



## Reporting Violence to Police: A survey of victims attending domestic violence services

Emma Birdsey and Lucy Snowball

**Aim:** The aim of the study was to investigate what proportion of domestic violence (DV) victims who seek help from DV services choose not to report the violence to police and to investigate factors and reasons associated with non-reporting.

**Method:** Data was collected by interviewing 300 victims attending DV services. The interview was conducted by telephone and included questions on (a) victim characteristics, (b) characteristics of victims' most recent incident, and (c) victims' reasons for not reporting to police. Descriptive and bivariate analyses were undertaken to determine characteristics associated with the decision to report a domestic violence incident to police.

**Results:** Approximately half (51.8%) of victims reported their most recent incident to the police. Victims were more likely to report if they had an AVO against the offender, if their property had been damaged, if they were physically injured, if the abuse was physical or sexual, if they felt their children were at risk or if they had reported previous DV incidents. Victims were less likely to report if they were pregnant or experienced more than 5 previous incidents of abuse. The top three reasons for not reporting to police were fear of revenge/further violence (13.9%), embarrassment/shame (11.8%), or the incident was too trivial/unimportant (11.8%). The primary barrier to reporting, according to those interviewed, is that police either do not understand or are not proactive in handling DV (17.1%).

**Conclusion:** Half of victims reported DV to the police, leaving the remainder without official legal intervention and professional support.

**Keywords:** counselling, domestic abuse, domestic violence services, refuge, reporting to the police, victim survey, willingness to report

### Introduction

Less than half of all victims of violence at the hands of spouses or other family members report their abuse to the police (Grech & Burgess, 2011). There are three reasons for concern about this. First, when domestic violence (DV) goes unreported, offenders go undetected and unpunished, thereby robbing the law of any deterrent effect it might have had. Second, failure to report may mean that victims do not receive the mental and physical support they need or would benefit from receiving (Bosick, Rennison, Gover, & Dodge, 2012). Third, inaccurate information on the actual number of incidents may lead to the misallocation of funds for DV management (Bosick et al., 2012).

Large scale representative sample surveys (e.g. ABS, 2006) provide some information on the prevalence of different

reasons for not reporting intimate partner or family violence to police. The first Australian survey on violence against women (ABS, 1996), for example, offered respondents a variety of possible reasons for non-reporting, and asked them to nominate the main reason. The options included: 'dealt with it myself', 'did not regard it as a serious offence', 'did not think they could do anything', 'fear of the perpetrator' and 'shame/embarrassment'. The most commonly endorsed options were 'dealt with it myself' and 'did not regard it as a serious offence'. Similar options were put to women who participated in the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004). Similar results were obtained.

Findings such as these are useful because they give us accurate point estimates of the prevalence of various reasons for

reporting or not reporting DV violence to police. Phrases such as 'dealt with it myself', however, do not reveal very much about a victim's motives for not reporting violence to police. To be more specific, they reveal nothing about why so many victims elect to deal with violence themselves. The fact that a large percentage of female victims of male violence do not report it to police because they view the violence as 'not serious' is hardly surprising. Most of the assaults reported by women interviewed in such surveys involve little or no injury (see for example, ABS 1996, p. 20). The advantage of representative sample surveys is that they allow us to generalise findings to the population from which they are drawn. Additional insights, however, can sometimes be obtained from non-representative surveys of particular groups. Female victims of domestic violence who seek support, advice or assistance from services for victims of domestic violence are a group of particular interest to Government. Their reasons for reporting or not reporting violence to police may provide insight into how the criminal justice response to victims of violence might be improved. This report presents the results of a study designed to achieve this objective.

## Aim

The aim of the study was to investigate what proportion of victims of domestic violence who seek help from domestic violence services choose not to report the violence to police and to investigate factors and reasons associated with non-reporting. It should be noted that while the term 'domestic violence' features prominently in what follows, the results relate principally to female victims of intimate partner violence.

There is not a great deal of research literature on reasons for non reporting of domestic assault to police. In their analysis of national survey data on violence against women, Coumarelos and Allen (1999) found that age, birthplace (Australia versus overseas), labour force status, injury and relationship between victim and offender were predictors of willingness to report. Women were less likely to report violence to police if they were born overseas or were unemployed. They were more likely to report violence if they had sustained injury or if the assailant was not the woman's current partner. Variables measuring age, language spoken at home, birthplace, relationship status, and assault seriousness were therefore included in the study. Also included were measures of the offender's gender, the location of the DV incident, number of previous incidents, years of abuse by the same partner and whether or not a previous incident of DV had been reported to police.

## Method

### Research strategy

To determine the prevalence of reporting, respondents in the survey were asked whether they had reported the most recent incident in which they were abused by someone with whom they had a domestic relationship. Abuse was defined as physical or sexual abuse, verbal abuse, being made to feel socially isolated, being overly controlled or having your

property damaged. Three strategies were employed to obtain a better understanding of the reasons for non-reporting. The first involved an analysis of the relationship between whether or not a victim reported violence to police and various victim and incident characteristics. The second involved providing victims of domestic violence with a list of possible reasons for not reporting the most recent act of violence to police and asking them to nominate the main reason. The third involved giving victims an open-ended opportunity to identify potential barriers to reporting.

### Sample

Participants in this study were recruited from a variety of DV services across NSW (including counselling services, refuges, advocacy services). All respondents were attending, or had recently attended (<5 years ago), a DV service.

### Recruitment procedure

A list of DV services across NSW was supplied by Women NSW. These DV services were then each sent a letter informing them that the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) was conducting a survey with people who had experienced DV and was seeking their assistance in finding clients who might be willing to participate in the survey. Services were also provided with posters and leaflets advertising the survey and inviting participation. Potential respondents were all informed that the survey was voluntary and that any data obtained in relation to the study would remain confidential and anonymous. Respondents were advised to contact the BOCSAR researcher carrying out the interview by phone or email (details were provided on the poster and leaflet). Potential respondents were offered a \$25 Woolworths gift voucher as payment for participating in the study.

A total of 376 victims contacted BOCSAR, gave their names and contact numbers and offered to be interviewed. The first author contacted each of these respondents and arranged a time to do the interview. The interview began with a brief introduction to the research topic, an explanation of what DV constitutes (for the purposes of this study) and the types of relationships in which DV can occur. The \$25 Woolworths gift voucher was forwarded to the victim upon completion of the interview. Victims younger than 18 years were not interviewed. Once 300 interviews were completed no further victims were interviewed. Data collection spanned 3 months.

### The survey

The survey consisted of seven sections:

- A) Participant demographics (All respondents completed this section)
- B) The most recent incident of domestic violence (All respondents completed this section)
- C) Reasons for not reporting to police (Participants only completed this section if they did not report their most recent incident to the police)
- D) The first incident of domestic violence (Participants only completed this section if their first incident occurred within the last 5 years)

- E) Help from a professional (Participants only completed this section if they completed section D)
- F) Reasons for not telling or getting help from a professional (Participants only completed this section if they did not tell a professional about their first incident of violence)
- G) Acquisition and accessibility to the domestic violence service being utilised (All respondents completed this section)

This report only deals with responses to questions in sections A, B and C.

## Variables

The key dependent variable in the study was whether or not the respondent reported the last incident of violence to police. The independent variables measuring victim characteristics were:

- Gender
- Age
- Indigenous status (Indigenous versus non-Indigenous)
- Postcode (urban versus rural)
- Statistical division (Sydney versus rest of NSW)
- Mother's country of birth (Australia versus elsewhere)
- Father's country of birth (Australia versus elsewhere)
- (Respondent) born in Australia or English speaking country versus born in a non-English speaking country
- Relationship status (married/not married, divorced/not divorced, single versus not single)
- Main source of income (employed versus other income, Government benefits versus other income)

The independent variables measuring incident characteristics were:

- When the last incident occurred (less than one month ago versus more than one month ago)
- Location (in the home of the victim versus not in the home, by phone/text/email versus other location, in the street or other open location versus another location)
- Relationship between victim and offender (current spouse versus other relationship, former spouse versus other relationship, relative versus other relationship)
- The most serious kind of abuse that occurred in the incident (physical assault versus other types of abuse, verbal abuse versus other types of abuse, harassment versus other types of abuse, emotional abuse versus other types of abuse)
- Indicators of seriousness (AVO against offender versus no AVO, pregnant versus not pregnant, felt children were at risk versus children not at risk, felt ashamed versus not ashamed, property damaged versus no property damage, physically injured versus not physically injured)
- Number of previous incidents by the same offender
- Number of years of abuse by the same offender

## Analysis

Bivariate analyses were carried out to examine the relationship between victim and incident characteristics and reporting to the police. A Chi-square test for independence was used to determine whether the relationship was statistically significant at a 1, 5 and 10 per cent level. When the relationship between the characteristic and the outcome variable could be associated with a linear trend (e.g. the number of previous incident of abuse) the Mantel-Haenszel Chi-square test was used instead. Small numbers can affect the ability of these tests to determine a difference so where possible, and appropriate, some categories were grouped in the final analysis.

## Results

### Participant characteristics

In total, 300 victims of DV were interviewed. Table 1 shows the characteristics of these respondents. Sixty percent (60.7%) were aged between 25 and 44 years. Twenty-two percent (22.3%) were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent. Over half (55.6%) lived in an urban area of NSW and one-third (34.5%) lived in the Sydney metropolitan area. Nine in 10 (90.7%) spoke English in their home, four in five (83.0%) were born in Australia and one in 10 (10.0%) were born in a non-English speaking country.

### Characteristics of most recent violent incident

Table 2 shows the characteristics of victims' most recent incident of DV. Over half of incidents occurred more than 6 months ago (54.0%). Nearly three-quarters (73.0%) occurred in the victims' homes and one in ten (11.7%) in the home of a friend or relative. Nine in 10 (89.0%) victims experienced abuse by a male offender. At the time of their most recent incident, 40.3 percent of victims were husband/wife/de facto with the offender and one-third (32.7%) were ex-husband/ex-wife/ex-de facto with the offender.

Table 3 provides information on the seriousness of the most recent incident. When asked to nominate the most serious kind of abuse that had occurred, nearly half (46.3%) of respondents stated physical assault, one-fifth (18.7%) stated verbal abuse and one in 10 nominated (9.4%) emotional abuse. Over one-quarter (28.4%) experienced property damage.

Over one-fifth (22.7%) of respondents held an AVO against the offender at the time of the incident; less than one in 10 (8.3%) female respondents were pregnant; and over half (54.0%) of respondents felt their children were at risk during the incident. Over two-thirds in the current survey (69.9%) reported feeling ashamed at what happened. Over one-third (38.8%) were physically injured in their most recent incident and, of these, nearly 40 percent (39.3%) sought medical treatment for their injuries. Over half (55.1%) of respondents estimated that they had experienced over 100 previous incidents of DV from the same offender and nearly half (47.1%) of all respondents estimated they had experienced abuse by the same offender for the last 1 to 5 years.

**Table 1. Participant characteristics**

		Frequency (N = 300)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	23	7.7
	Female	277	92.3
	Total	300	100.0
Age (years)	18 to 24	19	6.3
	25 to 34	88	29.3
	35 to 44	94	31.3
	45 to 54	73	24.3
	55 plus	26	8.7
	Total	300	100.0
	Indigenous status	Non-Indigenous	233
Aboriginal		65	21.7
Torres Strait Islander		2	0.7
Total		300	100.0
Postcode <sup>a</sup>	Urban	158	55.6
	Rural	126	44.4
	Total	284	100.0
Statistical Division <sup>b</sup>	Sydney Statistical Subdivision (SSD)	98	34.5
	NSW regional Statistical Divisions (SD)	186	65.5
	Total	284	100.0
English spoken at home	Yes	272	90.7
	No	28	9.3
	Total	300	100.0
Place of birth	Born in Australia	249	83.0
	Born in another English speaking country	21	7.0
	Born in a non-English speaking country	30	10.0
	Total	300	100.0
Current relationship status	Married/de facto	49	16.3
	In an intimate relationship	23	7.7
	Divorced	36	12.0
	Separated but not divorced	59	19.7
	Widowed	5	1.7
	Single	128	42.7
Total	300	100.0	
Main source of income	Government benefits	192	64.0
	Employed	93	31.0
	Other <sup>c</sup>	15	5.0
	Total	300	100.0

<sup>a</sup> Postcode was missing for 16 records.

<sup>b</sup> Statistical Division was missing for 16 records.

<sup>c</sup> Other includes no income, student allowance, dependent on others, retirement fund and rental income.

**Table 2. Characteristics of respondents' most recent incident of domestic violence**

		Frequency (N = 300)	Percent (%)
When the last incident occurred			
	Last 24 hours	9	3.0
	Last week	17	5.7
	Last month	51	17.0
	Last 6 months	61	20.3
	More than 6 months ago	162	54.0
	Total	300	100.0
Location of the incident			
	In the home of the victim	219	73.0
	In the home of a friend or relative of the victim	35	11.7
	At the work of the victim	21	7.0
	Other <sup>a</sup>	25	8.3
	Total	300	100.0
Offender gender			
	Male offender	267	89.0
	Female offender	27	9.0
	Some male, some female offenders	6	2.0
	Total	300	100.0
Relationship between the victim with the offender			
	Husband/wife/de facto	121	40.3
	Ex-husband/ex-wife/ex-de facto	98	32.7
	Intimate partner	25	8.3
	Boyfriend/girlfriend	14	4.7
	Relative	15	5.0
	Other <sup>b</sup>	27	9.0
	Total	300	100.0

<sup>a</sup> Other includes in the street or other open land (e.g. beach), recreation area (e.g. playground), pub/bar/nightclub/restaurant/licensed premises, public or private vehicle, at a train station, bus stop or interchange, shopping centre, phone/text/email and holiday accommodation.

<sup>b</sup> Other includes former intimate partner, ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend, date, child and flatmate/housemate.

## Reporting of most recent incident of violence to police

Table 4 shows the number of respondents interviewed who had reported at least one of their previous DV incidents to the police. Also shown in this table is the number of respondents who reported the most recent DV incident to police. Nearly two-thirds (62.8%) of respondents had reported at least one of their previous incidents of DV to the police and just over half (51.8%) of the respondents interviewed had reported their most recent incident of violence to the police.

As noted earlier, respondents were asked their reasons for not reporting the most recent incident to police. Respondents were then asked to choose the most important reason for not reporting. The options presented to the respondent were as follows:

**Table 3. Seriousness of the most recent incident of DV**

	Frequency (N = 300)	Percent (%)
The most serious kind of abuse that occurred during the incident		
Physical assault	139	46.3
Emotional abuse	28	9.4
Psychological abuse/mental abuse	15	5.0
Controlling behaviour/Social isolation	10	3.3
Verbal abuse	56	18.7
Harassment/stalking/intimidation	31	10.4
Other <sup>a</sup>	21	7.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Indicators of the seriousness of the incident		
Current AVO at the time of the incident	68	22.7
No AVO	232	77.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Victim was pregnant at the time of the incident	23	8.3
Victim not pregnant	254	91.7
<b>Total</b> <sup>b</sup>	<b>277</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Victim felt his/her children were at risk during the incident	162	54.0
Did not feel children were at risk	138	46.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Victim felt ashamed at what had happened	209	69.9
Not ashamed	90	30.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Victim had property damaged	86	28.7
No property damage	214	71.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Victim was physically injured	117	39.0
Not injured	183	61.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>
If the victim was injured whether medical treatment was needed	46	39.3
Injured but no medical treatment needed	71	60.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Number of previous DV incidents by the same offender <sup>c</sup>		
Less than 5	16	5.8
5 to 10	44	15.9
11 to 50	48	17.4
51 to 100	16	5.8
100 plus	152	55.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Number of years of DV from the same offender <sup>d</sup>		
Less 1 year	17	6.1
1 to 5	132	47.1
6 to 10	63	22.5
11 to 15	30	10.7
16 plus	38	13.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> Other includes indecent assault, face to face threatened physical assault, non face to face threatened physical assault, property damage and breach of AVO.

<sup>b</sup> Whether the victim was pregnant at the time of the incident was missing for 23 records as these were male respondents.

<sup>c</sup> Number of previous DV incidents by the same offender was missing for 24 records.

<sup>d</sup> Number of years of DV from the same offender was missing for 20 records.

**Table 4. Willingness to reporting of domestic violence incidents to the police**

	Number (N = 300)	%
At least one previous DV incident <sup>a</sup>		
Victim reported the incident to the police	177	62.8
Victim did not report the incident to the police	105	37.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Most recent DV incident <sup>b</sup>		
Victim reported the incident to the police	155	51.8
Victim did not report the incident to the police	144	48.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup> At least one previous DV incident reported to the police was missing 18 records as 18 respondents had never experienced a previous incident of DV.

<sup>b</sup> Most recent DV incident reported to the police was missing for 1 respondent.

1. Person who abused me prevented me through physical force
2. Person who abused me threatened physical violence
3. Person who abused me pleaded with me not to report
4. Family members/friends prevented me from reporting
5. Embarrassment/shame
6. Sought help from another professional
7. Private and personal matter
8. The incident was too trivial/unimportant
9. There was nothing police could do
10. Police would be unwilling to do anything
11. Bad/disappointing experience with reporting previous incidents to police
12. Did not want the person who abused me charged /in trouble
13. Afraid of revenge from the person who abused me
14. Fear of further violence
15. Too confused/upset/injured
16. Feared losing children
17. Feared losing home
18. Feared losing income
19. Unsure whether the person who abused me had committed a crime
20. Person who abused me didn't mean to cause any harm

Figure 1 shows responses to this question. The most commonly cited reasons were fear of revenge or further violence from the offender (13.9%), feelings of shame or embarrassment (11.8%), and a belief that the incident was too trivial or unimportant (11.8%). One in 10 (10.4%) respondents, however, stated that they had not reported the incident because

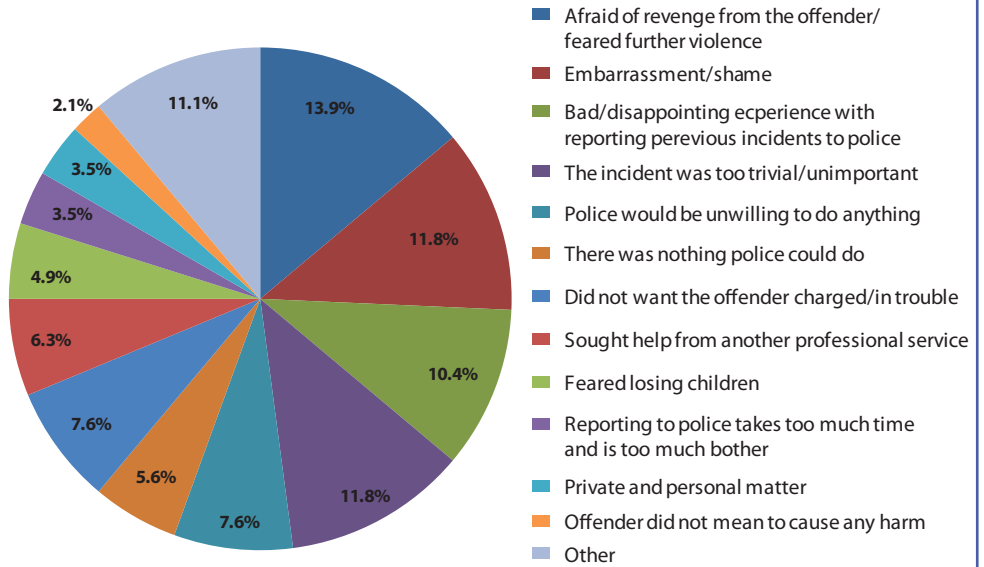
they had previously had a bad or disappointing experience with the police. A further 7.6 percent had not reported the matter because they thought the police would be unwilling to do anything about the violence.

After being asked the most important reason for not reporting to police, respondents were asked 'What would have made it easier for you to report the most recent incident to police?' The question was open-ended but the responses have been grouped into the categories displayed in Figure 2. Of respondents who did not report their most recent incident to the police, nearly one-fifth (17.1%) stated that a barrier to reporting was that the police are not sufficiently understanding or proactive in their handling of DV. The second and third most common barriers were that respondents perceived their abuse as not serious enough to warrant a report (11.4%), and a perceived lack of help and advice for respondents before and after reporting to the police (7.9%). It should be noted, however, that over one-third (38.6%) of respondents could not identify any barrier to reporting DV to the police.

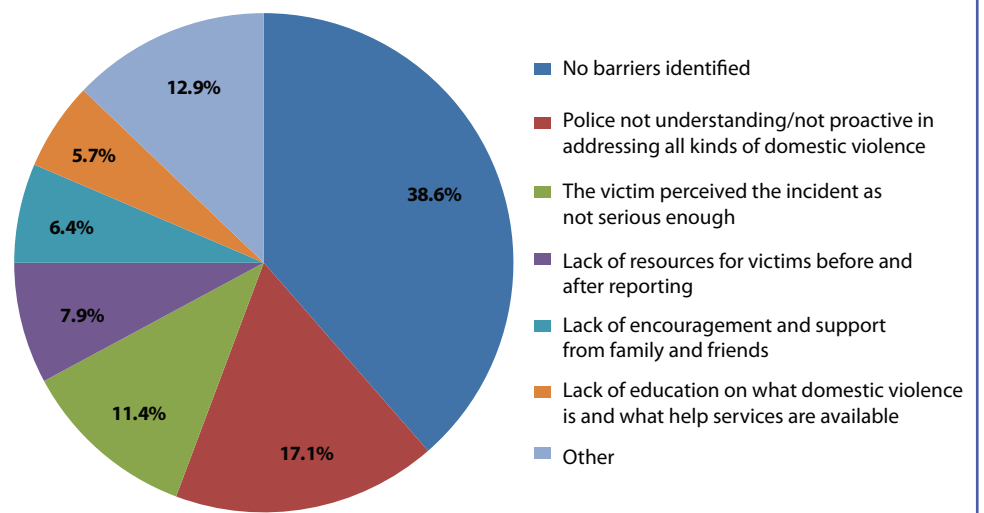
Although many respondents had not reported their most recent incident of violence to the police, nearly two-thirds (63.2%) of them stated that they were 'happy' they had not reported the violence. The three most common reasons given for this were (1) the abuse did not get worse (25.0%), (2) the victim said they handled the situation themselves and did not have to deal with the embarrassment of police invading their privacy (23.8%), and (3) the victim said they had avoided the stress associated with reporting DV to police (23.8%). Of the one-third (36.8%) of respondents who said they were unhappy they had not reported the most recent incident to police, over half (56.3%) stated that they were unhappy because there was no justice and the offender would go unpunished. The remainder said they were unhappy because the abuse will ultimately continue (43.8%).

Even though two-thirds of respondents said they were happy they had not reported the most recent incident to police, nearly one-third (29.2%) of respondents said, in hindsight, they wished they had sought help from the police or another professional

**Figure 1. Primary reason for not reporting their most recent incident of domestic violence to the police (N=144)**



**Figure 2. Barriers to reporting most recent incident of domestic violence to the police (N = 140)**



NB: Data on this question were missing for four respondents.

service sooner than they had. About 14 percent (14.4 %) said they wished they had left the abusive relationship earlier. Likewise, when respondents were asked about the advice they would give another victim who had not reported their DV to the police and not sought help from anyone, nearly one-quarter (21.9%) suggested that they should report it to the police. One-fifth (18.7%) suggested the victim should leave the abusive relationship, 17.0 percent suggested the person should at least speak to family or friends, and 13.4 percent said they should seek help from a professional DV service.

### Characteristics associated with the likelihood of reporting DV

The bivariate relationship between the likelihood of reporting the most recent incident of DV and victim and incident characteristics are presented in Table 5. Also indicated is

whether the Chi-square test for independence or the Mantel-Haenszel Chi-square test is significant. Significance does not suggest a causal relationship between the characteristic and the outcome variable. Rather it suggests that there is an association between the two variables examined (i.e. it is more common for victims who report to be in one category than victims who do not report).

From Table 5 it is clear that the following characteristics are associated with an *increased* likelihood of reporting:

- Had an AVO in place at the time of the incident
- Being the victim of physical or sexual abuse
- Feeling your children were at risk
- Being physically injured in the incident
- Having property damaged
- Previously reporting an incident of abuse

The following characteristics are associated with a *decreased* likelihood of reporting:

- Being pregnant at the time of the incident
- Having more than five previous incidents of abuse by the same person

The fact that no relationship was found between reporting to police and other factors, such as age, non-English speaking, marital status and number of years since first abuse occurred (all of which show differing rates of reporting across the categories) does not necessarily mean these factors are irrelevant. It is quite possible that these factors exert an effect that could not be detected because of the small sample size in the current study.

## Summary and discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate what proportion of domestic violence victims who seek help from domestic violence services choose not to report the violence to police and to investigate factors and reasons associated with non-reporting. This study found that, consistent with other victimisation surveys (e.g., ABS, 2010), just over half (51.8%) of the respondents surveyed in this study reported their most recent incident to the police. Of the respondents who had experienced more than one incident of DV, nearly two-thirds (62.8%) had reported at least one prior incident to the police.

The top three reasons for respondents not reporting their most recent abuse to the police were they were afraid of revenge or said they feared further violence from the offender (13.9%); were too embarrassed or ashamed (11.8%); and/or thought the incident was too trivial or unimportant (11.8%). These reasons for not reporting are largely similar to those reported by the ABS (2011). The bivariate results suggest respondents were more willing to report their DV incident to police if they had an AVO against the offender, if they had experienced property damage, if they were physically injured as a result, if the abuse was physical or sexual, if they felt their children were at risk or if they had reported at least one previous incident of DV to the police. Respondents were less likely to report to the police if they were pregnant or they had experienced more than five incidents of abuse by the same person.

It is possible that respondents with an AVO supporting their claims may be more likely to report because they have greater awareness of legal options for dealing with DV. They may also be more confident that the police will respond and less likely to perceive the incident as trivial or unimportant. Furthermore, these respondents may have previously experienced abuse severe enough for them to seek an AVO against the offender. Respondents who had experienced property damage might feel they can report the incident to the police more readily than those who were verbally abused as they have physical evidence to support their claims and they may place more weight on the seriousness of the incident. These findings are largely consistent with other research. For example, an analysis of victim survey data (ABS, 2010) found that more serious incidents of abuse are more likely to be reported to the police (Grech & Burgess, 2011). The finding that respondents who have experienced fewer previous incidents of DV are more likely to report to the police compared with respondents which have experience a greater number of incidents is surprising and further research is needed to investigate the reasons behind this. Respondents who have reported previous incidents of abuse may be more likely to report their most recent incident as they may be better informed of what constitutes DV and informed of the reporting process.

While approximately half of respondents did not report their abuse to the police, 63.2 percent stated they were happy and satisfied with their decision because (1) the victim thought they had avoided further abuse (25.0%), (2) they preferred handling the situation themselves in order to avoid the embarrassment of police invading their privacy (23.8%), and (3) they did not experience the stress involved in reporting the incident (23.8%). Despite this, nearly one-third (29.2%) of respondents wished they had sought help from the police or a professional service earlier. The top three barriers to reporting to police as identified by respondents who did not report their most recent incident to police were: (1) police were not understanding or proactive in addressing all kinds of DV (17.1%), (2) the incident was not serious enough (11.4%), or (3) there is a lack of help resources before and after reporting an incident to the police (7.9%). This said, the majority of respondents (38.6%) could not identify any barriers to reporting.

The barriers to reporting and the motivating factors for not reporting most commonly identified in this survey suggest that there is still some way to go in educating the public, police and respondents about the nature of DV abuse, including the range and seriousness of behaviours that DV encompasses. It has been argued that the criminal justice system may not be as well practiced in handling less serious kinds of non-violent abuse, such as emotional abuse between a husband and wife, as it is in dealing with complaints of physical abuse or abuse of property (Coumarelos & Allen, 1999). Without the physical evidence of victimisation police may be less willing or able to charge an offender and courts may be less willing to convict offenders (Coumarelos & Allen, 1999). Wangmann (2012) has argued that while ADVOs have the potential to be a progressive mechanism and to incorporate a broader understanding of IPV, they are still

**Table 5: Bivariate relationship between likelihood of reporting the most recent incident and selected victim and incident characteristics**

Characteristic		Percent reporting most recent incident	Percent not reporting most recent incident
Gender	Female	52.5	47.5
	Male	43.5	56.5
Age	18-29	66.7	33.3
	30-39	50.6	49.5
	40-49	45.1	54.9
	50+	52.7	47.3
Indigenous status	Indigenous	48.5	51.5
	Non-Indigenous	52.8	47.2
English spoken at home	Yes	50.6	49.5
	No	64.3	35.7
Primary income source	Full time employment	51.3	48.7
	Part time employment	50.0	50.0
	Benefits	53.9	46.2
	Other	60.0	40.0
Marital status <sup>#</sup>	Married	42.9	57.1
	In a relationship	60.9	39.1
	Single	56.7	43.3
	Separated	45.8	54.2
	Divorced	55.6	44.4
Pregnant at the time of the most recent incident <sup>*</sup>	Yes	34.8	65.2
	No	53.3	46.7
AVO in place <sup>***</sup>	Yes	73.1	26.9
	No	45.7	54.3
Relationship to abuser	Spouse	52.1	47.9
	Ex-spouse	43.9	56.1
	Partner	50.0	50.0
	Other	64.6	35.4
Type of abuse <sup>***</sup>	Physical or sexual	64.1	35.9
	Verbal	30.4	69.6
	Stalking	51.6	48.4
	Other	42.4	57.6
Felt children were at risk <sup>*</sup>	Yes	57.1	42.9
	No	45.7	54.4
Felt ashamed	Yes	54.6	45.5
	No	45.6	54.4
Physically injured <sup>***</sup>	Yes	66.4	33.6
	No	42.6	57.4
Property was damaged <sup>***</sup>	Yes	71.8	28.2
	No	43.9	56.1
Number of times abused by same person <sup>***</sup>	Never	76.5	23.5
	Less than 5	82.4	17.7
	5 to 10	64.4	35.6
	11 to 19	54.6	45.5
	20 to 50	51.4	48.7
	51 to 100	18.8	81.3
	100+	44.1	55.9
Years this abuse occurred	Less than 1	64.7	35.3
	1 to 5	53.8	46.2
	6 to 10	46.0	54.0
	11 to 15	40.0	60.0
	16+	47.4	52.6
Reported previous incidents of abuse <sup>***</sup>	Yes	65.5	34.5
	No	24.8	75.2

\* 10% level of significance    \*\* 5% level of significance    \*\*\* 1% level of significance

# The widowed category was removed due to small numbers.



being used in a narrow context and focus on discreet incidents of violence rather than a pattern of abuse. The full potential of ADVOs has yet to be realised (Wangmann, 2012).

The provision of specialist DV care to respondents when they initially report an incident to the police so that immediate follow-up care and support can be offered may be one option to address the issue of low reporting. While this may not necessarily increase the conviction or charge rate of DV offenders, it may improve reporting rates as respondents come to learn that reporting to official sources can help them access the necessary resources which could potentially help reduce the occurrence of future abuse. Providing respondents with better and more publicly accessible information on the current legal methods used to address DV, the types of victim help services available, and any recent reforms in the area of DV may also have an impact on victim reporting rates (Coumarelos & Allen, 1999).

It is important to note that these findings arise from a study of respondents of domestic assault who were recruited through DV services. Although some of our findings resonate with those of other more representative surveys of respondents (see for example ABS, 1996; ABS, 2006; Grech & Burgess 2011; People, 2005), we cannot be sure that the respondents interviewed for this study are representative of domestic violence respondents in general. In particular, the results reported here may not be true of DV respondents who do not access DV services in NSW. Surveying this specific group of respondents has allowed us to conduct more in-depth interviews with respondents of domestic violence than is possible in general population surveys. Even if our quantitative findings are not fully reflective of the experiences and views of respondents of domestic violence in general, they may still be useful in developing more effective ways of preventing such violence and providing better services to respondents of domestic violence. Just over half of victims attending a DV service had reported their most recent incident to the police, leaving the remainder without official legal intervention and possibly without the professional support needed to leave an abusive relationship (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009).

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the following people and organisations. At BOCSAR, Craig Jones, Clare Ringland, Lily Trimboli and Suzanne Poynton for discussion and advice. Candy Jacques at Liverpool Women's Health Centre, Vicki Johnston at The Deli Women & Children's Centre, Susan Smith at the Sydney Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service, and Anuna Boughton at Women's Activities and Self-Help House. The DV services across NSW which helped promote the survey to victims of domestic violence and Women NSW for commissioning this investigation.

## References

- Akers, C., & Kaukinen, C. (2009). The police reporting behaviour of intimate partner violence victims. *Journal of Family Violence*, 24, 159-171.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996). *Women's Safety Australia 1996* (Cat. No. 4128.0). Retrieved from [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/F16680629C465E03CA256980007C4A81/\\$File/41280\\_1996.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/F16680629C465E03CA256980007C4A81/$File/41280_1996.pdf)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006). *Personal Safety Survey* (Cat. No. 4906.0). Retrieved from [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/056A404DAA576AE6CA2571D00080E985/\\$File/49060\\_2005%20\(reissue\).pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/056A404DAA576AE6CA2571D00080E985/$File/49060_2005%20(reissue).pdf)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010). *Crime victimisation, Australia, 2008-09*. (Cat No. 4530.0). Retrieved from Australian Bureau of Statistics website [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/C153E64EDD32A47DCA2576CD00184756/\\$File/45300\\_2008-09.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/C153E64EDD32A47DCA2576CD00184756/$File/45300_2008-09.pdf)
- Bosick, S. J., Rennison, C. M., Gover, A. R., & Dodge, M. (2012). Reporting violence to the police: Predictors through the life course. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 40, 441-451.
- Coumarelos, C., & Allen, J. (1999). *Predicting women's responses to violence: The 1996 Women's Safety Survey* (Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 46). Retrieved from NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research website: [http://www.agd.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll\\_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/CJB47.pdf/\\$file/CJB47.pdf](http://www.agd.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/CJB47.pdf/$file/CJB47.pdf)
- Grech, K., & Burgess, M. (2011). *Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults: 2001 to 2010* (Crime and Justice Statistics No. 61). Retrieved from NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research website: [http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll\\_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/bb61.pdf/\\$file/bb61.pdf](http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/bb61.pdf/$file/bb61.pdf)
- Mouzos, J., & Makkai, T. (2004). *Women's experiences of male violence: Findings from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)* (Research and Public Policy Series No. 56). Retrieved from the Australian Institute of Criminology website: <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/5/8/D/%7B58D8592E-CEF7-4005-AB11-B7A8B4842399%7DRPP56.pdf>
- People, J. (2005). *Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults*. Crime and Justice Bulletin (No. 89). Retrieved from NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research website [http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll\\_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/CJB89.pdf/\\$file/CJB89.pdf](http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/vwFiles/CJB89.pdf/$file/CJB89.pdf)
- Wangmann, J. (2012). Incidents v context: How does the NSW Protection Order System understand intimate partner violence? *Sydney Law Review*, 34 (4), 695-719.