

Family violence, homelessness and 'safe at home'

Data state of knowledge, October 2021



McAuley Community
Services for Women
A ministry of the Sisters of Mercy





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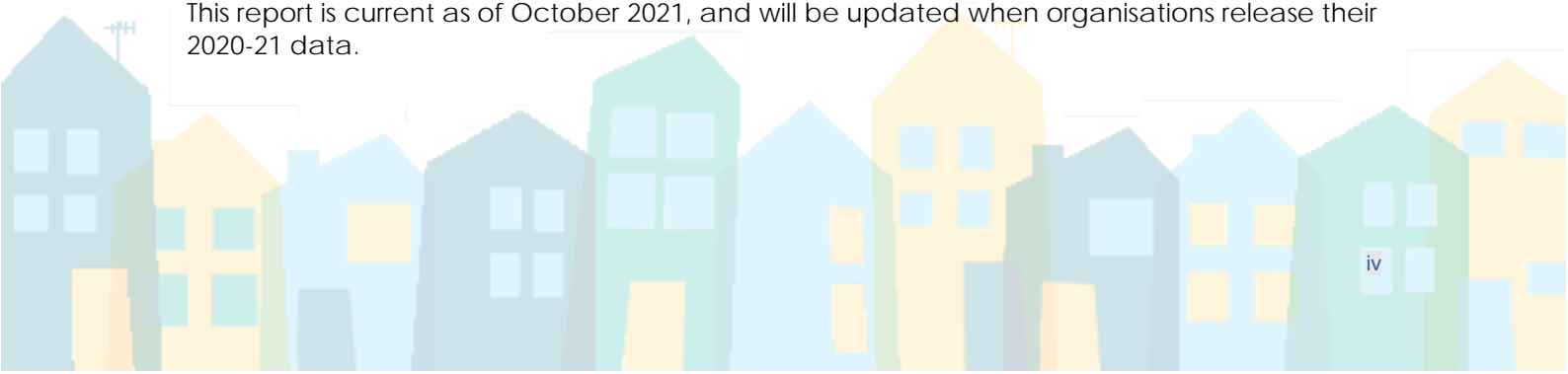
Notes on data

The following legends are used to note sources. It must be noted that there are different client counts from each source.

- AIHW 19-20 has a unique client count of 53202
- Crime Statistics Agency of Victoria counts 56600, but in its data visualizations the unique client number is 51,164. Even though their data is derived from AIHW, they advise: “During our processing of figures we remove clients that were believed to be referrals to an agency who were not able to be contacted or never received a service.”
- Because of these inconsistencies, the source is always noted in brackets and the tally may differ.
- In some instances data refers to numbers of support periods rather than individuals.

AIHW 19-20	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2019-2020 Available: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary Unique client no = 53202
AIHW 19-20 fact sheet (Vic)	https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/fact-sheets-by-state-and-territory
CSA 19-20 (data tables)	Crime Statistics Agency, Specialist Homelessness Services https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/download-data-tables Unique client no = 56600
CSA 19-20 (homelessness data visualization)	Crime Statistics Victoria Family Violence Data portal https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/specialist-homelessness-services-in-victoria Unique client number = 51164
MCSW census	Snapshot of 65 women supported by McAuley in June 2021
Victoria Police data tables	Crime Statistics Agency https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/download-data-tables no of family incidents 88214

This report is current as of October 2021, and will be updated when organisations release their 2020-21 data.



About the 'Safe At Home' project

McAuley Community Services for Women (McAuley) supports women and children who have experienced family violence and homelessness. In a submission to the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence, McAuley's main recommendations centred on the adoption of a 'safe at home' approach.

A 'Safe at Home' approach addresses this key question: why should victims of violence be the ones to leave? 'Safe at Home' is a prevention of homelessness response with safety a key criterion. It has a human rights basis and aims to rectify the injustice of women and children fleeing their homes for their own safety. Victim-survivors are enabled to live safely at home, remaining connected to their communities, schools and workplaces.

Since the Royal Commission, McAuley has remained concerned at the continuing, and growing, association between leaving a violent relationship and a drift into homelessness for women and children. It is a link that has persisted and worsened even against a backdrop of record investment in family violence services since the Royal Commission, and even though a 'safe at home' approach is noted as one of the seven targets of the Victorian Government's 10-Year Plan: *Victim-survivors will be supported to remain safely in their homes and connected to their community.*¹

In 2021 McAuley initiated a roundtable of services who play a role in supporting those affected by family violence and homelessness. This group has committed to exploring the system barriers which are preventing women and children from being 'safe at home' and developed a systems map. McAuley also undertook a process to analyse the data and what it tells us about the extent of the issue, and the factors that are involved.

It appears there is no official target or process to capture 'safe at home' outcomes in Victoria, which makes it hard to set targets or assess whether outcomes are improving over time. This paper gives us a snapshot of what is publicly known and an analysis of what further needs to be collected – or further examined - to understand the dimensions and causes of this issue. It provides a starting point for developing a baseline for measuring safe at home targets. It helps identify what we don't know and complements the identification of barriers in the system map which has been prepared for the working group.

The main source of data is on how many presentations to homelessness services are connected to family violence services. McAuley also drew on data provided by members of the Safe at Home Working Group, as well as our own data.

The data in this report is more fully understood and brought to life by what McAuley has been learning through consultations with those who have lived experience. (See *accompanying paper*).



Key findings in our understanding of 'safe at home' factors in Victoria

Growing numbers of women leaving family violence are becoming homeless

- In 2019-2020 45 per cent of presentations to homelessness services were because of family violence.
- The number of adult women presenting to specialist family violence, or general homelessness services, is 32405. Large numbers of children (14011) also accompanied their parents; 38 per cent of these were aged under 4.
- Numbers of unique clients presenting has grown by 30 per cent between 2015-2016 and 2019-2020.

Many women who present to homelessness services do not get assistance

- In 2019-2020 females made up 64% of all those unassisted
- 10,034 women aged over 18 are not assisted
- Of presenting women **not** assisted, the daily average figures are:
 - 25.8 are requests for short term or emergency accommodation
 - 20.3 are requesting 'other' housing/accommodation.

National data suggests only 3.2% of women who are experiencing family violence are currently receiving the long-term housing solutions they need. 7,690 women a year are returning to perpetrators due to having no-where affordable to live. ²

Missing and incomplete data creates significant challenges in understanding 'safe at home' factors

Some of the missing or incomplete data identified includes:

- Reasons for closure of support periods is 'don't know' in 12,806 (22 per cent) of those provided by specialist family violence services, pointing to either a major failure of compliance or many clients getting lost in the system.
- Overall, outcomes of 37% of cases where support periods are closed have no real known resolution as they have fallen into either 'lost contact with client', 'client didn't turn up', 'maximum service reached', 'other' or 'don't know'.
- There are already shortfalls in measuring 'unmet need' for those presenting to homelessness services in general and specifically those presenting because of family violence.
- A major difficulty in interpreting data is different reports of unique numbers.
- We know little of housing outcomes for male perpetrators of family violence.

Economic insecurity and lack of employment are barriers to women's ability to stay home safely

- 28 per cent of females presenting to homelessness services because of family violence do not have any income and only seven per cent have any employment income.
- McAuley Works, a program which supports women who have significant disadvantage (and most of whom have experienced family violence) is showing promise as a way forward for 'safe at home'. Initial findings suggest women are better positioned to maintain housing, and that women's employment is linked to perpetrators being the ones who leave home.

Family violence rates are rising in the community, and increasing numbers of breaches will impact on women's ability to feel safe in their homes

- Family violence-related offences increased 11.3% to 112,432 offences.
- Breaches of family violence orders (up 18.4% to 53,285 offences) and family violence-related common assaults (up 5.9% to 16,264 offences).
- These rising rates are not solely attributable to COVID but have evolved over the past three years.
- Against a backdrop of increased incidents and breaches it appears the trajectory of family violence incidents where charges were laid has declined from 2017 – 2020 with both 'no charges laid' and 'unsolved' incidents on the increase.
- The majority of flexible support packages that involve Personal Safety Initiatives such as security upgrades and other protections appear to be mainly reaching those who have already stayed home rather than those already 'on the move' through transitory accommodation or homeless.

While the data throws light on many areas of interest, significant gaps also exist. It is unclear whether the large numbers of 'don't knows' across many categories represent a failure to collect information, or people getting lost in the system or simply giving up. Future actions to clarify the data and shed light on outcomes are needed:

- Working with safesteps to understand what further data they hold and what is meant by certain categories such as 'self-exited' and 'safe at home'
- Crime Statistics Agency to understand some categorizations and missing data
- Council to Homelessness Persons for further analysis of unmet need and outcomes
- No to Violence to get a picture for outcomes for perpetrators and whether their pilot program in accommodating men is leading to women being able to stay home
- Victoria Police to understand why it appears rates of charging for family violence incidents has decreased and Magistrates' Court for data on how often behaviour change program attendance is part of the order and any data illuminating how often perpetrators are being excluded.

Introduction: about this report

McAuley Community Services for Women supports women and children dealing with family violence and homelessness. We regularly see the major consequences of leaving home because of violence: housing instability, loss of friendships and family connections, unemployment, poverty, and major disruptions to children's education. All of these have impacts on women's and children's health and wellbeing, and make it more difficult to rebuild their lives after violence. The very real likelihood of becoming homeless may also discourage women from leaving.

McAuley's own data has been showing that the problematic association between family violence and homelessness has persisted. Over the past three years the proportion of those regarded as able to be 'safe at home' after staying in our crisis accommodation has been less than five per cent.

We also see consequences further down the track, in the histories of women who live in our longer-term homelessness support services. Sixty-one per cent of these women have experienced family violence and are dealing with significant long-term trauma related to these experiences. Seventy-one per cent of these women also have a diagnosis, or indicator, of mental illness, and many have poor physical health and are socially isolated. Twenty-five per cent of these women have slept rough.³

These concerns have led McAuley to initiate a working group of those services who play a role in supporting those affected by family violence, including police, courts and services for perpetrators. This group has agreed to explore the reasons why women and children are becoming homeless because of family violence, and advocate for a 'safe at home' approach, where perpetrators are excluded where possible from the family home. We realised through our work we needed to understand better what information and data exists on the scale of the problem, and the factors that cause it. The following report captures what we currently know, and where gaps exist in our understanding.

The following overview is derived in the main from two publicly available sources: the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Specialist Homelessness Services annual report, and Crime Statistics Agency's Family Violence Data portal. While this provided a great deal of useful information, inconsistencies in this data, and large numbers of missing data, make interpretations sometimes challenging. In particular the absence of a consistent number for unique clients presents difficulties. Figures quoted should be read in this context (see note on data page ii).

Data appears to suggest that Victoria is doing much worse than other states in terms of outcomes and unmet need. As an example the daily average unassisted request figure for Victoria is 108.4, with the next highest average being WA on 57.1, while NSW reports 24.7.

Our understanding is that different data collection approaches may make this an unfair comparison. For this reason, data is only reported specifically for Victoria rather in comparison to other states.⁴



Family violence and homelessness – what we know

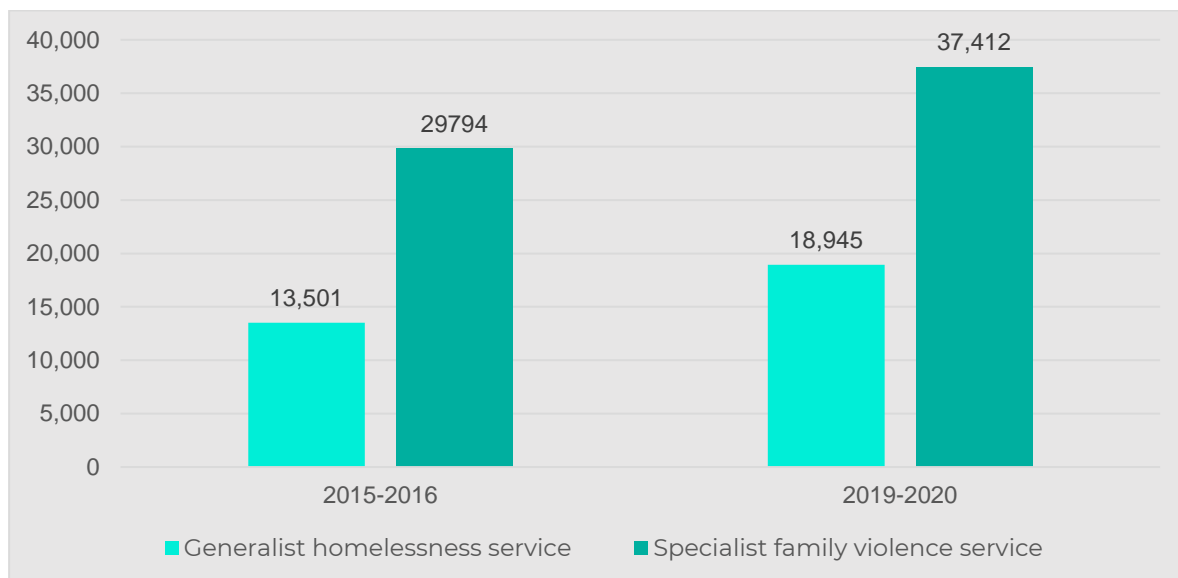
Family violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia. The most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that over 50 per cent of women who permanently leave a violent partner report that they, and not their partner, moved out of the home they shared⁵.

A specific, state-wide 'safe at home' figure is not recorded or collected in Victoria. Because of this gap, data on the association between family violence and homelessness is the main way we can gauge the numbers and factors involved.

In 2019-2020, family violence accounted for 45% of presentations to homelessness services in Victoria (*AIHW Victorian fact sheet*). The number of adult women presenting is 32405.⁶

Family violence and homelessness link rising

Figure 1: Unique clients presenting to Victorian homelessness services because of family violence, 2015-2016 to 2019-2020 (CSA 19-20 data tables)



The total number of individuals presenting to homelessness services because of family violence has grown 30 per cent in the past five years (*CSA 19-20 data tables*).

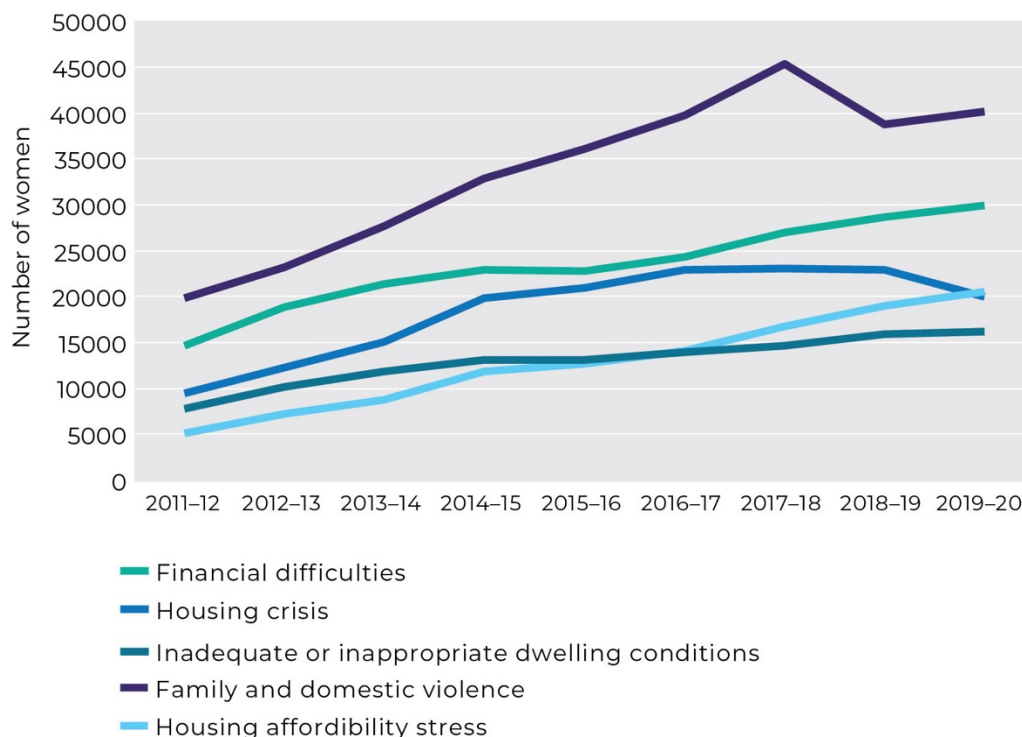
In the past year (from 2018-19 to 2019-20), numbers presenting to specialist family violence services grew by 3.8%, with a 2.9% increase to general services where family violence is a reason for presenting (*CSA 19-20 data tables*).

There is also evidence that the proportion of those presenting to homelessness services because of family violence is increasing. In 2019-2020, per 10,000 clients, the rate per 10,000 presenting for this reason rose from 78.6 to 80.7 (*AIHW 19-20 fact sheet Vic*) compared to the previous year.

Overall, the number of females presenting to homelessness services because of family violence has risen by 60 per cent between 2011-2012 and 2019-2020 with an average increase of six per cent per year. (*AIHW annual reports, comparison 11-12 to 19-20*). Family

violence as a reason for presenting has risen over that period while other factors have remained relatively stable.

Figure 2: Top five reasons for females seeking assistance (AIHW annual reports 2011-12 to 2019-2020)



Family violence and homelessness demographics

Seventy-seven per cent of those presenting were female and the average age of female clients was 31 (CSA 19-20 data visualization).

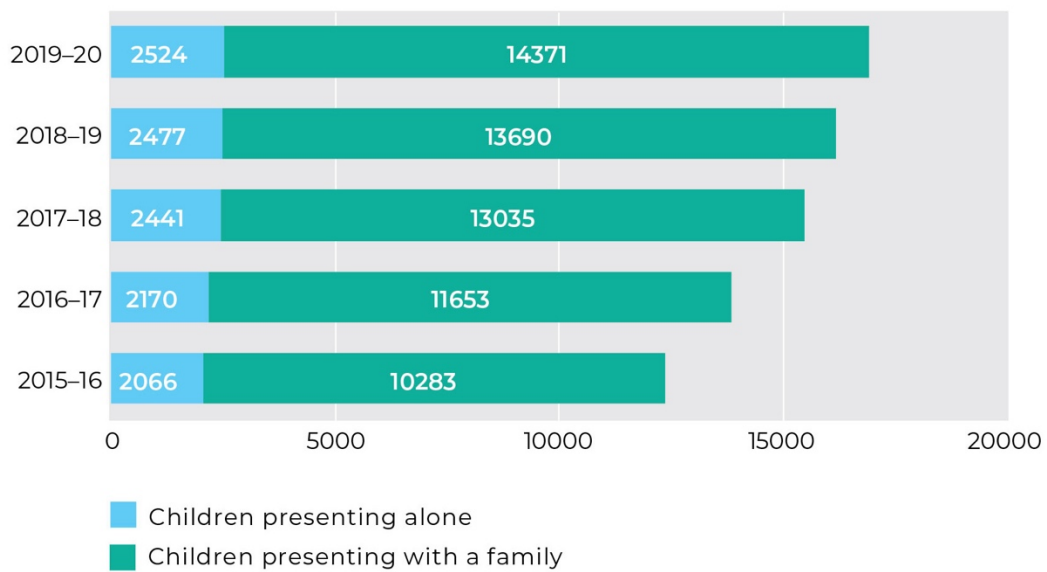
Large numbers of children are involved: 14,011 children and young people aged under 14 presented as part of a family, and 38 per cent of these were aged under 4. (CSA 19-20 data visualization).

A total of 6,098 young women aged between 15 and 24 presented. Of these, 1,906 were aged between 15 and 18 and may have been part of a family group, while 4,192 were aged between 18 and 24 and may have been presenting in their own right (CSA 19-20 data visualization).

While police are the main referrers to specialist family violence organisations, accounting for 31 per cent of support periods, 22% are self-referred (CSA 19-20 data tables).⁷

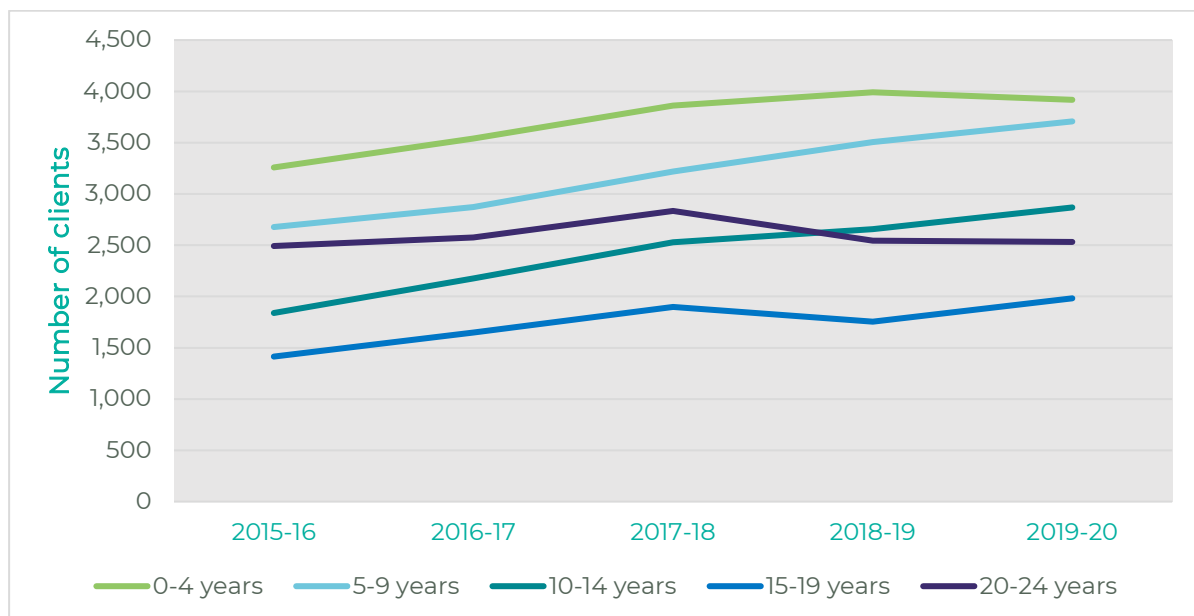


Figure 3: Children and homelessness presentations (CSA 19-20 data visualization)



The total number of unique children or young people 24 years and under (as defined by Crime Statistics Agency, 2021) presenting for family violence specialist service in Victoria has seen a 28% increase from 2015 – 2020 (CSA 19-20 data tables).

Figure 4: Number of family violence specialist service clients aged under 24 (CSA 19-20 data tables)

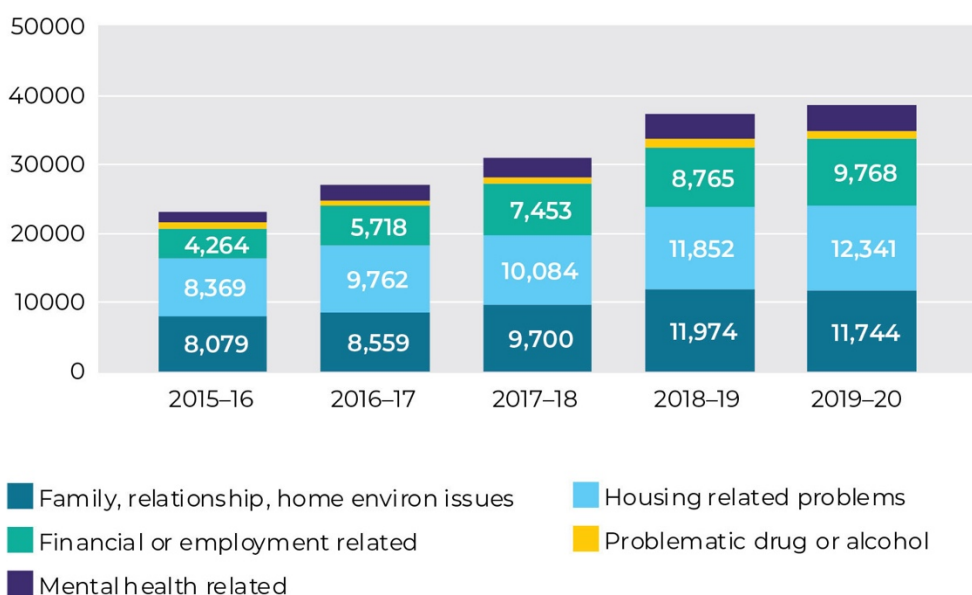


Reasons for presentations to homelessness services

Of those presenting to homelessness services where family violence was the **main** reason, 32% also gave 'housing-related problems' listed as a reason for presentations (CSA data visualisation). More than one reason can be selected

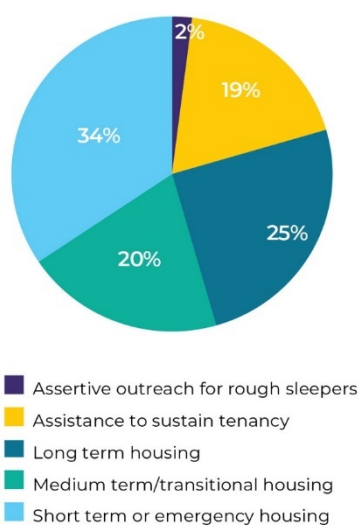
Further work would need to be done to understand what is meant by the second largest category 'Family, relationship, home environment issues.'

Figure 5: Reasons for presentations at homelessness services where family violence is MAIN reason for presenting (CSA 19-20 data visualization)



'Service types' provided to those seeking homelessness support

Figure 6: Housing services provided (CSA 2019-2020 data visualization)



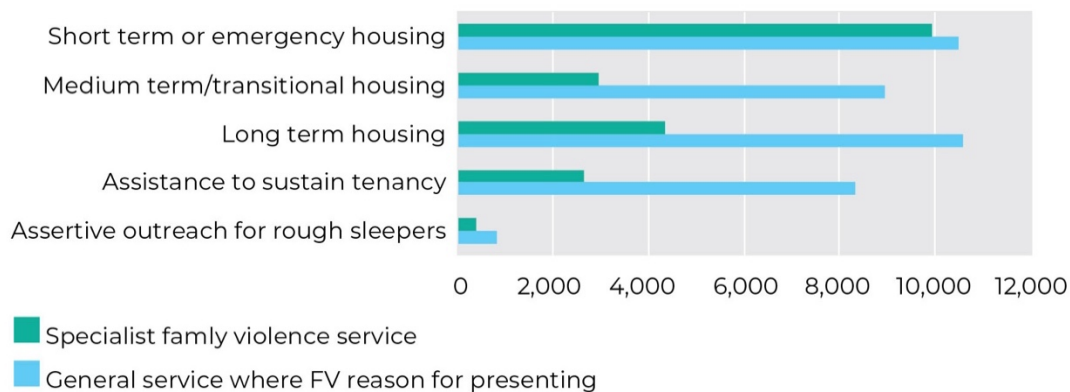
While 25% are given support for long-term housing, 34 per cent are supported with what is described as either short term or emergency housing.

*Note: this figure only looks at **housing service supports**, and an array of other supports are provided, such as legal assistance, financial or employment-related assistance.*



However when this is broken down further into the two different service providers, it appears that there are more long-term housing 'service types' delivered in general homelessness service than specialist family violence services.

Figure 7: Outcomes comparison – specialist FV vs general service (CSA 19-20 data visualization)



Outcomes for those presenting to homelessness services

When reasons for closure of a support period are examined, the data suggests that many clients either don't get a service or became 'lost' in the system.

While overall, 33,621 are listed as having 'immediate goals met/goals achieved', 28,590 others fall into the categories: 'lost contact,' 'did not turn up', maximum service reached,' 'other' or 'don't know.' (CSA 19-20 data visualisation). Between 2018 and 2020 there has been a 78% increase in cases with an unknown closure reason.

One factor worth investigating further is that the 'don't know' category is **overwhelmingly** higher for those presenting to specialist family violence support services rather than general homelessness ones. In 2019-2020, there were 12,806 presenting where the reason for closure is recorded as 'don't know'; there are only 601 in general services. (CSA data visualisation 19-20).

There is also a wide difference in the outcomes which are described as 'immediate goals met/case goals achieved', depending on presentations to specialist family violence services compared to general. In 2019-2020:

- 37 per cent of those going to a specialist family violence service are described as having goals met
- In 'general homelessness services' this figure is 60 per cent (CSA 19-20 data visualisation)

It would be extremely valuable to explore what is meant by 'immediate needs met/goals achieved' and why this statistic appears to vary widely between the two service types. whether this includes a housing solution, as well as to understand why the outcomes achieved appear to vary so widely between the two service entry points.

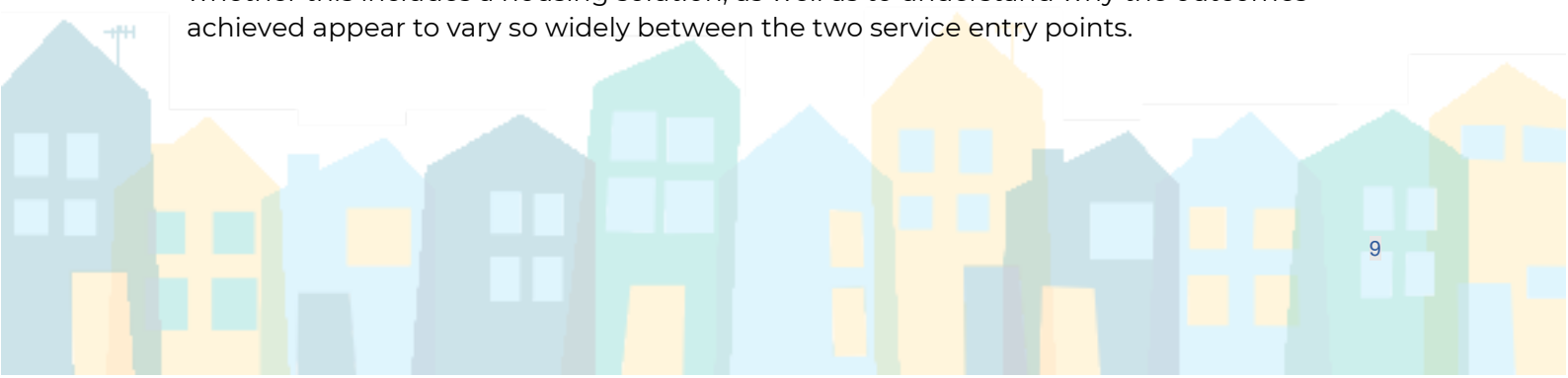
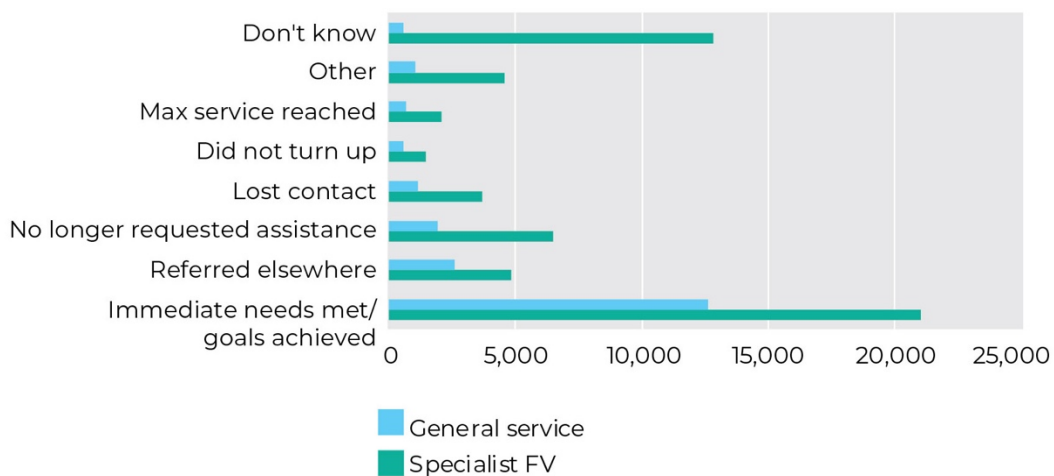


Figure 8: Reasons for closure of support period comparison general and specialist (CSA 19-20 data visualization)



Unmet need for homelessness assistance - general

Overall, 108 requests for homelessness assistance went unmet each day in Victoria (AIHW fact sheet Vic). According to a report by the Northern and Western Homelessness Networks, 'this is almost certainly a significant undercount.'⁸

Examining the situation in metropolitan Melbourne this report points out that:

- There is currently no way of accurately determining how many households presenting to IAP (initial assessment and planning) services for assistance are turned away across the region, nor is it possible to explore the reasons behind any unmet assistance.
- Rather than capturing total or 'true' demand for housing assistance across the region, this data only reflects the **capacity** of IAP services to meet demand within the constraints of available resourcing.

Other sources also point to a system under significant strain. In one snapshot, the Salvation Army Western Metro Homelessness Services identified that 200 people a month are unable to even access an initial appointment.⁹ (Western Homelessness Network, 2019).

In August 2019 crisis homelessness services in Melbourne's west reported they could only meet a fraction of the demand. Of 13,546 presenting to homelessness services, 4,000 were turned away without appointments¹⁰.

Unmet need – those presenting with family violence

The above figures are not specific to those seeking homelessness support **because of family violence**.



However there is a high likelihood that women in this situation are missing on a service given the following statistics (AIHW, data tables 2019-20):

- Females make up 64% of all those **unassisted**
- 10,034 women aged over 18 are not assisted
- Of those women **not** assisted, the daily average figures are:
 - 25.8 are requests for short term or emergency accommodation
 - 20.3 are requesting 'other' housing/accommodation.

Data from the Council to Homeless Persons¹¹ further suggests an increase over the past five years, in the number of those leaving family violence, whose homelessness remains unresolved.

Figure 9: Increasing numbers unassisted (Council to Homeless Services)



Males at homeless services because of family violence

2,728 males aged over 21 presented to general homelessness services because of family violence (CSA data table 19-20).

It is unclear whether these males are perpetrators who have had to leave home, or are themselves victims of family violence.

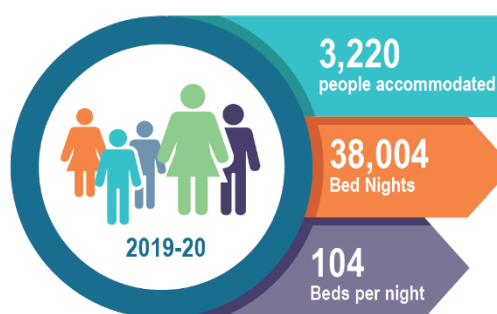
It would be valuable to understand where male perpetrators are currently going if they are excluded by police. Last year around 200 males were supported with short term accommodation through a pilot program (*information from No to Violence*). A better understanding of outcomes for these men and information on whether it enabled more women and children to maintain their housing would be a useful field of further research.



What do we know about 'safe at home' outcomes?

Outcomes for women supported by 'Safe Steps'

Safe Steps is the central intake point for those experiencing family violence in Victoria, and arranges for women and children to be housed in motels, crisis accommodation and refuges. Their data is therefore a significant indicator of how many women are unable to be 'safe at home.'



Last year according to Safe Steps Annual Report 2019 – 2020:

- 3,220 people escaping family violence were accommodated (1,717 women and 1,503 children)
- 38,004 Bed nights were provided in secure crisis accommodation over a one-year period (this equates to 104 victim-survivors accommodated on any given night)

Figure 10: safe steps accommodation (safe steps annual report 19-20)

This figure – of 1717 women accommodated annually by safe steps – represents only a fraction of the figure of 32405 individual women who in the same period sought homelessness support because of family violence. As noted previously, we know many of these remain unassisted.

Sixty-one per cent of women are staying one to five nights in crisis accommodation, with a further 26 per cent staying six-to-ten nights.

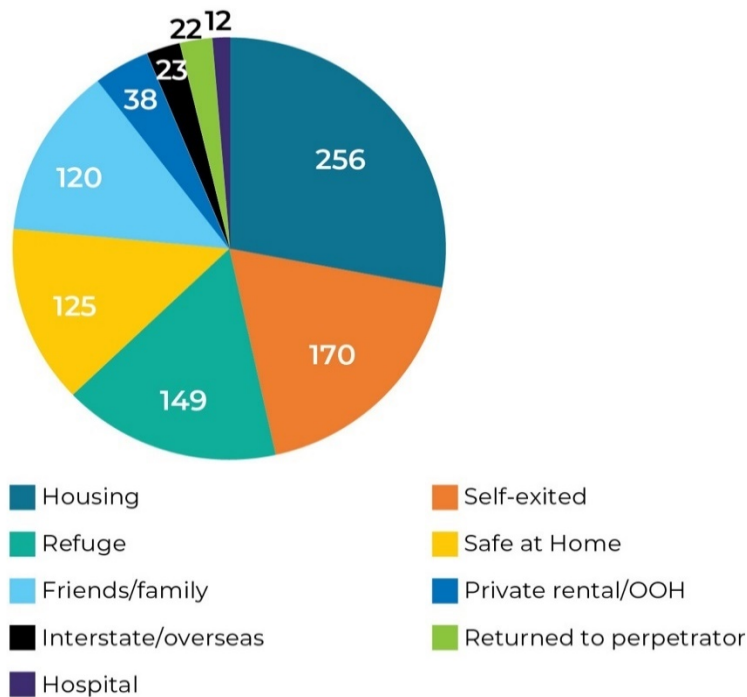
Safe steps also directly provided to the 'safe at home' roundtable information on outcomes for 915 women who left safe steps motels in October 2020 and March 2021. (Note; this means they have already left home **at least once** because of family violence).

This showed:

- 14% were 'safe at home' and 16% went to another refuge
- 28% were exited into housing (this is not clear as there is a separate category of four per cent of women who went to private rental or Office of Housing accommodation)
- 19% 'self-exited' (it would be useful to understand where these clients go).

Another indicator of what is happening for women leaving violence is McAuley's own data which last year showed that 92% of women staying in our crisis accommodation had lived in short-term or emergency accommodation in the month before presenting, and three per cent had been sleeping rough. (McAuley annual report 2019-2020).

Figure 11: Outcomes for 'safe steps' clients leaving motels October 2020–March 2021 (*safe steps provided to working group*)



Personal safety initiatives

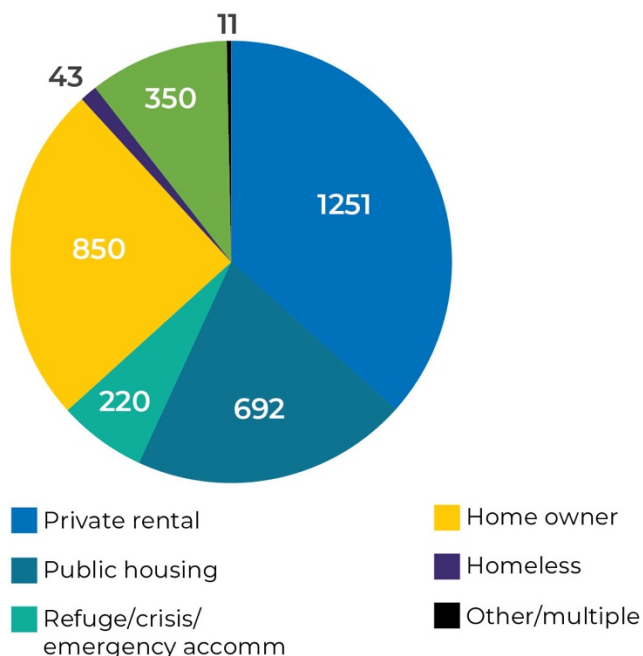
The Personal Safety Initiative (PSI) is a central aspect of Victoria's 'safe at home' response. It forms part of the Flexible Support Packages which were developed to deliver personalised and holistic responses with the intention of supporting victim- survivors to remain safely in, or return safely to, their own home.

These provide safety and protection measures including upgrades of security such as cameras, sensors, new locks, and personal alarms. All these measures are categorised as Personal Safety Initiatives or PSI.

During the period of 1 July 2018 – 30 December 2019, 3417 packages were allocated which included a Personal Safety Initiative. (*Family Safety Victoria, 2019*).



Figure 12: PSI allocation July 1, 2018–December 30, 2019 (FSV 2019-20)



The data suggests these have mainly been allocated to those who are still living at home compared to those already in transitional and insecure accommodation.

Analysis shows that 2793, or 82% of these, were allocated to those who are in private rental, homeowners, or public housing.

*(Note: it is not clear whether this was to assist women **into** these forms of housing, or whether this was their original housing which they were able to maintain).*

It is also apparent that PSIs do not necessarily provide the complete answer to a ‘safe at home’ response, given that in the financial year 2018-19, 54,762 individuals presented to homelessness services because of family violence (CSA 2019-2020, data table), and in the same period 2329 packages were allocated.

McAuley’s own data shows that only 24 of 65 women in a June 2021 ‘snapshot’ had received PSI support, yet 77% of these had an experience of homelessness. (McAuley snapshot, June 2021).



Analysis: 'Safe at home' factors – economic security

The four philosophical pillars which form a platform in which 'Safe at home' can be founded are: 1) promoting safety; 2) operating as an integrated response; 3) promoting economic security; and 4) preventing homelessness.¹²

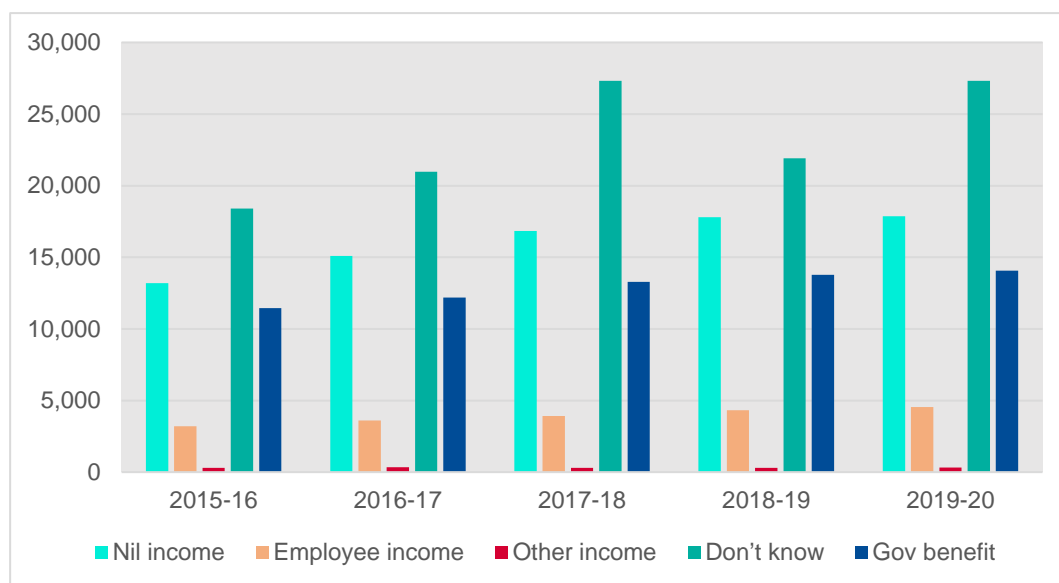
We have examined quantitative data around economic security and safety for those presenting to homelessness services because of family violence.

Economic security

Support periods (CSA data table 2019-2020) were provided to specialist family violence clients in this income/employment category:

- 28% have nil income which was a greater number than the 22% who were in receipt of a government benefit
- Only 7% had employee income
- 42.5% were categorised as 'don't know' – a large amount of data not being collected.

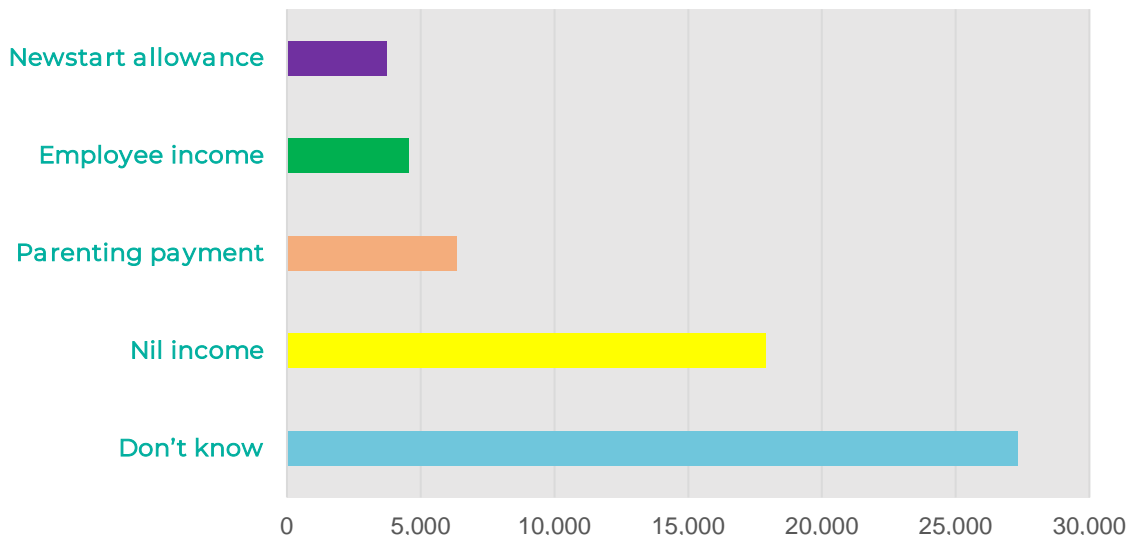
Figure 13: Income source at time of presentation specialist family violence service only (CSA 19-20 data tables)



In fact, as Figure 14 below demonstrates, 'don't know' is the top reason recorded as an income source, yet this data would be instrumental in understanding further one of the driving factors of the family violence-homelessness connection.



Figure 14: top 5 income sources recorded presentations to specialist FV services in 2019-2020 (CSA 19-20 data tables)



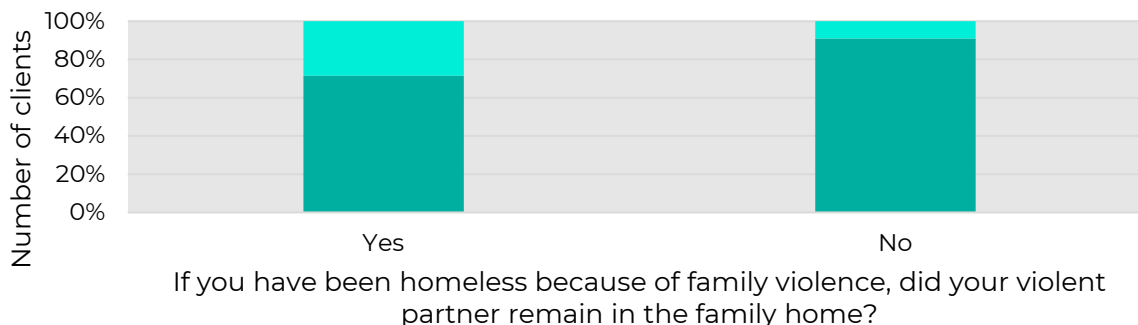
Note: Data is not available in this category for those presenting to general homelessness services.

McAuley data also confirms the role of income in women being unable to stay 'safe at home', showing that:

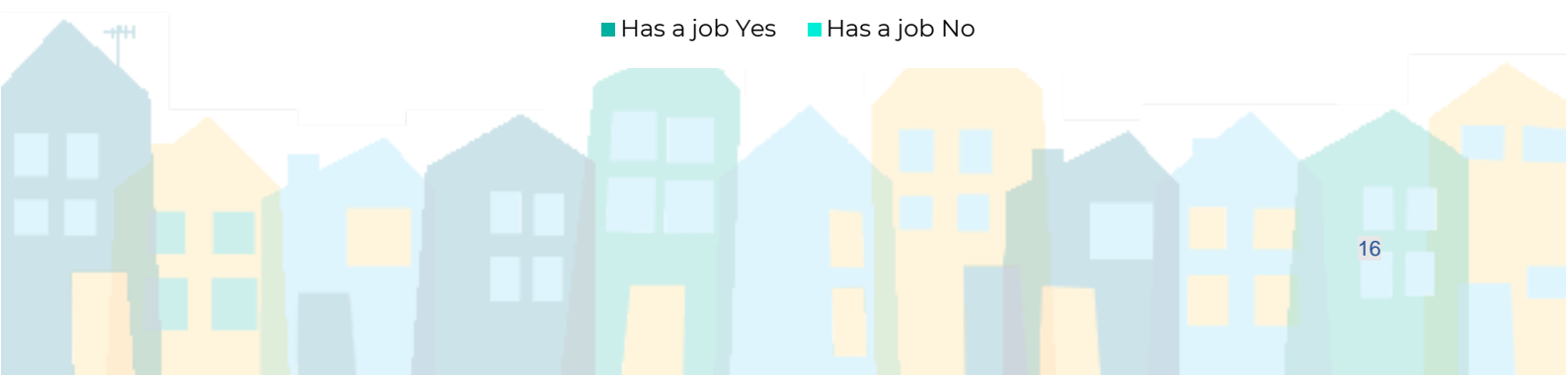
- 28% of women in crisis accommodation had no income
- 12% of women living in McAuley refuges had no income.¹³

In June 2021 McAuley analysed the situation of 49 women who had received support to obtain employment after an experience of family violence. (This is McAuley's specialist employment program McAuley Works). Twenty-two had achieved full-time work, however of the 13 not working, nine were in situations where the perpetrator remained at home.

Figure 15: association between employment and violent perpetrator remains home (McAuley private data, June 2021)



■ Has a job Yes ■ Has a job No



Housing availability and affordability

According to Equity Economics' 2021 national study 'Nowhere to go' report, only 3.2% of women who are experiencing family violence are currently receiving the long-term housing solutions they need.

Based on pre-pandemic incidents of family violence, 7,690 women a year are returning to perpetrators due to having nowhere affordable to live and approximately 9,120 women a year are becoming homeless after leaving family violence and being unable to secure long-term housing.

Of those who temporarily left family violence and then returned:

- For 12.2 per cent this was because of a lack of financial support.
- For 7.3 per cent, they had nowhere else to go.¹⁴

(These are Australia-wide figure, not specific to Victoria. It would be valuable to do a specific Victorian analysis.)

In April 2019 it was noted that rental affordability had plummeted to the extent that Anglicare found that within Melbourne, there were no properties available that were affordable for a single person on Newstart¹⁵.

While there has been a recent announcement of a 'Big Build' to increase the amount of social housing, experts have pointed out that:

- Victoria has a history of spending less on social housing per person than the rest of Australia;
- When complete, this will increase social housing dwellings from 80,500 to 89,000 – about 3.5 per cent of all housing, which will still be less than the Australian average of 4.2 per cent and OECD average of 4.2%¹⁶



Analysis: 'safe at home' factors - promoting safety

Another pillar of 'Safe at home' approaches is 'promoting safety'. Women's confidence in being able to be 'safe at home' will be affected by the prevalence and severity of family violence incidents as well as their confidence in a speedy and timely response by police and courts. Rising rates of family violence will also have an impact on workloads and responsiveness in police and courts.

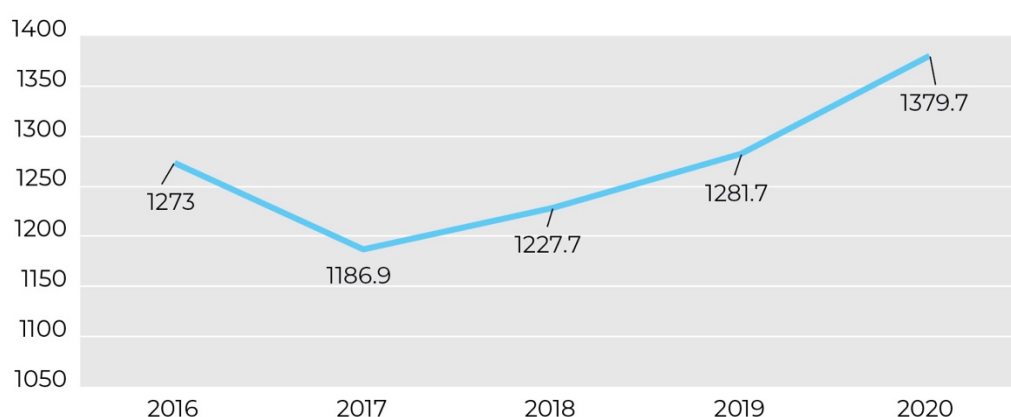
Rising rates of family violence

In the 12 months leading up to 31 March 2021 (the most recent data available at time of preparing this report) family violence had increased to record levels, against a backdrop where **other offences decreased**. One in five offences in Victoria are family violence-related (21 per cent). Over that timeframe:

- Family violence-related offences increased 11.3% to 112,432 offences.
- The increase was particularly driven by breaches of family violence orders (up 18.4% to 53,285 offences) and family violence-related common assaults (up 5.9% to 16,264 offences).
- Family incidents increased 8.2% in the last 12 months to the highest on record at 92,999 incidents, as did the rate of family incidents, also up by 8.3% to 1,389.1 incidents per 100,000 Victorians.
- The number of family incidents that resulted in at least one criminal offence increased 6.3% to 46,782 incidents in the last 12 months.¹⁷

In the release of this data the Chief Statistician stated that this rise could not be solely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic as it had been on the rise for the previous three years.¹⁸ (A further analysis of COVID's impact is in Appendix B).

Figure 16: Rate per 100,000 of family incidents attended by Victoria Police (CSA data tables, Victoria Police)



Demographics of family violence incidents

In 2019-2020 there were 63,102 females over the age of 15 affected by family violence and 19,789 males. There was at least one child witness recorded in 26,284 incidents (30 per cent of instances).

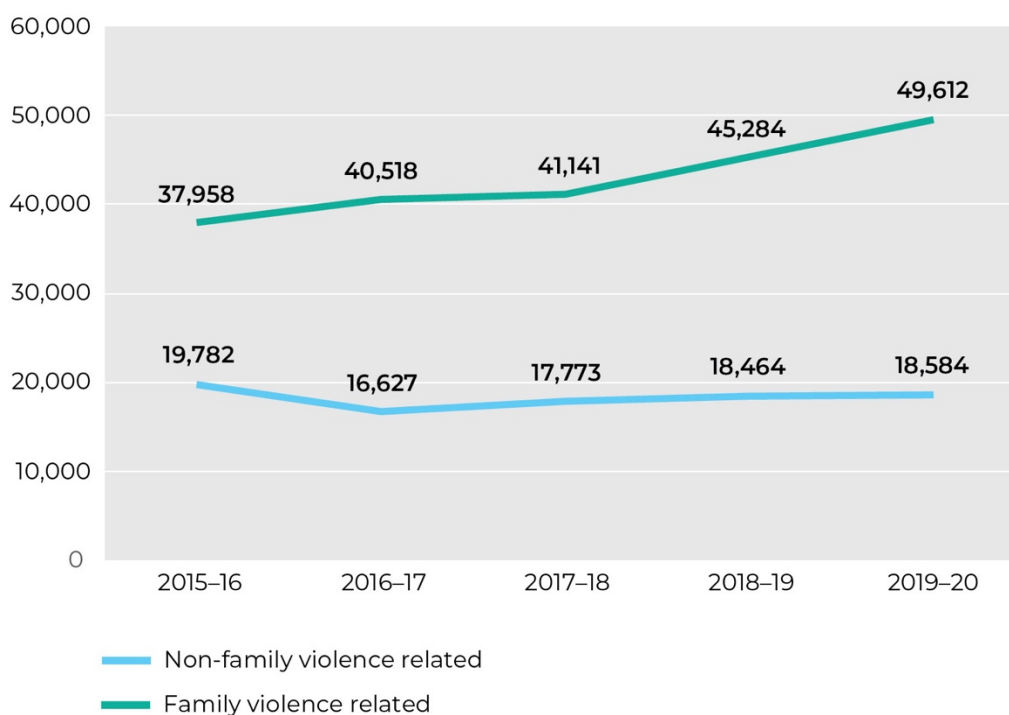
Of 88,214 family incidents, holding powers (direction or detention) were recorded in 7635 incidents or nine per cent of incidents.

In 41% of incidents, it was noted that there had been an escalation or increase in severity or frequency of violence, and in 31% of cases separation was 'recent or imminent.' *(All data from Crime Statistics Agency, Police data tables, 2019-2020)*

Perpetrator accountability and breaches of orders

The rate of breaches of orders related to family violence has escalated significantly while breaches of other orders remain relatively stable.

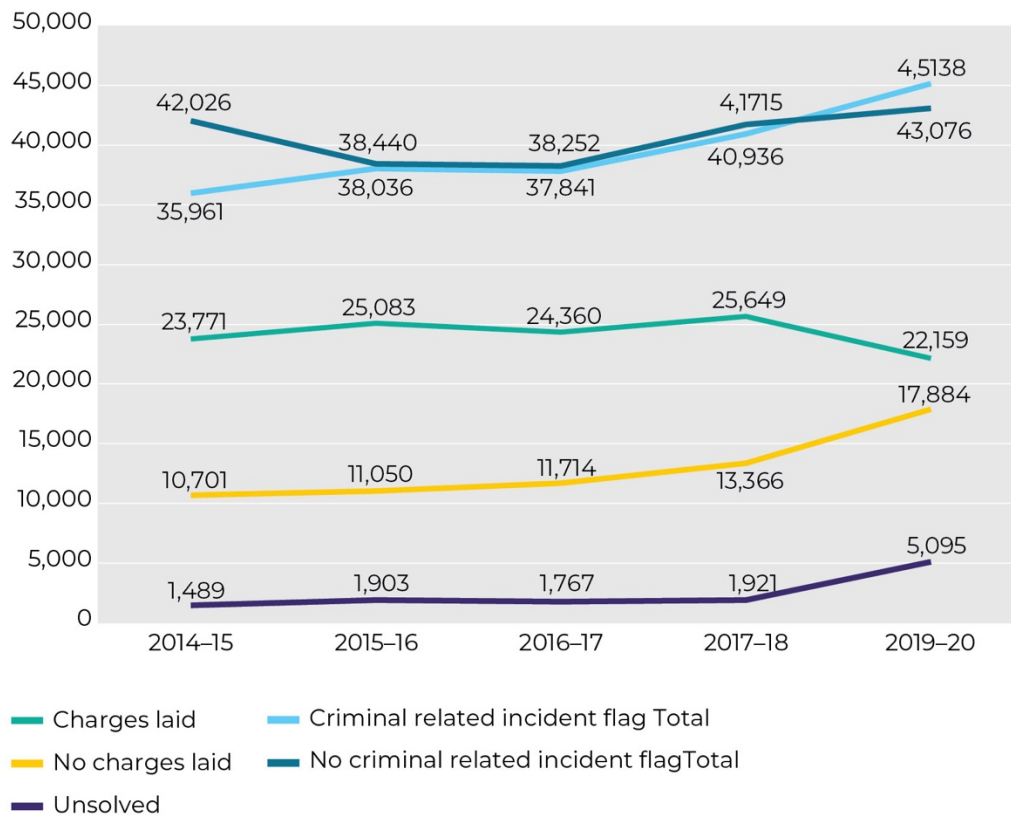
Figure 17: Breaches of orders family violence compared to non-family violence (CSA, 19-20, Vic Police data tables)



Perhaps surprisingly against a backdrop of increased incidents and breaches it appears the trajectory of family violence incidents **where charges were laid** has declined from 2017 – 2020 with both 'no charges laid' and 'unsolved' incidents on the increase. (Understanding this would be an extremely valuable piece of further research).



Figure 18: Family violence incidents where charges were laid by criminal incident flag, (CSA 19-20 data tables, Victoria Police)

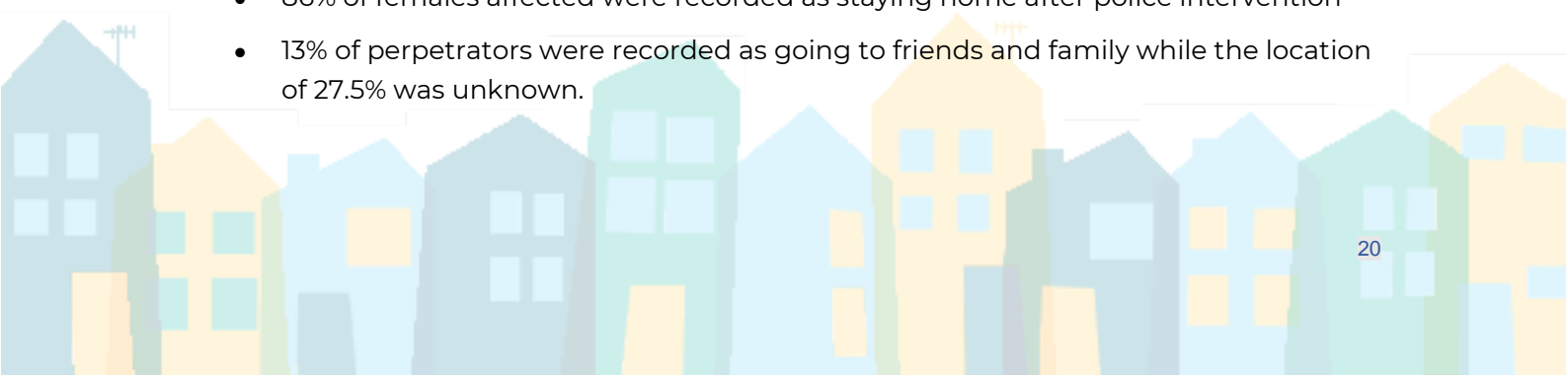


Policing and ‘safe at home’: a snapshot

Policing practices could also play a critical role in ‘safe at home’ outcomes. One data question has been whether unintended consequences within the *Victorian Family Violence Act (2008)* create a bias towards keeping the perpetrator in the home.

Victoria Police provided direct data to the ‘Safe at home’ workshop in April 2021. This analysed data relating to the 20-month period 1 July 2019 to 31 March 2021, where there was an incident of male-to-female intimate partner violence, and an intervention order was not already in place. This was therefore around ten per cent of all family violence incidents responded to. Their data showed:

- In 90% of these situations, an exclusion condition for the perpetrator formed part of the family violence safety notice.
- 86% of females affected were recorded as staying home after police intervention
- 13% of perpetrators were recorded as going to friends and family while the location of 27.5% was unknown.



Conclusions

The available data confirms that increasing numbers of women and children are becoming homeless because of family violence, and that their requests for assistance are not being met. This is happening against a backdrop of rising rates of family violence and a rise in situations where intervention orders are being flouted. Lack of income and employment, at a time when housing affordability is at a low ebb, are also factors in pushing women and children into homelessness following family violence.

Further work in several area would boost understanding of 'safe at home':

- We were unable to get more recent data from some sources and a further tranche of data will become available over the next few months, which will enable this document to be further developed.
- It would be helpful to work with safesteps to understand what further data they hold and what is meant by certain categories such as 'self-exited' and 'safe at home'.
- We hope to work with Crime Statistics Agency to understand some categorizations and missing data.
- The Council to Homelessness Persons could provide a further analysis of unmet need and outcomes.
- No to Violence can help us get a picture for outcomes for perpetrators and whether their pilot program in accommodating men is leading to women being able to stay home.
- Victoria Police could help us understand why it appears rates of charging for family violence incidents has decreased.
- Magistrates' Court could hold data on how often behaviour change program attendance is part of orders made and whether perpetrators are being excluded.



Appendix A: Children present at incidents and longer-term consequences

An analysis by Crime Statistics Victoria of family violence incidents showed that over 1 in 50 children in Victoria between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2019 were recorded by police as having been exposed to family violence. That is 32,705 children who were recorded as having been present at or affected by a family incident.

Many of the children recorded as witnesses at a police attended incident were very young, with nearly two thirds (66.1%) of children under the age of 10 years old at the date of the incident. 35% of children were under the age of 5 years old.

Relationships with children were more likely to involve assault and repeat police attended incidents. These relationships were also more likely to involve police attended incidents spanning over a longer period of time, and involve family violence protection orders.

77.2% of children who witnessed a police reported family violence incident had a future interaction with the justice system within five years of witnessing an incident. 62.2% of children became protected persons on Family Violence Intervention Orders, and over half (53.8%) witnessed subsequent family violence incidents. ¹⁹



Appendix B: Impact of COVID on family violence, homelessness & children-at-risk

Evidence from previous disasters worldwide shows that the rates of family violence rise in the aftermath of such events. The COVID-19 pandemic has the additional risk of lockdowns, where women and children were isolated with their perpetrators in their homes with limited access to friends and family. According to the Crime Statistics Agency of Victoria family violence portal between 1 October and 31 December 2020²⁰:

Impact on homelessness

- **5,027** unique clients sought short-term/emergency or medium term/transitional housing accommodation from a homelessness service for reasons relating to family violence. Compared to the same period in 2019, the number of unique clients seeking assistance increased by **5.9%**.
- **3,535** people sought short or medium-term accommodation from a specialist family violence homelessness service for women and children. Compared to the same period in 2019, this increased by **20.1%**.
- **1,979** people aged under 18 seeking short or medium-term accommodation from a specialist homelessness service, and 195 people aged 55 and older. Compared to the same period in 2019, the number of people aged under 18 seeking short-term/emergency accommodation from a specialist homelessness service decreased by **19.9%**, and the number of people aged 55 and older increased by **51.2%**.

Impact on family violence incidents

- There were **4,149** Family Violence Safety Notices (FVSNs) issued. Compared to the same period in 2019, this is a **6.9%** increase.
 - The number of FVSNs was higher every month in the fourth quarter of 2020 when compared to the same period in 2019.
 - FVSNs issued to protect older people, aged 55 and over, comprised 15.5% of all FVSNs issued. FVSNs issued to protect younger people, aged 17 and under, comprised 30.9% of all FVSNs issued.
 - There were 644 FVSNs issued to protect older people. Compared to the same period in 2019, this is a 5.6% increase.
 - There were 1,284 FVSNs issued to protect young people. Compared to the same period in 2019, this is a 5.6% increase.
- Key findings
- There were 1,455 notices of risk filed in the Federal Circuit Court between 1 July and 30 September 2020. Compared to the same time period in 2019, this is an increase of 32.9%.
 - There were 678 notices of risk filed in the Federal Circuit Court that were referred to a child welfare agency between 1 July and 30 September 2020. Compared to the same time period in 2019, this is an increase of 33.5%.
 - There were 739 of parenting applications filed in the Federal Circuit Court between 1 July and 30 September 2020. Compared to the same time period in 2019, this is an increase of 30.6%.

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References

¹ <https://www.vic.gov.au/ending-family-violence-victorias-10-year-plan-change>

² Nowhere to go: the benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence' (July 2021) research report prepared for the Women's Housing Alliance

³ McAuley Community Service for Women Annual Report, 2019-2020, <https://www.mcauleycsw.org.au/about-us/annual-reports/>

⁴ (Table Unmet.1, daily average unassisted requests, by state and territory (AIHW, data tables)

Table UNMET.1: Daily average unassisted requests, by state and territory, 2019–20									
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	National
Daily average	24.7	108.4	11.8	57.1	2.4	36.4	0.8	18.8	260.3

⁵ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2019). *Domestic and family violence, housing insecurity and homelessness: Research synthesis* (ANROWS Insights, 04/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

⁶ Calculations as follows, based on the Crime Statistics Vic data : <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/family-violence-data-portal/specialist-homelessness-services-in-victoria>

- 51164 individuals going to homelessness services because of FV
- There are 39328 females presenting
- There are 6923 females aged under 15

⁷ This data is not available for referrals to specialist homelessness services which relate to family violence.

⁸ 'Crisis in crisis II: a way forward: report of the crisis accommodation project (Northern and Western Homelessness Networks, 2021)

⁹ Western Homelessness Network (2019) *Ending homelessness in Melbourne's West*, WHN, Melbourne

¹⁰ Western Homelessness Network: Ending homelessness in Melbourne's west (August 2019)

¹¹ (Parity, Vol. 33, No. 8, Sep 2020: 14-15)

¹² Breckenridge, J., Chung, D., Spinney, A., & Zufferey, C. (2015). *National mapping and meta-evaluation outlining key features of effective "safe at home" programs that enhance safety and prevent homelessness for women and their children who have experienced domestic and family violence: State of knowledge paper* (ANROWS Landscapes, 05/2015). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

¹³ McAuley Community Service for Women Annual Report, 2019-2020, <https://www.mcauleycsw.org.au/about-us/annual-reports/>

¹⁴ 'Nowhere to go: the benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence' (July 2021) research report prepared for the Women's Housing Alliance

¹⁵ Anglicare Victoria, Rental Affordability Snapshot 2019: Regional Reports and Snapshots

<https://www.anglicare.asn.au/home/2019/04/28/anglicare-australia-releases-rental-affordability-snapshot-all-parties-must-commit-to-affordable-housing>

¹⁶ <https://theconversation.com/victorias-5-4bn-big-housing-build-it-is-big-but-the-social-housing-challenge-is-even-bigger-150161>

¹⁷ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/media-release-1-in-5-criminal-offences-in-victoria-were-family-violence>

¹⁸ Crime Statistics Agency Chief Statistician Fiona Dowsley (2021, Media Centre – Media release, accessed <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/media-release-1-in-5-criminal-offences-in-victoria-were-family-violence>) "1 in 5 criminal offences in Victoria were family violence") said that *"Victoria has recorded the highest ever number of family incidents and family violence-related criminal offences during this period. The number of family violence-related victim reports has continued to increase, while other types of victim reports decreased over the past 12 months. This increase in family violence-related victimisation has been seen for the last three years, reflecting more than pandemic-related impacts."*

¹⁹ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/new-research-provides-first-look-at-data-about-children-who-have>

²⁰ <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/media-release-new-covid-19-family-violence-data-portal-shows-covid-19-0>

