

Fact Sheet

Myths and Facts about Family Violence

AVERT
FAMILY VIOLENCE



**Collaborative Responses in
the Family Law System**



An Australian Government Initiative

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Fact Sheet: Myths and facts about family violence

Below is a list of common myths and brief responses. Please refer to the suggested sections of the AVERT Paper *Dynamics, Dimensions and Impact of Family Violence* for more in-depth discussion. All references also can be found in the Paper.

Myth: Family violence is physical assault.

Fact: Family violence involves the abuse of power and control to victimise one partner. This may be done through a range of behaviours that do not necessarily involve physical assault. (See: Naming and defining family violence)

Myth: Family violence is usually a one-off occurrence at the emotional time of separation or the ending of a relationship.

Fact: Although one-off incidents occur it is most often an ongoing pattern of behaviour, and frequently involves a number of violent tactics used in concert with each other. Where physical violence occurs, emotional abuse is almost always present. (See: Naming and defining family violence)

Myth: Victims provoke family violence.

Fact: No one asks for or deserves to be abused - there is no excuse for domestic violence. In fact, most victims of domestic violence do everything they can to pacify their partners to avoid further violence. Responsibility for the violence rests with the perpetrator. It is not the victim who committed the crime. (See: Naming and defining family violence)

Myth: Alcohol abuse causes family violence.

Fact: Although there is often a high correlation between alcohol use and family violence and abuse, alcohol is more accurately described as a trigger rather than a cause. It cannot be assumed that if the drinking stopped the violence would also stop. It is problematic to attribute responsibility for violent behaviour to something separate from the perpetrator. Alcohol misuse and violent behaviour may, however, be overlapping problems. (See: Naming and defining family violence)



Myth: Stress at work and/or about money causes family violence.

Fact: As with alcohol, such issues are not a cause of violence. Perpetrators will rarely hit their bosses or colleagues in stressful situations because they are able to judge the negative consequences of such an action. (See: Naming and defining family violence)

Myth: Family violence is quite rare.

Fact: The ABS Personal Safety Survey for 2012 shows that: 'An estimated 3,106,500 women had experienced violence by a known person (36% of all women) compared to 1,068,200 women who had experienced violence by a stranger (12% of all women). The most likely type of known perpetrator was a previous partner (1,267,200, 15% of all women). More than half of cases heard in the Family Court of Australia and the Family Magistrates' Court involved family violence and/or child abuse (Moloney et al. 2007, p. vii). (See: Dimensions of family violence)

Myth: Family violence and abuse is more of a problem with people in lower socio-economic groups.

Fact: Family violence and abuse occurs in all income groups, professions, geographical locations and ethnicities. When lower income groups show up in statistics, it is often because these statistics relate to women living in women's refuge shelters (a source of much research on violence against women). Many of these women lack financial resources for other housing options and are therefore not likely to be representative of the wide range of women affected. (See: Dimensions of family violence)

Myth: Family violence is a private matter.

Fact: Family violence has increasingly been made public. Physical assault in the home is a serious crime and must be viewed as seriously as assault outside the home. Under the broad heading of 'family homicides', a study revealed that in Australia, over a 13 year period, 38 percent of victims were killed where a family member was the primary offender. Of these family homicides, the majority involved intimate partners (60%) (Putt, 2009). (See: Contextualising the statistics)

Myth: Victims wouldn't put up with it if they didn't like it.

Fact: There are many complex reasons why victims stay in abusive and violent relationships. The period after a victim leaves, or expresses an intention to leave, is



the most potentially lethal, and the time when most serious assaults occur. This in itself is a strong deterrent to leaving. (See: Why don't victims leave?)

Myth: Children are not really impacted by family violence

Fact: Children are acutely harmed by family violence and parental conflict. Children generally have immediate trauma reactions and long term mental health concerns as a result of exposure to family violence. This is particularly likely when children are not supported to recover from experiences of family violence. (See: Impact on children)