

**Family violence among
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander peoples**

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Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

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and Michelle Wallis**

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Executive summary

Family violence is acknowledged as an issue of national importance, both generally and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are many barriers to assessing its true extent but this report presents information currently available in relation to Indigenous Australians. The report draws on a number of surveys and administrative data sets and also discusses gaps in existing information and strategies for improvements.

What do the data tell us about family violence?

Self report

Data on the prevalence of violence come from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.

About one in four Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence in the twelve months before the survey (24%). The rate was higher among those who:

- were aged 15–24 years
- had been removed from their natural families (38% compared with 23% among those not removed)
- had a disability (29% compared with 22% among those without a disability)
- had experienced a high number of stressors (50% of those with 11 or more stressors compared to 8% among those with none)
- lived in low income households (27% compared with 19% among those in high income households)
- were unemployed (38% compared with 21% among the employed).

The age-standardised rate for being a victim of physical or threatened violence among the Indigenous population was over twice the rate of the non-Indigenous population.

Although the rates were similar among those living in major cities (25%) and in remote areas (23%), people in remote areas were much more likely to report that family violence was a neighbourhood problem (41% compared with 14% in non-remote areas).

Support services (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program)

People who experience family violence may seek refuge, especially women. In 2003–04, 7,950 Indigenous females sought refuge to escape family violence.

Indigenous females and males were 13 and 7 times more likely to seek this assistance as non-Indigenous females and males, respectively.

The rate was highest for females aged 25–34 years.

Hospitalisations

In 2003–04, there were 4,500 hospitalisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons due to assault in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory combined.

Indigenous females and males were 35 and 22 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults as other Australian females and males, respectively.

Indigenous hospitalisation rates for family violence-related assault were highest among:

- females
- people aged 25–34 years.

For Indigenous females, about one in two hospitalisations for assault (50%) were related to family violence compared to one in five for males. Most hospitalisations for family violence-related assault for females were a result of spouse or partner violence (82%) compared to 38% among males.

Mortality

Between 2000 and 2004, there were 150 deaths due to assault among Indigenous Australians in the four jurisdictions.

Indigenous females and males were nearly ten and nine times more likely to die due to assault as non-Indigenous females and males, respectively.

The death rate was highest among people aged 35–44 years.

Data problems and suggested improvements

The true extent of family violence is difficult to determine due to under-reporting by victims, lack of appropriate screening by service providers, incomplete identification of Indigenous people in many data sets and problems of quality and comparability of existing data.

The existing data sets differed in their ability to distinguish between family violence, partner violence and other violence, and between different types of violence such as physical violence, sexual violence, and threatened violence. The feasibility should be explored of developing a module of a minimum set of national standardised data items that allows reporting on the perpetrators of violence and the different types of violence, along with contextual information.

Improving the quality of Indigenous identification across all relevant data sets continues to be of paramount importance in providing more complete information on the extent of violence among Indigenous Australians.