

## What is domestic violence?

**D**OMESTIC violence is a crime, a crime punishable by law. It occurs when one partner, in a past or present relationship, uses violent or intimidating behaviour to control or dominate the other.<sup>1</sup>

Domestic violence is an abuse of power, always perpetrated by the more powerful member of a relationship against a less powerful member in order to gain control.

Such violence is found in *all* social classes, in *all* age groups and across *all* cultures and communities. It occurs within marriage and de facto relationships, between family members, couples who are separated or divorced, and even within shared household

Domestic violence is most often perpetrated by men against women and children. Reported cases indicate that 95% of perpetrators are male.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, it is overwhelmingly women and children who seek the assistance of laws and services to escape from domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a deliberate act. The great majority of men who are violent towards their partners are not violent towards 'others' such as friends or work colleagues.

The National Committee on Violence Against Women defined domestic violence as:

*Violence and abuse perpetrated by a man upon a female adopted to control his victim, which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation or economic deprivation, or behaviour which leaves a woman living in fear.*

**Fear** is the common key element in violence against women. It is often the most powerful weapon used by the perpetrator to control his victim.

### Types of domestic violence

Domestic violence may include one or any number of the following types of abuse:

#### Physical abuse

This includes hitting, punching, slapping, biting, kicking, hair pulling, strangulation, the infliction of fractures or burns, throwing things and the use of weapons.

Physical abuse tends to get worse over time, with attacks becoming more frequent and more savage.

#### Sexual abuse

The crime of sexual assault includes any sexual act to which the woman does not freely give consent. This may include being forced to do or watch something sexual, being forced to perform humiliating sexual acts, having pain inflicted on them during sex or being forced to view pornography. Some women are forced to have sex after they have been beaten.

Because the vast majority of incidents of domestic violence are perpetrated by men, this kit refers to the perpetrator as a man and the victim/survivor as a woman. We acknowledge, however, that in a minority of cases such as violence in lesbian relationships and violent women in heterosexual relationships, the perpetrator is female.

#### Psychological and emotional abuse

Having to live in constant fear of physical violence is a form of psychological abuse.

Other forms include being told repeatedly that you are not good enough, that you are a bad mother, that if you were a better person you would not get beaten, and regular accusations of being ugly, useless, dumb, stupid and/or incompetent.

Psychological abuse has been likened to systematic brainwashing. As the woman's self-esteem is eroded, so too is her ability to

leave her violent partner.

Emotional abuse often consists of threats concerning access to the children: for example, 'if you leave, you won't be able to see the children'.

## Social abuse

The perpetrator of domestic violence can limit his partner's contact with family, friends and the wider community.

He may lock her inside the house, monitor phone bills or disconnect the phone altogether. He may abuse the woman's family and friends until they no longer visit, or seek to humiliate her in front of them.

For women living in rural and isolated areas, geographic isolation and the lack of public transport are major barriers to escaping domestic violence. The use of private transport may also become impossible if the violent partner constantly monitors the car, checks the odometer and the petrol gauge.

Social abuse may also include alienating a woman from her cultural and religious beliefs. Her partner may destroy religious symbols, shrines and statues, or forbid her to pray or worship in an effort to isolate her.

## Financial abuse

The perpetrator may assume control over the couple's finances. Financial abuse may entail forbidding a woman to have a job, or insisting that she

### One woman's story

He kept breaking my religious shrines. I think he thought if he could break them, he could break me.

*Woman in Forbes*

hand over her entire pay packet. He may give her a tiny allowance from which she has to buy all the groceries and then demand that every cent be accounted for. He may force her to take sole responsi-

bility for debts he or she has run up.

Common threats may include 'if you leave, I will get all the money'.

## Harassment and stalking

Some perpetrators of domestic violence harass their partners with constant telephone calls or threatening letters.

Some stalk their partners, perhaps following them wherever they go or continually photographing them. The abusive partner may watch or wait for the woman at her home, work or place of leisure.

Such behaviour can occur both during a relationship or once it has ended and can sometimes include the children.

## Abuse during court proceedings

Perpetrators may use their time in court to further humiliate their partner or former partner. Intimidating tactics such as eye

contact and threatening or abusive language may be employed. In some instances the children will be used as a means to make contact with and/or threaten the woman.

The perpetrator may also take out vexatious applications for protection or continually apply for variations to custody orders.

### One woman's story

We'd been separated for 14 months. But he'd do things like ring me and tell me what we'd just eaten for dinner, and he'd tell me what I was wearing. He'd warn me to watch out for the kids. It was terrifying.

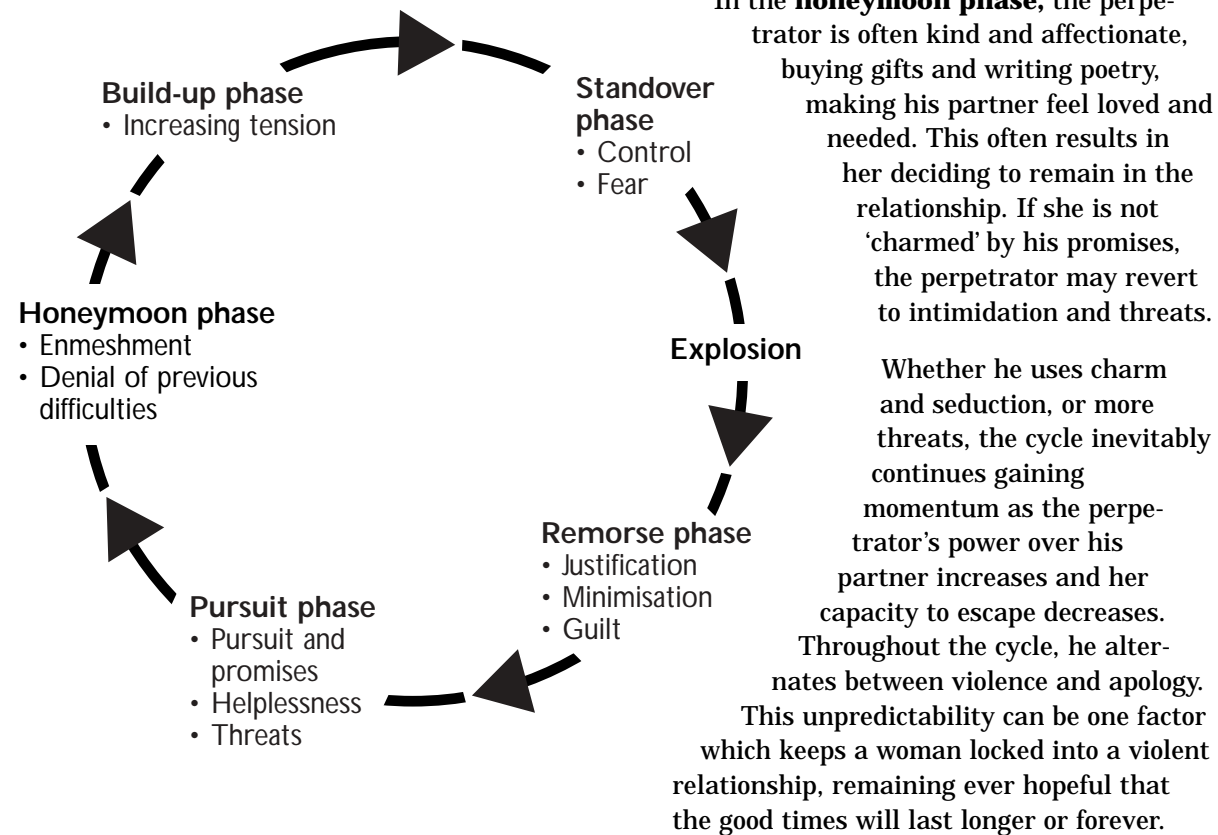
*Woman in Lismore*

## The cycle of violence

**R**ESearchers and domestic violence workers have found that in many abusive relationships there is a cycle of violence. First developed by Dr Lenore Walker in 1979, the 'cycle of violence' theory suggests that violence generally rotates between relative calm and an explosion of abuse.<sup>3</sup>

Many women find that recognising this cycle is very useful, but it is important to note that the cycle may vary. Similarly, not all women experience a cycle of violence. For some, a sudden attack occurs 'out of the blue'. Others report constant abuse without any apparent build-up or remorse.

What is the cycle of violence?



### Phases of the cycle

Five distinct phases have been identified within the cycle of violence:

In the **build-up phase**, tension increases. This is often marked by increased verbal, emotional and/or financial abuse, poor communication and isolation.

In the **standover phase**, violence occurs. Power over the woman escalates with the use of threats, intimidation, coercion and/or battering. It is often in this phase of the cycle that the perpetrator lashes out at his partner in rage.

The **remorse phase** is often marked by the perpetrator feeling guilty about his behaviour. He may seek to justify his behaviour by blaming others.

During the **pursuit phase**, the perpetrator often promises never to be violent again. He may say he is unable to control himself. He may also threaten to kill himself, claiming he could not live without his partner.

# It's not love – it's violence

This pattern usually occurs repeatedly. Typically, the violence escalates over time with the interval between each phase shortening. It is common for the honeymoon phase to become shorter, the longer the relationship continues. In some cases this phase will become non-existent.

## Why is the cycle of violence useful?

For many women, recognising the cycle of violence can be an illuminating experience. The violence follows this pattern of build-up and release often enough for many women to clearly identify the phases within the cycle. They may be able to locate their own situation at a particular point in time.

Furthermore, the realisation that the

violence is part of a repeating pattern and that it happens to many women 'in the same way', can help a woman to understand that she is not alone, and that the situation is not her fault.

*'Women have no control over the progression of the cycle, women are powerless in controlling men's violence.'*<sup>4</sup>

The cycle may be useful in explaining to women the ways in which the perpetrator uses the violence or the threat of violence, to gain control over them. It can assist in showing that factors such as financial problems do not directly relate to the violence.

The deliberate tactics which a perpetrator of violence may use are well illustrated in the 'Power and control' wheel on page 5.

## 6 A personal experience

When he first hit me I couldn't believe it. I was so shocked, because he had always been easy going, kind and gentle. He apologised saying it would never happen again. I believed him.

When it did happen again we had just been having a normal fight over something silly, and he broke down and cried saying he never meant to hurt me and he swore he'd never lay a hand on me again. I believed him. But I was wary.

I've lost count of the number of times he hit me after that, but I do know it got worse. It all became a game to him. He knew I'd forgive him each time. He apolo-

gised less and less, saying that I was to blame for making him angry. I started to fear him. He sensed it. I'd beg and plead with him to stop. His temper was so bad that in order for peace, I'd agree with him about anything. I lost all my independence, my confidence. I put on weight, I'd walk down the street with my eyes to the ground. I wanted to lock myself away and die.

I don't know what made me get up and leave. I know that if I didn't, I could have seriously injured him or myself.

*From **Through Black Eyes - A Handbook of Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.***<sup>5</sup>

## The power and control wheel

**T**HE 'power and control' model has been developed to portray the patterns of domestic abuse. This model presents the primary tactics and behaviours that abusive men use to establish and maintain control over their female partners.

The wheel symbolises the relationship of violence to other forms of abuse.

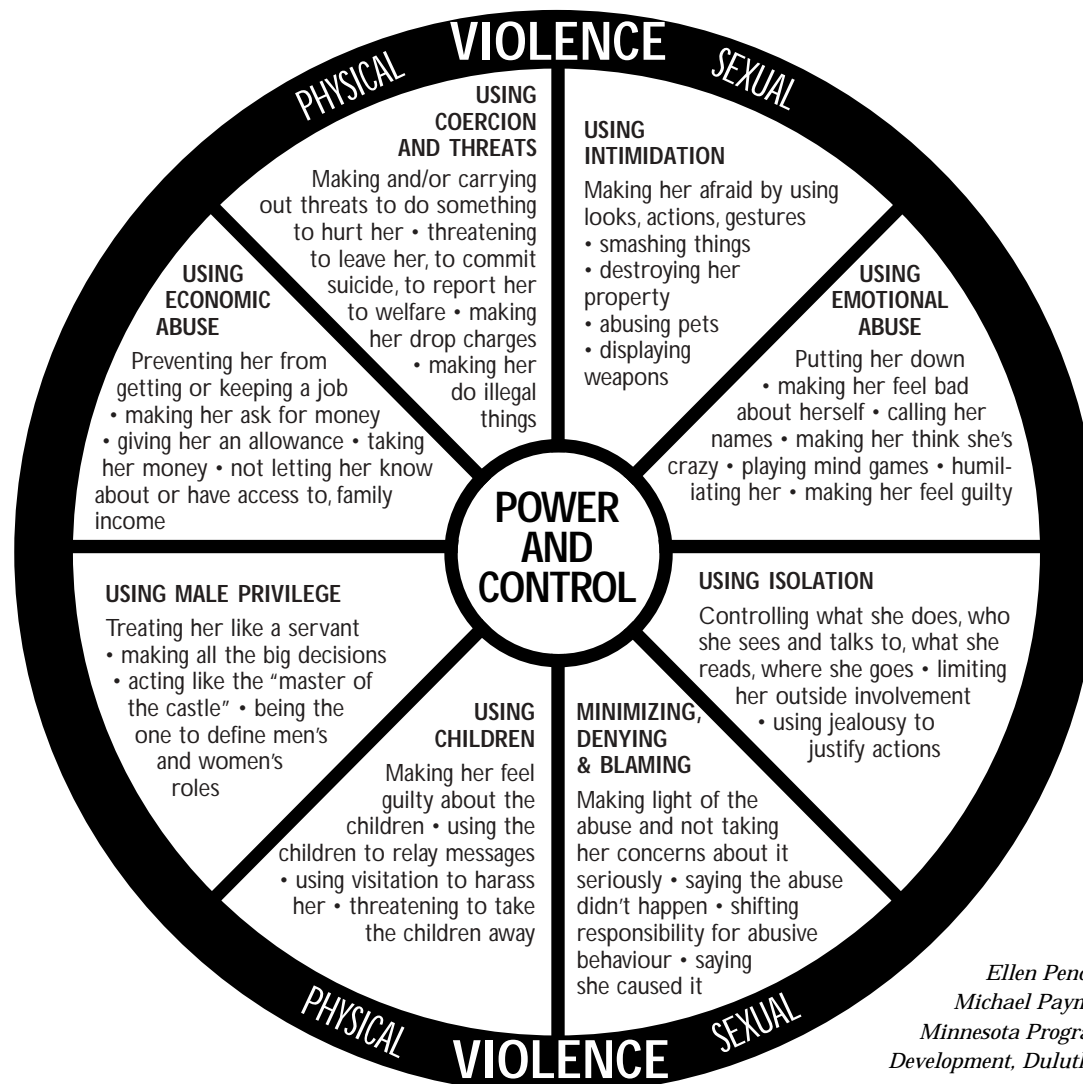
Each spoke represents a tactic used to exert control or gain power, which is the hub of the wheel.

The rim which surrounds and supports the spokes is physical and sexual violence, actual or threatened.

This model recognises that violence is not an isolated behaviour, but that it is at the violent end of the continuum of abuse.

Many of the tactics exist in abusive relationships, whether they are physically violent or not. Violence, or the mere threat of it, holds the system together and gives it strength.

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## The statistics

**T**HE Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, *Women's Safety Australia* survey found that in the last 12 months:

- 7.1% (490 400) of all women in Australia aged 18 & over, reported that they have experienced an incident of violence (page 4)

### The incidence of domestic violence

*Women's Safety Australia* also found that;

- 23% of women who have ever been married or in a de facto relationship, experienced violence from their partner at some time during the relationship (page 50)
- 8% (345 000) of women who were married or in a de facto relationship reported an incident of violence at some time during their current relationship (page 7)
- 2.6% of women who were married or in a de facto relationship (111 000) experienced an incident of violence by their partner in the previous 12 month period (page 7)

### Domestic violence during pregnancy

- Of women who experienced violence by a partner in a previous relationship where they were pregnant at some time during the relationship, 42% (292 100) reported that violence occurred during pregnancy
- 20% said they experienced violence for the first time during pregnancy  
(*ABS Women's Safety Australia page 8*)

### Domestic violence and children

- 68% (682 200) of women who experienced violence from a previous partner had children in their care at some time during the relationship
- 46% (461 200) said the children had witnessed the violence  
(*ABS Women's Safety Australia page 8*)

### New South Wales

- The New South Wales *Costs of Domestic*

*Violence* survey estimated that in NSW each year, 100 000 women are subjected to domestic violence

(quoted in *ACT Community Law Reform Committee Discussion Paper 1992*)<sup>13</sup>

- In 1995, 43% of assaults in NSW where victims were female, occurred inside the home.  
(*Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994, Crime and Safety Survey 1994. ABS 1995, Crime and Safety Survey 1995 and ABS 1996, Crime and Safety Survey 1996. Figures from unpublished tables from ABS to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research*)
  - In February 1997, the Domestic Violence Line (a statewide service) received 512 crisis calls from victims of violence (this is 18 calls per day and extrapolates to around 6144 calls per year)
  - The types of violence reported included economic, social, psychological, sexual, verbal and physical.  
(*Domestic Violence Line Report, February 1997*)
  - In a census conducted on one night in May, 1995, it was found that 902 women and 1500 children were accommodated in SAAP services for women and women with children escaping domestic violence.  
(*Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Home for a night census, 25th May 1995 APS, Canberra, page 12*)
  - In the 12 months between March 1992 and April 1993, New South Wales Police attended 21 394 domestic violence incidents  
(*Bradley Nolan and Sutton 1993 cited in Women's Legal Resources Centre 1994, Quarter Way to Equal, page 46*)
  - In NSW in 1991, nearly 12 000 Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) (an average of 230 a week) were taken out by women against their violent partners.  
(*Anne Cohen, NSW Minister assisting the Premier on the Status of Women, reported in the Canberra Times, 22 November 1992*)
- ### Breaches of AVOs
- The rate of breach of Apprehended Violence Orders per 100 000 population (Jan – Dec 1995) was higher outside the combined Sydney areas. The figures are as follows:

Central West	70.9
Far West	194.9
Hunter	66.5
Illawarra	56.9
Mid North Coast	96.8
Murray	50.9
Murrumbidgee	91.8
Northern	86.4
North Western	112.1
Richmond-Tweed	64.3
South Eastern	71.4
Sydney combined	52.5
State average	61.2

(Source: Table 2.27 Recorded Criminal Incidents April 1994 – Dec 1995 Breach AVO NSW Recorded Crime Statistics, 1995)

## Homicides

- Between 1968 and 1986, almost one-quarter of all cleared homicides in NSW were spouse killings.
- The majority of these (73%) were committed by men.  
(NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1988, Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 5 April)
- There was evidence of previous domestic violence in 48% of spouse homicides.  
(Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 5)
- 46% of men who killed their spouses, were separated from them.
- Almost half (48.4%) of the homicides occurred in the victim's home and, in more than half of these cases (58.9%) it was the home shared by both the victim and the offender.  
(NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1988, Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 5 April)
- Between July 1992 and June 1993 there were 326 homicides in Australia. 25.6% of these occurred between sexual intimates.  
(Australian Institute of Criminology 1995, Homicides in Australia 1992-93, no 51)

## Rural areas

- Rural areas report a higher rate of homicides within families than do urban areas (47.2% compared to 37.5%).  
(Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 5)

- In rural areas, 54% of spouse homicides involve the use of a gun (compared to 35% in urban areas).  
(NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1988, Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 5 April)
- The Crime, Locality and Citizenship Interim Research Report 1996, found that the highest per capita crime rates for violent crimes and crimes against the person (including assault, murder and sex offences) were reported consistently in rural (non urban) areas of NSW.

## Changing attitudes

In 1995, the OSW survey *Community attitudes to violence against women* revisited some of the views reported in the similar survey published in 1988. It found that in 1995, less than one in five see domestic violence as a private matter (reduced from one-third in 1987). In addition, 93% of those surveyed consider domestic violence to be a crime (compared to 79% in 1987).

Educating the community and raising awareness about the criminal nature of domestic violence, does, over time, show results.

## Access to weapons

- The study suggests that one factor contributing to the higher crime rates is the easier access to weapons in rural communities.
- It is estimated that 41.1% of rural households have guns/weapons compared to 11.7% of households in metropolitan areas.  
(Crime Locality and Citizenship Interim Research Report page 71)

## Contacting police

- One-fifth of women who had ever experienced an incident of physical assault had reported the last incident to the police
- One-tenth who were sexually assaulted reported the last incident to the police
- Women were more likely to report incidents perpetrated by a stranger
- Only 5% of women who reported experiencing physical violence from a current partner reported the violence to the police  
(ABS Women's Safety Australia page 29)

## Common community beliefs about domestic violence

**M**ANY myths surround domestic violence. In small communities in particular, the mythology can be very strong and prevailing. People often hold strong views and make judgements without having any personal experience or understanding of the situation. As a result of these judgements, women and children can be denied access to the services and assistance they need, to which they have a legal right.

It is always necessary to challenge myths, though this may be a long-term process. A useful way to approach this task is to ask questions which explore the myth more fully. For example, consider who benefits from the belief contained in a myth. What is the effect of this belief or attitude or comment on the safety of women and children.<sup>6</sup>

### Myth:

**Why doesn't she leave? She could leave if she wanted to.**

### Fact:

**Many women experience real barriers to leaving a violent relationship.**

Women have to negotiate many obstacles which make leaving a violent situation difficult, even dangerous.

Some of these potential difficulties include:

#### Social isolation

A woman may be isolated from friends, family and the wider community. She may be 'kept' isolated on a farm, or in a remote

location. Her partner may disconnect the phone or monitor all phone calls. He may immobilise the car, keep the keys and lock the petrol pump. Coupled with the lack of public transport in rural areas, escape may be impossible.

#### Emotional commitment and/or dependence

Like women in non-violent relationships, abused women are generally committed to their marriage, love their partner and hope for change in the relationship. Some women fear that their partner will not cope with a separation and will attempt suicide as he may have often threatened.

#### Low self-esteem, isolation, loneliness and financial dependence

After years of beatings and verbal abuse, many survivors have lost self-confidence and doubt their ability to cope on their own. Financial dependence and social stigma complicate a woman's decision to leave.

#### Fear of reprisal

One of the most compelling reasons why women and children find it difficult to leave an abusive relationship is their fear of being pursued and 'punished'.

The Wallace study of homicides in NSW found that nearly half (46%) of women killed by spouses were separated, or in the process of separating, at the time. The Domestic Violence Advocacy Service found that 50% of the calls to the service were made from women who were still being pursued and harassed by their partner even though they had separated.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, when women say they are too frightened to leave their relationship, they may be accurately assessing their own risk.

#### External factors

The external factors which keep country women and children trapped in violent situations include: the sometimes unhelpful police response; lack of transport; the often poor financial status of women; the unavail-

ability of emergency and long-term affordable housing; inadequate support services; pressures from family; and community attitudes.

Women may leave, or try to do so, on a number of occasions only to be later reconciled. This is usually the result of a combination of threats, promises and hope. It is also due, in part, to a general failure of legal and welfare services to provide proper support for women and children escaping domestic violence. Unsympathetic or unhelpful responses from agencies such as police, lawyers and the legal system in general, welfare agencies and families are all common experiences for victims of domestic violence.<sup>8</sup>

Myth:

**Alcohol causes domestic violence.**

Fact:

**There is no evidence that alcohol is the cause of domestic violence.**

Alcohol may be present when the violence occurs but it does not cause domestic violence. A study by Alison Wallace (1993) on the causes of violent behaviour found that:

- the perpetrator was sober in over 50% of domestic violence incidents reported to police;
- where alcohol was present in incidents of domestic violence, it was not the cause.

The study concluded that men use alcohol abuse as an excuse for their violence. Blaming alcohol for domestic violence implies that the man is deserving of sympathy and that the woman, by complaining about the violence, is unsympathetic and undeserving.<sup>9</sup>

A recent study conducted by the NSW Police Service and entitled *Domestic Violence in Aboriginal Communities* found that alcohol played a part in less than half of the domestic violence incidents reported.

Some men who are drunk are still able to direct their punches to places on a woman's body where the bruising will not show, indicating a degree of control and considered intent.

Myth:

**The stress of the recession/drought causes domestic violence.**

Fact:

**Stress may be a trigger for violence but it does not cause it.**

People who are under stress and violent towards their partners at home are rarely violent towards co-workers or non-family members.

Myth:

**Children need their father, even if he is violent.**

Fact:

**Research indicates that children exposed to domestic violence suffer long-term repercussions or effects.**

Research (Wolfe 1986, Blachard 1993) has shown that children who experience domestic violence often suffer from emotional trauma, depression, and often behavioural problems such as aggression, withdrawal, bed-wetting, and distress. Longer term, these children, are more likely to experience substance addictions and mental illnesses.

Some children are terrified of their father and resist contact. Forcing contact brings further trauma to some children. Refuge workers have observed that some children go through a build-up stage which includes anxiety and when they return after contact, they show signs of distress including withdrawal or aggression.

## Domestic violence in rural areas

**T**HE CONTEXT of a woman's life shapes her response to domestic violence. In rural areas, her difficult situation is likely to be exacerbated. In addition to her fear of her partner and the reality of trying to survive alone, the rural woman must overcome barriers such as distance, smallness of communities, conservative attitudes and a lack of appropriate services. These external factors are often what keep rural women and children trapped in violent situations.<sup>10</sup>

### Barriers to getting help

In her research into domestic violence in rural areas, Lyla Coorey identifies these barriers:

#### Variable police response

In her 1988 study, Coorey identified several issues of concern regarding police response to domestic violence in rural areas.

To begin with, police often did not use their powers to intervene in the violence.

Police familiarity with the victims and/or the perpetrators was also considered a potential problem. In country towns, police are more likely to socialise with the offender and their children are likely to know one another. The woman may also know the police socially and so be too embarrassed to call them.

Recent consultations with Local Domestic Violence Committees confirmed that while the response of some police was very good, these problems remained. The following comments were reported by committees concerning the police response in their area:

*'Good but always an ongoing education process with them'*

*'Erratic - depending on officer'*

*'Some officers are very supportive, some are very unsupportive'*

*'Unpredictable'*

It is often reported that police remove the woman rather than her partner. This may mean that she has to leave her town and her support networks.

A refuge worker described the following experience as *'a common scenario'*.

#### One woman's story

A woman and her three children have a cohabitation AVO which specifies that her partner must not go to the house or near her or the children when he has been drinking. The house is in her name.

The woman's partner abused her again. The police were called and took the perpetrator away in their van, driving him around allegedly to calm him down. He had been drinking and was bashing the inside of the van.

Despite the offence being a breach of an AVO, the police did not charge him and did not lock him up. They would have had to drive 500km to the nearest lock-up.

Instead, the police took the woman and her children to the hospital. They waited there for the refuge to pick her up. The nearest refuge was 300 km away.

The man was taken back to the house. The woman did not want him charged because she was afraid of deaths in custody.

*Woman from around Forbes*

For many women, the perception that they may not get the help they need from police presents enough of a barrier for them to not call. As a result, their life and those of their children, remains in danger.

Current police policy in relation to domestic violence is pro-active. The police response is

### **The Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody**

Many Aboriginal women fear their partner being in gaol because of the possibility of them dying in custody. This is a barrier which often prevents these women from getting help to escape domestic violence.

The recommendations of the Royal Commission include police use of discretion in arresting Aboriginal men, in favour of alternatives such as home detention. However, many Aboriginal women, while supporting the recommendations of the Commission, are concerned that the recommendations be carried out in ways that continue to ensure the safety of Aboriginal women and children.

determined by standards, so no matter where the call is made or who responds, the service should be of the same high quality. The Revised Corporate Plan of the NSW Police Service developed in response to the Royal Commission into the NSW Police Service, includes a commitment to raise the standards of service in policing.

In a situation of crisis, the police are the only service with the legislative power to ensure the safety of the women and children who may call them. It is thus crucial that police respond appropriately and provide the immediate and on-going protection which will help to make women and children safe.

### **Access to transport**

There is often a lack of public transport and, due to the distances which must be travelled to safety, private transport is expensive or impossible.

Through the local gossip network, people may inform the woman's partner which bus or train she and her children are on and which way they are heading.

In more remote areas, there may only be one

bus or train a day or a week. Without some form of private transport, there may be no way out. If women have taken public transport, there can be little secret about where they are going.

### **Access to money**

The expense of leaving is beyond the means of many rural women. Women on the land do not usually have access to ready cash - with partnership bank accounts and credit accounts often being used in the town. Applying for income support can be daunting, especially when the service only visits the town irregularly. Women may also experience limited job opportunities and childcare facilities.

### **Access to safety**

Many women and children have nowhere to go. There may be no refuge in town. In most towns there is a shortage of short and long-term accommodation and public housing. In mining towns, it may be impossible to secure any housing as most of it is reserved for employees.

Some women who have separated and chosen to remain in their town report suffering

### **‘ One woman's story**

I now live in fear of my life following a severe domestic assault in January (which resulted in Court Charges and an AVO). He has constantly lied about everything and both the children are concerned over his rapid mood changes. He has repeatedly rung them looking for me - I am in Police Protection - telling them he would like me to have 'one more chance' at our marriage. When the children tell him they don't know where I am (which they don't) his mood immediately changes and he tells them he could get me killed. He has also told the children he will find me and get me even if it takes 5 years.

*Extract from a letter*

ongoing abuse, living in constant fear of their ex-partner arriving at their home.

These factors contribute to the perception that there is no escape. This can become a psychological barrier to getting help.

## Community attitudes in a small town

Lyla Coorey reported that small town attitudes could be oppressive, and the comments of local people often unsympathetic and conservative. People were generally reluctant to become involved, and there was a lack of privacy and anonymity in rural districts.

Some members of the community continue to hold the misconception that domestic violence is a private marital problem. Coorey found that, too often, these attitudes were held by local doctors and members of the clergy. Women may be advised to 'put up with abuse' in order to keep the family together.

## Mining towns

In mining towns, much of the population is transient. For some women, this results in isolation and prevents them from getting to know people and services.

In mining areas such as Lightning Ridge, this situation is further exacerbated. Many miners live on 'claim' camps which may be outside the townships. There are many guns reported in the mining camps. These areas are often male dominated and high levels of violence are reported. Public transport is limited or non-existent.

Many women have reported that the community appears to have their own form of 'law and order'. They have related that there is a 'code of secrecy' in mining communities, with attitudes such as 'mind your own business' and 'don't interfere in other people's business' common.

Isolation leaves all women living in these communities and experiencing domestic violence, extremely vulnerable, and particularly women from a non-English speaking

## Firearms

Research conducted into homicides in NSW found that a disproportionate number of family or spouse killings occurred in rural areas. According to Wallace, these killings were far more likely to involve guns: for example, guns were used in 53% of rural spouse killings compared with 35% in urban areas. Wallace suggests this may be due to the greater availability of guns in the country, coupled with the greater lethal potential of those guns.

Firearms are a very real threat. If firearms are present and threats are being made, it is important to take those threats seriously.

*Cited in Rebecca Peters 1995* <sup>11</sup>

background. Lack of family support or local social network systems can mean that no-one knows they are there, and no-one is looking out for them.

## Access to services

Services in country towns are often limited, with one centre fulfilling a range of functions. There is often a lack of adequate legal representation, refuges, court assistance and counselling. Services may not open out of hours, with many only being staffed - and therefore open - on a part-time basis.

Concerns about court safety are regularly raised in consultations.

There is a lack of specialist services for Aboriginal women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, women with disabilities and lesbians.

There is also a lack of child focussed workers in most services.

Many women are not aware of the services and the help they offer. Others fear lack of confidentiality. Women often reported concern about the stigma attached to

Women in small towns are substantially at the mercy of local service providers. 'Consumer choice' as a concept is not a reality for women in isolated areas. If the advice provided by the local doctor, solicitor or police officer is not helpful, there is often little opportunity to obtain a second opinion.

*Christine Nolan 1992*<sup>12</sup>

domestic violence, particularly if they knew the staff personally.

### **Additional barriers for women on the land**

If a woman lives out of town on a property, the isolation, distance and the financial arrangements between couples can make leaving a violent situation even more difficult.

She may have no transport or means of communication. There are cases of women being 'kept prisoner' on properties without anyone knowing. The woman's partner may immobilise the car, or disconnect the phone. Isolation, and the infrequency with which people come to town may mean that the woman's plight goes unnoticed and that she has no-one to turn to.

Furthermore, if a woman's family has lived in the district for generations, the threat of tarnishing the family name can be a genuine deterrent to reporting domestic violence.

### **Issues for service providers**

For service providers working in rural and isolated services, the problems inherent in most community organisations become even more acute. Issues of concern include:

- limited or inadequate communication by government departments
- an information delay in rural areas - a component of inadequate communication

- poor participation by government agency representatives in inter-agency meetings is often reported
- government administration often requires that services provide statistical information about service usage, with funding and resources to be based on this information. Collecting statistics about the under-reported crime of domestic violence presents many difficulties
- a lack of support and professional supervision for workers in rural services
- a lack of resources and training
- worker burnout as a result of time constraints, distances to travel and overwork, compounded by the impact such work has on the worker's life in terms of harassment, frustration, despair, privacy and confidentiality
- worker safety, because service providers are highly visible: everyone knows who they are and where they work. Workers in the area of domestic violence are often confronted by members of the public and by the perpetrator.

Similar problems are experienced by government agencies working in rural areas.

### **One woman's story**

After suffering physical abuse and rape, being kept hostage and listening to suicidal threats from her husband, one woman left her husband and moved into town. Their family were well-known and respected in the community.

The farm business was in both their names. Her husband used this as blackmail. He told her the business and her money would go by the wayside. She said she had been doing the administrative part of the farm for many years.

She suffered financial blackmail because she left. The children persecuted her too - saying it would affect their futures.

*Woman in Young*

## A domestic violence helping strategy

**T**HE following are some guidelines for service providers. They may be used as a checklist when assisting women and children who are experiencing domestic violence.

### On an agency level

- 1** Ensure your agency has an agreed policy and procedure for helping women and children escaping domestic violence.
- 2** Ensure this procedure is inclusive of cultural factors and addresses confidentiality.
- 3** Develop and maintain a list of appropriate referrals.
- 4** Establish and maintain contact with domestic violence workers and agencies in your area.

### On a worker level

- 1** Stress the need for the woman and her children to be safe.
- 2** Consider the needs of children in their own right.
- 3** Be aware of cultural factors.
- 4** Be clear about confidentiality. Make sure you let the woman know honestly about whether information is confidential or not. It will also be important to let her know under what circumstances information would be divulged. For example - if there is a court subpoena, or if there are child protection issues.
- 5** Stress that it is not her fault.
- 6** Reduce anxiety and blame.
- 7** Acknowledge and validate her fears.
- 8** Explore options.
- 9** Decide upon a mutually agreed action plan.
- 10** Refer women and children accordingly.

## Further reading

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## Endnotes

- 1 Women's Refuge Movement *Women's Refuge Information Kit*
- 2 Women's Coordination Unit, 1993, *Domestic Violence: you don't have to put up with it*, Sydney
- 3 Sources: Domestic Violence Policy Unit, Community and Youth Branch, 1994, *We CAN stop Domestic Violence - Fact Sheet 2* Department of Family Services and Aboriginal Islander Affairs
- 4 Condonis, M., Paroissien, K., and Aldrich, B. *The Mutual Self Help Group* Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, 1990, page 33
- 5 Sam, M. 1992, *Through Black Eyes - A Handbook of Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities* Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, page 8
- 6 Sources for myths: Redfern Legal Centre 1996, *Domestic Violence Court Assistance: An Information and Training Kit* Redfern Legal Centre Publishing, Sydney, and Domestic Violence Policy Unit, Community and Youth Branch, 1994, *We CAN stop Domestic Violence - Fact Sheet 7* Department of Family Services and Aboriginal Islander Affairs and Coorey, L. 1992, 'A rural perspective on domestic violence' in *Discussion and Resource Kit for use in rural and isolated communities* OSW and NSW Police Service 1992 *Domestic Violence in Aboriginal Communities*
- 7 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, page 15
- 8 Coorey, L. 1992, page 25
- 9 Redfern Legal Centre 1996, page 17
- 10 The sources for this section are Coorey, L. 1989, *Domestic Violence and the Police - Who is being protected* University of Sydney Printing Service; and Coorey, L. 1992, pages 25-30. Lohse, K. and Cosier, G. 1991, 'Workshop: rural and isolated women' in *Local Domestic Violence Committee Conference Papers* NSW Domestic Violence Committee, Sydney. Correspondence from Western Region Domestic Violence Collective.
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- 12 Nolan, C. 1992, 'Domestic violence in country areas of Australia' in National Domestic Violence Education Program *Discussion and Resource Kit for use in Rural and Isolated communities* National committee on Violence Against Women, page 21
- 13 Cited in Women's Legal Resources Centre 1994, *Quarter Way to Equal*, page 46)