Excerpt from Q&A June 27, 2016 – watch from 3:30.

Some proportion of that [funding] was supposed to be for preventing violence against Indigenous women, which ranges between 34 times the national figures to, you know, in the worst areas, 80 times. So … it’s a high-priority issue. – Professor Marcia Langton, speaking on Q&A, June 27, 2016.

Prominent Indigenous academic Marcia Langton told Q&A that violence against Indigenous women ranged from between 34 times the national figures to up to 80 times in the worst areas, saying funding was needed for services “to stop the violence”.

Is that correct?

Checking the source

When asked for sources to support her statement, Langton sent The Conversation a series of links to a range of articles, speeches and reports on the issue.

One report she referred to, published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2006, said that:

Indigenous females and males were 35 and 22 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults as other Australian females and males, respectively.

An analysis she referred to, authored by Curtin University researcher Hannah McGlade and published in The Australian newspaper in 2016, said that:

Aboriginal women here are 37 times more likely to be hospitalised than non-Aboriginal women for non-fatal family violence-related assaults. In the Northern Territory the rate of hospitalisation is up to 86 times higher for Aboriginal women. In central Australia, this figure is 95 times more likely for Aboriginal women.

Langton also referred The Conversation to figures reported by the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council (NPY Women’s Council) that said that its domestic and family violence service had

a client base of 519 women, which from a total population of 6000 (accepting that at least half are
men/boys and a large number of those are children), puts those at risk of domestic violence above the national average of one in three. It also means that there are very few individuals whose lives are not affected by domestic violence, either as direct victims, child witnesses of violence or as family members of victims and users of violence. NPY Women’s Council calculates that Aboriginal women in the region are around 60 times more likely to be victims of domestic homicide than are non-Aboriginal women.

She also referred to a report by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner in the Northern Territory that said that Aboriginal women in the NT are 80 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of assault.

**Sorting out the technical terms**

It’s worth noting that “domestic violence” and “family violence” are related, but different terms.

“Domestic violence” refers to acts of violence (physical, sexual, emotional and psychological) that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. It tends to involve an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear.

“Family violence” is the most widely-used term to identify the experiences of Indigenous people because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur, rather than just intimate relationships. In order to cover both definitions, commentators often use the expression “domestic and family violence” in Australia.

Langton used the broad term “violence against Indigenous women” as part of a wide-ranging discussion about funding for domestic violence services, so we have checked a range of data on both domestic and family violence.

**Are Indigenous women 34 to 80 times more likely to experience domestic and family violence?**

It is difficult to measure the full extent of domestic and family violence against women as most incidents go unreported, but we know that Indigenous women are much more likely to experience domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous Australian women.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 quotes a figure of Indigenous females being up to 35 times more likely to experience domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous Australian women. And the Productivity Commission’s 2011 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report says Indigenous women and girls are 31 times more likely to be hospitalised due to domestic and family violence related assaults compared to non-Indigenous women and girls.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022 quotes the 2009 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Social Survey as finding that around a quarter of all Indigenous women have experienced physical violence in the last 12 months and that nearly all of them knew their perpetrator.

We also know that Indigenous people are disproportionately victims and offenders in homicide incidents, and that most of these occur between family members.

There is evidence to support the claim that Indigenous women are up to 80 times more likely to experience violence in the “worst areas”. There is also anecdotal evidence and media reporting to support this assertion.

We know that rates of domestic and family violence are higher in remote Indigenous communities, and that there are even greater barriers to reporting violence to authorities in small remote communities than there are in regional area and metropolitan centres. Anecdotal evidence from community leaders in remote communities does back up this claim.
Why are Indigenous women more likely to experience domestic and family violence?

There are various explanations as to why rates of domestic and family violence are more prevalent in Indigenous communities. Many accept that the impact of colonisation, ongoing trauma from the displacement of Indigenous people from their traditional lands and kinship groups, the removal of children from their families, and the ongoing negative relationship between Indigenous people and the criminal justice system have all contributed to heightened levels of violence.

For others, the low expectations that mainstream society has for Indigenous Australians, the high rates of unemployment and poverty, and substance misuse are more likely explanations.

Verdict

The available evidence on domestic and family violence suggest Marcia Langton is broadly correct. There is evidence for the higher end of the claim, including anecdotal evidence and media reports.

Getting accurate data on the true extent of domestic and family violence is notoriously difficult. – Angela Spinney

Review

I agree with most of the comments made in this article, particularly that much of the domestic and/or family violence in Indigenous communities goes unreported. The reasons for this are complex. To add further weight to the article, it is useful to include the data below that confirms Marcia Langton’s assertion is broadly correct.

In NSW, the domestic assault rate per 100,000 population averaged 388.7 for the period April 2015 to March 2016.

However, there were significant fluctuations across the state. In Walgett, for example – where the population is approximately half Indigenous and half non-Indigenous – the rate was 2339.2 domestic assaults per 100,000. In Moree, where the population is approximately 25% Indigenous and 75% non-Indigenous, the rate was 1738.6 per 100,000.

This suggests that in NSW, the rate of domestic assaults in areas with high Indigenous populations far outstrips the state average.

Data reported by the Northern Territory police reveal a similar dynamic at work in that state. In Tennant Creek, for example – where the population is approximately half Indigenous and half non-Indigenous – the rate of domestic violence assault was 4,451.8 per 100,000.

It’s not possible to drill down to the rate of domestic violence assault among Indigenous people versus non-Indigenous people using this data set. However, if we were able to separate Indigenous versus non-Indigenous Australians, my experience as a researcher in this field suggests it would be unsurprising to find the rate for Indigenous populations at levels described by Marcia Langton. – Kyllie Cripps

UPDATE: This article was updated on July 5 to include more data sources that Marcia Langton sent to The Conversation. The new sources include figures from the NPY Women’s Council and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner in the Northern Territory. The sentence in the verdict that formerly read “There is less statistical evidence for the higher end of the claim, but there is anecdotal evidence that, tragically, this figure may well also be correct” now reads “There is evidence for the higher end of the claim, including anecdotal evidence and media reports.”

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