



Trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults

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Domestic violence is an issue that arouses widespread and justifiable public concern. Six to nine per cent of Australian women aged 18 and over are physically assaulted each year. In the majority of cases, the assailant is a man they know. This bulletin uses data recorded by the New South Wales (NSW) Police to provide information on the trends and patterns in domestic violence assaults in NSW. The trends in recorded incidents of domestic violence assault between 1997 and 2004 are described. Data on incidents of domestic violence assault that occurred during 2004 are used to examine the spatial distribution of domestic violence assault in NSW and the locations and premises at which these assaults occur. These data are also used to examine the time of day, day of week and month that incidents occur, as well as the involvement of alcohol in domestic violence assaults. Information about victims and perpetrators involved in incidents of domestic violence assault in 2004 is then provided, including their gender, age, Indigenous status, victim-offender relationship and any injuries they sustained during a domestic violence assault. The bulletin concludes by examining the relationship between domestic violence assault and several socio-economic factors.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is an issue of widespread and justifiable public concern. A 1996 survey on violence against women in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996) estimated that nearly 405,000 Australian women (i.e. 5.9 per cent of Australian women aged 18 and over) had been physically assaulted in the preceding 12 months. In the majority of cases the assailant was a man they knew. The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos & Makkai 2004), using a somewhat different set of questions to tap the nature and extent of violence, found that about eight per cent of women aged between 18 and 69 had been physically assaulted by a male in the preceding 12

months. Three per cent of Australian women with a current or former intimate partner experienced partner violence in the preceding 12 months and one per cent had been assaulted by a male relative. Similar levels of prevalence have been estimated in many other parts of the world (e.g. Tjaden & Thoennes 2000; Medina-Ariza & Barberet 2003; Gracia 2004).

Not surprisingly, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research often receives requests for data on domestic violence. The purpose of this bulletin is to provide information on domestic violence in NSW using trends and patterns in domestic violence assault. This bulletin begins by examining trends in recorded incidents of domestic violence assault between 1997 and 2004. Information on incidents of domestic

violence assault recorded between January 1 and December 31, 2004 are then used to examine: (a) the spatial distribution of domestic violence assault in NSW; (b) the locations and premises at which domestic violence assaults occur; and (c) the time of day, day of week and month that incidents occur. The involvement of alcohol in incidents of domestic violence assault is also described. The bulletin then provides information about victims and offenders involved in incidents of domestic violence assault in 2004, including their gender, age, Indigenous status, victim-offender relationship and any injuries they sustained during a domestic violence assault. Finally, the relationships between domestic violence assault and several socio-economic factors are explored.

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Section 4(1) of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) defines domestic violence as a personal violence offence committed against a person who is currently or was previously linked to the perpetrator in the following ways:

- married, in a defacto or intimate personal relationship;
- living in the same household or residential facility;
- in a relationship involving his or her dependence on the perpetrator;
- a relative.

This is a broader definition than that used in much of the international literature on domestic violence, which typically refers only to violence between parties who have, or have had, an intimate relationship (e.g. Erez 2002; Dobash & Dobash 2004; Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Most victims of domestic violence are, however, abused by their intimate partners (Stubbs & Powell 1989). Some studies claim that women are as likely as men to be the perpetrators of domestic violence against an intimate partner (e.g. Straus 1990). The majority of studies of domestic violence, however, find that women are subjected to more frequent and severe abuse by their partners than are men (Johnson 1995; Straus 1999; Dobash & Dobash 2004).

The most commonly acknowledged forms of domestic violence are physical and sexual violence, emotional and social abuse (e.g. preventing contact with friends or family) and economic deprivation (e.g. withholding money). This study focuses on domestic violence assault, that is, physical violence (including threats) rather than on other forms of abuse because physical violence is more likely to be recorded in police and survey data than emotional abuse, social abuse and economic deprivation (Gardner 1994). Physical violence may include, but is not limited to, slapping, pushing, kicking, choking or the use of any weapon or object to inflict injury.

MEASURING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It is difficult to obtain good measures of the extent of domestic violence. Violence between intimate partners and other family members was (and sometimes still is) regarded in many countries and cultures as a normal and acceptable part of life that should not be disclosed outside the family (Davidson 1977; Okun 1986; Erez 2002). Although domestic violence is a criminal offence in Australia, many young Australians still evince attitudes that essentially condone it (Indermaur 2001). Many also still believe that it is a private and personal matter, rather than a crime (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

Not surprisingly, many instances of domestic violence are not reported to the police (e.g. Ferrante et al. 1996; Johnson 2004; Mouzos & Makkai 2004). The Australian component of the 2004 International Crime Victimization Survey (Johnson 2004) found that only 37 per cent of assaults and threats of assault were reported to the police. The survey did not specifically ask how many assaults were domestic violence incidents but, of all assaults reported in the survey, five per cent involved a perpetrator who was a partner/ex-partner of the victim and a further five per cent involved a perpetrator who was a relative of the victim. The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey, which surveyed 6,677 women between December 2002 and June 2003, also provided information about violence perpetrated by former or current intimate partners. This survey found that only eight per cent of the most recent violent incidents perpetrated by a current partner were reported to police compared with 24 per cent perpetrated by a previous partner (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Typical reasons for not reporting domestic violence incidents to the police (Mouzos & Makkai 2004) are:

- because the victim does not consider the incident serious enough;

- because the victim dealt with it herself;
- because the victim wants to keep it private, is ashamed or embarrassed;
- because the victim fears the offender; and
- because the victim does not think that the police would/could do anything about it.

Being attacked or suffering physical injury independently raise the odds of reporting assault to the police (Johnson 2004).¹

The data used in this bulletin are derived from reported incidents of assault recorded (or flagged) by the NSW Police as domestic violence-related (hereafter referred to as domestic assault). Because incidents of domestic violence recorded by police are not a representative sample of all domestic violence incidents, it cannot be assumed that the patterns and characteristics of domestic assault found in police data are typical of domestic violence in general. There are some reasons, however, to have confidence in police data as an indicator of trends and of the spatial distribution of domestic assaults. Public willingness to report assault to police in NSW has shown no systematic upward or downward trend over the last decade (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999, 2004a). Differences between areas in recorded rates of domestic assault have also been strongly correlated with differences between areas in rates of domestic homicide, an offence that is nearly always detected by police (Devery 1992). Taken together, these findings suggest that, although police data do not provide a reliable guide to the prevalence of domestic violence, they can be used to examine trends in the incidence of this offence and assess differences between areas in rates of domestic violence. They may also provide useful information on the timing and location of at least the most serious incidents of domestic violence.

INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

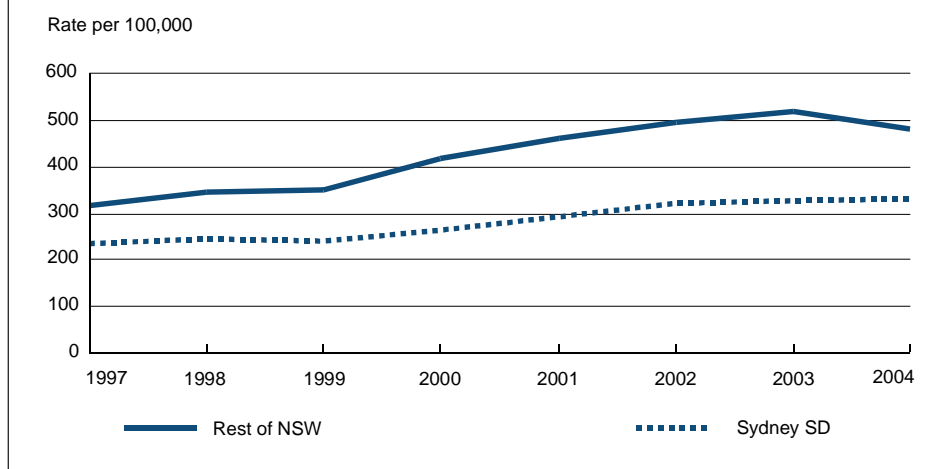
TRENDS IN REPORTED INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ASSAULT

The number and rate per population of all types of assault reported in NSW increased steadily from 1997 to 2001, but have been stable over the period 2002 to 2004 (Doak 2000; Doak et al. 2003; Moffatt et al. 2005). The trend for domestic assaults has closely followed that of all assaults, with domestic assaults consistently accounting for 35 to 40 per cent of all assault incidents each year. For example, in 2004, the NSW Police recorded 68,984 incidents of assault. Of these, 25,761 (37.3 %) were domestic assaults.

Figure 1 shows the rate per 100,000 people of reported incidents of domestic assault for the Sydney Statistical Division (SD) and the rest of NSW from 1997 to 2004. Each year, the per capita rate of recorded domestic assaults is lower in the Sydney SD than in the rest of NSW. In the Sydney SD, the rate per population was similar from 1997 to 1999, increased from 1999 to 2002 but did not change a great deal from 2002 to 2004. A similar pattern is apparent for the rest of NSW, although the rate of increase is higher than that in the Sydney SD and a slight decrease occurred in 2004.

Since 1997, the rate of recorded domestic assaults has increased by 39.5 per cent in the Sydney SD and 50.7 per cent in the rest of NSW. Doubts have sometimes been raised about whether increases in recorded rates of domestic violence reflect real increases in the incidence of the offence (Stubbs 1992). Over the last few years, however, there has been no consistent upward trend in the willingness of female victims of assault to report the offence to police. In 2000, 2003 and 2004, the percentage of female assault victims reporting the offence to the NSW Police ranged between 45 per cent and 47 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Crime and Safety Australia 2002; Crime and

Figure 1: The rate per 100,000 people of recorded domestic assaults: NSW (excluding prisons), 1997 to 2004



Safety, New South Wales 2004, unpublished data). In 2001, the percentage reporting was about 33 per cent, while in 2002, it was 31 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Crime and Safety Australia 2002; Crime and Safety, New South Wales 2004, unpublished data).

LOCATION

The graphs and tables that follow are based on an analysis of assaults recorded by the NSW Police between January 1 and December 31, 2004. Table 1 lists the ten NSW Local Government Areas (LGAs) that had the

highest recorded rates of domestic assault during this period. Note that all of these LGAs are outside of the Sydney metropolitan region and all had much higher rates than the state as a whole (382.7 per 100,000 population). The areas with the highest per capita rates of domestic assault were Bourke, Walgett, Coonamble, Moree Plains and Gilgandra.

The 10 Sydney metropolitan LGAs with the highest recorded rates of domestic assault are shown in Table 2. Campbelltown had the highest recorded rate of domestic assault, followed by Blacktown, Sydney, Wyong and Penrith.

Table 1: NSW LGAs with the largest number of domestic assaults: 2004²

Rank	LGA	Number of domestic assault incidents	Estimated population in 2004	Rate per 100,000 population
1	Bourke	139	3,924	3,542.3
2	Walgett	266	8,096	3,285.6
3	Coonamble	70	4,728	1,480.5
4	Moree Plains	201	16,027	1,254.1
5	Gilgandra	53	4,682	1,132.0
6	Glen Innes	61	5,945	1,026.1
7	Dubbo	398	39,077	1,018.5
8	Narromine	69	7,020	982.9
9	Lachlan	67	7,431	901.6
10	Carrathool	29	3,308	876.7

Table 2: NSW LGAs within the Sydney metropolitan region with the largest number of domestic assaults: 2004

Rank	LGA	Number of domestic assault incidents	Estimated population in 2004	Rate per 100,000 population
1	Campbelltown	1,087	149,961	724.9
2	Blacktown	1,829	278,532	656.7
3	Sydney	778	146,297	531.8
4	Wyong	747	141,764	526.9
5	Penrith	852	177,554	479.9
6	Marrickville	362	75,870	477.1
7	Liverpool	717	167,880	427.1
8	Holroyd	387	91,211	424.3
9	Fairfield	782	187,683	416.7
10	Hawkesbury	259	63,598	407.2

The number of domestic assault incidents and the rate per population for each LGA in NSW are shown in rank order in Appendix 1.

TYPES OF PREMISES

Figure 2 shows the percentages of domestic assaults that occurred on various types of premises in NSW. Data on non-domestic assaults are included for comparison. The majority of domestic assaults occurred on residential premises (86.1%). Some incidents occurred outdoors or in carparks (8.3%) and relatively few occurred on other types of premises. Non-domestic assaults were less common on residential premises (25.1%). These assaults occurred mostly in outdoor areas and carparks (35.2%) but some occurred on licensed premises (15.0%) and a small percentage occurred on other types of premises. These results are in accord with previous research, which has found that 75 per cent of domestic assaults occur in and around the victim’s home (Jones et al. 1986). Domestic assaults also commonly occur on other residential premises, such as the homes of friends or relatives, or on the street (Jones et al. 1986).

Figure 2: Percentages of domestic or non-domestic assault incidents by premises type: NSW, 2004

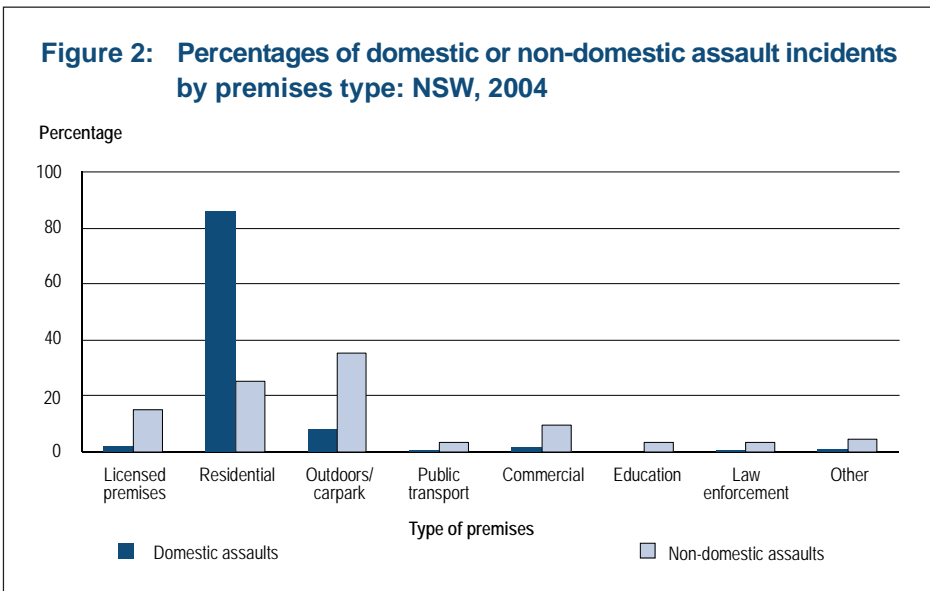
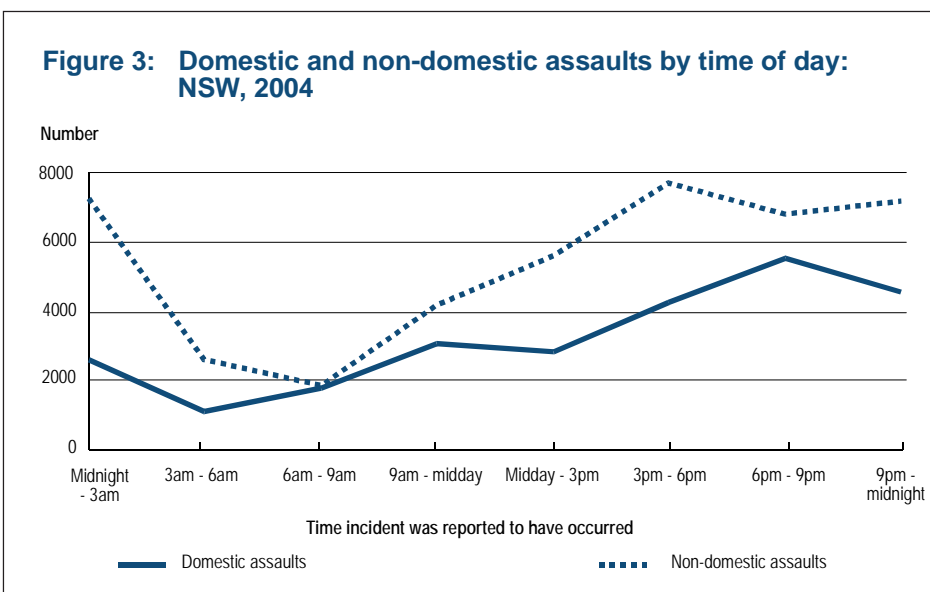


Figure 3: Domestic and non-domestic assaults by time of day: NSW, 2004



TIME OF INCIDENTS

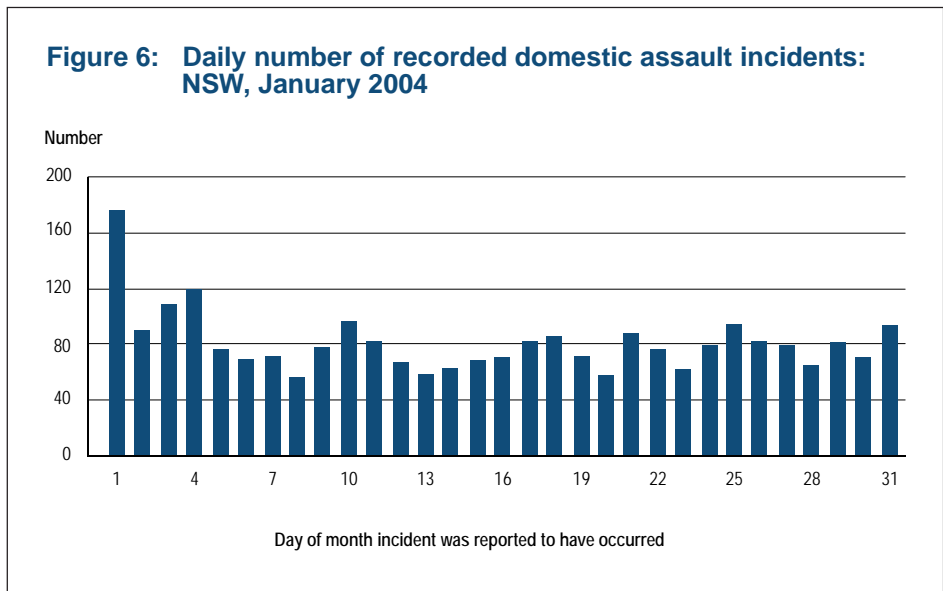
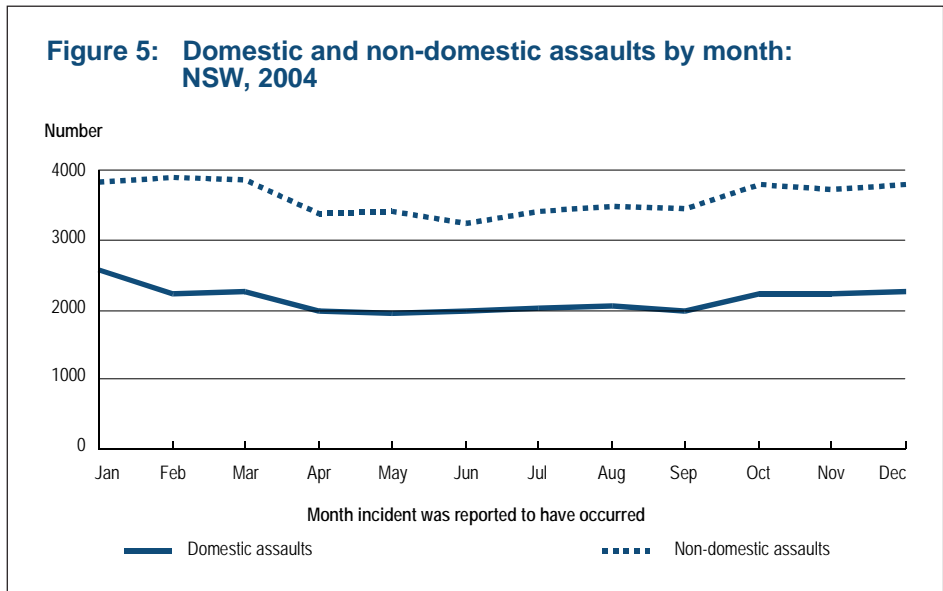
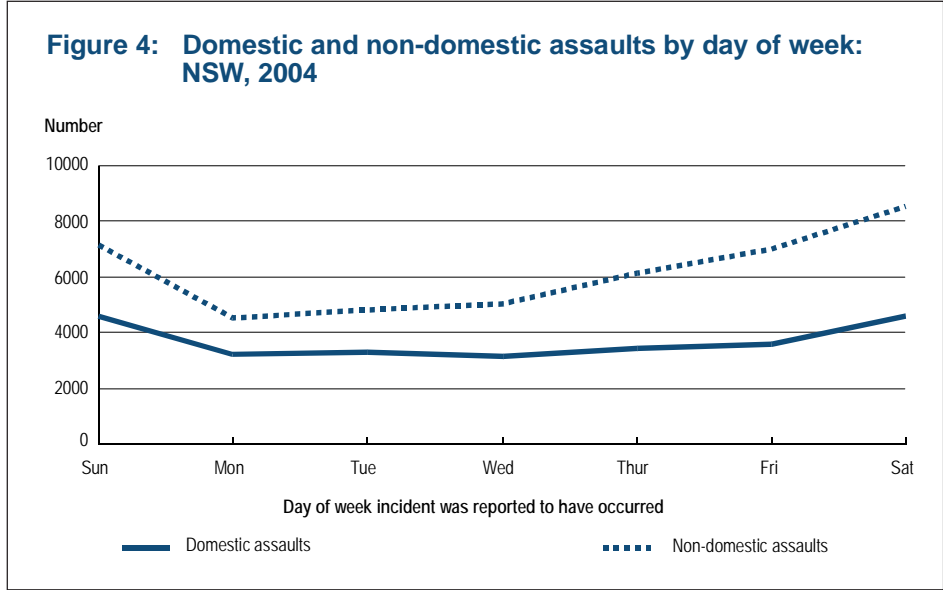
Figure 3 shows the time of day at which domestic and non-domestic assault incidents reportedly occurred. More domestic assault incidents occurred between three pm and midnight than any other times, with the peak number of incidents occurring between six pm and nine pm. The smallest number of incidents occurred between three am and six am. The pattern for non-domestic assaults was similar, with large numbers of non-domestic assaults occurring from three pm to three am, with the largest numbers of these assaults occurring between three pm and six pm. Large numbers of non-domestic assaults also occurred between midnight and three am. The smallest proportion of these assaults occurred between three am and nine am.

As can be seen from Figure 4, the numbers of domestic assault incidents recorded by police varied only slightly across the weekdays. On Saturdays and Sundays the number of domestic assault incidents was one and a half times higher than it was on weekdays. Non-domestic assaults were much more common on Saturdays and Sundays. Unlike domestic assault, however, the incidence of non-domestic assault tended to increase toward the end of the working week.

Figure 5 shows the number of domestic and non-domestic assault incidents recorded for each month of 2004. There were more recorded incidents of domestic assault in the period from October through to March than during any other month of the year, with the highest number occurring in January. Figure 6 provides a closer look at the pattern over this month. The number of domestic assault incidents that were recorded by police in January 2004 varied from 57 to 120 per day, with the exception of 1 January, where 176 incidents of domestic assault were recorded. This number was substantially higher than any other day in January or the rest of the year. Except for this day, the number of incidents recorded in 2004 varied between 37 and 120 per day. The number of recorded domestic assaults on 1 January is about 150 per cent higher than the average daily number reported throughout the year (70.2). The monthly pattern for non-domestic assaults is similar to that for domestic assaults, except the highest number of these occurred in February and March, as shown in Figure 5. As with domestic assaults, however, the number of non-domestic assaults varied from day to day during the year, with many more non-domestic assaults on 1 January (327) than on any other day (60 to 228 per day).

ALCOHOL

There is considerable debate about the contribution that alcohol makes to domestic violence, but a number of



studies (Stevenson 1996; Finney 2004) have found that alcohol consumption increases aggression. There were 25,761 domestic assault incidents recorded in NSW in 2004, 36.2 per cent of which were flagged by police as alcohol-related.³ A similar percentage (38.7%) of the 43,223 other assaults in NSW in 2004 were also flagged as alcohol-related. As mentioned above, the greatest number of assaults for 2004 occurred on 1 January. On this day, 51.7 per cent of domestic assaults and 72.8 per cent of non-domestic assaults were flagged as alcohol-related.

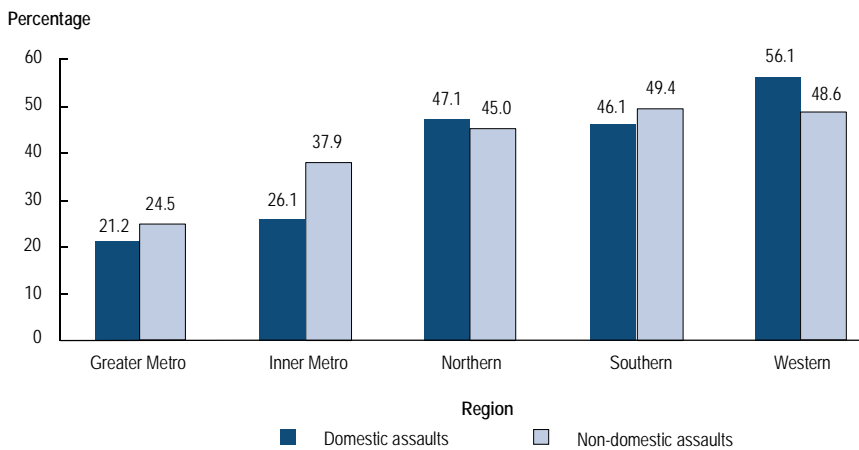
When the five regions of NSW were considered separately, as shown in Figure 7, the Northern, Southern and Western regions of the State had greater proportions of assaults that were flagged as alcohol-related than the Sydney metropolitan regions.⁴ Within most of the regions, however, the proportions of alcohol-related domestic and non-domestic assaults were fairly similar. The exception is the Sydney inner metropolitan region, where the percentage of alcohol-related non-domestic assaults was considerably greater than the percentage of alcohol-related domestic assaults.

VICTIM AND OFFENDER

GENDER

As can be seen from Figure 8, the majority of victims of domestic assault were female (71.1%) and the majority of offenders were male (80.4%). This finding is to be expected given that a large proportion of victims of domestic violence are women who are abused by their male partners (Stubbs & Powell 1989; Dobash & Dobash 2004). It is noteworthy, nonetheless, that 28.9 per cent of victims of domestic assault recorded by police are male.⁶

Figure 7: Percentage of assaults flagged as alcohol-related by region: NSW, 2004



AGE

Figure 9 shows the percentages of victims of domestic assault by gender and age group. The risk of domestic assault appears to increase rapidly up until the mid-thirties and then to slowly decline. Most victims, whether male or female, were aged between 20 and 39. There are, however, differences in the distribution of ages for male and female victims. In the under 15-year old age group, and in each age group over the age of 40, the proportion of male victims was substantially higher than the proportion of female victims. Relatively few female victims were aged less than 15 and female victims were more commonly aged between 15 and 39.

Figure 8: Gender of victims and offenders of domestic assault incidents: NSW, 2004⁵

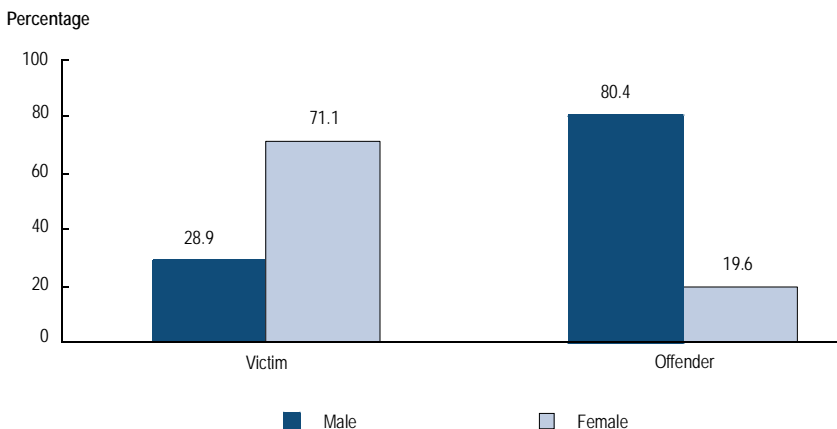


Figure 10 shows offenders in domestic assaults by gender and age group. The age distributions are very similar for male and female offenders. As with victims, a large percentage of offenders were aged between 20 and 39, with the highest percentage being aged between 30 and 34. Female offenders were almost as common as male offenders in most age groups and were more common among those under 19 years of age. It is important to note that these patterns might not be characteristic of domestic assaults that are not reported to police.

Figure 9: Percentages of victims of domestic assault by gender and age group: NSW, 2004⁷

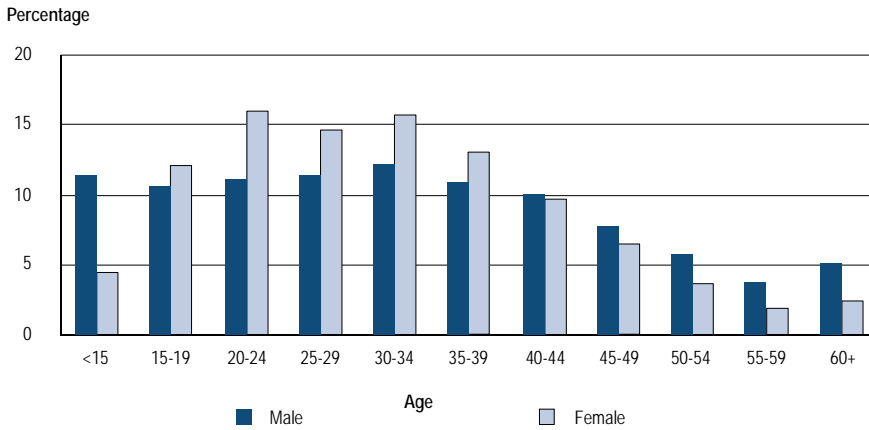


Figure 10: Percentages of offenders of domestic assault by gender and age group: NSW, 2004⁸

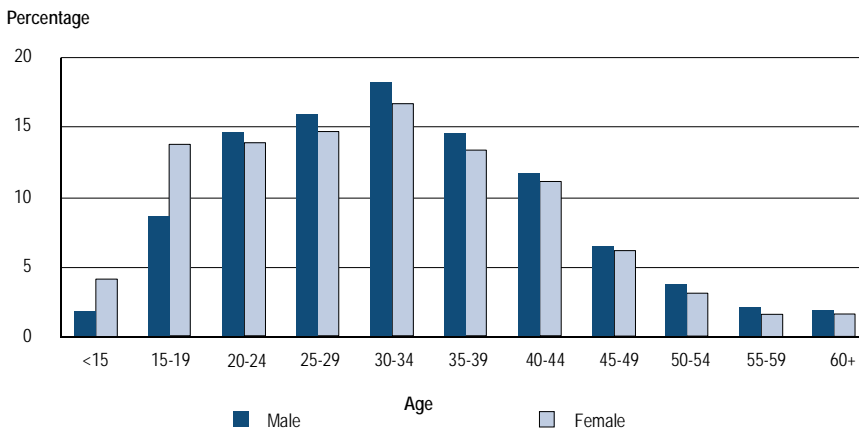
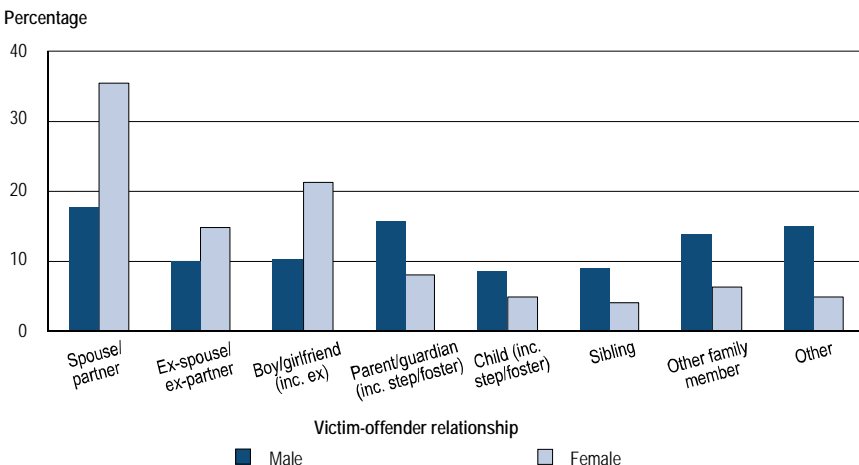


Figure 11: Gender of victims of domestic assault by victim-offender relationship: NSW, 2004⁹



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VICTIM AND OFFENDER

In 61.8 per cent of reported incidents of domestic assault, the offender was a current or former intimate partner (spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend) of the victim. In 10.1 per cent of domestic assaults, parents/guardians (including step/foster parents) were the offenders. Other family members (including siblings, aunts/uncles and cousins) were the offenders in 19.9 per cent of domestic assaults and the remaining 8.2 per cent of victims were assaulted by offenders from other categories.

When male and female victims were considered separately, the relationship of the offender to the victim followed different patterns, as shown in Figure 11. Where the relationship between victim and offender was one of current or former intimate partner (spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend), the victim was more likely to be a female. In all other categories of victim/offender relationship (i.e. parent/guardians, children, siblings, other family members and other persons), the victim was more likely to be male. As shown in Figure 9, 11.5 per cent of male victims and 4.4 per cent of female victims were under the age of 15. Almost half the victims in this age group were assaulted by a parent or guardian.

Table 3 shows the gender of victims and offenders of domestic assault by their relationship as intimate partners (current or former spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend) or non-partners. Some domestic assault incidents involved more than one victim or offender. Table 3 counts each victim separately and shows whether male or female victims were assaulted by males only, females only or by males and females.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, for partner relationships, almost all female victims were assaulted by males (95.2%). Very few females were assaulted by other females (1.5%) or by a combination of males and females (3.3%). The data differ greatly for partner relationships when male victims are considered. Seventy per cent of male victims were assaulted by females, 15.8 per cent were assaulted by

Table 3: Gender of victims and offenders of domestic assault by partner or non-partner relationship: NSW, 2004¹¹

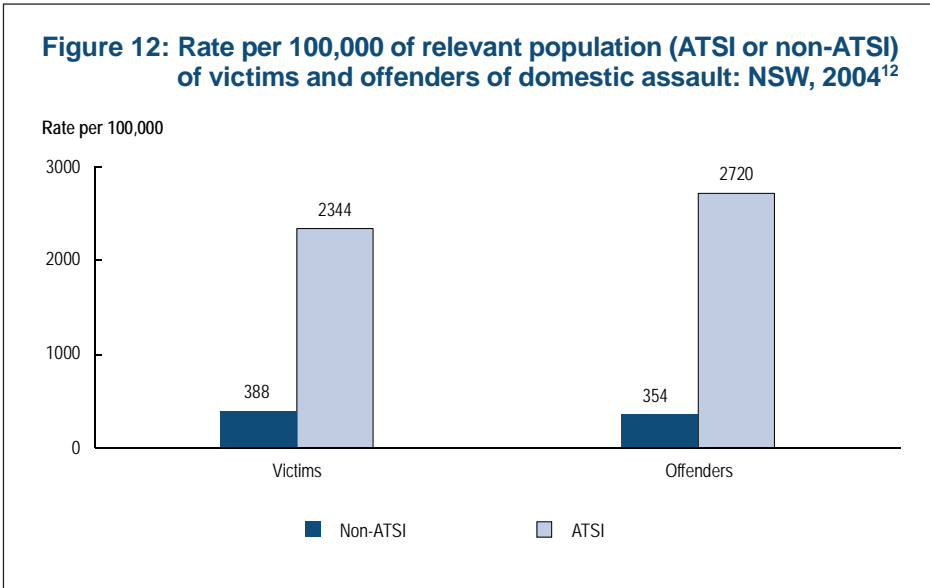
		Offender(s)			Total
		Male	Female	Male & Female	
Partner relationship					
Victim	Male	14.1	70.1	15.8	100
	Female	95.2	1.5	3.3	100
Non-partner relationship					
Victim	Male	83.4	12.9	3.8	100
	Female	62.6	33.1	4.2	100

males and females and 14.1 per cent were assaulted by other males. The relatively large proportion of male-male partner assaults highlights the extent of domestic violence in same-sex couples, an issue that is generating a growing body of literature (e.g. Kuehnle & Sullivan 2003; Toro-Alfonso & Rodriguez-Madera 2004). For non-partner relationships, victims were most likely to be assaulted by male offenders. It is noteworthy, however, that in non-partner relationships, about a third of female victims were assaulted by other females.

ATSI STATUS

Figure 12 shows that proportionally more people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) origin were victims or offenders of domestic assault incidents than people of non-ATSI origin. As a proportion of their respective populations (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004b,c), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were approximately six times more likely to be victims and approximately eight times more likely to be offenders of domestic assault than non-ATSI people.

Figure 12: Rate per 100,000 of relevant population (ATSI or non-ATSI) of victims and offenders of domestic assault: NSW, 2004¹²



INJURY

Figure 13 shows the percentages of victims and offenders injured during domestic and non-domestic assault incidents in 2004. Many more victims than offenders were injured in both types of assaults. Approximately one-third (31.1%) of the 28,290 victims of domestic assault were injured but a very small proportion (4.8%) of the 26,594 offenders were injured. Similarly, 28.2 per cent of the 49,294 victims of non-domestic assault were injured, whereas only 3.9 percent of the 36,133 offenders were injured.¹³

Figure 13: Percentages of victims and offenders injured during domestic and non-domestic assaults: NSW, 2004

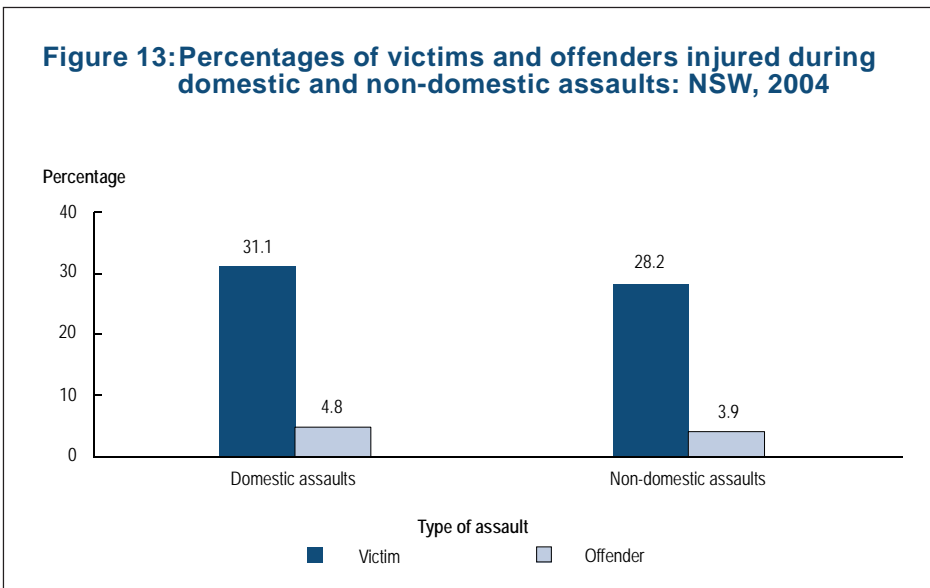


Figure 14 shows that in domestic assaults, females are more likely to be injured when the assailant is a partner but males are more likely to be injured when the assailant is someone who was not their partner.

The percentages of injured victims who sustained various types of injuries are

shown in Figure 15. Of the 2,260 male and 6,454 female victims of domestic assault who were injured, 28.4 per cent of males and 40.2 per cent of females were bruised. Red marks were apparent on 28.2 per cent and 32.3 per cent of male and female victims, respectively. Injuries were not visible on 28.6 per cent of male victims and 31.3 per cent of female victims, although they reportedly suffered physical pain. Bleeding (29.2% male; 18.6% female), minor lacerations (29.0% male; 18.4% female) and swelling (15.2% male; 19.7% female) were also common. About 15 per cent of male and female victims fell into the more serious category, that is, they suffered injuries such as unconsciousness, fractures, burns, internal injuries, torn/strained muscles, severed body parts, shock, spinal injuries, sprains, torn ligaments and severe lacerations.¹⁵ Female victims were noticeably more likely to be bruised and less likely to suffer minor lacerations and bleeding than male victims. This may reflect gender-based differences in the kinds of incidents reported to police rather than actual differences in the patterns of injuries involved in domestic assault.

Figure 16 shows the percentages of victims who sustained different types of injuries by gender. The percentages were almost identical for male and female victims. Of the injured victims, approximately 58 per cent sustained only one type of injury, approximately 22 per cent sustained two types of injury and the remaining victims (approximately 20%) sustained three or more different types of injuries.

It is worth noting that, although domestic assault incidents reported to police tend to be at the more serious end of the spectrum, the Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (Mouzos & Makkai 2004) found similar results. Forty per cent of women in that study reported being injured in their last incident of intimate partner violence. The most common injuries were minor in nature. For example, 83 per cent of women who

Figure 14: The percentages of victims injured in partner and non-partner domestic assaults by gender: NSW, 2004¹⁴

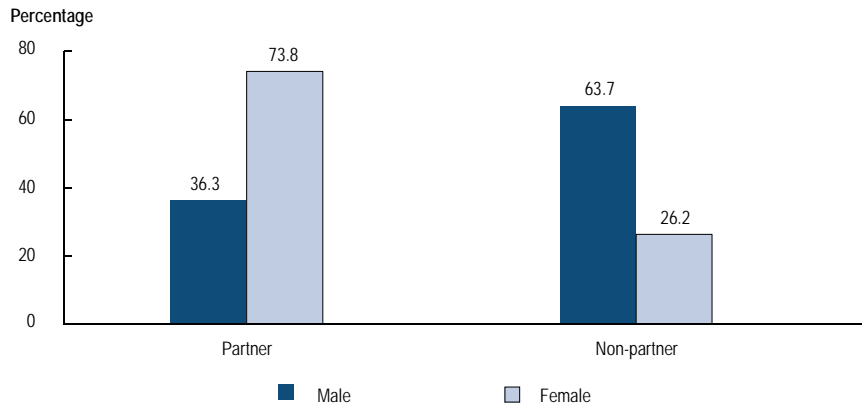


Figure 15: Percentages of injured victims that sustained various types of injuries by gender: NSW, 2004

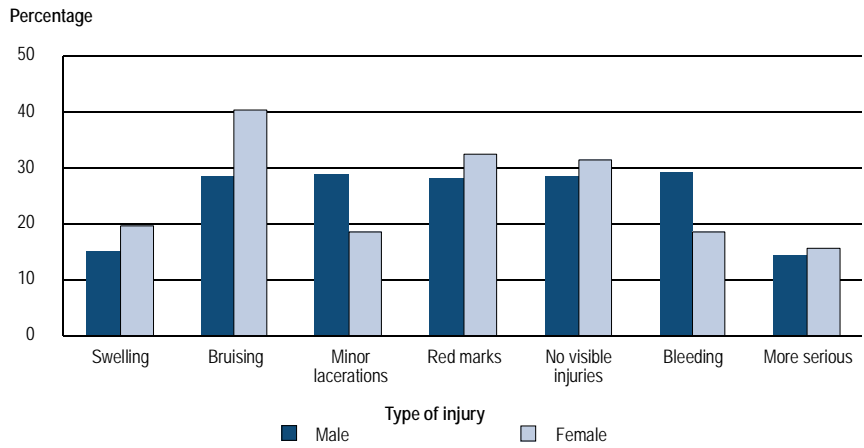
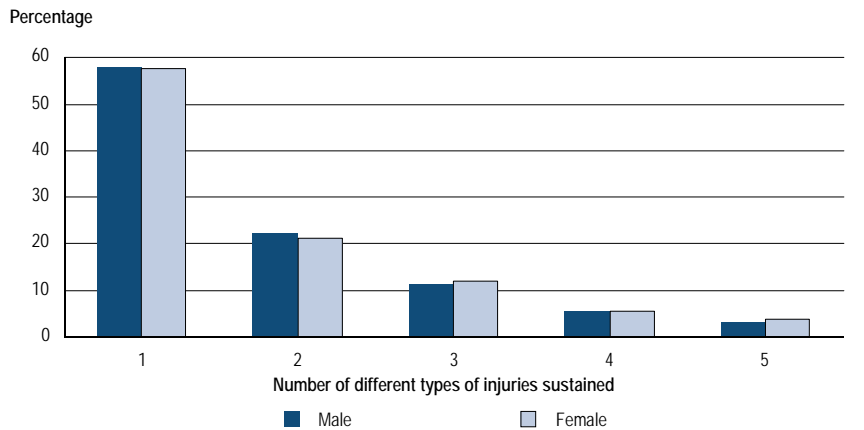


Figure 16: The numbers of different types of injuries sustained by victims: NSW, 2004



sustained injuries during the most recent event suffered bruising and swelling, 22 per cent suffered cuts, scratches and burns, 10 per cent had broken bones/noses and a smaller proportion suffered other types of injuries.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CORRELATES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ASSAULT

Several studies have examined the risk factors associated with domestic violence. In an earlier NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research study, Coumarelos and Allen (1998) used data from the first national survey on violence against women to examine the impact of the victim’s age, birthplace, educational attainment, labour force status, marital status, main source of income, childhood experience of physical or sexual abuse and previous experience of violence as an adult. They found that the risk of having experienced violence was higher among younger women; among those whose highest level of education was a diploma; among those who were in a defacto relationship, separated, widowed or never married; among those who had experienced childhood physical abuse and among those who were on a Government benefit (as opposed to being a wage or salary earner). These results are consistent with other evidence linking crime to economic and/or social disadvantage (Weatherburn & Lind 2001; Pratt & Cullen 2005).

Mouzos and Makkai (2004) examined the relationship between intimate partner physical violence and marital status, household income, educational attainment, length of current relationship, alcohol consumption, previous experience of violence by a partner, childhood physical or sexual abuse, whether the victim’s partner had a history of violence outside the family and whether he engaged in a range of ‘controlling’ or aggressive behaviours (e.g. limiting his partner’s contact with

family and friends, closely monitoring the partner’s whereabouts, damaging property). They found that among the socio-demographic factors they examined, only the length of the relationship was significant. Overall the strongest risk factors were characteristics of the male, such as controlling behaviours, aggression and drinking habits. Data presented earlier in this bulletin indicate that Indigenous people are much more likely to be victims of domestic assault than non-Indigenous people. Trimboli (1995) found that single mothers in New South Wales were almost three times as likely to be victims of personal crime than married women. Unemployed women have been found to be more likely to be victims of personal crime than employed women (Trimboli 1995). These individual-level associations between disadvantage and crime are mirrored in studies of the correlates of high crime communities. Higher rates of crime have been found in areas with high rates of family dissolution, high rates of unemployment, higher rates of residential instability (Pratt & Cullen 2005; Weatherburn & Lind 2001) and higher proportions of public housing (Matka 1997).

To examine the relationship between domestic assault and disadvantage in NSW, the recorded rate of domestic assault in each postcode of NSW¹⁶ was

examined using a regression analysis¹⁷ of five factors:

- the percentage of Indigenous people resident in the postcode;
- the percentage of sole parents under 25 years of age resident in the postcode (as a proportion of the total number of families);
- the percentage of rental accommodation in the postcode that is public housing;
- the male unemployment rate; and
- the level of residential instability in the postcode (measured by the proportion of residents who had a different address one year ago).

The results of the regression are shown in Table 4. All factors are significant independent predictors of the recorded rate of domestic assault within a postcode. Taken together, the five factors explain 61 percent of the variation in the rate of domestic assault ($r^2 = 0.61$). It would appear, then, that while domestic assault is a problem in every area of NSW (see Appendix 1), the incidence of domestic assault in an area is strongly linked (either through higher risks of offending or greater risk of victimisation) to the level of economic and social disadvantage in the area. The mechanisms underpinning the relationship between disadvantage and domestic assault, however, remain unclear.

Table 4: Relationships between domestic assault and a number of socio-economic factors¹⁸

	<i>Unstandardised coefficient</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	T	P
Intercept	4.482	0.094	47.467	<0.001
Per cent Indigenous	0.091	0.009	10.287	<0.001
Per cent sole parent	0.187	0.047	3.947	<0.001
Housing Authority/total rented	0.015	0.002	8.581	<0.001
Male unemployment rate	0.032	0.006	5.006	<0.001
Proportion different address one year ago	0.018	0.004	4.251	<0.001

SUMMARY

Somewhere between six and nine per cent of Australian women aged 18 and over are physically assaulted each year. In the majority of cases the assailant is a man they know. Domestic assaults accounted for 35 to 40 per cent of the assaults recorded by police each year from 1997 to 2004. The recorded rate of domestic assault in NSW increased steadily from 1997 until 2002, but has remained relatively stable since 2002. The increase does not appear to be a result of increased willingness to report the offence to police (or increased police willingness to record the offence), but it is impossible to dismiss this possibility altogether.

The incidence of domestic assault peaks between three pm and midnight, with the highest number of assaults occurring between six pm and nine pm. Police are one and a half times more likely to record a domestic assault on weekends than on weekdays. More domestic assaults occur in January than any other month of the year, with the highest number of domestic assaults being recorded on the first of January. The frequency of domestic assault on this day is two and a half times higher than the average daily frequency throughout the year (70.2). Not surprisingly, given this finding, alcohol appears to be a contributing factor in a large percentage of domestic assaults recorded by police. In 2004, about 36 per cent of all domestic assaults recorded by police were flagged as alcohol-related. On 1 January, 51.7 per cent of domestic assaults were flagged as alcohol-related. The metropolitan regions of Sydney had fewer alcohol-related domestic assaults than other parts of NSW.

Many more victims than offenders are injured during a domestic assault. Females are more likely than males to be injured by their current or former partners but males are more likely to be injured than females when the offender is someone other than a current or former partner (e.g. a family member). Bruising, red marks, minor lacerations and bleeding were common injuries

sustained by victims of domestic assault incidents recorded by police.

Approximately 15 per cent of victims suffered more serious injuries. Males were more likely to suffer minor lacerations and bleeding than females. Females were more likely to suffer bruising than males. Approximately 58 per cent of injured victims were recorded as having only one type of injury. The remaining victims had multiple injuries. These injury patterns are not likely to be reflective of all domestic assault incidents because injury is one of the factors that influences whether a domestic assault is reported to police.

Police data suggest that Indigenous Australians are far more likely to become victims of domestic assault or to be offenders of domestic assault than non-Indigenous Australians.

Most victims of domestic assault incidents recorded by police are aged between 20 and 39. The majority of victims are female (71.1%) and the majority of offenders are male (80.4%). Where the victim was under 15 years of age, or more than 39 years of age, however, male victims outnumber female victims (in the former case by more than two to one). Female victims are more likely to be abused by a current or former intimate partner and male victims are more likely to be abused by other family members and other persons. Almost half of all victims under 15 were abused by a parent or guardian. It should be borne in mind, however, that these patterns might be typical only of domestic assaults that are reported to, and recorded by, the police.

Bourke and Walgett have the highest recorded rates of domestic assault in NSW. Campbelltown and Blacktown have the highest recorded rates of domestic assault in the Sydney metropolitan region. In general, the incidence of domestic assault recorded by police is higher in areas that have: a higher percentage of Indigenous residents, a higher percentage of sole parents under 25 years of age, a higher percentage of public housing, a higher male unemployment rate and higher rates of residential instability.

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NOTES

- 1 As with the data collected by the police, victim surveys can also underestimate the occurrence of domestic violence. Some people may not disclose such incidents in the surveys or they may not remember them. In addition, many surveys are not worded in a way that would distinguish domestic violence from other types of violence (Johnson 2004).
- 2 Rates per 100,000 population for LGAs with population less than 3,000 are not included.
- 3 These data may underestimate the true incidence of alcohol-related assault because police do not consistently flag assaults as alcohol-related.
- 4 The numbers of flagged alcohol-related assaults might be underestimated in the greater and inner metropolitan areas of Sydney because a new, more consistent method of flagging alcohol-related assaults was not used in these areas for the entire of 2004.
- 5 Totals exclude 396 cases (of 28,290) where the gender of the victim was unknown and 247 cases (of 26,594) where the gender of the offender was unknown.
- 6 This figure is higher than is commonly noted in the literature and reflects the broad definition of domestic violence adopted in the NSW legislation.
- 7 Data excludes 835 (of 28,290) cases where the age and/or gender of the victim were not known.
- 8 Data excludes 522 (of 26,594) cases where the age and/or gender of the offender were not known.
- 9 Data excludes 560 (of 28,290) cases where the gender of the victim or the relationship between the victim and offender were not recorded.
- 10 For cases with multiple offenders, at least one of the offenders must be an intimate partner (current or former spouse/partner/boyfriend/girlfriend) to be included in the data for partners.
- 11 Data excludes 1629 (of 28,290) cases where the gender of the victim or the offender was not known or where the relationship between the victim and offender(s) was not recorded.
- 12 Rates for ATSI and non-ATSI populations were calculated using 2001 population estimates because more recent data for ATSI populations were not available.
- 13 These figures should be treated with caution because police may be more willing to record injury to the victim than to the offender. Victims who are injured are also more likely to report the offence to police (Johnson 2004).
- 14 Data excludes 125 (of 8810) injured victims where the gender of the victim or the relationship between the victim and offender were not recorded.
- 15 Percentages for the number of victims with specific types of injuries do not add up to 100 per cent because some victims may have sustained multiple injuries.
- 16 Postcodes with populations smaller than 3,000 were excluded because recorded rates of domestic assault in postcodes with small populations may not provide a reliable guide to the true rate of domestic assault.
- 17 An ordinary least squares regression was conducted with all factors entered simultaneously. The number of reported domestic assaults for 2001 (the same year as the census) was used as the response variable. Data on the independent variables were sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Basic Community Profile for 2001. Because the response variable was highly positively skewed the log of the recorded domestic assault rate was used as the dependent variable, rather than the actual rate.
- 18 Regression diagnostics showed no problems of multi-collinearity and residuals were normally distributed.

APPENDIX 1

Number of domestic assault incidents and the rate per population for each LGA in NSW in rank order

<i>Rank</i>	<i>LGA</i>	<i>Number of domestic assault incidents</i>	<i>Estimated population in 2004</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000 population</i>
1	Bourke	139	3,924	3,542.3
2	Walgett	266	8,096	3,285.6
3	Coonamble	70	4,728	1,480.5
4	Moree Plains	201	16,027	1,254.1
5	Gilgandra	53	4,682	1,132.0
6	Glen Innes	61	5,945	1,026.1
7	Dubbo	398	39,077	1,018.5
8	Narromine	69	7,020	982.9
9	Lachlan	67	7,431	901.6
10	Carrathool	29	3,308	876.7
11	Wentworth	63	7,236	870.6
12	Wellington	69	8,668	796.0
13	Inverell	121	15,729	769.3
14	Campbelltown	1,087	149,961	724.9
15	Tenterfield	49	6,785	722.2
16	Evans	38	5,356	709.5
17	Cowra	93	13,147	707.4
18	Kempsey	198	28,114	704.3
19	Tumut	79	11,382	694.1
20	Narrandera	45	6,594	682.4
21	Broken Hill	136	20,440	665.4
22	Blacktown	1,829	278,532	656.7
23	Young	78	11,957	652.3
24	Warren	21	3,282	639.9
25	Griffith	154	24,909	618.3
26	Guyra	27	4,441	608.0
27	Shoalhaven	532	91,765	579.7
28	Narrabri	81	14,239	568.9
29	Lismore	245	43,229	566.7
30	Bathurst	174	31,564	551.3
31	Coffs Harbour	363	66,529	545.6
32	Richmond Valley	113	20,838	542.3
33	Greater Taree	250	46,474	537.9
34	Sydney	778	146,297	531.8
35	Lithgow	109	20,564	530.1
36	Wyong	747	141,764	526.9
37	Leeton	63	12,028	523.8
38	Orange	195	37,546	519.4
39	Snowy River	38	7,322	519.0
40	Wagga Wagga	297	57,557	516.0
41	Muswellbrook	78	15,195	513.3
42	Greater Argyle	137	27,003	507.4
43	Great Lakes	167	34,186	488.5
44	Penrith	852	177,554	479.9
45	Newcastle	697	145,633	478.6
46	Cobar	24	5,020	478.1
47	Marrickville	362	75,870	477.1
48	Maitland	279	59,949	465.4
49	Cootamundra	35	7,596	460.8
50	Harden	17	3,771	450.8
51	Albury	198	44,887	441.1
52	Gunnedah	54	12,287	439.5
53	Kyogle	42	9,628	436.2
54	Greater Queanbeyan	157	36,331	432.1
55	Cessnock	208	48,143	432.0
56	Manilla	14	3,254	430.2

Number of domestic assault incidents and the rate per population for each LGA in NSW in rank order

<i>Rank</i>	<i>LGA</i>	<i>Number of domestic assault incidents</i>	<i>Estimated population in 2004</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000 population</i>
57	Liverpool	717	167,880	427.1
58	Gundagai	16	3,763	425.2
59	Holroyd	387	91,211	424.3
60	Mudgee	78	18,421	423.4
61	Fairfield	782	187,683	416.7
62	Hawkesbury	259	63,598	407.2
63	Forbes	40	9,974	401.0
64	Parkes	60	15,034	399.1
65	Clarence Valley	197	49,422	398.6
66	Ballina	157	39,546	397.0
67	Shellharbour	247	62,338	396.2
68	Cabonne	50	12,626	396.0
69	Eurobodalla	142	35,902	395.5
70	Armidale Dumaresq	97	24,596	394.4
71	Wollongong	754	191,558	393.6
72	Bellingen	50	12,720	393.1
73	Junee	23	5,887	390.7
74	Bega Valley	123	31,955	384.9
75	Port Stephens	239	62,448	382.7
76	Nambucca	70	18,525	377.9
77	Gosford	607	162,841	372.8
78	Parramatta	561	151,076	371.3
79	Rylstone	14	3,821	366.4
80	Temora	23	6,295	365.4
81	Lake Macquarie	684	189,196	361.5
82	Ashfield	145	40,258	360.2
83	Yass Valley	44	12,549	350.6
84	Hurstville	262	75,640	346.4
85	Hay	12	3,549	338.1
86	Murray	22	6,604	333.1
87	Oberon	17	5,106	332.9
88	Hume	27	8,166	330.6
89	Botany Bay	122	37,192	328.0
90	Bogan	10	3,122	320.3
91	Singleton	70	21,913	319.4
92	Coonabarabran	21	6,673	314.7
93	Corowa	27	8,596	314.1
94	Byron	95	30,724	309.2
95	Tamworth	115	37,272	308.5
96	Camden	154	50,302	306.2
97	Quirindi	15	4,928	304.4
98	Wollondilly	122	40,661	300.0
99	Uralla	18	6,040	298.0
100	Wingecarribee	132	44,311	297.9
101	Lockhart	10	3,528	283.4
102	Deniliquin	23	8,214	280.0
103	Tweed	222	79,910	277.8
104	Hastings	190	69,737	272.5
105	Bankstown	477	175,428	271.9
106	Palerang	30	11,325	264.9
107	Burwood	81	31,085	260.6
108	Berrigan	21	8,188	256.5
109	Auburn	160	62,797	254.8
110	Blayney	17	6,688	254.2
111	Kogarah	138	55,012	250.9
112	Upper Lachlan	19	7,621	249.3
113	Tumbarumba	9	3,623	248.4
114	Gloucester	12	4,902	244.8

Number of domestic assault incidents and the rate per population for each LGA in NSW in rank order

<i>Rank</i>	<i>LGA</i>	<i>Number of domestic assault incidents</i>	<i>Estimated population in 2004</i>	<i>Rate per 100,000 population</i>
115	Waverley	151	62,096	243.2
116	Parry	31	12,807	242.1
117	Randwick	306	126,431	242.0
118	Rockdale	227	95,036	238.9
119	Weddin	9	3,823	235.4
120	Scone	23	9,819	234.2
121	Coolah	9	3,877	232.1
122	Wakool	11	4,837	227.4
123	Culcairn	9	4,017	224.0
124	Yallaroi	7	3,137	223.1
125	Canterbury	301	135,048	222.9
126	Blue Mountains	171	77,011	222.0
127	Ryde	201	99,662	201.7
128	Leichhardt	103	51,430	200.3
129	Warringah	272	138,646	196.2
130	Strathfield	60	31,129	192.7
131	Walcha	6	3,261	184.0
132	Dungog	15	8,379	179.0
133	Kiama	34	20,176	168.5
134	Sutherland Shire	362	214,784	168.5
135	North Sydney	102	60,789	167.8
136	Cooma-Monaro	16	9,773	163.7
137	Canada Bay	108	66,148	163.3
138	Manly	63	38,987	161.6
139	Willoughby	97	63,905	151.8
140	Pittwater	85	56,954	149.2
141	Coolamon	6	4,111	145.9
142	Baulkham Hills	217	157,854	137.5
143	Hornsby	212	156,929	135.1
144	Woollahra	71	53,095	133.7
145	Mosman	35	28,420	123.2
146	Lane Cove	39	32,341	120.6
147	Bland	7	6,552	106.8
148	Hunters Hill	13	13,911	93.5
149	Ku-ring-gai	84	108,830	77.2
—	Balranald	23	2,737	na
—	Barraba	2	2,185	na
—	Bingara	4	2,029	na
—	Bombala	8	2,545	na
—	Boorowa	7	2,476	na
—	Brewarrina	80	2,143	na
—	Central Darling	148	2,418	na
—	Conargo	5	1,791	na
—	Holbrook	2	2,470	na
—	Jerilderie	5	1,883	na
—	Merriwa	4	2,312	na
—	Murrumbidgee	13	2,636	na
—	Murrurundi	1	2,165	na
—	Nundle	4	1,310	na
—	Severn	16	2,849	na
—	Urana	8	1,395	na
—	Unincorporated Far West	6	828	na
	New South Wales	25,761	6,731,295	382.7

* Rates per 100,000 population for LGAs with population less than 3,000 are not calculated.