

**INQUIRY INTO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS AND  
ISSUES IN NSW**

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date received:** 23/09/2011

---

Partially Confidential

# Submissions

---

## Inquiry Into Domestic Violence Trends and Issues in NSW

9/23/2011

NB – could you please keep my name confidential in any circulation or publication of these submissions

## **INDEX**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>My background</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>BIASES</b>	
- <b>The Police</b>	<b>4</b>
- <b>The Courts</b>	<b>5</b>
- <b>NSW Health</b>	<b>6</b>
- <b>DV Crisis Line</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Increase in Occurrence of Violence from Women</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>10</b>

## **Introduction**

Thanks you for the opportunity to make submissions to the Inquiry regarding Domestic Violence trends. I make these submissions not just as an interested member of the public, but as a long term victim of domestic violence and also as someone who has struggled through the public and private systems of DV assistance and support.

## **My background**

To offer perspective to my submissions, I give a brief background of my experience of DV.

I was married in Sept 2001 and experienced the first episode of DV the night before I left for my honeymoon. My wife was frustrated with exhaustive packing to go on an overseas trip and lashed out at me when I suggested, at 4.30am, that the packing was taking too long and we should stop and get some rest. It was a sudden outburst and the first I knew of any violence starting was when the coffee mug hit me in the head. Over the next half hour, whilst I remained silent but crying, I was punched, kicked, scratched, spat on and had several more objects thrown at me, including more kitchen crockery and a steel tool kit. Half an hour after this beating, while I was lying bleeding and crying on the laundry floor, my wife returned for what I thought was going to be an apology. Instead she kicked me in the ribs and said "suffer cunt". Unbelievably, I still went on my honeymoon the next day.

This behaviour from my wife, or any suggestion of it, had never been seen by me before that night. However, it continued spasmodically and I suffered many more episodes over the following 8 years. As interested parties in the DV complexities, I am sure you are aware of the reasons why many victims remain in the relationship and seek to improve the situation or put up with it. I was committed to my marriage and chose to try and find a solution, so I stayed.

Once the violence became directed at my children in 2008 (by which time we had 4 daughters), I left the marriage and sought refuge for my children. Since separation I have suffered her attacks again many times and she has also forcibly gained entry to my elderly parents' home and broken my mother's ribs in an attack on her.

The Family Court awarded me sole custody of my children and her contact with the children was to be supervised. Obviously the Family Court would only remove young children from their mother for good reason – which I had. Unfortunately though, most other govt authorities and private support services are less objective than the Family Court about their approach to DV perpetrators and victims.

I believe there exists a major flaw in the way our community approaches DV and this inhibits improvements. In some cases, I believe the current system actually increases the occurrence of DV.

## BIASES

### The Police

When I attempted to report my former wife's violence and attacks I was confronted with extreme resistance from the Police. I was referred to the local Domestic Violence Liaison Officer, which I believe most police Commands have. She told me it's unlikely there would be any action against my wife as 'men are the usual perpetrator'. I was also told "you're a big bloke – you should be able to handle it". Apparently being a big bloke somehow meant I was meant to be impenetrable.

I escalated my complaint to the [redacted] Police management, Inspector [redacted] who told me in a formal meeting in his office the view of him and the police, as follows:

- *Its very hard to get a conviction against a female perpetrator so the police are reluctant to 'waste their time' on complaints against women*
- *Domestic Violence Liaison Officers in NSW are universally women (I subsequently searched and found there was only 1 male DVLO in NSW) and so men's complaints were not taken seriously.*
- *The perception that there was a trend of increasing violence from women against men was partially incorrect. It was the police's view that violence from women has always been occurring but it was only recently that there was an increase in the reporting of these. However this did not change community or legal perceptions*
- *It was the police's view that violence from women to men was still significantly under-reported*

I draw your attention to the NSW Police brochure on Domestic Violence (attachment 1). On the first page it states "Generally speaking victims of Domestic and Family Violence are usually female, while perpetrators are male." Firstly, I challenge the presumption that most victims are female as only reported cases can be measured, and, as stated by the police above, DV toward men is significantly under-reported. Secondly, how does this statement and attitude of presumed gender of a perpetrator encourage male victims to speak up, report assaults and help address the growing occurrence of violence from females?

### **The Court**

Through significant perseverance and my own collection of overwhelming evidence, I eventually managed to have the police partly react to my wife's violence. An AVO application was sought by them for interim and urgent protection and she was ultimately arrested.

Upon attending Court, I was horrified at the attitude of female police and court officials in refusing to recognise me as a victim, despite police Prosecutors clearly outlining the details of my case.

I was refused entry into the 'Victim's Room' (as safe haven at court where DV victims can await their case without fear or intimidation from the perpetrator) on the basis it was for women only. I was even refused entry into the waiting room for AVO applications. The police DVLO told me that I was to sit outside and she would 'try to keep an eye on me'. That was the extent of the 'support' they offered. Strangely, even though my former wife was the perpetrator and had been arrested and charged for offences, she was welcomed to the victim's support room and offered free legal advice from the female legal advocate on offer from the community justice centre. This was not offered to me, despite being the victim.

I also draw your attention to the many notices at the Local Court that raises awareness to DV. If I put aside that all of the images in these notices depict men mistreating women and just focus on the facets of DV, it lists the behaviour that constitutes DV. These include:

- Verbal abuse and insults
- Social isolation
- Threats and intimidation
- Harassment

In a discussion with the Police prosecutor before my case, I raised the question of how many men complain about DV under these elements rather than physical assault. The prosecutor told me *"if we investigated every instance of a wife verbalising abusing and insulting a husband, the courts would be processing AVOs and charges 24/7 and still wouldn't get through them."* The other policeman present in the discussion referred to the list from a male's perspective and said to me *"that's called marriage"*

I find it extraordinary that a Court system and Justice Dept can display such archaic attitudes of sexual discrimination as to refuse support on the basis of being a male victim. It felt to me that, as a male, my case was lost before it began and my attacker had won an important psychological game of power via the actions of the Court and Police. This perceived support of her made it harder for me to stand up to her actions and even after an AVO was awarded against her, the assaults continued and I didn't have the courage to respond or report the further attacks.

I understand from the Anti Discrimination Board that the dept of justice have an exemption from the state's anti discrimination laws to be able to provide support for women only in the courts. Exemptions aside, I find this extraordinary and infuriating that men, if brave enough to report violence toward them, can be so belittled and degraded in the Court system. To gain more readiness for men to stop suffering in silence, this discriminatory display in the court system must stop.

#### **NSW Health – Community Health**

In 2010 my GP recommended ongoing therapeutic counselling to deal with the issues of being a DV victim. He recommended the free services of NSW Health's Community Health Centre at Hospital. I attended, was interviewed by a counsellor who gave her name as and was told they can definitely help me with these issues and victims of DV was their speciality.

However, after the first session – which was outstandingly successful - I received a letter from on NSW Health letterhead stating that she had been reminded by her manager that NSW Health does not provide support services and counselling for men, only for women. Obviously I objected, as a victim was still a victim no matter the gender. told me there was nothing she could do and that was the strict policy of her department. This intensified the issues of isolation I had already felt as a DV victim and left me very angry and feeling wronged.

## DV Crisis Line

In early 2010, upon the recommendation of NSW Health I also contacted the DV Crisis Line via the Dept of Family & Community Services. The number for this service is 1800 656 463. When I outlined my case to the person on the phone, I was quickly cut off to be told the DV Crisis Line only offers support for females, not for males. I objected as I was still a victim and was hung up on.

On the date of this submission, 23 Sept 2011 I again contacted this DV Crisis Line to ascertain if this discriminatory policy had changed. I spoke to [redacted] and was told again that they could only support females.

Interestingly, [redacted] offered the following comments during our phone call:

- No support services exist for men in your area, the nearest to [redacted] is Cabramatta.
- She could recommend various courses for men to help, but they are all Perpetrator Programs, not victims programs.

The conclusion I came to was men were only recognised as perpetrators, not as victims.

Various other programs and support services exist where only support services are offered to women. One of many examples is attached – the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, which talks directly about women being victims and men being perpetrators, without suggestion of the alternative.

## Increase in Occurrence of Violence from Women

There has been a general increase in violence by women reported over the last few years. However, the attitudes surrounding this increase remains bias and subjective. For example, this very enquiry by the Standing Committee on Social Issues lists in the terms of reference under item 3:

*"The increase in women being proceeded against by police for domestic related assault"*

Does that not suggest that the increase is not in the rate of assault but only in the action of police in proceeding with action? Does it not suggest that the problem is the police? This typical choice of language to describe violence from women inhibits us as a community to deal with the problem as it



restricts us indentifying the true cause of the problem. Likewise to blame women's assault on being 'pushed too far' by a man, as I have heard dozens of times, stops us dealing with violent women and instead focussed our attention of what men may be doing to upset women.

In a News Review published in the Sydney Morning Herald on Nov 19 2000 (attached), Melanie Phillips states:

*"Without doubt, some women are the victims of serious domestic violence. Yet the evidence strongly suggests that Stanko's research does not stand up to scrutiny. It lends support instead to a propaganda offensive that demonises men and minimises or conceals the fact that women can be equally if not more violent, a distortion that has cost many men their homes and their children."*

This is precisely my experience. Yes little seems to be changing and there appears to be no sympathy from the large and powerful women's groups.

On May 30, 2010 the SMH reported the

*"release of data showing violence by girls in schools has soared by 70 per cent in NSW in the past five years."*

It also stated *"Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) figures show that physical attacks involving girls have risen at the rate of nearly 15 per cent a year since 2005, while the level of male violence is unchanged."*

Over the last four years I have interviewed couples extensively about the dynamics and power games within their relationships. In mainstream Australia, I see a trend of a significant power shift to the female in a partnership, to the extent that now I understand what the policeman in the courthouse meant when he said the terms of DV outside of physical abuse is what men know as 'Marriage'. I have also worked in the nightclub security industry for 20 years and I have seen as many physical fights and assaults involving or caused by women as I have men.

On Dec 1 2010 the SMH reported a US woman who threw her baby off a shopping centre car park down six stories to her death. This article (attached) received 5 paragraphs in the news. Yet a similar case in Melbourne where a father threw his baby daughter from a bridge to her death, was significantly major news around the world, has been debated incessantly and there are lobby groups using this episode to demonstrate why father's rights should be diminished. Why are father's generally being demonised for violent behaviour that can and is also carried out by women?

## Conclusions

In submitting my experiences to this committee, I hope to highlight the gender stereotypes, bias and discrimination that exists in our community, our media, our legal system and our Government regarding Domestic Violence.

I am one of the few lucky ones. I persevered through a lazy and complacent police service, I was humiliated and angered at the lack of action and care in the Court system and I have been made to feel criminal and worthless by our social support services. However, luckily, my experiences were so bad that I was able to finally get recognition by the Family Court and enable them to prioritise my childrens' right to a safe environment, even if my right to the same was ignored.

In talking to dozens of other dads and husbands I know that these biases that exist fuel the fire. I'm not saying they make non violent men violent, but I am saying that the anger one feels when the social support services set up for DV victims, ignore real complaints and real threats based purely on gender, is immense. This frustration can lead to a breakdown of otherwise calm relationships and ignite hostility.

In order to properly reduce DV we as a community need to raise awareness about the real extent of the problem. By only recognising women as victims we further alienate men from joining the movement to eradicate DV. The discussions themselves can often create more hostility.

## **My recommendations**

To properly tackle the increase in DV, I see the following measures as essential:

1. Eliminate the culture within the police that men don't need protecting. This could be assisted by employing a more balanced and fair number of male DVLOs.
2. Eliminate the prejudice and stereotyping of wording and text in police, legal and government literature on DV. Either use genderless references or better still, highlight that woman can be perpetrators as well.
3. Eliminate the prejudice propaganda in the Local Courts that promote DV victims as only female
4. Correct the discrimination in the Courts that do not recognise men as victims. This would mean that a 'victims room' becomes a victims room and that all support services are on offer to all victims.
5. Correct the biases and discrimination in wider community support services, including the Dept of Health, and offer the same support to men on such things as the DV Crisis Line.
6. Start a community discussion recognising the need for men not to tolerate DV. All forms of DV are a crime yet men's suffering is so horribly under-reported. If we can openly discuss that it's OK for men to report and open up about their suffering, our community will be more aware and DV from both genders will be less tolerated. The media need to take significant responsibility here also.
7. Employ more men onto govt committees such as this one.