# RESHAPING RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## FINAL REPORT

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# Consultation

We are grateful for the assistance provided by the following organisations and groups during the conduct of this research project:

- Aboriginal Education Employment and Development Branch
- Aboriginal Family Support Services
- Aboriginal Research Institute, University of South Australia
- Aboriginal Sobriety Group
- Dawn House
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs
- Legal Department, Pitjantjatjara Council Inc.
- Lesbian Domestic Violence Action Group
- Lower North Community Health Service
- Mee Wee Community Coalition
- Migrant Resource Centre
- Migrant Women's Support and Accommodation Service Inc. (MWSAS)
- NESB Action Group
- Noarlunga Community Corrections Violence Prevention Group for Men
- Nunga Mimini's Aboriginal Women's Shelter
- Nunkuwarrin Yunti of SA Inc.
- Salisbury West Community Health Centre
- Salisbury West Community Health Centre Violence Prevention Group for Men
- Second Story
- South-East Regional Community Health Service
- Southern Women's Community Health Service
- The Office for Families and Children
- Vietnamese Community of Australia, South Australian Chapter Inc.
- Whyalla Community Health Service
- Women's Health Statewide
- Women's Information Switchboard

# 1. Introduction

Domestic violence has been a political concern for three decades involving women's movement activists, the State and the non-government sector. A complex web of responses to deal with domestic violence has evolved over this period. A great deal is already known about domestic violence from Australian and overseas research and the experiences of people working in the field of domestic violence. Given the multi-faceted nature of domestic violence, no one piece of research or intervention can provide the solution. This research was funded under the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative of the Commonwealth Government and examined the needs of men, women and young people experiencing domestic violence in South Australia.

The aim of the research as outlined in the Consultancy Brief was:

> *To inform the design/implementation of effective strategies and interventions to prevent domestic violence based on a current analysis of the needs of victims, perpetrators and also young people who have witnessed domestic violence. These strategies will be inclusive of people from Aboriginal, rural, migrant, lesbian and gay communities.*

The research collected qualitative data using a multi-method approach. The methods involved phone-ins, focus groups, interviews with service providers to marginalised groups and networking with various communities.

The research findings confirm prior research and indicate that many organisational and professional developments have had a positive impact on the experiences of women, men and children seeking help for domestic violence. Specialist domestic violence services were generally viewed positively by participants. However, participants reported both positive and negative experiences of mainstream services. Overall, domestic violence services appear to be less effective for marginalised groups in the community, including Indigenous people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those living in rural and remote areas, gay men and lesbians. Culture, location, sexuality, gender and class were critical factors in how people living in domestic violence understood their experiences and the effectiveness of service responses. The experiences of domestic violence in these marginalised groups challenge current theories and orthodox service delivery. There is a need for a more complex understanding of power and its abuse in relationships. Current theories of domestic violence need to include and address a greater diversity of experiences. New approaches are needed, which may require further research.

When advertising the phone-in, it was decided not to use the words 'domestic violence' in promotional materials, in an attempt to target a wider range of participants. The words 'relationship abuse' were used instead, with a range of examples of non-physical behaviours that people may be experiencing. Whilst a large number of participants had used domestic violence services and described themselves as 'victims' or 'survivors' of domestic violence, other participants had not identified their situations as 'domestic violence' until they read the behaviours and feelings described in the posters. The data suggest there is increasing public awareness of domestic violence; however, the general perception was that non-physical forms of violence did not constitute domestic violence without accompanying physical violence. These findings suggest a need for future education and awareness campaigns to focus on expanding the public's understanding of domestic violence to include emotional, psychological, social and economic abuse.

A common response to women living in situations of domestic violence is to ask: 'Why don't you leave?' The research participants described this as one of the most unhelpful responses to women experiencing domestic violence. As previous research has shown, there are many complex reasons

why women remain in abusive situations. The pressure to remain in a relationship and not have it 'fail' was a major reason for many women. This pressure to 'make the relationship work' was often reinforced by family, friends and work colleagues. Constant threats and intimidation also made women fearful of leaving. Informal networks were often women's first source of help for domestic violence and their responses were often critical in determining future courses of action. This research points to the need for public education initiatives that aim to help family, friends and workmates respond appropriately and effectively when people disclose domestic violence. Service providers, such as doctors and police, also need further education and training to assist them to identify domestic violence, establish or adhere to appropriate protocols, respond effectively and make appropriate referrals.

The male participants in this research were primarily perpetrators of domestic violence. Focus groups included men who were attending group programs and a small number of male victims and perpetrators participated in the phone-in. An overarching theme was that the victim/perpetrator distinction did not capture the ambivalence men experienced in naming their place in domestic violence. However, such a distinction is needed to maintain a focus on the responsibility that perpetrators must take if the incidence of domestic violence is to be diminished.

Amongst many of the women participants in the phone-in there was a dominant narrative that indicated the development of an identity as a domestic violence 'victim' or 'survivor'. It was concerning, however, that some women appeared to have developed a 'career' as a survivor of domestic violence. On the other hand, common themes were not evident from the male participants' descriptions of their experiences. Some men did not locate their experiences within the domestic violence discourse and in some cases described themselves as both victims and perpetrators (sometimes confusing the two).

Men who could be identified as perpetrators of domestic violence sought relationship counselling instead of domestic violence services, as they perceived their violence as a response to a 'relationship problem'. Men's commitment to change was primarily motivated by their own personal investment in making their own lives better and saving or improving their relationship.

Male participants found that contemporary stereotypes of domestic violence portrayed men in a negative light, establishing a barrier to domestic violence prevention messages and services. The dominant male culture was seen to promote their ongoing use of violence, with limited support offered to stop or prevent violent behaviour. Whilst men's groups were seen as supportive and helpful they often could not meet the need for on-going support as they were time-limited.

Men felt that dominant ideas and beliefs about masculinity and the ways they were raised as men limited their ability to communicate within relationships, to understand their role in relationships and to deal with the pressures of relationships and daily life. Violence was seen by some men to be a normal and justified action. There is a continuing need for community based awareness programs to work with young men to prevent and stop violence, and for services that contribute to men's education in life skills, communication and relationship skills.

There is considerable research on the effects of domestic violence on children. This project relied on parental reports of the effects of domestic violence on children and the findings corroborated previous research. It was found that effective services for children who had experienced domestic violence were either not available or were not easily accessible. Where children had attended counselling it was not viewed as valuable for two main reasons:

- service providers often focussed on the anti social nature of children's behaviour and did not place their behaviour within the context of domestic violence; and
- children often perceived their attendance at counselling as a punishment (when they had done nothing wrong) and/or as an unsuitable method of helping them.

# 2. Background, Objectives and Research Methodology

Young people also reported difficulties in disclosing domestic violence and finding appropriate services. They supported the use of peer education programs for raising awareness of domestic violence amongst young people and as a means of support to young people who have experienced domestic violence. Thus whilst the effects of domestic violence on children and young people are well understood, the next stage requires the development of specific service models relevant to their needs.

Domestic violence research and services have made important contributions to large numbers of people who have lived in situations of violence and abuse. However, it is timely to review domestic violence theories and interventions in the light of new knowledge and current challenges identified in this research. This research has demonstrated the need for new terminology, more inclusive theories of relationship abuse and a greater diversity of approaches to domestic violence. New approaches are needed which respond effectively to the unique needs of children and young people, Indigenous people, people from diverse cultural backgrounds, those living in rural and remote areas and those who do not identify as heterosexual.

## 2.1 Consultancy Brief

This research consultancy involved an investigation into the needs of women, men and young people who have been involved in domestic violence situations. In the first part of the project, the consultants reviewed relevant research in Australia and overseas. The second part of the project involved conducting a phone-in and running focus groups to assess needs and to develop sound strategies to address the objective of the research project. This required analysis of the primary data collected throughout the project as well as consideration of prevention strategies used both in Australia and overseas.

### Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research were to identify:

- strategies for preventing domestic violence victimisation and cross-generational abuse as a result of learned behaviour;
- interventions which will assist those subjected to violent and abusive behaviour to increase their safety; and
- interventions which will assist those perpetrating violence and abuse to stop this behaviour.

The Consultancy Brief stated that the research be inclusive of people from Aboriginal, rural, migrant, lesbian and gay communities.

The project was conducted during a time of considerable research activity in the area domestic violence. Research funded under the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime through the State and Commonwealth Attorneys General and the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* through the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women are at present generating important national data on domestic violence in Australia. It is expected that this new research will assist in developing strategies and interventions targeted to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention of domestic violence.

### Assumptions of the researchers

In devising the methodology for the research project, the researchers recognised that there is no such thing as 'neutrality' in social science since we can never function independently of our culture and our belief systems. The values and perspectives of researchers need therefore to be clearly stated and explicit. A primary value of the researchers in this project was a commitment to elucidating women's, men's and young people's experiences from their own perspectives and with a respect for diversity of experiences and views. In this objective, the researchers were guided by feminist perspectives, which not only informed how we thought about domestic violence, but raised important questions about the nature of conventional research in this area.[1]

Speaking about violence is not easy for most people for a number of different reasons, including the social stigma attached to domestic violence and the often deep psychological impact of such experiences. However, for the purposes of this research it was important that the women, men and young people involved were provided with an opportunity to make informed and free comment about their experiences and needs. For this to happen it was essential that consultations took place in a collaborative environment where it was likely that participants would feel safe and free to discuss issues of violence without fear of judgement, stigma or recrimination.[2] Time was taken to ensure that participants understood the purpose of the research and what the researchers meant by domestic violence. They were assured of respect, confidentiality, anonymity and understanding. Data was collected with the explicitly stated purpose of improving the lives of survivors of domestic violence to avoid objectifying survivors' experiences.[3]

### Ethical considerations

All research conducted by staff or students in the University of South Australia is carefully scrutinised and approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee ensured that the research protocols clearly involved informed, voluntary consent. All written or transcribed material generated from this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored. Audio-taped recordings were erased after transcription. Participants interviewed were not identified by name.

In relation to involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the research, guidelines outlined by the NH&MRC[4] were followed, as well as University guidelines.[5] These guidelines are 'aimed at ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are consulted about, and involved in, any research conducted in relation to them or their communities'.[6]

In relation to running the focus groups, clear guidelines were provided to participants around specific information to be disclosed or kept confidential during and after the group sessions. People were not asked to provide personal details that could identify them further.

Relevant agencies dealing with domestic violence were advised of the phone-in and focus groups where possible.

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1 Bograd, M. (1990) 'Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse' in B. Yllo & M. Bograd (eds) *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse*, Sage, Newbury Park.

2 Hoff, L.A. (1990) 'Collaborative Feminist Research and the Myth of Objectivity' in Yllo & Bograd, op. cit., ch. 11.

3 Ribbens, J. & Edwards, R. (eds) (1997) *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, Sage, London; Franz, C. & Stewart, A. (eds) (1994) *Women Creating Lives: Identities, Resilience, and Resistance*, Westview Press, Boulder.

4 National Health and Medical Research Council, *Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*.

5 Aboriginal Research Institute, *Ethics in Aboriginal Research*, University of South Australia.

6 Human Research Ethics Guidelines, Section 6.1 @ www.unisa.edu.au/orc/ethics/section6.htm.

### Aim of the research as outlined in the Consultancy Brief

The Consultancy Brief asked us to provide research that could be used:

> *To inform the design/implementation of effective strategies and interventions to prevent domestic violence based on a current analysis of the needs of victims, perpetrators and also young people who have witnessed domestic violence. These strategies will be inclusive of people from Aboriginal, rural, migrant, lesbian and gay communities.*

As feminist scholar, Nancy Fraser has highlighted, the interpretation of need is not unproblematic and the 'contextual and contested character of needs claims' should be recognised.[7] Needs discourses can become politicised discourses or can be used as the rationale for a range of professional expertise. As Fraser notes, 'the politics of need interpretation' must be carefully negotiated.[8]

As the research for this project is specifically concerned with hearing the communities' voices and not those of professionals, the key questions for the consultants were:

- when domestic violence has occurred or is occurring what would help to stop the violence and/or increase safety?
- when people seek assistance for their involvement in domestic violence situations, what else could/should be done to more effectively meet their needs?

In order to address these questions, and the objectives of the needs assessment, a methodology was proposed which involved conducting focus groups with women, men and young people who have been involved in situations of domestic violence. In the following section, a rationale is provided for a modification to the suggested methodology based on our experiences of working with participants who are being asked to discuss sensitive personal issues. We would argue that the methodology we used enabled the collection of more extensive and detailed data, whilst respecting people's anonymity.

### Assumptions underpinning the methodology

Domestic violence is both a public and a private issue. In South Australia, and elsewhere in Australia, community values and attitudes towards domestic violence have tended to maintain it as a private issue making it difficult for change to occur. Often dominant values and attitudes, such as those that define 'normal' gender roles and family relationships, can reinforce a narrow interpretation of needs in relation to domestic violence.

The research team therefore believed that in domestic violence research it was important to:

- illuminate the experiences of those involved from their own frame of reference;
- assume that perpetrators must take responsibility for their violence for interventions to be effective;
- avoid explicitly or implicitly blaming victims for, or implicating the victims in, the violence;
- approach victims as survivors of life-threatening experiences who have many adaptive capacities and strengths; and
- validate the experiences of victims and their children.

[7] Fraser, N. (1989) 'Struggle over Needs' in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 161–187.

[8] ibid, p. 163.

The research took place in a social context that privileges the values and knowledge system of Western, heterosexual culture. As researchers, we adopted a reflexive methodological position in relation to the experiences that were recounted to us by the participants in the research. That is, we used this opportunity to reflect on our assumptions about domestic violence and consider whether the stories we were hearing challenged conventional opinion about, or interpretations of, domestic violence. When contacting participants from different cultural groups, attention was paid to the different cultural factors which restrain people from discussing violence and/or from seeking help, whilst recognising and respecting individual difference and diversity within these groups. We were concerned to ensure that different understandings of domestic violence would be heard and different interpretations of need recognised.

Dobash and Dobash make the important point, however, that:

> *It is unethical to use community groups in a predatory manner, as mere avenues to research subjects, or sources of information, to be used solely for professional ends and discarded once the research results are in. Nor it is acceptable to behave in an arrogant or aloof manner by setting oneself up as the expert, denying the legitimacy of the knowledge and expertise that group members have gained through various forms of direct and continual experience with the problem.*[9]

While feminist research tends to be based on the premise that women are oppressed, it is important (as Kelly stresses[10]) to understand how women categorise their own experience. Women experiencing domestic violence may not see themselves as oppressed and/or they may see themselves as having appropriate methods for handling the violent situations. The commitment of the research team was to elucidate participants' experiences of domestic violence from their own perspective. When interviewing participants the researchers asked questions in a manner inclusive of different perspectives and sensitive to different frames of reference.

A holistic approach was used which allowed for assessment of specific individual and family factors as well as broader contextual and situational factors such as the quality, appropriateness and accessibility of resources. Developmental factors, such as intergenerational factors and the stage of the individual and family life-cycle and so on, were also considered (see Figure 1). In combination with a feminist perspective, the framework allowed the research team to view the needs of people experiencing domestic violence from many different aspects, taking into account the broader social, economic and political context.

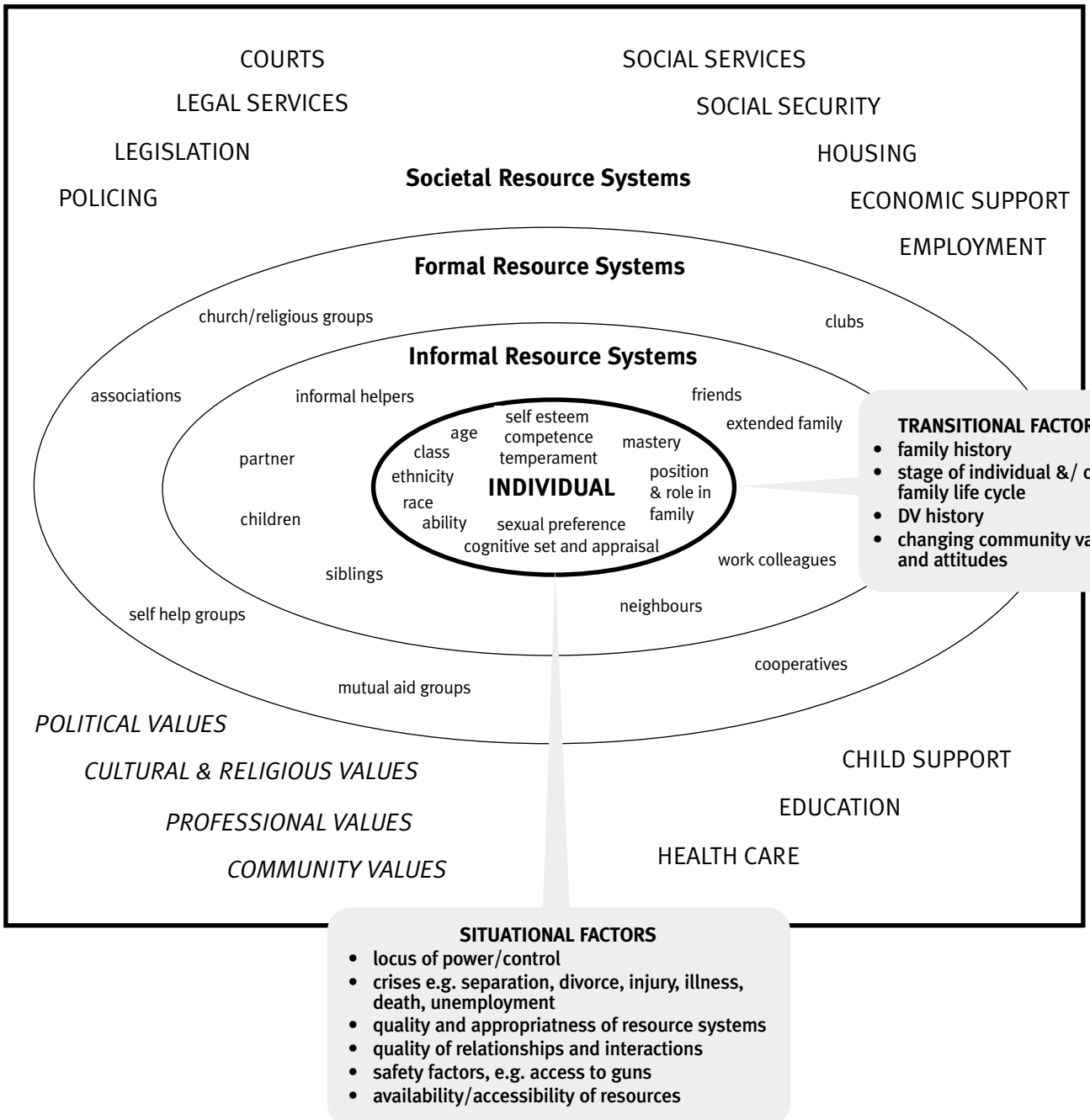
In this consultancy, the researchers integrated the principles they have established in their work with all people – respect for individual difference and diversity within and between groups, acceptance, honesty, confidentiality, empathy and open sharing of knowledge and information. The researchers at all times attempted to be self-critical, constantly checking for their own biases and prejudices, both individually and collectively.

In relation to data collection, it was recognised that fixed format measures for collecting data in which the researchers decide on categories from which the respondents can choose can lead to biased or distorted results. Data collected from the phone-in included quantitative items such as, demographic information, family structure and length of time of relationship. However, the focus in the research was not on quantifying the experience of domestic violence since previous studies have shown that domestic violence is a prevalent and pervasive social problem. Qualitative methods were employed to gain participants' perspectives on what could help prevent or stop domestic violence.

[9] Dobash, R.E. & Dobash, R.P. (1990) 'Research as Social Action. The Struggle for Battered Women' in Yllo & Bograd, op. cit, pp. 69–70.

[10] Kelly (1990) 'How Women Define their Experiences of Violence' in Yllo & Bograd, op.cit.

**Figure 1 Factors to consider in assessing the needs of men, women and young people in domestic violence situations**—(Bagshaw 1998)



Such suggestions from those who had experienced domestic violence could not have been gained from quantitative methods that rely on categories pre-determined by the researchers. A variety of qualitative methods were used and themes were identified from the data collected, using grounded theory where the objective, as Sarantakos explains 'is not on collecting volumes of data but organising the variety of thoughts and experiences the researcher gathers during the analysis of data'.[11]

Collaborative models of research were employed, characterised by shared power between the participants and researchers and an openness to what develops from being 'inside the culture' of the person being interviewed.[12] This involved obtaining feedback on reports of initial findings where possible to ensure that the researchers' interpretations of the data adequately and sensitively captured their experiences.

Because of the sensitive and painful nature of the material discussed with participants, it was important that members of the research team supported each other in the research process and made time to share and debrief feelings generated by the research experience.

## 2.2 Research Methodology

As discussed previously, the Consultancy Brief proposed conducting focus groups with men, women and children who have been involved in domestic violence and a broader methodology which sought input from a wider range of community participants. From the issues raised in the previous section it can be seen that our approach was respectful of the sensitive nature of the material that we asked people to disclose and discuss. A multi-method approach was used, including a phone-in initially around the research questions, followed by interviews and focus groups to generate more specific options around intervention and prevention. This involved having separate interview schedules for male and female respondents and for different groups, and male and female researchers of different ages (questionnaires and focus group questions are provided in the Appendices).

### Rationale for the phone-in

As a modification to the Consultancy Brief, we suggested conducting a phone-in in addition to the focus groups. The reasons for this suggestion are outlined below.

- Despite protections that researchers put in place, focus groups are public forums for people who are being asked for the first time to speak about sensitive issues of domestic violence – this requires participants to not only trust the researchers but also all other participants, which may not always be possible.
- The phone-in allowed complete anonymity.
- The phone-in allowed access a wider range of community participants than would be possible by accessing people for focus groups through current services, and had the added advantage of accessing people who are not currently using services.
- The phone-in provided a rich source of data from which the researchers designed questions for the focus groups, and promoted discussion of possible interventions and preventive strategies in greater depth.

[11] Sarantakos, S. (1993) *Social Research*, Macmillan, Melbourne, p. 269. See also Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) *Bodies of Qualitative Research*, Sage, London.

[12] ibid., p. 272.

### The methodology: a multi-method, phased approach

The consultancy team used a multi-method phased approach to the research:

1. **A literature review** to identify research and current initiatives in the prevention of domestic violence. The findings are summarised in each chapter.
2. **A phone-in** to target the various groups and to gather data around the two research questions outlined in the consultancy brief (ensuring participants' anonymity and gathering more qualitative data than the focus groups alone).

A range of media resources were used to advertise the phone-in:

- regional, metropolitan and national radio, including talk-back radio;
- television news;
- *The Advertiser* newspaper;
- urban and regional print media;
- electronic mail distribution of University of SA staff and students;
- SERCIS Health Survey; and
- a limited distribution of posters.

According to the responses we received the most effective forms of advertising were: The Advertiser (35%); The Messenger Press (35%); television (6.8%) and radio (6.5%).

A deliberate characteristic of the advertising was to leave the term 'domestic violence' out of the advertisements and use the phrase 'abusive relationships' instead. People who had left abusive relationships were clearly able to identify with the wording on the poster and name their experience as 'domestic violence'. By comparison other callers who were calling about their experience explained that they realised their relationship was 'abusive' for the first time when they read the advert. This was particularly the case for people who were experiencing non-physical forms of abuse, as they understood domestic violence to be primarily about physical violence. The decision not to include the words 'domestic violence' in the advertising, or to emphasise physical violence, appears to have been valuable in reaching a wide range of people.

The opportunity to make a call anonymously by telephone provided a non-threatening way for people who were currently living in violent situations to make contact. There was a high personal risk associated with disclosure, including the potential for reprisal from perpetrators. Telephone contact also empowered callers by allowing them to regulate their level of involvement. One woman from the country arranged for her husband to be hospitalised so she could phone. However, another woman rang briefly to complain that the phone-in was being conducted at a time when her husband was home and she was therefore unable to participate. Given the degree of surveillance reported by women callers, this was possibly true for many women still living in abusive situations. However, Friday night and Saturday were the only times the research team had access to the phone-in service. In cases where people were unable to participate, they were interviewed at a later date by arrangement with researchers. Despite these limitations the phone-in involved more than 121 interviews of an average of 30 minutes each.

Separate semi-structured interview schedules were used for victims and perpetrators (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) and extensive notes taken by the interviewers under the headings provided. These were later typed and rigorously analysed, using grounded and reflexive theory. For detailed data from the phone-in please refer to Appendix 3.

3. **Identification of gaps in information.** Recognising the cultural barriers to accessing a phone-in, the gaps in information from various groups were identified. The groups to be followed up included – male victims and perpetrators, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, gays and lesbians, children and young people. During this stage members of the team canvassed service providers, associations, other relevant formal and informal community networks and key informants to determine appropriate ways to access members of the identified groups. It is important to say that research with these various groups around issues of interpersonal violence tended to raise issues that are both unique to particular community groups as well as issues that are common to all.

A combination of methods was used to gain information from members of these marginalised groups including: face-to-face interviews, small group discussions, telephone interviews and a separate half-day phone-in for lesbians. Interviews with service providers and key informants from the targeted communities were conducted as a means of accessing data about some of the targeted groups.

4. **Focus groups** with the targeted groups including: women, men and young people, lesbians and service providers for people from Aboriginal and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Participants for the focus groups were recruited in two major ways:

- participants in the phone-in were asked whether they would be prepared to be involved in a focus group to discuss how people's needs could be met more effectively; and
- service providers were contacted as a means of recruiting participants for focus groups from current service providers and users.

Focus groups were semi-structured with clear parameters provided for the participants, in particular with regard to confidentiality (See Appendix 4). Each group involved one or two observers whose detailed notes assisted the analysis. With permission of all group members, the focus groups were audio-taped and the tapes were transcribed and analysed. Individual members of the group were not identified in any way and the tapes will be destroyed when the research is completed. Specific details about the membership of the focus groups for each community of interest are included in each chapter of the report.

5. **The data analysis** involved all team members at various stages. To ensure rigour in analysis of the data all team members were invited to provide feedback. This provided for an independent check of the data collected by each researcher and ensured a comprehensive approach. This was also a major form of process evaluation for the team in consultation with the Reference Group. A thematic analysis of the data was presented in the first instance with more detailed analysis evolving as the project proceeded.

6. **Report writing.** Members of the Consultancy Team took responsibility for writing different aspects of the report. This report was written in three stages. Two *Interim Reports* provided a focus for discussion and feedback in consultations between members of the research team and with the Reference Group. Presentations were also made at three Forums on the interim findings of the research.

In summary, the methodological process involved:

- reviewing the literature on domestic violence prevention initiatives and related research;
- presentating the *First Interim Report* to the Reference Group;
- advertising a phone-in;
- conducting a State-wide phone-in over two days;
- analysing the phone-in data;

- presentating the *Second Interim Report* to the Reference Group and incorporating feedback;
- identifying gaps in information;
- conducting 3 focus groups, each with 12–14 female volunteers from the phone-in;
- conducting two focus groups for men attending domestic violence groups;
- conducting a focus group with young people who had experienced dating violence and/or domestic violence;
- ascertaining from service providers and others appropriate ways to contact participants from other targeted groups for focus group research;
- conducting focus groups and interviews with services providers for targeted groups, namely Aboriginal communities, non-English speaking background communities, rural communities and gay and lesbian communities;
- conducting focus groups, individual interviews and phone interviews with members of targeted groups, namely gays and lesbians, male victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and young people who have experienced violence in intimate relationships;
- analysing primary and secondary data; and
- preparing and submitting *Final Report*.

## 2.3 Resources for the Project

The Consultancy Team formed for the purpose of this research is interdisciplinary and contributes a wide range of relevant expertise. Members of the team have a wide range of complementary backgrounds, experience and research interests that dovetailed with this consultancy. Collectively, the team has strong links with a wide range of service providers and community groups in both rural and metropolitan areas of South Australia. Dale Bagshaw and Donna Chung from the School of Social Work and Social Policy University of South Australia, shared the coordination and management of the project, including conducting and analysing the research and writing the reports. Ben Wadham (men and violence) and Murray Couch (gays and violence) worked on the phone-in and the follow-up research which involved men (refer to Appendix 5).

The Women's Information Service assisted with the phone-in by providing premises and telephones and specially trained and sensitive staff and volunteers who supported the members of the consultancy team. Following each call, callers who needed assistance were linked by phone to a Domestic Violence Crisis line and/or provided with other relevant information.

Research Assistance from Staff and Students at the University of South Australia

- Dr Sandra Lilburn, research assistant for the Conflict Management Research Group, was a key research assistant for the project. Sandra has relevant expertise in feminist qualitative research and assisted with many aspects of the research and with writing the reports.
- Dianne Halliday, a fourth year Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Honours student undertaking a field-placement, contributed extensively to the research on Filipino women and lesbians who have experienced violence.
- Susan Oakley from the Institute for Social Research also assisted with aspects of the research involving lesbians.
- Heather D'Cruz (originally a member of the Consultancy Team) assisted with aspects of the children's literature review and the phone-in.
- The work of two BSW fourth year Honours students – Carlie Atkinson (Aboriginal issues) and Tanya Russo (children's issues) – enhanced the literature reviews.

- Laurence Field, a research assistant with the Conflict Management Research Group, responded to callers who rang after the phone-in, and analysed the quantitative data from the phone-in.
- Bev O'Brien, research assistant for the Social Policy Research Group, assisted with the coding of the phone-in questionnaires.

The Consultancy Team had access to The University of South Australia's considerable research infrastructure – computers, software, library, research support staff etc. The resources of three research groups were readily available in Murray House on Magill Campus to support the team – the Conflict Management Research Group (which provided the research infra-structure support), the Social Policy Research Group, and the Institute for Social Research. The team also accessed the resources of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Research Centre.

The Reference Group – Sue Foster and Roger Peck, Domestic Violence Unit, Office of Families and Children; Margaret Ripper, University of Adelaide; Alison Wish, Port Pirie Central Mission; Melinda Mayne, Crime Prevention Unit (established by the Domestic Violence Unit, Family and Youth Services), provided ideas and feedback which were incorporated into plans and reports at all stages of the project.

**Table 1: Recommendations by Sector**

| | Community Learning | Service Provision | Policy | Training & Education | Legal Responses | Further Research |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Women | 1.02, 1.03, 1.08, 1.10, 1.22 | 1.05, 1.06, 1.07, 1.09, 1.11, 1.15, 1,16, 1.17, 1.18, 1.21 | 1.01, 1.04 | 1.22, 1.23, 1.24, 1.25, 1,27 | 1.14, 1.26 | 1.10, 1.12, 1.13, 1.20 |
| Men | 2.03, 2.06 | 2.05, 2.07, 2.08, 2.09, 2.10 | | | | 2.01 2.02, 2.04 |
| Young People and Children | 3.11<br>8.05 | 3.02, 3.04, 3.05, 3.07, 3.09, 3.10<br>7.03<br>8.07 | 3.04, 3.06 | 3.01, 30.3, 3.08 | 3.10 | 3.3 |
| People in Rural and Remote Areas | 4.05 | 4.01, 4.03, 4.04<br>8.12 | 4.03 | 4.02 | 8.15 | 4.04 |
| Families from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds | 5.04, 5.06 | 5.01, 5.02, 5.03, 5.05 | 5.04 | | 5.02 | 5.07 |
| Gay men | | | | | | 6.01 |
| Lesbians | 7.10, 7.11, 7.12 | 7.02, 7.03, 7.05, 7.06, 7.09, 7.12 | 7.12 | 7.02, 7.03 | 7.07, 7.08, 7.12 | 7.01, 7.04, 7.12 |
| Aboriginal Families | 8.01, 8.02, 8.03, 8.17 | 8.05, 8.06, 8.07, 8.08, 8.09, 8.10, 8.12, 8.17, 8.18, 8.19 | 8.20, 8.21 | 8.03, 8.04, 8.12 | 8.12, 8.13, 8.15, 8.16, 8.21 | 8.01, 8.06, 8.11, 8.14, 8.19, 8.19, 8.21 |

# 3. Findings from the Research

Findings from the research are grouped into eight sections which focus on the needs of women, men, children and young people; and then the special needs of people in rural and remote areas, from non-English speaking backgrounds; in gay and lesbian relationships and from Aboriginal communities. A summary of the recommendations by sector is tabled on the previous page.

## 3.1. Women and Domestic Violence

### 3.1.1 Introduction: Literature Review

The victims of domestic violence in Australia are predominantly women.[13] Feminists argue that men are violent because of the way gender and power operate against women and children. Attitudes to women, their status in society, traditional sex-role ideology and the privacy of the home and family relationships are all factors which can perpetuate violence and prevent people speaking out about it. Violence against women occurs in all cultures.[14]

In 1993, the National Committee on Violence Against Women clearly outlined that male violence against women is a technique for controlling women which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation and/or intimidation, and which cause women to live in fear.[15] The National Strategy stressed that 'violence against women is a serious national problem that Australians can neither afford to condone nor allow to continue'.[16] It is of concern to find, five years later, that only a small proportion of women subject to violence use crisis services or contact the police and that the majority of these women 'dealt with it themselves'. It has been suggested that it may take two generations before attitudes towards domestic violence can be changed.

> *Abuse of women's rights, be it domestic violence or blatant discriminatory customs or religious laws, are more often than not, simply tolerated or accepted as the norm.*[17]

Studies of domestic violence by Dobash and Dobash (1979, 1984, 1990) and other researchers have demonstrated that

> *violence was used by men they lived with to silence them, to 'win' arguments, to express disatisfaction, to deter future behaviour and to merely express dominance.*[18]

Dobash and Dobash also note that patriarchal patterns influence women's predicaments once violence becomes part of the relationship.

> *Women feel guilty and trapped in these relationships. Guilty because cultural prescriptions make family problems into women's problems regardless of the source. Trapped, because it is considered disloyal to betray patriarchal privacy by seeking help from outsiders and thus expose husbands and the family to potential scrutiny. Women are also trapped by the difficulties with living an independent life free from men.*[19]

[13] National Committee on Violence Against Women (1992) *National Strategy on Violence Against Women*, Commonwealth of Australia.
[14] ibid., p. vii.
[15] ibid.
[16] Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Women's Safety Australia*, ABS Catalogue No. 4128.0, Commonwealth of Australia.
[17] Dobash, R.E. & Dobash, R.P. (1990) 'Research as Social Action. The Struggle for Battered Women' in Yllo & Bograd op.cit., p. 57.
[18] ibid.
[19] ibid.

Dobash and Dobash found that, although female relatives and friends often provide support and sometimes material assistance, the women in their study also experienced dismissive responses and even the helpful responses were short lived. The responses of State agencies were less effective, with responses from the police and social services leaving women even more isolated and husbands in a stronger position.

There is evidence to suggest that women of all ages in all cultures are more likely than men to define themselves in the context of relationships, and therefore may find it difficult to leave their partner or report domestic violence to police. Women's identity is often strongly linked to their male partner and/or to their family, especially where they do not work outside the home. They may be more concerned with the ethic of responsibility and care, or with 'protection of face' for their partner or the family, or may blame themselves for the violence.[20] Further to this if women leave relationships, it is likely that their standard of living and those of their children will fall considerably. This is an added pressure for women with children to remain in abusive relationships.

In general, women in all cultures are strongly socialised to meet the needs of others. Women may find it difficult to assert their interests and needs within a context of responsibility for others, such as children.[21] In addition, women are often caught in no-win/double bind situations and may lack, or perceive themselves as lacking, as many real options as men.[22] These problems are exacerbated where women are economically dependent on men.

Feminist analyses of domestic violence, which have provided the philosophical basis for service delivery and public policy in Australia in recent times, are not without criticism. It is argued that patriarchy does not explain why some men are violent to their partners and others are not, nor does it explain female aggression to male and female partners. More recently the issue of violence in lesbian relationships has raised important theoretical issues for feminist understandings of domestic violence. Critiques of feminist theories of domestic violence occur on two levels. Firstly, within the context of a broader debate about the limits of modernity and grand narratives to explain social phenomena. And secondly, on a community level in the questioning of the extent and impact of domestic violence, which is part of a more conservative backlash against women's rights. In relation to the broader theoretical debate, there has been recognition that theories which focus on men as a class oppressing women as a class do not address the complexities of individuals' social positions, generally and specifically, in relation to domestic violence.

There have been calls for a greater range of approaches to support the diversity of women's needs when they are in violent domestic situations in Australia.[23] Perpetrators and victims of violence come from every culture and from all walks of life, and include the affluent and the educated. Although there are some similarities in the nature of domestic violence as experienced by women from different backgrounds and groups, there is also diversity in that experience. Such women have differing needs, barriers to disclosure or reporting of violence, and differing constraints on accessing services.

This research has explored how the needs of women can differ depending on their situation and how needs may differ according to the type of abuse being experienced. Early research focussed on physical violence, as this was the major threat to women's and children's safety. It therefore considered help-seeking and what assists women to escape/leave abusive relationships. This research

[20] Bagshaw, D. (1990) 'Gender Issues in Mediation', *Mediation UK* 6(4).

[21] ibid.

[22] ibid.

[23] Family and Domestic Violence Task Force, Western Australia (1995) *It's Not Just Domestic. An Action Plan on Domestic Violence*.

examines the needs of women living in domestic violence situations, post-separation needs that may or may not involve violence and the changing nature of needs over time. How people's needs are affected by their location, age, sexuality and ethnicity was considered. People's understandings of their experiences and what they considered helpful were critical to this research.

### 3.1.2 Research Findings from the Phone-In and Focus Groups

The largest group to participate in the research were women survivors of domestic violence. They represented the majority of phone-in callers and focus group participants. As discussed in the methodology, the intent of the phone-in was to gather data about the needs of people around domestic violence. The focus groups then aimed to examine in greater depth the key needs and issues raised by the phone-in. Various themes which emerged from the two data sources will be explored in order to clearly identify these needs.

There were 102 women who were victims/survivors of domestic violence who participated in the phone-in. Three focus groups were held with thirty callers who had telephoned during and following the phone-in. Primarily, the focus group participants were heterosexual women from English-speaking backgrounds. Most identified their cultural background and that of the perpetrator, as Australian. The women's ages ranged from late-20s to mid-60s, with the largest age group represented being between 30–39 years. In most cases, the perpetrator came from the same age group, although he was often a few years older. Nearly all the women had lived in the relationship for over five years and over half were resident in the city at the time. At some stage during the relationship, 12 of the women had lived in a rural area. The decision to finish the relationship was made by the woman in the majority of cases.

All the women in the focus groups discussed sensitive and personal issues. This was particularly difficult for a number of the participants who had recently ended an abusive relationship or who were still coming to terms with their experience. One woman who intended to attend a focus group session found that on the day she 'just freaked out' although she had previously believed that she was over the experience and had regained control of her life. Even though she felt unable to attend, she called to remind the researchers that the effects of domestic violence are deeply felt and can emerge unexpectedly.

We greatly appreciated the extent to which women were prepared to discuss their experiences with us and for the opportunity this affords us to extend our knowledge about domestic violence as an everyday experience in our community. The women who participated all expressed a desire to see improvements in the way that domestic violence is dealt with by the community through education and the provision of better services.

#### Women's experiences of abusive relationships

In general the phone-in callers' experiences were consistent with accounts of domestic violence provided by workers in the area and in the literature. Callers did not provide new information in the sense of the types of abuse which they had experienced. Rather they confirmed the prevalence of physical, psychological, emotional, social and financial abuse, as well as other forms of abuse which acted to isolate and control victims. Callers also described patterns of extreme cruelty often developed in long-term, violent relationships, with the 'strategies' of abuse becoming more diverse over time. In some relationships, acts of cruelty were perpetrated on the adult 'victims', the children in the family (primary and secondary victims) and on the family pets. Humiliation, cruelty, jealousy and the infliction of pain were common experiences for some callers. In almost every case the caller spoke of the perpetrator's need to control. Many variations were described, including the screening of phone calls and an obsession with controlling all aspects of the victim's behaviour, both in and away from the house.

The link between length of relationship and the experience of cruelty is particularly noteworthy because 95 per cent of respondents reported that they had experienced abuse over a period of years. Little wonder that a common theme in women's accounts of violent relationships was the experience of living in constant fear. The findings indicated that 58 per cent of female victims were frightened of their partner compared to only 21 per cent of male victims (although the sample of males was small). The women's stories described a wide range of acts of commission/omission which callers found 'abusive' or 'oppressive'.

#### *Physical abuse*

Of all women callers, 86 per cent reported physical abuse. Physical abuse took various forms, including direct assaults on the body resulting in severe injuries requiring significant medical intervention. Weapons were used in a number of cases and in others there was the threat that weapons could be used. Forms of physical abuse included a wide range of behaviours: driving dangerously in the car, smoking in the house when the woman has a serious respiratory condition, the destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, physical assault of the children, women being locked out of the house on cold nights and left outside until the morning, and sleep deprivation.

#### *Sexual abuse*

The experience of sexual abuse was reported by 50 per cent of the callers. Sexual abuse ranged across the continuum from sexual pressure and coercion, comments about women's unattractiveness, being forced to take part in various sexual acts and penetrative rape. Sexual relations were often considered to be the women's 'duty' and were viewed as part of an exchange in the relationship. Sex was in some cases the 'price' for 'keeping the peace'. If women resisted engaging in sex they were often accused of having sex with other people. The most extreme cases of sexual abuse involved women being beaten unconscious, raped and denigrated by their partners in front of others.

#### *Verbal abuse*

A total of 89 per cent of callers had experienced verbal abuse. Callers reported that verbal abuse was the most pervasive and damaging form of abuse in the long term. The focus of the verbal attacks fell into clear themes. Verbal attacks on women focussed on their intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a parent and a wife. Women were commonly referred to as 'stupid'. Women often said they were labelled as 'sluts', 'whores', etc. Perpetrators were critical of women's appearance generally referring to them as 'fat' and 'ugly'. Women were often compared unfavourably to other women. Mothers were often blamed for their children's behaviour – it was considered to be the result of poor and inadequate parenting for which perpetrators did not take any responsibility.

#### *Emotional abuse*

Emotional abuse was reported by 84 per cent of callers. Emotional abuse resulted in the attribution of blame and guilt to women for problems in the relationship. Constant comparisons with other women impacted on victims' self-esteem and self-worth. Another form of emotional abuse used by both women and men was emotional withdrawal, such as long periods of silence which could continue for weeks, sporadic 'sulking' and withdrawal of any interest and engagement with the partner.

#### *Social abuse*

Social abuse was reported by 67 per cent of callers. Frequently reported forms of social abuse included the systematic isolation of women from family and friends. Techniques included perpetrators' ongoing rudeness to family and friends that gradually resulted in a reluctance to maintain contact with the woman. Alternatively, women discontinued contact with family or

friends because this contact triggered abuse from the perpetrator. Other means by which women were socially isolated included moving to new towns or to the country where they knew nobody and were not allowed to go out and meet people. In some cases women were physically prevented from leaving the home and were kept 'prisoners' in their own homes.

#### *Economic abuse*

Economic deprivation was reported by most women. This included complete control of all monies by perpetrators, no access to bank accounts, inadequate 'allowances' given to women and, if the woman worked her wages were used for all household expenses, whilst the perpetrator's wages were used completely on him. In many instances, the perpetrator controlled all access to food, with food being locked in cupboards and, in some instances, women and children going hungry.

Other forms of abuse included control of transport, control of keys, and stalking. Examples of the wide range of abuses experienced are provided in Appendix 3.

Often the various forms of abuse overlapped in the experience of an abusive event. For example, one woman reported that if she resisted sex, her husband would put her in a headlock, hold her on the bed and rub his very rough unshaven face against hers. She said he did this to avoid leaving bruising and thereby calling the attention of others to what was happening in their relationship.

Whilst the experiences of abuse described concur with previous research descriptions of domestic violence, three significant issues stand out:

- the inadequacy of current measurement tools to accurately describe and define the experience of abuse;
- related to this is the need to give greater priority to the effects of non-physical forms of violence, abuse and intimidation; and
- challenges to the commonly held misconception that domestic violence ends when the couple are not living under the same roof.

### A critique of the Conflict Tactics Scale as a measurement tool of domestic violence

The qualitative data gathered from the stories provides further evidence that the most commonly used measure of domestic violence, the Conflict Tactics Scale, does not and cannot account for every specific act of violence that occurs within the circumstances of the relationship.[24] In particular, the issue of fear and intimidation, one of the most common themes arising from the data, is something which current measurement tools (such as the Conflict Tactics Scale) do not take into account. Therefore, when people are asked questions about 'how often' the violence and abuse happens, responses are not always straightforward, because people may report that 'he only hit me once or twice in a month, but I live in the fear he will hit me everyday'. The phone-in respondents were asked to consider the range of abusive behaviours outlined above. When asked how frequently did abuse happen, 84 per cent responded that they experienced abuse at least once or twice a week or more often. Forty-nine per cent reported abuse as a daily experience.

### Living with abuse: challenging the assumption that physical violence does the most damage

There is a commonly held view that what defines violence is that it includes physical forms of violence and punishment. A popular perceptions of domestic violence is that it is mainly about physical violence in the form of hitting, slapping, pushing, etc. Writers on domestic violence have identified how physical forms of violence are assumed to be worse than other forms of abuse because they are visible. The adage 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me' did not hold true for respondents in this survey, for whom psychological and emotional abuse were often a daily event and far more devastating and long-lasting in their negative impacts.

[24] Strauss, M.A. (1979) 'Measuring Intra Family Conflict and Violence: The Conflict Tactics Scale', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 41: 75–88.

Many of the women's stories commenced with the 'verbal' and 'emotional' aspects of abuse, which to them were more insidious and oppressive in the long term than even some of the life-threatening physical incidents. In particular, many spoke about the unpredictable nature of abusive outbursts (as also indicated in the literature). Psychological and emotional abuses were often built into the relationships, occurring around the 'little things' of daily life. A commonly reported pattern of abuse was one where physical assaults may have occurred ten times a year but the threat of physical abuse and verbal 'put-downs' were used every day. The threats of physical violence were as powerful in maintaining control over women as the actual incidents of violence themselves. One of the reasons for this was that perpetrators had shown that they were capable of carrying out the threats made in relation to physical assaults.

Given these stories, which are supported by the literature, all forms of domestic violence (not just the physical assaults and injuries) should be regarded as serious and unacceptable forms of controlling behaviour.

### Post separation violence: challenging the assumption that ending the relationship ends the abuse

Post-separation violence is another complex dimension of the experience of domestic violence and is a well known issue for human service professionals and the Family Court. Our understanding of 'living with domestic violence' must include those people living under the same roof as the perpetrator and those people who have left the relationship.

Many of the callers who had left their relationships reported various forms of post-separation violence. In its extreme forms it included the burning down of a caller's new home, fire-bombing a woman's business and having a caller sacked from her employment. Other more commonly experienced forms of post-separation violence included making threatening comments during access hand-over visits, not paying child support, threatening phone calls, denying access to joint financial resources and stalking behaviours which resulted in fear, intimidation and injury for victims. The ongoing connection to an abusive ex-partner through the children offered continuing opportunities for intimidation and abuse for a number of survivors following separation.

An additional concern for some callers was anxiety around children being in the custody of fathers who had a history of violence towards the mothers. Whilst post-separation violence is not exclusive to women with children, it would seem that this situation offers an additional opportunity through which the abuse can continue in ways which are not the same for women *without* children. Laws around stalking recognise the severity of this form of domestic violence; however, other responses to the issue of post-separation violence should also be examined.

### Violence and surveillance

Intense levels of surveillance, which leave women without autonomy, were reported by some callers. This experience was exacerbated for women living in rural and remote areas, especially on isolated properties. Strategies of surveillance included not allowing the woman to obtain a driver's licence or paid employment, constant telephone calls to check whereabouts, timing the distances to be travelled (for example, home from work) and/or preventing the woman from closing the toilet door.

One caller talked about how the house was surrounded by an eight-foot high jarrah fence with gates that her husband usually padlocked. After a particularly serious physical and sexual assault, when she had returned from the maternity hospital with their second baby, he went out taking the older child with him and leaving the gates unlocked. The woman said she saw her chance and left, taking the baby with her. However, when she described living with the abuse it became apparent that he had 'allowed her to go to work' each day and 'no one knew what happened' in her private life. This story presented an interesting example of how 'oppression' and 'escape' are managed as part of a

violent relationship – even by the women who did not see going to work daily as an opportunity to escape. The husbands exercised control at all levels of the relationship, which left them with no sense of autonomy.

A number of the callers had left and re-entered their relationships on more than one occasion. Some finally left for good. All of these callers emphasised how difficult it was to leave the relationships and that it was extremely *unhelpful* to have people say 'why don't you leave?' or 'why do you stay?' Furthermore, abusive behaviour often continued, sometimes with more hostility, after the domestic relationship had effectively ended.

## Women's frameworks for understanding abusive relationships

### Women's identities: identifying self

#### *Survivors' narratives*

There were a number of women callers who could be distinguished by their self-construction of an identity based on being a domestic violence 'survivor'. These women were very practised in giving an account of their lives and experiences. They had no trouble moving through a complex story in precise chronological order. There appeared to be a common narrative structure to their accounts. A common feature was the theme of 'self-redemption': 'It was up to me; nobody could help me until I recognised my problem and decided to do something about it'. Having overcome the situation on their own these women then moved out of the relationship and 'took control' of their lives.

> *I woke-up one day and said: 'This is not right'.*

> *Walk away and get on with your life – women have to learn this for themselves.*

Some women resist early intervention or support until the 'self-redemption' associated with this form of identity is 'complete'. Women in this situation are most likely to require direct assistance and support once the relationship has ended.

Well-rehearsed narratives about their experiences also suggest the development of a 'career' as a domestic violence survivor, just as such 'careers' develop for people with a mental illness. This is of concern in that interventions being provided by services may be contributing to developing and/or maintaining this primary identity as a 'survivor' of domestic violence. It would seem that, whilst the need for survivors to recognise that they are not isolated in their experiences is an important part of healing, women may develop a new social identity which may inhibit them from getting on with their lives. Women giving this type of account stand in sharp distinction to the women and men who were telling their story (perhaps for the first time) in a hesitant, less rehearsed way.

Some women survivors reported being 'attracted to that type of man' – that the men were seen (initially at least) as 'exciting' or 'dangerous'. This could be viewed as fitting within an accepted romantic heterosexual discourse about such men's 'attractiveness'. One woman explained that she now knew she was attracted to 'this type of man', and from this insight about herself had 'learned' to avoid 'men like that'. Another woman's comments pointed to an interesting dynamic of these relationships, which is also talked about in different ways within the literature on violence. She explained that 'you could be in a room with a thousand other people and you are just drawn to people like that [violent]. I don't know what it is, it is a kind of magnetism'. Women also reported that the men with whom they became involved in abusive relationships often were seen by family and friends and defined by social standards as being 'a good catch', 'a nice man', and so on. This invalidated the women's experiences. In some such cases women were labelled as 'crazy', 'depressed', etc.

## Women's identities: social identifications

### *Victims' narratives*

Women's identities as 'victims' are partly maintained by community and social attitudes to domestic violence. Domestic violence is something that is not talked about or is avoided: 'It would have helped if someone had asked a direct question like, "Are you being beaten?", rather than hedge around things'. Attitudes to domestic violence also contributed to women's decision to remain silent about their experience: 'I do not tell anyone in the community because my husband is well respected and I would not be believed'.

Myths about marriage and the family (also subscribed to by the women themselves) lead to women trying to maintain a public image of perfection and 'normality'. The myth that women must keep the marriage and family together and have a happy family is so powerful that women often feel they are to blame, or that it is their fault if the relationship is not working. Some women maintained this image by not seeking help for physical injuries (or being prevented from doing so by the perpetrator), or by telling their general practitioners that they 'can't cope' or were 'stressed', which meant that doctors prescribed medication and/or referred them to counselling for 'the problem'. This resulted in the 'symptoms' of domestic violence (such as anxiety, depression, etc), rather than the abuse, becoming the focus of the intervention. Women in rural areas often did not tell anyone about the violence because they felt ashamed and feared that they would not be believed. They were also concerned to maintain a 'respectable' image of their family within the community.

## Women's identities: across the relationship span

The dominance of the narratives (previously described) in the phone-in prompted the researchers to examine further in the focus groups the ways in which women's perceptions of themselves and their partners changed throughout the relationship. All of the participants described the beginnings of their relationships as very exciting. Romantic notions of 'being in love' and associated behaviours were described by participants. When entering into these relationships none of the participants had sensed or been concerned that there would be violence and abuse. No single reason was offered for the transformation of the relationship from one described in terms of romantic ideals to one characterised by violence. For one participant, the abusive behaviour began on her wedding night; for others it was a number of years later before violence and abuse featured in their relationships.

Physical injury (after a car accident) and illness (after heart surgery) precipitated the violence for two of the participants' partners. Having had a loving relationship prior to these incidents neither of these women felt free to 'desert' their partners.

In discussing their perceptions of their experiences, some women found the benefit of hindsight enabled them to understand better the transformation in their relationships. In many of the cases, where this was the participants' first permanent relationship, they often assumed that the violence and abuse was one of those 'problems which everyone has in a relationship' that would be worked through eventually. It was not until a later point in the relationship that they recognised that the problem was beyond resolution.

### *Changes in women's perceptions of self*

When participants were asked about how they would describe themselves at the beginning of the relationship compared to the end, their responses invariably described a dramatic transformation, as indicated in the table below.

**Table 2: Women's changing descriptions of self in their abusive relationships**

| Beginning of relationship | End of relationship |
|---|---|
| Young, naive, trusting, gullible | Vulnerable, paranoid, guarded, untrusting |
| Career minded | Not committed or confident to work |
| Trustful, happy | Wary, unhappy |

In general, women reported detrimental changes in their perceptions of their psychological and social selves along the following lines:

**Table 3: Women's perceptions of their psychological/social state in their abusive relationships**

| | Beginning of relationship | End of relationship |
|---|---|---|
| **Psychological state** | Confident, independent, intelligent, thoughtful | Anxious, insecure, frightened, sad, useless, low self esteem, sick, betrayed |
| **Sociability** | Outgoing, sociable, excited, hopeful, relaxed, trusting | Disorientated, weak, unsure, isolated, lost, introverted, empty, tired, exhausted |

However, perceptions of self tended to be highly variable and reflected differences in an individual's psychology and social location. For instance, while some participants described themselves at the end of their relationships as 'nervous', 'without my own identity' or as 'a failure', others described themselves as 'stronger', 'more determined', and 'more accepting of self'.

**Table 4: Variations on women's descriptions of changes to self in abusive relationships**

| Beginning of relationship | End of relationship |
|---|---|
| Simple, fat, uneducated, poor | Intelligent, beautiful, kind caring |
| Shy, needy, lonely, young | Strong, confident, scared, angry |
| Strong, adventurous, kind, participating | Strong, adventurous, determined, thankful |

One woman who had experienced two separate abusive relationships offered two very different perceptions of self in the transformation of these relationships:

**Table 5: Changes in one woman's perceptions of self in two different abusive relationships**

| | Beginning of relationship | End of relationship |
|---|---|---|
| **First relationship** | Naive, needy | Terrified, plotting, both powerful and powerless |
| **Second relationship** | Excited, open, confident | Shattered, insignificant, worthless, depressed |

It is evident that the sense of self that women hold at the beginning and at the end of their relationships with abusive men changes. However, the changes vary according to a range of individual variables, such as self-esteem, social context and the nature of the abuse. One participant, whose abusive partner worked in a management position, felt at the end of the relationship like one of his employees:

*I just felt like the employee – 'Do this, do that!' – I was just some showpiece wife.*

While the descriptions of self vary, the transformation of a seemingly loving relationship to one of abuse has a profound impact on a woman's sense of self.

#### *Changes in women's perceptions of their partners*

Consistent with the findings from the phone-in, participants in the focus groups commented on how different and unpredictable their partners' behaviour seemed during the relationship. Many also noted how their partners presented a public self which differed greatly from the private self, and how they felt this made it more difficult for others to believe or accept their experience of domestic violence.

Describing the change in their perceptions of their partners from the beginning to the end of the relationship, most reported a transformation from a 'romantic' man, with whom they were 'in love', into somebody who was 'controlling and abusive'. Participants characterised the transformation in their perceptions in the following terms:

**Table 6: Changes to women's perceptions of their male partners over the course of an abusive relationship**

| Beginning of relationship | End of relationship |
|---|---|
| Romantic, charming, interesting, exciting | Controlling, manipulative, possessive, bully |
| Loving, kind, caring, trustworthy, protective, devoted | Abusive, cruel, wicked, violent, angry, evil, terrible, frightening, hateful, vicious, untrustworthy, liar |
| Happy, funny, interesting, exciting | Unpredictable, insecure, unhappy, confused, pathetic, pitiful, ridiculous, confused, crazy |

All participants characterised the changes in their perceptions of their partners in oppositional terms as a result of the abuse that had transformed their relationships.

### Women's understanding of the reasons for domestic violence

When asked about what triggered incidents of violence and abuse in the relationship, a large number of callers recognised after long periods of violence and abuse that there was nothing specific which could be identified – 'anything and everything' triggered the abuse. Specific triggers identified by the women can be categorised into three groups:

- external stressors such as unemployment, stress at work, money problems;
- perpetrators' use or abuse of alcohol and medication; and
- perpetrators' perception of women as not adhering to their traditional feminine roles or as not carrying out required tasks in the relationship (for example, by failing in household or child-rearing responsibilities, by obtaining a job or undertaking training).

More generally when callers were asked about why domestic violence occurs, the majority of explanations could be viewed as falling within the framework of a 'disease' model. Violence was usually characterised as being symptomatic of another underlying condition. Common explanations were that perpetrators were not satisfied with their own identity and life, or suffered abuse as a child. Within this broad 'disease' framework the responses could be categorised as one of the following:

- inter-generational transmission of violent behaviour (callers often described abusive adult relationships as the 'natural' outcome of growing up in a family where there was violence);
- mental health explanations (for example, post-traumatic stress disorder, affective bipolar disorders, psychoses, etc.);

- perpetrators' poor self-esteem and insecurity;
- personality explanations (including a need to be in control, a bully, sadistic, 'Jekyll-and-Hyde' personality, etc.);
- egocentric thinking and behaviour (perpetrator's preoccupation with meeting his own needs; failure to accept responsibility for own actions/failures and a need to blame, or 'take it out on', someone else);
- poor communication skills;
- physical health problems and disability (for example, multiple sclerosis, side effect of heart surgery, brain injury from a car accident);
- the role of alcohol and medication in triggering or decreasing violent behaviour was identified by some callers.

Other explanations for violent behaviour in males were more broad-ranging and included social and cultural factors, such as:

- gender socialisation and stereotyped ideas about the roles of women and men; and
- the need for power and control over partner.

Significantly, women who offered the latter explanations had often studied at a tertiary institution since leaving the abusive relationship and had subsequently developed a theoretical analysis of their personal experiences. Some of the callers who had used formal domestic violence services also gave these explanations.

### Women's knowledge about the nature of domestic violence

It is clear that knowledge or information about the nature of domestic violence provided an important backdrop against which many women were able to assess their situation. A common theme from the data collected was the relief women experienced in discovering that the term 'domestic violence' described their experience. The domestic violence theoretical framework, which acknowledges that domestic violence is more than physical violence, seemed to be well understood by many of the callers (sometimes because of the advertisements for the phone-in). This was evident in the way many of the callers told their stories – they did not need to be prompted about different ways in which the abuse occurred. Knowledge about the nature of domestic violence represented an important turning point for many callers.

> *I could have sought out counselling at an earlier stage but I didn't recognise my experience as 'abuse' for a long time.*

> *[Once I got] information about who to contact, who to talk to, what you could do, I contacted legal services, the doctor, a counsellor, the domestic violence unit, Women's Information Service and the Clovelly Park Community Health Centre.*

It should be noted that finding out about the common experience of 'domestic violence' seemed to be primarily useful for women in heterosexual relationships and for children living in domestic violence. It is not necessarily as valuable to people in same sex relationships (see Sections 3.6 and 3.7). Understanding their situation gave some women the impetus to change other aspects of their lives. For others, a change in circumstances was a catalyst for gaining insight into the abusive relationship.

A number of callers included their achievements in pursuing further study or new employment opportunities in their stories. Some of these callers reported that they went on to study and employment *after* having separated from an abusive relationship. Others commenced employment or

study during their relationships and in some cases this triggered the abuse or made the violence worse and/or the relationship less tolerable. For others, their active participation in self-development courses was a way of becoming stronger and gaining self-confidence, as a means of resisting the oppressive power of the relationship (at least initially), rather than a strategy for getting out.

The commonly described 'cycle of violence' was understood by a large number of the callers. Whilst for many it was helpful to know that they are not the only people experiencing such a situation, a dangerous edge to this understanding was that in some instances it was being used to develop survival skills in a violent relationship, as the following quote from a caller living in a violent relationship demonstrates:

> *I am a counsellor now, so I know the cycle and have learnt to be a bit passive when I need to*.

It is clear that knowledge about domestic violence is not enough. Women use this knowledge and other narratives to explain their situation and to construct a sense of identity that is not defined simply by the experience of domestic violence.

### Living in abusive relationships

People living with abuse were asked about their understanding of their relationship and why they remained in the relationship. They reported that they continued in the relationships for a range of reasons.

Reasons for staying can be categorised as:

- values and beliefs about family and relationships;
- some aspects of the relationship were positive despite the violence;
- protection of the children from the perpetrator (some callers feared that if they left the perpetrator may get custody of the children and they would be prevented from seeing them and/or they were fearful of how the perpetrator would treat the children);
- level of restraint exercised by perpetrators, particularly where victims had illnesses or disabilities;
- perception of few alternatives;
- geographical location; and
- limited access to resources to leave and/or re-establish themselves.

Many of the women who remained in abusive relationships were able to identify their situation as 'domestic violence' and were also able to give a clear account of their reasons for remaining in the relationship. These reasons often incorporated other narratives about traditional aspects of feminine identity, such as being 'wives and protective mothers' rather than as a 'victims of violence'.

Other narratives, or considerations, that were important to women living in violent relationships included:

#### *Ideals of romantic love*

Women callers often talked about other aspects of their relationships with the perpetrator – 'when it was good it was very good' or 'I still love him in spite of the violence'. They resisted an interpretation of the situation that saw their partner solely as 'a perpetrator of domestic violence'. Such identifications disregard their overall perceptions of the man and their feelings toward him.

> *[It was] hard to get out because there were some good factors. Perpetrators are not bad people, but it is bad behaviour … [It is an unhelpful response to say:] 'He's an idiot, an arsehole, tell him to f…k off'. Abuse is not the whole person.*

This is critical information for legal and social services, in responding to people in situations of domestic violence.

#### *A belief in their partner and his capacity to change*

A number of women reported leaving relationships when they gave up the belief that the person would change. One woman returned to the relationship after her partner completed a 16-week domestic violence perpetrator program. However, she reported that on returning he claimed his behaviour 'was not that bad by comparison with other members of the group'.

#### *Images of 'happy families' or a desire to live as 'normal' a life as possible*

Women made judgements about their domestic situation by prioritising a range of considerations. Sometimes, however, these considerations were not within their immediate control, for example, material circumstances and geographical location. Rural women for instance reported particular difficulties in living in close, conservative communities. One woman, who had left the relationship once before, explained that she actually felt safer living with the perpetrator.

> *He has stalked me before, so I felt safer living under the same roof, then I knew where he was. His cousin did a murder suicide and I thought he could do the same thing.*

### 'Ending' abusive relationships

Women living with domestic violence may often be trying to shield themselves from the scrutiny of others by living up to expectations of normalcy and not drawing attention to themselves. They often engage in a complex process of negotiation and conflict management in their personal relationship and may or may not decide to include others in this process. Service providers need to be aware of the complexity of abusive relationships for both victim and perpetrator.

A common theme among the stories reported by people who had left abusive relationships, and those who had tried to leave, was the extent to which they had made attempts to 'change' so that the situation would improve, or the abuse would stop. This is in direct contrast to commonly held myths about people not being committed to long-term relationships and that divorce is 'too easy' an option for people. The evidence from the phone-in contradicts such notions and suggests a high level of commitment to resolving the conflict in the relationship. None of the callers left relationships after one incident of violence or abuse, but rather remained until the abuse either became intolerable for them, there was violence and abuse directed at the children, the perpetrator was gaoled for assault and/or a restraining order was taken out against him.

With the benefit of hindsight it is sometimes easier for women to identify the process of negotiation within a violent relationship or, more specifically, the point where they were no longer prepared to continue negotiating and took the decision to leave.

Reasons given for leaving the relationship included:

- Feeling prepared/ready to leave – often required planning and support from informal and formal networks. This response is consistent with the 'self redemption' narrative described previously. It is important to recognise women's active agency in this process.
- Giving up the belief that the perpetrator would change, and/or recognising that the severity of abuse and injuries were too great. These responses can be understood in the context of the 'disease' model discussed earlier. There is reason to be concerned about the pervasiveness of this model for explaining interpersonal violence and the extent to which people may find health-related reasons to excuse the perpetration of violence in the first instance. Many callers reported that doctors and psychiatrists treated them for 'depression' and 'anxiety' and the perpetrator for 'stress-related illnesses'. Callers also reported that when they presented at hospitals with life-threatening injuries the perpetrator stayed with them and was then allowed to take them home.

One victim was treated at the same hospital in intensive care many times and yet the nature of the abuse was not identified. General practitioners also treated the symptoms of abuse and yet rarely asked about the causes. Again, perpetrators often stayed during the consultation, making it impossible for victims to disclose the violence.

- Developing awareness that the children were being affected by the violence – either as secondary victims witnessing the violence or experiencing violence directly. The effects of domestic violence on children as reported by parents in the phone-in and focus groups are discussed in Section 3.3 of this report.

## Seeking help from others

The reasons women gave for deciding to seek help are complex. The reasons that help is successful or unsuccessful are very much influenced by the particular situation. It is important to identify help-seeking as one of many options that those experiencing violence may pursue and not to see it as the only or most constructive option at any given time. What seems more important, the data suggests, is that the community and service providers directly involved with domestic violence situations be encouraged to recognise the complexity of the experience and the difficulties women face in negotiating abusive situations. The opportunities available for providing help should be maximised according to where they intersect with the desire of victims and perpetrators of violence to seek help.

### Reasons for not seeking help

Of all callers, 10.3 per cent had not sought help for the abuse. Victims/survivors of domestic violence either had not told anybody or had delayed telling people about their situations for four main reasons.

#### *Feelings of embarrassment or shame*

Many callers reported feeling embarrassed or ashamed about their violent relationship. Related to this was the strongly held fear that if they told people they would not be believed, particularly where perpetrators were well known and respected in their families and communities.

#### *Feeling responsible for the violence*

Some callers reported that they felt responsible for the violence and this feeling prevented them from telling people about the situation. Silence extended the opportunity to take control and find a means of resolving the conflict in private.

#### *Fear of ending the relationship*

An interesting point raised by one caller was that it was hard to tell anybody about abuse because implicit in the telling was the risk that the relationship would end.

> *It's a unique situation – it's not as easy to leave as to stay in it. I was too frightened to tell anyone because I thought he would leave me. Taking the first step to end the relationship is the hardest. I still loved him and thought I couldn't do any better. It took a long time before I felt nothing.*

#### *Not knowing who to contact, or being unable to make contact*

One caller reported wanting to go to counselling to share her situation but the cost of the service was prohibitive. Callers who had experienced abuse in their families of origin reported that they did not know who to tell about the violence and abuse. Others were unable to make contact with others outside the home because of the perpetrators' constant surveillance.

## Seeking help

Most callers (89.7 per cent) reported that when they had eventually decided to seek help they chose either informal and/or formal support networks. These included family and friends, the police, medical services, and social and legal services. It is difficult to make general comments about the helpfulness of various networks because the experience depended upon a number of variables. For instance, the experience of seeking help from family and friends varied, with some callers reporting extremely valuable support and others finding that they were not believed or were blamed as being at least partly responsible for the violence and abuse.

### *Responses from informal networks*

The number of reports of helpful/unhelpful responses from family and friends were equal (both 14.5 per cent).

*Helpful responses* included being believed by family and friends and offers of practical help such as the provision of housing or help in finding accommodation, child minding, financial and social support. Such assistance suggests a strong commitment to the person seeking help. In some instances, mutual commitment deterred some callers from telling family members or friends about the situation, either because they did not wish to worry them or because they did not want to put them at risk from the perpetrator.

*Unhelpful responses* included those that minimised or disregarded the experience, those that attributed blame to the victim for the violence, and those that insisted that the women remain in the relationship. Responses which disregarded the complexity of the situation, such as asking, 'Why don't you leave?', were reported to be particularly unhelpful. These responses suggest a lack of understanding of the situation, reflecting instead some of the popular misconceptions about domestic violence.

### *Responses from formal networks*

Many comments were made about a wide range of formal services, as can be seen from the data, and some common themes emerged.

A number of women talked about how some domestic violence service providers were reluctant to accommodate their interpretation of the problem, but rather pursued a narrow focus on the actual violence in the relationship. Many women, however, had a sense that their problems were worse after they had left the relationship because they had lost just about everything, and wanted to focus on rebuilding their lives.

Generic services, such as those provided by police, general practitioners and lawyers, seemed to be common points of contact between survivors and service providers. General practitioners, counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists were seen to be helpful on occasions. However, treating symptoms with medication, and a failure to provide support outside of the therapeutic environment, seemed to detract from the respondents' experience of these services. The services provided by police and general practitioners were seen to vary in quality and helpfulness. Given the significance of the services as a point of first contact, it would seem pertinent that resources be invested in improving the quality of generic services, in particular educating service providers about the nature of domestic violence and appropriate strategies for detection, referral and intervention.

A frequent complaint about both services and informal networks was not having their stories of violence and abuse believed by those they told. This was the first and critical step for many callers – if they were not believed this further exacerbated feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and responsibility for the violence. The failure to respond also increased the sense that many women had of having to cope on their own, reinforcing the narrative of 'self-redemption', discussed earlier.

A common revelation in the stories told by victims/survivors was that they rarely acknowledged their experience of violent and abusive relationships to general practitioners or counsellors. Rather, they presented with 'symptoms' such as depression, anxiety or more general 'inability to cope' explanations. In a number of cases, this resulted in referrals to psychiatrists that led to 'symptoms' being treated with counselling and medication. The underlying abuse in the relationship was not considered in this process, rather the medical model was used as the framework for understanding the problem.

### Summary of the responses from various service providers

#### *Police*

The South Australian Police have placed considerable effort in the area of domestic violence in recent years and the benefits are now being reported by some women callers who provided positive feedback about the responsiveness of specially trained police in situations of domestic violence. However, other female callers reported unhelpful responses, especially from male police. No male callers (victims or perpetrators) reported helpful police responses.

Helpful responses included:

- taking control of the situation by removing the perpetrator, helping with restraint orders, charging the perpetrator with assault, arresting the perpetrator, removing firearms (some callers commented that, despite their resistance at the time, such decisions made by the police had been for the best in the longer term); and
- helping the woman to leave the situation by returning with her to collect possessions.

Unhelpful responses included:

- believing the perpetrator;
- viewing the woman as provoking the abuse;
- not taking the matter seriously;
- providing inadequate protection for the victim; and
- poorly trained ancillary staff at the police station.

#### *Medical services*

Medical services were often a first point of contact for people living in abusive relationships, but as discussed, the problem can remain unresolved where treatment of symptoms is emphasised.

Helpful responses included:

- providing respite care in hospital;
- counselling and courses run by one psychiatrist;
- supportive doctor;
- doctor giving husband medication; and
- doctor advising of options for leaving.

Unhelpful responses included:

- health professionals not understanding the nature of domestic violence, and/or ignoring the problem;
- judgemental professionals;
- treating only the physical injuries;
- treating the effects of violence (for example, anxiety, depression) as illness and giving medication;

- health professionals allowing the partner to attend all consultations so the survivor could not speak about the violence; and
- not being believed.

#### *Social and legal services*

There were mixed reports about the usefulness of counselling, particularly couple counselling, where there was domestic violence. Counselling for children was generally not found to be helpful and in some cases children viewed this intervention as a sign of punishment.

#### *Lawyers*

Generally lawyers were reported to be both helpful and supportive to women who were leaving situations of domestic violence. The cost of lawyers, however, was prohibitive to women in cases where legal aid was unavailable. One caller did not find her lawyer to be supportive or believing of her.

#### *Family Court*

Concern was raised by many mothers about Family Court decisions which allowed children residence or contact with the perpetrator. They feared for their children's safety.

#### *Women's shelters*

There were mixed responses to shelters. Callers reported that it was essential to have somewhere that women could go in order to leave violent relationships. Shelters were positively regarded as providing social support for women in similar situations, linking women to other services, providing assistance with further accommodation and furniture, and for other material help.

Negative experiences of shelters included:

- teenage sons being refused accommodation (the separation of the family at that time being particularly difficult);
- judgemental attitudes of shelter staff when women considered going back to the relationship;
- general problems of communal living being heightened by families being in crisis and living in fear;
- not feeling safe from other residents in the shelter who were sometimes violent or had a mental illness; and
- being asked to leave the shelter due to mental illness or other behaviour not considered to be appropriate.

These issues are not new and have been recognised and are being addressed within current reforms to domestic violence services in South Australia.

#### *Domestic violence support groups*

There were positive and negative experiences associated with domestic violence support groups. Some callers found the groups helpful as they met other people who both believed them and understood the situation they had experienced. Negative experiences included: some callers did not feel that the group helped them to 'move on' and sometimes the experience of recounting events made them feel worse.

#### *Counsellors, social workers, psychologists*

Women reported mixed responses from these service providers.

Helpful responses included:

- listening and believing their stories;

- not judging them for remaining in the relationship;
- being compassionate;
- normalising their experience and explaining the nature of domestic violence; and
- providing links to services and giving practical information on how to survive.

Unhelpful responses included:

- not referring on to the range of appropriate services;
- not following up the progress of clients; and
- long waiting lists for counselling.

One caller reported that the worker saw the couple together and wanted to send them to seminars, which the caller did not consider relevant. Counselling seemed inappropriate to some callers if the perpetrator denied or lied about having a problem.

#### *Self-help books*

Reading self-help books was identified by some callers as a source of help in understanding their situations and making changes. This represents an important addition to formal and informal supports that may or may not be consistent with approaches taken by service providers to addressing domestic violence. The 'purple domestic violence book' which was produced by one of the DVAGs was recommended by some callers. In particular the 'recognition of domestic violence' and 'what to do when deciding to leave' sections were identified as valuable.

#### *Ministers of religion*

Ministers and priests were identified by some as important sources of formal help with their relationships, however there were mixed reactions to their effectiveness. Helpful responses included giving information about how to leave the relationship and offers of support to make that choice. Unhelpful responses included being told to remain in the relationship or to 'try harder'.

#### *Other helpful/unhelpful factors*

In hindsight many callers identified practical aspects that would have helped them, for example women reported that their partner always accompanied them to the doctor and they were seen together. One woman was never able to state the reason for her injuries and later, when she left the relationship, the doctor's notes were used in court as evidence 'against her'. Everyday practices of human service workers should provide opportunities for people to raise their problems away from their partners.

One caller mentioned that the use of the word 'crisis' in promoting services was misleading for her. She did not see herself as being 'in a crisis' as she lived in the abusive relationship all the time.

### 3.1.3 Needs of Women Victims and Survivors of Domestic Violence

#### Needs whilst living in abusive/violent relationships

Participants consistently reported that their experiences of living in abusive/violent relationships were complex and the solutions were equally complex. The needs of women in domestic violence situations cannot be characterised in simple, linear terms where the sole objective of service provision is to get them out of the situation. Women's perceptions of their relationships, of themselves and of their partners undergoes a transformation from the beginning to the end of the relationship, and this transition is affected by a range of variables in the relationship. For most

women, the level of control exercised by the abuser inhibits their capacity to fully recognise or act upon the alternative options available to them. Strategies for intervention must accommodate the differing experiences of victims/survivors.

From women's responses about what would have helped them whilst in the abusive relationship two main suggestions were offered.

#### *Need for unconditional support*

A number of the participants indicated that they needed support from a person, or a network of people, who were not 'scared away' by an abusive partner or did not know him. For some participants this was because they either did not want to burden their family with the knowledge of their abusive relationship, or they felt that their family would not believe and/or support them. Where participants had not told family or friends about the violence prior to leaving, they were usually 'shocked' as everything had appeared to be fine on the surface. For some participants this fed their fears about not being believed. Whilst others were believed, responses which were unhelpful such as 'Well why don't you leave', indicated of a lack of understanding of their experiences.

The support needed could either be from a friend, a support group or a professional. The important criteria identified were availability and flexibility, according to the woman's needs. What women needed was someone who:

- was not judgemental about the relationship;
- would support them through their complex decisions as to whether they remained or left the relationship;
- was available at all times, especially 'after hours';
- understood that it was not easy to 'just leave' the relationship; and
- would continue to support them, despite their partners' behaviour.

Some women expressed a preference for female support, finding contact with men at this time threatening.

**1.01 It is recommended that the Ministerial Forum for the prevention of Domestic Violence give priority to community education and development activities that target family, friends and work colleagues in order to raise awareness of the needs of victims of domestic violence and appropriate responses to these needs.**

#### *Need to be asked directly about the abuse*

Participants all reported that it helped if people asked them *specifically* and *directly* about violence and abuse in their relationship, rather than asking generally how things were in the relationship (which some interpreted to mean that people really did not want to hear or know about the violence and abuse). This may reflect a sample bias, as the participants were open enough about their experiences to take part in a focus group and thus may also have been more open to this level of directness.

Some participants had found it helpful whilst living in the relationship to be told by a professional that things would *not* change, especially if they had considered leaving the relationship. However, timing was important; some were not ready to accept such a message. This highlights the complexity of the separation transition for most women. As one woman suggested, support is needed from

> *someone who understands that you still feel love for the person but hate the behaviour… Someone who doesn't try to rush you but explains that the behaviour is inappropriate*.

In offering support, people should be clear that abusive behaviour is not acceptable, at the same time recognising that the woman may need to set her own pace in resolving her situation. Clearly there will be instances where intervention needs to be more pro-active. For instance, in cases where women repeatedly report with severe injury, the level of control that is being exercised in the relationship may inhibit all opportunity for individual agency.

**1.02 It is recommended that domestic violence awareness campaigns and community development activities continue and that they:**
- **focus on promoting community values and attitudes which condemn violence and abuse in relationships;**
- **promote equality in relationships; and**
- **encourage community responsibility for domestic violence, not in lieu of State responsibility, but as an adjunct to changing attitudes.**

### Changing needs at different stages in the separation transition

The differences in the needs expressed by women suggest that there are transitional stages between the beginning and ending of an abusive relationship. These stages vary and may not be experienced by all women, but some common themes were evident in the research.

The major problems that women in violent and abusive relationships had to overcome were:

- an overwhelming sense of failure in their relationship or marriage;
- difficulties in identifying inappropriate behaviour; and
- feeling responsible for the violence.

#### *Women's needs in the transformation of violent relationships: expectations about marriage, responsibility for the relationship and the violence*

The social pressure to be in a long lasting and successful relationship is often internalised by women and reinforced through the responses of friends, family, work colleagues and the media. The shame associated with 'marriage failure' makes women reluctant to tell people about their experiences and to seek help. Commitment to maintain the relationship resulted in many women enduring considerable abuse and violence over a long period of time . There were three main issues related to the endurance of violence and abuse:

- some women loved their partners and enjoyed other aspects of the relationship;
- there was an internalised pressure to 'make the marriage work'; and
- this was the first relationship for a number of women and so they were uncertain about whether violence was 'normal' or 'acceptable'.

Women's uncertainty about the acceptability of some types of abuse in relationships, such as verbal abuse, reflects a common understanding of domestic violence as physical violence. Non-physical forms of violence and abuse are not necessarily viewed as 'domestic violence' in the general community. However, most women reported that fear and intimidation generated by emotional or verbal abuse can be more detrimental in the long term than physical violence. The broader-based definition of domestic violence used by agencies needs to reach women who may not currently recognise abusive behaviour in their own relationships. It is important to challenge perceptions that non-physical violence and abuse are 'normal' parts of inter-personal relationships.

Feeling responsible for the relationship and for the violence is a very common experience for women in violent relationships. In many respects women's sense of responsibility for the violence reflects more than just traditional female conditioning about relationships. Perpetrators often do not take responsibility for their behaviour and blame their partners. Participants were often relieved to find the term 'domestic violence' to explain their situation, as this provided a name for their experiences and reduced their feelings of responsibility for the violence. Knowing about domestic violence helped some women leave a violent relationship. However, evidence suggests that whilst there continues to be positive or enjoyable aspects in the relationship many people will remain, as 'it is not all bad', or because 'he has his good points'.

Many women may be alienated or threatened by an either/or choice, between their commitment to themselves and to their relationship. However, over time many women reported an escalation in the forms of violence and abuse they experience in their relationships. Some reported that they did not leave a relationship when violence escalated to an intolerable level – they continued in the abusive relationship in relative isolation to a point where their perceived and actual options became severely restricted. Some women were extremely resilient and/or reluctant to acknowledge that violence reflected a problem with the relationship as a whole. These women's needs must be very carefully considered.

The research indicated that in general domestic violence victims had incredibly high levels of commitment to their relationships and nobody left after a few incidents of violence and abuse. Women usually took some responsibility for the violence against them at the beginning of their relationships; however, over time most recognised that it was 'not their fault'. Despite this insight some women continued to live in relationships where there was violence because of their commitment to the relationship and/or the institution of marriage. For many women, recognising that violence is unacceptable took a considerable period of time. With this in mind, the following recommendations aim to heighten community awareness of the nature of relationship violence both to prevent its occurrence and act as a catalyst for early recognition and intervention.

**1.03 It is recommended that domestic violence campaigns continue to highlight men's responsibility for violence.**

**1.04 It is recommended that domestic violence campaigns include a focus on non-physical forms of domestic violence – such as emotional and verbal abuse – as these forms are often more prevalent, more pervasive in their effects and less likely to be considered violent and abusive by the community.**

**1.05 It is recommended that service providers, and others conducting education and prevention campaigns, re-examine the most effective ways to transmit the message that relationship violence is unacceptable.**

### Women's needs when deciding to leave the relationship

The needs identified in respect to women leaving an abusive relationship were generally practical in nature.

#### *Need for information about services*

Women leaving abusive relationships need to know about relevant agencies – specialist domestic violence services and generic human services – and the services and referrals they can provide. This is especially important where women have been systematically isolated over a period of time.

A central service that provides victims with information about their rights, and practical information about removalists, legal services and so on would be useful. One participant used the example of the public awareness campaign for the *Quit Line*, a service to the members of the community who are in the process of giving up smoking. Domestic violence services need to be well publicised so women can be supported in their decisions. Information should be everywhere – on bus shelters, public toilets, in the media, in the workplace: 'The issue needs to be out there' and 'in your face'.

Practical information about generic services is important; for example, knowing you can ask to speak to a social worker at Centrelink if you are in a situation of domestic violence. Many people found it difficult to talk about their situations in a public space. The option of a private consultation with someone who understands their experiences should be available in all human service organisations.

**1.06 It is recommended that a central telephone number for information about domestic violence be continued and that this number:**
- **is widely publicised;**
- **provides practical information and referrals on a 24-hour basis; and**
- **is available toll-free for rural callers.**

**1.07 It is recommended that a 'one-stop shop' approach to service delivery for families experiencing domestic violence be adopted to maximise opportunities for victims to access services and for the provision of educational material for the community generally.**

**1.08 It is recommended that information about domestic violence be prominently displayed in many different public areas including shopping centres, public toilets, workplaces, schools and sporting venues. These displays should include information about:**
- **the various forms of domestic violence;**
- **where to get help; and**
- **how individuals in the community can help to ameliorate, prevent or stop domestic violence.**

#### *Need to secure assistance from professionals*

Many women seek help for the 'effects' of domestic violence (such as anxiety, loss of confidence, physical injury) and not for the actual violence and abuse in their relationships. It is critical for these women to have their story taken seriously by those to whom they disclose, as well as being provided with practical help and support.

In disclosing domestic violence to human service workers and other professionals, some participants found that responses differed depending on the types of abuse they had experienced. They found that professionals, such as police, doctors and social workers, were more sympathetic when there was evidence of physical abuse than when they were describing non-physical forms of abuse.

Many women described the medical profession as resistant to dealing with domestic violence. A number reported that doctors treated the symptoms of abuse (including serious injuries) without labelling the cause of the problem or referring to appropriate services. Where doctors labelled the violence and appropriate referrals were made, women's needs were better served. A number of participants were prescribed medication by general practitioners or psychiatrists whilst they were in violent relationships. They were diagnosed as 'depressed', 'anxious', and 'unable to cope'. A number were also prescribed medication when relationships ended. There were mixed responses to the benefits of this medication.

Women reporting to hospitals and doctors surgeries after abusive episodes were often interviewed with the perpetrator present, making it difficult to disclose the cause of their symptoms or injuries. These women suggested that protocols be introduced to make it mandatory for women to be

interviewed separately from their partners (male and female), especially where there are unexplained injuries or illnesses.

The need for services to be more accessible was also emphasised. In particular, extensive waiting lists for counselling were prohibitive and long-term affordable accommodation for women and children was often difficult to locate. Easy access to support groups for women and improved services for men were also needed.

**1.09 It is recommended that all professionals give priority to strategies that acknowledge the importance that victims and survivors of domestic violence place on finding some level of personal control over their lives.**

**1.10 It is recommended that the following strategies be implemented:**
- **research the impact on victims and perpetrators of domestic violence of prescribing medications for the symptoms and effects of domestic violence;**
- **reinforce the application of protocols for identifying domestic violence in General Practice, psychiatry and in hospitals;**
- **encourage doctors to see female patients alone, not with their partners, especially where there are unexplained symptoms or injuries;**
- **examine how the structures of General Practice can be made more responsive to the needs of people in domestic violence situations; and**
- **inform all doctors of the range of domestic violence services and ensure doctors can make appropriate referrals.**

*Need to make plans to leave the relationship*

Many women report that meticulous planning was essential when preparing to leave a violent relationship. The 'purple domestic violence book', produced by the North Eastern Domestic Violence Action Group, contained valuable information for this purpose. Many of the participants commented on how crucial financial assistance was to the plan to leave – the cost of leaving can make planning difficult.

**1.11 It is recommended that information booklets on domestic violence containing information useful in planning to leave a violent relationship be made available in a wide range of diverse locations, including health services, social security services, and legal services.**

*Safety needs when leaving the relationship*

Most women leave the family home to escape domestic violence. As safety is a key issue at this time, participants reported that it would help if the perpetrator was removed for a 24–48-hour period so that they could safely gather up their things and leave. The current practice of having a police escort to the house makes it hard for women to collect the things they need; however, it was acknowledged that the presence of police gave women and children a level of safety and protection. All women expressed a strong preference for the perpetrator to be removed and for the women and children to be allowed to stay in the home safely.

**1.12 It is recommended that detailed research be conducted into a number of safety issues that effect women and their children during separation. This research should assess the viability of:**
- **removing perpetrators from the family home for a period of 24–48 hours whilst family; members pack up and leave the home; and**
- **removing the perpetrator permanently from the family home.**

### Post-separation needs

Many women experience some of their most difficult times after leaving the relationship, and in some cases felt worse after leaving, as they had lost everything. This was related to a number of issues including:

- experiences of post-separation violence;
- dealing with the legal system;
- lack of support;
- loneliness; and
- poverty.

#### *Need for protection*

The level of violence sometimes increases after women leave the relationship. Abuse can take the form of stalking, constant threats or physical and sexual assault in the months immediately following the separation. Many women felt the need for more protection at that time.

> *You're safe living in the relationship but when you leave and he's lost his security that's the most dangerous time*.

Some participants found stalking to be especially frightening, as this form of abuse is less predictable than the abusive behaviour experienced within the relationship. A related concern for victims living in rural areas was perpetrators' access to guns. Participants argued that where there was evidence of domestic violence, perpetrators' guns and gun licences should be revoked.

Post-separation violence was often experienced when children were handed over to their father for visits. For a number of participants this was a regular anxiety-provoking event for the following reasons:

- women generally had to come face-to-face with the perpetrator;
- the perpetrator made threatening or disparaging comments to the woman (often in front of the children);
- children were upset and anxious because they did not wish to go with their father;
- women worried about the children's safety and whether and when they would be returned; and
- fathers made disparaging comments to their children about their mothers.

Participants expressed the need for more access/hand-over centres and for improved services offering 'supervised' access.

**1.13 It is recommended that research into the safety of women and children during separation be extended to include the post-separation period. This research should address:**
- **the effectiveness, of existing measures for enforcing and policing legislation with regard to guns and the gun licences of domestic violence perpetrators, in particular in rural areas; and**
- **the feasibility of providing more supervised hand over/access centres which are empathic to the needs of both parents and the children involved.**

#### *Need for accessible, affordable legal support*

Experiences with the legal system are generally negative and draining for all parties. A common issue for female victims was the lack of access to legal aid. This was a particular issue for participants who had not finalised property settlements and had assets but no, or limited, income. Where participants were not able to access legal aid there were complaints about the cost of legal

representation, particularly when the court proceedings were deliberately delayed or prolonged by partners in high-paying jobs. Women experienced this as a form of post-separation abuse.

Many participants found it hard to find a lawyer who was supportive and experienced in dealing with domestic violence cases. Where participants had been to the Women's Legal Service or specific domestic violence services, such as women's shelters, they had generally been assisted with supportive legal representation.

**1.14 It is recommended that access to affordable legal advice and legal representation be increased for victims of domestic violence.**

***Need for professionals to normalise victims' responses to domestic violence***

A number of participants who had sought help from formal services after leaving an abusive situation had been told by professionals that they were experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some women found this positive as the label normalised their experiences. Other labels given to women when they were in violent relationships, such as 'depressed' or 'neurotic', were generally viewed as unhelpful.

**1.15 It is recommended that helping professionals avoid using labels that implicitly blame victims for the effects of domestic violence on their social and psychological functioning, and strive to use language and approaches which 'normalise' the feelings and behaviours of domestic violence victims and which puts their responses in a context.**

***Need for accessible, affordable counselling services, including after-hours support***

Once women left the abusive relationship, and the immediate needs for shelter, income and safety were met, many found counselling helped them to make sense of the experience and adjust. Often the need for counselling was acute at nights, when counsellors were not available. Participants reported that after-hours support services, staffed by professionals or by volunteers who had an understanding of their experiences, would be helpful. Other participants stressed the importance of being able to access services when needed – it was not helpful to have to make an appointment six weeks ahead.

**1.16 It is recommended that affordable and accessible support be provided for victims of domestic violence with consideration given to:**

- **after-hours access;**
- **using both paid workers and volunteers;**
- **early intervention; and**
- **diversity of location, for example the provision of workplace counselling to all employees.**

***Need for respite***

Some women with children identified the need for respite or assistance with the parenting role, especially in the early stages of leaving the relationship. Similarly, many women needed social security support for a short period immediately after ending an abusive relationship, so that they could recover from the trauma and readjust their lives.

**1.17 It is recommended that services offering respite child care be available to parents who are leaving or have left a domestic violence situation, staffed by people who are familiar with the impact of domestic violence on children.**

**1.18 It is recommended that women leaving domestic violence situations, and who are applying for the New Start allowance, be given a temporary exclusion from the Social Security work test requirements for three months, to enable them to adjust and prepare for seeking employment.**

*Need for appropriate accommodation and financial security*

The experience of poverty, particularly where there are children, can be enough to make women return to violent situations. Actual or potential poverty can also deter women from leaving violent relationships in the first instance.

Women reported having to live on income support after leaving abusive relationships and, where there were realisable assets, they were not necessarily eligible for these payments. Many women pointed out that even though they (and often their children) were the victims of violence, it was the perpetrator who remained in the family home and continued to go to work and receive a salary. Women and their children often lived in temporary accommodation and endured poverty. In some cases the children blamed their mother for their poor material circumstances. This compounded the difficulties faced by women negotiating their way out of violent relationships and illustrates to the outsider why it is not easy to 'just pick up your things and leave'.

**1.19 It is recommended that research be undertaken to document the range of ways in which poverty is experienced by women and children leaving violent relationships.**

## Special needs

*Needs relating to medical conditions and disability*

Two participants had been in relationships that became violent after their partners had experienced medical traumas – in one case a head injury and another, heart surgery. For both participants their relationships had been positive until that point and their commitment to the relationship was sustained by the hope that things would improve or 'get back to normal'. The positive aspects of their relationships were never restored. When partners have a disability or medical condition, women are under greater pressure to remain in the abusive relationship.

**1.20 It is recommended that further research be undertaken to identify the special needs of victims and/or perpetrators with a disability.**

*Needs of women whose partners are members of a particular profession*

A small number of women reported particular problems in accessing help because of the nature of their ex-husbands' professions. Some professions, such as the armed services, require families to move frequently and women are removed from the support of families and friends. Confidentiality is also an issue, in particular where the families of professionals live in closed communities (again in the services), or the perpetrator has easy access to relevant information (as with lawyers and police). In some professions there can be a cultural attitude that normalises controlling behaviour and does not see it as abusive. If a partner is a family lawyer or judge, women report particular difficulties during separation and divorce proceedings.

**1.21 It is recommended that special strategies be developed to assist victims and children whose partners work in relatively closed, hierarchical and/or mobile professions; for example, in the police force, the legal profession or in the armed forces. Strategies should address:**
- **confidentiality issues;**
- **the lack of access to extended family and supportive friends;**
- **authoritarian attitudes which may be an accepted part of the culture of the profession; and**
- **the impact of holding a high-status public position in the community both on victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.**

### Needs relating to prevention, early intervention, professional education and training, and service provision

#### *Need for improved education and training of medical practitioners*

Education of professionals about domestic violence and comprehensive assessment and referral processes are needed to meet the complex needs of those experiencing domestic violence.

In recent years many human service professions have put considerable effort into professional education and development around domestic violence. However, women reported that many general practitioners, doctors in hospitals and psychiatrists still indicated to the victims of domestic violence that they did not understand the nature of the problem and did not make appropriate referrals when domestic violence was identified.

**1.22 It is recommended that improvements in professional education and training be made, to assist doctors to identify and refer domestic violence cases appropriately. This should involve the inclusion of social and feminist theories of domestic violence in the curricula of courses for:**
- **all undergraduate students in the medical profession;**
- **psychiatrists; and**
- **general practitioners engaged in post-graduate training and continuing education.**

#### *Need for improved education and training of police*

Feedback about the quality of police services has been increasingly positive in recent years. In particular, police working in specialised domestic violence units were identified as providing helpful responses. However, the need for *all* police officers to have training in domestic violence was identified.

**1.23 It is recommended that domestic violence education and training continues to be provided to all South Australian police officers, including police in rural areas, and quality control strategies be put in place to ensure effective outcomes.**

#### *Need for improved education and training of human service professionals*

Ongoing education and training is needed for all human service professionals in the area of domestic violence.

**1.24 It is recommended that domestic violence education and training be provided for all public contact staff in human service agencies.**

**1.25 It is recommended that domestic violence continues to be included in the curricula of professional undergraduate courses such as social work, human services, nursing, teacher education, allied health education, childcare, as well as post-graduate and continuing education courses.**

*Need for changes to legislation and the legal system*

Many needs in relation to legislation and the legal system were identified by participants in this research.

- Many of the participants argued that the onus of proof for the abuse should not be on the victim, but on the perpetrator.
- Participants noted that restraining orders are too hard to get and don't take into account non-physical forms of abuse. These orders can often generate the greatest fear for victims.
- The law was not seen to take threats seriously and placed an unreasonable onus on the victim to provide dates or other evidence of violence, requiring a level of documentation that is generally impossible for a woman living in a state of constant surveillance.
- The adversarial nature of the legal system was generally seen as a problem. The adversarial, 'win at all costs' approach ignores the complex human needs and fears in situations of domestic violence.
- The high cost of legal representation is a problem, as is limited access to legal aid.
- Participants reported compromising with ex-partners so as to finish their associations with them, despite not achieving what they felt was a fair settlement in relation to division of property.
- Participants suggested that domestic violence should be taken into account in property settlements to ensure that victims are compensated for the abuse.

**1.26 It is recommended that consideration be given to reviewing domestic violence legislation, and the responses of the legal system to domestic violence, to ensure the provision of adequate protection for victims of violence. In reviewing legislation and legal practices consideration should be given to:**

- **ways of ensuring that the burden of responsibility for violent behaviour is on the perpetrator;**
- **strategies to make it easier for victims of violence to take out restraining orders to protect them from physical *and* non-physical violence and abuse;**
- **appropriate ways of collecting evidence of domestic violence that do not unduly burden victims with the onus of proof;**
- **ways to compensate victims for the long and short-term effects of domestic violence;**
- **ways of allowing victims of domestic violence, and their children, to remain in their homes and/or near their communities after separation; and**
- **the effects of domestic violence on children in all decisions involving residence and contact (refer to the section on children).**

*Need for changes to specialist and generic services*

Women in the research identified a number of issues around services that have already been discussed. Further recommendations are as follows.

**1.27 It is recommended that accessible and affordable courses continue to be provided for the survivors of violence which focus on:**
- **raising self-esteem;**
- **assertiveness training;**
- **conflict resolution skills; and**
- **effective parenting strategies for parents of children who have been exposed to domestic violence.**

## 3.2 Men and Domestic Violence

### 3.2.1 Literature Review

Discourse on the issue of domestic violence is historically situated in the context of male violence toward women. Feminist women, and women from many different backgrounds have focused on male violence in domestic situations, with a view to dealing with the significant safety issues that it poses for women and children. In the broader context, male violence in the home is just one issue amongst many that illustrates the oppression of women by men. This context has promoted the development of domestic violence services that address the needs of women who are victims of male violence. Since the early 1980s, services in Australia have also been extended to deal with issues of male perpetrators of domestic violence. Significantly, however, in recent times the issue of female violence toward men has also emerged. This section will discuss both the phenomenon of male violence toward others and the issue of female domestic violence toward men in the context of domestic violence services.

#### Men as perpetrators

Research into domestic violence, over the past two decades in particular, has focused upon the predominance of male violence. Violence generally, and domestic violence more specifically, is mainly carried out by men. Egger explains that men in Australia commit about 91 per cent of homicides, 90 per cent of assaults, nearly all sexual assaults and nearly all armed and violent robberies.[25] Researchers such as Dobash and Dobash, Daly and Wilson, Straton, Yllo and Gondolf have all discussed the preponderance of male violence toward women.[26] Furthermore, these researchers, amongst many others, also explain the context of male dominance within which this male violence occurs.[27] As Kaufman explains:

> *The act of violence is many things at once. At the same instant it is the individual man acting out relations of sexual power; it is the violence of a society – a hierarchical, authoritarian, sexist, class divided, militarist, racist, impersonal crazy society – being focused through the individual man onto an individual woman.*[28]

[25] Egger, S. (1995) *A Preview of Violence in Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, AGPS, Canberra.

[26] Dobash, R.E., Dobash, R.P., Daly, M. & Wilson, M. (1992) 'The Myth of Sexual Symmetry in Marital Violence', *Social Problems* 39(1): 71; Straton, J.C. (1994) 'The Myth of the Battered Husband Syndrome', *Masculinities: Interdisciplinary Studies on Gender* 2(4): 79-83; Yllo, K. (1984) 'The Status of Women, Marital Equality and Violence against Wives', *Journal of Family Issues* 5(3): 307–20; Gondolf, E.W. (1993) 'Reconceptualising Batterer Program Evaluation', *3rd National Conference for Professionals Working with Men Who Batter*, Proceedings, Minneapolis.

[27] Eisikovits, Z. & Edleson, J. (1989) 'Intervening with Men Who Batter: A Critical Review of the Literature', *Social Service Review*, September: 384–414; Pease, B. (1991) *Evaluating Treatment Programs for Violent Men: Dilemmas and Priorities*, The NSW Local Domestic Violence Committees, Medlowbath, p. 1; Jouriles, E.N. & O'Leary, K.D. (1985) 'Interspousal Reliability of Marital Violence', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 5(3).

[28] Kaufman, M. (1987) *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, p. 1.

Archer concurs, explaining that ending male violence is a daunting task requiring a community prevention program which would 'strike at the root of so many entrenched cultural beliefs which underlie the relations of male dominance'.[29] Gilbert believes that 'male violence may even outrank disease and famine as the major source of human suffering'.[30]

The point of placing such emphasis upon male violence toward women, children and other men is twofold. Primarily, this emphasis focuses attention on the safety issues which women have faced, and continue to face, at the hands of violent men. Secondly, this emphasis also points to the relationship between being male, social constructions of masculinity and the perpetration of violence. Thus, as we will see, contemporary male perpetrator programs focus on (amongst other things) the ways that men understand masculinity as a technique for changing men's violent behaviours. As a consequence of the predominance of male violence toward women, domestic violence services have largely been developed to assist women who are victims of domestic violence.

Interestingly, Bob Pease explains that although services may have initially been established to assist female victims of domestic violence, there has remained a conceptual loyalty to externalising, and thus misdirecting, the causes of violence toward women.[31] Responses by services and others, both legal and within the community, have often misleadingly 'redirected responsibility for the violent behaviour from the perpetrator to [other] factors', such as alcohol use, stress or the women may have somehow 'asked for it'.[32] In the 1980s, legal reform and an acknowledgment by service providers and professionals in the field of the failure of previous therapeutic paradigms, prompted the establishment and running of male perpetrator programs. In 1983 in Adelaide, South Australia, the first men's program[33] was funded by the then Domestic Violence Service.[34]

### Male perpetrator programs

David Adams outlines five models of therapeutic programs for addressing male perpetrators' domestic violence that have been used over the past three decades.[35] Programs are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in many cases they consist of a combination of approaches which include the following models:

- insight model;
- ventilation model;
- interactive model;
- cognitive behavioural and psycho-education models; and
- profeminist models.

These models have had varying currency during different periods over the past three decades or so and assert different reasons for male violence. Contemporary approaches favour the profeminist model of addressing men's violence.[36]

[29] Archer, J. (ed.) (1994) *Introduction: Male Violence in Perspective*, Routledge, London, p. 1.

[30] Gilbert, P. (ed.) (1994) *Male Violence: Towards an Integration*, Routledge, London p. 532.

[31] Pease (1991).

[32] ibid.

[33] This program was a structured 12-week group based upon the principles of violence is an issue to be addressed; a man's violence is always a man's responsibility and, while his behaviour is violent, the issue is the man's need to have power and control over others. This program has been evaluated (Poynter 1989; 1990).

[34] This is now the Domestic Violence Unit located within the Office for Families and Children, Department of Human Services.

[35] Adams, D. (ed.) (1988) *Treatment Models of Men who Batter: A Profeminist Analysis*, Sage, California.

[36] Pease(1991); Grace, C. (1996), 'Service Responses to Perpetrators of Domestic Violence', *National Domestic Violence Forum*, Proceedings, Parliament House, Canberra.

### Contemporary philosophy of male violence programs

The profeminist model for addressing male violence considers that male violence is a practice that serves to create and maintain an inequality of power between men and women. Power and control, within the context of the culture of male dominance over women, comprise the fundamental focus of therapeutic attention and the man is counselled on his attempts to control his partner.

This model is predominant in Australia in contemporary service provision for men who have engaged in domestic violence.[37] Throughout Australia, many programs use the approach outlined by Jenkins,[38] which involves inviting men to address the practices they adopt that are stopping them from changing their violence and to consider alternative ways of relating with others.[39] Grace further suggests that across Australia therapeutic models such as those outlined above are currently considered inadequate for dealing with male violence.

The profeminist approach to addressing male violence has both a therapeutic and reformist philosophy. Therapy is provided to assist the man to take care of others and to improve his communication and relating skills, and reform is promoted by discussing and challenging the man's sexist values and expectations and controlling behaviour.[40] The recent release of the South Australian Domestic Violence Unit's Competency Standards for Intervention Workers reflects this philosophy and consolidates a gendered approach to addressing male violence in South Australia.[41]

### Men as victims and masculinity politics

Domestic violence is a term that has become analogous with male violence toward women in domestic settings. When Walker made this clear analogy in the *American Psychologist Journal* in 1989, the claim was met with some controversy. The controversy that this analogy invokes generally involves a response of equivalence, that is, it is contended that women are just as violent as men, and men and women are equally seen to be the victims of domestic violence.[42] Skirting the issue of the legitimacy of male violence for the moment, it is relevant to consider how such claims of equivalence are made.

The equivalence argument is predominantly based upon the use of strictly quantitative methodologies. Two forms of such methodologies are the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and hospital admissions data. The CTS, used by researchers Straus and Gelles in the *Behind Closed Doors* telephone study in America is an incidence recording tool.[43] One partner (not both) is telephoned and asked about their experience of violence in their relationship. Acts of violence are recorded according to a violence incidence scale ranging from minor violence (including 'discussing calmly', 'crying', 'shouting') to severe violence (including 'threw something at him/her', 'beat him/her up'). Thus, this methodology records the type of violence and incidence of violence by reducing the context of violence to a single quantitative act. Other problems with the CTS include:

- there is no distinction between offensive and defensive acts;
- there is no consideration of the meaning or intent behind the acts;

[37] Grace (1996), p. 6

[38] Jenkins, A. (1990) *Invitations to Responsibility: The Therapeutic Engagement of Men Who Are Violent and Abusive*, Dulwich Centre Publications, Adelaide.

[39] Grace (1996) p. 7.

[40] Pease (1991) p. 7.

[41] Domestic Violence Unit (1997) *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers*, Report, Adelaide.

[42] Wadham, B.A. (1996) 'The Myth of Male Violence?' *XY: Men, Sex, Politics* 6(1): 6–8; Straton (1994); Archer (1994) p. 4.

[43] Straus, M.A. & Gelles, R.J. (1986) 'Societal Change and Change in Family Violence from 1975–1985 as Revealed by Two National Surveys', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48: 465–79.

- there is no discrimination between the intent and effect of the violent act;
- the types of violence are poorly differentiated (for example, 'having kicked, bit, hit or tried to hit with an object, beat up or choked, or threatened with a knife or fired a gun' are all naively grouped as severe violence); and
- violence is only looked at in one year and the history of the violence in the relationship is not considered.

Hospital admission data similarly fails to record the context of the violence that is being reported. These methodologies record the act of violence and do not record the context in which that violence occurs.[44]

Briefly, it is important to recognise that female violence toward men is not a dominant issue within the domestic violence area for two key reasons. Firstly, the issue of domestic violence has arisen due to the safety issues which women have faced from living with men who are violent towards them. Secondly, domestic violence (amongst many other issues such as child care, the division of labour and women's public representation), has been a sites where the struggle for women's equality has been contested. Female violence toward men remains a poorly researched issue and one that requires further investigation.

The equivalence argument and the interest in men as victims of domestic violence are not new. Since the emergence of second-wave feminism, and the establishment of the domestic violence discourse, various individuals have attempted to redress what they consider a 'gender imbalance instigated by feminism'.[45] Subsequently, reasons why the equivalence argument emerges every so often may include a desire by some men to re-swing the pendulum back to 'the ways things were'. Other factors that contribute to the perception that men are not as likely to be victims of domestic violence is that they are less likely to disclose domestic violence toward them because of potential ridicule, social stigma and victimisation.[46]

The 'equivalence argument' is a response that is described well by sociologist Bob Connell's notion of 'masculinity politics'.[47] Masculinity politics primarily occur within the field of gender relations. Masculinity politics is a term coined by Connell, referring to the mobilisation of men's political interests along explicitly masculinist lines; that is, the current conceptions of masculinity are used as the moral legitimacy for addressing men's issues.[48] The relevance of this is in the ways that men's needs are contested within the field of domestic violence service provision. For example, some men's claims for regaining the ground that feminism has made are mobilised by their sense of what is 'normal' and what it means to be a man or a woman.

Connell[49] suggests that there are four strands of masculinity politics: masculinity therapy, hegemonic interests, queer politics and gender transformationists.[50] These political positions are to some extent determined by the individual's notion of masculinity. Connell describes four dominant masculinities: hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, complicit masculinity and marginalised masculinity.[51]

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[44] See VicHealth Injury Surveillance System (1994) 'Domestic Violence', *Hazard* 21.

[45] Harrison, J. (1978), 'Warning, The Male Sex Role May Be Dangerous to Your Health', *Journal of Social Issues* 34: 65–86; Farrell, W. (1993) *The Myth of Male Power: Why Men Are the Disposable Sex*, Simon & Schuster, New York; Biddulph, S. (1994) *Manhood*, Finch, Sydney; Coochey, J. (1995a) 'Domestic Violence Survey Provokes a Row', *IPA Review*; Coochey, J. (1995b) 'All Men are Bastards', *The Independent Monthly*.

[46] Archer, W., Newburn, T. & Stanko, E.A. (1994) *When Men are Victims*, Routledge, London.

[47] Connell, R.W. (1995) *Masculinities*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

[48] ibid. p. 204.

[49] ibid. pp. 61–64.

[50] *Masculinity Therapy*

Connell's (1996) masculinity therapy refers to the men focusing on liberating their sense of self and manhood. Connell (1996) also calls it a 'psychological recovery movement'. Connell is referring to the psychological, socio-biological and pop-psychoanalytic trend in these men's investigations of gender and masculinity. At its base is the complicit masculinity that accepts current and traditional structures of gender but is not usually militant against them. This is also considered a 'bourgeois movement' comprising white, middle class, straight, middle-aged men (Connell, 1996, p.62; Flood, 1996, p.15; Pease, 1997, pp. 18–19). The 'men's movement', accommodates these

Hegemonic masculinity forms the basis of men's relations of dominance with women and with other men. Subordinate masculinity relates to a way of being masculine that is popularly viewed as failing to meet the standards of what is commonly expected of men; for example, gay masculinities. Complicit masculinities are expressed through men's failure to challenge hegemonic forms of masculinity. These masculinities use ideas and practices that maintain men's structural privilege, although not necessarily in explicit ways. An example might be men who claim that they are as equally oppressed as women. Marginalised masculinities are those that are structurally and materially excluded from the dominant ways of being a man, for example, as in the case of Aboriginal men.

In short, the way that men, and women for that matter, contest their needs is enmeshed within their lives and their sense of gender. A 'men as victims' discourse is often situated within a hegemonic masculinity, best expressed in the claims of equivalence by writers such as John Coochey (see *All Men are Bastards*), Warren Farrell (see *The Myth of Male Power*) and most recently in Australia and in a less explicit fashion, Steve Biddulph (see *Manhood and Raising Boys*).[52]

This typology of masculinity politics is important as a context for policy makers and service providers considering men's 'needs claims' in domestic violence as well as in other arenas such as men's health, boys education or family law issues. In the discussion of the research findings the relevance of this typology will become further evident, particularly when we begin to think about prioritising men's needs generally and the needs of different groups of men specifically. What is particularly clear from this exposition is that men's needs are not unproblematic but are claims made within specific political contexts and thus need to be considered as such.

In summary, male violence toward women remains a serious issue. Contemporary wisdom favours an approach that focuses on issues of power and control within the context of male dominance. Female violence toward men is a cloudy and under-researched issue. There is a need for basic research that

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ideologies in what Flood (1996) and Clatterbaugh (1990) call 'men's rights', 'men's liberation' and 'mythopoetic men'. Men's rights express their resentment at the construction of the male role (Clatterbaugh 1990, p. 62). They also adopt an explicitly adversarial stand toward feminism and women, sometimes lobbying governments, legal institutions and feminist organisations to change what they see as an imbalance of power. Their intention is to restore balance in a world where feminism has gone too far (Flood, 1996, p. 23). The men's liberation perspective espouses that the male role is a health hazard (see Harrison, 1976). In some areas of men's liberation the belief exists that women impress a form of sexism on men. Farrell explains: sexism is discounting the female experience of powerlessness, the new sexism is discounting the male experience of powerlessness (Farrell, 1987, p. 18). Again, because the focus is on the impact of the sex role upon the individual, no historical or social perspective of men is adopted. These men work upon the notion that men's sex role is bad for them and that men's lives are 'alienating, unhealthy and impoverished' (Flood, 1996, p. 22). Men's liberation comes from addressing the perceived sexism inherent in feminism and in some cases fighting for equality in a 'feminist-driven world'. The mythopoetic groups Flood (1996) and Clatterbaugh (1990) discuss are 'founded on the conviction that masculinity derives from deep unconscious patterns' (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 11). These ideas are based upon paradigms of Freudian and Jungian psychology. They too work upon a sex role paradigm, and believe that the male sex role is harmful to men. However, they also believe that rather than negotiating equal terms between men and women, there needs to be a return to the 'deep masculine' (Bly, 1990). The 'deep masculine' is a metaphor for men's biologically essentialist nature.

*Hegemonic Interests*

Connell (1995) suggests that hegemonic interests are represented through changes in culture, politics or business. Hegemonic interests are those which drive the machinery of decision-making, resource allocation and the construction of dominant cultural meaning. The New-Right attacks on the welfare state are an example of the operation of hegemonic masculine interests (Connell 1996, p.62). Clatterbaugh (1990) suggests that sex role ideology supports hegemonic interests by providing a static and covertly essentialist notion of what is masculine (Connell, 1987, p.50). It is this hegemonic form of masculinity that forms the basis of many people's understandings of gender. While some men may want to change this, conservative interests believe it is 'perfectly natural for men to be the protectors and providers of women; it is natural for men to be socially and politically dominant' (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 9).

*Queer Politics*

Queer politics has emerged from the gay liberation movement, a movement against heterosexist masculinity. This movement is different from the broader 'men's movement' for this important reason: it involves a group joining in union to challenge a universal axis of oppression for them, namely hegemonic masculinity and heterosexism. This mobilisation reflects a subordinated form of masculinity strategically addressing hegemonic masculinity in the effort for emancipation.

*Gender Transformation*

Transformative gender politics has its heritage in the women's movement and the consciousness-raising groups which emerged from women's challenge to male dominance. Flood (1996, pp. 21–22) calls this group of men the anti-sexist strand. The core assumption of this strand is that contemporary hegemonic masculinity is oppressive to women as well as being harmful to men in various ways. These men are sometimes called profeminist and engage in activities that illuminate the broader social implications of masculinity in society. Profeminist politics would fall within what Connell (1995, p. 220) refers to as 'exit politics'. Exit politics involves men attempting to relinquish their hold on the 'patriarchal dividend' (the benefits of being male) and working with women and 'others' to address the oppressive structures and practices of male dominated society. Profeminist men reject the emphasis placed upon men's sex role by the other men's political groups in varying degrees.

[51] Connell, pp. 204–224.

[52] Coochey (1995a); Farrell (1992); Biddulph (1994).

moves outside of the traditional quantitative and incidence based research to research that explores the social and cultural context of female violence within relations of male dominance, for example, studies of women's violence as self defence.[53] At the same time there is also a need to understand claims about female violence toward men as potential strategies for deferring issues of power and control and reaffirming the relations of male dominance.

How men interpret their needs will influence what services they may go on to access. It is important to consider how models of service delivery can be made more responsive to men generally and those in violent relationships in particular. On a macro level, it is essential to have an understanding of men's perceptions in order to provide targeted, appropriate and effective prevention and early intervention measures.

#### Conclusion: researching men and violence

The needs of men who have engaged in domestic violence or who have attested their experience of violence have been structured in historically and socially specific ways over the past three decades or so. Within the domestic violence literature from Family Systems Theory[54] to the Straus and Gelles *Behind Closed Doors* research[55] to, in contemporary times, socio-political approaches to domestic violence such as Narrative Therapy,[56] there remains a strict adherence to the notion of people as victims or perpetrators within this field. The distinction of perpetrators and victims continues to serve an expedient political function, namely to maintain attention on the continuing subjection of women to men by violence in the home. This is not say, however, that men are simply perpetrators and that they do not have specific needs with regards to domestic violence.

Men have been, and continue to be, placed within the dominant discourse of domestic violence as perpetrators, a term that presupposes particular service responses to their needs. This is not say, as might a populist or 'men's rights' response, that men's needs have simply been neglected.[57] In contrast, men's needs have been addressed but not in an equivalent way to the needs of women who have experienced domestic violence.

Researching men's needs in domestic violence is a potentially controversial and political issue. Men's needs have been explored through interviews and focus group data. At the same time, men's responses to the interview questions were considered in the context of current literature describing men as perpetrators or victims and the broader collection of writings on masculinity politics.

The following discussion will explicate the findings of the phone-in and the focus groups. It will describe the ambivalence and tensions in these men's lives and their experiences of domestic violence within the traditional perpetrator/victim framework.

### 3.2.2 Research Findings

#### The phone-in

Of all respondents who called in for the phone-in about 14 per cent were male. Of those, about 3 per cent were men who rang up as perpetrators of violence. For many of these callers, violence is a complex facet of their lives and the distinction between victim and perpetrator is often blurred.

[53] Sounders, D.G. (1986) 'When Battered Women Use Violence: Husband Abuse or Self Defence?' *Victims and Violence* 1(1): 47–60.

[54] Nichols, M.P. (1987) *The Self in the System: Expanding the Limits of Family Therapy*, Brunner/Mazel, New York.

[55] Straus & Gelles (1980).

[56] Jenkins (1990).

[57] In relation to the previous discussion of masculinity politics a 'men's rights' response typifies a strategy of hegemonic or complicit masculinity to address men's position of power and identity within society.

Most, whether they saw themselves as victim or perpetrator, rang to communicate the difficulties or uniqueness of their particular experience often because these experiences had been unacknowledged or unexplained by social perceptions of domestic violence. Some men identified as victims and wanted to indicate the difficulty they had in expressing this experience.

The following views of domestic violence were articulated by different men who participated in the phone-in:

- wanted the opportunity to talk about his experience – there is a 'misconception that women are always the victim';
- felt irate that domestic violence is portrayed as if women are always the victims;
- experienced continuous emotional abuse from his family because they would not let him discuss his experience of sexual abuse by his uncle at the age of 12 to 13;
- wanted to highlight the bad psychological effects from violence; and
- perceived that his ex-wife's violence was a consequence of an undiagnosed mental condition.

Other men felt they had been unjustly labelled as perpetrators and wanted to challenge social perceptions about domestic violence and the way the problem is dealt with.

- One caller had been labelled as a perpetrator by both women he had been involved with, when they took out restraining orders against him;
- another's wife left against his will and 'lied' that he was violent in order to get police protection when she came with a furniture truck to their home;
- another felt stigmatised by the involvement of the police for minor or no physical abuse on his part;
- one identified the need to dispute the definition of abuse and the statistics about female victims – 'its only their story, not both sides'; and
- another's wife was helped to leave without his knowledge.

For the majority of male callers the violence had stopped because the relationship in which the violence occurred had ended. Men who identified as victims reported that:

- they had initiated change by leaving or by mutually agreeing to end the relationship;
- 'I moved out – couldn't put up with it any more' and could not retaliate;
- they had tried to maintain contact after divorce, but after three months 'called it quits'; and
- female partners had 'walked out' or taken out a restraining order – one 'because she was shown (by a police officer) a restraining order from my previous relationship'.

These responses indicate an interesting paradox in the way the men identify themselves within the context of domestic violence. On the one hand, they feel victimised and maligned by women and to some degree by society. On the other hand, their narratives betrayed a possibility that they were violent. This phenomenon was clear throughout the phone-in data and is consistent with the claims of many men in other fields of policy, such as men's health or boys education (see Browne & Fletcher and Biddulph).[58] These claims fit well within the forms of masculinity politics that Connell names as hegemonic interests and masculinity therapy, in that women are either explicitly targeted as making inaccurate claims or their treatment is seen as inequitable or unequal (see Coochey or Dunn).[59] Men's 'need claims' in this context must be understood as a contest for resources and services and not

[58] Biddulph (1994); Browne, R. & Fletcher, R. (eds) (1995) *Boys in Schools*, Finch Books, Sydney.

[59] Coochey, J. & Dunn, K.J. (1994) 'Media Beat Ups Conceal Truth on Domestic Violence', *The Australian* 21 July.

merely as a simple claim that women get more than men and thus men need equal services.

Men who identified as perpetrators reported that:

- their partners had left them and several did not know where their partners had gone; and
- one reported that his wife had left four months ago leaving a 'Dear John' letter.

None of the men who identified as victims continued to be frightened after the relationship had ended, a finding that directly contrasts the women's ongoing experience of fear of their male partner. Interestingly, men who identified as perpetrators often did not comment on whether the victims were still frightened of them.

The male callers identifying as victims reported the following forms of abuse.

#### *Physical abuse*

The physical abuse experienced by men who identified as victims included:

- direct assault;
- spat in the face; scratched, hair pulled;
- pots thrown;
- rushed at, having to push her away, pushed to the ground;
- kicked in the ribs and kidneys; being bashed; punched, regularly hit, kicked;
- being choked; and
- being threatened with a knife.

One caller, however, highlighted the ambiguities that emerge in cases of domestic violence and demonstrated how the distinction between victim and perpetrator can become blurred.

> *One day she lashed out – first, scratching, pulling hair, flung a pot into the back of his head. I hit back and grabbed her by the jaw – she screamed and rang police. I was arrested and charged with assault. No-one gave me any opportunity to talk.*

This caller also related occasions when his partner's son threw things and punched him or when his partners' parents threatened to kill him.

Often the male callers who identified as perpetrators denied that they were physically abusive:

- she claims he hit her – he denies that; and
- 'I've never hit a woman – I never will'.

One man confessed that he had 'slapped, pulled her hair, pushed her off the chair' but he also claimed that 'she hit me too'.

#### *Sexual abuse*

Most men did not claim an experience of sexual abuse as an adult, however:

- one respondent was raped by an uncle when he was a child; and
- another who suffered from impotence felt abused by the demands of his highly sexed female partner.

Callers who identified as perpetrators did not characterise any of their behaviour as sexual abuse.

#### *Verbal abuse*

Men who identified as victims reported that the verbal abuse they experience frequently involved sexual references. These included:

- constant accusations and interrogation about other women, friends, neighbours;
- when a nephew and his girlfriend came to stay he was accused of 'lusting after' the girlfriend; and
- verbal harassment when he was unable to perform sexually.

Other examples included:

- name calling on a daily basis by partner's son;
- being told that he was 'no good', 'hopeless', 'useless'; being put down; ridiculed; and
- 'bitchy' comments.

Men who identified as perpetrators reported that the verbal abuse was mutual or that as the relationship came to an end there was no verbal communication at all. One caller reported that while the verbal abuse was mutual, he focused on her ethnicity and would call her an 'ethnic so and so'.

#### *Emotional abuse*

Reports of emotional abuse included the following:

- the experience of negotiating between his partner and her violent son was 'very draining';
- she had an 'instantaneous temper' which would 'just occur in a flash'; and
- moody, bitchy behaviour – she used to leave and go to her sisters.

In general, callers who identified as perpetrators did not identify their behaviour in terms of emotional abuse. One caller who said he was identified by others as a perpetrator, highlighted the ambiguity of some behaviour by giving the impression that he was a victim of emotional abuse and infidelity. He gave the following account:

> *'I used to sit up and wait for her, but then she stopped coming home and wouldn't ring.' She was visiting men. She went missing at a party he gave her – he found her with a boyfriend.*

#### *Social abuse*

Few of the respondents experienced abuse at a social level but some of those who identified as victims reported:

- being denied a social life – 'she went out without you' (he was from New Zealand and had no family or friends here);
- that his partner's abusive behaviour extended into the social sphere – 'It wasn't just me' – she also expressed her temper to the neighbours; and
- 'she was paranoid about other people.'

Another caller highlighted the ambiguity of some behaviours and called into question the distinction between victim and perpetrator. He claimed to have been subjected to social abuse by his first partner, who took out a DV restraining order, and by her friends who constantly tried to track him. (His second partner had also taken out a restraining order after police had shown her a copy of the first.)

Most of those who identified as perpetrators did not report that they had subjected their partners to social abuse:

- his partner 'had an active social life' – he never held her back;
- he was only preventing his partner from associating with a friend because the friend was 'aiding and abetting her to find another lover';

- his partner would only allow him $1 per fortnight from his disability pension;
- his partner refused to see that there was a problem with her temper and would not seek help; and
- his partner would spend money irresponsibly when in a rage.

Callers who identified as perpetrators did not identify other forms of abuse/control.

Men who reported as victims of domestic violence suggested that the following things contributed to the abuse.

- nothing specific; any little thing; 'always on pins and needles – unpredictable';
- menstrual cycles were significant and gave him some way of understanding and predicting the abusive behaviour;
- his attempt to move away from the relationship was significant;
- criticism about his contribution to the housework or claims that he was lazy – watching TV/reading;
- the behaviour of partner's violent son was triggered when he did not get his own way – for example, he was not allowed to watch a TV show, his meal was not ready, school time, he was told to clean room; and
- an inability to communicate as a family.

Other factors reported to have a bearing on abusive behaviour included:

- alcohol and medication;
- mental heath issues – personality disorders, depression, dementia;
- emotional instability;
- insecurity; and
- stress from study.

Callers who identified as perpetrators often did not indicate what set off their abuse but some who did respond reported relatively minor incidents which seem to overlay much deeper problems:

- she'd always have TV and radio on when he was talking to her; her embroidery magnifying glasses shining on the TV used to annoy him; he retired and 'got under her feet';
- 'she told me that she flirted with the police officer – this bald bloke who has other women';
- 'she's a compulsive liar';
- 'I was shitty and disappointed, let down'; 'we argued'; and
- one caller admitted to having slapped his partner three times during a four-year period and that 'he had never punched her with a fist'.

One claimed that he had never abused his partner, that her claim to the police was false and they had only argued once or twice in the relationship.

Most of the callers who identified as victims reported that they had never been in an abusive relationship before. The following claims again highlight the difficulty in distinguishing between victims and perpetrators:

- a previous partner was unstable and took out a restraining order for no valid reason; he terminated that relationship; and
- another caller's first wife was emotionally abusive – 'a bitch, slept around'.

None of the callers who identified as perpetrators reported being in other abusive relationships as perpetrators or victims.

### Overview of the findings

There are two main themes that emerge from the phone-in data. Firstly, we can see that the way men talk about their experiences of violence as both perpetrators and victims is very different to that of women. Secondly, the way the men situate themselves within their accounts of violence transgresses the victim/perpetrator distinction that is so evident in the women's accounts and in the literature describing domestic violence.

The way men talk about their experience of violence appears to be intimately connected with their sense of agency or responsibility within the domestic violence. In other words, their account of the violence is often related to the woman's actions, their sense of what possible options were available to them or that women and society were conspiring against them by discounting the possibility of women being violent to men. There are possibly two impulses shaping these responses.

Firstly, within the male violence prevention literature, there is discussion of men's tactical diminishment of their responsibility.[60] In this case, the men are accounting for their experience in such a way as to diminish their responsibility for their part in the violent relationship. Secondly, it is clear in the domestic violence literature and in 'men's rights' responses to domestic violence that there has been a structuring of domestic violence that diminishes the possibility of female violence to men and that marginalises men's accounts of experiencing domestic violence as a victim.

What is particularly illuminating from the focus groups is that the men's accounts of domestic violence and responsibility shift significantly. This indicates a relationship between the men's understanding of themselves and their place in society and their understanding of domestic violence. This is an example of what the feminist movement has called 'consciousness raising' – something that men in our society may not have felt compelled to engage in.

These themes were expanded through the focus groups that will be discussed in the following section.

### Focus groups for men

There are different challenges to locating and interviewing men who have used violence and have taken responsibility for their behaviour and men who see themselves as victims of domestic violence by women. In South Australia there are a number of male perpetrator, violence prevention groups running within the community health and the community corrections sectors. These groups largely consist of men who are aware of their use of violence and its effects on others and are attempting to change their lives. In the course of our research, we made contact with men involved in domestic violence situations in the following contexts.

Two focus groups were conducted with men who were involved in, established and running, violence prevention groups for men. Both violence prevention groups were conducted using a therapeutic model that addressed issues of power and control in the man's life. The models were informed by the principles of narrative therapy and the work of Alan Jenkins outlined in his work *Invitation to Responsibility* (1990).

Eleven men altogether were involved in the focus groups. The men were aged between 31 and 51 and their partners aged between 30 and 53. The relationship age differences were minimal except for one relationship were there was a 21-year age difference between the young man and his partner. All the men were in heterosexual relationships and none of their relationships had ended. Of all the

[60] Jenkins (1990).

focus group participants that responded to the questionnaire, each lived in the city. Most participants and their partners were of Australian background, two were from European background and one was from the United Kingdom. The men's relationships ranged in duration from five years to eighteen years. Four of the respondents had children.

#### *The Noarlunga Community Corrections Violence Prevention Group for Men*

The focus group, held in the southern Adelaide metropolitan area, was a group convened by the Department of Community Corrections. The group ran for ten weeks and consisted of two facilitators and about eight men, depending on attendance. The group is primarily run for men who have court orders to attend violence prevention groups because of their use of violence or as a condition of release. However, other men from the broader community also attend the group because of relationship problems involving violence. On the night of the focus group five men were in attendance.

#### *The Salisbury West Community Health Centre Violence Prevention Group for Men*

This focus group, held in the northern metropolitan area of Adelaide, comprised a group convened by the Salisbury West Community Health Service. The group is part of the Northern Metropolitan Domestic Violence Project. The group ran for ten weeks and consisted of two facilitators and about eight men, depending on attendance. The group is a community health service and is run for men who are having relationship problems involving violence. On the night of the focus group six men were in attendance.

### Themes from the focus groups

#### *Men's perceptions of relationships*

The ways the men discussed their relationships indicated a significant connection to their partners and a significant engagement with changing and improving their lives. There was an assumption in the questionnaire that the focus group participants' relationships had ended. This was not true in any case, in either group. The main reason for the men attending the groups was to address their relationship problems. In many cases, it was the men's desire to improve their relationships that motivated them to come to the group. Often choices or ultimatums were offered by the partner; for example, one partner was reported to have said, 'You either pull your head in or do something about it [the violence]'.

The desire of the man to improve personally within the context of the relationship was also a powerful motivation. One participant suggested that he was committed to improving his relationship but overall it was himself that he needed to change. The men were sick of 'arguing, being upset, being uncontrollable', 'the nastiness and that sort of carry on'.

An interesting point here is that most of the men attended the domestic violence groups through their search for relationship counselling and support, in contrast to attending specific domestic violence counselling services.

#### *Identity*

Within the field of domestic violence prevention people who use violence and people who are subjected to violence are defined as 'perpetrators' and as 'victims' respectively. This distinction is useful in distinguishiing between the needs of people who are involved in violent or abusive relationships. It is clear within the domestic violence research field that women are more likely to

be victims of domestic violence and men are more likely to be perpetrators.[61] This distinction developed within a historical context in which women have fought to have their social and physical health needs met within the male dominated State health and welfare systems. To gain services for women and to have the safety needs of women met, identifying women as victims of male violence has proved an effective strategy.

This context has provided an environment, both material and discursive, in which women can talk about and associate with their experiences of violence. Men however, have been treated differently. The emergence of male perpetrator groups in South Australia in the early 1980s was a controversial move, criticised for the allocation of resources away from women. When talking with the men on the telephone and in the focus groups, it was evident that the men did not identify themselves easily within a theoretical position.

From the phone-in it became evident that the men did not have an established narrative structure within which to place their experiences of domestic violence: they saw themselves as both victims and perpetrators of violence, sometimes simultaneously. In the focus groups, the men did not refer to themselves as perpetrators. When prompted, the men in one group refused to be labelled a perpetrator, although they accepted responsibility for their action; in the other group, the men (when asked) were apparently comfortable in defining themselves as perpetrators. The men did not refer to themselves as victims either; however, they were clear when discussing the dynamics of violence in their relationship that violence involved both partners. A number of men commented on their perception that their female partners were violent to them but in more subtle and emotional ways. For example, one man explained that 'my partner is quite intelligent and she gets me geared up … she knows how to affect me but I can't affect her'.

The men in both groups were particularly clear that they were to take responsibility for their actions and not to downplay their use of violence. As one man explained, 'because we are here, we are obviously taking responsibility … because we made that step, from that point we walked through the door on the first night, we have changed the way we are, so to speak, and we have just built on that'. Both groups of men were active within the focus groups in minimising discussion of women's violence towards men and in limiting opportunities for downplaying their own use of violence.

These men clearly identified themselves as men who had used violence but they also recognised their own needs and the ways that abuse had shaped their lives. Quite distinct from the way that service providers and other professionals speak of domestic violence as a relationship between victim and perpetrator, these men were much more dynamic in their understanding of the violence and themselves. They recognised that to end the violence and improve their lives and the lives of their families, they needed to concentrate and work on their role within the violence. The men acknowledged that focusing on their partner's weaknesses, aggression or abuse would distract them from their own process of change.

#### *Gender and masculinity*

Violence toward women has been the driving force in the development of domestic violence services today. Men have been, and continue to be, the predominant perpetrators of violence toward women, children and other men in Australian society.[62] Male violence prevention groups are based upon this understanding and they attempt to address issues of anger, control, power, and what it means to be a man.

[61] Archer (1994); Dobash & Dobash (1990); Daly & Wilson (1992).

[62] Egger (1995).

Questions were asked in the focus groups about what the men thought it meant to be a man, how they thought they were raised as men and how those ideas influenced their relationships. Within both groups there was an understanding that to be a man meant being tough, in control and always right. One man explained the process of a boy becoming a man:

> *Right from the days they are born, boys are taught to be the boss. You have to be like this, you have to be like that, you have to like so and so. That's how you grow up believing how you should be. Therefore, you grow up believing women are inferior, and therefore they can be treated that way… peer pressure, what else would you call it, tradition, traditional male role?*

The effects of this way of being – strong, authoritative and invulnerable – have been devastating for these men and their partners. The following narrative provides an insight into how it shaped a man's actions:

> *Once you're being violent it is really hard to pull up. In the moment … she's fucking wrong and your fucking right and that's the end of it. It's totally wrong, of course, but that's how you see it.*

The effects on the man of this way of being are wide-ranging and complicated. Claims that men are victims of the male role or that being a man is a health hazard are often repeated yet simplistic.[63] No doubt there is some truth in these claims but men's pain is also political and certainly not unproblematic.[64] Often these responses arise from what is popularly called a 'crisis' in masculinity. The men spoke of this implicitly, talking of 'equality in relationships', 'changes in gender roles causing internal conflict in relationships' and the 'break-away from traditional male roles'. The men spoke of feeling torn in different ways and confused about what was expected of them. They also referred to changing environmental circumstances and the pressures that placed upon them – less money, more responsibilities and unemployment. Thus, the expectations of what it means to be a man, the changing nature of gender relations and diminishing government support in welfare and employment are factors that contribute to the stress experienced by these men.

The men also spoke of the effect that their usual relationships with other men had upon them in their everyday lives. They talked about having formed new relationships within the violence prevention groups but how, upon returning to a 'male world', unless they kept their involvement in the group hidden, they were ridiculed. For example, the men's friends would say things like, 'Are you going to your shit tonight?' One anecdote shows the way ideas of masculinity limit men's ways of thinking and acting:

> *It's like my brother in law, he's having trouble with his marriage. You say 'go and see a counsellor' [and he says] 'I'm not going to see no fucking mind reader'. That's the way the male world thinks or most of the male world does think.*

The imperatives of masculinity require that men maintain control and deal with their own problems. Health data for men's health service attendance supports claims that men are less expressive and help-seeking than women are.[65] While this may have an effect on the man, its effects on women and children are potentially extreme. Violence is an option because it is so embedded in these men's lives and stories: 'when you see a man and a man punching each other up, I don't know about the rest of them but to me its normal'.

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[63] Harrison (1978).

[64] McLean, Carey, White (eds) (1996) *Men's Ways of Being*, Westview Press.

[65] Mathers, C. (1995) 'Health Differentials between Australian Males and Females: A Statistical Profile', *National Men's Health Conference*, Proceedings, AGPS, Canberra; Huggins, A. (1995) 'Men's Health is a Serious Issue Not Being Taken Seriously Enough', *National Men's Health Conference*, Proceedings, AGPS, Canberra.

For many men, being a man involves a life of conforming to the cultural and social constructions of masculinity. The pressures for young men to be 'masculine' are immense and shift across different locations and contexts – from Salisbury to Burnside to Christies Beach – through class, age, sexuality and socio-economic status, manifesting in many different ways of behaving and living. Yet, there are common influences to which most Australian men respond – the expectations of body and mind, to be tough, confident, knowledgeable, and in control. While these particular male violence prevention groups were held with men from lower socio-economic status and area, violence is not peculiar to their world.

### *Men's perceptions and understandings of violence*

Men who have been violent often use strategies for diminishing their responsibility for their actions or their choice to use violence. One participant explained that preceding the group he would 'always blame the violence on something else, like … "she should have kept her mouth shut"'. The men explained that their perceptions of violence were limited, their understanding of their actions restricted and their awareness of the pain they were causing their partners and others around them, absent. They explained this as a consequence of how they were raised as men and the absence of information about such issues when they were young children. Three men talked about watching how their parents' interacted, how their fathers treated their mothers and the violence that was present in their families' lives. They suggested that they had been brought up not to know any different – they 'just thought it was natural'.

The men revealed that attendance at the violence prevention groups had been significant in raising their awareness about what violence meant and what its effects were. They expressed their shift in thinking and of feeling a sense of naivete. They acknowledged that violence meant much more than physical violence: 'it isn't just hitting someone – it's verbal, emotional, financial, all types of abuse'.

The men blamed the contemporary stereotype of domestic violence for inhibiting their recognition of such a phenomenon in their lives. The stereotype these men described was the 'out of control', more than likely alcoholic, physically abusive male. Men in both groups indicated that this stereotype, which has been portrayed in advertisements and posters, did not register with them as one they might be personally associated with. Violence in their lives was not always physical and was often described as unremarkable, constituting a relationship problem and not domestic violence. This finding is confirmed by responses to the research strategy used in this project to promote domestic violence as 'relationship abuse' – many phone-in respondents had not previously considered their abusive situation as domestic violence.

The participants of the groups indicated that they were remorseful for their violent behaviour, that they understood that they were responsible for the violence and that their behaviour was unacceptable. These men acknowledged that violence towards their partners was a 'terminal problem' in their relationships. It was highly important to both groups' members that they improve their lives and their relationships. One participant talked about engaging with the patterns in his life which caused him to be violent: 'everyone has different patterns and we all need to look at changing those patterns to have a better life'.

The men in both groups were quite selective in the ways they rationalised violence, making quite a strong distinction between violence in the home, violence outside the home, violence against women and violence against men. They discussed how they saw their violence in the home as different or separate from their violence in other places and at other times of their lives. This was not simply a selective definition of where violence is appropriate and where it is not but something that was bound up in the importance that the men place on different areas of their lives. One man

gave a hypothetical example: 'At work there is a fat person and a skinny person. At work the skinny person says "you're fat, you're fat" [to the fat person]. At work it doesn't really matter but at home it sticks with you'.

Another man explained that 'outside the domestic scene it [violence] doesn't really matter' and another man said, 'The person at the other end, a person you are having a violent confrontation with, you will never see again, so it doesn't really matter, it won't affect you. But at home it does'.

For these men violence was not seen as detrimental in itself, but its effects were evaluated. If it is likely to hurt the man or someone close to him then it is considered inappropriate. For example, 'It sticks with you, it stays with you and you are staying there to confront it again and again, the next day and the next day'. Violence in the home was seen as contributing to the troubles in their lives. But violence outside the home was often seen as 'normal behaviour': 'When you see a man and a man punching each other up, I don't know about the rest of them but to me it's normal'.

Violence for these men was clearly a context-specific practice. The men's groups were largely treated as relationship counselling groups, dealing with violence in the relationship. The operation of violence and identity is explored in the groups and the men take on a responsibility to end it with some commitment. Yet this activity seemed to remain detached from their broader lives in ways that are unclear from this research. Suffice to say that the acceptance of violence remains entrenched in the men's sense of self and their broader lives and lifestyles. An example would be their acceptance of the use of violence to protect the home and the family or the use of violence to maintain that status that some men require to feel in charge of their lives. The clear issue that arises from this part of the focus group discussion is that addressing domestic violence as a discrete issue has its limitations as well as its strengths. One of these limitations is that violence prevention is learnt in the specific context of the home, without necessarily impacting on their beliefs and practices in other areas of their lives.

#### *Men's violence prevention groups*

The men interviewed were positive about their experience of the men's violence prevention groups. They indicated that the groups helped them to think about their lives and their violent behaviour. A significant outcome was a sense of 'turning their lives around', made possible because of the group setting and the skills of the facilitators. Of even greater importance to these men was the experience of the group bonding and the relationships that these men gained from the groups. One man summed this up:

> *A lot of us here, we know each other fairly personally now, we know things about one another that even their families don't know. I think it does, ah, sort of knits the group together, and you do find that what is actually talked about in this room is situations that we've all been through and you can work it out. You can learn to control yourself and that's the thing.*

The group context was useful primarily because it provided support for the men to think about their troubles. Other important outcomes were that it widened the men's definition of violence and their understanding of what constituted violence; it gave them a way of putting their new-found knowledge into action (by helping each other to work their issues out) and it allowed them to attain a level of intimacy with other men that they had not experienced before.

A key dilemma raised by the groups is the issue of ongoing support. At the end of a ten-week course, participants are left without a network of support. As described earlier, these men often experience ridicule or condescension from their friends outside the group. When the group ends, their new sense of themselves as non-violent men will be confronted by the cultural forces in which they live.

### *Existing domestic violence strategies and services*

The men raised some interesting points about violence prevention strategies, such as advertisements and posters naming domestic violence. A Salvation Army advertisement was mentioned several times in which domestic violence was stereotyped as the act of a man physically abusing a woman.[66] There was widespread agreement that this stereotype was unhelpful, having several distinct effects. Firstly, these messages were easily brushed off as irrelevant to the men who felt that physical violence was the lot of someone else. Secondly, they felt that it implied that men were generally the aggressors and that as an aggressor they were powerful and without need. These men strongly advocated their needs in the situation. Lastly, several of the participants expressed the belief that the advertisement implied that men are aggressive and uncontrollable. Such stereotypes, they suggested, have their merits but do not take into account men's needs in the situation.

The men in the violence prevention groups were aware of the imbalance in resource allocation and service provision. They raised this issue quite clearly and strongly in different ways: 'Seems to be this thing in society that only women are subjected to domestic violence; what about men who are subjected to domestic violence' and 'Women get all the fuckin' rights'. One man provided an interesting anecdote that expressed his sense of this imbalance:

> *Why does the domestic violence cops come around and see my missus and give her a fuckin' ten foot long bit of paper, when the cops come and see me and threaten me and give me nothing? Why can't they bring one with them? Even if they do charge me. You can rip it up and throw it in their face or you can put it away and think about it.*

More generally, there was a feeling that services were hidden and invisible. The men agreed that public awareness should be raised about what constitutes domestic violence and what services are available to men. The men's knowledge of and attendance at the groups, as an example, arose from court orders, their partner's advice or the 'fluke' of finding a name in the telephone book.

On the surface, the 'what about us?' responses of these men may seem reactive, even supportive, of the previously described 'men's rights' position. It certainly expresses the strong need that these men feel for improved services for men and a change in the way that these services are provided and promoted. The contradiction between men's rights and responsibilities raises a number of important questions for researchers, policy makers and service providers:

1. What do these men think constitutes support? What would be their idea of visible and responsive service options?
2. How does men's level of awareness limit or facilitate their use of services?
3. What services are already available for men?
4. In what ways can researchers, policy makers and service providers respond to the needs of men?

Due to the nature of the focus groups and the limitations of this study, these questions have not been followed up in the research.

There are domestic violence services dedicated to men, although the men in the focus groups men did not necessarily see them as services. The following anecdote provides an insight into the effect of service responses to men:

[66] The Salvation Army advertisement promotes the Salvos as 'being there when you are most in need'. It uses the image of a women and young child being assisted by the Salvo's. The woman has a black eye and has obviously been physically abused – she looks bedraggled and morose. The men's perception of the advertisement is that it infers that the woman's trouble has arisen from domestic violence with her male partner.

> *They [police] treat you like you are shit… It's like it's difficult, let's put it this way. The cops came and went 'rah, rah, rah' at me and tried to get my missus to talk. She wouldn't. Right? And basically all they did by coming around and doing that just made me more pissed off and believe that you me mate, the cops coming around never stopped me one bit. That's okay, it makes you think then, but the next day when you get angry, you forget about it, and the cops coming, you know what I am saying, it had a negative impact. They're sitting there here like this going 'rah, rah, rah and instead of going, 'here mate go and do this, go and do that, here's a few numbers even. Instead it's like, 'We're going to lock you up, blah, blah, blah'.*

This man suggested another way for the police to approach the situation:

> *If things are cool they should, at least, turn around and offer a number or something. Cos' it's at that time the bloke might think about what he's doing and if he's got the number he might ring someone, you know.*

These anecdotes exemplify the ways the men experienced police contact. The courts were often regarded as too judgmental and antagonistic.

Services that address men and violence are traditionally located within the punitive field of the State, and for good reasons. The men in the violence prevention groups have experienced this and felt that responses to their service needs were limited. They generally felt that the punitive response to their violence is another experience of being controlled and antagonised. The claim that arose from the focus groups with regard to services was that men need services that respond to their needs in more creative and caring ways.

### 3.2.3 Needs of Men Involved in Domestic Violence

A number of needs were identified by the men who participated in this research. An overarching theme was that the victim/perpetrator distinction does not capture the ambivalence the men experienced in naming their place in domestic violence. However, such a distinction does maintain a focus on the responsibility that perpetrators must take if the incidence of domestic violence is to be reduced. The needs of men are therefore discussed using this distinction.

#### Men as victims of domestic violence

***Need to further research how men identify within domestic violence***

Men who are victims of violence and abuse from women need to have their experiences acknowledged. Those interviewed felt disadvantaged by the way services, service providers and general society perceived domestic violence and found police, counselling and welfare responses to be inadequate for men and biased toward women.

There has been little research into men as victims of domestic violence from their female partners.

**2.01 It is recommended that consideration be given to commissioning further research into the needs of men as victims of domestic violence within the following parameters and guidelines. The research should:**

- **be informed by feminist principles;**
- **adopt a social health approach to men's victimisation;**
- **be consistent with the *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers Working with Men who Perpetrate Domestic Violence Abuse and Violence;***
- **be informed by critical theoretical perspectives;**
- **explore men's ways of identifying as victims;**
- **explore what services are available for men;**
- **explore how research and statistical evidence has situated the debate on men as victims of female violence;**
- **use concepts of gender, identity, power and history;**

- **explore the implications for women's domestic violence services;**
- **explore the nature of men's violent experiences;**
- **contextualise how men's and women's experiences of violence are different; and**
- **provide recommendations.**

### Men as perpetrators of domestic violence

The findings of the needs assessment for men who are violent can be summarised as follows:

- men sought relationship counselling instead of domestic violence counselling/services;
- men's commitment to change was primarily motivated by their own personal investment in making their lives better and saving/improving their relationship;
- men did not know how to locate their experiences within the domestic violence discourse as victims or perpetrators (sometimes confusing the two);
- men felt disadvantaged in relation to women in the provision of domestic violence services and in the public perception of who is responsible for domestic violence;
- men felt that the dominant ideas of masculinity and the ways of being raised as men limited their ability to
  - communicate within relationships
  - understand their role in relationships
  - deal with the pressures of relationships and daily life (violence was sometimes seen as a normal and justified action)
  - understand what constitutes violence (their definition was limited to physical acts);
- men found limited support to stop violence outside of the violence prevention environment because male culture was seen as promoting their ongoing use of violence;
- men saw violence as a normal way of addressing issues in relationships;
- men believed that contemporary stereotypes of domestic violence portrayed men in a bad light, establishing a barrier to domestic violence prevention messages and services;
- men experienced groups as supportive and helpful but often they could not meet the need for on-going support as groups are time limited; and
- men perceived services as punitive and adversarial.

The following recommendations attempt to identify some beginning points for considering men's needs within the context of existing domestic violence discourses and services.

#### *Need to further understand how men identify themselves within domestic violence*

Men adopted ambivalent subject positions in their narrative about domestic violence. Usually they did not identify purely as perpetrators or victims but sometimes identified as both simultaneously. They were primarily interested in changing their behaviour for personal and relationship reasons but this process was hampered by stereotypical views of men as aggressive perpetrators. Domestic violence services may not have been recognised because men were looking for relationship assistance. These points suggest that research needs to reconsider how men see themselves within a context of domestic violence and how services can connect with men within such circumstances.

**2.02 It is recommended that research be undertaken to facilitate a better understanding of men's ambivalence towards current domestic violence narratives, which examines:**
- **how men understand themselves within domestic violence;**
- **how they understand the concept of taking responsibility for violence; and**
- **what they think should be changed.**

*Men's needs within the definition of domestic violence*

Men indicated that the current definition of domestic violence is limited and were often surprised to find that behaviour they thought was 'normal' could be experienced as abusive. They also indicated that they felt unsure, or unaware, of how to address a situation where they found themselves using violence against their partners or children. In accordance with recommendation 1.5, any community education campaigns should target non-physical forms of domestic violence – such as emotional and verbal abuse – because these forms are often more prevalent, more pervasive in effect and less likely to be recognised as violence and abuse by the general community.

**2.03 It is recommended that strategies be developed for broadening men's awareness of domestic violence and its effects upon relationships, for example, by:**
- **distributing pamphlets with information to homes; or**
- **advertisements encouraging men to seek assistance.**

*Research strategies that would address the needs of men within domestic violence*

Men have difficulty in identifying and addressing their violence and finding effective strategies for dealing with it, and experience difficulties in maintaining any endeavour to change. Since many men are unaware of what constitutes domestic violence, it is important to investigate what services and programs men already know of and use voluntarily.

**2.04 It is recommended that research be undertaken that focuses on the specific needs of men who use violence, to improve:**
- **services that support men to identify their violence, address their violence, and that provide ongoing support for men in their endeavour to change; and**
- **strategies that would help men to broaden their understanding of violence and recognise the connections between violence and violence prevention.**

*Need for a primary health care approach to domestic violence*

Counselling strategies to assist men are concentrated within community health and community correctional services. Domestic violence policy incorporates a number of government agencies, from Health to Corrections to the Attorney General's Department. There are competing strategies – from rehabilitation, to prevention, to incarceration – within these government agencies. Of these, prevention is potentially the most cost effective.

With recent government restructuring, in particular the development of the Department of Human Services, an approach that encompasses the many dimensions of domestic violence is possible. Issues of gender, sexuality, housing, socio-economic status, education and health (to name a few), all contribute to male violence and domestic violence more generally.

The concepts and philosophies which underpin strategies of primary health care and social health would allow a cross-discipline, intra- and inter-government, multi-factorial, informed community response to domestic violence.

**2.05 It is recommended that strategies based upon the principles of primary health care be developed and that these strategies be incorporated into all government responses to male violence.**

*Need for ongoing primary prevention strategies for preventing male domestic violence*

The ways that men understand themselves in relationships, what they see as a legitimate option of behaviour with other people, how they view themselves as men and how the dominant ideas of being a man contribute to their sense of self and use of violence, will determine long-term prevention strategies aimed at changing the cultural possibilities of what being a man may involve.

**2.06 It is recommended that curriculum and community based awareness programs that work with young men to stop violence are continued and programs that incorporate the *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers Working with Men Who Perpetrate Domestic Abuse and Violence* be supported.**

*Need for life-skills and communication skills*

Many of the participants noted the difficulties they have had with communication in relationships and with general life-skills. They felt that these deficits placed pressure upon them and contributed to their use of violence. It is important to note that while this is an important area of need it does not imply that by 'healing' men violence will be prevented.

**2.07 It is recommended that discrete, integrated services be developed that educate men in life-skills such as communication skills, relationship skills and conflict management skills.**

*Need for guidelines to prioritise needs in domestic violence services*

Determining men's needs without any necessary consideration of the historical, social and political development of domestic violence services, may lead to competition between different population groups.

**2.08 It is recommended that guidelines that constitute part of a reviewed and expanded version of the *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers Working with Men Who Perpetrate Domestic Abuse* be developed. The guidelines would cover:**

- **needs identification;**
- **the way needs are situated and contextualised;**
- **needs prioritisation; and**
- **how needs are responded to and addressed.**

*Need for consistent standards among agencies providing services to men who have used violence*

Domestic violence services take various forms and operate from different premises. Relationship counselling is one example of a service that can address domestic violence in a way that is inconsistent with the *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers Working with Men Who Perpetrate Domestic Abuse*.

**2.09 It is recommended that the Department of Human Services adopt the principles of the *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers Working with Men Who Perpetuate Domestic Abuse* as a framework for service provision and that the application of these principles be extended to include the advertisement, promotion and structuring of services.**

**2.10 It is recommended that recognition and merit standards (established in conjunction with non-government and community services) be promoted to encourage adherence to the *Competency Standards for Intervention Workers Working with Men Who Perpetuate Domestic Abuse*.**

## 3.3 Domestic Violence – Children and Young People

'Misogynist'

(The lyrics of a song sent to us by a ten-year-old boy who witnessed his father's violence towards his mother).

*Slap me in the face*
*You are a disgrace*
*Feelin' kinda he-man*
*You do 'cos you can*

*(Chorus):*
*Misogynist*
*Slapping every woman you meet*
*Take a seat*
*Stop beat*
*Woman hater*
*It's getting dark, turn out the lights, hear the dog bark.*

*Come home*
*Act normal*
*Slap her in the face*
*Laugh and laugh*
*She sits there crying*
*You're always lying*
*This is Domestic Violence*
*It's a bad case*

*(Chorus)*

*Misogynist you womaniser*
*You woman hater*
*Can't be a man*
*Just wait till she gets power*
*Ha! Ha! Your biggest fan.*

*(Chorus).*

In recent years there has been considerable attention paid to the effects of domestic violence on children. The ever growing body of literature indicates that there are particular effects on children of witnessing and/or experiencing violence within the context of the family. Another area of research which has evolved in the last twenty years is that of dating violence. A number of researchers have considered the possible link between the experience of family violence and later experiences of dating violence.

### Methodology

One of the methodological difficulties experienced in conducting this research project was the dilemma of how to include children and young people's perceptions of the effects of domestic violence, whilst respecting parents' rights to consent to their children's involvement in research. Further to this was the dilemma of asking children about their experiences of domestic violence and then not necessarily being able to provide immediate access to appropriate counselling and support.

Taking into account these problems, we adopted two methods to gather data on the needs of children and young people: asking parents from the phone-in and adult focus groups about the needs of children and young people (reported in part 1 of this section) and conducting a focus group with young people who had experienced domestic violence and dating violence (reported in part 2 of this section).

The young people in the focus group were recruited through a youth health service where they were already service users. This ensured that the young people disclosing information were linked to services for support. The limitations of these methods are recognised in terms of representativeness but the methods yielded rich qualitative data within the bounds of ethical practice.

### 3.3.1 Literature Review – Part One: Children and Domestic Violence

#### Children as victims of violence

Children as primary victims of violence are the focus of an extensive range of child protection literature, including publications of the *National Child Protection Clearing House* in Australia and journals such as the *Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect*, and the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*. They are all dedicated to a problem called 'child abuse' and its types: namely physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse and neglect.[67] Statistical and epidemiological data support professional claims of the wide-ranging extent of child maltreatment, and highlight the need for political and professional intervention.[68]

#### The links between domestic violence and child abuse

Children living in situations of domestic violence first became a direct focus of research and intervention in the 1980s in the United States.[69] Until recently, and in spite of the recognition that both child abuse and domestic violence are entrenched and pervasive forms of violence in society, there has tended to be a separation of domestic violence and child protection issues in Australia. Child abuse has been regarded as 'a health and welfare issue' and domestic violence 'regarded as a matter for police, courts, women's refuges and other women's support services'.[70] There is now increasing recognition that these are not separate phenomena.

There are two main concerns about children living in families experiencing domestic violence. First, they may be sole (or primary) victims of one or both parents/care givers[71] or they, along with their mothers, may be victims of violence by adult males (fathers/intimate partners/spouses).[72] Studies

[67] Some selections from this extensive literature include: Wissow, L.S. & Wilson, M.E.H. (1992) 'Use of Epidemiological Data in the Diagnosis of Physical Child Abuse Cases: Variations in Response to Hypothetical Cases', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16(1): 45–56; Wurtele, S.K. & Schmitt, A. (1992) 'Child Care Workers' Knowledge about Reporting Suspected Child Sexual Abuse', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16(3): 385–90; Hibbard, R.A. & Zollinger, T.W. (1992) 'Medical Evaluation Referral Patterns for Sexual Abuse Victims', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16(4): 533–40; Johnson, C.F. (1993) 'Physicians and Medical Neglect: Variables That Affect Reporting', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 17: 605–12; Seaberg, J.R. (1993) 'Emotional Abuse: A Study of Interobserver Reliability', *Social Work Research and Abstracts* 29(3): 22–9.

[68] Wissow & Wilson (1992); Finkelhor, D. (1993) 'Epidemiological Factors in the Clinical Identification of Child Sexual Abuse', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 17(1): 67–70; Finkelhor, D. (1994) 'The International Epidemiology of Child Sexual Abuse', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 18(5): 409–418; McGee, R.A., Wolfe, D.A., Yuen, S.A., Wilson, S.K. & Carnochan, J. (1995) 'The Measurement of Maltreatment: A Comparison of Approaches', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 19(2): 233–50.

[69] Peled, E. (1996) 'Secondary Victims No More. Refocusing Intervention With Children' in J. Edleson & Z. Eisikovitz (eds) *Future Interventions with Battered Women and Their Families*, Sage Publications, California.

[70] James, M. (1994) 'Issues in Child Abuse Prevention (No. 2) – Domestic Violence as a Form of Child Abuse: Identification and Prevention', *National Child Abuse Protection Clearing House Information Manual*, Canberra, p. 2.

[71] Featherstone, B. (1996) 'Victims or Villains? Women Who Physically Abuse their Children' in B. Fawcett, B. Featherstone, J. Hearn & C. Toft (eds) *Violence and Gender Relations*, Sage, London, pp. 178–189; Featherstone, B. (1997) 'What Has Gender Got to Do with It? Exploring Physically Abusive Behaviour Towards Children', *British Journal of Social Work* 27: 419–33; Wise (1990) 'Becoming a Feminist Social Worker' in L. Stanley (ed.) *Feminist Praxis*, Routledge, London; Janko, S. (1994) *Vulnerable Children, Vulnerable Families: The Social Construction of Child Abuse*, Teachers' College Press, New York.

[72] Featherstone, B. (1996); Featherstone, B. (1997); Wise (1990); Janko (1994); Stark, E. & Flitcraft, A. (1988) 'Women and Children at Risk: A Feminist Perspective on Child Abuse', *International Journal of Health Services* 18(1): 97–118.

have shown an overlap between violence towards women and violence towards children of at least 40 per cent.[73] Many studies show that both male perpetrators and female survivors abuse their children, or use more severe violence more frequently against a child.[74]

Second, children may be 'secondary victims' and suffer trauma and other significant emotional and psychological effects through witnessing violence, usually directed to their mothers by male partners/fathers.[75] Figures from a range of studies in Australia and overseas illustrate a high incidence of children as witnesses to domestic violence, ranging from abusive language to homicide. Various studies report that a high percentage of children living in a violent family witness extreme forms of violence such as wife assault and/or threat or use of a weapon.[76]

The research literature identifies that children's responses to witnessing violence vary by gender, age and stage of development. Other variables include the extent and the frequency of the violence, the role of the child in the family, the number of repeated separations and moves, cultural background, the personality of the child and economic and social disadvantage.[77]

## Barriers to intervention

### *Secretive nature of domestic violence*

The primary focus of child protection in Australia is within the family.[78] The family has traditionally been regarded as a source of support and nurturance for children and this has led to an element of denial of abuse at both a community and an individual level. Violence within the family is also often viewed as a private matter, adding to the complexity of the problem. Parents may try to hide the violence from the outside world and from their children. Their 'fights' may not be identified as violence by the parents or the child, even though the children commonly report feelings of fear and terror, and/or the children may not feel free to disclose the violence.[79]

### *Attribution of responsibility for child protection to mothers*

The attribution of responsibility for maltreatment of children in the family varies with the type of abuse. For example, the statistical data show that adult males are predominantly responsible for sexual abuse of children, whereas women predominate in figures on physical abuse of children.[80] Some commentators who search for equivalence between women and men as child sex abusers have been critiqued from a feminist perspective.[81] Feminists have highlighted the potential for coercion of mothers by male partners who initiate the abuse. The sexual abuse of children by women is currently a research issue under investigation.

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[73] Hughes, H. (1986) 'Research With Children in Shelters: Implications for Clinical Services', *Children Today* 15(2): 21–25; Straus, M.A., Gelles, R.J. & Steinmetz, S. (1980) *Behind Closed Doors*, Anchor Books, New York; Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force (1988) *Beyond These Walls*, Report of the Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force to the Minister of Family Services and Welfare Housing, Brisbane.

[74] Peled (1996), pp. 138–39.

[75] Hyden, M. (1994) *Woman Battering as a Marital Act: The Construction of a Violent Marriage*, Scandinavian University Press, Oslo; Gary, L.T. (1991) 'Feminist Practice and Family Violence' in M. Bricker-Jenkins, N.R. Hooyman & N. Gottlieb (eds) *Feminist Social Work Practice in Clinical Settings*, Sage Sourcebooks, Newbury Park, California, pp, pp. 19–32.

[76] James (1994), footnote 4.

[77] ibid; Peled (1996).

[78] Lawson, C. (1993) 'Mother-Son Sexual Abuse: Rare or Underreported? A Critique of the Research', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 17(2): 261–70; Smith, D.W. & Saunders, B.E. (1995) 'Personality Characteristics of Father/Perpetrators and Nonoffending Mothers in Incest Families: Individual and Dyadic Analyses', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 19(5): 607–18; Kelley, M.L., Grace, N. & Elliott, S.N. (1990) 'Acceptability of Positive and Punitive Discipline Methods: Comparisons among Abusive, Potentially Abusive, and Nonabusive Parents', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 14(2): 219–26; Benedict, M.I., Wulff, L.M. & White, R.B. (1992) 'Current Parental Stress in Maltreating and Nonmaltreating Families of Children with Multiple Disabilities', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16(2): 155–64; Tymchuk, A.J. (1992) 'Predicting Adequacy of Parenting by People with Mental Retardation', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 16(2): 165–78.

[79] Peled (1996).

[80] Bell, V. (1993) *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law*, Routledge, London; Forbes, J. (1993) 'Female Sexual Abusers: the Contemporary Search for Equivalence', *Practice* 6(2): 102–11; Thorpe, D. (1994) *Evaluating Child Protection*, Open University Press, Buckingham; Stark, E. & Flitcraft, A. (1988) 'Women and Children at Risk: A Feminist Perspective on Child Abuse', *International Journal of Health Services* 18(1): 97–118.

[81] Forbes (1993).

There is some debate about the gendering of responsibility for physical abuse of children by parents. Featherstone discusses statistics which show mothers as being either equally or predominantly responsible for physical abuse of children.[82] Feminist literature explains this as partly a feature of a society where mothers have primary responsibility for child care, partly as a feature of male coercion where the mothers themselves are victimised, and partly as a feature of the stresses of poverty and the social isolation of mothering.[83]

Overall, mothers are held responsible for maltreatment of children, whether or not they are primarily or solely responsible. Korbin, Milner, Stark and Flitcraft and D'Cruz comment on the phenomenon of 'responsible mothers, invisible men' where cultural, patriarchal expectations of mothering by professionals operate to focus attention on the mothers – the males responsible for abuse become 'invisible'.[84] Mothers' responsibility for child maltreatment is informed by expectations that they should protect their children from adult males' violence, even where they may be victimised themselves.[85] This becomes a major concern when considering children as 'secondary victims' of the violence towards their mothers. The mothers' denials that they are experiencing violence for fear that their children will be removed from their care, may be perceived by professionals as a 'failure to protect her child'. The professionals may then intensify State surveillance and regulation of the mothers to ensure they protect their children.[86]

There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that women's treatment of their children is affected by their own victimisation.[87] However, Peled highlights the dangers of sacrificing the rights and safety of children when working to uphold the rights of their mothers, or when working towards the 'empowerment' of mothers.[88] At the same time we need to avoid the common injustice done to women by attributing to them sole responsibility for children's protection and well-being. The 'invisible' fathers also have a responsibility for their children's well-being and should be held accountable.

### *Definitions of abuse and perceptions of need*

The statistical indicators of 'need' in relation to domestic violence and child abuse represent only the events brought to the attention of State agencies and professionals employed by them, within particular official definitions of abuse. They do not tell us about the many experiences of children which are not brought to public attention and/or which may be assessed by professionals as not worthy of investigation.

Prout and James, and Hendrick discuss the changing social and political status of the child over time and place, and related public policy responses to the treatment of children in private and public domains.[89] Within the Australian context, the meaning of child protection is interpreted differently according to the race, ethnicity, Aboriginality, gender, age, ability and social class of the child.[90]

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[82] Featherstone (1996); Featherstone (1997).

[83] Stark & Flitcraft (1988); Featherstone (1996); Featherstone (1997); Graham, H. (1981) 'Mothers Accounts of Anger and Aggression towards their Babies' in N. Frude (ed.) *Psychological Approaches to Child Abuse*, Billing, Guildford, pp. 39–51; Wise, S. (1990) 'Becoming a Feminist Social Worker' in L. Stanley (ed.) *Feminist Praxis*, Routledge, London.

[84] Korbin, J. (1989) 'Fatal Maltreatment by Mothers: a Proposed Framework', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 13: 481–89; Milner, J. (1993) 'A Disappearing Act: The Differing Career Paths of Fathers and Mothers in Child Protection Investigations', *Critical Social Policy* 38: 48–68; D'Cruz, H. (1998) '"Taking Responsibility" for "Physical Abuse": Gender and Disability', *7th Australian Women's Studies Association Conference*, Proceedings, Adelaide; Stark & Flitcraft (1988).

[85] Stark & Flitcraft (1988).

[86] ibid.; Milner (1993); Korbin (1989); D'Cruz, H. Constructing Meanings and Identities: Child Protection in Western Australia, Doctoral thesis, in progress.

[87] Peled (1996).

[88] ibid.

[89] Prout, A. & James, A. (1990) 'A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood: Provenance, Promise and Problems' in A. James & A. Prout (eds) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*, The Falmer Press, London, pp. 7–34; Hendrick, H. (1990) 'Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present' in James & Prout (1990), pp. 35–59.

[90] van Krieken, R. (1991) *Children and the State: Social Control and the Formation of the Australian Welfare State*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards; Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997) *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Sterling University Press, Commonwealth of Australia; D'Cruz, Doctoral thesis, in progress.

### *Lack of adequate knowledge, skills and resources*

The opportunity to help child witnesses of domestic violence in the health, education and welfare systems is often missed. For example, Peled identifies that the police and social services are not always successful in identifying or responding to the specific needs of children who are witnesses of domestic violence, in part due to a lack of specialised knowledge and skill.[91] Other inhibiting factors identified include insufficient and ambiguous legislation, an under-funded, overwhelmed and overworked system, and resistance by advocates of women victims who focus exclusively on the needs of the mother.[92]

### *Child witnesses as 'secondary' victims*

Children are often omitted altogether from feminist analyses of domestic violence and their status has a direct impact on service provision.[93] Staff in women's shelters were the first to report the emotional and behavioural problems of child witnesses of violence.[94] These shelters have provided important services to children with limited resources, but Peled and others have identified ideological barriers to the effective provision of protection and support to these children.[95] The battered women's movement was created to collectively and individually respond to the needs of battered women, and children are commonly seen as a secondary target group, not the primary victims of male violence.

## Conclusions

There is considerable evidence in the domestic violence literature that children are frequently directly and indirectly abused or maltreated in situations of domestic violence. We need to understand the way in which children interpret, and attribute meaning to, violence in the family.[96] This includes how children access formal, public services (such as telling school teachers, social workers or police)[97] or informal, private assistance (such as by telling relatives or friends).

Similarly, the meanings of events need to be understood from the perspective of each parent. Whilst professionals may legitimately be concerned for the lives and well-being of children, professional definitions, perceptions of problems and approaches to intervention may not achieve the goal of protecting children in families experiencing domestic violence. Instead, their mothers may resist professional intervention for fear of the consequences of acknowledging their male partners' violence, either to themselves or their children. These consequences may include increased risk to their safety or the loss of their children into public care.[98] Furthermore, understanding the perspectives of the persons responsible for the abuse or neglect of children, whether male[99] or female,[100] may allow for the development of more appropriate services.

[91] Peled (1996).

[92] Echlin, C. & Marshall, L. (1995) 'Child Protection Services for Children of Battered Women: Practice and Controversy' in E. Peled, P. Jaffe, & J. Edleston, *Ending the Cycle of Violence. Community Responses to Children of Battered Women*, Sage, Thousand Oaks.

[93] For example Yllo & Bograd (1988).

[94] Prout & James (1990).

[95] ibid.

[96] Hyden (1994).

[97] ibid.

[98] Stark & Flitcraft (1988); Hyden (1994).

[99] Scully, D. (1990) *Understanding Sexual Violence: A Study of Convicted Rapists*, Unwin Hyman, Boston; Dietrich, D., Berkowitz, L., Kadushin, A. & McGloin, J. (1990) 'Some Factors Influencing Abusers' Justifications of their Child Abuse', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 14: 337–46; Hyden (1994); Phelan, P. (1995) 'Incest and its Meaning: The Perspectives of Fathers and Daughters', *Child Abuse and Neglect* 19(1): 7–24; Hearn, J. (1996) 'Men's Violence to Known Women: Historical, Everyday and Theoretical Constructions by Men' in Fawcett et al. *Violence and Gender Relations*, pp. 22–37.

[100] Janko (1994); Korbin (1989).

### 3.3.2 Research Findings – Part One

#### Parents' perceptions of the experiences of children who have been involved in domestic violence

In both the phone-in and the focus groups, parents were asked to comment on the experiences and needs of their children in relation to the violence that was being reported. The following findings reflect the perceptions of the parents interviewed.

##### *Challenging the assumption of intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour*

A common view about the effects of domestic violence on children is that of intergenerational transmission of violent behaviour. This view is often promoted in media reporting of domestic violence research. An important and interesting challenge to this view emerged from some callers' stories which provided evidence to show that their children had not grown up to be either perpetrators or victims of domestic violence. They did not, therefore, view domestic violence as an inevitable consequence of social learning or modelling. A few callers were uncertain whether the children were affected by the domestic violence because it always occurred late at night or not in front of them. One caller stated proudly that despite living in a violent home her children did not have problems in their adult lives. While some children experience various problems in the short and long term, this is neither universal nor inevitable.

##### *Children as 'bargaining chips' after separation*

Parents' experiences suggested that domestic violence introduced complex tensions into the family, and that these affected the relationships between children and their parents, and/or between siblings. A number of callers reported children being used as a 'bargaining chip' in what were already unequal relationships. This occurred both during the relationship and following the separation (around residence and visitation issues).

##### *Perpetrators using children to control*

Another concern was that children became a means through which the perpetrator could exercise control over the woman's life. One participant had a daughter with multiple disabilities. When she tried to leave the relationship the perpetrator threatened to withdraw consent and financial resources for the child's treatment.

##### *Consequences for children of living with domestic violence*

It is clear that most children do suffer some consequences from living with domestic violence. Of all callers, 94.3 per cent reported that their children had been affected in some way by the experience. A major concerned expressed by women in the focus groups was the fear and terror which children experienced through witnessing, or being direct victims of, abuse from the perpetrator. Most perceived that the experience had a detrimental impact on:

- family relationships – including relationships with parents, relationships between siblings and adult partnerships;
- sociability and educational attainment – including lack of motivation, social withdrawal and aggression towards peers; and
- personal characteristics – manifesting in alcohol/drug abuse problems, suicide attempts and low self-esteem.

#### *Domestic violence as a model for violent behaviour*

A number of participants in the focus groups were concerned about the impact that modelling violent behaviour has on their children. For example, one child was told by her father before he hit her mother – 'I'm sorry I have to do this to your mother, your mother needs this' and 'I feel sorry for you – look at your mother'. The child (a seven-year-old female) speaks openly about the violence she observed against her mother and is now acting violently towards her mother, although she does not appear to be using this behaviour towards school friends. A number of participants reported that their children were violent and abusive to other siblings and other children.

#### *Behavioural problems exhibited by children*

For younger children, the types of effects of domestic violence reported by parents were aggressive behaviour with peers, social withdrawal and lack of confidence to socialise with other children. Other behavioural problems included enuresis, psychosomatic illnesses, anxiety, antisocial behaviour and emotional problems.

### 3.3.3 Parents' Perceptions of the Needs of Children Who Experience Domestic Violence

#### Need for support and understanding from teachers/counsellors at school

Parents in this research were concerned to protect their children from violence and abuse and to try and minimise effects on the children. One of the difficulties experienced whilst still living in an abusive relationship is that parents are often unable to explain to teachers and others close to children why their children may be behaving in abnormal ways. Schools need to be aware of the effects of domestic violence on children and should not make simple judgments about children on the basis of their behaviour.

Both parents and young people stated that it would be of great benefit if teachers were more aware of the effects of domestic violence on children at school. This would assist teachers 'to make sense' of students' behaviour and consequently their understanding would help students to feel supported. From the research findings it seems that whilst some teachers had an understanding of the effects of domestic violence on children at school, it was not a universal experience.

**3.01 It is recommended that innovative methods of assisting children who are experiencing domestic violence be developed within the school setting and be widely promoted and implemented, and that:**

- **methods be developed in discussion with the Domestic Violence Unit, Department of Human Services; and**
- **training and professional development for teachers and school counsellors include information about the impact of domestic violence on children and its likely effects within the school setting.**

#### Need for appropriate services for children who experience domestic violence

When parents had left violent relationships, most wanted to give their children the opportunity to talk through what had happened as a means of trying to reduce the long-term impact of the abuse. Parents involved in the research found very little help that was effective for their children. The lack of services for children was also reflected in the data collected from service providers on the needs of children in rural, Aboriginal, non-English speaking and lesbian communities.

The number of services for children who have experienced domestic violence is small. Generic services for children, such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, often have long waiting lists and may not always address the children's behaviours within the context of domestic violence. Often children did not wish to be referred to counselling. Those parents whose children had used counselling found it to be ineffective and inappropriate for two reasons. First, the children saw counselling as a punishment and as inferring that they, not their parent, were 'having a problem'. Secondly, participants indicated that counsellors' responses were frequently focused on the antisocial behaviour of the children and not on what parents saw as the underlying experience of domestic violence that had precipitated the behaviour. There was a general view that the long-term impact of fear on children was not adequately understood or dealt with by counsellors.

It is therefore pertinent to consider measures to ensure that children do not develop an identity that is tied to the experience of domestic violence. This is particularly important in a cultural context where the intergenerational transmission explanation for violent behaviour is reproduced and reinforced.

The ineffectiveness and scarcity of services for children were seen as issues to be addressed through developing responsive intervention systems and improving access to expert professionals.

**3.02 It is recommended that further research be conducted to identify and develop service models that effectively respond to the needs of children who have experienced domestic violence and that these services be accessible to all children, including children from rural areas and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.**

### Early intervention and prevention

Parents identified a pressing need for young children to learn about respectful relationships and how to be assertive in relationships without resorting to violence. The need for conflict resolution skills to be taught to children from an early age at school was identified as an area requiring urgent attention.

**3.03 It is recommended that children from a young age be encouraged by the school curriculum to learn about:**
- **respectful relationships;**
- **how to be assertive in relationships; and**
- **constructive strategies for handling conflict.**

## 3.3.4 Literature Review – Part Two: Young People Who Have Experienced Domestic Violence

### Violence and abuse in young people's dating relationships

As an area of social investigation and intervention, dating violence followed the identification domestic violence, child abuse and family violence as social problems by social researchers, feminist activists and human service workers in the 1960s and 1970s. Increased awareness of violence and abuse in intimate relationships has led to research and intervention programs focused on dating violence. An unexpected trend in examining dating violence research is that it has developed in relative isolation from domestic violence research. The feminist theoretical frameworks and ideologies that have shaped explanations of domestic violence are not evident in the dating violence literature. The absence of a strong feminist influence is surprising, given its predominance in other

areas of interpersonal violence such as domestic violence and child abuse.

Dating violence research has concentrated on two main areas: determining rates of dating violence amongst populations of university and high school students, and examining young people's attitudes about the use of violence in intimate relationships. Varying definitions of dating violence and the use of different methodologies have led to considerable variation in prevalence rates found in studies.

### Defining dating violence

The terms for violence in dating relationships are used interchangeably in the literature and include 'dating violence', 'courtship violence' and 'premarital abuse'. Brustin defined dating violence as:

> *physical, psychological, or sexual abuse occurring between individuals, at least one of whom is under eighteen, who are married, living together, have children together or are involved in a dating relationship. In other words, violence between neighbours, business associates, and strangers would not constitute dating violence unless there had been some type of intimate or attempted intimate relationship, not necessarily sexual, between the parties.*[101]

Brustin's definition is useful in two respects. It demonstrates that violence in a relationship is not confined to physical abuse and it makes a distinction between violence perpetrated by an intimate partner and others in society – suggesting that the relationship between the perpetrator and survivor will influence how the violence is both interpreted and experienced.

### Dating violence: research methodologies and prevalence

The predominant methodologies that have been used in dating violence research are positivist, large scale surveys measuring the prevalence of dating violence amongst secondary and tertiary student populations. All but a few of these surveys have used the Conflict Tactics Scale or a modified version of it.[102] The Conflict Tactics Scale is the most commonly used instrument in studies of interpersonal violence. The criticisms of the Conflict Tactics Scale as discussed above re domestic violence are also relevant to dating violence.

The results of dating violence studies indicate that males and females engage in violent behaviours in approximately equal proportions. This is consistent across studies of interpersonal violence that have used the Conflict Tactics Scale. There is a clear disparity between the experiences of service providers in domestic violence and the findings of these studies.[103]

Findings of dating violence research indicate prevalence rates from 12 to 87 per cent.[104] Reasons for the large range in prevalence rates include, firstly, that researchers used varying definitions of dating violence, and secondly, that some only asked about current relationships whilst others asked about all dating relationships. Some studies have shown that females tend to engage more in lower level

[101] Brustin, S. (1995) 'Legal Responses to Teen Dating Violence', *Family Law Quarterly* 29(2), p.332.

[102] Strauss, M.A. (1979) 'Measuring Intra Family Conflict and Violence: The Conflict Tactics Scale', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 41: 75–88.

[103] Kingston, K. (1996) Outside the Square: Male Victims of Domestic Violence, Hons thesis, School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia.

[104] Bethke, T. & De Joy, D. (1993) 'An Experimental Study of Factors Influencing the Acceptability of Dating Violence', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 8(1): 36–51; LeJeune, C. & Follette, V. (1994) 'Taking Responsibility: Sex Differences in Reporting Dating Violence', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 9(1): 133–40; Riggs, D. (1993) 'Relationship Problems and Dating Aggression: A Potential Treatment Target', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 8(1): 18–35; Makepeace, J. (1986) 'Gender Differences in Courtship Violence Victimisation', *Family Relations* 35: 383–88; Lane, K. & Gwartney-Gibbs, P. (1985) 'Violence in the Context of Dating and Sex', *Journal of Family Issues* 6(1): 45–59; Follingstad, D., Wright, S., Lloyd, S. & Sebastian, J. (1991) 'Sex Differences in Motivation and Effects in Dating Violence', *Family Relations* 40: 51–57.

[105] Roscoe, B. & Callahan, J. (1985) 'Adolescents' Self Report of Violence in Families and Dating Relations', *Adolescence* 20(79): 545–53.

forms of violence and males in more severe forms of violence.[105] They also found that whilst the overall number of males who had perpetrated violence was lower than for females, the males who identified as being violent had done so on more occasions and in more relationships than females. Generally dating violence is seen as relatively common, as indicated in the following quote:

> *Violence in the context of dating is a regular pattern of behaviour for many males, whereas for females it is more likely to be a one time event.… Half of the females experienced this violence on only one occasion with one person. But nearly two thirds of the males reported violence on multiple occasions with multiple partners, compared with one quarter of the females.*[106]

The second most commonly researched area of dating violence has been young people's attitudes to violence in intimate relationships. There in not consensus in the literature about whether attitudes to dating violence are indicators of violent behaviour. Generally respondents were not accepting of violent tactics but were more tolerant of them when the relationship was serious or the perpetrator was female. Carlson found that around half of the males and one third of the females thought that violence was acceptable towards a partner who had had sex with someone else.[107] This was similar to the findings of the Australian *Community Attitudes to Violence against Women* survey conducted in 1995.[108]

### Impact of dating violence on the relationship and those involved

Very few studies have examined the effects of dating violence on young people. One study which did, found that the most common effects for females were anger, fear and anxiety, and emotional hurt at physical force being used.[109] For male victims the most common effects were: anger, emotional hurt at physical force being used, guilt, and fear of not being loved. Follingstad et al. concluded that females experienced 'significantly more negative effects' from physical violence than did males.[110]

### Dating violence and domestic violence

An indicator that adolescent dating violence is an important social problem is the link which some researchers have made between it and domestic violence in subsequent relationships. Some studies have shown an association between a family history of domestic violence and dating violence during adolescence.[111] However Carlson did not find a relationship between adolescents observing marital violence between parents and engaging in dating violence.[112]

Research has found similarities between the patterns of dating violence and domestic violence in marital relationships, and some have argued that the research focus should shift from a family history of domestic violence to understanding dating violence as a precursor to domestic violence.[113] Carlson has identified dating violence as a risk marker for domestic violence in adulthood.[114]

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[106] Lane & Gwartney-Gibbs (1985), p. 52.

[107] Carlson, B. (1987) 'Dating Violence: A Research Review and Comparison with Spouse Abuse', *Social Casework* 68: 16–23.

[108] Office of the Status of Women (1995) *Report on Community Attitudes to Domestic Violence*, AGPS, Canberra.

[109] Follingstad et al. (1991).

[110] ibid., p. 53.

[111] Smith, J. & Williams, J. (1992) 'From Abusive Household to Dating Violence', *Journal of Family Violence* 7(2): 153–65; Barnes, G., Greenwood, L. & Sommer, R. (1991) 'Courtship Violence in a Canadian Sample of Male College Students', *Family Relations* 40: 37–44; Roscoe, B. & Benaske (1985) 'Courtship Violence Experienced by Abused Wives: Similarities in Patterns of Abuse', *Family Relations* 34: 419–24; Roscoe & Callahan (1985).

[112] Carlson, B. (1990) 'Adolescent Observers of Marital Violence', *Journal of Family Violence* 5(4): 285–99.

[113] Roscoe & Benaske (1985); Smith & Williams (1992).

[114] Carlson (1990).

### Dating violence and seeking help

The research indicates that, as with people experiencing domestic violence, those experiencing dating violence are also unlikely to seek help. In Le Jeune et al.'s study 46.3 per cent of respondents did not tell anybody about the dating violence.[115] Of the remaining 53.7 per cent, 87 per cent told a same sex friend, 72 per cent an opposite sex friend, 34 per cent mother, 31 per cent sibling, 3 per cent father and 7 per cent a counsellor. None of participants reported the violence to the police. Makepeace found that only 5 per cent (n=2) reported it to legal authorities such as the police.[116] Mahlstedt & Keeny, in a study of female survivors of dating violence, found that 92 per cent told at least one person.[117] Like Le Jeune et al., Mahlstedt & Keeny's participants most often told a friend or family member.

Roscoe & Benaske surveyed women in a domestic violence shelter about their current experiences of domestic violence and previous experiences of dating violence.[118] In seeking support to deal with the violence there was one striking difference between dating respondents compared with married ones. Thirty-three per cent reported having no support systems available whilst dating.

A large proportion of young people do not tell anybody about their experiences of dating violence. Of those who do, informal help from friends and family members is sought most frequently. In relation to formal help, only Roscoe & Benaske reported a high level of professionals being told (45%) compared to Le Jeune et al's rate of 7 per cent. The studies indicate that legal authorities are rarely involved in cases of dating violence.

Mahlstedt & Keeny focused on the effectiveness of the help sought for dating violence.[119] The fathers' responses were rated as the least helpful by the female survivors of dating violence. Professionals had the lowest rate of being unhelpful in their responses. This leads to the identification of an important barrier – whilst professionals were seen to be an effective source of help they are not often used. Respondents in this study reported being reluctant to inform others of their dating violence for two main reasons: belief that it was private because they felt embarrassed; and fear that by telling their parents they (their parents) may end the relationship, or take over the situation and not let the participant deal with it. This suggests that adolescents can face barriers to seeking help that are specific to their developmental stage as well as facing many of the same barriers as adults experiencing domestic violence. As Makepeace has pointed out it is inaccurate to assume that ending a dating relationship is easy simply because there is not economic dependence or dependant children.[120]

### Conclusions

It is an interesting anomaly that dating violence researchers have extensively used the measurement instrument developed for domestic violence research (the Conflict Tactics Scale) but have not drawn in any systematic or extensive way on domestic violence theories to explain dating violence. In any case, violence in intimate relationships is apparently not confined to adult relationships and working with young people may be an important starting point for changing and preventing violent relationships.

[115] Le Jeune & Follette (1994).

[116] Makepeace (1981).

[117] Mahlstedt, D. & Keeny, L. (1993) 'Female Survivors of Dating Violence and their Social Networks', *Feminism & Psychology* 3(3): 319–33.

[118] Roscoe & Benaske (1985).

[119] Mahlstedt & Keeny (1993).

[120] Makepeace (1981).

In conducting the research it will be important to investigate whether young people who experienced domestic violence in their home believe it has had any impact on their dating relationships and peer relations more generally. Comparing the responses to this issue in terms of gender will provide some interesting data about perceptions of dating relationships and effects of the experience of domestic violence. As discussed earlier one of the critical aspects of the research will be that it speaks to young people directly about how they believe the experiences have impacted on them and is not 'measuring effects'. This is intended to generate new information about the needs of young people both in living in their families and as they move into their own adult relationships.

### 3.3.5 Research Findings – Part Two: Young People's Focus Group

#### Participants in the focus group

Eleven young people from northern metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia, participated in a focus group to discuss the needs of children and young people experiencing domestic violence. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 22 years. The mean age was 18 years. Ten of the eleven participants were female. Nine of the participants' mothers were born in Australia and two were from non-English speaking backgrounds, seven of the participants' fathers were Australian born, two were from non-English speaking backgrounds and two participants did not know their father's country of birth as they had not had contact with them. Five participants lived with both parents, two lived with one parent and four lived independently either by themselves or with a partner.

#### Nature of the abuse

The time over which participants experienced abuse ranged from 1 to 17 years, with the average length of time spent in an abusive situation being 8.7 years. The relationships in which participants experienced abuse were:

- fathers who were violent towards both the mother and children (5);
- mother who was violent towards her child (1);
- stepfathers/adult male partners/adult male friends violent to children (3); and
- violence from dating partners (2).

Seven of the participants no longer lived in abusive situations and four were still living in situations where violence and abuse were being witnessed and/or experienced.

For the seven participants no longer living in abusive situations, the situation had changed because:

- the young person had left the parental home (4);
- the young person had separated from her boyfriend (2); and
- the perpetrator had been charged with offences related to the abuse (1).

#### Staying in the abusive situation to protect others

Two participants stated that they remained in the situation as a source of support for their mothers and siblings who were also abused by their fathers.

> *I couldn't leave my mum alone with an abusive father and brother. I'm protective of my mother, I'm easing some of her pain being there*.

Whilst this participant's protective response can be viewed as empathic towards her mother, the dilemma is that the daughter continues to live in an abusive situation as long as her mother remains. It also indicates that the young woman is adhering to typical gender assumptions about women putting the needs of others above their own. Similar responses as to why women remain in violent and abusive relationships have been found in domestic violence research.

### Young people's perceptions and experiences of violent and abusive relationships

When asked what constituted domestic violence or abusive relationships, the young people in the focus group identified a continuum of behaviours from physical violence through to emotional abuse, social isolation, stalking and surveillance. The participants pointed out that physical violence could not be experienced in isolation from other forms of abuse:

> *Well when she is hitting and laying into you she is not just saying nothing, she is going off at you at the same time saying what a stupid bitch you are or whatever.*

In contrast to this they explained that it was possible to experience damaging abuse over a period of time that never involved physical violence. Like the women's focus groups, the young people reported the *effects of emotional and mental abuse as being longer lasting than the physical violence*.

The ever present and pervasive sense of fear was described by a number of participants as characteristic of living with violence and abuse.

> *I felt fear every day of my life – I lived in fear of dad, the court case, which I wanted to happen but also didn't want to happen as you have to go through it all again.*

> *Sometimes it seems easier to be living with the abuser rather than being stalked and followed once you leave. We left dad so many times but he would always find us. The only time he didn't was when we left the State.*

### Impact of domestic violence on trust, self esteem and relationships with others

For young people the effects of domestic violence included poor self esteem, feeling suicidal and not being able to trust people enough to develop relationships (both friendships and dating relationships). This lack of trust which had resulted from living in violent and abusive relationships, was a major issue for the young people in the focus group.

Living in violent relationships had influenced how participants related to potential partners in emerging intimate relationships. One participant reported that she had started a relationship with her boyfriend after finding she could trust him and that he had never behaved abusively (physically or emotionally). She was very definite about how she was developing an equal relationship where there was support. In contrast to this, another participant felt that she did not trust her own judgement about what was acceptable in a relationship after being in a very violent dating relationship.

> *I need to be more assertive with men – I don't have the courage to stand up for myself with blokes, I have problems with my self-esteem and that affects relationships and what I accept in them.*

The most commonly reported effect of domestic violence by participants was a lack of confidence and self esteem. The second most commonly reported concern was a lack of trust towards other people based on experiences of violence and abuse in intimate relationships. Other descriptions of the effects of domestic violence included feeling 'unworthy of love', 'suicidal' and 'withdrawn'. Two participants reported that they had been violent in self-defence and that this had been frightening as they became aware of their potential to be violent. Some of the participants had small children and all reported that they were developing strategies to prevent their children being victims of

violence and acting violently towards others. For one participant this had meant encouraging her son to understand equality in relationships.

### Impact on educational performance

The young people's data provides a clear insight as to why young people do have problems at school generally and with their educational attainment. The stories provided are varied but show the same outcome, these young people's educational opportunities have suffered as a consequence of experiencing violence and abuse in the home. Despite these experiences a number of the young people in the focus group had continued with their education, as they saw it in the long run as providing them with greater control and power over their lives if they had an education.

All participants reported a decline in their educational achievement when they were experiencing violence and abuse in the home. They explained that one of the reasons for doing poorly at school was that in comparison to what was going on in the rest of their lives they 'didn't give a shit about grades'. One participant said that her mother (who was the perpetrator of abuse) valued her daughter gaining high marks, and failing at school was one way she could have power over her mother. Another participant, whose father was the perpetrator of abuse, reported that her grades declined once she was in high school. However in recent years her father has been sick and less able to be abusive, so her marks had improved as his health declined. Some participants also reported that they challenged teachers and were confronting in their approach to them, as teachers were the only adults in their lives that were not abusive to them. Thus in some ways teachers were 'safe targets' for young people's anger towards their abusive parents.

### Coping with violent and abusive relationships

Strategies which participants had used to cope with living in violent relationships changed over time as they grew. For many as children their initial reactions were to run and hide. Some participants commented that because this was the only family experience they knew they thought it was normal behaviour when they were young children. Participants had often taken some responsibility for the violence and abuse in the first instance, as with that reported by women in domestic violence situations.

Strategies used by the young people to cope with the violence were:

- leaving the situation;
- moving out permanently when they were old enough;
- putting on weight (one participant put on weight as she became older as this made it more difficult for the parent to physically assault her);
- fighting back;
- not responding to the perpetrator's jibes as this escalated violence at a later point; and
- submitting to the violent behaviour (one participant in a violent dating relationship stated that in order to avoid being physically abused she would submit to sex as this was not as bad as being beaten – she described this as a 'successful strategy').

The type of coping strategies which participants employed depended on their age, the person who was abusing them and their situation. It was evident from the participants' accounts that they felt an overwhelming sense of powerlessness to change the situation when they were younger. For most, as they got older, the only viable option which they saw for living *without* violence was to leave the family home.

### Barriers to disclosing violent and abusive relationships

All of the young participants had told somebody about the violent situation in which they lived; however, there were barriers to telling people.

#### *Fear of breaking up the family*

Participants feared that if they reported the abusive situation it would result in the family breaking up, for which they would feel responsible.

#### *Fear of further abuse*

Participants also reported being very fearful about telling anyone for fear of further abuse as a result of disclosure.

#### *The problem of mandatory notification*

The perception that disclosure to someone who was a mandated notifier would result in reporting to authorities prevented some young people disclosing their situation. An important issue raised was that they resisted telling people they knew to be mandatory notifiers because, in the first instance, they really only wanted to share their problem, not have intervention from outside.

#### *Trust issues*

A related issue identified by the group was the need to have absolute trust in the person to whom they were disclosing violence and abuse. A number of participants did not have adults that they could trust to talk to about their situation. Strategies used by the participants at a young age included telling pets or toys about the situation, as they knew they could not repeat what was said. As they grew older some participants told close friends, but this always entailed the risk of the friend telling others, either with good intentions or maliciously, at a later date.

### People they told about the abuse

People that participants told about the abuse included:

- school counsellors;
- friends and boyfriends;
- social workers; and
- police (when admitted to hospital with severe injuries).

In some cases participants disclosed the information in order to access services or for income security. The disclosure in these cases was therefore different to those who told friends for support. One participant in a violent dating relationship did not tell her parents about the situation because she had become alienated from her parents as a result of her partner's abusive behaviour.

### Helpful responses when young people are disclosing violence and abuse

#### *Validation of their feelings*

The responses perceived by young people to be helpful and effective were those which reassured them that the violence and abuse was not their fault, nor was it 'normal' or acceptable, but that their reactions and feelings towards the abusive situation and the perpetrator were 'normal'.

#### *Normalising contradictory feelings and feelings of disloyalty*

Related to the need to have their feelings validated was that many participants at the time were experiencing contradictory emotions towards family members. Generally there was dislike and fear of the perpetrator, however, where this was a parent there were also feelings of disloyalty about

disclosing the perpetrator's behaviour and their negative feelings towards them. In cases where the perpetrator was not a family member, there was not a sense of disloyalty about disclosure.

In cases where the mother was also a victim of violence and abuse, there were differing reactions to the mother. Some participants were concerned about the well-being of their mother and also viewed her as a victim. Other participants felt anger towards their mothers in what they perceived as the mother's failure to either stop the abuse or remove the children from the situation:

> *My mother had 14 partners and they were all abusive in different ways to me. She had no self-esteem, but I still hate her because she didn't protect me from the violence. I have a child now and I would never let anyone hurt him.*

By comparison, other participants saw their mothers equally as victims without power:

> *My mother tried to stop the abuse (against the children) but she would always end up getting beaten up as well.*

#### Support from peers

Participants reported that it was helpful to have somebody of the same age to talk to about the situation, as they could provide understanding and support. A strength identified in talking to peers with similar experiences was that they could be trusted and would understand how difficult it was to talk about violence and abuse in your family. One participant commented that after having a boyfriend for a while she told him about the abuse and he then discussed how his father had constantly put him down. She stated that this has provided a strong basis for their relationship – based on trust and respect.

### 3.3.6 Needs of Young People Who Have Experienced Violence and Abuse

Many of the young people's feelings and reactions to domestic violence were similar to those of adult survivors – a sense of worthlessness, living in constant fear and feeling powerless. Another significant similarity was that young people, like women survivors, reported that it was the mental and emotional abuse which was more devastating and long lasting in its impact.

However, this research found that young people are resilient and some are able to lead lives free from violence – challenging assumptions about the intergenerational effects of domestic violence.

#### Someone caring and trustworthy to talk to

'Having someone to talk to who cares' was identified by young people as a strong need, but few knew an adult they felt they could trust. The youth health service met their need to have someone to trust and talk to about their experiences because the workers:

- were able to relate to young people;
- were not viewed as being in positions of authority;
- demonstrated an understanding of the situation; and
- instilled in the young people a sense of having power over their own lives.

Some participants found that teachers were not people that they felt comfortable talking to because they represented a form of authority. This was especially the case when they had been previously been in trouble at school.

To meet young people's needs it is imperative that services can assure the young people of confidentiality within clearly defined limits.

Participants felt that having people similar to their age to talk to was valuable, as their peers knew the unique difficulties that they faced and could explain things in ways that they understood. It is important that service providers recognise the lack of trust and the confidentiality issues that young people identify as major barriers to reporting domestic violence to adults.

### Examination of the effects of mandatory notification on young people

Mandatory notifying requirements affected who young people chose to tell about their abusive situation.

> *With mandated notifiers sometimes this makes the situation worse. You need to trust this person not to tell unless it won't make things worse. When FaCS [Family and Community Services] got involved things got worse. You need to be in control of who else gets told.*

Some young people in a violent situation felt they had no control or power over what happened to them. As children they were aware of teachers being mandated notifiers of child abuse, and therefore did not want to disclose their situation and be responsible for the family breaking up. Similar wariness about telling social workers was also reported. The young people therefore continued to live in violent and abusive situations and continued to experience an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and isolation.

**3.04 It is recommended that young people be made aware of the implications of disclosing experiences of violence or abuse to workers by:**
- **establishing protocols which clearly explain the role of workers as mandated notifiers;**
- **educating children in schools about the role and purpose of mandated notifiers as a means of increasing their understanding and aiding trust in school staff.**

**3.05 It is recommended that priority be given to developing strategies that give power, choice and control to children and young people in situations of domestic violence in order to overcome their experiences of powerlessness.**

### Need for ongoing support during legal processes

Some participants who had been involved in court cases which were related to their experiences of violence talked about having the 'courage to make a statement and press charges'. One participant described the added difficulty of having to 'go over and over the events months later'. This meant that, like women survivors, they did not feel free of the abuse, regardless of the time since they had separated from the perpetrator.

**3.06 It is recommended that agencies' policies and practices recognise and respond to young people's need for support throughout the entire period of court and other legal processes which arise as a consequence of domestic violence.**

### Need for informal peer support

Participants identified a need for friends to listen and support them and a need for support groups. They recommended exploration of the further use of peer education.

**3.07 It is recommended that models of service delivery which involve peer support groups and peer educators be developed and used in a range of settings to assist young people to deal with domestic violence.**

### Need to include domestic violence issues in the school curriculum

As with other groups involved in this research, young people argued that domestic violence and child sexual abuse should be discussed in schools as part of the curriculum in order to raise children and young people's awareness of the issues. The need for relevant information about these issues to be made publicly available for all children was also advocated.

**3.08 It is recommended that school curricula include information about domestic violence and child sexual abuse within the context of current social problems, providing opportunities for students learn about:**
- **the extent of domestic violence in the community;**
- **the reasons for domestic violence; and**
- **effects of domestic violence and current responses to the problem.**

### Need for safe accommodation and support after leaving the violent situation

Young people emphasised the need to feel safe in their temporary environment once they had left the abusive situation. Because of the temporary nature of the accommodation available for those fleeing from domestic violence, the young people often experienced fear and concern that they would have to return to the situation.

Services for young people escaping situations of domestic violence were seen as inadequate by participants. In particular, there was not enough safe accommodation that specifically addressed their immediate needs. Youth shelters were not viewed as responsive to their needs and were often full.

**3.09 It is recommended that service models be reviewed and developed from the perspective of children and young people escaping from domestic violence and abuse.**

**3.10 It is recommended that current accommodation options for young people be examined with a view to providing a greater number of responsive services to young people who are at risk of homelessness because of domestic violence.**

### Need for increased awareness amongst young people about the problem of violence in relationships and the services available

Similar to the women survivors' experiences, young people reported the need for public awareness to be raised about violence and abuse not being an acceptable part of relationships. As suggested in recommendation 1.05, community education campaigns need to be broadly based.

**3.11 It is recommended that domestic violence campaigns include a component that specifically addresses children and young people.**

## 3.4 Domestic Violence in Rural and Remote Areas

### 3.4.1 Literature Review: Domestic Violence in Rural Areas

For people experiencing domestic violence in rural and remote areas there are important structural and cultural issues to be considered. Confidentiality and privacy issues are far more important where communities are small and news travels quickly through informal networks. People from outside the community are often viewed with suspicion. Geographical isolation, increasing poverty, the ease of access to weapons such as guns,[121] insufficient police numbers, a lack of culturally appropriate services and community norms make rural women who are victims of domestic violence particularly vulnerable.

Many women in rural areas, whether wealthy or poor, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, are aware that reporting domestic violence will bring shame to their children and extended family. It is not uncommon for those who do report the violence to people outside the family to be criticised by their families and the community, thereby becoming increasingly isolated.

Rural communities are commonly viewed as conservative, with a strong emphasis on maintenance of traditional family norms. Dominant ideologies maintain powerful constraints on women in rural areas and ensure sex stratification based on the subordination of women and sex-based division of labour.[122] Victims of domestic violence may find it difficult to find support to leave a relationship.[123] In addition, there is a lack of crisis accommodation, such as refuges, in rural and remote areas.

In the past few years economic factors have added stress to rural families, with droughts, reduced access to social security provisions and removal or decline of essential services posing extreme hardship to increasing numbers of people.[124] Margaret Alston notes that declining prosperity and depopulation in rural areas in Australia, coupled with impoverished health and welfare conditions, led to an increase in stress related problems in rural families and to an increase in marriage breakdown and in domestic violence.

> *Health workers and rural counsellors … report increasing incidence of domestic violence. Isolation, lack of transport, availability of firearms and lack of crisis services make this a terrifying experience for rural victims.*[125]

In working with rural men who are perpetrators of domestic violence, the issues of confidentiality and privacy are also relevant. In addition, there may be limitations on the types of interventions that are used to work with the men around their violence, as services may be generic in focus, or not available due to location. For example, the running of men's groups (a common practice in the city) may not be possible in remote locations.

In 1995 Alston conducted an exploratory study of violence against women in two rural communities in Australia. She confirmed that violence was under-reported because of factors such as stigma attached to public disclosure, lack or support, lack of alternatives, a perceived lack of confidentiality and resistance to leaving their rural lifestyle. She found that some professionals in rural areas only recognise overt physical violence as abnormal and do not act on other forms of domestic violence, which are widespread and commonplace.[126] Of all the published literature, rural and remote experiences of domestic violence was the area with the least research publications.

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[121] Coorey, L. (1988) Domestic Violence and the Police: Who Is Being Protected? A Rural Australian View, Masters thesis, University of Sydney, Department of Social Work & Social Policy; Coorey, L. (1992) 'A Rural Perspective on Domestic Violence', *Discussion and Resource Kit for Use in Rural and Isolated Communities*, National Committee on Violence Against Women, Office of the Status of Women, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra.

[122] Alston, M. (1997) 'Violence Against Women in the Rural Context', *Australian Social Work* 50(1).

[123] Coorey (1988).

[124] Alston, M. (1993) A Study of Farm Women, Doctoral thesis, University of New South Wales, Department of Sociology; Alston (1997).

[125] Alston, M. (1996) 'Rural Models of Service Delivery: Barriers to Effective Practice', Paper prepared for the Family Services Council, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, p. 2.

[126] Alston (1997).

### Conclusions

The experiences of women living in domestic violence in rural and remote areas are likely to be exacerbated due to geographical isolation, lack of services and lack of anonymity. Options for service delivery both for perpetrators and victims/survivors are limited in rural areas in terms of what is provided and where. Alston's study identified key issues for those in rural and remote areas experiencing domestic violence – all of which were confirmed by our research.

## 3.4.2 Research Findings

### Methodology

Twenty-seven callers (23%) to the phone-in were from rural areas. Whilst the focus groups were undertaken in the city, just under half of the participants had at some stage lived in the country whilst in violent relationships. Many of the women survivors had moved to the city in order to escape the abusive relationship. Participants who had experienced domestic violence whilst living in rural areas presented some of the most desperate stories.

The following regional health service providers were consulted about the specific experiences and needs of rural people living in domestic violence situations:

- Lower North Community Health Service;
- South-East Regional Community Health Service; and
- Whyalla Community Health Service.

### Issues for women victims/survivor of domestic violence in rural areas

Whilst many of the issues identified for women in metropolitan areas were also present for women in rural and remote areas, there were special issues arising for the latter group.

#### *Extreme isolation*

The sense of isolation for women in rural areas was palpable. In some cases women did not have independent access to transport and were controlled to the point of feeling imprisoned.

Some callers had moved to the country when they had married their partners and thus were without the support of their family and friends. For others, extended family members were unsympathetic – for example, a woman's parents-in-law refused to accept that their son was violent, despite evidence to the contrary.

Women who had lived in rural areas all their lives encountered particular difficulties. Their standing in the community, or their family's standing, acted as a barrier against changing the situation. They were frightened, ashamed and fearful that they may embarrass families members who lived in the area, and/or felt they would not be believed by servicaproviders who knew their male partner. Being well-known in the community can inhibit victims from telling others about the abuse and prevent others from responding appropriately to evidence, or the suspicion of abuse. It could also be divisive in towns where different people 'took sides' around couples in a domestic violence relationship.

#### *Entrapment and alienation*

Overall there was a much stronger feeling of entrapment and alienation experienced by women from rural areas than by those living in the cities. This experience is in stark contrast to the perception of mutually supportive communities that we often associate with country living. One women explained: 'The GP and Rural Counsellor say, "You've got to get out". They explain avenues such as safe houses but I'm not in a position to respond'. (The caller lives in a remote farm-house, has no access to money and no access to transport.)

#### *Financial dependency*

Whilst financial dependency is a problem for most women leaving violent relationships, this was mentioned by many rural callers as being a major barrier to change as they did not know how to access legal assistance or social security payments. Additionally they may have left the situation without sufficient identification information to apply for income support.

Many women reported being unwilling to force property settlements because of pressures not to break up family properties. Assets were also sometimes difficult to identify and/or were controlled by family trusts.

The financial situation for some rural callers was especially difficult as they were not eligible for income support or legal aid due to land and other assets. Thus the situation arose where some women had no access to any money whatsoever. Women in these circumstances are doubly disadvantaged – they may be unable to access means-tested services, as well as having their entitlement to income support denied.

In cases where the property settlement is prolonged, rural women experience ongoing financial abuse, despite having ended the relationship. Extended and enforced poverty may force them to return to violent relationships, especially where there are children involved. This form of structural inequality can act as a strong disincentive for rural women to plan to leave an abusive relationship.

#### *Safety issues*

For rural women, leaving a relationship would usually require the woman to leave town because of safety issues and a lack of alternative safe accommodation. The idea of leaving was made more difficult for callers who did not have access to transport, and/or when children did not wish to relocate away from their local communities.

### Barriers to disclosing abuse to others

Whereas 92 per cent of city callers indicated that they had told someone of their situation, only 82 per cent of rural respondents indicted that they had informed others of their situation.

#### *Lack of community response*

Where participants had tried to tell people about their situation they had often been met with ‘a wall of silence’ and been shunned by the community. This provided a strong disincentive for women to seek any further help within the same community. For example, one participant had an abusive partner who did important volunteer work in the community and had close ties to both the police and the doctors in the town. The woman felt that she would not be believed by either of these groups who ‘would not want to rock the boat’ and risk losing his voluntary services.

#### *Mixed responses from service providers*

There was reluctance amongst country callers to tell family, the police and social services of their situation, although they were equally as inclined as city callers to inform friends and their doctors. This study found that, apart from sympathetic friends, the local doctors were a first point of contact for some rural victims, so it is imperative that doctors’ responses are effective. Further analysis of the support provided by the police and social services in country areas is warranted.

One rural worker consulted as part of the research found that, in her experience, referrals for domestic violence often came from astute workers or contacts such as kindergarten and school teachers, nurses, business people and local organisations such as the Country Women’s Association. The Country Women’s Associations have recently been distributing domestic violence kits (developed by the Office of the Status of Women) in rural areas.

Participants in the focus groups who had experiences with the police in both rural and the city areas reported that the responses of police had been much better in the city. They reported that police in a number of rural areas were generally unsympathetic. They thought that the response from police reflected the rural community's attitude towards domestic violence in general.

#### *Limited access to resources*

Rural areas are poorly serviced and people reported having to travel long distances to services. The importance of addressing children's needs was further emphasised by those living in rural areas, where children's services are scarce.

In summary, key issues for women in the country were:

- social and physical isolation;
- the close, conservative nature of rural communities;
- community acceptance – being ashamed to tell people about the abuse;
- limited access to resources, particularly financial and legal resources;
- no anonymity (phoning is easier);
- the relationship between partners and local service providers;
- distance to services and limited transport options;
- lack of services for children;
- lack of access to safe accommodation; and
- other safety issues – for example, there are no police on 24-hour call in some areas.

The following comments from callers to the phone-in demonstrated the issues summarised above.

- 'I need a safe place to go when I am locked outside by my husband.'
- 'Children's needs have to be considered in the country where there are few services.'
- 'My husband drank with the police so they didn't believe me.'
- 'My husband was born here and is friendly with everyone including the police and the doctor – how can I tell them? I am the outsider – who would believe me?'
- 'Country services are absolutely abominable. There is nothing. The one woman that I was referred to was untrained. She deserves the title "do-gooder"; she had no idea what she was on about: there's no choice, especially if the worker is useless.'
- 'Victims and perpetrators have to travel long distances to get help.'

### Issues for men in rural areas

Many of the issues identified for rural women equally applied to men in rural areas. These include lack of anonymity, being ashamed to let people know that there is violence in their relationship, and lack of trained workers and specialised services to meet the needs of men. Rural areas were perceived as very poorly resourced in services that deal with relationship issues generally. In particular services for male perpetrators outside major towns are non-existent.

## 3.4.3 Specific Needs of People Experiencing Domestic Violence in Rural and Remote Areas

### Need for toll-free telephone services

The lack of specific services in rural areas was emphasised by all participants from the country and by service providers, suggesting a crucial need for toll-free telephone services which would enable people living in rural areas to access specialised help and to speak with someone outside their community. However, it should be noted that some victims are so isolated that they cannot access a telephone.

**4.01 It is recommended that a toll-free telephone number for rural callers be available and that this telephone number be widely promoted, using strategies appropriate to rural communities.**

### Need for access to relevant services

Since there are only a small number of services in rural areas, there is a need for generic and specialised services to develop inter-agency practices, protocols and agreements which facilitate access to services. This includes providing relevant information and support on income and legal matters, so that women and children are not forced to remain in unsafe situations or return to them.

**4.02 It is recommended that human service organisations ensure that training, professional development and ongoing support be provided to workers based in rural and remote areas.**

**4.03 It is recommended that inter-agency protocols for dealing with situations of domestic violence be reviewed to ensure that those experiencing domestic violence are not disadvantaged due to location.**

### Need for the development of appropriate models of intervention

Given the unique circumstances of those involved in domestic violence in rural and remote areas, it is imperative that models of intervention are developed which take these circumstances into account. The application of city-based models to rural areas can be inappropriate and ineffective.

Strategies for rural areas should include the continuing dissemination of information about domestic violence to rural communities through a range of accessible media.

**4.04 It is recommended that innovative models of intervention that are more responsive to the unique needs of rural domestic violence victims, survivors and perpetrators, including children, be developed.**

**4.05 It is recommended that rural-specific domestic violence public education campaigns be conducted to reach target audiences in rural and remote areas, using various strategies.**

## 3.5 Domestic Violence and Families from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds

### 3.5.1 Introduction: Literature Review

The Office of the Status of Women report on community attitudes to violence against women identified that males and females born in non-English speaking countries were among the groups who were consistently least informed about various aspects of domestic violence.[127]

In 1995, the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) researched the needs of consumers from non-English speaking backgrounds in Commonwealth-funded marriage and relationship counselling services.[128] According to OMA a person of non-English speaking background is

- someone born overseas in a non-English speaking country or a country in which the first language is not English; or
- someone born in Australia with one or both parents as defined above.[129]

The experience of being a person of non-English speaking background (NESB) in Australia is complex.[130] Language, ethnicity and culture have all played a major role in creating a NESB identity. Relationships Australia (NSW) noted that NESB clients encounter significant stress through the various experiences of migration and settlement in Australia.[131] A significant number of publications have highlighted that Australia's immigration policies 'can impact detrimentally on the marriage/family relationship, placing certain members within this relationship (usually women) in a less powerful position than others'.[132]

Refugees experience particular vulnerability within their marriage and family relationships as a result of previous encounters of torture or other trauma. This, combined with the experience of being unable to prepare for migration, leaving family members behind and the problems related to resettling into a new country such as learning English, securing housing and work), create special needs for this group.[133]

Acculturation stress is defined as 'a physiological and psychological state within the individual that is altered by the acculturation process and that requires distinct coping strategies until satisfactory adaptation is achieved.'[134] Important predictors include education, gender, attitudes to acculturation, prior inter-cultural experiences and contact experiences with the host society. Many authors identify that where migrant families hold beliefs and values which are similar to those of the host culture they are more successful.[135]

[127] Office of the Status of Women (1995) *Community Attitudes to Violence against Women*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, AGPS, Canberra.

[128] Stoyles, M. (1995) *Partners in Any Language*, Office of Multicultural Affairs, AGPS, Canberra.

[129] ibid.

[130] Jayasuriya, L. (1990) 'Language and Culture in Australian Public Policy. Some Critical Reflection', *International Migration Review* 24(1): 124–48; Castles, S. (1992) 'Australian Multiculturalism. Social Policy and Identity in a Changing Society' in G. Freeman, & J. Jupp (eds) *Nations of Immigrants: Australia, the United States and International Migration*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne.

[131] Stoyles (1995), p. 2.

[132] ibid., p. 13.

[133] ibid.

[134] Berry J. (1989) 'Comparative Studies of Acculturative Stress', *International Migration Review* 21(3): 492–3.

[135] Nuack, B. (1989) 'Assimilation Process and Group Integration of Migrant Families', *International Migration* 27(1); March & Mithun, J.S. (1983) 'The Role of the Family in Acculturation and Assimilation in America: A Psychocultural Dimension' in W. McCready (ed.) *Culture, Ethnicity and Identity: Current Issues in Research*, Academic Press, New York.

On reviewing the literature, Stoyles found that for migrants stressors in marriage/family relationships include:

- having to adjust to a new socio-cultural and economic life;
- changes in the rights and independence of women;
- adjustment to unrealistic, overly optimistic expectations;
- cross-cultural and intergenerational conflict;
- extensive time lapses in sponsoring spouses/children to Australia;
- unresolved experiences of torture or other trauma;
- stresses relating to the application of immigration law; and
- stresses arising from extreme individual and structural isolation.[136]

Other factors contributing to the vulnerability of migrants include

- the extent of language proficiency;
- the extent of membership of religious or linguistic groups/communities;
- educational and socio-economic level; and
- the extent and experience of racial prejudice.[137]

The way immigration structures domestic relationships is also significant. Sponsorship arrangements can introduce a volatile power dynamic into a relationship. The experiences of Filipino women, and others who migrate as sponsored spouses, are indicative and are discussed.

The OMA research found that needs presented by non-English speaking people were specific to their experiences of being migrants in Australia. Factors identified that may either predispose people to domestic violence, or increase their vulnerability to domestic violence, include:

- clashes in the family's values and traditions with those of Anglo-Australian society, in particular gender expectations of male and female roles within the marriage;
- a loss of identity and self-worth by men in the marriage, brought about by failure to find work or by other family members becoming less dependent on them for their needs; and
- a feeling of disempowerment for women in the marriage as a result of being locked into a particular role expectation, homesickness or breakdown of extended family support networks.[138]

In the OMA research, 16 discussion meetings were held with people from Vietnamese, Arabic-speaking, Jewish, Greek and Filipino backgrounds living in NSW. All female groups indicated that violence was a problem in their community – particularly with newly-arrived migrants. Many felt the problem was exacerbated by the lack of family support and influence, for example:

> *He would drink and then come home after losing all his money gambling and punch me and swear at me…. I had no family here, if I did they'd have spoken to him and put him in line* (Greek woman).[139]

Male participants had a different view, saying that the incidence of domestic violence was 'exaggerated by the government and the media'.[140]

[136] Stoyles (1995), pp. 29–38.

[137] Jupp, J., McRobbie, A. & York, B. (1990) *Metropolitan Ghettos and Ethnic Concentrations*, Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, p. 61.

[138] Stoyles (1995), p. 68.

[139] ibid., pp. 83–4.

[140] ibid., p. 84.

Whilst highlighting issues for non-English speaking background groups and communities, it is important to stress that all individuals have unique needs and do not always belong to homogenous groups or communities. Given this, there is substantial evidence that there may be major cultural differences in attitudes towards, and responses to, domestic violence in ethnic communities in Australia which need to be understood. It is important to look at legislation and institutions, such as community-based family service agencies, to understand how they implicitly exclude people because of cultural differences, or are only accessible if people give up their particular culture in some way.

The capacity of people from non-English speaking backgrounds to access services can be hampered by:

- a lack of information/knowledge about social services;
- language and associated barriers;
- fear of deportation and persecution at home if on temporary visas;
- fear of police and bureaucrats from prior experiences;
- age (elderly people are particularly vulnerable);
- different religious and cultural values, beliefs and norms; and
- social isolation or fear of isolation from family and/or community.

Literature about the nature of domestic violence against women from two ethnic groups will now be examined in more detail to illustrate the specific difficulties these women experience.

### Violence against Vietnamese women in Australia

The Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) project on *Multiculturalism and the Law* identified many factors which contribute to the difficulties experienced by Vietnamese women in accessing services.[141] These are broadly classified as 'psycho-social or cultural' factors and 'social access factors'. The 'psycho-social or cultural' factors are related to a person's cultural conditioning and the consequent values, expectations and beliefs about what is acceptable, which influence the way the person thinks and feels about the law and related social services.

Factors identified by the ALRC report include:

- For women in traditional Vietnamese culture, it is seen as shameful to seek outside help, or even let other people know you are having family problems.
- Vietnamese women may fear that if they consult a Vietnamese worker their problems will become known to the whole community and the family name will be damaged.
- The concept of professional help is foreign to Vietnamese people.
- There are language barriers that lead to feelings of embarrassment or frustration.
- Non-Vietnamese workers may be avoided because they do not understand the cultural context, experiences or difficulties faced by Vietnamese people.
- Using interpreters may be seen to compromise confidentiality, or lead to inaccurate translations, or may not be financially viable.
- Many people feel privileged to be living in Australia and do not want to complain or show they are having difficulties lest they appear ungrateful or are labelled as a 'problem community'.
- Those who speak out may be reprimanded by others.

[141] Celermajer, D. (1991) 'Family Law: Issues in the Vietnamese Community', *Multiculturalism and the Law Research Paper 1*, Australian Law Reform Commission, Sydney.

In Vietnamese communities, social position and status is strongly linked to family status, which is traditionally structured along hierarchical, patriarchal lines.[142] A survey of the Vietnamese, Khumer and Lao communities in Sydney in 1990 suggested that many women from these communities do not recognise domestic violence as an offence and may see it as a 'natural' part of family life. Furthermore, because of the social stigma attached to separation, divorce and single motherhood, many women make the choice to stay in an abusive relationship to avoid social isolation and jeopardising their children's prospects within the community.[143]

### Violence against Filipinas in Australia

Filipino women (Filipinas) who are subjected to domestic violence from their partners are often isolated from friends and family, unsure of their rights and subjected to racial vilification. At a recent conference, Melba Marginson reported that data from women's refuges have consistently shown that Filipino women have always ranked among the first five groups of ethnic women users.[144] This is despite the fact that Filipinas are reluctant to abandon their marriages 'at all costs'.[145]

Isolation is a major contributing factor to Filipinas' unwillingness to seek help. Pendelbury states[146] that many are living in mining towns or outback communities where 'women from a gregarious tightly-knit culture' find themselves totally alone and dependent on their partner.[147] Many report incidences of racial discrimination and resentment.[148] They have to contend with 'Asian phobia' in the general community. In addition, their status as 'mail order brides' puts them at odds with women who resent their presumed passivity, and the general populace who perceive them as 'jumping the immigration queue'.[149]

A report in the *Weekend Australian* in 1993 claimed that 'hearsay evidence … showed that of 110 serial sponsors, 80 had been violent towards their wives or had deprived them of rights and freedoms'.[150] In 1993 Ian Munro reported that the official toll of deaths and disappearances of Filipino women and their children stood at 18 over a 6-year period, prompting calls for an inquiry.[151] A further publication in 1997 reported that the murder rate of Filipinas is five times that of any other group of women in Australia.[152]

There are a number of relevant issues that the Filipina's plight when she is subjected to domestic violence, not least of all her cultural heritage and religious beliefs. Tan and Davidson identify four predominant cultural values that are considered to be traditionally held. They are: *'amor propio, hiya, pakkisama and utang na loob'*.[153] With reference to Filipina victims of domestic violence they conclude that:

[142] Huynh Anh, T. (1994) 'Two Facets of an Issue: Domestic Violence in the Vietnamese Community in Vietnam and Australia' in *Between Two Cultures: Vietnamese Women in Australia*, Vietnamese Women's Association NSW, Lidcombe, pp. 42–50.

[143] Dong, K. & Alcarso, C. (1990) *Better on Your Own?: A Survey of Domestic Violence in the Vietnamese, Khumer and Lao Communities*, Vietnamese Women's Association NSW, Lidcombe.

[144] Marginson, M. (1996) 'Increasing Access for Filipino Survivors of Domestic Violence' in *Not The Same: Conference Proceedings and a Strategy on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault for Non-English Speaking Background Women*, Office of the Status of Women, Melbourne, p. 18.

[145] Pendelbury, J. (1990) *Filipino Brides in Remote Areas*, Occasional Paper No. 5, Northern Australia Development Unit, Darwin, p. 13.

[146] ibid., p. 12.

[147] Rodell, S. (1982) 'The Bride's Price', *Australian Society*, p. 13.

[148] Pendlebury (1990), p. 12.

[149] Wall, D.R. (1983) 'Filipino Brides: Slaves or Marriage Partners? – A further comment', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 18(1): 219.

[150] Montgomery, B. (1993) *Weekend Australian*, 10 July, p. 8.

[151] *Sunday Age* (Vic) (1993) 4 July, p. 6.

[152] Cunneen, C. & Stubb, J. (1997) 'Gender, "Race" and International Relations: Violence against Filipino Women in Australia', *The Institute of Criminology Monograph Series*, No. 9, Sydney.

[153] Tan, J. & Davidson, G. (1994) 'Filipina-Australian marriages : further perspectives on spousal violence', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 29(3): 269.

> *The likelihood of their leaving, or telling someone or seeking help may increase as a function of their sense of honour or personal dignity (amor propio) but decrease as a function of their sense of embarrassment (hiya), desire for a smooth interpersonal relationship (pakikisama), and sense of obligation (utang na loob).*[154]

Cahill adds that 'family centredness is the core value around which the whole cultural system revolves'.[155] Despite a high level of education amongst Filipino women their credibility is gauged by their ability to perform as wife, mother and homemaker.[156] To admit to domestic violence is an admission of failure to maintain these roles.[157] The male is seen as the household head and 'has legal authority for his decisions to prevail in case of family disagreement'.[158]

Divorce is illegal in the Philippines. Catholicism is the dominant religion and its teachings are entrenched in Filipino social behaviours. It is reasonable to assume that divorce not only brings shame upon the woman but also upon her family back in the Philippines.[159] Divorce is frowned on by the church, so women from the Philippines bring a strong commitment to marriage.

It is held that the statistics on incidents of domestic violence against Filipino women are sketchy because in many situations these women deny their experiences and are largely resistant to ongoing group contact.[160] Apart from the hiya it is also claimed that they are often ambivalent and ignorant on matters of domestic violence. 'They think it is a normal, although much hated part of married life'.[161] A study by Tan and Davidson in 1994 revealed that the broader definition of domestic violence which includes emotional, social and economic abuse, was not readily acknowledged by Filipinas, despite the frequency of such behaviour and the harmful effects.[162]

In 1996, Marginson identified that Filipinas who have managed to transcend the many structural and personal barriers and left a violent partner, or those who have been abandoned, have found problems with the agencies where they have sought refuge.[163] She mentions reports by the women that indicated that refuge workers were not sensitive to their situation and discouraged them from relating to their children according to their own customary practices.

Stereotypical images have been constructed for the Filipino woman in Australian society. The term 'mail order bride' is deemed offensive and disrespectful by Filipinos, yet is commonly used.[164] Filipina brides are promoted as a commodity to be acquired and as easily disposed of if found unsuitable. Fray quotes *War of the Sexes* by Australian author, Ken Morgan, which describes how 'lonely middle aged men can marry a Filipino virgin for the cost of a lousy secondhand car'.[165]

The Filipina who is a victim of domestic violence may experience extreme social isolation. She may feel she has nowhere to turn – her natural reluctance to draw attention to her situation isolates her from her own cultural support base. This idea prompted the Murray Mallee Women's Health Service to develop community networks. They acknowledged that the victims are often in denial, and they are developing an awareness of their domestic violence program through indirect means. A Filipino

[154] ibid., p. 270.

[155] Cahill, cited in Tan & Davidson (1994), p. 270.

[156] Watkins, D. (1982) 'Filipino brides : Slaves or marriage partners?' *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 17(2): 76.

[157] Marginson (1996), p. 18.

[158] Watkins (1982), p. 76.

[159] Pendelbury (1990) p. 4.

[160] Barnett, K. & Radoslovich, H. (1996), 'Murray Mallee Women's Health Service & women of non English speaking background : A case study', *Stating Women's Health* 6(2): 29.

[161] Marginson (1996), p. 17.

[162] Tan & Davidson (1994), p. 26.

[163] Marginson (1996), p. 17.

[164] Ipong quoted in Lerriera (1992) *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 May.

[165] *Sunday Age* (Vic) (1993) 4 July, p. 6.

performing group has developed a performance based on Filipino women as domestic violence victims to raise awareness of the issues in the community.[166] This approach has had the effect of bringing victims together.

It has been argued that the acceptance of unrestricted sponsorship has been a major contributor to the abuse and abandonment of Filipino wives, or has allowed their partners to threaten them with desertion. In 1993, *The Advertiser* reported that in South Australia, 'one man has been married five times to mail order brides and is believed to be negotiating for another after his last left him'.[167] This phenomenon is known as serial sponsorship. The 'Not the Same' conference recommended that lobbying should continue to stop serial sponsorship.[168]

Filipino women often claimed that lack of appropriate information about their prospective husbands, and the Australian culture, needs to be addressed.[169] In 1994, in light of growing concern over incidences of abuse, the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs revised the sponsorship questionnaire to include information about other sponsorships. This information is now made available to prospective spouses.[170]

Filipino women who are subject to domestic violence have similar issues to other women who are victims. However, there are a number of unique factors including:

- isolation from her own culture and family;
- lack of understanding of Australian cultural norms;
- being confronted with racial prejudice; and
- general lack of awareness of social support services and legal and welfare rights.

### Improved service responses for NESB women

Interventions should be based on a clear understanding of these and other issues that are particular to the Filipino woman's situation.

The need for helping professionals to provide services that are responsive to the diverse needs of a multicultural clientele has been examined elsewhere.[171] The OMA research identified a number of suggestions for improved service delivery for non-English speaking background consumers including:

- improved targeting and cultural relevance of promotional and advertising materials;
- increased cultural responsiveness and flexibility by provision of cross-cultural training for staff, the employment of bilingual/bicultural counsellors and increased funding for interpreters;
- involving NESB people in the organisation through a community development/ consultation strategy;
- reviewing and developing service models that are culturally relevant for NESB clients;
- identifying and addressing actual or potential language barriers for NESB clients within these services;
- extending outreach services to areas of high NESB concentrations; and
- establishing closer working relationships with local, ethnic community organisations.

[166] Barnett & Radoslovich (1996), p. 29.

[167] Male (1993) *Advertiser* 2 Nov., p.15.

[168] Marginson (1996), p. 21.

[169] Pendelbury (1990), p. 18.

[170] Iredale, R. (1995) 'Serial Sponsorship : Immigration policy and human rights', *Just Policy* 3: 37–43.

[171] Stoyles (1995); e.g. Boynton, G. (1987) 'Cross-cultural Family Therapy: The Escape Model', *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 15(2): 123–30; Ibrahim, F.A. (1988) 'Effective Cross-cultural Counselling and Psychotherapy: A Framework', *The Counselling Psychologist* 13(4): 625–38; Peterson, P. (1985) (ed.) *Handbook of Cross-cultural Counselling and Therapy*, Praeger, New York; Bagshaw, D. (ed.) (1996) *Mediation and Cultural Diversity*, Conference Proceedings of the Second International Mediation Conference, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

Meemeduma highlights the need for all professionals to develop a frame of reference to inform practice with ethnic groups and states:

> *It is about identifying the fundamental values shaping the culture, the everyday concepts used to articulate the values of the culture, and the assumptions inherent within the culture of the nature of the social, personal and existential constructs.*[172]

### 3.5.2 Research Findings

#### Methodology

Not surprisingly, there were only a small number of callers in the phone-in from non-English speaking backgrounds. Those from culturally diverse backgrounds who did call had been, or still were, victims of violence.

To help assess the significance of cultural background to the experience of domestic violence, we interviewed nineteen service providers, (individually and in a group) with considerable experience in working with a wide range of migrant communities, including the Vietnamese, Filipino, Greek, Italian, former Yugoslavian, Polish, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Cambodian, Iraqi, Iranian and Hungarian communities. Drawing from a structured list of questions (see Appendix 9), they were asked to identify the specific needs of victims, perpetrators and children involved in domestic violence situations.

Drawing on their experience as service providers we asked about of the type of abuse experienced by people in the NESB communities, which sectors of the communities were particularly vulnerable, how cultural attitudes and practices mediate the abusive behaviour, the needs of the people involved and strategies to address the needs.

#### Experiences of people from NESB backgrounds: the perspective of service providers

This research confirmed that for some sectors of the South Australian community, the experience of domestic violence is complicated by the problems associated with migration. The stress of migration increases the risk of violence and makes it harder to report. The needs of people in migrant groups are influenced by specific cultural beliefs and practices, and the success of services in catering for these needs will often depend on whether or not they are culturally appropriate. The needs of NESB communities cannot be adequately addressed unless these sorts of barriers are taken into account.

#### Barriers to leaving an abusive relationship

Many women do not want to separate from their partners and many remain in or return to abusive relationships as a consequence. There are a number of possible reasons:

- Traditional gender roles

  Abuse is not always recognised by NESB women who may consider it to be an aspect of 'normal' married life. These views are often reinforced by traditional cultural and religious practices. For instance, in some communities women are taught to defer to masculine authority no matter how it is exercised.

- Community attitudes

  In some communities, domestic violence is a hidden problem, denied by community and religious leaders. Women who seek help may not be believed, or may be told that they must bear the abuse for the sake of the community.

[172] Meemeduma, P. (1993) 'Reshaping the future: Cultural sense and social work', AASW *Conference Proceedings*, p. 10.

- Fear of social isolation
  Many NESB women are already socially isolated by race and ethnicity – the pressure to put up with abuse rather than separate can come from a desire to retain contact with their community.
- Absence of extended family
  Some women lose the support offered by an extended family network through migration.
- Community respect
  Many women may be embarrassed and may not want to be seen to be 'making trouble' in their new communities or for immigration officials.
- Language barriers
  Many NESB women are unable to access information or ask for help because they do not speak English, or because the system of service provision differs from the system in their country of origin. For instance, the concept of counselling may be meaningless to some women because counselling services were not provided in their country of origin.
- 'Culture of violence'
  In their country of origin, violence may be an everyday experience because of State repression or civil war, and/or gender hierarchies involving abuses of power may be the norm.
- Stress of migration
  Recently arrived women may see finding work and housing for their family as a priority. The desire to keep the family together can outweigh personal considerations.
- Immigration issues
  Some women who are resident in Australia on temporary student or visitor visas fear deportation, or being persecuted once they return home, if they report domestic violence. For women who have been sponsored by a resident partner, abuse may be perceived as the price that they have to pay. Many men use the threat of notifying the authorities to control women's behaviour.

### Sponsorship and 'Mail Order Brides'

Service providers highlighted the provisions within the Australian Migration Program for the sponsorship of family members, including spouses and prospective spouses, as a particular problem area. Under these provisions, the migration of a spouse or prospective spouse is supported by a resident of Australia who agrees to provide:

> *adequate accommodation and financial assistance as required to meet your relative's reasonable living needs during their first two years in Australia. This includes providing financial and other support such as child care that will enable your relatives to attend appropriate English language classes. By signing the undertaking you also agree to provide information and advice to help your relative settle in Australia (DIMA, Form 961i).*

The relationship between sponsor and spouse can be difficult, particularly where expectations differ. A difference in expectations can become a catalyst for abuse. For example, one woman was abused by her husband/sponsor because he claimed that she was here to look after him, not to attend English language classes. He insisted that she had made a contract with him to provide domestic services in exchange for his sponsorship. He believed that his support of her and her son for two years entitled him to her services and that he should not have to tolerate her absence while she was studying.

The view that sponsorship is a form of indenture is exacerbated by popular views held by some Australian men that Asian women, in particular, are 'compliant' and 'submissive'. To the contrary, as one worker noted, 'getting out of the country in an effort to better themselves is a sign of an adventurous spirit.'

Workers noted that some women's expectations of life in Australia were unrealistic. The potential for women to be exploited by sponsors is enormous. Women from economically unstable or impoverished countries (for example from China, Russia, the Philippines) see marriage to foreigners as a means of improving their circumstances. These women can be easily seduced by the romantic attention of an apparently prosperous prospective husband. For example one of the workers said:

> *I've noticed in a lot of cases you can see already the patterns of abuse, the cycle of violence beginning, but it's not the violence, it's like the honeymoon phase. The woman might have come for a holiday and he gives her gifts and really woos her and when she goes back, he calls her every day and tells her how much he loves her, so she feels really excited – someone is paying her that much attention. Nobody tells her of his history of alcohol abuse or of domestic violence – the community covers up, they want that person [the sponsor] to have a stable relationship. They don't think about the woman, they won't tell her.*

Women in these situations are confronted with some very difficult options. Although some would prefer to return home, they are shamed by their families and feel they have failed. For some women, particularly those from cultures with traditional attitudes towards marriage, there is a strong incentive to remain and put up with the abuse in the relationship. This is coupled with a range of practical considerations. For instance, in order to migrate from their country of origin, they may have given up their entitlement to public housing (and have to wait 10 years if they return); or they may have given up their job in a community where there are high levels of unemployment; or had to sell personal assets to pay for the costs of travel.

The relationship between immigration regulations, sponsorship arrangements and domestic violence is complex and difficult for migrant women to negotiate. Many of the service providers believed that DIMA should intervene before the woman gives up her job and leaves her country. Furthermore, immigration authorities tend to focus on the person being sponsored, but a greater level of scrutiny is needed of the sponsor.

The following situation was reported by one of the workers:

> *One client who met her husband overseas came here and thought that everything would be nice, would be OK. However, the house was a pig-sty. She left after four days of being there. He was getting drunk every day, there were faeces of animals everywhere in the place. Now she is really in limbo for a year – waiting to find out what immigration is going to do with her, whether they are going to send her back or not.*

Service providers generally thought that the burden of failure in the sponsorship relationship mostly falls on women in that their position in the relationship and as temporary, sponsored residents of Australia was the most precarious.

### Experience of migration: long term issues

The social services that may be used by migrant communities need to be aware of the possible linkages between the stresses of migration and domestic violence. These stresses may extend well beyond the initial period of migration and resettlement.

A number of workers drew our attention to the long-term difficulties faced by women from the Greek and Italian communities. Although these communities are well established in South Australia, some of the obstacles to migrant women accessing services persist. Language barriers, for instance, remain for some women whose relationships do not extend beyond the private sphere and their cultural community. Even though some women have been resident in South Australia for 20 or more years, many have never learnt to drive or use public transport and have relied on their husbands to deal with transport and manage other services such as banking and Social Security.

Some women do not know where their personal documents (such as passports, birth and marriage certificates) are located because their husbands have 'looked after' them. Women who experience abuse may be unaware of their rights or the services that are available to them as recently arrived migrants.

### Abuse of the elderly

Workers identified increasing instances of abuse of the elderly in migrant communities. Women in their sixties or seventies are being abused by adult children directly or as a consequence of their collusion with the father. In many instances this collusion is motivated by a concern over property issues should the parents separate or a general belief that the integrity of the family should be preserved at all costs. For example one woman who had been abused for many years and who had endured sexual torture and physical beatings, left her husband at the age of 71. The children intervened to keep the parents together and she was unable to explain her actions to them because of the shame she felt. Her husband used community expectations about her role as a wife to claim that she should remain because that was her proper place. Her abuse was completely silenced.

As well as being unable to resist community attitudes, elderly women return to abusive relationships – or remain in the first place – because they have worked hard to established themselves in South Australia and have an interest in property which they do not want to lose at this stage of their lives.

There is also evidence that children from NESB communities who grow up witnessing domestic violence can be deeply affected by the experience. Like children in the general community, some of these children (male and female) grow up to become abusive of their mothers. This can be reinforced by patriarchal attitudes about the status of male children in some NESB communities, where it is common for mothers and sisters to be subjected to violence from teenage sons.

One worker in the Italian community noted that many women do not leave abusive relationships until the children are older. Often by then, the daughters have married abusive males and the sons have become abusive in their relationships. Mothers attempting to leave in these circumstances may find that it is the male children who are supportive, while the female children urge them to stay, believing that violence is a part of women's experience in marriage. They say, 'You went through it for such a long time. Why are you separating now while I am putting up with abuse from my husband?'

### Specific migration experiences

While many of the linkages between domestic violence and migration are common to all migrant communities, we interviewed workers who specifically service two migrant groups – the Vietnamese community and women from the Philippines married to Australian men.

For Vietnamese and Filipino women (Filipinas), the experiences of displacement, the stresses of resettlement and the sense of isolation or cultural difference are acute. Women in both groups, share a precarious position that arises from immigration sponsorship arrangements. The conditions of sponsorship differ, however. Vietnamese Australians, through family links or 'arranged marriages', frequently sponsor young Vietnamese women. Filipinas, on the other hand, often see marriage to an Australian national as a romantic adventure, and immigrate as 'mail order brides'. The comparison highlights how different migration experiences can generate different needs for women in abusive relationship.

### Experiences of domestic violence in Vietnamese communities

Over the last 20 years, the Vietnamese community has grown to represent a significant sector of the South Australia population. It currently numbers about 13 000 people. The experience of domestic violence within the Vietnamese community is complicated by the migration experience. Our interpretation of the needs of victims and perpetrators must therefore be made with the everyday considerations of living in a culturally specific, migrant community in mind.

The prevalence of domestic violence in the Vietnamese community is consistent with that in the rest of the community. Usually perpetrators come from the same cultural group. While domestic violence occurs in Vietnam, the instances within the community are thought to be higher in Australia because of the following factors:

- Isolation
  There is less family support and opportunity for family intervention.
- Cultural transition and associated changes in expectations and roles
  Expectations about the role of women are challenged in Australia. Women experience more economic independence and have a stronger idea about their legal rights.
- Immigration processes
  Men who return to Vietnam to find brides may actively isolate their young wives to avoid the influence of Australian culture.
- Language
  Many migrant women have poor English language skills and rely on their husbands for translation.

The combination of these factors can mean that Vietnamese women experience a range of abusive behaviours including being threatened with objects such as knives and hammers, experiencing financial abuse and deliberate social isolation. The following example was provided:

> *One young woman, whose migration was sponsored by her husband, experienced complete social isolation after her arrival. She did not speak English and he deprived her of adequate finances, even after her first child was born. She was completely distraught and cried all day. At night, he would lock her out of the house leaving her to roam around because she had nowhere else to go. This abuse continued during her pregnancy. Finally a neighbour called police who contacted one of the domestic violence service providers. The woman could not be persuaded to leave until after she became concerned about her child's welfare. She eventually returned to her husband.*

The pressure to remain in relationships is extremely strong in the Vietnamese community, where the integrity of the community is valued over individual need. Vietnamese women may remain in, or return to, abusive relationships because of one or more of the following:

- Community attitudes towards women
  Women are generally held responsible for domestic violence – the abusive behaviour of men is sanctioned by the community. Often women's complaints are ignored and the problem denied. It is seen as something women have to deal with themselves, not as a community issue.
- Social significance of the family
  Social status in the Vietnamese community is linked to family standing within the community. There is a strong stigma attached to single motherhood and this can have long term consequences for children's marriage and career prospects. Sometimes couples who have been maintaining separate relationships will reunite prior to a child's marriage. Considerable influence is exerted by the extended family, even from Vietnam, and women are generally encouraged to preserve the family unit at all costs.

Service providers identify community attitudes as a major impediment to adequate servicing of Vietnamese women's needs, and point out that there are two distinct groups of women in the community who can be distinguished by their level of education:

- women who are well educated, learn English easily and are adaptable and open to new ideas; and
- women who come from rural areas, have limited education (lower primary only) and are not literate in Vietnamese.

The second group is far more vulnerable as they have problems learning English, hold very traditional values and are more concerned about community perceptions. The immigration process adds to this vulnerability because of age, immigration status and the nature of the sponsorship relationship.

Service providers emphasised the importance of changing attitudes towards domestic violence within the Vietnamese community and particularly the importance of challenging assumptions about the appropriateness of male behaviour. For interventions to be successful, a culturally specific response is essential.

### Experiences of Filipinas who are victims of abuse from Australian husbands

Three service providers were individually interviewed about the experiences of Filipino women, who often migrate to Australia under the migration sponsorship program as the spouses or prospective spouses of Australian men. Under current immigration arrangements, marriage to an Australian man is seen by Filipino women as a legitimate means of improving their current circumstances and future prospects. There are very few couples who are both Filipino in South Australia – one service provider reported that in 17 years her service had only been in contact with two couples involved in a situation of domestic violence who were both Filipino.

Women from the Filipino community in South Australia are often well educated and speak fluent English. For these reasons, they experience fewer obstacles in locating and accessing services than other NESB groups, once the problem is recognised. As with most cultures, however, the acceptance of male social privilege means that a level of abuse is seen as a 'normal' part of marital relationships. Filipino women therefore have trouble identifying their experience of violence as unacceptable.

All forms of violence are used against Filipino women in Australia. Two possible reasons why they experience higher level of violence than Australian women were suggested by service providers.

- Some husbands treat Filipino women as commodities from the outset:

  *'Mail Order Bride' is advertised to sound like a guaranteed package. We can be ordered from a catalogue, specifying size and shape.*

- Some husbands believe that Filipino women are subservient and are infuriated when their wives argue against them or fight back.

Filipinas in Australia often experience cultural isolation and a lack of community. This can exacerbate a sense of insecurity and uncertainty which characterises the migration experience. They are particularly vulnerable to a range of abuses from their Australian husbands. In particular they experience:

- Social isolation

  They have no family or friends and are usually completely dependent upon their husband for financial support and information about services.

- Communication problems

  While many women speak English, their husbands expect them to understand an Australian vernacular. This can establish a basis for poor communication and place stress on the relationship.

- Obligation

  Women may feel indebted to their husbands for sponsoring them, particularly if they have children.

- Poverty

  Sometimes women will feel obliged to work for no wages or poor wages to help compensate for the cost of sponsorship; many women send money home to their families.

- Deportation threats

  Temporary visas only are granted for two years before residency status is approved. This leads to fear of deportation and consequent problems at home.

Service providers emphasise the need to provide culturally specific support networks for Filipino women, and to encourage sponsors to recognise and respect cultural differences by establishing early intervention services (where these differences can be negotiated).

### 3.5.3 Needs of Women, Men and Young People Experiencing Domestic Violence Who Are from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB)

For many women and children who experience abuse in their domestic relationships, their sense of vulnerability is compounded by their migrant status and by their cultural and linguistical difference from the mainstream community. Those from non-English speaking backgrounds experiencing domestic violence can therefore have special needs in addition to those identified for other women.

#### Need for culturally appropriate services

A common view of service providers was that strategies to address domestic violence must recognise the broader context within which it occurs and be culturally appropriate. There was a general perception that women's needs were not being met by current services that offer crisis support.

Many of the service providers to NESB communities acknowledged difficulties with implementing and maintaining 'culturally appropriate' generic services but offered instances of institutional complacency, or a failure of agencies to follow through by monitoring culturally appropriate workplace practices. It was recognised that this can sometimes reflect a problem with scarce resources.

Service providers expressed considerable concern about the lack of culturally specific services for NESB communities, exacerbated by the increasing pressure being placed on specialist migrant services to amalgamate with mainstream services. These factors make it difficult to instigate and maintain culturally appropriate preventative measures within the community. Generic services are also ill-equipped to meet the more complex needs of people from NESB backgrounds, such as translation and education services.

#### Need for counselling, group work and other interventions

There is only one specific support service for migrant women experiencing domestic violence in South Australia. Workers from this service find that the absence of culturally specific counselling services for women, men and children from non-English speaking backgrounds is a consistent limitation. Often the only strategies they can offer women and their children are emergency support and accommodation.

Services for children are limited – there are long waiting lists and workers are often unaware of the special issues for children from non-English speaking backgrounds. The need to establish culturally appropriate services for children from NESB families was considered an urgent priority.

Similarly, there are few, if any, appropriate services available to NESB perpetrators. The provision of culturally appropriate services for all members of the family is essential if the needs of people experiencing domestic violence are to be addressed. Mandatory counselling for male perpetrators is not feasible in the absence of culturally specific services for men.

**5.01 It is recommended that additional and separate specialist services be provided for women, men, children and young people from NESB communities who experience domestic violence.**

### Need for information about domestic violence and related services

Service providers report that there is a general lack of awareness of existing counselling and other social services within NESB communities. This can be a consequence of the resettling process where particular priorities, such as acquiring work, housing, language skills and so on, dominate the needs of migrants.

For many NESB people, however, the very idea of accessing counselling or other community support services is unfamiliar. Such services may not exist in their country of origin, so they may not consider the possibility of seeking outside help. Many of the workers reported that 'we have needed to actively promote our service to make them aware of our commitment'.

It was suggested by service providers that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs needs to take a more proactive role in the provision of information about domestic violence during migration and the process of resettlement.

**5.02 It is recommended that relevant department and services with a focus on newly arrived migrants:**
- **raise awareness in new migrants about the nature of domestic violence;**
- **disseminate information to new migrants about available domestic violence services in culturally relevant ways; and**
- **ensure that information about domestic violence legislation and policies in Australia are provided to people who are migrating to Australia.**

### Need for confidentiality and trust in the services provided

Many people from non-English speaking backgrounds resist seeking help because they do not trust people in authority, some having experienced repressive regimes in their country of origin. They may also fear shame or embarrassment within their community, or being characterised as a 'trouble-maker'.

### Need for improvements in service delivery by generic services

Culturally and linguistically appropriate services are essential. General service providers need to regularly monitor and review workplace practices. There was a general perception that a great deal of research has been done on the special needs of NESB communities and many of the gaps in services have previously been identified. It was noted, however, that in spite of this, generic services are only paying lip service to the special needs of migrants.

The strategies used in hospitals were seen as exemplary of service provision that acknowledges the need for culturally appropriate service provision, but fails to implement workplace procedures that would allow this to be followed through in practice. NESB clients often fail to get adequate service because they require extra time and special resources such as interpreters. Everyday workplace procedures currently do not allow nurses and doctors to take the time to adequately address a NESB patient's situation, especially where there is domestic violence.

**5.03 It is recommended that the delivery of generic services to NESB communities experiencing domestic violence be improved by:**
- **developing strategies that promote the development of best practice, for example by initiating 'a year of servicing migrant communities';**
- **increased training and education of generic service providers;**
- **improving access to well trained interpreters;**
- **employing more bilingual workers;**
- **implementing and monitoring workplace protocols and assessment practices to ensure access and equity; and**
- **developing appropriate quality strategies to monitor service delivery.**[173]

[173] For an example of an appropriate quality strategy refer to FAMQIS, Legal Aid and Family Services, Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.

### Language and literacy needs

All service providers agreed that culturally appropriate community education strategies are urgently needed to address the issue of domestic violence in NESB communities. For instance, information about women's options might advocate the security of a women's shelter. For some cultural groups, however, the word 'shelter' carries a negative connotation, suggesting a place for displaced persons rather than a place of safety. Translations need to pay attention to the subtleties of cultural meaning.

**5.04 It is recommended that information and education strategies for NESB communities:**
- **ensure the use of culturally appropriate language**
- **acknowledge and respect differences in cultural meaning and**
- **take into account differing levels of literacy.**

### Need for improved monitoring of sponsored migration

The possible linkages between the migration experience and domestic violence need to be recognised. Some progress has been made in the services provided but the experience of workers in this field suggests the need for greater scrutiny of the sponsorship process, in particular where there are marriage contracts or 'mail order brides'.

**5.05 It is recommended that consideration be given to the linkages between the migration experience of people with marriage contracts and domestic violence through consideration of suggestions from service providers, within legal constraints, that:**
- **potential arranged marriage partners be informed about the history of the sponsor before leaving their country of origin, including the prior number of sponsored relationships, evidence of violence in previous relationships and of substance abuse;**
- **sponsors be required to demonstrate an awareness of, and respect for, the spouse's culture and familial circumstances- for example, the spouse's desire to share economic resources with family at home needs to be understood and discussed;**
- **food preferences need to be recognised and respected;**
- **where there are arranged marriages, couples be encouraged to attend for relationship counselling early in the relationship and prior to marriage, so that different expectations and needs can be discussed and understood;**
- **it be made clear in advance to people to be sponsored that their educational or professional qualifications may not be acceptable in Australia and/or that they may not immediately find work and highlighting the consequences of being dependent on their future partner;**
- **the standard of support being offered by sponsors is monitored – there are currently no checks to determine whether a sponsor is meeting these obligations, in spite of having signed a declaration of intention to do so;**
- **the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs takes action against a sponsor who misrepresents his or her circumstances;**
- **sponsored parties are readily able to access information about their entitlements and the services that are available to them;**
- **the expectation that the sponsor will arrange an orientation program for the new spouse be enforced;**
- **instances of serial sponsorship be closely examined and monitored and the obligation of sponsors to disclose previous sponsorships be enforced.**

### Need for community education programs for victims and their families

All service providers recognised the importance of providing community education programs to inform people in NESB communities of domestic violence as well as to change attitudes and responses to domestic violence in NESB communities. Information about the problem must be broadly publicised to overcome the fact that many women in these communities are isolated by cultural difference, language and/or actions of the perpetrator.

**5.06 It is recommended that consideration be given to the following suggestions of service providers for community education programs which inform people in NESB communities about domestic violence as well as trying to change attitudes and responses to domestic violence:**

- **place notices in many languages in accessible, public places such as public toilets (like the strategy used to publicise protective sexual practices and the PAP smear campaign) to provide NESB women with basic information about domestic violence and relevant services;**
- **provide regular and culturally relevant publicity about domestic violence and available services to NESB communities using ethnic radio, TV, newspapers, brochures in many languages;**
- **work with/through religious and community leaders to increase their awareness of, and change their attitudes to, domestic violence; and**
- **develop and foster culturally appropriate role models for young people and men in NESB communities.**

### Need for a whole community approach

NESB women with low levels of literacy are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse. They are less likely to identify the abusive behaviour as inappropriate, and more likely to put community interests over their own safety. A whole community approach is needed to reach these women.

### The special needs of elderly women in NESB families

Service providers reported that they are aware of many instances of abuse towards elderly women in NESB families, which are not being reported or addressed.

**5.07 It is recommended that there is further research to determine:**

- **the incidence and nature of domestic violence towards elderly people in NESB families;**
- **strategies for prevention of elder abuse; and**
- **the specific needs of the people involved.**

## 3.6 Violence in Gay and Lesbian Relationships

### 3.6.1 Introduction: Common Threads in the Literature

Increasing attention is being directed to the phenomenon of domestic violence in lesbian and gay relationships. There are separate bodies of literature for gay men and lesbians, and a further body of literature that considers them together in terms of same-sex relationships. Threads in the literature are:

- the challenge that same-sex violence poses to prevailing theoretical explanatory frameworks of domestic violence;
- the implications for policing and service provision; and
- characteristics which may differentiate same-sex domestic violence from other manifestations of similar phenomena.

#### Challenge to theoretical frameworks

Feminist theorists and researchers, like Renzetti, maintain that a feminist framework is appropriate for explicating the experience of lesbians in violent domestic relationships.[174] This she does through the deployment of a feminist participatory research methodology. Others caution, however, that to limit explanatory speculation to the single dimension of gender is to overlook other salient sociopolitical and psychological factors.

Letellier writes from the experience of a San Francisco community-based lesbian and gay activist organisation, Community United Against Violence.[175] He challenges the hetero-normative assumptions of some contemporary feminist theorising about domestic violence and argues that social phenomena such as homophobia, the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the difficulties for stigmatised groups obtaining help need to be taken into account in any explanation of violence in same-sex relationships. Merrill also recognises that domestic violence is not a gender issue alone.[176] He advocates the incorporation of sociopolitical and psychological theories into an integrated model. He concludes that if domestic violence occurs at the intersection of social and psychological factors, then viable solutions must address both. However, he warns against theories based upon social identity, theories which explain a phenomenon for every group that experiences it, not only the majority group: 'While these theories should not be identity-based, they also should not be blind to the very real impact of identity-based social oppression'.[177]

#### Implications for policing and service provision

The second common thread identifies implications for health and support service provision and the policing of violence in same-sex relationships, given the dominant perceptions that domestic violence is done by a man to a woman. In a community-based research project on the relationship between the lesbian and gay community and the police in South Australia, there are accounts of victims of domestic violence approaching police for intervention.[178] One respondent commented:

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[174] Renzetti, C.M. (1992) *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park; Renzetti, C.M. (1995) 'Studying Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships: A Case for the Feminist Participatory Research Model', *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 3(1): 29–42; Renzetti, C.M. (1996) 'The Poverty of Services for Battered Lesbians', *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social-Services* 4(1): 61–8.

[175] Letellier, P. (1994) 'Gay and Bisexual Male Domestic Violence Victimization: Challenges to Feminist Theory and Responses to Violence', *Violence and Victims* 9(2): 95–106; Letellier, P. (1996) 'Twin Epidemics: Domestic Violence and HIV Infection among Gay and Bisexual Men', *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 4(1): 69–81.

[176] Merrill, G.S. (1996) 'Ruling the exceptions: Same-sex battering and domestic violence theory'. In C.M. Renzetti and C.H. Miley (eds) *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Relationships*, Harrington Park Press, New York.

[177] ibid, p. 20.

[178] Baird, B., Mason, K. & Purcell, I. (1994) *The Police and You: A Report of a Survey of the Experiences of Lesbians and Gay Men with the South Australian Police by Lesbian and Gay Community Action*, LGCA, Adelaide.

*I was told by the police officer (woman) that restraint orders are for women dealing with husbands and boyfriends. A restraint order 'was not for things like* that' *(i.e. lesbian violence and ongoing harassment, threats of violence).*

In health care settings, lesbians and gay men sometimes experience difficulty having their sexuality taken into account. They are also less likely be taken seriously in reporting domestic violence.[179] As Thompson reports, domestic violence occurs in lesbian relationships in similar forms and with the same damage to self-esteem as it does in heterosexual relationships.[180] However, there are added difficulties for lesbians seeking help because many health and social workers cannot comprehend the concept of violence between women, as the language used to describe domestic violence assumes the perpetrator is a man. As a consequence, many lesbian survivors of abuse are forced to 'come out' and reveal themselves as lesbians if they want appropriate help. Thompson also asserts that many lesbians believe their care may be compromised if they 'come out' in health care settings because of a widespread belief that many workers are homophobic.

### Special characteristics of violence in same-sex relationships

The third thread identified in the literature addresses characteristics that may differentiate same-sex domestic violence from other manifestations of domestic violence. Farley conducted a qualitative study of gay male and lesbian perpetrators of domestic violence in Seattle, using demographic profiles from 288 clients who had been referred for perpetrator treatment.[181] The analysis revealed a high incidence of personal histories of abuse experiences among gay or lesbian adult perpetrators, as well as a high incidence of secondary abusive behaviours (particularly substance abuse) within this sample. Lie & Gentlewarrier in discussing lesbian violence also make a connection between some forms of substance abuse and some same-sex violence.[182] Hamberger advocates an analysis of violence in gay male relationships which takes into account multiple levels of sociopolitical and community experience, and argues that any intervention needs to address behaviour at all of these levels in a way which accommodates the particularities of the gay male experience.[183]

### Implications for this research

Some caution is required when discussing the experience of abuse in same sex relationships. It is easy to lose sight of different individual experiences when focusing on social identity. Sexual preference is a complex aspect of identity that may or may not be publicly expressed. For instance, some people may publicly identify as gay or lesbian, some will not. Further, some women (or men) may prefer sex with other women (or men), but will not identify as lesbian (or gay). Sexual preference does not confer membership of a special social community. The emphasis in this research, therefore, is on how different sexual preference may change needs and may inhibit access to services. We are concerned to understand how the current conceptualisation of domestic violence marginalises individuals with diverse sexual preference rather than to 'define' gay or lesbian needs per se. Our objective is to begin to identify the barriers to existing services that arise because of heterosexist assumptions about domestic violence.

[179] Eliason, M.J. (1996) 'Lesbian and gay family issues', *Journal of Family Nursing* 2(1): 10–29; Elliott, P. (1996) 'Shattering Illusions: Same-Sex Domestic Violence', *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 4(1): 1–8; Harris, R.J. and Cook, C.A. (1994) 'Attributions about Spouse Abuse: It Matters Who the Batterers and Victims Are', *Sex-Roles* 30: 7–8, 553–65;Wise, A.J. and Bowman, S.L. (1997) 'Comparison of beginning counsellors' responses to lesbian vs. heterosexual partner abuse', *Violence and Victims* 12(2): 127–35.

[180] Thompson, J. (1996) Naming the Unmentionable, Masters thesis, Flinders University of South Australia, Bedford Park (Unpubl.).

[181] Farley, N. (1996) 'A Survey of Factors Contributing to Gay and Lesbian Domestic Violence', *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 4(1): 35–42.

[182] Lie, G.Y. and Gentlewarrier, S. (1991) 'Intimate Violence in Lesbian Relationships: Discussion of Survey Findings and Practice Implications', *Journal of Social Service Research* 15: 1–2, 41–59.

[183] Hamberger, L.K. (1996) 'Intervention in gay male intimate violence requires coordinated efforts on multiple levels'. In C.M. Renzetti and C.H. Miley (eds) *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Relationships*, Harrington Park Press, New York.

Trying to 'add' gay and lesbian domestic violence to 'mainstream' domestic violence theory runs the risk of ignoring or rendering invisible issues around violence and abuse. In general, examining violence in gay and lesbian relationships presents a challenge to conventional thinking, and an opportunity to place domestic violence within a broader context of violence in intimate relationships and consider how power and control may be understood in new ways. In particular heterosexual dominance, homophobia and social constructions of gender could provide important theoretical entry points for extending current explanations rather than merely accommodating gay and lesbian domestic violence into mainstream theory.

From the survey of the current research it was expected that gay men and lesbians, as both perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence, would confront unique issues such as threats of being 'outed' and the constant 'coming out' about their sexuality when dealing with services if seeking help. It was also hypothesised that the normative heterosexual and gender assumptions of mainstream services are likely to make such services alienating and unsuitable to gays and lesbians. In addition, specialised services may not have the range of staff available to work in the area of domestic violence. These hypotheses were confirmed by our research. The findings relating to gay men and violence are outlined in the following section. A more detailed discussion of research on abusive lesbian relationships is provided in the following chapter.

### 3.6.2 Research Findings: Gay Men and Violence in Relationships

A few cases of violence in relationships involving gay men were identified through informal networking in this research. These were men who were no longer in the particular relationship. In another research project on the non-HIV health promotion needs of gay men, conducted by one of the consultancy team (Murray Couch), a small number of men gave accounts of violence within relationships. It has proved very difficult, however, to integrate these men and their experience into the methodology and the reflection on domestic violence in this project. This difficulty is in part definitional and in part conceptual.

Gay men do not fit easily into a domestic violence project such as this because, as a population, they experience the possibility of definitional exclusion on two counts. On the one hand, as has been noted elsewhere in this report, as men they and others are less likely to define themselves into a category of domestic violence victims.[184] On the other hand, because domestic violence is most commonly, and sometimes exclusively, defined as a heterosexual phenomenon, they are defined out by the same-sex nature of their relationship.

#### Need to foster discussion and debate

There does not yet appear in South Australia to be a discursive space in which men who are in abusive same-sex relationships can articulate the experience in terms linked with the concept of domestic violence or partner abuse, or to discuss the issues publicly or seek support services of any kind.

In understanding something of the position of gay men in the context of partner violence, it is important to avoid a too easy alignment of gay men and lesbians. Lesbians can more easily be approached as a population where there are traditions (for example, in women's health) of self-reflexivity and action around issues of health and welfare. No such elaborated tradition exists for gay men in South Australia. It is only since the development of 'gay men's health' as a notion within the context of HIV/AIDS prevention services, that a possibility arises for such community-wide discussion and action, and within this context violent relationships have not yet found a discursive place.

[184] See Section 3.2 Men and Domestic Violence.

Given the development of activity around 'gay men's health', the time may be right to assist this community to begin debate and discussion around violence in relationships. Whether the concepts of 'domestic violence' or 'partner abuse' prove to be culturally useful in such discussion and activity remains to be seen. Aspects for exploration in any emerging community activity may include the hyper-masculinity associated with some aspects of gay community life, and wide age discrepancies in some relationships between gay men.

**6.01 It is recommended that consideration is given to appropriate ways of helping gay men in South Australia to begin discussions and debates around the issue of violence in gay relationships. It may be appropriate for this activity to occur in the context of 'gay men's health'. Aspects for exploration should include:**

- **the incidence and nature of violence in gay male relationships;**
- **culturally appropriate ways to conceptualise abuse in gay male relationships;**
- **the effects of hyper-masculinity associated with some aspects of gay community life; and**
- **the effects of the wide age discrepancy in some relationships between gay men.**

## 3.7 Abuse in Lesbian Relationships

### 3.7.1 Literature Review

The investigation of the available literature on domestic violence in lesbian relationships revealed how lesbians perceive the prevalence, nature, and reasons for the behaviour. The issues are complex and require multi-layered responses. Awareness of the problem has been slow to develop because it has unique dimensions, and thus gives rise to special needs for those directly involved. It was clear from our research that meeting those needs requires all service providers to examine their values and attitudes in order to change practices which are based on heterosexual paradigms, underpinned by entrenched homophobia.

#### Barriers to lesbians acknowledging abuse in their relationships

##### *Challenging a utopian dream*

At an international level, the discourse on lesbian domestic violence has been slow to develop due to an unwillingness by many researchers to admit that there was a problem. For many women, to acknowledge that domestic violence existed is to question the basis of their lesbianism. There is also a fear that public acknowledgment of abuse in lesbian relationships may destroy the credibility of the community and 'make them even more vulnerable to homophobic attacks'.[185]

##### *Patriarchy and domestic violence*

The issue of violence in lesbian relationships also challenges an assumption that domestic violence is a simply a product of unequal power relationships between men and women. Shapiro noted:

> *The reality of lesbian battering disturbs and frightens all women because it forces the battered woman's movement, on the one hand, to expand upon an otherwise stable and viable analysis, and it means on the other hand that lesbians do not yet have both feet firmly planted in paradise*.[186]

##### *Failure to recognise that women are abusive*

Bell noted that women who abuse are sometimes dismissed as 'unnatural'.[187] Ristock argued that to cling to such an idealised standpoint is harmful and limiting 'because negative aspects of lesbian relationships become difficult to discuss'.[188] It is only by admitting to the reality of abuse that lesbians can develop strategies to support victims and develop strategies for change.[189]

#### Incidence of abuse in lesbian relationships

According to the Coalition of Active Lesbians (COAL) report, the incidence of domestic violence in lesbian relationships is difficult to determine because very little research has been conducted.[190] The hidden nature of the problem makes this task all the more difficult. However, what evidence there is does indicate that the incidence is high enough to require the development of appropriate intervention strategies.

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[185] Lockhart, L., White, B., Causby, V. & Isaac, A. (1994) 'Letting out the secret: violence in lesbian relationships', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 9(4): 470.

[186] Shapiro, L. (1991) 'Lesbian Battering: Romance to Ruin', *Off Our Backs*, p. 16.

[187] Lockhart et al. (1994), p. 470.

[188] Ristock, J. (1992) 'Beyond ideologies: understanding violence in lesbian relationships', *Canadian Woman Studies* 12(1): 74.

[189] Bennet, W. (1997) 'Barriers to support for lesbians in abusive relationships'. In *Out of Limbo, First National Conference on Violence in Lesbian Relationships*, Conference papers, Adelaide, 10–11 April, p. 18.

[190] Dann, S., Haertsch, M., Hartree, A. & Manton, D. (1997) *Out of Control: Getting a Grip on Lesbian Domestic Violence*, The Coalition of Activist Lesbians, Australia, pp. 6–7.

In the United States of America, studies show that 22 to 46 per cent of all lesbians have been in a physically violent same-sex relationship indicating that lesbian domestic violence of a physical nature does exist, probably at the same incidence rate as heterosexual domestic violence.[191]

### Nature of abuse in lesbian relationships

Abusive behaviour in lesbian relationships ranges from physical and sexual violence through to psychological or emotional abuse. Although the range of behaviour is similar to that of heterosexual abusers, 'an additional component of lesbian abuse is related to one's lesbian identity, a threat made possible by homophobia and misogyny'.[192]

### Definitions of abusive lesbian relationships

Much of the research in lesbian domestic violence has been conducted in the United States of America where the term 'battering' has been adopted from heterosexual domestic violence discourse. There is some concern that this terminology, along with the term 'domestic violence', is not appropriate to the lesbian community. The COAL report recommends the term 'abusive lesbian relationships' as this in inclusive of the diversity of lesbian relationships and partnerships and the various physical and non-physical abusive behaviours which are inappropriate.[193]

Hart defines lesbian abuse as:

> *that pattern of violent and coercive behaviors whereby a lesbian seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of her intimate partner or to punish the intimate for resisting the perpetrator's control over her.*[194]

Hart's definition has been challenged on the grounds that it presupposes that the perpetrator's intent is to control. Margolies & Leeder claim that

> *the most striking inaccuracy in the literature on domestic violence is the confusion of battering's effect with the perpetrator's intent.*[195]

Their analysis is based on knowledge gleaned from heterosexual domestic violence research and the experiences reported by victims. Their conclusion is that:

> *Assumptions have been made about the battering relationship and the psychology of the batterer without adequate input from the perpetrator of the violence. Without actually studying these women, many therapists have fallen into the trap of understanding the batterer in absentia and by deduction. This second hand methodology is clinically unsound.*[196]

### Victim and perpetrator perspectives

Margolies & Leeder's study found that of the limited research conducted into lesbian abuse, most analyses are based on victim experiences and perspectives. They propose that this is due, at least in part, to the fact that victims are more likely to access services.[197]

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[191] Elliot, P. (1996) 'Shattering Illusions: Same-Sex Domestic Violence'. In C.M. Renzetti & C.H. Miley (eds) *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships*, Harrington Park Press, New York, pp. 2–3.

[192] Ristock (1992) at footnote 16, p. 74.

[193] Dann et al. (1997), p. 5.

[194] Hart, B. (1986) 'Lesbian battering: An Examination'. In K. Lobel (ed.) *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, The Seal Press, USA, p. 173.

[195] Margolies, L. & Leeder, E. (1995) 'Violence at the door: Treatment of lesbian batterers', *Violence Against Women* 1(2): 140.

[196] ibid., p. 140.

[197] ibid.

The issue of developing an analysis of lesbian abuse that incorporates perpetrator perspectives is one that is strongly debated in the literature. For instance, Shapiro contends that:

> *Batterers often ask us to identify with our own aggressiveness. To remain accountable to the victim we must listen to and validate her perspective, not that of her abuser.*[198]

## Explanations for abuse in lesbian relationships

Despite the tendency for analysis to be victim-focused, research is now being undertaken into why lesbians are behaving violently to their partners. There have been numerous explanations offered to account for the phenomenon of lesbian relationship abuse.

### *Response to homophobia*

Blenman suggested that in her case her partner was fighting her homophobia: 'Every time she hit me she was beating up on the lesbian part of herself'.[199] There is consensus that the pervasiveness of homophobic attitudes in society impact on lesbians in a myriad of ways. Benowitz maintains that it is inevitable that 'since homophobia permeates society, lesbians have internalized the lies and stereotypes motivated by homophobia'.[200] It is by this criterion, Hall explains, that lesbians define their relationships.[201] She concludes that 'we are not born knowing how to form equal, non-destructive relationships, so we borrow from heterosexual models'.

> In their research design, Almeida, Woods, Massineo, Font & Heer factored in an understanding that 'homosexuals of all races live in an antagonistic society and often experience hostility on a daily basis'.[202] They hypothesised that any analysis of violence in a relationship needs to take into account the levels of oppression to which a person may be publicly submitted, and how these pressures can affect behaviour. Benowitz concurred that the stress caused by societal homophobia compounds both the pressures leading to abuse and the difficulties experienced by lesbians in disclosing the situation.[203]

### *Intergenerational issues*

Blenman also identified the common belief that abusive behaviour is often based on modelling from past family experiences of abuse. Margolies & Leeder gave merit to this notion but claimed that, rather than violent lesbians identifying with the abused mother's feelings of 'vulnerability and fragility' they will fight against it, therefore 'they are more likely to use the defence mechanism of identification with the aggressor'.[204] This notion of intergenerational appropriation of violence as a control mechanism is one which, according to Lockhart et al., deserves further investigation.[205]

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[198] Shapiro, L. (1991) 'Lesbian Battering: Romance to Ruin', *Off Our Backs*, p. 17.

[199] Blenman, A. (1991) 'The hand that hits is not always male', *Canadian Women's Studies* 11: 61.

[200] Benowitz, M. (1986) 'How homophobia affects lesbians' response to violence in lesbian relationships'. In K. Lobel (ed.) *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, The Seal Press, USA, p. 199.

[201] Hall (1992), p. 40.

[202] Almeida, R., Woods, R., Messineo, T., Font, R. & Heer, C. (1994) 'Violence in the lives of the racially and sexually different: A public and private dilemma', *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 5(3/4): 117.

[203] Benowitz (1986).

[204] Margolies & Leeder (1995), p. 142.

[205] Lockhart et al. (1994), p. 473.

### *Substance abuse*

Schilit et al. found a prevalence of substance abuse in their study of lesbian perpetrators and noted that 'respondents' frequency of drinking significantly correlated with committing abusive acts as well as with being the victim of abusive acts'.[206] Although they did not claim that substance abuse is the cause of domestic abuse they stated that:

> *Our society heavily stigmatizes both lesbianism and alcohol abuse in women, and this results in considerable damage to the self esteem of lesbian alcohol abusers. Anger over societal rejection may be projected onto other lesbians, possibly resulting in abuse.*[207]

### *The issue of power*

Analyses of power dominate the discourse around abuse in lesbian relationships, but according to Hall this alone is insufficient to explain why some women choose to abuse.[208] Renzetti hypothesised that abuse results when one partner senses an imbalance in the power dynamics of the relationship and uses violence to assert dominance and control.[209] Ray offered another perspective – that the perception of a power imbalance leads the abuser to act in order 'to right the imbalance and create a more equal partnership'.[210]

In summary, the literature identifies abuse in lesbian relationships as a significant problem that is largely unrecognised. The failure to acknowledge or prioritise the problem reflects a general perception that women are not violent. This perception is compounded by homophobic attitudes within the broader community and a belief among some lesbians that the problem is not serious or that to draw attention to the issue only serves to fuel anti-lesbian rhetoric. The experience of violence in a relationship which is socially stigmatised makes it very difficult for women to seek help and very difficult for service providers to ascertain with certainty the needs of these women. This difficulty was recognised in the First National Conference on Violence in Lesbian Relationships which was held in Adelaide in April, 1997. This conference established a foundation for dialogue about this issue within the lesbian community. There is consensus in the literature that ongoing research into this area is urgently required.

## Methodology

The research conducted represents a preliminary inquiry into the needs of lesbians in abusive relationships. It focuses on one lesbian community in Adelaide that has coalesced around the Southern Women's Community Health Service. This service is recognised as offering lesbians culturally appropriate health services and has been dealing with the issue of domestic violence in lesbian relationships for a number of years. When the Service was approached to help organise a focus group to explore the issue of the needs of lesbians dealing with domestic abuse it was overwhelmingly supportive.

In order to explore aspects of the problem of abuse in lesbian relationships and to identify the needs of victims and perpetrators, a focus group was conducted with lesbians who had direct experience of violence and service providers who work with lesbian victims and perpetrators of violence. The focus group was followed by a phone-in to allow victims and perpetrators to discuss the issue in confidence. The phone-in was thought to be appropriate by members of the health service to protect anonymity. However, we note that the views presented in this report are those put forward by one particular lesbian community and may not be representative of all lesbian communities. While the sample size was small, the findings are consistent with other research in the area. Future research should be more broadly based through making contact with other lesbian communities.

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[206] Schilit, R., Lie, G.Y. & Montagne, M. (1990) 'Substance abuse as a correlate of violence in intimate lesbian relationships', *Journal of Homosexuality* 19(3): 51.

[207] ibid., p. 62.

[208] Hall (1992), p. 40.

[209] Renzetti, C. (1988) 'Violence in lesbian relationships: A preliminary analysis of causal factors', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 3(4): 384.

[210] Ray, V. (1991) 'Investigation of violence in lesbian dyadic relationships', *Journal of Feminist Studies* 1(1): 40–48.

The focus group consisted of 12 participants, some of whom were service providers (some with experience of abuse in their own personal relationships), others who had been in abusive relationships or had friends in abusive relationships. The participants ages ranged from 35 to 50 years and all lived in the city. Most of those who had been involved in an abusive lesbian relationship were in these relationships for between three and six years and nearly all had been the victim. One woman identified mutual abuse within the relationship. Nearly half of the participants had previously been in abusive heterosexual relationships.

The findings from the focus groups were augmented by the phone-in, which was publicised in the *Gay and Lesbian Times*. Seven respondents who were or had been involved in an abusive lesbian relationship were interviewed. These women were aged between 35 and 45. Most had been involved in an abusive relationship until very recently and one of the callers was still in an abusive relationship. Two of the callers reported mutual abuse in their relationships. Of all callers, five reported previous experiences of abuse, either when they were children, in heterosexual marriages or in other lesbian relationships.

### Experience of lesbians in abusive relationships

The information gathered from the focus group revealed that lesbian victims of domestic violence shared some common experiences with women in abusive heterosexual relationships. The prevalence and types of abuse were thought to be similar in spite of popular views to the contrary. However, it was felt that some issues are unique to lesbian relationships and that to use the same theoretical frameworks and models of service delivery for both groups may be inappropriate. The members of the focus group were concerned to tease out and identify the special needs of lesbian women. Similarly, the women who telephoned during the phone-in were keen to see the issue of lesbian abuse more widely discussed in lesbian communities.

### Extent and nature of the problem

Participants in the focus groups believed that the incidence of domestic violence in lesbian relationships is statistically comparable to that in heterosexual relationships, but further research is needed to confirm this perception. The types of abuse identified were also similar to abuse in heterosexual relationships – physical, sexual, psychological, social and economic abuse were all identified.

The exercise of power and control in heterosexual relationships is often viewed as gender linked. In heterosexual relationships there is considerable evidence that the perpetrator of abuse is usually male and that these males usually have more power than their female partners – for example, greater physical strength and better access to resources. That is, there tends to be a gendered power dynamic that reflects traditional social expectations about masculine and feminine behaviour. However the service providers and lesbians interviewed report that in abusive lesbian relationships the perpetrator is not necessarily the seemingly most powerful partner – often to the contrary. This confirms Renzetti's findings that the abusive person in a lesbian relationship is often the most dependent person.[211]

> *The phenomenon of same-sex violence illustrates that routine, intentional intimidation through abusive acts and words is not a gender issue but a power issue. A certain number of people, given the opportunity to get away with abusing their partners, will do so because they hunger for control over some part of their lives, lives over which they feel they have no control.*[212]

There is also a difference in the perceptions women have of their relationships. For instance, lesbians described their perceptions of self and of their partner at the beginning of the relationship as being similar. That is, they often perceived themselves and their partners as possessing the same attributes – of being passive, giving, fun-loving and passionate. When asked the same question,

[211] Renzetti, C. (1992) *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*, Sage Publications: London.

[212] Elliot, P. (1996) 'Shattering Illusions: Same-Sex Domestic Violence'. In C.M. Renzetti & C.H. Miley (eds) *Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships*, Harrington Park Press: New York.

women in heterosexual relationships generally described their male partners in terms of traditional heterosexual narratives.[213] That is, they described their partners as romantic, kind, protective, or exciting. However, by the end of the relationship, women who identified as victims of abuse, both from lesbian and heterosexual partners, reported similar perceptions of their partners – that is as abusive, aggressive, controlling and selfish.

The table below highlights some of the key words used by lesbian victims to describe their perceptions of self and partner.

**Table 7 Perceptions of self and partner at the beginning and the end of an abusive lesbian relationship.**

| Beginning of relationship | | End of relationship | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Self** | **Partner** | **Self** | **Partner** |
| Charming, giving, intelligent, happy, independent | Friendly, happy, stimulating, fun-loving, sociable, independent | Exhausted, terrified, untrusting, angry, low self-esteem | Controlling, abusive, weak, predatory, selfish angry |

The transformation in perceptions from the beginning to the end of a relationship confirms the profound impact that abuse has on an individual's sense of self and the basis for the social isolation that occurs as a consequence.

### Identifying abuse in lesbian relationships

Not all lesbian relationships are the same and it is therefore generally difficult to clearly identify what constitutes abuse. This was identified as an area in need of further research.

Some lesbians have difficulty in deciding if they are victims or perpetrators, or both – a difficulty previously identified for males in heterosexual relationships.

> *Some women live in relationships which accept as normal a measure of physical violence, whereas other women may feel threatened by a raised voice.*

There was a suggestion that was tentatively accepted that 'when one partner lives in fear of the other then the relationship is abusive'. Another measure of abuse suggested was the degree of difficulty in being able to leave a relationship.

It was agreed that the term 'domestic violence' does not adequately describe abuse in lesbian relationships. The myth is still perpetuated that 'as long as no-one is being hit then the relationship is not violent'. Victims report that non-physical forms of abuse can be far more devastating than physical abuse. Verbal insults and 'put downs' continually undermine self-esteem and were seen to be particularly destructive. Abuse is often about hidden issues of control through intimidation.

The phone interviews revealed a range of experiences of abuse including physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, economic, social and other forms of control and surveillance.

A common element in the experiences described by the lesbians who called was the prior experience of abuse. A number of women had experienced abuse by men in heterosexual relationships or had been abused by their fathers or 'uncles' as children.

One woman described a complicated experience that she initially found hard to understand. She was inexplicably rejected by her lesbian lover – which she experienced as abuse – who in turn accused her of abusive behaviour. The caller believed however, that she was unfairly labelled and provided evidence that she may have been a target for projections from the woman's prior

[213] See p. 23, this report.

experiences of abuse. Her story reflected the problem with identifying abuse and illustrates how perceptions of abuse can vary from relationship to relationship, individual to individual. It also highlighted some of the long-term consequences of living in abusive relationships and how this experience can become a part of a personal narrative.

### Models of 'healthy' lesbian relationships

Focus group participants highlighted the lack of role models for 'healthy' lesbian relationships. Lesbian relationships are not based on the same models as heterosexual relationships and the lack of role models can provide fertile ground for disagreement and misunderstanding, which in turn can lead to abuse. As one participant noted: 'lesbians have this idea that they will have "better" relationships, yet they never talk about what that relationships should look like'. Models of behaviour in intimate lesbian relationships are therefore often based on experiences gained from growing up in a heterosexual family.

> *There needs to be honest reflection on what makes a positive relationship as well as what creates disharmony and abuse. It needs to be recognised that learned behaviours involving power and control do not disappear because a person is lesbian.*

Another participant noted, however, that the lack of role models does not excuse violence or abuse.

It is clear from the focus group and the phone-in that members of the lesbian community are actively looking for forums in which these issues can be explored. The women's community health sector in South Australia has offered an important base for the beginnings of this discussion. However, there was general agreement that the message about the existence of abuse in lesbian relationships needs to be more pervasive, particularly if the acute isolation experienced by victims is to be overcome.

## Barriers to seeking help

### The issue of trust

Women in the focus group and who called during the phone-in highlighted that trust and confidentiality are essential criteria for seeking help. Because of the nature of the lesbian community, and the homophobic attitudes prevalent in the general community, there are specific barriers to seeking help.

### Barriers for victims

#### *Nature of the community*

The general lesbian community consists of many communities, some inter-linked, others not. Some sectors of the lesbian community in South Australia are tightly networked and people are well-known and easily identified. This means that it can be extremely difficult to maintain anonymity. There is a fear that revelation of abuse will lead to both victim and perpetrator being ostracised by the community. Further, there are few agencies that offer specialist services to lesbians and therefore there is a strong possibility that potential clients are socially acquainted with the service providers and others in the waiting room. There are also long waiting lists for individual counselling where there are specialist services.

Hammond and others found that one major barrier to victims disclosing violence is the lack of knowledgeable and sympathetic service providers in the mainstream community.[214] Lesbians are likely to seek help from mainstream services in order to maintain some degree of confidentiality within the lesbian community.[215] The abuse lesbian victims suffer is compounded by the lack of support offered.

[214] Hammond (1988).
[215] Bennet (1997).

*Without the energy and support of non-lesbians, it will be impossible to provide the services needed to adequately address the lesbian battering issues.*[216]

#### *'Feminist' inspired myths*

Some participants believe violence in lesbian relationships is hidden because of the unwillingness of many lesbians to accept (in the words of one woman) that 'the feminist dream of a lesbian utopia' is not a reality. Another observed that, 'the easiest way to get yourself ostracised by some feminist workers is to raise the question – *what about the women who are violent?*' Furthermore, those victims who believe that women are not violent are silenced by their convictions. They blame themselves for causing the abuse.

#### *Fear of homophobic backlash*

There was concern that public acknowledgment of abuse in lesbian relationships may cause a homophobic backlash. However it was agreed that it is a risk that the lesbian community must take in order to expose and deal with the problem. There was also overwhelming agreement that efforts to break down homophobia in the general community need to continue.

*Lesbians are subject to abuse and accusations of aberrant behaviour so that it is sometimes difficult to maintain a positive self image. Without that it is difficult to form and maintain positive, caring and mutually respectful relationships.*

#### *Lack of understanding and support from extended families*

Because of the pervasiveness of homophobic attitudes, support from extended family may not be given. Families respond very differently when a heterosexual family member ends a relationship. Lesbian relationships are often not acknowledged as real commitments. There is therefore little recognition of the difficulties encountered when a lesbian relationship breaks up, especially where there has been abuse.

One woman reported that when she revealed her fear of her lesbian abuser to her family they used the opportunity to try to 'bring her back into line'. Despite the fact that she had previously suffered in an extremely violent heterosexual relationship they blamed her sexuality for her predicament. Alternatively, if the victim is not 'out' then she lives in fear of her lesbian lifestyle being exposed. This prevents her from talking about the violence to anyone at all. The threat of being 'outed' is often used as a form of control by perpetrators.

#### *Homophobia among mainstream service providers*

A general concern was expressed that any issue raised in a public forum that reflects badly on the lesbian community will invite further criticisms of the lifestyle from the wider community. Some women do not seek help from mainstream services for this reason.

It is difficult for a lesbian victim to be taken seriously by generic service providers, such as police, doctors and social workers, despite real threats to her safety. There can be serious consequences for women and their children when abuse in lesbian relationships is ignored. Examples were provided of lesbian perpetrators accompanying their injured partners to doctors and hospitals who 'believe her to be a supportive friend', and do not interview the victim separately. Participants reported that police are generally 'ill-informed' and are often not willing to respond to violence when it is perpetrated by a woman – they tend to trivialise or ignore the situation.

Often the responses that lesbians receive from mainstream services reflect strong homophobic attitudes. One participant described her experience:

[216] Benowitz (1986).

*I contacted a worker on the phone and her first reaction was to suggest that possibly I was experiencing problems because I wasn't really a lesbian. So then I had to explain that 'yes I was' and that violence happens and by the time I got around to my stuff I felt it was all too tiresome.*

## Barriers for perpetrators

### *Fear of being ostracised or rejected by the lesbian community*

This is a real barrier to seeking help for both the victims (who do not want their partner to be rejected) and the perpetrators.

### *Denial of the abuse*

One woman related how it was only when she got a restraining order to prevent her ex-lover from contacting her that her ex-lover understood that her behaviour was abusive and frightening.

## Experiences of children of lesbian parents

There are commonalities in the experience of all children living with domestic violence. Where abuse occurs in a lesbian relationship, however, there are some particular complications for children.

### *The abuse is hidden*

The hidden nature of the abuse means that the children are silenced or feel unable to acknowledge the impact of the abuse on them. They often refrain from seeking help because they do not want to publicly compromise their parents' privacy about their personal relationship.

### *Homophobic attitudes*

Even when their parents are open about their lesbian relationship, children are aware of the possible negative reactions from teachers, friends or the parents of their friends.

### *Limited access to extended family*

Very often children are cut off from potential support from their extended families because their mother has been ostracised. This serves to compound their difficulties. They currently have no-where to turn, as there are no appropriate services available.

### *No public or legal recognition of the consequences of separation*

Children also have to deal with social attitudes about lesbianism after their parents' relationship ends. For instance, one worker noted that the general community does not perceive the break-up of a lesbian relationship in the same way as a break-up in a heterosexual de jure or de facto marriage. It does not elicit the same level of concern and sympathy and is not recognised by the legal system or the Family Court.

*People don't recognise that a child who is brought up by two women loves both of these women as parents, and that when the relationship breaks up and one of them disappears they've lost a parent.*

### *Parenting issues*

A common occurrence within lesbian relationships is that the birth parent is not automatically the primary care-giver of the child. In cases where the abuse comes from the birth parent, not only does the child lose a parent, but they also lose a sense of safety and security when they lose the primary care-giver (who has no legal rights) and are left with the abuser.

### 3.7.2 Needs of Lesbians and their Children in Abusive Relationships

#### Need for further research and new theoretical frameworks

Many lesbians in Australia are beginning to recognise that research is necessary to empower the community to challenge the structures that have allowed the issue of domestic violence to remain hidden. Members of the lesbian community who participated in this research, and other researchers canvassed in this study, expressed the belief that through research, debate and education they need to work with others to develop a new feminist framework for analysis which is inclusive of lesbian identity and issues.

Abuse in lesbian relationships is an area that requires further investigation from a lesbian-specific perspective.

**7.01 It is recommended that support be given for lesbians to work with others through research, debate and education to develop new feminist frameworks for analysis of domestic violence that are inclusive of lesbian identity and issues.**

#### Need to challenge the homophobic attitudes of mainstream service providers

Because of the difficulty in maintaining confidentiality when using specialist services, many lesbians look to mainstream providers of women's services as an alternative. However they reported that they are currently experiencing homophobic responses from most service providers. Lesbians also reported that generic service providers 'often believe popular myths about women and assume that women are not violent to each other'. Empathic responses from all service providers are essential to meet the identified needs of lesbians in abusive relationships.

**7.02 It is recommended that women's services and mainstream service providers, such as police, health and social workers, be educated about the experiences of lesbians in abusive relationships and have an awareness of the needs of lesbians who present for help.**

#### Need for specialist services for perpetrators, victims and children

Most participants found sympathetic lesbian counsellors and friends offered the most helpful responses. For victims it was important to be believed and reassured that they were not responsible for the abuse. For the perpetrators the opportunity to understand and address their behaviour was welcomed.

Children who witness an abusive lesbian relationship need special consideration and understanding. Many are especially isolated from extended family and other mainstream sources of support, in part because of homophobic attitudes. There are currently very few relevant services available to these children, and existing counselling services have long waiting lists.

There are also few, if any, services for lesbians who abuse their partners and specialist services for victims are limited. Given the reported homophobic responses of generic service providers, it is imperative that specialist services be explored.

**7.03 It is recommended that schools and specialist and generic service providers be made aware of the special issues for children whose parents are involved in an abusive lesbian relationship.**

**7.04 It is recommended that further research be undertaken to determine the appropriate type and nature of services required for people involved in abusive lesbian relationships.**

**7.05 It is recommended that specialist services be made available for both victims and perpetrators of abuse in lesbian relationships and for the children involved.**

**7.06 It is recommended that specialist counselling services for lesbians in community health settings continue to be supported.**

### Changes to domestic violence legislation

Domestic violence in lesbian relationships is currently not adequately addressed by legislation and it is difficult for lesbians to take out and enforce restraining orders. There is a need for this situation to be reviewed.

**7.07 It is recommended that domestic violence legislation and police policies and practices be reviewed to make it easier for lesbians to take out and enforce protection orders when they need protection from their partner.**

### Changes to family law and processes within the Family Court

Issues of residence and contact after separation were particularly complex for the children of lesbian relationships. Children generally resided with the birth parent and needed help to cope with the loss of their other carer and to deal with issues of abuse. This was particularly problematic where the abuser was the birth parent and the primary care-giver was the non-abusive partner (there is anecdotal evidence that this is often the case). The Family Court of Australia and legal system do not generally recognise or address this problem.

**7.08 It is recommended that the Family Court of Australia, the Family Law Council and/or other relevant family law bodies consider the special issues and needs of lesbian parents experiencing violence in their relationships (including the non-biological parent), and the special residence and contact needs of the children who are, or have been, in their care.**

### Access to appropriate alternative housing

Shelters and other protective services were perceived and experienced by participants as 'not being lesbian friendly'. One person revealed that she lived in a shelter for seven months and never felt comfortable enough to reveal her sexuality. There was a suggestion that prominent posters or literature acknowledging abusive lesbian relationships might be reassuring to women in this situation. There is also a need for alternative housing for lesbian victims and their children.

**7.09 It is recommended that staff in women's shelters review their policies and practices to ensure that they are inclusive of the needs of abused lesbians and their children.**

### Raising the awareness of the lesbian community

It was commonly agreed that publicity about the issue of relationship abuse within the lesbian community needs to be strategically placed in order to raise awareness of the issue.

**7.10 It is recommended that culturally appropriate publicity be undertaken to raise the awareness of lesbian communities to the issue of abuse in lesbian relationships and that this publicity be placed in areas commonly frequented by lesbians.**

### Education and support for public forums and debates

There was consensus between all lesbians who participated in the research that the need to educate the whole lesbian community (comprising many different sub-groups) about the issue of violence in lesbian relationships is of paramount importance. While the issue of lesbian abuse is hidden, or ignored, women's experiences are not validated and the violence is effectively condoned. Participants in the focus group agreed that open discussion and debate within the community is needed. As one participant noted: 'once the issue is acknowledged it can begin to be dealt with'.

One worker proposed that any public campaign about abuse should be accompanied by 'a campaign that promotes pride in being a lesbian' in order to lay the foundations for honest and open discussion.

**7.11 It is recommended that to ensure that the issue of violence in lesbian relationships is effectively addressed:**
- **education, open discussion and debate occur within the lesbian community as a whole; and**
- **support be provided for the organisation of conferences, forums and other avenues for discussion and debate to occur.**

### Need for a whole community approach to the problem of abusive lesbian relationships – challenging oppressive social structures

Evidence from this research indicated that lesbians, whether they be perpetrators or victims of relationship abuse, were being disadvantaged and further oppressed by the structures that were supposedly in place to protect them. Because of homophobic community attitudes to their parents' sexuality, children were also subjected to additional pressures that effectively silenced them and compounded their difficulties.

**7.12 It is recommended that strategies to stop violence in lesbian partnerships should include:**
- **changing the social context to reduce the opportunities for abuse;**
- **confronting oppressions including homophobic responses to lesbians;**
- **developing culturally appropriate prevention and early intervention programs;**
- **improving the legal system for the abused individuals;**
- **developing a body of knowledge about women who abuse; and**
- **offering viable interventions to address the needs of the individuals concerned.**

## 3.8 Family Violence in Aboriginal Communities

### 3.8.1 Introduction: Literature Review

#### Incidence of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities in Australia

Open discussion of domestic violence in Australian Indigenous communities is relatively new. Discussion of the issue in this report relies heavily on the views of Indigenous authors and on recent reports. One report has stated that in some Aboriginal communities, violence is so high that it is said to affect up to 90 per cent of families.[217] Another report indicated that Aboriginal men are four times more likely to die a violent death than non-Aboriginal men, and women are six and half times more likely to die a violent death than non-Aboriginal women.[218]

There is considerable evidence that Indigenous women are much more likely to be victims of domestic violence than non-Indigenous women and to sustain more serious injuries. Judy Atkinson in referring to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reports that in some areas in Australia the rate of domestic violence involving Aboriginal women is 45 times higher than for non-Aboriginal women.[219] Aboriginal women are more likely to be killed as a result of domestic violence – their rate of homicide victimisation is ten times the figure for all Australian women.[220] South Australian government statistics suggest that incidences of domestic violence are 'likely to be between 7 and 16 times higher than rates among non-Aboriginal people'.[221] Domestic violence may not just involve the spouse but a larger group of relatives – 'brothers, cousins, fathers and other Aboriginal men in the vicinity'.[222] Bolger notes that Aboriginal women are more likely to be attacked with a weapon than non-Aboriginal women and in a large number of cases the women are not alone at the time of the assault.[223]

> *In some communities [family violence] has reached a level that women expect to be bashed and, in fact, do not think that their 'bloke' loves them unless he belts them. Children are also being abused – something so foreign to Aboriginal culture that it reveals the extent to which communities are in total social crisis.*[224]

#### Barriers to reporting family violence

The literature consistently states there is considerable under-reporting of the rates of violence in Indigenous communities. There are complex reasons why women from Indigenous communities do not report domestic violence in Australia.[225] The role of police and other government employees in the history of intervention in Indigenous families, and the racist attitudes and behaviour of many police officers and welfare officers, is well documented and reflected strongly in the writings of Aboriginal women about violence.[226] There is considerable support for Hilary Astor's view that:

> *The law has been an instrument in the oppression of Aboriginal people far more than it has been a resource for them.*[227]

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[217] Report of the Queensland Domestic Violence Taskforce (1988), p. 256.

[218] Keys Young (1995).

[219] Atkinson, J. (1996a) 'A Nation is Not Conquered', *Law Bulletin* 3(80): 4–9.

[220] Astor, H. (1996) 'Mediation Initiatives and the Needs of Aboriginal Women'. In D. Bagshaw (ed.) *Second International Mediation Conference:Mediation and Cultural Diversity*, Conference proceedings, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

[221] Quoted in Jarrett, S. (1997) '*We Have Left it in Their Hands': A Critical Assessment of Principles Underlying Legal and Policy Responses to Aboriginal Domestic Violence: a Location Study*, Doctoral thesis, University of Adelaide, p. 1 (Unpubl.).

[222] Lucashenko, M. (1990) 'Violence against Indigenous Women. Public and Private Dimensions'. In S. Cook and J. Bessant (eds) *Women's Encounters with Violence: Australian Experiences*, Sage Publications, California, p. 153.

[223] Bolger, A. (1991) *Aboriginal Women and Violence*, Australian National University, North Australia Research Unit, Darwin.

[224] Atkinson, (1990d), cited in Family Violence Professional Education Taskforce, 1991, p. 76.

[225] ibid.; Ralph, S. (1997) 'Practice Issues and Guidelines for Family and Child Counsellors Working with Aboriginal Families', Unpublished paper produced for the Family Court of Australia.

[226] Atkinson, J. (1990a) 'Violence against Aboriginal Women: Reconstitution of Community Law – the Way Forward', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* 6(2): 46; Atkinson, J. (1990b) 'Violence in Aboriginal Australia: Colonisation and Gender', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker* Parts 1 and 2; Atkinson, J. (1990c) *Beyond Violence – Finding the Dream*, National Domestic Violence Education program, Office of the Status of Women, Canberra.

[227] Astor (1996), p. 13.

There are suggestions that domestic violence legislation increases the intervention of a brutalising police force in Aboriginal lives and in fact has resulted in increasing incarceration of both Aboriginal men and women.[228] Carlie Atkinson notes that:

> *Aboriginal women say that when their men go to jail, they emerge more violent, and their* [the women's] *voices are ignored. They are given no real option apart from the criminal justice response and because of this they are hesitant to use the legislation to its full intent.*[229]

A recent Australian Law Reform Commission report highlighted the general frustration many Aboriginal women experienced in relation to their experiences with police, courts and lawyers when trying to obtain protection from violence.[230] Problems included lack of cultural sensitivity and awareness of domestic violence issues, failure to provide appropriate and accurate advice, lack of access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services, and lack of appropriate services for remote communities. Aboriginal women were identified as least well served because of their extreme social and economic disadvantage and distrust of the system. In 1991 the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified similar problems.[231]

Women from Indigenous communities may have feelings of shame, or concerns about racism, which are likely to affect their willingness to discuss issues of violence against them with people from outside their communities.[232] There may also be strong pressure from within the extended family or community to 'put up with' the violence so as not to shame the family or the community, or to deal with the problem with or without the support of family or friends. In Aboriginal communities the boundary between self and family is not as clearly defined as in Western society, which some authors suggest creates an important link between domestic violence and self-inflicted injury and suicide.[233]

### Definitions of violence

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders do not believe that the term 'domestic' violence adequately describes what is happening within their families and communities and have indicated they prefer to use the term 'family violence'[234] to bring into focus 'the trauma of the inter-connecting and trans-generational experiences of individuals within families, to show the continuity between how we have been acted upon, and how, in turn, we may then act upon ourselves and others'.[235] Family violence as defined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission report, *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia*, the behaviours and experiences of:

> *beating of a wife or other family members, homicide, suicide and other self-inflicted injury, rape, child abuse and child sexual abuse…. When we talk of family violence we need to remember that we are not talking about serious physical injury alone but also verbal harassment, psychological and emotional abuse, and economic deprivation, which although as devastating are even more difficult to quantify than physical abuse.*[236]

[228] Atkinson, J. (1995) 'Aboriginal People, Domestic Violence and the Law: Indigenous Alternative Justice Strategies, Future Directions', *Queensland Domestic Violence Conference*, Proceedings, p. 233.

[229] Atkinson, C. (1998) *Submission in Response to the Model Domestic Violence Laws Discussion Paper*, Domestic Violence Legislation Working Group, Attorney-General's Department, Canberra.

[230] Australian Law Reform Commission (1994) *Equality before the law: Women's access to the legal system*, Interim report no. 67, AGPS, Canberra, pp. 31–2.

[231] Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) *National Report*, vol. 2, AGPS, Canberra.

[232] ibid.; Bagshaw, D. (1996) 'Whose Idea of Fairness? Examining the Impact of Culture on the Mediation Process'. In D. Bagshaw (ed.) *Mediation and Cultural Diversity*, Conference proceedings of the Second International Mediation Conference, University of South Australia, Adelaide.

[233] Atkinson, C. (1998).

[234] ibid.

[235] Atkinson, J. (1995), p. 233.

[236] Mow, K.E. (1992) *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia*, report and literature review for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Canberra.

Judy Atkinson expands on this definition by including social, cultural and spiritual forms of violence.[237] She quotes a Tasmanian Aboriginal survivor of family violence.

> *People get hurt physically – you can see the bruises and black eyes. A person gets hurt emotionally – you can see the tears and the distressed face – but when you've been hurt spiritually like that – it's a real deep hurt and nobody, unless you're a victim yourself, could ever understand because you've been hurt by someone that you hold in trust.*[238]

Carlie Atkinson reports that many Aboriginal women who are married to non-Aboriginal partners experience continual 'put downs' about their cultural identity and beliefs, especially in regard to the differences in child rearing practices.[239] They also experience a negation of a cultural and spiritual sense of self which is different to that of an Anglo-Australian.

### Importance of history and context

Aboriginal writers strongly believe that violence in Indigenous communities should be examined against a history of social, emotional, physical, economic, psychological, cultural and spiritual violence against Indigenous people.[240] Prior to colonisation Aboriginal women had considerable power and status that has been described as egalitarian in comparison to the patriarchal structures of the colonisers.[241] This has changed considerably since colonisation. There has been increased effort by Aboriginal people to rectify the violence and dispossession perpetrated by colonisation and racism which continues to be an Australian legacy.[242] This legacy has contributed to increasing levels of what some call criminal behaviour, mental illness, suicide attempts, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual distress.[243] Aboriginal authors have also noted that while women in Australia were generally pursuing the issue of domestic violence there was little consultation with, or inclusion of, Aboriginal women in this process.

> *In discussions about violence towards women there has been little consideration that the violence, labelled domestic, has alternative dimensions for Aboriginal women, and more particularly, the solutions provided by the narrow feminist response to issues of violence towards women, have been experienced by many Aboriginal women as another form and experience of violence.*[244]

One Aboriginal author, Melissa Lucashenko, believes that violence within Aboriginal communities is often seen by Aboriginal people as having its roots in the 'genocidal dispossession of Aboriginal people from lands and political power'.[245] She explains that when Aboriginal men are committing suicide and self-mutilating in response to oppression it is hard for Aboriginal women to portray such men as all-powerful individuals. She also notes that some 'traditionally oriented' Aboriginal women consider family violence to be traditional behaviour under certain circumstances. However she points out that many of the violent sanctions contained in customary law were structured, controlled, and conducted publicly as a means of community justice – in the main restricted to 'shaming, ostracism, banishment, sorcery, and physical attacks, such as ritual spearing'.[246] When

[237] Atkinson, J. (1990a); Atkinson, J. (1996b) 'We Al-Li – Past Present Future: The Changing Cultural Face of Indigenous Healing Process', *Mapping Regional Cultures Conference*, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton.

[238] Atkinson, J. (1990c), p. 7.

[239] Atkinson, C. (1998).

[240] ibid.

[241] Bell, D. (1993), *Daughters of the Dreaming*, McPhee Gribble: Melbourne.

[242] Atkinson, J. (1990c).

[243] Atkinson, C. (1998).

[244] Atkinson, J. quoted in Atkinson, C. (1998).

[245] Lucashenko (1997), p. 149.

[246] ibid., p. 152.

asked about violence by Aboriginal women towards Aboriginal men, NYP Women's Council representatives have commented that it does occur but it is usually in public and has a different impact to the violence by men towards women.[247]

Payne suggests that some Aboriginal women are subjected to three types of law – 'white man's law, traditional law, and bull-shit traditional law', the latter being 'a distortion of traditional law used as a justification for assault and rape of women'.[248]

Judy Atkinson's work (1990 to 1997) on transgenerational trauma provides an important perspective on domestic violence within colonised and traumatised populations. She highlights critical factors that have not been addressed or acknowledged, specifically the use of the legal system to criminalise actions that are essentially based in transgenerational, traumatic experiences and behaviours.[249]

Furthermore, while the claim of mainstream theorists on domestic violence is that domestic violence and alcohol and drug misuse are unrelated, research in Aboriginal situations indicates a direct correlation between the two, with between 70 and 90 per cent of all assaults being committed while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Some Aboriginal people believe that these are not two separate issues and should not be treated as such.[250]

### Aboriginal perspectives and approaches to family violence

Aboriginal people are currently exploring new approaches to family violence based on customary law practices and principles of restorative justice, with a philosophical base of reconciliation. It is hoped that new approaches will return to Indigenous Australians the right to define what is, and is not, violence within their families and communities and to determine appropriate sentencing options for destructive behaviour in a way that promotes healing of the community.[251] Proposals have suggested that more culturally appropriate processes, such as the circle courts in the Canadian system, be made available to Aboriginal communities.[252]

When considering the perpetrators of family violence, Carlie Atkinson highlights a key issue for Indigenous people:

> *While it is important to acknowledge that a domestic assault is an offence against a victim, the question that needs to be asked in relation to Aboriginal offenders is, how can we also recognise that their behaviours have largely been determined by the violence of the State in Aboriginal lives, while at the same time holding the offender accountable and providing programs whereby the offender is enabled to change their behaviour.*[253]

She notes that part of government responsibility is to provide resources for workshops so elders are enabled to heal their own pain by providing information about the trans-generational transmission of trauma and trauma behaviours, and healing from trauma. 'Beginning at this level would allow levels of responsibility to return to the community for healing and changing destructive behaviours.'[254] She also suggests that governments must accept responsibility for the proper resourcing of Indigenous organisations to develop and present culturally relevant educational programs and to provide culturally appropriate services to men and women (separately and together) to assist the healing process.

[247] Meeting between Representatives of the the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Women's Council Domestic Violence Project and the Family Law Council, Alice Springs, May 1998.

[248] Payne, S. (1990) 'Aboriginal women and the criminal justice system', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* 46: 9–12. In Lucashenko, p. 152.

[249] Atkinson, J. (1995).

[250] Atkinson, C. (1998).

[251] Bennett, B. (1997) 'Domestic Violence', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 21(4): 11–14; Atkinson, J. (1995).

[252] ibid.

[253] Atkinson, C. (1998).

[254] ibid.

### Finding a response to Aboriginal family violence

Many Aboriginal writers identify ownership and control of the issue of domestic violence as an imperative for Indigenous people in Australia at this point in time, and favour restorative approaches to justice. It is clear that approaches to family violence in Indigenous communities in Australia need culturally sensitive strategies that are directly linked to enhancing support from informal community networks and resources, and that take into account the collectivist orientation of the culture. Heise notes:

> *Rightly or wrongly, feminist anti-violence groups are widely perceived in many cultures as anti-male and anti-family … especially in cultures where family and community are valued and recognized far above individual rights.*[255]

Lucashenko cautions, however, that the 'politics of victimhood', which is the dominant focus in Aboriginal literature about domestic violence, overlook the 'hierarchies of oppression' in Aboriginal society, which clearly privilege Aboriginal males and mask the sexist oppression of Aboriginal women, and the adult oppression of Aboriginal children.[256]

Non-Aboriginal researcher, Stephanie Jarrett, identifies the need for an integrated response that recognises both Aboriginal cultural rights and victim's rights and suggests that:

> *viable, optimal Aboriginal domestic violence intervention programs require a back-drop of government Aboriginal policy-making that encourages more Aboriginal integration with, rather than more differentiation and distance from, the white population.*[257]

## 3.8.2 Research Findings

### Methodology

As a research team we placed considerable emphasis when conducting research on methods which were respectful and empowering and did not reproduce or reinforce prejudice and disadvantage. On the basis of our review of literature in the area of family violence in Indigenous communities, and in speaking with key stakeholders, a dominant theme was that there had already been enough primary research conducted in this area and that what was needed was for the recommendations from past research to be put into action. Our research methodology therefore did not involve conducting further primary research but rather working with stakeholders to identify from their perspectives how progress can be achieved in this area. This required a framework of analysis which recognised the impact of colonisation and dispossession and how, within such a perspective, changes can be achieved which are culturally appropriate, respectful and community building.

To ascertain the needs of victims, perpetrators and children involved in domestic violence in Aboriginal communities in South Australia, we interviewed a number of service providers, including representatives from:

- Nunga Mimini's Women's Shelter;
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs;
- Nungawarrin Yunti of SA Inc.;
- Aboriginal Family Support Services;

[255] Heise, L. (1996) 'Violence against Women. Global Organising for Change'. In J. Edleson & Z. Eisikozits (eds) *Future Interventions with Battered Women and Their Families*, Sage Publications, California, pp. 23–24; Bagshaw (1996).

[256] Lucashenko (1997), pp. 157–8.

[257] Jarrett (1997), p. 310.

- Aboriginal Research Institute, University of South Australia;
- Aboriginal Education Employment and Development Branch;
- Legal Department, Pitjantjatjara Council Inc.;
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council; and
- Central Australian Women's Legal Service Inc.

We are very grateful to those who were able to attend a focus group to discuss the needs of Aboriginal people who experience domestic violence. Aboriginal service providers work extremely hard and their time is valuable. Some service providers who were unable to attend, but offered insights into the problem during telephone interviews.

As one service provider observed, 'I don't have the time to educate governments about Aboriginal issues, I'm too busy working with the community'. This comment reflects a general wariness amongst Aboriginal service providers about the potential for reports to governments to make any difference.

Drawing on their experience as providers, we asked the focus group participants and workers interviewed by telephone about the type and prevalence of family violence in Aboriginal communities, how cultural attitudes and social practices affect abusive behaviour and the experiences and needs of the people involved.

## Family violence in Aboriginal communities in South Australia – the perspective of service providers

### *Historical, social and economic context*

Service providers agreed with the literature that suggests that the experience of family violence for people in Aboriginal communities is complicated by a range of historical, cultural, social and economic factors. Aboriginal people deal with the loss of cultural traditions and social structures within their own communities and experience systemic discrimination from a colonising culture. The capacity for Aboriginal people to access services is hampered by a combination of factors, including acute need for assistance in a range of areas, and a low level of resources which are inadequate to deal with the complex social and economic problems confronting these communities.

There is an uneasy link between a genuine need for more government funding for programs and services that service providers believe could make a difference to the community, and past experiences with government procedures. One of the providers we spoke with noted:

> *It has only been 30 years since Aboriginal people have been legally recognised as independent agents and there are still some people around who lived under the Superintendent Act…. When I was eight, I still came under that animal act. There are people who have been through the transition of not being able to drink and then being able to drink, and they drank greedily – we are still coming through that. At a time when government is trying to cut back funding, it is most needed.*

Many of the workers emphasised the importance of understanding the current needs of Aboriginal communities in this period of transition in the context of the deep impact that issues such as the 'Stolen Generation' and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have had on these communities. One worker observed that the current generation finds it extremely difficult to comprehend the experiences of older generations, and that there is a great deal of anger about the treatment of Aboriginal people in the past and the present. The needs of Aboriginal communities cannot be adequately addressed unless these sorts of issues are recognised and adequate resources are provided for finding 'new' ways of dealing with problems such as family violence. In short, the experience of family violence in Aboriginal communities must be understood in a complex political and historical background which has placed a severe strain on the social support structures within extended families and communities.

### *Family violence in Aboriginal communities – the issue of terminology*

Aboriginals tend to use the term 'family violence' to define the experience of violence within their communities. Many reasons were given for preferring the word 'family' to 'domestic':

- It acknowledges that perpetrators and victims of violence can come from extended family networks – abuse does not necessarily occur within a 'domestic' environment.
- It recognises the vast range of abuses that individuals experience within extended families, including physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, social and economic. For instance, one worker described the experiences of some elders in the community who face bullying and intimidation from young people wanting access to money on the day that pension payments are made.
- It conveys the intergenerational nature of violence within the Aboriginal community. Many of the perpetrators of violence have experienced family violence as children.
- It reminds community members that the effects of violence are not just physical and can leave other long-term scars on individuals and families.

However, one participant in the focus group pointed out that the concept of 'family violence' alienates many men in the Aboriginal community. While these men may be prepared to acknowledge their violence against their partner, they see their abusive behaviour as qualitatively distinct from the other forms of abuse that come under the rubric of 'family violence', such as child abuse and incest. These men believe that their behaviour, while wrong, is very different to that of the perpetrators of crimes they believe 'are more calculating and sneaky'. Another participant noted that the term family violence also had the effect of making the problem seem like a community problem, not a problem for individual men.

> *Some men won't recognise their behaviour as a problem – they won't take responsibility and see it as everyone's problem as well.*

It was suggested that the failure take responsibility for violent behaviour also reflects the 'matrix which characterises the domestic violence process – either the man is sent to gaol or the woman is removed. Either way, the family is split up'. The potential for further erosion of the social structures of everyday life is of great concern to the Aboriginal community.

## Experiences of Aboriginal men who are perpetrators of family violence

All service providers interviewed emphasised the link between family violence and other cultural issues in the Aboriginal community. Apart from the problem of terminology, service providers agreed that it is difficult to tell whether male perpetrators recognise that their abusive behaviour is a problem and is wrong. Often their perceptions of violent behaviour are distorted by other experiences, such as:

- Men's experiences as victims of violence
  Some men experience violence in other areas of their lives and this may compound tensions in their relationships with family/friends or involvement with the police. Further, many Aboriginal men who are perpetrators have been involved in family violence as children.
- Drug/alcohol abuse
  Substance abuse is a significant issue for the Aboriginal community and is seen to be a common trigger for other abusive situations.
- Loss of identity and poor self esteem
  Aboriginal men often experience an acute loss of identity and lack culturally relevant models of masculine identity. One participant in the focus group described the men as 'caught between the anthropological model of Aboriginal manhood and the Western cultural models of the new age man'. Aboriginal men cannot live up to either model and the subsequent erosion of self-esteem is

compounded by other factors such as shifts in traditional gender roles, economic dependency on the State or female partners, and poor communication skills. In general, as another service provider noted, Aboriginal men's attempts to integrate with the dominant culture have had a negative impact on them.

- Lack of appropriate role models

  The erosion of identity has serious repercussions for the models of masculinity available to younger men. This is compounded by the loss of other important resources, such as Aboriginal cultural studies in schools. As one service provider explained:

  *Boys have said to me, 'Hey, I'm black, that's why I do that' and I say, 'Blacks have never gone around being violent to our women – my mother never got violence in her life and she was a traditional Aboriginal woman'.*

### Experiences of Aboriginal women who are victims of family violence

Many women in Aboriginal communities do not recognise family violence as a problem because it has always been a part of their life – they don't believe they have a choice about whether or not to put up with it. Rather they may take a 'that's reality – that's what happens' position. One service provider illustrated with the following example:

*One of the worst cases this year was a woman who said that she 'weighed the good against the bad'. Trouble was that the bad was getting bashed with a baseball bat, but because that only happened once a month, she was prepared to stay for the three weeks that was good. But the bad, if it kept going, was going to get to a point where it was going to kill her.*

Women in Aboriginal communities often tolerate a great deal of violence before they take action such as getting counselling or escaping to the safety of a shelter. They may also try to change the behaviour of their partners, especially if they believe that the aberrant behaviour was triggered by alcohol, drug use or other causes of stress, such as loss of cultural identity, social and economic discrimination. In other words, they believe that abusive behaviour is not simply an isolated problem for the individual perpetrator, and may recognise abusive behaviour in the context of broader problems.

The complexity of the experience of family violence is discussed in detail in Maryanne Sam's *Through Black Eyes: A Handbook of Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*.[258] This survey of the experiences of violence within Aboriginal communities suggests that both the severity of the problem and the resilience of women experiencing family violence reflect a deep alienation from mainstream society. Aboriginal women understand the stresses that Aboriginal men endure in contemporary society. In these circumstances, it can be very difficult for Aboriginal women to decide to leave an abusive relationship.

### Experiences of children from Aboriginal communities

As noted elsewhere with other sectors of the South Australian community, services for children from Aboriginal communities who experience family violence are limited and inadequate. Counselling services provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are difficult to access because of long waiting lists, and are culturally inappropriate. Some service providers identified the counselling services available at Enfield Child and Family Health Services as culturally appropriate and beneficial to children because the emphasis is placed on restoring a sense of security and providing information about what had happened.

[258] Sam, M. (1991) *Through Black Eyes: A Handbook of Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, Maryborough.

Generally, children in Aboriginal families do not experience violence directly but often witness the abuse of women by male relatives and suffer emotional effects from this experience. One service provider observed:

> *It does affect them, emotionally – little boys particularly – depending on the level of violence at home, the little boys will treat mum the same way. We had one little four-year old who was talking to mum the same way as her partner – you could imagine from the things that she told us, that the little boy was doing the same thing. Away from the dad, the little boy was taking on the same role – put down stuff. Little girls are very quiet, withdrawn and really scared.*

The emotional effects of family violence can emerge in other sorts of behaviour as well. One worker provided an example:

> *One eight-year old boy went berserk in a classroom. He did damage to the classroom and then to the cars outside and when asked why he was so destructive he said that when his Dad hit his Mum he says that he's going to get into trouble for this, so he might as well do a good job. He was doing the same thing.*

This story reinforces the value of understanding domestic violence in terms of family violence and recognising the way violent and abusive behaviour can have a carry-on effect for other members of the family and others in the broader community. Similarly, one service provider noted that women who are the victims of abuse will sometimes 'take it out on the kids'.

Participants at the focus group emphasised how the experience of family violence can cultivate in Aboriginal children an expectation of violence and abuse throughout life.

### Aboriginal community responses to family violence

The experience of family violence is further complicated by attitudes to family violence in the Aboriginal communities. Victims of family violence receive little assistance from the rest of the community for a number of reasons:

- the violence often occurs behind closed doors;
- even if members of the community are aware of the situation, they do not feel that they can get involved because 'it is not their business';
- family violence brings shame to the family, and members of the community may be reluctant to exacerbate or compound this;
- often people who intervene to break up a fight within a family will later be treated as if it was their fault.

### Issues for Aboriginal people in rural and remote communities

There are a number of Aboriginal communities near major rural centres in South Australia, such as Port Augusta. While women from these communities have access to a limited range of generic services it needs to be emphasised that the provision of culturally appropriate services in these areas is also crucial (see Section 3.4, the rural section of this report). Findings from a recent research project in one rural centre highlights the difficulty associated with the provision of generic services to individuals from a culturally disadvantaged community.[259] The problem of delivery of and access to appropriate services is intensified for Aboriginal communities in remote regions of the State – there is a need for the expansion of services for women experiencing family violence in rural and remote areas.

[259] Jarrett (1997).

In the north-west corner of the State, a part of an area which covers 300 000 kilometres and extends into Western Australia and the Northern Territory, there are between 24 and 26 small Aboriginal settlements. The closest regional centre to these settlements is Alice Springs. Cross-border services to women experiencing violence in these communities are provided by three services:

- Central Australian Women's Legal Service;
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council; and
- Pitjantjatjara Council.

In instances of family violence, these services liaise with police in prosecuting for domestic violence restraining orders. According to one service provider, the applications for domestic violence restraining orders by women in these regions are steadily increasing.

Many of the Aboriginal people in remote communities in this region have basic, or no, English language skills and need interpreter services to assist them. This is also an issue for men who have a restraining order taken out against them. Interpreters are needed to explain the reasons for, and the implications of, the order.

Aboriginal police aides are very effective in this region and restraining orders work where police are cooperative and supportive of the communities. This is particularly important because of the delays experienced in obtaining orders. In these instances, police will often release the perpetrator on bail conditions, which are similar to a restraining order, until the magistrate's hearing.

### Post-separation family disputes

The perception of service providers in Alice Springs is that, in general, Family Court decisions following separation or divorce do not always benefit the community. For example, they believe that child-related residence and contact disputes can become a way of men using children to control the behaviour of women. Service providers cite cases where fathers, who prior to separation had not played an active parenting role, are using children's rights of contact to establish parental rights.

Child residence and contact issues are also complicated by the involvement of extended kinship networks in Aboriginal communities. Disputes arise between the extended family members of each parent's family after a couple separate. Grandparents and other relatives usually want to keep a relative's children in their own community and the families of each parent often live a long way apart, making contact difficult.

### Services for Aboriginal male perpetrators of family violence

The need to encourage Aboriginal men to acknowledge their abusive behaviour and recognise that it is inappropriate was emphasised by service providers. However, the services and strategies that are currently available to men are inadequate.

#### *Counselling*

Counselling is largely ineffective because few men attend, and those who do report that it 'doesn't work'. For instance, one man who went to counselling and was told 'you are not that violent at all because you have come for counselling'. Nunkawarrin Yunti have the expertise, but rarely counsel male perpetrators on family violence issues.

#### *The criminal justice system*

The criminal justice system does not act as an effective deterrent to abusive behaviour. For instance, when the police are called to a family violence situation, male perpetrators will often exhibit the characteristic 'Jekyll and Hyde' qualities. Police are reluctant to intervene, believing the situation to

be resolved or that the female victim has over-reacted. Where they do intervene, their options are limited. In some cases, police will simply drop the perpetrator off around the corner, giving him time to 'cool off'.

Further, women may be uncooperative because they do not want their partners to go to gaol or they believe that the partner will return and will be more violent if they do make an official report. Women are reluctant to make formal complaints because of the negative prior experiences Aboriginal people have had with the justice system.

#### Self-help organisations and programs

Self-help groups such as the Mee Wee Community Coalition or programs such as the Family Wellbeing Program have the advantage of being non-stigmatising and inclusive and tend to locate the problem of family violence in the broader social context.

The Mee Wee Community Coalition was established in 1992 by Aboriginal women in Adelaide to 'provide crisis intervention and support and ultimately to break into the desperate cycle of poverty and hopelessness many Aboriginal people experience'.[260] The aims of Mee Wee (which is a Ngarrindjeri term for 'life') is to draw on and foster the strengths within the Aboriginal community and culture and to find solutions to community problems, such as homelessness, substance abuse and family violence, at the grassroots level.[261] The Coalition can be described as a multi-service, self-help organisation that has been sustained by the enthusiasm, commitment and resources of its members. It has received very little funding to date.

The Family Wellbeing Program is offered through the Aboriginal Education Employment and Development Branch. As one service provider noted, the program 'relates to personal well-being and how you can adjust to your personal situation – how to take responsibility'. Programs such as these can provide narratives for male perpetrators that they may be more inclined to engage. Further, they have an objective of maintaining effective family relationships rather than privileging a model of separation that characterises the crisis-care services.

The Family Wellbeing Program was created in 1993 and over two thousand people have participated in the four-stage course. Each stage is conducted over nine weeks and is designed to address 'all the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual issues which impact on family unity and stability which affect the ability of individual family members to benefit from education and to obtain and retain satisfying employment'.[262] The program is specifically designed for Aboriginal people and offers a holistic approach with the long-term objective of aiding 'Aboriginal people in achieving economic independence and self empowerment'. The program covers a range of issues including family violence and anecdotal reports suggest that it is very successful and highly valued by the Aboriginal community.

### 3.8.3 Needs of Aboriginal People Experiencing Family Violence

#### Terminology

The issue of terminology requires more research and discussion amongst Aboriginal communities – 'family violence' is generally preferred to 'domestic violence' but some Aboriginal men reject the term.

Service providers reported that Aboriginal perpetrators often reject popular narratives about domestic violence. Alternative ways of identifying and discussing violent behaviour that do not alienate perpetrators and/or victims need to be developed.

[260] Mee Wee Community Coalition Inc (1996) Open letter from the Committee of Mee Wee.
[261] Mee Wee Community Coalition Inc (1996) Background Statement, June.
[262] Aboriginal Education Employment and Development Branch (AEEDB) pamphlet on the Family Wellbeing Program.

**8.01 It is recommended that further research be conducted by Aboriginal researchers to identify culturally appropriate ways of defining and discussing 'family' or 'domestic' violence in Aboriginal communities.**

### Education in Aboriginal communities

Many service providers noted the importance of educating Aboriginal communities against toleration of the problem of family violence.

**8.02 It is recommended that culturally sensitive education be provided for Aboriginal communities about the nature and impact of family violence and the implications of tolerating such violence.**

**8.03 It is recommended that culturally appropriate strategies be developed to encourage members of Aboriginal communities to intervene in appropriate ways to help prevent and change violent behaviour in their families.**

### Early intervention in schools

Service providers are concerned that Aboriginal cultural studies are disappearing from the curriculum in schools. They believe that early and ongoing intervention is needed in schools to educate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children about traditional Aboriginal culture in order to boost the self-esteem and status of Aboriginal children in the school system. Children also need to be introduced to a range of strategies for resolving conflict from an early age.

**8.04 It is recommended that early intervention programs be introduced in schools to:**
- **educate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children about the nature and effect of abusive or violent behaviour;**
- **teach Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children alternative strategies for handling conflict; and**
- **introduce Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to aspects of Aboriginal traditional culture through cultural studies in the curriculum.**

### Positive role models for Aboriginal children

Identifying positive role models for Aboriginal children living in abusive situations is a priority. One Aboriginal researcher cited the Uncle/Nephew program that has been established in Alice Springs as a good example of a community initiative which seeks to reverse some of the negative influences experienced by young Aboriginal men. This scheme fosters a mentor relationship between young boys/men and older men who are good role models and are able to 'relate stories of their lives or the community'. It was noted, however, that initiatives such as these may not work in all communities, and programs need to be generated with the specific needs of a community in mind.

**8.05 It is recommended that role models and/or mentors be fostered and developed for Aboriginal children and young people who have experienced family violence, with the involvement of each Aboriginal community and each participant to ensure cultural and individual relevance.**

### Culturally appropriate services for women and men

Historical, cultural, social and economic issues compound Aboriginal experiences of family violence. As a consequence, when Aboriginal women do seek help, they are more inclined to approach culturally appropriate specialist services, not generic services. One service provider reported that most Aboriginal women refuse referral to a mainstream shelter if the Aboriginal Women's Shelter is full and will decide to return to the violent family situation instead.

Nunkawarrin Yunti offers general counselling and other services to the broad Aboriginal community. In the context of family violence, women victims are more likely to seek help. The reluctance of male victims or perpetrators to attend counselling is understood to relate to the complex nature of the problem.

**8.06 Given the specific history and the social, cultural, legal and economic circumstances of Aboriginal people in South Australia, it is recommended that:**

- **culturally specific specialist services be provided for Aboriginal people experiencing domestic violence;**
- **service delivery to Aboriginal people be tailored to meet the specific needs of a particular community and the individuals involved; and**
- **culturally sensitive, creative ways to deliver appropriate services to Aboriginal *male* victims and perpetrators of family violence be identified through further research and community consultation.**

### Services for Aboriginal children who experience family violence

There is a pressing need for the provision of culturally relevant services for Aboriginal children who have experienced family violence. There is ample evidence that witnessing family violence has long-term negative consequences for these children. Service providers reported that generic counselling services for children have long waiting lists and that recent cuts in funding to specialist children's counselling services for Aboriginal children have caused serious concern. Funding for a children's worker at Nunga Mimini's is no longer available despite the ongoing need for the services of at least one, preferably two, counsellors. On average women using the shelter come with four or more children, so in any given year approximately 200 children who have experienced or witnessed family violence spend time at Nunga Mimini's. Currently, the needs of these children are not met.

**8.07 In order to mitigate against the intergenerational impact of family violence, it is recommended that priority be given to establishing culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children who have experienced family violence.**

### Improvements to services currently used by Aboriginal women

There are a number of services that are currently heavily used by Aboriginal women, but which are under-resourced.

#### *Crisis Care*

The after-hours Crisis Care service is vital for Aboriginal women's safety. Often this service offers the best option for a woman subjected to immediate physical threat. However, service providers reported numerous instances of Aboriginal women in danger contacting the service and receiving 'no answer' or being put 'on hold'. Staffing of this service needs to be maintained at higher levels to avoid delays. The Crisis Care Unit usually refers Aboriginal women to the Aboriginal Women's Shelter.

**8.08 In order to ensure the safety of Aboriginal women and children who experience family violence, it is recommended that facilities be made available to immediately answer after-hours calls and to organise an appropriate and timely protective response.**

*Accommodation for Aboriginal women and children*

Statistics indicate that Aboriginal women represent over one-fifth of the users of shelters funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.[263] Given the already heavy use of services funded through this program and the frequent failure to meet demand, the expansion of shelter services for Aboriginal women is an urgent need in urban and rural communities.

The only Aboriginal women's shelter in South Australia is Nunga Minimi's which caters for five families (up to 21 children) in crisis and administers four transition houses. This service is currently establishing an outreach program to be conducted at various suburban health centres. Currently, Nunga Minimi's is unable to meet demand. One of the workers reported that on one day recently they had to refuse accommodation to four families. On average, they would turn away 30 families per year.

Although Nunga Minimi's is funded by the South Australian Government through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, the clientele includes women from interstate, particularly Western Australia, who see relocation as the only means of escaping an abusive relationship or family situation. This highlights the problem many Aboriginal women face in communities with extended kinship networks. It can be very difficult to 'disappear', and the only option for some women is to completely isolate themselves from their family network.

To meet intra- and interstate demand, Nunga Minimi's urgently needs to be expanded and to receive funding which is adequate for the specific needs of a diverse, national clientele of women and children.

**8.09 It is recommended that there be an expansion of protective accommodation services for Aboriginal women and children in urban and rural communities in South Australia.**

**8.10 The findings of this research support the recommendation of the Ministerial Implementation Advisory Committee's report of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program-funded domestic violence services in South Australia – *It's My Choice*[264] – that resource allocation to Nunga Minimi's be increased. This is vital to ensure a strong emphasis upon family education and the support of women and children within their family, community groups and language groups.**

**8.11 It is recommended that the national patterns of Aboriginal migration to escape family violence are further assessed, and the implications for the funding of crisis and accommodation services be investigated by both Federal and State governments.**

### Increased services to rural and remote communities

Aboriginal communities in remote regions need access to culturally appropriate services. Service providers reported that existing services for Aboriginal people are only able to respond effectively to the crisis accommodation and counselling needs of women experiencing family violence in the metropolitan area of Adelaide. Other services are needed such as legal services, interpreter services, family mediation following separation. If these are located in Adelaide, they cannot meet the needs of Aboriginal women from rural or remote areas.

[263] Ministerial Implementation Advisory Committee (1997) '"It's My Choice': A focus on women and children', Implementation plan for reform of SAAP-funded domestic violence services in South Australia, July, p. 19.

[264] ibid., p. 20.

Service providers expressed a preference for mediation and restorative justice approaches to disputes within and between Aboriginal families. Mediators need to be specially trained and able to travel to rural and remote communities. They need to be aware of the special needs of the community, but not be too closely attached to the community (because of issues of impartiality and confidentiality). Service providers in Alice Springs reported that in some communities, specially trained non-Aboriginal mediators may be preferred, with the support of interpreters who are knowledgeable about the culture.

**8.12 Services to Aboriginal people experiencing family violence in rural and remote communities are inadequate, and in some areas non-existent. It is therefore recommended that consideration be given to the provision of:**

- **interpreter services by specially trained people who understand the language and the culture and language of a particular Aboriginal community;**
- **special services to cater for the protective accommodation and counselling needs of Aboriginal women and children, such as a women's shelter at Mahler and/or Cooper Pedy;**
- **culturally appropriate legal services, for example more resources and personnel for Aboriginal people in rural and remote communities to deal with issues arising from family disputes following separation;**
- **family mediation and other restorative justice approaches to dispute resolution within and between families;**
- **education and training to service providers to increase awareness of Indigenous customary law and how it fits with other laws; and**
- **flexible delivery of culturally appropriate services on location, such as family mediation, in preference to people having to travel long-distances into regional centres.**

### Relationship between Indigenous customary law and the Family Law Act

There can be a conflict between the requirements of the Family Law Act and Indigenous customary law or traditional practices, which can intensify the experience of family violence for Aboriginal people.

**8.13 It is recommended that the relationship between Indigenous customary law and the Family Law Act be further investigated by the Australian Family Law Reform Commission and/or the Family Law Council.**

### Substance abuse and violence research

Aboriginal researchers and service providers identified substance abuse as a significant issue for the Aboriginal community and reported close links between substance abuse and family violence. They believed that the two issues cannot and should not be separated.

**8.14 It is recommended that further research be undertaken to identify the links between family violence and substance abuse in Aboriginal communities and to determine the implications for policies and practices in these communities.**

### Ongoing education and training of police

The introduction of Aboriginal police aides into the Police Force was viewed positively by service providers. However, continued improvements in the services offered by the police to Aboriginal communities are needed in both rural and urban areas.

**8.15 It is recommended that support be provided for continued improvements in services offered by police to Aboriginal communities in both rural and urban areas, including continued support for strategies such as:**
- **the use of Aboriginal police aides;**
- **education of police about Aboriginal culture; and**
- **seminars to cadets by representatives from Nunga Mimini's at Fort Largs Police Academy each year.**

### Education of personnel in the legal and justice systems

There is a general perception that the legal and justice systems do not work for Aboriginal communities.

Service providers report an ongoing need for information, education and training of staff at all levels in these systems. For instance, judges need to be well informed about Aboriginal cultural issues because, even though Police Aids submit reports to the courts, it is ultimately the judge who deals with the issue.

**8.16 It is recommended that culturally specific education and training of relevant personnel (including judges) occur at all levels in the legal and judicial system and that consideration of Aboriginal cultural issues be reflected in the choice of dispute resolution process used and in the decisions or judgements made.**

### Changes in legal and judicial responses to family violence

Service providers expressed a strongly held belief that the burden of responsibility and inconvenience should be shifted from victims of family violence to the perpetrators. They made the following recommendations about how the legislation and/or the judiciary might better deal with family violence in Aboriginal communities:

**8.17 It is recommended that the burden of responsibility for dealing with the consequences of family violence be shifted from the victims of violence to the perpetrators of violence in Aboriginal communities. In order for this to happen consideration should be given to the following suggestions from service providers:**
- **Mandate perpetrators to attend anger management counselling or other relevant self-help programs, such as the Family Wellbeing Program.**
- **Arrange compulsory family conferences with the extended family, except where men are extremely violent or where men do not accept responsibility for their violent behaviour.**
- **Encourage the perpetrator to accept responsibility for the violent behaviour and to deal with the consequences.**
- **Move the perpetrator from the family home for a set period of time so victims (who are usually women and children) can relocate and re-establish a sense of safety, or preferably so women and children can continue to live in their home and their community.**

### Self-help initiatives

Service providers agreed that the best potential for effective interventions comes from within the Aboriginal communities themselves. The problem of family violence in these communities does not accommodate a generic response. Specialist, culturally specific programs are needed to cater for differing needs within Aboriginal communities. For instance, some remote communities have limited access to services but, as in the case of the Uncle/Nephew program in Alice Springs, mentor

type programs have the potential to make a difference in close knit communities. Similarly, the Mee Wee Community Coalition, an urban Aboriginal community initiative, works with existing community networks and has the potential to provide appropriate interventions. However, the Coalition has been trying for many years to secure ongoing funding with little success and the future of this service is unclear.

Some of the relevant services available in the city are not well publicised or do not have sufficient funding to accommodate large numbers of people into their program. The Family Wellbeing Program is a good example of a community-based, culturally appropriate self-help program, which has made a very positive contribution to the Aboriginal community generally. Both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence have reported that attendance at this program helped them to address the issues underlying family violence, leading to positive changes. A review of the funding for this program should be made in conjunction with an assessment of its potential benefit to the community.

**8.18 It is recommended that best practice examples of self-help initiatives for addressing family violence in Aboriginal communities be identified, supported and publicised.**

**8.19 It is recommended that the Family Wellbeing Program for Aboriginal people in Adelaide be evaluated as a service for Aboriginal victims and perpetrators of family violence.**

### Establishment of consultative committees

Another suggestion from service providers included the establishment of consultative committees to liaise between the community and government. A Women's Consultative Committee is currently being established under the auspices of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, to bring women together from all around the State to identify, discuss and respond to particular community issues. The principle behind this Committee is community empowerment and this initiative seeks to establish the infrastructure, or network, for a consultative procedure that is inclusive of all sectors of the South Australian Aboriginal community.

Because of the historical background of colonisation, the diverse geographical and cultural needs of Aboriginal communities, and the everyday social and economic challenges that confront many Aboriginal people, it is important that community-based initiatives be encouraged and adequately funded. Initiatives such as the establishment of community consultative committees provide an important infrastructure for this process and offer the potential to realise the dual objectives of effectively targeting scarce resources and the empowerment of Aboriginal communities as they work to find the best means of helping themselves.

**8.20 It is recommended that consideration be given to establishing and funding a consultative committee to address the issue of family violence within Indigenous communities. This consultative committee should include all relevant sectors of the South Australian Aboriginal communities and provide an effective means for ensuring that grass-roots needs are being identified or monitored and services are effectively targeted.**

### Development of new, culturally relevant approaches to family violence in Aboriginal communities

Aboriginal researchers and service providers have all identified a need to develop new approaches to family violence in Aboriginal communities that are culturally relevant. For example, these could include approaches that are based on customary law practices and principles of restorative justice, with a philosophical base of reconciliation similar to the Circle Courts in Canada. These

approaches should return to Indigenous Australians the right to define what is, and is not, violence within their families and give Aboriginal communities the right to determine appropriate sentencing options for destructive behaviour in a way that promotes healing of the community.

**8.21 It is recommended that further research be commissioned to identify, develop and trial culturally relevant approaches to family violence in different Aboriginal communities; for example, approaches based on principles of restorative justice, with a philosophical base of reconciliation.**

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