

OUR FOCUS

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

There are a number of terms to describe violence which are often used together or interchangeably in Australia. At DVRCV, we have tended to use both 'family violence' and 'violence against women' to describe the focus of our work.

This paper outlines the rationale for our decision to use the language of **violence against women and their children** to articulate our expertise and the core focus of our work. The core issue our work seeks to address is violence against women – we do this by reducing the prevalence of this violence, and reducing its impacts on both women and children.

This decision does not represent a significant change to our focus, the work that we do, or the ways that we do this work. Rather, it is a shift in language to ensure we are as clear and explicit as possible about our expertise and our approach to achieving our vision of a world where women and their children are thriving, respected and free from violence.

DEFINING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence involves patterns of coercive, controlling and abusive behaviours by the perpetrator and makes the victim survivor fear for their own or someone else's safety and wellbeing. The severity and frequency of violence often escalate over time.

Family violence can take many forms, none of which are mutually exclusive. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and spiritual violence, and financial/ economic abuse and control. It can also include exposing a child to the effects of family violence, such as through hearing, witnessing or otherwise living with violence at home.

Family violence can happen within all types of family and family-like relationships, including;

- Intimate partners (current or former): married or de facto couples, girlfriends and boyfriends, dating relationships
- Other family members; including siblings, step-parents, extended kinship connections
- Adolescent or adult children and their parents
- Older people and their children, relatives or carers; known as elder abuse
- People with disabilities and their carers, even when their carers are not related to them

DEFINING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is any act of violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women¹. This includes threats of harm or coercion and can occur in public or in private life.

In addition to the various forms of family violence experienced by women, violence against women also includes violence that women experience outside of family and relationship contexts, such as harassment at work or sexual assault by a stranger, neighbor, colleague or acquaintance.

WHY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

All violence is wrong, regardless of the sex or gender of the victim or perpetrator.

Research into the drivers, dynamics and impacts of both family violence and violence against women has focused primarily on violence within heterosexual intimate relationships. While the evidence base around other forms and contexts is growing, our understanding continues to be most strongly shaped by what we know about men's violence against their current or former female partners.

DVRCV is a feminist organisation with an extensive history in this space and a staff cohort whose expertise is grounded in preventing violence against women and working with women who have experienced family violence.

We also recognise that children and young people who live with and/or witness family violence are victim survivors of this violence in their own right, and our work includes addressing the impacts of this.

Therefore, in line with DVRCV’s five-year strategic plan, we have made the decision to clearly articulate our focus on **violence against women and their children** and to move away from using the term family violence when we describe our primary area of expertise.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OUR WORK

Our work is focused on addressing the prevalence of violence against women and the impacts this violence has on women and their children.

As a registered training organisation, our role is to build the capability of organisations and professionals to work effectively with women who have experienced violence, to work with children who have been exposed to this violence, and to prevent this violence from occurring in the first place.

In Australia, intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence against women and women are the most common victim survivors of family violence, which underpins our interest and involvement in supporting family violence reforms in Victoria.

We will continue to engage in activity that seeks to address family violence, acknowledging that the value and expertise we bring to this work is primarily based on women’s experiences of violence within intimate relationships. While there are common threads and transferable capabilities, we do not claim to have in-depth knowledge and skills around addressing family violence against people of other genders, or every form of family violence that women can experience (such as violence from a carer or an adolescent child). We take steps to make sure this is clear in any family violence work that we undertake, and we work collaboratively with others who have dedicated expertise in addressing other forms family violence.

However, our expertise around preventing violence against women is not limited to violence within family and intimate relationship contexts. This means our prevention work includes other forms of violence against women, such as non-partner sexual assault, sexual harassment and online abuse.

Finally, we do not take the lead on work that focuses on specific groups of women’s experiences of violence (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, women living with disability, trans women, migrant and refugee women, or lesbian and bisexual women). We recognise that specialist understandings of violence against specific groups of women can support and strengthen our own expertise – and vice versa – and we are committed to working collaboratively with women who have lived experience and others who have dedicated expertise, when addressing violence against any specific group of women.



Our specialist expertise includes violence against women both within and outside of family and intimate relationship contexts. However, our specialist expertise doesn’t encompass every form of violence that women experience (within or outside of family contexts).



Our specialist expertise intersects with, influences and is influenced by specialist understandings of violence against specific groups of women, specific forms of violence that women experience and family violence that people of other genders experience, but does not encompass them.

1. DVRCV considers and affirms anyone who identifies as a woman to be a woman. We recognise that people of other genders – including non-binary people and trans men – can also experience or have experienced oppression and violence ‘as women’ (for example, if they have identified as or been perceived by others to be women), and we don’t exclude these experiences from our understanding of violence against women.