

Figuring Violence

The Personal Safety Survey 2005

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The Personal Safety Survey 2005, undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), is the first national survey to compare men's and women's experiences of safety and violence. The study revealed gender differences in experiences of violence: men were most likely to be subjected to violence perpetrated by a male stranger, while women were most likely to be subjected to violence by a partner or a family member or friend. More women than men experienced violence in their relationships.

Methodology

Female interviewers held private face-to-face interviews with one randomly selected person in a household. Foreign language interviews were undertaken by phone. The total survey sample comprised 11,900 women and 4,600 men over the age of 18 (ABS 2006b: 12). Some comparisons can be made between this survey and the 1996 Women's Safety Survey (ABS 1996).

General Statistics on Violence in Australia

How many women and men had experienced violence?

- In the 12 months prior to the survey, 5.8 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men had experienced an incident of physical or sexual violence (p.6).

Who were the perpetrators of the violence?

- People were three times more likely to experience violence perpetrated by a male than by a female in the previous 12 months (p.6).
- Women were most likely to be physically assaulted by someone they know. Some 242,000 women had experienced physical assault in the previous 12 months, and for these women, the most recent incident of assault was perpetrated either by a current or previous partner (30.6 per cent) or by a family member or friend (36.8 per cent).
- Men were more likely to be physically assaulted by a stranger. Of 485,400 males who experienced physical assault, in the previous 12 months, 65.7 per cent

were assaulted by a stranger, and only 4.3 per cent were assaulted by a current or previous female partner in the most recent incident (p.30).

- In relation to the most recent incident of assault experienced since the age of 15, for women the main perpetrators were current or previous partners (46.1 per cent) while only 14.2 per cent of men were assaulted by current or previous partners (p.30).

Violence by Partners

How many women and men experienced violence by a partner?

- In the last 12 months, 1.5 per cent of women experienced violence by a current or previous partner. Of men, 0.3 per cent experienced violence by a current or previous partner (calculated using Table 1, p.15).
- Since the age of 15, 16 per cent of women experienced violence by a current or previous partner, compared to 5.8 per cent of men (calculated using Table 2, p.16).
- Women were more likely to experience repeated incidents of violence from a current partner than were men - 46% of women experienced more than one incident; compared to 26% of men (p.37).

How many women reported the violence to police or obtained a protection order?

- In relation to violence by a current partner experienced in the previous 12 months, 17.1 per cent of women reported the most recent incident to police (p.21)

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- Only 10 per cent of women who experienced current partner violence had a violence order issued. Of those women, 20 per cent reported that the violence still occurred (p.11).
- Reporting to police by women of violence by a previous male partner in the past 12 months has increased from 35 per cent in 1996 to 61 per cent in 2005 (p.21).

Sexual Assault and Harassment

How many women and men experienced sexual assault or harassment?

- Significantly more women than men experienced sexual assault. Since the age of 15, 19.1 per cent of women experienced sexual violence (including threats) compared to 5.5 per cent of men (p. 11).
- In the last 12 months 1.6 per cent of women experienced sexual assault or threats compared to 0.6 per cent of men (p.19).
- Since the age of 15, 25 per cent of women and 9.9 per cent of men experienced unwanted sexual touching (p. 9)

Who were the perpetrators of sexual violence against women?

- In the last 12 months women were more likely to have been sexually assaulted by a current or previous partner (28.8 per cent) or by a family member or friend (39 per cent) than by a stranger (21.8 per cent) (p. 33)

¹ The *Personal Safety Survey User Guide* notes that 'care should be taken when using the data on physical abuse as they were not collected using detailed questioning'. A definition of physical abuse was provided that excluded discipline, but the user guide says that even so, 'the response given by people would reflect their interpretation of the question and what constitutes physical abuse' (2006b: 3).

Child Physical and Sexual Abuse

How many women and men experienced physical or sexual abuse in childhood?

- Physical abuse before the age of 15 was experienced by 10 per cent of women and 9.4 per cent of men (p.12) ¹. The perpetrators of abuse were most likely to be fathers or step-fathers: of people who experienced physical abuse, 55.6 per cent were abused by a father or step father; and 25.9 per cent were abused by a mother or step-mother (p. 41) .
- Sexual abuse before the age of 15 was experienced by 12 per cent of women and 4.5 per cent of men. (p.12). Of people who experienced sexual abuse, 30.2 per cent were abused by a male relative; 31.9 per cent were abused by a family friend, acquaintance or neighbour; and 13.5 per cent were abused by a father or step father (p. 42). More women than men were abused by someone in their family, while men were more likely to have been abused by a stranger or 'other known person'.

References:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2006a) *Personal Safety Survey Australia 2005* (Reissue), Catalogue no. 4906.0, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS (2006b), *Personal Safety Survey User Guide Australia*, ABS, Canberra.
- ABS (1996), *Women's Safety Australia*, Catalogue no. 4128.0, ABS, Canberra.

The Personal Safety Survey can be downloaded from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website: www.abs.gov.au.

On the ABS site you can also view the User Guide; and selected tables of data for New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia.