

women's experience of crime and safety in victoria 2002

"We...know that violence against women and children knows no boundaries of culture, age, sexual preference...class, ethnicity or creed."

CRIME
PREVENTION
VICTORIA



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message from the minister

While Victoria has recorded a level of crime significantly below the national average for nine consecutive years, the Victorian Government is not complacent about crime.

The Government is particularly mindful that while crime has a significant impact on society, men and women have differing experiences and perceptions of crime.

Women are at a considerably higher risk than men of being the victim of family violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment and stalking. Research shows that a third of Australian women have experienced violence or serious threats of violence in their adult lives. Women are also likely to be subjected to workplace harassment. Perception surveys reveal that women's fear of crime is consistently higher than men's. Compounding the seriousness of these figures is the fact that an estimated 80 percent of violence against women is not reported to the police.

The effects of crime and violence on women should not be underestimated. Women's differential experiences and perceptions of crime significantly affect their sense of well-being and the degree of confidence they have about their safety in their homes, at work and in the community.

Unfortunately, no Victorian publication to date has documented in one clear, accessible format women's experience and perceptions of crime. This document seeks to redress this situation by providing statistics on the incidence of crime against women, the myriad effects that crime has on women, and what we, as a Victorian community, have done and continue to do to address this serious issue.

The publication of *Women's Experience of Crime and Safety in Victoria 2002* represents only one of a number of initiatives undertaken by the State Government to improve the lives of Victorian women. Specifically, the Victorian Government has developed a whole-of-government *Women's Safety Strategy*, launched on 21 October 2002, which is an essential part of the Government's policy agenda for women. The aim of the *Women's Safety Strategy* is to improve women's safety, well-being and capacity to fully participate in Victorian life by reducing the level, and fear, of violence against women. The Strategy is one of over 150 initiatives that will benefit Victorian women under the Government's Forward Plan for Women.

Like the *Women's Safety Strategy*, *Women's Experience of Crime and Safety in Victoria 2002* represents a long-term collaboration with many key Government and non-government stakeholders, including the Office of Women's Policy, Victoria Police, the Victorian Community Council Against Violence, Centres Against Sexual Assault, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, the Victorian Law Reform Commission, the Equal Opportunity Commission, WorkCover and the Department of Human Services. Without the support of these stakeholders, the development of this document would not have been possible.

I commend the *Women's Experience of Crime and Safety in Victoria 2002* as a key tool in assisting in the development of policies and programs throughout government and at the local level which seek to improve the safety of all Victorian women.



André Haermeyer

Minister for Police and Emergency Services



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women as victims of crime

“We ... know that violence against women and children knows no boundaries of culture, age, sexual preference ... class, ethnicity or creed.”¹

Generally, the risk of becoming a victim of crime in Victoria is unequally spread across the community. Major differences exist between socio-demographic groups, with members of some groups having a higher risk of becoming victims of crime than others.

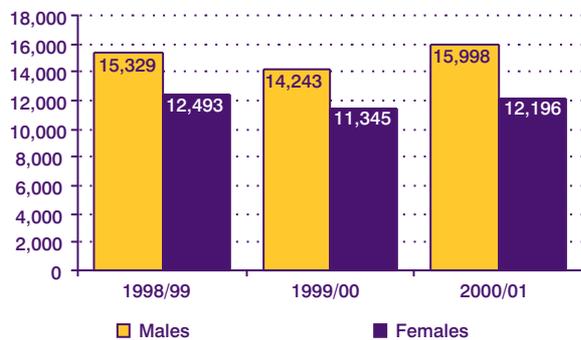
While in general, a greater number of males are victims of recorded crime against the person than females, women are at far greater risk of specific forms of crime than men.

Profile of victims of crime against the person

In 2000/01, there were a total of 12,196 recorded female victims of crime against the person, which represented 42.3 percent of all victims of crime against the person.

Crime against the person includes homicide, sexual assault, assault, robbery and abduction/kidnap.

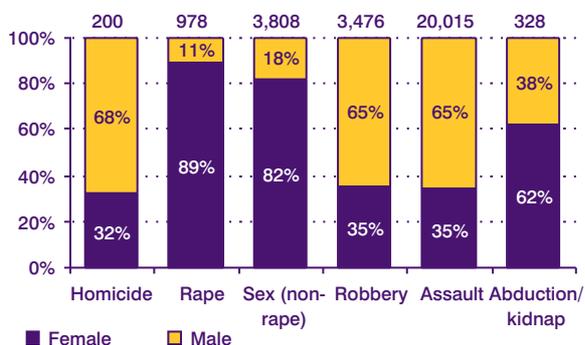
Figure 1 Number of recorded victims of crime against the person by sex, 1998/99 to 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

There was a 7.6 percent increase in the number of female victims of crime against a person from 1999/00 to 2000/01, while the percentage of male victims increased by 12.2 percent. There were 507 recorded female victims of crime against the person for every 100,000 women in the Victorian population. It should be noted that people who are victimised on more than one occasion in the same year are counted for each occasion.

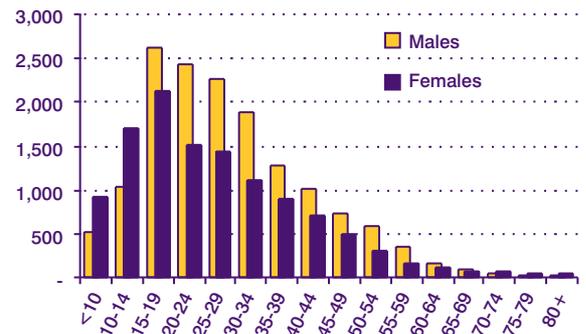
Figure 2 Number of recorded victims of crime against the person and the percentage break-up by sex, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

While men are more likely to be victims of homicide, robbery and assault, women are more likely to be victims of rape, sex (non-rape)² and abduction/kidnap.

Figure 3 Number of recorded victims of crime against the person by age and sex, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

The peak age groups for victims of crime against the person are 15-19 and 20-24 years.

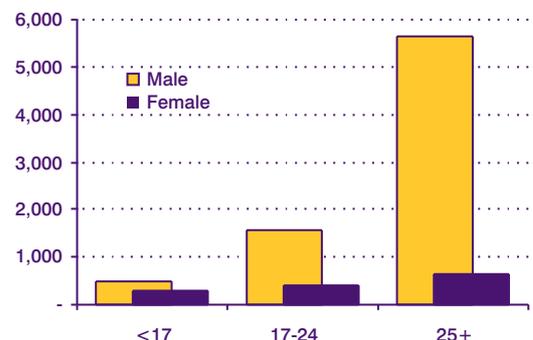
The number of recorded male victims of crime against the person is higher than females across all age groups, with the exception of:

- the offences of rape and sex (non-rape);
- under 10 years, where females are much more likely to be victims than males, primarily due to the incidence of sex (non-rape); and
- older Victorians (60+), where male and female victims have a roughly equal probability of being recorded as victims (with the particular exception of rape and sex (non-rape) for which women still record higher rates).

Offenders of crime against women

As shown in Figure 4, the majority of offenders of crime against the person, where there was a female victim, were male (85.7 percent).

Figure 4 Number of recorded offences of crime against the person where there was a female victim by sex and age group of alleged offender processed, 2000/01



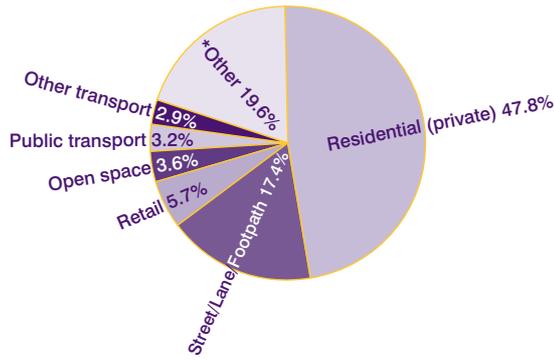
(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics – unpublished data)

1 Lloyd (1997) 'Defining violence against women', in Bewley S, Friend J and Mezey G (Eds). *Violence Against Women*. London: RCOG
 2 Sex (non-rape) offences include indecent assault, sexual assault against children and indecent exposure in public

Type of location

Private residences are the most common location for crime against the person because many of the violent offences perpetrated against women involve family violence. Approximately 88 percent of all crime against the person offences in the home are perpetrated by males.

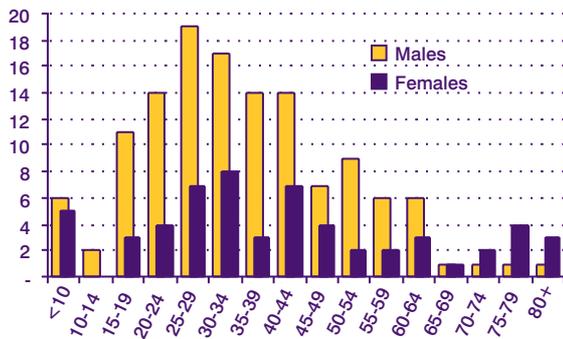
Figure 5 Number of recorded offences for all crime against the person where there was a female victim by type of location, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics – unpublished data)
* Includes offences where location was unspecified

Homicide

Figure 6 Number of recorded victims of homicide by age and sex, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

While most victims of homicide are men (133 compared to 63 women in 2000/01), most women victims are killed by men³. The chances of a woman being killed by a person with whom she has been sexually intimate are much greater than a woman being murdered by a stranger – each year in Australia, fewer than 14 women are killed by a man that they do not know⁴. Nearly three in five of all murders of women aged 15 years and over occur

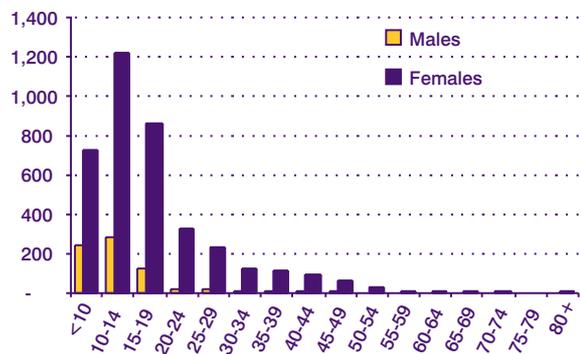
between intimate partners, and nearly all of these are the result of a domestic dispute⁵. Women are at greatest risk of being killed at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner⁶. For male offenders, there is often a prior history of violence towards their deceased partner⁷. At least one-fifth of such homicides had involved police interaction for a pre-homicide incident of domestic violence. Victorian Coroner’s data show that of the victims who had died as a result of family violence, 90 percent were women⁸.

While Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women accounted for approximately 15 percent of the homicides of female victims, they only comprise two percent of the total female Australian population⁹.

Sexual assault

Females comprise the vast majority of both rape and sex (non-rape) victims.

Figure 7 Number of recorded victims of rape by age and sex, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

From 1999/00 to 2000/01, recorded rape offences increased by 5.5 percent from 1,170 to 1,234, while recorded sex (non-rape) offences decreased by 1.7 percent from 6,455 to 6,343. In 2000/01, 3,961 females were recorded as victims of sexual assault (including both rape and sex (non-rape) offences) compared with 783 males. The age group with the highest number of victims of sexual assault was 15 to 19 year olds.

Sexual assault is significantly under-reported by victims. The Department of Justice’s 1999 Victorian Crime Victimization Survey (CVS) found that only 17.3 percent of the female respondents who were victims of sexual assault

3 Mouzos, J. (1999a) "Femicide: An Overview of Major Findings" Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice series, no. 124, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra
 4 Mouzos 1999a, as above
 5 National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology
 6 Lees, S. 'Marital rape and marital murder', IN Hanmer, J et al. Home Truths about Domestic Violence: Feminist Influences on Policy and Practice: A Reader. London: Routledge, 2000
 7 Easteal (1993) "Survivors of Sexual Assault: A National Survey", in P. Easteal (ed.), Without Consent: Confronting Adult Sexual Violence, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra
 8 Sherrard et al. (1997) 'Domestic Violence: Patterns and Indicators', Monash University Accident Research Centre, Report #63
 9 Mouzos (1999b) "Changing Patterns in Homicide", Paper presented at the 3rd National Outlook Symposium, 22-23 March 1999, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra

reported the offence to the police, while the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 1996 Women's Safety Survey found that only one out of 10 female victims did so.

Studies indicate that women are more likely to report rape by a stranger¹⁰, while the majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by acquaintances, dates, de factos or marital partners¹¹. The ABS Survey found that over a third of women who were sexually assaulted by a stranger reported the incident to police, while only 4.4 percent of women sexually assaulted by their current partner did so¹². This may reflect a common misconception that women cannot be raped by men they know. Low reporting rates may thus be partly explained by the fact that the majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by acquaintances, dates, de factos and marital partners¹³.

The reasons why women choose not to report a sexual assault, particularly if the assailant is known to the victim, include:

- the belief that the incident is a private matter;
- the trauma resulting from the assault;
- the sense of shame that the victim has somehow contributed to the assault (e.g. by having been drinking);
- anxiety that the victim's family might find out (which is of particular concern to people from specific ethnic groups);
- fear of reprisals from the known assailant(s); and
- concerns that the police and/or court will not take the victim's claims of sexual assault seriously, especially if the victim knew the offender(s), however briefly.

An additional complication in the case of sexual assault facilitated through drink spiking is the loss of consciousness and/or memory of the event. Drink spiking is the addition of alcohol or drugs to a person's drink without her knowledge or approval. The ingestion of date rape drugs often results in loss of memory, so victims frequently feel that they do not remember the details of the rape well enough to enable them to report it to police. While it is difficult to estimate accurately the incidence of date rape and spiking of a woman's drink to ensure less resistance to sexual assault, such offences are reportedly on the increase.

The ABS Survey also found that:

- female victims were less likely to report a physical assault if the offence was committed by a current partner;
- younger victims were less likely to report physical assault than older victims;

- with respect to both physical and sexual assault, if a woman sustained a physical injury during the incident, she was much more likely to report the offence to police;
- a woman's place of birth is a key determinant in the likelihood of her reporting sexual assault – while 34.5 percent of overseas-born women who were the victims of sexual assault reported the last incident, only 11.8 percent of Australian-born victims did so¹⁴.

Robbery

According to Victoria Police figures, females are less likely to be victims of robbery than males – 34.2 percent of all recorded robbery victims in 2000/01 were female. While males were more commonly the victims of robbery than females in the adolescent age group, between the ages of 40 and 59 years, females tended to be the victims of robbery as frequently as men of this age group.

Assault

In 2000/01, the number of recorded assaults (21,889) was 10.2 percent higher than the number recorded in 1999/2000. While males were about twice as likely as women to be victims of assault, there was an increase of 8.1 percent in the number of female victims of assault compared to the 10.8 percent increase for males from 1999/00 to 2000/01. The age group that comprise the largest number of victims of assault for both genders is 25 to 29 years.

The most common locations for assaults against women in 2000/01 were residential locations (47.8 percent) followed by streets/lanes/footpaths (21.1 percent).

Assaults are most often committed by someone known to the woman, such as a partner or boyfriend, a family member or casual acquaintance¹⁵.

Family violence

The term "family violence" is used in preference to "domestic violence" as it incorporates all forms of violence within families, including children being harmed by family members or guardians, and women being harmed by their partners or children.

Family violence is an extremely important area of concern with respect to women's safety, as women subjected to physical and emotional abuse are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, psychosomatic symptoms, eating problems and sexual dysfunction¹⁶ in addition to physical injury and even death.

¹⁰ Belknap (1989) 'The sexual victimization of unmarried women by nonrelative acquaintances', *Violence in Dating Relationships*, (eds) Maureen A. Pirog-Good & Jan E. Stets, Praeger Publishers, New York

¹⁴ Easta (1992) 'Rape' *Violence Prevention Today* No. 1 Oct, Australian Institute of Criminology

¹² Coumarelos and Allen (1999) 'Predicting Violence against Women: The 1996 Women's Safety Survey' *Crime and Justice Bulletin, Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, Number 47, p. 9

¹³ Easta (1992) 'Rape' *Violence Prevention Today* No. 1 Oct, Australian Institute of Criminology

¹⁴ Coumarelos and Allen (1999) 'Predicting Violence against Women: The 1996 Women's Safety Survey' *Crime and Justice Bulletin, Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, Number 47, p. 9

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Women's Safety Australia Survey 1996, which includes unreported cases of assault*

¹⁶ World Health Organisation *Factsheet No 239. June, 2000*

Some information about the extent of family violence can be gleaned from Family Incident Reports, which are completed when police are called out to deal with domestic disturbances. In 2000/01, there were 21,622 Family Incident Reports submitted by Victoria Police, which represents an increase of 10.4 percent from 1999/00.

There were 1,162 offences of assault that arose from these Family Incident Reports.

According to a Department of Justice report released in October 2002¹⁷:

- between 1994/95 and 2000/01, the number of complaints for an intervention order finalised in the Magistrates' and Children's Courts of Victoria under the *Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987* remained consistent each year (approximately 15,000 complaints);
- between 1994/95 and 2000/01, there was an increase each year in the number of aggrieved family members included in finalised complaints for intervention orders (except for 1999/00); and
- in 2000/01, 80.5 percent of defendants to complaints for an intervention order finalised were male – this proportion has remained relatively stable over the last seven years.

The ABS *Women's Safety 1996 Survey* found that 7.1 percent of women surveyed had experienced a violent incident in the previous 12 months. The survey found that 23 percent of women who had ever been married or in a de facto relationship experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship.

Australian survey data indicate that relationship breakdown is strongly associated with repeat assault victimisation of women¹⁸.

An analysis of the national ABS Women's Safety Survey data found that the relative risk of a woman being the victim of physical violence in the preceding 12 months depended on their circumstances. Young women, unmarried women, women who had experienced childhood abuse and/or previous violence as an adult, were more likely to experience physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months than their counterparts¹⁹. The

risk of being a victim of physical violence decreases with age (the incidence of violence was higher amongst younger women, aged 18-24 years, compared to women over 24 years). Women who had already experienced violence or abuse, either as a child or as an adult, were at greater risk of future violence, especially if the women were young and not married²⁰.

Studies undertaken overseas into family violence indicate similar trends. Acts of family violence in the United Kingdom have been estimated to be committed every six seconds and 999 (emergency) calls reporting attacks are made every minute, according to a nation-wide report²¹. The study also showed that a quarter of all violent crimes in London are 'domestics' and that children witness more than 50 percent of incidents, including beatings, rapes and stabbings. The British Crime Survey 2000 found that family violence accounts for almost a quarter (23 percent) of all violent crime²². A major survey involving over 12,000 Canadian women in 1993 also found that one in four women reported experiencing violence from a partner or ex-partner²³.

In the United Kingdom, domestic violence has the highest level of repeat victimisation – more than half of all victims of domestic violence are involved in more than one incident²⁴. Five percent of 'health years' of life are estimated to be lost worldwide by women as a result of family violence²⁵.

The major findings of the literature review of domestic violence undertaken by Sherrard *et al.*²⁶ include: over-representation of women as victims of domestic violence; under-detection of domestic violence; high rates of suicide by victims of domestic violence; the cyclical nature of abuse (i.e. the relationship between child and adult victimisation) and the high incidence of domestic violence injury during pregnancy. The Victorian study also found that up to 70 percent of female family violence victims may not be detected as such by hospital staff²⁷.

Women who experience violence by male family members are more likely to report having been unemployed and to suffer from a range of physical and mental health problems that can affect employability and job

17 Department of Justice (2002) "Statistics of the Magistrates' and Children's Courts of Victoria: Intervention Order Statistics 1994/95-2000/01", Melbourne, Victoria

18 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Women's Safety Survey, 1996*

19 Coumarelos and Allen (1999) 'Predicting Violence against Women: The 1996 Women's Safety Survey' *Crime and Justice Bulletin, Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, no. 47

20 Coumarelos and Allen (1998) 'Predicting Violence against Women: The 1996 Women's Safety Survey' *Crime and Justice Bulletin, Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, no. 42

21 Stanko, E. 'The Day to Count: A Snapshot of the Impact of Domestic Violence in the UK'. *Criminal Justice* 1:2, 2000

22 *The British Crime Survey: England and Wales. (2000)* London: Home Office

23 *The Violence Against Women Survey. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply & Services, 1993*

24 *British Crime Survey England and Wales (2000)*. London: Home Office

25 *Domestic Violence and Social Care: A Report on two Conferences held by the Social Services Inspectorate. London: DoH, 1996 cited in Women's Aid Federation of England, Domestic Violence Statistical Factsheet No 1. August 2001*

26 Sherrard, J., Ozanne-Smith, J., Brumen, I., Routley, V. and Williams, F. (1997) "Domestic Violence: Patterns and Indicators", Monash University Accident Research Centre, Report #63

27 *ibid*

performance. An American study interviewed 50 working women who sought counselling assistance at a victims' services agency in a large metropolitan area – 56 percent of the respondents reported having lost at least one job and 54 percent reported missing an average of three days of work per month as a result of family violence²⁸.

Stalking

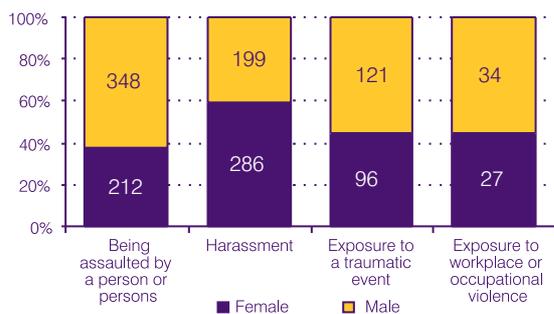
The number of stalking offences recorded by Victoria Police rose from 693 in 1995/96 to 852 in 2000/01.

An unpublished 1999 Department of Justice study on stalking²⁹ which analysed Victoria Police crime data found that most stalking victims were female (82.4 percent), while most stalkers were male (87.7 percent). Both men and women were more likely to stalk women (86.0 percent and 57.1 percent, respectively) than men. While the study found that 67.6 percent of stalking offenders were aged between 20 and 39 years, 81.7 percent of female stalking victims were less than 39 years of age.

Violence and misconduct in the workplace

Violence and misconduct in the workplace include a diverse range of behaviours from intimidation, bullying and racial and sexual harassment to severe emotional and physical assault and may be committed by a manager, colleague, client or even a member of the public. Workplace violence and harassment jeopardise the safety and health of employees, the lynchpin of all organisations, and as a consequence, the productivity of the workplace.

Figure 8 Number of standard claims to WorkCover by mechanism of injury in the workplace, 2000/01



(Source: Victorian WorkCover Authority)

In Victoria in 2000/01, 621 standard claims were reported to WorkCover where the cause of the injury/disease was classified as being assault by a person(s) or exposure to workplace or occupational violence. Females were claimants in 38.5 percent of these claims. During that same period, a further 485 harassment claims were reported to WorkCover. The claimants were female in 59.0 percent of these cases.

Missing persons

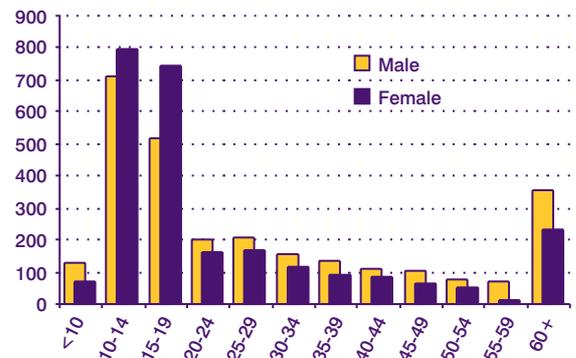
Although it is not an offence category, missing persons are recorded by Victoria Police and are of interest from the perspective of the safety of the community as a whole. The statistics presented in this section are based on the number of persons reported missing to Victoria Police and recorded on Law Enforcement Assistance Program in 2000/2001 (escapes from custody are excluded).

Overall, there were 2,819 males and 2,631 females recorded missing in 2000/01. Of the total number of missing persons (5,497)³⁰ recorded in 2000/01, 94.4 percent were located as at 30 June 2001.

A greater number of males were reported missing than females in all age groups except 10-14 and 15-19 years, which together represented by far the greatest number of missing persons in Victoria (Figure 9).

In Victoria in 2000/01, males comprised a slightly higher proportion of the total number of missing persons at 51.7 percent compared to 48.3 percent of females. Just over 47 percent of those missing in 2000/01 were young people under the age of 17 years. The category with the greatest number of missing persons was girls aged 10 to 14 years (14.5 percent), followed by young women aged 15 to 19 years (13.5 percent).

Figure 9 Number of recorded missing persons by sex and age, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

In 2000/01, most missing females (59.9 percent) were located within one day, while 86.4 percent were found within a week.

The majority of missing persons are recorded as missing "due to their own accord" (52.7 percent) and along with domestic (10.5 percent) and suicidal (4.7 percent), these make up 67.9 percent of all missing persons. It should be noted that for 26.7 percent, no reason was specified.

28 Friedman and Couper. (1987). "The cost of domestic violence: A preliminary investigation of the financial cost of domestic violence". Victim Services Agency. New York

29 Assessment of the Impact of Stalking Legislation on Victoria, prepared by Dr Inez Dussuyer, Crime Prevention Victoria

30 Includes cases where sex is unspecified

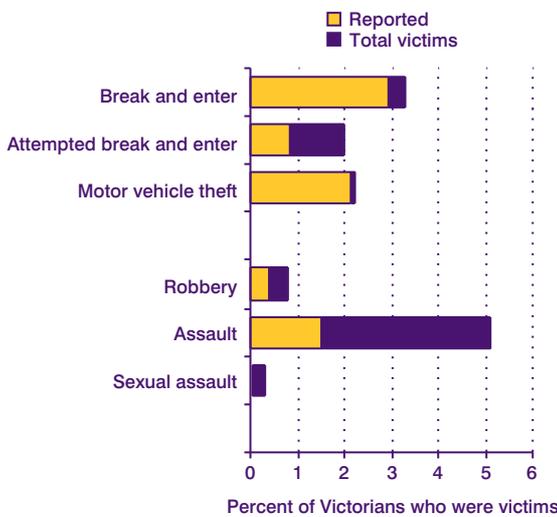
Property crime

Property crime is less clearly sex-related than crime against the person. It is important to note that the victim of crime against property is recorded by Victoria Police as the person who reports the crime. Thus, if a male member of a household reports a residential burglary, then the victim is recorded as a male, even though the rest of the family are also victims of the crime. Caution should therefore be exercised when interpreting Victoria Police victim data for property crime.

Reporting crime to the police

The rate of reporting to police varies according to the type of offence experienced by the victim. According to the Department of Justice's 1999 Crime Victimization Survey, 96.6 percent of the victims of motor vehicle theft and 88.8 percent of victims of break and enter reported the crime to the police. However, only 17.3 percent of the victims of sexual assault did so.

Figure 10 Percentage of the Victorian population who were victims of selected offences and whether they reported last incident to police, 1999

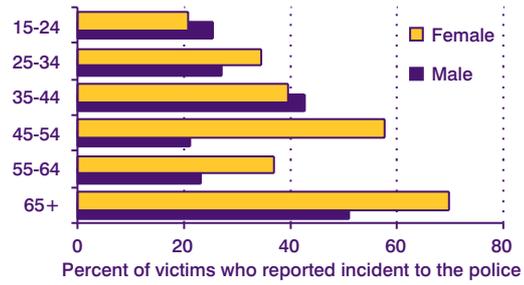


(Source: Victorian Department of Justice, Crime Victimization Survey, 1999)

The 1999 Crime Victimization Survey explored the level of under reporting and the reasons for not reporting victimisation to the police. For personal offences, sex and age affected the likelihood of reporting the incident to police. Females (37 percent) were more likely than males (29 percent) to have reported a personal offence to police. However, females were more than three times as likely as males (25.7 percent versus 8.1 percent) not to have reported the offence to the police for the reason that they thought the "police could not do anything about it". Females (11.3 percent) were more than twice as likely as males (4.5 percent) to report that they had told someone other than the police about the offence.

Impact of victimisation

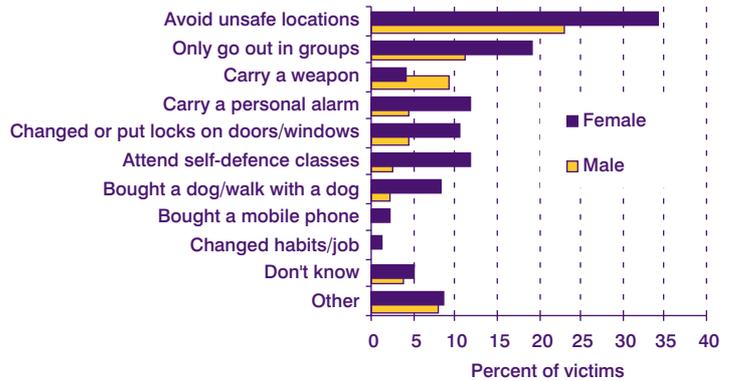
Figure 11 Victims of personal offences by whether emotionally affected by last incident and sex of victim, 1999



(Source: Victorian Department of Justice, Crime Victimization Survey, 1999)

Almost two-thirds (64.7 percent) of victims of personal offences aged 15 years and over were emotionally affected by the incident. Female victims (84.0 percent) were much more likely to be emotionally affected to some degree than male victims (53.8 percent). Female victims were three times more likely than males to have been very much affected emotionally by a personal offence (16.9 percent compared to 5.5 percent).

Figure 12 How the incident of the personal offences affected the victim, 1999



(Source: Victorian Department of Justice, Crime Victimization Survey, 1999)

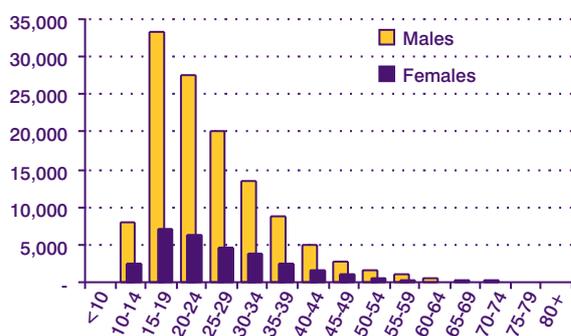
Just over half of the victims of personal offences (53.2 percent) reported that the last victimisation incident changed their habitual behavioural patterns in various ways. The effects of victimisation were different for females and males. Almost twice the number of females reported that the last incident affected their usual way of doing things (72.1 percent) compared to males (42.6 percent), as shown in Figure 12.

women as offenders

Overall, males have a significantly higher rate of offending than females. In 2000/01, there was a total of 123,704 male offenders processed for crime in Victoria compared to 31,123 alleged female offenders processed, as recorded by Victoria Police. The number of alleged male offenders decreased 0.4 percent, while the number of female offenders increased 4.4 percent, from 1999/00 to 2000/01.

Profile of offenders

Figure 13 Number of alleged offenders of all recorded crime by age and sex, 2000/01

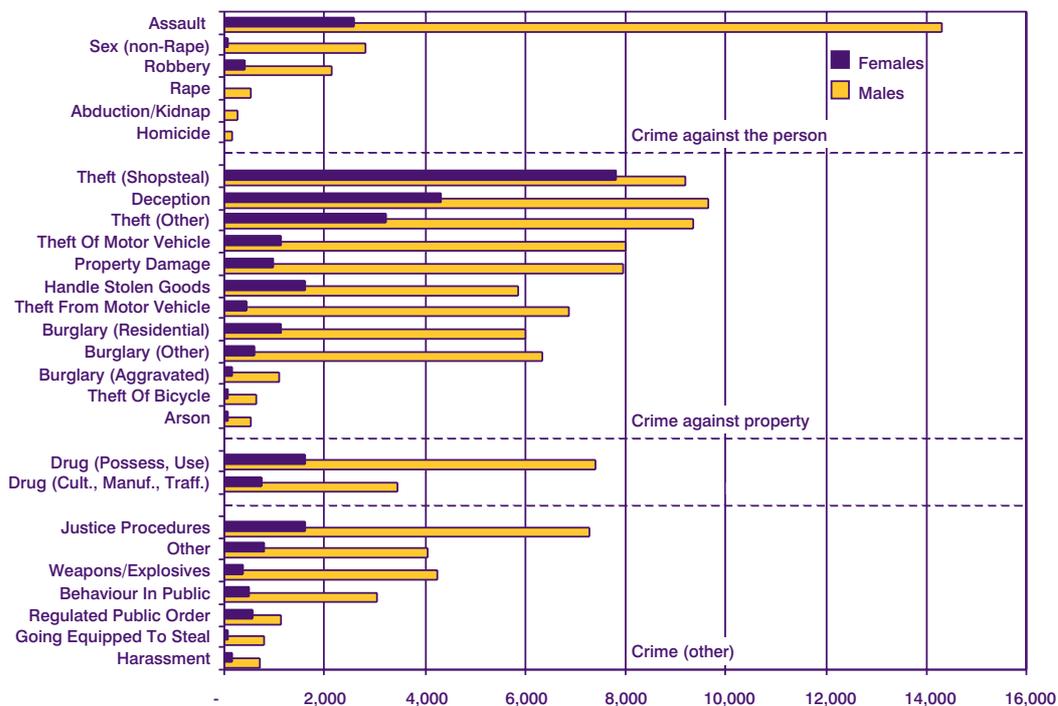


(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

As shown in Figure 13, the peak age group for offenders is 15-19 years, followed by 20-24 years. This pattern is consistent for both sexes.

Males comprise the majority of offenders in all of the 27 crime categories. In 2000/01, females made up 20.0 percent of all alleged offenders processed by Victoria Police.

Figure 14 Number of alleged offenders by offence type and sex, 2000/01

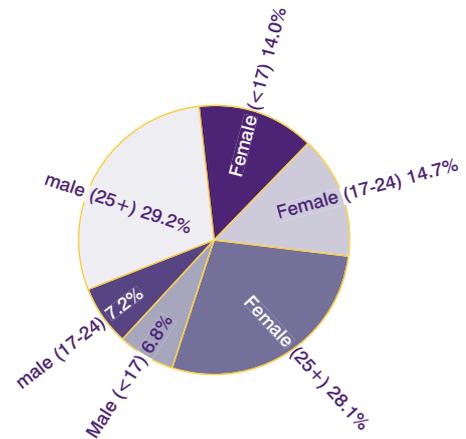


(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics)

Victims of crimes by women

There was a female victim in 56.8 percent of crime against the person where there was a female offender processed.

Figure 15 Percentage of recorded offences of crimes against the person, where there was a female offender processed by sex and age group of victim, 2000/01

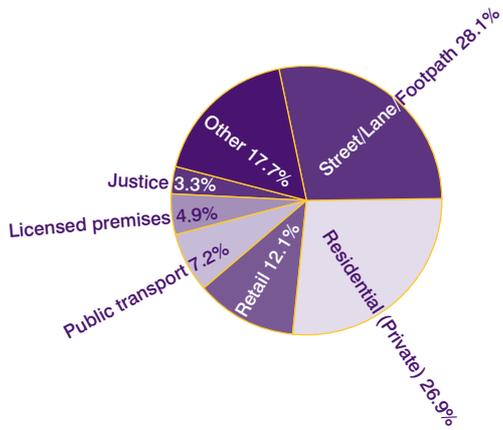


(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics – unpublished data)

Type of location

The most common type of location where females were recorded as being the offender of crime against the person was street/lane/footpath (28.1 percent), followed by private residential (26.9 percent). This is the reverse order for the two most common type of locations for male offenders where the most common location is residential (34.1 percent) followed by street/lane/footpath (27.7 percent).

Figure 16 Percentage of recorded female offenders of crimes against the person by type of location, 2000/01



(Source: Victoria Police Crime Statistics – unpublished data)

Just under two-thirds of female offenders of property crime committed the offence in a retail location (62.9 percent), while 12.8 percent perpetrated the offence in a private residence.

women’s perceptions of crime and safety

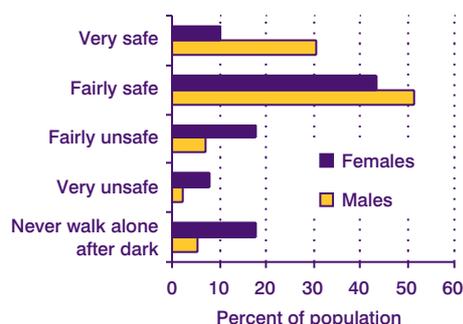
It is crucial to understand women’s experience of crime and their perceptions of safety, as both have a significant effect on their well being and the degree of confidence they experience in being and feeling safe in their home, at work and in the community.

The Victorian Department of Justice collects data on women’s perceptions of crime and safety via several surveys including the Crime Victimization Survey, as previously discussed.

In this Survey, it was found that females (54 percent) were significantly less likely than males (82 percent) to feel either ‘very safe’ of ‘safe’ walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark.

Females were also more likely than males to indicate that they never walk alone in their neighbourhood after dark (18 percent compared to 5 percent) (Figure 17).

Figure 17 Safety in the local neighbourhood after dark by sex, 1999



(Source: Department of Justice, Victorian Crime Victimization Survey, 1999)

Another survey undertaken by the Department of Justice is the Local Safety Survey. This Survey, which was conducted by Crime Prevention Victoria, Department of Justice in 1999, 2000 and 2001 is designed to better understand people’s concerns about crime and safety in their local municipalities. The sample size of the March 2001 survey was 11,418 respondents from across Victoria³¹.

The 2001 Local Safety Survey asked people to rate how safe they feel in different situations both day and night on

a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 means ‘very unsafe’ and 10 means ‘very safe’). The results are reported as an average rating score out of 10.

With respect to safety on the streets and in public places, females were significantly more likely to rate their safety lower than males in streets and public places during the day (8.7 compared to 8.9) and at night (5.9 compared to 7.2).

Similarly, females were more likely to rate their safety lower than males at local shops during the day (8.9 compared to 9.1) and at night (6.4 compared to 7.4). Older females (aged 70 years and over) in particular, were more likely to rate their safety lower at local shops at night than younger respondents.

Females also rated their safety lower than males on:

- public transport both during the day and at night – females rated their safety on buses during the day slightly lower than males (8.6 compared to 8.8); and
- buses at night (5.5 compared to 6.9).

Figure 18 Safety ratings of buses and trains during the day and at night by sex, 2001



(Source: Local Safety Survey 2001)

People were asked in the 1999 Crime Victimization Survey how safe they felt on public transport and to identify the kind of transport they use when they go out in the evening after dark, but before 9:00pm. Females were slightly less likely than males to say that they walked or caught a train compared to males, and females were slightly more likely than males to say that they would drive in a car with others. Females were less likely than males to say that they would walk, drive a car alone and or catch a train after 11:00pm.

Figure 19 Where women feel safe, 2001



(Source: Local Safety Survey, 2001)

31 100 people from each of Victoria’s 78 local government areas (LGA), in addition to boosted samples in 11 LGAs, at the request of the municipalities

discussion

It should be noted that while the level of crime increased for certain offences in 2000/01, Victoria is still the safest place to live in Australia. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, Victoria has recorded a level of crime significantly below the national average for nine consecutive years. In 2001, Victoria's victim rate was 19.7 percent below the national average.

However, the Victorian Government is not complacent about crime. The Government has a vision for a safer future for all Victorians, which includes specific initiatives to tackle crime against women. In *Growing Victoria Together*, the Victorian Government has outlined its commitment to placing a high priority on making our streets, homes and workplaces safer. As part of the *Growing Victoria Together* strategy, the Government has boosted the number of police officers in the Victoria Police by an additional 800. Local safety committees have been established in each municipality to enhance community safety. The Government is also working in partnership with local communities through 10 Community Building Projects to improve the social and economic well-being of Victorians in targeted areas.

The Victorian Government has developed a whole-of-government *Women's Safety Strategy*, launched on 21 October 2002, which is an essential part of the Government's policy agenda for women. The Strategy is one of over 150 initiatives that will benefit Victorian women under the Government's Forward Plan for Women. Alongside the development of the Victorian Government's crime and violence prevention strategy, *Safer Streets and Homes*, the development of the *Women's Safety Strategy* has involved every Victorian Government Department and numerous non-government agencies. The aim of the *Women's Safety Strategy* is to improve women's safety, well-being and capacity to fully participate in Victorian life by reducing the level, and fear, of violence against women. The principles underpinning the *Women's Safety Strategy* include the right of women who experience violence to be afforded protection and to have access to effective legal remedies.

During the five-year implementation of the *Women's Safety Strategy*, the Victorian Government will continue to work in partnership with community and non-government agencies through the establishment of three State-wide Steering Committees which will implement safety strategies:

- Reducing Family Violence (to be jointly convened by Office of Women's Policy and Victoria Police);
- Reducing Sexual Assault and Non-relationship Violence Against Women (to be jointly convened by Office of Women's Policy and Victoria Police); and
- Reducing Violence Against Women in the Workplace.

The committees will play a critical role in relation to the implementation of the *Women's Safety Strategy* and will

provide advice to the Chief Commissioner of Police, the Office of Women's Policy and relevant Government agencies.

Other major Government initiatives will support the *Women's Safety Strategy*, including the *Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* and the Youth Policy Framework, *Respect*, launched in August 2002.

The Victorian Government is also undertaking specific programs which seek to assist particular groups which may require additional support.

In 2001, the Government launched Crime Prevention Victoria, a new crime prevention agency whose role is to:

- develop and implement an integrated whole-of-government and evidence-based crime prevention strategy for Victoria;
- work with local communities to develop effective local responses to community crime and safety concerns within a State-wide framework;
- provide support and advice to local communities and other agencies on crime trends, issues and best practice in crime prevention to assist and support local program development;
- develop, implement and fund innovative and cost-effective programs to reduce crime; and
- conduct strategic data analysis, research and evaluation to inform the development and implementation of Victoria's crime and violence prevention strategy.

One of the key initiatives of Crime Prevention Victoria has been the development, in consultation with a number of Government Departments and agencies, of a three-year crime and violence prevention strategy for Victoria, entitled *Safer Streets and Homes 2002-2005*. The strategy takes a comprehensive approach to tackling crime and the causes of crime, involving all Government Departments, Victoria Police, local and regional service providers, local councils, community groups and business, all working together to improve the response to offending and to take action to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent future offending behaviour. This will integrate well with the operations of Local Safety Committees – which include representatives from the police, local government, community organisations and others – which work to improve ongoing community safety.

Cultural diversity – issues for consideration

As well as the risks that may be generally encountered by women, certain groups in the community may experience additional challenges.

Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

As stated in Victoria Police's *Violence Against Women Strategy: A Way Forward report*: "...it is (critical) that any way forward in addressing violence against women

acknowledges and ensures appropriate representation of [multicultural] communities, so their unique problems are recognised and also focused upon”.

However, the effects of crime and the perceptions of safety by members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities have been sketchy to date. Victoria Police statistics do not provide accurate and comprehensive information on the ethnicity/cultural background of victims. In addition, people whose English language proficiency is not well developed often cannot participate fully in surveys about crime and safety.

To address this situation, in 1999, the Victorian Government undertook the Multicultural Perspectives of Crime and Safety project, which involved discussions with 48 focus groups in three multicultural communities to explore their experiences of crime and perceptions of safety. The focus groups found that that lack of confidence in English proficiency is a significant barrier to a person feeling safe – many participants were concerned that they could not obtain help quickly (due to their limited English skills). Participants whose ethnic/cultural appearance differs from that of the traditional Anglo-Celtic perceived that they were less safe in an area. Nearly all groups indicated that they feared some form of racial discrimination, including vilification, as a result of “looking different” from others in the local area. Muslim women who wear traditional clothing reported feeling unsafe in the community because of their increased visibility.

Crime Prevention Victoria, in association with the Victorian Multicultural Commission, has recently extended the scope of the Multicultural Survey in order to better understand perceptions of safety of people from multicultural communities. Any programs developed as a result of the findings of the Survey will benefit from an understanding of the values of the women’s culture and collaboration with religious organisations and multicultural community organisations.

Crime Prevention Victoria, in conjunction with the Women’s/Multicultural Co-ordinator of the Department of Justice, has also undertaken an initiative to develop a closer working relationship between service providers and women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Consultations were undertaken with service providers and CALD women’s groups in Hume and Mildura. The purpose of the consultations was to identify strategies to better understand the safety concerns of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and thereby enhance program development and devise responsive policy.

Indigenous communities

Historically, there has been a lack of understanding of the needs of Aboriginal women with respect to crime and the criminal justice system. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high levels of disadvantage and inequity. Many young Indigenous people, including Indigenous women, are caught in a cycle of perpetual disadvantage and confront a wide range of barriers,

manifesting in considerably lower levels of health, education, employment, housing and justice outcomes relative to the non-Indigenous population. The Australian Institute of Criminology has found that while Aboriginal/TSI women comprise 2 percent of the total female Australian population these women accounted for approximately 15 percent of all female homicide victims.

Family violence in Indigenous communities is being increasingly recognised at a State and national level and within Indigenous communities themselves as a problem which is adversely affecting the social and emotional well-being of Indigenous communities.

There is widespread recognition that solutions to family violence lie within Indigenous communities themselves. Government is seen as having a role in supporting communities to examine these issues and develop solutions appropriate to local conditions and needs.

The *Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy* aims to resource and support an indigenous-led approach to prevent, reduce and respond to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous communities throughout Victoria. An Indigenous Family Violence Task Force has been appointed to lead the development of the Strategy.

Four key components underpin the development of the Strategy:

- 1 Establishment and Operation of the Indigenous Family Violence Task Force.
- 2 Establishment and resourcing of nine Indigenous Family Violence Action Groups.
- 3 Employment of the State-wide Coordinator and nine family violence Support Officers; and
- 4 Establishment of an Indigenous Family Violence Community Initiative Fund.

The Victorian Government endorsed the framework for the development of the Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Strategy through an Indigenous-led community approach that will occur as part of a parallel and complementary whole-of-government response. An Indigenous Family Violence Taskforce was Ministerially appointed to engage Aboriginal communities throughout Victoria in the development of a community-led strategy to address family violence, to establish Local Family Violence Action Groups and to prepare a report recommending the contents of a State-wide Strategy by June 2003.

At the moment, it is difficult to document the extent and nature of family violence in Indigenous communities in Victoria. This is primarily due to an inability to accurately identify both Indigenous persons in many of the data collection systems as well as an inability to identify family violence as the cause of the events which may bring people into contact with the health, community services and justice systems.

One of the clear challenges for the Strategy will be the development of an appropriate set of indicators in the relevant collection systems and to the undertaking of

specific research to assist in establishing the size and nature of the problem. Such data are required to assist in monitoring the impacts and outcomes associated with the implementation of responses.

Gender-based violence

Certain forms of violence are predominantly perpetrated by men against women, include family violence, sexual assault and stalking. These crimes, given their gender specificity, are addressed below.

Family violence

Males are almost twice as likely as females to be victims of assault. There are more male victims of assault than female victims in every age group, except for those aged below 10 and those aged above 80 (the latter may be explained by the fact that there are fewer men in this age bracket due to women's longer life expectancy).

With respect to the location of assaults, almost half of recorded assaults against female victims in 2000/01 occurred in private residences (47.8 percent). By contrast, the majority of assaults against men in 2000/01 occurred in the street (32.2 percent) followed by other (29.6 percent) (which includes public transport, police stations, courts and open spaces) and licensed premises (8.6 percent). Less than one-quarter of assaults against men occurred at private residences compared to almost half of assaults against women. These recorded figures suggest that men are more likely to be assaulted in public places, while a higher proportion of assaults against women involve family violence.

Current strategies

Given that Victoria Police is at the vanguard of family violence incidents every day, in 2001, the Chief Commissioner Nixon nominated family violence as one of three priority areas for review by Victoria Police. Victoria Police subsequently conducted an internal review of responses to violence against women entitled *Victoria Police Violence Against Women Strategy: A Way Forward*, which identified the following opportunities for enhancement:

- improved data collection to identify patterns in domestic violence;
- better training and education for police to deal with domestic violence including victim awareness; and
- increased police accountability when responding to incidents of violence against women.

Specifically, Victoria Police will seek to simplify access to legal intervention options, review the role of Family Violence Liaison Officers and develop a new police code of practice to respond to family violence.

One of the three key themes of the Victorian Government's whole-of-government crime and violence prevention strategy, *Safer Streets and Homes, A Crime and Violence Prevention Strategy for Victoria, 2002-2005*, is preventing family violence which includes:

- the piloting of an integrated family violence prevention and response service in high need LGAs;

- a resource kit for key professionals to assist them in dealing with people who have suffered from family violence;
- programs to assist young men who have experienced family violence to prevent them from perpetuating their experience; and
- targeted education campaigns for men who use violence, including conditional intervention orders directing violent men to undergo prescribed counselling.

Crime Prevention Victoria is working closely with the Victorian Community Council Against Violence in the implementation of this component of the Strategy.

Services

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Human Services, funds family violence outreach services, women's refuges, a telephone crisis and referral service, and an immigrant women's service.

Data on family violence

Until recently, data on family violence were limited, fragmentary and poorly integrated. To address this issue, the Victorian Community Council Against Violence has launched the Family Violence Database project to establish a State-wide "one-stop-shop" for family violence data by integrating published and unpublished family violence data currently collected by a broad range of government and community agencies into a single database.

It is also important to note that family violence, like sexual assault, is believed to be considerably under-reported. While the Family Violence Database project will draw together available data, further initiatives will be undertaken to encourage victims of family violence to report the offences to police.

Sexual assault

From 1999/00 to 2000/01, recorded rape offences increased by 5.5 percent from 1,170 to 1,234.

The Victorian Government has developed targeted strategies to reduce the incidence of rape in Victoria.

During the 1990s, considerable changes were made to the sexual offences laws in Victoria, in response to criticisms relating to the effect of the laws on victims of sexual assault. In 2001, the Attorney-General gave a formal reference to the Victorian Law Reform Commission to review both the substantive and procedural aspects of the law relating to sexual offences, including the effects of the aforementioned reforms. The Commission subsequently released a discussion paper on sexual offences, outlining a number of changes to the substantive law that are being considered. However, an important focus for the reference relates to the way in which the law is being implemented in practice by a number of key agencies.

Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs) provide counselling, support and advocacy, crisis care and referral, and groups programs for recent and past victims/survivors

of sexual violence and community development. An After Hours Telephone Service provides advice and support and co-ordination of crisis care services.

Statistics suggest that a specific area of concern is the victimisation of young women aged 15 to 19 who are more likely to be victims of sexual assault than any other age group. It is important to empower women, particularly those at greatest risk, by informing them of their greater vulnerability. A range of initiatives has been implemented by the Victoria Government to assist in protecting young women from the dangers of sexual assault. For example, Convenience Advertising is undertaking a project funded by Crime Prevention Victoria through the Victorian Law Enforcement Drug Fund to disseminate educational messages about the dangers of drink spiking to patrons of licensed premises in the City of Melbourne and the City of Greater Bendigo.

Stalking

There is considerable overlap between family violence and stalking with the perpetrators of former sometimes responsible for the latter.

The Government intends introducing legislation to expand the current definition of stalking to include on-line or "cyber" stalking.

Overarching issues relating to crime against women

Under-reporting

In interpreting statistics on recorded crime, it is critical to note that a significant proportion of women do not report incidents of violence committed against them. It is well-documented that the incidence of family violence is significantly under-reported by women. According to the 1999 Crime Victimisation Survey, fewer than 20 percent of Victorian women who experience sexual assault report the offence to police. Low reporting rates are partly attributable to the fact that the majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by acquaintances, dates, de factos and marital partners of the victims and that women are less likely to report a physical or sexual assault by current partners or people they know.

The ability of the criminal justice system to apprehend, imprison and deter sexual and violent offenders depends on the offences being reported to police. Nationally, low reporting rates of sexual and physical assault have persisted even though numerous State and national initiatives have been undertaken in the last decade to encourage reporting and to change community attitudes to violence against women.

Societal attitudes may often contribute to women's hesitancy in reporting physical and sexual assault given that, as noted by the Office of the Status of Women, there is a persistent view amongst many in the community that some women make false claims of sexual assault. However, it must be noted that, consistent with false reporting for other crimes, it has been estimated that only

a very small proportion of reported cases are false.

Women may also be deterred from reporting for fear that their claims would not be taken seriously, the failure of the justice system to proceed with some cases of assault and sexual assault, and the trauma experienced by some victims during the court process.

Another factor which may contribute to low reporting rates is the desensitisation of the community, particularly its younger members, to violence as a result of increasing exposure to explicitly violent materials.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission is reviewing the law and procedure in relation to sexual offences which will inform future Government responses in this area. In particular, the Commission is looking at reporting rates over the past eight years and will also consider those cases where no charges are laid or where investigations do not proceed.

In addition, it would be beneficial to undertake a study to determine the reasons why women are reluctant to report sexual assault, family violence and other forms of violence against women, in order to:

- improve the reporting rates to provide a more accurate indication of the prevalence of violence against women in the community;
- gain a better understanding of victims' experiences;
- develop more appropriate responses by the justice system to the needs of victims;
- deal more effectively with the perpetrators; and
- assist in the development of government policies to assist victims of violence against women to report the offence to police and to access crisis care and support services.

Shortfalls in data collection

In addition to under-reporting, the true magnitude of the extent of women's experience of crime is also confounded by gaps in data collection, recording and reporting processes. For example, while family violence represents a significant issue for women in Victoria, recorded crime data does not specify whether a particular assault represents a domestic assault or an assault between strangers. In fact, for the majority of recorded crimes against the person, the relationship (if any) between the victim and the alleged offender is not appropriately recorded (in 2000/01, for 70 percent of recorded crime against the person offences, the association of victim to offender was "unspecified").

An opportunity exists to develop a comprehensive understanding of the true nature and extent of women's experience of crime and violence in Victoria, and to measure the effect of changes in crime trends (e.g. the evolution of cyber-crime) and advances in crime prevention. A key barrier which must be overcome is the current lack of data integration between the eight major Victorian Government Departments. Presently, each Department sends requests for data to each of the other seven Departments and no central mechanism exists by which to co-ordinate the data flow. Often, Departments

never have the opportunity to view the final product to which they have contributed, which tends to discourage rapid assistance with future requests. A major step in addressing this issue would be the fostering of an ongoing network of key stakeholders with responsibility for data and information on women's experience of crime and violence. This would be consistent with the whole-of-government *Women's Safety Strategy* and the whole-of-government response to crime prevention with *Safer Streets and Homes, 2002-2005*.

In addition, Crime Prevention Victoria is considering undertaking a Victorian Women's Safety Survey either in conjunction with a Crime Victimization Survey or as a stand-alone questionnaire. Crime Prevention Victoria has been advised that the next national survey on women's safety will not be undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics until 2006. A Women's Safety Survey undertaken in Victoria in the interim will provide current State-wide indicators regarding the prevalence of violence against women in Victoria and any changes in reporting patterns.

Conclusion

The *Women's Experience of Crime and Safety in Victoria 2002* has been developed by Crime Prevention Victoria to provide a comprehensive analysis of statistical information about crime and safety as it relates to women.

This document has brought together crucial data and research information not previously available into an integrated package to inform the community and provide the basis for the continued development of targeted policies and strategies to reduce violence and harm to Victorian women.



women's experience of

crime and safety in victoria 2002

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