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# Chapter 8: Extent and types 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 8

## EXTENT AND TYPES OF VIOLENCE

This chapter describes violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities in our sample. It reports on whether, and how frequently, people experienced violence. It categorises types of violence into three domains – physical, emotional and sexual – and analyses participants' experiences of these domains of violence by degree of remoteness, by gender and by age group.

There was clear recognition that family violence is starting to be more openly discussed in the family and community – demonstrated by the fact that 18 communities agreed to participate in the study, with over 1,500 community members becoming involved. This recognition was expressed by one participant:

*The other thing is, we're talking more openly about it, we're doing it here today. I mean, I've seen posters on the walls around here and other places about Aboriginal men, you know, particularly in, you know, sporting events and stuff like that to say, 'It is not okay to go and hit your partner. Stand up for your right not to fight.' All of those sorts of things. We've got to talk about it, we've got to recognise it and we've got to have people understand the outcomes or repercussions.*

We asked CMS participants whether they had ever experienced a set of specific behaviours. To reduce social desirability bias and bias relating to perceptions of what constitutes violence, we did not label these behaviours as forms of violence. It is possible that stigma would deter individuals from reporting *personal* experiences of family and community violence and that they were more willing to state that violence was a problem *in their community*. CMS findings may, therefore, underestimate the true extent of personal experiences of violence in the sample. Stigma was felt by those who experienced violence but *did not* tell anyone. There are probably several reasons for not telling anyone, including that they may want to stay with their partner. One participant said this very openly:

*I think it's because they love this person, they actually don't want to speak it out and once people know, like, they don't want to leave this person because they love them, and once it's spoken and it's out there, people then judge them because they're deciding to stay there. That's what I think, yeah.*

Despite any possible underestimation of the true extent of violence, the study provides the first national, large scale, mixed methods Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and governed study of family and community violence as experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Experience of violence in any domain (physical, emotional, sexual)

Data from this study indicate that many people and families *do not* experience violence; however, interviews, focus groups and surveys identified levels of physical, emotional and sexual violence. Violence was reported as perpetrated by both non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in communities. One service provider illustrated this, making the point that family violence was not just an issue within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities:

*We have a lot of Indigenous families who have a lot of family violence within their families. Often the police are called and they're at court with AVOs [Apprehended Violence Orders], so we have some good support services that support the whole community but the Aboriginal Community as well. And I'd say the ratio might be a little bit lower at the moment for Aboriginal families than non-Aboriginal. I think the non-Aboriginal would be a bit higher at the moment for family violence.*

CMS participants were asked whether they had experienced subtypes of physical violence,<sup>36</sup> emotional violence<sup>37</sup> and sexual violence;<sup>38</sup> if they did:

- > whether the violence had occurred within the past year (recent)
- > whether the violence had occurred more than a year ago (lifetime)

36. Shook, pushed, grabbed or thrown you, used or threatened to use a knife or gun or other weapon, hit you with a fist or object, kicked or bit you (or tried to), confined or locked you in a room or other space (or tried to).

37. Blamed you for causing their violent behaviour, tried to convince your family, children or friends that you are crazy, or turn them against you, followed you or hung around your home, threatened to harm or kill you, your family, children, friends or pets, harassed you over the phone or by text, email or social media, tried to keep you from seeing or talking to your friends, kept you from having access to a job, money or credit cards.

38. Tried to or forced you to have sex, made you perform sex acts that you did not want to perform.

- > how frequently the violence occurred (categorised as 'frequent', including responses 'about once a month' or 'about once a week', or 'not frequent', including once or a few times)
- > who perpetrated the violence (partner or family, known, unknown).

It was made clear to participants that they did not have to answer questions if they did not wish to. Table 10 presents the prevalence of each outcome overall by age group, gender and remoteness. Table 11 shows the association between the violence outcome (excluding responses of 'don't know' and 'unsure') and age group, gender and remoteness. Table 12 shows whether the perpetrator over the participant's lifetime was: a partner or family member, someone known (not family), or unknown to the participant. Using the same variables, Table 13 shows results for the past year.

Analysis of the experience of all domains of violence (any physical, emotional and/or sexual violence) among CMS participants showed:

- > Thirty-six percent had *never* experienced violence over their lifetime, 5% did not want to answer, and 59% had ever experienced violence.
- > Twenty percent had experienced violence in the past year: 80% had not experienced violence in the past year.
- > Thirty-nine percent had experienced violence more than a year ago.
- > Fourteen percent had experienced any type of violence frequently.

CMS participants reported their:

- > Lifetime experience of physical violence (52%); emotional violence (48%) and sexual violence (19%)
- > Recent experience of physical violence (15%), emotional violence (17%), and sexual violence (5%).
- > Lifetime experience of two domains of violence (physical and emotional violence most commonly co-occurred) was reported by 26%. Lifetime experience of three domains of violence was reported by 15%.

Importantly, 80% of participants reported not experiencing any type of violence in the past year, and 36% reported not experiencing violence in their lifetime. The proportion reporting experience of violence in the past year<sup>39</sup> is similar to other published findings, noting differences in the study population and outcome definition. For example, NATSISS 2014–15 found that 23% of males and 22% of females aged 15 years and older had experienced or been threatened with physical violence in the last 12 months.(76)

## By remoteness

There was some variation in the experience of any violence across domains (physical, emotional and/or sexual violence) by levels of remoteness. Lifetime experience of violence was less common in remote areas (46%) than regional areas (67%) and major cities (71%) (Table 10). After adjusting for age group and gender (Table 11), we found no significant difference in the prevalence of lifetime violence experience in regional areas, compared with major cities (PR=0.94; 95%CI:0.85, 1.04); but the prevalence of lifetime violence experience in remote areas was significantly lower than in major cities (PR=0.68; 95%CI:0.60, 0.77).

Experiencing violence within the past year was similarly common across all remoteness categories (20% in remote areas, 19% in regional areas and 23% in major cities) (Table 10). After adjusting for age group and gender, we found no significant difference in the prevalence of recent violence in regional areas (PR=0.81; 95%CI:0.60, 1.10) or remote areas (PR=0.89; 95%CI:0.65, 1.21), compared with major cities (Table 11).

Experience of frequent violence was less commonly reported in remote areas (8%) than regional areas (17%) and major cities (21%) (Table 10). After adjusting for age group and gender, we found no significant difference in the prevalence of frequent violence experience in regional areas, compared with major cities (PR=0.85; 95%CI:0.62, 1.16), but the prevalence of frequent violence experience in remote areas was significantly lower than in major cities (PR=0.41; 95%CI:0.28, 0.61) (Table 11).

These data indicate that, within the sample, there is a similar prevalence of recent violence experience across major cities, regional areas and remote areas. In remote communities, however, the prevalence of both lifetime violence experience and frequent violence experience is significantly lower (>30% lower and 60% lower, respectively) than in major cities.

39. Twenty percent, or 21% when excluding participants who responded 'don't want to answer'.

## By gender

Participants in interviews and focus groups acknowledged that family and community violence was a problem. They saw violence as affecting both men and women; while not denying the extent of violence against women, many participants explained that this was not the only story. Violence against men was an issue often ignored:

*It's a problem. Not only young fellas, even the girls, even the ladies, the young girls. They use this too. This is how the problem started, is starting up and that's why we've got an ongoing issue here in our Community and it's been going on for a while now.*

Service providers stated that they were worried about a perceived increase in violence against men and expressed their belief that family violence may not be as gendered as in the wider community:

*I think there is an increasing cohort of Aboriginal men being impacted by family and domestic violence; and in the Aboriginal Community it is not necessarily a gendered crime as it may be in the broader community.*

*Not only just men with women, it's women with men as well. Not always is violence against women, it's violence against men as well, you know what I mean? I've seen a fair bit of it. Not with myself, but in the family, along the line in families that I know.*

Women in interviews and focus groups explained complexities of situations surrounding violence against men:

*Like with men and women violence, like usually the violence against women is usually physical with verbal, but it also happens with men as well, physical and verbal, and they're just ... oh how do you put it? They're scared to leave, they don't want to leave the situation because they're getting abused and threats even, that the woman might ... wants to harm themselves and that's why they don't want to leave, and they'll just stay in that situation. And just continue to be abused. It doesn't have to be physical, but it's verbal and emotionally, you know what I mean? ... Same with women as well, they don't want to leave just because threats and it could lead to them saying 'Oh well, you don't want me, and you don't stay with me, I'll just kill myself.' And that's why they will stay, or they just don't have any help, they think they don't have any help, and can't get out of the situation. And haven't talked out about it. When really they can get help, because there's lots of people ...*

Women also described how sexual violence against men impacted on male behaviour:

*Certain smells, certain situations, the way one man touches another man's body. They're not going to say to the coppers 'I had a flashback of when I used to get raped and I beat the shit out of the guy because I was a bit drunk or I was a bit off my head and this flashback took over and I couldn't ... .' They're just going to say, 'Oh, he pissed me off.' So, in the court's eyes they think ... he must be aggressive, he has no remorse for his actions when really they're just too ashamed to tell you the real reason as to why they reacted like that.*

Across the three domains of violence, by gender, the CMS (Table 10) showed the prevalence of ever experiencing:

- > physical violence was similar for males (53%) and females (52%)
- > emotional violence was higher for females (51%) than males (44%)
- > sexual violence was higher for females (22%) than males (14%).

The findings (Table 12) also showed that it was more common for:

- > women to report ever 'experiencing violence from a partner or family member' (41%) than men (23%)
- > men to report ever experiencing violence from 'someone known, but not family' (24%) than women (12%)
- > men to report ever experiencing violence from 'someone unknown' (18%) than women (4%).

In the past year, across the three domains of violence, by gender, the prevalence of experiencing (Table 10):

- > physical violence was similar for females (16%) and males (13%).
- > emotional violence was similar for females (18%) and males (15%)
- > sexual violence was twice as common for women (6%) as men (3%)
- > women more commonly reported frequent experience of violence (17%) than men (10%).

The CMS reporting of violence is aligned with the NATSISS in finding no difference by gender in the experience of physical violence in the last 12 months and also that it was twice as common for women than men to experience violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or other family member.<sup>(13)</sup> The similar rate of physical

violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males differs markedly from data in the general Australian population, where non-Indigenous women report experiencing higher rates of physical and threatened physical violence than non-Indigenous males.(3,77)

The Personal Safety Survey of the general Australian population reports that women were nearly three times more likely to have experienced partner violence than men, with approximately 17% of women and 6.1% of men reporting experiencing partner violence since the age of 15 years. Physical, emotional and sexual violence was reported more frequently by women than men (physical violence, 16% compared with 6%; emotional violence, 23% compared with 16%; sexual violence, 5% compared with <1%).(78)

## By age

The CMS showed the following findings about experience of violence across age groups across the three domains (i.e. physical, emotional and sexual violence) (Table 10):

- > 'Ever experience of any type of violence' was common across all age groups and was significantly less commonly reported by participants aged below 25 years (16–17 years 58%, and 18–24 years 54%), compared with those aged 25–39 years (64%).
- > 'Recent experience of violence' (within the past year) was reported less commonly for those over 50 years (14%) and those 16–17 years (20%), and more commonly by those aged 18–24 years (25%) and those aged 25–39 years (23%).
- > 'Experiencing frequent violence' was less commonly reported for the two youngest age groups – 16–17 years (8%) and 18–24 years (11%) – and those over 50 years (12%), compared with those aged 25–49 years (17%).

In the 2014–15 NATSISS, females in the age groups 25–34 years and 35–44 years were most likely to have experienced or been threatened with physical family and domestic violence in the previous 12 months (14% in both age groups).(13) The FaCtS Study presents the first evidence of reported experience of violence in the past 12 months for the 16–17 year-old age group (20%) (Table 10), but comparisons should not be made with previous research, because the FaCtS study is not designed to be population representative. Other studies have sampled participants as young as 15 years (e.g. NATSISS); however, results are presented for a broad age group (e.g. 15–24 years).(13)

## Experience of physical violence

Physical violence was reported as witnessed, experienced and perpetrated within and between families and in the communities:

*And sometimes when they throw things it might just come [hurtling] across because you're right next door to where the violence is happening. And we don't want to witness someone getting cracked on the head, falling on the ground, lying down, no movement.*

*... like there'll be an event happening and one girl might walk up to her own sister or cousin or aunty and say something and that's when the violence will break out. And it's brutal, like they'll bring out whatever they find. Scooter or bike or rock or stick. They find anything to um, hit each other with. They wanna see blood, it's that brutal.*

Participants discussed situations where family violence led to death. One participant said:

*Sadly, I have seen situations where people have passed away because of domestic violence.*

The same participant also described how family violence had a devastating long-term health impact:

*One of the saddest things that I've ever had happen to me in my life, when I was working in [place], every morning on my way to work, I used to go past the brain injury unit. And one day I seen one of my brothers ... when I say brothers, an Aboriginal man ... walk out of this brain injury unit and he had these tears coming out of his eyes. And I said, 'You alright, brother?' I said, 'I've seen you come in and out of there a few times.' He said, 'Oh, I've just gone to see my sister.' It was his biological sister. And I said, 'Why, what's happened, bud?' And he said, 'Oh, she hasn't changed.' And I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'Her husband bashed the living daylight out of her seven year ago.' He bashed her so badly that she had acquired brain injury which means it was never going to be repaired. She was basically being treated like a baby, she had to be fed, she had to be changed, she had to be washed and everything else like that. She didn't recognise anyone. That meant that that poor woman was not dead, but spiritually she was not there. And it was one of the saddest things I ever seen.*

The CMS showed that:

- > Forty-eight percent reported *no* experience of any type of physical violence, and 85% had *not* experienced physical violence in the past year (Table 10).
- > Thirty-four percent who had ever experienced violence reported that physical violence was perpetrated by a family member, 17% reported that it had been perpetrated by a known person, and 9% reported that it had been perpetrated by an unknown person (Table 12).

### By remoteness

The interview and focus group data demonstrated variation across communities in reports of violence; however, the data did not indicate remoteness as a factor related to experience of violence.

The CMS showed that:

- > Reports of physical violence were more common in major cities (65%) and regional areas (59%) than in remote areas (39%) (Table 10).

### By gender

Participants of interviews and focus groups reported that physical violence was experienced by both women and men, and sometimes by both people in a relationship:

*Mum would probably get bashed or get a chair chucked at her and bust her head open. And then we'd have to go, you know? We'd have to go and stay at a family member's house or something, yeah.*

*... and it's like people just go, 'Oh, it's the guy hitting the girl,' and you go, 'No, there's actually a lot going on the other way as well sort of thing.'*

*... my ex-wife ... [she] abused me ... the old mob, they'd come and they'd take me to the hospital and into the emergency ward ... [I] used to smack her around.*

The CMS showed that:

- > Lifetime experience of physical violence was reported at a similar percentage by women (52%) and men (53%) (Table 10).
- > Past year experience of physical violence was reported by 17% of women and 13% of men (Table 10).
- > More women (15%) than men (8%) reported frequent experience of physical violence (Table 10).
- > Women were more likely to report experiencing physical violence from a family member (41%) than someone they knew (not family; 12%) or who was unknown (3.5%) (Table 12).
- > Men reported experiencing physical violence from a family member (23%), someone they knew (not family; 24%) or someone unknown (18%) (Table 12).

Although the results are not directly comparable, the 2014–15 NATSISS found a similar proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and females experiencing physical violence (around 57%).<sup>(13)</sup> While rates of physical violence are similar, the impact of physical violence appears to be greater for women. A Western Australian study showed that the rate of hospitalisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women was nearly 1.3 times that of their male counterparts. Sixty-five percent of the women had more than one admission arising from interpersonal violence.<sup>(79)</sup>

One literature review of non-Indigenous women found that women who were violent were more likely than men to have been victimised in early life. This review also showed that women's violence is often a response to a partner's ongoing and sustained abuse and that, even in 'mutually violent' relationships, women experience graver detrimental effects: physical injury, depression and anxiety.<sup>(80)</sup> There is no specific evidence about whether this finding applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

### By age

Interview and focus group participants reported that some young people participated in violent acts against each other, and some against older age groups in the community; that some partners were violent towards each other, or one partner perpetrated violence against the other partner; and that some parents were violent towards their children:

*... I've seen young, old, in between, it doesn't matter how old, if there's an issue they sort it out ... most of the time physical or mental abuse ...*

*I see mainly older people who are having relationship problems and, like, get angry at each other and hit each other, end up with bruises and shit on their faces. I've seen a lot of it.*

The CMS (Table 10) showed that:

- > Ever experiencing physical violence was highest for 25–49 year olds (55-56%).
- > Ever experiencing physical violence was reported by 47–48% of 16–24 year olds.
- > Experiences of physical violence start from an early age, with 48% of 16–17 year olds reporting ever experiencing physical violence.

## Experience of emotional violence

Interview and focus group participants described emotional violence as controlling behaviour that isolates the victim from support networks and limits or excludes access to finances and assets. It includes continued bullying and demeaning statements (also verbal abuse) that result in lowered self-esteem and self-determination:

*... mental abuse is just as potent as physical ... controls the money. Doesn't work for it, but got the control over it.*

*... you have the physical violence, but I also see that the power control, the finances, isolating partners, and stuff like that.*

*... why are you only allowed out the house on certain days? Why is your car in his name? Why are you not allowed your bank card? All of this is sounding pretty controlling.*

The CMS showed that:

- > Fifty-two percent of participants reported *no* experience of any type of emotional violence (Table 10)
- > Eighty-three percent had *not* experienced emotional violence in the past year (Table 10)
- > Thirty-three percent reported that emotional violence was perpetrated 'by a family member', 16% by a 'known person', and 6% by an 'unknown person' (Table 12).

## By remoteness

The interview and focus group data demonstrated variation across communities in reports of violence; however, the data did not indicate remoteness as a factor related to experience of emotional violence.

The CMS showed that:

Reports of emotional violence were more common in major cities (59%) and regional areas (56%) than in remote areas (34%) (Table 10).

## By gender

Interview and focus group participants reported that emotional violence was experienced and perpetrated by women and men, using different approaches. For example, these quotes describe men as more likely to financially abuse and socially isolate their female partners, and women as more likely to verbally bully and demean their male partners:

*I wasn't allowed to speak ... oh, well, he would always put my family down. And he would say, 'Oh, you can talk to them, and when you do talk to them ...' then when he goes in his rage again, and that's when he brings it all up again, so I just thought 'I'll just stop it all, I won't talk to anybody to stop all the arguments.' So, I was sort of isolated, I isolated myself, and my children.*

*I know a girl ... her partner, her husband ... she ... was coming to work all the time and she was like, 'He wants me to get another job. He reckons my job's not working for me. A woman my age should be on this much money, should be on more.' He's controlling her. And I told her, 'That's mental abuse. He's mentally killing you ...'*

*The police take the men more serious than the women and the women get away with a lot. A lot of them are perpetrators, too. They do a lot of verbal to men and everything.*

The CMS showed that:

- > Lifetime experience of emotional violence was reported by 51% of women and 44% of men (Table 10)
- > Past year experience of emotional violence was reported by 18% of women and 15% of men (Table 10)
- > More women (18%) than men (8%) reported frequent experience of emotional violence (Table 10)
- > Women reported experiencing emotional violence from a family member (41%), someone they knew (not family; 12%) or who was unknown (3%) (Table 12)
- > Men reported experiencing emotional violence from a family member (22%), someone they knew (not family; 22%) or someone unknown (10%) (Table 12).

## By age

Interview and focus group participants reported the abuse of Elders by young people:

*... but there's a lot of Elder abuse as well ... younger generation that don't have enough connection with the culture to respect themselves, their parents, their grandparents.*

The CMS showed that:

- > Reports of lifetime and past year emotional violence were similar across age groups (42-54%) (Table 10)
- > For 16–17 and 25–39 year olds, emotional violence from someone known was particularly common (23, 21%), compared with the other age groups (12–15%) (Table 12)
- > In the peer reviewed or grey literature, specific results on emotional violence could not be identified. Emotional violence was identified in the FaCtS Study as being experienced across age groups and genders, although there were some limits on participants' understandings of what constitutes emotional violence (Table 9).

## Experience of sexual violence

The CMS showed that:

- > Eighty-one percent of participants reported *no* lifetime experience of any type of sexual violence, and 95% of participants had *not* experienced sexual violence in the past year (Table 10)
- > Ten percent of participants reporting sexual violence experienced across the lifetime said that it was perpetrated by a family member, 5% by a known person, and 3% by an unknown person (Table 12).

Evidence on sexual violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is sparse: one study showed that, when sexual violence was reported as common, so was normalisation of violence more generally.<sup>(81)</sup>

Although participants found it difficult to discuss sexual violence, one offered the following comment:

*I wouldn't say there's heaps [of sexual violence] but it's happened.*

Speaking of children, another participant said:

*Vulnerable children [to sexual violence] are a huge concern in this Community.*

## By remoteness

The interview and focus group results demonstrated variation across communities in reports of violence; however, the data did not indicate remoteness as a factor related to experience of violence.

The CMS showed that:

Reports of ever experiencing sexual violence were around twice as common in major cities (27%) and regional areas (21%), compared with remote areas (12%) (Table 10).

## By gender

There were limited qualitative data describing sexual violence. Of the few data there were, males were reported as being the offenders against both women and men. According to one participant:

*There's been ... women I know that have been sexually abused, but they've dealt with it ... they've addressed those issues. I could tell you of at least seven of my male friends that have all been sexually abused that would not tell another soul ... And they won't tell another man. They're more comfortable coming to a woman and saying 'This is what happened to me. This is why I use drugs ...'.*

The CMS showed that:

- > Lifetime experience of sexual violence was reported by 21% of women and 14% of men (Table 10)
- > Past year experience of sexual violence was reported by 6% of women and 3% of men (Table 10)
- > There was variation in the prevalence and gender distribution by subtype of sexual violence (Table 10)
- > More women (5%) than men (1%) reported frequent experience of sexual violence (Table 10)
- > Women reported experiencing sexual violence from a family member (13%), someone they knew (not family; 6%) or who was unknown (2%) (Table 12)
- > Men reported experiencing sexual violence from a family member (4%), someone they knew (not family; 5%) or someone unknown (3%) (Table 12).



Almost one in five women (18%) and one in 20 men (4.7%) from the general population had ever experienced sexual violence (sexual assault and/or threats) since the age of 15 years.(2) Rates of sexual violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could not be identified; however, much of the literature states that sexual violence is likely to be under-reported.(3)

Experiencing sexual violence can impact negatively on individuals' physical and mental health.(82) Additionally, evidence suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who are incarcerated have commonly experienced sexual and physical violence.(65) The demonstrated association between incarceration and experienced sexual and physical violence is influenced by complex and interrelated factors that have not yet been fully explained for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.(65) Research also highlights the vulnerability of women who experience sexual violence who sometimes adopt maladaptive coping strategies that can result in incarceration, rather than culturally appropriate services. Barriers to reporting sexual violence can also reduce access to services and supports.(83)

## By age

The CMS (Table 12) showed that:

- > Sexual violence by a partner or family member was reported by 3% of people aged 16–17 years, 5% of those aged 18–24 years, 12% of those aged 25–39 years, 11% of those aged 40–49 years and 9% for those aged more than 50 years.
- > Sexual violence by someone known, but not a family member, was reported by 5% of people aged 16–17 years, 4% of those aged 18–24 years, 6% of those aged 25–39 years, 5% of those aged 40–49 years and 6% of those aged more than 50 years.
- > Sexual violence by someone unknown was reported by 3% of people aged 16–17 years, 3% of those aged 18–24 years, 3% of those aged 25–39 years, 0% of those aged 40–49 years and 2% for those aged more than 50 years.

## Ever afraid of partner

CMS participants were asked whether they had 'ever been afraid of any partner/boyfriend/girlfriend'. Response options were: never had a partner, no (never afraid of a partner), yes (ever afraid of a partner). This question was not restricted to being afraid of a current partner – it was about ever having being afraid of any partner or partners. In total, 5% of participants said that they had never had a partner; the prevalence of never having a partner was highest among those aged 16–17 years (25%), but the majority of this age group had already had a past or current partner (73%) (Table 10). Asking about being afraid of a partner has been a proxy measure for a violent relationship in other studies and clinical settings. It should also be noted that the meaning of being afraid of a partner may vary by level of remoteness, gender or age group and for individuals.

The CMS (Table 10) showed that:

- > Sixty-eight percent of participants had never been afraid of their partner.
- > It was more common to report ever being afraid of a partner in major cities and regional areas, compared with remote areas.
- > It was more common for women (38%) than men (11%) to report ever being afraid of a partner.
- > Among 16–17-year-old participants, 8% reported that they had ever been afraid of a partner.
- > Participants who had ever experienced any violence<sup>40</sup> were more likely to report that they had ever been afraid of a partner than those who had not experienced any violence (40.1%, compared with 4.5%).

These findings suggest that being afraid of a partner is likely to be a consequence of experiencing violence. There was a small number of participants who had not reported any experience of violence but did report ever being afraid of a partner (4.5% overall; 1% of males and 7% of females). These participants might have experienced other types of violence which were not asked about in the survey. Alternatively, for those people, being afraid of a partner might be because they were afraid of potential future violence.

Results from the CMS indicate that 60% of participants had ever experienced violence, and about 25% had ever been afraid of a partner (Table 10). One explanation for this discrepancy is recall bias, which has been shown to impact less when a previous event is significant.(84)and Policy</secondary-title></titles><periodical><full-title>Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy</full-title></periodical><pages>165–170</pages><volume>3</volume><number>2</number><dates><year>2011</

40. This analysis included the experience of violence by all perpetrators (i.e. including partners as well as other family members, other known persons and unknown persons).

It may be easier to remember the violent act because it is an event, and harmful; remembering the feeling of being afraid may be more difficult. Another possible explanation is that the participant may have experienced violence by a perpetrator who was not their partner, such that they were afraid of the perpetrator, and not necessarily their partner.

## Witnessing violence

The CMS asked participants how often, before they were 18 years of age, their parents or adults in their home slapped, hit, kicked, punched or beat each other up ('never', 'once', 'more than once', 'unsure', 'don't want to answer'). Participants were also asked how frequently they had witnessed violence in their community in the past year ('once', 'a few times', 'monthly', 'weekly', 'daily or almost daily', 'only heard about violence', 'not in the past year').

The CMS (Table 10) showed that:

- > Fifty-three per cent of participants reported witnessing *no* violence by adults in the home before the age of 18 years.
- > Witnessing violence in the home before the age of 18 years was more common for participants from major cities (6% once and 27% more than once) and regional areas (5% once and 27% more than once) than remote areas (9% once and 13% more than once).
- > There was no clear difference in the prevalence of reported violence in the home before the age of 18 years across gender or age groups.
- > Fifty percent of participants had *not* witnessed violence in their community in the last year.
- > Thirteen percent of participants had heard about violence in their community in the last year.
- > Witnessing or hearing about violence in the previous 12 months was common across areas of remoteness; however, remote participants were potentially more likely to report frequent witnessing of violence (weekly/monthly/daily), at 23%, compared with 17% in regional areas and 18% in major cities (not tested for significance).
- > There was no clear difference in witnessing or hearing about violence in the last year across gender or age groups.

## Using physical or emotional violence<sup>41</sup>

To reduce biases from socially desirable responding, CMS participants were asked whether they had ever felt violent.<sup>42</sup> Response options were: 'a lot', 'a fair bit', 'a little bit', 'not at all', 'don't want to answer'. To our knowledge, this is the first time questions have been asked in this way.

The CMS (Table 14; Table 15) showed that:

- > Seventy-two per cent of participants had *never* felt violent.
- > Ever feeling violent was more common in major cities (38%) and regional areas (31%) than in remote areas (28%).
- > Participants in regional and remote areas were significantly less likely to report having ever, versus never, felt violent, than participants from major cities.
- > Ever feeling violent was significantly less common among women (27%) than men (35%); 85% of participants had *not* been arrested/convicted in relation to violence.

## Arrest and conviction related to violence

Participants were also asked whether they had ever been convicted or arrested in relation to violence. The vast majority (71.6%) reported that they had not. However, there were some differences in the prevalence of violence-related arrests or convictions across levels of remoteness (Table 14):

41. Because socially desirable responses and understandings of what constitutes sexual violence were likely to bias the results, perpetration of sexual violence was not measured.

42. Felt violent (including hitting, choking, pushing containing someone); tried to control a family member (including saying they are stupid or crazy, threatening them, trying to stop them seeing family and friends); and tried to control a family member from having access to a job, money or credit cards.

- > In major cities, 75% of participants reported that they had never been convicted or arrested in relation to violence, 16.5% reported that they had been convicted or arrested, 3.2% said that they were unsure, and 5.3% said 'don't want to answer'.
- > In regional areas, 68.9% of participants reported that they had never been convicted or arrested in relation to violence, 19.3% reported that they had been convicted or arrested, 3.2% said that they were unsure, and 8.7% said 'don't want to answer'.
- > In remote areas, 73.8% of participants reported that they had never been convicted or arrested in relation to violence, 9.7% reported that they had been convicted or arrested, 5% said that they were unsure, and 11.5% said 'don't want to answer'.
- > The prevalence of ever being arrested or convicted in relation to violence (adjusted for age and gender) was not significantly different in regional cities, compared with major cities (PR=1.23, 95%CI:0.87,1.73); but it was significantly lower in remote areas, compared with major cities (PR=0.66; 95%CI:0.44,0.98). This analysis excludes participants who responded 'unsure' or 'don't know'.
- > Both males and females in the sample reported previous convictions or arrests related to violence, but this was more common among males (23.9%) than females (8.9%); 61.5% of male participants reported that they had never been convicted or arrested in relation to violence, 23.9% reported that they had been convicted or arrested, 4.1% said that they were unsure, and 10.5% said 'don't want to answer'.
- > Of female participants, 78.7% reported that they had never been convicted or arrested in relation to violence, 8.9% reported that they had been convicted or arrested, 3.8% said that they were unsure, and 8.6% said 'don't want to answer'.
- > After adjusting for age group, the prevalence of arrests or convictions was about 60% lower among females, compared with males (PR=0.36; 95%CI:0.29,0.46); This analysis excludes participants who responded 'unsure' or 'don't know'.

In all age groups, there were some participants who had ever been arrested or convicted in relation to violence (Table 14):

- > This was most common for participants aged 25–39 years (20.9%) and 40–49 years (20%).
- > Among participants aged 16–17 years, it was 7.7%.
- > Across age groups, 10–15% of participants responded 'unsure' or 'don't want to answer'.

Although it is not directly comparable with our research, the 2014–15 NATSISS reported that around 15% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over said that they had been arrested in the last five years (20% of males, compared with 9% of females).(13) This compares with the FaCtS study finding that 17% of participants had ever been arrested or convicted in relation to violence.(13) The NATSISS did not report on a comparable age group to that of the FaCtS study, nor specifically about arrests in relation to violence.

The NATSISS reported that around 9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had been incarcerated in their lifetime (14% in remote areas, compared with 7% in non-remote areas). Males were almost four times as likely as females to have been incarcerated (15%, compared with 4%).(13) Incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are high: although about 5% of young people aged 10–17 years in Australia are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, half (50%) of those in youth detention on an average day in 2016–17 were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.(85) Higher arrest/conviction rates are probably associated with higher incarceration rates.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females are being incarcerated at an increasing rate. Family violence and 'acts intended to cause injury' are notable contributors to rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female incarceration. In 2009, the incarceration rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females was 360 per 100,000 population, 20 times that of non-Indigenous females, at 18 per 100,000.(64)

## Key considerations

### Experiences of violence across levels of remoteness

Participants were asked whether they had personally experienced a set of 14 behaviours/actions; for example: 'Has anyone ... Shook, pushed, grabbed or thrown you? ... Blamed you for causing their violent behaviour? ... Tried to or forced you to have sex, made you perform sex acts that you did not want to perform?' These behaviours are considered violence, according to current guidelines;(86) however, these were not explicitly labelled as forms of 'violence' in the questionnaire. The prevalence of recent (within the last year) experience of violence among CMS participants was similar across all levels of remoteness. However, it was less common for participants living in remote areas compared with those in major cities, to report experiencing violence across the lifetime and to report experiencing it frequently. The Prevalence Ratio findings are adjusted for age and gender; therefore, differences in age and/or gender distribution across levels of remoteness do not explain the observed differences.

In general, there were lower understandings of what constitutes violence in remote areas, compared with major cities, but this is unlikely to explain the pattern of results about individual experiences of violence. Because the questions were about specific behaviours/actions, different understandings of what constitutes violence should not have biased reporting. It is possible there are differences by level of remoteness in willingness to self-report personal experiences of violence. This could explain why the reported lifetime prevalence of violence, including frequent violence, was significantly lower in remote areas than in major cities – notwithstanding both remote and major city respondents being similarly likely to describe violence as common in their community. However, this is not consistent with the finding that the reported prevalence of recent violence was similar across levels of remoteness.

These findings clearly indicate that violence is not an issue restricted to remote communities, contrasting with media portrayals focusing disproportionately on violence affecting remote communities.(87) They may indicate that people living in remote areas are more likely to experience factors protective against violence. Further in-depth research is required to understand the differences in violence experienced across levels of remoteness.

### Experiences of violence by women and men

Our findings suggest that violence against both men and women is a reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; this is consistent with participants' perceptions of violence in their Communities. Women and men were about equally likely to experience any type of physical violence; women were relatively more likely than men to experience emotional violence and much more likely than men to experience sexual violence. Women were also more likely to experience frequent violence and to report ever being afraid of a partner. There could be gender differences in willingness to report experiences of types of violence; however, it appears that there is probably more of an impact, or greater severity of violence, on women (e.g. frequency, fear) than on men.

### Experiences of violence by age

Over 75% of participants aged 16–17 years had already had a partner at the time of the survey. Fifty-eight percent of people in this age group had experienced violence in their lifetime. Twenty percent had experience violence in the past year. The vast majority (92%) of people in this age group had not ever been afraid of their partner.

### Arrests and incarceration related to violence

Arrests and incarceration related to violence appear to be very high, at 17% of all CMS participants. The fact that the study was about violence could be one reason for the high reporting of arrest/conviction for violence-related offences. There may be other explanations, such as the generally high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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