



Gendered Violence and Citizenship

The long term effects of domestic violence on
mental health, housing, work and social activity:

PRELIMINARY REPORT



*Miracles of
Each moment*

Kaz 2003

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INTRODUCTION

Women's rights as citizens continue to be damaged by the persistence of violence against them. Citizenship assumes all members of society are equal; however, gender inequality remains embedded in the fabric of society. Men's violence against women exacerbates gender inequality and takes a range of forms. This study investigated intimate partner violence (IPV), which has a direct impact on one in four women during their lifetime.

This report presents the preliminary findings from a research project funded by the Australian Research Council. The project examined the longer-term effects on women who have experienced IPV and how this affects their everyday lives, wellbeing and aspirations, following separation from a violent partner. The project had two components: a national online survey and face-to-face qualitative interviews. Women who participated in the survey self-selected as having experienced or currently experiencing intimate partner violence. The survey was promoted through an online publicity campaign in order to recruit a community sample. A unique element of this research was that it did not rely only on IPV services for participants.

The project sought women's knowledge and experiences about the longer-term impacts of intimate partner violence in four areas: mental health, housing, work and social activity. The research has explored the interconnections between these various areas of women's lives over time. The authors argue that these four areas are central to women's citizenship, and that IPV undermines women's capability to function as full and equal citizens. Safe and stable housing and employment, good mental health, and social participation are essential to women's inclusion and wellbeing.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report presents quantitative data from 658 survey participants and qualitative data is drawn from those women who have separated from a violent partner. The first section of the report presents demographic data about the participants and their circumstances. The second section of the report describes the impact of IPV on four areas: work, housing, mental health and social activity. How the effects of IPV impact and interconnect across these areas is presented through individual case studies drawn from the survey and interview data. These also highlight women's recoveries from IPV in various ways across their life course.

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of the participants (63%) continued to experience violence from their former partner following separation.
- The majority of the participants (over 75%) did not continue in the same workplace following separation.
- On leaving the IPV situation, one third of the participants depended on family and friends for immediate accommodation.
- Almost half of the participants (45%) received a diagnosis of mental illness either during or after the IPV.
- All forms of social activity by all participants decreased significantly during exposure to IPV
- IPV affected all the women in each of the four areas (work, housing, mental health and social activity).

STUDY DESIGN

The research employed a mixed methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The first stage of the project was a national online survey to investigate the effects of IPV across the four areas. The second stage of the data collection involved face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews to further understand the interconnections between the four areas and to create life history case studies of the women's experiences over time.

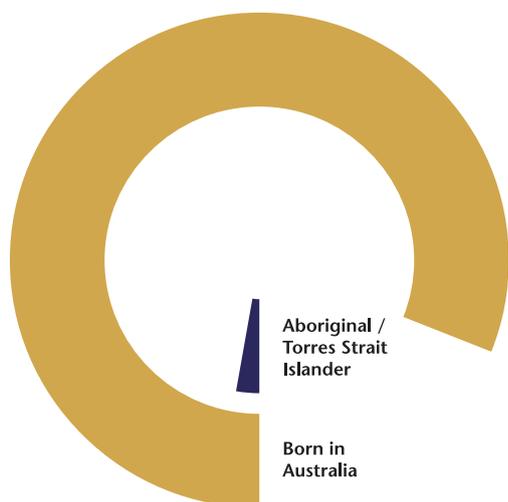
THE PARTICIPANTS

The total number of participants included in this analysis is 658. This represents all women who completed the survey, of which 578 (87.9%) women had separated from violent partners and 80 were living with violent partners.

Women participating in the study ranged in age from 18 to over 80 years. Over a third (34.6%) of the women were aged from 35 to 44 years, 27.1% from 45 to 54 years and 20.9% from 25 to 34 years. Eighty per cent of the participants had children.

The vast majority were Australian born:

- 81.2% were born in Australia and described their cultural identity as Australian (78.7%) or Northern/Western European (12.2%).
- 2.9% of the sample was of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin



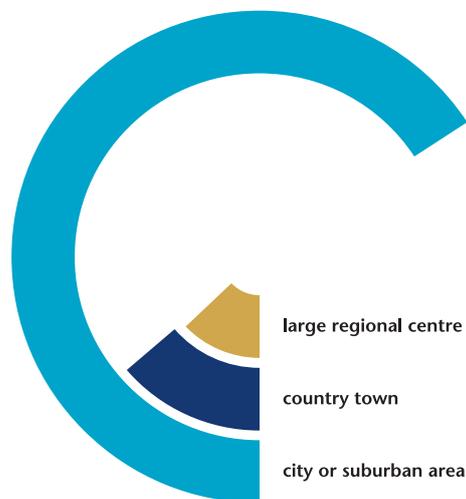
In relation to current living arrangements:

- 12.9% were living with a partner
- 17.6% were living without a partner
- 18.8% were living with a partner and children
- 38.8% were living with children but without a partner.



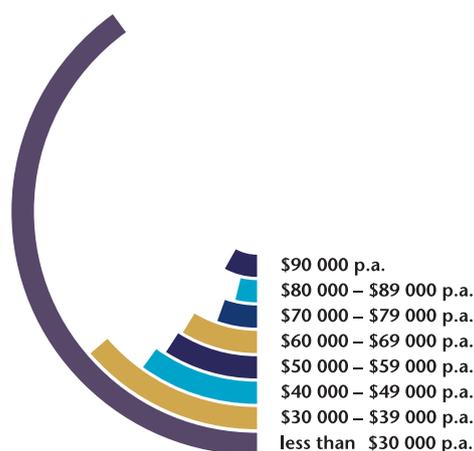
The location of participants ranged from large cities to small isolated rural areas:

- 65.8% of respondents lived in a city or suburban area
- 13.7% lived in a country town
- 12.9% lived in a large regional centre.



The annual earnings of the participants covered a wide range; however, they were predominantly in the lower income groups:

- 40.0% were earning less than \$30 000 p.a.
- 13.7% were earning \$30 000 – \$39 000 p.a.
- 10.0% were earning \$40 000 – \$49 000 p.a.
- 9.1% were earning \$50 000 – \$59 000 p.a.
- 8.7% were earning \$60 000 – \$69 000 p.a.
- 5.5% were earning \$70 000 – \$79 000 p.a.
- 3.8% were earning \$80 000 – \$89 000 p.a.
- 8.1% were earning more than \$90 000 p.a.



Women reported experiencing multiple forms of violence from their partners with over 90% reporting emotional/psychological abuse, social abuse and physical abuse, 79% financial abuse and 65.2% sexualised violence.

Women’s length of time in a relationship with a violent partner was most frequently 1-7 years, with an average time of 3.25 years (Standard deviation = 1.49). **The majority of women (63%) who had separated continued to experience violence from their former partner.** Around 17% were experiencing such violence at the time of their participation in the survey. The average duration of post-separation violence was almost three years.

WORK

The survey asked participants about their employment before IPV as well as about their current situation. Overall, women were working fewer hours at the time of completing the survey. Just over half of the women were employed full-time before IPV, which decreased to 29.6% at the time of completing the survey and having left the violence. Part-time employment increased and those who were in the category ‘not working and not seeking work’ rose to 16.3% after leaving the violence (see Table 1).

Vivien is in her late forties, is single and has no children. She lived with IPV for nearly five years and left three years ago. She lived in private rental accommodation with her partner in a country town. She experienced most types of violence. She is on a disability pension because of a physical disability that has prevented her from working. Vivien reported her mental health as good before the IPV and very poor since, and she described feeling extreme fear and having lost her sense of self. Vivien was eventually offered public housing in the city. She describes the apartment block where she now lives as ‘a living hell’, with high levels of violence and abuse between the residents. Vivien has been physically attacked and is regularly verbally abused. Being unable to work has reduced her sense of self-worth and increased her social isolation. She now has panic attacks, agoraphobia and has attempted suicide. Vivien accesses counselling from a psychologist who describes her symptoms as ‘PTSD’. She has not found this counselling particularly helpful and says she feels hopeless about her life.

Table 1: Percentage of participants’ reports of employment before IPV and at the time of completing the survey

Employment	Before IPV		Current	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Full-time employment	330	50.2%	195	29.6%
Part-time employment	96	14.6%	124	18.8%
Casual	60	9.1%	61	9.3%
Self-employed	31	4.7%	28	4.3%
Employer (own business)	14	2.1%	11	1.7%
Employed (family business)	8	1.2%	2	.3%
Employed family business (Unpaid)	2	.3%		
Unemployed seeking full time work	12	1.8%	28	4.3%
Unemployed seeking part time work	10	1.5%	38	5.8%
Unemployed not seeking work	40	6.1%	107	16.3%
Other	23	3.5%	39	5.9%

The change in the forms of employment also suggests that IPV impacts on women's employment opportunities. Of particular note is the increase in home duties from 8.2% before IPV to 16.7% after the violence. A small number of respondents specifically mentioned the positive effects of being able to gain employment or take up study following separation from IPV (see Table 2).

Table 2: Participant occupations before IPV and at the time of completing the survey.

Employment	Before IPV		Current	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Manager	74	11.2%	50	7.6%
Professional	168	25.5%	180	27.4%
Technical/Trade	14	2.1%	7	1.1%
Community/Personal Service	23	3.5%	54	8.2%
Clerical/Admin	110	16.7%	76	11.6%
Sales	62	9.4%	14	2.1%
Machinery Operator	1	.2%	1	.3%
Labourer	11	1.7%	1	.5%
Home Duties	54	8.2%	110	16.7%
Student Part-Time	5	.8%	13	2%
Student Full-time	79	12%	41	6.2%
Volunteer	5	.8%	17	2.6%
Other	24	3.6%	61	9.3%

It is striking that although women were unlikely to change occupation, **the majority of respondents (67%) did not continue in the same workplace following IPV**. Approximately 60% of respondents had made significant changes to their employment (e.g. hours, location, job status) because of IPV. The women reported that the main reasons for changes to employment were:

- partner interference with working life
- mental and physical health problems resulting from IPV
- having to change address to escape IPV
- child care needs.

The direct effects of IPV on women's employment are complicated by the interconnected impacts of IPV on their mental health, housing, and social activity; for example:

I feel [IPV] has affected where I want to be in my life in terms of career, housing, and standard of living by about ten years.

It destroyed my family, career and community; it wreaked havoc on my credit rating and my ability to do the work I'm professionally trained to do. Even more than ten years since the abuser finally disappeared from our lives, there is really no part of my life that is not still affected.



HOUSING

Safe and appropriate housing and sufficient economic resources are the most pressing concerns for women wanting to escape IPV. Following separation from a violent partner, women and their children are likely to experience significant income loss, financial hardship and housing instability: particularly women who were at least partially financially dependent on their partners.

Table 3: Changes in women’s housing situation, during IPV, after IPV, and at the time of completing the survey.

Living arrangements	During IPV		After IPV		Current	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Remained in family home			55	8.4%		
Sole Owner	47	7.1%	40	6.1%	136	20.7%
Jointly owned with violent partner	278	42.2%	39	5.9%	43	6.5%
Jointly owned with others (family)	10	1.5%	9	1.4%	65	9.9%
Private Rental	240	36.5%	176	26.7%	265	40.3%
Public Rental/Housing Trust	45	6.8%	27	4.1%	51	7.8%
Caravan	2	.3%	8	1.2%	1	.2%
Lodging/Boarding House	1	.2%	5	.8%	4	.6%
Staying with Friends or family	25	3.8%	217	33.0%	45	6.8%
Women’s Assisted Shelter			64	9.7%	4	.6%
Improvised dwellings (car, park, street)	4	.6%	12	1.8%	4	.6%

As indicated in Table 3, women’s home ownership did not return to their previous levels of joint ownership. Private rental housing use increased, although there was only a slight increase in access to public housing. Immediately after leaving IPV situations, 46.5% of the sample lived

in temporary accommodation, which included lodging/boarding houses, staying with family and friends, emergency shelters, cars, parks and caravans. **One third of the whole sample found temporary accommodation with family and friends.**

The survey found that 42% of the women had to make a significant move to a different geographical location—interstate or overseas—because of IPV. Less than 10% were able to remain in the house they had shared with their former violent partner. Despite 21% of the women regaining some stability and security through home ownership, over two thirds reported an increase in housing costs. The majority attributed the costs to former partners' debts, damage to property, enhanced security measures and re-establishment costs. One participant stated:

I was financially worse off than before we bought a house together. After I left I lived with my parents (with our daughter). It took me three years to save enough money for a deposit and my parents assisted me and I bought much further away from the city as that is all I could afford.

The direct effects of IPV on women's housing are complicated by the interconnected impacts of IPV on their work, mental health, and social activity; for example:

- the stress and worry of the financial burden from maintaining their housing on limited work, income and increased care responsibilities
- continuing fear impacting on their sense of safety, independence and well-being in their housing situation
- isolation restricting interactions beyond the home and into new communities.

A participant stated:

I lost financially and so had to rent and then bought a much cheaper house in the outer suburbs where I have felt completely isolated and fell into depression. I have changed, and this has affected my ability to work. I cannot handle such a demanding role or boss/environment where I feel controlled or under a lot of pressure. This has resulted in shorter employment and consequently difficulty finding a permanent job in my field. I am a professional (should I say was). I am not the same person. I fear life now and feel stuck in a horrible black rut. I have lost friendships and have become alienated further from my family.

Evelyn is in her early forties, and lives with her five children. Evelyn has experienced all types of violence from three partners over a sixteen to twenty-year period and left her last partner two years ago. The most recent violent relationship was with a man in the defence forces. They lived in defence force housing and she now lives in private rental housing; her housing costs have increased and she has had to move a long distance because of his violence. She described being unable to find housing of a decent standard as a single parent because of 'landlord prejudice'. Evelyn was a manager before IPV, but she was prevented from working by her former violent partner. He controlled all the money, was a spendthrift, and she ended up with large credit cards debts in her name. She cannot work because of chronic pain from a violence-related injury, with the costs of child care also being prohibitive. Evelyn reported very good mental health before the IPV, very poor mental health during and poor mental health after. She described herself changing from 'very confident and independent' before IPV to being unable to leave her house because of panic attacks and agoraphobia. She has felt hopeless and suicidal because of the chronic pain, and is considering giving up part-time studies in law because of the side-effects of the violence.

MENTAL HEALTH

Just over half of the respondents reported receiving a diagnosis of a mental illness, with nearly 44% reporting depression and 41% reporting anxiety, including post-traumatic stress disorder and panic disorder. A small percentage reported unprompted suicidal feelings and suicidal attempts. **Most of the women (87%) received a diagnosis of mental illness either during or after IPV.** Most of the women (90%) reported they had had contact with a professional about their psychological and emotional wellbeing.

Respondents were asked to describe how they felt about their future at the time of completing the survey. Almost half reported feeling hopeful about the future, while almost a third felt discouraged or hopeless about their futures.



Table 4: Wellbeing self-rating.

Self Rating	Pre IPV	During IPV	Post IPV	Currently
Very Poor	2%	66%	43%	8%
Poor	6%	25%	26%	19%
Fair	20%	8%	14%	31%
Good	32%	1%	12%	26%
Very Good	40%	0%	5%	16%

These differences were statistically significant¹ and show that many women do not regain their emotional well-being even after they have left their violent partner. Women also described their mental health in the following ways:

- feelings of low self-esteem, including being unconfident at work
- feeling unsafe, fearful and hypervigilant, including having experiences of violence-related agoraphobia (causing inability to leave the house)
- high levels of stress
- worries about work, finances and poverty.

Some women pointed to work as beneficial to their mental health. When the women felt safe in their homes, they reported reduced feelings of fear. Overall, most women experienced long-term consequences for their mental health from IPV; for example:

It has absolutely shattered me. I never thought it would happen to me. I experienced such humiliation, fear, anxiety and extreme despair during the abuse whilst at the same time it appeared that all was fine on the outside. I now have depression which has got worse than [it was] straight after I left the relationship. I am battling despite knowing in my heart that the abuse was not my fault. It has left me in a black hole in many ways. I have lost my social status, friends, money, my home and my ability to be happy.

¹ (F (1, 597) = 309.22, p < .001)

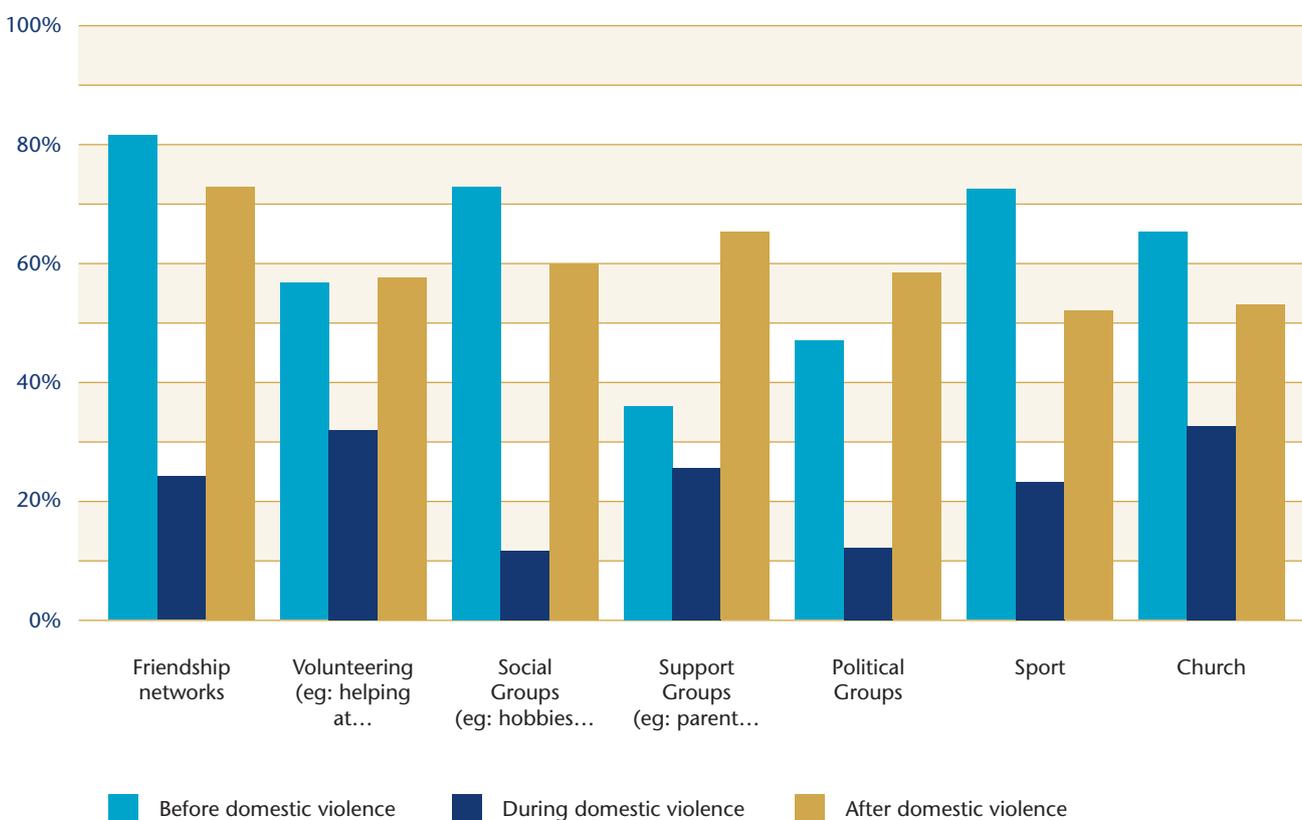


Sascha is fifty-six years old, lived with IPV for ten to fifteen years and left her partner eighteen years ago. She was a joint owner-occupier of her house with her partner. She experienced all types of violence. She described herself as having ‘a sense of myself’ before violence and as losing her self-esteem over the course of the violent relationship, resulting in anxiety and depression. When Sascha left the violent partner, she went into private rental accommodation and started doing some casual work. Her mental health initially worsened due to high rent, few good job prospects and total responsibility for her children. She applied for public housing and was offered a house in the ‘good area’ she had already been living in, near schools and family. Sascha said that the house ‘made all the difference’. The low rent meant she could engage with work slowly because she needed a lot of time and space to ‘recover from domestic violence’. She gained back some confidence through part-time work. Sascha was also able to access free feminist-oriented counselling and a domestic violence support group. Eventually she went to university and is now a qualified professional, earns a reasonable income and has purchased her house. While Sascha said she feels hopeful about her life, her mental health never bounced back to pre-violence levels.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY

The impact of IPV on women’s social participation diverged according to the nature of the activity. **All forms of participation decreased significantly during IPV.** The study suggests that involvements with friendship networks, social support, political groups, volunteering, sport and church do not tend to recover to the levels of participation reported before IPV. However, participation in volunteering, support and political groups tend to increase after IPV.

Graph 1: Activity involvement outside work and family.



Women described feeling fearful, unsafe or scared after IPV and most experienced diminished confidence. Some women felt lonely while other women reported preferring their own company after IPV. One participant stated:

Domestic violence has made me want to spend a lot of time alone instead of socialising with others.

Shame, embarrassment and loss of trust were identified as reasons for not getting involved in social activities. Physical tiredness and lack of

energy from dealing with the effects of IPV reduced participants’ motivation to engage in social activity. Mental health problems limited participants’ social participation in activities outside family and work. Financial and time pressures grew because of increased need to care for children.

A modest number of women (approximately 15%) said that leaving IPV enabled an increase in their involvement in social activities outside family and work; for example:

If I did manage to go anywhere, he would sabotage it by causing a scene or constantly calling me while I was out, making more and more threats towards me and others.

I didn't participate as my partner didn't like me to have interests other than him. I found it really hard to be around my family as he always put them down so it was easier to avoid them. I lost everyone: even some of my extended family. The ongoing stress and pressure put on me caused me to drop out of many courses... I had no time or money to do what I wanted and he would make me feel guilty as he had the job and I did nothing.

I have lost friendships. The economic cost has stopped me from doing many things. My damaged sense of trust, self-esteem and confidence has made it very hard for me to try to make new friendships. I now bury myself in work or stay at home. My children are in fifty-fifty shared care. My life is extremely lonely when they are away.

SUMMARY

These findings challenge the denial of the breadth and depth of the impact of men's violence on women's lives, work, housing and mental health. An important result of the denial of violence and its effects is that the community and the state fail to comprehensively address the wide range of interconnecting consequences. Although policies and practices in response to IPV have improved in recent times, the compounding effects on women continue to be ignored or minimised. The shame, fear and erosion of sense of self by both the violence itself and its denial undermines women's engagement in the social activities of citizenship.



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