



GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Policy position

- Family violence is gendered violence. While both men and women can be victims and perpetrators, the vast majority of family violence is perpetrated by men against women. The experiences of women are usually more frequent and more severe.
- It is widely recognised that gender inequality is a key driver of family violence, often in intersection with other social inequalities such as age, race, sexuality, ability and social class.
- There is a considerable weight of evidence to support this view. Studies by the United Nations, European Commission, World Bank and World Health Organization all identify gender inequality as the major underlying cause of violence against women.
- The risks of family violence have been found to be higher when resources such as education and income are distributed unequally between men and women, and when women's economic, social and political rights are poorly protected.
- Another key factor is when there are rigid distinctions between the roles of men and women and between masculine and feminine identities. Differences in gender roles create inequalities where women are subordinate and men have more control and decision-making power in both the public and private spheres.
- Gendered violence is rooted in the structural inequalities between men and women. It is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and discrimination against women.
- Violence against women and their children cannot be eliminated until gender equality becomes a core and underpinning social objective.

Understanding gender inequality and family violence

Women—as a group—fare less well than men in terms of most key economic and social wellbeing indicators ([Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022](#)).

- Women's average earnings are 77% of that of men.
- Only 22.2% of CEO positions in the private sector were occupied by women in 2021-22.

- Just 1 in 5 governing boards are gender-balanced, while more than 1 in 5 boards have no women at all.
- Less than four in ten federal parliamentarians in the House of Representatives are women.
- Women are less likely than men to be managers, and more likely to be in low-paid insecure employment.

These characteristics cause and reflect that women do the bulk of unpaid labour, and are more likely to reside in low-status, poorly recognised positions in society. They are, in turn, more vulnerable to housing and financial insecurity, along with welfare dependency and later reliance on the age pension.

The lower-status position of women within the community is often reflected within households, underpinned by rigid gender stereotypes.

[As noted by ANROWS](#), 'levels of violence against women are significantly and consistently higher in communities and relationships where there are more rigid distinctions between the roles of men and women – for example, where men are assumed to be the primary breadwinner and women to be primarily responsible for childrearing – and between masculine and feminine identities, or what an 'ideal' man or woman is'.

Increasing women's economic independence, along with her status and influence in the community - through increased gender equality - is key to minimising and eventually eliminating violence against women.

Recognising intersectionality

Women may experience inequalities differently - including family violence - depending on identities and characteristics including age, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and class. Many women may, for example, experience multiple forms of discrimination such as race and sex-based discrimination. It is essential to note also that it is not people's identities that cause vulnerability but is instead systems and practices that are based on discriminatory biases and assumptions.

- Factors such as intergenerational trauma and experiences of discrimination, racism and poverty can all form a key part of [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women's experiences](#).
- Migrant and refugee women face compounding barriers and intersections of multiple forms of systemic disadvantage, including in relation to migration status. [Migration and social security can work together to prevent some women from seeking safety and redress after experiencing family violence](#).
- Women with disabilities face a range of accessibility barriers, including in relation to employment and health-care. [Gender-based and disability-based discrimination](#)

[doubles the risk of violence for women and girls with disabilities as compared to women without disabilities.](#)

- Older women are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and poverty, as well as [elder abuse](#) which can take the form of domestic violence, such as psychological and financial abuse. Young women are more likely to suffer [online abuse](#).

Recognising intersectionality - the way in which different women face multiple forms of systemic and structural disadvantage and inequality - is essential to addressing inequality through policy and program design and delivery.

About WESNET

With almost 350 eligible members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/referral services.

Harnessing its large national network of members and associate members, WESNET plays an important role in identifying unmet needs, canvassing new and emerging issues, facilitating policy and sector debate and providing expert advice to government to provide improved responses to the problem of domestic and family violence. We do this within our communities - including the Australian Women's Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) - and in partnership with non-government stakeholders.

References and further reading

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). [Gender Indicators](#).

Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (2021). [National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey \(NCAS\)](#).

Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (2020). [Technology-facilitated abuse: Extent, nature and responses in the Australian community](#).

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. [For older people](#).

Harmony Alliance (2020). [Submission to inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence](#).

Judicial Council on Cultural Diversity (2017). [Barriers to access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women](#).

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration (2016). [Domestic violence and gender inequality](#).

United Nations. [Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls](#).

Women with Disabilities Victoria. [Violence against women with disabilities.](#)

World Economic Forum (2021). [Global Gender Gap Report.](#)