

The Victorian  Women's Trust

VICTORIAN ROYAL COMMISSION INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE

# *Reflections on gendered violence*

Submission from the Victorian Women's Trust and the Dugdale Trust  
for Women & Girls

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Victorian Women's Trust Ltd as Trustee

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I saw the light on the night that I passed by her window  
I saw the flickering shadows of love on her blind  
*She was my woman*  
As she deceived me I watched and went out of my mind

My my my Delilah  
Why why why Delilah  
I could see, that girl was no good for me  
But I was lost like a slave that no man could free

At break of day when that man drove away I was waiting  
I crossed the street to her house and she opened the door  
She stood there laughing  
*I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more*

Songwriters: Mason, Barry / Reed, Les  
Delilah lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

**Song sung by Tom Jones as principal entertainer at the AFL Grand Final September, 2014  
and watched by an estimated viewing audience of over 4 million Australians alone.**

## REFLECTION NO. 1: REFRAMING MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

*Six men were absolved from legal responsibility in the death of a drunken South Melbourne woman, notwithstanding their testimony that they had followed her from a public house and raped her. Her bruised body was found in a drain where she had apparently drowned.*

*A twenty-nine year old man was charged with the murder of his twenty-three year old wife after allegedly stabbing her to death because he believed she was having an affair. A man was charged with the murder of his ex-partner and her unborn child after allegedly beating her to death with a tomahawk. A man allegedly stabbed his wife to death with a pair of scissors after she had been turned away from numerous women's refuges that did not have the room to house her.*

What separates the first example of extreme violence from the others is *historical time*. The exoneration of the six men took place in 1884 while the other three examples occurred recently, in 2015.

Across this long span of time, there has in fact been no substantive change to this grim social picture.

As a society, we are a strange and troubling mix.

On the one hand, there are huge numbers of men where the question of being violent towards the women and children in their lives – physically, emotionally or psychologically – is *never* and *nowhere* on their cultural radar. They play active, strong and hands-on parenting roles; display respectful attitudes towards women in workplaces; experience loving personal relationships; enjoy the regard of their peers; and show leadership on questions of the representation of women in senior echelons of business, government and across the community.

Put simply, when men value women positively, respect them and love them - they do not hurt them.

This particular social and cultural dynamic is why societies that have higher levels of gender equality experience reduced rates of sexual and family violence.

But another social dynamic is also at play. *In this very same society of ours*, there are large numbers of Australian men socially and culturally shaped in ways that make them feel entitled to devalue and demean women; entitled to dominate and control and to harm others in the process.

These men are not robotic individuals somehow unaffected by forms of social conditioning. They move through our shared world, growing up in families, attending schools, participating in community activities and organisations and participating in workplaces. They are shaped by our society, learning from our cultural script, adopting stances that are legitimated and socially condoned. Tom Jones' song *Delilah*, describing the action of a jealous male in killing his girlfriend, is part of our cultural script written, embedded and handed down from generation to generation. Subliminally, the same lyrics work on women too - in that jealous rage is tacitly 'accepted' as the way things are between men and women.

Along this journey, *and without contestation, guidance and support*, boys and young men can absorb myriad negative influences and adopt rigid gender roles that feed a sense of over-arching

entitlement that has at its base, the sexist demeaning of women and girls and reinforcement of themselves as the powerful agents in relationships.

We seem to keep shying away from these central issues – that while some women can be mean and hurtful as individuals and as parents (and racist and homophobic as members of their society), hurting others in the process, it is largely men socialized to demean and disrespect women, and seek to exert control over women, who commit sexual assault in public places and commit most of the violence in homes.

Our submission focuses on Point 14 of the Discussion Paper provided by the Royal Commission:

**Research shows that it is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by family violence, and men who are violent towards them. For this reason, family violence is described as being 'gendered'. Although family violence is gendered, men may also be affected by it.**

Our plea is for greater intellectual honesty in analyzing the problem of violence in our society. We should be asking what we are doing in our society that shapes and embeds cultural and social conditions that source male violence that harms women and children.

By all means examine the family violence services and other systems that are in place and which can be better supported, but let's not lose sight of the need to examine the social and cultural forces at work that create and maintain the deep, sexist and misogynistic attitudes underpinning the violent behavior of many Australian men.

We should be able and mature enough to do this without becoming overly defensive. Positive manhood and non-violent models of masculinity are not under attack. What needs changing and rendered unacceptable (and indeed, abnormal) is the expression of an Australian masculinity that has normalized harm to women and children.

## REFLECTION NO. 2: THE PASSIVE VOICE OBSCURES PUBLIC ANALYSIS AND DEFLECTS COMMUNITY DEBATE

Dr Jackson Katz is a gifted analyst, writer, communicator and anti-violence campaigner, famed through such writings as *The Macho Paradox*. The Victorian Women's Trust brought Jackson out to Australia in February 2011 as part of our *Be The Hero!* violence prevention program for boys and young men which we launched in 2009.

Jackson argues that one of the ways we hold ourselves back in dealing with the problem of violence in our society is that we have subconsciously developed a *cultural script* that at its most fundamental shies away from naming the problem in a much more direct and intellectually honest fashion.

He borrows from the brilliant early work of linguist Julia Penelope and her paper entitled '*Patriarchal False Descriptions of Language*' presented at the National Women's Studies Conference in 1980. We reproduce it here, from pp. 111-112 of Jackson's book, *The Macho Paradox* (Sourcebooks, 2006).

Penelope dissects how the passive voice harms women. She warns women to be aware of the language they use to talk about violence, because current convention is antithetical to offender accountability and does not serve women's interests. Penelope illustrates her point with the following sequence of sentences:

1. ***John beat Mary.***
2. ***Mary was beaten by John.***
3. ***Mary was beaten.***
4. ***Mary was battered.***
5. ***Mary is a battered woman.***

The first sentence is a good, active English sentence. The second sentence rewrites the first, but this time in passive voice. This does not simply change the structure of the sentence; it changes the meaning. People who take remedial writing classes often turn in first drafts that are filled with passive sentences. They hedge their bets, qualify themselves, and dance around key points. A good writing instructor will typically tell them: "Say what you mean. Take responsibility for your ideas. Be direct." But the use of the passive voice is more than just bad writing; it has political effect. In this case it changes the subject of the sentence, which means he is close to dropping off the map of our consciousness. By the third sentence, John is gone, and it's all about Mary. In the final sentence, Mary's very identity – *Mary is a battered woman* – has been created by the now absent John.

People frequently ask why battered women stay with the men who beat them. They are right to ask the questions, although it is likely that some people's curiosity *about* battered women is actually frustration *with* them, because if you have never been a battered woman you rarely have a clue about the complexities of their families and relationships. Still it is instructive that few think to ask similar questions about batterers. *Why do they beat women? Why do so many American men seek to control through force the women they claim to love?* How might the use of active language point us toward answers to these questions?

Many advocates in the field, along with academics who study domestic violence, argue that the incessant focus on the behaviour of battered women is *de facto* proof of the prevalence of victim-blaming. Women who are the victims of violence are frequently held responsible for what was done

to them. This is a type of re-victimization that not only discourages women from seeking help or getting out of abusive relationships; it also makes it more difficult to hold abusive men accountable for *their* behaviour.

Victim blaming is popular for many reasons. In this case the passive voice – intentionally or not - *deflects attention off men at the same that it helps keep the focus on women.*

This, in turn, reinforces the idea that “violence against women” is exclusively a women’s issue, *which gets us back to the original problem: men’s central role is either overlooked or rendered invisible.*

The phrase “violence against women” itself contributes to this dynamic. It is so common and influential that relatively few people ever cause to contemplate what is wrong with it. But “violence against women” is a passive phrase. It contains no active agent. It is like saying “shit happens.” *No one* makes it happen, *at least no one we can identify from the available evidence.* It is just something that unfortunately occurs. If you insert the active agent – men – a new phrase emerges” *Men’s violence against women.*

It doesn’t roll off the tongue as easily, but it is far more accurate and honest.

**Taking the cue from Penelope and Katz, let’s now go back to the simple sentence: *John beat Mary.***

**It is crucial that we keep this focus on John. We can then ask (and research if necessary) the important questions *about John* – why on earth did he beat Mary in the first place? Has he done so before? What harm did he cause her? Did he harm others in the process? What caused him to do so? What has made him think he can do this sort of thing? What kind of social license does he think he has got? What are we going to do to stop him from beating Mary? Where must we start?**

### REFLECTION NO.3: PROFOUND CULTURAL SHIFT HAS TO OCCUR – AND CAN OCCUR

***One woman is murdered by her partner or ex-partner every week in Australia. One in three women has experienced physical violence and one in five has experienced sexual violence at some stage in their lives. This violence against women and girls in Australia remains at steady levels. It cuts across income and occupation, geography, cultural groupings and ethnicity.***

The media reporting is upsetting. Yet another death of a young woman raped and killed while walking home from a bar. People shake their heads, despairing in the knowledge that this problem of violence is hideous and seems to be getting worse. The media coverage and debate over solutions rises and swells, and then fades until the next violent episode presents itself.

More CCTV cameras on street ‘hotspots,’ more policing, tougher sentencing and alarm systems for women are necessary and will deliver some beneficial outcomes for many women and children. But even in combination, they will not lead to significant reductions in rates of sexual assault and family violence because they occur late in the process. *They do not address the attitudes and behaviours that source the violence.*

There is a growing sense in the community that something has to give. It can. It lies within us as a society - in a profound change in the beliefs, attitudes and practices that source, promote and maintain violent behaviours.

***The problem is every one of us who laughs at that revolting joke which severely degrades women – knowing that we shouldn’t. It is those of us who verbally abuse and physically intimidate women in the way that those young French women were abused on a Melbourne suburban bus....It is everyone of us who doesn’t say something when we start to suspect something isn’t right with our friends. We create the environment in which these people – who are 95% men – think it is OK to do what they do. (Ken Lay Victorian Police Commissioner 23 November 2013).***

Community leadership can produce the profound cultural change that paints violence as socially unattractive and inappropriate behaviour. Everywhere and every day, *confident in the knowledge that respectful relationships produce only social benefit*, people need to model respect in all of their interactions at the same time as challenging and contesting the attitudes and behaviours around them, at home, in workplaces, in schools and in their communities, that lead to disrespect, personal abuse and violence.

Australian men have a special role here. They can build and sustain a model of male leadership that accepts they have a critical role to play in actively contesting the violent attitudes and behaviours of their peers – in their families and kinship groups, at work, in their sports clubs and other social groups.

This is both a positive and visionary direction for our society.

As is always the case, cultural change does not come about by magic. We need to find the ways to instigate it. We have to become *practiced* – and improve our practices and self-confidence with teaching, community education, reflection, critical evaluation and community support.

We think men's leadership can make *the* difference in producing the profound change across Australia that reduces violence against women and children, but how can this be achieved?

For us, the breakthrough moment occurred in 2009 when our organization, the Victorian Women's Trust, designed and launched an innovative, web-based violence prevention program for boys and young men – *Be the Hero!* The project drew a great deal of its inspiration from the work of globally-respected anti violence campaigner, Dr. Jackson Katz and his "bystander" model that encourages boys and young men to build their lives to be free of violence.

In this approach, men play the crucial leadership role in violence prevention. They challenge the beliefs and attitudes of their male peers and foster the critical self-examination that triggers changes in behaviour.

In the space of only a couple of years, the experience of the *Be the Hero!* program shows that this shift can be quite remarkable. Our partner organisation, Melbourne Storm Rugby League Club, can attest to the significant and practical value of such an approach years on from the time their young men were trained and supported in applying the *Be The Hero!* approach to life off the field.

In the week prior to lodging this submission, we received the following feedback from a group of boys at a south eastern Melbourne high school who had participated in a *Be-The Hero!* training session. Here are their responses to Q7: Please provide us with any additional feedback you would like to share. Feel free to include suggestions, recommendations for other clips or videos we can use, activities which you think might be helpful, what you enjoyed from the program, etc.

*- I liked the different videos you got us to watch during your visits. It really sets aside what we could and can do in difficult situations :)*

*- i found the be the hero program really interesting, and helpful to understand the different forms of violence and what to do if I see violence. the be the hero program is really great and is very helpful to teens or young adults that are witnessing violence.*

*- I found it very confronting but good, it was very easy to understand the presenters and learn things that I have not particularly noticed before in a way. I now understand how easy it is to help someone when they need it and also understand the necessary precautions and steps in doing that. I also found out some very interesting things that I think about daily - about making the school a better place and myself a better person - Thanks :)*

*- the videos were good and provided a lot of information.*

*- In the Be The Hero program, I found it very useful and interesting in ways on how to stop bullying around the school, town and at other places.*

*- This program really made me realise what a bystander can do to help and what they can do to let the situation get out of hand, thank you for teaching us how to be a better person in the world.*



- this program was exactly what we needed there is far too many violent people and it needs to stop. I also really enjoyed that we were talked to about being respectful to other sexualities and promoting equality. thank you so much.

- I really enjoyed the 'Be the Hero' program because it helped me understand more about what happens to women and men in some relationships. It also helped me see what I could do if I were to be a person close by and how to change habits. I would definitely recommend this program to many people as I think it is very helpful.

- Be the hero is great. It will affect people in life, if a man hurting a women will know what to do if it happen to someone. Thanks

- I would like to say is thank-you guys for coming to our Secondary College. I really liked what you guys were talking about. You guys helped me with my relationship. I have learn a lot of about relationships.

- I really liked the program because I think it is something that needs to be spoken about and you did it well, you had my full attention and I was fully interested. Thanks for your time at our school.:

- i just want to say thank you a lot , I don't know many people who would talk about it but you have inspired me to help put a stop to it , and I liked it that way it is , but maybe more videos I loved watching the videos. I enjoyed the program because my family member was in a violent relationship once and nobody stood up to him. I hated how he used her but im glad he's in jail and she's happy now so keep doing what your doing !

- Women being persuaded, meaning that the person she loves is using his love against her... 'what if' questions pop in her head and ends up just going okay even if she doesn't really want to. If she says no it means no-guys shouldn't persuade women at all to do things that they might not enjoy.

- I think be the hero is good for other teen's to see when they have any trouble.

And from one of the teachers came this response:

*We have many students at our school who have suffered 'trauma' in their lives from a very early age. For them to understand more about 'who they are' and 'what they have to offer' in itself is a key intervention. The Be The-Hero! program focuses on these things, it gets the students to deal with 'power struggles' that they have within themselves and others around them. Through the program they learn how to create 'connection' and defuse 'conflict' without feeling shame or loss of masculinity. They begin to develop emotional literacy, to build confidence, self esteem and self awareness, they are able to hear the views of many of their peers in a safe 'place'.*

*I had a student in my office this morning who had absolutely 'spat the dummy' with a female teacher this morning and spoke to her disrespectfully. I drew on what he learnt in the Be-The-Hero! program and how he could have handled things differently and how he could have spoke to the female teacher. Jack decided to apologise and mend the relationship.*

*This program is invaluable to the many young men in our community, and I hope it continues for many years to come.*

***Be The Hero!* has been operating for some five years, with great success – reaching extensive numbers of young men, and enlisting the community and educational leadership of men.**

**Privately funded, it is one of several other major public initiatives around parts of the country that aim to support boys and young men to reject violence in their approach to life and in their relationships. It means there are now increasing numbers of young men and male leaders who are finding, developing, and practicing, the language and tools to effectively challenge the existing social norms that sustain violent attitudes and behaviours. They are progressively using these tools to empower other men to build the momentum for positive social change. It is working.**

## REFLECTION NO.4: THE GENDERED COMMUNITY BURDEN

The Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust has operated an annual grants program to support Victorian women and girls since its establishment in 1985. In that time, and supported financially by private donors and some philanthropic foundations, it has been able to make over \$6 million worth of grants to more than 500 projects across Victoria.

Prevention of violence against women and girls has been a constant theme and many of these grants have been directly or indirectly focused on supporting programs to address and prevent domestic violence and abuse.

The striking aspect is that the burden of care in dealing with family violence is highly gendered. Women experience the violence at the hands of men. Women do most of the heavy lifting at the community coalface.

The following overview provides some insight into the type and extent of this gendered burden – crucial community work that is still largely carried out by women; services for women and children that are struggling acutely to deal with the pressures imposed by high rates of family violence; country women struggling to provide even the most basic support for women and children; the challenge of ensuring women's voices are heard in male-dominated policy and political debate about family violence and sexual assault; and the knowledge that this gendered burden will not shift as long as a negative culture of sexism, misogyny, masculine entitlement, domination and control persists.

### The running issues

For the first decade of grant-making, the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust addressed domestic violence by focusing on projects highlighting survival, rape and murder of women and children as a result of domestic violence and advocating for change.

Grants made to organisations **highlighting women who were murdered** as a consequence of domestic violence included the *Domestic Murders Research Project* (1989/1990) which presented case studies of murdered women. In 1989 *Does the Man in your Life have a Gun* pamphlet was produced by the Australian Coalition for Gun Control. In 1992/93 The Women's Coalition Against Family Violence researched and published the book *Blood on Whose Hands* which examined cases of women and children who had been murdered in domestic violence, and the gendered dynamics of the issues including community, media and legal responses. The work was widely acclaimed and led to substantial reform.

Other projects included the Geelong Rape Crisis Centre's community education program focusing on presenting an affirmative message for survivors of sexual assault, and the Counterpoint Young Women's Refuge's project *Survivors Stories* (1996/1997).

From 1997 to 2001, many of the grants were to organisations specifically focused on **community development and capacity building**. Projects funded that reflected these issues include the Heather Osland Release Group's community project (1997/1998), South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault's *Creative Catharsis* project (2000/2001), Annie North Women's Refuge and Domestic

Violence Service's *Anna Lost, Anna Found* video project, and Gippsland Community Legal Service's *Navigating the Maze* project (2000/2001).

**Educational projects** supported by the Trust include the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (1998/99) *When Love Hurts*, Women's Health in the North (2007/08) for their *Triple Ms: Modern Media Mediums* which assisted in the education of young women experiencing or at risk of intimate partner violence, especially by using the emerging new media technologies and Doncaster Community Care and Counselling Service for their recent *iMatter* project to develop a Smartphone application again targeting young women experiencing or at risk of intimate partner violence.

Grants for projects on **economic abuse** include Good Shepherd's Youth and Family Service's project *Addressing Economic Abuse* (2011/2012) and Brenda House & Safe Futures Foundation's ongoing *Breaking the Mould* project (2012-2014) and the action research report by Wyndham Legal Service *Restoring Financial Safety: Legal Responses to Economic Abuse* which was launched by Minister Fiona Richardson in April 2015.

Grants for projects focused on providing support for **women facing legal issues** as a result of domestic violence include Fitzroy's Legal Service *Women and Family Law* program (2001/2002), Whitleion's Legal Program (2002/2003), and Werribee Legal Service *Wyndham Family Support Service* (2002/2003).

Grants for projects focused on **health and intervention** include the Royal Women's Hospital Foundation's project *Good Clinical Practice for Health Professionals* (2005/2006), the Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service's *Peak-a-Boo Club* for children and their mothers affected by severe family violence (2005/2006), and Lighthouse Foundation's *Homeless Mothers and Babies Psychological Wellness Program* (2013/2014).

During 1986 to 2001, many of the projects had a broad focus and often focused on all **survivors of domestic violence**. However, since 2002 the projects supported have shifted toward being more specific in their region and target groups.

The Trust also increased its focus on providing grants to **organisations working in rural and regional Victoria**. These included the Ballarat Centre Against Sexual Assaults' *The Pathologisation of women claiming domestic and sexual violence in the Victorian and family court* project (2003/2004), Gippsland Women's Health Services' *Respectful Relationships* project (2005/2006), the Grampians Community Health Centre's *Behind Closed Doors* project (2008/2009), and the WRISC Family Violence Support Service Ballarat based project *Women's Private Rental Access* (2010/11).

The Trust has also increased its efforts on **collaborating with organisations** working on a specific aspect of domestic violence, as well as supporting particular groups, including women with a disability, from CALD backgrounds, and Indigenous communities. Examples of projects specifically for women from **CALD backgrounds** include the Victorian Trades Hall Council & Working Women's Health's *Violence Against Women in the Workplace* project (2003/2004), the ongoing Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's *Women's Human Rights Advocacy Program* (2006-2009), the Wombat Housing Maribyrnong Youth Accommodation Program (2010/2011) and the Whittlesea Community Connections *Women's CALD Communities Family Violence* project (2012/13 - 2013/14).

Projects to support **Victorian Indigenous women** include South Western Centre Against Sexual Assault's *Wananga Kooneen Pa project* (2001/2002), McAuley Community Services *Switch Project* (2009/10), Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative's *Peeneeyt Ngarrakeetoon Woorn (Strong Family Camp)* project (2010/2011), Healesville Indigenous Community Service Association's *Indigenous Women's Health and Healing Circle* (2010/11) and Gippsland Lakes Community Health / Yoowinna Wurnalung Healing Service's *Strengthening Community Workshops* (2011/12).

Projects to support **women with a disability** include the Domestic Violence Resource Centre's *Sowing the Seeds of Change* project (2009/10), the Federation of Community Legal Centres *Making Rights a Reality for Victims with Cognitive Impairment* (2010/11), Housing Resource and Support Service for the project *Women with Disabilities Empowering Service Providers to Respond to Family Violence* (2010/11) and the Women's Mental Health Network for their *Women Consumers of Mental Health Services Speak Out* project (2011/12).

In 2011 the Trust's grants program had a major focus on **safety for women and girls** through projects that tackle domestic violence and sexual assault, with the majority of grants directly addressing this focus. Some were to distinct population groups, while others had a broader perspective or geographical reach. While some have already been mentioned it is important to note the largest grant of \$43,000 went to the Women's Domestic Violence Resource Crisis Centre for their project *A Right to Safety – Planning for Disability Access to Women's Domestic Violence Services*. Another was for important new research to investigate the links between domestic violence and international parental child abduction, through International Social Service Australia's work, with further funding provided the following year for stage 2 of their work. Youth Projects in partnership with the Centre Against Sexual Assault conducted the *Creative Arts Project for Women*, especially targeting homeless women. Monash University's Department of Criminology in partnership with the Domestic Violence Resource Centre received a \$20,000 grant to revisit the 1992 domestic homicide publication, *Blood on Whose Hands*, with a view to providing a critical reflection since then, as well as looking at the impact of recent defensive homicide legislation and encouraging fresh debate on family violence law, improved community education and greater media accuracy in reporting.

In addition to one off projects, some of the Trust's grants have allowed **a continuum of research or support programs**. Examples are the previously mentioned 2012/13 Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service project *Addressing Economic Abuse* which grew out of an earlier grant *Researching the Gap: Recovery needs of Women in Domestic Violence* (2007/08) and has led into their current research grant *Economic Security for Survivors* (2014/15) which aims to scope and develop a range of indicators to quantify the impact of family violence on economic security of women and children. South East Centre Against Sexual Assault has used a series of innovative grants to better engage and support their clients – the *Creative Workshop Video Diary*, the *Trauma Focused Fitness Program* and the *Reflexology and Massage Program* (2011 to 2014).

Finally, it is important to recognise the work of several **ground-breaking projects**, sometimes conducted or funded in partnership with other organisations, with concepts often developed and guided as part of our broader advocacy and leadership work. These include:

The ***Be-the-Hero! project***, initially funded by VicHealth, designed by the Victorian Women's Trust and rolled out across the community in partnership with the YWCA Victoria (2009-2012). This work was complimented by a speaking tour by Dr Jackson Katz hosted by the Victorian Women's Trust.

The ***Reality and Risk*** project was co-funded by the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust. Led by Maree Crabbe and Dave Corlett on behalf of Brophy Youth and Family Services (2008/09 & 2013/14), they conducted research and produced a documentary film and educational material on the pervasive impact of pornography.

The Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust also funded a year of operation of ***Bsafe*** whereby Women's Health Goulburn North-East could provide more ***Bsafe*** personal alarm kits, for women and children escaping domestic violence in the region, to enable them to remain safe in their homes and community. The grant also enabled further evaluation of the effectiveness and advocacy of the program, especially its benefit for rural women.

A major grant from the Victorian Women's Benevolent Trust was made to General Practice Victoria in 2010/2011 to assist the ***Family Violence in General Practice Peer Education*** project (2010/11) which involved the research and design of a peer education program to increase general practitioners awareness of family violence with view to improving patient management and treatment responses. This triggered our interest in supporting the ***Champions of Change*** project at Monash University's Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (2012/13) which developed a program to educate undergraduate primary care health professionals to recognise and respond to family violence and sexual abuse. Following the initial Trust's grant, this work was supported by an Australian Government grant to develop a national learning and teaching resource on family violence in the tertiary education sector.

In compiling this snapshot, we hope we have provided some understanding of the ways in which the burden of care for women and children who have violence committed against them by men in their lives is highly gendered.

It is important to note that many of these grants have only been possible due to the support of a host of private donors. In the main this financial support has also come largely from individual women with some additional assistance from private foundations and partnerships with other philanthropic organisations.

The cost of family violence to Australian society has variously been estimated to exceed \$13billion annually. It is in everyone's interests to see the rate of family violence decrease, and decrease markedly in the years to come. When men's leadership increasingly comes to the forefront at all levels of society, when men mainly do the challenging and changing of the model of masculinity that produces violent and abusive attitudes and behaviours, the burden will not only be shared, it will diminish.

Currently, the social and economic burden is heavy – horrifically on the women and children directly experiencing the violence at the hands of their male partners or ex-partners; on the men whose choice and practice of violence nonetheless leaves them angry, frustrated, unfulfilled and unhappy; on the family violence agencies across the community, workplaces, hospitals and general practice; on schools and the educational attainment of children affected; on families traumatized across generations; on the economy; on achieving the human rights and potentiality of women; and on progress toward gender equity.

(We acknowledge the assistance of Anne Paul and Samantha Montalvo in compiling aspects of this submission).

## REFLECTION NO.5: REPORTING FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

The way the media reports on incidents of men's violence against women has the power to either bolster cultural norms that reinforce violence supportive attitudes, or negate them. Unfortunately the majority of reporting on family violence incidents contributes to a culture that condones violence and sexual assault, a culture that is deeply ingrained in Australian society.

News media's strong influence on public opinion can lead to social change through public pressure for policy reform and broader cultural change. Therefore media outlets have a responsibility to report family violence in a way that presents the issue as a social issue in need of a whole-of-community response. Responsible reporting such as this will shift the public's focus from the violent actions of one individual to the broader societal context of men's violence against women.

There are a number of issues that become obvious when examining how intimate partner violence is reported on in the media. These include:

- Whether the article is framed with the broader social context of violence against women. Including naming violence for what it is.
- How the victim is portrayed, and whether they are blamed for the violence.
- How the perpetrator is portrayed, and whether their violence is excused.
- Whether a previous history of violence is included. (where appropriate)
- Whether the victim's resistance to violence has been included. (where appropriate)
- Whether the story is sensationalized as a tragic love story.

When we consider these issues we begin to see how public opinion towards men's violence against women may be shaped through the influence of media publications and also understand how important responsible reporting of IPV is. For a more detailed look into this please see the separate attachment *'Tumultuous Relationships': Reporting Intimate Partner Homicides in Australia* by Georgie Proud.

Incidents of family violence need to be framed within the broader context of men's violence against women, rather than as isolated incidents of violence. This would mean including information about the broader impact and prevalence of family violence in our society, using terminology such as "family violence" and including references to support services following articles depicting family violence. All forms of abuse need to be recognised and labelled as such in order to make the public understand that non-physical forms of violence are just as serious as physical ones.

Excusing the behaviour of the perpetrator, or blaming the victim is completely unacceptable yet it is seen time and time again in news coverage of violence against women. There is no excuse for violent behaviour and the media should reflect this. Focusing on the behaviour of the victim (e.g. that she may have been having an affair) or excusing violence (e.g. citing drug abuse as an excuse for violent behaviour) only perpetuates the idea that men's violence against women is an acceptable part of our society. When appropriate, the victim's resistance to violence should be included, emphasizing their lack of consent to violence rather than portraying them as a passive entity being acted upon.

Journalist should avoid using tired tropes such as the “tumultuous relationship” in their reporting of family violence, in particular intimate partner homicides, where murder is often sensationalized as a tragic ending to an argument rather than an escalation of abusive behaviour.

Media reporting is a crucial component in generating the kind of cultural shift needed to eliminate men’s violence against women.



**'Tumultuous Relationships':  
Reporting Intimate Partner Homicides in  
Australia**

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## Introduction

In 2005 one in five women in Australia identified as experiencing physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner since the age of fifteen.<sup>1</sup> In 2009 the cost of domestic violence to the economy was estimated to be \$13.6 Billion.<sup>2</sup> Seventy-eight percent of female victims of homicide in 2007-08 were killed by an offender with whom they shared a domestic relationship.<sup>3</sup> *Intimate partner violence* (IPV) is a serious societal issue in Australia and the way it is reported in the media needs to reflect that.

The media has a strong influence on public opinion, which can in turn lead to public pressure for policy implementation and change for broad societal issues. Therefore media outlets have a responsibility to report intimate partner violence in a way that presents the issue as a community problem in need of a community response. This will shift the public's focus from the violent actions of one individual to the broader societal context of men's violence against women.

The following two case studies analyse newspaper coverage of the murder of Lisa Harnum and the attempted murder of Jessica by their intimate partners.\* The reporting of both cases brings up many different issues associated with reporting IPV. Each of the articles was analysed using a framework of ten questions to determine the efficacy of the articles in reporting the incident. These questions were:

1. Does the article report broader social context of intimate partner violence?
2. How are the victim(s) portrayed?
3. Is the victim blamed?
4. How is the perpetrator portrayed?
5. Is the perpetrator excused?
6. Is there specific mention of family violence terms?
7. Is there mention of a previous history of violence?
8. Is there mention of her resistance?
9. Is it portrayed as a tragedy/love story?
10. What sources does the journalist use?

When viewing the articles through this framework a different picture emerges. We begin to see how public opinion towards men's violence against women may be shaped through the influence of media publications. We can also begin to understand how important responsible reporting of IPV is.

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\* "Jessica" is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the victim, a court suppression order was put in place for this reason.

## The Lisa Harnum Case

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2011 Lisa Harnum fell 15 storeys from the balcony of her apartment in Sydney, following an argument with her fiancé, Simon Gittany. Simon Gittany was charged with murder, he was released on conditional bail in January 2012. The Magistrate noted that the Mr Gittany had an arguable defence, a close relationship with his family that meant he was unlikely to fail to attend court, and that it would be a long time before his Supreme Court trial.

There are witnesses who heard the couple fighting and Ms Harnum call for help minutes before the incident. There is CCTV footage of Mr Gittany putting his hand over her mouth and dragging her back into their apartment after she tried to leave. A witness saw Mr Gittany throw what he thought was a suitcase off the balcony.

Seven newspaper articles, from different publications (a mix of metropolitan and national newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet from News Limited and Fairfax publications) covering these events were analysed.

### Articles:

**Woman screamed for help before death fall: Court Hears<sup>4</sup>**

The Sydney Morning Herald. 6:29pm August 3 2011

Vincent Morello

**Murder Charge over fiancée's fatal fall<sup>5</sup>**

The Australian. 12:00am August 04 2011

Jodie Minus

**Was apartment death fall murder?<sup>6</sup>**

The Daily Telegraph. 12:00am 04 August 2011

Lisa Davies

**Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told<sup>7</sup>**

The Sydney Morning Herald. 1:06am 30 September 2011

Louise Hall

**Crashing sounds before ballerina's death fall in CBD<sup>8</sup>**

The Daily Telegraph. 2:38pm January 19 2012

Amy Dale

**Man accused in balcony-throw murder 'jealous', Sydney court told<sup>9</sup>**

The Australian. 2:44pm 19 January 2012

Author Unknown

**Man accused of throwing ballet dancer off the 15th floor balcony gets bail<sup>10</sup>**

The Age, 7:14pm 19 January 2012

Paul Bibby

### Simon and Lisa- how much do we know?

We are given the following information about Mr Gittany:

- 37 years old
- Ms Harnum told her psychologist that he was "Very spiritual"
- He had strong family support throughout the court hearings, his family offered \$600,000 surety for his bail.

We are given the following information about Ms Harnum:

- 30 years old
- Professionally trained dancer- ballerina
- Canadian
- Weight: 55kg
- Height: 170cm tall
- Long hair
- Bulimic

Australia has strict court reporting rules, journalists who break these rules faced being charged with contempt of court. These prevent any information being published that may prejudice the trial of an accused.<sup>11</sup> This means that while we know very little about Mr Gittany we are given some of Ms Harnum's most personal details, her height, weight and the eating disorder she suffered from. The defence was able to exploit these details to strengthen their case. The victim's life is dissected down to the smallest and most intimate details, she is not offered the same protections that Mr Gittany is. This may allow assumptions to be made about her behaviour and excuses to be made about his violent actions. Although these reporting rules are meant to prevent the judicial process being influenced by the media, it means journalists can say much more about the victim than the person charged with the crime, especially when the victim has died.

### **Framing**

All seven articles reported the case as an isolated incident through an episodic frame, as opposed to a thematic one. There was no mention of the broader social context surrounding IPV. There was no information provided on resources for people who may be suffering, or know someone suffering, from abuse by an intimate partner.

Court reporting rules prevent journalists from reporting anything that is not said in court until a person is found guilty, making it difficult to name IPV for what it is if the prosecution does not present the case as family violence. The use of expert witnesses, particularly a family violence expert, may allow the prosecution to frame the case within a context of IPV and in turn allow journalists to report it as such. Court reporting rules also prevent any sources outside of the court hearings being used when reporting a case. This may make it difficult for the public to fully understand the issues they are reading about. If the prosecution has not presented the case as one of IPV then journalists are unable present the case as part of this wider social issue. This may minimise the violence for both the victim and perpetrator, shifting the focus of the case from a wider social issue that needs to be addressed by the government and community, to an anomaly perpetrated by a violent individual.<sup>12</sup>

A search was performed for key words relating to IPV to understand if and how the media were naming family violence. It is important to understand that the public, media and community sectors use a number of different terms when referring to family violence, this may cause a disconnect between the language the public is familiar with and that used within the community sector. The broader terms for family violence were searched for to see if any of the articles identified the case as IPV.

None of the articles contain the words intimate partner violence, violence against women or intimate partner homicide. One article uses the term domestic violence stating "He [Mr Gittany's lawyer] also disputed police claims that Mr Gittany had a history of domestic violence."

### **Portrayal of the Victim**

There were three initial articles published within four days of Ms Harnum's death.

These articles describe Ms Harnum as Canadian, 30 years of age, living in a luxury apartment and the fiancé of Mr Gittany. There is no mention of her profession, or training as a dancer.

In *Woman screamed for help before death fall* there is little reportage of the prosecution's case, while much weight is given to the defence's case. This casts doubt as to whether the victim is actually a victim, or in fact climbed over and slipped off the balcony.

*Murder Charge over fiancée's fatal fall* similarly details the defence's case, although this is balanced by the case of the prosecution, giving less credit to the claims made by the defence.

*Was apartment death fall murder?* Goes in to much further detail about the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. It portrays Ms Harnum as the victim trying to leave a controlling relationship. Despite this the relationship is never referred to as abusive. The article includes police witness testimony that Mr Gittany was extremely controlling of Ms Harnum, monitored her movements, SMS and email and rarely let her leave home. She had also told her friends that she wanted to leave the relationship and had a bag with her passport in it hidden away from the apartment. By detailing this history of abuse, the article casts doubt on the defence's case and alludes to a wider context of IPV. Some readers may see the case as an escalation in an already abusive relationship, although the public may not consider psychological abuse as a form of family violence.

From this point onwards the portrayal of Ms Harnum shifts. Mr Gittany's defence claims that Ms Harnum climbed over the railing of the balcony, slipped and fell to her death, and that he was trying to prevent her from falling. Forensic investigators found none of Ms Harnum's fingerprints on the balcony railing. Mr Gittany's lawyers claim that as a trained ballerina she could have leapt onto the railing without using her hands. This is the first mention of Ms Harnum as a ballerina. Of the following four articles, three refer to Ms Harnum as a ballerina or ballet dancer in the headline. The "ballerina-type leap" then becomes a main focus of the case.

*Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told* details the exchange in court: "Justice Kirby said "the person has got to physically get up on the railing and over it and how you do that without grasping and leaving fingerprints is difficult to see." Mr Richter replied: "she was a ballerina. If she did a ballerina-type leap she could do it quite easily."

There is no indication as to whether the prosecution attempted to dispute this claim with expert witness testimony, or whether there was any further research into Lisa's training as a dancer. A later article published in the Sydney Morning Herald, on

March 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, clarifies the extent of Ms Harnum's dance training. "However, her family said while she took "dancing lessons when she was younger, she was not a prima ballerina". "She just enjoyed the chance to dance and entertain, something she was passionate about from a young age," they said."<sup>13</sup> Lisa was, in fact, not a ballerina at all.

It is at this point the defence also introduces the idea that Ms Harnum's bulimia may have affected her state of mind. The three most recent articles all include this detail. Again there is no indication of expert witness testimony used to dispute this claim. This shifts the blame onto the victim, and away from the bigger picture of IPV, and more importantly from Mr Gittany's behaviour.

The defence also questions the reliability of the witness, who saw Mr Gittany throw what he thought was a suitcase off the balcony, and claim the physics of her fall make it impossible for her to have been pushed.

### **Resistance to violence**

Lisa's voice is lost in the reporting of this case. We are given glimpses of the ways in which she tried to resist abuse, but never a clear view of how she reacted to the violence she experienced. The inclusion of resistance by the victim is important in understanding violent acts as unilateral actions performed without the consent of the victim.<sup>14</sup> When resistance is omitted so too is a crucial aspect of the story, one that highlights the lack of mutuality and consent of the interaction. This can be extremely misleading, as only one side of the story is made visible. The inclusion of Lisa's resistance is particularly important in this case as a balance to the defence's claim that Lisa climbed over the balcony herself.

"CCTV footage showed Ms Harnum screaming as she exited the front door of the unit when Gittany allegedly reached around her head and put his hand over her mouth and brought her back into the unit." (*Woman screamed for help before death fall*) Here we are given our first glimpse of the resistance Ms. Harnum showed against Mr Gittany's violence. One other article also describes this incident but attributes it to a neighbour looking through their peephole, rather than CCTV footage. It is unclear whether this is inaccurate reporting or a separate piece of evidence.<sup>15</sup>

Lisa also screamed for help just prior to being dragged back into the apartment, a neighbour heard her screaming "Please help me, God help me". Three of the articles state this explicitly and one mentions neighbours hearing an argument.

*Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told* describes how Ms Harnum was packing her bags to leave following the argument. Another article *Was apartment death fall murder?* also details the resistance Lisa had shown earlier in the relationship. It describes how Mr Gittany was controlling, checking her emails and SMS. "She had also told friends she wanted to end the tumultuous relationship- and had "secreted a travel bag and passport in a location away from her home unit" police said." This is the closest the court comes to naming the case IPV, by referring to it as a "tumultuous relationship".

### Portrayal of the Perpetrator

The portrayal of Mr Gittany varies with each article. Mr Gittany's history of violence and abuse is reported inconsistently. Reporting a history of violence places the incident in a broader context of a continuum of abuse, rather than an isolated incident.

"The crown told the court Mr Gittany had a "history of violent offences", including malicious wounding and assaulting police, for which he was sentenced to two years' periodic detention. He had breached his parole conditions." (*Murder Charge over fiancée's fatal fall*) This is the only article that mentions Mr Gittany's prior conviction.

*Man accused of throwing ballet dancer off the 15th floor balcony gets bail* mentions that

"...Mr Gittany allegedly broke Ms Harnum's finger last year, though she did not report the incident to police." Again the only article to include this.

*Man accused in balcony-throw murder 'jealous', Sydney court told* and *Was apartment death fall murder?* both detail the controlling nature of the relationship and *Ballerina may have leapt off balcony, court told* briefly refers to this as well. Despite mentioning this abuse they do not go so far as to call it IPV, domestic violence, or violence against women.

*Woman screamed for help before death fall* states:

"They certainly had their ups and downs," Mr Price [Mr Gittany's lawyer] said. "Any dispute was always a verbal argument". This implies that non-physical forms of abuse are not as serious as physical ones. *Crashing sounds before ballerina's death fall in CBD* makes no mention of Mr Gittany's violent history. Mr Gittany was also portrayed as a grieving partner in the earliest three articles, although this was not mentioned in later articles. This may cause the reader to empathize with him. Mr Gittany has been released on bail due to, what the magistrate referred to as "exceptional circumstances" and the "strong case" he had against the charges. (*Man accused of throwing ballet dancer off the 15th floor balcony gets bail*)

The inconsistency in the reporting of Mr Gittany's history of violence causes an important element of the story to be lost. Including all these details would clearly present the story as an escalation in an abusive relationship, not a tragic ending to an argument. It would also give more weight to the seriousness of the crime, rather than speculating over "ballerina-type" leaps.

### Conclusions

The inconsistency in the reporting of this case may skew public perceptions of not only this incident but IPV in general. As none of the articles include any further information on IPV the incident is seen as an isolated event, rather than a broader social issue. This shifts ideas of responsibility from the government and community, to punishment of one individual. Prosecutors need to name the behaviour- men's violence against women- for what it is so that journalists can report the case within

this context and audiences can understand what they are reading about. If there is no specific reference to family violence in court journalists can also use what has been said in court as context without using specific terms. As the case progressed Mr Gittany's history of violence was detailed which could allow journalists to frame the case as family violence without being prejudicial.

The portrayal of Ms Harnum as a bulimic ballerina, who was "not in the right state of mind" casts doubt on the reliability of witnesses, and indicates that women who accuse their partners of abuse can not be trusted. While journalists have a responsibility to cover the defence's case, this needs to be balanced with coverage of the prosecution's case. By focusing on the "ballerina-type leap" attention is shifted from the perpetrator, and his violent history, onto the victim. Lisa becomes the victim of a tragedy her fiancé was unable to save her from. This is emphasized by the omission of her resistance to his violence. Her voice is lost and she becomes passive in the relationship, when in reality she was actively resisting his unilateral actions against her. Again the case is disconnected from IPV as a social problem. If Mr Gittany's history of violence from court discussions was included in an article the frame would shift completely, to one in the context of IPV generally. This may also reduce focus on the victim blaming tactics of the defence's case to the underlying issue of an escalating abusive relationship that Lisa Harnum was trying to leave. The case continues and a committal hearing is expected to be set in May.



## Jessica's Case

On the seventh of September 2007 Cameron Neil Cook drugged his son. He then bound, gagged and beat his wife Jessica, before chaining her to the backseat of his car and driving off Mordialloc pier with the intention of killing them both. Jessica broke free and escaped the car that was filling with water. She managed to find a police van and was taken to hospital. She survived the ordeal. Mr Cook was arrested in the car. He pleaded guilty to attempted murder, intentionally causing serious injury and reckless conduct endangering life and was sentenced to 15 years jail, with a minimum of twelve.

Eight newspaper articles, from different publications (a mix of metropolitan and national newspapers, both tabloid and broadsheet from News Limited and Fairfax publications) covering these events were analysed.

### Articles

#### **Court told of shackled wife's ordeal<sup>16</sup>**

The Age. 11 September 2007

Julia Medew

#### **Woman tells how husband tried to drown her<sup>17</sup>**

The Age. 31 July 2008 12:00 am

Kate Hagan

#### **Court hears pier plunge murder attempt followed divorce request<sup>18</sup>**

Herald Sun. 06 February 2009

Paul Anderson

#### **Chained wife Cheated Death<sup>19</sup>**

Herald Sun. 07 February 2009

Paul Anderson

#### **Ex-cop jailed for trying to murder wife<sup>20</sup>**

The Age. 25 February 2010

Author Unknown

#### **Cop gets 15 years' jail after wife chained to car, driven off pier<sup>21</sup>**

Herald Sun. 25 February 2010

Unknown Author

#### **Beaten and chained inside a car, desperate mother "Jessica" escaped her jealous husband's bid to drown them both at Port Phillip Bay<sup>22</sup>**

Herald Sun. 25 February 2010

Paul Anderson and Elissa Hunt

#### **Chained wife fears for day when husband released<sup>23</sup>**

The Age. 26 February 2010

Kate Hagan

### **What do we know about Jessica, Cameron and their son?**

We are given the following information about Mr Cook:

- 41 years old at time of incident
- Ex-policeman
- Adopted son of Port Moresby hospital midwife

- Father in military, moved around a lot as a child
- “Dabbled” in University degrees
- Taught English in Japan
- Ex-girlfriend fatally stabbed in robbery gone wrong
- Joined Victoria Police in 1996
- Became a legal aid solicitor following his time in the police force
- Suburb he lived in

We are given the following information about Jessica:

- Her given name and surname
- 34 years old
- Worked as film editor
- Mother of a young son
- Suburb she lived in

We are given the following information about their son:

- 7 years old
- His first name

We are given a lot of extraneous information about Mr Cook, mainly through one article *Chained Wife Cheated Death*, this may cause the reader to empathise with him as we learn about his “difficult past”. This could allow the reader to excuse his behaviour because of assumptions made about his upbringing.

The first article published contains information that makes the victim easily identifiable. "..., who worked on Australian film December Boys, which premiered at the weekend and stars the Harry Potter series' Daniel Radcliffe, was taken to The Alfred hospital with facial injuries and remains in a stable condition." Not only is the information about the film irrelevant, it removes the privacy of the victim which could cause fears over her safety. Similarly their son is named in *Woman tells how husband tried to drown her*, which could be extremely damaging to a young child as he is so easily identifiable and could become a target for bullying or harassment. Jessica's name was suppressed by the judge later on in the case, and the two final articles do not include her name, although the earlier articles can easily be found on newspapers web pages, causing her identity to still be accessible.

### **Framing**

As with the first case study each of the eight articles use an episodic framework. None of the articles reported the incident within the broader context of IPV. There was no further information provided on resources for people who may be suffering, or know someone suffering, from abuse by an intimate partner. In accordance with court reporting rules seven of the eight articles use only the court hearings as sources. The remaining article uses an exclusive interview with the victim, after the perpetrator was found guilty, as well as evidence from the court hearings. None of the articles use the terms Intimate Partner Violence, domestic violence, family violence, or violence against women. Again this distances the incident from IPV, causing it to be seen as an isolated incident perpetrated by a violent individual.

### Portrayal of the Victims

Three of the articles' headlines refer to Jessica as "shackled wife" or "chained wife". (*Court told of shackled wife's ordeal*, *Chained wife Cheated Death* and *Chained wife fears for day when husband released*.) Referring to her this way not only removes her identity as a woman, mother and person but also removes Mr Cook from focus, absolving him of the responsibility for his actions. Attention is shifted to Jessica, what did she do to become the chained wife? Similarly *Cop gets 15 years' jail after wife chained to car, driven off pier* uses passive language, although Mr Cook is present in the sentence, it is still passive, removing the action of his violence toward her. From this headline it is not clear that he was the one who chained her to the car and drove off the pier. Although Mr Cook was no longer working as a policeman he is still identified through his former profession, while she is only identified as a "wife".

Mr Cook drugged their son before he began the attack on his wife. None of the articles refer to this as abuse or an act of violence. Four of the articles refer to this as a "drugging". One article describes him as "tricking" his son into taking the sleeping tablet and one as him "giving" him a sleeping tablet. The remaining two articles do not mention the drugging, one stating that "He called his father and told him to go and get their son [name] 7, who was asleep in his bed." (*Woman tells how husband tried to drown her*) The seriousness of this violent act is dismissed through the lack of inclusion, or clarification as abuse, causing it to appear acceptable to the reader. The psychological affects of the incident on their son are only reported in one article, the rest dismiss the impact of Mr Cook's violence on the young child.

### The Victim's Voice

The fact that Jessica survived her husband's murder attempt allows her voice to be present in the reporting of the case. This is a stark contrast to cases of murder, where the victim's voice is completely lost. All the articles mention Jessica's resistance to some extent. Three articles merely mention that she was able to escape the sinking car, while others go into further detail. Including the victim's resistance to violence shows the audience the lack of consent from the victim. It also emphasizes the unilateral behaviour, as opposed to mutual behaviour, of Mr Cook.<sup>24</sup> *Woman tells how husband tried to drown her* includes a detailed account of Jessica's resistance to her husband's violent actions. The article includes direct quotes from Jessica's witness statement such as: "'He did a loop around the car park at full speed, and I was mumbling through the gaffer tape, 'Don't do this'," [name] told police. "He took off as fast as (he could) heading towards the pier. I was trying to scream but my mouth was taped over."' It is through such details we no longer see Jessica not as a passive object being acted upon.

*Beaten and chained inside a car, desperate mother "Jessica" escaped her jealous husband's bid to drown them both at Port Phillip Bay* includes an exclusive interview with Jessica. The article describes how Jessica believed a guardian angel was looking over her and how she didn't want to give her husband the satisfaction of seeing her die.

### Portrayal of the Perpetrator

In 2007 Jessica asked her husband for a divorce. Mr Cook threatened to kill her and they saw a marriage counsellor; two months later at the time of the attack she believed the marriage was over. The threat is only mentioned in one article *Court hears pier plunge murder attempt followed divorce request*. The article does not identify death threats as a form of men's violence against women. This is a critical part of the story that should be highlighted.

The fact that Jessica was pursuing a new relationship is reported in all the articles, although extremely inconsistently. Jessica had asked for a divorce and according to her the marriage was over. Despite this four of the articles refer to her relationship with another man as an affair. Three articles describe the marriage breakdown in varying detail, one refers to footage of her and another man. *Chained wife Cheated Death* goes into the most amount of detail on the strain on the relationship caused by Mr Cook's work as a police officer and then legal aid solicitor. By reporting such details the media is excusing the behaviour of the perpetrator by focusing on that of the victim. Justice Hollingsworth stated that Mr Cook's "conduct was completely inappropriate" to the breakdown of his marriage. *Chained wife fears for day when husband released* and *Ex-cop jailed for trying to murder wife* both include this detail, no other articles include this. Jessica was trying to leave a dysfunctional and abusive marriage, by referring to her "affair", reporters are excusing his behaviour and scrutinising hers.

Mr Cook's vengeful attitude is widely reported. "Cook, who has shown no remorse, was overheard at one of his court appearances saying, "When I get out of here I'll do the job properly"." (*Beaten and chained inside a car, desperate mother "Jessica" escaped her jealous husband's bid to drown them both at Port Phillip Bay*) Three of the articles refer specifically to threats Mr Cook made against Jessica following his arrest. None of these articles define this as psychological abuse, despite the inclusion of the sense of fear Jessica felt about the eventual release of Mr Cook from jail. Again the seriousness of psychological abuse is absent, so much so that Mr Cook is able to continue to inflict his violence on Jessica from jail. This perpetuates the idea that psychological abuse is not as serious as physical abuse. This may influence society's idea of what constitutes men's violence against women, as well as prevent women who are experiencing psychological abuse to take action to seek help. The *Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Bill 2011* redefined family violence as "threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person's family, or causes the family member to be fearful."<sup>25</sup> Now that legislation recognises the serious nature of all forms of family violence, public perceptions also need to shift to reflect this change.

### Conclusions

Media reporting of cases such as this one need to focus on the behaviour of the perpetrator and not scrutinise that of the victim. This prevents excuses being made for the behaviour of the perpetrator. The protection of victims' identities also needs to be considered. Including details such as first names and suburbs puts the safety of

the victim at risk, and may cause undue psychological stress. The seriousness of psychological abuse also needs to be highlighted. The use of expert witnesses in court testifying about the significance of psychological abuse would allow journalists to report it as abuse. This may help break down the misconceptions surrounding psychological abuse in society and help efforts to prevent psychological abuse in Australia.

The media has a strong influence on public opinion, which in turn can put pressure on the state to create policies to address societal problems. Although court reporting rules are in place to protect a trial from prejudice, what protections are there for the victims and survivors of violence?

### Things to Remember when Reporting IPV

The reporting of both cases shows the issues faced by the Australian media when trying to report IPV in a responsible manner.

It is important to frame incidents of IPV within the broader context of men's violence against women. This can be done by including information about the affect Men's violence Against Women has on, and its prevalence within, our society. Although this may only be possible once a person is found guilty and the strict court reporting rules have been loosened, it is still crucial in presenting family violence as a community issue. The use of expert witnesses by the prosecution may also enable journalists to do this. Articles should also include resources for those who may be, or know someone who is, experiencing violence in their own life when possible such as help lines and websites. Such information could save the life of a woman experiencing violence.

Journalists should give equal weight to the prosecution and defence's cases, which prevents the defence's case been taken as truth. If the perpetrator has a history of violence this should also be included, preventing the audience from seeing the incident as an isolated episode. Using this information may allow journalists to frame the case in the context of IPV without prejudicing the trial. Steps should be taken to protect the victim's identity. Extraneous facts should not be included in articles, especially those that make the victim easily identifiable.

All forms of abuse need to be recognised and labelled as such in order to make the public understand that non-physical forms of violence are just as serious as physical ones. These violent behaviours include: verbal abuse, emotional abuse, social abuse, spiritual abuse, economic abuse as well as sexual and physical assault. Men's violence against women should be reported as what it is, using language that enables the public to fully understand what they are reading about, rather than using suggestive terms that skirt around the issue. This can again be achieved through expert witness testimony, allowing journalists to use the language used in the courtroom.

Excusing the behaviour of the perpetrator, or blaming the victim is completely unacceptable. There is no excuse for violent behaviour and the media should reflect this. Focussing on the behaviour of the victim or excusing violence only perpetuates the idea that men's violence against women is an acceptable part of our society. Although most men are not violent, this is a serious issue affecting all sectors of our community. When appropriate, the victim's resistance to violence should be included, emphasizing their lack of consent to violence rather than portraying them as a passive entity being acted upon.

All these things need to be considered in order to write responsibly about IPV. A change in the media can affect change within public opinion. Therefore journalists should consider how their audience may respond to their piece and whether they are perpetuating victim-blaming attitudes. Care needs to be taken to ensure media

publications make it clear that men's violence against women is a problem affecting all sectors of Australian society that needs to be addressed as a community issue. For further information on how to report Intimate Partner Violence please see the EVA's *Responsible Reporting Guidelines for Journalists and Family Violence in the News: A Media Toolkit*.<sup>26</sup>

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