

ATTACHMENT RM-3

This is the attachment marked '**RM-3**' referred to in the witness statement of Dr Robyn Maree Miller dated 14 July 2015.

IMPACT TABLE 2: How does violence between intimate partners affect parenting?

It is vital to consider violence between intimate partners in the context of parenting because research shows that violence between intimate partners is more likely to occur between couples with children, often beginning during pregnancy. Violence between intimate partners is overwhelmingly a gendered issue with the vast majority of incidents involving a female victim and male perpetrator (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005). Other patterns of violence do exist (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005), but this paper adopts a perspective from within the dominant pattern of men's violence towards women.

Individual impacts	Parenting impacts
<p>Physical assaults may result in a range of injuries (e.g. bruising, scratches, cuts, burns, bone fractures). Long-term physical assault may result in reduced mobility, long-term adverse health effects, disability, miscarriage, sexual and reproductive health problems. A Victorian study showed that domestic violence is 'responsible for more ill-health and premature death in Victorian women under the age of 45 than any other of the well-known risk factors, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking' (VicHealth 2004a, p8).</p> <p>A well-established association exists between the experience of intimate partner violence and mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, trauma, self-harming and suicide) (Campbell 2002, Golding 1999, Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano 2002, VicHealth 2004a). Although not as strong, there is also an association between domestic violence and substance use (Golding 1999).</p> <p>Domestic violence includes sexual assault by an intimate partner (Heenan 2005). In a national survey of Australian women, 12 per cent reported experiencing sexual violence perpetrated by a current or former partner and 73 per cent of women who were sexually assaulted by their partner were also physically assaulted (Mouzos & Makkai 2004).</p>	<p>Mothering</p> <p>Mothers who have experienced domestic violence are frequently held responsible for 'failing to protect' their children (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan 2008). However, research shows that mothers make considerable efforts to protect their children (Mullender et al 2002). Women may choose to remain with violent partners because they believe it is too dangerous to leave. With evidence that violence frequently continues and may actually increase after separation (Holt et al 2008), such fears cannot be discounted. These findings suggest that a blaming approach with mothers is unlikely to be helpful.</p> <p>Effects of violence (e.g. pain, distress, anger, irritability, fear, reduced mobility, hospitalisation) may affect a mother's parenting capacity, as may mental health issues or substance use problems that emerge as a consequence of domestic violence. Domestic violence may result in mothers who are emotionally distant, unavailable or unable to meet their children's needs (Holt et al 2008).</p> <p>"I didn't have the same patience with the children when he was there, because I think I was frightened he was going to lose his temper" (mother cited in Mullender et al 2002).</p>

Individual impacts

Domestic violence is also linked with homelessness and housing instability for victims fleeing violent partners. About 100,000 Australians are homeless, including 7,483 homeless families (10,608 parents and 16,182 children). Some 12 per cent of the homeless are children under 12 (most accompanied by a parent) and a further 21 per cent are aged 12 to 18 years (mainly on their own) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Data from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) for 2007–08 show that the main reason females with children sought support was domestic or family violence (55 per cent) (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008a).

At its most extreme, domestic violence can result in death. In Australia, about 20 to 25 per cent of homicides were perpetrated by spouses (Mulrone 2003).

Characteristics of perpetrators

Perpetrators of domestic violence have been shown to display the following characteristics towards their spouses: control, entitlement, selfishness and self-centredness, superiority, possessiveness, confusion between love and abuse (e.g. claiming they would not become violent with them if they did not love them so much), manipulative, externalisation of responsibility, denial, minimisation and victim blaming (Bancroft & Silverman 2002). Service providers are cautioned to avoid making assessments about violent men's propensity for future violence based on their stated beliefs, because men who are violent towards their partners may make strong anti-violence statements while continuing their violent behaviour (Bancroft & Silverman 2002).

Perpetrators of domestic violence may experience homelessness, housing instability, relationship breakdown, separation from children, loss of contact and disintegration of father-child relationship, criminal charges, prosecution and incarceration as a result of their violent behaviour.

Parenting impacts

In their attempts to prevent or manage men's violence and as a result of living in fear, mothers have reported prioritising their partners' needs over those of their children and denying their children normal childhood experiences (Humphreys et al 2008, Holt et al., 2008).

"I was so hooked into placating him that I emotionally neglected the kids" (cited Mullender et al 2002).

Evidence suggests that violence can damage the mother-child relationship. Belittling, undermining, insulting and hitting women in front of their children may affect children's respect for their mother's authority (Bancroft & Silverman 2002, Humphreys 2007), and her ability to exercise authority and control over her children (Holt et al 2008).

Some research suggests that the effects of domestic violence on mothering may not be permanent. A US study found that women who had experienced intimate partner violence but were no longer victims had significantly better parenting scores than women who were experiencing intimate partner violence. However, there was no significant difference between women who had experienced intimate partner violence in the past and women who had never experienced intimate partner violence (Casanueva, Martin, Runyan, Barth & Bradley 2008). On a similar theme, children who had escaped domestic violence with their mothers predominantly felt that their fathers were to blame and reported wanting to stay with and support their mothers (Mullender et al 2002).

Individual impacts

Fathering

Research is limited on the effects of domestic violence on father-child relationships and on men's capacity to father. The fathering practices of men who are violent towards their intimate partners will vary along a continuum of abusive to optimal parenting. However, it is important to highlight that a man who perpetrates domestic violence can never be a fully responsible parent, because exposing children to domestic violence is itself abusive (Bancroft & Silverman 2002).

Bancroft and Silverman (2002) identified common parenting characteristics of men who were violent towards their spouses. They suggested that men who were violent towards their spouses were more likely to:

- Have developmentally inappropriate behavioural expectations of children.
- Generally be under-involved with their children and less physically affectionate, but at times (and unpredictably) to be powerfully present in the child's life, interacting with energy and humour and spending money freely.
- Be authoritarian and rigid when involved in the disciplining of children and more likely to use physical punishment and 'smack hard'.
- Be self-centred and put their own wants above the needs of their children, or even believe that children exist to meet their fathers' needs.

"They were never allowed to talk, they were never allowed to play, they had to be quiet. My son did not talk until a year after we left the refuge, because that's what they had to do at home ... They knew what he was like, I never had to say anything" (Mullender et al. 2002).

Parenting impacts

Children *experience* rather than passively witness domestic violence

The term 'witnessing' domestic violence implies that children are passive witnesses who see or hear the violence between the adults in their home. However, research shows that children – rather than being passive witnesses – *experience* domestic violence.

In a US study, mothers reported that 37 per cent of children were accidentally hurt during domestic violence, 26 per cent of children were intentionally hurt during domestic violence, 49 per cent of mothers were hurt protecting children, 47 per cent of perpetrators used the child as pawn to hurt mothers, 39 per cent of perpetrators hurt mothers as punishment for children's acts, and 23 per cent of perpetrators blamed mothers for perpetrator's own excessive punishment of children (Fox & Benson 2004).

Children are sometimes hurt as part of the torture and abuse of their mothers. They may be held hostage or threatened. Children may also be forced to watch or perpetrate the abuse of their mother, other siblings or pets (Radford & Hester 2006, Humphreys et al 2008).

Exposure to domestic violence is abuse

The psychological effects of witnessing verbal, physical and sexual assaults perpetrated on the mother, combined with the effects of living with a father who is frightening, inconsistent, intolerant and unable to put children's needs first, is abuse.

The toxic stress and complex trauma caused by living in a perpetual state of alert can damage the developing brain and have profound long-term psychological effects.

Individual impacts

- Behave in a manner that suggests they are jealous of their children. For example, many women report domestic violence starting during pregnancy and men being more likely to direct their assault towards the breasts and abdomen during pregnancy. Mothers and children frequently identify family events such as children's birthdays as occasions of violence.
- Undermine their children's mother (in addition to being violent towards her) by overruling her parenting decisions, ridiculing, belittling and insulting her in children's presence or to children and telling children that their mother is a bad or unsafe parent.
- Be manipulative with their children, for example creating confusion about which family members are responsible for violence and encouraging children to blame themselves or their mothers.
- Make statements and express emotions regarding their love and pride for their children and desire to be involved in their children's life, despite the reality of their under-involvement.

Children's reports of the damage or disintegration of the father-child relationship as a result of domestic violence cite betrayal of trust, loss of respect, seeing their father as a source of fear and terror, loss of love and hatred for their father (Mullender et al 2002).

"We do not see my dad now and don't want to see him. I am happy about not seeing him." (8-year old South Asian girl, cited in Mullender et al 2002).

Parenting impacts

Effects of exposure to domestic violence

Children living with domestic abuse display physical, developmental, psychological and behavioural effects, as well as the impact of trauma and developmental regression. They have been shown to have significantly poorer outcomes on 21 child psychosocial, developmental and behavioural dimensions, compared with those who do not witness abuse. Behavioural problems include acting out, violence and aggression towards others. Outcomes for child witnesses were similar to those where children were also directly physically abused (Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt & Kenny (2003).

Risks vary at different ages and stages

Family violence has different effects on children at different ages. In utero, the mother's physical and emotional distress has a direct impact on the developing foetus (Jordan, Sketchley, Bromfield, & Miller, in press). Assault of the mother may result in miscarriage, premature birth, physical injury or disability (Cleaver, Unell & Aldgate 1999, McGee 2000). Infants and younger children are at risk of being harmed while being held in the mother's arms during an assault; older children may be harmed while intervening to defend their mother from assault (Humphreys et al 2008).

Risks of physical abuse or sexual abuse

The presence of domestic violence puts children at higher risk of experiencing physical abuse, with rates of co-occurrence ranging from 45 to 70 per cent (Holt et al 2008).

Evidence also exists that the presence of domestic violence increases the risk of child sexual abuse (Holt et al 2008). If children are sexually abused, they may also be less likely to disclose. Perpetrator manipulation, threats and intimidation; damage to mother-child relationship; and a belief that their mother cannot protect them may delay or decrease the likelihood of disclosure.

Individual impacts	Parenting impacts
	The effects of domestic violence on women can result in mothers who are emotionally distant, unavailable or unable to meet their children's needs and therefore increase the risk of children experiencing neglect.