



**Australian Social Trends
2007**

**Article: Interpersonal
violence**

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Article: Interpersonal violence

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SYMBOLS AND USAGES

billion	1,000 million
kg	kilogram
m	metre
n.a.	not available
n.e.c	not elsewhere classified
n.p.	not published
n.y.a.	not yet available
no.	number
'000	thousand
'000m	thousand million
\$	dollar
\$m	million dollars
\$b	billion dollars
\$US	American dollar
%	per cent
*	estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution
**	estimate has a relative standard error of greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use
. .	not applicable
—	nil or rounded to zero (including null cells)

Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between the sums of the component items and totals.

Interpersonal violence

In 2005, 11% of men and 6% of women aged 18 years and over reported experiencing violence during the 12 months prior to interview.

Violence occurs as a result of a combination of individual, interpersonal and societal factors, and takes both a human and an economic toll on society.¹ The incidence of violent crime raises much community concern due to the potential severity of the consequences arising from it, and fear that it may affect us, or people we know. High crime rates can reduce levels of community trust, confidence and freedom. People who experience violence and those around them can suffer in many ways. The consequences of violence can range from physical injuries to psychological and physiological health problems.¹

In 2005, 50% (3.7 million) of men aged 18 years and over and 40% (3.1 million) of women aged 18 years and over had experienced violence at some point since the age of 15 years. That is, they had experienced physical or sexual assault, or an attempt or threat of these.

Prevalence of violence

Men and women experience different levels and types of crimes (see *Australian Social Trends 2003*, Crime victimisation and feelings of safety, pp. 187–189). In 2005, men were at a greater risk of having experienced violence, with 11% (808,000) of men reporting at least one experience of violence during the 12 months prior to interview, compared with 6% (444,000) of women.

Data source and definitions

Data in this article are from the 2005 Personal Safety Survey (PSS), which collected information from people aged 18 years and over. Both urban and rural areas in all states and territories were included, but very remote areas of Australia were excluded. Survey respondents were asked questions about their experience of violence since the age of 15 years, including the type of violence and the type of perpetrator. More detailed information was collected about the most recent incident of each type of violence by a male and a female perpetrator, such as where it occurred and whether the police were told. The sample of men interviewed was smaller than the sample of women, therefore the standard errors for similar sized estimates will be greater for men than for women. This article focuses on violence that occurred during the 12 months prior to interview in 2005, unless otherwise specified.

Violence is any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault which occurred since the age of 15 years.

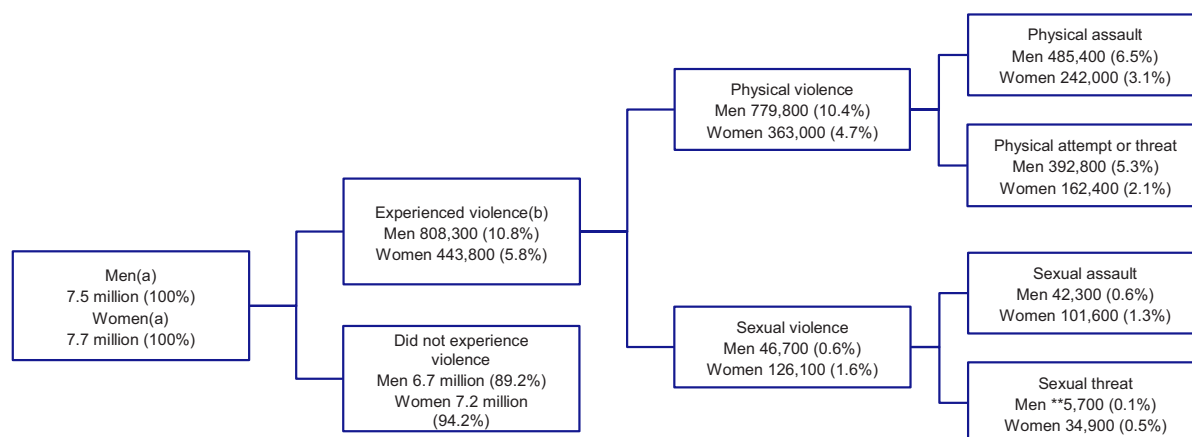
Physical assault involves the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten.

Physical threat is defined as an attempt or threat to inflict physical harm that the respondent believed was likely to be carried out.

Sexual assault is defined as an act of a sexual nature carried out against a person's will, including attempts to force a person into sexual activity.

Sexual threat involves a threat of sexual assault that the respondent believed was likely to be carried out.

Experience of violence during the last 12 months — 2005



(a) Aged 18 years and over.

(b) Components do not add to total as some respondents experienced more than one type of violence.

Source: Personal Safety Survey, Australia (ABS cat. no. 4906.0).

Measuring violence

Violence is a sensitive issue and a challenging phenomenon to measure. There are a number of sources from which data on violence can be obtained. Victimisation rates obtained from surveys are generally higher than rates from administrative records.² Data from administrative sources are limited in that incidents may never be reported to authorities such as the police, whereas surveys provide the opportunity to ask people directly about their experience of violence. However, in an interview respondents may choose not to report incidents of violence that they have experienced.²

Physical violence refers to physical assault, and threatened or attempted physical assault. In 2005, physical violence was experienced by 10% (780,000) of men and 5% (363,000) of women during the last 12 months. Physical assault was the largest component of physical violence, with 6% (485,000) of men and 3% (242,000) of women experiencing physical assault in 2005.

Sexual violence refers to sexual assault (including attempted sexual assault) and threatened sexual assault. In the 12 months prior to 2005, 46,700 (0.6%) men and 126,100 (1.6%) women had experienced sexual violence. Most of these men and women were sexually assaulted (0.6% of all men and 1.3% of all women).

Experience of violence during the last 12 months: levels among persons with selected characteristics(a) — 2005

	Males		Females	
	'000	%	'000	%
Aged 18–24 years	304.3	31.0	117.0	12.4
Living in a Regional or Remote area(b)	257.6	10.2	135.1	5.4
Born in Australia	671.0	12.2	363.2	6.4
Not in a registered or de facto marriage	580.4	17.0	313.1	8.1
No non-school qualification	362.0	10.8	232.5	5.7
Unemployed	50.7	23.8	32.5	16.1
Living in area of greatest socio-economic disadvantage(c)	141.0	11.4	94.0	6.9
Total aged 18 years and over	808.3	10.8	443.8	5.8

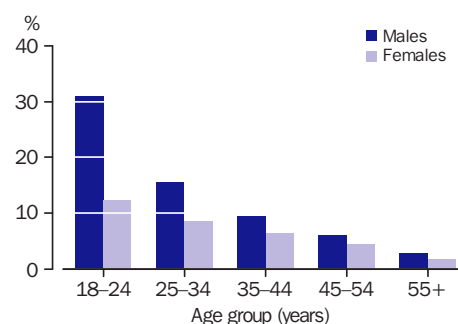
(a) Although a number of the characteristics are related to age, the rates presented have not been age standardised. While removing the influence of age through age standardising reduces the level of prevalence for certain populations (particularly males experiencing violence by 'Not married' and 'Unemployed') it does not change the patterns of prevalence.

(b) Based on the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). Data for Very Remote and Migratory areas are not available.

(c) Those in the lowest Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) quintile, using the Index of Advantage/Disadvantage.

Source: ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey.

Proportion of persons who experienced violence during the last 12 months by age — 2005



Source: ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey.

Characteristics of people who experienced violence

In 2005, half (50%) of the people who experienced violence in the 12 months prior to interview were under 30 years of age. Men and women aged 18–24 years were more likely than the other age groups to have experienced recent violence, with 31% of men and 12% of women in this age group having reported at least one experience of violence in the last 12 months.

Greater proportions of unmarried men and women experienced violence, for example, 17% of unmarried men experienced violence, compared with 6% of men who were in a registered or de facto marriage; and 8% of unmarried women experienced violence, compared with 3% of married women.

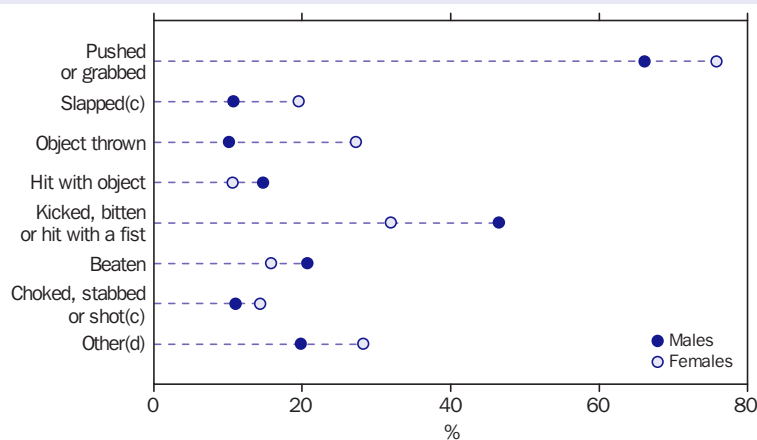
Men who were unemployed were more likely to have experienced violence than those employed (24% compared with 12%). This was also the case for women, as 16% of unemployed women had experienced violence compared with 6% of employed women.

Characteristics of violent incidents

An incident of physical assault may involve one or more of a range of behaviours. The most common form of physical assault by a male perpetrator reported by both men and women was being pushed or grabbed (66% and 76% respectively of those who had experienced physical assault). Almost half (47%) of the men and 32% of the women had been kicked, bitten or hit with a fist. A small proportion of men and women had been choked, stabbed with a knife or shot with a gun (11% and 14% respectively).

Most men (89% or 430,000) who had been physically assaulted said that the perpetrator was male. A smaller proportion (16% or

Nature of physical assault reported(a)(b) — 2005



- (a) Most recent incident of physical assault by a male perpetrator during the last 12 months.
- (b) Some respondents reported more than one type of behaviour in the physical assault.
- (c) Estimate for males has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.
- (d) Includes burns, scalds, being dragged by the hair and deliberately hit by a vehicle.

Source: ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey.

79,500) of men were physically assaulted by a woman. Some men (5%) experienced different incidents of physical assault, one of which was perpetrated by a man and the other by a woman. Almost half (48%) of the men physically assaulted by a man said that there was more than one person involved in the incident. In contrast, 90% of men physically assaulted by a woman said there was only one person involved. Of women who experienced physical assault, 81% (195,000) said that the perpetrator was male, with 27% (66,500)

reporting that the perpetrator was female. The majority (93%) of women physically assaulted by a man reported that there was only one person involved in the incident, as did 79% of those physically assaulted by a woman.

The majority (87% or 36,800) of men who had been sexually assaulted said that the perpetrator was female. Almost all (99% or 101,000) women who were sexually assaulted, reported that the perpetrator was male.

...relationship to perpetrator

Around two-thirds (66%) of men physically assaulted during the last 12 months said that the perpetrator was a stranger. In contrast, women were less likely to be physically assaulted by a stranger (22%) than by someone they knew (82%). Almost a third (31%) of women physically assaulted said that the perpetrator was a current or previous partner, and 37% reported their attacker as being a family member or friend (see *Australian Social Trends 2007 Women's experience of partner violence*, pp. 200–204). Women were also most likely to be sexually assaulted by someone known to them (89%), with 29% of those sexually assaulted reporting that the perpetrator was a current or previous partner, and 39% a family member or friend.

...location

In keeping with the high proportion of men physically assaulted by a stranger, men most frequently reported that they were physically assaulted by a man in the open (35% or

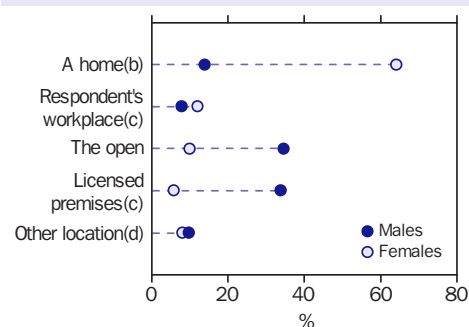
Experience of assault during the last 12 months, relationship to perpetrator(a) — 2005

	Physical assault		Sexual assault	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
	%	%	%	%
Partner	*4.4	30.5	n.p.	28.8
Family or friends(b)	17.4	36.8	*43.7	39.0
Other known persons(c)	21.2	20.5	*35.1	32.0
Stranger	65.7	21.9	*32.9	21.8
Total(d)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	'000	'000	'000	'000
Total persons who experienced assault	485.4	242.0	42.3	101.6

- (a) Includes both male and female perpetrators.
- (b) Includes boyfriend, girlfriend or date.
- (c) Includes ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend.
- (d) Components do not add to total as some respondents experienced assault by more than one type of perpetrator.

Source: Personal Safety Survey, Australia (ABS cat. no. 4906.0).

Location of physical assault by a male perpetrator(a) — 2005



- (a) Most recent incident during the last 12 months.
- (b) Includes respondent's and another person's home.
- (c) Estimate for males at respondent's workplace, and estimate for females at licensed premises, have relative standard errors of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.
- (d) Includes in a private vehicle, using public transport, in an institution, at a sporting venue and other locations.

Source: Personal Safety Survey, Australia (ABS cat. no. 4906.0).

149,000) or at licensed premises (34%). Of those who were physically assaulted by a woman, just over three-quarters (77% or 60,900) said that this violence occurred in their home or another person's home.

The most common location where women were physically or sexually assaulted by a man was in their home or another person's home (64% or 125,000, and 74% or 75,100 respectively). This was also the case where the perpetrator of the physical assault was female (38% or 25,300).

...alcohol or drugs

Consumption of alcohol or certain drugs increases the likelihood of a violent incident occurring for both biological and social reasons.¹ Most (72% or 310,000) men who were physically assaulted by another male said that the perpetrator had been drinking or taking drugs, and 28% said that they themselves had done so. Almost half (47% or 92,300) of the women physically assaulted and the majority (84% or 50,600) of women who were sexually assaulted by a man said that the perpetrator had been drinking or taking drugs.

...more than one violent incident

Most men and women who had experienced violence during the last 12 months said that there had been more than one incident (71% and 76% respectively). However, a small proportion (11%) of men and 14% of women who had experienced violence during this time reported that there had been incidents by different types of perpetrator (these being: a partner; a boyfriend, girlfriend or date; an other known person; and a stranger). For

example, 9% of men and 9% of women had experienced violence from both a stranger and a person known to them.

...stalking and harassment

Besides physical or sexual violence, other less physical threats to a person's sense of safety and wellbeing include stalking and harassment. Stalking refers to a range of activities which the respondent believed were intended to harm or frighten them, and of which the respondent had experienced more than one incident. Examples include following the respondent or giving them offensive material. Harassment refers to a range of disturbing situations, such as indecent exposure or unwelcome brief sexual touching (that did not constitute a sexual assault).

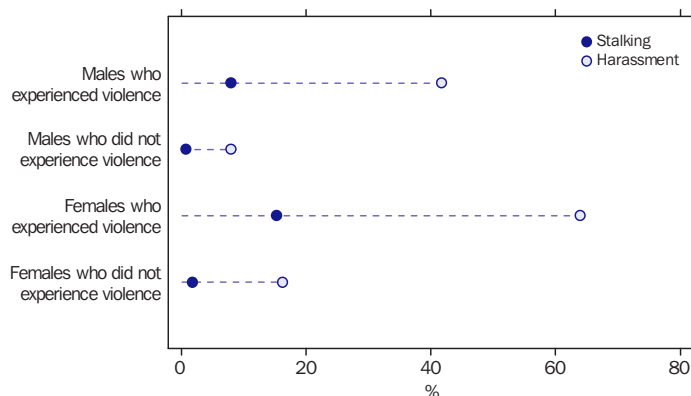
In 2005, men and women who had experienced violence during the last 12 months were more likely than those who had not experienced violence to have also experienced stalking or harassment during this time, although the violence, stalking and harassment may not have been committed by the same perpetrator. A higher proportion of men who had experienced violence had been stalked (8% or 63,900) compared with 1% of men who had not experienced violence. Women's experience of stalking and harassment followed a similar pattern. A greater proportion of women who had experienced violence had been stalked (15% or 67,800) than those that had not experienced violence (2%). A considerable proportion of men who had experienced violence had been harassed (42%) and 64% of women who had experienced violence had also experienced harassment.

Consequences of assault

Compared with assault by male perpetrators, relatively small numbers of men and women reported physical or sexual assault by female perpetrators in 2005. This affects the reliability of estimates and the significance of comparisons drawn between these and other estimates. For this reason discussion of the consequences of and responses to assault refer to male perpetrators only.

In 2005, almost half (47% or 203,000) the men who were physically assaulted by a male perpetrator during the last 12 months were injured as a result. Among women physically assaulted by a man, just over half (55% or 107,000) reported being injured, and 27% (27,300) of those sexually assaulted were injured in the assault. Bruises were the most common type of injury inflicted, as reported by 77% of men and 89% of women injured in the physical assault, and 87% of women injured in the sexual assault.

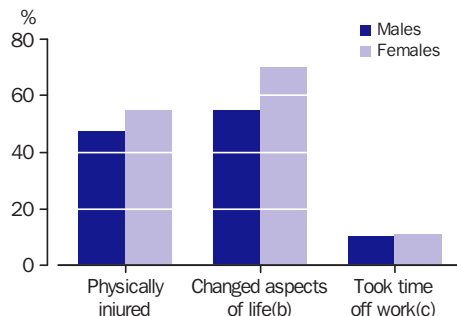
Proportion of males and females who experienced stalking or harassment during the last 12 months(a) — 2005



(a) Of males or females who experienced or did not experience violence during the last 12 months.

Source: ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey.

Consequences of physical assault by a male perpetrator(a) — 2005

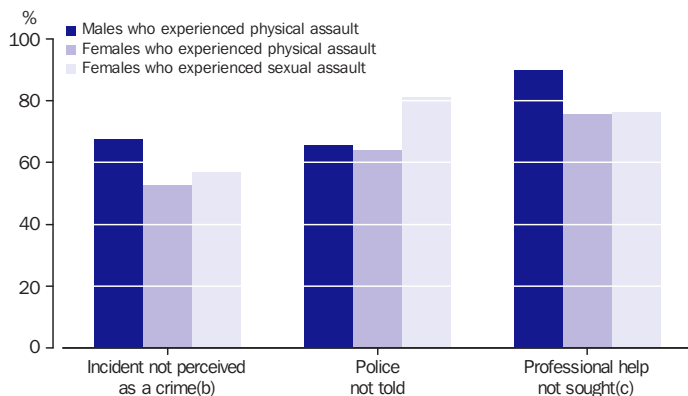


- (a) Most recent incident during the last 12 months.
 (b) Includes aspects changed due to fear and/or injury, such as household tasks, social or leisure activities, work and child care.
 (c) Includes time off to appear in court, meet with police or lawyer, see doctor or counsellor or because respondent was unable to work due to injuries or emotional distress.

Source: ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey.

As a result of injuries, or even the anxiety or fear caused by violence, a person's life may change in a variety of ways, ranging from changes to social and leisure activities such as playing organised sport, neglect of relationships with people, or altered sleeping patterns. Over half (55%) of the men who were physically assaulted by a male perpetrator reported having changed at least one such aspect of their life because of injury or fear. Most (70%) women who were physically assaulted, and 66% of those sexually assaulted by a man, said that they had been affected in this way.

Selected responses to assault by a male perpetrator(a) — 2005



- (a) Most recent incident during the last 12 months.
 (b) Includes do not know, could not remember and refused to answer.
 (c) Professional help includes doctor, counsellor, minister or priest.

Source: ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey.

Violence takes an economic toll on society through absenteeism from work and lost productivity. Similar proportions of men and women who were physically assaulted by a male perpetrator had taken time off work as a result of the assault (10% and 11% respectively).

Responses to assault

Significantly more men (68%) than women (52%) who were physically assaulted by a male perpetrator during the 12 months prior to the survey reported that they did not consider this violence to be a crime. Over half (57%) the women sexually assaulted by a man reported that they did not consider the incident to be a crime.

A significantly higher proportion of men (90%) reported that they had not sought professional help after being physically assaulted by a male perpetrator, compared with women (75%). The proportion of women who reported that they had not sought professional help after being sexually assaulted by a male perpetrator (76%) was similar to women who had experienced physical assault.

Rates of reporting to police for personal crimes like assault are quite low compared to reporting rates for property crimes such as motor vehicle theft (see *Australian Social Trends 1997*, Reported crimes, pp. 167–170). Many incidents of violence are not reported to the police. In 2005, 65% of men physically assaulted by a male perpetrator said that the incident was not reported to the police (by them or by anyone else). A similar proportion of women (64%) said that the police were not told of the physical assault. In contrast, significantly more women (81%) said that the sexual assault was not reported to the police.

The most common main reason given by men for not reporting their experience of physical assault by a male perpetrator was that they did not consider it a serious offence (43% or 120,000 of those who said the police were not told). The most frequent main reason given by women was that they felt they could deal with it themselves (30% or 36,900).

Endnotes

- 1 Krug, EG et al. (eds) 2002, *World report on violence and health*, World Health Organization, Geneva.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002, *Information Paper: Measuring Crime Victimisation, Australia – The Impact of Different Collection Methodologies*, cat. no. 4522.0.55.001, ABS, Canberra.

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