

The Issue Explained

Understanding violence
against women in Australia



Australian Government

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
LET'S STOP IT
AT THE START

The issue

Not all disrespect towards women results in violence. But all violence against women starts with disrespectful behaviour.

Violence against women is at epidemic proportions in Australia. In 2022–23, **1 woman was killed every 11 days by their current or former intimate partner**¹ in Australia.

Since the age of 15²:

- 1 in 4 women have experienced violence by an intimate partner; compared to 1 in 14 men.
- 1 in 11 women have experienced violence by a boyfriend, girlfriend, or date, compared to 1 in 44 men.
- 1 in 4 women experienced partner emotional abuse, compared to 1 in 7 men.
- 1 in 12 women have experienced violence by a family member since the age of 15, compared to 1 in 17 men.

Violence can take many different forms, including physical and non-physical, and we may not always recognise it. Being aware of the different ways that violence and abuse is used helps us to better understand it, talk about it, and reject it.

Coercive control, emotional and economical abuse, and harassment through technology, are all ways of perpetrating violence which can often be used alongside, or lead to, physical violence. Violence can also exist in different types of relationships, whether that be with an intimate partner, or ex-partner, or between family members.

We know that rates of violence increase for some women when other forms of discrimination exist. Gender-based violence disproportionately impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally, ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse women, migrant and refugee women, women with disability and LGBTIQ+ and gender diverse people.

Violence against women and all gender-based violence has long-term and far-reaching impacts. It affects children, families, friends, work colleagues, communities and society as a whole. It will take all of us to play an active role to prevent and end it.

Prevalence of domestic and family violence in Australia



1 [Homicide in Australia 2022–23, Australian Institute of Criminology, aic.gov.au](#)

2 [Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey 2021–22](#) (published March 2023).

Violence against women starts with disrespect

While anybody can experience family, domestic and sexual violence, data shows that most victims are women, and that overwhelmingly, violence against women in Australia is perpetrated by men.³

Research shows that many people who are ambivalent about, or don't support gender equality are generally more supportive of attitudes that endorse violence against women.

This includes not respecting a woman's ability to make choices and control her own life. Agreement with rigid gender roles and hostility towards women have been associated with violence against women.

This kind of disrespect starts when we are young and our attitudes, beliefs and expressions of gender are developing. Disrespect looks like not treating people equally, and not supporting people's freedom of choice or valuing their unique differences.

Each instance of disrespect we encounter in life including on social media and online, can build up in layers, become more extreme and lead people to think it is OK to use or excuse violence against women. For example, a young person may see:

- Parents or carers treating boys and girls unequally using outdated expectations about their roles in society.
- Adult relationships where the man controls most decision-making and limits the woman's independence.
- An online influencer who speaks about women in derogatory and hostile ways, and encourages his followers to treat them that way.
- Pornography that shows men using physical or verbal aggression against women, which can normalise such violence.
- Men's relationships with other men that involve aggression, competing for dominance and control or boasting about their sexual prowess.

These influences, when combined over time, can escalate to a boy or man thinking he is entitled or even expected to dominate and control a girl or woman. And too many men use physical or emotional abuse to maintain that control.



Attitudes and behaviours are shaped from a young age

Children form beliefs from the world around them—what they hear, see, and talk about at school, amongst friends, within their families, and popular culture through media and online.

There are many influences on young people's ideas about the roles of men and women. Research tells us that, from a young age, some people start to believe there are reasons and certain situations that make disrespectful behaviour okay .

Boys can develop certain rigid or unhelpful ideas about what it means to be a boy or a man, and they can feel pressured to conform to these to be accepted and valued. This can include expectations to be tough and dominant.

Pressures from social media are also very real and has consequences for all of us. It can affect a young person's mental health and wellbeing, as well as change their attitudes and behaviours.

These harmful expectations can also encourage disrespectful attitudes toward women. When this goes unchallenged, young people will gradually start to believe that it's just a normal part of relationships and growing up, which can influence their behaviour. Girls and women can also learn over time to tolerate disrespect or downplay it.

This all plays a role in driving men's violence against women.

When children are raised to be women and men with equal value and opportunities in relationships and in society, violence against women is less likely.

Society expects us to treat everyone as equals no matter their gender, and most adults might feel like they are doing their best to set a good example. But the reality is, too many of us expect different things from both children and adults based on their gender, and we often treat them differently as a result—often without even realising it.

When we are aware of the impacts of our words and expectations, and are having open conversations with other adults and our kids about gender roles, expectations, respect and healthy relationships, we can create a society where violence against women is not tolerated.

[The Conversation Guide](#) has more information on how to talk to young people about respect.



The hidden trends of disrespect

Using social media and online platforms is a normal way to stay in touch with people, read news, watch videos, and play games.

Young people spend so much time online—especially during their teenage years that the content they watch and listen to can influence and shape their views and behaviour.

While some online content may make us feel happy, there is also a risk of being exposed to disrespectful and aggressive content at any time.

Most social media platforms have complex algorithms that show us profiles or posts it thinks we're likely to engage with. If someone spends time engaging with potentially harmful content, it can lead them to seeing more of the same material or increasingly harmful material in their feeds. Sometimes the algorithms can contribute to content 'going viral' by spreading it quickly and widely, and this can amplify misinformation and extreme views.

Social media influencers often target young people, including young boys and men, with harmful and disrespectful content even if they don't look for it. Sometimes this negative content can be disguised as positive or helpful by initially focusing on healthy lifestyles, sporting achievements and wealth creation. This is used to pull young people in initially, at which point, the content can subtly (or openly) shift to being harmful and misogynistic. This type of content then intensifies once the user interacts with it.

Harmful content and disrespectful behaviour online can look like:

- degrading or sexist language in comments
- discriminating language or treatment of women in online gaming
- sharing personal or intimate photos or videos of someone without their permission
- 'memes' or jokes about rape, stalking, or women being inferior to men
- promoting attitudes that excuse and minimise harassment and violence or blame the victim
- slang words and phrases that originate from harmful or disrespectful language
- influencers or people with large followings that are disrespectful to others or perpetuate dangerous behaviours and thoughts about gender.

The discussion guide, [Hidden trends of disrespect](#), includes more information about disrespect online.

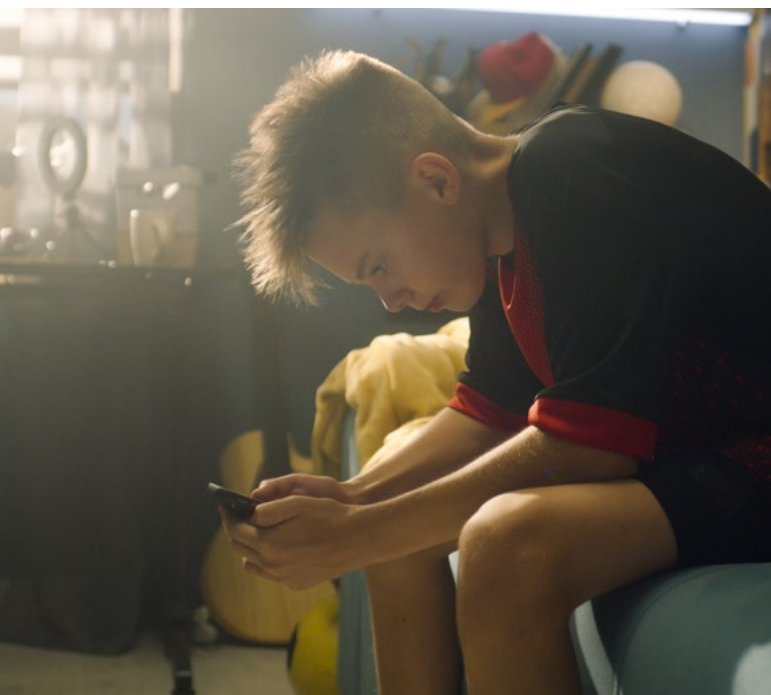
As parents and carers, it can be difficult to censor or control the content young people may be exposed to online. To support our young people, we need to develop a better understanding of what they are seeing and hearing and the impact this may have on their perceptions of gender and violence.

It's important to remind young people they don't need to engage with everything they see in their feed, especially if it upsets them or makes them feel uncomfortable. What we are shown is influenced by what we search, watch and engage with. The more positive content we engage with, the less offensive or disrespectful content will be shown to us.

You can also familiarise yourself and your young person with ways to block or report accounts, or posts that are promoting harmful or disrespectful content. This will help ensure you see less similar content, and could even result in the harmful content being removed.

The eSafety Commissioner has resources to help you [report online harm](#).

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Together we can help stop violence against women

Our young people should be free to explore and develop who they are without the pressure of fitting into expectations about gender norms. We want them to live in a world free from violence.

As parents, guardians, carers, and family members, we want the best for our young people. We want them to have rich experiences, healthy relationships, and opportunities to shine. We want them to understand right and wrong, to respect others and themselves.

All adults, including parents, carers, guardians, siblings, grandparents, teachers, coaches, employers, and role models, can have a positive influence on young people and set the standard for what is and isn't acceptable, right from the start.

Together we can:

- Reflect on our own understanding of respect, gender equality and the pressures to conform to social norms and stereotypes.
- Be more aware of the excuses we make, and how our behaviour sets an example for our young people that can have a lasting impact.

- Model respect by being aware of what we do and say, and the impacts this can have on others.
- Take steps to understand the type of information young people are engaging with online and the disrespectful words and statements they may be exposed to.
- Start having conversations with other adults about raising a respectful generation of young people.
- Start having conversations about respect with our young people as they grow up—discuss the impact of values, attitudes and behaviours.

There are resources and tools available on the *Stop it at the Start* website, www.respect.gov.au, to help you learn more about the issue, the type of information young people are engaging with online and ways you can talk about it.



Find out more

National Community Attitudes Survey (NCAS)

The NCAS is the world's longest-running population-level survey of community attitudes towards violence against women. Read more about Australians' understanding of violence against women, attitudes towards gender inequality and people's willingness to intervene.

www.ncas.au

Personal Safety Survey

The Personal Safety Survey (PSS) collects information from Australian adults about the nature and extent of their experiences of different forms of violence.

www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

AIHW provides evidence, data and information related to health and welfare. This includes information on family, domestic and sexual violence. www.aihw.gov.au

The Line

The Line encourages healthy and respectful relationships by challenging and changing attitudes and behaviours that support violence. The Line is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. It is delivered by Our Watch. www.theline.org.au

Student Wellbeing Hub

The Student Wellbeing Hub is a one-stop shop for information and resources on safe school strategies to assist teachers and school leaders, students, parents, specialist professionals supporting students and pre-service teachers. www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au

eSafety Commissioner

eSafety is Australia's independent regulator for online safety, educating Australians about online safety risks and helping to remove harmful content such as cyberbullying, cyber abuse, and intimate images or videos shared without consent. The eSafety site has many resources and tips for keeping children safe online. You can also report online harm at www.esafety.gov.au

Say It Out Loud

Say It Out Loud encourages members of LGBTQ+ communities to have healthy relationships, get help for unhealthy relationships and support their friends. www.sayitoutloud.org.au

