Family violence in Aboriginal communities

Family violence impacts on Aboriginal people at vastly disproportionate rates and has devastating effects on Victorian Aboriginal communities. The following article is an extract from the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (FVPLS Victoria) submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

Aboriginal women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence\(^1\) and almost 11 times more likely to be killed as a result of violent assault.\(^2\) Aboriginal women have been identified as the most legally disadvantaged group in Australia.\(^3\)

Tragically, family violence against Victorian Aboriginal people appears to be escalating. Across Victoria, police reports of family violence against Aboriginal people (predominantly women and children) have tripled in less than a decade.\(^4\) This is despite evidence that the majority of family violence incidents go unreported and the reality that Aboriginal women are markedly less likely to disclose family violence due to a multitude of complex barriers.\(^5\)

Family violence is complex and the issues our clients face are complex. Our clients live with intergenerational trauma, removal of children, discrimination, poverty, mental health issues, family violence-driven housing instability and homelessness, disability, lower levels of literacy and numeracy, as well as a range of other cultural, legal and nonlegal issues.

Colonisation, discrimination and intergenerational trauma

There are multiple complex and diverse factors contributing to the high levels and severity of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It must be clearly understood that the causes do not derive from Aboriginal culture. Family violence is not part of Aboriginal culture. However, the disadvantage, dispossession and attempted destruction of Aboriginal cultures since colonisation have meant that family violence has proliferated in Aboriginal communities.

This does not, however, mean that family violence affecting Aboriginal victims/survivors, predominantly women and children, is exclusively the domain of Aboriginal communities—or that all perpetrators of violence against Aboriginal women are Aboriginal men. There is insufficient data on the Aboriginality of perpetrators and FVPLS Victoria routinely sees Aboriginal clients, mostly women, who experience family violence at the hands of men from a range of different backgrounds and cultures, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The only certainty in the
existing data is that Aboriginal women are at disproportionately higher risk of family violence.

Aboriginal women face the “double bind” of gender and racial discrimination and oppression. Violence against Aboriginal women includes many forms of abuse that are directed against them because they are women, or that affects women disproportionately compared to men. Significant causes of this violence are embedded social attitudes, norms and structural inequalities with regard to their perceived place and value.

In addition, there are many other factors arising from colonisation and systemic discrimination against Aboriginal peoples, which contribute to the high incidence and severity of family violence among Aboriginal people. This includes:

› inter-generational trauma
› dispossession of land
› forced removal of children
› interrupted cultural practices that mitigate against interpersonal violence
› disproportionate rates of criminalisation and incarceration
› economic exclusion and poverty
› systemic and indirect racism.

Gender

It must be recognised that family violence in Aboriginal communities is gendered—just as it is in the mainstream community. While men can certainly be victims of family violence and their needs must not be overlooked, women and children represent the vast majority of victims/survivors within Aboriginal communities.

Court and police statistics, together with FVPLS Victoria’s 12 years of frontline experience, confirm the majority of victims/survivors of family violence are women and children, and the majority of perpetrators are men—including both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men. At last count, 93 per cent of FVPLS Victoria’s clients were Aboriginal women. While there are certainly instances of men as victims, it is important to note many male victims are children—many of whom experience violence perpetrated by men not women. Indeed, as discussed in further detail below, recent research indicates that men’s violence against women is a primary driver in up to 95 per cent of Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care. Where children are at risk alongside their mother, the most effective way of protecting those children from violence is to provide culturally safe, specialist and effective assistance to the mother and equip her with the supports necessary to safely care for her children free from violence.

In addition, FVPLS Victoria’s legal team have been involved in a number of cases where a man has made allegations of violence against a female partner in an attempt to minimise legally substantiated complaints she has made against him (which are often much more serious in nature) or, alternatively, in order to intimidate and
控制一位女性伴侣，她被该男子长期施暴。令人担忧的是，一些旨在解决家庭暴力的策略和框架未能认识到性别化及其对家庭暴力的影响，反而将家庭暴力框定为家庭和社区的问题，或者仅将其视为‘横向暴力’——从而忽视了女性和儿童作为男性施暴的主要受害者/幸存者所经历的活生生的体验。FVPLS维多利亚热切支持家庭暴力影响土著人的解决方案应在于土著社区，土著人必须引领策略来预防和消除家庭暴力在我们的社区。社区所有权和社区驱动的解决方案至关重要。然而，重要的是，社区途径不能导致土著女性的声音被忽略。如果没有参考女性或忽略性别，依赖‘社区声音’可能会巩固既有的性别权力动态，并使土著女性保持沉默。

### 障碍于报告和寻求支持

澳大利亚的殖民历史、包括通过法律和政府系统实施的压迫，不能被夸大。土著社区的家族暴力是性别化的——就像主流社会一样。

它必须认识到，在土著社区中，家庭暴力是性别化的——就像在主流社会中一样。

### 读完整提交

FVPLS维多利亚的完整提交包含具体建议，包括：

- 增加土著家庭暴力预防法律服务和策略的资金和资源
- 投资文化安全和针对早期干预和预防策略的土著妇女和儿童
- 加强对土著妇女和儿童家暴的警察响应
- 加强对土著家暴幸存者的家庭暴力预防和早期干预策略
- 加强对土著家暴幸存者的司法服务
- 加强政府和社区间的协调和整合，以利土著受害者/幸存者
- 改善土著受害者/幸存者的司法服务的准入
- 加强政府间的协调和整合，以利土著受害者/幸存者
- 改善数据收集、评估和政府问责。

pressure not to leave a violent relationship, stemming from a priority within some parts of the community of maintaining the family unit due to a misconceived fear that parental separation will threaten cultural connection (especially for children) and community cohesion.

- poverty and social isolation
- lack of cultural competency and indirect discrimination across the support sector, including, for example, discriminatory practices within police and child protection agencies, lack of culturally appropriate housing options, alienating and deterrent communication and client/patient approaches by medical, legal, community services and other professionals.

Endnotes


2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006) Family Violence Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Cat. no. IHW 17, p.71


6. Information provided by the office of the Victorian Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, SUBM.0941.002.0021, p.22

7. Lateral violence, sometimes referred to as ‘horizontal violence’ or ‘internalised colonialism’, has been described by Richard Frankland as ‘[T]he organised, harmful behaviours that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group: within our families; within our organisations; and within our communities. When we are consistently oppressed we live with great fear and great anger and we often turn on those who are closest to us.’ See: Australian Human Rights Commission (2011) ‘Chapter Two: Lateral Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities’, Social Justice Report 2011, SUBM.0941.002.0022, p.23