

Indigenous women suffering domestic violence have greater risk of losing children due to lack of suitable housing

- Indigenous women in situations of domestic and family violence are at particular risk of losing their children due to difficulties of finding appropriate, safe and affordable accommodation.
- A shortage of emergency and long-term housing is a contributor to high rates of injury and death amongst Indigenous women in situations of domestic and family violence, as many women have no choice but to return to unsafe homes.
- Current policy settings pay inadequate attention to the cultural and situational complexities of many Indigenous women, adding to their difficulty in escaping violence.
- While more needs to be done to address the housing issues that compromise the safety of Indigenous women and children, long-term solutions require holistic responses that include provision of services and housing options for men.

A key factor in the high rates of domestic and family violence-related injury and death amongst Indigenous women is that a lack of appropriate accommodation means Indigenous women often have no choice but to return to an unsafe home, new AHURI research has revealed.

The report, *Improving housing and service responses to domestic and family violence for Indigenous individuals and families*, undertaken by researchers from UNSW Sydney and the University of Tasmania, focused on the unique needs of Indigenous women and children in remote and regional communities in Australia in the aftermath of domestic and family violence.

According to the report, the shortage of appropriate accommodation means Indigenous women have a greater risk of their children being removed by Child Protection authorities, particularly in remote and regional Australia. The difficulty of accessing stable long-term accommodation is also a significant barrier to reunification once children have been removed.

'If women leaving a violent home cannot find long-term stable housing, generally, within a 12-month timeframe, they may lose their children permanently. All states and territories have now introduced legislation prescribing specific time limits—typically between one and two years—for children to transition from out-of-home care to permanent care,' says lead author Dr Kyllie Cripps from UNSW Sydney.

'Given the historical and intergenerational experiences with Indigenous children being removed, Indigenous women were particularly concerned by the timeframes and were fearful of its consequences for their children, themselves and their families. This was

exacerbated by the hopelessness they felt in being unable to secure long term housing in the aftermath of domestic and family violence, through no fault of their own.'

The research also found that in instances where men had been excluded via court orders from the family home as a consequence of their violence, that they too faced precarious housing situations and were effectively made homeless. As a consequence, they usually returned to the family home, making this policy largely ineffective in the Indigenous context. There was also a consensus that sending the men to jail (for breaking the DVOs when they had nowhere else to go) was not helping the women in domestic and family violence situations, but rather exacerbates their distress and has the real potential to compromise their ongoing safety.

'What we find is that the tightly woven cultural and kinship connections of Aboriginal communities requires a holistic response to domestic and family violence that caters to the housing and support needs of both men and women. In the absence of an equivalent service response for men, providing services to women and children in isolation to the men is at best, a band-aid solution of limited long-term effectiveness,' says Dr Cripps.

The report can be downloaded from the AHURI website at <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/320>

The findings from this new report will be presented at the National Housing Conference 2019, running from Wed 28 to Fri 30 August: nhc.edu.au

For media enquiries about this research, or to enquire about interviews or media passes for the National Housing Conference, please contact:

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