Women should be safe everywhere and at all times

How many of us look over our shoulders, or walk hurriedly after an event, parent evening or when even going for a walk in a park?

This is me all the time. I do not feel safe. The first thing I do when I book any accommodation for work is to calculate how close it is to the venue. When I go for a walk, I carefully map out my route and make sure at least one person knows where I am. I seldom walk in the dark by myself and if I have to, I have a plan to protect myself.

I am sure I am not alone in these actions.

We should **all** feel safe **all** the time. We know that statistically an estimated 736 million women globally – almost one in three – have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. This statistic and the ones below are from UN Women Australia.

- It is unacceptable that an estimated 483 million women and girls aged 15-49 years, have been subject to sexual violence from a non-partner.
- It is unacceptable that a woman or girl is killed every 11 minutes in her home by her family.
- It is unacceptable that the rates of depression, anxiety disorders, unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections are higher in women who have experienced violence compared to women who have not.

Alarmingly, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2024, the number of victims of assault in Western Australia increased by 10 per cent (4,219 victims) to 47,045 victims, the highest recorded across the 30-year time series. The assault victimisation rate also increased from 1,486 in 2023 to 1,580 victims per 100,000 persons in 2024.

For victims of assault, around three in five (62 per cent) were female (29,257 victims) and more than a quarter (26 per cent) were aged between 25 and 34 years (12,220 victims).

The number of sexual assault victims increased by nine per cent (292 victims) to 3,721 victims in 2024, the highest recorded number of victims in the 32-year time series. The victimisation rate also increased to 125 victims per 100,000 persons in 2024.

For victims of sexual assault, most were female (86 per cent or 3,185 victims) and nearly half (45 per cent) were aged between 10 and 17 years at the date of incident (1,657 victims).

Most sexual assaults occurred at a residential location (74 per cent or 2,764 victims) and did not involve the use of a weapon (75 per cent or 2,780 victims).

Almost a third (31 per cent) of all recorded sexual assault incidents were family and domestic violence (FDV) related (1,142 victims).

When the SSTUWA conducted its gender-based violence (GBV) survey last year, it was concerning to read how many women members have experienced or witnessed GBV in their workplace. While half of the respondents felt that their workplace listened to concerns about overall safety, more needs to be done to hold student perpetrators accountable and to have a system that will not stand for any form of violence including GBV.

Every year from 25 November to 10 December, everyone across Western Australia and beyond has the opportunity to recognise that we need to end violence against women. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women falls on 25 November, while 10 December is Human Rights Day globally.

We know that GBV continues to be one of the drivers of gender inequality, especially in areas of work and financial security. We also know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women and people who are LGBTIQ+ are more at risk regarding GBV.

This is not the work for women, or those impacted, but the work of **everyone**. New information from Our Watch states that four in five men surveyed want to change the alarming rates of violence against women, although 43 per cent say they

personally can’t do anything to change this. Our Watch runs a campaign with strategies for how men can make a positive impact in the prevention of violence against women.

Your union, will continue to work to advocate for safety for all, free from GBV, and stress the importance of policies from the Departments of Education and Training and Workforce Development to support this. At the time of writing, the SSTUWA is looking into the departments’ sexual harassment policies and also providing feedback for the code of practice on sexual harassment.

If you need support, help is available: 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732 | 1800respect.org.au), Women’s Domestic Violence Helpline (1800 007 339), Men’s Domestic Violence Helpline (1800 000 599) or Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800). If you’re in immediate danger, call 000.



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