

SUBMISSION TO:

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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Royal Commissioner

Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

SUBMISSION FROM:

TM for Women

TM for Women is a not-for-profit organisation offering the women and girls of Australia the knowledge and practical techniques to gain inner happiness, good health and success in their lives. Our 'Strengthening the Inner Woman' projects are aimed at giving mental and physiological strategies to help women recover from stress and trauma.

This submission offers a unique, evidence-based approach to Recovery and Healing for victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence.

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Further Information

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TM for women appreciates the opportunity to respond to the urgent questions raised by the Commission

NEEDS OF SURVIVOR-VICTIMS

The most urgent need for victims of FDV is their physical, environmental, emotional, mental and financial safety. To this end, the social and economic root causes of FDV such as perpetrator's violence, homelessness, gender discrimination, financial dependence are important areas to be addressed.

LONG-TERM NEEDS

It is well-documented that acts of domestic violence can have serious, long-lasting effects on the survivor, their family, and the community. In terms of physical impacts, domestic violence can lead to serious injury, sexually transmitted infections, adverse pregnancy outcomes, sleep problems, hypertension and death. Psychosocial implications can include

substance misuse, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, homelessness, and suicidality.

The effects of domestic and family violence are perpetuated in the next generation with problems now concretely linked to child abuse and neglect including behavioural and achievement problems in school; heart, lung and liver disease; obesity and diabetes; depression, anxiety disorders, and increased suicide attempts; increased criminal behaviours, illicit drug use and alcohol abuse; increased risky sexual behaviours etc.

Our submission suggests an evidenced-based, intervention to support the emotional and mental safety of survivors of FDV. The intervention helps women with a past history of FDV manage stress and trauma. It offers a self-managed tool to help victims develop resilience, thereby enabling them to access support systems to assist them with urgent and complex circumstances.

CURRENT BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

The recovery strategies available vary considerably across clinical guidelines, ranging from psychological treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy, counselling and group work, to stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.

Clinical evidence suggests that some psychological treatments may be effective in improving several sequelae of domestic violence (i.e. anxiety and depression) in heterosexual female survivors of domestic violence. However, findings from a recent Cochrane review have revealed that psychological therapies are no more effective than usual care or no treatment at improving quality of life or PTSD in survivors of domestic violence [Hameed 2020; Keynejad 2020].

Concerns also have been raised about the accessibility of psychological therapies to people living in regional/rural/remote Australia. These concerns relate to the high cost, inappropriateness (e.g. presence of gender/sexuality bias, lack of cultural safety) and poor availability of such services [Campo 2015; Laskey 2019]. Limited access to these therapies poses a significant barrier to recovery for survivors of domestic violence living in regional/rural/remote communities. This was also highlighted in the recent ABC article: the close-knit nature of geographically isolated communities can result in a perceived lack of anonymity and confidentiality which can discourage women from speaking up.

There is a need for an inclusive and accessible easily implemented approach to domestic violence recovery

Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence [State of Victoria 2016] and the World Health Organisation Global Plan of Action to Address Interpersonal Violence [WHO 2016] call for improvements in the accessibility, affordability, acceptability,

availability and quality of domestic violence services. These recommendations specify the need for services/interventions that support the long-term recovery of victims, particularly those living in rural, regional and remote communities. Current evidence suggests existing approaches to supporting recovery in survivors of domestic violence fall short of these recommendations. We believe our submission outlines a unique approach that fills many of these gaps.

A VALUABLE ADDITION TO BEST PRACTICE

This unique approach to recovery and healing has been researched in South Australia and around the world (over the past 50 years 400 studies have been independently published in peer-reviewed journals, and include 9-year longitudinal studies, random control studies and meta-analysis.)

The results of a pilot program carried out in the southern suburbs of Adelaide during 2019-2021 has been published in the Journal of Family Violence.

<https://rdcu.be/dad0E> Transcendental Meditation for Women Affected by Domestic Violence: A Pilot Randomised, Controlled Trial (Leach 2023)

The intervention used was the Transcendental Meditation® technique (TM; an internationally standardised, effortless, meditative technique). TM is easy-to-learn, and convenient (i.e. can be practised anywhere and anytime). It is a 'do-it-yourself' technique so does not depend on ongoing support to be effective. (Nevertheless, those who have learned TM can access ongoing support at TM Centres worldwide at no extra cost). These features make TM a suitable, accessible and sustainable therapy for survivors of domestic violence

The conclusion of our pilot study states that the Transcendental Meditation® technique is shown to have promising effects on quality of life, perceived stress and mood among women exposed to domestic violence.

WHAT IS TM?

The Transcendental Meditation technique is a simple, effortless, mental technique practised for 20 minutes morning and evening sitting comfortably in a chair with eyes closed. It does not require a change in lifestyle or belief system. It is not a religion or philosophy.

TM is distinct from mindfulness and other meditation practices. As such, it has its own unique 'brain signature'. The 'Alpha' activity in the brain during TM is a signature of a state of 'restful alertness'. This cultivates the ability to remain calm whilst acting in daily life.

TM training is an acceptable, accessible, safe and effective intervention to support recovery in survivors of domestic violence. Our pilot randomised controlled trial of 42 female survivors of domestic violence found Transcendental Meditation® to be significantly more effective than group support at improving quality of life, and severity of depression, anxiety

and stress symptoms at 16 weeks [Leach 2023]. These findings were both statistically and clinically significant. Our findings were also consistent with changes in quality of life and mood reported in trials of other vulnerable groups exposed to TM training (e.g. mothers living in poverty, male prison inmates, racial minority students, women with breast cancer) [Chhatre 2013; Elder 2011; Elder 2014; Goldstein 2018; Joshi 2022; Nidich 2009; Nidich 2017].

Transcendental Meditation may support recovery in survivors of domestic violence through a range of demonstrable neurochemical, neurophysiological, and cognitive-behavioural effects. To date, TM has been shown to reduce cortisol and noradrenaline levels, increase the synthesis and release of dopamine, serotonin and gamma-aminobutyric acid, stimulate alpha wave activity in the prefrontal and temporal cortex, and reduce amygdala activity [Mosini 2019]. Collectively, these actions contribute to reductions in stress, anxiety, depression, disassociation, sleep disturbance and fear, and improvements in self-efficacy, resiliency, quality of life, and mental and physical well-being – all of which have been demonstrated in clinical trials to date [Elder 2014; Goldstein 2018; Nidich 2017; Nidich 2018; Orme-Johnson 2014]. These effects provide important insight into the mechanisms by which TM may reduce the physical and emotional burden of domestic violence.

HOW IS TM TAUGHT?

The TM technique is learned from a fully qualified teacher of Transcendental Meditation. Instruction is given for approximately 1.5 hours on each day over 4 consecutive days. The first day of instruction is always one-to-one instruction with the student and teacher. The following 3 days can be done in a group. This initial course is followed by personal follow-up of approximately 30 mins to 1 hour each week for the first 4 weeks after learning. Anyone who has learned TM can access group meditation and other support programs at TM centres worldwide free of charge. This ongoing support can be accessed in-person and on-line. Children from the age of 4 to 10 years can learn a special children's technique. Children aged 10 and over learn the adult technique.

SUGGESTION OF EMBEDDED APPROACH reducing the risk of re-traumatisation and supporting victim-survivors to be safe and healthy

Given the ease of learning and the fact that the practitioner does not necessarily need ongoing support for the technique to be successful, we feel that the TM technique can be readily implemented into practice and policy. We suggest that if training in the TM technique for victim/ survivors was introduced via existing support services, progress towards a better quality of life, greater self-confidence, increased resilience, better decision making and a more positive outlook would be greatly accelerated.

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APPENDIX A:

TESTIMONIALS from the Strengthening the Inner Woman Pilot Research Project 2019 TO 2021

Below are some testimonials from some of the participants in the study carried out in South Australia. This provides anecdotal evidence of the impact of TM for preventing and managing Mental Health.

After 16 weeks

“TM has helped me make positive life changes. I feel happier, have more energy, am more productive and am better at managing stress or other obstacles that come up.

“I highly recommend TM to anyone who is struggling. It gives you the tools to go from surviving to thriving in your daily life, to enables you to deal with issues as they arise in a healthy way.” TM study participant.

“I have found that I am a lot more positive and have a new calmness about me. I now have a ‘can-do’ attitude and am not pre-occupied with what other people think.” TM study participant

“I had never imagined how positive I could become. A long time I had no appetite. Now I am enjoying eating for the first time in decades. I am happier every day. My confidence is

incomparable. My sister-in-law and others are impressed with the progress I have made.”

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“For a person who has never meditated before, I found the experience calming and really peaceful. Nothing seems to be troublesome – go and live every day is a wonderful gift when stress seems to be so much less. It’s a great coping mechanism. I feel very blessed to have been part of this study. Fully recommend this. The support has been great. Thank you.”

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“Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this. TM has honestly been a life changing experience for me, and I do not use those words often or lightly! I feel like, well I definitely am, a different person than I was before learning TM, and all for the better! So many positives to learning this, I cannot recommend learning TM enough to those who want to make positive life changes, feel happier, have more energy, increase productivity, manage stress or any obstacles life may present you with. It has also helped me with my depression and anxiety so very much. I had resigned myself to the fact that I would always feel the way I did prior to learning TM. I am so very glad to be completely wrong about that. My coping mechanisms on a day to day basis have become so solid because of TM. I am more confident within myself, I now definitely acknowledge my self-worth and realise the potential I have to honestly do anything I put my mind to. I know that sincerely, none of this would be possible without having learned what I have throughout my TM experience.

I had previously done meditation and mindfulness and while I did benefit from those experiences, I found it challenging to be advised to ‘catch my thoughts’ and push them out of my mind and keep it ‘empty’. Truly though, I had no idea what true meditation was until I experienced the beautiful and blissful elements of this daily practice that I now have. Seriously, try it! Once you learn it, you have it for life and you will not regret it, not one bit. Thank you Heather and all the TM crew.”

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Testimonials : after 2 years

“Learning TM has caused some great changes in my life. It's helped me start getting it more in order, which was such a hard thing for me before. It's helped me interact with others better. And I believe it helped me repair a rift with my daughter because since starting TM I've been able to articulate things that I didn't properly understand or even have words for and that has helped bridge a gap that, at one stage I didn't think would be bridged. And finishing things! I can complete a whole task now. Which was something I'd not been able to do for years before due to suffering severe mental health problems. And my depression, it's not around nearly as much.

I'm so thankful that I got to learn TM because I was a part of the strengthening the inner woman research project, I feel sorry for those who didn't get to learn it. What bad can come from sitting in a comfy chair, closing your eyes and relaxing?” ■■■■■

*“Learning the new skill of t.m. has been life changing for me.
I feel I have calmed my mind thoughts and emotions
I have been able to distance myself from the drama of the rollercoaster of life's challenges
I feel more balanced and steady
More trusting of my ability to cope with whatever life deals me. It's an incredible tool and
practice that I use every single day
I cannot imagine my life without it.”* ██████████

*“I have been meditating almost two years now and it has almost completely eliminated my
anxiety and depression. Thankfully I have a more positive outlook on life.
I also used to be extremely overreactive, and from one extreme to the next. Now I feel more
calm and relaxed than I have been in a very long time and I am more able to cope with life's
challenges.”* ██████████

APPENDIX B:

For further information:

<https://www.tmforwomen.org.au/>

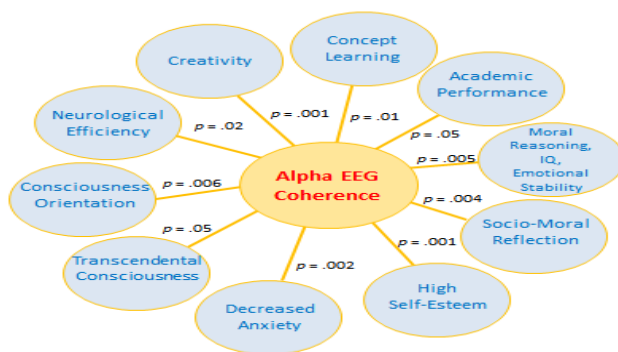
[Reduced Violence in Schools: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUZRIX_SIHU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUZRIX_SIHU)

[TM in families: https://www.dpfamilyhealth.com/what-s-transcendental-meditation-how-can-it-make-you-a-better-person](https://www.dpfamilyhealth.com/what-s-transcendental-meditation-how-can-it-make-you-a-better-person)

<https://www.davidlynchfoundation.org/>

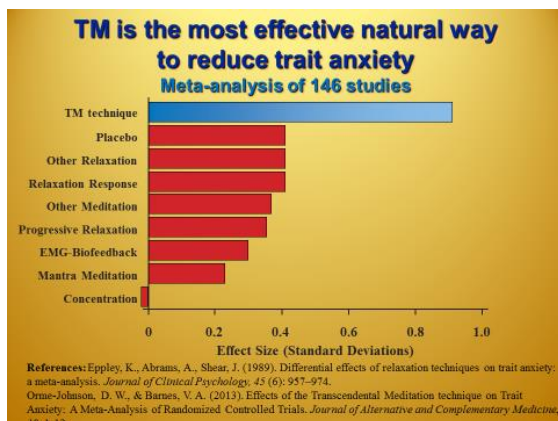
Additional research studies pertinent to our submission

**TM increases EEG coherence,
increasing the ability to solve problems, thus avoiding getting anxious.**



References: *International Journal of Neuroscience* 13 (1981):211-217
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1. **Decreased Cortisol.** Research has shown that the Transcendental Meditation technique reduces the major stress hormone cortisol by 30% during TM, and that meditators have 30-40% lower levels of cortisol than matched controls throughout the day and night. TM may help reduce problems associated with high cortisol, such as sleep deprivation, acid reflux, migraines, depression, chronic fatigue, exhaustion and immune system failure. **References:** *Hormones and Behavior* 10, no. 1 (1978): 54-60; *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 1, no. 3 (1995): 263-283.
2. **Decreased Adrenaline and Noradrenaline.** Research has shown that people who practice the Transcendental Meditation technique have 30% to 40% lower levels of the major stress hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline, than matched controls who do not meditate. **References:** *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 1, no. 3 (1995): 263-283; *Journal of Neural Transmission* 39 (1976): 257-267; *Physiology & Behavior* 72, no. 1-2 (2001): 141-146.
3. **Increased Stability of Hormone Cycles.** During the 24-hour cycle of the day, people practicing the Transcendental Meditation technique have smaller swings of the three major stress hormones—cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenaline. **References:** *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 1, no. 3 (1995): 263-283; *Psychosomatic Medicine* 48 (1986): 59-66.: 257-267; *Physiology & Behavior* 72, no. 1-2 (2001): 141-146.
4. **Increased Vitality.** The Transcendental Meditation technique reduces baseline levels of the stress hormone by 30-40 %, but when cortisol is needed to meet challenges, TM increases the cortisol response by 90%, providing the body with increased vitality. **Reference:** *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 22, no. 4 (1997): 277-295.
5. **TM Residence course decreases cortisol.** Research has shown that a weekend TM residence course significantly decreases the stress hormone cortisol. **Reference:** *Proceedings of the Endocrine Society of Australia* 19 59 (Abstract) (1976).



The TM technique is the most effective technique to reduce depression, stress and shows twice the reduction of anxiety than any other form of meditation. This reduction in anxiety has been corroborated with hard physiological measures indicating a profound decrease in anxiety. The most extreme cases of PTSD showcase the results of TM most dramatically.
