

Patterns of violence perpetration in Australia

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How many people are perpetrating domestic, family, and sexual violence?

- Let's do the maths:
 - 1.6 million women (17%) and 548,000 men (6.1%) in Australia have experienced physical or sexual violence from a current or previous cohabiting partner
 - So how many people have perpetrated this violence?
- We know little about the perpetrators of domestic, family, and sexual violence



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The Perpetration Project

- A national research project on the perpetration of violence in intimate, domestic and family settings in Australia
- A collaboration between the Queensland University of Technology, the Equality Institute, and the Accountability Matters Project
- Report, released on February 8:
Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why?



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Data from victims and police

- Most violence is perpetrated by men
 - Among people who experienced physical assault in the last year:
 - Among male victims 77% of the perpetrators were male
 - Among female victims 70% of the perpetrators were male
 - 87% of perpetrators of homicide in Australia are male
 - Three-quarters (75%) of all victims of domestic violence reported the perpetrator as male
 - Among all victims of sexual violence since the age of 15, six times as many reported sexual violence by a male perpetrator as by a female perpetrator
- Police and legal data are limited sources of information on perpetration
 - Problems: Only the most severe cases. Variation in legal definitions. Over-policing of First Nation and ethnic minority communities. Misidentification of victims as perpetrators

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Self-report data on the use of violence

- Most self-report data on domestic violence relies only on asking individuals if they or their partners have ever committed any violent acts from a specified list
 - E.g., the Conflict Tactics Scale
 - Focuses on 'counting the blows'
 - Such studies are not measuring domestic violence 'proper', but just whether individuals have ever used any physically aggressive acts against a partner
- | | |
|-------|---|
| i. | Threatened to hit or throw something at the other one |
| j. | Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something |
| k. | Threw something at the other one |
| l. | Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one |
| <hr/> | |
| m. | Slapped the other one |
| n. | Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist |
| o. | Hit or tried to hit with something |
| p. | Beat up the other one |
| <hr/> | |
| q. | Threatened with a knife or gun |
| r. | Used a knife or gun |
| s. | Other (PROBE): _____ |

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The Conflict Tactics Scale

- Methodological problems:
 - Asks only about acts, and ignores their impact, meaning, and history (who initiated it, who got hurt, what has happened before, etc.)
 - Leaves out sexual violence, stalking, other violent acts, and violence after separation
 - Uses samples shaped by high rates of refusal particularly among individuals perpetrating or suffering severe DV
 - Draws only on married and intact couples and excludes violence after separation
- Therefore produces findings of gender symmetry
- Studies using the CTS therefore are popular among MRAs

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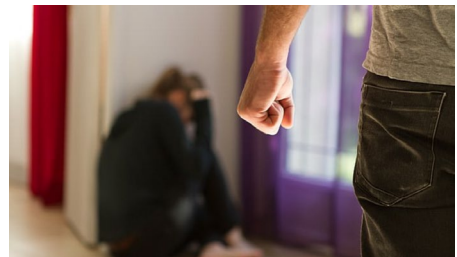
Self-report data on the use of intimate partner violence

- Acts-based studies find that:
 - Substantial proportions of men and women and young people have ever used aggression against an intimate partner
 - Males and females perpetrate aggression against intimate partners at similar rates, or women report higher rates of perpetration than men

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Self-report data on the use of intimate partner violence

- However:
 - Most studies are just 'counting the blows'. They involve false positives or over-reporting
 - Men are less likely than women to report their own use of violence
 - CTS studies often mistakenly include behaviours that were playful, unintentional, and non-abusive
 - More of women's than men's violence is in self-defence
 - Males' use of violence is more frequent, severe, fear-inducing, injurious, and harmful than females' use of violence



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Self-report data on the use of sexual violence

- Boys and young men have significantly higher rates of sexual violence perpetration than girls and young women
 - E.g., in a survey in 10 European countries among young adults aged 18-27, 16.3% of men and 5% of women had perpetrated sexual aggression
- Strategies used: Verbal coercion and alcohol- or drug-facilitated or incapacitated sex are more common than assaults involving physical force

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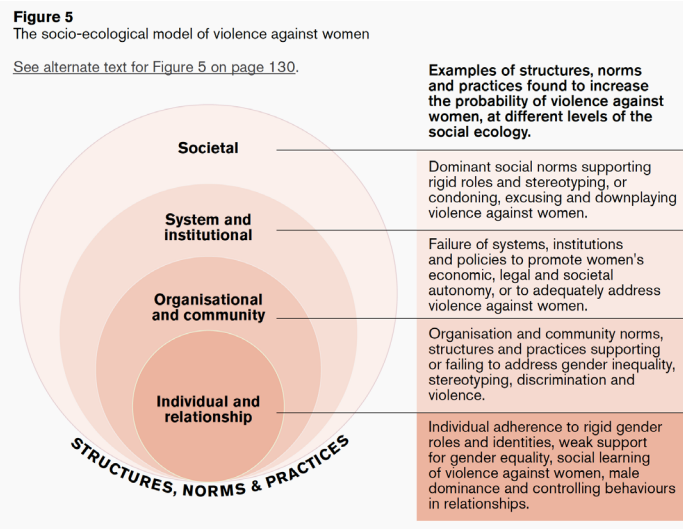
Self-report data on the use of sexual violence

- Significant numbers of males have ever perpetrated sexual violence:
 - Close to one-third of men (29%) in their lifetimes, at universities in the USA and Canada
 - One in ten men (11.4%) in the last 2 years, at universities in the UK
 - 10% to 62% of men in a multi-country study in the Asia-Pacific



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Drivers of perpetration



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Drivers of perpetration

- Features of neighbourhoods, communities, and cultures, particularly gender-inequitable structures and norms
- Violence-supportive settings and contexts
- Situational variables (separation, firearm availability, etc.)
- Sexist and violence-supportive peers
- Violence-supportive and hostile masculine attitudes
- Witnessing or experiencing childhood violence

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Diversity in perpetrators and perpetration

- Among the people who assault their intimate partners:
 - Some are 'specialists' who assault only their partners
 - Others are 'generalists' involved in various forms of violent and criminal behaviour
- There are different forms of violence and abuse in relationships:
 - Situational couple violence
 - Intimate terrorism / Coercive control

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Diversity in perpetrators and perpetration

- Risk factors for the use of violence differ between different groups
- E.g., sexual coercion:
 - A US study examined 4 potential predictors of sexual coercion: 1) prior sexual abuse, 2) sociosexuality (a desire for short-term, casual, and impersonal sex), 3) sexual compulsivity, and 4) sexual dominance
 - Prior sexual abuse was a shared predictor among men and women
 - Men's sexual coercion was predicted by sexual dominance and sociosexuality
 - Women's sexual coercion was predicted by sexual compulsivity
- E.g., intimate partner violence:
 - Internalised homophobia is an important driver of IPV in same-sex relationships

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Patterns of co-occurrence and overlap

- Co-occurrence:
 - A key risk marker for perpetration of intimate partner violence or sexual violence is the perpetration of *other* forms of violence and abuse
 - Men who perpetrate sexual harassment also are more likely than other men to perpetrate sexual assault
 - Co-occurrence of intimate partner violence and child maltreatment in households
- The risk factors for different forms of violence perpetration overlap

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Perpetrators in society

- Perpetration starts young
 - Large proportions of adolescents perpetrate dating violence against their intimate partners and ex-partners.
 - Male perpetrators of sexual violence typically start at around 16
 - Most individuals who commit sexual coercion as young adults will continue to do so (without intervention)
- Few perpetrators are held to account
 - Nearly all of the people who use domestic and sexual violence never come to the attention of police or legal systems

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We need data

- We need national data on the extent and character of people's use of domestic, family, and sexual violence:
 - The Perpetration Survey
- There are effective and ethical ways to gather data on violence perpetration
 - Surveying people about their own use of violence is feasible, ethical, and impactful
- We also need:
 - Well-designed methods that capture the character, breadth, severity, impact, and contexts of violence perpetration
 - Research on diverse perpetrators: female, LGBT, etc.
 - Research on diverse forms of violence
 - Information about the risk factors that feed into perpetration and the protective factors that protect against it

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We need data in order to:

- Know where best to target interventions against perpetration
- Decide how and where to intervene early
- Track whether Australia's efforts to reduce the use of violence are making progress

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A problem above all of perpetration

- The problems of domestic, family, and sexual violence, fundamentally, are problems of *perpetration*
- “Perpetration, ultimately, is the problem we must solve if we are to end domestic, family, and sexual violence.” (Lula Dembele)

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Resources

- Flood, M., Brown, C., Dembele, L., and Mills, K. (2022) *Who uses domestic, family, and sexual violence, how, and why? The State of Knowledge Report on Violence Perpetration*. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology. URL: <https://research.qut.edu.au/centre-for-justice/wp-content/uploads/sites/304/2023/01/Who-uses-domestic-family-and-sexual-violence-how-and-why-The-State-of-Knowledge-Report-on-Violence-Perpetration-2023.pdf>
- Flood, M., and Dembele, L. (2021). Putting perpetrators in the picture. *Centre for Justice Briefing Papers*, Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology, No. 13, May. URL: <https://research.qut.edu.au/centre-for-justice/wp-content/uploads/sites/304/2021/06/Michael-Flood-briefing-paper-issue-13.pdf>
- Contact: Professor Michael Flood, m.flood@qut.edu.au

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Further resources

- FREE Book, *Engaging Men and Boys in Violence Prevention* (Flood, 2019): <https://xyonline.net/content/new-book-engaging-men-and-boys-violence-prevention>
- Engaging men and boys in violence prevention: Resources: <https://xyonline.net/content/engaging-men-violence-prevention-walking-tour-some-xys-content>
- Men's violence against women: Key readings (in full text): <http://xyonline.net/content/mens-violence-against-women-some-key-readings-and-reports>
- Violence prevention: short, key introductions (in full text) <http://xyonline.net/content/preventing-violence-against-women-xy-collection-short-key-introductions>
- Violence prevention: key international reports and reviews (in full text) <http://www.xyonline.net/content/preventing-violence-against-women-xy-collection>
- Bibliographies on key strategies and settings for prevention: <http://xyonline.net/books/bibliography/27-violence-and-responses-violence/bibliography-16>