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Chapter 5: Catalysts and consequences of violence

'The answers were there before white man come in'

Stories of strength and resilience for responding to violence In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

CHAPTER 5
CATALYSTS AND CONSEQUENCES
OF VIOLENCE

In this chapter we describe factors related to contemporary violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, based on quantitative analysis of data from the CMS and qualitative findings from interviews and focus groups with community members and service providers. This includes factors understood as precipitating or perpetuating violence, factors understood as consequences of violence and factors understood as both.

Factors commonly linked to violence by interview and focus group participants are shown in Figure 5. These were: inadequate housing; racism; financial stress; alcohol and other drug use; poor physical and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB); mental health difficulties; unemployment; and contact with the justice system and incarceration. While these factors were sometimes described individually, participants were very aware that the interrelationships between them related to violence. The combination of these factors was described as creating complex and disadvantageous family and community environments. Community members succinctly described this complexity:

> … it's youth unemployment, gambling, alcohol, drugs, finance, housing, overcrowding, jealousy, generational DV [domestic violence] and unemployment.

> The story of family violence comes because there's no employment opportunities, there's drug and alcohol addictions, and families are together twenty-four seven with no separation. That's the honesty of it all.

> This is all leading to all these things here. Council responsibility. Neighbourhood Watch, Aboriginal workers, jobs, all of these things here all come back to these things here. If we can work on these, we can have a better community, a safer community, a community that we can be proud to be part of.

Trauma and the negative impacts of ongoing colonisation

A common theme underlying each of these factors and their intersection is trauma and the negative impacts of ongoing colonisation, detailed in Figure 5. Historical and more recent forms of trauma were understood as a common cause of these precipitants of violence; participants described how witnessing violence and child removal could have lasting negative impacts on families, causing psychological distress and leading to alcohol and other drug use:

> The causes are a lot deeper, you know. They're a lot deeper, a lot to do with cycles of intergenerational trauma, seeing violence as you grow up as a kid. Alcohol just brings it out. Developing poor relationships with each other, the weakening of culture, and add in issues about overcrowding, poverty, gambling, these compound the problem. So, without the right support and early interventions, educational programs, a lot of these cycles will just continue and just keep filling up that prison. And what you're doing, you're exposing a new generation of young people to all these same situations. So, the intergenerational trauma cycle continues …

> I've been in Child Safety myself, like, when I was a kid. My sister, she's probably been in Child Safety half her life, and that really broke my mother ... she's been drinking ever since and she's got mental health issues. She's got [chronic health problem] … And so that leads to the cycle. It is a big thing. It affects a lot of families, even though Child Safety might think they're doing the right thing …

> [Child removal] it's gonna tear a mother or father apart, you know? It's just gonna make them fall to alcohol or keep doing drugs.

Detailed findings on each of these key factors are described below, integrating qualitative findings, quantitative findings and evidence from the literature, where relevant.
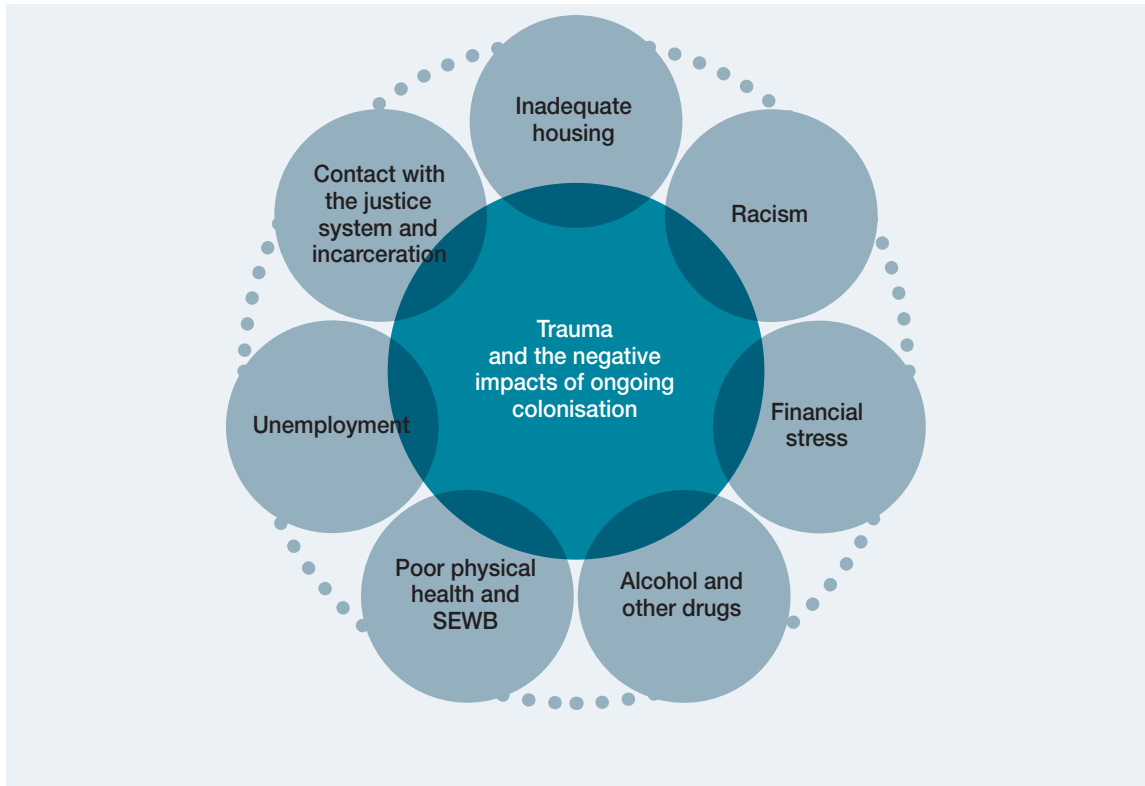
Figure 5: Interrelationships between trauma and the negative impacts of ongoing colonisation, and catalysts and consequences of violence

Inadequate housing

Housing was commonly identified in focus groups and interviews as a key concern. Many participants described problems relating to overcrowding and inadequate availability of housing. Participants explained that, without more housing, people were having to move away from their communities:

> *… there's so many guys in the house, they got to go sleep in the creek or go sleep with extended family that's already got an overcrowded house, with their family and kids and that, so they've got to take their family, kids and all their family there, and it's just creating more problems.*

> *Wait lists is an issue on everything. Housing is such an issue here at the moment. [People are on housing wait lists] years … Three years. Yeah. And even if you're a priority, if you're not a red priority. If you are physically homeless but even then they say, 'Go and house surf.'*

> *We need more houses because we've got a lot of people here [place] like that, you know, still living in the same roof, crowded, over-crowded.*

> *Every house that's been going here that was sold was over a mil [million dollars], every land, and have been bought by outside people and now the thing is some of the land owners now with all the existing accommodation, nothing is under one thousand dollars so how is the local … going to pay, afford to pay. It's one thousand dollars a week … We're talking about rent for houses … We've asked for a threshold and tried to lock it off. It's been trying to get blood out of a rock.*

The CMS data confirm that housing problems are impacting many participants: more than one-third said that their home was 'a little' to 'a lot' overcrowded, and about 15% said they did not have a regular, stable place to sleep. Focus group and interview participants saw housing as a key determinant of wellbeing and community safety, forming the foundation for other social determinants of health. Housing shortages were interconnected with other community issues, including education, employment, alcohol and other drug use (often described as coping mechanisms) and violence. Together, participants described a situation of cyclic disadvantage and insecurity for many community members:

> *We need housing. They said, 'Why did you pick that?' And I said, 'Because, unless you've got a roof over your head, how can you have a safe environment and be able to … then look for a job.' If you're looking for a job and you've got nowhere to live, what's the use of it. Okay, education, once again, comes back to housing. If you've got proper housing, you can then have the education that you need for yourself and your children, okay? Your health, how can you have good health within yourself and*

your community, if you haven't got a place to live? It all keeps coming back to housing. Status within your community, okay, how are you going to have status within your community if you can't say to someone, 'Oh, I've got this place over here, and, geez, it's good, I'm looking after it, it's looking after me.' It comes back to housing – violence in our community. A lot of people are surfing on couches. They go over to cousin one month and then another cousin the next month because of violence, because they haven't got a stable environment – comes back to housing. Drugs – why do people take drugs? Because they want to make themselves feel better. Why? Because they feel sad because they've got none of these things, which means that they haven't got this here – housing. Same with alcohol – it all leads back to housing. Okay, but see all of these issues here, it all comes back to housing, a roof over our heads, a lot of these things could come into play.

Having stable housing and living in conditions that were not overcrowded were significantly associated in the CMS with a lower prevalence of violence (Table 7; Table 8). For example, the prevalence of experiencing violence in the past year was halved among participants who reported sleeping in the same place most or all nights, compared with those who reported never to sometimes sleeping in the same place (18% versus 35%; PR=0.54, 95%CI:0.44,0.68). A similar strength of association was observed for conviction in relation to violence (14% versus 38%; PR=0.44, 95%CI:0.35,0.55). This probably partially reflects the fact that violence – whether experienced or perpetrated – often leaves people with nowhere to stay. Living in a house that was not overcrowded, compared with 'a lot' overcrowded, was significantly associated with a lower prevalence of feeling violent (27% versus 37%; PR=0.70, 95%CI:0.51,0.96). The pattern of association was similar, but not significant, for the other violence outcomes:

They got there and said, 'You choose right now between the person you love or your children.' [Male accused perpetrator] had nowhere else to go. He went and slept in my car at the park that night. Because it was either he becomes homeless or we lose our kids.

Racism

Racism is evidenced in several ways: one example relates to the history of violence perpetrated upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which has caused high levels of unresolved trauma within families and communities. The policy of the Stolen Generations, described earlier, is one example of embedded systemic racism that ignored evidence of increased trauma upon the removed child and the family affected. Racism can be covert or overt, as commonly identified during focus groups and interviews:

Yeah, there is. There's definitely racism in [Community name] everywhere.

What the underlying thing is in this [Community name] Community, and it will be here forever, is racism.

Racism also occurs in settings such as the hospital system:

But it just, and I mean, really, that boils down to racism. That's indirect, you know, and that's underlying, happens everywhere. But, like especially in the hospital system.

And in the education system:

More Aboriginal kids than non-Aboriginal kids. The school is not supportive, there is racism.

People also talked about racism in media coverage of court appearances for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

It happens in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community here but there's more coverage of, I guess, Aboriginal perpetrators, especially at the courthouse, as opposed to white peoples at the courthouse …

Racism was spoken about in relation to police behaviour, through normalisation of what police expect from Aboriginal community members:

[There is] racism in Community – 'that's just how black fullas behave'; it's treated as acceptable by police, and it shouldn't be.

Racist attitudes extend to victims of violence whose situations are not taken seriously and who, therefore, are not protected by those in authority:

[If things were better] people would have the right to report violence and know that they would be protected and something would be done to stop the violence. At the moment they don't feel like they can because there is complacency by the authorities in relation to violence amongst the Aboriginal Community and it is often not taken seriously with victims being protected.

Financial stress

Participants in the interviews and focus groups explained that, when money was an issue for a family, there was an increased risk of violence. Financial challenges were often described as arising from difficulties with finding and keeping employment, perhaps because of mental health difficulties, and discrimination and racism in the workplace. Gambling was also linked to financial problems. The following quotes describe financial challenges as exacerbating interpersonal difficulties, thereby further increasing the risk of violence, particularly if a family member used alcohol or other drugs:

> So hence when people are in that proximity for a long time it becomes a negative component within the family structure and so that creates arguments about behaviour, it creates arguments around financial status, it creates arguments around ... and particularly the children because they don't have enough financially to get them off to school so there's a very compact process that goes on that leads to family violence and so, on top of that, the compounding poverty that we live in ... I hope you're writing all this down.

> Gambling's had a massive impact in our communities. So now it's common language to say, 'Oh, just going to have a press,' 'Going to have a tap.' And, that can be all of their income. So, it goes hand in hand, drinking, gambling … and domestic violence.

Participants also linked the Basics Card[29] to violence:

> You know another problem is just the sheer poverty and the Basics Card.

> That will cause a lot of problems here in the Community because of the change and it's going to be very hard mostly for the young ones and for the Elders because they're so used to getting that Centrelink payment … it's the government that's changing everything in the Community and that will … it might raise that DV. So that changes what the council's told us what's going to happen. It is so scary about it, about that card, because it's happening in [place]. They told us [place]'s violence went up because of that card so they're going to introduce that to the [Community name] soon.

Consistent with the qualitative findings, analysis of CMS data demonstrated a link between financial strain and violence. The prevalence of experiencing and using violence was significantly lower among families experiencing financial stability, as measured by family money situation (run out of money, have just enough, or have savings), welfare benefits and problems with gambling in the household (Table 7; Table 8). The prevalence of violence was 20–50% lower among those who were on stable welfare benefits over the last year than among families who had welfare that was limited or cut off in the past year. It was 20–70% lower among those who received no welfare benefits at all. One interpretation of this finding is that it is not the reliance on welfare benefits that is linked to violence, but rather the disruption of income flow, and resultant stress, when welfare payments are cut off. An alternative interpretation is that involvement with violence, or exposure to other factors linked to violence (such as incarceration, as described below) plays a part in welfare benefits being limited or cut off. Both explanations probably play a role in explaining the observed relationship. One participant explained the inflexibility of the welfare system in relation to their lived realities of contact with the justice system or lack of job opportunities:

> I sat there for two and a half hours, just trying to talk to someone just to get my payments back on, because I was in lockup and I was supposed to do my form on Monday, but then I couldn't even do it on Tuesday, because I was meant to get paid on Tuesday, then they were gonna cut me off for four weeks and that, you know? I was like, well, I've got my paperwork and everything stating I was in lockup, that I couldn't have done my forms.

Alcohol and other drugs

Many participants viewed alcohol and other drug use as a catalyst for violence:

> I don't think anybody wants family violence and I think everybody recognises that most of it is fuelled by drugs and alcohol and we've got to do something about that.

> I think the catalyst in a lot of times are, you know, alcohol and drugs.

> Well, the alcohol and drugs usually trigger more and more and then it just starts a whole heap of trouble, sort of goes downhill after that.

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29. The Basics Card has been replaced by the Cashless Debit Card, which 'is testing whether reducing the amount of cash available in a community will reduce the overall harm caused by welfare fuelled alcohol, gambling and drug misuse.'((59)

And alcohol like, alcohol's legal but alcohol is more of a cause of domestic violence than what drugs is. There's a lot of domestic violence that constantly happens, for years and years ago it's unreported, you know, and that's just for alcohol use.

This aligns with national statistics from the 2014–15 NATSSIS. More than two in three (68%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 and over who had experienced physical violence in the last 12 months reported that alcohol or other substances contributed to the most recent incident. This was observed for both males (70%) and females (67%). In the vast majority of these cases, it was alcohol, rather than other drugs, that was described as contributing to the incident.(2,13) Similarly, in the 2017 NCAS, 61% named 'an alcohol problem' and 70% named 'a drug problem' as a factor contributing to violence 'a lot of the time.'(43)

While alcohol and other drug use is often described as an individual 'choice', many participants made the important distinction that it was tied to trauma and resultant mental health issues, with alcohol used as 'numbing' self-medication. Participants viewed this as a perverse and dangerous cycle, wherein people consuming alcohol were more likely to become violent and so further compound and reinforce the trauma cycle. That is, in some cases, substance misuse was viewed as perpetuating (keeping it going), but not precipitating, violence:

… it's causing major mental health issues across the board for everybody … then drug psychosis, they may not have had a mental health problem prior to all that, but because of the chemicals that the drug's been cut with, then they're getting chemical imbalances. And then they're becoming … to have mental health problems.

I'd say it's got a lot to do with drugs. Heavy drug addictions that are usually brought on from years of trauma, or just because that's the cycle that particular family's been in.

This is consistent with previous evidence showing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in prison frequently explain their substance use (most often alcohol) as a response to other traumatic events in their lives.(60)

Alcohol and other drug use was also understood as contributing to, and being a consequence of, financial challenges:

Low income earners, Aboriginal and Centrelink people, and buying drugs, alcohol and not worrying about food, that's when all the domestic violence starts because the kids are hungry next door, you know? I give them food, left-overs, you know? Yeah. And police come, Housing Commission inspectors come, yeah. All related to alcohol, their domestic violence next door and across the road.

… these old people, they get robbed for their money, so these people can get drunk and then that's how they become very volatile, like, they end becoming the victims, financial abuse, you know.

And there's a lot of domestic violence happening next door. I ring the police a few times but the lady does, too, you know. It all boils down to alcohol, that's a poison. It brings death to you. You drink it in moderation but a lot of blokes humbug,[30] 'I've got to have booze', you know, and trying to bash your wife.

People are just racking on debt and thinking who cares and then self-medicating on that.

And so, what happens is, from my experience and what I've seen is, the women will play cards, and if they lose their money and then the males have no money because they've drank the money or they've bought, you know, gunja [cannabis], they've got no money for food or [other essentials], but usually round eight o'clock at night, you can hear all the screaming and yelling, you know, all the domestic violence in community houses.

Other participants explained that the use of alcohol could be a response to a lack of things to do:

… boredom's a big factor for 'em, I reckon. Like, they don't know what else to do. [They say] 'Let's go get high, let's go and drink.'

And because like I said, my clients, you know, the reason why they drink is because their mind's not occupied, their hands not occupied. And drinking is the only way that they occupy themselves for their time.

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30. 'Humbugging' is a term used in some Aboriginal Communities to describe interactions related to reciprocal rights and obligations between Community members, and driven by a perceived right rather than unsolicited giving, frequently resulting in excessive or unreasonable demands on some individuals who may be seen to have more resources than others. In everyday usage, it can be described as the feeling by individuals of 'people wanting stuff all the time'.

Like, there's nothing here for us. Like some of us, well not me, but some of the ones that I know, they're fighting people on the streets just for their smokes and money because they've got none of them, and they've got nowhere to go of a night time and they've got nothing to do, so they're out in the streets, roaming, breaking into your damn car and stealing small change, CDs, radios, phones, whatever they can get their hands on just to sell for money for other drugs, or something else.

The link between alcohol and other drug use and violence also appeared in the quantitative data. There was a consistent pattern of association between violence and the use of alcohol and other drugs at the individual, family and community level. The prevalence of both the experience and the perpetration of violence was significantly lower among participants who:

> did not use cocaine or amphetamine-type stimulants within the past year

> did not drink, or used alcohol but did not have signs of alcohol dependence, compared with those who had signs of alcohol dependence

> reported that alcohol and other drug use, including sniffing, were not a big problem in their home or community.

The prevalence of experienced violence was almost halved among participants who did not (versus did) have problems relating to alcohol or other drugs at home (18% versus 31%; PR=0.48, 95%CI:0.34,0.58) (Table 7). Similarly, the prevalence of conviction in relation to violence was almost 66% lower among participants who did not (versus did) have problems relating to alcohol or other drugs at home (9% versus 32% PR=0.36, 95%CI:0.26,0.49) (Table 8). However, while many CMS participants identified alcohol and other drug use as a problem in their community, the vast majority (90%) did not report symptoms of alcohol dependence and reported not using cocaine or amphetamine-type stimulants within the past year.

While alcohol restrictions are sometimes imposed in response to alcohol misuse, interview and focus group participants explained how alcohol restrictions are seen as moving, rather than stopping, the violence:

Well, like, it's quietened down the streets, but never really quietened that violence much … and also creating a black-market for alcohol, increasing the financial pressures. But you've got your grog runners and you've got your sly groggers. Your sly groggers are the ones that buy the alcohol but double the price and sell it from over the fence.

The thing with the restrictions, it's just a sign, it doesn't stop people from going into that place and drinking.

Poor physical health and social and emotional wellbeing

Low social and emotional wellbeing (including mental health difficulties) was described as resulting from experiencing or witnessing violence; the breakdown of families; interpersonal difficulties; discrimination; racism; marginalisation; and financial challenges:

… the biggest factor that comes out of all of this stuff is the mental health and breakdown that is related to all of these issues.

Big impact on social and emotional wellbeing of both perpetrator, victims and community.

A service provider working for an Aboriginal organisation spoke of the intergenerational consequences of violence on wellbeing:

… we're noticing that a lot of younger people are being either born with a disability or are being diagnosed now with a disability … You know, when the mother's pregnant and there's been a case of domestic violence, there's something that's happened while she's carrying the baby. Yeah, and it is around drug and alcohol and that kind of stuff, so I think that is why a lot of them are being diagnosed.

In response to a question about how they would rate their general health, 33% of participants rated their general health as excellent or very good, 43% as good and 24% as poor or fair. Almost one-third of respondents (32%) indicated that they had 'medical conditions or disabilities (that have lasted or are likely to last for six months or more)' which limited the kinds of activities they could do (60% indicated that they did not, and 8% were unsure).

There was strong evidence of better wellbeing for community members who had not been involved in violence (Table 7; Table 8). It was significantly less common for participants to report having experienced or used violence if they reported high (versus low) levels of life satisfaction, happiness and general physical health and

low (versus high) levels of psychological distress (according to a modified Kessler-5[31]), pain and functional limitation. For example, community members with low psychological distress at the time of survey were one-third as likely to have experienced violence, compared with those who had high psychological distress (7% compared with 21%, PR=0.27, 95%CI:0.16,0.45).

These findings might reflect the fact that participants with higher levels of wellbeing were less likely to be involved with violence and/or that involvement in violence was associated with negative impacts for wellbeing. In many cases, the effect was stronger for the outcome of violence within the last year than for lifetime experience of violence. This may indicate that the negative impacts of violence on wellbeing are strongest in the short term but persist over the long term.

Unemployment

Many participants voiced concerns about employment opportunities in their local Community:

There's a lot of areas in the Community that needs employment, more employment, and if we can have those opportunities, the unemployed, we'll apply … because they do have the talent but there's no opportunities for them [place] and we can't force them to relocate … for work. This is their home and if they want to stay here, so be it.

There'd be well over a thousand Aboriginal people registered with the three job network agencies here, and I guess [only] two or three [people] would … get a full-time job.

Access to employment, as well as education, was described as key to supporting family functioning and safety. Numerous participants spoke of the connection between the lack of employment, financial strain, boredom and violence:

Employment, opportunity and education … Besides family would have to be the top ones. Because if you don't have that then you're not secure, what have you? You'll never be safe.

If we can get more employment opportunities [place], that would be great for the people here because that can be one of the causes for domestic violence, yeah, financial side, yeah … And boredom, like, you've got nothing to do … That triggers violence.

In relation to issues with Centrelink, participants described the lack of employment opportunities:

It certainly would take the pressure off job seekers anyway and employment agencies too because a lot of black fellas are going to them, but there's no jobs. There's just no jobs then the pressure is being put on families with Centrelink, and non-complying, and then that leads to violence, it just seems to spiral back.

No, CDEP [Community Development and Employment Projects] shouldn't come back, but there's got to be a better structure than the job network agency, and the thing is they've got you over a barrel because of the connection to Centrelink, they control you by your money, so you're controlled by money, right, and your destiny and everything else ... young people get cut off and everything else, they can't do things, leads to suicide, leads to everything else. So everything comes back to ... and the job network agency have got a lot to answer for black fellas, right, because we're in the lower spectrum of getting a job. Yep, they can bring in all these Asians and everyone else, employ them at the abattoirs four times and a black fella goes out for three months and they fall off when they're three months. They stay with the agency because they're their meal ticket.

Quantitative analysis of CMS data was consistent with the qualitative findings, indicating that employment (including full time, part time, casual work or paid caring responsibilities) was linked to a significantly lower prevalence of recent violence experience and use. However, there was not a significant association between current employment and lifetime experience of violence. Compared with those who were not in paid employment, participants who were employed had a 35% lower prevalence of experiencing violence in the past year, a 40% lower prevalence of ever feeling violent and a 65% lower prevalence of ever being convicted in relation to violence (Table 7; Table 8).

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31. The Kessler-5 (K-5) is a subset of questions derived from the Kessler-10 (K-10). The K-10 has 10 related items asking participants to self-report on psychological distress. The scale has been found to be useful for population health surveys.((61) The modified K-5 was originally developed for use in the social and emotional wellbeing module of the NATSISS.((62) It has subsequently been used in nationwide surveys of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.((63) The K-5 incorporates minor word changes to make it more appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Contact with the justice system and incarceration

Participants in the interviews and focus groups described a cycle of incarceration, tightly linked to violence and trauma:

> So, you can have police and all the other services, night patrol, but it's like a washing machine. They go in, they get dried and then they go out. They either go into gaol and what happens there, it's just another revolving door. I've worked in the courts with Legal Aids [name] has, too. We've seen that spin dry and sixty percent of … the fellas incarcerated are in there for offences relating to domestic violence or breach of domestic violence.

> There are a lot of good stuff around but not enough focus on our young people who make up one hundred percent of the youth detention facility. And I'd say ninety-nine percent of those young people have experienced trauma in their life … through family and domestic violence and this is the end result.

In some cases, males discussed how prison is sometimes seen as a safe place, or a safe alternative to living on the streets, by men who have unstable living situations or are homeless. The lack of transitional housing, short-term accommodation and programs for men was described as contributing to a cycle of incarceration:

> I know people that get locked up every six months a year in the winter, and like, smash a shop window, get six months gaol. Be in the winter in gaol, and then homeless in the summer. And they do it every winter. Because they'll give you a gaol cell, and they reckon it costs them so much money to have us in gaol, but they can't put us to bed in a refuge anywhere, you know? You can't get a refuge; a bloke cannot get a bloody refuge anywhere.

> Mate, I've been there that many times, and I tell you … well, eleven times I've been to prison, and sometimes when I get out here I think 'Well, fuck it's easier to be back in there', you know what I mean? And I live better in gaol then I can out here.

> My mum says to me, 'Oh, when you're in gaol son, at least I know you're safe. I know you'll look after yourself.' And it's sad to say but it's true and, when you got nowhere to go, you just bugger up and go to gaol.

> Some people would rather be staying in prison than get out to nothing. Because you're out there, you don't get your three feeds a day. You don't [get] a bed, you know.

The fact that some men see gaol as a solution to a lack of safe living conditions and support programs highlights the extent of the problem and illustrates just how bleak the situation can be. More detail follows in Chapters 9 and 10. This is extremely problematic, given the negative effects of incarceration on individual and family wellbeing, future employment prospects and life opportunities.

One in five (20%) participants in the CMS had ever been in prison and/or youth detention. Further, nearly half (45%) had had a close family member arrested within the past year. Aligned with concern raised in the focus groups and interviews about youth imprisonment, 9% of 16–17 year olds in the CMS had been arrested or convicted in relation to violence, suggesting that this cycle is beginning early in life.

Individual and family contact with the justice system was closely linked to both the experience and the use of violence. The prevalence of violence was significantly lower among community members who had no contact with the justice system themselves and whose family members had not been in contact with the justice system in the last year. The prevalence of experiencing violence in the past year was halved among those who had never been in contact with the justice system (versus those who had; 18% versus 31%; PR=0.48, 95%CI:0.38,0.61). A similarly strong association was observed between 'feeling violent' and individual contact with the justice system (25% versus 55%; PR=0.48, 95%CI:0.40,0.56) (Table 7; Table 8). Contact with the justice system could be an indirect contributor to, or consequence of, violence, through financial or other stress.

Contact with the justice system can also result directly from involvement in violence. We found that 15% of all CMS participants had ever been arrested or convicted in relation to violence. The figure was higher among males, at almost three in every 10 (28%); but it was still high among females, with one in every 10 (10%) (Table 14). This is consistent with increasing rates of incarceration among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females. The incarceration rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females in Australia in 2009 was 360 per 100,000 population.(64) Previous research has identified a link between the incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their experience of sexual assault and separation from family, noting the complexity and interrelatedness of many other factors.(65)

Demographic factors

Analysis of the CMS suggests that higher levels of education were linked with a lower prevalence of violence (Table 7; Table 8). Compared with having an education of less than Year 10, completing Year 12 or having a post-secondary qualification was associated with a lower prevalence of violence experience and use; the association was significant for all outcomes except lifetime experience of violence. For example, the prevalence of conviction or arrest in relation to violence was 60% lower (10% versus 24%; PR=0.39, 95%%CI:0.27,0.58), and the prevalence of experiencing violence in the last year was 30% lower (18% versus 35%; PR=0.71, 95%%CI:0.50,0.99), among participants who had an education of Year 12 or higher than among those with less than Year 10.

One participant explained how the experience of violence could have intergenerational impacts:

> *Family and DV is impacting on children's ability to perform at school.*

The prevalence of violence (experience and use) was 10–30% higher among participants who were single rather than partnered; the link was significant for all outcomes except 'felt violent'(Table 7; Table 8). This might mean that participants who have recently been involved with violence have split from their partners: this hypothesis is supported by the finding of a stronger link for violence that occurred within the past year, compared to lifetime experience of violence.

Speaking an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language as a first language was associated with a significantly higher prevalence of experiencing violence in the past year (25% versus 18%; PR=1.58,95%CI:1.23,2.03); however, the association was not significant for the other violence outcomes (Table 7: Table 8). This finding might reflect that the question about language use is picking up interrelated contextual factors that are independently associated with violence, such as discrimination.