



Release date: 23 February 2000

MEDIA RELEASE

Predicting women's responses to violence: The 1996 Women's Safety Survey

Only 1 in 100 Australian-born women who are sexually assaulted by their current partner without being injured report the offence to police.

Less than 10 per cent of women who are sexually assaulted by their current partner without being injured seek any kind of professional advice or support in relation to the assault.

These disturbing findings have emerged from the first-ever national analysis of the willingness of female victims of sexual or physical assault to report violence to police and to use the services available for victims of violence.

The analysis was carried out by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, using data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in its 1996 National Women's Safety Survey.

Not surprisingly, the willingness to report physical or sexual assault, or to use victim services in relation to the assault, increased significantly if the victim was injured or the offender was someone other than the victim's current partner.

Surprisingly, however, Australian-born women are much less likely to report physical or sexual assault than are overseas-born women.

Also surprising was the finding that young (18 to 24 year old) women are less likely to report physical assault and to use professional help services than are older women.

This finding is particularly disturbing given that younger women are more likely to be victims of violence than are older women.

The results do not provide much support for the widespread view that willingness to report violence to police is more common among more affluent or better educated female victims of violence.

The willingness to report a sexual assault to police was not related to the victim's educational attainment, to their employment status or to whether their main source of income was a government benefit.

Only one of these factors, not being employed, increased the likelihood that a victim of physical assault would report the offence to police.

Commenting on the findings, the Director of the Bureau said that further research would be needed to understand why certain women were reluctant to report violence to police or use victim services.

'It could be because some women still fail to see violence inflicted by their partners as criminal or because the criminal justice system does not offer the remedy they need', he said.

'Women may not be adequately informed about the assistance currently available through the existing services for victims of violence or they may feel that their needs cannot be met through existing services.'

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