

I am making this submission to the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence on behalf of my daughter, [REDACTED] who is no longer able to advocate for herself due to Domestic Violence.

[REDACTED] was just [REDACTED] years old when she broke off the relationship with her first boyfriend, [REDACTED] weeks later she was dead.

PREVENTION

Domestic violence is often perceived as occurring within a relationship where people are co-habiting. In the case of my daughter, she was living at home and still attending school. Her ex-boyfriend was living at his [REDACTED] house and was working. It took me some time to accept she had been in a Domestic Violence relationship.

I know there are many varied and complicated reasons that domestic violence occurs, and each situation can be different and difficult to identify, there are some behaviours for both people with lived experience and people who use violence that can be recognized and acted upon.

This needs to be done at a young age, as soon as the behaviour starts. Schools are a valuable resource. I know our teachers do so much for their students, but this has to be the first-place behaviours can be identified. Those involved need to be assessed and assisted.

In the case of my teenage daughter, she did not turn to me when she had issues, she turned initially to her friends and then eventually to the school counsellor. More widespread knowledge of what behaviours in relationships are acceptable and what are not would have assisted both my daughter in recognizing her situation and also her friends in advising her (hopefully to seek help).

General education is important, focusing on what is perceived to be the 'at risk' group is important but can miss those that are not in that demographic. [REDACTED] had not been raised in a DV home environment and we had no experience prior to this. The person who used the violence was a white male from a middle-class family and was well educated, having just completed a [REDACTED] degree.

During the relationship breakup her ex-boyfriend threatened suicide and both the police and the ambulance were called. His mental state was assessed but he knew what to say to make the paramedics leave. There was no check on my daughter at all. There was no check on his access to firearms. There was no shared information between the services or with my daughter's school counsellor. The assessment was made on his communication alone.

Perhaps a central repository of information so someone had the ability to pull everything together and make a more informed decision.

In relation to changing societal attitudes, I think we, once again, need to rely on the school system. It is not enough to allow teachers to make the call on how to teach gender equality as everyone has their own bias. A set program that has gender equal resources, allows sharing of achievements equally and promotes understanding between people should be developed. This will assist with more than just Domestic Violence.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Due to the age gap and her young age when the relationship began, she was [REDACTED] and he was [REDACTED]. I tried to force the relationship to end. When this did not work, I called the police to assist, I was told 'if your [REDACTED] daughter wants to tart about with older men it isn't our problem'. I was left to fend for myself in trying to control the relationship. I insisted that he only see her under my roof when I was about. This worked for about [REDACTED] months and then things fell to pieces when my mother was diagnosed and

died of cancer. I relaxed my rules a little as I was preoccupied, and my daughter was now [REDACTED]. He seemed to have proved that he cared for her. They were now allowed to go on [REDACTED] dates.

Had the authorities taken this more seriously we may have been able to nip the relationship in the bud.

The continued support of people dealing with the situation, so that an unexpected event does not disrupt the status quo.

My observations and experience after the death of [REDACTED], is that the legal system focuses on the person using violence and there is little consideration given to the people on the receiving end. AVO is aimed at controlling the person using violence, clearly they are of little use for actually protecting the people experiencing violence if the person using violence has no regard for the law.

The emphasis is currently on those from the stereotypic environment, However, our family background does not include Domestic Violence, hence we were unable to understand what a dangerous situation she was in. Education needs to be for all people so that those involved, and those surrounding them, can understand and be supportive.

The authorities who were involved in the last week of her life included the police, the ambulance for the person using violence and the school counsellor for my daughter. The police and ambulance did not reach out to our family, I'm not aware that they contacted her school. I feel sharing of information would have helped us all to understand the situation better. The information that the person using violence had a gun licence and access to guns would have been invaluable, I'm not sure the police even put this information together, let alone shared it with anyone.

I understand the need for privacy, but when this potentially threatens the life of others then information should be shared with the appropriate bodies. We didn't need to know any diagnosis of the person using violence, just the potential danger my daughter was in.

Informing us of the risk would have been a good starting point. Monitoring of the person posing the risk would also have been helpful. He was left to his own devices, without any further follow up, in the days after being attended to by the police and ambulance for a suggested suicide attempt. In that time he was able to access a gun, buy ammunition and determine the movements of my daughter in the coming days. Maybe his family needed following up also as they did nothing during this time, and so he was completely unsupported.

RESPONSE

Barriers to reporting family and sexual violence

- Knowledge of domestic violence and how it escalates, so both people involved do not understand where they are at and what may be coming.
- The stereotyping of both the people experiencing violence and those using it. This allows people to easily say 'not me'.
- The attitude of the authorities when receiving information and dealing with those involved.
- The reporting in the media of domestic violence and sexual violence cases with blaming and false reporting.
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After my daughter's death the press 'story bombed' the media [REDACTED]. When I took this up with the police, I was told they were trying to 'flush the family out' in order that they could get a story. One TV station managed to get my number and phoned and asked for an interview, when I declined they said to me 'you'd better not be giving an interview to another station'. This was within days of her death. Some restrictions around the media's reporting and approaching families would be welcome.

For me personally, there was absolutely no follow up with the family regarding our mental health after her death. I was introduced to a police victims officer the day after the incident, when I was in shock

and had no idea what was going on. That was the last time anyone in authority contacted me or anyone in the family in this manner.

Dealing with the coroner's office was an absolute nightmare. When I went to view the coroner's report, which I had to do at their office, they had removed the report and any reference to the person who had used violence as this, apparently, encroached on their privacy. I was not allowed to see the suicide note as it was not addressed to me. I was not allowed to read the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] However, it was appropriate for me to read about her screaming in agony as they lifted her into the ambulance. There was zero consideration to what I was going through.

As she was underage, I was still receiving family allowance for her. I received one payment after her death from Centrelink by mistake. 12 months later, on her actual birthday, I received a letter of demand for repayment of the overpayment (one fortnight's worth for one child, less than \$100). There was zero consideration of the impact on me. The money was not the problem, the way it was address was distressing.

At the hospital, when she was declared dead, I went to identify her body. I was told I was not allowed to touch her as she was a crime scene. It was an open and cut case, [REDACTED]. I have since learned that it would have been helpful for my grief to be able to touch her and hold her one last time. Was it necessary to stop me from touching her, would it have made a difference?

The detective handling the case was good to us, but he could have kept us more informed rather than me having to chase things up. Additionally, they did not take statements from all of us. I guess it was an open and shut case, but I felt the need to have my say. I had to chase them to make a statement. [REDACTED]'s siblings were not asked to make a statement. Making a statement at least allows us to feel we'd had some input to the case.

The legal system expunges all crime on death, so the fact that the person using violence completed suicide immediately after gave us no sense of satisfaction or closure. He was never called a murderer or found guilty. [REDACTED] don't feel that was justice.

RECOVERY AND HEALING

Support, emotionally and financially. Being taken seriously during and after the situation. The right to privacy and not allowing the media to cast aspersions on the character of either party, good or bad.

On going counselling and support. I had to search for my own support, I saw a grief counsellor initially and then various psychologist for up to [REDACTED] years after her death. I had a mental health program done every year by my GP in order to assist with the cost.

I joined a support group for grieving parents, I found the support group [REDACTED] too confronting. I eventually became involved in running the support group, but it was unfunded and every year I had to go hat in hand to the Commissioner for Victims of Crime for funding (we only needed about \$6k per year). Even that was eventually pulled when [REDACTED] took over the role. As a victim the additional stress of fund raising is unreasonable, especially when it is such a small amount.

Subsequent to my daughter's death I became involved with a support group called The Compassionate Friends. Through this I became involved with a group run by the Commissioner for Victims of Crime to help victims. The group included academics, police and specialist in certain areas. I was one of the victim representatives. I found my input was regularly dismissed. Maybe, in part, because the subject is quite emotional, and it often makes me cry (Yes even [REDACTED] years later). I feel that I am dismissed as either too emotional, or as too difficult to listen to. The 'experts' in the area made decisions that I felt were detrimental to victims, and only served in reaching a budget. For instance, the counsellors that assisted with Victim Impact Statements and Court Companions were removed. These are 2 areas which are very difficult for a victim and yet they were left to their own

devices. Trauma leaves a person unable to concentrate and make decisions for a period of time so I feel that these decisions left the victim helpless. I left the group shortly after that. I don't know if these services were ever reinstated.

THIS SUBMISSION

I would love to think that our society had made inroads to Domestic and Sexual violence in the [REDACTED] years since my daughter was murdered, but looking at the number of deaths that still occur I fear that is not the case. I am keen to make a difference in this area and would be happy to become further involved. I have [REDACTED] surviving children and [REDACTED] grandchildren, so it is in the interest of my family as well as the memory of [REDACTED], that I pursue this.