-parent families and early parenting
- substance and drug abuse
- poor or inadequate housing
- social isolation

- lack of access to services.

Specialist services are available

Many Aboriginal people do not report family violence because they fear discrimination, racism and lack of understanding from support services. It is important to get the help and support you need.

Some Aboriginal communities have safe houses, which provide short-term accommodation for women and children escaping violence. While at the safe house, women are free to decide whether they want to report incidents of domestic violence.

There are support services especially designed for Aboriginal women experiencing family violence, such as **Djirra** Tel. **1800 105 303**.

Remember

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Where to get help

- Call 000 at any time if you are worried about your safety or your children's safety.
- **Djirra** Tel. **1800 105 303**
- Nunga Miminis Shelter (South Australia) Tel. **8223 2200** (After hours call Crisis Care on **13 1611**)
- **Nunga Miminis** offers support and emergency accommodation for Aboriginal women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Service available 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday.
- **Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria**
- **SafeSteps Family Violence Response Centre** Tel. **1800 015 188**
- 1800 RESPECT (**National Sexual Assault, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Line**) Tel. **1800 737 732** (24 hour information and support)
- 1800 RESPECT **services and support map**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **MensLine** Tel. **1300 78 99 78**
- **White Ribbon** (list of national hotlines and state and territory helplines)
- **Salvation Army**
- **Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service**
- **Queensland Health**

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Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria ? DVRCV

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