

I am writing as a woman who has survived and experienced sexual violence and on behalf of my younger sister who has recently disclosed to her experiences of being sexually abused by a family member. In both our stories we have had different experiences of abuse, different perpetrators, in different countries and the abuse having occurred decades apart.

Perhaps our story is a unique one, but the statistics say otherwise. I am writing this submission in the hope that no other woman in my family will ever become the victim of any form of violence perpetrated by a man. I would like to see my sister heal and for my mum to feel supported, for this to happen they need people in their lives to understand the long lasting impacts of men's violence against women. This means raising the awareness in the community around the prevalence of men's violence against women, the types of violence against women and also the underlying causes and determinants of men's violence against women. I am hoping to see changes in my community, workplaces, schools that ensure all women and girls are respected, valued and celebrated.

My experiences as both a victim/survivor as well as being in a family where sexual violence and abuse has occurred has been difficult not only due to the impacts of the abuse itself but also because of the isolation myself and members of my family felt after the abuse. As victim's of the abuse both directly and indirectly we have been made to feel ashamed, labelled and lost.

Coming from a culturally diverse background has made our experience even harder particularly for my mum who has had to navigate an under resourced and uncoordinated service system.

In the last three years we have passed through the criminal justice system, legal services, housing, centrelink, community health, mental health and counselling services, DHS (child protection) and each time feeling more and more disempowered. There needs to be better coordination within the whole service system, one entry point that from disclosure/notification access to support services for families are facilitated. All members of the family, including the perpetrator should have access to support and treatment services. In order for this to happen there needs to be an intensive assessment of the situation within the family, and all those involved. I believe this can prevent further abuse, prevent further mental health issues arising and help each member of the family function and participate in daily life including supporting their participation in the workforce and education.

The lasting impacts of family violence and men's violence against women is life long, however women, children and families have the ability to survive this and even thrive after the violence has occurred. What is crippling for individuals and families is a lack of support which would otherwise enable them to return to work, continue to study, maintain relations and participate in everyday life again. We need to minimise the impact violence can have on the lives of those directly impacted by violence and the family and friends who support them.

I would like to live in a world where all women and girls are free from men's violence against women. Until then I would like more to be done to ensure women feel safe at home, at work and in their communities. Until then I would like all women and their families who have experienced violence to feel like they have somewhere to go, someone to call and to feel that they have a bright future ahead of them after the abuse has occurred.