

Relationships Australia VICTORIA Perth, August 2016

## The Annual Women's Health Update 2016

### Family and domestic violence – The crucial role of the GP

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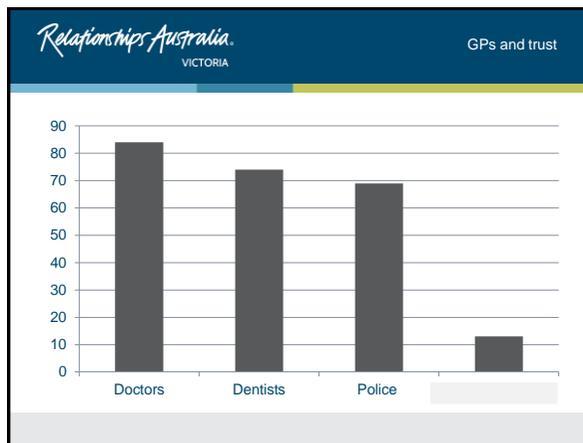
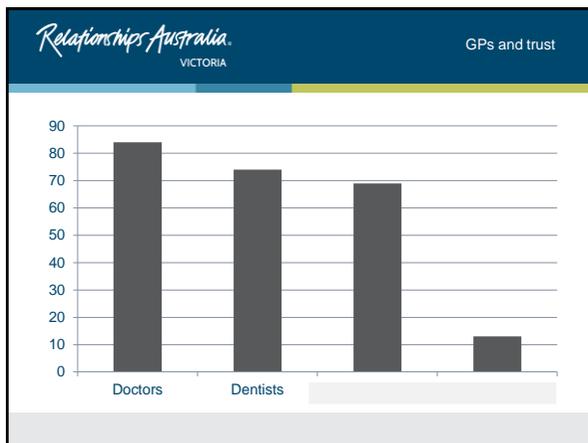
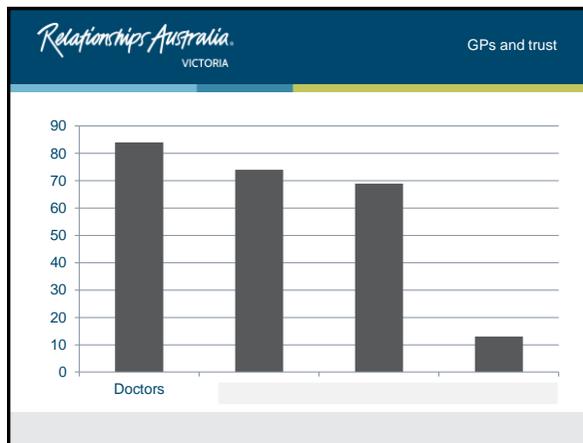
Relationships Australia VICTORIA Introduction

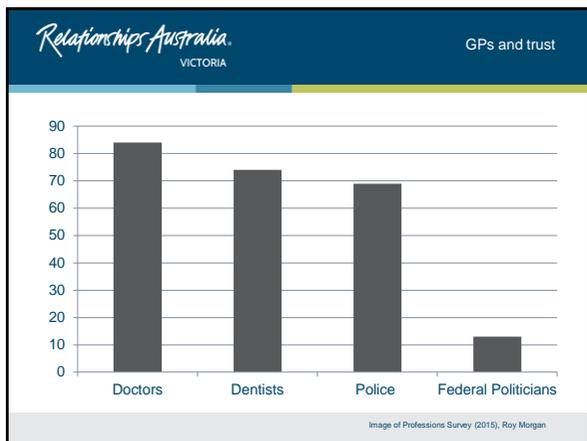
During today's session:

- Relationships Australia
- The role of the GP
- What to do in the room?
- Questions.

Relationships Australia VICTORIA About Relationships Australia

- Relationships Australia is a valued provider of family and relationship support services for individuals, couples, families and communities.
- We are an Australian community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations.
- We offer services across the state that include counselling, family dispute resolution (mediation) and a range of family and community support and education programs.





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GPs and trust

- Trust of GPs is very high.
- Often the first time that people are disclosing their experience or use of family violence.
- Positives.
- Challenges.

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Diagnosis and identification

Physical:

- obvious physical signs e.g. unexplained bruising, to injuries that are on parts of the body hidden from view, complications in pregnancy, STDs, patterns of injury, or chronic conditions such as headaches and muscular pain.

Psychological/Behavioural:

- emotional distress, sleeping and eating difficulty, self-harm or suicide attempts, drug or alcohol abuse, psychosomatic and emotional complaints.

Source AMA 2015.

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Considerations

How does your patient present, and who do they present with?

- Accompanied by a partner who does most of the talking and wants to remain with their partner.
- Seems uncomfortable in their presence.
- Nervous, evasive or ashamed.
- Reluctant to follow advice.
- Low confidence.
- Social isolation.
- Explanation of the injuries is unconvincing or incomplete.

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Responding to potential victims

Must be seen and assessed separately.

Curious, non-judgmental open questions/questions assessing their situation, including:

- how are things for you and your children at home?
- tell me about how you and your partner are getting on together?
- is there anything else happening for you that may be related to your health?

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What do you need to know?

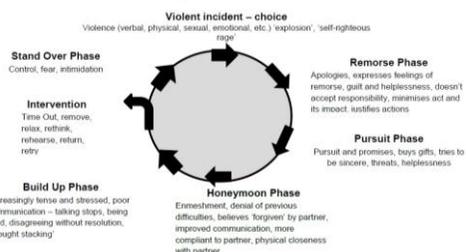
- How long?
- How often?
- How recent?
- How violent?
- How safe?
- Children.
- Referral.

How do family violence perpetrators present?

- Anxiety/Panic attacks
- Depression
- Victim identity
- Suicidality
- Trauma/history of abuse
- Stress at work and/or financial stress at home
- Lack of sleep
- They feel like things are getting "out of control"
- Alcohol and other drug issues
- Parenting issues
- Chronic pain
- Zoning out
- Violence.

- Engagement is critical.
- Curious, non-judgmental open questions/questions assessing their situation.
- Anticipate resistance.
- A point on collusion.
- Referral.

### Cycle of Violence



- What about men who are victims of family violence?
- What about women who are perpetrators?
- Do Men's Behaviour Change Programs work?

The *Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975* definition of family violence:

- For the purposes of this Act, **family violence** means violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family (the **family member**), or causes the family member to be fearful.

This includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, spiritual, damaging property, financial, harming pets, social abuse and isolation, stalking, controlling, or exposing a child to any of these forms of violence.

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Definitions: Children

Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 section 4 AB (3).  
"a child is **exposed** to family violence if the child sees or hears family violence or otherwise experiences the effects of family violence."

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Family violence facts

- **1 in 3** women have experienced **physical violence**, since the age of 15.
- **1 in 5** women has experienced **sexual violence**.
- **1 in 4** women has experienced **emotional abuse** by a current or former partner.
- In Australia, **1 woman dies** at the hands of a current or former partner **almost every week**.
- Women in Australia are three times more likely than men to experience violence at the hands of a partner.
- Over half the women who experience violence had children in their care at the time of the violence.

Source: Our Watch [www.ourwatch.com.au](http://www.ourwatch.com.au)

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Higher risk groups

- **Young women** aged 18 – 24 years experience significantly higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women in older age groups.
- There is growing evidence that **women with a disability** are more likely to experience violence. For example, 90% of Australian women with an intellectual disability have been subjected to sexual abuse.
- **Indigenous women** experience disproportionately high levels of family violence.

Source: Our Watch [www.ourwatch.com.au](http://www.ourwatch.com.au)

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The extent of family violence

- Intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to preventable ill health, death and disease for Victorian women aged 15 to 44.
- The cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy in 2009 was \$13.6 billion. It is calculated to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2012-22 without the right preventative action.
- Men also experience family violence, but in considerably different and less circumstances. Men are more likely to experience violence by other men in public places.

Source: Our Watch [www.ourwatch.com.au](http://www.ourwatch.com.au)

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Witnessing family violence is a form of abuse

- Child and young person **abuse and neglect**: Any non-accidental behaviour by parents, caregivers, other adults or older adolescents that is outside of the norms of conduct and entails a substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm to a child or young person. Such behaviours may be intentional or unintentional and can include ...physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect, sexual abuse, **or witnessing of family violence**.
- Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) Child Family Community Australia (CFCS) Resource Sheet, June 2012, [www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications](http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications)