

Submission for the Royal Commission (Into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence)

In [REDACTED], I migrated to Australia with my ex-husband, the perpetrator, and my two children. From the moment we arrived, I was subjected to daily violence—physical, emotional, and financial. This abuse left my children and me isolated, without a support network, and silenced for years. At the time, I accepted this as my reality, not realising that, as a woman and a mother, I was deserving of so much more.

Barriers to Reporting

The overwhelming sense of isolation and shame was one of the primary reasons I didn't report the violence earlier. I feared the loss of dignity and privacy that would come from asking for help, and I know many silent victims feel the same. After enduring years of suffering, I finally found the courage to leave. Even then, the manipulation continued. The perpetrator would show up at my daughter's school, attempting to undermine me as a mother. Despite having an intervention order, it took the school and the Department of Education over six months to bar him from the premises. These delays left me vulnerable, battling a system that did not act swiftly enough to protect us.

Impact on My Children

This ongoing manipulation profoundly affected both my children, causing significant anxiety that continues to this day. The fact that my children could not be protected under my intervention order only heightened the stress. The responsibility of juggling both my own safety and my children's, without sufficient legal support, was overwhelming. Intervention orders should automatically include children, as the trauma inflicted on the primary carer inevitably impacts them as well.

Lack of Financial Support & Child Support.

The perpetrator's refusal to pay child support compounded our hardship. Financial abuse is often invisible, but it is a powerful tool used by perpetrators to maintain control and limit a survivor's independence. While child support systems exist, they lack the necessary enforcement to hold perpetrators accountable. In my case, the failure of the system left me struggling to provide for my children. Recently, under pressure from the perpetrator, I was coerced into waiving over \$8,000 in unpaid support. Although I agreed, I did so out of a desperate need for peace and safety, not because it was just. Now that he is detained, I am contesting this decision, but the lack of assistance from both Child Support and the AAT has been disheartening. Once again, I feel as though the system gave in to the perpetrator's manipulation, and my safety was compromised in the process.

Crisis Response

Victim-survivors, especially those fleeing domestic violence, need a crisis response that goes beyond immediate safety and addresses long-term financial security. A more empathetic, understanding approach is essential. Too often, services take a dismissive tone, praising women for their "strength" in leaving, which feels hollow after enduring years of abuse. What we need is not condescension, but compassion—an approach that respects the dignity and pride of survivors, many of whom, like myself, simply want to regain control over their lives with better support systems in place.

Police and Justice System Response

While the police have been helpful, their efforts were often hampered by a lack of communication between states. My ex-husband was able to flee across state lines and continue his cycle of violence against other women. Despite my repeated attempts to warn authorities, the lack of interstate coordination allowed him to evade justice for years. He was only recently detained after causing immeasurable harm to others. This gap in communication among states creates dangerous opportunities for perpetrators to continue offending, and it needs urgent reform.

Preventing Further Violence

A critical issue within the justice system is the absence of effective cross-jurisdictional communication. Perpetrators, like my ex-husband, can exploit these gaps to avoid accountability and reoffend. Had states shared information more effectively, he would have had fewer chances to evade the law and harm others. This is an area that must be addressed to prevent further violence and ensure perpetrators are held accountable, regardless of where they flee.

Recommendations:

1. Child Support Enforcement: Perpetrators must be held accountable for child support, with proactive measures in place to enforce payments. Financial hardship remains one of the greatest obstacles for women trying to rebuild their lives after leaving violent relationships.
2. Interstate Communication: There must be seamless communication between states to track and apprehend perpetrators. This will prevent them from using state borders as a shield to escape justice.
3. Holistic Crisis Responses: Services should adopt a more compassionate, respectful approach, recognizing the emotional toll of leaving an abusive relationship. A survivor's journey is deeply personal, and the system should be designed to empower them with dignity and autonomy.
4. Automatic Inclusion of Children in Protection Orders: When a primary carer is granted an intervention order, their children should automatically be included. The safety and well-being of the children are inseparable from that of their parents.

Yours sincerely,

