



OLSH

Hearts for Others



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

The issue of domestic abuse is a national emergency: one in four Australian women has experienced violence or another form of abuse from an intimate partner. It is a gendered crime which is deeply rooted in the societal inequality between men and women.

Of the 87,000 women killed globally in 2017, more than a third (30,000) were killed by an intimate partner, and another 20,000 by a family member. In Australia, a country of almost 25



million, one woman is killed every nine days by a current or former partner.

(Jess Hill, "See What You Made Me Do," 2019).

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer. In the vast majority of cases it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. It can include, but is not limited to:

- Coercive control (a pattern of intimidation, degradation, isolation and control with the use or threat of physical or sexual violence)
- Psychological and/or emotional abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Financial or economic abuse
- Harassment and stalking
- Online or digital abuse.

(2020 Women's Aid Federation)

Why don't women leave abusive relationships?

Understanding why survivors stay in abusive relationships allows them to be supported and empowered to make the best decision for them and holds abusers solely accountable for their behaviour.

- **Danger and fear:**

Persecution, threat, danger, or being forcibly displaced gives rise to a right to seek asylum rather than to migrate through ordinary channels.

- **Isolation:**

Perpetrators will often try and reduce a woman's contact with the outside world (family and friends in particular) to prevent her from recognising that their behaviour is abusive. Isolation leads to women becoming extremely dependent on their controlling partner.

- **Shame, embarrassment or denial:**

Abusers are often well respected or liked in their communities because they are charming and manipulative. They often minimise, deny or blame the abuse on the victim. Victims may be ashamed or make excuses to themselves and others to cover up the abuse.

- **Trauma and low confidence :**

Imagine being told every day that you're worthless and the impact that this has on your self-esteem. Victims have very limited freedom to make decisions in an abusive relationship, they are often traumatised, regularly told 'you couldn't manage on your own, you need me.' Fear is constant and they live in a world of everyday terror.

- **Practical reasons:**

Abusers often control every aspect of their victim's life - making it impossible to have a job or financial independence. By controlling access to money women are left unable to support themselves or their children. A women may fear having her children taken away or, if she has an insecure immigration status, may fear being deported.

- **The support isn't there when they need it:**

Asking for help is not easy. Myths and misunderstandings about domestic abuse often prevent professionals, including police, from knowing what to do, how to talk about it or where to direct women disclosing abuse.

In Australia, a country of almost 25 million, one woman is killed every nine days by a current or former partner.



Pope Francis' messages about domestic abuse:

In February 2021 Pope Francis called abuses and violence against women "acts of cowardice and a degradation of all humanity."

"We must not look the other way. Let us pray for women who are victims of violence, that they may be protected by society and have their sufferings considered and heeded by all."

Pope Francis



Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement 2022-23: Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse

Australia's bishops have issued a call for respect in relationships. They remind us that no matter who suffers such violence, and who perpetrates it, the damage to the lives of the victims and survivors of abuse is real, destructive, and long-lasting. We are all challenged by the virtue of solidarity to support those who are seeking justice; the teaching of Christ urges us to promote relationships marked by respect and freedom rather than coercion and control. The message of the Gospel is not a message of domination of one person over another but a message of mutual esteem and kindness.

The statement also highlights the fact that some groups are more vulnerable than others to family and domestic violence. A staggering 65% of women with disabilities report experiencing at least one incident of violence since the age of 15. People who identify as LGBTQUI+; people living outside major cities, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are particularly at risk.

Family and domestic violence is also a painful and complex reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; it occurs within the context of a history of the violence of colonisation and ongoing racism; for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, it can be a hard topic to talk about.

Reflection, discussion and sharing:

- In what ways does the strength of my own religious community depend on my capacity to love and to teach how to love?
- Pope Francis exhorts us not to "look the other way" where domestic abuse is concerned. OLSH Sisters have supported Bayside Women's Shelter for some time; what more could be done by me and/or by my community for these courageous women, their families and their supporters?
- How can I and my community include victims of domestic abuse, and perpetrators, in our personal and communal prayer?

