

FAST FACTS:

Domestic violence among women from priority populations during the COVID-19 pandemic

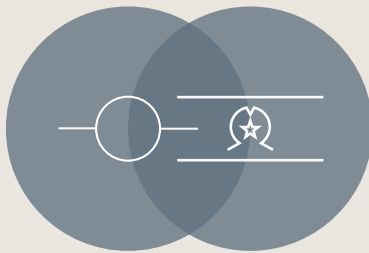
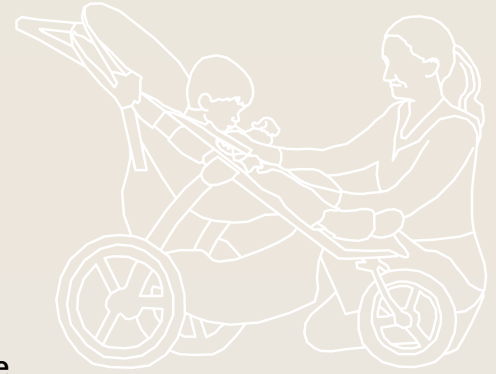
In May 2020, the Australian Institute of Criminology surveyed 15,000 women aged 18 and over about their experiences of domestic violence since February 2020, when Australia first began to feel the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey aimed to estimate the prevalence, characteristics and drivers of violence, both reported and unreported.

Who is most at risk of physical and sexual violence and coercive control during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Australian and international research consistently demonstrates that domestic violence disproportionately affects particular communities, rather than being evenly distributed across the general population. This held true in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following specific populations were more likely to experience domestic violence in the three months prior to the survey:



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*



Women with a long-term health condition



Pregnant women



Those experiencing high levels of financial stress



Younger women—in particular, those between 18 and 24 years of age

Definitions:

Coercive control

For the purpose of this study, women were considered to have experienced coercive control if they had experienced three or more forms of non-physical forms of emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours in the three months prior to the survey. See note in “Limitations” on the operationalisation of “coercive control” in this study and the need to exercise caution when interpreting results associated with this term.

Domestic violence

Physical violence, sexual violence or emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviour that occurs between current or former intimate partners.

Partner

A person with whom the respondent lives, or lived with at some point in a married or de facto relationship during the last 12 months. This includes current and former partners, and may also be described as a cohabiting partner.

Partner violence

Physical or sexual violence and emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour that occurs within current and former cohabiting relationships.

Limitations:

The AIC report’s authors draw attention to the limitations of the study in a [technical appendix](#), including, notably, the operationalisation of “coercive control”. As noted in the ANROWS policy brief [Defining and responding to coercive control](#), coercive control is an attack on autonomy, liberty and equality (Stark, 2007). It is accomplished through a wide range of abusive tactics (which may or may not involve actual physical or sexual abuse) aimed at domination and control over the victim’s personhood.

Further limitations of the study follow:

- Because it is a cross-sectional survey, cause–effect relationships cannot be established (only suggested).
- Women who could not safely complete the survey were discouraged from participating (due to safety concerns), and some women who completed the survey may have chosen not to disclose the violence or abuse they had experienced given the sensitive nature of the questions, both of which mean that it is possible that the true level of violence has been under-reported.

* Exact figures capturing risk for this population are not included. This is to avoid direct comparisons between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and non-Indigenous women, in line with the [Warawarni-gu Guma statement](#).

Who is most at risk of physical and sexual violence and coercive control during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The sample for this study was 9,284 respondents. Women who had not been involved in an intimate relationship in the 12 months before the survey were removed from the sample. Unweighted data (see [technical appendix](#)) were used to explore the relationship between variables.



Figures in this illustration refer to differences in the odds of experiencing violence between women with and without these characteristics.

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

Source

Boxall, H., & Morgan, A. (2021). *Who is most at risk of physical and sexual partner violence and coercive control during the COVID-19 pandemic?* (Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice no. 618). <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi618>

Suggested citation

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2021). *Domestic violence among women from priority populations during the COVID-19 pandemic* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS.