



Australian Government

Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare

Bulletin 30

Female SAAP clients and children escaping domestic and family violence 2003–04

Introduction

Domestic violence affects the physical, emotional, social and economic wellbeing of individuals and families (OfW 2005). Domestic violence is also a major factor contributing to homelessness in Australia, particularly for women. In 2003–04, it is estimated that 33% (32,700) of the 100,200 clients accessing the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the major government response to homelessness in Australia, were women escaping domestic violence (Table A1 and AIHW 2005:12). In addition, 66% (34,700) of the 52,700 accompanying children in SAAP were children who accompanied a female parent or guardian escaping domestic violence (Table A12 and AIHW 2005:13).

The definition of homelessness used in SAAP considers a person to be homeless if he or she does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. Hence, even if a person has a physical home, they are considered to be homeless if they are subjected to domestic violence, as they are not safe in that environment. The SAAP National Data Collection defines domestic violence as physical or emotional abuse inflicted on the client by a partner or other family member.

This bulletin, the fourth thematic report from the SAAP National Data Collection focusing on a particular client group, provides an overview of the 2003–04 data about female clients escaping domestic violence and the children who accompanied them.

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This overview includes a profile of the age and cultural and linguistic diversity of women escaping domestic violence. Their circumstances before and after receiving SAAP support are also examined, including housing type, living situation, income source, employment status and involvement in legal processes. The types of services women in the domestic violence group requested and were provided with are also discussed, as well as the length of support and the length of accommodation across cultural groups and geographic regions. Comparisons are made between the SAAP female domestic violence group and all other SAAP clients for referral source, support plans, service provision and for circumstances before and after support.

The profile of children accompanying female SAAP clients within the domestic violence group is also examined, as well as the types of services provided to these children.

For more information on the definitions used in this bulletin, please refer to the publication *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2003–04 Australia* (AIHW 2005).

Main findings

Cultural and linguistic diversity

- Almost one-quarter (24%) of female clients escaping domestic violence in 2003–04 were Indigenous Australians, 57% were other Australian-born clients, 15% were clients born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries and 4% were clients born in predominantly English-speaking countries.
- When compared to the cultural and linguistic diversity profile of the Australian population, Indigenous women are greatly over-represented in the SAAP female domestic violence client group.
- Indigenous women in capital cities were most likely to have periods of support greater than 6 months, whereas Indigenous women in remote areas were most likely to have periods of support between 2 and 7 days.
- Women who were born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries were far more likely to enter SAAP support with no source of income compared to women in other cultural groups.
- Indigenous women were more likely to enter SAAP support from public or community housing, whereas women from other cultural groups were more likely to enter SAAP support from the private rental market.

Comparisons between clients in the female domestic violence group and other SAAP clients

Women in the domestic violence group were:

- more than twice as likely as other SAAP clients to enter support from public or community housing
- referred by the police or a legal unit in around 11% of their support periods, compared to only 2% of support periods for other clients

- more likely than other clients to have a support plan implemented by the end of their support period (60% compared to 48%)
- more likely than other clients to request culturally appropriate support, interpreter services and assistance with immigration issues
- more likely than other clients to request incest or sexual assault counselling and support (in 2,300 support periods compared to 1,700), and had fewer unmet needs for this service (9% compared to 11%).

Accompanying children

- Indigenous women in the domestic violence group were more likely to have four or more accompanying children than women from other cultural groups, whereas women born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries were more likely to have just one accompanying child.
- Accompanying children in the female domestic violence group were significantly more likely to have their requests met for child care, health and medical services and help with behavioral problems than children accompanying other SAAP clients.
- The highest unmet request for accompanying children in the female domestic violence group was for sexual or physical abuse counselling and support (9% of closed support periods where it was requested).

Estimating the SAAP female domestic violence group

For the purpose of this bulletin, SAAP clients are included in the domestic violence group if they were female and they:

- indicated domestic violence as a reason for seeking assistance; or
- needed, were provided with, or were referred on for domestic violence counselling or support; or
- approached a SAAP agency targeted at women escaping domestic violence.

Also included in the domestic violence group are clients of unknown gender with the above criteria who approached a SAAP agency targeted at women escaping domestic violence or targeted at single women only.

All other SAAP clients are referred to as 'other' clients. This includes female clients who were not escaping domestic violence, and 2,200 male clients who indicated domestic violence as a reason for seeking assistance, or who needed or were provided with or referred on for domestic violence counselling or support, or who approached a SAAP agency that was primarily targeted at women escaping domestic violence.

SAAP agencies are classified according to six different primary target groups: young people; single men only; single women only; families; women escaping domestic violence; and cross-target, multiple or general agencies. Although in the majority (78%) of support periods, clients in the SAAP domestic violence group approached agencies targeted at women escaping domestic violence, many were supported by agencies in different target groups. Cross-target, multiple or general agencies reported the second highest proportion

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of this group (9%), followed by agencies targeting young people (5%), single women and families (both 4%), and single men (0.3%) (AIHW unpublished data).

Of those female clients who approached a SAAP agency primarily targeted at women escaping domestic violence, 25% did not have other domestic violence criteria—that is, they did not indicate domestic violence as a reason for seeking assistance and it was not indicated that they needed or were provided with or referred on for domestic violence counselling or support. Around half of these clients were Indigenous women.

In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that the definition of physical or emotional abuse on the SAAP client collection form is often misunderstood. The SAAP National Data Collection definition of physical or emotional abuse should only be reported where a non-related individual inflicted the abuse on the client. It is possible that physical or emotional abuse has been reported in instances where a family member in fact inflicted the violence. It is for this and the above reasons that all female clients supported by SAAP agencies for women escaping domestic violence have been included in the domestic violence client group.

Quantifying the extent to which people escaping domestic violence appear in the homeless population and in the SAAP population can be difficult. As can be seen from the above, there is no single data item that allows comprehensive identification of clients who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. It is also difficult to ascertain whether all clients in the domestic violence group are victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence may have been recorded as a reason for seeking assistance for perpetrators of domestic violence through misinterpretation of the definition, though this is likely to have occurred in only a small proportion of cases.

Profile of female SAAP clients escaping domestic violence

Table A1 shows the age profile of female SAAP clients escaping domestic violence across cultural groups. Of the 32,700 female SAAP clients escaping domestic violence, 57% were Australian-born non-Indigenous, 24% were Indigenous, 15% were born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries (EP groups 2–4), and 4% were born in predominantly English-speaking countries (EP group 1).

When compared to the cultural and linguistic diversity profile of the Australian population, Indigenous women are significantly over-represented in the SAAP domestic violence group, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up only 2% of the Australian population and 2% of the female Australian population (ABS 2004a, ABS 2004b). This over-representation affects the relative proportions of the other cultural groups. However, the proportion of women born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries who are in the domestic violence group is similar to the proportion of these women in the Australian population (15% and 16% respectively).

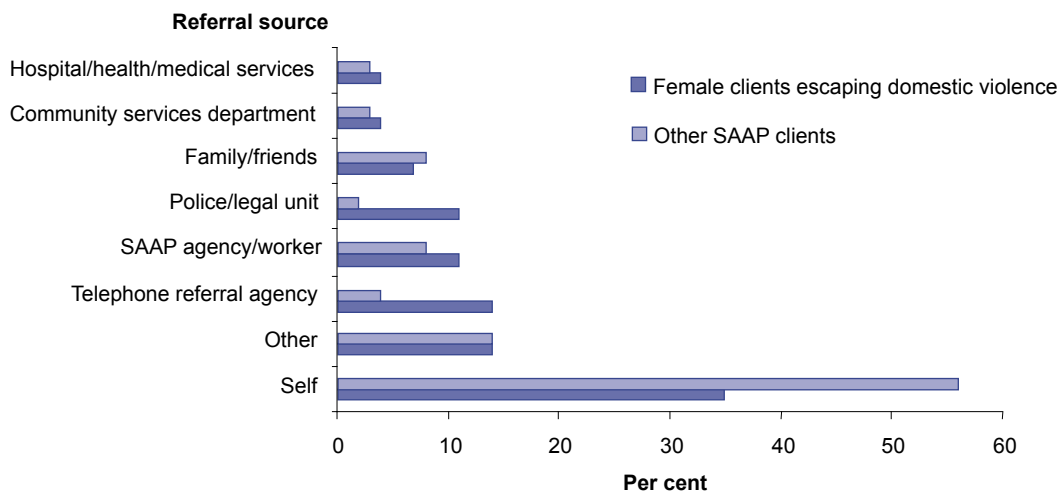
Overseas-born female clients in the domestic violence group were, on average, older than Australian-born clients. Clients born in EP group 2–4 countries had an average age of 37 years and those from EP group 1 countries had an average age of 38 years (Table A1). Indigenous and other Australian-born clients had average ages of 31 years and 33 years respectively.

Women in the domestic violence group presented with accompanying children in 55% of support periods. This equates to 27,200 support periods (Table A2). Women born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries were somewhat more likely to present at SAAP agencies with accompanying children (in 57% of support periods) than women from other cultural groups. Women from predominantly English-speaking countries were the least likely group to present at SAAP agencies with accompanying children (in 53% of their support periods). Indigenous women presented with accompanying children in 56% of their support periods, and Australian-born non-Indigenous women presented with accompanying children in 55% of their support periods.

Referral source

Figure 1 shows that there are significant differences in the sources of referral to SAAP agencies for the female domestic violence group and other clients. Women in the domestic violence group were referred by the police or another legal unit in around 11% of their support periods, compared to only 2% of support periods for other clients. Around 14% of support periods for women in the domestic violence group were referred by a telephone or crisis referral agency, compared to 4% of support periods for the other clients. The most common source of referral for both groups was self-referral (34% domestic violence group, 56% other clients).

Figure 1: SAAP support periods: source of referral for female clients escaping domestic violence compared with other SAAP clients, Australia 2003-04 (per cent)



Source: Table A3.

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Length of support and accommodation

A support period is the period of time that a client receives ongoing support from a SAAP agency. This period may or may not include SAAP accommodation. The following analysis of length of support and length of accommodation relates to closed support periods—that is, support periods that finished on or before 30 June 2004.

Length of support by cultural and linguistic diversity

The most common length of support for female clients in the domestic violence group who had finished support was one day or less. This occurred in 30% (13,500) of closed support periods (Table A4). The second most common length of support was 2 to 7 days (21%), followed by 4 to 13 weeks (18%). There were variations in length of support between cultural groups. In general, the length of support for Indigenous women was much shorter than for other cultural groups. Sixty-nine per cent of support periods for Indigenous women were for 7 days or less, compared to 44% or less for the other cultural groups. Women from countries in EP groups 2–4 had the highest percentage of support periods with a length greater than one year (5%).

The average length of support was significantly lower for Indigenous women than for women in the other cultural groups (26 days compared to between 58 days and 79 days). Female Indigenous clients had an average of 1.8 support periods each, compared to an average of 1.5 support periods for other cultural groups (Table A1). Indigenous women tend to have shorter and more frequent support periods than women from other cultural groups. Previous consultations held in Indigenous communities revealed that Indigenous women use SAAP services to escape family violence when it actually erupts, as well as to escape anticipated violence (Keys Young 1998). Other factors could include strong ties and commitments to their families and communities and the lack of alternative accommodation available.

Women from predominantly non-English-speaking countries, on average, had longer periods of support than women from other cultural groups (79 days) (Table A4). The longer support periods of this group are likely to be because of a lack of social support networks; language and cultural barriers; and a lack of information (Easteal 1996). Given that women from predominantly non-English-speaking countries are far more likely than women in other cultural groups to enter SAAP support without a source of income (Table A8), they are in turn likely to find it more difficult to leave SAAP support.

Length of support by region

Table A6 shows the length of support between cultural groups across geographic regions. Indigenous women in the SAAP domestic violence group were most likely to access SAAP services in remote areas (in 44% of their closed support periods). Indigenous women in remote and other rural areas were more likely to have shorter periods of support than Indigenous women in capital cities, metropolitan and large rural centres. Indigenous women in capital cities were most likely to have periods of support greater than 6 months, whereas Indigenous women in remote areas were most likely to have periods of support of between 2 and 7 days.

Women from all other cultural groups were most likely to access SAAP services in capital cities (53% for Australian-born non-Indigenous, 65% for women from EP group 1 and 86% for women from EP groups 2–4). There was little variation between these other cultural groups in terms of length of support across geographical regions.

Length of accommodation

The most common length of accommodation for all cultural groups was 2 to 7 days (33%), followed by one day (21%) (Table A5). The length of accommodation across cultural groups generally followed the same pattern as length of support. Women born in predominantly non-English-speaking countries had longer periods of accommodation than women from other cultural groups, with an average length of 71 days. Australian-born non-Indigenous women were accommodated on average for 49 days, and women born in countries from English proficiency group 1 for 45 days. Indigenous women had the shortest average length of accommodation (15 days).

Meeting the needs of women escaping domestic violence

One way that SAAP's performance can be assessed is by measuring the ability of agencies to meet the needs of clients. This can only be measured after a client has finished receiving support. Therefore, it is necessary to look at closed support periods (that is, support periods that finished on or before 30 June 2004) when examining the provision of services requested by a client. It should also be noted that service types can be reported only once for a client in a particular support period. The number of times a particular service is requested, provided or referred during a particular support period is not recorded.

Housing or accommodation services

It is likely that women in the domestic violence group are seeking shelter at a SAAP agency to escape a violent situation. Thus, it is important to assess SAAP's ability to provide accommodation to these women. SAAP or Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) accommodation was requested by female clients in the domestic violence group in 26,300 closed support periods (58% of the 45,400 closed support periods for the domestic violence group) and was able to be provided in 91% of these support periods (Table A7). A further 7% of requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation were able to be referred on to other organisations when they could not be provided directly, leaving 2% of the requests for accommodation by clients unable to be met. SAAP or CAP accommodation was also provided in 91% of requests for other SAAP clients, but referrals were arranged slightly less often (5%), leaving 4% of requests for accommodation unable to be met.

Women in the domestic violence group who requested assistance to obtain or maintain short-term accommodation had their requests met in 73% of cases, and those that requested assistance to obtain or maintain independent housing had their requests met in 74% of cases. Referrals were arranged for these two service types in 19% and 17% of cases respectively, leaving 8% and 10% of requests unmet.

In addition to the data gathered in 2003–04 on SAAP clients with unmet needs for SAAP accommodation in the Client Collection, data on people who had unmet



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requests for SAAP accommodation were collected in 2002–03 in the Demand for Accommodation Collection. However, no estimate is available of how many women (and their accompanying children) escaping domestic violence were turned away from SAAP accommodation during the 2-week collection period. The best estimate is the national turn-away rate for agencies that were primarily targeted at women escaping domestic violence.

The average daily turn-away rate for agencies targeted at women escaping domestic violence was 48% (AIHW 2004:60)—that is, around 1 in 2 women who approached these agencies were unable to obtain immediate accommodation on an average day. This rate was the second lowest turn-away rate by primary target group (agencies targeted at single men had the lowest turn-away rate of 25%). Although only half of the women requesting immediate accommodation from domestic violence agencies could be accommodated, domestic violence agencies were able to meet requests for immediate accommodation relatively more often than agencies for families, young people, single women and cross-target or general agencies (AIHW 2004:60).

Financial and employment services

For both the female domestic violence group and other clients, financial and employment services had very similar proportions of unmet needs. For example, requests for employment and training assistance were unable to be provided or referred in 15% of closed support periods for the female domestic violence group and in 16% for other clients, and financial assistance or material aid was unable to be provided or referred for both client groups in 3% of closed support periods (Table A7). The ability of SAAP agencies to arrange referrals for financial or employment services varied between the two groups. For example, for other clients, referrals for assistance to obtain or maintain government payments were provided in 20% of support periods, compared to 15% for the female domestic violence group.

Counselling

Overall, women in the domestic violence group were more likely to receive counselling services than other clients. Family or relationship counselling was able to be provided in 87% of closed support periods when it was requested by clients in the domestic violence group, compared to 77% for the other clients. Emotional support or other counselling was the second most commonly requested service in the domestic violence group. It was requested in 28,400 closed support periods and was provided in 98% of these support periods (compared to 96% in 41,900 for the other client group).

Domestic violence counselling was able to be provided in 89% of the 24,400 closed support periods when it was requested. In addition to this, agencies were able to refer domestic violence clients to other organisations in a further 8% of requests, leaving 4% of requests unable to be provided or referred. For other clients, domestic violence counselling services were provided in only 74% of the 1,200 closed support periods when it was requested, with 13% of requests referred on and 13% unmet (these requests were from male clients, as female clients with requests for domestic violence counselling are counted in the domestic violence group).

Incest or sexual assault counselling and support was requested in more support periods by the female domestic violence group—2,300 compared to 1,700 for other clients—and was provided in slightly more cases (68%) compared to other clients (67%); and clients in the female domestic violence group had fewer unmet needs for this service (9% compared to 11%).

General support or advocacy

Advice or information was the most commonly requested service overall for women in the SAAP domestic violence group, and for other clients. This type of service was provided in 99% of closed support periods when it was requested for both client groups. Women in the domestic violence group were more likely to receive assistance with legal issues or court support than other clients (83% compared to 73%), but less likely to have their belongings retrieved, stored or removed (89% compared to 98%). In 6% of cases, requests for this service by women in the domestic violence group were unable to be provided or referred.

Specialist services

For women escaping domestic violence, the service types that were provided least often when they were requested were psychological services (36%) and psychiatric services (39%). However, these services were able to be referred in a further 50% of closed support periods for psychological services (leaving 14% of requests unmet) and in 47% for psychiatric services (leaving 14% of requests unmet). Requests for psychological and psychiatric services were met more often for other clients (40% and 45% of requests respectively), but these clients had greater proportions of unmet needs (23% and 15% respectively) and lower proportions of referrals (37% and 40% respectively). Clients who were not in the domestic violence group had more requests for psychiatric services (4,000) than they did for psychological services (2,700), whereas the female domestic violence group had more requests for psychological services (1,800) than psychiatric services (1,200).

Women escaping domestic violence were less likely than other clients to receive drug or alcohol support or intervention (in 66% of closed support periods compared to 83% for the other client group).

Reflecting the greater cultural and linguistic diversity found in the female domestic violence group, culturally appropriate support was requested in more closed support periods for the female domestic violence group (6,800) than for other clients (4,200). Interpreter services were also requested in more closed support periods (1,300 compared to 500) as was assistance with immigration issues (800 compared to 300). All these services were met in slightly higher proportions for the female domestic violence group than for other clients.

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Circumstances before and after support

One of SAAP's aims is to help people experiencing homelessness to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. Comparing a client's circumstances before and after support provides a basic measure of how well this goal has been achieved. For women escaping domestic violence, the need for safe accommodation where they are free from violence is paramount. However, it is difficult to determine from the National Data Collection whether this is achieved for clients once they leave SAAP support.

Employment status

Table A9 provides a comparison of circumstances before and after support between the SAAP female domestic violence group and other clients. There was almost no change in employment status before and after support for either group. Women in the SAAP domestic violence group were more likely not to be in the labour force than other clients (72% of closed support periods both before and after support compared to 58% before support and 59% after support). Other clients were twice as likely to be unemployed (looking for work), both before and after support, than women escaping domestic violence (34% of closed support periods before support and 31% after support compared to 17% before support and 16% after support).

Table A8 shows the circumstances of women in the SAAP domestic violence group both before and after support, according to cultural and linguistic diversity. Indigenous women escaping domestic violence were more likely to enter SAAP support unemployed (looking for work) than women from other cultural groups (22% of closed support periods before support compared to between 12% and 16% of support periods for women from other cultural groups).

Income source

A government pension or benefit was the most common source of income both before and after support for both the female domestic violence group and other clients (Table A9). Women in the domestic violence group were twice as likely to be receiving some other type of income, both before and after support, than other clients (11% of closed support periods before support and 10% after compared to 4% before support and 6% after).

A critical factor in women being able to leave a violent partner or family situation is that they have their own source of income. Income source before and after support varied significantly across the cultural groups. Indigenous women had the highest proportion of government pension or benefit as an income source out of all the cultural groups (94% before support and 95% after support) and women from countries in EP groups 2–4 had the lowest proportion (59% before support and 70% after) (Table A8).

After support, the proportion of all women in the SAAP domestic violence group receiving a government pension or benefit increased, with the proportion of women from countries in EP groups 2–4 recording the largest increase, from 59% before support, to 70% after support. Women from predominantly non-English-speaking countries were

the most likely to enter SAAP support with no source of income (17% of closed support periods compared to just 2% of closed support periods for Indigenous women, who had the lowest proportion). This suggests that women from these countries in the domestic violence group are significantly disadvantaged in terms of having an independent source of income. However, the high proportion of these women with no income source decreased significantly after support to 10%. This shows that SAAP services assist these women in obtaining an independent source of income, which is crucial to enable them to escape the violence by leaving a violent partner.

Type of accommodation

There was an increase in the proportion of women in the domestic violence group who were accommodated in SAAP accommodation from before support to after support (Table A9). In 16% of closed support periods, women in the domestic violence group were accommodated at another agency immediately before support. After support, women in the domestic violence group exited to SAAP accommodation in 20% of closed support periods. This may indicate that women in the domestic violence group are moving between SAAP agencies for emergency accommodation.

For other clients, there was a slight decrease in the proportion being accommodated by SAAP or other emergency housing after receiving SAAP support, from 17% of closed support periods before support to 15% after support.

Women in the domestic violence group were far more likely to enter SAAP support from public or community housing than other clients (22% of closed support periods before support compared to 9%). Similar proportions were found for clients exiting SAAP support to public or community housing. Other clients were far more likely to both enter and exit SAAP support from living in a car, tent, park, street or squat than women in the domestic violence group (15% of closed support periods before support and 12% after support compared 3% before support and 1% after).

Indigenous women were more likely to enter SAAP support from public or community housing (42% of closed support periods) compared to other cultural groups who were all more likely to enter SAAP support from the private rental market (31% of women from countries in EP group 1, 29% of women from countries in EP groups 2–4 and 28% of Australian-born non-Indigenous women) (Table A8). The proportion of women exiting from the private rental market was similar to the proportion entering this type of accommodation across all cultural groups. Women from predominantly non-English-speaking countries were far more likely to be living in their own home both before and after SAAP support than women from other cultural groups.

Living situation

Women in the domestic violence group were far more likely to enter SAAP support from living with a spouse or partner with or without children than other clients (44% of closed support periods compared to 12% of closed support periods) (Table A9). This proportion decreased significantly after receiving SAAP support for women in the domestic violence group, from 44% to just 19% of closed support periods. For other clients, the proportion living with a spouse or partner with or without children remained unchanged, at 12%,

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after receiving SAAP support. Other clients were far more likely to be living alone or with other unrelated persons, both before and after support (48% before support and 52% after), than women in the domestic violence group (13% before support 20% after).

Indigenous women were more likely than other cultural groups to be living with relatives or friends either short-term or long-term, both before and after support, although across all groups, women in the SAAP domestic violence group were most commonly living with a spouse or partner with children before seeking support from a SAAP agency (Table A8). After receiving support, the proportion of women living with a spouse or partner with children fell significantly (from 26% to 15% for Indigenous women; from 26% to 10% for Australian-born non-Indigenous women; from 30% to 10% for women from countries in EP group 1; and from 34% to 15% for women from countries in EP groups 2–4). This corresponds to an increase in the proportion of women who reported that they were living alone with children after support (from 14% to 25% for Indigenous women; from 22% to 40% for Australian-born non-Indigenous women; from 20% to 40% for women from countries in EP group 1; and from 19% to 37% for women from countries in EP groups 2–4). These data suggests that SAAP services are able to assist these women, and their accompanying children, in leaving a violent partner or other family member. However, it is not possible to determine from the data whether these women were still subjected to the violence after exiting SAAP support.

Legal processes

The most common legal process that clients in the female domestic violence group were involved in both before and after support was a restraining order, put in place because they had been subjected to violence (Table A10). All legal processes show little difference between cultural groups, although Indigenous women had the highest increase in restraining orders (as a result of violence perpetrated against the client) from before support to after support (56% before and 60% after). There were also increases in the proportions of Australian-born non-Indigenous women and women from EP group 1 countries who had this type of restraining order after receiving support from a SAAP agency. Women from predominantly non-English speaking countries actually had a decrease in the proportion with this type of restraining order after receiving support from a SAAP agency (55% before support to 52% after support).

The second most common legal process among all cultural groups was 'other legal processes'. This includes, but is not limited to, good behaviour bonds, probation orders, parole orders or orders resulting from early release programs, and release from police custody on bail or a personal guarantee. Women from predominantly non-English-speaking countries had the highest proportion of 'other legal processes' both before and after support (47% before and 50% after).

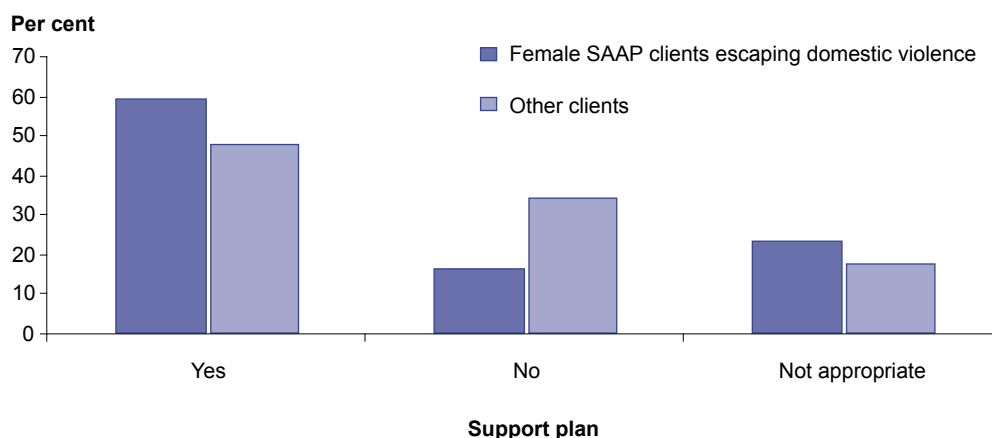
Interestingly, the data also indicate that women in the domestic violence group had a restraining order taken out against them because they were the perpetrators of violence in a significant proportion of support periods, both before and after support (between 8% and 12% across all cultural groups). Further work needs to be undertaken to confirm the quality of these data. It is possible that errors are being made due to misinterpretation of definitions on the client collection form.

Support plans

A support plan is a personal plan or a support agreement that usually has a statement of the client's problem or need, some goals for the client and strategies to achieve those goals. It is usually developed between the client and agency as a result of an assessment process.

Figure 2 shows that clients in the SAAP female domestic violence group were more likely to have a support plan implemented by the end of their support period (60%) than other clients (48%). This higher proportion for women in the domestic violence group is likely because these women are likely to have special needs including the need for protection, accessible and affordable legal support and counselling services, assistance with parenting, financial assistance and appropriate accommodation (Bagshaw et al. 1999:36–44).

Figure 2: SAAP closed support periods: support plans for female clients escaping domestic violence compared with the other client group, Australia 2003–04 (per cent)



Source: Table A11.

Accompanying children

There were a total of 34,700 children accompanying female clients in the SAAP domestic violence group (Table A12). This equates to 66% of the 52,700 accompanying children in SAAP (AIHW 2005:13). Therefore, domestic violence affects a large proportion of children in SAAP and is of particular concern. Children who witness or experience domestic violence may suffer severe psychological trauma and have very specific needs. They display high levels of distress, low self-esteem and, in many cases, behavioural problems such as depression (Rogers 2003; Stone 2003).

Table A12 examines the profile of children accompanying female clients in the SAAP domestic violence group. Of the 34,700 children accompanying female clients in the SAAP domestic violence group, approximately 50% were female and 50% were male. The majority of these accompanying children were aged 12 years and under (89%). On average, children accompanying women escaping domestic violence had 1.3 support periods each.



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Table A13 shows the number of support periods for women in the SAAP domestic violence group with accompanying children according to cultural and linguistic diversity. Overall, women in the SAAP domestic violence group who had accompanying children were most likely to present with one accompanying child (in 39% of support periods) followed by two accompanying children (in 31% of support periods).

Indigenous women were more likely to have four or more accompanying children than other cultural groups (15% of support periods compared to between 9% and 14%). Women from predominantly non-English-speaking countries were more likely to have just one accompanying child than other cultural groups (44% of support periods compared to between 35% and 39%).

Meeting the needs of accompanying children

Children who accompanied female clients in the domestic violence group had higher proportions of met requests for every service type, except for school liaison and access arrangements, than children accompanying other clients. The most common type of service requested for children accompanying women escaping domestic violence was SAAP or CAP accommodation (Table A14). This type of service was requested in 21,600 closed support periods (which is 54% of the 39,800 closed support periods recorded on the general client form for children in the domestic violence group) and was able to be provided in 97% of these support periods. A further 2% of requests for SAAP or CAP accommodation were able to be referred on to other organisations, leaving 1% of such requests unmet.

Children in the domestic violence group received child care services in a significantly greater proportion of requests than children accompanying other clients (93% compared to 75%). Children in the female domestic violence group were also significantly more likely to receive counselling services than children in the other group. In particular, help with behavioural problems was provided in 85% of closed support periods when it was requested compared to 66% for children in the other client group.

SAAP agencies provided health or medical services to accompanying children in the domestic violence group in 73% of closed support periods when these services were requested, compared to only 55% for children accompanying other clients. Sexual or physical abuse counselling and support was the service type with the highest unmet requests for both groups (9% for the female domestic violence group and 12% for children accompanying other clients).