

FAST FACTS:

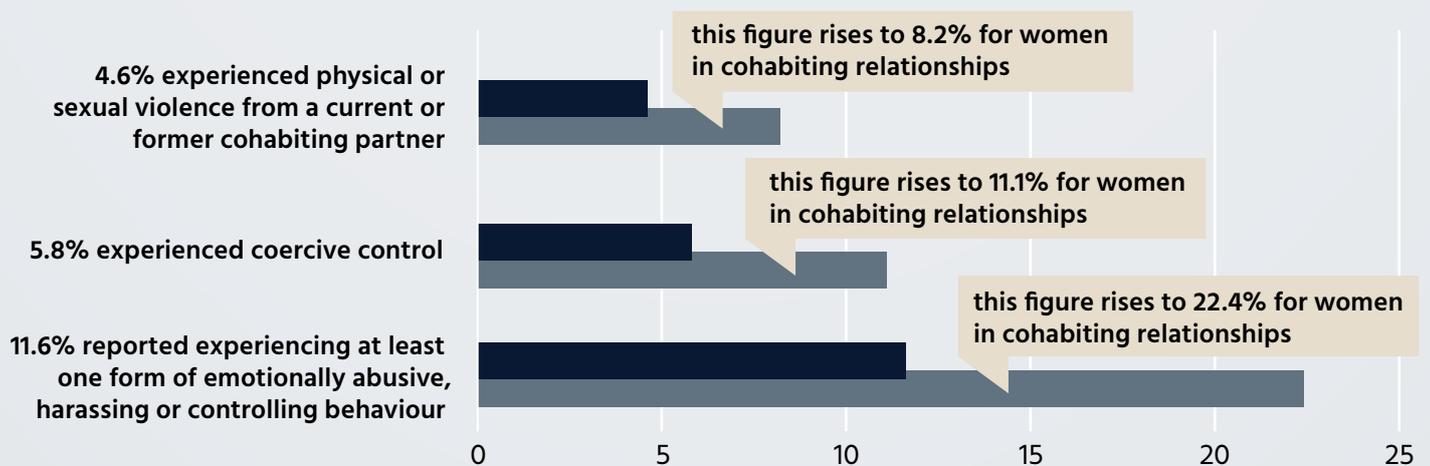
Prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic

In May 2020, the Australian Institute of Criminology surveyed 15,000 women aged 18 and over about their experiences of domestic violence since February 2020, when Australia first began to feel the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey aimed to estimate the prevalence, characteristics and drivers of violence, both reported and unreported.

Key findings

Of the 15,000 women surveyed, in the three months prior to the survey:



Women commonly reported experiencing **both** coercive control **and** physical or sexual violence

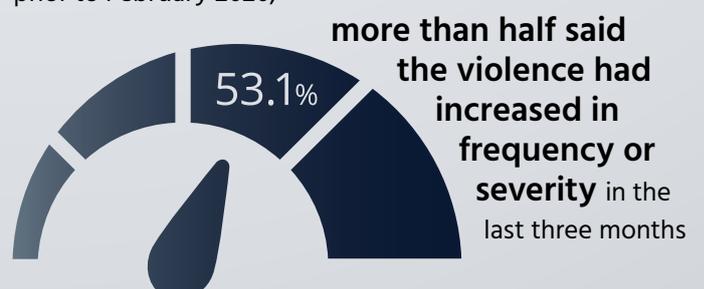


Onset and escalation of violence

Violence started for the first time or escalated in the three months prior to the survey for:



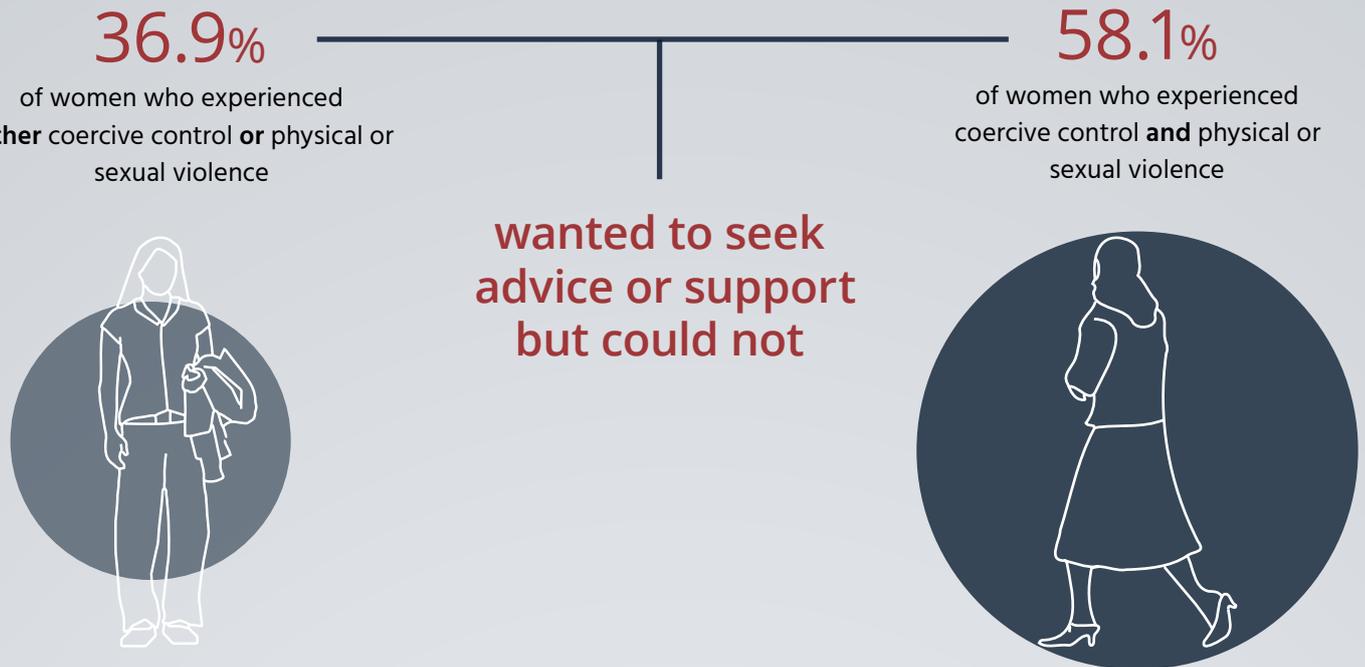
Among women who had experienced physical or sexual violence from their current or former cohabiting partner prior to February 2020,



Barriers to help-seeking

Available evidence in Australia about the number of domestic violence incidents reported to police in March and April of 2020 is mixed. Some state and territory police agencies have seen an increase in the number of reports of domestic violence, while others have seen no change. These changes have also sometimes varied month by month within single jurisdictions. This could be partly explained by many women reporting that safety concerns were a barrier to help-seeking (consistent with concerns raised by many in the support services sector that they found it difficult to engage with women during this period of social distancing). National and international research consistently demonstrates that many factors and barriers influence reporting rates, and that domestic and family violence is often under-reported.

On at least one occasion, 36.9% of women who experienced **either** coercive control **or** physical or sexual violence reported that they wanted to seek advice or support in the three months prior to the survey but could not. This figure rises to 58.1% among those who experienced both forms of abuse.



Definitions:

Coercive control

For the purpose of this study, women were considered to have experienced coercive control if they had experienced three or more forms of non-physical forms of emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours in the three months prior to the survey. See note in “Limitations” on the operationalisation of “coercive control” in this study and the need to exercise caution when interpreting results associated with this term.

Domestic violence

Physical violence, sexual violence or emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviour that occurs between current or former intimate partners.

Partner

A person with whom the respondent lives, or lived with at some point in a married or de facto relationship during the last 12 months. This includes current and former partners, and may also be described as a cohabiting partner.

Partner violence

Physical or sexual violence and emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour that occurs within current and former cohabiting relationships.

Limitations:

The AIC report’s authors draw attention to the limitations of the study in a [technical appendix](#), including, notably, the operationalisation of “coercive control”. As noted in the ANROWS policy brief [Defining and responding to coercive control](#), coercive control is an attack on autonomy, liberty and equality (Stark, 2007). It is accomplished through a wide range of abusive tactics (which may or may not involve actual physical or sexual abuse) aimed at domination and control over the victim’s personhood.

Further limitations of the study follow:

- Because it is a cross-sectional survey, cause–effect relationships cannot be established (only suggested).
- Women who could not safely complete the survey were discouraged from participating (due to safety concerns), and some women who completed the survey may have chosen not to disclose the violence or abuse they had experienced given the sensitive nature of the questions, both of which mean that it is possible that the true level of violence has been under-reported.

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA’S NATIONAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN’S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

Source

Boxall, H., Morgan, A., & Brown, B. *The prevalence of domestic violence among women during the COVID-19 pandemic* (Statistical Bulletin no. 28). <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb28>

Suggested citation

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