

ANROWS

MEDIA RELEASE

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Two new reports contribute invaluable data to what we know about intimate partner homicide in Australia

Intimate partner homicide is the most common form of homicide in Australia. These offences accounted for 21 per cent of all homicides in Australia in 2018–19, and 62 per cent of all domestic homicides, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology.

Two new research reports from ANROWS shed light on the dynamics of intimate partner homicides in Australia. The reports, exploring two separate data sets, offer important insights into the characteristics of these offences, the intimate partner relationships in the lead-up to these lethal incidents, as well as the life course trajectories of offenders prior to fatal violence.

“Learning from these processes and pathways is critical for prevention,” said ANROWS CEO Padma Raman PSM.

“Both of these studies point to a great number of warning signs prior to fatal intimate partner violence. Together they address gaps in our understanding of how we should use this data on lethal violence against women to intervene before there is a homicide.”

The first report, led by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network (the Network) and titled *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network Data Report: Intimate partner violence homicides 2010–2018*, presents data from the 311 intimate partner violence-related homicides, both male- and female-perpetrated, that occurred in Australia between 2010 and 2018.

The Network’s data shows that more than three quarters of all cases reported involved a male intimate partner homicide offender killing a current or former female partner. The vast majority of these male offenders had been the primary user of domestic violence behaviours against the woman they killed.

In the majority of cases which involved a female intimate partner violence homicide offender killing a current or former male partner, the female homicide offender was also the primary domestic violence victim, who killed her male abuser.

Using a focused subset of data (292 cases) where further information was available, the Network found that the domestic violence behaviour most frequently identified was emotional and psychological abuse (such as verbally denigrating, threatening, blaming or gaslighting the victim). Physically violent behaviours were the second most frequently identified type of abuse. Social abuse (such as isolating the victim from her support networks and controlling her movements) was evident in 60 per cent of cases (134 of 212 cases) where a male primary domestic violence abuser killed a female domestic violence victim).

There was also a heightened vulnerability for women who separated or intended to separate from their partners in the weeks and months leading up to the homicide.

The Network's data highlights a need for services and first responders to recognise, beyond the use of physical violence, the pattern of abusive and controlling behaviours that present in a domestic violence relationship.

The second report, *The "Pathways to intimate partner homicide" project: Key stages and events in male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide in Australia*, explores the pathways leading up to homicide. In their deep-dive analysis of almost 200 cases of male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide, researchers at the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) searched for factors that emerged at different points in the lives of homicide offenders and during their relationship with victims that may have increased the risk of lethal violence, and potential points of intervention.

"By looking into the life histories of male intimate partner homicide offenders, we were able to identify three separate offender trajectories, which we called 'fixated threat', 'persistent and disorderly', and 'deterioration/acute stressors'" said project lead, AIC Research Manager, Violence against Women and Children, Dr Hayley Boxall.

"While the pathways leading to homicide were complex and diverse, there were a number of points at which it would have been possible to intervene and stop these trajectories at different points in the life course," said Dr Boxall.

While the reports focus on different datasets which cannot be directly compared, together they demonstrate that there is no one picture of what an IPV homicide offender looks like, and no single progression of events toward a fatal event. Instead, they offer information about the multiple points of intervention available to us in disrupting pathways to homicide.

Minister for Women's Safety Anne Ruston said that prevention and early intervention are key pillars in the draft *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* which outline the aim to stop violence from happening before it starts and intervene to prevent the escalation of violence and protect victims and survivors from harm.

"The Morrison Government continues to focus on perpetrator interventions to reduce the risk of intimate partner homicide. In the 2021-22 Budget, we committed \$9 million for perpetrator programs to change the behaviour of men who use violence. This included funding the Coordinated Enforcement and Support to Eliminate (CEASE) Domestic Violence Program trial which aims to deter perpetrators from reoffending through overt monitoring and clear consequences for further offending, particularly repeat intimate partner violence," Minister Ruston said.

"We have also invested \$4.5 million to allow Monash University's Department of Forensic Medicine to develop and roll out accredited training to health professionals and frontline workers to better recognise and respond to victims of sexual violence. The training covers how to identify indicators of sexual violence and respond appropriately so we can intervene sooner and ensure victims get the support they need immediately.

"These reports make important contributions to the evidence on women's safety as they capture significant national data on homicides, including the diversity of offenders and their life course trajectories."

The reports will be launched simultaneously on the first day of the [ANROWS National Research Conference on Violence against Women](#), at an opening session titled “[What we know about intimate partner homicide](#)”. Dr Hayley Boxall (AIC) and Anna Butler (Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network) will speak to the data from their respective reports as part of a larger discussion on the gaps in our knowledge of intimate partner homicide, professional accountability when it comes to preventing the intimate partner homicide deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims, and Australia’s response to intimate partner homicides in a larger, global context.

“We have chosen to begin with a discussion of this evidence because by learning from the deaths of intimate partner homicide victims, we are able to honour their lives through change,” said Ms Raman. “The insights from these reports can now play an important role in informing policy change and targeted practice interventions.”

DOWNLOAD REPORTS:

Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network Data Report: Intimate partner violence homicides 2010–2018

The “Pathways to intimate partner homicide” project: Key stages and events in male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide in Australia

About ANROWS

Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Limited ([ANROWS](#)) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia’s National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.