

Domestic and Family Violence



At least 23% of Australian women have survived instances of domestic/ family violence; the Australian Bureau of Statistics puts the number at 2.2 million women. Family violence occurs when individuals misuse their power within an intimate relationship, i.e. as a partner, parent or child. Abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, social and financial. The vast majority of perpetrators are male.

Family violence often leads to homelessness, which results in marked impacts on children's lives, including high rates of mental health problems, behavioural disorders and disrupted schooling. Temporary housing often adds to their fear and distress; meanwhile, family violence survivors and their children who live on the streets face increased risk of exposure to assault, poor diet and inadequate shelter. The survivors themselves may be suffering from depression or stress, which may mean they are unable to respond adequately to their children's developmental, emotional and physical needs.

Significantly, as awareness of and responses to reported family violence rise, so, too, do levels of consequent family homelessness – up 17%, from 22,944 to 26,790*. There are an increased number of families entering supported accommodation to escape domestic violence, combined with a lack of affordable housing and limited intervention initiatives.

Research shows that supporting families, particularly through early intervention and prevention

strategies for those most in need, has positive social and economic benefits such as:

- reductions in child abuse and neglect
- higher rates of employment and skill levels in mothers
- better school performance
- decreased welfare dependency
- lower rates of criminality within families
- a decreased need for services.

Children raised in an environment of financial difficulties, social isolation, domestic or family violence, mental health problems, disability, alcohol and/or substance abuse, and the lack of adequate housing, are more likely to experience:

- lower social competence
- poor school performance
- impaired language ability and mental health
- imprisonment.

Each year The Salvation Army's Australia Southern Territory** assists more than 2,000 women who have survived family violence, as well as additional numbers of women and children at risk, through 20 different services.

Australian statistics are taken from the *Australia's Welfare 2009* Biennial Report and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Salvation Army statistics are from The Salvation Army's service and mission information system (SAMIS).

For more information visit salvationarmy.org.au



*Comparison of 2001 to 2006 figures. ** The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory comprises WA, SA, NT, VIC & Tas.