

SUBMISSION BY [REDACTED]
ROYAL COMMISSION INTO DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE (SA 2024)

1 Nature of Submission

This submission will focus specifically on responses to serial domestic, family and sexual violence offenders/perpetrators.

2 Background of Author

The majority of my experience in the domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) field stems from over 30 years of employment with the SA Department for Correctional Services (DCS) and to a lesser extent, SA Health.

I retired in 2021 and am no longer working in the DFSV field however I remain passionate and committed to assisting where I can to address the scourge of DFSV. This is my primary motivation in making this submission.

This is strictly a personal submission and while it draws on experience, observations and conclusions associated with my employment as detailed above and below, the views expressed here are separate from those of the agencies and organisations I have been employed by or worked in conjunction with. For this reason I have chosen to use first person language in this submission.

A brief summary of my relevant experience follows:

- Social Work qualified with DFSV being the primary professional focus throughout my career
- 10 years as Manager of DCS Victim Services Unit where the majority of clients were DFSV survivors
- Member of numerous committees and forums with a DFSV focus within and external to DCS
- Contribution to DFSV related policy and guideline development within and external to DCS
- DCS coordinator for Family Safety Framework
- Led DCS involvement in White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program
- Extensive experience (not in recent years) as a men's worker facilitating DFV perpetrator behavior change programs. Men's worker with Central and Northern Violence Intervention Programs
- Delivery of DFV training to workers
- Long term involvement with White Ribbon primary prevention initiative

3 Submission

Over recent years there has been a growing focus on serial DFSV perpetrators and the increased risk they pose to former, current and future partners. Examples of this focus include findings of DFV death review processes pointing to a significant proportion of DFV homicide perpetrators having a prior history of DFV. Also the establishment of a serial

offender database (listing almost 10,000 serial perpetrators) by Women's Safety Services SA and the DFV Disclosure Scheme to assist in case management and safety planning with DFV survivors. These highly regarded and effective initiatives draw on existing knowledge of the risk posed by known perpetrators in order to enhance women's safety.

During my time in the DCS Victim Services Unit (VSU) I conducted an informal review of 130 serial DFV perpetrators subject to oversight by VSU. Although this was a small sample it pointed to the following conclusions:

- Heightened risk posed by perpetrators with multiple victims – the more victims the higher the risk
- A correlation between increasing number of victims and the earlier onset of violence toward the next partner. For example a perpetrator with 6 prior DFV victims began his use of violence within 2 weeks of the commencement of his most recent relationship
- Relatively short sentences restricting DCS's capacity to effectively manage, control and intervene with many of the high risk perpetrators.

For most high risk serial DFSV perpetrators the likelihood of further violence toward current and/or future partners is perhaps best described as "utterly predictable".

We know who many of these offenders are, who their current/next victims are likely to be, where the offences are likely to occur and (with accurate risk assessment) when the offending is likely to take place. This knowledge offers unique opportunities for intervention that don't exist with almost all other categories of offending. This requires an approach involving proactive use of this knowledge to target and intervene with those offenders we know are most likely to continue to use violence. It must involve a range of actions aimed at preventing utterly predictable violence from being repeated. The current system is too focused on reacting after repeated violence has occurred - again and again.

In the corrections field, the targeting of high risk offenders is well recognized best practice both in terms of rehabilitation and offender management more broadly. Given the obvious high risk posed by serial DFSV perpetrators, the provision of an enhanced system-wide response is justified. It must focus on tertiary prevention and involve actions we know will be effective in stopping reoffending. I believe this has the potential to significantly reduce the rate of DFSV offending and I submit consideration be given to the following new and enhanced preventative measures:

3.1 Introduction of court and parole conditions prohibiting serial DFSV perpetrators from establishing new intimate partner relationships. Similar conditions have been issued by NSW authorities in recent years. Child sex offenders in SA have for many years been issued with "no contact with children" conditions. Ought not this measure also apply to the prevention of DFSV offending?

Authorities rarely enquire about how serial perpetrators met their previous partners. Knowledge of this aspect could assist in the setting of specific conditions restricting access to internet dating sites and hotels and clubs for example.

3.2 Appropriate measures to require courts to prioritise community safety in the sentencing of serial DFSV offenders. Given the high risk of further offending by this cohort, any non-custodial sentence should involve DCS supervision. Further, the period of supervision should be long enough to enable the effective case management of high risk offenders including assessment for and (if suitable) participation in an appropriate behaviour change program. DCS has the knowledge of which offenders should be targeted and closely managed and if courts prioritise community safety in sentencing DCS will be better placed to provide appropriate intervention.

Most importantly, when a DFSV offender is subject to custodial or community based management by DCS, their former and/or current partners are eligible for registration with the DCS Victim Services Unit. This entitles them to information about the offenders progress through their sentence including release from custody/expiry of supervision. This is critical to survivors' planning in relation to their own and their children's safety, it provides a contact point for them to express concern / make enquiries and enables referral to other services for further assistance.

3.3 Ensure effective monitoring and confinement of DFSV perpetrators. Incarceration of perpetrators effectively restricts (but does not eliminate) their capacity for further abuse. Survivors usually report feeling relatively safe while perpetrators remain in custody.

Safety concerns are understandably greatest leading up to and following release from custody. Home detention monitoring (either bail, parole or sentenced orders) offers the next best option in terms of both offender monitoring / restriction and survivor safety. However this changes dramatically when offenders abscond from home detention. This usually involves the offender removing the monitoring device or "cutting and running" as it commonly referred to. For survivors this is a terrifying experience akin to a prisoner escaping from custody, with no knowledge of where the offender is or what their intentions are.

To address this I submit that all reasonable steps should be taken to make it as difficult as possible for offenders on home detention to remove their monitoring devices and abscond.

3.4 Continuation of SAPOL's Operation Storm. This statewide anti-DFV initiative was conducted in July 2024 targeting 265 known DFV offenders and resulting in 80 arrests. This equates to an arrest rate of over 30% of those offenders targeted confirming the high rate of reoffending by this cohort and sends a clear message that repeated DFV related offending will not be tolerated. This is an outstanding initiative by SAPOL to proactively target known offenders in order to detect and prevent further offending. This was the first time such an operation was undertaken by

SAPOL with plans to repeat the initiative on a quarterly basis. A more random approach may be preferable however as offenders are likely to quickly learn that a three month reprieve between SAPOL visits presents opportunity for considerable further offending.

3.5 Review of options for relevant agencies to share information on the identity of serial DFSV offenders. The Family Safety Framework has been an important and successful vehicle for partner agencies to share information on individual high risk cases. No such initiative exists for those agencies to share information on the identity of serial DFSV perpetrators more broadly. Different agencies have different methods for identifying serial perpetrators based on the information available to each agency – which undoubtedly leads to gaps and under identification across the system. Given the importance of this information to case management, safety and intervention more broadly, a mechanism to share data on the identity of serial perpetrators would represent an important step forward. This would also lend itself to a more integrated approach across agencies – well recognized best practice.

3.6 Further research be undertaken on serial DFSV perpetrators. Improving our understanding of serial DFSV perpetrators would enhance capacity to better manage this cohort and most importantly reduce the harms they are responsible for. What proportion of DFSV is committed by serial perpetrators? How does the risk profile vary across the cohort? What is working nationally and internationally to prevent reoffending by serial DFSV perpetrators and how do authorities best manage and control them?

Primary prevention promises long term solutions but in the meantime we must find better and more effective ways to deal with those current, known perpetrators who remain at highest risk of ongoing use of violence. Further research will undoubtedly assist in this task.

Most importantly, knowing more about serial perpetrators assists those agencies and individuals working with survivors in the provision of support and safety planning.

4 Public Awareness Campaign

This is a more general point and not specifically focused on serial perpetrators. Over many years there have been repeated instances of members of the public being aware of abuse and violence being perpetrated in a neighbouring dwelling but deciding not to report it. We have all read accounts of DFSV fatalities where multiple neighbours have overheard disturbing sounds in the lead up to the victim's death but police were not notified in time. I submit a media campaign may help persuade members of the public that they have an important role to play in situations such as these. *"If you hear something, say something – it could save a life"*.