



# Understanding Family Violence and the role of the car and insurance

New research following findings from Allianz's  
"Understanding Family Violence and Risks of Insurance" report





This report contains material on domestic violence that may be triggering for some individuals.

The following resources are available 24/7 if you need support:

**1800 RESPECT** – A counselling line for people at risk of family and domestic violence, and/or sexual assault: **1800 737 732**

## Introduction

The [Insurance Council of Australia \(ICA\)](#) has recently identified domestic and family violence (DFV) as a key insurance-related issue.

At Allianz we recognise that motor vehicles are very important for the safety of victim-survivors and we have taken a proactive approach to develop policies that will support our customers experiencing DFV.

In 2020, Allianz commissioned the [Gendered Violence Research Network \(GVRN\)](#), at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), to undertake research to help us develop best practices for customers facing DFV. This was released as a report called "[Understanding Family Violence and Risks of Insurance](#)" and supported by a toolkit "[Insurance and Family Violence: What to consider when separating from a partner](#)". This research identified

that a significant proportion of DFV-related insurance claims were associated with motor vehicle insurance policies. To further explore this finding and investigate the links between motor vehicles, DFV, and insurance, Allianz commissioned GVRN to conduct further research in 2023.

The research was designed in three phases:



### Phase one:

GVRN conducted a scoping review of the evidence on ways in which access to a motor vehicle enhances mobility and contributes to improved financial wellbeing. This included discussion of the 'weaponisation' of motor vehicles by DFV perpetrators.



### Phase two:

An online survey and interviews with DFV service providers to explore their experiences and perceptions of the intersections between DFV, motor vehicles, and insurance.



### Phase three:

A review of Allianz customer files where DFV had been identified as a factor in a motor vehicle insurance claim.

## Summary of key findings:

### Phase one

The research identified two key issues around the importance of motor vehicles for the safety of DFV victim-survivors; and their use, by other individuals, to perpetrate DFV.

- It is important for victim-survivors of DFV to have access to a motor vehicle to maintain independence and support their safety, both while in the relationship and after they leave a violent relationship.
- Perpetrators may damage or sabotage the victim-survivor's vehicle as a means of coercive control, which may result in an insurance claim that is not covered under a typical insurance policy and may cause considerable financial hardship for the victim-survivor.

## Summary of key findings:

### Phase two

All respondents had encountered victim-survivors who had used their vehicle to escape from a violent relationship, attend work or education, access support services or stay in contact with family and friends. Perpetrators often used tactics to exert control over the victim-survivor to prevent them from leaving the relationship, limit their independence and ability to access the necessary services and support.

#### **The most common tactics identified include:**

- Intentionally damaging the victim-survivor's vehicle
- Preventing the victim-survivor from accessing funds needed to use the vehicle, eg petrol, critical car maintenance
- Tracking the victim-survivor's vehicle
- Stealing or hiding the victim-survivor's keys

Most respondents had encountered victim-survivors who had experienced motor insurance issues related to DFV.

#### **The most common issues identified include:**

- Malicious damage to the victim-survivor's vehicle
- Perpetrator cancelled the victim-survivor's insurance policy held jointly without their knowledge, or consent
- Victim-survivor paid an excess, even though they may not have been at fault, to avoid aggravating the perpetrator

## Summary of key findings:

### Phase three

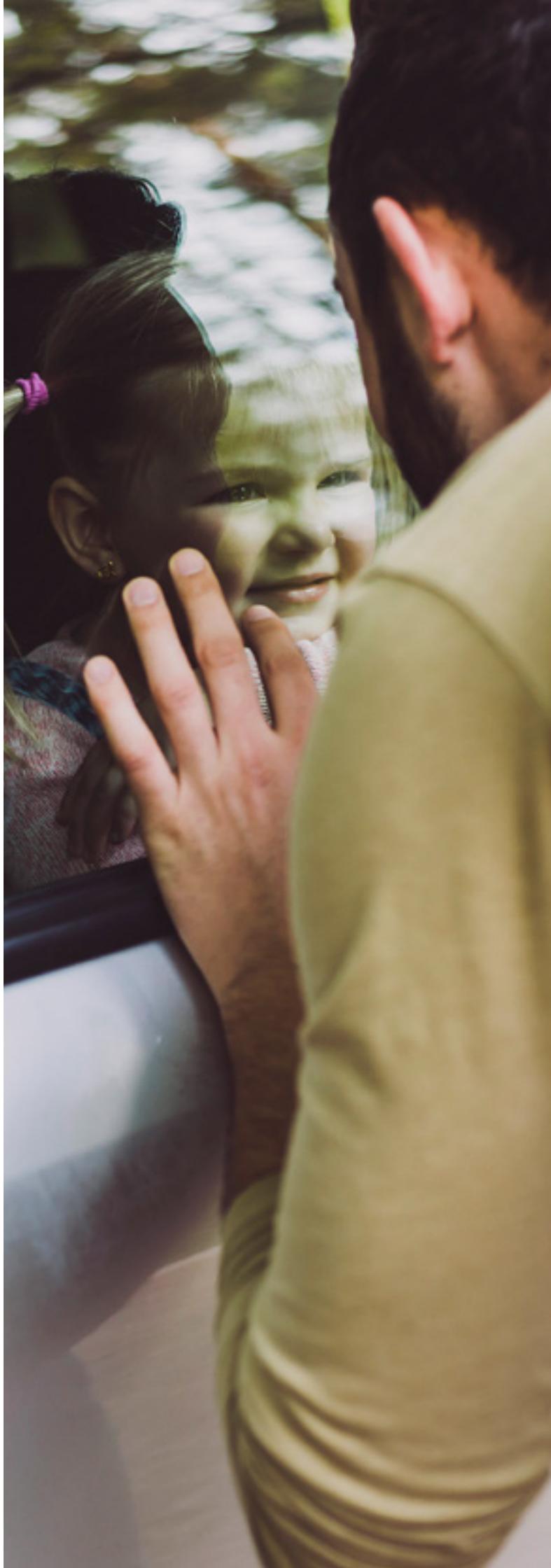
The identified key trends from the Allianz DFV customers' files correspond with the UNSW research of DFV service providers.

Of the Allianz DFV customer files analysed, just under half of the motor vehicle claims arising were due to the direct actions of the DFV perpetrator.

#### **Key perpetrator tactics involving the identified motor vehicles included:**

- Intentionally causing damage to the vehicle
- Stealing the vehicle or using it without the victim-survivor's consent
- Intentionally causing an accident with the vehicle
- Damage to the vehicle when the victim-survivor was fleeing a DFV situation
- Stealing keys to the vehicle

In just over half of the cases, DFV was not the direct cause of the insurance claim, however the presence of DFV was still relevant to the customer's circumstances.





## Case studies

The research identified case studies that highlight the importance of access to a motor vehicle for victim-survivors in ensuring safety, fulfilling caring responsibilities and accessing services.

Many case studies discussed how perpetrators may exploit the victim-survivor's financial vulnerability to prevent them from leaving the violent relationship or exert control over the victim-survivor to limit their independence and access to support services.

For example, in the case of **Sarah\***: Sarah's vehicle was in her partner's business name. Her partner stopped paying repayments and refused to pay registration. As a result, Sarah was caught driving the car unregistered and therefore without compulsory third party insurance, but was released from the fine due to DFV. The partner had taken over all assets and joint funds after separation so Sarah couldn't get a car loan in her name due to inherited bad credit rating from the partner's revenge debts in joint names. Sarah had to return the unregistered car which was about to be repossessed leaving her with no car to get to work or to assist look after three children.

In **Clare's\*** story, her husband had damaged the vehicle, rendering the vehicle undrivable. Clare was not able to pay to fix this as he was financially abusive towards her and prevented her access to funds.

Another victim-survivor needed access to a vehicle to care for her child and attend medical appointments. The perpetrator manipulated this situation to ensure that the victim-survivor remained reliant on him.

This is **Sam's\*** story: Sam was experiencing emotional and financial abuse from her husband. They share a 6-year-old son who is diagnosed with Autism and requires regular appointments for his assessments and care. Sam was unable to leave the relationship due to financial dependence on her husband who is financially well off. She begged him for a car to enable her to care for their son. He bought her a car on his name, however the car had a lot of maintenance issues and often broke down. Her husband refused to make repairs and then sold it at no notice to deliberately make her car situation difficult and limit her independence.

## Allianz actions

Based on the findings of this report, Allianz has taken steps to implement the following actions to ensure a best practice response for our customers affected by DFV.

### Training and awareness

- Allianz has implemented a communications strategy across the organisation to ensure that employees and other stakeholders are aware of the intersections between DFV, motor vehicles, and insurance and the tactics commonly used by perpetrators and the insurance implications of these tactics.
- Allianz is engaging in activities to raise awareness in the community about the intersections between DFV, motor vehicles, and insurance, including how motor vehicles may be used by perpetrators to abuse, control and manipulate victim-survivors.

### Protecting private and confidential information

- Allianz takes data security and protection extremely seriously but has developed even more robust processes and procedures and all possible steps to provide for private, confidential and personal information of customers affected by DFV.

### Minimising the need for customers to repeat disclosure

- Allianz has taken steps to minimise the number of times a customer is required to repeat disclosure of DFV, acknowledging that reliving their experiences may have a traumatic effect on them.

### Conduct of others

- Allianz may in some circumstances pay claims which arise from wrongful conduct by a family member in circumstances such as family violence and mental illness that would otherwise trigger an exclusion and denial of the claim and even when cover has been varied or terminated with malicious intent.

### Sensitive claims handling

- Allianz strives to handle all claims with sensitivity, flexibility and care, particularly when the customer and perpetrator are joint policy holders or the perpetrator has caused the claim.
- Allianz provides targeted support to customers where the motor vehicle claim has arisen due to the victim-survivor's actions but was the result of DFV.
- For customers affected by DFV, Allianz strives to cover claims where the perpetrator, who may be a co-insured, has deliberately caused damage to the motor vehicle.
- Allianz considers how an insurance policy may be effected in situations where a victim-survivor is living in their vehicle to escape from DFV.

### Access to financial hardship help

- Allianz recognises the importance of financial hardship assistance for victim-survivors of DFV which can be a potential cause of payment difficulties. We have reviewed our processes to ensure they are appropriately supporting customers experiencing financial hardship and we seek to provide innovative and flexible responses.

### Referring customers to specialist DFV services

- Allianz recognises the important role insurers play in referring customers to external specialist support services and we have reviewed our referral pathways in each state and territory to ensure that employees are provided with an up-to-date list of external specialist services that can assist customers affected by DFV.

