

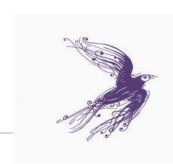
# SDVAG Submission for Royal Commission

Southern Domestic Violence Action Group (SDVAG) presents this submission with a particular emphasis on two of our members with lived experience (Part i) and one member who worked with male perpetrators (Part ii). SDVAG has been operating in the southern suburbs since 1989, with a focus of addressing the issue of domestic violence in the south. It is an independent community based organisation. Membership of our group consists of devoted and committed community members and service providers in the Onkaparinga region. SDVAG's latest achievement is the establishment of The Yellow Gate at Colonnades.

The two women with lived experience of DV have given examples from their own history. They are named, simply, X and Y.

## POINTS WE WANT THE ROYAL COMMISSION TO HEAR

1. Better educated: judges (esp family law court), police, medical practitioners, and social workers. Particularly, it's essential that social workers receive a course in their degree that is specifically on DV. Everyone in SW comes across DV, and most of them have NO idea!
2. Significantly increased budget expenditure on housing for women and their children.
3. Acknowledgement that an abusive husband is also an abusive father.  
[A man who is prepared to abuse a child's mother is also an abusive father, and any access that he has to the children post-separation gives him further opportunity to abuse the mother/his ex-partner. This is not good for the children or the mother as it allows the abuse to continue. The judges MUST know that just because they are no longer under the same roof does not mean that the woman and children are safe. FAR FROM IT!]
4. Change to bail laws – a man who is a threat to his wife and children should not receive bail.
5. Societal education on coercive control.
6. Less traumatising legal processes – that abusers not be allowed to use the courts to continue abuse – the courts can put a stop to unnecessarily lengthy court proceedings and other abuses of the legal system, and lawyers should not be allowed to proceed where it is obvious that the litigation is being used to continue to control and abuse the woman.
7. Education for boys to understand equality. More education for families on how to raise boys that understand equality – eg. Understanding that doing housework is everyone's job.
8. Education in schools on recognising abusive/unhealthy relationships.
9. DV specific services for girls under 18 who are experiencing their own intimate partner abuse.
10. More accurate and informed statistics/data. We need data on patterned coercive control, not just violent incidents. These two behaviours are not even close to being the same. Our current data is significantly inaccurate for multiple reasons.



## PART i

## About Y:

- 47yo
- Three children
- 17 when she met her abuser
- 19 when she married him
- He moved her over from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]
- 34 when she exited the relationship
- She ran her own [REDACTED] business from 2008 till now – with staff.
- Now she is a single mum and full time carer for her youngest son who has a disability with an NDIS plan.
- She experienced homelessness the day she exited the abusive relationship. She was housed in motels for the first couple of months, then at [REDACTED] shelter – till he found her, then moved to a southern shelter- till he found her, then to a house in [REDACTED] – till he found her, then the [REDACTED]. Then she moved to a house in [REDACTED] – till he found her because the courts gave him her address, then she moved to [REDACTED] and now she is moving to a new home due to her rental house being closed down.
- She experienced two trials over 10 years. ... Initiated by him. She had to pay \$280k in legal fees. And received \$55k in settlement and \$9k of his superannuation. He paid court costs, but represented himself as lawyers wouldn't do what he asked, so his legal costs were minimal.
- He managed to secure access to the two older children – and carried out parental alienation. It took the judge 10 years to recognise the parental alienation and finally rule differently for the youngest child.
- Has many health issues now.

## About X:

- 55yo
- One daughter and one foster child and numerous adult step-children
- 30 when she met her abuser
- 31 when she married him
- 40 when she exited the relationship
- Experienced homelessness due to exiting the abuse
- Was taken to court by her abuser who won unsupervised access to their child. She paid for legal fees. He paid \$0 legal fees.
- Mediation secured half of the proceeds of the house sale for her and no superannuation.
- She ran her own [REDACTED] teaching business for 25 years.
- Now has been happily re-married for 11 years and holds a BSW and is employed in the field.
- Has many health issues now.



**a) PREVENTION. How SA can facilitate widespread change in the underlying drivers of DFSV by addressing the attitudes and systems that drive all forms of DFSV and particularly violence against women and children, to stop it before it starts.**

- Public education with correct narrative/representation of DFSV. Can we please stop with the pictures of white women cowering from a fist raised at them? This is violence, but it is misleading as there are many various ways that violence can be inflicted, including coercive control (guessing it might be hard to create an image that represents coercive control?).

EG: X – lived in DV for ten years, having no idea that this is what she was living in. It was not until a police officer gave her a pamphlet (created by SDVAG) on DV that she understood her situation. She had zero education/knowledge on DV. There are a number of reasons for this:

- The media had represented it as a low socioeconomic male in a blue singlet giving a woman a black eye. This hadn't been her experience, so she just figured she was in a difficult marriage that required more effort on her part to make her husband happy.
- Her parents didn't understand it, and were therefore unable to educate her, as they were stuck in society's narrative of feminine submission and male superiority.
- There was zero education in schools regarding healthy relationships and recognising warning signs.

In fact, X has heard many women say, "I didn't think it was that bad, because he had never hit me." Society is using the "hitting" as a gauge for how serious abuse is. This incorrect image is preventing some women from seeking help.

- A campaign addressing societal attitudes to boys would help – Eg. encouraging parents to teach their boys to take on a fair share of housework/contribute to the home so that these boys don't grow up assuming that they are entitled to all the privileges of home, but none of the responsibility. Eg.2 Demonstrate that we value females in our language, eradicating the pay gap, and stronger legislation on pornography (refer to Exodus Cry).
- More education in schools that helps young people recognise what is healthy relationship behaviour and what is not. We recommend hiring a third party provider who has expertise in this area. X has created a resource for this purpose.
- Some training in education settings on how to navigate conflict in relationships. The introduction of Restorative Practice and their Circles approach in all schools would be most useful. However, many schools give a half-hearted attempt at applying this important approach and so never succeed. The school leadership/Department of Education could facilitate restorative practices by adjusting school structure so that teachers/other staff have the capacity/time to apply the practice thoroughly and successfully. All teachers could be expertly trained in this skill during university studies. Whilst teachers use an authoritarian (rather than authoritative) teaching style they only contribute to the issue of coercive control. X has worked in schools for [REDACTED] and seen the varying results of authoritarian teaching as opposed to authoritative. She's also seen how Restorative Practice can be applied very successfully in difficult situations.



**b) EARLY INTERVENTION. How SA can improve effective early intervention through identification and support of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating DFSV and preventing the recurrence of such violence.**

- That all Social Work/Social Sciences/Youth Work/Psychology/Counselling studies have a full course in understanding SDFV/Coercive Control so that all these practitioners are fully across the issue and can recognise it and provide appropriate early intervention. X has completed a BSW at [REDACTED], and domestic violence was rarely spoken about, let alone a course provided.

EG: X had the misfortune of receiving counselling from one uneducated lady at a well known service provider who told her that she had contributed to her abuse. The woman gave such poor advice that it significantly compromised X's safety and exposed her to further attacks from the perpetrator.

EG: X actually sought counselling many times for her "troubled marriage" and not one counsellor assessed her for domestic violence.

EG: X also had the misfortune of being on the receiving end of a family assessment during court proceedings. The family assessor was clearly uneducated in domestic violence, because, despite identifying that X was a victim of DV who was terrified of her ex-partner, this social worker did nothing to prevent the recurrence of abuse. Instead, she proceeded to recommend full visiting rights to their [REDACTED]. The social worker had zero idea that this would facilitate ongoing abuse of the mother – the perpetrator using the daughter as a weapon against the mother. She had zero understanding that an abusive partner is also guaranteed to be an abusive father. Any man who chooses to abuse a child's/children's mother is not a safe father. This was evident in X's relationship. Whilst still married, the father was an absent father in their daughter's life (he didn't even attend her [REDACTED] birthday!). He refused to ever care for their daughter on his own, and he expressed seething anger and resentment at being asked to look after their daughter one day on his holidays. (His words were, "How dare you expect me to look after her while I'm on [REDACTED] holiday." His actions were to smash their car whilst mother and daughter were taking refuge in it to be safe from him). His incapacity as a father was further evidenced in the discovery of [REDACTED] on the computer X retrieved from the home and the searches for, "how to avoid detection in a drug test." It was further borne out in the scattered reports that the daughter brought home over the years where he had unsupervised access to her each weekend. Reports such as: "I had to stay out at work with dad all day, it was boring." Or, "I always have to get my own breakfast, and there are never any clean bowls, so I have to wash one so I can use it" or, "We had to go for long drives at night so Daddy could talk to a strange man." Or, "We had a fight and I ran away from home and slept outside in the park. Daddy never came to find me." Or, "I have to lie to Daddy and say, 'I love you', when I don't. And he makes me kiss him on the lips." Or, "I get to watch TV all morning at Daddy's until he wakes up in the afternoon." Or, "I don't really remember what happened, I just remember going into a room where there were all these men standing around me while I was laying on a bed." Or, after returning from her first visit back with her dad, "I hate you Mummy, I don't want to live with you, you're ugly!" and "You were mean to Daddy," and "Maybe you could die and I could go and live with Daddy." or, "Daddy says you're going to burn the house down and I'm not safe with you." And this went on for many years: "I don't know who to believe, Mummy. Daddy says it's your



fault that we aren't a family." Or, when X got remarried she said many times with much fear, "Daddy says you will never be able to stay married." There was much more. This all occurred between the ages of 4 and 11. The outcome? After having visited her dad every weekend and for one week of every school holiday as per the court order, now, at 18 years old, L refuses to see her father. She despises him. She worked out that he used her as a weapon to hurt X. She worked out that he lied to her over and over again, fabricating narratives that made him look good and X look bad. She worked out that his whole family was not to be trusted. She worked out that he was neglectful of her and abusive. She stopped seeing him at age [REDACTED], when she attempted to harm herself in the hope that she would be taken to hospital and the staff would deem it necessary to call her mother. From that point, with the doctor's assistance, L made a choice to not go back to see her father. She received counselling and then (long story short) some mediation was engaged in where the very educated (finally) counsellor/social worker [REDACTED] – whom he chose) assessed all the family separately and eventually gave a report back that he needed to stay away from L until he grew up and could be a supportive father to her. She also reiterated that L did not exist to meet his needs, he was meant to meet hers. L, however, was already damaged and now has all the signs of trauma, all the symptoms of exposure to DV and abuse as a child, and all the 9 possible symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder. She has made many attempts on her life and had significant self-harm and eating disorders. She did not complete year 12, but is now working on healing herself. She says she will never speak to him again. X holds the court family assessor and the judge [REDACTED] responsible for exposing her child to such harm.

- That police receive full training in their academy on FDSV and particularly coercive control so they can recognise it and intervene appropriately.

EG: X is grateful that one police officer demonstrated the wisdom to provide her with a brochure on DV (created by SDVAG) that was a most useful educational tool and service resource.

EG: X was also on the receiving end of a police presence at her house when she returned to the family home to retrieve some essential belongings, and police officers in [REDACTED] facilitating an intervention order with little fuss.

**c) RESPONSE: How SA can ensure best practice response to FDSV in SA through the provision of services and supports, such as crisis support, health services, police intervention and a trauma-informed justice system that will hold people who use violence to account, to intervene in and address existing violence, and support victim-survivors experiencing violence.**

- Significantly more budget allocation into:
  - Social housing – crisis, transitional and long-term ... quality services, not dodgy motels where the women can be easily located, and where providing normalcy for children is near impossible. Services are currently very restricted and overburdened.
  - Evidence-based assessment tools. Currently, women under-go a "risk assessment" that will identify if the risk is a crisis or a risk over a period of time. Currently, the "risk" for a woman must occur within the last 14 days to be seen as a crisis – then



she is eligible for a service. Longer than 14 days, and she is influenced by counsellors to “stay” with family or friends. For such women who do not receive crisis support, there are few counselling services that specialise in FDSV available.

- Domestic violence support/counselling for women – no matter where they are in their journey – thinking of leaving, leaving, having left one week ago or one year ago.
- Training of front line services – medical staff, ER intake, doctors, teachers, police, and judiciary. And/or knowledgeable advisor positions should be provided for these professions/roles.

EG: X wishes that the judiciary were up to date with knowledge on FDSV. The judge ignorantly ruled in favour of L’s father having unsupervised access to their daughter. If the judge understood the harm he would be exposing both mother and child to, then surely the decision would have been very different. As it was, to X’s mortification, L needed to be “handed over” to the abuser every week. It was traumatic on two counts: 1. This went against every fibre of X’s being as a mother. The law was forcing her to put her precious child in harms’ way again and again and again. 2. X was terrified of being anywhere near the abuser. To her horror, the intervention order was overturned, and instead, X was required to communicate with and see the abuser every week! X found ways to make this safer, despite the unsafe situation the courts had put her in. For all the years that L visited her father, X had someone assist her with drop-offs and pick-ups. She ensured she was never near or alone with the abuser. But this in no way kept her safe. The abuser used access to their child as an opportunity to continue abusing her unceasingly – sending derogatory messages to her through their daughter, or teaching their daughter that this sad separation was all X’s fault and that she should be hated. X was aware of his neglect, but then she further realised he was taking their child on drug runs, and stealing other people’s property to fund his drug habit. Owing money to drug dealers is dangerous, and this put their child in danger. She also finally realised that he was exposing L to other abusive men who, it seems, took sexual advantage of her. X holds the judge responsible for the abuse, neglect, and rape of her child which has caused L much harm and disadvantage in life. L was a [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED], but due to her mental health ended up pulling out. Her poor mental health also prevented her from completing year 12.

EG: A friend of X’s husband strangled her and was removed from the home in handcuffs. The police had enough evidence to convict the abusive husband, however, the judge said, “I’ll dismiss this case. You are from a good suburb [REDACTED] and your career would be adversely affected by a guilty verdict (of aggravated assault)” and let the perpetrator go free. The judge also said “I would have hated to know what would have happened if your daughter had not come out and interrupted you.” *Please note the judge’s language in this, demonstrating that he prioritises a man’s career over the lives and safety of women and children.*

EG: Y also wishes that the judges were far more educated. Things that judges think are minor issues, such as sharing Y’s address with her abuser, are major issues for a woman who is under threat from an abuser! The abuser told the judge that he needed to know where his son was living. The judge made Y write her address down for him. However, Y was never given *his* address. This breach of confidentiality in favour of someone who had been cautioned against stalking was unconscionable, and forced Y to have to move for her safety...as the abuser kept turning up in the middle of the night, doing things like killing her pets, or moving the bin in front of her door.



EG: Another example from Y is that her abuser accused her of infidelity, and the judge ordered a paternity test for their third son, which Y had to pay half for. The perpetrator knew that the baby was his. This was a tactic by the perpetrator, facilitated by the courts, to make Y feel shamed and worthless. People (family and school) then called N “N\_\_\_ No Dad”. The paternity test proved that the perpetrator was, in fact, N’s father.

EG: Y wishes that police were more educated. One instance she recalls happened on White Ribbon day. She had been in family court, the proceedings didn’t go in the perpetrator’s favour, and the judge delayed the trial for 6 months. The perpetrator waited until the judge walked out of the court room and walked straight towards Y, standing between her and the door, and said, “You’re going to pay for this.” Then he said, “You just wait.” Y said, “I can’t believe you just said that to me in the courtroom, in front of everyone!” He left the courtroom, swearing as he exited the Family Law Court. Y’s lawyer said, “You need to go and report this, we are concerned for your safety.” Y drove straight from the law court to [REDACTED] Police Station to report the threats/incident. Y was standing in front of a White Ribbon banner when she spoke to the police officer. The officer said that there was nothing that they could do because they didn’t deem it a direct threat. They split hairs on semantics, pointing out that he said, “I’m going to ... “ rather than, “I will ...”. They wouldn’t even let Y make a report. It wasn’t until Y called one of her service advocates and they attended the police station together that a report was made.

- Legislation alteration to recognise patterned coercive control in addition to the incidents outlined in the *Criminal Consolidation Act 1935 (SA)* (which the police and prosecutors have relied on for the perpetration of a criminal act – an incident such as assault or stalking as defined in order to press charges). Proposed new coercive control laws will give greater scope for addressing patterned, psychological abuse. These laws may also help to highlight the risk of domestic violence towards children, which may eventually impact the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)* which currently (and dangerously) overturns protection orders in favour of child visitation.
- That intervention orders NOT be overturned by the Family Law Court and that supervised access be supplied for all children that have experienced FDSV.

X & Y were both shocked to discover that their protective intervention orders were immediately overturned by the Family Law Court. They realised that the Family Law Court did not value their safety at all, and was prepared to risk their lives and wellbeing and their children’s safety and wellbeing in order to provide the abusive father with unsupervised access to their children. The judge’s orders were terrifying and horrific because the mothers both knew how unsafe this was ... they knew what the abuser was capable of.

EG: Y’s daughter said, “If the Family Law Court, and the police can’t keep us safe, what’s the point? Nobody can stop dad.”

The Family Law Court set us up so that we would have to break the law in order to keep our children safe – with the threat hanging over our heads that we would lose custody of our children if we didn’t follow the court order. This attack on our ability to mother (at the very basic level of desire to keep our children safe) has broken our hearts. There are no words to describe how unthinkably appalling this is.



- Better advocacy for children - so their voices can be heard and respected in court proceedings/deliberations. Trained professionals that know what to look for. If children aren't keen to visit their abusive parent then they should REALLY be listened to!

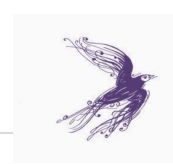
EG: Y said that N tried three times to kill himself because of the abuse he was experiencing at the hands of his father, and still the Court demanded that access be continued for "Parental Rights" and at the same time, DCP was telling Y that she was a bad mother for knowingly allowing N to go back to the abusive father. This was while Y had four children under guardianship from DCP in her care.

- Women need someone to advocate for them at court - and advise them with useful knowledge - giving confidence with how to navigate this system for the best outcome for their children.

EG: X asked for supervised access because he had a history of drug use and underage porn usage, however, every time she pressed for this, the court ended up giving him MORE unsupervised time. So the access went from one phone call one week, and an overnight stay the alternate week to every weekend, one night/two nights alternating.

EG: From 2013 Y's always had full parental responsibility for their youngest child (N). The perpetrator kept telling people that he had full custody. The ex created a [REDACTED] for N, because the record creator believed him (without checking) when he said he had full custody of N – and then he could stalk the mother and child. Apparently anyone can change [REDACTED] records. So Y sent him court orders and SA Health closed the account that he'd created and then he opened another one 7 days later. Y then called because she got a letter saying he had opened another one. They closed it again and then he opened another account 5 days later. Y escalated this and made a formal complaint and this went on to the media. The ex had previously been cautioned for stalking and this was one way that he could deviously get to them. Eventually, SA Health created a locked account for N. Still to this day the account is locked. When she took this to trial at Family Law Court the judge said that she couldn't prove it was the perpetrator and so she didn't win at court. Luckily SA Health realised the huge breach of privacy and remedied the situation. If Y had advice on how to present her original family court order with more careful wording he wouldn't have been able to get to the second trial and they wouldn't have been in court for ten years. He never had to prove anything, but all the onus was on Y to prove. She says that, "One of the significant issues in this whole court thing is that we get exhausted by all the conflict and court proceedings".

EG: Y's ex accused her of being a flight risk simply because she went for a 3-week holiday (with return flights – which the police and lawyer and family were aware of/notified of) with her youngest son (N) back to [REDACTED]. The ex took her to court when she arrived back from [REDACTED] and accused her of being a flight risk. Y willingly handed over the passport of N in order to demonstrate that she wasn't a flight risk and has never been able to access the passport since. The son is upset because he would like to be able to travel overseas, but his father and the courts won't let him. He is 12 and will have to wait until he's 18. Y points out that there is no way she would have left her two other children in Australia to "escape" overseas. If Y had better advice she would have been less "compliant" and easy to get along with and fought more for her son's rights in court. However, at the time, she had two other children to consider who were currently staying with their father (and, despite having court orders for her to have shared custody of them, the ex was not, and has not, facilitated them seeing/living with their mother. They've stayed one night with her since 2012). She was trying to make things as peaceful as possible for the sake of all her children. X & Y both agree



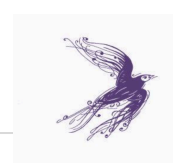
that every time they interacted with the family law court, “for the best interest of our children,” it made it worse for them and they gave up on the Family Law Court to do anything good for their children.

- Family Law Court purports “child focussed” and “in the best interest of the child”. But this lacks substance because they have a simplified understanding of DV ... because of this they assume that “best interest” looks like having equal access to both parents as best as possible. They also demonstrate a belief that the parent has a “right” to access to their child. This premise is not proven ... research does not uphold this. So “best interest of the child” needs to be explored in much more depth. Consider:
  - The abuser will most likely be abusing the children as well as their mother.
  - The abuser will use the children as a weapon against the mother. This is detrimental to the children and the mother.
  - It confuses children – it tells them that it’s ok to abuse their mother. The Court deems their dad is a good and safe person for them to be around.
  - It can alienate the children from their mother because he creates a false narrative.
  - Children are not weapons or pawns.
  - The children are often “bought” with expensive toys/gadgets and lenient home rules.
  - You make mothers feel like failures because all they want is to protect their children and keep them safe, and yet the (family) law requires them to hand their children over to an unsafe person/environment.

EG: Y knew that when her son went to be with his father he would be given food that he was intolerant to and then give him (four different) laxatives that would make him unwell and Y would have to take the son to A&E with bad stomach pain and diarrhoea.

EG: X knew that the father would neglect their child, and take their daughter on drug runs to buy illegal substances late at night. X’s daughter recalls one night when she ran away from home and he did not go to find her so she slept rough for the night at about 9 years of age. A mother should not be forced by the government to give up their precious child’s safety in this way – ever!

- It’s essential that social workers receive a course in their degree that is specifically on dv. Everyone in social work comes across DV, and most of them have NO idea!
- Change to bail laws – a man who is a threat to his partner and children should not receive bail under any circumstances. If Australia doesn’t know this by now, it never will. How many women have to die?
- Less traumatising legal processes – that abusers not be allowed to use the courts to continue abuse – the courts should put a stop to this, and lawyers should not be allowed to proceed where it is obvious that the legal process is a tool for further abuse and control.

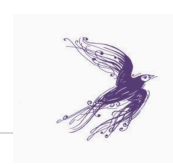


EG: X recalls two good/helpful services she experienced whilst undergoing the extremely distressing court experience.

1. There was a volunteer court support person offered to her so she had someone to attend court with. She will never forget this woman's help.
  2. The court staff provided a separate room and separate exit so that she did not have to see her abuser.
- Specialist support services opened up for young women under 18yo who are experiencing their own intimate partner violence. X has worked with and met young women who are experiencing their own intimate partner violence. We really need to provide services for these young women too.

**d) RECOVERY AND HEALING: How SA can embed an approach that supports recovery and healing within SA through reducing the risk of re-traumatisation, and supporting victim/survivors of FDSV (including children) to be safe and healthy to be able to recover from trauma and the physical, mental, emotional and economic impacts of violence.**

- AGAIN! Better educated: judges (especially family law court), police, medical practitioners, and social workers – particularly. It's essential that social workers receive a course in their degree that is specifically on DV. Their lack of education continues to increase the risk to victims (women and children) and re-traumatizes us.
- More money spent on housing for women and their children – more appropriate, dignified and safer.... More consideration of the impact of moving homes on the children and more consideration on maintaining support systems around the woman/family when they are relocated. Consideration of the impact on children's education. It has been suggested that men should move out of the family home, and the women and children be allowed to stay. Although this sounds nice, X disagrees. It may work for some women, but not for her. She was offered the family home, however she declined because she could see she would become a "sitting duck" for all to have access to. This would have been extremely detrimental – she would have had visitors (family and friends) who would have tried to convince her to go back to him. She knew she wouldn't be able to withstand this onslaught.
- More counselling available to women and their children once they have exited.
- Not having to deal with seeing the abusive parent until they are ready to do so - not forcing visitations on the woman and her children when they are not ready/don't feel safe.
- Listening to the children when they say they don't want to see their abusive parent.
- Acknowledgement that an abusive husband is also an abusive father.  
A man who is prepared to abuse a children's mother is not a good father, AND any access that he



has to the children post-separation gives him further opportunity to abuse the mother/his ex-partner. This is not good for the children or the mother.... It allows the abuse to continue. **The judges MUST know that just because they are no longer under the same roof does not mean that the woman and children are safe. FAR FROM IT! And the judges must, at some point, concede complicity in the harm done – physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and homicide inflicted upon women and their children with the judges’ consent and facilitation.**

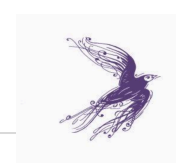
- e) **How government agencies, NGOs and communities can better integrate and coordinate efforts across the spectrum of prevention, early intervention, response and recovery, including through whole of system approaches and information and data sharing systems.**

Better statistics are needed in order to clearly see the issue in its entirety and magnitude. How can we expect people to be more informed when services, statisticians, government agencies, and academics still struggle to come to an agreement on definitions and terminology. Some obvious points for consideration are:

- i. The difference between incidents and patterns.
- ii. The difference between mutual violence as opposed to power and control.
- iii. The difference between intimate abuse and other family and stranger abuse.
- iv. The fact that, after numerous years of trying to inform the public that “violence” can be psychological, sexual or financial etc, people still think of physical assault when they hear “violence” probably means that we need to come up with a different word for “domestic violence”. I still prefer “intimate partner terrorism” as well argued by Johnson (2008). But I think “domestic abuse” or “coercive control” as replacement terms for “domestic violence” could be a step in the right direction.
- v. Whilst “violence” covers so many variables (patterned, incidental, stranger, intimate etc) the statisticians cannot hope to bring us a clear picture of the issues at hand. The Conflict Tactics Scale approach used in many surveys, including the ABS’ Personal Safety Survey (which provides Australians with our most often quoted statistics) are quite misleading, failing to clearly identify the different types of “violence” and to even discover much of the most serious “violence”.

Jess Hill (2019) covers the issue of statistics in great depth in *See What You Made Me Do* and we really can’t compete with her well presented and articulated research. So we refer you to her book, and highlight these few very important points (Hill 2019, pp.202 – 226):

- vi. The actions of women protecting themselves from perpetrators, or reacting under provocation, often seem to get tallied in the “women are violent” count.

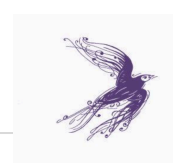


- vii. Males are often stronger than women and women fear for their lives, whilst men fear for their reputation. The impact of the violence is still gendered.
- viii. The Conflict Tactics Scale is not an appropriate measure of how much domestic abuse is occurring in our community, nor of who is perpetrating the abuse. The CTS does not explore “why” the incidents occurred. “Why” is extremely important.
- ix. Psychological abuse can go undetected by police, services, law courts, and statisticians, who will, (sometimes fatally) focus on the more obvious physical abuse. This does not paint a full picture of what is happening. Many abusers know how to, “fly under the radar” and commit terrible torture upon their victims, but it is the victim that gets noticed when they finally can’t take it anymore and respond dramatically and obviously.
- x. Few women experiencing domestic violence would willingly tell a stranger who turns up at her door with a safety survey about the psychological warfare she experiences in her home on a daily basis – this would likely be a risk to her safety if she was still living in the relationship. Further, many of these women will be willing to share the incidents where they have reacted with aggression.

#### References:

Hill, J 2019, ‘See what you made me do: power, control and domestic abuse’, Black Inc, Collingwood Australia.

Johnson, MP 2008, ‘A typology of domestic violence: intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and situational couple violence’, Northeastern University Press, Boston.



## PART ii

I am a [REDACTED] retired male social worker, and counsellor. I worked eighteen years for Drug and Alcohol Services SA in the southern region of Adelaide. During this time I co-facilitated a Men Stopping Violence Group from 2008 until 2013, was the DASSA representative on the southern Family Safety Framework from its inception in 2013 until retirement, and have been an active member of the [REDACTED] Violence Action Group Inc from 2008 up to the present time.

Based on my experience working with perpetrators of violence, counselling survivors of sexual abuse, and listening to the stories of traumatised women and their children abused not only by intimate partners but by state authorities, I believe the only effective way of combating domestic, family and sexual violence is the establishment of a dedicated service. A statutory authority with the regulatory powers to ensure appropriate changes are made and acted upon.

Violence against women is described as an epidemic, a national emergency. Research and statistics show that the vast majority of perpetrators of this violence are men. Men *must* be held accountable and action taken to change men's behaviour if there is to be any chance of stopping this violence.

Violence towards women is not a new phenomenon, it has been a reality in our societies for centuries. Its dynamics are embedded in our social conditioning. Consequently things will not change by providing a few services. Running a 'changing men's behaviour group' while helpful is not enough. A campaign by itself is not enough. Rallies are an expression from the community that people want women and children to be safe, but they are not enough. It requires a holistic and long term approach, a dedicated service that can reach all stratas and sectors of our community.

Our current State's structures and institutions were developed in the past at a time when women had few rights. They could not own property, they were not accepted into universities, they were their husband's chattel. The political, legal and economic systems were written by men for their own benefit, women were generally seen as incapable in such affairs. In the modern world there have been changes, women are employed, can attain higher learning, even gain political standing, however when confronting the State systems, the police, and the courts they are not heard. You have only to listen to women's stories experiencing or escaping domestic or sexual violence to realise the laws don't support them or keep their children safe. This is of great detriment to them, and, as importantly, to their children.

The patriarchy of the past - its ideology, beliefs, and consciousness - is passed on intergenerationally. It has been said that, 'The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living'. We are all raised and socialised with this nightmare from the past.

This insidious patriarchy not only controls women and children, it also controls respectful men. It not only blinds men to the abuse, it makes it difficult to stand up against peers. A colleague and co-facilitator of the Men Stopping Violence Group once said, "It is so hard to be a respectful man, because every morning when I wake up I remember that I have to be different".

Do 'Men Stopping Violence Groups' work? I believe for some men they do. We attempted to measure the effectiveness of our [REDACTED] Group with the help of a researcher from Flinders



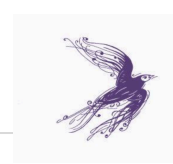
University, the results were inconclusive due to lack of data. Many men did not complete the twelve weeks, and many ex-partners had moved, were uncontactable, or were not willing to talk. However, there did appear to be some successes. More work is needed in finding further strategies to hold men accountable and not only change their behaviour but beliefs about relationships and community. Also, effective programs that magistrates and other professionals can refer men to would be helpful.

Working with perpetrators of violence is a challenge. Men dismiss, minimise, excuse, and deny their behaviour. Male workers need to be well trained and supervised to prevent collusion. Currently, if we were to set up services, groups, and counselling for men, I doubt we could fill the positions with adequately trained personnel. There is a dire need for skilled education and training for not only workers in the field, but in all sectors of the workforce. For students to be attracted to work in the field they need to see a career pathway, something a dedicated state wide service could provide.

When I first commenced counselling in the drug and alcohol field I realised there were two issues I needed further training in: Those of domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse. So many of my clients were self-medicating due to the symptoms of trauma they experienced or were experiencing. I needed a safe and reliable service to refer my female clients to. I found the Southern Women's Health Service and developed a working relationship with the staff. It was Southern Women's which provided training for me, as well as workers from other services. They also provided training for working with perpetrators of domestic violence. It was in this way I made sound working relationships with other community workers, such as Anglicare, Correctional Services, Uniting Communities, Southern Domestic Violence Service to name a few. Southern Women's promoted collaboration between southern services, and it was through this process that the men's group developed and was run. Southern Women's was eventually (and detrimentally) closed, services retreated into their silos, and the south was left with no dedicated domestic violence prevention and recovery service for a number of years. However, the blueprint is there. Community-based prevention and recovery services for women are needed. They don't need to be large but easily accessible and spread throughout the metropolitan and regional areas. Again, we may find a shortfall in experienced trained personnel to fill positions.

Providing services for the recovery and safety of women and children, and developing appropriate programs to hold men accountable and change behaviour focuses on the here and now. But these responses are not enough. Early intervention for our children and future generations is essential. Educators are required to develop and provide age appropriate programs in schools both private and public. Children need to understand respectful relationships, recognise grooming behaviour and what to do about it, and the concept of consent. Teachers will benefit from training to recognise domestic violence, but cannot be expected to run these extra programs. These educators would come from the education and training department of the dedicated Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Service.

A statutory authority established with the aim of eliminating domestic, family and sexual violence will have the power to amend discriminatory laws. It can develop a dedicated service to research and develop programs, training and education services, and coordinate outreach services. It will have the power to ensure directives are acted upon. A statutory authority has several benefits as opposed to relying on the Parliament:



- *Efficiency – State and Federal Parliaments do not have the time nor resources to investigate, analyse, draft, enact and monitor laws for every area of our increasingly complex society. By delegation of legislative power to a statutory authority, a specialist body may subrogate parliament and use its authority in a more efficient manner*
- *Bipartisanship – Statutory authorities are usually responsible for areas of legislation where there is a common goal or direction desirable within the community. Delegation of authority away from parliament prevents these areas of law from becoming partisan issues.*
- *Transparency – The disclosure requirements placed upon statutory authorities are generally stricter than that of State and Federal Parliaments; statutory authorities cannot rely upon the same government secrets provisions as can State and Federal governments.*
- *Accountability – The jurisdiction of a statutory authority is expressly set out in its corresponding act (i.e. the Act of Parliament which created the statutory authority). This, therefore, makes switching, sharing or evasion of responsibility in the instance of a scandal more difficult for officers of the statutory authority.*

I would like to finish by reiterating that men must be held accountable. A man who abuses the mother of his child abuses that child. Children, our future citizens, need to be kept safe from trauma, and need to be front and center in action taken to eliminate domestic violence.

To emphasise this I am including a poem written by a year 8 student.



A Wish!

Sometimes my Dad

stays out all night,

When he comes home

my parents fight.

Dad attacks Mum

After he's been boozin',

And out of her arm

The blood is oozing.

Sometimes,

I have to get away,

So I leave home

For maybe a day.

When I get back,

Dad would be waiting

He'd beat me up

Without hesitating.

I only wish

That they could see

All I want,

is a happy family.

*Thank you*

[REDACTED]

*Much of this submission has been written as the result of the trauma of DV and systems related to fleeing DV.*

*15th August 2024*

# Questionnaire on exiting domestic violence:

Please return this completed questionnaire to [REDACTED] by 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024.

*This study is for women in particular who have experienced coercive control in an intimate relationship and have exited this relationship. By filling in this form you agree for your de-identified story to be used in both our Transitional Supportive Housing Proposal and the Royal Commission. We may quote some of your sentences, or we may compile and paraphrase everyone's shared experiences. Your questionnaire will be attached as an appendix to both the Royal Commission submission and the Housing Proposal. People viewing the Royal Commission submission and the Housing Proposal will be politicians, funding bodies, the In2Life Board and the Steering Committee for the Housing Proposal. If we decide to share your story wider than this we will refer back to you for further permission.*

**Please let me know if you wish to adjust/withdraw permission for any of these uses. Please also take care of yourself when you revisit your story – plan something kind for yourself post-questionnaire. If you need support please let me know. Please note, “coercive control”, “domestic violence” and “abusive relationship” are seen as interchangeable for the purposes of this questionnaire. Our focus is on patterned intimate relationship abuse.**

**Thank you for sharing your story – it may help many others.**

## **1. At what age did you exit the abusive relationship?**

*2001 I left him. I tried to leave him twice before that.*

**And how long were you in it for?**

*15 years.*

## **2. Can you describe how you felt:**

- a. **During the abusive relationship:** *Inadequate, unnecessary, stupid, downtrodden, waste of oxygen.*
- b. **When you decided to leave:** *scared, petrified about my future and my children's future.*
- c. **As you were leaving:** *apprehensive*
- d. **Directly after you left:** *panicking, I had to go back and get some belongings with the police. I'd never had anything to do with the police so it was uncomfortable. All I got out of the relationship was my clothes dryer. He wouldn't let me have anything else. The removalists who came under DV services instructions worked with K\_\_\_\_ more than me. He said what he wanted, and the removalists honoured his wishes. A woman from DV services took me in her car because I didn't have a car (he'd taken the wheels off of my car). I was such a mess. I went to [REDACTED] shelter first, then they put me into a [REDACTED] one, and I broke down. They told me if I didn't pull myself together they would take J\_\_\_\_ (younger son) off me. I had previously had my older son taken off me when I was with my first abusive husband (I had to move out for my own safety, but they wouldn't let me take my son because I didn't have stable accommodation, and wasn't near his playgroup. And so they sided with [REDACTED] – so I had my son taken away from me). This first incident of losing my son destroyed me. I had a full time job during this time – I had to pay maintenance. I had saved money to leave .. I used to put away \$50 a fortnight. I found it hard to gather my thoughts because I was so traumatised that I was on the edge of psychosis. I*

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*managed to keep myself together so I could keep J \_\_\_\_\_. I had to leave my older son at the house because I couldn't let him know what I was doing. He wasn't allowed to stay with me in the shelter because he was 17/18yo. He ended up staying with friends. He wasn't allowed in to see me at the shelter for visits even. I couldn't work full time by the time I lived with K\_\_\_\_\_ because I was often so sick.*

### 3. How long did it take you to heal/get your life sorted after you were no longer under the same roof?

*I still haven't. Every day the trauma gets you. At first it was the fact of not knowing where you are going to go next... I was in the first shelter for 7 weeks (\_\_\_\_\_) then they put me in a community house for the same length of time. I was then offered a place at \_\_\_\_\_ – a 3-bedroom house. I was taken to look at it from the outside and I freaked out because it looked so rough after living in the \_\_\_\_\_. I was scared for J\_\_\_\_\_... having to go to a rough school – with his disabilities. The community house staff pleaded with me not to send J\_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ PS. But I didn't have a choice. I didn't have a car, or money for a car. The money I had was for a fridge and kitchen utensils ... I had to start a house again. I got some loan from the Salvation Army to help me buy my fridge. I got \$100 from Centrelink for a crisis payment. That helped – not. I think J\_\_\_\_\_ was damaged by being at \_\_\_\_\_ PS. Also, he had got into drugs at the shelter by associating with other kids at the shelter... he was 12yo and he saw a lot of things he shouldn't have seen there – women injecting and snorting. I've never healed. J\_\_\_\_\_ never healed either. It stopped his puberty. He was seeing a children's doctor because of his ADHD. He was trauma impacted. They put him onto testosterone tablets to try and promote his puberty/growth. I think it's harder for boys in the shelter.*

### 4. What services did you engage with that were helpful? Why?

*None. All the help I received was not enough. It always fell short of what we needed to make our life better and safer. Salvos only gave us a \$1000 loan. The SAHA \_\_\_\_\_ social housing caused lots of problems. It was a bad location and the rent was high for just two of us.*

### 5. What services did you engage with that were not helpful? Why?

*DV shelter – Staff were only there from 9 – 5 and after 5 was when the ex-husbands and partners would come and visit. Other women would let their abusive partners come in to the shelter – after 5 and weekends. J\_\_\_\_\_ learnt a lot of bad stuff. He had/has CAP and DDHD and OCD and depression and he shouldn't have been in the shelter. I never told K\_\_\_\_\_ our location, and he never visited. The partners of bikies wanted to know where the shelters were in Adelaide – these were some of the women I had around me.*

*Family Law Court – nobody had warned me that he might take me to court for custody of J \_\_\_\_\_. I just remember a knock on the door. There was a big tall man wanting to serve me papers ... that night we took off and stayed with a girlfriend. I thought K\_\_\_\_\_ was going to come and steal J\_\_\_\_\_ and J\_\_\_\_\_ was freaking out. I went to court. I managed to prove that K\_\_\_\_\_ had smashed the dining room table and J\_\_\_\_\_ ended up with a shard of glass in his head. The court said at trial that because "K\_\_\_\_\_ was such a good father, he would have got custody of J \_\_\_\_\_, however, K\_\_\_\_\_ had pulled out and didn't turn up to the trial so this didn't go ahead. I think that after J\_\_\_\_\_ saw a court psychologist they "proved" paternal alienation against me. K\_\_\_\_\_ used to come across really well. He went to \_\_\_\_\_ Family Law Court experience was scary, dreadful, and cold. I never want to go through that again. I had a free lawyer and she was fantastic. She was great because she calmed me down, she knew that women suffer badly in this situation and men were preferred. She didn't really achieve a good result for me though. I think it's all about financial*

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stability for the children. The fact that the father was drunk and on drugs at court wasn't an issue. He had a house and some capacity to provide financially – that's all that counted. And, of course, I didn't. J\_\_\_\_\_ would vomit when going to supervised access. He was scared to death of his father.

**6. Do you have any suggestions for new or better service provision for women exiting abusive relationships? (what would have helped you to better navigate this really difficult time in your life?)**

Access to 24/7 legal help, counselling (I never got any counselling), 24/7 staffing at shelter, 24/7 counselling, my own space as a shelter – not shared accommodation. Much more concentrated support and care after exiting because I wasn't coping well with anything.

Social Housing in a safer location. And better care for the children – not just thrown into a new school that's not suitable. Credit for the mobile phone. A metro card with credit on it. I had to learn how to catch public transport. I had a car at K\_\_\_\_\_ 's place, and wasn't used to public transport. K\_\_\_\_\_ had taken the wheels off my car.

Better food – more money for quality food. Food poisoning didn't help.

I reckon structured lessons during the day for women on such things as the court system would have been helpful. Education/information on things that aren't common knowledge.

Trauma counselling for children – J\_\_\_\_\_ had seen a lot of me being hit, and had been hit by K\_\_\_\_\_. J\_\_\_\_\_ was worried about me. He wasn't up to going to school for a while.

**7. Can you give an idea of the financial hardship you experienced due to leaving the abusive relationship?**

I had \$1100 cash when I left K\_\_\_\_\_. And I managed to save my dryer and some photos and some precious items. We were renting. I didn't have a ca.. I had shares in his car – it was half mine, but I never got it. There was very little else to claim.

I had to pay for storage – they charged me a fortune to store a dryer and some books. I tried to make J\_\_\_\_\_ 's life happy – take him to places he hadn't been, like the zoo - this cost money. Unfortunately, the free stuff went to indigenous people.

**8. Did you experience homelessness or were you at risk of homelessness due to leaving the abusive relationship?**

Yes, I was living in shelters... then received social housing. But then later- a few years later after leaving K\_\_\_\_\_ – I spiralled down and gave up the will to live and ended up homeless for 6 months. I no longer had J\_\_\_\_\_ to look after (empty nest) and slept in my car. I slept at OTRs .. it was well lit and you have access to the bathroom, and close by you'd get a 20c cup of coffee in the morning

**9. How did you solve your housing issue?**

*I managed to get out of this homeless situation by conning an Indian man – telling him I'd get him the bond for his one room, one toilet place.... I slept on a mattress on the floor.*

**10. Do you have any other comments? (Maybe barriers that kept you from leaving?)**

*K\_\_\_\_\_ used to lock the mobile phone up in the filing cabinet every day. I used to have to wait till he would forget to lock it. This was a significant barrier to me leaving.*

*Not knowing if I had a safe place to go to with my two boys. My oldest son wanted to finish year 12 and he was a merit student.*

*Unfortunately, 2 days before I left, M\_\_\_\_\_ hit K\_\_\_\_\_ and I was very worried that M\_\_\_\_\_ would harm K\_\_\_\_\_ and get a criminal record as he was near 18.*

*When I went into the shelter I was offered lots of drugs. I was completely clean, and said no.*

*Since then, I have used more drugs. This experience made me more interested in relationships with women (lesbian) – they are comforting and safer, and softer.*