Chapter two: Prevalence and severity of violence
Chapter two: Prevalence and severity of violence

This chapter provides an overall account of the experiences of violence of women who participated in the 2002/03 IVAWS. The specific focus is on the occurrence of different types of violence (physical and sexual) experienced, and the level of victimisation over a lifetime, and in the five years and 12 months preceding the survey. **Prevalence** refers to the percentage of women who reported being victimised at least once during a specific period, such as during the previous 12 months or over their lifetime. The severity of physical and sexual violence in relation to the most recent incident experienced by these women will also be explored in this chapter. Estimates of women’s experiences of physical and sexual violence based on their socio-demographic characteristics are also provided.

Occurrence of physical and sexual violence

One of the main problems affecting estimates derived from surveys is the issue of non-disclosure or non-reporting. While there are many barriers to reporting (see Lievore 2003 for an overview), people are more likely to disclose information about experiences of violence to researchers conducting surveys than to police (Lievore 2003; Lobmann et al. 2003). Depending on the focus of a survey, this may also result in differences in estimates of violence. Dedicated surveys such as the Women's Safety Survey and the IVAWS provide more accurate estimates on violence against women than more general surveys on crime, such as the Crime and Safety Survey (ABS 2003).

The most recent *Crime and Safety Survey 2002* (ABS 2003) asked both males and females whether they had been victims of assault in the 12 months preceding the survey. Results indicated a victimisation prevalence rate of five per cent for assault, meaning that five per cent of persons surveyed reported that they were victims of assault at least once during the previous 12 months. Over half of the victims of assault reported experiencing more than one incident (51%). Just under half (45%) of the assault victims were female. Both males and females aged 25 to 34 years had the highest incidence rates, with 22 per cent of male victims and 28 per cent of female victims in this age group. The majority of incidents involving female victims did not result in injury to the victim (73%). Approximately 47 per cent of assaults involving female victims occurred in the home. While the proportion of male and female victims who had experienced one or two incidents of assault in the twelve months prior to the survey were quite similar, a larger percentage of females (34%) than males (31%) reported experiencing three or more incidents of assault during the same period.

More detailed data on female victimisation is provided in the *Women’s Safety Australia Report* (ABS 1996). This survey, based on the Canadian *Violence Against Women Survey* (Statistics Canada 1993), interviewed a total of 6,300 women aged 18 and over from both urban and rural areas about their experiences of violence. An incident of violence, actual or
threatened, was experienced by seven per cent of women in the 12 month period that preceded the survey (ABS 1996); this equates to approximately 490,400 women who experienced some form of physical or sexual violence during the 12 months preceding the survey (ABS 1996).

A larger proportion of women experienced physical violence by a male (5%) than sexual violence by a male (2%). Risk of experiencing violence was higher for young, single, unemployed women born in Australia, than for any other group. These findings are also consistent with those of the British Crime Survey (see Mirrlees-Black & Byron 1999; Myhill & Allen 2002) where the risk of experiencing violence was greater for women aged between 16 and 24, women who were unemployed and women who were single.

As with assault, data from the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) shows that women who are murdered in Australia represent a third of the victims. In 2002/2003, 33 per cent of victims of homicide in Australia were female, and females are killed at a rate of 1.1 per 100,000 females in the Australian population (Mouzos & Segrave 2004). Females aged between 20 and 24 years experience the highest risk of homicide victimisation at a rate of 2.1 per 100,000 females (Mouzos & Segrave 2004). The majority of males and females killed in Australia are killed by someone known to them. However, males are more likely to be killed by a friend or an acquaintance, whereas females are more likely to be killed by a current or former intimate partner (Mouzos 1999; 2003; Mouzos & Segrave 2004). Very few persons are murdered by strangers in Australia (Mouzos 2003; Mouzos & Segrave 2004).

In contrast when homicides within families are examined, three-quarters of the intimate partner homicides involve males killing their female partners (Mouzos & Rushforth 2003). Females comprised only 20 per cent of offenders of intimate partner homicide, confirming prior research that males are more likely than females to kill their intimate partner (Johnson & Hotton 2003).

**IVAWS results**

Figure 1 provides an overall picture of the number and estimated proportion of women who either experienced physical and sexual violence or harm or did not experience any violence during their lifetime (that is, since the age of 16 years), five years and 12 months preceding the survey. Overall, 57 per cent of the women surveyed reported some level of physical and/or sexual harm over their life course. This reduces to 10 per cent during the last twelve months.
An examination of women’s experiences of all types of violence across their adult lifetime (Figure 2) found that:

- 43 per cent did not report experiencing any of the types of violence included in the survey;
- nine per cent of women reported experiencing sexual violence only;
- 23 per cent of women experienced physical violence only; and
- 25 per cent of women experienced both physical and sexual violence. This could have occurred in the same incident, or on separate occasions.
When the time frame is reduced to the 12 months preceding the survey the levels of violence experienced are lower:

- 90 per cent did not report experiencing any of the types of violence included in the survey;
- two per cent of women reported experiencing sexual violence only;
- six per cent of women experienced physical violence only; and
- one per cent of women experienced both physical and sexual violence (Figure 2). This could have occurred in the same incident, or on separate occasions.

**Physical violence**

There is no generally agreed accepted definition of what constitutes violence (ABS 1996), and it is largely dependent on what people perceive as violence. Physical violence has been previously defined as ‘the occurrence, attempt or threat of physical assault, where physical assault was the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten’ (ABS 1996: 2). While it is important to distinguish between actual physical harm and threats to harm, as will be exemplified later on, threats to harm in the vast majority of cases are associated with occurrences of physical harm.
Similar to previous national surveys (see ABS 1996; 2003), the type of physical violence covered in the survey ranged from threats of harm to actual physical harm. Women were asked whether since the age of 16 any male had committed the following acts against them:

- threats of physical harm;
- threw/hit with something;
- pushed, grabbed, twisted arm, pulled hair;
- slapped, kicked, bit, hit with a fist;
- attempt to strangle, suffocate, burn;
- used/threatened to use a knife or gun; or
- other physical violence.

A little under half of the women aged between 18 and 69 years who participated in the IVAWS reported experiencing some form of physical violence over their lifetime (48%; Figure 3). Prevalence rates are always higher over the lifetime. Thus, the percentage of women who reported being victims of some form of physical violence reduces to 20 per cent in the past five years and eight per cent in the past year. If threats to hurt are excluded from the total of physical violence, the percentage of women who experienced an incident of physical violence over the lifetime reduces to just over two out of five (between 40 and 43%; Table 1).

![Figure 3: Women’s experiences of physical and sexual violence in the last year, 5 years and over their lifetime](chart)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file], n=6,677

AIC Research and Public Policy Series
Of the 57 percent of women who reported being a victim of some form of physical violence in their adult lifetime, the majority experienced more than one type of violence over their lifetime (63%; n=2,016; Figure 4). The co-existence of different forms of violence highlights that women’s experiences of violence are often not isolated incidents. The majority of female victims experience more than one type of violence either in the same incident or as part of a pattern of repeat victimisation. A different pattern emerges during the last twelve months. Of the 10 per cent of women who experienced physical violence or harm during the last twelve months, 60 per cent experienced only one form of physical violence.

![Figure 4: Women’s experiences of one or more types of violence over their lifetime (a)](image)

(a) Refers to women who experienced violence during their lifetime (n =3,810)
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file]

These women reported that the most common type of physical violence they experienced from a man over their adult lifetime was threats of physical harm (between 32 and 34%; Table 1). The second most common type of violence reported was being pushed or grabbed or having their arm twisted or hair pulled, with between 27 and 29 per cent experiencing this type of violence over their lifetime. Excluding other physical violence, women were least likely to report that a man had tried to strangle or suffocate, burn or scald them on purpose (between 5 and 6% over their lifetime).

As already mentioned different types of violence co-exist. Of those women who reported that they had experienced threats of physical harm, just over three-quarters of them (77%) also reported they had over their lifetime also experienced actual physical violence either during the same incident or on a separate occasion.
While the proportion of women reporting violence differs depending on the time frame, the pattern of violence experienced does not (Table 1). In other words, women were more likely to report experiencing threats of harm from a male irrespective of the time period examined and least likely to report being strangled, suffocated or burned.

### Table 1: Women’s experiences of different forms of physical violence, percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical violence</th>
<th>Past 12 months</th>
<th>Previous 5 years</th>
<th>Lifetime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>95 CI</td>
<td>RSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of physical harm</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4 – 5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threw/hit with something</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 – 3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushed, grabbed, twisted arm, pulled hair</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 – 4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slapped, kicked, bit, hit with a fist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 – 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangled, suffocated, burned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used/threatened to use a knife or gun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other physical violence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 – 1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total physical violence</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7 – 8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total physical violence excluding threats</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5 – 6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file], n=6,677

### Sexual violence

The estimated extent of sexual assault in Australia varies according to the data source (Lievore 2003). The central issue is one of definition — what is actually being ‘counted’ as sexual violence. Some surveys include ‘unwanted sexual touching’ in the definition of sexual assault, while others do not. This is further confounded by ‘the absence of a standard definition of ‘sexual assault’, ‘rape’ and ‘sexual violence’ …’ (Lievore 2003: 11). IVAWS includes unwanted sexual touching in its definition of sexual violence, and therefore in the estimates of women who experienced sexual violence in the survey. Under an offence-based definition, unwanted sexual touching is a behaviour recognised as ‘sexual assault’ in the ABS Sexual Assault Information Development Framework (2003: 9).

The inclusion of ‘unwanted sexual touching’ in the definition of sexual violence ascribes to the notion that all acts of a sexual nature should be conceptualised as sexual violence irrespective of which end of the continuum of sexual violence they fall and whether or not
they result in injury. This is consistent with an experienced-based definition of sexual assault, which refers to:

- unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature directed towards a person:
  - which makes that person feel uncomfortable, distressed, frightened or threatened, or which results in harm or injury to that person;
  - to which that person has not freely agreed or given consent; and
  - in which another person uses physical, emotional, psychological, or verbal force or (other) coercive behaviour against that person (ABS 2003: 9).

The Women’s Safety Survey (ABS 1996) definition of sexual violence excludes unwanted sexual touching. This behaviour is classified as ‘harassment’ (along with obscene phone calls, indecent exposure by a man, and inappropriate comments about a victim’s body or sex life by a man) (ABS 1996: 82). This is an important difference in the definitions given that the most frequent type of sexual violence reported by women who participated in the IVAWS was unwanted sexual touching. Within the previous year, three per cent of women reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching. Of these, 10 per cent reported unwanted sexual touching during the 12 months preceding the survey and five years preceding the survey (Table 2). However, a similar proportion of women reported being victims of attempted forced sexual intercourse (10%; 4% RSE) and actual forced intercourse (9%; 4% RSE) over their lifetime.

Very few women reported experiencing attempted forced sexual intercourse or actual forced intercourse during the 12 months preceding the survey and five years preceding the survey. However, a similar proportion of women reported being victims of attempted forced sexual intercourse (10%; 4% RSE) and actual forced intercourse (9%; 4% RSE) over their lifetime. Since the age of 16 years, less than two per cent of women reported that a male had forced or attempted to force them into sexual activity with someone else, including being forced to have sex for money or in exchange for goods. That is, of those women who were interviewed, few reported being forced into prostitution by a male. The number of women who were interviewed is too small to produce statistically reliable estimates.
### Table 2: Women’s experiences of different forms of sexual violence, percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual violence</th>
<th>Past 12 months</th>
<th>Previous 5 years</th>
<th>Lifetime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%  95 CI RSE</td>
<td>%  95 CI RSE</td>
<td>%  95 CI RSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted sexual touching</td>
<td>3  3 – 4  7</td>
<td>9  8 – 10  4</td>
<td>24  23 – 25  2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted forced intercourse</td>
<td>1  0 – 1 16</td>
<td>3  2 – 3 8</td>
<td>10  9 – 11  4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced intercourse</td>
<td>0  0 – 1 20</td>
<td>2  2 – 3 8</td>
<td>9  9 – 10  4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced sex with someone else</td>
<td>- - -*</td>
<td>0  0 – 1 20</td>
<td>1  1 – 2 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sexual violence</td>
<td>- - -*</td>
<td>1  0 – 1 18</td>
<td>2  1 – 2 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug facilitated sexual activity (a)</td>
<td>- - -*</td>
<td>- - -*</td>
<td>1  0 – 1 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sexual Violence</td>
<td>4  3 – 4  6</td>
<td>11  10 – 12  4</td>
<td>34  33 – 35  2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) This question was asked in the second stage of the IVAWS, and the estimates are based on a sample size of 3,047
- Counts too low for a statistically reliable estimate
* Relative standard error is greater than 25%

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file], n=6,677

In recent years, there has been much media coverage in relation to ‘drink spiking’ as well as ‘drug facilitated sexual assault’ and some have even reported an increase in its prevalence (Brenzinger 1998; Chapman 2000; Vogel 2002). ‘Drink spiking’ is defined as the surreptitious addition of drugs or alcohol to a drink (alcoholic or non-alcoholic), without consent of the person ingesting it (Australian Drug Foundation 2002). ‘Drug facilitated sexual assault’ refers to non-consensual acts which take place when the victim is incapacitated due to the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, which prevents them from resisting and/or giving meaningful consent (Abarbanel 2001).

Despite the attention toward this type of offence, there is very little empirical data available on its prevalence, and specifically as to whether or not it is on the increase. In recognition of the lack of empirical data, in the second stage of the IVAWS the questionnaire was modified to include a question on drug facilitated sexual activity (see Appendix 1 for further information). A total of 3047 women participated in the second stage of IVAWS, and about one per cent reported a drug facilitated sexual assault in their adult lifetime (Table 2). The number of women who experienced this type of sexual violence during the 12 months and five years preceding the survey was too small to produce statistically reliable estimates.

In the previous section it was reported that two-thirds of women who experienced physical violence over their lifetime, reported experiencing more than one type of physical violence (63%; Figure 4). In contrast, women who reported experiencing sexual violence over their
lifetime were less likely to report experiencing more than one type of violence (27%; Figure 4). Of the 24 per cent of women who said they had experienced unwanted sexual touching during their lifetime, 17 per cent also reported that they had experienced forced intercourse, 19 per cent attempted forced intercourse and four per cent forced sex with someone else.

During the twelve months preceding the survey, four per cent of the women interviewed reported being victims of sexual violence. This increases to 11 per cent during the five years preceding the survey, and just over a third of the women since the age of 16 (Figure 3). If unwanted sexual touching is excluded from the total sexual violence estimates, the proportion of women who experienced at least one incident of sexual violence over their lifetime decreases to about one in five women. Due to the ‘drug facilitated sexual assault’ question being asked of only half of the women who participated in the IVAWS (second stage only), the prevalence estimates for sexual violence (previous 12 months, five years and lifetime) do not include the women who were victims of drug-facilitated sexual assault.

Factors associated with physical and sexual violence

Previous international research has found that the risk of experiencing violence varies by a number of characteristics. Age, marital status, race, educational attainment, and labour force status have all been found to differentiate between women who experienced physical or sexual violence and women who did not (Lauritsen & White 2001). The Violence Against Women Survey conducted in Canada in 1993 found that while women from all socio-economic backgrounds reported experiences of violence, the highest 12-month rates of violence were reported by women with household incomes under $15,000, by women aged between 18 and 24 years, and by women with some post-secondary education (Statistics Canada 1993).

Analyses of risk factors using the Women’s Safety Survey (ABS 1996) found that young women had a higher likelihood of experiencing violence than older women when all other factors were held constant. It was suggested that the higher prevalence of violent victimisation for this age group was due to their lifestyles, in particular their increased contact with young males who are more likely to use violence, and their relative inexperience at identifying and avoiding potentially violent situations (Coumarelos & Allen 1998).

Contrary to expectations, the analysis of risk factors using the Women’s Safety Survey (ABS 1996) found no significant effects for employment, educational attainment, level of income and main source of income. The effect of these socio-economic indicators was possibly mediated by the other factors such as childhood abuse and neglect, which have been linked to poverty, poor education and unemployment. International research has found
correlations between economic disadvantage and violence against women in intimate relationships (Benson, Fox, Demaris & Van Wyk 2003; Lauritsen & White 2001), although this is not a consistent finding when other variables are taken into account (Tjaden & Thoennes 2000).

A more recent survey questioned 5000 Australians aged between 12 and 20 about their experiences of violence (Indermaur 2001). The rates of victimisation did not appear to differ between the genders. However, when young persons (19–20 year olds) were asked whether they felt afraid or were injured during any of the instances of violence they experienced, almost one third of the young women reported that they had been frightened or hurt (30%), compared with one in eight of the young males (12%). As other studies have found, young women from lower socio-economic areas were more likely to experience violence than those from higher socio-economic areas.

Other work by the ABS has found that rates of assault are higher amongst the Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population. The rate of family violence victimisation for Indigenous women was almost 40 times the rate for non-Indigenous women (Harding et al. 1995). However, it must be noted that the current literature on the incidence and prevalence of family violence in these areas and for these particular groups is limited, making it difficult to draw accurate conclusions.

In terms of sexual assault specifically most victims of sexual assault are women aged 18 to 24 years (46%) and unmarried (80%) (ABS 2002). Perpetrators are predominantly male (93%) and 34 per cent of women who had experienced a sexual assault experienced two or more incidents of sexual violence in the last 12 months. Canadian research also reported higher levels of victimisation among young women and higher rates of offending for young men (Kong et al. 2003).

**Age as a factor**

Age has been found to be the strongest predictor of risk, with prior research showing that younger women are victimised disproportionately to older women (Lauritsen & White 2001; Craven 1997; Johnson 1996; Tjaden & Thoennes 1998; 2000). In the IVAWS, younger women reported higher levels of violence (physical, sexual or any form of violence) during the 12 months preceding the survey than older women (Table 3).
Given that sexual violence has been described as a ‘crime against youth’ (Tjaden & Thoennes 1998: 6), it is not unexpected to find that over one in ten women aged 18 to 24 who participated in the IVAWS had experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months. This compares with no more than two per cent of women aged 45 years or over (Table 3).

**Women from minority populations: Indigenous women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)**

Research has documented the high levels of violence experienced by women from minority populations, in particular, Indigenous women. However, quantifying the level of violence experienced by women from minority populations compared to women from the general population is fraught with difficulty (see Lievore 2003).

**Indigenous women**

Prior research has documented high levels of violence in Indigenous communities in Australia (Memmott et al. 2001; Strategic Partners 2003). More specifically, there is substantial evidence that Indigenous women are much more likely to be victims of violence within the family, and to sustain injury, compared to non-Indigenous women (Strategic Partners 2003). From the available data Indigenous women are also far more likely than non-Indigenous women to experience sexual violence (Lievore 2003).

However, assessing the level and extent of lethal and non-lethal violence inflicted against Indigenous women is not straightforward. Although homicide figures represent the whole
population (and not a sample), they too have some problems with the subjective assessment made by police in identifying persons as Indigenous. Notwithstanding this, they are considered to accurately reflect the level of lethal violence. Despite representing just over two per cent of the total Australian population, Indigenous women accounted for 15 per cent of homicide victims in Australia in 2002/03 (Mouzos & Segrave 2004).

Aside from the usual problems of under-reporting and reliability due to under-sampling in the examination of non-lethal violence against Indigenous women (Lievore 2003), many Indigenous women do not have telephones or permanent residential addresses, which would automatically exclude them (and details of their experiences of violence) from telephone surveys. Nonetheless, in order to capture the experiences of violence of those Indigenous women who participated in IVAWS all women were asked a question as to whether or not they were an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Women who responded ‘yes’ were classified as Indigenous for the purpose of this report (n=92). This number under-represents the number of Indigenous women in the general population (1.4% of the sample compared to 2.2% in the general population (women aged 18-69 years)). The IVAWS sample of Indigenous women was also more likely to be English speaking and reside in urban areas.

Compared to the non-Indigenous women in this sample, this group of Indigenous women reported higher levels of physical, sexual and any violence during the 12 months preceding the IVAWS (Figure 5). During this period, about seven per cent of non-Indigenous women reported experiencing physical violence (4% RSE), compared to 20 per cent of Indigenous women (21% RSE). Three times as many Indigenous women reported experiencing an incident of sexual violence, compared to non-Indigenous women (12%; 28% RSE versus 4%; 6% RSE). However, the estimate of the Indigenous women in this sample should be viewed with caution due to the high relative standard error.

The IVAWS results reinforce findings from previous research:

…although the statistics are imperfect, they are sufficient to demonstrate the disproportionate occurrence of violence in the Indigenous communities of Australia and the traumatic impact on Indigenous people (Memmott et al. 2001: 6).
Chi-square test of significance: *p<0.001 **p<0.01
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file], n=6,673

**Women from non-English speaking backgrounds**

In addition to capturing information on Indigenous women’s experiences of violence, the IVAWS also captures information on women from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). A total of 1122 women who participated in the IVAWS identified as being from a non-English speaking background (a total of 62 IVAWS interviews were conducted in a foreign language by a bi-lingual interviewer). NESB women report lower levels of physical violence than women from English speaking backgrounds (Figure 6), while a similar proportion from both groups experienced sexual violence during the 12 months preceding the survey.
Women from English-speaking backgrounds reported higher levels of physical, sexual and any violence compared to NESB women when the period examined is extended to over their lifetime. While this suggests that violence against NESB women compared to women from other populations is less prevalent, research has identified factors which not only influence NESB women’s perceptions of what is considered to be violent behaviour but also their willingness to report. Specifically in relation to sexual violence, four main categories of reasons for non-reporting by NESB women have been identified (Lievore 2003: 66). These are:

- personal;
- cultural and religious;
- informational/language; and
- institutional/structural.

It is possible that some of these factors may have resulted in NESB women who had experienced violence not participating in the survey or of those who did participate they were less likely to report incidents of physical and sexual violence, and openly discussing such sensitive information with survey interviewers. Although topics and activities regarded as private vary cross-culturally and situationally, women often record misgivings or unease about questions directed to their private life (Stanko & Lee 2003: 3).
**Relationship status**

The risk patterns for lethal and non-lethal violence differ based on a woman’s relationship status. Women who fall victims to lethal violence in Australia are usually either married or in a de facto relationship (see Mouzos 1999; 2003). In contrast, women not in a current relationship report higher levels of non-lethal violence during the 12 months preceding the IVAWS compared to women in a current relationship (Figure 7; Table 4). ‘Current relationship’ refers to women who are either married, de facto and or have a boyfriend. It is important to note that this refers to their relationship status at the time of the IVAWS interview, and does not indicate that these women were victimised by their partners.

![Figure 7: Women’s experiences of violence during the last 12 months by relationship status](image)

Chi-square test of significance: *p<0.001
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file], n=6,677

Women not in a current relationship were twice as likely as women in a relationship to report experiencing physical violence during the previous 12 months (12% versus 6%; Figure 7). As most of these women fall in the younger age groups, it is important to canvass possible explanations for higher victimisation rates. Routine (or lifestyle) activities theory provides a feasible explanation for the higher rates of violence among young single people (Hindelang, Gottfredson & Garofalo, 1978; Cohen & Felson 1979). The main tenet of the theory is that some socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, employment and marital status), as well as place of residence, influence the type of lifestyle that a person leads, and their vulnerability to criminal victimisation. A number of lifestyle factors (see Hindelang 1978) may lead to increased victimisation:
amount of time spent in public places after dark;
the riskiness of activities undertaken in these places;
the proximity to potential offenders; and
one’s ability to guard against attack.

These lifestyle factors seem to describe the social activities of many young women (and men). It is therefore anticipated that as a cohort, young single women would experience higher levels of victimisation.

Previous victimisation surveys have found that women who are divorced or separated report higher levels of violence (ABS 1996; Cravens 1997). Women who had a previous relationship (includes women who were separated and divorced) were almost three times as likely as women who did not have a previous relationship to report experiencing violence (physical and/or sexual) during the 12 months preceding the survey (Figure 7). Specifically, one in five women who were married but separated reported experiencing either physical or sexual violence during the 12 months preceding the IVAWS (Table 4). Married women reported the lowest levels of violence compared to all other women in the IVAWS. This is not unexpected given that married women are also likely to be older than women who are single (only 5% of women aged less than 25 years were married compared with 66% of women aged 25 or over). The risk of intimate partner and non-partner violence will be further explored in the substantive chapters that follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Physical violence</th>
<th>Sexual violence</th>
<th>Any violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>RSE</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De facto relationship</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current boyfriend</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>(510)</td>
<td>(245)</td>
<td>(666)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This estimate should be used with caution, as the relative standard error is greater than 25%  
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file]
Educational attainment

A common misconception is that violence only occurs between people who have little or no formal education, and that those who are highly educated are immune from violence. Research findings are contradictory. Some researchers have found an inverse association between women’s educational attainment and the risk of domestic violence (Craven 1997), while others have found higher levels of violence reported by women with higher educational attainment (ABS 1996; 2002; Morris 1997). Others find no relationship (Rollins & Oheneba-Sakyi 1990). The responses from women who participated in the IVAWS indicate that there appears to be little difference in the prevalence of physical and sexual victimisation based on women’s educational attainment (Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Physical Violence %</th>
<th>Sexual Violence %</th>
<th>Any Violence %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary and some secondary/technical school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finished technical school/commercial college/TAFE/Year 12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some/completed University/CAE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N)</td>
<td>(509)</td>
<td>(244)</td>
<td>(667)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Women’s experiences of violence during the last 12 months by educational attainment

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file]

Labour force status

Income and employment status have been found to be significant risk factors for violence against women (Mouzos 2000; 2003; Johnson 1996; Craven 1997). Lethal violence research indicates that only 27 per cent of female homicide victims in Australia in 2001/2002 were employed at the time of the incident (Mouzos 2003). In line with such research, it would be expected that women who were not working for pay and women from households with low incomes would report higher levels of victimisation. The IVAWS revealed results to the contrary. There was no statistically significant difference between working and non-working women and their levels of reported violence (Figure 8).
Furthermore, the levels of physical and sexual victimisation reported by women in the survey tended to be relatively similar irrespective of the combined income of their whole household (after tax) per week (Table 6).

### Table 6: Women’s experiences of violence during the last 12 months by combined household income

| Combined household income (a) | Physical violence | | Sexual violence | | Any violence |
|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|
|                              | %                 | RSE            | %              | RSE            | %              | RSE            |
| Less than $300               | 9                 | 21             | 5              | 29*            | 12             | 18             |
| $300 to less than $500       | 8                 | 12             | 3              | 19             | 10             | 10             |
| $500 to less than $850       | 8                 | 8              | 3              | 14             | 10             | 7              |
| $850 and over                | 8                 | 6              | 4              | 9              | 10             | 5              |
| Total (N)                    | (469)             | (220)          | (609)          |                 |                |                |

* This estimate should be used with caution, as the relative standard error is greater than 25%

(a) Refers to combined income of whole household, after deductions for tax etc., per week.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file]
Severity of physical and sexual violence in the most recent incident

IVAWS included questions on whether the woman was injured during the most recent incident, and the type of injuries sustained. A general overview of the severity of physical and sexual violence of those women who had reported such violence is presented here. In order to contain the length of the interview, victims of violence were asked to provide details of the most recent incident of partner violence, and violence from another male.

Physical injuries sustained

In relation to the most recent incident experienced over the lifetime, it is estimated that about two-thirds of the women who experienced either physical and/or sexual violence did not report sustaining any injuries (Figure 9). While this may seem low when compared to previous estimates, it is important to keep in mind that the most common types of violence experienced by women were threats of violence and unwanted sexual touching. It is therefore expected that no injuries would be sustained in such incidents. When women reported that injuries were sustained during the most recent incident of violence, they were more likely to occur during an incident of physical violence than an incident of sexual violence (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Women who experienced violence by whether they sustained any injuries in the most recent incident

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file]
Type of injuries sustained

The most common type of injury sustained was bruising, with four out of five women reporting that they sustained this injury. This is consistent with prior research abroad, which finds that most victimisations involving injuries result in minor injuries, such as bruises and scratches (Craven 1997). Just under a quarter of the women sustained cuts, scratches and burns, followed by an estimated less than one in ten women who sustained broken bones, broken nose, or internal injuries. There were few differences in the type of injury sustained based on whether the violent incident involved physical or sexual violence. This may be partly explained by the large overlap of women experiencing both physical and sexual violence.

To gauge the seriousness of injuries sustained, women were asked if they required medical care and whether they felt that their life was in danger. Of the women who were injured, over a quarter reported that they were injured so badly that they needed medical care regardless of whether they received it. There were no differences between physical and sexual violence in this regard. An estimated three out of ten women reported that they felt that their life was in danger (Figure 10). A higher proportion of women who experienced physical violence as compared to women who experienced sexual violence reported that this was the situation (35% versus 31%).

Figure 10: Women who experienced violence and whether they felt their life was in danger during the most recent incident

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, IVAWS 2002/03 weighted data [computer file]

---

5 The Australian Institute of Criminology is currently completing a report on drink spiking for the Australian Government Attorney-General’s Department.

6 If unwanted sexual touching is excluded from the total, about 1% of women reported experiencing sexual violence within the last year; and about 5% of women reported experiencing sexual violence within the last five years.

7 This refers to all other women who did not identify as coming from a non-English speaking background.

AIC Research and Public Policy Series