



Women's Health East

Investing in Equality and Wellbeing for Women

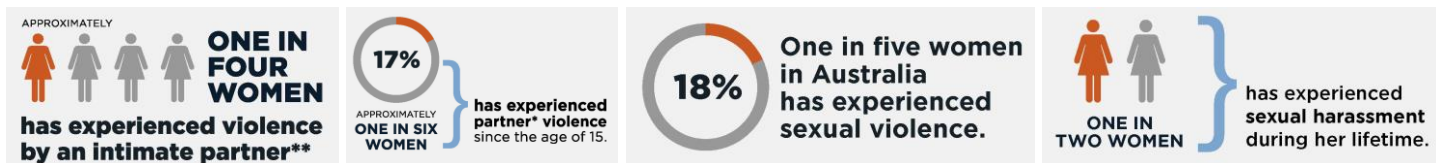
Women and Crime

National research conducted in 2004 by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that 87 per cent of female prisoners were victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse, with the majority being victims of multiple forms of abuse.¹

Women as victims of crime

Victoria's Crime Statistics Agency recorded 219,855 victim reports for the year ending December 2017. Of this total number, 53.6% (or 117,908) involved male victims and 44.0% (or 96,619) involved female victims. A small proportion of victims were recorded with an unknown sex. Where sex was known, fewer numbers of females than males were reported as victims of homicide and robbery, but greater numbers of females than males were reported as victims of sexual offences, abduction and stalking/harassment or threatening behaviour.²

Population-level studies show that the prevalence of violence against women in Australia is high.^{3,4} The Australian Bureau of Statistic's *2016 Personal Safety Survey* collected information from 21,250 women and men aged 18 years and over about the nature and extent of violence experienced since the age of 15. It found:



* Partner is a person a woman lives with, or has lived with at some point, in a married or de facto relationship.

** Intimate partner is a current or previous partner with whom a woman lives with or has lived with, or a current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or date with whom she has not lived with or does not live with.

Much of the violence women experience is at the hands of men, and most often men that they know. For more on violence against women, see Women's Health East's [website](#) (fact sheets series).

Some women are more likely to be victims of crime than others because of intersecting systems of disadvantage and discrimination that increase their risk of exposure. Indigenous women, young women (aged 18–24 years), sex workers and drug users are among these groups.⁶

Women as offenders

Females offend at much lower rates than males, with males making up 79.5% of offenders in Victoria for the year ending December 2017. Females comprise 17.9% of offenders for crimes against the person, and 23.7% of offenders for property and deception offences. For females, the age group with the greatest number of offenders is 25–29 years.⁷

Women who commit crime often have been victims of crime, particularly of physical and sexual abuse. For many, drug and alcohol use or dependency, along with mental health issues, are related to offending behaviour.¹ Poverty, social deprivation, childhood abuse and neglect, and lack of social supports also figure highly in the female offender population.⁸

The effects of victimisation can include:

- mental health issues such as PTSD, anxiety and depression;
- poor educational or employment functioning;
- ongoing physical health issues from injuries such as scarring, dental problems, and loss of function;
- loss of trust in others and society;
- financial difficulties; and
- increased use of alcohol and/or drugs.⁵

Health impacts of victimisation and offending

The health impacts of women's crime victimisation include physical, financial and psychological injury, with adverse effects lingering for many years. Women with their children can face additional stresses in recovering from crime victimisation, particularly where children have witnessed the incident (including family violence).⁹

Fear of further victimisation can prevent women from fully engaging with society, limiting their access to employment or education, and compounding a sense of social exclusion. Research indicates that being a victim of violent crime has a greater impact on women's mental health than on men's.¹⁰

The detrimental health impacts of incarceration on women are also well-documented, and include loss of contact with their children and family members, a deterioration in mental health, high incidence of exposure to blood-borne viruses such as Hepatitis C and HIV, and a higher mortality rate post release.¹¹ Many of the social determinants of poor population health outcomes occur at high rates in offender and prisoner populations, such as:^{1,6,8,11,12,13}

- low levels of formal education;
- unemployment;
- homelessness;
- parental incarceration;
- disability;
- high levels of stress;
- drug and/or alcohol addiction;
- social exclusion; and
- poverty.

Women in Australian prisons: Facts and figures

- Women made up just 4% of prison entrants in Victoria in 2015.¹³
- 49% of women entering prison had previously spent time in adult prison, and 18% had spent time in juvenile detention.¹³
- 65% of women entering prison reported using illicit drugs in the previous 12 months, and 58% reported ever injecting drugs.¹³
- 30% of women entering prison reported ever receiving a head injury leading to a loss of consciousness, compared with 9% of women in the general adult population.¹³
- 27% of women aged 35–44 years entering prison reported drinking seven or more drinks on a usual day of drinking, compared with 8% of 35–44 year old women in the general population.¹³
- 74% of women entering prison reported being current smokers, compared with 12% of women in the general adult population.¹³
- 71% of women entering prison had a highest level of completed education at Year 10 or below.¹³
- 7% of women being released from prison reported starting or continuing any formal qualifications while in prison.¹³
- Female prisoners have much higher rates of intellectual disability than their male counterparts.¹¹
- Women are more likely to have committed their offence(s) while under the influence of substances or to support their drug use.¹¹
- One study found that 84% of female prisoners interviewed met criteria for a mental disorder in the year prior.¹¹
- Women in prison are eight times more likely to experience severe psychosocial distress than women in the general population.¹¹
- 21% of women entering prison were employed 30 days prior to incarceration, compared with 37% of men.¹³
- 18% of women entering prison reported one or more of their parents/carers had been imprisoned while they were a child, compared with 16% of men.¹³
- 47% of women entering prison reported having dependent children.¹³
- 36% of women entering prison had ever intentionally harmed themselves.¹³

References

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