

DEFINING THE DATA CHALLENGE FOR

***Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence,
Australia: Summary***

2013



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WHAT IS AN EVIDENCE BASE AND WHY DO WE NEED IT?

All Australian governments have worked together to develop the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022) (the National Plan). The National Plan addresses areas of violence in creative, innovative and targeted ways to bring about change. It also recognises the need for a strong evidence base to inform the development of appropriate, targeted strategies to reduce these forms of violence and for evaluation of action taken. The current evidence base is not sufficiently robust to support the information requirements of governments to achieve the aims of their coordinated response, now and into the future. An improved evidence base is therefore required to assist the implementation of effective interventions and preventative measures.

An evidence base can provide a range of information that reflects the lived experience of individuals involved in and affected by incidents of family, domestic and sexual violence. This information can relate to the socio-demographic characteristics of offenders and victims (such as their age, education levels, income, health status, family composition and housing tenure), through to details of incidents, how they occur and responses to those incidents. Those affected by family, domestic and sexual violence may engage with a range of agencies, individuals and services, however this information can be fragmented. These pieces of information, when harnessed for analytical purposes can provide valuable insights that can be used to identify those at risk of family violence and deploy effective prevention, intervention and support strategies.

WHAT IS THE EXTENT OF THE DATA CHALLENGE?

Data in this field is generally inconsistent and does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of violence against women and their children. Variations in data across Australia are affected by differences in what is captured, counted and reported across states and territories. The National Plan places a high priority on a comprehensive approach to building the evidence base to inform short and long term policy and service delivery decision making about violence against women.

At present, there are very few sources of quantitative information to help understand the extent of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, and available information is difficult to compare due to differences in how the issue is defined. Despite this, there are many agencies that collect family violence information, including, but not limited to justice, health, and support and housing services. The key requirement is to be able to unlock this information for the purposes of effective policy making and evaluation.

To help address this gap, the Commonwealth is investing in data. The ABS Personal Safety Survey and the ABS National Community Attitudes Survey will provide prevalence and attitudinal data at both a national and state and territory levels which will directly benefit governments, researchers and service providers. These surveys alone however cannot answer all the questions about family, domestic and sexual violence. *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence* will assist data experts, researchers and policy makers understand the true extent of the issue, and provide a pathway to better understand how to effectively measure family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia. It will be used as a common point of reference to help explain the difficulties in collecting and limitations of data collection in this field.

Figure 1: Elements outlined in “Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence”

CONTEXT	RISK	INCIDENT/EXPERIENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The environmental and individual psycho-social factors that influence community and individual attitudes, and otherwise provide the context for the occurrence and experience of family, domestic and sexual violence. What are the Environmental Factors associated with family, domestic and sexual violence? Psycho-social Factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The actual and perceived risk of family, domestic or sexual violence. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How big is the problem of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia? How likely is it that Australians will be a victim of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The occurrence of family, domestic or sexual violence, and the way this violence is experienced. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does an incident of family, domestic or sexual violence in Australia look like? Who experiences family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia? Who are the perpetrators of family, domestic and sexual violence? In what circumstances does it occur?

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: “DEFINING THE DATA CHALLENGE FOR FAMILY, DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE”

High quality and comprehensive information about family, domestic and sexual violence to support policy, research and operational activity is currently lacking. This publication describes the concept of family, domestic and sexual violence and the key questions that remain unanswered. It sheds light on the significant challenges encountered in trying to quantify and explore these forms of violence, the experiences of victims and perpetrators and outcomes for those directly impacted in the broader society and economy.

WHAT IS IT FOR?

Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence is a tool for policy and data experts, as well as researchers and service providers with an interest in data, in the fields of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia.

It defines and describes the social phenomena of family, domestic and sexual violence and aims to put it into a statistically measurable context.

It does this by identifying key statistically measurable ‘elements’ (see Figure 1). These elements describe the types of data needed to:

- support the analysis of the current status of family, domestic and sexual violence as areas of social concern;
- support measurement of the activity and performance of the systems that provide responses to family, domestic and sexual violence; and
- support the measurement of changes over time, across geographies and between communities.



The document outlines the data collection challenges (including under-reporting, and barriers to disclosure), assisting in uncovering current and potential data sources in relation to family, domestic and sexual violence. It forms the building blocks for a common language to help measure family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia across sectors and jurisdictions.

Bringing all this together in one document creates an agreed starting point to analyse how existing data may be brought together to be more comparable or usable, and to identify and agree key data gaps and potentially how to fill them. Where there are differences between jurisdictions or sectors, it will be possible to come back to this document to help understand the differences and identify what impact they may have.

This document will also help educate others such as researchers and service providers about potential sources or limitations in collecting or using data about family, domestic and sexual violence.

HOW DOES IT DO IT?

In order to understand the nature and extent of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, the impacts and the successful interventions, statistical information and measurement is vitally important. *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence* helps to identify the data required to measure the issue, the required sources and methods for measurement and the quality of information to ensure that family and domestic violence data is timely, relevant and robust.

RESPONSE	IMPACTS & OUTCOMES	PROGRAMS, RESEARCH & EVALUATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The response to family, domestic and sexual violence by individuals, families, the community, and formal or system responses such as by the justice, health and community services sectors.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the types of responses to family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia? - What actions are likely to be taken by a person who has experienced family, domestic or sexual violence? - What kinds of services are most effective? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The short, medium and long-term impacts and outcomes of family, domestic and sexual violence for victims, perpetrators, families and the broader community and economy.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the impacts of family, domestic and sexual violence on individuals, families and the community? - What are the most effective outcomes for victims? - What are the most effective outcomes for perpetrators? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The response of research and education to family, domestic and sexual violence to inform targeted prevention, intervention, and support services.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can family, domestic and sexual violence be prevented? - How can the risk of family, domestic and sexual violence be reduced? - How can the formation of individual and community attitudes be influenced?



DEFINING THE DATA CHALLENGE: WHERE DOES IT FIT?

Phase one of this evidence base building project involves a range of activities to support strategic targeting of data development efforts throughout the life of the National Plan. This will enable a coordinated approach to information development effort across the Commonwealth, states and territories and the non-government sector. *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence* is the first deliverable in phase one, and will assist in forming the data collection and reporting framework. The diagram below outlines the steps in phase one of the project.

