



PACTS:

The health impacts  
of family violence

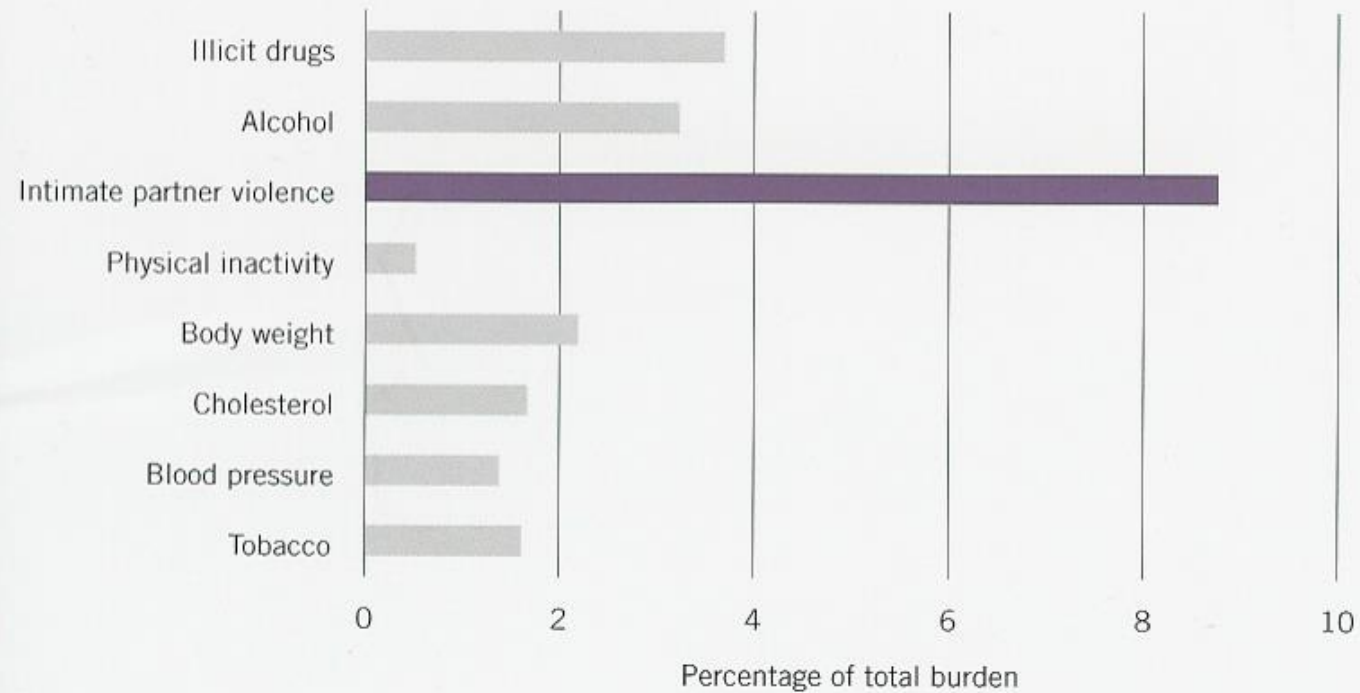
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JAN COLES

# Outline

- ▶ What is the evidence
- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Physical health
- ▶ Health behavior
- ▶ Take home message

# What is the evidence?

Figure 2: Top eight risk factors contributing to the disease burden in Victorian women aged 15–44 years



# A health issue because

- ▶ It makes women sick;
- ▶ It increases the use of health services;
- ▶ It increases the health costs;
- ▶ It decreases women's capacity to work;
- ▶ It is the single greatest burden of disease for young Australian women, aged 15-44 years;
- ▶ Children exposed to violence in the home are more likely to grow up to repeat the violence if they are boys and be victims of violence if they are girls.

# Mental health after violence

- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ PTSD
- ▶ Suicide
- ▶ Eating disorders
- ▶ Somatisation disorders
- ▶ Personality disorders

# Physical health after violence

- ▶ Unexplained gastrointestinal symptoms
- ▶ Unexplained pelvic pain
- ▶ Chronic pain
- ▶ Poorer overall physical health
- ▶ Traumatic injury
- ▶ CNS: headaches, poorer cognitive function and hearing loss
- ▶ Repeated health service use without a clear diagnosis

# Reproductive outcomes

- ▶ Higher rates of pregnancy at a younger age
- ▶ Higher rates of unintended pregnancy
- ▶ Higher rates of termination of pregnancy
- ▶ Higher rates of multiple termination
- ▶ Prematurity
- ▶ Low birth weight

# Health behavior after violence

- ▶ Increased drug use
- ▶ Increased alcohol use
- ▶ Increased smoking
- ▶ Higher rates of obesity
- ▶ Poorer rates of health screening
- ▶ Late antenatal care



# Interventions that work

- ▶ Psychological interventions

CBT Adults with PTSD no longer in violence relationship

Psychological “first aid” support for acute distress

Relaxation and physical activity for those with depressive symptoms

Brief structured psychological treatments

- Interpersonal therapy

- CBT

- problem-solving treatment

- ▶ Antidepressant and benzodiazepam should not be used as an initial treatment in the absence of a mod-severe depressive disorder

# Take home message

## **Be prepared to respond,**

- ▶ Know the protocol or pathway to care
- ▶ Know and practice how to ask and how to respond
- ▶ Ensure you are in a private setting before asking
- ▶ Ensure confidentiality
- ▶ Have a system of referral in place to expert family violence services