



*Our lives:
women in
the ACT*



YWCA
CANBERRA

Contents

Acknowledgement of country	04
Methodology	05
A snapshot of women in Canberra	07
CEO message	10
Executive Summary	12
Survey responses	16
<i>Location</i>	17
<i>Relationship status</i>	18
<i>Age</i>	18
<i>Diversity</i>	19
<i>Personal income</i>	20
<i>Highest level of education</i>	21
Hopes and fears	22
Labour and finances	23
<i>Work</i>	24
<i>What other studies found</i>	24
<i>What we found</i>	25
<i>Paid work</i>	25
<i>Unpaid work</i>	25
<i>Financial security</i>	27
<i>What other studies found</i>	27
<i>What we found</i>	27
<i>Retirement</i>	28
<i>What other studies found</i>	28
<i>What we found</i>	29
Housing	30
<i>What other studies found</i>	30

<i>What we found</i>	31
<i>Housing tenure</i>	31
<i>Housing stress</i>	32
Living in Canberra	33
<i>Personal safety</i>	34
<i>What other studies found</i>	34
<i>What we found</i>	34
<i>Interpersonal violence</i>	36
<i>What other studies found</i>	36
<i>What we found</i>	36
<i>Wellbeing</i>	37
<i>What other studies found</i>	37
<i>What we found</i>	38
<i>Recreation</i>	39
<i>Sexism</i>	40
<i>Homophobia</i>	42
<i>Racism</i>	42
<i>Ableism</i>	43
<i>Ageism</i>	43
Leadership, influence and opportunity	44
<i>What we found</i>	44
<i>In the workplace</i>	44
<i>In the community</i>	46
<i>Politics</i>	46
The role of data in advocacy	47
Acknowledgements	49
About YWCA Canberra	50
References	52

Acknowledgement of country

YWCA Canberra proudly recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to own and control their cultures and pays our respect to these rights. YWCA Canberra acknowledges the need to respect and encourage the diversity of Indigenous cultures and to respect Indigenous world views, lifestyles and customary laws.

We extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who for thousands of years have preserved the cultures and practices of their communities on country.

This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and will continue to always be Aboriginal land.



Methodology

The online survey that informed this report was developed by YWCA Canberra. The survey was distributed using social media and targeted outreach through our membership base, service clients, community stakeholder groups and advocacy organisations. Some incentives were provided to prompt responses including tickets to the 2019 She Leads Conference and networking event.

YWCA Canberra promoted survey participation among members of our Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre, including food hub members and volunteers, and a group of older Aboriginal women who meet using the Mura Lanyon facility. Collection of surveys at this location typically involved YWCA Canberra staff assisting respondents to complete the survey. Small financial incentives were also available for members of the Mura Lanyon food hub who participated.

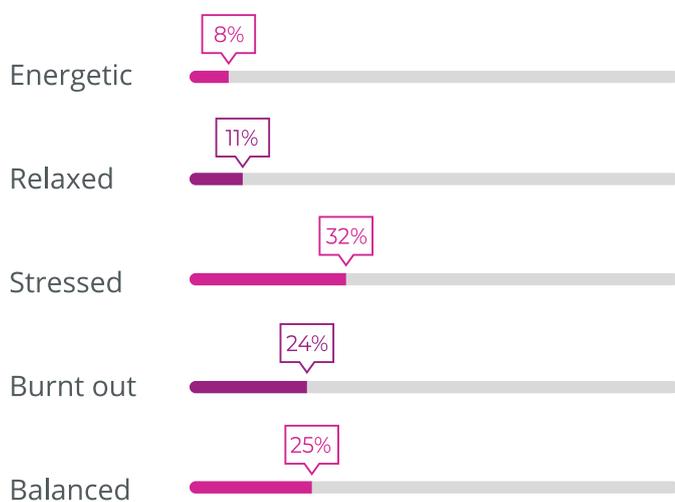
The purpose of the survey was to gain an understanding of women's lives in the ACT: their roles in the workplace and the home, their hopes and fears, as well as their movement through public spaces. Importantly, YWCA Canberra proactively engaged underrepresented cohorts of the community to ensure their perspectives were captured. The survey was available online from 4 June to 6 August 2019 with a total of 1090 responses received. Responses were sought from women, including female-identifying and non-binary people, age 18 years and older who resided in ACT postcodes. Those respondents who did not meet the survey qualifying criteria were exited from the survey.

Some limitations to the survey should be considered when reading the report:

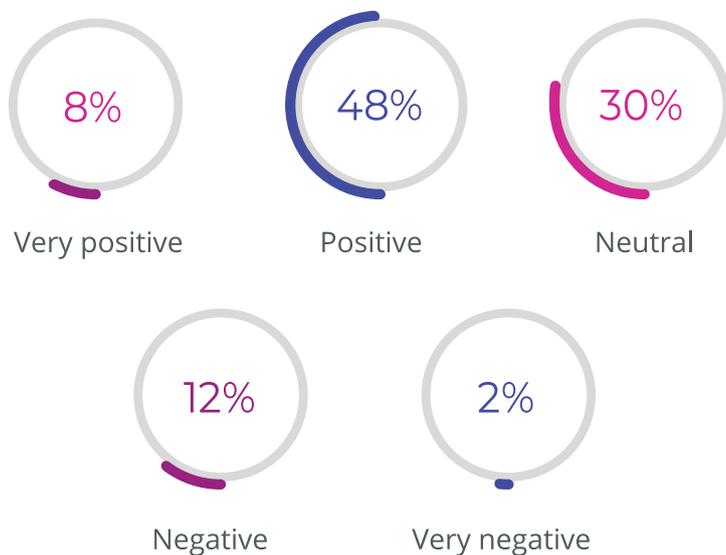
- Efforts were made to engage respondents of non-English speaking backgrounds; however, unless they were aided by an interpreter (which were not provided by YWCA Canberra) participants needed to be literate in English in order to respond.
- Participation in the survey required basic computer literacy. Where computer literacy among members of the Mura Lanyon food hub was a barrier, staff conducted the survey in person if the respondent agreed.
- Given the population of women in Canberra at the last census was 202,952 our sample size allows accuracy within ± 3.0 per cent at the 95 per cent confidence interval. This report rounds all percentage values to the nearest full number.

A snapshot of women in Canberra

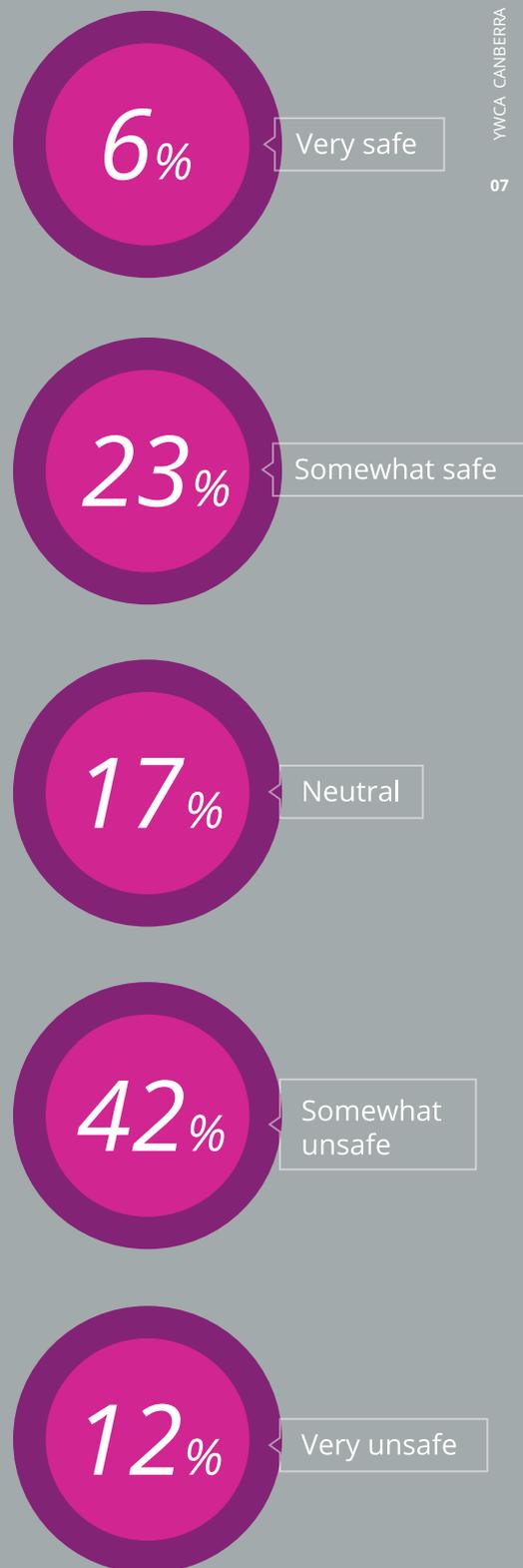
How they feel about their current state of health or wellbeing



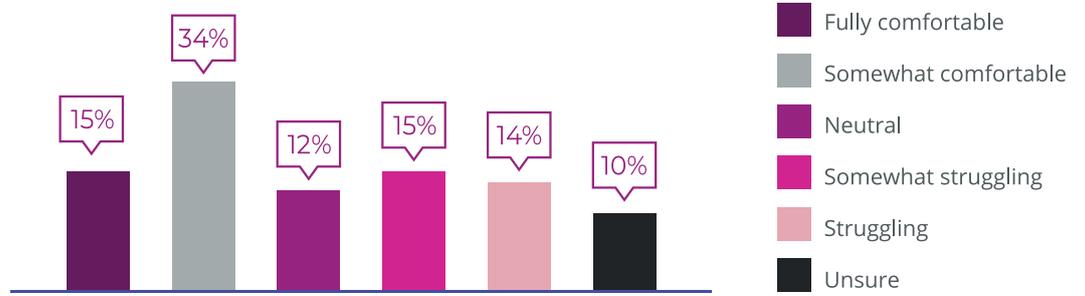
How they feel about their personal future



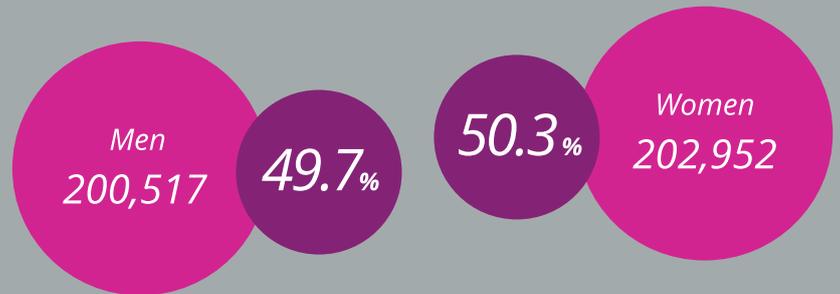
How they feel accessing public spaces after dark



How they feel regarding their financial security in retirement



Population¹ of Canberra



Population by age and sex²



A snapshot of Canberra

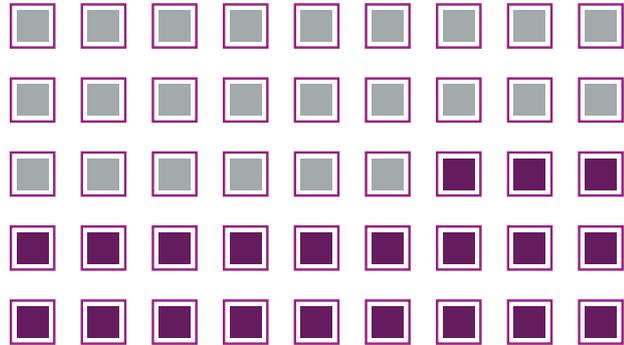
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population³



Total
7513 1.9*

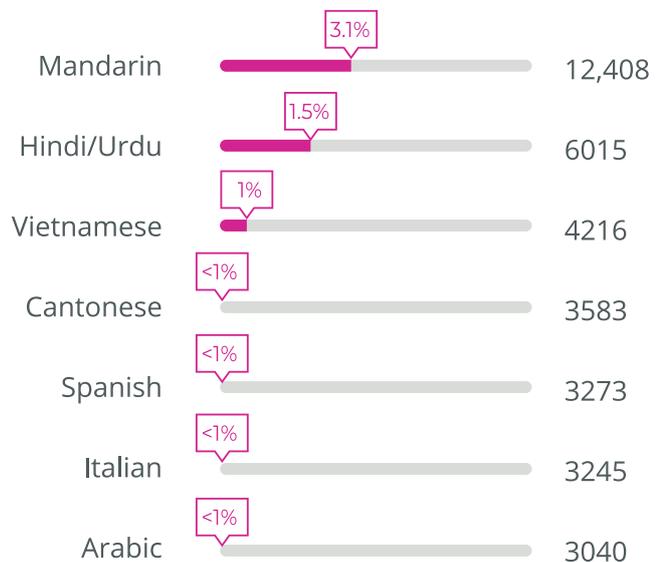
* The total population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a proportion of the total population is 1.9 per cent.

Same sex couples⁴



Male same sex couples 549
 Female same sex couples 652
 Total same sex couples 1201

Language spoken at home⁵





CEO message

For 90 years, YWCA Canberra has been a trusted feature of our community. Our vision of 'girls and women thriving' guides our work. Whether it's delivering cutting edge leadership programs for girls, women and non-binary people, providing families with reliable and trusted children's services, or providing outreach and support for vulnerable people in our community, our organisation touches the lives of thousands of Canberrans each week.

There is a real story to be told by surveying the lives of Canberra women and capturing trends in their lives over time so that we can fully understand and address their concerns.

As a large service provider and employer of more than 300 staff, we are well placed to investigate the lived experiences and perceptions of Canberra women.

YWCA Canberra's *Our lives: women in the ACT*, shines a light on the daily realities of over half of Canberra's population. It presents a polarity between women on the cusp of careers and family, those who are able to design their life, those struggling to meet the immediate needs of their families and those who are simply trying to get by.

In any case, this report demonstrates that the collective pendulum is imbalanced. Despite greater participation in the labour market and the community, women are still performing most of the unpaid labour in their households.

While statistics can tell us a lot about what a community looks like, the numbers often fall short of telling us how a community feels: what they hope for, how they perceive their circumstances, their capacity to influence and bring about change, and their individual and shared lived experiences.

This report endeavours to play a role in painting that nuanced picture. I'm pleased to present it as a gift to Canberra women in celebration of our 90th anniversary and a valuable policy document for all sector leaders to consider and act upon.

I would like to thank the women who added their voices to this research. The responses to our survey were candid, insightful and sometimes deeply moving.

YWCA Canberra will continue to provide a platform for diverse women's voices to be heard, and to advocate for change so that all women and girls can thrive.

We call on leaders in our community to consider the perspectives shared in this report to inform the design of public policy and spaces and to build real and lasting positive change for all Canberra women.

Frances Crimmins
CEO YWCA Canberra



Executive summary

Canberra is generally regarded as an economically prosperous, socially progressive and inclusive city. With a highly educated workforce, good educational outcomes, strong recreational participation and the highest life expectancy in the country, there is much to celebrate. But as this survey explores, there remains a chasm between those who are thriving and those who are surviving.

This gap, often conveyed in policy terms such as 'structural inequality' or 'hidden disadvantage' is manifestly real. It could present as single parents struggling to afford healthy lunches or medical appointments for their children, young women experiencing workplace sexism, women who want for little else than a holiday, women who forfeit pay to provide care for family members or women on low incomes who have to choose between taking their sick pet to the vet or helplessly watching it suffer until their next pay.

This report captures responses to our survey across the following themes:

- financial security
- housing
- living in Canberra
- leadership, influence and opportunity.

Responses to our survey indicate that Canberra women are leading fulfilling and dynamic lives consisting of employment, recreation, family and volunteering. Most are generally positive about their future and want for little more than a

happy and healthy life; they are working hard and contributing to the social and economic fabric of the community and their families.

It is clear, however, that the demands of unpaid work are heavy and, for many women, the obligations that envelop their lives are leaving them stressed or burnt out. The role of women in unpaid care is arguably one of the central factors affecting their economic progress. While unpaid work contributes enormously to the wellbeing of individuals and families, its defining character trait of gender inequity stymies both women's participation in the labour market and men's equal contribution to the demands of the home. Women are conscious of the long-term impact the unequal distribution of unpaid labor can have on their retirement stability, as reflected in the survey findings.

For some women, the tension of meeting both family and career demands is a perennial challenge and finding a manageable balance between expectation and choice can be difficult. For others, their immediate focus is on getting out of poverty or finding a safe place to live.

As a longstanding provider of housing and community services to local families, YWCA Canberra sees first-hand how the confluence of population pressure and increasing unaffordability in the private rental market are disproportionately impacting families and older single women.

An increasing number of older people in Australia are renting in the private market. Renting in older age is associated with a number of potential socio-economic risks including poverty.⁶ Our survey questions on sustainability of

housing tenure sought to explore the impact of housing costs on women if their circumstances were to change (eg. death of a spouse or relationship separation).

Responses reveal that those who own their own home and are married or in a de-facto relationship would feel somewhat comfortable continuing their housing tenure despite a potential change of circumstances. Our survey, however, did not gauge sustainability of tenure if both circumstances and tenure changed, such as transitioning from ownership to renting due to a relationship breakdown. This is an important point of difference and an issue worth exploring in future research.

Responses to our survey also reveal that many women's experience of the workplace is marred by discrimination, leaving an indelible impression on them from the inception of their working lives. Responses give an impression of the instances, environments and perpetrators of discriminatory behaviour including sexism, homophobia, racism and ableism, with the workplace featuring prominently as a location.

Domestic and interpersonal violence remains a concerning feature in the lives of some Canberra women. Sadly, 24 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds said they had experienced emotional, physical, verbal or financial abuse in a domestic or interpersonal relationship in the previous twelve months.

Regardless of whether a woman experiences domestic, family or interpersonal violence in her life, the threat of gender based violence is pervasive and responses to our survey demonstrate that women are acutely conscious of threats to their safety when accessing public spaces after dark.

Cohorts such as women living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and those of diverse sexuality or cultural background have unique experiences in their everyday life that can often lead to them experiencing social or economic exclusion or abuse.

This report depicts the lives of Canberra women at a particular moment in time. It sets a precedent for future work to drive accountability and monitoring of government decisions and policy design and address the dearth of available data accounting for the experiences of diverse demographics.

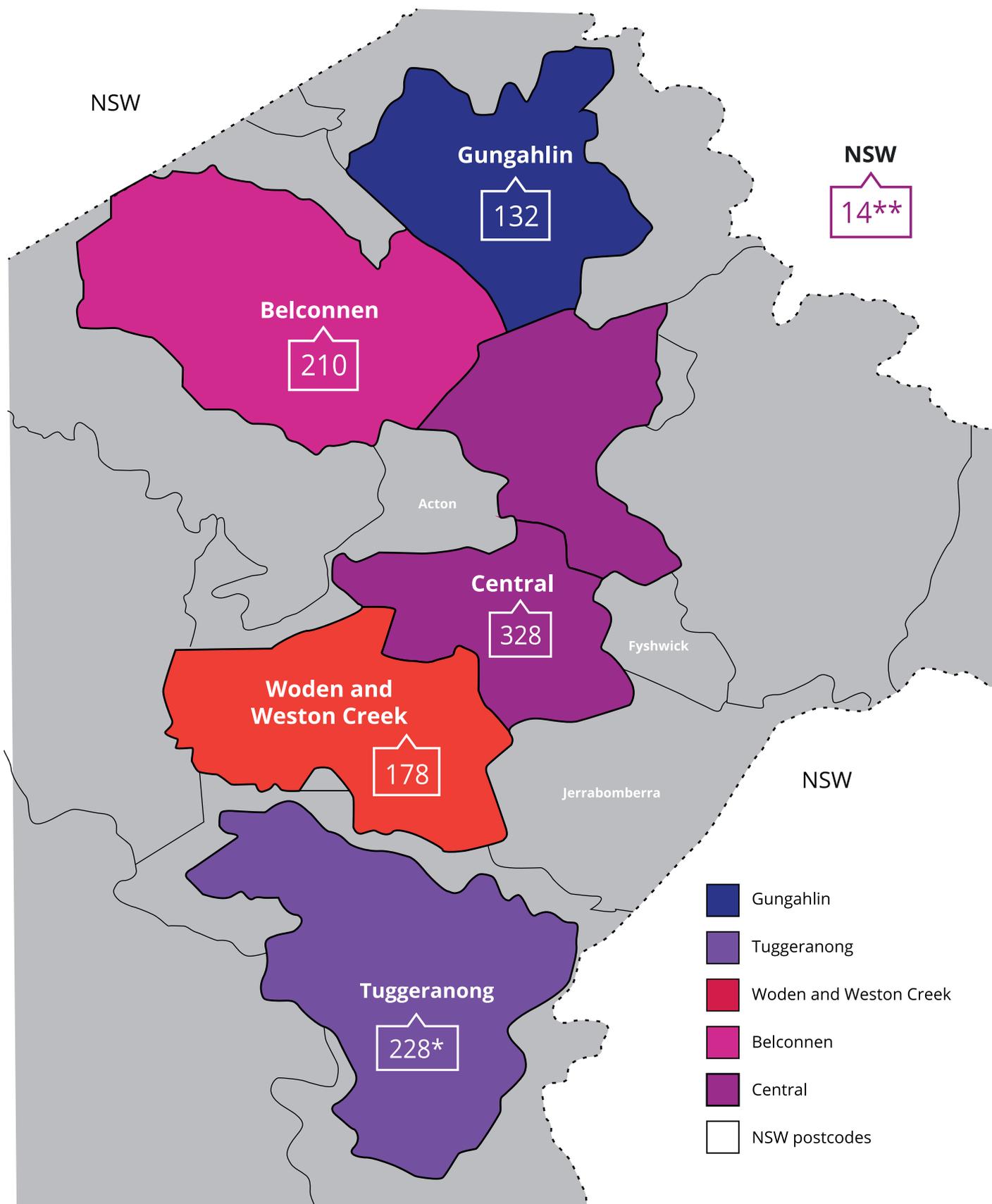
Survey responses

A total of 1090 responses were received capturing every ACT postcode. Due to some NSW postcodes falling within the numerical range for ACT postcodes, a small number ($n=14$) of responses were included.

Responses were received across every age bracket with the greatest number of responses ($n=276$) received for those age 25 to 34. The next strongest bracket of responses were received from those age 35 to 44 with 202 responses. The lowest response rate was in the 55 to 64 age bracket where 115 responses were received. While responses were received by women who speak a language other than English at home ($n=52$), these responses amount to only five per cent of total responses. Given English is spoken at home by 73 per cent of the ACT population⁷, there is a need for stronger data collection to build a more representative picture of the lives of those who do not speak English at home.

The initial line of questioning in the survey collected baseline demographic data relating to age, relationship status, diversity, income and educational outcomes. This demographic data was used to measure responses to questions capturing personal experiences that are conveyed throughout this report.

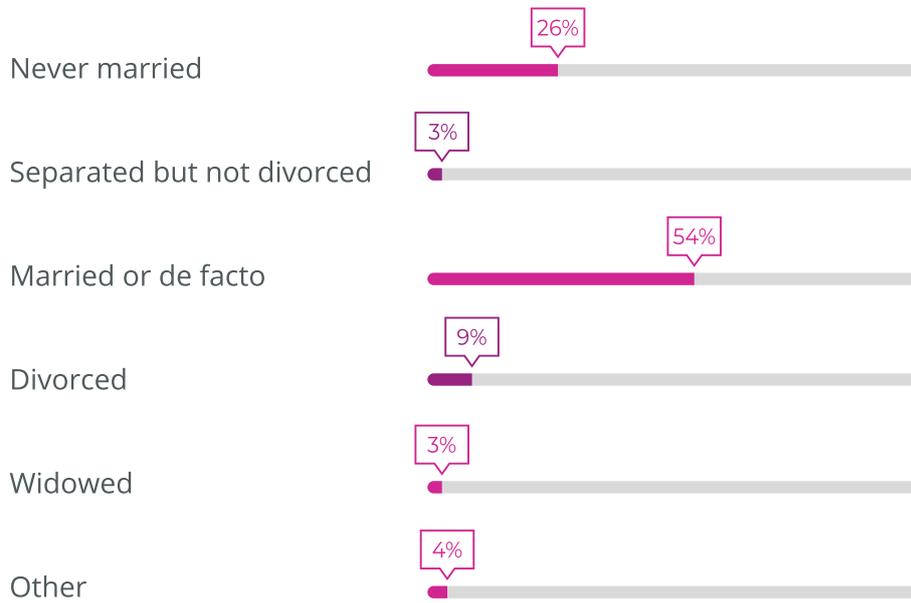
Location



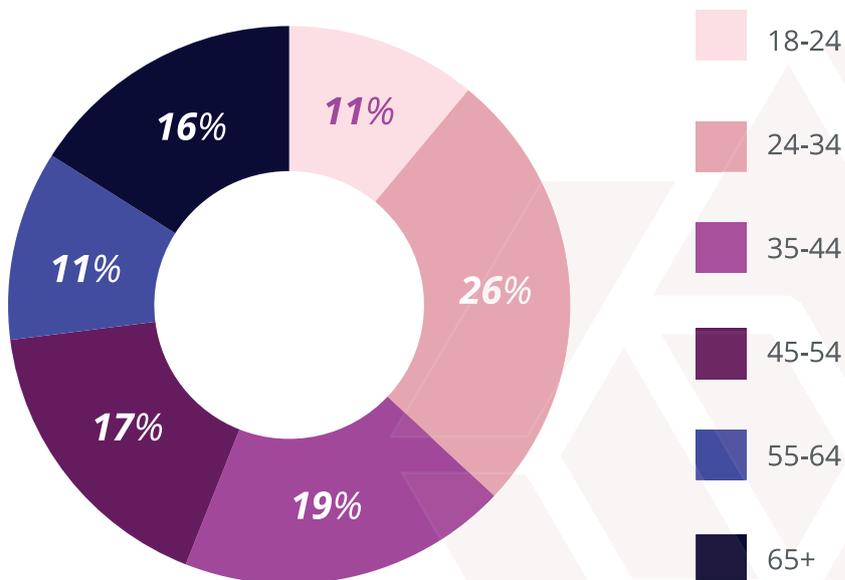
* There is a minor degree of crossover of postcodes that are shared between NSW and low-populated areas of the ACT.

** The NSW postcodes captured are part of the postcode range used within the ACT.

Relationship status

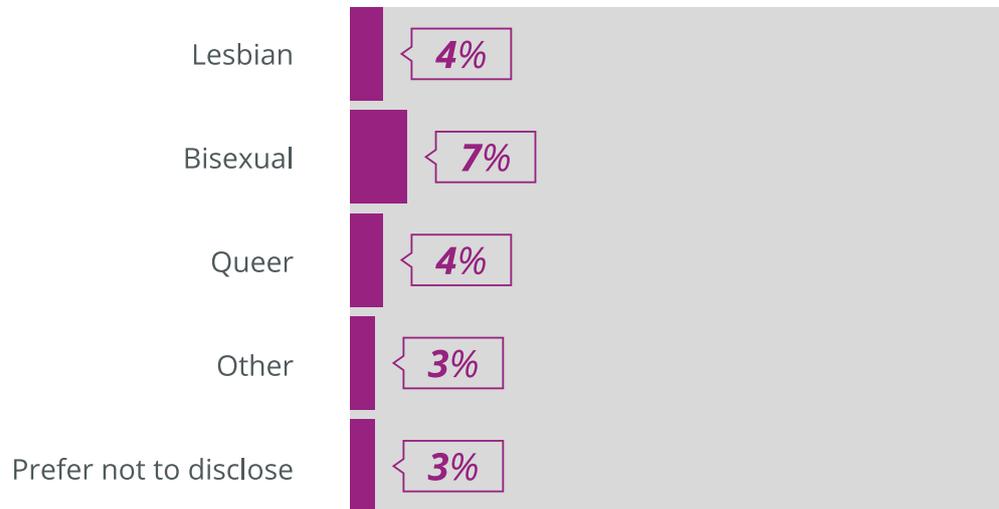


Age



Diversity

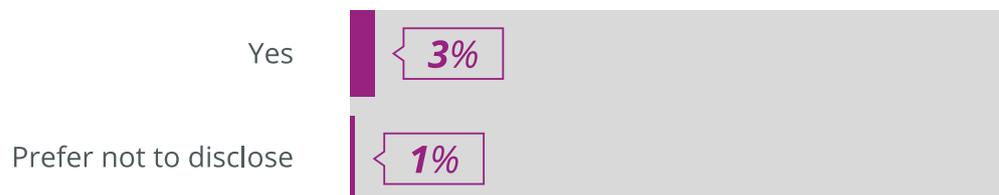
Sexuality



Disability

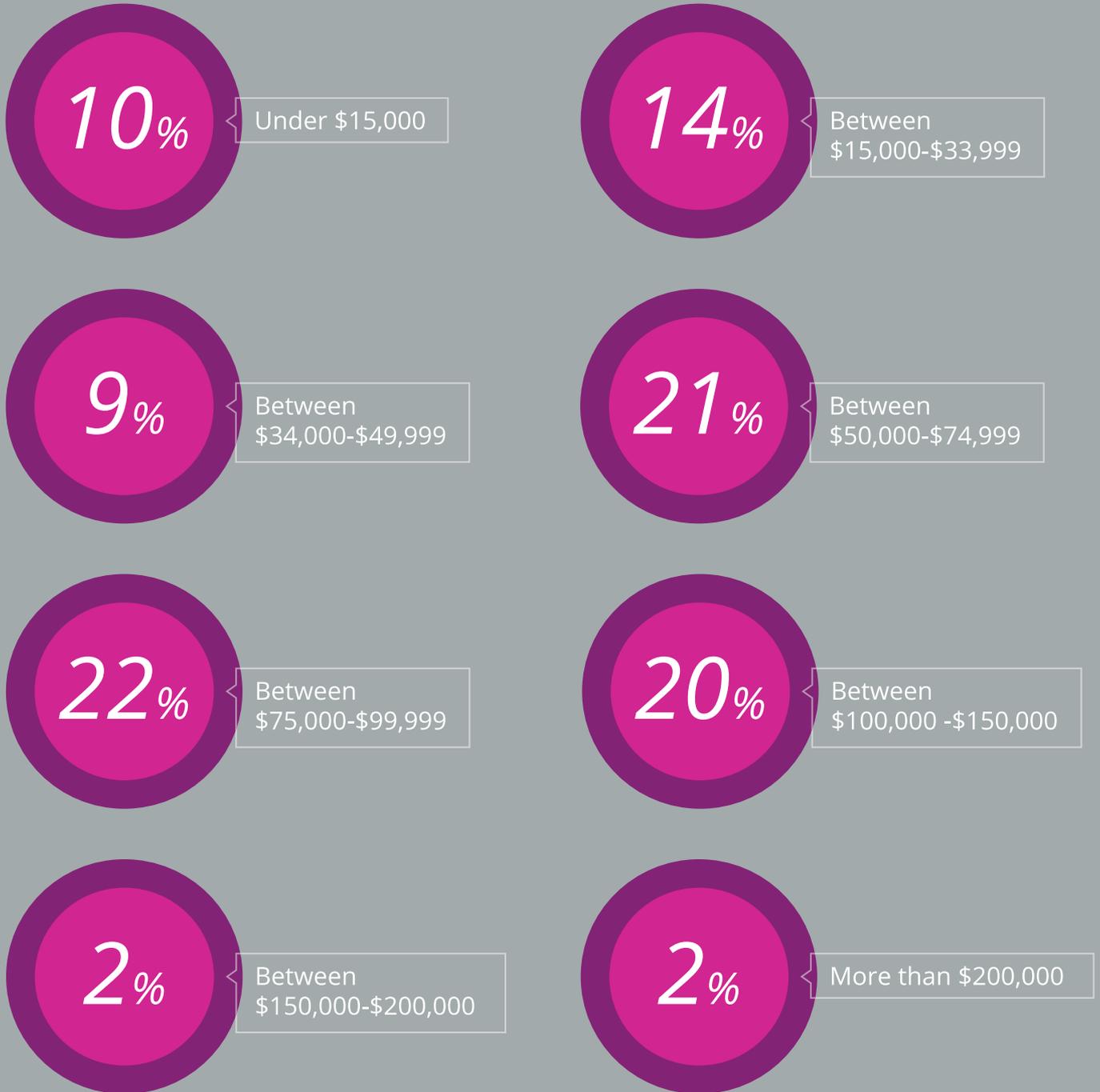


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



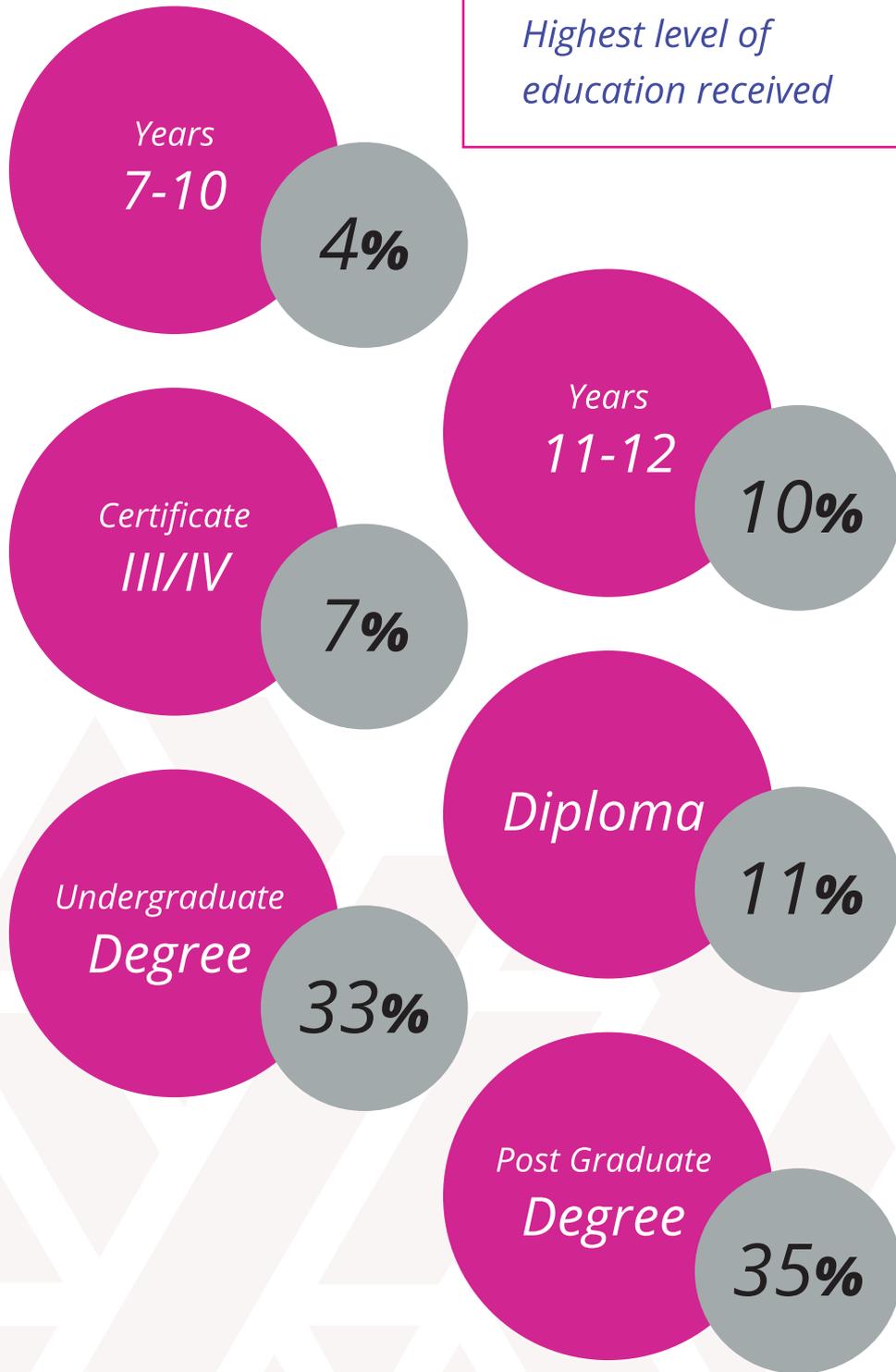
Five per cent of respondents spoke a language other than English at home with Mandarin/Cantonese, Vietnamese, Urdu/Hindi reported as the most frequently spoken languages.

Personal income



Within this income data, 33 per cent of respondents reported they were receiving income support payments.

*Highest level of
education received*



Hopes and fears

We asked women to share their hopes and fears for the future. While good health and building a future for their children and family were common themes, some women hoped for things many take for granted: holidays, a stable income, more time with their children or being stimulated in their careers.

Some women referenced fears such as global events like climate change, but other common fears included being in poverty, being dependent on others, feeling obligated to take on demanding caring roles, or never finding a way out of harmful relationships.

Hopes included

Good health **To own my own home**
Personal freedom **Stable housing** **A sense of purpose**
Stable income **To have a family** **A holiday**
Fulfilling career *Action on climate change* **More time for myself**
Happiness **Financial stability** **Companionship**
Positive relationships *Success* **A stress-free retirement**
Better income prospects *Acceptance*
Dying before my super runs out **To have time to enjoy my children**
A world without discrimination *To be safe* **Financial independence**

Fears included

Climate change *Being obligated into a demanding caring role*
Poverty *Poor health* *Partner passing away*
Going into a nursing home *Homelessness* **Abuse**
Living paycheque to paycheque *Not being able to afford to retire* *Dying alone*
Feeling like I need to choose between career progression and starting a family
Losing my mobility **Loneliness** *Dependence on others*
Family breakup *Not being able to provide for my children*

Labour and finances

Nearly 60 per cent of respondents who had lived in Canberra for more than 10 years said they found it more difficult to live a comfortable life in Canberra today compared to a decade ago. The overwhelming majority of respondents pointed to the escalating cost of living pressures, particularly housing and utilities, as putting pressure on personal and household finances.

The presence of unpaid work in women’s lives also carries a substantial burden on financial independence and retirement security and featured prominently in stories and responses.

Our survey revealed that nearly 20 per cent of working women turned down paid work in the last twelve months to perform unpaid care for others. Many also referenced the imbalance of obligations around childcare and school runs falling to women in the family when discussing career obstacles.

Work

What other studies found

- The workforce participation rate for women in the ACT is 67.1 per cent, compared to 73.9 per cent for men⁸.
- For women “caring for children” was the most common reason for not looking for a job or more hours at work with 23.9 per cent of women stating this as a barrier. For men, “caring for children” was the second to last reason for not being able to look for more work with 4.6 per cent of men stating this as a barrier⁹.
- Female parents spent 8 hours and 33 minutes a day looking after children and male parents spent 3 hours and 55 minutes¹⁰.
- In heterosexual couples with dependent children and an approximately equal individualised income, women typically spent 41 hours a week performing house duties and caring for children, while their male partners reported spending 27.2 hours a week. Where the woman was the breadwinner in the household she still performed a ‘substantially higher’ load of unpaid domestic work¹¹.

What we found

Paid work

Three quarters (73 per cent) of respondents were in paid work, with:

- nearly half of those (45 per cent) working full time
- over a quarter (26 per cent) working part-time, between 11 and 35 hours a week
- around one fifth (21 per cent) working more than 40 hours a week.

Unpaid work

- 59 per cent of women undertake unpaid work such as caring or volunteering.
- For respondents with children and in paid work, almost 32 per cent reported turning down work to perform unpaid care.
- Regardless of employment status, unpaid volunteering or caring featured prominently in women's lives.
- 65 per cent of women not in paid employment undertook unpaid work in the form of volunteering or caring.
- 46 per cent of women working more than 35 hours a week are also performing more than 20 hours a week of unpaid work.
- 56 per cent of women in paid work undertook unpaid work in the form of volunteering or caring.

Hours women in paid work spend doing unpaid work

Less than 5 hours	38%
Between 5 and 10 hours	22%
Between 10 and 20 hours	15%
More than 20 hours	25%

- More than half (55 per cent) said they felt their volunteer roles gave them a sense of leadership.

When asked to elaborate on the nature of their unpaid work, many women spoke to their roles in foundations and community groups while others highlighted their roles as instructors, tutors and coaches for local sporting clubs

“I teach English language for migrants and refugees”

respondent aged 65+

Financial security

What other studies found

- In 2018, close to 11 per cent of the adult population in Australia—around 2.1 million people—experienced severe or high financial stress¹².
- In 2017, almost one in three Australian adults had no savings or were just two pay packets away from serious financial stress¹³.

What we found

Of women who had lived in Canberra for more than ten years, 58 per cent said they found it more difficult to live a comfortable life in Canberra today compared to ten years ago, particularly as the cost of living had exceeded income growth.

- 55 per cent of all respondents said they were ‘financially stable’ or ‘somewhat financially stable’
- 28 per cent of all respondents said they were ‘financially stressed’ or ‘somewhat financially stressed’
- Two per cent of all respondents said they were in ‘financial crisis’.

Young women appear to be most concerned about their financial stability:

- 46 per cent of those age 18 to 24 were ‘stressed’ or ‘somewhat stressed’
- 33 per cent of those age 25 to 34 were ‘stressed’, ‘somewhat stressed’ or in ‘financial crisis’.

Given younger people typically earn entry-level wages and have only short periods of time in the workforce this finding may not be entirely surprising. However, there remains a significant cohort of older women approaching retirement age who have similar perceptions of their income security:

- 35 per cent of women age 45 to 54 were 'stressed', 'somewhat stressed' or in 'financial crisis'
- 26 per cent of women age 55 to 64 reported feeling 'stressed' or 'somewhat stressed'.

Retirement

What other studies found

Retirement readiness is highly dependent on gender¹⁴. With women's workforce participation typically characterised by uncompetitive wages compared to male peers (the gender gap), extended periods performing unpaid parenting duties and part-time work, women's capacity to prepare for a comfortable retirement is limited.

How the superannuation balances of men and women in the ACT compare at age 60 to 65¹⁵:

- men: \$487,985
- women: \$207,101.

The superannuation gap starts at the inception of women's working lives.

- In 2013, the median superannuation account balances for a woman age 15 to 24 was \$2000. For her male peer it was \$3000¹⁶.
- In 2013, the median superannuation account balance for a woman age 24 to 34 was \$18,000. For her male peer it was \$20,000¹⁷.

What we found

Financial insecurity in retirement was a common fear raised by survey participants, with many fearing they will have to work full-time until they reached pension entitlement age and others worrying that they would outlive their superannuation and be in poverty.

Only 15 per cent of all respondents expected to be 'fully comfortable' in their retirement with an almost identical proportion (14 per cent) expecting to be 'struggling' in their retirement.

The concerns were most prominent in two age groups:

- 40 per cent of those age 18 to 24 expect to be 'struggling' or 'somewhat struggling' in their retirement.
- 36 per cent of those age 45 to 54 expect to be 'struggling' or 'somewhat struggling' in their retirement.

Expectations for retirement comfort also greatly differed depending on relationship status, with three quarters of women who were married or in a de facto relationship not concerned about their financial stability in retirement.

Housing

Canberra remains the most expensive city in Australia to be a renter¹⁸. Strong population growth has fed demand for rental properties and many on modest incomes struggle to be competitive in the market.

Housing stress is a feature in the lives of some survey respondents where the cost of tenure exceeds 30 per cent of household income which is also in the bottom 40 per cent of income distribution. With a longer life expectancy and a lifetime of typically lower incomes, our survey highlights that the affordability of housing tenure if circumstances change is an issue for many women, particularly those in part-time employment.

What other studies found

- Home ownership rates in Canberra continue to fall while rates of renting in the private market increase¹⁹.
- The number of older people in private rental accommodation has increased, with older women more likely to be renters than older men²⁰.
- Older, single women have emerged as the fastest growing demographic cohort experiencing homelessness in Australia²¹.
- In 2017, those in the lowest income quintile spent on average 35 per cent of their income on housing costs, an increase from 29 per cent in 2013²².

- Women who escape the family home due to domestic violence are at heightened risk of experiencing homelessness and some may return to the home (and the perpetrator) in order to avoid homelessness²³.
- In 2017, those in private rentals were spending on average 18.6 per cent of their household income on housing costs²⁴.
- In 2017, those with mortgages were spending on average 14.3 per cent of their household income on housing costs²⁵.

What we found

Four per cent of respondents had accessed housing support services in the last 12 months and the majority were parents to dependent children.

Housing tenure:

Provide housekeeping services in exchange for lodgings	1%
Pay rent to a relative or friend in exchange for lodgings	5%
Social/government housing tenant	5%
Owner without a mortgage	23%
Private rental tenant (incl. share housing)	25%
Owner with a mortgage	40%

Several responses did not fall into the available survey brackets, with some saying they were living in retirement villages, couch surfing or sleeping in their cars.

The capacity of women to maintain their housing tenure if their circumstances changed, particularly as they age, is highly dependent on the nature of their existing tenure.

60 per cent of respondents in private rentals believed they would not be able to maintain tenure on their own if their circumstances changed.

56 per cent of respondents who were still paying off a mortgage believed they would not be able to maintain tenure on their own if their circumstances changed.

Housing stress

For expenditure on housing costs, most respondents indicated their households sat comfortably within ranges that were not indicative of housing stress.

However, more than a third of households reported spending more than 30 per cent of their household income on their tenure costs.

- 31 per cent of respondents whose household income was between \$34,000 and \$49,999 per year estimated they spent more than 30 per cent of their household income on housing costs.
- 39 per cent of respondents whose household income was between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year estimated that they spent more than 30 per cent of income on housing costs.
- 37 per cent of respondents whose household's income was between \$100,000 and \$150,00 per year estimated that they spent more than 30 per cent of income on housing costs.

“My husband, myself and our children are living with my parents while we have looked, applied and haven’t been able to be accepted for rental properties”

respondent age 35 to 44

Living in Canberra

Our survey found that women are acutely aware of their surroundings and threats to their safety when accessing public spaces after dark. Domestic and interpersonal violence remains a reality for too many Canberra women, with young women in particular reporting the highest rates of domestic or interpersonal violence.

Discrimination continues to impact the lives of women and more than half of all respondents said they had experienced sexism in the last twelve months. For

41 per cent of respondents, the workplace was the site where they experienced sexist behaviour. For women age 18 to 24, more than 80 per cent indicated they had experienced sexist behaviour in the last twelve months.

The structural nature of discrimination and harassment was also noted by some participants. While some may not have experienced overt discrimination, they were however impacted by workplace policies or public design which they felt inadvertently excluded their participation.

Personal safety

What other studies found

- 19 per cent of women in the ACT had experienced sexual harassment in the previous twelve months²⁶.
- 23 per cent of women in the Australian workforce have experienced some form of workplace sexual harassment in the last twelve months²⁷.
- 36 per cent of Canberra women who walked alone after dark felt safe doing so²⁸.
- 82 per cent of Canberra women who used public transport alone after dark in the previous twelve months felt safe doing so²⁹.

What we found

Canberra women tend to feel safe when moving about in public in general; however, the response drastically reverses when asked about perceptions of safety at night.

- 67 per cent of Canberra women feel 'very safe' or 'somewhat safe' in public spaces in general.
- 28 per cent felt 'very safe' or 'somewhat safe' when accessing public spaces after dark.
- 55 per cent felt 'somewhat unsafe' or 'very unsafe' in public spaces after dark.
- 72 per cent of women age 18 to 24 felt 'somewhat unsafe' or 'very unsafe' when accessing public spaces at night-time.
- 46 per cent of women age 55 and older felt 'somewhat unsafe' or 'very unsafe' when accessing public spaces at night-time.

63 per cent of women who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander felt 'somewhat unsafe' or 'very unsafe' when accessing public spaces at night-time.

For women living with disability, 67 per cent felt 'somewhat unsafe' or 'very unsafe' when accessing public spaces in the evening.

Interpersonal violence

What other studies found

- The ACT has the highest rate of women experiencing emotional abuse from a current or former partner (5.9 per cent) over a 12 month period in Australia (4.8 per cent nationally)³⁰.
- Younger women are more likely to experience violence (includes physical threats and assault and sexual violence)³¹:
 - 18 to 34-year-old women: 9.1 per cent
 - 35 to 54-year-old women: 3.8 per cent.
- In 2014, 14 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experienced physical violence in the previous year and about 28 per cent reported that their most recent incident was perpetrated by a cohabiting partner³².
- Women with disabilities are 40 per cent more likely to be the victims of domestic violence than women without disabilities³³.
- More than 70 per cent of women with disabilities have been victims of violent sexual encounters at some time in their lives³⁴.

What we found

- While most Canberra women enjoy lives without abuse, there is a concerning number who are experiencing violence.

- 16 per cent of all respondents said they had experienced physical, emotional, verbal or financial abuse in a domestic or interpersonal relationship in the past twelve months.
- 24 per cent of women aged 18 to 24 reporting they had experienced abuse in a domestic or interpersonal relationship in the past twelve months.
- 18 per cent of respondents who identified as having disability reported experiencing physical, emotional, verbal or financial abuse in the last twelve months.
- 33 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women reported experiencing physical, emotional, verbal or financial abuse in the twelve months.

Wellbeing

What other studies found

- Four per cent of Canberra women report never being able to set aside time for themselves without demands from anyone else³⁵.
- The ACT has second highest rate of volunteering in Australia, with 38.6 per cent of Canberra women volunteering³⁶.

- The ACT has the highest rates of recreational participation in Australia, with 72.1 per cent of women participating in sport and physical recreation compared to a national average of 59.4 per cent³⁷.
- 60 per cent of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people said they experienced verbal abuse because of their sexuality³⁸.
- 33 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced verbal racial abuse³⁹.

What we found

- More than half of the respondents said they are currently feeling 'stressed' or 'burnt out', with only 20 per cent feeling relaxed or energetic.
- 67 per cent of respondents age 18 to 44 reported their current state of wellbeing as being 'stressed' or 'burnt out'.
- More than 77 per cent of women said they often prioritised the needs of others ahead of their own.

“I cut short my own leisure time and sleep in order to complete all the caring and domestic duties I have”

respondent 35 to 44

When asked to elaborate, some women noted that this dynamic was an inevitable part of parenting. Others commented that they often went to work when unwell, undertook caring roles that limited them, or felt obligated to make others happy even it meant they became overwhelmed.

Recreation

- 74 per cent of respondents participate in a recreational activity, with more than half of those engaging in personal exercise such as going to the gym.
- Although comparatively lower, recreational participation rates among those who were parents to dependent children were still high, with 63 per cent indicating they participated in recreation. Of those, 33 per cent engaged in personal exercise.
- Time limitations was a primary reason for those women who did not participate in a recreational activity, especially for women who were parents to dependent children.

Category of primary recreational activity	
Religious activities	2%
Outdoor activities (gardening etc)	7%
Cultural activities	10%
Organised sport	12%
Other	12%
Personal exercise	57%

- Other frequently listed activities included crafting, book clubs, dancing and (video) gaming.
- Women age 18 to 24 and 35 to 44 recorded the lowest rates of recreational participation, with participation generally increasing with age.

Participation in a recreational activity

18-24	64%
24-34	76%
35-44	62%
45-54	75%
55-64	81%
65+	86%

Sexism

- More than half of all respondents (54 per cent) said they had experienced instances of sexism in the last twelve months.
- There is an inversely proportional relationship between age and experiences of sexism:
 - 80 per cent of 18 to 24-year olds
 - 67 per cent of 25 to 34-year olds
 - 58 per cent of 35 to 44-year olds
 - 55 per cent of 45 to 54-year olds.

- Only women over the age of 55 years old did not respond in a majority to experiencing sexism in the last twelve months.
- With younger women participating more fully in the labour market as well as the night time economy and social scene, their heightened responses are possibly a reflection on how they move about the city and the evolution of personal social circles. This divergence could also be a result of older women and younger women perceiving the same behaviours differently.

Of those who had experienced sexism, 60 per cent said the perpetrator was known to them and 41 per cent said it occurred in the workplace.

- 30 per cent of respondents reported that their experience of sexist behaviour impacted their mental health.
- 13 per cent of respondents reported that their experience of sexist behaviour impacted their career.

“***It (sexism) impacted my daily behaviours and how I went to and from work, where I walked my dog and if I should stand up for others***”

respondent aged 25 to 34

Homophobia

- Of the women who identified as lesbian, bisexual, queer or other, 39 per cent said they had personally experienced homophobia in the last twelve months.
- Lesbian women reported the highest levels of targeted homophobia, at 66 per cent, followed by women who identified as queer (61 per cent).
- 41 per cent said this homophobia had occurred in public and 56 per cent said the perpetrator was known to them.
- 10 per cent said they had experienced homophobia in their home.

Racism

13 per cent of all respondents had personally experienced racism in the last twelve months, with 42 per cent of this behaviour occurring in public.

More than half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women said they had experienced racism in the last twelve months. The location of these incidents was nearly evenly split between the workplace and in a public setting.

Ableism

42 per cent of women who identified as having disability said they had experienced discrimination or harassment based on their disability in the past twelve months. Of these:

- 34 per cent said this experience took place in the workplace.
- 46 per cent said the experience detrimentally affected their mental health.

Ageism

Ageism appears to occur across age brackets with 37 per cent of those age 18 to 34 and 27 per cent of those age 45 to 64 saying they had experienced age-based discrimination in the past twelve months.

- Of respondents age 45 to 64 who had experienced ageist behaviour, 53 per cent said it took place in the workplace.
- 28 per cent of women age 65+ reported experiencing age-based discrimination in the preceding twelve months.



Leadership, influence and opportunity

In general, women felt able to influence change in their workplace. However, they felt unable to exert influence in their community or their wider political sphere.

- 63 per cent of all respondents felt they had none or negligible influence on politics.
- Many women referenced obstacles in their work and family lives that impeded their careers with some women noting overt 'boys' clubs' and latent workplace biases against women with parenting responsibilities.

In the workplace

- 66 per cent felt they take a leadership position in their workplace.
- 70 per cent were able to influence change in their workplace.
- 41 per cent felt there were obstacles that hinder women's progress in their workplace when compared to male employees. However, many women commented that they worked in female-dominated industries so did not perceive obstacles.

When asked about the obstacles hindering women's progress in the workplace, many women referenced obligations around childcare and school runs as falling to women in the household.

The presence of boys' clubs and golf days still seem to be a factor leading to workplace biases around opportunities and capability.

It feels difficult to raise issues of harassment because almost all executive positions are held by men, particularly where the harassment comes from a male superior.

- Respondent age 25 to 34

It is a male-dominated workplace, and not being 'one of the boys' excludes me from certain social interactions and this prevents me from learning certain information and getting the same access to opportunities.

- Respondent age 25 to 34

I work in a bar where it is a male-dominated environment. Both managers are male, 3 staff are female. I see it in other bars as well but worse - Men on the bar, women on the floor.

- Respondent age 25 to 34

The women in my workplace who have been promoted to senior positions are either past their childrearing years or do not have children. However, most male leaders have young families.

- Respondent age 35 to 44

In the community

- 30 per cent of all respondents felt they had a leadership role in their community.
- 38 per cent of all respondents felt they were able to influence changes that were important to them in their community.
- Of women who volunteered, 55 per cent said they feel they take a leadership role in their volunteer position. This was particularly high in younger women, with 76 per cent of those age 25 to 34 feeling a strong sense of leadership in their volunteering.

Politics

Despite living in the nation's capital and the ubiquity of technology enabling individuals to reach out to political representatives, perceptions of influence in local and federal politics are overwhelmingly poor.

63 per cent of all respondents felt they had none or negligible influence on politics.

This perception of disenfranchisement does not appear to follow any age based or income based trend as all age brackets recorded roughly the same feelings of powerlessness when it came to influencing political outcomes.

The role of data in advocacy

Robust data collection is fundamental to good policy. By creating a window into the lives of subjects, policymakers can develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, perceptions and lives of those they make policy for. This report drew on publicly available data sources as a means to complement responses to our survey.

Good public data has the potential to tell a story where anecdotal reporting may be lacking; however, there is an ongoing need for improvement in collection methods and presentation. For example, data on perceptions of public safety in Canberra are available through ACT Policing and provide for an understanding of community fears in relation to a variety of personal and property related crimes.

We deliberately chose not to include this data when referring to women's perceptions of safety when accessing public spaces. While the data shows that the ACT compares favourably across nearly all indicators, the absence of gender disaggregated data (including in relation to obvious gender motivated crimes such as sexual assault and domestic violence), remains a serious flaw limiting our understanding of women's perceptions of safety in Canberra⁴⁰. Responses to our survey questions relating to perceptions of safety in general and after dark offer a preliminary understanding of women's perceptions of personal safety and movement across the city.

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) and the Personal Safety Survey gauge attitudes and experiences of violence against women, public safety and instances of violence in current or previous domestic partnerships. These instruments are critical in understanding the societal trends and the extent of violence in Australia.

As our understanding of violence continues to shift with cultural norms that have been prompted in part by #MeToo, there is a need for diverse and evolving data collection methods to incorporate definitional change including improved research and understanding of coercive control behaviours.

Confusion about consent and controlling behaviours is disturbingly common among young people⁴¹ and our findings highlighted that young women are particularly targeted by domestic, family or interpersonal violence. And while NCAS revealed that young people have a strong understanding of physical violence against women, there was a discernible gap in their understanding of controlling and coercive behaviours.

Given the findings of our survey and the experiences of young women in particular, YWCA Canberra continues to call for age-appropriate respectful relationships education from K-12 and the university setting as an effective and systemic measure to prevent violence against women. We also continue to call on the ACT Government to develop a new and funded ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy, in line with national commitments. The work of the *Family Safety Hub*, while significant, does not negate the need for an up-to-date Strategy and a new local plan should be developed as an urgent priority.

Recent modifications to collection techniques for the Personal Safety Survey allowing computer assisted self-interviewing are welcomed. However, there is a need to build responses for gender diverse people and those from diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds. It is also likely that current collection limitations mean the Personal Safety Survey under represents the experiences of those with profound communication disabilities and those in institutional or residential settings who can be severely targeted by perpetrators.

A further consideration for researchers should be to take into account the presence of coping mechanisms, such as rationalising perpetrator behaviour, which may influence the responses of those who experience abuse or violence in their relationships.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the thoughtful contributions of the women and gender diverse people who make up the Canberra community. YWCA Canberra also wishes to thank Advocacy for Inclusion, Australian Women Against Violence Alliance, Equality Rights Alliance, Women with Disabilities (ACT) and Antonia Kaucz for their insight, expertise and feedback.

About YWCA Canberra

YWCA Canberra is a feminist not for profit organisation that has provided community services and represented women's issues in Canberra since 1929.

YWCA Canberra provides essential, quality services for women, girls and families in the ACT and surrounding regions. We work in the areas of children's services, community development, homelessness and affordable housing, youth services, personal and professional training, women's leadership and advocacy.

Through its national Affiliate Association with YWCA Australia, YWCA Canberra is part of the World YWCA network, which connects 120 countries across the globe. YWCA Canberra's vision is 'girls and women thriving' and our mission is 'we strengthen communities by supporting girls and women through our services and advocacy'.

References

- ¹ ABS, 2016, *Population by age and sex of Australia (ACT)*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3235.02016?OpenDocument>
- ² *Ibid*
- ³ ABS, 2016 *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3238.0.55.001Main+Features1June%202016?OpenDocument>. *The estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presented in this publication are based on 2016 Census of Population and Housing counts adjusted for net undercount as measured by the Post Enumeration Survey.*
- ⁴ ABS, 2016 *Census of Population and Housing: reflecting Australia – stories from the census – same sex couples*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2071.02016?OpenDocument>
- ⁵ ABS, 2016 *Census of Population and Housing: reflecting Australia – stories from the census – cultural diversity*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2071.02016?OpenDocument>
- ⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2015, *Housing decisions of older Australians*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/housing-decisions-older-australians/housing-decisions-older-australians.pdf>
- ⁷ *Ibid*
- ⁸ ABS, 2019 *Labor Force, Australia (ACT), Aug. 2019* <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0Aug%202019?OpenDocument>
- ⁹ ABS, 2017 *Barriers and incentives to labor force participation*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6239.0July%202016%20to%20June%202017?OpenDocument>
- ¹⁰ ABS, 2006 *How Australian's Use their Time*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/>

Lookup/by+Subject/4125.0~Jan+2012~Main+Features~Caring+for+children~4120 ,

¹¹ *The Household, Income and Labor Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA)2019*, https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3127664/HILDA-Statistical-Report-2019.pdf

¹² *Centre for Social Impact (Dec, 2018) Financial security and the influence of economic resources*, <https://www.csi.edu.au/media/2018-Financial-Resilience-in-Australia.pdf>

¹³ *Centre for Social Impact (Sept, 2017) Why is financial stress on the rise?* https://www.csi.edu.au/media/Financial_Resilience_Part_One.pdf

¹⁴ *American Academy of Actuaries, Australian Actuaries*

Institute, and the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries in the United Kingdom (2017) Retirement readiness, a comparative analysis of Australia, The United Kingdom and the United States [https://actuaries.asn.au/Library/Opinion/2017/RetirementReadiness\(web\).pdf](https://actuaries.asn.au/Library/Opinion/2017/RetirementReadiness(web).pdf)

¹⁵ *The Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia Limited (ASFA) 2017, Superannuation account balances by age and gender*, https://www.superannuation.asn.au/ArticleDocuments/359/1710_Superannuation_account_balances_by_age_and_gender.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y

¹⁶ *Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2016 Household income and wealth 2013-2014*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6523.02013-14?OpenDocument>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Doman (2019) Rent report, June*. <https://www.domain.com.au/research/rental-report/june-2019/>

¹⁹ *ABS 2019 Housing Occupancy and Costs 2017-2018, household estimates selected characteristics, ACT* <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4130.02017-18?OpenDocument>

¹⁹ *Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2019, Older women's risk of homelessness: background paper*. https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_ow_homelessness2019.pdf

²⁰ ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2049.0Main+Features12016?OpenDocument>

²¹ ABS 2019 Housing Occupancy and Costs 2017-2018, housing costs as a proportion of gross household income selected characteristics, ACT <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4130.02017-18?OpenDocument>

²² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2018, Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ ABS 2016, Personal Safety Survey: state and territory infographics [https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/017A140806DA3624CA25826C001158CA/\\$File/4906.0%202016%20personal%20safety%20survey%20state%20and%20territory%20infographics.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/017A140806DA3624CA25826C001158CA/$File/4906.0%202016%20personal%20safety%20survey%20state%20and%20territory%20infographics.pdf)

²⁶ AHRC, 2018, Everyone's business: fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everyones-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual>

²⁷ ABS 2018, Personal Safety Survey ACT 2016 <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4906.02016?OpenDocument>

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Op. cit*, xviii.

³⁰ *Op. cit* xix.

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2018, Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

³² Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA) 2015, Preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities: integrating a human rights perspective. http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Think_Piece_Revised_Edition.pdf

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Jenny Hailes, 2018, *Women's health survey; understanding health information needs and health behaviour of women in Australia*, <https://jeanhailes.org.au/contents/documents/News/Womens-Health-Survey-Report-web.pdf>

³⁶ ABS, 2015, *General social survey 2014, volunteers characteristics, states and territories*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4159.02014?OpenDocument>

³⁷ ABS, 2015, *Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2013-14*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4177.02013-14?OpenDocument>

³⁸ AHRC, 2014, *Face the facts: lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people*. https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/7_FTF_2014_LGBTI.pdf

³⁹ Reconciliation Australia, 2016, *the state of reconciliation in Australia Summary* https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/State-of-Reconciliation-Report_SUMMARY.pdf

⁴⁰ ACT Policing, 2018, *Annual Report 2017-2018*, <https://police.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF/ACTPAnnualReport2017-18.pdf>

⁴¹ Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) 2019, *young Australian's attitudes to violence against women and gender equality; findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)* <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/21135741/2017NCAS-Youth-SubReport.pdf>



YWCA
CANBERRA

02 6185 2000
canberra@ywca-canberra.org.au

Central Office

Level 2, 71 Northbourne Avenue
Canberra City
ACT 2601

Postal address

GPO Box 767
Canberra
ACT 2601

