

Australia: Misleading stats used to conceal social causes of “gender-based violence”

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Marches involving some thousands of predominantly women were held throughout Australian cities over the past two weeks to protest “gender-based violence against women.”

Organised by advocacy group What Were You Wearing (WWYW), the campaign followed the stabbing deaths of five women at Bondi shopping centre and the deaths of other women allegedly by their partners. The rallies have been followed by daily reporting in virtually all the mainstream media outlets of the experiences of women in relationships where domestic violence has been alleged.

The “No More: National Rally Against Gender Based Violence” was widely promoted by the media and attended by various politicians, including Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who spoke at the Canberra protest on April 27.

Highlighted in the coverage is an increase from 2021–22 in the number of women killed in 2022–23 and a rise in the first four months of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

To April 2024, nationally 27 women have died “at the hands of men” compared to 11 less in the comparable period last year. The tragic circumstances surrounding the deaths of these women have been deliberately amplified to claim a virtual epidemic of domestic violence and “gender-based” deaths. Calls were issued at the rallies to declare the situation a “national emergency”.

The Labor government called an “urgent national cabinet on men’s violence against women” that allocated almost \$1 billion over five years to establish the Leaving Violence Program that provides up to \$5,000 in crisis support for women leaving violent relationships, as well as risk assessments and access to support services.

Albanese has seized on the issue for two reasons. Recent polling shows his government’s support plummeting to historically low levels, which would result in a hung parliament at the next elections due within the next year. This is a desperate and false attempt to present the Labor government as responding to the concerns of the constituency.

The second is to sheet home the responsibility to “men” rather than the worsening social conditions created by the government that have led to many of the deaths.

The figures released by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) released at the end of April reveal a different situation. While its homicide statistics showed the female intimate partner homicide rate (IPH) in 2022–23 rose by 28 percent from the previous year to 0.32 per 100,000 women, the AIC also reported a

clear downward trend over the previous three decades when compared to the rate of one per 100,000 women in 1989.

The report revealed a 66 percent decline in intimate partner deaths of women in the past 34 years. The 2022–23 figures are the second-lowest rate recorded since the first report was released for 1989–90. In fact, intimate partner homicide figures show a greater fall than the overall decrease in homicides by 52 percent over the same period.

As has been the case historically, men comprise not only the highest percentage of perpetrators of homicides but also the greatest proportion of victims. In 2022–23, 87 percent of perpetrators were men with 69 percent of the victims being male. Men were more likely to be killed by an acquaintance, friend or non-family person, whereas 49 percent of women were killed by their partner.

In fact, the greatest disparity exists between indigenous and non-indigenous communities: 20 percent of total deaths were of those who identify as Aboriginal, who comprise less than 4 percent of the total population. This is the result, not of racial attitudes between the sexes among Aboriginal people, but the acute social tensions in many indigenous communities produced by the highest levels of poverty, homelessness, unemployment and chronic health issues in the country.

The dire conditions facing Aboriginal people have been the subject of multiple royal commissions. This includes the Closing the Gap report that, in the almost 20 years since it was initially proposed and accepted by all governments Labor and Coalition, has seen the main health indices, life expectancy and economic conditions of indigenous people further deteriorate.

AIC research manager Dr Samantha Bricknell reported that while there was a sizeable increase in all homicides in the 2022–23 period, they have, in fact, returned to the levels of the pre-COVID period, which produced a decline in crime rates to the lowest on record. Subsequent reports will determine whether this current rise in homicides is a general trend.

The actual situation surrounding domestic violence deaths is deliberately ignored by feminists and governments to conceal the social conditions that produce such deadly events. To probe into the increasingly intolerable situation confronting many working-class families would mean indicting those responsible—the capitalist class and governments, Liberal and Labor, that govern on their behalf.

Even the terminology “domestic violence deaths”, which

describes deaths by a current or former intimate partner, as opposed to deaths by an unknown assailant, has become increasingly interchangeable to the point where the distinction is almost obliterated. The figure of 27 women killed this year, for example, includes the deaths at Bondi shopping centre in Sydney by Joel Cauchi who was unknown to all his victims when, in the throes of a mental health episode, he stabbed and killed six people, including five women and injured 12 others.

His diagnosis of and decades-long struggle with schizophrenia are now well documented. The fact he was unemployed, in poverty and homeless, which resulted in disruption to his mental health treatment, is acknowledged as the conditions that contributed to his actions on April 13. This has not, however, prevented the deaths resulting from the Bondi attack from being included with those of “gender-based deaths” that inflate the figure to 27.

The gender of the alleged assailants, who were all men, is falsely rendered synonymous with the cause of death. The social circumstances that led to these violent and tragic deaths are not only not addressed but overtly rejected. Mental health, declining social conditions, increased economic inequality and the destruction of education and health facilities required to deal with the complex problems facing millions of people are dismissed with disdain by feminist pundits as causes for homicides.

This process was made clear following the two stabbing events in Sydney in April. Demands from a coterie of feminists in Australia and other countries that the Bondi attack be designated as “terrorism by misogyny” was a particularly reactionary expression of the denial of social causes. They justified their demand on the simplistic argument that the preponderance of those killed and injured were female, thus Cauchi “hated” women. Cauchi cannot speak for himself as he was shot dead by police on the day.

The increasingly shrill demand for the Bondi incident to be branded as terrorism came two days later when Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel was stabbed, allegedly by a 16-year-old boy in a church in southwestern Sydney. That was classified as terrorism within a matter of a few hours by the NSW Police in conjunction with ASIO, the AFP and Albanese. Despite the boy’s parents describing him as troubled by long-term mental health and behavioural problems, his transformation into “a terrorist” was exploited to justify the largest police raids in Sydney in decades. Some 400 police were mobilised throughout working-class areas leading to multiple arrests of other teenage boys.

There is unquestionably a desire to understand how and why such events happen and how they should be prevented in future.

What does not explain “gender-based violence” are theories that ascribe it solely or primarily to “misogyny,” “male attitudes,” “disrespect of women” and the other purported individual attributes of men. The focus of the government on male behaviour camouflages the real objective conditions that generate enormous social tensions and fuel the breakdown in relationships that lead to violence, injury and death.

Significantly, COVID-19 lockdowns produced the lowest homicide and crime rates for decades, in part because the Liberal-National Coalition government was forced to provide Jobkeeper payments and other benefits for those workers whose employment

was disrupted or suspended. That payment lasted a year, ending in March 2021. During this period, superannuation was also made accessible for those in need.

Notwithstanding the many difficulties associated with the lockdowns, most people adhered to the restrictions because broad sections of the population were committed to the social measures necessary to defeat the spread of the virus. It was not the lack of support by ordinary working people for the necessary social and health measures but the decision of governments, at the behest of big business, to dispense with them, that has cost more than 20,000 lives since the end of 2022.

It should be noted that this year to April, during which 27 women have died supposedly all due to domestic violence, 567 people have died of COVID-19 as the direct result of dispensing with all restrictions and health measures. That these deaths are not declared a “national crisis” is because of the criminal policy of the governments to allow the deadly virus to rip through the population.

The 2022–23 period after the end of COVID restrictions saw the highest cost of living increases for almost 40 years. Working people confronted rising inflation, 12 interest rate rises, unaffordable rental accommodation and sackings with business closures in many sectors, including retail and the building industry. The cost of living for a household where wages are the primary source of income has increased by 9.3 percent over the past year, which, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is the highest rise since 1987.

To imply that the fear of losing one’s job, not being able to pay mortgage or rent payments, and juggling the payment of power bills and rising grocery bills does not produce, at times, intolerable tensions that explode in violence is to wilfully ignore reality.

Moreover, these conditions arise as governments turn to war and the military to resolve geo-strategic rivalries internationally. According to the Italian central bank governor, Fabio Panetta: “The number of violent conflicts in 2023 was the highest since the Second World War.”

Many of these conflicts, notably the war in Ukraine that threatens to escalate to a nuclear conflagration between NATO/US and Russia and the genocidal onslaught in Gaza, have been backed by Australian governments, including the Albanese Labor government. Prosecuting them involves gutting health, education, infrastructure and all social programs in favour of massive increases in defence budgets.

To suggest that deteriorating social conditions and the resulting acute personal crises have no impact on the daily lives of those who are forced to pay for government decisions, which they have not voted for nor been consulted over, is to deliberately cover up for the Albanese government’s reactionary program of war abroad and class war at home.



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