

Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria

ANROWS submission to the Parliament of Victoria
May 2024

ANROWS

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

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited
PO Box Q389, Queen Victoria Building, NSW, 1230
ABN 67 162 349 171
Phone +61 2 8374 4000 | anrows.org.au

Contents

Overall comments	3
Considerations.....	4
What data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is collected in Victoria?4	
Profile and volume of family violence perpetrators	4
ANROWS-led research	5
Access to data.....	5
What additional data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators should be collected in Victoria?.....	6
References	8

Overall comments

ANROWS thanks the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria.

This submission highlights important considerations related to family violence perpetration, the breadth of data collected relating to the perpetration of family violence in Victoria, and opportunities for collecting additional data to better understand and respond to the perpetration of family violence in Victoria. ANROWS contributes to this submission as both stewards of data about perpetration including the limitations and opportunities to improve that data and, as a research organisation in which we are data users, in the ways we analyse and apply data for research and evaluation purposes.

We maintain the language used in original reports throughout and therefore use the variations of “victims”, “victim-survivors”, “victims and survivors” and “domestic and family violence (DFV)” or “domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV)”.

We would be very pleased to assist the Committee further, as required.



Dr Jane Lloyd
Acting Chief Executive Officer

29 May 2024

Considerations

The terms of reference for this inquiry use the language of “family violence” and “perpetrators”. ANROWS encourages the committee to consider what is in scope in the context of both family violence and perpetrators, and how this scope can impact the quality and usefulness of data collected.

Specifically, there are many forms of violence, including sexual assault and sexual violence, child sexual abuse, filicide, elder abuse and adolescent use of violence, that often occur in the context of family violence. These behaviours may not be captured by the family violence or perpetrator frameworks even where these behaviours intersect with use of family violence. *The Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023–2028* uses the language of “people who use violence” (Lloyd et al., 2023). Focusing broadly on people that use violence and considering the complexity, nuances and co-occurrence of different forms of behaviour is critical if we are going to shift from a focus on incidents to a focus on patterns.

ANROWS also encourages the committee to be mindful of issues related to data sovereignty. This is particularly important in relation to data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples held by systems, and in the context of the role of systems in historic and ongoing harms against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Attempts to collect and analyse existing data on domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) must recognise the underlying context of distrust of and harms stemming from systems, including the legal system, and the ongoing failure of systems to respond to DFSV that is experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bevan et al., 2024).

What data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is collected in Victoria?

Profile and volume of family violence perpetrators

People that use violence and people that experience violence come into contact with a range of services and, as a result of this contact, data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is collected in many settings. While research analysis may not be the primary purpose of this data, the Australian National Research Agenda (ANRA) highlights the need to make better use of this existing data. Improved use of administrative data can include data development, data linkage and enhanced data analysis (Lloyd et al., 2023). Services that hold data include, for example, men’s support services, victims’ and survivors’ support services, gambling harm and support services, alcohol and other drug services, housing and homelessness services, health and mental health services, child protection, police, courts and corrections. Administrative data on family violence victims and survivors and people who use family violence is also collected by banks, real estate and housing services, social media platforms, employers and others. Data collected by these services is not necessarily collected in the context of understanding family violence perpetration but in the context of service delivery. The nature and extent of data held by these services varies and is impacted, for example, by available resources to collect and record data.

Prevalence data is also collected via population surveys including the Australian Bureau of Statistics’s (ABS; 2023) Personal Safety Survey and 6-yearly National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (ABS, 2019). While these surveys are not exclusively focused on perpetration, they provide a valuable dataset for understanding the perpetration of DFSV via victims’ and survivors’ perspectives. Existing population-level data such as police, hospital morbidity, emergency department and child protection data can also be used to ascertain prevalence related to experiencing and perpetrating DFSV (for examples of research using existing data, including linked data, see Robinson et al., 2022; Octoman et al., 2022; Orr et al., 2022; Luu et al., 2024). This data is collected in a range of contexts, including as part of risk assessment processes. In the context of risk assessments, ANROWS research cautions how reliance on an individualised, deficit-oriented and reductionist model of risk assessment currently in practice across Australia risks stigmatising and marginalising families (Wright et al., 2021). We would encourage the committee to consider what kind

of data is captured in these datasets and what this is meaningfully able to tell us about perpetration, noting that it may be limited in its capacity to provide nuance about perpetration.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies's (AIFS; 2024b) Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health also provides a valuable dataset – the *Ten to Men* data is currently being used to better understand the nature, prevalence and impacts of intimate partner violence (AIFS, 2024a).

ANROWS-led research

ANROWS-led research and evaluation evidence also provide important data related to people using violence. For example, the ANROWS “Voices” project included an online survey with 563 people who have used intimate partner violence and/or sexual violence, and in-depth qualitative interviews with eight people who had used violence (Hegarty et al., 2022). This study provides insights into the demographic, experience and health profile of people who use violence and their help-seeking behaviours. Data on perpetrators of DFSV is also documented via the work of the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network (ADFVDRN) and ANROWS (ADFVDRN, 2018; ADFVDRN & ANROWS, 2022, in press). The ANROWS project on “Pathways to intimate partner homicide” (Boxall et al., 2022) analysed male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide (IPH) of a female partner and identified three primary offender types and pathways to intimate partner homicide. These included: fixated threat offenders (ANROWS, 2022a), persistent and disorderly offenders (ANROWS, 2022b), and deterioration/acute stressor offenders (ANROWS, 2022c).

The identification of these three trajectories underscores that there is not a single pathway to IPH, but a complex and diverse series of pathways that can lead to a lethal incident. There is no one family violence perpetrator profile; however, there are common intervention pathways that provide opportunities to intervene to prevent the perpetration of family violence, including IPH. These intervention points also provide insights into where data on family violence perpetrators is collected and held. Critically, in thinking about the need for data on the profile of DFSV perpetrators, it is important to recognise the need for qualitative incident-specific analysis to understand the nuances of precipitating events, personal characteristics of offenders and victims and survivors, and motives of perpetrators, including motives pertaining to domestic and family violence (DFV) homicides (Cussen & Bryant, 2015, cited in ADFVDRN & ANROWS, 2022). Some perpetrator types, such as persistent and disorderly offenders (ANROWS, 2022b), will have greater contact with the criminal justice system and will be easier to identify, while other perpetrator types may be harder to identify and track. Rather than assuming all perpetrators are the same, we need to identify the opportunities for a nuanced understanding of perpetration and the pathways into lethal actions. This is not achievable through existing national data collection mechanisms (ADFVDRN & ANROWS, 2022).

Access to data

Access to data occurs in the context of both information sharing – which is relevant to case management, safety planning, response and monitoring – and in the context of access for analysis and evaluation. The ANRA calls on data stewards to consider the data they have, including administrative data, survey data and other forms of data, and the opportunities to make that data accessible for analysis to inform individual and systematic recommendations and support system reforms.

Access to data is varied and sometimes limited to the services that record and collect it. There are many reasons why data access may be limited. For example, there may be challenges particularly for small, resource-strapped services in being able to function as data custodians and to support making better use of this data both within and across services. Further, while there have been important information sharing reforms in Victoria related to the Child Information Sharing Scheme, the Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme and the use of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM; Victorian Government, 2022), challenges related to information sharing across services remain. Research has found that both victims and survivors and service providers may be hesitant to share information in cases where they are concerned about their safety, privacy or autonomy (ANROWS, 2020b; Healey et al., 2020). Information sharing in practice may also be dependent upon staff being able to access information sharing systems which is sometimes restricted to a small number of specialist staff (Meyer et al., 2023). This may mean that information sharing is dependent upon the availability of those staff.

Data stewards may face challenges in that there may be work involved in preparing existing data for research access and analysis. This may require additional, dedicated resourcing. Further, there are issues with differences in recording methods across jurisdictions and limits to the linkages of data between systems in different jurisdictions including, for example, police, child protection and DFSV services (Humphreys & Healey, 2017). The perpetration of DFSV is not limited to state boundaries, and better joined-up data management would enable a more comprehensive dataset and enable proactive and strategic work related to perpetration of DFSV. Access to data offers great potential, but sharing data takes time and significant resources to ensure there is a consistent approach to different data classifications and collections.

What additional data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators should be collected in Victoria?

The ANRA highlights the need for improved evidence on the prevalence and characteristics of people who use DFSV, on what leads people to use DFSV and the interventions that work best with cohorts, including the factors that encourage them to do so. Building on this need, ANROWS's most recent funding grants round focuses on the ANRA research priority "people who use domestic, family and sexual violence" (ANROWS, 2024). In the grants round, ANROWS received 83 applications, asking for almost 19 million dollars in funding. Applications focused on sexual violence, coercive control (including reproductive coercion, forced marriage and substance use coercion), adolescent family violence, economic abuse (including dowry abuse), and technology-focused abuse.

The purpose of data collection is varied and is often driven by the needs of the individual services that collect data. Data may not be collected with an understanding of the perpetration of DFSV as a central component of the work or with the potential for data linkage and collaboration in mind. However, there are opportunities to make better use of this existing data, through improved data development, data linkage and enhanced data analysis (Lloyd et al., 2023). There is scope for enhancing the way in which the various data sources collected could be joined up. There is need for improved information sharing pathways in practice between the criminal justice system and service providers. Across these processes victims and survivors and their safety must remain central.

Improved data linkage also provides opportunities for improving our understanding and ability to capture the pattern-based nature of DFSV and to move away from the limitations associated with incident-based approaches. Domestic and family violence deaths rarely occur without warning. In many fatal cases, there has been an identifiable pattern of abuse prior to the homicide, as well as identifiable indicators of risk. There have typically also been many opportunities for individuals or agencies to intervene before the victim was killed. When viewed as the escalation of a predictable pattern of behaviour, the killing of DFV victims can be seen as largely preventable (ADFVDRN & ANROWS, 2022).

There is a need to collect data that captures the patterns of DFSV. This is particularly important for identifying the nuances and contextual factors of DFSV and for identifying and preventing misidentification of the predominant aggressor (Nancarrow et al., 2020). Women – especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women – are being misidentified as perpetrators on protection orders and the effects of this are extensive. This is exacerbated by a focus on single incidents of visible or physical violence. This focus does not support the appropriate application of DFSV legislation, where violence would be considered in context to assess the need for protection from *future* harm (Nancarrow et al., 2020). It is important that the committee consider the risks of data collection being utilised to exacerbate these issues. While seeking to understand the volume of perpetrators, it is imperative that the committee consider the need for meaningful qualitative measurement that allows more accurate understanding of perpetration.

ANROWS works in partnership with the ADFVDRN (2022, in press) on research that provides valuable insights into the profile of family violence perpetrators and the need for nuance. Together, ANROWS and the ADFVDRN have completed one project on intimate partner homicides (2022) and are finalising a second on filicides (in press) in the context of DFV, with the report due to be released later this year. What this work

shows is that it is possible to create national minimum data sets, to examine the DFV context of cases, and to look at families' prior contact with services, all with a view to better understanding the nuances of these cases. This work adds to the national knowledge base of homicides that occur in the context of DFV, and the drivers of DFV, to inform DFV prevention and intervention opportunities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience high rates of DFSV, yet determining the full extent of family violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is difficult due to under-reporting and unreliable recording practices (Carlson et al., 2021). It is estimated that up to 90 per cent of incidents of violence perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women go undisclosed (Department of Social Services, 2016, as cited in ANROWS, 2020a). There are also issues with the recording of reported violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women driven by the incomplete identification of Indigenous status in many survey datasets and in service providers' screening processes (Olsen & Lovett, 2016). Given that improving the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is a priority of Closing the Gap Target 13, there is a need for more current data about the prevalence of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children and the characteristics of those perpetrating against them – including non-Indigenous users of violence. Any data or analysis of data relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples needs to be understood within the context of colonisation and intergenerational trauma (McGlade, 2012, as cited in ADFVDRN & ANROWS, in press), the ongoing colonial system (Watego et al., 2021, as cited in ADFVDRN & ANROWS, in press), the persistent lack of appropriate services (McGlade, 2012, as cited in ADFVDRN & ANROWS, in press), deficiencies in the practices of identification of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples (Cripps, 2023, as cited in ADFVDRN & ANROWS, in press), and the limited resourcing of support services and programs (Langton et al., 2020a, as cited in ADFVDRN & ANROWS, in press).

In considering how we collect data on people using violence and the ways in which that can be improved, it is important to keep in mind that while most people who use violence come into contact with some systems (such as banks or GPs), use of violence is often not identified during these interactions. Many people who use violence do not have contact with services likely to identify their use of violence. Therefore, focusing on systems data will limit who comes into scope. Collecting additional population-wide data focused on prevalence of perpetration beyond that captured by systems is critical. There is also a need to enhance developmental capacity of services to support organisational learning, to improve the recording and collection of data which enables identification and pattern recognition at the local level. Services hold a wealth of data, but they are restricted in their capacity to capture this data in a meaningful way and to work with this data to inform our understanding of DFSV perpetration.

References

- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2019). *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-survey/latest-release>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Personal Safety, Australia*. ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/2021-22>
- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network. (2018). *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network data report 2018*. Domestic Violence Death Review Team. [https://coroners.nsw.gov.au/documents/reports/ADFVDRN_Data_Report_2018%20\(2\).pdf](https://coroners.nsw.gov.au/documents/reports/ADFVDRN_Data_Report_2018%20(2).pdf)
- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, & Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022). *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network data report: Intimate partner violence homicides 2010–2018* (2nd ed.; Research report, 03/2022). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/australian-domestic-and-family-violence-death-review-network-data-report-intimate-partner-violence-homicides-2010-2018/>
- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network, & Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (in press). *Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network data report: Filicides in a domestic and family violence context 2010–2018* (1st ed.; Research report). ANROWS.
- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2024a). *Approved projects*. Australian Government. <https://aifs.gov.au/tentomen/data-users/access-usage/approved-projects>
- Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2024b). *Ten to Men: The Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health*. Australian Government. <https://aifs.gov.au/tentomen>
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020a). *Improving family violence legal and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: Key findings and future directions* (Research to policy and practice, 25–26/2020). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/improving-family-violence-legal-and-support-services-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-key-findings-and-future-directions/>
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020b). *Working across sectors to meet the needs of clients experiencing domestic and family violence* (ANROWS Insights, 05/2020). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/working-across-sectors-to-meet-the-needs-of-clients-experiencing-domestic-and-family-violence/>
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022a). *Pathways to intimate partner homicide: The “fixated threat” offender trajectory* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide/>
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022b). *Pathways to intimate partner homicide: The “persistent and disorderly” offender trajectory* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide/>
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2022c). *Pathways to intimate partner homicide: The “deterioration/acute stressor” offender trajectory* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/resources/pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide/>
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2024). *ANROWS Research Grants*. <https://www.anrows.org.au/research-grants/>
- Bevan, C., Lloyd, J., & McGlade, H. (2024). *Missing, murdered and incarcerated Indigenous women in Australia: A literature review*. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/missing-murdered-and-incarcerated-indigenous-women-in-australia-a-literature-review/>
- Boxall, H., Doherty, L., Lawler, S., Franks, C., & Bricknell, S. (2022). *The “Pathways to intimate partner homicide” project: Key stages and events in male-perpetrated intimate partner homicide in Australia* (Research report, 04/2022). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/the->

[pathways-to-intimate-partner-homicide-project-key-stages-and-events-in-male-perpetrated-intimate-partner-homicide-in-australia/](#)

- Carlson, B., Day, M., & Farrelly, T. (2021). *What works? Exploring the literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs that respond to family violence* (Research report, 01/2021). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/what-works-exploring-the-literature-on-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-healing-programs-that-respond-to-family-violence/>
- Healey, L., Heward-Belle, S., Humphreys, C., Isobe, J., Tsantefski, M., & Young, A. (2020). *Working at the intersections of domestic and family violence, parental substance misuse and/or mental health issues*. <https://vawc.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/STACY-working-with-complexity-Final-Report.pdf>
- Hegarty, K., McKenzie, M., McLindon, E., Addison, M., Valpied, J., Hameed, M., Kyei-Onanjiri, M., Baloch, S., Diemer, K., & Tarzia, L. (2022). *“I just felt like I was running around in a circle”*: Listening to the voices of victims and perpetrators to transform responses to intimate partner violence (Research report, 22/2022). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/i-just-felt-like-i-was-running-around-in-a-circle-listening-to-the-voices-of-victims-and-perpetrators-to-transform-responses-to-intimate-partner-violence/>
- Humphreys, C., & Healey, L. (2017). *PATHways and Research Into Collaborative Inter-Agency practice: Collaborative work across the child protection and specialist domestic and family violence interface: Final report* (ANROWS Horizons 03/2017). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/pathways-and-research-into-collaborative-inter-agency-practice-collaborative-work-across-the-child-protection-and-specialist-domestic-and-family-violence-interface-the-patricia-project-final-report/>
- Lloyd, J., Dembele, L., Dawes, C., Jane, S., & Macmillan, L. (2023). *The Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023–2028*. ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/australian-national-research-agenda-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children/>
- Luu, B., Wright, A. C., Schurer, S., Metcalfe, L., Heward-Belle, S., Collings, S., & Barrett, E. (2024). *Analysis of linked longitudinal administrative data on child protection involvement for NSW families with domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drug issues and mental health issues* (Research report, 01/2024). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/analysis-of-linked-longitudinal-administrative-data-on-child-protection-involvement-for-nsw-families-with-domestic-and-family-violence-alcohol-and-other-drug-issues-and-mental-health-issues/>
- Meyer, S., Helps, N., & Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2023). *Domestic and family violence perpetrator screening and risk assessment: Current practice and future opportunities*. Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/crg/reports/crg-3319-20>
- Nancarrow, H., Thomas, K., Ringland, V., & Modini, T. (2020). *Accurately identifying the “person most in need of protection” in domestic and family violence law* (Research report, 23/2020). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/accurately-identifying-the-person-most-in-need-of-protection-in-domestic-and-family-violence-law/>
- Octoman, O., Hawkes, M., Lima, F., O’Donnell, M., Orr, C., Arney, F., Moore, T., Robinson, S., valentine, k., Marshall, A., Burton, J., & Brebner, C. (2022). *The nature and extent of domestic and family violence exposure for children and young people with disability* (Research report, 16/2022). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/the-nature-and-extent-of-domestic-and-family-violence-exposure-for-children-and-young-people-with-disability/>
- Orr, C., Sims, S., Fisher, C., O’Donnell, M., Preen, D., Glauert, R., Milroy, H., & Garwood, S. (2022). *Investigating the mental health of children exposed to domestic and family violence through the use of linked police and health records* (Research report, 10/2022). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/investigating-the-mental-health-of-children-exposed-to-domestic-and-family-violence-through-the-use-of-linked-police-data-and-health-records/>
- Robinson, S., valentine, k., Marshall, A., Burton, J., Moore, T., Brebner, C., O’Donnell, M., & Smyth, C. (2022). *Connecting the dots: Understanding the domestic and family violence experiences of children and young people with disability within and across sectors: Final report* (Research report,

17/2022). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/connecting-the-dots-understanding-the-domestic-and-family-violence-experiences-of-children-and-young-people-with-disability-within-and-across-sectors-final-report/>

Victorian Government. (2022). *About the information sharing and MARAM reforms*. State Government of Victoria. <https://www.vic.gov.au/about-information-sharing-schemes-and-risk-management-framework>

Wright, A. C., Metcalfe, L., Heward-Belle, S., Collings, S., & Barrett, E. (2021). *Critical interpretive synthesis: Child protection involvement for families with domestic and family violence, alcohol and other drug issues, and mental health issues* (Research report, 06/2021). ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/critical-interpretive-synthesis-child-protection-involvement-for-families-with-domestic-and-family-violence-alcohol-and-other-drug-issues-and-mental-health-issues/>

ANROWS is an independent, not-for-profit company established as an initiative under Australia's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). Our primary function is to build the evidence base that supports ending violence against women and children in Australia.

ANROWS is embedded in the National Plan architecture and will continue to deliver and develop this function across the next decade under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*. Every aspect of our work is motivated by the right of women and children to live free from violence and in safe communities. We recognise, respect and respond to diversity among women and children, and we are committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

ANROWS

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

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited
PO Box Q389, Queen Victoria Building, NSW, 1230
ABN 67 162 349 171
Phone +61 2 8374 4000 | anrows.org.au