

I want to start by saying I was raised by a strong mother who raised my sister and I well. We were taught compassion and empathy and all work with disadvantaged people, my mother work with adult drug detox, my sister disabilities and I in out of home care. I am fortunate enough to say I have never had a violent partner, and have an amazing and supportive partner now. I live a normal and generally quiet life. In saying this family violence has impacted my life in some way for majority of my of life. I wish to remain anonymous not out of shame but out of respect for the brave woman and children in my story, who do not wish to be identified.

I grew up in a strict catholic [REDACTED] family in the late 70s. My father was a religious fanatic well respected by his local church community for his commitment to God and the parish. He was not known for the violent man he was behind doors. As a child I remember the fighting and my mother's bruises, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We were hit or whipped with a belt if we had answered him incorrectly or we had behaved in a way he did not like (regardless if it was normal childlike behaviour). My mother tried to leave him once and he agreed to leave the house so that we could live there in peace. Within days he was back in the house trying to play happy families. It wasn't until I had started high school that my mother gained the strength to try again. She recently told me she was in contact with woman's support services for three years before she felt brave enough to act. We lived next door to my dad's cousin, so she was often watching us come and go from the house. My father would also ring twice a day to check that my mother was home where she was supposed to be. One memorable morning my mother made us dress for school and pretended to take us to school as normal, this time she returned us secretly home again, she waited for the morning phone call and then snuck my sister and into the garage. We hid in the back seat of the car as mother drove away with nothing but the shirts on our backs.

We stayed in a woman's refuge for a number of weeks and remained in hiding for a number of years, even not participating in school photos as precaution. My father and threatened massacres to judges and was still granted access with his children. My mother did her best to start again with us. My father harassed the families' of our school friends searching for us. My father's family of course blamed my mother and said she was making things up and he was wonderful man who loved his family. My uncle and aunt both school teachers, blamed my sister saying that her behaviours was the reason that mum and dad separated. When we had access with my dad he would harass us about where were residing, and why we wouldn't come home? All of family relationships were now gone, we were looked down upon due to what was seen as my mother's disrespect to the family. For many years my sister and I did not feel safe to visit my grandparents or father by ourselves and would only go together. I am lucky enough as an adult

to have a relationship with my father and have put in significant boundaries around acceptable behaviours for me and my children. It also helps that he has mellowed over the years.

Even today people hear my story and say 'was that really violence? Or' well that was just the way it was back then'. It is amazing how people do not want to call violence for what it is and still accuse women of exaggerating. Violence is violence. In European families' family violence is still tolerated and women are expected to live with it whilst being grateful for a loving husband. My mother showed much courage to keep us safe and stand up to a man that abused herself and her children. In doing this she lost most of her supports, her family and had no money and nowhere to go.

I suggest a review of the following to assist supporting our multicultural communities:

- Education for CALD communities about violence and abuse.
- Targeted early intervention/ offenders programs for CALD communities around family violence
- Targeted resources to support women and children from these communities experiencing Family Violence?
- Specific CALD programs in women's refuges?

In a couple of years my sister had entered an abusive relationship and became engaged at the age of 17, she soon entered a world of drugs and alcohol and grew distant from me. By her early 20s she had broken away from this relationship and found a new partner I will call Paul, the man not afraid to leave bruises where people could see them. He was from a strong Maori family who thought their son could do no wrong. I remember times when my sister would call me to come and get her on the side of a road. She would be sitting in her car with Paul, both affected by drugs or alcohol, her with a black eye, face bleeding and her eyes swollen from crying so much. She would beg me to help her and then refuse to come with me. Many times I would not see her for weeks and then she would appear with a neck brace or a limp.

In her mid-20s she fell pregnant to Paul. Even though it was well known that Paul was violent towards my sister my grandfather asked him to marry her. It appears there is more shame attached to being a single mother, than to a man who hurts the vulnerable. My sister became very sick with her pregnancy and due to preeclampsia my nephew was born at 26 weeks weighing less than 500grams. Paul's family would threaten my sister that they would take her baby from her if she didn't use the name wanted on the birth certificate or do something they wanted. They treated my sister cruelly and my sister would not listen to my pleas for to break away from them. The hospital was on high alert to Paul and his threats of kidnapping and others of turning off my nephew's life support system.

The hospital raised concerns with my sister that they would need to notify child protection, should she bring my nephew to reside in the same house as his father. After a number of months my nephew was well enough to leave the hospital and my sister did bring him home to reside with both his parents. Only a number of days later my sister took my nephew for a walk to the shops and never returned to Paul. She went into hiding and stayed at a friend of ours for some time. It took my nephew's life for my sister to find value in her own. Paul's family have had a relationship over the years with my now 16 old nephew. My sister has been a good mother free from drugs and worked hard to give him a happy and wonderful childhood. Although she allows Paul's family to have contact with him and mostly they are appropriate, my sister is still trapped in the control cycle. She still lives in fear of them and feels some obligation to his family, like she owes them something.

What programs are in place in hospitals for people like my sister? At that point there should have been therapy available to her to understand how to break the cycle fully. Instead she her past has continued to traumatise her and make her doubt her self-worth. Paul went onto marry a woman with small children and continue to have many more children of his own. They lived in [REDACTED] away from any supports. I cringe at the thought of what those children may have been exposed to and raise the question why is there not a Family violence registered. The hospital knew he was a violent person and yet he was allowed to go onto to care for other vulnerable children, when we already knew what he was capable of.

When are we going to recognise Family violence for what it is, a criminal offence When are we are going to send the message that just like its not ok to assault someone in the street it is not ok to assault your partner or children. We need to be tougher and send loud messages to people of all ages that family violence is not ok and you will be charged and sentenced with a crime if you are a perpetrator.

Consideration should be given to moving to model like America where the justice system can press charges without the victim needing to press charges.

- If the justice system are alerted to violent behaviour then the perpetrator should be made to attend an educational program around anger management, stress management and appropriate relationships. In the first instance followed by harsher penalties should they reoffend?
- If they refuse or offend again they should be place on a register known by the authorities, hospitals, schools and child care centres. This so we are alerted to any children in the care of offenders.
- Victims struggle to stand up to their violent partners and there should be a way society can step in so they don't have to risk their lives futher by pressing charges.

My mother in 40s went back to school to train in welfare. She finally had a stable home an annulment of marriage and built up a good support network. She met someone, the only other boyfriend she had had other than my father at the time. I will call him Larry. He was different from my dad, Anglo-Saxon, trendy, funny and well respected as leader in narcotics anonymous. He would buy my mother flowers take her on weekends away and made her feel good about herself. She appeared to be happy. What we didn't know was that he had convinced her to loan him a large sum of money to start up a new business. My mother took out a mortgage on the house. Soon he came back asking for more and mother refused. He threatened her s and her family's lives, harassing her constantly, threatening to use his gun on her family. She soon found out that he had somehow forged her signature and that of my already deceased grandparents to get a higher mortgage on my mother's house. I found this out a few months later when he had disappeared from her life. The banks still found my mother responsible for the debt regardless of the situation and on pension she was still made to pay off a portion of the debt.

Where is the responsibility of the banks in this instance where a man clearly submitted fraudulent documents that they didn't check properly?

- Do banks have policy's in place around victims of emotional and or physical violence to access to the \$ in their accounts and joint accounts?
- There should be a strong educational / media campaign on human rights and violence in the home. People don't need to feel shame, they are worth more and don't deserve abusive treatment.

My closest friend growing up lived in out of home care. She was adopted and struggled with this most of her life. As a child, a family member abused her and this sparked many of the issues resulting in her entering the care system. Her family didn't believe her claims of abuse; and her cycle unhealthy relationships commenced. I will not talk about all the relationships in her life but will about her current one. A few years ago she became entangled in a relationship with an older woman, later discovered to be involved in drug dealing. My friend decided that the lifestyle was not one that she wanted to be part of and tried to break it off. Her partner covered her in petrol and tried to set her on fire, demanding that my friend could not leave. I tried to help my friend to get an intervention order and took her to the police station. Sadly a few years later my friend is still living with this woman. At what point are children and young people exposed to trauma taught about healthy relationships. My friend nearly aged 40 is still stuck in the cycle of unhealthy relationships and low self-worth a journey that started in care. She was never empowered to understand her worth, what a healthy relationship looked like and as adult has struggled with mental health, drug addiction, and abusive partners and is still trapped in a world of abuse.

We know trauma doesn't just go away, it scars long term.

- What programs are in place in our education system to teach young people about healthy relationships?
- All children and young people in schools should be taught anger and stress management, what are a good friendship/ relationship looks like how to identify grooming.
- Consideration of how are these messages getting through to those
 - disengaged from school and
 - those already exposed to trauma
 - those living in out of home care

Last year my sister-in-law lost her life to breast cancer. She was mother of three children, the youngest only 4 months old when she died. Sadly she had a history of undesirable partners and each of her children had a different father with its complexity's.

The oldest child feared his father who was a suspected drug dealer, and thief. The middle child's father kidnapped her as a toddler and was very transient, his wife battling with significant mental health issues. There had been custody battles ever since. The youngest child's father was in a relationship with my sister in-law for a number of years prior to her death. He was violent towards her and had in the past been imprisoned for drunk driving and reckless behaviour trying to run over police men. He would disappear with the baby for hours at a time and was suspected of stealing my sister in laws medication to sell locally.

Her dying wish was for her children to grow up together in a safe place. In her last months she grew weak and desperate at times retaliated to her partner's violence to protect herself and her children. She asked my partner and I to assist her and contact child protection to help keep her children safe. The response from them was that the children were deemed safe whilst the mother was still living there. A mother that was dying and sleeping most of the day? My sister in law told her nurses and therapist about her partner's behaviours yet no notifications were made. Prior to her death her partner agreed that all three children would be placed in the care of my partner and me and wanted the children to grow up together. After her death he reneged this, we maintained caring for the children and spent everything we had and more for the legal battles to keep the children together. Child protection recommended that the baby not have overnight access let alone reside with her father. The judge ruled the older children reside together in our care but that the baby the, (the one without a voice) be in the full time care of her father. Child protection recommendations were not acknowledged, stories from the older children witnesses to aggressive behaviour was dismissed. The father argued relationship violence and as my sister in law did not go to the police there was no evidence to suggest otherwise. The hospital did not document the reports of violence and as my sister in law was not alive to be cross examined so everything was deemed here say. I contacted the child safety commissioner and the department of human services principle practitioner and had no response. The baby has weekly access with her siblings and we monitor her for any signs of ill treatment. My heart breaks each day that we may not notice anything out of the ordinary until it is too late.

How can a judge and family report writer think that a man violent towards someone in their most vulnerable time of their life not be considered a risk to a baby. Other than the weekly visits no-one is monitoring that baby or her care. How is that ok! Since a child I have admired that as a society we stop when an emergency service vehicle needs a clear path to proceed. That we believe it's worth stopping everything to save one human life, and rightly so. Yet we are so quick to place the vulnerable at risk to ensure parental rights are met.

- The family court system needs to consider children's rights equal if not higher to that of the adults in their lives. Perhaps the family court system can be more aligned with children's courts procedures and give more of a voice to children in proceedings.
- Child protection recommendations should be considered in court proceedings regardless if they are sought or not.
- A deceased person's story should still be acknowledged and researched thoroughly before dismissing
- If we are to truly break the cycle then any offenders towards children should be monitored and be involved in long-term rehabilitation.
- Stricter policies should be put in place for mandated staff to report violence.
- Better supports and response times from the supporting bodies – commissioner's office, child protection, principle practitioners

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- Many of the woman I have talked about in my stories are afraid of repercussions so don't speak up. If something happens that they die, their voices are then lost and a violent person is free to potentially go on to hurting others.
- As a society the best early intervention is education from school age up, as per recommendations earlier.
- This issue is not just around policy or service reform, but a culture reform. The shame is not in being a victim but in a culture that keeps on accepting this as ok. Our communities need to acknowledge this not ok. A national day that recognises that Family Violence is not ok and it should be loud and embraced by the media. If there is already one in place, I don't know about it, meaning the message is not getting out there.
- We have had campaigns that target smoking, safe sex and killing diseases like cancer. There is now an understanding around these things, early interventions in place and a general culture that support lowering the impact. Now it is time to apply the same process to family violence. Campaigns need to be bold and put this issue in people's faces.
- Tougher penalties around family violence should be in place.
 - Starting with first offenders requiring attending a program to deal with anger, stress and understand healthy relationships.
 - second offenders should be charged with a criminal offence with or without the support of the victim
 - A register should be in place for offenders with a history mad a available to the authorities, hospitals and educational and child care facilities.
 - .Long term rehabilitation programs should be available especially for parents
- Family court needs to work more aligned with the children's court system
- Financial institutions need to have better special considerations for victims
- Culturally sensitive programs need to be implemented from early invention right through to escaping family violence.
- If any of these are already in place then I suggest the marketing behind them needs to be more prominent and the information more readily known to victims and the general public