

# Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence

## Submission in response to issues paper

[REDACTED]

15 August 2024

---

### My professional profile is as follows:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

---

### My personal journey of family violence for context and relevance

#### Background

- I am a survivor of domestic violence, coercive control including isolation, emotional abuse and financial abuse. I was in the abusive relationship for over 15 years and during that time I had a child and had [REDACTED] miscarriages. I fled my abuser with my child in 2020 when my [REDACTED] was 10 and I was 50. During that relationship my abuser had taken all my savings of approx. \$250,000 to pay

for a deposit on a \$725,000 home in 2009 (he had no money but an income) the home was in middle class ██████████ in Melbourne, where I had grown up. We purchase the house with my deposit with a verbal agreement that I would resign from my position as ██████████ University Business School Enterprise Workplace Training Department to have by son at 40 years old. However, my abuser refused to put my name on the house title once he had my deposit. Subsequently my abuser lost the home due to his tax evasion and having to pay around 400K in tax and legal fees. Of the 1.16 million dollars for the house sale ██████████ he did not give me access to a cent.

- During the time I was with my abuser he strangled me, choked me at least 40 times, punched me in the face, routinely pushed me to the floor, kicked me in the stomach, pinned me to the bed screaming and threatening me, sexually assaulted me, threaten to kill me, threaten to take my son away, called me crazy constantly, in total there were hundreds of physical assaults and thousands of verbal assaults and threats. He intimidated me with knives and machetes on his desk in his shed office. He would scream at me nightly over my insufficient cooking, shopping, cleaning, washing, daring to speak, asking for money for essentials, food, schooling, clothing or any items. If I tried to get childcare so I could work or tried to get work my abuser would threaten me by saying if I got work I had to use it to pay the childcare. I was on my own.
- The neighbours, my mother and strangers called the police to report domestic violence disturbances several times over the years. However, I could see the police were apathetic and did nothing to protect me, so I was trapped.

### Child abuse

- My abuser would scream abuse at me, threaten me and physically hurt me in front of my son. My son had ██████████ delays and a severe stutter as a result. I took him to speech therapy for about 5 years via the school and local council services.
- My son was all but ignored by his father when we lived with him. He would come home from work, go straight to his shed, drink and smoke and look up conspiracy theory and 'prepping' for the end of the world information to add to his stockpile. He ignored me when I said dinner was ready...or would become abusive when I knocked on the shed door if we needed anything. He never came in and ate dinner with us unless it was takeaway that he ordered and we would have to wait until 9pm to eat, by which time he was drunk and abusive. Most days my abuser would come in usually after 9pm-11pm, after I had put my son down to bed at 7-8pm, I tried to get my son to bed before his father came in drunk, he would wake my son up, with no concern for my sons welfare or need for sleep. If I tried to stop him he would become physically and verbally abusive. He would then proceed to the kitchen and loudly bash around the kitchen splashing and spilling everything making as much mess as he could (knowing I would have to clean it all at midnight so my son wouldn't see the mess). He would do this whilst loudly complaining and name calling declaring what a "f&%king useless s\*it cook I was, calling my food slop and often physically and verbally assaulting me if I came in too close proximity trying to defend myself or my cooking.

### Isolation

- I was extremely isolated by my abuser, I was not able to have people over without him becoming rude, aggressive or abusive to them. He would always be extremely abusive to me after they had left, leading to a pattern of me being too fearful to have people over. He would also abuse me if I left the house after school pick up (around 4pm). Once my son was home from school I could not go out, if I did I had to take my child, which meant it was very limited as he had to be in bed by 7-8 most days.

- My abuser was horrifically abusive to my [REDACTED] who tried to help and support us and was the only person he did not scare away. His own family would not visit. My abuser would come into the house if my son and mum were at the dinner table he would yell "What the f&%k is that fu\*king old witch doing here?" "I want her the f&% out of my house!" it was extremely distressing for my [REDACTED] and very upsetting for my [REDACTED] and I. We were not able to have a normal family environment or extended family over safely.

#### **My abusers drug, alcohol addiction and mental illness**

- My abuser had previously been an ice addict which I thought had stopped when we met, but now I am not sure (along with being a user of various other drugs like xanax, speed, cocaine, ecstasy) but after we started dating he stopped or so I believed. I had never taken drugs so I had no idea about the brain damage or addiction issues associated. He has stopped and I had thought that was the end of it. However slowly he started to replace his addiction with 30 packs of cigarettes a day and often 8-10 beers a day and then started introducing spirits or red wine too, anything he could get his hands on.
- My abusers behaviour escalated and he developed more disturbing behaviour, around 2017-2019 (just before we escaped) he would stay on the internet until the early hours of the morning searching conspiracy theory YouTube and websites, the dark web, looking at extremist and premillennialist type and end of days type information and his delusional psychotic type of behaviour was becoming worse. He verbalised delusional grandiose superiority and sexism and misogynist statements continuously and began actioning his radical philosophical position by 'prepping', preparing and stockpiling large quantities of supplies and food and buying more knives, packing bags with water purification, camping, survival tools, seeds, clothes and gas masks. He twice applied for a gun licence application, which were sent to the house which I intercepted in an attempt to stop him getting access to guns. I could not understand why the police would issue him applications for gun licences when they had been called out several times for domestic violence disturbances.

#### **Post escaping issues and continued post separation abuse of myself and my child**

- I made the serious mistake of letting my son continue see his father after we escaped, after [REDACTED] years of being threatened that he would take my son I was too scared to go to court or to fight him. So I let my son go to his father's one night a fortnight (no longer in case his father drove him in the car whilst drunk). Unfortunately this has meant the last 4 years his father had him alone.
- I had thought that once we had left our abuser that I would be given support to keep my son safe away from the abuser we escaped. However it became apparent once I started dealing with pre court mediation and police that over a decade of abuse and photographic and video evidence did not guarantee us peace or safety and a chance to start fresh away from our abuser. My abuser knew that the custody laws would support him to gain partial custody.
- Since escaping my abuser my child has become a teen and as such has shifted into adolescence where the intergeneration cycle of domestic violence has begun. My son's father before him was also raised by a violent, sexist, chauvinistic man that mentally, emotionally and physically abused his mother and my son's father as a child. In fact my son's father has talked of it often. Of his hatred of his father and yet he had an obsessive desire for his father's love, attention and approval.
- From 2020 the torture of dealing with 'counter-parenting' instead of co-parenting and abuse by proxy began and has taken a toll on my health. My abuser coerced, emotionally abused, manipulated and bribed my child, this grooming by his father has instilled in my son disdain for

authority, sexist traits, attraction to violence and abusive behaviour and in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] he just disappeared and went to live at his fathers. After this my son started to mimic his fathers extremist and premillennialist/end of days type delusional and psychotic type of behaviour. He also started verbalising delusional grandiose superiority and misogynist statements however he also had radical philosophical religious positions on many issues. At his fathers these extremist beliefs were both fed to him by his father but also through his father encouraging and supporting my son's addition to social media and horrific content, gangs, online toxic masculine influencers like Andrew Tate and violent videos.

- After 14 ½ years of my trying to instil values, ethics and morals into my son and giving him all the love and care and protection needed from a monster he chose to go live with the monster we escaped, where there are no rules, no bedtime, no phone limits, no limitations on social media, violence, sexist and extreme content, where he can set up accounts on any platform, communicate and hang out with strangers, adults, gangs, taking drugs, alcohol and vaping etc. resulting in my son not attending school for nearly 3 months. Being suspended from school for violence, vandalism, abusing teachers, assaulting students, taking drugs at school and concerns about weapons. He purchased machetes and knives delivered to his father house, trying to sell drugs online on snapchat, was involved in criminal activity and posting photos of himself with gangs with machetes and knives. All whilst in a very confused state of swinging from telling me he is depressed and lonely to wanting to kill his father.

I have been in constant contact with police, the school, child protection, Orange Door, Doncare etc trying to gain help and after Child protection closed the case several times they finally decided to investigate by which time my son's safety, mental health and education were at extreme risk.

Between mid March [REDACTED] to now 15 Aug [REDACTED] my son had been living with our abuser for 5 months and is in a state of coercive control, stockholm syndrome, radicalised by his father and online influencers and involved deeply with a dangerous gang, violence and drugs. My child is utterly confused clinging to the relationship he finally has with his neglectful father who had ignored him 99% of his life.

Had our DV service been functioning properly my son would have been removed from our abusers home 5 months ago. This child and myself have suffered needlessly, which is why I am submitting this response.

## PREVENTION

### What causes domestic, family and sexual violence?

There are many causes:

**Intergenerational family violence, learnt behaviours, values, ethics, morals.**

Apart from children being raised with fathers perpetuating values and behaviours of misogyny, sexism, toxic masculinity, coercive control, violence, verbal and financial abuse. Post escaping family violence most mothers are ***forced to coparent with their abuser***. A better term for it is ***counter parenting***. Where the abuser counters any and all actions the mother takes to provide a safe, happy and nurturing environment for children. The message that this sends children is that there are no consequences for abuse.

Brian Martin, founder and CEO of the Childhood Domestic Violence Association and author of *Invincible: The 10 Lies You Learn Growing Up with Domestic Violence* and *the Truths to Set You Free*, helping children deal with trauma (and ending the cycle) explains that when he was planning his nonprofit, he gathered together experts and researchers in the field of domestic violence to learn how he could help fill that gap of addressing childhood domestic violence and intergenerational transmission of violence. He states 'if one of the best predictors if whether, as an adult, you'll be in a relationship that involves domestic violence is whether or not you grew up living with it, and there are no services for those who grew up with [domestic violence], how do you stem that problem? And if there's no awareness that this has an impact, then how do you begin to even address it?'

Children who are abused may become abusers. 'A lot of them show great resilience, but in some, there's this tendency of intergenerational transmission of violence,' Dr. Karen Roberto, Ph.D., the executive director of the Institute for Society, Culture and Environment at Virginia Tech and a member of the American Psychological Association.

In Australia our system not only minimises this very real risk of never ending cycles on generational violence, our custody laws and poor child protection action allows the abusers to continue to raise their victims, even after their mothers have escaped with them. Sending them back to continue damaging these children alone without the mothers protection .

#### **Custody of children being given to abusers.**

All fathers with ANY reports to the police or child protection of DV should have child custody revoked until a full investigation by a properly trained and qualified child protection department. It should not be the other way around, where children stay in harms way until its proven. The priority should be the protection of children at all costs. The mothers need to be supported to parent alone to during these harrowing times.

We know the vast majority of DV does NOT result in charges or official reports. Therefore our current system KNOWS many, many children are being sent back into homes with fathers that are abusers.

#### **Substance abuse -abusers addiction to alcohol and drugs**

The impact of alcohol consumption on family violence has been neglected and underplayed. Seemly profits and tax received from these substances is a higher priority than the safety of women and children. We know that 50% of alcohol is sold to 10% of people. Those 10% make up the alcoholic abusers of women and children. Alcohol consumption is more closely associated with violent behaviour than any other substance. Perpetrators that have had police interventions and reports for DV where alcohol has been a factor need to have restrictions placed on them. Repeat incidents where alcoholism is a factor is almost guaranteed. The reasons being alcohol facilitates behaviours that may otherwise be suppressed in the community by perpetrators, like aggression (disinhibition hypothesis) due to the alcohol disrupting normal brain function and consequently weakens the areas that control impulses and urges. An intoxicated perpetrator's focus narrows (alcohol myopia) this narrowed view leads to misperception. This misperception can lead to hostility. Alcohol interrupts cognitive processing (cognitive function impairment) making it difficult to problem-solve, control anger, and make good decisions. Research also indicates that perpetrators who ignore future consequences and focus on the here-and-now and are more aggressive when intoxicated (American Addiction Centres). So when these factors are added to an already volatile or misogynistic culture in a home, the danger for a woman is escalated.

#### **Poverty and lack of education.**

Many families continue in cycles of financial stress leading to frustration , depression, anger. There is a lack of access to support to break intergenerational poverty. Access to all levels of education for children, mentoring for kids of DV families on career, financial management, health and wellbeing, nutrition, psychosocial safety, equality, inclusion, belonging can help them escape the cycle, this is desperately needed. Children raised in environments with parents with minimal education, poor nutrition, and low incomes are less likely to strive and aspire to improve circumstances and don't have the opportunities and support of children from more stable homes. This is an area I have had considerable experience through managing education programs for the long term unemployed, community centres, traineeships, apprenticeships, school based apprenticeships and programs in Indigenous communities.

### **Family of perpetrators staying silent and enabling perpetrators**

**Family and friends are actively enabling and remaining silent about domestic violence and coercive control**, this is a significant factor in the cause of DV. The issue of family and friends quietly enabling perpetrators is one of the most damaging issues that I have seen. Within a relationship and family a victim always first looks to close family and friends for support, generally victims will hope for family and friends to rally and support them. However, the normalised culture of defending and denying family violence enables and empowers the perpetrator and disempowers and demoralises the victim. This issue has not been directly nor adequately addressed by the media or education campaigns despite research indicating:

- social and cultural factors can contribute to the enabling and silence surrounding domestic violence, and that family members may stay silent due to fear of retaliation or a belief that it is a private matter (AIC, 2021).
- family members may protect perpetrators out of loyalty, fear, or social pressure as highlighted in research from victim support services like 1800RESPECT or the Domestic Violence Resource Centre (DVRC) highlighting these family dynamics
- studies examining how family members' respond to domestic violence can affect the victim's experience and the perpetrator's behavior. (Kerney et. al 2020)

### **Cultural norms on inequality**

Equality for women needs to be a legal right ...**not just in public but behind closed doors**...currently our laws and culture do not enforce or promote that a woman is equal always...whether she is at home in any family or in the workplace. A campaign is needed to educate all of society, new Australians, visitors, citizens that these are the Australian values and anyone breaching them will be prosecuted. Religion, culture, morals, ethics, values **DO NOT override out laws regarding EQUALITY for women**.

### **Social media and the lack of regulation**

**This is a monumental failing of our regulators and government**. The next generation of abusers are modelling themselves on unlimited exposure to violence, sexual assaults, objectification of women, misogyny etc. because unlike tv or movies there is **zero regulation controlling what is published**. The lack of internet and social media regulation means:

- there is no control over **pornography and violence** online. Parents are simply not equipped to be IT experts and manage such a vast issue.

- **Disempowerment of parental control** – Parents do not have control over what their children see online. Unlike tv and movies there is no legislation to rate and regulate what is accessed online for children. No child (being a person that is not an adult – anyone under 18) should be able to set up any sort of social media without written authorisation from a parent. Currently there is nothing stopping any child from setting up snapchat, discord, twitter, facebook, Instagram, tiktok.
- Addressing online gendered violence and investigating and implementing some of the recommendations by my RMIT University colleague Prof. Anastasia Powell - Family & Sexual Violence. Board member, Our Watch:
  - [Sexual violence in a digital age - RMIT University Library \(exlibrisgroup.com\)](#)
  - [Digital criminology : crime and justice in digital society - RMIT University Library \(exlibrisgroup.com\)](#)
  - [The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology - RMIT University Library \(exlibrisgroup.com\)](#)
  - [Sex, power and consent : youth culture and the unwritten rules - RMIT University Library \(exlibrisgroup.com\)](#)

### **Mental Illness of perpetrator**

Many perpetrators have mental illness, depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, paranoia, narcissistic personalities etc. The Victorian Health Department is aware there is strong evidence linking mental illness with family violence. However, in my experience advising Child Protection that my son is alone with a perpetrator whom we escaped due to violence, alcoholism, paranoia, substance abuse, bipolar and depression still resulted in them closing a case and failing to investigate. Mental illness like many of the other factors like perpetrating coercive control, financial abuse appear to be only acknowledged on paper and given lip service whilst the services and police do not appear to have the knowledge, power or processes to respond to these issues.

## **2. What works, or will work, to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence?**

**Education programs for the public and community** scaffolded and layered to meet the needs of various cohorts. This would include:

- **Public awareness campaigns** - in visible public spaces, buses, radio, tv, shopping centres, community areas, public spaces. A highly visible campaign highlighting the culture of equity for women, and condemning sexist misogynistic, coercive and violent behaviours of any kind
- **New Australian** - Education and supports for families, children and women coming to Australia from countries with cultural histories of oppression and inequality for woman
- **Education for men** – This is a MEN'S BEHAVIOUR PROBLEM NOT A WOMEN'S BEHAVIOUR PROBLEM. Specific education and campaigns targeted at men. Promoting equality and cultural shift towards real equality not tokenistic lip service to equality. Promoting that equality includes financial, education, freedom, rights of women, reduces social acceptance of sexual and physical objectification of woman and addresses social norms and stereotypes of women being the house keepers, child carers, cooks and

carers. Promoting a truly equal place for woman in society and ensuring men at various stages of life are re-educated to understand equality in the home, relationships, family, workplace in spite of any or all cultural, religious or family cultural beliefs.

- **Education - primary and secondary schools** – introducing equality and gender based violence prevention messaging. Including the types of issues raised at adolescence, hormones, behaviour, access to social media and the ability to discern fact from fiction in porn, social media and much of the inaccurate and negative messaging available online about how woman like to be treated sexually, looked after, paid for etc.

### **Consultation with survivors on what they needed at each stage of abuse, escape, post abuse.**

Consultation and directly asking survivors what is needed is vital. However, DV survivors often have PTSD or various levels of trauma, any form of consultation needs to recognise the risks of triggering victims through reliving trauma. This is particularly dangerous dealing with survivors that have not had sufficient trauma therapy which supports them in understanding they are safe from danger. Writing about, talking about or even reading about DV for survivors puts them mentally back into the abuse situation causing a physical and emotional response that is dangerous for them both physically and mentally. Extreme care needs to be taken in consultations. (B. Van Der Kalk, 2015). Potentially some preliminary support prior than asking for input is required.

Survivors are where I gained my greatest level of education to escape. Survivors knew the tips and trick and techniques to survive and then escape, they know the blockers and problems and sadly the DV forums are filled with women that cant escape as they know that post escaping the system is terrible, their children will be in danger and their abuser has rights that will supersede the rights of the mother to protect their child.

### **Support for the victim's families, friends and colleges stepping in to support victims.**

Many victims are in such a heightened state of confusion, trauma and distress it is virtually impossible for them to think clearly. ***The research clearly indicts the extreme levels of distress victims are experiencing yet there is an expectation they will be able to articulate, plan, and execute an escape plan without high levels of support. Cognitive function is impacted*** under these conditions and victims need help, guidance support and to be taken care of. Research has shown that ***75% of people seeking help from domestic violence support services have clinical symptoms of post-traumatic stress, with depression and even more severe anxiety cases*** (Caponnetto et.al 2024).

Victims can not do it alone. So we need to educate their families, colleague and fiends to help them. This needs to be a much higher priority. Education campaigns need to reach the public, schools, workplaces, communities, cultural groups, tourists, migrants (this should be common knowledge for all our community) and include information on:

- what DV looks like, signs to look for
- why people abuse?
  - What is the underlying psychology and trauma that cause it
  - Substance abuse
  - Mental illness
  - Culture
  - Sexism, narcissism, chauvinism, misogyny

- Social media and internet impact on values and morals and abuse of women
  - what is intergenerational abuse
  - and why people become victims of abuse (empathetic)
  - what to do
  - where to get real help
  - financial help, housing, protection, legal and emotional support

### **Improvement in ACTION taken by police, DV services, child protection instead of enabling perpetrators**

Support services and early intervention organisations should stop DV in it's tracks however, currently it is ***empowering and enabling the perpetrators***. Through failures in their follow up, professionalism and interventions, for example mistakes and poor records by DV services contracted by the government to process family interventions like referrals to services and supports. I have witnessed recording of minimal information, recording incorrect information and refusal to accept written information from victims. Some of the errors that need to be addressed that I have witnessed in my own engagement with them include:

- closing child protection cases despite evidence of a child being in danger
- reporting between DV services and Child protection that I had 'declined' DV and family violence support services when I had in fact 'already' been engaged with support services for 12 months, which had included taking my son to obtain a mental health plan, commencing a psychologist sessions, starting a child counselling support program, obtaining my own DV counselling, engaging with the DV support counsellor (from their service), arranging for my son to see the school wellbeing staff and psychologists at both his old and new school. This bugle contributed to Child Protection closing my [REDACTED] protection case and leaving my [REDACTED] for months with his paranoid alcoholic father (whom my son had run away to live with in order to avoid discipline and rules at home with me).
- Child Protection closing my sons case multiple times despite being aware that my son had gone to live with the abuser we had escaped who had perpetrated assault, rape, verbally abused me, coercive controlled and stole my life savings. That my [REDACTED] year old was now living with a bi-polar paranoid conspiracy theory following, alcoholic drug taker that had allowed my son to drop out of school, join a gang, purchase machetes stay up all night, become addicted to his phone, go out in cars with adult men, buy and have weapons delivered to his house. It took weekly phone calls and follow ups to Child Protection talking to at least 10 different people and nearly 5 months before I finally had the case proceed to investigation.
- Child Protection assured me they would do an unannounced visit to my abusers house in order to establish and evaluate the living conditions including weapons, drugs, alcohol. I was told multiple times, ***do not let my [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] know they were coming*** to check. However the unannounced visit did not happen and a planned visit took place. Allowing my abuser was now get rid of evidence and prepare. Child Protection did get a realistic evaluation (which I believe is deliberate protocol to minimise workload)
- Child protection, DV services, DV counselling and police are so uneducated and ill informed about dealing with these perpetrators, dealing with narcissistic abusers and coercive controllers and their manipulation and deceit. They all appear to be oblivious to the fact that perpetrators

are getting rid of evidence, preparing for a visit and prepping and grooming children on what to and not to say to the Child Protection staff, schools, psychologists, police etc.

### **Ending the issue of survivors being forced to coparent with their abusers and rapists**

DV survivors are forced into silence by having to deny abuse. The contradiction lies in the fact that we tell abuse victims and children of abuse to speak up. However, once a victim escapes they are told by everyone including the professionals in this space NEVER to speak ill of the father. A cycle of denial is created where honesty and concern for child welfare is outweighed by the abusers parental rights.

Victims should be encouraged to protect and be honest with children if their father is potentially dangerous, however we are judged for being honest with our children. I have had schools, psychologists etc tell me not to speak ill of the man that abused me repeatedly in front of my child. WHAT MESSAGE DOES THAT SEND CHILDREN? Children on one hand in many public awareness campaigns are taught to identify and speak up if they witness bad behaviour or inappropriate behaviour in adults even if it's their own parents. However when you escape a DV relationship and are forced to coparent with your abuser by an archaic legal system it results in very very damaged children being sent back to the abuser alone after you got them out!

Our child protection services and community tell parents to teach their kids about awareness of perpetrators... **unless you have escaped one..** in that case they tell survivors don't warn them ... send your kids back.

### **Public awareness campaigns on how to support victims during abuse**

- Social media and accessible support, guidance and information for victims that share survival tips, techniques like:
  - Grey Rock Method: This involves being as uninteresting and emotionally neutral as possible to avoid triggering the abuser's anger or manipulation. You provide minimal responses and avoid engaging in emotional exchanges. You also effectively become invisible drawing little attention to yourself.
  - Limit information: start to limit the information you share with the abuser. They will use anything against you. Provide only absolutely necessary information on all movements, activities, thoughts, opinions, relationships, education, plans.
  - Safety Planning: Develop a plan for how to safely leave or manage dangerous situations. This includes having a packed bag, knowing where to go, and informing trusted friends or family of your plans.
  - Seeking Support:
    - Counsellors, or hotlines- Professional and personal guidance can provide coping strategies and help you navigate your situation safely. However currently these services are literally lip service very little is provided other than words.
    - Reach out to support groups, other survivors, online groups like Empowered and Beautiful on Facebook (who helped me and I partnered with to advocate for survivors),
  - FREE!!!! Legal and financial advice -Financial Planning: Gaining financial independence is the single most effective way to escape, however finances do not provide safety. All survivors need protection when leaving and ongoing income. They are victims of a predator and until our system recognises the abuse will continue through the courts, through finance, through child custody, through financial settlements and lawyers

women will be no better off once they have left and will often think it might have been easier to stay than to have tens of thousand of dollars in legal bills and their children now staying with the abuser without their mothers protection and the constant stress of legal threats etc all whilst trying to work, pay bills, look after children etc.

- Documenting Abuse: Keep detailed records of incidents of abuse. This documentation can be important for legal actions or obtaining protection orders.
- Self-Care: Engage in activities that bolster your mental and physical well-being. This can be essential for maintaining your strength and clarity. Yoga breathing, walking, sports, hobbies, art and community groups can be a life saver and helps you to build your network.
- Avoiding Isolation: Abusers love to isolate their victim. So victims should try to maintain connections with trusted friends and family. Isolation can increase vulnerability and reduce access to support, career option, education and health care.
- In the early stages setting boundaries is important, however once in an established abusive relationship this can be dangerous, understanding the stages is critical.
- Information on the psychology of trauma (B Van Der Kolk), how it effects children and survivors, signs of children who are being impacted by DV (stutters, behaviour, development delays) signs of abuse
- Education on what DV looks like, why people abuse and why people become victims of abuse. What is the underlying psychology and trauma that cause it

### Programs for perpetrators

A far greater emphasis needs to be on mandatory and publicly understood programs for men. Women and the victims are not the issue the perpetrator rehabilitation is the issue. These need to be mandatory for all perpetrators when police do call outs to DV incidents. ALL men implicated in DV should have mandatory participation. I work with some of the leading experts in this field and suggest investigating the following:

The work of Shelley Hewson Munro- Manager Prevention, Masculinities and Learning, HSW GBV Prevention

- Working Together with Men model - The model was originally created by Shelley Hewson-Munro together with Sarah McCook developed the follow-up guide for accountability and allyship. The 2.0 resource can be viewed & downloaded [https://lnkd.in/gdJY7 -F](https://lnkd.in/gdJY7-F)
- [A Critical Stocktake of Community-Based Healthy Masculinities Programs in Victoria, Australia - Michael Flood, Shelley Hewson-Munro, Amanda Keddie, 2024 \(sagepub.com\)](#)
- The Gender Equity and Justice – Community, Teaching and Learning Projects - [The Gender Equity and Justice – Community, Teaching and Learning Projects - RMIT University](#)
- [\(PDF\) Programmes for boys and men: possibilities for gender transformation \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- [\(PDF\) Intersectionality and social justice in programs for boys and men \(researchgate.net\)](#)

Lecturer and colleague Lecturer Sharon Simon was Project Lead for Respectful Relationships in the Department of Education & Training, Victoria, currently she is an academic lecturer at RMIT University. In investigating subject matter experts for the RMIT gender-based violence prevention training for academics I became aware of Sharons work on the Respectful Relationship program. This program should be mandatory for all perpetrators when there is a DV police call out.

**A complete overhaul and scaffolding of capability development through education, training and experience for all response workers including Child Protection intake, police, DV services, school educators, doctors etc.**

When investigating subject matter experts to support the University roll out of professional learning and embedding gender based violence prevention into Educator capability and awareness I became aware of the work of Christine Craik, PhD in Family Violence and Accredited Family Violence Social worker, who works in the FV field for the past 30 years. She is an advocate for Safe Steps, contributing to social education of FV. She developed the first family violence course in the social work programs at RMIT over 10 years and also worked through the AASW to ensure that FV courses are compulsory now for all SW courses across Australia. Some of her work includes:

[Social Work Education: Challenges and Opportunities - RMIT University Library \(exlibrisgroup.com\)](#)

[Professional practice in human service organisations: a practical guide for human service workers - RMIT University Library \(exlibrisgroup.com\)](#)

The current education, experience and work readiness for staff in critical roles especially in Child Protection and the police is completely inadequate. The child protection training and recruitment standards as a case in point.

### **3. What existing initiatives are directed at addressing the attitudes and systems that drive domestic, family and sexual violence? Are they effective?**

No the lack of support once you leave is completely inadequate. The current initiatives within what are supposed to be services provided to support victims are actually enabling the perpetrators. In my experience the DV service, police and child protection are horrifically inexperienced, untrained, unqualified and unprofessional. They are oblivious to tactics enlisted by narcissistic abusers and a case in point is when the police respond to my abuser calling them because I had tried to speak to my child at the bus stop, had had to hunt the streets to find when my child had been moved to another house. The attitudes and apathy is perpetuated by some people in these services. If those employed to help are not contributing to the solution how can we expect our community or the perpetrators to change.

For example Child protection services close cases without proper evaluations and triaging, do not keep proper records, they lose records, they have no continuation of support or service. I have had to call child protection twice to three times a week for 5 months trying to get them to adequately take records and follow up only to have my sons case closed several times due to mistakes. Which has now ruined my sons mental health, having left him alone with his neglectful, mentally ill, substance abusing father who's sole purpose in life is torturing me. He now is ruining his own sons life in a bid to torture me. Our systems and attitudes in the service providers are actually worsening the problem and empowering the perpetrators that are manipulating and using the system and its inadequacy to their favour.

Most of the systemic problems sit within the government services. There are several areas of records that are failing to contribute to identifying and addressing DV. These are some of the examples I have experienced:

- Police attending DV call outs, records post call outs seem to disappear when you call up to follow up
- Telephone calls to the police regarding family violence and child welfare to not appear to be recorded
- Walk in visit to police regarding rape, abuse with photos are not recorded nor taken seriously
- Calls to the police from Child Protection result in them being told they have no records of the above family violence
- Police asked to attend children welfare checks do not keep records nor follow up
- Orange door do not investigate or follow up with perpetrators participation in services, they fill in records incorrectly and provide incorrect information to child protection
- Child protection services, records, communication, consistency of case management and staffing is possibly the worst I have ever experienced in my life or career. After spending 4 ½ months contacting them about my [REDACTED] neglect and abuse at his fathers, finally the case was reopened for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time and proceeded to investigation stage. By this 5 month stage my child's life, health and education is destroyed due to the delays and he had become involved in gangs, weapons, drugs, violence and crime and missed about 4 months of school and will likely fail the year and is still there.
- Communication with schools needs to be addressed. Currently schools do not appear to recognise DV rather where the child is living at the time. Victims who's children return to the abuser (boys usually) end up alienated from the childrens education as the school begins communication with the abuser rather than the victim. Support by DV, and child protection is critical but non existent in this scenario. As abusers will be continuing to abuse the mother by proxy via the child with little or no concerns for this childs welfare or education. Rather they focus on counter parenting to alienate their victim from the children and the children education.

## EARLY INTERVENTION

**4. What systems, including systems outside of government, receive information which may allow for the identification of individuals who are at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?**

## 5. What is needed to allow for this information to be used by government and specialist domestic, family and sexual violence services?

- Clear records of all incidents and communication by all services
- Training on quality records
- Training on what questions to ask.
- Clear communication transparency and protocols between services

## 6. What interventions should be considered to manage the risk of a person who is identified as being at high risk of experiencing or perpetrating domestic, family and sexual violence?

As mentioned above:

### Programs for perpetrators

A far greater emphasis needs to be on mandatory and publicly understood programs for men. Women and the victims are not the issue, the perpetrator rehabilitation is the issue. These need to be mandatory for all perpetrators post police call outs to DV incidents. ALL men implicated in DV should have mandatory participation. I work with some of the leading experts in this field and suggest investigating the following:

The work of Shelley Hewson Munro- Manager Prevention, Masculinities and Learning, HSW GBV Prevention

- Working Together with Men model - The model was originally created by Shelley Hewson-Munro together with Sarah McCook developed the follow-up guide for accountability and allyship. The 2.0 resource can be viewed & downloaded [https://lnkd.in/gdJY7 -F](https://lnkd.in/gdJY7-F)
- [A Critical Stocktake of Community-Based Healthy Masculinities Programs in Victoria, Australia - Michael Flood, Shelley Hewson-Munro, Amanda Keddie, 2024 \(sagepub.com\)](#)
- The Gender Equity and Justice – Community, Teaching and Learning Projects - [The Gender Equity and Justice – Community, Teaching and Learning Projects - RMIT University](#)
- [\(PDF\) Programmes for boys and men: possibilities for gender transformation \(researchgate.net\)](#)
- [\(PDF\) Intersectionality and social justice in programs for boys and men \(researchgate.net\)](#)

Lecturer and colleague Lecturer Sharon Simon was Project Lead for Respectful Relationships in the Department of Education & Training, Victoria, currently she is an academic lecturer at RMIT University. In investigating subject matter experts for the RMIT gender based violence prevention training for academics I became aware of Sharon's work on the Respectful Relationship program. This program should be mandatory for all perpetrators when there is a DV police call out.

### **Ending the issue of survivors being forced to coparent with their abusers and rapists**

DV survivors are forced into silence by having to deny abuse. The contradiction lies in the fact that we tell abuse victims and children of abuse to speak up. However once a victim escapes they are told by everyone including the professionals in this space NEVER to speak ill of the father. A cycle of denial is created where honesty and concern for the child welfare is outweighed by the abusers parental rights.

Victims should be encouraged to protect and be honest with children if their father is potentially dangerous, however we are judged for being honest with our children. I have had schools, psychologists etc tell me not to speak ill of the man the abused me repeatedly in front on my child. WHAT MESSAGE DOES THAT SEND CHILDREN? Children on one had in many campaigns are taught to identify and speak up if they witness bad and inappropriate behaviour by adults, even if it's their own parents. Our child protection services and community tell parents to teach their kids about awareness of perpetrators... unless you have escaped one.. in that case don't warn them you send your kids back. When you leave a DV relationship and are forced to coparent with your abuser by an archaic legal system it results in very very damaged children being sent back to the abuser alone after you got them out!

## **RESPONSE**

### **7. What are the barriers to reporting domestic, family and sexual violence to police or seeking support from domestic, family and sexual violence services?**

In my experience:

- A complete failure by all the services that I sought help from kept me trapped for nearly 20 years.
- I reached out to Relationships Australia in the early 2000's asking for help. They gave me relationship counselling and enabled and empowered my abuser and gaslighted me.
- In 2010 Child Protection and the police were called in. They did nothing and enabled and empowered the perpetrator.
- Over the years I talked to the police on at least 5 occasions, they offered me nothing and treated incidents like a lovers tiff.
- When after [REDACTED] years I went to the police (in [REDACTED] with photo evidence of my years of abuse, rape and child abuse and neglect I was told it won't go anywhere, I was dismissed, humiliated and degraded.
- When I finally escaped abuse the financial and housing support was useless, services never called back, they had nothing to offer.
- In 2024 when I sought help form Child protection due to the DV by proxy and my childs immense neglect and abuse by our perpetrator it took 5 months to get them to investigate. I felt ignored, I was gaslighted and my child mental physical and emotional health is utterly destroyed after 5 months left with the monster we escaped.

## **8. What are the elements of a best practice crisis response which will meet the needs of:**

**Please see other sections of this report as they have all been answered**

### **a. victim-survivor?**

The following is needed:

- Police and Child Protection to believe and support the victims not the perpetrator
- Financial and housing support
- Education whilst in the abuse
- FREE counselling after abuse (not \$100 a session after Mental Health care plan) subsidy nor \$65 for Doncare counselling sessions. These need to be at least 12 months to 2 years.

### **b. a victim-survivor who is a child?**

- FREE counselling after abuse (not \$100 a session after Mental Health care plan) subsidy nor \$65 for Doncare counselling sessions. These need to be at least 12 months to 2 years.
- Perpetrator to have ALL custody revoked until evaluated and undertaken at least a year of mandatory education and counselling.

### **c. a perpetrator (acknowledging that one need is to hold a perpetrator to account for their use of violence)?**

- Perpetrator to have ALL custody revoked until evaluated and undertaken at least a year of mandatory education and counselling.
- See previous sections on perpetrator education

## **9. What are the elements of a best practice health response?**

Fully subsidised survivor mental health plans for up to 2 years

## **10. What are the elements of a best practice police response?**

- Police attending DV call outs, records and follows up
- Telephone calls to the police regarding family violence and child welfare properly recorded and followed up and communicated with DV and Child protection services
- Walk in visit to police regarding rape, abuse with photos are recorded empathetically and taken seriously

- Calls to the police from Child Protection result in action
- Police asked to attend children welfare do so with a matter of urgency and seriousness. Not sloppy apathy

### **11. What are the elements of a best practice justice system response?**

- Laws revoking child custody of perpetrators
- Laws protecting women who have been financially abused and left broke

## **RECOVERY AND HEALING**

### **13. Acknowledging that every victim-survivor will have different needs depending on their personal circumstances, are there universal needs that will arise for all victim-survivors?**

Shelter, food, clothing, safety, community, emergency housing to stay near kids schools and family.

### **14. What are the best practice approaches to supporting a victim-survivor to recover from trauma and the mental, physical, emotional and economic impacts of violence?**

Currently survivors are able to access via Orange Door referral to a local counselling services that are offered by unqualified and inexperienced and not specialist staff in places like Doncare. These services like Doncare are wonderful but the staff are not appropriately trained, qualified or experienced. The victim only gets a handful of free sessions and the abusers should be made to pay for victims professional fees. For example I had lost everything yet had to pay for a psychologist for myself and a counsellor \$165 a week as well as my [REDACTED] which came to \$330 . The perpetrators should be forced to pay this, however instead they pay no child support, whilst the victims pays for housing, bills, food, medical, schooling and mental health support. Whilst the perpetrator pays for nothing.

#### References:

Caponnetto P, Lenzo V, Sardella A, Prezzavento GC, Casu M, Quattropani MC. Breaking the Silence: Exploring Peritraumatic Distress and Negative Emotions in Male and Female Physical Domestic Violence Victims. *Health Psychol Res.* 2024 Mar 1;12:92900. doi: 10.52965/001c.92900. PMID: 38435339; PMCID: PMC10908590.

Australian Institute of Criminology. (2021). \*Domestic Violence in Australia: An Overview\*. Retrieved from [AIC Website](<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sb/sb27>).

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. (2020). \*Family and Domestic Violence: Key Facts and Statistics\*. Retrieved from [DVRC Website](<https://www.dvrcv.org.au/>).

Kearney, T., & Heffernan, M. (2020). \*Understanding the Role of Family and Friends in Domestic Violence\*. \*Journal of Interpersonal Violence\*, 35(11), 2238-2259.

How Drugs & Alcohol Can Fuel Violent Behavior, American Addiction Centres [How Drugs & Alcohol Can Fuel Violent Behaviors \(americanaddictioncenters.org\)](https://www.americanaddictioncenters.org/how-drugs-alcohol-can-fuel-violent-behaviors)

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/children-and-domestic-violence/what-to-do-if-your-teen-or-adult-child-is-abusive>

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/ending-domestic-violence/what-fuels-domestic-violence-part-1-a-family-pattern>