

ANROWS

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

MEDIA RELEASE

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“Carrying the burden alone”: Victims and survivors speak up about what inhibits healing and recovery from violence

New ANROWS research reveals that women seeking support for intimate partner and sexual violence feel they are “carrying the burden alone”.

Victims and survivors in the study were more likely to seek help from their friends and family than from professional services (64.4%). The biggest barrier to seeking help from a service for experiences of violence was shame (63.2%), which was compounded by not always being aware about what service could help.

“You get referred here, there, and everywhere ... You go through the same story hundreds of times, and you just get completely lost. You can't remember any of it ... It's really frustrating.”

Survey participant

Victims and survivors also felt that the service system was under-resourced and over-burdened, which negatively impacted their ability to seek help and obstructed opportunities for recovery and healing.

“I just feel like they've not got the time, they're just so under-resourced”

Survey participant

This research, led by Professor Kelsey Hegarty from the University of Melbourne, is also Australia's first study that explores the help-seeking journeys of people who use intimate partner and sexual violence.

Participants who used violence identified that they needed help to release emotions and regain stability, describing their need for help with not “bottling things up”. Concerningly, over a third of participants who had used intimate partner and sexual violence believed that violence was a normal part of their relationship (34.7%).

“In studying in-depth the experiences of people using intimate partner and sexual violence, and victims and survivors, what really stood out was that both cohorts had the same service support needs: to feel listened to, and to not feel judged,” said Professor Hegarty.

By mapping the help-seeking journeys of victims and survivors, the journeys taken by people who use violence, and the barriers to effective service provision experienced by service sector workers, this study produces a number of important findings to improve the way we respond to violence and abuse.

“When we see that nearly two-thirds of women experiencing violence are seeking help first and foremost from family or friends, it’s clear we need to work with the community to empower friends and family to know how to respond, and where to get help, if someone discloses experiences of violence”, Professor Hegarty emphasised.

In addition to strengthening informal support networks, the recommendations include building trauma-and violence- informed systems that include “care navigators” for pathways to accessible and long-term support and advocacy.

Co-researcher, Dr Patricia Cullen from UNSW Sydney stressed that the workforce called for a strength-based, public health approach across health, justice and social services. “Enabling policy and substantial investment is critical to bringing forth innovative responses,” she said.

“This is landmark research. It is the first and only Australian study to explore in-depth the help-seeking experiences and support needs of people who use violence. This is an invaluable contribution to the evidence required to stop the cycle of violence by focusing on perpetrator interventions. At the same time, it captures and centres the voices of victims and survivors and provides recommendations on how to support these women into recovery and healing,” said ANROWS CEO Padma Raman.

The report will be officially launched at 12:00 pm on Thursday 8 December as part of the global 16 Days of Activism campaign.

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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 inaugural *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.