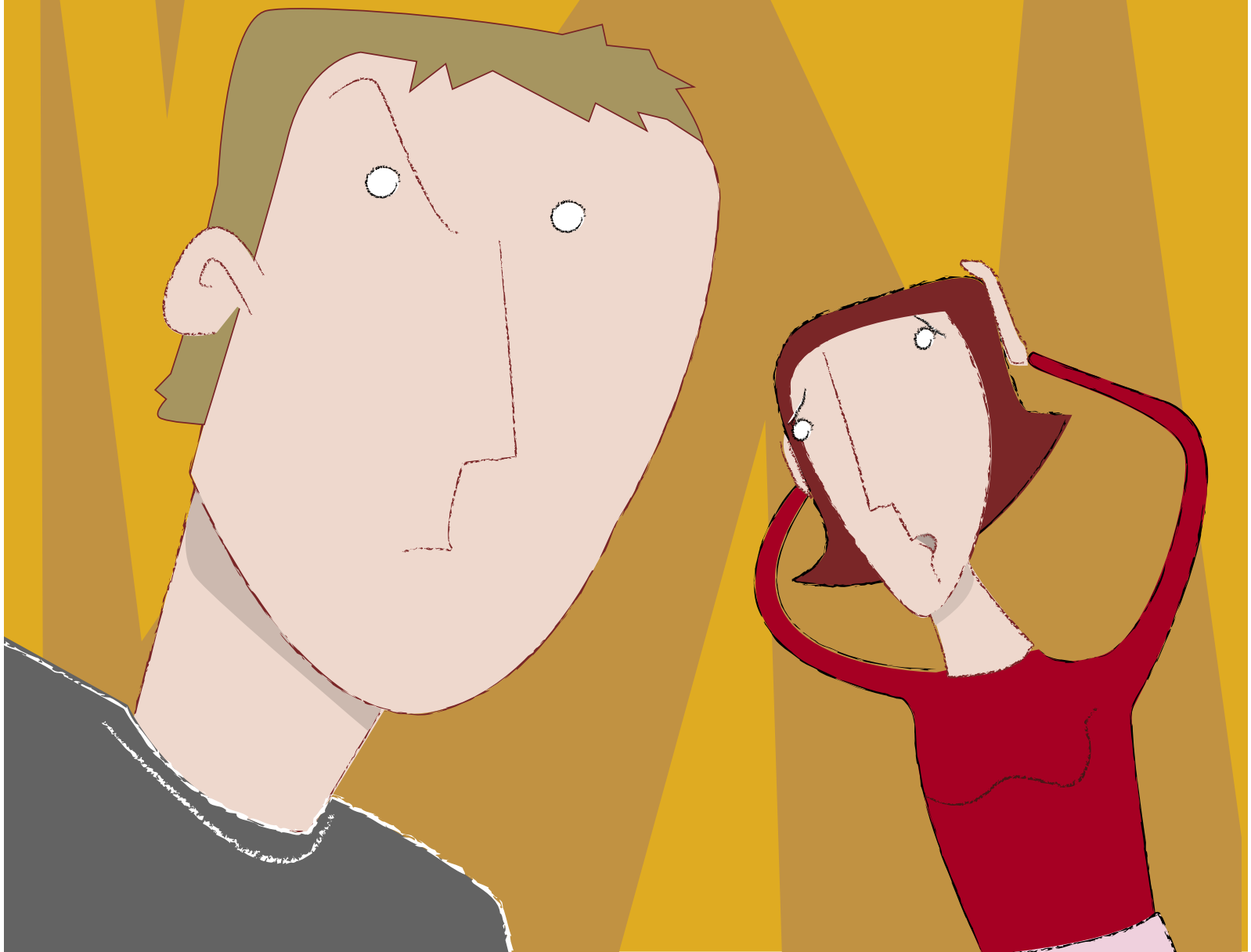


ATTACHMENT JH 3

This is the attachment marked "JH 3" referred to in the witness statement of Joanne Carol Howard dated 8 July 2015.

It All Starts At Home

Male Adolescent Violence to Mothers



A Research Report





He controls the way I parent. I do everything basically based around how he's going to react because of fear of it exploding...**there's only so much you can take** for 24 hours in your head like this...when I'd ring for help, I wasn't getting any help. (Effie)

No one should have to go through this. It's just horrible, it's just unbelievable...families are supposed to ...stick together...**it rips you to shreds.** (Susan)

It absolutely destroyed [the relationship], absolutely, absolutely...it virtually has been non-existent, which absolutely crushes you...**in a way it's like someone dying** but they're not... you sort of grieve for that loss of relationship but they're not gone. (Susan)

I just don't know what to do sometimes. I don't know how to handle it. And I feel like screaming, and I feel like **I'm suffocating.** (Effie)



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additional copies should be directed to the Manager, Community, Youth and Family Health Program, Inner South Community Health Service, 18 Mitford St, St Kilda, Victoria. 3181 or phone 03 9534 0981 or email jhoward@ischs.org.au or www.ischs.org.au.

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Acronyms

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
ISCHS	Inner South Community Health Service
ODD	Oppositional Defiance Disorder
SCERH	Standing Committee on Ethics in Research involving Humans

This report was written by:

Jo Howard, Manager, Inner South Community Health Service Inc

Jo Howard

Jo is a social worker and clinical family therapist with over twenty five years experience in the health and community sector, particularly in family violence. She first published on the issue of adolescent violence to parents in 1994, when she became aware of this issue through her work with women who had experienced family violence. She supported the establishment of an adolescent violence to parents program, which has been operating for over five years at the Inner South Community Health Service. She has written extensively on domestic violence and parenting, including publication of a book "Mothers and Sons" in 2001 and a parenting manual "Bringing Up Boys", for sole mothers raising sons.

Naomi Rottem

Naomi Rottem is a social worker and family therapist. She has worked in a range of roles within the ISCHS since 2000, including therapeutic work with families and young people, groupwork with women and children who have experienced violence, and more recently as a researcher. She has worked extensively with families dealing with a range of complex issues in the community health and non-government sectors, and is currently employed as a family therapist and trainer with the Bouverie centre.

August 2008

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Executive Summary

Whilst adolescent violence toward parents is an emerging trend internationally, little research has been undertaken in Australia that examines male adolescent violence to their mothers. This research examined male adolescents' abuse and violence to their sole parent mothers. It gathered qualitative data from ten women, from a range of cultural backgrounds to gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences of the abuse and violence from their sons. The women had a total of fourteen male children, between thirteen and nineteen years of age; twelve of these were identified as violent.

The research highlighted intra-generational and intergenerational issues relating to family violence. Most women and their ex-partners had grown up in families where they had experienced harsh discipline and/or the abuse of women and children. The sons' violence towards their mothers, siblings and others included physical, emotional, verbal, psychological and financial abuse. The impact of sons' abuse and violence to siblings was profound and severe.

Sons had witnessed abuse and/or violence from their fathers or their mothers' ex-partners to their mothers and some sons had experienced verbal and physical violence from their fathers. Where women had left the relationship when their sons were babies or toddlers, the abuse continued when the fathers had contact visits with their sons. Many sons were dealing with the effects which included anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, self harming, tension and irritability, learning difficulties and difficulty forming relationships.

Most sons exhibited developmental, behavioural and learning problems from a young age. These had not been adequately addressed despite most of them being in 'trouble' at school and experiencing difficulty with authority. Some boys were bullied and some bullied others. Some were diagnosed with ADD, ADHD and/or ODD and one was later diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Women were concerned about their sons' actual or possible abuse of drugs and alcohol. They worried their sons might become involved in criminal activities. A significant concern was that their sons would grow to be adults who were abusive and violent towards women.

The research highlighted the significant and lasting cumulative impact on the women of the abuse and violence experienced from the women's ex-partners and their sons. This severely affected women's mental, emotional, financial and physical health and wellbeing. They experienced depression, anxiety, stress, poor health and fatigue. They felt guilt, shame and blame. They felt unsafe in their own homes and powerless to protect their other children. Most were socially isolated and felt their sons' behaviour prevented them from having a social life or another relationship. Their sons' destruction of property and possessions and the impact of the violence on their ability to work meant women's financial situation was significantly compromised.

Women minimised their sons' violence to themselves and their sons' siblings and that of their ex-partners. They noted strong similarities in the behaviours and attitudes of their sons to that of their ex-partners. The research further highlighted that most sons blamed their mothers or others for their violence. The women gave many reasons for the violence including inherited behaviours, learnt behaviours, their parenting inadequacies, lack of the fathers' involvement in parenting, being undermined by their families, their sons' grief and trauma and their sons' drug and alcohol use. All women spoke about their sons' negative and disrespectful attitudes to women.

The women spoke of feeling emotionally close to their sons, despite the violence. Most women were torn between loving their sons deeply and hating their attitudes, abuse and violence. Women sought support from a range of services. Some were helpful but many did not meet the women's needs. Services they attempted to engage with were not accessible or flexible. Many services did not respond to the seriousness of the abuse and violence and gave strategies that could not be implemented. Because women were sole parents they did not have others to back them up. This compounded their isolation and exhaustion. Some women experienced their families as undermining and critical.

All women felt grave concerns for their sons' futures. They worried about their sons' employment prospects, many had dropped out of school and were not actively involved in education, training or work.

The research concluded that male adolescent violence to mothers is an under researched yet serious issue with far reaching ramifications for all family members. The violence to women is unlikely to cease when male adolescents leave home. The report recommends that male adolescent violence to mothers must be recognised as a form of family violence in its own right and as a possible precursor for adult violence to women. Additional resources must be allocated to support women with children who leave violent partners.

Part One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Adolescent violence to parents is a serious issue and one that has been under researched and under resourced. Anecdotal and other evidence suggests it is increasing. Up to one quarter of children aged twelve to twenty years have witnessed physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (Indermaur, Atkinson & Blagg, 1998). Victorian Police Family Incident Reports show a 23% increase between 2002/3 and 2006/7 for offenders (both males and females) aged up to 19 years. The incidence of male violence increased by 19%, and for female violence perpetrators almost 37%. Almost 80% of offenders aged up to 19 years in 2006/7 were male.

The causes and effects of this type of family violence are still unclear. Different theories attempt to explain why adolescent violence occurs. It remains a complex issue, which no one theory can adequately explain. Adolescents can be abusive and violent to both biological and stepfathers and stepmothers and to grandparents and other carers. They can also abuse siblings. Both adolescent males and females can perpetrate abuse and violence. There are very few services that specifically respond to this issue, either by working with the adolescent, supporting the parents or taking a whole-of-family approach. There are only a handful of group programs to support parents and carers across Victoria.

Inner South Community Health Service (ISCHS) has a strong commitment to preventing, and responding to family violence. Our family violence programs include individual counselling and group programs for women and children, a men's behavioural change program and an adolescent violence to parents program.

ISCHS has been working with adolescent violence to parents for over six years. Our work in this area has included individual and family work and a group program, 'Who's the Boss', for parents and carers who have experienced adolescent abuse and violence. There is a strong demand for these group programs. In 2004, ISCHS convened a forum on adolescent violence to parents, which attracted over 150 people and services across Victoria. The need to better understand adolescent violence to parents, the interest from the community and family violence sector in this issue and our commitment to supporting parents who experience adolescent abuse and violence, led the ISCHS to initiate the It All Starts At Home project, one component of which is this research.

The 'It All Starts At Home' project included enhancing group programs to support parents and carers experiencing adolescent violence; developing a resource booklet in English, Greek (and three other to be decided community languages) to provide information and strategies for parents who experience adolescent violence; and undertaking qualitative research.

Our work in adolescent violence to parents shows that almost a third of the adolescents of parents participating in the programs are female, and two-thirds male. Both female and male adolescents are physically, verbally, emotionally, financially and psychologically abusive against mothers, fathers and carers. This research focused on the issue of male adolescent abuse of, and violence toward women who were sole parents. It was initiated for several reasons. Firstly, our work in family violence made us wonder about the similarities between male adolescent violence toward mothers and adult male perpetrators' violence to their female partners. We wondered whether the women's sons had experienced violence from their father to their mother and were now behaving in similar ways. We wondered if the impact of sons' abuse and violence on their mothers was similar to that of women who experienced their partners' abuse and violence.

Secondly, we hoped this research would help enhance the safety and wellbeing of women. Whilst initiatives have been undertaken to increase the safety of women and children who have experienced family violence, there has not been any significant progress in response to the needs of parents who are subjected to adolescent violence. We knew from our own experience that many parents who experience adolescent

abuse and violence were not safe in their own homes and experienced dire physical, psychological and emotional consequences. We hoped that understanding more about male adolescent violence to mothers would assist in responses to increase women's safety. Increased knowledge of the cause and effects of this type of violence would enable services to respond earlier and more effectively to assist parents. Our own experience showed that the adolescent, whilst being a perpetrator of abuse and violence, is sometimes a victim of his father's abuse and violence. He too can be unsafe and unsupported. We hoped that highlighting the stories of these adolescents, albeit from their mothers' perspectives, may contribute to greater support for their safety and wellbeing and in taking responsibility for, and ceasing their abuse and violence.

Thirdly, because adolescent violence to parents is perpetrated by sons and daughters against both mothers and fathers, it is not a 'gendered crime' in the way that adult family violence can be perceived. Nevertheless, we were interested to explore whether adolescent violence by sons against mothers could be understood through a gendered analysis, and if there were similarities and parallels to adult male violence against women. This will hopefully contribute to the development of services to better respond to the needs of mother and children leaving violent men, parents who have experienced adolescents' violence and adolescents who are abusive and violent to their family members.

Finally, we were interested to document women's experiences in order to raise awareness of the impact of family violence. We hoped to add to the knowledge base of this under researched domain of family violence. We hoped this research would contribute towards an enhanced service system response to providing resources to increase the safety and wellbeing of women and children.

1.2 Definitions

This research report is informed by definitions of domestic violence and adolescent violence to parents.

Domestic violence can be defined as:

an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women both in relationships and after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation.¹

...any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.²

Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and mental human development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organisation defines adolescence as the period of life between ten and nineteen years of age.³ All the sons of women interviewed were in this age range.

Adolescents can also be referred to as 'teenagers' and 'young people'.

Other terms including 'child-to-mother violence', 'parental abuse' or 'parent abuse' are also used to refer to adolescents' violence toward their parents.

For the purpose of this research, **adolescent violence to parents** is defined as:

an abuse of power perpetrated by adolescents against their parents, carers and/or other relatives including siblings. It occurs when an adolescent attempts physically or psychologically to dominate, coerce and control others in their family.

1. Principles agreed for Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) by the Australian Heads of Government National Domestic Violence Summit (1997).

2. United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993).

3. Goodburn, Elizabeth A., and Ross, David A. (1995). "A Picture of Health: A Review and Annotated Bibliography of the Health of Young People in Developing Countries." Published by the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

4. Based on the definition of PADV (1997)

Adolescent violence to parents takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical violence, destruction of property and/or possession, threats and intimidation, psychological, emotional and social abuse, financial abuse and sometimes sexual abuse.⁴

Whilst some literature distinguishes between 'experiencing' domestic violence and 'witnessing' domestic violence, this research report, refers to 'experiencing' domestic violence as this includes 'witnessing' and acknowledges that children's and young people's 'experience' of domestic violence is severe and long lasting, whether they witness it against their mothers, or whether it is perpetrated directly on them. The term 'woman' is used throughout the research report, rather than the term 'mother'. This is in acknowledgement that mothering is a role rather than a definition of personhood. The term 'women' conveys a greater sense of personal agency.

The terms 'partner' or 'ex-partner' were used, rather than the term 'husband' because the women's marital status was not deemed relevant. The terms 'partner' or 'ex-partner' were used rather than the term 'men' because the men's experience was relevant only as it related to the women's lives. In this sense their role as 'partner', 'ex-partner' or 'father' was important. The term 'son' was used, rather than 'male adolescent' for the same reason.

1.3 Research aims

The research aimed to develop a better understanding about adolescent violence to parents, specifically toward women who were also sole mothers. Although adolescent violence can be perpetrated by either male or female adolescents and against mothers and fathers, some research and the experience of ISCHS indicated a major presentation is male adolescent violence against their sole mothers. Many sole mothers had left violent partners, and their sons had frequently witnessed or experienced these men's violence to their mother or themselves. For this reason, we specifically sought to understand sole mothers' experience of abuse and violence from their sons and to explore whether a history of violence perpetrated by significant males, influences sons to also perpetrate abuse and violence.

We were interested to explore the impact of this violence on sole mothers, particularly given that sole mothers are likely to be economically and socially disadvantaged and have fewer supports to respond to the violence. Sole mothers may be less able than most fathers to physically protect themselves or to prevent physical abuse and violence from their sons. We also wondered whether adolescent males who use abuse and violence against their mothers are more likely to use it against their female partners in later life.

1.4 Methodology

This research was undertaken in collaboration with Monash University's Child Abuse Research Australia (CARA). Ethics approval was gained through Monash University's Standing Committee on Ethics in Research involving Humans (SCERH).

The research utilised a qualitative research methodology. This methodology best suited this study as it is regarded as a fact-gathering procedure often conducted when little is known about the phenomenon. The approach allows people to tell their own stories in their own voices, promotes new realities to be discovered by interactive dialogue between researchers and participants and prevents the need to find simple answers to complex life issues (Berg, 1998). It allows for the multiple realities of the many persons whose voices have been silenced to be reflected and it examines how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others (Berg, 1998; Hudson & Nurius, 1994). It is rich in description and colorful in detail (Neuman, 1997).

Women were recruited through:

- Group programs, family workers or counsellors working with adolescent violence to parents across the eastern and southern metropolitan region of Melbourne;
- Notices placed on community health and family counselling services' notice boards; and
- Advertisements in local papers, including a Greek language newspaper

Information was available to the women through counsellors, group facilitators, in waiting areas of services and in several newspapers for potential participants to access. The information stated participants must be sole mothers of adolescent sons (aged thirteen to eighteen years) who were violent toward them. This information included a definition of adolescent violence to parents (the same definition used in this research). Women were provided with the researcher's work contact details and women were asked to telephone the researcher to discuss the research project and their participation.

The researcher, a qualified social worker and family therapist, was aware that the nature of the interview might cause some women to experience distress and some women were distressed. Participants were advised of this possibility prior to interview, and were made aware of support options available if this occurred. For example, information was given about free or low cost counselling and the telephone number of the ISCHS counselling co-ordinator. They were also informed of the researcher's responsibilities relating to reporting any risk of harm to the participant and/or others. The Ethics application detailed a protocol to follow if a woman disclosed information of a seriously threatening, harmful or criminal (as in family violence) nature.

The women who contacted the ISCHS researcher were informed of the aims of the project and asked if they were willing to be part of the research. They were given a clear explanation about why the research was being undertaken, the nature of the research, information about consent and privacy and their rights as a participant. Verbal and written information was provided. The women participants were interviewed by a female researcher who had not been involved in any ISCHS service delivery. Two interviews were conducted in the women's homes, two at other services and six at ISCHS sites. Participants chose the venue.

A Plain Language Statement was provided to each woman. This described the aims of the research and advised the woman that the researcher would contact her at an agreed time and venue. Interpreters were available should the women require them.

The woman's safety and wellbeing was considered by:

- Ensuring confidentiality about her participation in regard to her son, or anyone else of relevance to the woman.
- Establishing a safe method of contact for the researcher to contact the women (eg safe times to call, how the researcher should respond if her son answered the phone etc).
- A follow up call by the researcher after the interview to ensure that the woman was comfortable with what had taken place.
- Providing the opportunity to debrief, or have counselling with ISCHS, if any distress was caused by any part of the interview process.
- Giving the women the researcher's work telephone number so she could contact the researcher at any stage if she had queries or comments about the process, wished to cancel her participation or wished to debrief. Phone numbers of people not directly involved in the research (for example the Program Manager) were also supplied should the woman want to complain about the research process. There was provision on the information sheet and consent form for the participants to contact Monash SCERH if they had a complaint.

- Explaining that the woman may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the research at any time or withdraw any information given at the time of the interview.
- Explaining to the woman that her decision to participate or not participate in the research would not affect her access to, or use of ISCHS services.
- Explaining that her real name and those of her children would not be used in any of the reports, any identifying material would be removed or changed and that she could choose a pseudonym for herself and her children for the purpose of the interview.

Women were informed they would be able to view the research transcript and the draft research report prior to finalisation. These arrangements were discussed at the interview.

A consent form was given and explained to all women. They were asked to sign the form, following verbal consent and once they had demonstrated to the researcher that they understood to what they were consenting.

Ten women were interviewed. Most lived in the Southern Metropolitan Region, Department of Human Services, Victoria although several lived just outside this region. Women self selected by contacting the researcher. Three women found out about the research because they were attending group programs for parents experiencing adolescent violence, two from their counsellor or family support worker, one from her son's youth worker, one from a speech therapist at her son's school, one from a friend and two through local newspaper advertisements.

The interviews were based on a questionnaire that was approved by SCERH. The questionnaire was designed to support women to tell, and reflect upon their experience of adolescent violence. The researcher was aware of the impact of the experience of adolescent violence on the women, and that the interviewing may be emotionally confronting for some women. The interview was conducted in a sensitive and respectful manner. Some women did not answer all questions because they chose to focus on particular areas of the research questionnaire. Because the research privileged what women, rather than the researcher thought was important, the researcher did not press the women to answer every question.

Part Two: Literature Review

2.1 Adolescent violence to parents

A review of current literature revealed that limited research has been undertaken about adolescent violence to parents, particularly relating to sole mothers and their sons, the influence of gender and previous experience of family violence by mothers and children. Adolescent violence to parents is a complex issue and there is little evidence-based information that can assist families or practitioners working with families (Crichton-Hill et al, 2003). There are strong similarities between current attitudes toward parent abuse and past attitudes toward 'wife abuse' (Cottrell, 2001). Victims of adolescent violence were often blamed; abuse was seen as a private family matter and there were few supports available. It has been suggested that the lack of attention to this issue is in part, a reflection of the community's difficulty in coming to terms with adolescent violence to parents because it challenges fundamental societal beliefs about parenting and family relationships and the concept of power within those relationships (Pagani, et al. 2004; Gallagher, 2004). A unique aspect of adolescent violence to parents compared to other forms of family violence is that parents have a responsibility to care for their children, which means that their options to escape the violence may be more limited (Kennair & Mellor, 2007; Paterson et al 2002). Gallagher (2004) noted that adolescents may be abusive and violent to parents as a response to domestic violence or conflictual separation; to control their parents; to defend themselves or react to being abused and/or to defend mothers from fathers who are violent. Severely disabled children, psychiatrically disturbed and/or drug affected or drug dependent adolescents may also lash out at parents and carers. Cottrell (2001) observed that most adolescents use a combination of verbal and emotional abuse, threats and property damage and/or physical violence.

Verbal abuse if ignored, often escalates to more serious violence and intimidation (Gallagher, 2004). Violent adolescents often mentally devalue the victim as justification for their abusive behaviour.

2.2 Prevalence of adolescent abuse and violence to parents

The prevalence of adolescent abuse and violence to parents is yet to be determined. Different, and at times contradictory, information exists. Prevalence is difficult to ascertain because many parents are unwilling to report their children's abuse, feeling ashamed, guilty and/or fearing what will happen to their child if they report (Jackson, 2003; Kennair & Mellor, 2007). Adolescent violence may be even more hidden than other forms of domestic violence. There is no official reporting on adolescent violence to parents in Australia. However recent data identified that 9% of all family violence incidents recorded by Victoria Police in 2003-2004 involved parents/step parents who reported violence by a child/step child aged 12-24 years. Other estimates have ranged from 5 - 33% of the population (Robinson et al, 2004). Crichton-Hill et al (2003) point out that as with other types of interpersonal violence and abuse, it is likely that adolescent violence towards parents is more widespread than the available literature and research suggests.

2.3 Victims of perpetrators

Adolescent violence to parents occurs in all families across different races, social classes and family structures. Mothers and step-mothers, in both sole and two-parent homes, are the most common targets (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Kennair & Mellor, 2007). Rates are higher for mothers who are sole parents (Stewart et al, 2007). Males were more often responsible for the abuse than females (Agnew & Huguley, 1989).

Ulman and Straus (2003) suggest that at least part of the explanation for this is rooted in the subordinate status of women and gender role stereotyping. Young males may believe it is socially acceptable to control and dominate females; many families are parented exclusively or primarily by women who are more likely to be abused because they are more accessible; young people may view fathers as physically powerful, which reduces the likelihood of abuse against them and female abusers may perceive their mothers as weak and powerless and abuse their mothers as a means of separating themselves from this image of female vulnerability (Kennair & Mellor, 2007). Gallagher (2004) noted that the most common pattern in adolescent violence to parents is boys abusing mothers, in many cases following the lead of a violent father. His explanations of why women are more likely to be the victims of abuse and violence, concur with Kennair and Mellor's (2007) explanations, including that mothers are usually physically weaker than fathers; mothers are less likely to retaliate (even when physically capable); women are much more likely to be sole parents and spend more time with children; mothers have far more often been past victims of spouse abuse than have fathers and common attitudes allow males (including very young males) to feel superior to women. In addition mothers take much greater responsibility for their children and often feel guilty and inadequate because of the children's behavioural problems which makes them less likely to be assertive. Women in our society are generally less assertive (and less aggressive) than men. Cottrell & Monk (2004) stated that male youth may learn through a variety of societal messages that it is acceptable to control and dominate women; many female youth viewed their mothers as weak and powerless and used abusive behaviour against them as a way to distance from this image of female vulnerability; fathers were typically seen by youth as being strong and intimidating which decreased the possibility of abuse against them and that many families were parented solely or predominantly by women and therefore it was more likely that abusive behaviour would be directed toward mothers and stepmothers simply because they were more readily accessible.

2.4 Gender of perpetrators

The majority of studies indicate that males are more likely to be the perpetrators of abuse than females. Where children witness family violence, girls are more likely to internalise and boys 'act out' (DHS, 2007). Anecdotal evidence and individual reports can vary on the incidence of the gender ratio. Parentline's (2008) review indicated that in 2007, there were 67% males to 33% female adolescent perpetrators to parents. Victoria Police data (2003-4) showed that approximately 70% of adolescent perpetrators were male and 30% female. Some research supports the view that boys tend to be more physically violent towards their parents than girls; other research indicates boys and girls participate equally in forms of abuse (Stewart et al, 2005). Male adolescents may be more violent to their parents, particularly their mothers, because males are generally more aggressive than females and cultural attitudes support male aggression and control of others. Male adolescents are also physically more capable of violence and are threatening because of size and strength. They are also more likely to identify with an aggressive father than are girls (Bandura, 1973).

2.5 Age of perpetrators

The peak age for adolescents being violent to their parents is between fifteen and seventeen years of age (Evans et al, 1988; Strauss et al, 1988; Wilson, 1996). Parentline's (2008) review indicated that in 2005 the abuse peaked at fifteen to sixteen years of age and in 2007, the peak was fourteen to fifteen years. These findings support anecdotal evidence that the age of adolescents abusing parents is decreasing. Cottrell (2001) found that professionals believe that abusive behaviour manifests long before children are teenagers. Most parents in Cottrell's research reported the abuse began when the child was between twelve and fourteen years of age. Some were aware that their children exhibited signs of violent behaviour at an earlier age (four or five years) but they initially viewed the behaviour as a 'tantrum' rather than abuse. Cottrell & Monk's (2004) overall data showed that incidents of adolescent abuse typically began when they were between twelve and sixteen-years-old.

2.6. Explanations of adolescent violence to parents

There are no definitive explanations for adolescent abuse and violence to parents. It is likely that a range of multi-faceted interconnected dynamics contribute to the behaviour. These dynamics may include biological, psychological and social factors, as well as those related to youth culture (Martin, 2002) and risk factors linked with adolescent offending (McLaren, 2000, 2002). Paterson et al., (2002) found that explanations for adolescent violence included exposure to domestic violence; family disruptions and conflict; ineffective and poor parenting (particularly by mothers); learnt behaviour from witnessing violence; trauma through abuse and neglect; intergenerational patterns; young people taking control when parents are unable to do so and parenting practices leading to over entitlement.

2.6.1 Exposure to domestic violence

Growing up in the context of family violence and the continuation of violent behaviour in the next generation is increasingly highlighted in current family violence discourse (Crichton-Hill et al, 2003). Some evidence suggests that there is greater risk of the young person becoming violent towards his or her parent if they witness adult family violence and/or parents are violent towards a young family member (Ulman & Strauss, 2003; Bobic, 2004). Children who have been exposed to family violence, either directly or by witnessing spousal abuse, are more likely to abuse their parents in adolescence (Agnew and Huguley, 1989). Young men with past exposure to domestic violence have negative beliefs about, and greater acceptance of violence to women (Reitzel-Jaffe & Wolfe, 2001). Howard (1995) contends that children who have witnessed violence from their father against their mother may grow up learning that violence and abusive behaviours are acceptable, and male children may learn to hold disrespectful or derogatory beliefs about women. Perry (1996) and van der Kolk (2007) suggest that the trauma experienced through exposure to family violence means children may be more likely to become violent themselves in later life. Van der Kolk (2007) found that children who have experienced complex trauma may not have a capacity to regulate their emotions, and therefore may be prone to enraged and avoidant emotional reactions to minor stimuli. Trauma experienced from those to whom the child is attached both causes extreme distress and undermines the development of biological, emotional and behavioural capacities to regulate that distress (Allen, 2002). Cottrell and Monk (2004) found that perpetrators of parent abuse often start to abuse the victimised parent (typically mothers) soon after the violent parent (typically fathers) leaves the family home. This behaviour seems to be influenced by "...a combination of direct male role modelling, idealisation of the abuser and anger at the mother for failing to protect the family". The effects on children could be short or long term trauma, including the use of violence against others when they reach adolescence or adulthood (Downey 1997). Not all children who are exposed to family violence grow up to be violent or aggressive. Although the risk of perpetrating violence against others is increased through exposure to family violence, it should not be concluded that one leads to the other (Laing, 2001).

2.6.2 Parenting style

Parenting style appears to support adolescent violence to parents. Possible causes of adolescent violence to parents included confrontation with their adolescent (Cottrell, 2001), parents relinquishing authority (Pagani et al, 2004) and lack of limit setting (Laurent, 1997). Many authors noted the relationship between permissive parenting styles and inconsistent parenting (Agnew et al, 1989; Cottrell, 2001; Gallagher, 2004; Kennair and Mellor 2007) as contributors to adolescent violence to parents. Adolescents may use abuse and violence to coerce their parents into compliance (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Kennair & Mellor, 2007). Overly punitive discipline can contribute to adolescent violence to parents and can also be argued to exist on a continuum of violence (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Robinson et al, 2004). Adolescents may take

on the responsibilities of adults and assumed a self-autonomous role, which often resulted in violence, in families with inadequate parental guidance and supervision (Charles, 1986; Ramsey, 1989; Wilson, 1996 in Bobic, 2002). Adolescents may be abusive and violent when parents overprotect and excessively control their adolescents (Cottrell, 2004 in Kennair & Mellor, 2007). McKenna et al (2007) noted inconsistent or unassertive parenting may be influenced by a range of other difficulties (for example, parents may be less emotionally available to their children if they have experienced mental health issues, trauma or violence and/or problematic substance use).

2.6.3 Over-entitled children

Gallagher (2004) suggests that parents may take too much responsibility for their children which contributes to children and young people feeling over-entitled. Sole mothers may create high levels of entitlement by trying to assuage the guilt they may feel when they assume responsibility for 'depriving' their children of their fathers and exposing them to family violence.

2.6.4 Power and Control

Cottrell & Monk (2004) suggest adolescent boys learn to exercise power over women and role modelling of masculine stereotypes promotes the use of power and control in relationships. Downey (1997) suggests that parents who have previously experienced violence may respond to their child's violence as victims, rather than as empowered adults. Adolescents may use violence and abuse (and threats to harm themselves) to maintain power over parents (Paterson et al, 2002).

2.6.5 Response to victimisation

Adolescents who are violent to their parents may have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused themselves as children (Cottrell, 2001; Cottrell & Monk, 2004). This violence is usually directed at the non-abusive parent.

2.6.6 Substance abuse

Kennair and Mellor's (2007) literature review found that abuse was often precipitated by conflict because of the adolescents' use of substances. They noted that whilst there was a correlation between adolescent substance use and adolescent abuse to parents, it cannot be concluded that adolescent substance use 'causes' parental abuse.

2.6.7 Mental health issues

Cottrell (2001) cites that in rare instances, adolescent violence is a symptom of a serious mental health disorder such as schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder. Some studies identify types of mental illness (personality disorders, learning disorders, schizophrenia) amongst adolescents who abuse their parents (Wells 1987 cited in Cottrell & Monk 2004). Using diagnoses to explain parental abuse can be problematic as it allows adolescents and parents to use labels of disorders as justifications for violent behaviours (Hemphill 1996 in Bobic 2001).

2.6.8 Social influences

Cottrell (2001) notes that children's behaviour is not only influenced by their parents. However parents frequently assume that only they are responsible. Whilst violence is condemned by government policy responses, it is also frequently presented as acceptable, particularly through the media (Gelinias 2001 in Bobic 2001).

2.7 Effects on parents

Parents often experience desperation, a sense of shock and disbelief, fear, powerlessness, extreme stress, guilt and lack of support (Cottrell, 2001). They may question their parenting ability and be reluctant to call police. They may experience a high level of mental and physical health problems.

2.7.1 Denial

Parents may have difficulty accepting, and deny that their child is abusive toward them. They may also minimise the violence and "...go to considerable efforts to hide the problem" (Pettelier & Coutu, 1992). Their feelings of shame and fear of blame and their judgement of their capacity to parent may also contribute to parents denying or minimising their experiences and maintaining secrecy (Agnew & Huguley, 1989; Bobic, 2004). Cottrell & Monk (2004) suggest that reluctance to disclose is likely to be exacerbated by limited access to means of intervention.

2.7.2 Health and wellbeing

Adolescent violence to parents can have a negative impact on parents' health, sometimes making existing health problems worse and sometimes causing new problems. Some parents use prescribed medication to help them deal with the tension and stress and some parents turn to alcohol or drugs to help them cope (Cottrell, 2001). McKeena's (2006) exploratory research sample of 107 parents reported a high level of negative effects on their health and wellbeing as a result of the violence, threats and intimidation by the adolescent. These included depression, sleep problems, feeling they could no longer cope, negative impact on health, suicide ideation and attempted suicide. Paterson et al (2002) reported a high level of fear and anxiety was constantly present for parents. Mothers spoke of 'walking on eggshells' for fear of inadvertently triggering a violent outburst; and having to be constantly on guard about "what was appropriate to say and what wasn't, what would inflame a situation and what might calm it down a little". Parentline (2005 & 2007) reported that parents commonly felt hopeless, guilty, isolated, depressed and shame and thirteen percent of parents believed that their experience of violence from their adolescent was unique.

2.7.3 Shame and Blame

Parents experiencing adolescent abuse often experience a sense of shame, despair and isolation (Cottrell, 2001; McKenna, 2006). Furlong et al (1991) note that mothers are more likely to be blamed by professionals than fathers. This may lead them to question their parenting. Women are particularly likely to experience guilt and blame (Cottrell, 2001).

Parents may be as likely to feel disempowered and blamed, as helped by professionals (Cottrell, 2001).

2.7.4 Maintaining family secrecy

Parents who are abused by their adolescent children often “...go to great lengths to conceal their abuse from the outside world” (Agnew & Huguley, 1989). Adolescent violence to parents is likely to be underreported (Stewart et al 2004/5; Kennair & Mellor 2007). Cottrell & Monk (2004) found that parents and service providers described a high level of secrecy surrounding parent abuse due to parents initially denying the problem and often blaming themselves. Family loyalty prevented parents from disclosing the abuse to others because they feared the possible consequences on the adolescent and feared provoking further violence against them.

2.7.5 Isolation and despair

Parents report that the psychological impact of the violence is as severe as the physical impact (Cottrell 2001). They may also feel a great sense of isolation (Bobic, 2002). This is reinforced by the lack of awareness about the issue, the shame attached to it and the lack of information about the best ways of dealing with it (Cottrell 2001 in Bobic 2002). Miccuci (in Bobic 2002) found that families where adolescent abuse occurred were living in isolation from friends and family.

2.7.6 Relationship stress

Adolescent violence to parents may increase relationship stress between partners, and with other family members and friends (McKeena, 2006). Relationships can completely break down as a result of this violence. Adolescents may manipulate other family members into believing the abuse is the parents' fault (Cottrell, 2001). Many women fear the loss of the relationship with their adolescent if they made demands or called the police (Ibid).

2.7.7 Loss and grief

Parents and siblings experience profound grief and a sense of loss. This occurs because they feel they have 'lost' the child they raised, the adolescent leaves home and they lose relationships with family members and friends as a result of the violence (Cottrell 2001).

2.7.8 Lack of trust

Parents of abusive adolescents feel they can not trust their child to be left alone, fearing they will damage property or possessions or feel uncertain about the consistency of their child's behaviour (Cottrell 2001).

2.7.9 Employment

Parents report difficulty concentrating at work, concern about receiving numerous phone calls from children at work and taking time to attend professional appointments because of their child's behaviour (Cottrell 2001). The cost of counselling can also strain finances (Ibid).

2.7.10 Impact on siblings

Sibling abuse is frequently overlooked in the research. Adolescents who abuse their parents often abuse their siblings as well (Heide in Eckstein, 2004). More extensive studies are needed to explore sibling-to-sibling abuse and its impacts (Crichton-Hill et al. 2006). Parents may compromise the wellbeing of siblings by prioritising those of the abusive adolescent (McKeena, 2006). Parents may be fearful for other children's safety and wellbeing. There may be little time and energy for parents to pay attention to other children. Children who are being ignored sometimes 'act out' in order to gain attention or they become depressed. Boys are more violent to siblings than are girls (Straus et al 1980: 80).

2.7.11 Barriers to accessing help

Most parents are unwilling to report adolescent violence, often because of shame, fear of being blamed and the secret nature of the abuse within the family. Parents perceive support by the juvenile system as ineffective (Cottrell & Monk, 2004). The experience of having police minimise their victimisation contributed to their sense of hopelessness and discouraged them from seeking assistance in the future (Ibid). Parent abuse became entrenched when the justice system failed to enforce quick and meaningful consequences. Cottrell & Monk (2004) found that agencies could express competing philosophies regarding the best method of intervention. Police agencies often stated that abusive youth should be removed from the home and placed in residential care while child protection workers viewed parent abuse as a criminal matter best dealt with through the court system. In some cases abused parents were unsure about the level of authority they could exercise in the home. When they began to set firm limits, adolescents would sometimes counter by threatening to call police or child protection agencies and disclose child abuse (Ibid).

2.7.12 Help seeking behaviour

Most parents seek informal help through partners, ex-partners, family, friends and neighbours (McKeena, 2006). Parents sought help formally from support services such as community centres, support groups, government organisations, doctors and counsellors. Fifty-nine per cent of parents indicated that they had not had any assistance they considered appropriate from a community or government organisation. Lack of appropriate formal support was a major frustration (McKeena, 2006). Data from the Australian justice system indicates that more mothers than fathers take out Intervention Orders against their children with physical assault by sons against mothers being the most common type of assault (Paterson et al, 2002).

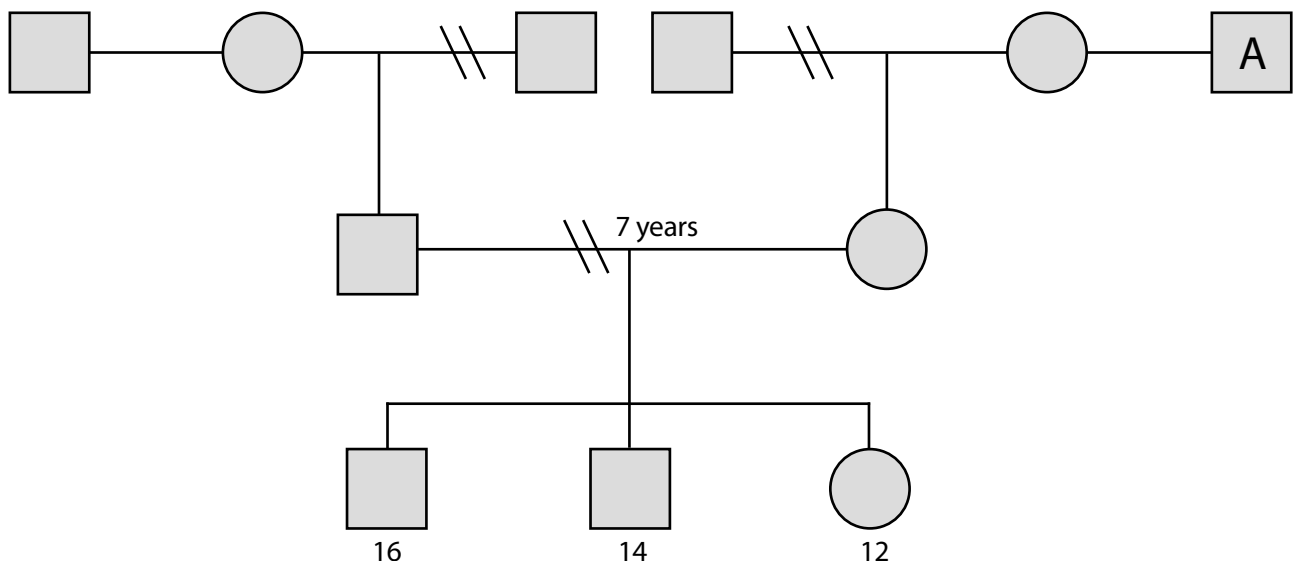
Part Three: Family Context

3.1 Family structure

Each woman was asked to describe her partner's and her own family of origin. Some women gave substantial information. Other women's knowledge is scant. Others did not answer the questions because they prioritised their present situation.

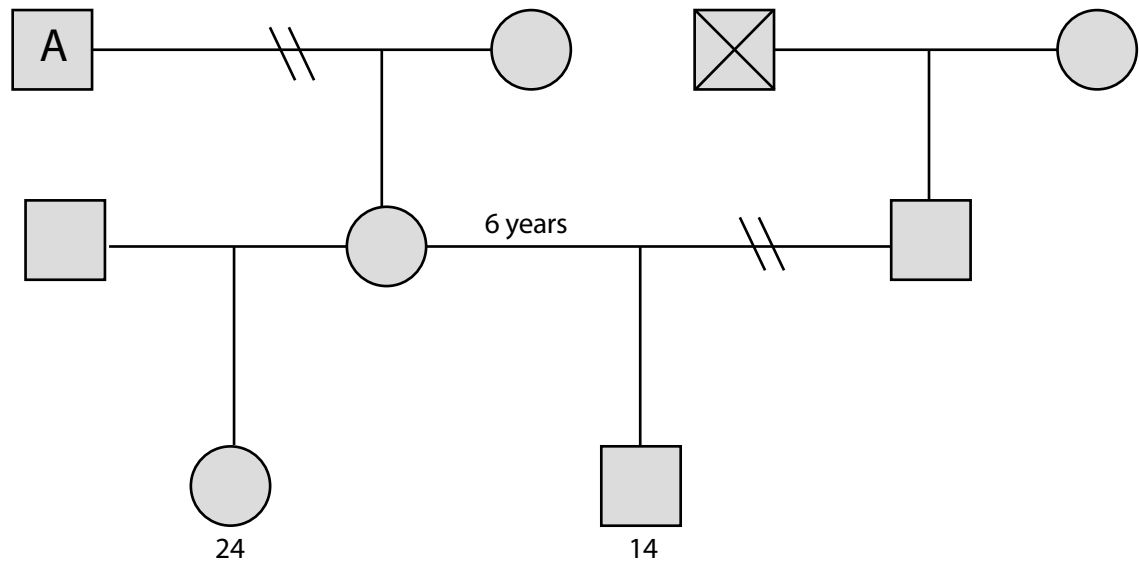
The following genograms do not show how many siblings are in the woman's or her partner's family of origin. The word 'partner' is used to describe both married and defacto relationships throughout the research. The genograms detail the women's ages and the genders of the women's children and the length of separation from the women's partner. Information pertaining to women's culture is not given in order to protect their identities. The letter "A" signifies the description of alcoholic. Mostly this applies to the sons' fathers and grandparents. Almost all women described their sons' fathers along a continuum of 'disrespect' and 'abuse' to 'severe physical violence'. For this reason abuse and violence are not highlighted in family structure but are dealt with in the research findings. The names used are not the real names of the women, their ex-partners or their children.

Donna



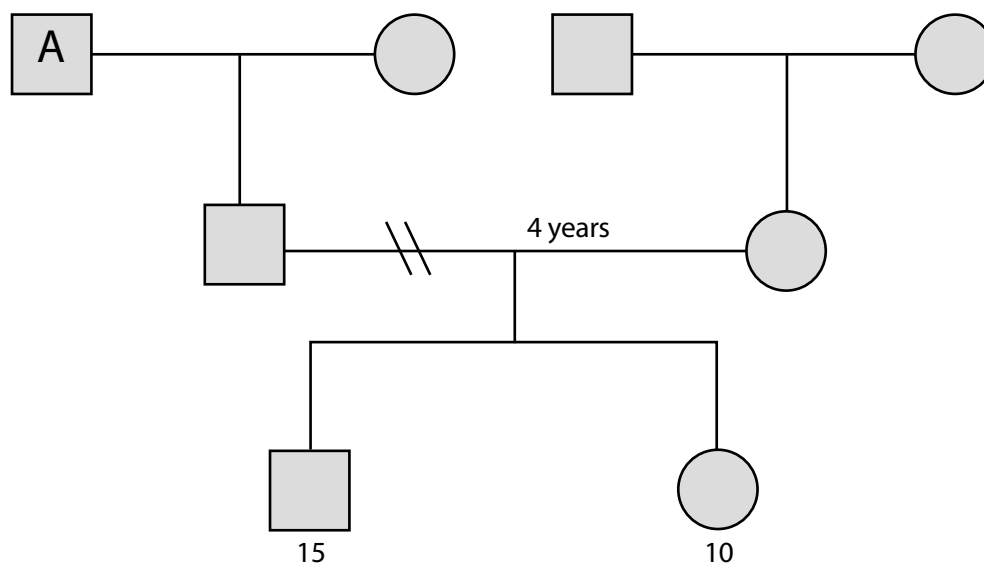
Donna had been separated from her ex-partner for seven years. She has no current partner. Both sons (Jarred and Angus) are abusive and violent towards their mother and sibling. The children had recently moved to live with their father. Prior to that they were having only sporadic contact with him and lived full time with their mother. Donna's father was verbally abusive to her mother and she describes a high level of family conflict and abuse from her father to her mother. Her mother divorced her father and then remarried. This man was alcoholic and also verbally abusive. Donna's ex-partner's father and stepfather were physically and verbally violent to him. Her ex-partner's father was possibly abusive to his mother – the relationship between both mother and father ended.

Sandra



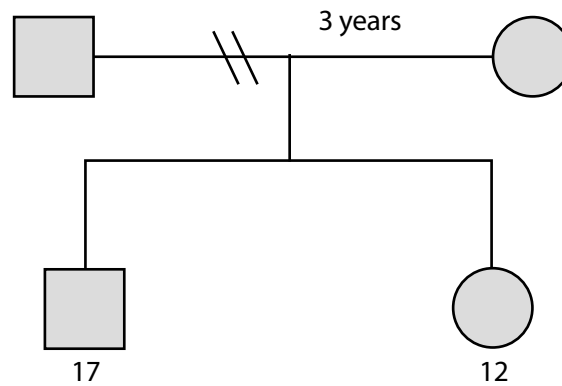
Sandra had been separated from her second partner for six years. She has no current partner. Her son, Daniel lives with her full time. Her daughter lives independently. Her son's father has been living overseas for the past five years so contact with his father is infrequent. Sandra's father was an alcoholic and her parents divorced when she was in her late teens. She stated there was neither abuse nor violence and he was a "happy alcoholic." Her parents worked hard: "We had trust, we had responsibility, we were pretty manageable kids – I had a happy childhood." Her ex-partner's father died when he was fourteen years old. She described his father as extremely physically violent - the youngest daughter (the father's sister) had a breakdown "at quite a young age." The children feared their father.

Patricia



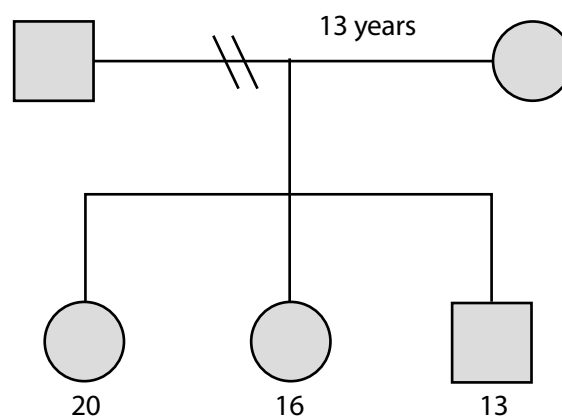
Patricia had been separated from the children's father for almost four years. Her children Jason and Sarah live with her. She described her son's father as obsessive/compulsive and depressed. She has no current partner. A court agreement means her children's father could see them fortnightly but the contact is sporadic. She described having a happy childhood. She talked about her ex-partner's father: "There was violence, his dad had a drinking problem and he used to become violent with that..."

Veronica

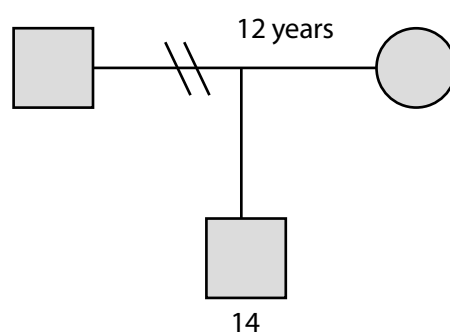


Veronica had been separated from her children's father for three years. Her son Cory and daughter Gemma live with her. She has no current partner. The children have almost daily contact with their father. There was no violence or abuse in her family. There was also no abuse and violence from her husband's parents to him.

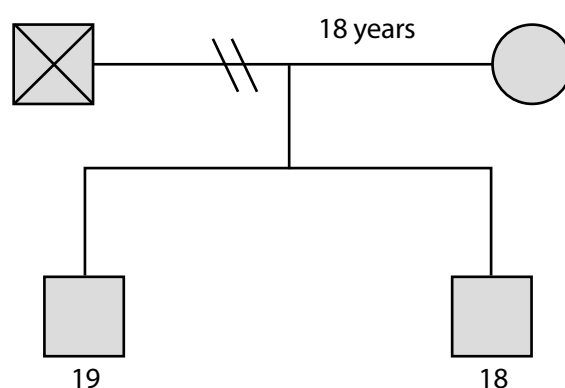
Kate



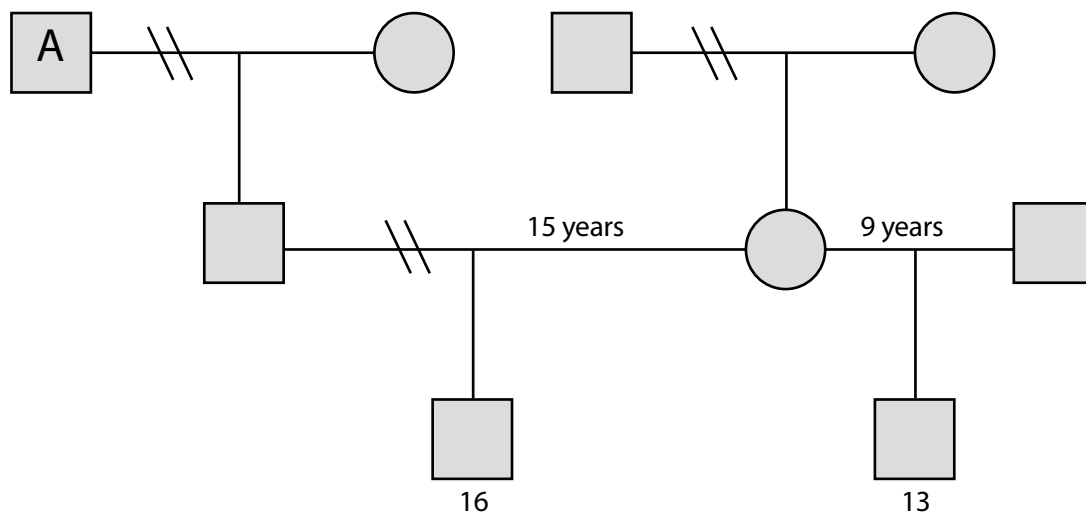
Kate's children, May, Charlotte and Bradley live with her. She has been separated from her ex-partner for almost thirteen years. He frequently speaks to his children on the phone (at least once a week). She had no current partner. The children do not like to stay with their father so the physical contact is infrequent. Her own family were strict and " ...if you did something wrong you'd get a belting for it". Her father would criticise or question her mother and she describes verbal abuse. Her parents "were old school – my upbringing was a stern one...you did something wrong you got a belting for it", [from both her mother and father]. She attributed this in part to her German cultural heritage. Her parents would "belt her" with the jug cord or the wooden spoon. She remembered her father throwing things at her older brother. Kate described how her parents would never cuddle her, a reason why she values cuddles with her own children. Her ex-partner's parents were "just not there for him". His father verbally abused his mother and also his father and he had physical fights, even into adulthood. Her ex-partner would recall "getting whacked across the head".

Effie

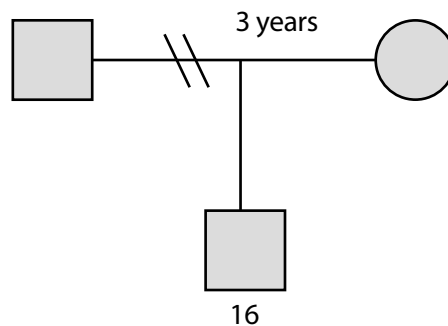
Effie had been separated from her partner for twelve years. She has a current partner but is not living with him. Her-ex partner lives overseas and her son, George had only seen his father once post separation. He used to speak with his father by phone but that has now ceased.

Susan

Susan had been separated from her ex-partner for eighteen years. He committed suicide when her older son was thirteen-years-old. She described her older son, Lucas as violent, and with the younger son, Paul, "there was some intimidation". Both sons had recently moved out of home. Susan's father was not abusive or violent to neither her nor her sisters but would punch or strap her stepbrothers. Her ex-partner's father was physically violent to his son – as an adult she experienced her ex-partner's father "king hitting" his son. She spoke about how her ex-partner's father came and helped her by beating up her son when he was "out of control". She did not think there was abuse or violence from her ex-partner's father to his partner.

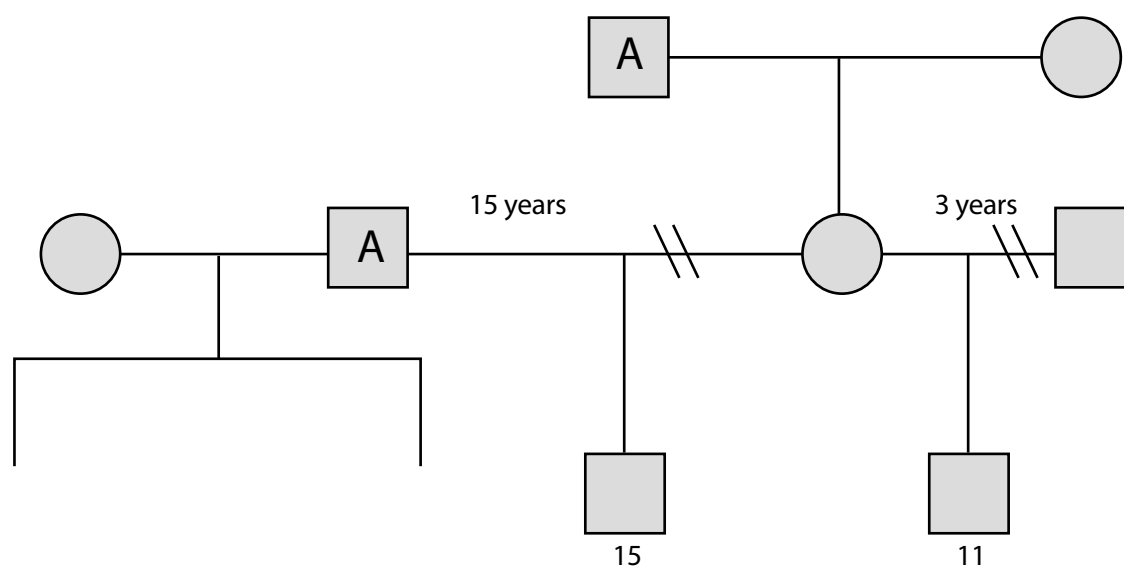
Marian

Marian had been separated from her ex-partner for almost fifteen years. She has since remarried and had been with her current partner for nine years. His son Alex also lives with them. Her son, Chris had been living with his father for less than a year but is often living *"on the streets"*. Her parents divorced when she was sixteen-years-old. She remembers her father putting a hole in the pantry but states he never hit her mother. Her father would occasionally slap her and send her to her room. Her ex-partner's father was a *"chronic alcoholic"*. His parents divorced and her ex-partner witnessed abuse from his father to his mother.

Jane

Jane had been separated from her ex-partner for three years. She had no current partner. Her son, Josh saw his father occasionally. She did not think there was abuse or violence in her ex-partner's family and did not comment on her own family of origin. Jane's ex-partner was adopted. His mother had a biological child one year later. Jane wondered if this contributed to her ex-partner's poor self-esteem and not feeling wanted or treated equally.

Angela



Angela is in the process of considering separating from her current partner who does not live with her. Her older son, Anton lived with his father but spends frequent time with her. Her younger son, Riley spent half a week with his father, her current partner. She separated from her older son's father fifteen years ago. Angela's father was an alcoholic and violent. She said: *"I witnessed my mother bleeding on the head because there were thrown objects, heavy thrown objects. And I witnessed a lot of verbal abuse. I witnessed my father hitting the rest of my siblings, including myself. Possibly, it's hard to tell, when I was eleven (it was dark) I heard my father get into my sister's bed and my sister saying "No, no, no". Whether that's possible rape I can only imagine... I witnessed quite a lot as a child living with an alcoholic father"*. Her ex-partner was an alcoholic. She describes him as *"very barbaric"*. He had a bad name and reputation as a teenager – *"police, crime, theft, car theft"*. She described that a lot of people were scared of him.

3.2 About the women

The women were aged between forty-one and fifty-one years with the average age being forty-six years. Three women had one child, five women had two children and two women had three children. A range of cultures were represented with four women identifying as Anglo Australian, and others identifying as Hungarian/Australian, Indian/Australian, German/Australian, Greek/Australian, Greek/Italian and Armenian/Egyptian/Greek/Lebanese. Women had also partnered with men from a range of cultures. All women were asked if they thought culture or ethnicity had any impact on their family situation or sons' behaviour. Six women were of mixed cultural background. Marian who was of Armenian/Egyptian/Greek/Lebanese background and whose ex-husband was Anglo Australian felt culture may have impacted on her son. She described how Chris idolised his father and that he rejected his cultural background: *"I think he likes to speak like a real Aussie, act like a real Aussie, hang around with typically Aussie families. He's got a typical Aussie girlfriend".* He says: *"I'm an Aussie. My dad's an Aussie. I'm not a wog".* She was the only woman who expressed a view that 'cultural issues' contributed to her son's behaviour.

Marian spoke of the role of religion in her family: *"He's grown up in a culture where we are believers in God. He grew up in a Christian Catholic environment, he's grown up in a Catholic primary school, he would go to church, has obtained all the sacraments of the Catholic Church. He went to a Catholic high school...I've always taught him to believe in God".*

Angela spoke about how *"when he was about six-and-a-half months old I used to put Anton to bed, rocking him after a bottle and I loved to read the bible to him".* Angela felt connected to her son, in part, because she had prayed for a child, after having three miscarriages.

The length of separation from the sons' father varied considerably from three years to eighteen years. Five women were separated between three to seven years and five women between twelve to eighteen years. Seven women had not repartnered since their separation from their sons' father. One had remarried. Two other women had repartnered with one separated and another considering separation.

In relation to birth order of the sons, three women had only one child, five women identified the abusive son as the eldest and two women identified the abusive son as the youngest (the older children were female). Women came from a range of professional backgrounds. Two women did not work outside the home.

Professions included:

- Service register attendant in the retail industry
- Part time nurse
- Part time in a nursing home as a kitchen assistant
- Part time as a call centre consultant
- Full time lawyer
- Full time in a state government department
- Full time as a personal assistant
- Part time phone counsellor

3.3 Why women wanted to be research participants

Women overwhelmingly expressed a view that they wanted to be part of the research in order to raise awareness of adolescent violence to parents. Kate put this as: *"To get the world to know that this is going on".* Women hoped that this would result in greater resourcing to support parents who experience adolescent violence and support for the adolescents themselves. Effie said she was interested because: *"I would be betraying myself if I wasn't...if this research group can [get help] then I think it's worth it. I'm really glad to see that there's a group out there and researchers are saying to the government "Look something needs to be done here.""*

Susan said: *"It's a taboo subject that no-one really talks about and it needs to be brought out in to the open because there's absolutely no help...and it's...as if it doesn't exist...it will bring it out into the open...there might be a lot of people...in the same situation that need help"*. Donna said: *"If my experiences can at all help other mothers in the same situation...that would make me feel good"*. Angela said: *"To possibly gain more knowledge about further resources, whatever the government does to contribute to stopping the violence..."*.

Some women hoped that telling their stories would also assist them to work through the issues they were facing, often because they had no one else to turn to. Jane said: *"Telling my story to others ... might also help me and I think by talking about it, it might clarify in my own mind whether I need to go and seek some more help"*.

3.4 About the sons

The average age of the sons was fifteen-and-a-half years. Four women had more than one son and for two of these women, both sons were abusive, although one less so than the older son. Two younger sons who were not abusive, were fathered by different men women had re-partnered with following the break-up of their relationship with the older son's father. Of the twelve abusive and violent sons, one was thirteen years, three were fourteen years, two were fifteen years, three were sixteen years and there was one each aged seventeen, eighteen and nineteen years. In relation to the birth order of the sons, three women had the one child, one woman had two abusive sons and a daughter, two women had one abusive son and one daughter, one woman had one abusive son and one daughter, one woman had two abusive sons and two women had two sons to different fathers of whom the older was abusive.

It is important to recognise that children's experience of family violence presents a risk to their safety and development. This experience can result in trauma. Trauma can result in many responses including poor regulation of affect where behaviours may present as oppositional, defiant, anxious, impulsive or depressed (James, 1994). The development of a child's brain may be altered, resulting in changes in physical, emotional, behavioural, cognitive and social functioning (Perry, 1996). Children who have been exposed to traumatic experiences may often find it difficult to form intimate relationships and be present as guarded, hyperactive, controlling or display adult-like behaviour (Department of Human Service, 2004). All boys experienced their father's disrespect, abuse and/or violence to their mother. Six of the ten boys were diagnosed with a mental health or physical health condition.

3.4.1 Sons experiencing their fathers' abuse or violence to others

Women spoke about their sons witnessing father to mother abuse and violence and the impact of this.

Sandra stated: *"He witnessed me crying a lot...my daughter's distress in seeing her mother...distressed and unhappy"*.

Donna spoke about Jarred witnessing kicking, punching, standing, *"...pulling out knives and standing there and literally...holding them up in the air threatening...and throwing things at me"*. She described fighting back: *"I'd try to fight back...if not, I'd go straight to my room after he was finished and sit in my room for awhile. I'd go for a walk, get out of the house"*. Donna commented that her ex-partner would tell Jarred *"...you shouldn't hit mum, it's wrong, it's not right..."* even though he was violent to her himself. She described *"...some pretty confusing messages there"*.

Women reported that their ex-partners did not actively seek their sons' participation in abusing or being violent to their mother, but would speak about their sons' mothers in a negative, derogatory and disrespectful manner. Donna spoke about *"...manipulation or control, verbal intimidation...mostly like I was "Mum going on again" or "Whatever mum says isn't important", rolling of the eyes, "She's talking shit again"*.

Donna's children experienced verbal abuse from their father against Donna. Donna thinks this abuse could have escalated to physical violence, except that *"I learnt to shut down and not talk back and not stand up for my rights; I was thinking in order to save the peace to not fight in front of my children...if I spoke up for myself, it would like in his own mind provoke him"*.

Angela's ex-partner would verbally abuse her and she reflected Anton's violence began at the same time she was arguing with the partner of her second son. Her partner would get *"the children to side with him and argue with me"*. Anton had to *"witness a lot of yelling, a lot of put downs"*. She felt he would question whether she really was stupid because he loved his father so much. Angela spoke of the impact on her son experiencing his father's abuse of her as *"Trauma, a lot of trauma"*.

Sandra talked about Daniel's father being abusive to her elder daughter from a previous marriage: *"My daughter suffered, and speaks today, of how much she suffered...he actually physically handled her roughly...gripping in a much firmer way than was necessary...just yelling a lot"*.

3.4.2 Diagnosis

Jane's son, Josh was born with Hirschsprung's Disease and had an *"upset tummy"* when he was a baby. Jane and Josh went to a live in parenting centre, which she describes as a place for *"bad mothers"*. By this she meant mothers who were not coping, and were therefore bad.

Four boys, Anton, Jason, Daniel and Bradley were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Anton was diagnosed at the age of eight years at a children's hospital. He was prescribed Dexamphetamine. Jason was diagnosed as having ADD and a *"little bit"* of Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) by a private paediatrician when he was in Grade four or five. He was re-diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome when he was fifteen years old. He takes Neuleptil for aggression, Catapres *"to take the edge off"*, Lovan for depression and Diabex for his weight. Daniel was assessed and treated for ADHD in his primary school years. A child and adolescent mental health service diagnosed Bradley with ODD when he was seven-years-old. A child and adolescent mental health service diagnosed George with separation anxiety, extreme anxiety and Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder when he was thirteen-years-old. Cory was diagnosed with a learning disability.

3.4.3 School and learning difficulties

Almost all women spoke about their sons having learning difficulties at school. Learning difficulties often manifested at a young age. Most felt their sons were not supported to overcome these difficulties. Patricia's son, Jason wasn't able to read until Grade three, for example. Jason had experienced a lot of bullying through both primary and secondary school. He also *"...had difficulty with authority, and more so if he had a female teacher. He would try and intimidate them more than if he had a male teacher"*. Susan's son, Lucas, had difficulty learning to read. She was astounded that he went through the school system and still, at eighteen years, can barely read and write. He used to get frequent ear infections. She commented that Lucas was not interested in school very much and had difficulties with the class work. He had moved to a number of schools and was *"...a bit of a class clown"*. Susan had changed his school three times in high school in the hope of seeing better results in his schooling. She spoke about Lucas leaving school at fourteen-years-old and feeling frustrated that she could not get help to keep him at school. She commented: *"I think a great down fall was when they got rid of technical schools because there's a lot of blokes...they're good with their hands and he's actually alright with his hands"*.

Donna spoke about Angus who has faced a lot of problems in school including *"disruption in the class and cheekiness to teachers"*.

Jane spoke about how well her son, Josh, now sixteen-years-old, performed at primary school; being good at sport and participating in the school play but that things started to go awry at secondary school. She remembered that there were problems with his literacy at primary school but the teacher told her not to worry. His literacy and numeracy problems were noticed at secondary school. Josh used to cry about problems with his maths teacher. A conflict resolution meeting was held but did not resolve the issue. In year seven he also stopped playing sport and started skateboarding. He was truanting school at fifteen

years. When Jane suspected this, she rang the school and was told Josh had not attended for two weeks. After Jane complained about not being informed, the principal attempted to get her son to sign a contract to attend school. This did not eventuate so her son started a Victorian College of Adult Learning (VCAL) course at a community centre.

Some boys experienced problems at school. Problems included bullying, and being bullied, as well as general classroom disruption "*...there's been a lot of other problems in the school, not violence but disruption in the class and cheekiness to the teachers*". Donna spoke about her sixteen year old son, Jarred, who is "*...likeable and popular and he's been in accelerated class since Year seven so he's very bright*".

Veronica spoke about her son, Cory having had problems at school since he was in Grade five: "*He used to argue a lot, he used to swear a lot, he used to be a bully as well...and never listened to the teacher*". Cory was later diagnosed as having a learning disability.

Sandra spoke about her son Daniel's bullying "*...probably more so in later years of primary and still now my son tends to be the one to seek out and be the bullyer ...historically through his school he has grouped with others to be the one to pick on other kids*". Sandra also noted Daniel was highly disrespectful to female teachers. He was now "*...getting alienated from friends...knocking around with kids that just are troubled kids because other kids aren't willing to muck around with him because they're going to get caught up too*".

Angela spoke of Anton at fifteen as having "*low self-esteem, no confidence...self-hatred there*". She described "*fights at school...a lot of rebelling...now he's latching on to the relationships, girls, but it's more lusting*".

Effie whose son, George started to become violent when he was twelve-years-old described how one of the first indicators of problematic behaviour was when he started secondary school: "*He was always involved in fights at school...he would get bullied...and he's a tall boy and he's always been taller than the other kids, and he wouldn't stand for it, he would fight back...I don't know if something happened at school...he stopped going to school for about a year, and we couldn't even drive past the school...even if we drove anywhere near that area he would scream and become neurotic...still to this day I don't know if something happened at school. He can't even mention the names of kids that went there*".

Kate's son, Bradley was diagnosed with ODD when he was seven-years-old. She had trouble keeping him at school. He had left a government secondary school and gone to an alternative school. Before Bradley finished his first year he was asked to leave because of his violent behaviour. He then went to a specialist school that specifically focused on children with behavioural problems. This improved his education because of the specific strategies in place. He then returned to a public school. Finally, he was moved to an all boys' school.

Marian described her son, Chris as a high achiever at school before his behaviour changed when he was fifteen-years-old. She had consulted a psychologist when he was two-years-old because of a stutter but the psychologist had assessed him as "*...a very fine, well-adjusted young boy*" who later became a very high achiever at school with high grades. This changed when he was fifteen-years-old and went to live with his father and changed schools. His mother explained that his new friends made fun of his accomplishments. Chris hated his new school and went back to his old school but by then the newfound freedom associated with living with his father led to his rebelling against his mother's limitations. He started getting into trouble at school, received detentions and then suspensions. He was suspended from school at fifteen-years-old for having pornography on his laptop computer. Chris finally left school.

3.4.4 Drug and alcohol use

Three women reported that their sons used drugs and consumed alcohol. Bradley started to use marijuana when he was fourteen-years-old and has also been drinking alcohol frequently. Chris also uses alcohol and has marijuana. Lucas used marijuana, which started at fourteen or fifteen years of age and also

metamphetamines. He is now nineteen-years-old and still using these drugs. Susan described entering Lucas' bedroom when he was fifteen-years-old and noticing *"all his clothes were silver, he'd been sniffing paint"*.

3.4.5 Risk of homelessness

Many women asked their sons to leave home because of their violence. Marian reported that Chris lives *"all over the place"* although he is supposed to be living with his father. Marian's current partner took him to his father's to live, following a particularly traumatic incident but his father does not supervise her son nor his whereabouts. She describes how he is *"living out of a bag"*.

Effie remembers a child and adolescent mental health service suggesting a foster home because she had told them: *"We're going to kill each other. He's going to kill me. I'm going to kill him"*. She did not take up this option but at a later date George moved in with her parents.

Susan's sons had both left home when they were eighteen-years-old and were now living with their girlfriends. One of these sons had been violent against a former girlfriend.

Angela's son had recently moved to live with his father because she could no longer tolerate his violence. This man had been extremely violent to her when they were in a relationship. Angela had hoped the father might mentor and guide Anton who had left school when he was fifteen-years-old. Instead he allowed Anton to do what he wanted, which has resulted in her son being at risk of homelessness.

3.4.6 Family context at onset of violence

Women described differing experiences related to their sons' initial abuse and violence. Whilst some women were able to link specific events to the onset of their sons' behaviour, such as a new partner's abuse or their sons' fathers leaving the home, most did not report that there was a specific time when the abuse and violence started. Rather, they reported that their sons' behaviours had always been problematic and the use of abuse and violence increased as their son matured and became physically stronger. Some described having *"difficult"* babies and their sons, as toddlers or in early primary school, having *"behavioural issues"*.

Kate spoke about Bradley getting into trouble for bullying at childcare; he would go up to weaker children and push them over.

Sandra talked about Daniel at five-years-old *"...starting to be very erratic and angry"*. He used to lash out and sometimes fail to interact with other children.

Patricia explained that Jason was *"...a really quiet child...it started in his kinder year"*. She noted that at this stage *"he wasn't fitting in but had always been rather quiet and a little bit obsessive in his behaviours as well"*.

Kate spoke of Bradley's behaviour before he started school: *"He always had some behavioural issues, tantrums...throwing of toys, breaking things especially when things weren't going his way"*. Once at school the problems continued with running away from school and harassing girls.

Sandra reported that although Daniel had been abusive, she *"could mark it on the calendar"* when his behaviour escalated. At this time her relationship ended and Daniel's father left the country.

Jane noted a number of precipitators to the abuse. Her relationship with her alcoholic husband ended and she and Josh moved out of the family home into a unit. At the same time Josh started secondary school where he had issues with his maths teacher. He also stopped playing sport.

Angela describes the onset of violence when Anton was four-years-old. She was trying to breastfeed her younger son, when Anton started throwing things. Angela said: *"If I tried to spend time with the younger one, there was always conflict, always to get my attention. Always break this, break that. We had a glass door... and he almost broke it which scares me because I'm trying to breastfeed peacefully you know. I was lucky to"*

have lasted under six months because of all the conflict that was going on...the more I was breastfeeding, the worse he was getting, So I had to stop". She described how Anton was born four weeks prematurely [after she had three miscarriages] and being so scared he would not live. She experienced severe postnatal depression on discharge from hospital and was severely psychotic. She was hospitalised for four weeks and heavily medicated on Hyperperidol, unable to even hold her baby, nor feed him, nor change his nappy. Angela felt that because she was experiencing violence from his father, that her baby may have been affected; even in the womb he felt unsettled. She was unsupported by the father during this time. Aside from her husband's violence, she remembers that at two-and-a-half years old Anton experienced her sister's boyfriend's violence where he put his fist through glass and bled profusely. There was lots of arguing and she found Anton *"in the middle of the room and he was shaking"*. Angela noticed Anton's behaviour deteriorated when he was ten-years old. She linked this to Anton seeing her arguing with her new partner. Her partner was verbally abusing her and Anton *"also had to witness a lot of yelling, a lot of put downs...it was like a volcano hit"*. Her partner would tell her sons: *"It's all your mother's fault why we're arguing"*. Angela felt her partner was able to get the children on side to argue against her.

Some women noted a specific time, often at adolescence, when their sons' problem behaviours escalated. Patricia said that *"by about thirteen-years-old it was really full on with him. He was having behavioural problems at school. Prior to that they were related to not being able to do the work and fitting in at school...the bullying and teasing and just not being like the other kids"*.

Effie spoke of George being *"a smiley little boy"* but his behaviour changing once he started secondary school. Effie thought something bad, such as extreme bullying might have impacted on him.

Susan noticed Lucas' behaviour change when he was fourteen-years-old and would not do as he was told, started pushing her and then the pushing escalated to punching the wall and punching her.

Marian noticed Chris' behaviour change when he was fourteen-years-old. He was supposed to be staying at his father's house every second weekend but his father allowed him more freedom than his mother thought appropriate and *"gradually Chris started to get the taste of a newfound freedom and that's when I noticed a lot of change...his attitude towards me changed immensely...speaking back, yelling back...then the swearing started to come into it"*.

Donna saw an increase in Jarred's behavioural problems when his father left the home: *"A little bit before he left, but definitely got worse after he left"*.

3.5 Sons' relationship with their fathers

Some women's sons had little or no contact with their father. One father had committed suicide; two others lived overseas and did not see their sons. Sons' contact with their fathers was not helpful in either preventing or addressing the sons' violence to their mothers, or supporting the women in their parenting. Some fathers continued to put the women down or blame them for their sons' behaviours when the relationship finished. Others minimised their sons' behaviours or did not seem concerned.

There were different reports from women about their sons' relationship with their fathers. Donna reported: *"They adore their father...they're close...he loves the children but has a hard time handling them...a lot of power issues, control issues...there's a lot of yelling...communication's not the best"*. Veronica's ex-partner visits the children almost daily. Kate's son had at least weekly phone contact with his father but didn't like to stay with him: *"It's not an environment they like"*. At the same time she said: *"He has a good rapport with his dad when they're talking"*.

Patricia spoke of infrequent contact although the Family Court had given Jason's father's fortnightly contact.

Marian's sixteen-year-old son, Chris had recently begun residing with his father. He spends time with his mother.

Angela's sons live mostly with their father. She said that although Anton had wanted to move in with his father, he now deeply regrets this. His father has been violent to his son. Child protection and a school counsellor support Anton.

Part Four: Women Speak about their Relationships

4.1 Nature of abuse and violence from sons' fathers

The research did not specifically recruit women who had experienced abuse and violence from their sons' fathers or ex-partners. The research aimed to explore whether there was a link between male adolescent violence to mothers and the experience of family violence. The findings showed that all women in the research experienced abuse and violence from their ex-partners. Most women minimised this. This was demonstrated by the use of certain words such as *'only'* and *'just'* and also by suggestions that their son was *'playing'* or that the violence was not really intended or was accidental.

Many women who had initially stated their ex-partners were not abusive or violent, described incidents, which were abusive or violent. Most women experienced different types of abuse and violence. None of the women had been in relationships where they felt valued, respected and cared for. Many felt that their ex-partners were not emotionally available for either the women or the children. Where ex-partners were abusive and violent to the women, they were also verbally and emotionally, and sometimes physically abusive to their children. All women reported that their sons experienced their fathers' abuse and violence toward their mothers. Most women reported *"wearing"* the abuse in order to prevent escalation and their children suffering. Their ex-partners' abuse and violence precipitated the relationship break up. A number of women reported that their sons behaved in almost identical ways to their fathers; they had learned how to be abusive and violent from him. Angela, Jane, Marian and Patricia described their ex-partners having *'issues'* with alcohol use. The women's ex-partners' behaviours are described under the following sub-headings:

Physical

Effie described George's father as *"a person who was really intimidating and could be, and was, violent"*. He was *"...quite aggressive"* and *"he'd thrown things...smashed walls and plates"*. George had witnessed this. The relationship ended when George was two-years-old and she reflected: *"I don't know if any of that stays in his memory...I don't know how much he's retained or if it stays in their subconscious"*. She spoke of her next partner *"never (being) violent or abusive"* but he would *"...get up and leave..."* when they argued, so George would see his mother distressed. Her third partner was *"never violent"* but *"when he couldn't get his own way would ...start swearing at her"*.

Marian's ex-partner would drink and physically and verbally abuse her. He would hit her, pull her hair and *"nearly killed her"* a couple of times. Her marriage ended because of his violence.

Donna described *"...shoving, slaps, really hard ones, he's a really well built guy, very strong...he always denied them afterwards...he would say he couldn't remember hitting me"*.

Angela discussed her ex-partner's violence to her and also to her son who now lives with his father. His father had given her son, aged fifteen years a black eye and a *"bloody, fat lip"*. The mother informed Child Protection and the police. Angela who initially stated her husband was not violent later revealed that *"he has beaten me in the ribs, pushed me hard against brick walls"*.

Sandra felt distressed that her son, her daughter and her son's step-sister experienced his abuse of her: *"We'd all go off and hide somewhere. My daughter used to say "I would just take off somewhere under the house and hide because I just knew if I got in the way what would happen"*.

Emotional

All women experienced emotional abuse. This was often described as criticism, poor communication and yelling. Sandra reported: *"There was a considerable amount of emotional abuse, control, verbal abuse....which escalated as my ex-husband gained more power and responsibility in his career"*.

Patricia talked about how her husband was *"...not good at communicating and preferred to be just by himself"*. She used to feel *"he was depressed but he wouldn't seek help...when the kids came along as babies...he was more interested in pursuing his own stuff than family things"*. Although Patricia had stated her husband was not abusive she spoke of how he *"had become a bit obsessive and compulsive in his behaviour...he was fixated on newspapers and they used to be in little piles all over the place...I'd gotten rid of them and he became really agitated and there was lots of yelling and screaming at me...he sort of kicked the shower door which broke"*.

Susan described her ex-partner's abuse as *"not physically but emotionally and providing-wise"*. By this she meant that he did not support the family economically and in fact used any money available to purchase drugs. She described how he would *"sit in a chair and do nothing"*. The relationship was *"pretty volatile"*.

Verbal

Many women spoke of verbal abuse. Some felt that this abuse was a warning; that if they retaliated or spoke back it would lead to physical violence. Donna explained: *"The children witnessed verbal abuse...Ivan was quite controlling and there could've been physical violence because there had been a couple of times in the past...I learnt to shut down and not talk back and not stand up for my rights. I was thinking in order to save the peace to not fight in front of the children. But the children, they witnessed a lot of disrespect towards me. I would get ignored, my opinions would be put down, any authority of mine would be undermined"*.

Patricia said: *"Gary was very verbally intimidating when he wanted to be and I think the kids were intimidated too and I think it sent a message to Jason that if you can't get what you want, if you intimidate someone you can"*.

Effie's ex-partner would *"swear a lot and carry on a lot"*. She commented: *"That wasn't good for George"*. Kate spoke of Bradley's father as a violent drug addict. She said that she could not talk about the violence, saying: *"It's a waste of my time to think about it"*.

Jane said her ex-partner was verbally abusive to her especially about her cooking. He would say things like: *"Because you're a big fat pig, you want to eat now. I don't want to eat now. I want to finish my work outside"*. He would often criticise what she cooked, something her son also does. He would also follow her around the house in order to continue to verbally abuse her. This would result in her and her son locking themselves in her bedroom to escape him. Jane often felt unsafe around her husband *"screaming in my face"*.

Psychological

Sandra talked about *"a lot of walking on eggshells, a lot of isolation because I was actually living away from my family in a different state...and I felt I had no way to escape. ...my movements were controlled to some degree, and affection and intimacy were withheld...as a sort of tool, as an emotional tool."* Sandra also spoke of *"mind gamesit's so hard to define, but always undermining decisions that I made"*.

Veronica who initially did not identify her partner as abusive spoke of feeling controlled: *"He'd...say he'd always want me home before tea time...he'd always want to know who I'm with, where I am and what time I'm coming home"*.

Kate whose ex-partner used 'speed' and marijuana said *"...if he'd been awake for a few nights...I'd be tiptoeing around the house telling the kids "Keep quiet". Inside [I was] just really squeezed with stress...if you said the wrong thing he'd be sort of shouting...I felt trapped...later on he'd be apologetic"*.

Intimidation

Psychological abuse often involves intimidation. A number of women talked about feeling intimidated by their ex-partner's words and behaviour. Sandra commented: *"He was a large man, bigger than me, a lot of being made aware that I wasn't as physically significant as he was"*. He would stand in front of Sandra and block her moving away whilst he yelled at her.

Donna reported how she would shut down: *"It's kind of like if I spoke up for myself, it would in his mind provoke him...he would want me to be compliant"*.

Jane reported that she found her ex-partner intimidating and threatening, even though he did not physically abuse her. She took an Intervention Order out against him at the end of the relationship when she was concerned about his psychological wellbeing and he had cleaned his gun out in the garage. She felt scared that he might shoot her or commit suicide. Jane felt that he was *"implying I've got this gun so you better watch out"*.

Effie spoke about George's father being *"...really intimidating...and violent"*.

Sexual

Angela disclosed rape from her partner. After her son's birth she experienced severe post-natal depression and was sent to a mother/baby live in program with her baby son. She was heavily medicated at the time and described how her partner *"would pick him [the baby] up by the hips and throw him down on the change table [to change his nappy]. And I'm sitting on my bed totally zombied out, and I couldn't get to my child, although I could feel the swelling of the tears in my eyes...I didn't give him what he wanted, which was sex. And here I am heavily medicated...he then asked the nurse...I felt forced, because my body was heavily medicated and I did not want that. I wanted to feel right...to do that lovemaking as he wanted...I felt raped. I felt raped that night"*.

4.2 Other reasons for relationship breakdown

Whilst their ex-partners' abuse and violence was the main contributor to the woman leaving the relationships, other reasons were also cited. Veronica and Effie cited *"poor communication"* as a contributing reason for the marriage breakdown. Veronica later added that her ex-partner also yelled at her. Veronica described the marriage breakdown as about *"lack of communication"* and also added *"we would literally stand there and scream at each other"*. As the interview went on, her descriptions of her husband's behaviour sounded more like a description of family violence. Veronica later described *"punching, kicking"*.

A number of women spoke about feeling undermined by their sons' fathers' parents. Donna spoke about trying to get the children to attend family counselling with her and the father's mother saying: *"You're not mental [to the children] and so my children listened to her...because when I did take them the children treated it as a joke"*. Donna also stated the paternal grandparents had *"basically been poisoning my children against me for the last ... decade"*.

Part Five: Women's Voices on Abuse and Violence

5.1 Nature of sons' adolescent abuse and violence

Women experienced serious and ongoing levels of physical, verbal and psychological abuse from their sons. The most common types of abuse were damage to property and/or possessions and verbal abuse. Financial abuse was also present, often experienced by needing to replace broken and damaged possessions and property. When it did occur, physical abuse was often severe. As with adult violence to women, women in this research often minimised the seriousness of the abuse and violence, despite suffering markedly from the consequences. Many described the violence as their sons wanting to be affectionate or playful. Donna described Jarred's attempts to be affectionate: *"He's actually just very rough. Very rough, and he thinks he's only playing. Like he'll hit me ... for no reason. I'm not saying it's really violent. I don't necessarily think he's doing it violently but I mean ... do you see what I mean? I never learn, so it does hurt a bit and at the very least it's annoying. Nobody likes that consistently..."*

Another parallel with adult family violence was that mostly the abuse and violence was a secret from the outside world. Donna reported: *"A lot of their very worst behaviour was when no one was present...I don't think anyone's actually seen them spit at me...grabbing at my face and hair".* Donna's son had a friend who abused his mother and would laugh and snigger and encourage Jarred to abuse her.

Physical

Many women minimised the seriousness of their sons' physical abuse and violence. The language women used to describe the violence demonstrates this minimisation. Many described their sons' physical violence in terms of *"playfulness", "mucking around" and "affection"*.

Donna said: *"Angus often grabs me. In fact I don't know if I class that as violence or just attention seeking...it's all just sort of mucking around to him but he just does it too hard"*.

Veronica described having an argument one night where Cory *"...actually grabbed a dog leash and whacked it across my knuckles, he cut my knuckle open. Just... little things like that"*.

Other women were clear that their sons' behaviours were violent. Kate described her son's *"grabbing"* and that he held her hands and arms.

Susan described how Lucas and his girlfriend had physically attacked her: *"They beat me up. Mainly just punching and pulling hair"*. She described *"...threats, verbal intimidation, swearing, physical violence, damage to property...all of that"*.

Effie described the onset of violence when George was about eleven-years-old: *"We would always get caught up in fights...they'd be physical fights between me and him...it got to the point where he got bigger than me and I thought "I can't get involved in this any more, he's going to kill me"*.

Effie also described: *"I...go to work with black eyes...lots of bruising...on my back, my arms, my legs. He ripped my hair out"*. In one incident Effie was driving George and after an argument he *"...stopped the car, lifted over the hand brake, took the keys out of the ignition and had my seat belt down [so she couldn't move]"*. George used his physical strength to control her. He wouldn't let her answer the phone or get out of the car. He would also insist on sleeping in her bed or barricade her in the house.

Weapons

A number of sons made weapons, and either used or threatened to use them. Donna reported, *"...playing silly with knives to throwing things. Jarred's made the most dangerous weapons where he's attached with tape like sharp knives and things to a stick and throwing it...not consciously directed at people but near people..."*

Kate's son would get knives out. She described no injuries *"but there might have been a scratch here or something like that, but nothing like that violent...like when he gets the knife he tends to wave it. So he's threatening in that way, but he's not actually going to say "Right, I've got her". He doesn't do that, thank goodness, not at this stage"*. Kate described an incident where she asked her daughter to call the police when Bradley, who was eleven-years-old at the time, came in to a room with knives.

Verbal

McKinnon (2008) noted that verbal abuse becomes emotional abuse when it continues over time and has the potential to negatively affect the target person's emotional development and behaviour. Many women interviewed in this research said their sons swore and they found this intimidating and disrespectful. Donna, who has two sons, reported that *"the kids tell me even now, you know..."* *"You're full of crap"* or *"Everything you say is full of crap"*. Donna also spoke about *"the most derogatory language, it's just disgusting, but to a point where it just became so normal that that's how they would talk to me every day. They'd be like that from the minute you wake up to the time they go to bed. The derogatory things that come out of my boys' mouths is a major concern...not just calling me 'slut' and 'whore' and things like that, really disgusting things that they've told me to do with my friend Amanda because they hate her...they've gone and told me to do sexual things"*.

Kate spoke of Bradley calling her names like *'fat'* and *'slut'* or saying: *"You're an effing bitch"*.

Marian spoke of Chris' swearing: *"Fuck this. Fuck you, you're all a bunch of fuckin' cunts...you're all a bunch of fuckin' losers, I can't stand being fuckin' here"*.

Emotional and psychological

Effie spoke about George's obsessive and controlling behaviour: *"He would kick at my phone, he would go through all my calls. He would throw things round the house...it got to the point where I wasn't allowed to speak with people at all"*. She reported how George was *"with me twenty-four hours a day and I couldn't even get to make a call...if he'd go and have a shower I'd have two minutes, stolen moments so quick to make a call..."*. Effie recalled: *"I'd sit down and he'd sit next to me. I'd get up; he'd be behind me. I'd go to the toilet; he'd be behind me"*. George would also switch off her phone, take her car keys and lock her in her car if he thought the police may have been called after a violent incident.

Jane observed that *"it was almost a jealousy thing. If I thanked another kid for bringing in the plates he thought that I was thanking him too much"*. One night Josh had some friends around and they made a mess. When she insisted he clean it up he smashed the door of his bedroom with his fist.

Donna spoke about disrespect: *"They were disrespectful to me; they were the most difficult times, being spat at in the face..."*

Patricia stated: *"He doesn't seem to be able to recognise and appreciate other people's space or privacy...he'll just barge in or if you're on the phone he'll start yelling at you"*.

Veronica said: *"It all depends on what type of mood he is in. Like he has a lot of mood swings...one day he'll be really really happy and then the next minute he won't be so happy...on that day when he's not happy you have to be very careful what you say or do in front of him, because if you say the slightest little thing wrong...that's it, he's like a shark".*

Angela spoke of Anton using the "F" word and *"...put his chest up toward me...the intimidation...I thought "Is he going to hit me now?"*

Breaking possessions

Many women reported that their sons frequently broke possessions. Most women reported that their sons had damaged property.

Donna stated: *"He literally broke so many of my things. Yeah, taunting me, thinking it was all a game to him. What am I going to break next?" and he would break them".*

Sandra spoke about Daniel's *"...damage to stuff, huge damage, throwing things...at me. Throwing things at the wall. Extreme swearing".* She described how this behaviour started when he was twelve-years-old, but had escalated to *"...situations where I've called an ambulance because I didn't know how to calm him down, didn't know who to call actually".* Whereas she had previously called her mother she couldn't because Daniel *"had actually [hit her mother] with a baseball bat and then smashed all the windows in his bedroom".*

Patricia stated *"there's the pushing, hitting, breaking things, punching holes in the walls...and breaking things on purpose".*

Veronica reported that Cory's physical violence didn't occur until he was in his mid-teens. She felt this had stopped, only to be replaced with damage to property: *"It's gone from punching, from kicking to breaking my property now".*

Kate stated: *"It's more taken out on objects around the house...slamming the door...we've gone through a lot of broken things".*

Effie described a *"coffee table that had just chips...on it and some soft drinks...he just grabbed it and just lifted it all up, and there was chips and orange and Coke...all over the carpet...he also kicked the front door, the flyscreen and damaged it...just last week".* She described how George would break *"really nice pieces"* she had around the house. He would also damage her car and rip her clothes. He had broken her phone to stop her making calls.

Susan talked about *"swearing ... there were whole walls in his bedroom he punched and kicked through to my bedroom...that's two walls....mainly just punching and pulling hair but threats, verbal intimidation, swearing, physical violence, damage to property, all of that".*

Marian described: *"...the slamming of doors, food flying in the air, food flying on my roof".*

Chris used to smash holes in the wall. Once, when Marian was away, he invited at least fifty friends over to party. He also trashed the neighbour's house at five am in the morning. Marian had noticed broken things but had not thought about the possibility that Chris (who was living with his father but had keys to the house) would have been *"so irresponsible".*

Angela's son pushed holes in the doors and walls, broke her digital camera and wrecked her car. As a young child he deliberately and continually broke toys and *"wrecked the home".*

Financial

Jane spoke of Josh taking money from her purse. She described how her son stole some of the money she left out to pay the gardener. When Jane challenged him he swore at her and blamed the gardener for not being there to give the money to. She told Josh: *"Taking that four dollars is like forty dollars to someone else because I just haven't got it"*.

Susan spoke about Lucas' demands for money: *"If I didn't fix his car he was going to come around and kill me"*.

A few women reported their sons' stealing. Donna said: *"I won't know about it 'til I see it missing...gone into my room and rummaged, take what they want"*.

Fire

Two women spoke about their sons' involvement with fire. Donna reported that Jarred would spray hairspray on his friends and then set it alight. Angela whose fifteen-year-old son lives in the country said Anton had lit a bush fire when he was twelve-years-old.

Suicidality and self harm

Some boys had threatened or tried to harm themselves. Patricia recalled: *"He got a carving knife and was trying to stab himself but I wrestled him to the ground and he has bitten himself ...mostly just causing bruising and red marks"*.

Effie's son, George had told his mother: *"Don't worry...I'm going to kill myself"*.

Angela noticed: *"There was a mark on him, which he did with a cigarette lighter...self inflicted"*.

5.2 Sons' abuse and violence to siblings

Some sons were abusive and violent to their siblings. Donna disclosed: *"He'll always be hitting and punching his [twelve year old] sister...it's really weird because I still can't figure out why he does it. I mean he doesn't have to be angry with her or anything...he just does it. He's very impulsive, he just punches her still, sometimes accidentally bruises her and things like that..."*

Donna's two sons would verbally abuse her twelve-year-old daughter saying: *"Hey slut"*. Her daughter would react as if this was normal. Donna was concerned about leaving her daughter alone with her sons and said: *"The boys may be accidentally hurting her, because they're all very rough...they do get carried away physically and they do silly things..."* Donna was often forced to leave the house with her daughter to protect her. Jarred had *"...punched her on the back and the bruising ...is frightening because she's a little fragile – she's very little..."* She described how both her sons would *"jump on her while she's fast asleep in bed, landing on her"*. Donna did not think her sons' actions had adversely affected her daughter: *"She's so well adjusted at school and popular and oh, just a miracle"*. Donna spoke of how her daughter *"played on it... there's been times when I've seen her provoking, but then there's been just so many times when she's just done nothing"*.

Patricia disclosed Jason's violence against her ten-year-old daughter, Rebecca and her own mother: *"He's pushed mum and he verbally abuses her...quite regularly"*. She felt scared to leave the house when her daughter or mother were home, in case Jason would hurt them: *"In the beginning he didn't really articulate that he was going to hurt mum but he would quite often just whack Rebecca for no reason or push her or things like that"*. Patricia discussed the impact of Jason's behaviour on her daughter: *"It's made her really clingy to me...she hasn't really been able to settle very well at night. Up until about six months ago she was a*

lot of the time coming into my bed at night. It's made her a bit frustrated and she can be impatient...I think she sees it works for him...It's made her a little bit shy and unsure of herself...it's impacted on her school work. She's fallen behind in her schoolwork".

Veronica's twelve-year-old daughter had *"actually copped it on and off...for the past three years. He hits her, punches her, yells at her, he puts her down".* She described her daughter as an "emo" and spoke about how her daughter self harmed which she believed was a result of the violence.

Kate, whose thirteen-year-old son has two older sisters talked about his attitudes to women and how he would tell his sisters: *"You're sluts".*

Susan has an eighteen-year-old and nineteen-year old son. Whilst one was more physically violent, they would both have *"...really big punch ons".*

Angela's fifteen-year-old son would verbally and physically abuse his eleven-year-old brother *"slapping him on the back of the head, very hard...he's got a heavy hand".* Anton would also hit his younger step-brothers (on his father's side) and get into a lot of fights at school.

Marian had re-partnered and found Chris *"...puts standover tactics over Alex [her step-son] and becomes very bossy and bullies him".* Chris had really hurt her step-son in the past and her step-son *"...kept it under his belt for two days and he couldn't keep it under his belt any more because he was in a lot of pain".* Marian said Chris has a tendency to pick on people that are smaller than him. In this particular incident Chris had grabbed his step-brother by the neck and strangled him and pushed him away by the neck. He had pulled *"a whole neck muscle out".*

Angela described how when Anton was four-years-old he displayed feelings of *"...hatred for the baby...I had to sit with him and talk him through it: "I love you both the same...neither one of you do I love more...or less than the other. I love you equally and I'm there for you equally".* She described Anton's verbal and physical violence to his step-brother: *"He's got a heavy hand...slapping him on the back of the head, very hard".* She described the effect on her younger son: *"There's fear there".*

5.3 Sons' violence to others

Some sons were abusive and violent towards others as well as to family members.

Sandra described Daniel as a bully at school, who showed a real disrespect towards women, especially female teachers.

Kate talked about the family pet, a dog which *"...sees him and runs. He plays too rough with the dog".*

Susan described how her eighteen-year-old son *"beat his girlfriend up".* Her other nineteen-year-old son had *"a few really big punch-ons, like really big";* and Susan was scared it was going to escalate to something much worse.

Marian noted that when Chris first started to display violent behaviours to her, his behaviour on the football field changed: *"After a ...game parents were coming up to me saying "What's gotten into Chris?" He was swearing at the top of his voice on the football field, he was yelling abuse at umpires, he caused an all-in brawl ...and this was happening regularly".*

Angela recalled Anton, who was three-years-old, meeting her new partner and saying, *"Stop putting your hands on my mother".* Another time at a doctor's surgery, he lashed out at another boy.

5.4 The impact of sons' abuse and violence on their mothers

The literature articulates the severe effects of adolescent violence on mothers. This includes high levels of anxiety, depression, shame, guilt and embarrassment (Paterson, R., Luntz, H., Perlesz, A., & Cotton, 2002). Women in this research found the impact of experiencing abuse and violence from their sons was profound and overwhelming. It was similar to that described by women who experienced abuse and violence from partners. Most women described the abuse and violence as occurring in the home; there was an element of secrecy because others did not witness it and the shame, guilt and fear stopped them speaking about it. This secrecy made the effects more profound because their pain could not be shared with others and women felt overwhelmingly isolated and alone. Their sons' abuse and violence affected women physically, emotionally and psychologically. It left women feeling unsafe and vulnerable. One impact was women's financial vulnerability; paying off debts incurred by their sons' actions or replacing and repairing damage done to their house or property.

Safety

Veronica described feeling fearful. Cory's violence affected her sense of safety. Cory *"pulled weapons out like chains. He used weapons like knives, dog chains..."*

Angela mentioned *"...a couple of times [when]...I thought he was going to hit me...I had to move a little bit... what he did to the bathroom door. I thought "Is that me next or is that Riley (younger brother) next?"*

Marian talked about how she no longer felt her belongings were safe: *"We've changed all the locks on the doors. Now when we go away we let the neighbours know to keep an eye on the house, and we've put a lock on our bedroom"*.

Mental health

The experience of family violence is traumatic and a significant contributor to mental health problems. The mental health impacts experienced by women in this research included depression, trauma and stress. It is unclear when depression first manifested. Many women had experienced trauma and/or family violence as children, they experienced abuse and violence from their partners and now from their sons. It is likely this cumulative experience of abuse and violence contributed to the development and chronicity of depression. The secrecy and shame of family violence and adolescent violence means women did not readily seek help. Their experience of trauma may possibly have been misdiagnosed as depression, rather than named as a *'normal'* response to the experience of family violence. This leaves women at risk of mental health problems becoming entrenched and having significant impact on women's health and wellbeing. Mental health issues like depression, anxiety and stress significantly compromise parenting. Most women named mental health issues. Donna stated: *"I suffered from depression a long time, years and years"*.

Patricia disclosed: *"I've suffered severe depression as a result of it [her son's violence]. I can get really anxious and really nervous. I'm on a new anti-depressant so I'm better now, but there's just some days when I feel my nerves are absolutely shot, like the slightest noise or if he raises his voice you sort of jump"*.

The depression also impacted on women's ability to parent. Donna said: *"You have to keep functioning, it's not on a very good level though...you're doing what you have to do, a bit like a robot, but you're not yourself when you're depressed"*.

Many women spoke about the dire impact of stress. Donna added: *"All of this has undermined my confidence. It's caused me so much stress worrying about the children. It's just caused me so much stress because their behaviours have been just terrifying at times...It's made me sick...not eating, just hating myself, getting rundown and just not caring about myself"*.

Kate talked about tending *"to tiptoe more around him, let him get away with more than he perhaps should, just to keep the peace"*. She described the stress of wanting help, but not being able to access it: *"Nowhere to go. You're lost. You just battle and try to do the best things and you're not always doing the best things. So you're just like a swamp I guess. Some bits you're going to go into and you're going to sink, other bits might be land where you can actually walk in, but then, bang, you might be in that hole again"*.

Effie recalled: *"I just don't know what to do sometimes. I don't know how to handle it. And I feel like screaming, and I feel like I'm suffocating"*. She stated: *"It was just amazing how I could still ...semi function. I cried. Every single day I was crying"*.

Jane felt unsupported: *"I get overwhelmed by it sometimes...about working and housework and no-one's been particularly nice to me. I don't feel that anyone appreciates that I'm really trying and it's difficult. I often feel at a loss what to do. I feel that I'm not moving forward and solving the problem. I probably overeat...I feel just really tired...it affects my motivation sometimes"*.

Susan disclosed that *"since the last time...Lucas attacked me I forget stuff and I say things wrong sometimes... I don't know what day it is a lot of the time and I get confused with...you might ask me a question and I'll say, oh this, that, but it mightn't be exactly right. This is a really serious issue because it's affected me to the stage where I can't work, because I am physically and mentally exhausted and I go through cycles...where I might sleep for five hours but during that five hours I might wake twenty times. It feels like my whole life is ...stuffed"*.

Susan stated: *"I'm a mental wreck. I feel like knocking myself off but I wouldn't because then that would make the situation worse. I've thought it's much easier just to die...I get really depressed...I'm a nervous wreck, if something happens I get frightened real easy. I'm jittery"*.

Many women reported the impact on their sleep and feeling constantly exhausted and tired. Sandra reported: *"I just feel tired all the time"*.

Marian spoke about the effect on her sleeping: *"I take sleeping tablets. I pray every night that God keeps him safe and keeps him away from drugs and alcohol. It's affected my sexual relationship with my husband [not the boy's father] because there's so much going on in my mind about Chris that I'm really not up to anything else. I worry about him 24/7. I've aged"*.

Sandra described how *"there have been times she could have easily hurt myself", and "...had to call for help because I felt like I could just not do it [live] anymore"*.

Emotional

Women frequently described the enormous emotional impact of loving their sons, hating and being fearful of their behaviour, protecting the other children and trying to live normal lives in the midst of an abnormal situation. Sandra talked about the *"...emotional struggle...dealing with when things get broken, when things get thrown at you, dealing with the financial aspect of that, the repair aspect, sometimes walking on eggshells because you're too scared to start a conflict...it's emotionally exhausting..."* Sandra spoke about the impact of Daniel frequently staying away from home for days at a time and how she feels: *"I just feel like I can breathe and the person that I am returns for fleeting moments in there...I don't think I am ever relaxed at home with him because I don't know what's going to happen next"*.

Some women were confronted by their sons' behaviours reminding them of their sons' fathers' behaviour.

Sandra said: *"It's disturbing for me when I recognise it...that sometimes I feel I am living in the relationship with my ex-husband. It disturbs me enormously"*.

Veronica spoke about getting emotionally upset: *"I break down and cry, but I try not to show that emotion in front of him...Because if I showed it in front of him he'd call me a big sook. Or I go for walks".* Veronica said the experience with her husband and then son made her wonder *"are all guys like that?"* She had recently had a traumatic experience with a male neighbour who gave her a black eye, bruises on her head and bit her on her arm.

Susan moved out of her house after taking out an Intervention Order on her son: *"There was just like so many memories, which was a real pain because I sort of liked where I was...but it was just like too many memories...when I moved out I still had dreams about the house because I really liked it...but it was just too much, too much bad memories".* Susan described the impact of the violence as *"...mind bending...it twists my mind because I think...it absolutely takes control of your life and you think of ways to combat it and you can't... it's like...trying to stand in front of a tank and saying "I'm going to win this".* Susan had suffered a head injury from an assault from Lucas. She had recently had a brain scan to see if there were permanent effects [which she believed there was].

Many women hid their sons' violence from those outside the family. Some women only confided in close friends. Donna only told her mother and her closest friend. She stated: *"A lot of their very worst behaviour was when no one was present".*

Social

Only two women were in relationships (one of these was uncertain). Many spoke of how their sons' abuse and violence stopped them having a social life, going out and generally participating in society and community. Effie stated that George's violence limited her social life: *"I'd like to have a life too...even in the relationships; they've always been stunted because [of the violence]. And I've sort of made them [the relationship] stop or not go a certain way...because of that".*

Sandra had ended a relationship because she *"just couldn't deal with it any more".* She worried that if she had male companions Daniel would be *"screaming his head off at his mother and lashing out sometimes and indignant and angry".* She felt isolated by Daniel's behaviour and had stopped going to places with him for fear of his behaviour embarrassing her.

Patricia felt pessimistic about being able to have a relationship and asked: *"What person would want to accept a child like that into their lives?"* She talked about the impact on her social life as *"quite debilitating"* and talked about losing friends and contacts as a result of his behaviour: *"We've all tended to become a bit more isolated and just really spend time with the family...I just didn't know how he was going to behave in public. If we were invited to someone's place I just really didn't know how he would behave, and I just found that really demeaning and really humiliating".* She talked about how the family stopped being invited to birthday parties and other social events because of her son's behaviour.

Kate spoke of feeling too embarrassed to take Bradley out socially: *"It's limiting what we can do...that's limiting people I meet as well".*

Susan had lost friendships because she could speak only about Lucas and her problems with him: *"Even though you try not to say anything ...you tend to talk about it and people don't want to know about it...a lot of people, they get sick of hearing it..."*

Marian spoke of the effect on her social life: *"I'm embarrassed. A lot of friends we've made have been through the football club and all their boys are good boys...seeing the boys I'm very envious, very jealous. I wish Chris could've been like them. We've had to cancel functions because...I just haven't been in the mood to go".*

Financial

Almost all women reported financial problems resulting from their sons' behaviours. This included needing to take time off work and feeling not able to work. Most women emphasised the financial burden of repairing their sons' damage to property. Some women described their sons' theft of money.

Angela described how Anton would break expensive possessions such as her \$500 digital camera and a DVD player. She said he would always aim for the expensive things.

5.5 Impact on work and income

Several women spoke about the impact of their sons' violence and abuse on their work. Sandra described: *"It impacts on my job...sometimes I get called about different things at school"*. Kate described how *"if he's been suspended from school.... I've had to leave [work] and go home, pick him up and so forth"*.

Patricia said: *"I used to get a lot of calls at work and actually had to leave which is really difficult when you're a nurse"*. She commented: *"Sometimes it's impacted on my wages if I'm not at work"* [when she is called home to deal with Jason's violence].

Effie spoke about George insisting on coming in to work with her [he had stopped going to school]. A psychiatrist also advised her to take six weeks off work to spend more time with her son. She did this, drastically reducing her income.

Susan said the psychological impact of Lucas' abuse was so severe she was unable to continue to work

5.6 Impact on the mother/son relationship

Most women struggled with conflicting emotions about how they felt about, and related to their sons. They overwhelmingly worried about their sons and loved them deeply. Yet they were confronted by their sons' abuse and violence. Sandra experienced *"a complete feeling of having given birth to an alien, like "This can't be my child"*.

Veronica spoke about feeling hatred towards Cory for what he had done to her and her daughter *"Hatred, I feel lost, you know, lost, yeah I feel lost"*.

Kate said: *"I hate him. I do sometimes. I literally hate him that I would go and kill him. Not that. I haven't gone that far thank god. But ...I do think, "Oh gee, I wish you were just dead", which is not good"*.

In many ways the women's experiences mirrors those of women who are in relationship with abusive and violent men; they may love the person but hate the behaviour. They just want the abuse and violence to stop. Whilst some women could not comprehend their sons' behaviours, others experienced substantial loss, grief and sadness that their sons' behaviours so negatively impacted on their relationships.

Patricia said: *"I find it a very much love-hate relationship...obviously underneath I really really love him...but I resent the impact he's had on my life...having to just be called names and abused all the time and be told what a crappy mother I am and how he hates me...I just feel that...things were difficult enough when I was married to Gary and now that I've been able to move on from that, I just think it's time that I was able to enjoy my life a little..."*

Marian spoke of Chris' pattern of apologising after the abuse and violence, much the same as his father did: *"Carl [her ex-partner] used to say "I'm sorry for hitting you, I won't do it again"; but he did it again".* Chris would often send text messages to her saying, *"Sorry mum that I swore at you".* The reminder that Chris' response was almost identical to that of her abusive and violent ex-partner was very scary. Some times he would ring his mother at 1.30am saying, *"I love you mum, I'm really sorry, I really love you mum, I'm so sorry".* This would scare Marian who worried Chris might be suicidal although his psychologist assured her he wasn't.

A number of women spoke about how their sons' behaviour had distanced them from him. Marian, whose son had moved out of home, described the relationship as distant: *"He doesn't like coming here. I don't know if he's got reminders that he doesn't like. We've left the holes there as a reminder for when he does come. I don't know what he thinks when he goes into his room and he sees those holes".* Marian was resolved not to have Chris living back at home until the holes were fixed: *"Why should he come here until he fixes those holes, he's shown no remorse for those holes. He's never apologised for those holes. But as a mother I see those holes but I'm oblivious to them at the same time because I just want to see my son – why do women stay with their husbands when they punch the crap out of them? Because they love their husband; they hope one day it might change...I look at those holes and I think what does the future hold for him...who's he going to put a hole through?"*

Susan spoke about Lucas' violence: *"It absolutely destroyed [the relationship], absolutely, absolutely...it virtually has been non-existent, which absolutely crushes you...in a way it's like someone dying but they're not [dead]...you sort of grieve for that loss of relationship but they're not gone".*

Affection

Although their sons' violence was devastating, many women described the affection between them. Some women relished this because they sought the affection and closeness they once had with their sons; others felt the affection was smothering, controlling or manipulative.

Donna described how Jarred was *"too affectionate...he'll want to be physically – he'd want so much affection that he would ... be all over me, too much, and doing little things, flicking me to annoy me or really attention-seeking behaviour so he'd do everything he could so that I would push him away and then he had a reason to say "See ...you pushed me away".*

Donna stated: *"Maybe not affectionate, maybe that's the wrong word, maybe just to get my attention".* She described: *"Even on the most horrible days, [there was] a kiss and good night in bed every night. I would not go in there, and they would call me and I'd tell them, "I love you", every single day, no matter how bad things got".*

Angela described: *"As soon as we see each other, he comes in the door and the arms are up...for a hug".* She added that there was no affection when he didn't get his own way.

Sandra talked about how the affection she and Daniel had: *"Most days he tells me he loves me and vice versa".* Sandra tried to spend time playing cards and other activities where they could spend positive time together.

Patricia described: *"He might come and sit close to you and he'll put his head against you".*

Veronica described how: *"We cuddle each other, kiss each other on the cheek and say we love each other".*

Kate spoke of how Bradley asked: *"Can I have a kiss?".* She described how the night before she had given him a facial scrub that he had obviously enjoyed. Bradley also *"sits next to me and ...might move my arm to a position so he's comfortable. But you know he's snuggling up to me. So yeah, if there was no anger...definitely the cuddles".*

Effie whose son George no longer lived with her commented: *"Every day he says to me that he loves me...I'll drive past my parents' [where he now lives] in the morning and I'll go in...give him a hug, give him a kiss and say "Have a good day at school".*

Marian described: *"When I pick him up he always kisses me and hugs me...I just went up to him and gave him a big hug and big kisses and he loves it, you can see, he does love it and yet the next day he became abusive to me..."*

Remorse

Few sons expressed remorse. Donna commented: *"A lot of violence towards property, had a lot of holes kicked in the walls and doors, and the most worrying thing about that was there was never remorse afterwards...Like Jarred would seem not to acknowledge that he'd done anything wrong".*

Sandra described that, when the violence to property happens *"...it is beyond control...because there's like a glazed expression and he's quite remorseful later and exhausted later... he curled up in the foetal position".*

Jane, who expressed some hope in Josh's ability to change, described his seeming remorse. She would try and approach him after his anger had subsided and *"have conversations with him. I would be saying that "Gee, that was really terrible last night"...and we'd probably both have tears in our eyes".*

5.7 Blame

Women felt blamed by their sons; they had also experienced blame from their ex-partners for their violence and their sons' behaviours. They felt blamed by professionals and they blamed themselves.

Effie said: *"People tend to blame you...because there's no-one else to blame...If George [her son] behaves a certain way I'll get told, "It's your fault".* George's grandparents blame her for his behaviour.

Susan considered that one of the reasons Lucas was violent to her may have been because he blamed his father's suicide on her.

Marian reflected Chris was like his father *"He puts the blame on everyone else. We were to blame for his drink driving, we were to blame for him getting in the car that night, coming here to be violently aggressive towards us".* Marian also said her current partner *"blamed me a couple of times and said "You should have disciplined him more at an earlier stage...but it's too late now".*

Sandra said: *"I feel the blame's always back on me, so I basically just soldier on and deal with that stuff as a sole parent".* Her son also blames her: *"It's your fault".*

Veronica observed: *"His father always blamed other people for his own behaviour or for things that have happened to him".* She reflected that Child Protection's involvement with her daughter was *"you know, the blame thing".* Veronica spoke of how her ex-partner *"blames me a lot for the way the children...act. I get a lot of the blame...he blames me for everything".*

Jane spoke about Josh's school problems and how her ex-partner would blame her. Her ex-partner blamed Josh's behaviour on her decision to separate. Jane felt she could not speak to her family about his behaviours because *"once again I would be blamed".*

Angela felt that her interactions with counsellors and psychologists meant: *"I always got the blame. "It's your fault why he's like that".* She concluded: *"Of course the mother's always going to get the blame".* Angela's ex-partner also blamed her for their divorce. Her son also blamed her for his violence saying: *"You're not listening to me".*

Donna spoke about Jarred's grandparents who "*blame me for everything anyway*". They had said to her: "*You've fucked the children up, and I'm a loser because I don't work. They have taught my children that I'm a loser and I am worthless*". Her mother also blamed her for being weak with the children.

5.8 How women understand the violence

Women's explanations of why their sons were violent were similar to those described by women who experience abuse and violence from their partners.

Several themes emerged about the women's understanding of violence:

5.8.1 Inherited traits

Women clearly identified similarities and patterns in their sons' abuse and violence to those perpetrated by ex-partners. Some thought that these were learned attitudes and behaviours, whilst others thought they might have been inherent or biological. Sandra understood Daniel's violence as "*...inherent, biological*", because he behaved in the same way as her ex-partner. Sandra noted that there were elements in Daniel's behaviour that were in his control.

5.8.2 Learnt behaviour

Most women thought their sons' violence was linked to their experience of their father's abuse and violence to their mother. They saw it as learnt behaviour. Veronica's son, Cory reminded her of his father when he would tell her: "*Don't be silly*" or "*Use your brains, mum. I say nothing. I just go quiet because I know that if I don't shut up and if I say something then he'll start getting...angry*". Veronica stated: "*It's not his fault. Because he learnt from his father...He sees it with his own eyes, so he thinks the way his father treats women ... that it's right for him to treat women that way too*".

Angela described how Anton would tell her it was her fault for not listening to him [which his father would also say]. She said: "*He has admitted that most of his ways, his behaviour, attitude, violence, swearing... has got a lot to do with his father*".

Sandra saw her son's behaviour as both inherited and learnt: "*The way he sees his father speak to his mother, to women, to his sisters...that's definitely influenced*". Sandra also noted: "*I'm the one that puts the boundaries in place...I'm just it...He knows that I'll always forgive him, he knows I'm not going anywhere and it's way too easy ...to let it go with me than to try and use some strategies to control what he's saying or doing*".

Although five women separated from their sons' father when they were very young, they continued to experience abuse and violence post-separation, through contact visits and from new partners. Although children may not remember their fathers' abuse and violence, there is ample evidence that they are still affected by it (van der Kolk, 2005). Some women in this research spoke about their sons being unsettled, aggressive, irritable, clingy and anxious babies and toddlers. Babies and toddlers who witness violence against their mothers, even if it is short-term, are still affected by it.

Marian and her partner had separated when Chris was a year old. Chris had regular contact with his father who used any opportunity to denigrate and undermine Marian and her new partner.

Angela believed her ex-partner contributed to her son's violence. She married when she was eighteen-years-old and felt her husband had "*major resentment...hatred*" because she divorced him. As a result he tried to turn their son against her.

5.8.3 Sons' personalities

Patricia understood Jason's violence in the context of his being self-centred: *"He can't see past his own needs or his wants or feelings"*.

5.8.4 Parenting inadequacies

Most women blamed themselves for their sons' violence. Many felt blamed by others, particularly their ex-partners. Feeling blamed made women doubt their parenting. They felt if they had been stronger in their parenting, the abuse and violence would not have occurred. They concluded that therefore the violence was their fault.

Kate explained that she was a target of Bradley's abuse and violence because *"perhaps my backbone may have not been strong enough...I think I'm a soft target...sort of, for peace in the house...I might give in a lot easier...just to shut him up. I didn't have that sort of back up to ...reinforce things with him"*. She explained: *"Like a good mother, I was bottling it [the stress] inside...I doubt myself as a good mother...feeling worthless as a person...always thinking...could I have done this better and ...blaming myself"*. Bradley also does *"the blame game"*.

5.8.5 Lack of fathers' involvement in parenting

Susan described her son's father as *"non-existent"*. She described that she was the one who took responsibility for the children such as buying food and cooking meals and how her husband was selfish. He worked infrequently and would stay home and watch TV. Susan wondered if Lucas *"...decided to take over the role ...because he'd just sit there in the chair and do nothing"*.

Marian attributed Chris' violence to his father's abuse and violence to her, and his lack of parental responsibility. She said that he allowed Chris to have a lot of freedom from a young age which made it difficult for her to set boundaries.

5.8.6 Sons' trauma and/or grief

Sons who still had contact with their fathers did so in a context where parental conflict was enduring and strong. McIntosh (2003) highlights the negative impact of parental conflict on child development. Exposure to family violence and other chronic trauma leads to pervasive psychological and biological deficits (Streeck-Fischer & van der Kolk, 2000). Several sons had experienced trauma and grief because their fathers were deceased or had left the family home and not retained contact. Susan spoke of Lucas' father's suicide when her son was thirteen-years-old. She had not told him it was suicide. Lucas started to become violent a year later. However she also identified issues with Lucas prior to the suicide.

5.8.7 Drug and alcohol use

Susan's son, Lucas started using marijuana and *'speed'*, after his father's death, which she felt contributed to his irrationality and violence and being *"...totally out of control"*.

5.9 How sons understand the violence

A number of themes emerged about how the sons understood their violence:

5.9.1 Other people are to blame

None of the sons took responsibility for their abuse and violence. They blamed it on others; mostly their mothers but also siblings, school or other people. Sandra said Daniel mostly blamed others, saying they did something that upset him or asked him to do something he didn't want to do. Daniel might say: *"They looked at me the wrong way so it's their fault that I hit them"*. She said there was *"always a portion of blame to every one else"*.

Marian's son said his behaviour was caused by her *"frustrating him and nagging him"*. These were the same words used by his father to explain his abuse and violence. Chris perceived Marian treated his younger step-brother better than him and loved her partner more than him. He blamed her for this.

Donna said: *"I always give them reason to be angry with me. They blame me for their violence"*.

5.9.2 Making excuses

Patricia's fifteen-year-old son justified his abuse and violence: *"If he had a bad day or was angry, it was OK to take it out on the rest of the family"*. Patricia believed Jason's excuses were similar to those used by his father.

5.10 Sons' ability to control their violence

Women vacillated about whether their sons had control over their actions. Most felt that their sons' behaviours were well entrenched and they were *"out of control"*. Sandra commented: *"It was just beyond control"* but noted: *"Well basically I'm the only person...that he speaks to in that way...swearing...I know that he doesn't speak like that in his father's company. He's spoken to my friends a few times, not so much swearing but really rudely, back chatted... less so to males"*.

5.11 Women's experience of seeking help

Women may not disclose violence from their adolescents due to feelings of guilt and shame and a fear of being blamed. When they seek help, they may not find it useful. All women in this research had tried to seek help from family or friends or professionals. Most had tried at different periods in their sons' development to access professional support. They found most was unsatisfactory, although there were some positive experiences. Some women spoke about services requesting that their son attend appointments. Because the sons refused to meet with professionals, the women were unable to get support. Effie took her son to a private psychiatrist but he refused to get out of the car. Angela spoke to a youth worker who asked her to *"bring him along as well"* but he refused to attend. Their sons' refusal left the women unsupported. Some women had gone to extraordinary lengths to access help. Patricia was referred to a paediatrician when Jason was in kindergarten. He referred her to a psychiatrist. Later they saw the school psychologist. The school psychologist referred them to a children's mental health service. They saw a psychiatrist who resigned soon after. They were then assigned a case manager who was a psychiatric nurse. Patricia found her really helpful after a long search with little success. They could only see her fortnightly which Patricia felt was not enough. They were able to access a psychiatrist but only for a medication review. Patricia reflected: *"Our GPs really good...he's sent us off to different people to try to get some help for Jason's issues...like the weight issue"*.

Donna had tried to access support but her ex-partner and his parents undermined this, saying she was the problem. When she and her children finally attended family counselling, they saw it as a joke. At this time Donna had wanted family counselling because *"...it was a complete breakdown really...no-one was talking, it was hectic and chaotic and violent"*.

All women spoke of their reasons for not seeking support. Veronica believed she should *"handle this one on my own"*. Veronica was also worried that if she took action *"he [her son] would hate me"*.

Marian said fear stopped her taking action: *"He's a big boy. He's a solid boy. He's punching holes in the walls...He's never hit me but he could then go to strike me"*.

Patricia's son, Jason was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and she reported his medication was helpful. She recently had to *"up the tablet he takes to stop aggression because he was becoming potentially aggressive and had a real fixation on me and how much he hated me and how much he didn't want me in the house"*.

Effie sent George to live with her parents. Her brothers assist her parents to get him to school. She still sees George daily but does not feel his behaviour has improved enough for him to return home.

5.11.1 Family and friends

Some women's family and friends were unhelpful. Women felt blamed by them, or felt they did not fully understand the complexity and difficulty of their situation. Effie, whose partner had left when George was two-years-old, lived with her parents and experienced them as undermining and questioning her ability to parent. She felt she was unable to discipline George because of their influence and their constant siding with her son against her. Most women did not share the seriousness of their experience with friends because they felt ashamed, embarrassed or misunderstood. A few women found friends supportive. Veronica talked about her friends being important sources of support: *"They actually give me advice. They sit down and have talks with me about it. They also tell me not to blame myself"*. Another woman spoke about her *"very close-knit friendship group...my little support network"*.

Two women thought their family situation contributed to the problem. They felt their families blamed them, and therefore inadvertently supported their sons' behaviours. Susan asked Lucas' grandfather to intervene. He then asked one of his friends to come and beat Lucas up to stop his violence to her. None of the women felt their sons' father contributed to stopping the abuse and violence. Most fathers minimised or denied the severity of the violence if they knew it was happening. Others blamed the women for *'causing'* the violence. One father told his son not to hit his mother, but would hit her himself when they lived together. Some fathers actively or passively prevented the woman and her son from gaining professional support.

5.11.2 Paediatrician

Patricia took Jason to a paediatrician at a public hospital. She also utilised a privately funded paediatrician following a kindergarten referral. The paediatrician diagnosed him with *"...a bit of Attention Deficit Disorder and Oppositional Defiance Disorder"*.

A paediatrician diagnosed Kate's son with Oppositional Defiance Disorder. She said: *"He was absolutely useless...he weighed Bradley; he asked what Bradley does. I told him about the knife incident and he just wrote it down in the report and that was it"*.

5.11.3 Psychiatrist

Patricia's son's paediatrician referred him to a psychiatrist. This intervention was unhelpful because he made a notification to Child Protection Services when he heard about Jason's violence to Patricia's daughter. She said: *"I think it just compounded things and just sort of added another problem when I knew they were going to get Child Protection involved and I'm thinking "Well you know they're going to take Rebecca [her daughter]..." or you know the blame thing...it just caused me more anxiety...I was really disappointed"*.

Patricia also talked about medication helping reduce Jason's violence (he has Asperger's Syndrome).

Marian's son saw an adolescent psychologist individually and with her. He had some contact with the psychologist, which was helpful to his mother because it kept him linked with an adult. She wondered whether the psychologist would help Chris change: *"I don't know how he's going to help Chris become a better person...psychologists don't give advice. They just talk"*.

5.11.4 Adolescent mental health services

Three women had involvement with adolescent mental health services but none reported this as useful. Kate attended an adolescent mental health service for an eight-week program. She described how the psychologist suggested using stars as rewards for good behaviour but that after eight good weeks, when her time with this service ended, everything returned to how it was before.

Effie involved the police to take George to a hospital based youth mental health program. He refused to stay overnight but attended a day program. He dropped out within ten days so did not complete the program. The hospital referred him to an adolescent mental health service but again George would not attend. Effie attended the service alone, a huge undertaking, given that George was at this stage not letting her out of his sight. He was not attending school and accompanying her to work. She had to pretend to her son that she had a business appointment then drive from the city to Dandenong to attend the appointment. A psychiatrist told her she should stop her full time job for six weeks and devote more time to George. This was despite having told the psychiatrist that this was exactly what her son wanted *"...not to go to school, to have his mother at home..."*. However she took the psychiatrist's advice and George was *"thrilled"*. The violence increased and when she rang the psychiatrist she was advised to call the police. George was monitoring her phone calls and would make her get in her car and drive away if he suspected she had called the police. Eventually Effie went back to her job – nothing had changed.

5.11.5 Counselling

Kate saw a counsellor to deal with her stress levels. She hoped *"those times when at the moment it feels like you've lost control, the counsellor may be able to support you to find ways to keep control"*.

Marian talked about receiving counselling: *"It becomes very expensive. It was nearly \$100. We couldn't afford it any more"*. She described the counselling as *"a little bit helpful, but we couldn't afford it"*. It took some time for Marian to find out where to get help. She rang Help Line, then counselling services. Marian attended a support group for parents with abusive adolescents but stopped going because she found it too depressing *"...and I was getting emotional and couldn't deal with that anymore"*. The group facilitator rang her to see why she had not been coming and she told them: *"I come out of here bawling my eyes out. I feel so depressed"*.

Patricia saw a counsellor whom she thought was helpful but Jason would not attend any sessions with her: *"We did try but Jason [her son] would not cooperate"*.

Donna *"tried so many different counselling [sessions] with the children and myself as a family, so many...but that was undermined again and that failed again"*. Donna described *"the [paternal] grandmother convincing the children "You're not mental"...so my children listened to her and all my attempts were in vain because when I did take them the children treated it as a joke"*. Donna had done parenting courses: *"I've done about four parenting courses and positive parenting courses and I've read books"*.

Kate had rung a parenting line and told them: *"I'm at my wits end"*. They referred her to a parenting course specifically for parents who are abused by their adolescents. This was very helpful. They had also said they would link her with a counsellor to undertake a home assessment but had none available and this opportunity did not eventuate.

Sandra tried to get counselling, particularly to address the experience of abuse and violence from her son's father *"where it was all coming from...that he had suffered as a result of the abuse he had received as a child and that had influenced his own self esteem...the need for control and the abuse that exhibited itself more and more so in our relationship"*.

5.11.6 Child Protection

A number of women had involvement with Child Protection services; some because of the risks posed by their sons' violence to siblings and others because of their sons' exposure to abuse and risk. Donna contacted Child Protection because of her two sons' violence to her daughter (now twelve-years-old). She was *"covered with bruises from my oldest son"*. She told Child Protection her daughter was regularly being punched and verbally abused by both boys. Child Protection had referred her to a counselling service (where she is still involved). Donna had already been accessing this service. Her ex-partner's parents spoke with Child Protection and told them the mother was over reacting and stressed out and there was nothing wrong. Donna's daughter and her two brothers are now living with their father: *"I took my kids back there which didn't work before that anyway, and then the second we walked out Jarred would call the counsellor and tell her whatever she wanted to hear...I felt let down by Child Protection and Family Support Services, I don't think they're in a position to even deal..."*

Patricia's son's psychiatrist notified Child Protection about her daughter's (now ten-years-old) safety. She did not find this involvement helpful: *"They just basically made a phone call and said, "Well what's going on?...I've never had any letters or follow up"*.

Veronica described Child Protection's involvement following her daughter's disclosure that she was self harming. Her daughter told a friend, who told a teacher, who told the school guidance officer who notified Child Protection. Her experience was positive: *"The next minute he [the school guidance officer] rang me and he was telling me ... told me what my daughter was doing [self harming] and [asked] was I aware of it? I wasn't, and then the next minute he turned around and he said, "But I'm sorry to tell you this but I might take it a bit further". The next minute he rang Human Services [Child Protection]"*. Child Protection has supported her daughter and Veronica said *"no family wants to have DHS [Child Protection] involved but sometimes they can help...they can help you get other supports"*.

Angela had notified Child Protection because her ex-partner assaulted her fifteen-year-old son. Child Protection had also involved the school and the police. Anton was also connected to a police unit, which deals with children who have been abused. Angela believed Anton was afraid to report his father to the authorities. His father told him that if he returned to live with his mother he would never see him again. When he was younger his father threatened that he would be put in foster care if he lived with his mother.

5.11.7 GPs

Donna had spoken to her GP about the violence: *"My GP knows all about it...but they're busy and they're not counsellors...I might get ten or fifteen minutes with him"*.

Sandra's GP had told her: *"Just hold him until his breathing calms down"*. But she found she did not have the strength or energy to do this.

Jane took Josh to her GP when he refused to attend school, saying he was sick. Josh did have a bowel problem so there was a possibility that he may in fact have been sick. The GP did a thorough assessment and told Jane to bring Josh to him in his school uniform anytime he was saying he was too sick to attend school, and he would assess him. If Josh was not sick he would have to attend school. Jane thought this would have been a helpful strategy except that Josh would not comply with seeing the GP.

5.11.8 Police and legal

Many women spoke about involving the police as an option. However many were reluctant to do this. There were many reasons they did not involve the police, including concern that their son may get a criminal record. Sandra worried: *"He'll get a record or something"* and thought it might make matters worse and for a mother to call the police on her son was too drastic a step.

Effie and her brother had called the police on a number of occasions. She spoke about: *"Trying to call the police and getting the phones ripped out of the wall. The house was barricaded and it was two or three in the morning and all I was doing was crying in the house and couldn't call any one...for help"*. She experienced contact with the officers positively but as soon as they'd walk out the door George would revert back to his abusive behaviour. The police told her there was not a lot they could do because he was under eighteen years. The police were helpful in assisting her to take George to a hospital based adolescent mental health inpatient unit. They came to the house to collect him however her son refused to stay there.

Kate asked her sixteen-year-old daughter to call the police when Bradley came into the house with knives. The police were shocked to hear Kate had no support. They recommended that she attend a parenting program at a neighbourhood house, which she found very helpful.

Veronica whose son, for several years, had perpetrated physical and emotional violence against her twelve-year-old daughter said it only stopped when her daughter took out a *'restraining order'* on her son with the assistance of the police: *"That shook him up, that shook him up quite a lot, it actually made him sit back, stop and think"*.

Susan had taken out an Intervention Order against her son. He no longer lives with her.

5.11.9 Parenting groups

Four mothers attended adolescent violence to parents parenting groups. Kate found it helpful to learn new parenting strategies including warnings, removing objects he used as threats (such as knives) and trying to follow through with the suggested strategies. The course has also helped Kate to use humour at times as a way to de-escalate things: *"It nips it in the bud sometimes"*.

Kate also attended a neighbourhood house program. This was helpful.

5.11.10 Schools

Most women felt that schools had not supported their sons with their learning difficulties, social difficulties, bullying or being bullied. Nor did mothers feel supported to deal with their sons' abuse and violence.

Kate had contacted the Education Department because Bradley was constantly being suspended and was about to get expelled. She was disappointed they told her to wait until he was expelled before they could act. When she pushed them they suggested a school she could contact. It took a lot of ringing around to get Bradley linked in with a new school. She spoke about how helpful this school was. Angela's son was seeing a school counsellor. She did not know if the experience had been helpful.

5.11.11 Youth workers

A number of women stated they would like their son to be linked with youth workers. They thought a youth worker would be a positive male role model for their son and give him the support not provided by his father. Some women spoke of the difficulty in getting their sons to attend appointments where they could potentially engage with a youth worker and the expectation that the sons should attend an appointment at the youth worker's work place meant that potentially useful support was unable to be accessed. Youth workers who were flexible and utilised outreach approaches were seen to be of great value by the women.

Angela had spoken to youth workers who have asked her to bring Anton to see them "*...but he refuses to go*".

Patricia had been in contact with a youth resource officer who is linked in with her local police station. This had been helpful because, although she hasn't yet used it, she has worked with him to develop a safety plan that involves ringing the police and leaving the house. The resource officer had also spent some time with Jason "*...and is trying to be a male role model to him and actually takes him on outings and spends time with him*". Patricia described this man as a "*godsend*". She found out about him from her school. She appreciated his flexibility in engaging with Jason: "*He'll just pop in at school or pop in at home or he's even taken Jason on outings*".

Veronica's son and daughter have youth workers to support them.

5.11.12 Big Brother

Some women spoke about their efforts to involve male mentors as a positive influence for their sons.

Donna had organised Big Brother for Angus (her younger son who was just about to move in with his father) only to find that the father refused this. Donna said: "*That's a real real shame because... Angus ...has a few difficulties, doesn't really have close friends at school and his father works a lot...*"

5.11.13 Male mentors

Sandra spoke about a male mentor where the relationship between the male mentor and Daniel had been largely informal. She thought this had been beneficial and had definitely helped to modify some of Daniel's behaviour.

5.11.14 Nutritionalist

Sandra whose son had been diagnosed with ADHD consulted a nutritionalist both about the ADHD and her son's weight.

5.11.15 Religious beliefs

Marian would *"pray every night that God protects him and keeps him safe and keeps him away from alcohol and drugs"*. She had spoken to pastors about Chris but did not comment on the helpfulness of this. She commented: *"Spiritually, within myself, I do a lot of praying"*.

5.12 Parenting

Women who experience trauma may be unable to provide their children with the nurturing, guidance, support and physical care required for their development. The experience of family violence means women are often unable to meet their own needs, let alone those of their children. Donna talked about how often her children saw her *"being sick at times and in bed"*. Family violence is not just an assault on individuals in the home. It is also an assault on the relationship between the victim (most often the mother) and her child (Humphreys, C. et al, 2006). It is therefore not surprising that women in this research reflected that they wished they had been able to parent differently and that the mother/son bond was stronger.

All women reported their parenting style differed markedly from their partners'. Most women used styles of parenting that were non-abusive and non-violent. They did not like to *"smack"* their children and tried to parent in a way that emphasised responsibility through using consequences or explaining and communicating to their son. Donna highlighted the difference in parenting styles as contributing to Jarred's and Angus' problematic behaviour: *"It's hard. You can't have two separate rules...I just think it doesn't work anyway; violence and smacking...even when I've smacked them on the bum...that's a last resort...there's been enough violence and horror in my family"*.

Patricia said her ex-partner's parenting style was *"more a bullying thing...whereas I would try and explain to Jason why I didn't like what he was doing or why it was inappropriate and let actions have consequences"*.

A number of women reflected they had parented in ways that they would not use now. Several women, who spoke about smacking their son as a child, reflected they would now use explanations and consequences. Most of the women found parenting difficult as they struggled with the effects of their partners' abuse and violence, sons' misbehaviours and diagnosis and little support. Donna said: *"I do believe in consequences and I tried and I failed...There were inconsistencies...especially when I wasn't well I'd tend to give in, because I felt so worn down and ill...didn't have the strength"*.

A number of women were diagnosed with physical and mental illness, which they attributed to their experience of abuse and violence from either, or both their partners and sons. Donna *"suffered from depression a long time, years and years...due to difficult family circumstances"*. This made it difficult to parent: *"You have to keep functioning...it's not on a very good level though...a bit like a robot"*. Donna also experienced fibro myalgia, which left her prone to migraines.

Angela described her ex-partner's discipline as *"barbaric"*. She stated his approach was in complete opposition to hers from the moment Anton was born. Angela also stated that most of the time her ex-partner would not play any fathering role nor discipline Anton but if he did something to annoy his father he would become physically abusive. Much of her ex-partner's discipline was inconsistent, depending on his mood. Jane stated her ex-partner was alcoholic and verbally abusive to her and Josh: *"We went*

through the Family Court ...there was no access arrangement...because Max [her ex-partner] was unreliable and verbally abusive". She added:"I think he's [her son] seen it from his father, he's learnt that's the way you relate".

The women overwhelmingly asserted that because their ex-partners abused them, they also undermined their ability to parent in the way they wanted. Almost all reported that when they lived with their ex-partners, they took the main responsibility to parent their son. Sandra said: *"He was very caught up in his career and...I was the one researching and reading and trying to discover and learn more [about parenting]". Sandra found Daniel's father's attitude changed when "he was told by other people that there were things going on and he couldn't deny it".*

Women felt that their partners were not involved in parenting or disciplining their son when they lived with them, and following the separation. Donna said: *"He was basically like a fourth kid...he didn't really contribute". If they were involved, their idea of parenting and discipline was almost totally opposed to their partners'. Donna said: "I would get ignored, my opinions would be put down, any authority of mine would be undermined, you know "Don't listen to your mum"...Ivan fuelled the situation at that time, he'd tend to be like, "Leave the kids alone" or "Don't listen to what mum says"; "It's alright, you can do that". She stated "...that's when all the problems started, because you can't have...two separate rules. I think that caused a lot of problems later on".*

At the same time, their partners blamed the women for their sons' problems. Jane's ex-partner said: *"He's been skating past that football training when he should've been there – you should make him go to football". Veronica described how her husband was supportive "food-wise", meaning he put food on their table. She described though how it was her responsibility to find money to pay any bills and the rent. When she would cry he would tell her not to and would never be supportive or caring about what she was experiencing. Veronica described being blamed for any thing her children did wrong, although she was almost totally in charge of the parenting. Marian described how her ex-partner would always blame Chris' poor behaviour on someone else: "Oh, so what? Big deal. His teacher's just a bitch anyway". When she told her ex-partner about Chris' rudeness or other poor behaviour at school he would say: "Who cares?" Marian revealed that although she had been separated from her ex-partner for over fourteen years, the father would constantly undermine her: "What the fuck does your mother know? She's just a dumb bitch". She attributed Chris' lack of respect for her to his father's influence. She, on the other hand, tried to be diplomatic: "I never told Chris about his father [the violence] and why we broke up". One night Marian's drunk ex-partner had told her new partner he was coming over to bash him and her. In fear she rang the police who pulled him over and charged him with drink driving. Her ex-partner told Chris what had happened and blamed her for his being locked up.*

Sandra's son was diagnosed with ADHD. Daniel's father did not agree that he had a problem and blamed others, [which Daniel also does]. Sandra thought Daniel needed a lot of support, but her ex-partner thought other influences had led to his son's problems.

Patricia thought her ex-partner had contributed to Jason's violence because he had not taken a stand against it. She said: *"Obviously Gary [her ex-partner] wouldn't agree with him abusing me and his sister [but] he never really talked to him and tried to give him alternative ways to express himself or calm down or anything like that".*

Some women did not communicate about their sons' poor behaviour, fearing their violent partner would take it out on their son. Patricia said: *"If the kids, particularly Jason, had been playing up and I relayed that to him, he would like just lose it more to hit Jason, which I wasn't happy about...a lot of what was going on with Jason and me I didn't relay to him because I didn't want Jason to be on the receiving end of...being smacked". Patricia's ex-partner used derogatory nick names for their son, referring to him as "Blob boy" because he was overweight. Although she asked him not to refer to him this way, her partner "...couldn't see anything*

wrong with it". Patricia spoke of her husband's style as being "more a bullying thing" whereas she would "try and explain to Jason why I didn't like what he was doing or why it was inappropriate and let actions have consequences". She did not see her partner as undermining of her parenting but rather that he was "disconnected...he never did anything with the kids, never even really talked to them, never interacted with them, never played games with them..."

Kate spoke of how her ex-partner did not like to "smack" the children but would yell at them "which would scare the kids...they certainly fear their dad..."

Some women also found that if they tried to enforce boundaries their children would rebel. Donna said: "When I tried to [enforce consequences] ...that's when they'd play up even worse, deliberately trying to make my life a living hell".

5.12.1 Sole parenting

Most women felt the burden of parenting without support. They spoke of the physical, emotional and mental health impact of sole parenting. They were parenting alone and also recovering from their ex-partner's abuse and violence. Their experience of financial hardship, stress, poverty, poor physical health and lack of support made parenting difficult, despite their best intentions. Even though they had left the relationship, women experienced their ex-partners' undermining of their parenting and relationship with their children.

Sandra talked about the difficulty of being a sole parent: "You've got to make all your decisions...I'm constantly searching out support programs...You take on all the worry because...I don't have a healthy working relationship with my ex...I don't have anyone to talk to apart from my family, who are very supportive but there's only so much they can do".

When Patricia's relationship ended three years ago it felt no different because her ex-partner had been so emotionally and physically distant (he was often away). She felt the financial pinch and missed adult company. Patricia described the difficulty having "...to work so that we can have a certain level of lifestyle... I really needed to be home as well [though] I felt when I was at home that it was quite useless anyway". She thought because she was a sole mother Jason had more of a free rein: "He quite frequently tells me it's his house and he intends to kick me out".

Kate thought that if there had been a male in the home things would be different (she and her ex-partner separated when Bradley was six months old). She said: "If Mike [Bradley's father] asks him to do anything he'll do it. [If a man was here] and I said something and he didn't do it, well then the male would come in and... probably negotiate and then he'd most probably do it". She thought that if a male was in the house and Bradley, her son did anything abusive to any female in the house a male would tell him: "That's not on".

5.13 Parenting and discipline

Several women spoke of "smacking" as a means to discipline their son, although most did not advocate this. Women did not describe what "smacking" meant. Veronica's husband continued to "smack" Cory until he was seventeen-years-old (his current age). When asked to explain why this method made things worse, Veronica said: "When he actually smacked him for doing something bad, he'd [the son] end up with black eyes".

Three to seven years old

Several women described their sons as 'unsettled' as infants. Sandra reported when Daniel was born he was "very unsettled" but her partner did not agree with her view. Sandra used 'time out' and consequences: "Removing stuff and being taken out of something he wanted to do or play with". As Daniel got older she also used star charts to reward positive behaviour. By early preschool there were lots of tantrums and fits of anger. When Daniel started school he experienced social difficulties. She said: "I was the catalyst for having him assessed and diagnosed...and treated for ADHD".

Patricia reported having good routines; around mealtime and bedtime, for example. Jason was hard to settle at night so she would "...put him back to bed, pat him on the bed or talk to him softly".

Most mothers described trying to talk to their sons. Donna would say: "Please don't do that, it's not right. Say sorry to your brother. That kind of thing. Please put your toys away". Veronica stated: "I would never smack him because I honestly don't believe in smacking children". But her husband did believe in "smacking" and would do this to punish Cory. She preferred 'time out' though at times she would shout and if that didn't work she would smack Cory.

Marian remembered her five-year-old son returning from his father's house with a huge black bruise on his back. Her ex-partner would also be emotionally abusive to Chris when he returned to his mother's home. She described an incident where Chris had pulled a boy's ears quite severely in prep grade. They had met with the teacher and the mother had sat down with Chris to explain how to behave well and play nicely. The father's reaction was to say the teacher was "a fucking stupid moll" and had no idea how to discipline their son.

Susan spoke of Lucas' father's violence to her four-year-old son. His father would "whack" him over the head with an open hand, and "belt him around the head a bit" despite the mother saying not to do that. Because this "smacking" was so frequent the mother wondered if it resulted in any brain injury to Lucas who had learning difficulties at school. Susan described her parenting style as either authoritarian: "Just do it because I say", or relaxed. For example Lucas was able to go to bed when he wanted and she would not always follow through with things she asked of him. She reflected that she wished she had bargained more rather than saying things like: "Well, frickin' well go to bed" or "You're going to school, bad luck".

Angela remembered trying to reason with her three-year-old when he misbehaved. She attended an assertiveness course held at the school. At times she found it hard to control herself and would "chuck a na-na".

Seven to twelve years old

Mothers reported parenting strategies similar to those used when their children were younger. Donna spoke about: "Just explaining to them. Trying to teach them what's fair and not fair, just trying to provide them...with whatever morals a parent thinks is the right way".

Sandra's son, Daniel was diagnosed with ADD when he was seven-years-old and "was at times just completely out of control". She thought time out was "ridiculous" because she could not enforce it and the main method of discipline was "holding him". She also used "calming down strategies, withdrawing him and popping him into a warm bath". At times Sandra yelled at Daniel more in frustration: "We just didn't know what was going on. We were just chasing our tails". She and her ex-partner "probably used smacking in dangerous situations, ...because he was always taking off across the road and stuff like that".

Patricia spoke about speaking to Jason about his behaviour and telling him that he would need to give up one of his favourite toys for some time. She would ask him to sit in a quiet space although this was hard because by seven *"...he was...displaying some ADD traits and stuff"*.

Kate's son was diagnosed with ODD when he was seven-years-old. At times he would *"get really out of hand"*. She would put Bradley in a little room under the stairs *"...actually put him in there and shut the door... I'd actually hold the handle shut...sort of like time-out"*. She would tell him that when he settled down he could come out. She found that because Bradley's behaviour escalated so rapidly and got out of control, that this was one of the few useful strategies.

Susan who had separated and then reunited with her ex-partner found she *"...didn't have time to be reasonable and rational when I was dealing with this overgrown kid [the father] who was demanding"*.

Jane describes what a joy her seven-year-old son, Josh was. He participated in baseball, basketball, football and life saving. He had a structured life. If there were problems with his behaviour she would talk to him.

Angela, whose son, Anton was breaking things by the time he was seven-years-old, used to remove his privileges. But his behaviour continued.

Twelve to fifteen years old

Most women reported their sons were abusive and violent against their mothers by the time they were twelve-years-old. Women felt there was little they could do to stop their sons' behaviours. Most found using consequences or other parenting strategies difficult to implement as their sons developed. They also experienced consequences as less effective in changing their sons' negative behaviour.

Donna who spoke about trying to use consequences explained: *"That just didn't work because the more I would do that the worse they'd behave. That's when it got really [bad], threats..."*

Two women used withdrawal of privileges including the Internet. These strategies were helpful for a while but often exhausting to maintain. One also stopped driving her son to places he wanted to go and stopped pocket money and paying for damages he did to the property.

Kate would try and give Bradley a verbal warning that his behaviour was escalating. She would remove things he wanted, like the computer modem. She *"lost control"* and *"smacked"* Bradley occasionally. This happened when: *"I feel that I've got nowhere to go...and that's what I hate"*. For this reason she joined a parenting group to try to learn other strategies to deal with Bradley's behaviour.

Veronica observed Cory's behaviour changed when he was twelve-years-old. She would *"ground him"* or *"try to give him time out"*. But the time he was fifteen-years-old this approach no longer worked. One thing that was helpful was to take his mobile phone from him as a consequence for misbehaviour. She would call that *"time out"*. Sometimes he would become violent when she tried to do this, so she compromised and took it from him for five minutes, which worked at times.

Fifteen years old

By this stage many mothers reporting having lost control over their sons. Donna described: *"Basically I have no control over them now"*. Donna commented on her current parenting: *"I feel like I have to work on myself because I have no control over their behaviour...I have to work on myself and not allow them or Ivan or anyone to treat me like a doormat....I need to get a life, because up 'til now they were my only life and I haven't had a social life for many years. I don't go out, so I have to work on myself because that's not normal...I've got to get a life too"*.

Most women felt their ex-partners were not helpful in dealing with their sons' abuse and violence, especially when the sons became teenagers and their behaviour became more problematic. Donna explained: *"When I was finding it really difficult and the children were very out of control...he wasn't very supportive...he would say out of frustration things like "Oh I don't know, get a stick and smash 'em..."*

Patricia noted: *"It's really hard to implement any strategies because he is as tall as me and weighs a lot more than me".* Patricia tried to set boundaries and limits relating to computer use; the only strategy which made any difference. Jason *"quickly learned that he could intimidate and bully...us into submission...lots of swearing and yelling...just threatening us with violence".* Patricia worried that putting limitations on Jason may in fact make her more unsafe and that it was better not to try too hard to set boundaries. Jason, at fourteen had recently been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. She expressed that there were no interventions she could use *"because he has very little motivation with anything, he has very little interests... because of his size you can't send him to his room".* She said imposing any consequences means *"...he's likely to become violent as a result...which means he'll either react and hurt me or he'll destroy property in the house".*

Jane spoke of *"losing the battle"* in disciplining Josh, at fifteen years. She would try to put consequences in place such as not allowing his friends over but he would just go out anyway. She knew that *"...kids feel safer with boundaries...but I wasn't able to impose them".*

Marian said a significant change occurring in Chris from the age of fourteen years when his father allowed him more freedom. His father thought this freedom would *"let him grow up and be a man".* In hindsight she probably did too much for Chris: *"I never really let him deal with consequences in his life because I was always there, to make his lunch, to pack his sports bag...there was nothing Chris never had, there was nothing Chris ever missed out on, and if he ever did forget something, mum would be there".* She described how a social worker commented that she never let him deal with the consequences and responsibilities in his life. Chris started to get into trouble at school at fourteen-years-old. Marian used to try to use consequences. She said: *"Chris would lose a privilege whether that would be no lap top for a week, not going out for a weekend...missing out on telly, taking things away from him that he really loved doing".* She found her ex-partner would occasionally, but never consistently back her up. It came to the point where these consequences had no meaning for Chris.

Some women described vast discrepancies and inconsistencies between their own and ex-partners' approach to discipline, which resulted in little improvement. Veronica spoke of withdrawing privileges, like taking away Cory's Playstation and grounding him, not letting friends come over or making him stay at home when he wanted to go out.

Sandra attended a positive parenting program where she learned to use withdrawal of money as a consequence. Daniel damaged the house so one intervention was leaving the huge holes in the wall which he was expected to pay for and fix.

Angela described Anton as *"fifteen with a mind of a forty-five-year-old".* She described: *"If he does something wrong he'll be intimidating...the chest goes up, the breaking of this, the swearing, the cursing... I have to ignore it, let it go...and then let him come to me when he's good and ready...that's the best way I can approach it now".* She would only intervene if he hurt his younger brother.

5.14 Mothers' concerns for their sons' futures

Most women had grave concerns for their sons' futures. They worried about them finishing school, holding down a job, getting in trouble with the police, using alcohol and drugs and being violent to others. Their biggest concern was that their sons would be abusive and/or violent to their partners.

Donna commented: *"My biggest concern is when they know a girl better...I pray it doesn't happen but I can see how they've treated their sister".* She spoke about hoping her sons would later recognise her value as a parent: *"I just hope that they'll grow up and then be able to look back and realise I was always there for them and always have been and I've done the mum thing just like any mother...and to the sports events and that's hard when you're a single mum".*

Patricia spoke of being *"...very concerned about his future and his lack of ability to get an education"*

Veronica spoke about her seventeen-year-old son's drinking. She described: *"He goes totally crazy and then he starts showing aggressive behaviour and he gets really violent towards everyone".* She worried about Cory's ability to handle alcohol and what impact that may have in the future.

Effie whose son was fourteen-years-old wondered if *"...he's going to get better or as you get deeper into the teenage years...worse".* She was scared that because George had been abusive to her he would *"...grow up to be an adult who's going to be abusive towards other people and women".* Effie also said she *"would really like him to get help before he gets older...I don't want him to be violent; a person who's going to do something horrible in society. I'm scared of things like that...because he's bottling things up. I don't want him to have a criminal record...I'd rather him not be punished but be treated. I'm really afraid of what he'd got inside him...I want him to have a normal life and a happy life, and to have functioning relationships, because at the moment he doesn't want to see his friends. He's got no friends...at recess and lunchtimes he calls me...but I want him to play with his friends. That's normal. Calling his mother is not normal. So something's wrong".*

Marian wondered about her sixteen-year-old son's future relationships: *"It's a regular thought that I have...If you're going to talk to your mother in the way that you do, what are you going to be like when you're married?...In future when he's at a bar or when he's living with a girl, there's an absolute possibility that that will happen [being abusive or violent]"*

Marian whose ex-partner was violent said: *"...It's always been a fear of mine, that because I had a son...he would turn out like his [violent] father".* She feared Chris may end up on drugs or in jail or killing himself. She feels very pessimistic about his future.

Jane worried for Josh: *"If this is going to be his attitude to women...and to the way a family exists"*

Angela said: *"...Underneath it all he's a very good boy...It's so sad that he had to witness all that and display it... I pray for the future, when he's a grown man...It worries me"*

5.15 Positive change and hope

Support to women and their children after abuse needs to be undertaken in a spirit of hope and empowerment (Miller & Dwyer, 1997). This is vitally important when women have experienced their own trauma and may have lost hope for positive change. Some women had put in place strategies that helped the situation. They described these as changes in their parenting. Donna spoke about establishing baseline expectations of how she should be treated. She described Jarred demanding: *"Take me to Chadstone"* and her responding: *"I'm not taking you anywhere until you talk to me properly".* She said: *"I have to work on myself and not allow them to treat me as a doormat".* She found this change of strategy had some positive effects. Jane expressed hope for Josh's future, mainly because he was enrolled in a VCAL program and had started attending more regularly.

Part Five: Limitations of the Research

Adolescent violence to parents occurs from sons and daughters, against mothers, fathers and other carers. This research sought to explore a particular family context – sole mothers of sons. Therefore the findings are only relevant to this, and not other context of adolescent violence to parents.

The research findings do not in any way reflect the experience or family dynamics of all sole mothers raising sons or of sons who have experienced family violence. Although there were strong similarities between the experiences of the ten women, and their sons' violence them, the findings cannot be generalised to all sole mothers raising sons. Not all sons of sole mothers who experience family violence will use abuse and violence against their mothers and/or siblings. This research does suggest that boys who experience their father's violence may be at risk of being abusive or violent to women in adult life. There are many factors that circumvent this or influence boys' progression to using abuse and violence as adults.

Part Six: Summary and Conclusion

The research explored the experiences of ten sole mothers, from a range of cultural backgrounds, raising adolescent sons who were abusive and violent toward their mothers. The research findings are confronting and shocking. They demonstrate complex layers of the experience of abuse and violence, both intra- and intergenerational. The findings indicate that there are numerous and systemic causes of adolescent violence and that no one causal factor prevails.

The research highlighted the following trends:

Women experienced abuse and violence from their ex-partners, as well as their sons.

Women in this research had experienced their ex-partners' abuse and violence. This included physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, psychological and financial violence. The abuse and violence differed in its form and severity, but left lasting and severe effects.

Women minimised the violence (from ex-partners and sons)

Women's language indicated they minimised the severity of the violence and its impact. They used this language in relation to their sons' violence against others as well as to themselves.

The experience of abuse and violence had severe and lasting effects.

The experience of abuse and violence from their sons had severe physical, emotional, psychological, social and financial implications effects. These were similar to those described by women who experience family violence from adult men. These effects left women living with fear, guilt, shame, and embarrassment and socially isolated. Women experienced long term health and well-being impacts. They felt as though they were "*walking on eggshells*". Women were overwhelmingly devastated that their sons could treat them in this way and that the mother/son relationship was so negative.

Sons' violence to their siblings, particularly sisters, was severe

The frequency and severity of violence from the adolescent males to their sisters and brothers was highly concerning. All of the sons who were abusive and violent to their mothers were violent to their younger siblings. Three girls, and two boys who were younger than their male siblings had experienced their brother's violence and were still unsafe. The effects of this experience were severe and traumatic. Two sisters who were older than their brother experienced verbal abuse from their brothers. Two boys of similar ages (both who were abusive to their mother) physically fought with each other.

Women and siblings who experience adolescent violence were unsafe

Women and siblings of sons who are abusive and violent were psychologically, emotionally and physically unsafe.

The women's sons had experienced hardship, grief and trauma

It is well documented that family violence has a cumulative and deleterious effect on early neurological development and attachment behaviours (DHS, 2007). This can manifest in language and developmental delay, ADHD type behaviours, attachment disorders, cognitive impairment and emotional detachment and/or dysregulation (Ibid). The sons in this research had experienced their mothers' ex-partners perpetrating abuse and violence against their mothers. Some had been raised by women who were themselves seriously impacted on because of their own experience of abuse. Mothers were anxious, stressed, depressed, fearful and exhausted from their own experience of abuse and violence. Some sons also experienced direct abuse and violence from their fathers. The findings of this research support other research that children's experience of family violence is profound and has far reaching effects on their future development and relationships.

Sons' abuse and violence toward their mothers reflected their fathers' or step-fathers' attitudes and behaviours

All women observed that their son used the same or similar words as their father when they verbally abused their mother. They showed a similar lack of respect and contempt toward their mothers, which was reflected in the way they spoke to and their behaviour towards their mothers. Most women felt their sons had learnt these attitudes and behaviours from their fathers.

Sons are at increased risk of homelessness

Young people may be at risk of homelessness as a result of experiencing family violence and/or primary relationship breakdown (National Youth Commission, 2008). The contribution of adolescent violence to parents to youth homelessness has not been well researched, however this research highlighted the risk that young people may be made homeless as a 'last resort' if they do not stop their abuse and violence. Women reported their sons' use of drugs and alcohol, which is another risk factor for homelessness. Many women felt the only solution to address their sons' violence was for them to leave home. This was not their preferred solution; they felt there were no other options and the impact of their sons' violence on them and siblings meant they felt they had to take this difficult step. Some sons went to live with their fathers or their mothers' parents. Others lived independently. For some this meant that they no longer lived with family members who actively cared for and supervised them. This placed them at risk of homelessness.

Sons' fathers or step-fathers undermined the women's parenting

Howard's (1998) evaluation found that men who had been violent toward their partners and were attending individual or group counselling to improve their parenting may further manipulate and control their partners by claiming they have superior parenting knowledge and skills. This effectively further undermines women's parenting. Men who are abusive and violent to their partners undermine their parenting and the mother-child relationship. This may continue when the relationship ends, when children have contact visits. Some women in this research had separated from their partners when their sons were babies or toddlers, yet their ex-partners still perpetrated abuse against them and undermined their parenting and the mother-son bond, through their ongoing contact with their son. Sons' fathers did not support the women to parent their children in a way that was consistent with the mothers' values. Fathers were either uninvolved or absent in their parenting or were inconsistent and abusive to their child. Many fathers actively undermined the women's parenting by encouraging their sons to disregard and disrespect their mothers. The effects of family violence also undermined women's parenting because women experienced depression, fatigue, stress and other responses to the abuse. A few women parented inconsistently and used inappropriate forms of parenting, such as smacking.

Most women had tried to parent appropriately

The presence of a healthy primary caregiver is an important factor in supporting children to recover from the experience of trauma (Perry, Pollard, Blakely, Baker & Vigilante, 1995). Women in the research wanted to support their children and wanted to be 'good' parents. Most tried to use positive parenting strategies such as limit setting, consequences and 'time out'. Many had been unable to access meaningful and appropriate support for their sons and themselves. This increased their children's risk of maladaptive behaviours. Some women reflected that they could have parented differently, for example in a less authoritarian manner.

Women found it difficult to access appropriate and useful support

There are few resources, such as parenting after violence courses or specific counselling, to support women who have left violent partners and are parenting. Adolescent violence to parents, like family violence to women, is contextualised by secrecy, shame, blame and guilt. It is complex because sons

perpetrate the violence against those who have a primary role to care and nurture. This makes it difficult for women to seek help and implement strategies to stop the abuse and violence. Women in this research had gone to enormous lengths to seek help for their sons and to get the abuse and violence to stop. One had contacted six services before she received an adequate response. Many reported that services were not responsive or helpful; in fact some women experienced being misunderstood or blamed. Some felt professionals did not appreciate the complexity and difficulty of the women's situation, nor the women's safety concerns for themselves, their sons and the sons' siblings. Some women had positive responses from professionals, both for themselves and their sons. Four women attended adolescent violence to parents programs. All found these helpful, although one woman found listening to the other participants' stories too distressing. Some women had attempted to gain professional support for their sons but found it inflexible, inaccessible and unresponsive. For this reason adolescents who have experienced family violence as children or adolescents can easily 'fall through the cracks' and miss out on support that could make a significant difference to preventing their violence to others and increasing their own safety and wellbeing.

Sons who experience their fathers' violence to themselves or others may be at risk of perpetrating abuse and violence as adults

It is estimated that family violence affects one in four Victorian women and is perpetrated mostly by men. Recent research found twenty-five per cent of young people witnessed domestic violence against a female parent (PADV, 2000). The experience of family violence is a risk factor for adolescent males to grow to be men who perpetrate violence against women. Many women interviewed expressed a fear of this eventuating. Responding to adolescent violence to parents is complex because whilst the sons are perpetrators of violence, they may have also experienced significant impacts, including trauma.

Family violence negatively impacts on the development of children

A large and growing body of research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and the social sciences has shown the impact of traumatic events on a child's development. As children attempt to cope, as their brains adapt to the negative environments, their true emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and social potential may be diminished (Perry, Pollard, Blakely, Baker & Vigilante, 1995).

Almost all women in the research reported that their sons had developmental and behavioural difficulties from their early years. This research cannot make any firm conclusions about the link between experiencing family violence (either directly or through their father's abuse and violence against their mothers), perpetrating adolescent violence and having a behavioural or mental health diagnosis but the high incidence of boys with diagnoses warrants exploration. Five boys had a mental health diagnosis. Another had a physical health diagnosis. Another had been diagnosed with a learning disability. It seems reasonable to assume there is some relationship between the experience of family violence and the negative impact on children's development. Most boys had learning problems, often from a very young age. There is no empirical evidence from this research to link the experience of family violence with poor educational outcomes, however the experience of family violence, the high incidence of mental health diagnoses in sons, their poor educational outcomes and their abuse and violence to their mothers seems far from coincidental.

Women felt attached to their sons

Despite the abuse and violence most mothers felt a connection to their sons. Some women had mixed emotional responses; they could "hate" their sons at times. Most women spoke of moments of affection, where their sons would cuddle them and they experienced closeness. A few women commented that this closeness was sometimes their sons' manipulation designed to get what they wanted or that it could quickly be replaced with "moodiness".

Women did not identify the influence of gender

One literature review (PADV, 2001, 73), which examined young people's attitudes to and experiences of domestic violence, showed that "attitudes that strongly 'support' domestic violence are closely associated with notions about supporting male dominance of females (patriarchy)". Women in this research were asked to consider the influence of gender in their relationship with their son. Few women saw this as significant. However, it could be surmised that 'gendered ways of being' in the relationship between mother and son were stereotypically constructed; for example around the woman as care provider and nurturer and the son as dominant and entitled. The women reported relating to their sons as they had to their ex-partners. They tried to placate them, put their sons' needs before their own and others, were wary of offending them and 'walked on eggshells'. Their sons were like their fathers in their expectations and treatment of women. Patricia said: *"He would try and intimidate them [female teachers] more than if he had a male teacher. Gender issues [meaning disrespect] towards women...by the time he was in about grades four and five...He had little respect and didn't see them as equals."* Kate spoke about her thirteen-year-old son's attitudes to women: *"If he sees someone on TV or even girls in the street he might go..."sluts"; he'll say "sluts"*

Part Seven: Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerge from this research. Although, these recommendations specifically relate to male adolescents who perpetrate violence against their mother, most are relevant to adolescent violence to parents, regardless of the gender of adolescents, siblings and parents.

- 1. Male adolescent violence to mothers must be recognised as a form of family violence that seriously impacts on the safety, health and wellbeing of all family members.**
- 2. Adolescent violence to mothers must be highlighted through awareness raising campaigns that must also publicise supports available to family members, including the adolescents.**

These campaigns must raise awareness of the incidence, severity and impacts of adolescent violence to women and their children. Support options, including police and criminal justice options, must be available and accessible to women and their children, including the violent adolescents.

3. Further research is needed to explore:

- the frequency, severity and dynamics of male adolescent abuse and violence to mothers;
- the frequency, severity and dynamics of male adolescent abuse and violence to siblings;
- the impact of this violence on mothers and siblings;
- prevention of adolescent violence to mothers and siblings;
- enhancing the safety and wellbeing of mothers, sons and sons' siblings;
- the relationship between adolescent violence to family members and adolescent experience of family violence; and
- best practice response from professionals, including the police.

4. Specialised support must be accessible for women and their children.

The Victorian Government Initiative (2007) *every child every chance* is a positive step to ensure that children's rights and safety are protected and their development is promoted in culturally, age and gender appropriate ways. It acknowledges the impact of trauma on children who experience family violence. Early intervention to children who have experienced family violence and timely support to mothers who are escaping family violence is a key to preventing adolescent violence toward mothers and siblings, and adult male violence toward women.

An Early Intervention approach to support women and children who have experienced family violence must include:

- assessment of the impact of violence on the mother/son relationship and on the family system;
- assessment of the impact of living with family violence on children;
- assessment of the children's relationship with their father (and safety implications of this);
- assessment of the physical, emotional and psychological safety and wellbeing of women and children when adolescent violence is identified;
- assessment of the socio-emotional development of sons and their potential for aggression and violence toward others;
- support to address the impact of the violence on the mother/child relationship and on the family system;
- individual and family counselling for women and non-offending children;
- family counselling which includes the perpetrating adolescent where requested and where a family safety assessment is undertaken;
- the development and accessibility of group programs, including parenting programs to support women who experience adolescent abuse and violence;

- the development of group programs to support children and young people to recover from family violence;
- consideration of how best to engage male adolescents who are abusive and violent toward family members. The service response must support adolescents in their recovery from family violence, whilst maintaining the safety and wellbeing of women and siblings; and
- ensuring that programs and resources to support parents who have experienced adolescent violence must be culturally sensitive and recognise family variation and difference.

5. Professional development and training to support professionals to better assess and respond to adolescent violence to parents.

Service providers including child protection, family violence services, police and child, adolescent and family services must receive training on adolescent violence to parents and incorporate this into their work with families. An increased awareness and understanding of, and response to adolescent violence and its impact by service providers is urgently required.

Professional development and training must support the development and growth of services that supports parents who are experiencing, or have experienced adolescent violence.

6. Adolescent violence by sons against mothers should be understood through a gendered lens.

Support to family members and the male adolescents should include exploring perceptions about the roles and responsibilities of women and men and the beliefs and attitudes that support violence against women. Support to women who experience family violence must explore men's use of power and control and the impact of their violence and abuse on women's sense of personal agency, health and well being and parenting.

7. Men's behavioural change programs must include a component which supports men, including those that are separated from their partners and have children, to acknowledge the impact of their violence on their family and to support them to address this.

Additional resources are required for separate programs for men who have perpetrated violence against women and have children. These programs should be available for men to attend once they have been assessed to be ready to participate in a parenting program. This assessment must ensure that the safety and wellbeing of women and children is considered. Men should not participate in parenting programs until they have acknowledged and taken responsibility for their violence. Any parenting interventions for men must be accountable to their women partners (and where appropriate their children), and men's progress must also be assessed through information from current or ex-partners. Services must be proactive in safely engaging men and must also be aware that men may use this engagement to further manipulate and control women and undermine their parenting and their relationship with their children.

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