



BEYOND THE NARRATIVE

2026

AN INFORMATION GUIDE

Domestic and Family Violence, Suicide, and the Data Gap for Male Victims

*Understanding how domestic and family violence connects
to suicide in Australia, and where the data currently falls short*

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Introduction

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is usually discussed as a story about homicide, and public conversation about who it affects is shaped by that framing. But homicide is only one of the ways domestic violence ends in death. This guide looks at a second, much larger pathway: suicide, and at what happens to the public picture of domestic violence once that pathway is properly counted.

This guide draws on the same evidence base BTN2026 submitted to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs' Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide. It is written as a general information resource rather than a submission, so it can be shared, taught from, and referred back to on its own terms.

Nothing in this guide is intended to minimise or compete with the well-established evidence on female victims of domestic violence. That evidence is real, essential, and not challenged here. This guide instead sets out an underexamined part of the picture: the relationship between domestic violence and male suicide, and why Australia's data currently cannot answer some of the most basic questions about it.

1. Types of Domestic and Family Violence

Domestic and family violence is not a single act but a pattern of behaviours used to establish power and control over an intimate partner or family member. The main recognised types are:

- ▶ Physical abuse: hitting, restraining, use of weapons, or any direct physical harm.
- ▶ Sexual abuse: coerced or non-consensual sexual activity, including within a relationship.
- ▶ Psychological/emotional abuse, meaning humiliation, threats, intimidation, isolation from friends and family, and degradation.
- ▶ Coercive control, a sustained pattern combining several tactics (monitoring, restricting movement, controlling finances or communication) designed to entrap and dominate the victim over time. This is increasingly understood as the organising concept behind most other DFV categories, rather than a standalone type.
- ▶ Financial/economic abuse: restricting access to money, sabotaging employment, and accruing debt in the victim's name.
- ▶ Technology-facilitated abuse, such as stalking or harassment via phones, GPS tracking, social media, or spyware.
- ▶ Legal and administrative abuse ("systems abuse"), which means misusing family law, AVO/DVO, child custody, or immigration processes to continue control or harassment after separation.
- ▶ Post-separation abuse: a distinct and often escalating category. The risk of serious harm, homicide, and suicide frequently peaks around separation rather than during the relationship itself.

These categories overlap. Most DFV cases involve several types at once, with coercive control now understood as the common thread linking them.

2. How These Forms of Violence Contribute to Suicide

Suicide is not currently classified as a standalone "type" of DFV harm in most official frameworks, but a growing body of evidence treats DFV-related suicide as a distinct outcome category, sitting alongside DFV-related homicide.

Key mechanisms linking DFV exposure to suicide

- ▶ Cumulative psychological injury: chronic coercive control, humiliation, and isolation produce depression, complex trauma, and hopelessness (well-established suicide risk states), independent of any single violent incident.
- ▶ Crisis points around separation and legal proceedings, such as Family Court disputes, loss of contact with children, DVO/AVO proceedings, and financial ruin following separation, are identified in the literature as acute precipitating stressors.
- ▶ Victim suicide as an outcome of entrapment. Where escape feels impossible (financial dependence, threats against children, disbelief from services), suicide can present as the only perceived exit. This is the pathway most studied, and it has mainly been studied for female victims.

- **Perpetrator suicide.** A meaningful share of DFV-related suicides involve people who were also using violence, including some who die by suicide following the legal and social fallout of an allegation, whether substantiated or not. Separately, some genuine victims, particularly male victims defending themselves, are misidentified by police as the primary aggressor; this is a distinct, documented issue in DV policing research and should not be conflated with perpetrator suicide itself.
- **Systemic disbelief and service exclusion.** For victims who don't fit the stereotypical profile (notably male victims, and victims from minority or Indigenous backgrounds), being turned away or disbelieved by support services compounds despair. A systematic review of male victims of domestic violence identified fear of disclosure, a perceived challenge to masculinity, and the invisibility of existing services as recurring, documented barriers to help-seeking; this was independently corroborated by a large 2026 US study of nearly 1,200 male victims, where keeping the abuse private was the dominant barrier across all groups studied.

This pattern shows up in Australian administrative data too: men are the majority (55.9%) of people actually experiencing homelessness in Australia, yet only 40% of Specialist Homelessness Services clients, and just 25% of clients whose presentation was recorded as domestic and family violence, are male.

What the national data shows

The clearest national evidence on this question comes from AIHW's Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Integrated Data System (FDSV IDS).

3,889 men / 2,003 women within the FDSV-linked cohort died by suicide, 2010 to 2023, nearly double the number for men.

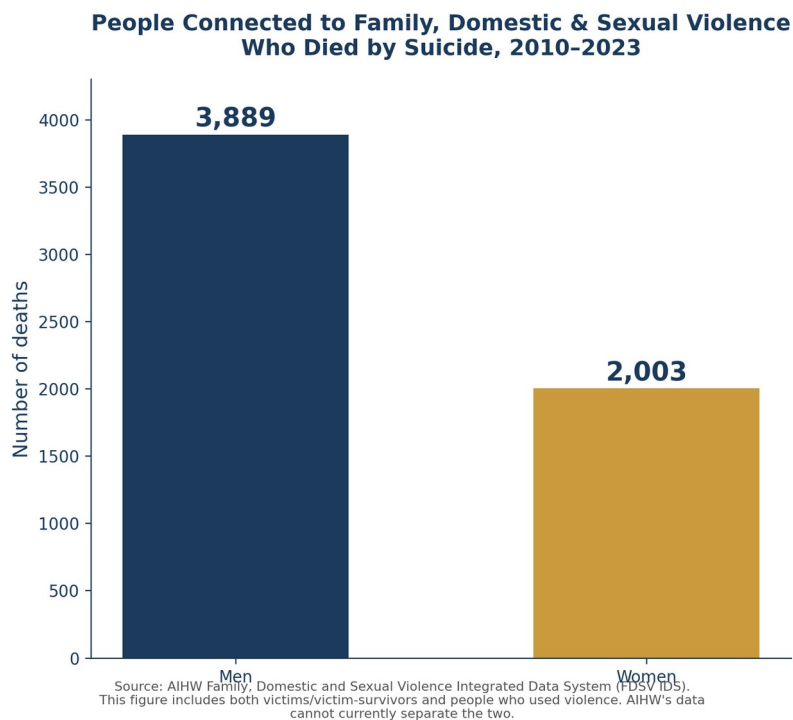


Figure 1. People connected to family, domestic and sexual violence who died by suicide, 2010–2023. Source: AIHW FDSV IDS.

Men in the FDSV cohort were also proportionally more affected relative to their own comparison group: they were 4.1 times as likely to die by suicide as matched men without FDSV involvement, compared with 3.4 times for women in the FDSV cohort relative to matched women. Expressed as a share of all suicide deaths nationally over the same period, the FDSV-linked group accounted for 19.4% of all female suicide deaths and 12.3% of all male suicide deaths.

Separately, ABS coroner-referred death data shows "problems in spousal relationship" circumstances, which explicitly include domestic violence, are recorded as a risk factor in 25.4% of all suicides (all ages, 2022 to 2024), making it the third most common risk factor recorded across all suicide deaths generally, not specific to either sex.

3. Why These Numbers Need Careful Handling

Suicide is under-integrated into DFV statistics, and where it is included, it needs specific methodological handling rather than simply being added to homicide counts. Key considerations:

- ▶ Suicide is multiply-determined. Unlike homicide, a suicide death rarely has one legally attributable cause. Coronial findings typically list several contributing psychosocial risk factors (relationship breakdown, legal problems, financial hardship, substance use), so "DFV-attributable" suicide requires a case-by-case coronial review methodology, not a simple death-certificate code count.
- ▶ The FDSV IDS cannot currently distinguish victims from people who used violence. AIHW states explicitly that the FDSV IDS "includes both victims/victim-survivors and people who use violence," with findings that "do not differentiate between them due to data limitations." This means the 3,889 figure cannot be read as 3,889 male victims. It is 3,889 men connected to FDSV in some capacity who died by suicide.
- ▶ Coronial-review methodology exists for women, but not yet for men. Coronial-review methodology applied in NSW, Victoria and WA has established that intimate partner and family violence are contributing factors in an estimated 28–56% of female suicides. No equivalent coronial-review study disaggregating victim from perpetrator status has been conducted for men in Australia.
- ▶ Undercounting versus overcounting risk. Too narrow a definition (only cases with a formal DVO history) will undercount; too broad a definition (any suicide following relationship breakdown) will overcount by capturing non-abusive separations. A defensible dataset needs explicit inclusion criteria, ideally aligned across jurisdictions.
- ▶ There isn't yet a dedicated national dataset. The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network (ADFVDRN) was established in 2011 to analyse and share knowledge about deaths in the context of family and domestic violence, with an explicit intent to expand its national minimum dataset beyond intimate-partner homicide to include FDV-related suicides. This work is still developing.
- ▶ Research funding is not currently proportionate to the data. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) received \$10,328,996 in government revenue in 2024–25; no comparable body is funded to research male FDSV-suicide at a comparable scale.
- ▶ Scale of unsubstantiated and false allegations, approximated only. Applying the credible 2–12% false allegation rate range found in the literature to the roughly 97,800 FDV offenders proceeded against by police nationally in 2024–25, the number of people potentially affected annually is approximately 1,956 to 11,736. This is an approximation, not a measured figure, and no data links it to suicide outcomes; it's included only to give a sense of scale.

4. What the Picture Looks Like Once Suicide Is Included

Public and policy discussion of domestic violence deaths in Australia is overwhelmingly framed around homicide. That framing is genuinely accurate for intimate-partner homicide specifically: between July 2010 and June 2018, around 77% of intimate-partner homicide victims were female and around 21% were male (roughly 239 women and 71 men over that eight-year period).

But once the fuller category of domestic and family homicide is considered, which includes parricide, filicide, and homicide by other family members and not just intimate partners, the balance is close to even. In 2024 to 2025, the most recent year with a full sex breakdown, there were 49 male and 48 female domestic homicide victims nationally.

The more significant shift comes from adding suicide. Combining the FDSV-linked suicide figures (3,889 men and 2,003 women, 2010–2023) with the ADFVDRN's intimate-partner homicide figures (approximately 71 men and 239 women, 2010–2018) shifts the combined total from female-majority to male-majority:

≈3,960 men / ≈2,242 women combined DV-related homicide and suicide deaths, a reversal of the homicide-only picture.

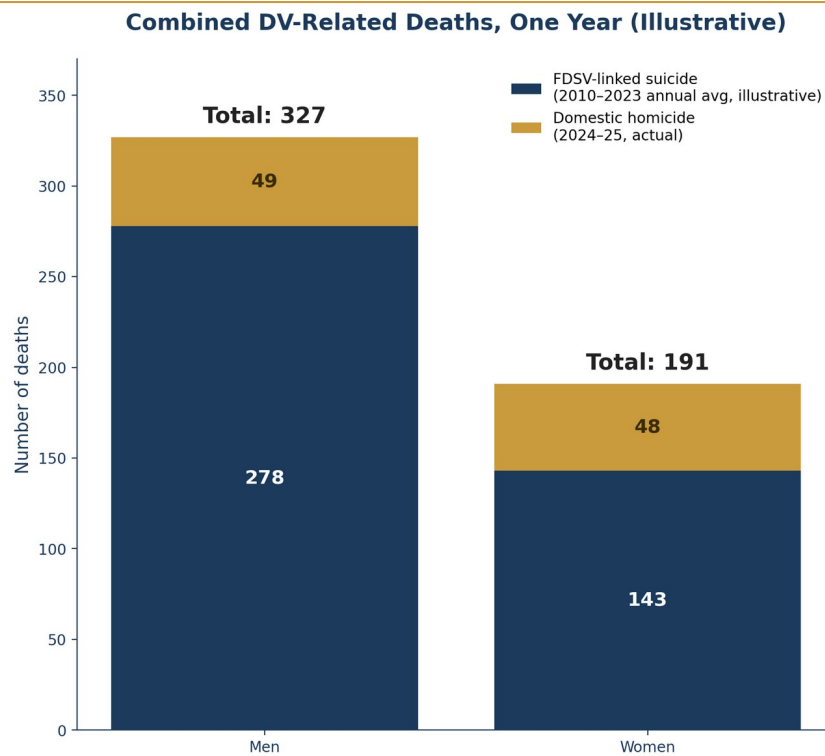


Figure 2. Illustrative single-year combined total, not measured data. Homicide figures (49 male, 48 female) are real, measured figures for 2024 to 2025. Suicide figures (278 male, 143 female) are the 2010 to 2023 totals divided evenly across 14 years for illustrative single-year comparison. They are not a confirmed annual measure, and are not yet verified as attributable to domestic violence specifically.

This reversal should be read carefully. It is not a finding that men are "the more affected group" in domestic violence deaths overall.

It is a demonstration that the entire reversal is driven by the suicide component, and that component is precisely the data that cannot currently distinguish victims from people who used violence, or confirm domestic violence as a cause of death at all.

The current narrative of domestic violence deaths as predominantly a women's issue is accurate for the one death category where the data is genuinely victim-specific (homicide). Its applicability to the full picture of domestic-violence-related death is currently unknown, not disproven, simply because the numerically larger category of death, suicide, has never been analysed with the same rigour for men.

5. Getting Help

If this content has raised anything difficult for you, or if you or someone you know is struggling, support is available right now:

- ▶ Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention)
- ▶ Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467 (24/7)
- ▶ MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78 (24/7 support for men)
- ▶ 1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732 (24/7 domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, for all genders)
- ▶ Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (24/7, ages 5 to 25)
- ▶ In an emergency, call 000.

About Beyond the Narrative 2026 (BTN2026)

BTN2026 is a not-for-profit advocacy and research organisation focused on identifying and closing data and research gaps affecting male victims of domestic and family violence in Australia. Our work includes engagement with government agencies, researchers, and parliamentary processes, including a submission and supporting evidence appendix to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs' Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence and suicide, on which this guide is based.

This guide is an educational resource, not a substitute for the coronial or clinical review process that would be required to build a validated DFV-suicide dataset for male victims. Get in touch: admin@polaniassists.com | 1300 083 226 | beyondthenarrative2026.com

Sources

- ▶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Integrated Data System (FDSV IDS) analysis, accessed 2026.
- ▶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), "Domestic homicide," Family, domestic and sexual violence topic page, accessed 2026.
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- ▶ Bates, E.A. et al. (2019), Help-seeking by male victims of domestic violence and abuse: a systematic review and qualitative evidence synthesis.
- ▶ Russo, L.N. et al. (2026), Barriers to Help-Seeking Among Male Victims of Female-Perpetrated Intimate Partner Violence, *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*.
- ▶ UNSW research on coronial-review findings, IPV and female suicide (NSW/Vic/WA).
- ▶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Causes of Death, Australia, 2024; Estimating Homelessness: Census, 2021.
- ▶ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited, Annual Information Statement 2025 (ACNC register).
- ▶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024–25.
- ▶ Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, 2020–21 Annual Report; Queensland Health correspondence to BTN2026, 29 July 2026 (File ref: C-ECTF-26/13027).
- ▶ SafeLives / ManKind Initiative, UK domestic abuse service statistics, 2024/25.

A fuller reference list, including all sources cited in the original submission and appendix, is available on request.