

Domestic Violence against Women: Policy, Practice and Solutions in the Australian Context

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The focus of this chapter is domestic violence against women. While domestic violence against women has existed for many centuries, it is only since the late 1960s that such violence was named and described. Before this time there was no commonly used term to describe male partners who were violent and abusive to their female partners. It was largely as a result of significant feminist activism from the late 1960s onwards in Australia, the United Kingdom and North America that domestic violence or “wife battering”, as it was earlier referred to in North America (eg, Gayford, 1975), was named as a social problem that affected a large number of (then mostly) married women. There were two key aspects to feminists raising awareness about the issue: one was to highlight its incidence and significant negative effects, the other was to work towards its elimination through education and direct interventions by the state and non-government bodies.

As knowledge about domestic violence has developed, the definition and understandings of domestic violence have expanded. The United Nations considers male violence against women, and therefore domestic violence, as a violation of human rights. This has been influential in how Australian governments have defined domestic violence in their policy documents (see *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children: Council of Australian Governments, 2013*). Most definitions generally contain three main elements:

1. Descriptions of the behaviours that constitute domestic violence.
2. The intention of those perpetrating domestic violence.
3. The impact of domestic violence on those subjected to such violence.

The definition currently used by Australian governments to guide policy and determine interventions is as follows:

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power

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