

After being in two minds about making a submission, I read an article in the Uniting church newspaper "*Crosslight*" March 2015 edition. The article described harrowing journeys of women who experienced Family Violence including how to get support. Just above the footer, in unassuming print, "We acknowledge that men can also be victims of domestic abuse". A purposeful distance between article and acknowledgement made it seem like my own church includes male victims of Family Violence as an afterthought.

I am a ■ year old male, father of ■ and married for ■ years. I believe that my wife suffers from emotional dysregulation, maybe Borderline Personality Disorder. During periods where her mental health declines, my wife will lash out with physical and physiological abuse. Triggers can be dates, people (my family) and situations created by psychosis or anxiety.

The focus of my submission, the lack of support and awareness for male victims of Family Violence. I can only base this on my own personal experiences and point of view. And I make an assumption that other men who are victims would also perceive a lack of support.

Sometime ago my wife was suffering badly, unwilling to seek help and lashing out with abuse. I was being beaten on a weekly basis, whilst physical violence had taken place before, it was the first time I asked for help.

Depressed and shell shocked as to what to do. I reached out to a male GP, he offered to council me, which I accepted. I quickly found there was no interest in me talking about being abused. He soon left the practice, leaving me to look for other options.

Mensline told me my best option was to leave, and there was no other dedicated support available for men or their children.

The Police, told me if lodge an AVO then I would be removed from the home. With no money or family in Melbourne it seemed to be an option of last resort. I feared what would happen to our children if I was removed. Would my wife allow access, would my version of events be considered, questions that rapidly became barriers.

After reporting being knocked out and choked to a Female GP, she arranged contact with a Domestic Violence support group. A meeting was arranged and I talked to a councillor, describing my feelings and what was happening. At the end of the session, the councillor said they do not offer support for men and the meeting arranged because someone they knew was doing research about male victims. I was utterly devastated, the hard part is asking for help, the harder part is finding it.

Avoiding contact with my family because of the outbursts of abuse it generated. Only increased the problem of being isolated. I felt alone, stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Choosing to tough it out, try to support her and fix her problems, was in hindsight, the wrong thing to do. Not only did I expose my children to Family Violence, something that I am ashamed about now. It also didn't help my wife and her fluctuating mental health, instead reinforcing the cycle of violence. Once I did leave, my wife responded by attempting suicide using sleeping pills. I didn't call for help. Instead accepted what she said, that I was responsible for her actions.

I have fought back, slapped her and bruised her wrist in an attempt to stop a beating. Becoming violent, was horrifying. Being a Family Violence victim meant not only being abused, but also changing me into being abusive out of sheer desperation. Something that my wife quickly capitalised on, saying she should call the Police and report it. I didn't fight back again.

An event that sticks in my mind, was an Easter Sunday when we attended our local church. A large bruise on my face from a beating the night before. Members of the congregation, people who knew us, just stared. No one came up and asked what happened, even if someone did what could I say.

Eventually I found help, understanding my wife can't be helped unless she wants to change. I am not responsible for my wife's mental illness, keep the children out of any abusive situation and attempt to remove myself from situations when abused. This process took years, with a reoccurring theme from Phycologists, Counsellors and friends. That is, don't talk about it, don't want to know about it. One Phycologist told me not to talk to other people about our relationship, only talk to your wife. When mentioning that abuse was occurring I was given a photocopied sheet on how I should "fight fair" in an argument.

The few friends who took the time to look past the stigma and listen, have been a blessing, helping me more than anything else. However, knowing when you are saying too much has become an important skill. To be honest I am filtering within this submission, because I feel revealing too much will result in it being ignored.

I urge the Royal Commission to consider that more can be done to help men who find themselves as victims of Family Violence. Awareness could be raised by including men in Family Violence prevention campaigns, not as the perpetrator but as the victim. Support for men and their children could modelled on the support offered to female victims. Even though men make up a small minority of Family Violence victims, that doesn't mean that they require a reduced level of support.

Being "acknowledged" is a step forward that needs to be supported. So I replied to *Crosslight*.

"Thank you for publishing the article 'Time to listen' in the March edition of *Crosslight*. As a society we need to have the discussion about domestic violence, and push toward lasting solutions.

What I write, should in no way be considered as detracting from women who are victims in the overwhelming majority of domestic violence cases.

Men who are being physically abused within a relationship experience a different trajectory to women. Very little support infrastructure is geared toward supporting men and their children. Seeking help from professionals or friends, usually results in ignorance and indifference toward the victim.

Isolated by being caught between male programming of toughing it out and a lack of support. Men in this situation might feel they are sitting in their own garden, waiting for the next abuse, alone. If he is lucky, some remarkable people will sit with him. Remarkable because they don't accept the societal default, only seeing someone in need.

Acknowledging that men can be victims of Domestic Violence in the article, was a remarkable thing to do. Thank you."

The reference to a garden in the reply, relates to Jesus Christ waiting in the garden of Gethsemane. A moment in time I have pondered, because Easter is a date that triggers my wife to become abusive.

I am still in the relationship with its good times, bad times and times where I am abused. And one day I would like to talk openly and honestly about the journey, my mistakes and moving forward.

Thank you for reading.