



Personal Safety Survey Analytical Paper #3: *Demographics of partner violence*

Introduction

Under the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#) (National Plan), the Australian Government committed to funding the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) every four years throughout the life of the National Plan. This commitment was a key priority of the National Plan and made in recognition of the need to build a strong and lasting evidence base.

The PSS is identified as the data source for measuring success against three of the six national outcomes under the National Plan, namely that *services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence* (national outcome 4), *justice responses are effective* (national outcome 5) and *perpetrators stop their violence and are held to account* (national outcome 6).

The ABS has conducted the PSS in 2005, 2012 and 2016, with the final PSS under the National Plan due in 2020. In the 2016 PSS, approximately 21,250 men and women aged 18 years and over were interviewed in all states and territories and across urban, rural and remote areas of Australia (excluding very remote areas). Further information and definitional information about the PSS, including how interviews were conducted can be found in the Personal Safety Survey [User Guide](#) (ABS cat. no. 4906.0.55.003).

This report provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of women who experience partner violence, where a partner is defined as a person the respondent currently lives with, or has lived with at some point, in a married or de facto relationship (co-habiting partner). It does not include violence by a boyfriend/girlfriend or date or ex-boyfriend/girlfriend. Violence is defined as any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault experienced by a person.

The 2016 PSS estimated that 255,600 women aged 18 years and over reported experiencing partner violence in the two years leading to their interview (2.7 per cent). This report will look at how this rate compares across different sub-populations in Australia.

All data explored in this paper is from the [2016 PSS](#).

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Definitions

Partner: The term partner in the PSS is used to describe a person the respondent lives with, or lived with at some point in a married or de facto relationship. This may also be described as a co-habiting partner. Includes current and former partners.

Intimate partner: Includes current partner (living with), previous partner (has lived with), boyfriend/girlfriend/date and ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend (never lived with).

Physical violence: The occurrence, attempt or threat of physical assault experienced by a person since the age of 15.

Physical abuse: Any deliberate physical injury (including bruises) inflicted upon a child (under the age of 15 years) by an adult. Excludes discipline that accidentally resulted in injury, emotional abuse, and physical abuse by someone under the age of 18.

Sexual violence: The occurrence, attempt or threat of sexual assault experienced by a person since the age of 15.

Sexual abuse: Any act by an adult involving a child (under the age of 15 years) in sexual activity beyond their understanding or contrary to currently accepted community standards. Excludes emotional abuse and sexual abuse by someone under the age of 18.

Sexual harassment: Is considered to have occurred when a person has experienced or been subjected to behaviours which made them feel uncomfortable, and were offensive due to their sexual nature.

Emotional abuse: Emotional abuse occurs when a person is subjected to certain behaviours or actions that are aimed at preventing or controlling their behaviour, causing them emotional harm or fear. These behaviours are characterised in nature by their intent to manipulate, control, isolate or intimidate the person they are aimed at. They are generally repeated behaviours and include psychological, social, economic and verbal abuse.

Incident: An 'incident' is referred to as an event of assault or threat, an occurrence or event of violence, abuse or assault that an individual has encountered in their life. It is possible that people have experienced multiple incidents of violence. Where a person has experienced more than one type of violence, they are counted separately in each type of violence they experience but are only counted once in the totals. Components therefore may not add to the totals.

What is the picture of Partner Violence in Australia?

One in six women and one in seventeen men reported experiencing partner violence since they were 15 years old. That's 1.6 million women or 17 per cent of all women aged 18 years and over in Australia and 547,600 men or 6.1 per cent of all men (ABS 2017).

How many people have experienced **partner violence** since the age of 15?



1.6 million women or
17% of all women aged 18 years
and over in Australia and 547,600 men or
6% of all men (ABS, 2017).

Are we seeing any change in partner violence over time?

Women's experience

The proportion of women who experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months has remained relatively stable over the last decade. In 2005, approximately 1.5 per cent of women aged 18 years and over experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months, whilst in 2016 the figure was 1.7 per cent (ABS 2017).

Men's experience

The proportion of men who experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months increased between 2005 and 2016. In 2005, approximately 0.4 per cent of men aged 18 years and over experienced partner violence in the previous 12 months, whilst in 2016 the figure was 0.8 per cent. However since the survey was last conducted in 2012, there was no significant change in the proportion of men who experienced partner violence (0.6 per cent) (ABS 2017).

Things to be aware of while reading this report:

This report provides analysis of women who have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years by their demographic characteristics at the time of interview. Although it is likely that these characteristics would have remained the same between the experience of violence and the time of interview, this is not certain (for example, people move interstate, move into the labour force). This is further discussed in Appendix 2.

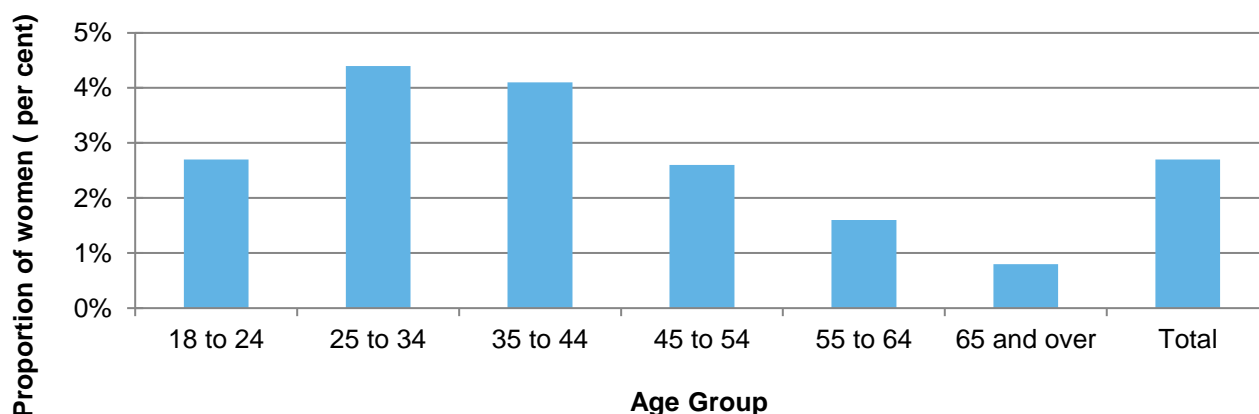
Partner violence also occurs within a complex environment of social structures and relationship dynamics. The information contained in this report may be useful in understanding the profile of women who are more likely to have experienced recent partner violence. However, it cannot be used to draw causal conclusions about the relationship between one variable and another. For example, while women who have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years have a lower socio-economic status than those who have not, it cannot be concluded that lower socio-economic status is a leading cause of partner violence. This paper explores the likelihood of women with certain characteristics who have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years, rather than significance testing variables that cause partner violence. For a definition of partner violence, see Appendix 3.

For discussion about men's data and why it has not been included in this report, see Appendix 4.

Age

Women aged 25-44 years were more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years. Over 4 per cent of women aged 25-44 years had experienced partner violence in the last 2 years compared to 2.7 per cent of all women. That's over 140,000 women aged between 25 years and 44 years who have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years.

Graph 1: Proportion of women who had experienced Partner violence in the last 2 years by age groups



Geographic Location

Jurisdiction

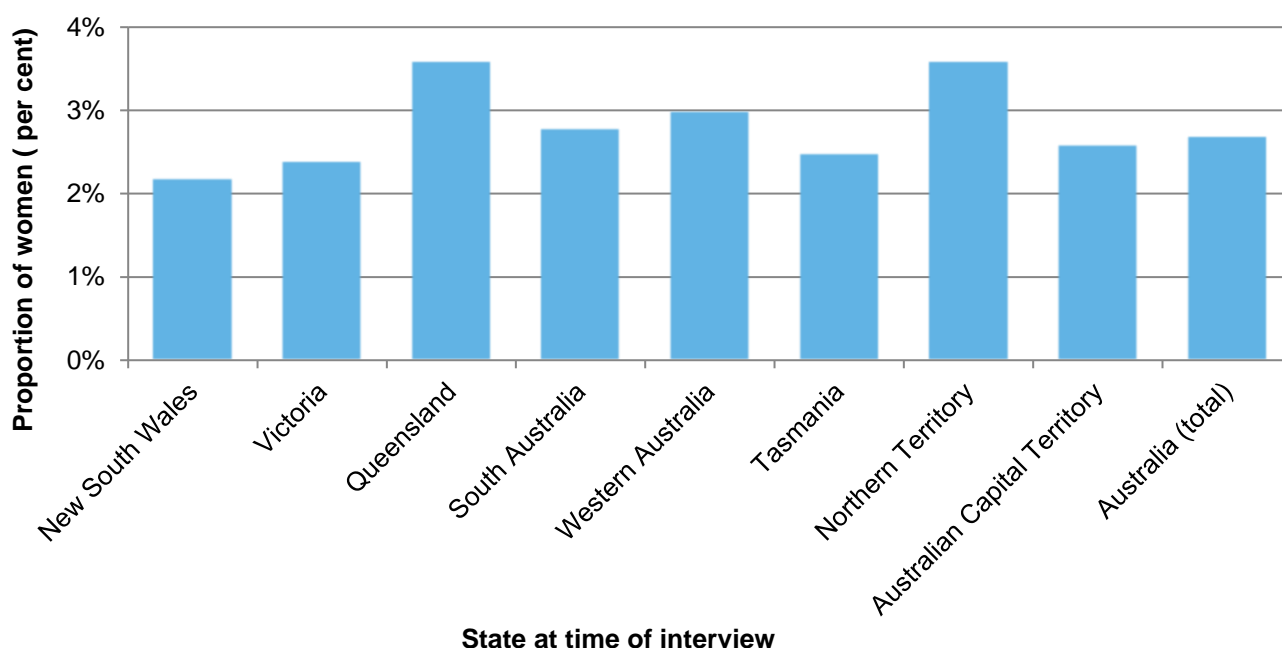
Women living in Queensland or the Northern Territory were more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years than women living in New South Wales (3.6 per cent, 3.6 per cent and 2.2 per cent respectively).

Women living in Queensland were also more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years than women in Victoria (3.6 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively).

Note: due to a relatively high standard error for the Northern Territory data, its rate is not statistically significantly higher than Victoria.

No other states were statistically more or less likely to have women who experienced partner violence.

Graph 2: Proportion of women who had experienced Partner violence in the last 2 years by state at time of interview



Remoteness

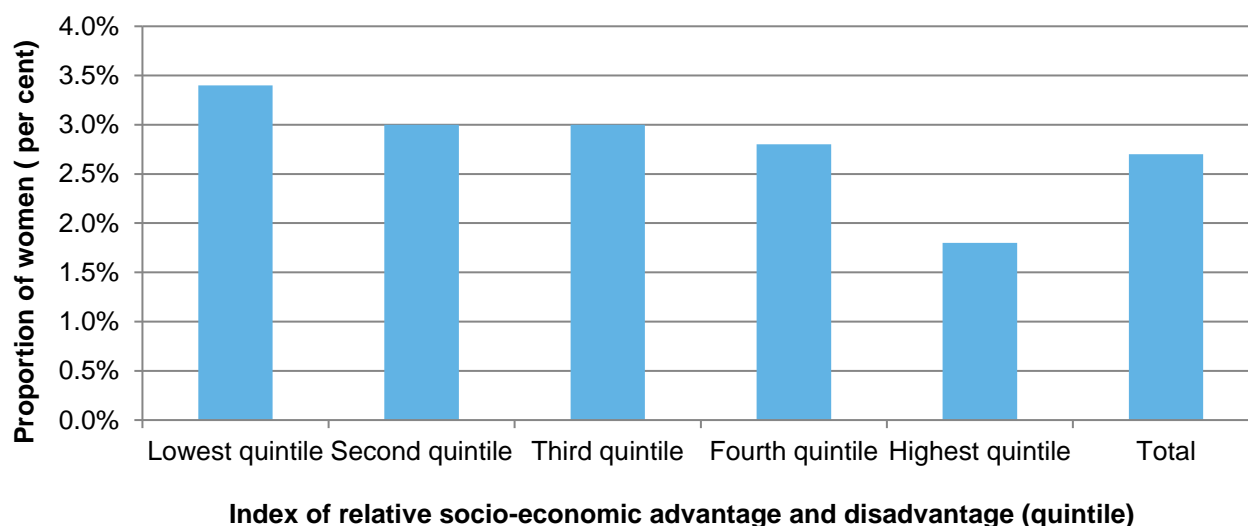
Women who lived in a capital city were no more or less likely to report having experienced partner violence in the last 2 years than women who were living outside of a capital city. Similarly, when women living in 'major cities', 'inner regional Australia' or 'outer regional or remote Australia' are compared to one another, they are no more or less likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years.

Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA)

SEIFA is an ABS measure of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage which looks at a number of information sources and ranks areas in Australia according to results from the most recent available census data. In the graph below and attached data tables, these areas have been grouped into 5 groups (quintiles) from lowest SEIFA to highest SEIFA with higher grouping indicating the respondent lives in an area of higher socio-economic advantage.

When ranked according to their SEIFA, women living in the highest quintile of socio-economic advantage were less likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years. These women experienced partner violence in the last two years at a rate of 1.8 per cent compared to 2.7 per cent of all women aged 18 years and over.

Graph 3: Proportion of women who had experienced Partner violence in the last 2 years by Index of Relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage



Source: ABS 2016 Personal Safety Survey

Income

Women living in households with the highest quintile of weekly income in Australia were less likely than all women aged 18 years and over to have experienced partner violence in the last two years (1.7 per cent compared to 2.7 per cent).

Country of Birth

The 2016 PSS indicates that persons who were born in countries where the main language spoken is not English are less likely to experience partner violence in the last two years than women who were born in Australia or women who were born in main English speaking countries.

Languages spoken

PSS 2016 data also shows that women who speak English either as their first language or as their main language spoken at home are more likely to experience partner violence in the last two years than women who spoke a language other than English as their first language or women whose main language spoken at home is not English.

Note: there are survey procedures introduced to protect the safety of the respondent participating in PSS which may have led to an under-representation of persons who do not speak English or do not speak English well. For example to ensure the safety of participants, all interviews must be conducted in private. Where it was necessary for a member of the respondent's household to provide interpretation, the interview was ceased before reaching sensitive questions about the respondent's experience of violence. Details about the PSS interview procedures can be found here. Furthermore, for those respondents who did complete an interview, either reading the questions themselves, with assistance from the interviewer or with an ABS interviewer speaking a foreign language, there are additional cultural considerations to be taken into account which may have reduced these respondent's likelihood of reporting their experiences of partner violence.

Labour force

Women who were employed were no more or less likely to report having experienced partner violence in the last two years than women who were unemployed or not in the labour force.

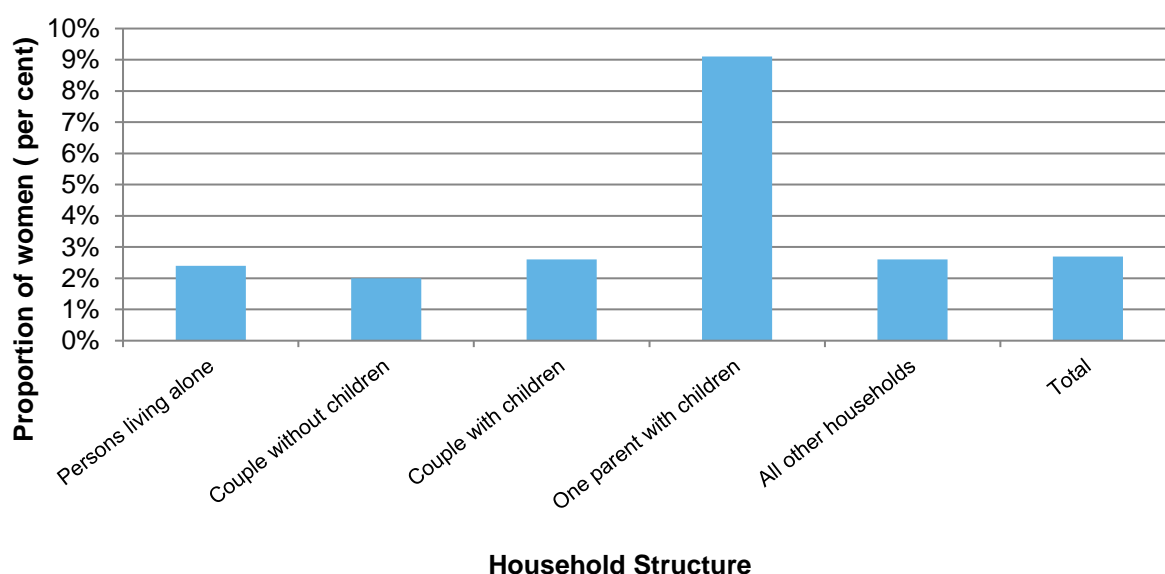
Education

The proportion of women who experienced partner violence in the last two years does not show any differences dependent on whether or not they have a non-school qualification.¹

Single parent households

Women living in single parent households were more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years. Over 9 per cent of all women living in single parent households had experienced partner violence in the last two years compared to 2.7 per cent of all women aged 18 years and over.

Graph 4: Proportion of women who had experienced Partner violence in the last 2 years by Household structure



However, this rate is high because there are comparatively fewer women who live in single parent households in Australia compared to women living in couple households with or without children, or other household types. Women living in couple households make up the majority of women who have experienced partner violence in the last two years in Australia.

Of all women who have experienced partner violence in the last two years, it is estimated that:

- 110,000 women live in a couple household
 - 50,000 without children

¹ Non-school qualifications are those completed above year 12 (including diplomas, certificates, and university degrees).

- 60,000 with children
- 40,000 live in single parent households
- 30,000 live alone
- A further 70,000 live in other household types.

110,000 women who have experienced **partner violence** in the last 2 years live in a couple household:



50,000
without
children

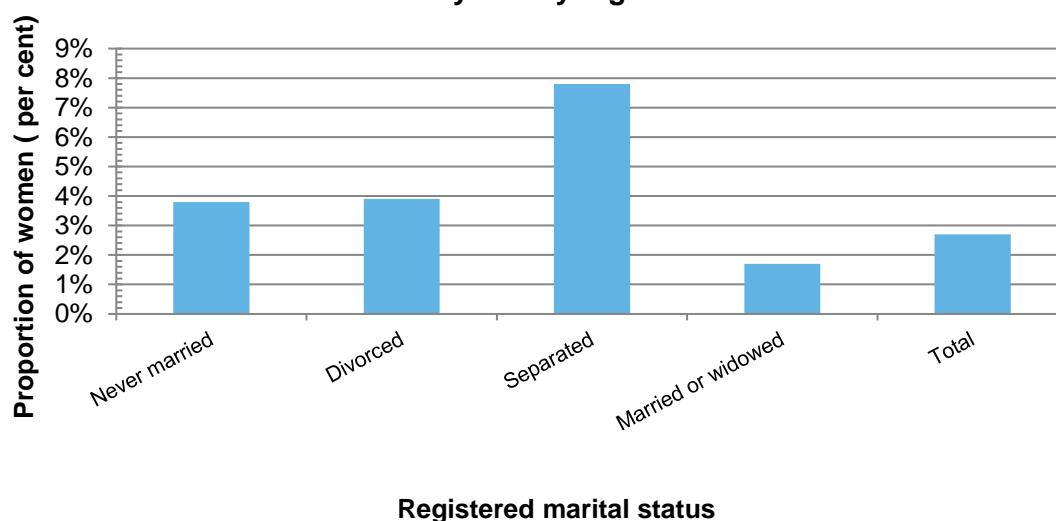


60,000
with
children

Marital Status

The PSS includes two measures of marital status – a person's registered marital status and their social marital status (which includes de-facto relationships).

Graph 5: Proportion of women who had experienced Partner violence in the last 2 years by registered marital status



Registered marital status

Women who were married or widowed were less likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years (1.7 per cent of the 5.4 million women who were married or widowed).

Women who were never married, divorced or separated are more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years, with women who were separated the most likely (7.8 per cent of the 320,000 women who were separated).

Similar to the above example, as there are comparatively fewer women in Australia are separated this means that this group is significantly over-represented.

Of all women who have experienced partner violence in the last two years, it is estimated that:

- 100,000 have never married
- 90,000 are married or widowed
- 34,000 are divorced
- 25,000 are separated.

Social Marital status

The PSS showed that women who were living in a de-facto relationship were more likely to experience violence from a partner in the last two years (4.9 per cent) than either women who were not married (3.2 per cent) or women who were married in a registered marriage (1.8 per cent).

Of all women who have experienced partner violence in the last two years, it is estimated that:

- 120,000 are not married
- 80,000 are in a registered marriage
- 50,000 are in a de-facto marriage.

Disability or long term health condition

Women reporting having a disability or long term health condition in the PSS were more likely than women without a reported disability or long term health condition to have experienced partner violence in the last two years (3.9 per cent compared to 2.2 per cent). Almost 115,000 women with a disability or long term health condition have experienced partner violence in the last two years.



Almost 115,000 women with a disability or long term health condition have experienced partner violence in the last 2 years.

Household ability to raise \$2000 within a week

Data from the PSS indicate that women who reported that their household would have difficulty 'suddenly raising \$2,000 within a week for something important' are more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years. Women who experienced this difficulty had experienced violence from a partner at a rate of 5.8 per cent compared to 2.1 per cent of women who reported that this amount could be raised.

That's 80,000 women in Australia who have experienced partner violence in the last two years and also reported that their household would have difficulty 'suddenly raising \$2,000

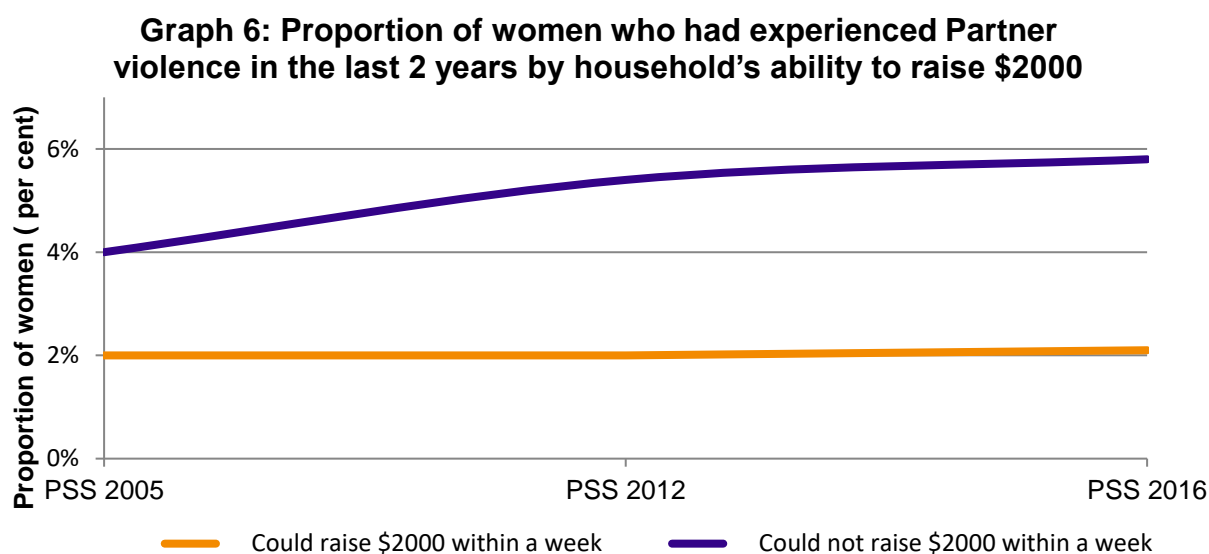
within a week for something important' (compared to 160,000 women who reported their household would not have this difficulty).



Change over time

The below graph shows the change in this measure between 2005 and 2016.

In 2005, women whose household would have difficulty 'suddenly raising \$2,000 within a week for something important' experienced partner violence in the last two years at a rate of 4 per cent. This increased to 5.8 per cent in 2016. In 2005 these women remained more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years than women overall.



Social Connectedness

The PSS asks respondents about their ability to ask for assistance from persons living outside the household, and their social contact with persons outside the household. Those who reported experiencing partner violence in the two years were no more or less likely than women overall to be able to ask for this assistance or to be in contact with persons outside the household.

Self-reported health status

PSS respondents were asked to self-report their health status on a scale reporting either excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor. Women who rated their health as fair or poor were more likely to have experienced partner violence in the last two years (4.7 per cent) than women who rated their health higher on the scale (2.2 per cent who rated their health as excellent or very good and 2.8 per cent who rated their health as good).

Overall life satisfaction

When asked to report their overall life satisfaction on a scale from zero to ten, women with lower scores tended to experience higher levels of partner violence in the last two years than women who rated their life satisfaction highly. 1.9 per cent of women who rated their life satisfaction between seven and ten had experienced partner violence in the last two years. Over 8 per cent of women who rated their life satisfaction between zero and three had experienced partner violence in the last two years.

Appendixes

Appendix 1

This data report addresses the following policy questions highlighted in [Defining the Data Challenge for Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) (ABS cat. no. 4529.0):

- What are the characteristics of *communities* that have a higher incidence of family, domestic and sexual violence?
- What are the characteristics of particular *sub-populations* that place them at more or less risk of family, domestic or sexual violence?
- Does the size of the problem vary across different population groups or communities?
- What are the environmental factors that influence societal and community context within which family, domestic and sexual violence occurs?
- Is there change over time?
- In what circumstances does family, domestic and sexual violence occur?
- Are some population groups and age groups over-represented in incidents of family, domestic and sexual violence?

Appendix 2

The PSS collects some information about a person's current demographic characteristics at the time of their interview.

People's demographic characteristics change over time – for example over the course of their life someone can move interstate, transition into or out of the labour force, or gain an educational qualification.

For this reason data from the PSS for demographic characteristics of persons who have experienced violence vary in their degree of usefulness – someone who experienced violence seven years ago is unlikely to have the exact same characteristics at the time of their interview in 2016, so analysing their demographic characteristics is unlikely to prove informative in understanding their experience of violence.

However when looking at people who experienced violence relatively recently, their demographic characteristics are less likely to have shifted drastically. This report looks at persons who have experienced partner violence in the last two years analysed by their demographic characteristics.

Appendix 3

Definition: Partner Violence

Partner violence is defined by the PSS as violence experienced from a current or previous partner.

A 'current partner' is defined as a person that the respondent was living in a relationship with at the time of their interview.

A 'previous partner' is a person who the respondent lived with at some point but was no longer living with at the time of their interview. When analysing previous partner data from the PSS it is important to note that of all persons who have experienced violence by a previous partner, the vast majority experienced violence while they were living with their previous partner (i.e. the perpetrator was a current partner at the time of the violence).

Appendix 4

Men's experience of partner violence: data limitations

Men and women experience partner violence at different rates, with comparatively fewer men reporting experiences. The 2016 PSS found that 138,000 men had experienced violence from a partner in the last two years (compared to 255,600 women).

While the PSS does collect the same information from both men and women, when analysing data in detail for demographics by experience of partner violence in the last two years, men's data quality diminishes and unfortunately for the purposes of this report very little of the data analysed showed any statistical differences between populations. For this reason this data report and attached data tables focus on women who have experienced partner violence. For more information about statistical significance testing see paragraph 16 of the Personal Safety Survey [Technical Note](#) (ABS cat. no. 4906.0).

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