

Royal Commission Submission

Personal Experience of Family and Domestic Violence and the impact on me and my children

I have been and still am the victim of family and domestic violence perpetrated by my ex-wife during our marriage and through the Family Court system.

During our marriage I was subjected to verbal, emotional, physical, psychological, coercive control as well as witnessing child abuse. She traumatised and abused our eldest [REDACTED] to the point that he felt worthless. He wrote a letter stating that he was a brat and signed it, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]". My ex-wife verbally abused me one night for [REDACTED] minutes and threatened to kill me and then to suicide and then grabbed a knife. I called the police. The police did not wish to intercede nor protect my family or myself in any way. In fact they left us in the vulnerable position with us both living under the same roof.

I brought evidence to the police of my ex-wife's threat to murder me. They agreed it was a threat, yet when I asked if they would be issuing an Intervention Order, they instead came after me. This was very confusing to say the least as I have never mistreated my wife. I made a complaint about the officer's conduct but was told that it was reasonable.

I reported up to [REDACTED] of these abusive incidents to the Department of Child Protection (DCP) with no response, and I was told that my case was closed.

Finding no protection, I fled with my [REDACTED] whom my ex-wife was abusing, but she learned of my Safe House and used her influence to have us evicted. I desperately looked for crisis accommodation but there was nowhere for a single father- only refuges for women. I felt as though the system had failed my [REDACTED] and I and believed that the only option would be to live on the streets rather than return to the abuse at home.

In the Interim Hearing the Judicial Registrar noted that no Intervention Order was issued by the police. She was disturbed by the revelations of my 23 page Affidavit but, rather than protecting my children and I, first banned my [REDACTED] from his trauma counselling, sent him back to live with his abuser, and then gave primary custody of all [REDACTED] of my children to my ex-wife. The danger to my children and their physical injuries were ignored. All my ex-wife had to do is deny the accusations. My evidence was ignored and held in contempt.

My ex-wife has since further abused our children but I now realise that, after my experience with DCP, SAPOL and the Family Court System, children are not protected from the abusive parent (if the parent is female).

The Court ordered many mediations during which I was constantly coerced by officials to give up on gaining shared care of our children and protecting them from further abuse. The response to my complaint to the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia was that they are unable to investigate such things as mediations are confidential, and so the abuse continued.

Prevention

It is vital that support services understand that family and domestic violence and sexual violence can and is perpetrated by both men and women and education and training is paramount in this space. Frontline workers such as police, ambulance, firefighters, agency workers, DCP, family law staff

including lawyers and magistrates need to be given training to recognise family and domestic violence and how to respond; with the aim of keeping victim survivors (which includes children) safe.

It is clear that there are vulnerable/high risk individuals that include women, children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and LGBTI+ communities who require nuanced support but it is also vital to acknowledge that many men who are being ignored in their time of need because of the current narrative that only women are victims.

Early Intervention

I was unaware that I was a victim of family and domestic violence until separation occurred. However, once I began to understand what I had been experiencing from my ex-wife, I sought support from 1800RESPECT and Mensline. They gave me critical support about how to recognise abuse, encouragement in how to report it and how to prepare to flee safely and I did follow their advice. That's when the support stopped.

Response

The negative and damaging effects of family and domestic violence support services that I have experienced outlines how the system, after early intervention support, did not support me responsively in my time of distress and in fact turned against me when I needed their help desperately.

A complete review of the funding requirement for agencies so that it can be shown that they are providing services for all those at risk of family and domestic and sexual violence. There are currently limited checks and balances about the kinds of services being provided and how the money is spent. Specific services for men and boys should be put in place including counselling and refuges.

Schools should be engaging in training and education for staff and pupils about consent, safety and healthy relationships and, most importantly, how to navigate the conflict of parental separation.

There are so called "peak bodies" that have appointed themselves as such in all states saying that they represent Men's Behaviour Change Programs however there is no official body that can oversee what work is being done to support men and boys and the ones that are operating all do so from the stance that men cannot be victims and this needs to be addressed immediately.

Recovery and Healing

I have followed the advice of the system to seek counselling to help me heal from the trauma resulting from the domestic violence, but the trauma has been exacerbated by a system that does not support men and boys and sees men as perpetrators only. It has been made quite clear to me that my experiences will not be listened to nor validated- most poignant is the complete dismissal of evidence of my ex-wife grabbing a knife after she threatened to murder me and that our [REDACTED] reported that he was afraid that his mother, "might try to kill him with a knife", just before he was sent back to her care.

The Child Impact report recommended to the Court that the children's experiences, "should not be given any significant weight by the Court". The Court agreed and banned my [REDACTED] from trauma counselling and I ordered to attend parenting programs such as the Anglicare program- Kids Are First. This program is designed to help parents appreciate what children experience in homes with domestic violence, however, there is no understanding of how this re-traumatizes victims when they

are forced to attend the programs. I was reminded of a decade of being abused by my ex-wife. The agencies who run these programs do not assess suitability for victim-survivors and/or acknowledge that men can be victims too and are often being kept away for their children. With the Courts ensuring my ex-wife got the lion's share of our assets and the Child Support agency making me pay a stipend to my abuser, I'm reminded monthly how utterly helpless the truth is in the face of the law.

I now understand why, ***an estimated 15 people each week who have been exposed to family violence are either killed or take their own lives; two-thirds of whom are males*** (Glen Poole, Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence. Stop Male Suicide Project, 3 May 2017).

Sadly, it is our children that hurt the most in these situations. I have devoted my life to raising my children well, yet somehow, thanks to a very broken system, they have become almost fatherless and confused as to why they cannot see me. Children are grieving the loss of the family unit, the parent being kept away from them and so much more.

Studies show that the absence of a father contributes to many forms of emotional disorder among children, especially anger, rebelliousness, low self-esteem, depression, and antisocial behaviour.

(Dad's for Kids- The Daily Dad, The Horrendous Harms of Fatherlessness.

<https://dads4kids.org.au/the-horrendous-harms-of-fatherlessness/> Warwick Marsh, 31/07/2024).

Virtually every major social pathology has been linked to fatherless children: violent crime, drug and alcohol abuse, truancy, unwed pregnancy, suicide and psychological disorders- all correlating more strongly with fatherlessness than with any other single factor, surpassing even race and poverty (Is there really a Fatherhood Crisis? Steven Baskerville, The Independent Review, v. VIII, n. 4, Spring 2004).

I have four children whom I love and share an inseparable bond with; who have now been separated from me through the efforts of my ex-wife (perpetrator) and a Family Law System that does not support men/fathers.

I am trying to heal from the pain and suffering caused by all of this but it is devastating to hear my children crying and saying, "Why can't we see you more daddy?" on the very rare occasions I am allowed to see them. What can I say but that the world isn't a fair place?, as I hold them until they stop crying.