

## Section One

### My background

I married my wife in the mid 1980's. We lived together as a married couple for approximately thirteen years. During this time we had some very good times, as well as some very bad times involving disagreements and arguments. Sometimes these arguments would become abusive (usually verbal, sometimes there would be physical pushing). There were times when I became abusive towards my wife, and at other times my wife would become abusive towards me. It was really a case of both of us being perpetrators, as well as victims, alternating on different occasions.

During some of these arguments my wife punched me in the face, kicked me in the shins (whilst wearing heavy work boots), and once punched me in the groin a week after I had had an operation. All of these things were factors which built up to a dysfunctional relationship. It should also be noted that my wife was larger and stronger than me, and was often very controlling.

After one particular argument, my wife decided to leave the home and stay with a friend. My wife stayed with her friend for a few days. I continued to live in our house, as well as go to work over these few days. After the few days had elapsed, a police car drove into the house driveway. This was on a week night, approximately 8.00pm. The Police knocked on the door, and I let them in. The Police then informed me that my wife had made a complaint against me. My wife claimed that I had been violent towards her. I then informed the Police that this wasn't the case, and that we had just had an argument. Both of us had pushed each other a bit during the argument. When I told the Police that we had both pushed each other, the response from the Police was "What's the matter mate? You're a man aren't you?" I was very disappointed with this response, as I felt that it was one-sided.

The Police then informed me that I had to vacate the house that night, so that my wife could move back in. I told them I had nowhere to go. The Police then told me that that was bad luck for me, and I would have to sort it out.

The Police then said that they have no choice in these situations, and that it is best to leave it up to the courts to decide any outcome.

The Police allowed me to make a phone call to my parents. I then arranged to go to my parents place after I had finished with my interview at the Police Station. The Police issued me with an "Apprehended Violence Order" and told me that I would have to deal with it at the Magistrates' Court.

I went to court on the allocated date and time with legal representation. I had no choice but to accept the AVO. However, I accepted the AVO on the basis of no admission of guilt.

I then chose to enrol myself in a local Men's Anger Management course. The Court had not made this decision for me. I just felt that it would be a good idea to do this, so that my marriage had a chance to recover. At the time of the court case, we had a two year old son (he is now an adult in his early [REDACTED], living with me, as I was awarded custody from the time he was seven).

The Anger Management course was very good, since it showed me a way to avoid arguments. The main theme throughout the course was to take responsibility for our own attitudes and actions, regardless of what may or may not be said or done by our wife (or partner). A person can only control their own thoughts and actions, and can therefore chose not to react to other people's behaviour.

Sometimes a good response during an argument can be "I can't discuss this with you at the moment, I am going for a walk. We can talk about it again when I come back". This response allows the situation to be diffused, so that both parties cool down. I found this worked really well.

I would thoroughly recommend that all people do a course such as this sometime during their adult life, as it is a great way to learn how to cope in difficult situations, without resorting to violence of any form.

These things are all well and truly in the past for me, and I do not hold any grudges against my former wife, or women in general. I believe that there are certainly things I could have done better during my marriage, and there are things that my wife could have done better as well.

Every person is responsible for his or her behaviour. It is of no benefit to blame others around us. We can only control our own behaviour!

My experiences in my life do not in any way negate other people's experiences.

Each person has their own experiences which have a bearing on how they cope with life, and all of the challenges that life brings. I believe that we learn far more in this life if we learn to listen to other peoples' experiences with an open heart and mind.

It should be noted that no one makes us angry. We sometimes allow ourselves to become angry, instead of choosing to diffuse the situation, or agreeing to disagree.

## Section Two

### Food for Thought

I would like to start the discussion in this section with a radical thought. Men, Women and Children are all part of the Human Race, and as such have the same desires, needs and wants as each other. We are all capable of great acts of kindness, charity, compassion and love towards our fellow man (woman or child).

Unfortunately, as humans, we are also capable of incredible acts of cruelty, hate and violence. I believe that people, regardless of their sex, are equally capable of being perpetrators of violence, in all of its many forms. We should not allow ourselves to become conditioned to a stereotyped view of the human race.

In these times of increased stress, World unrest, terrorism and general uncertainty, we need to remain focussed on factual details, rather than emotions or pre-conceived ideas. The only way to fully understand the intricacies of a problem is to have all of the relevant data available for thorough analysis. This, I believe is the only way to have any hope of solving any significant problem.

With respect to Family Violence, I would like to suggest that it would be more beneficial to be armed with facts, backed up with reliable honest statistics, if we truly want to solve, or at the very least, reduce horrific events of Family Violence we are seeing more of every year.

### What are some of the factors which influence who we are as people?

People are as varied as snowflakes falling from the sky, and should not be categorised in to little boxes simply because of their sex.

The following is a table which lists just some of the factors which have an effect on a person's views, beliefs and attitudes in life (generally as well as with specific reference to Family Violence):-

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Culture</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Religion</b>
<b>Environment</b>	<b>Upbringing</b>	<b>Geographic Area</b>	<b>Poverty</b>
<b>Drugs</b>	<b>Alcohol</b>	<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>Depression</b>
<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>Pride</b>	<b>Shame</b>	<b>Peer Pressure</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Intelligence</b>	<b>Poor Choices</b>	<b>Social Expectations</b>

Any person's character (adult or child) of any sex will be formed by factors such as those listed in the table above. As humans, we are complex beings who are products of our environment, upbringing, and experiences we have throughout our lives. We cannot simply be made to fit into a narrow minded, stereotypical view of male and female. It is neither logical, nor intelligent to do so!

## **Who are the Perpetrators?**

Although there are statistics which show that there are more male perpetrators than female, we need to remember that a person's sex is only one facet of their total being. It is far better to take a "Clear Thinking" approach to Family Violence, which then allows us to analyse each situation on a "Case by Case" basis. There is no point in demonising people on the basis of their sex, since this reinforces negative stereotypes, and does not assist in solving the basic problem.

As I have mentioned before in **Section One**, it is possible for a person to be both a **Perpetrator** and a **Victim**, not necessarily at the same time.

We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by Political Correctness. There should not be any area off limits in terms of research or statistical analysis. In order to find out the truth behind Family Violence, we must remain open-minded at all times, and not be afraid to ask the difficult questions.

## **Who are the Victims?**

According to statistics released throughout Australia, generally there are far more women and children who are victims of Family Violence. This may well be the case. However, it must also be pointed out that these statistics may not be completely accurate, as there are cases of under reporting (especially with regard to male victims, who may feel ashamed). There have also been cases where children have been violent towards one or both parents.

Undoubtedly there have been some horrific cases in the last few years of women and children dying at the hands of their husband, father or other male relative. This is indeed very disturbing, and something must be done to stop this.

Again, I reiterate that it is imperative that open and intelligent discussion is maintained in the matters of Family Violence, so that all factors can be considered, in our endeavour to reach a solution.

## **What can the Police do to improve the situation?**

According to recent statistics, there have been more than 33,000 Apprehended Violence Orders (AVO) issued in Victoria since 2012. How can the Police possibly deal with this many? Perhaps there is a need to introduce a "risk" system to the AVO's, so that the Police can prioritise these in order of greatest risk to the victim. This would then help to protect people better. It must also be pointed out that there will be a number of these AVO's that have been issued to people for the wrong reasons. Sometimes AVO's are issued against people without justification, or due process being followed, or simply to frustrate Family Law matters (especially when it comes to Child Support and access).

The Police should also keep proper statistical records of both perpetrators and victims, which include all of the relevant factors (such as sex, age, cultural background, religion etc.). These statistics could then be categorised in to relevant groups. Although this may seem to be intrusive, the data retained would not be specific to individuals, only group data. The group data would then be extremely useful to find which areas, or sectors need the most attention in terms of counselling services, and social programs designed to combat negative beliefs and attitudes.

### **What can the Media do to improve the situation?**

The Media would do well to report facts, not one-sided opinions. There is far too much bias against men in the Media. Yes, there are violent men out there who need to face the full force of the law. However, there are also violent women who should be taken to task by the authorities.

Rather than only having campaigns aimed at reducing men's violence against women and children, could there also be campaigns that state that violence against anyone is unacceptable?

It is time that we start to look at things intelligently in this country, instead of jumping on the bandwagon of popular opinion.

Not all men are from Mars, and neither are all Women from Venus. Men and Women cover all spectrums of masculinity and femininity, and as such should be seen as representing themselves as people, rather than a reflection of their sex.

### **Improvements to the Family Law Court system**

The Family Law Court system in Australia, like most other Westernised countries has its problems. Like any system which deals with people, it is not perfect since it is a reflection of human nature itself with all its flaws.

When people are going through difficult divorces involving property settlements and child access (custody), they are at their most vulnerable. These cases can go on for years, creating enormous financial and social problems. Sometimes, of course people can be the cause of their own misery by not taking good legal advice when it is offered.

If there is way of speeding up the process so that issues are resolved faster, this will go a long way to reducing peoples stress and anxiety. There also needs to be more attention given to fathers, so that their concerns are heard as well as their ex-partners. More strict counselling needs to be given to the people involved in Family Law matters earlier, so that cases are not protracted.



## Men's Referral Services

Men's Referral Services throughout Australia exist to help men deal with violence issues. These services are great to help men deal with their anger and violence issues, however, they invariably assume that if you are a man, **you are the perpetrator**. I have yet to find a Men's Referral Service that offers counselling to men who are **victims**. Why can't we have services for men which offer the same services currently offered to Women? Surely there are men out there who are in need of this!

Don't get me wrong, I think that these Men's Referral Services are great. They provide a good service which many men will benefit from, as well as providing for a safer environment for the women who share their lives with these men. I just think that we need to expand our view of the whole Family Violence situation in Australia, and perhaps provide services which cater for other needs as well.

Here are some examples of services which I believe would be useful for men:-

- Temporary accommodation for men. This would be a great way for men to get away from any problems at home. They may not need protection, in the same way perhaps women do, however, just the fact that they are out of the house may be enough to diffuse any violent situations. Also, trained counsellors could be made available in these temporary accommodation areas, who could guide men in how to manage anger, and change their beliefs and attitudes. It must also be noted that if a man is required to leave his home (because of Police intervention for example) then he has nowhere to go, and is therefore more likely to retaliate against his partner (not that he has any right to do this!).
- Professional Development Workshops and training courses. This can be great for men's self-esteem, as well as provide positive role models.
- Courses designed to help men find meaningful employment.
- Anger Management Courses for Men (Taking Responsibility). Currently most Men's Referral Services offer these courses.

## Women's Referral Services

Women's Referral Services are great for women and children who are in need of emergency accommodation, in the event of a crisis at home (such as Family Violence). These services also offer various courses ranging from Professional Development Courses, literacy, Computing, Financial Advice and legal advice. Unlike the Men's Referral Services, these services tend to lean towards the assumption that women (and children) are always the **victims** of Family Violence.

There is not even a hint that a woman could be a **perpetrator**.

We definitely need services such as these for women and children to keep them safe in the event of a crisis. However, I believe it would also be beneficial to our society as a whole if these Women's Referral Services also offered Anger Management Courses for Women. After all, we are all human and are capable of making mistakes and bad decisions.

### **Child Support Agency**

The Child Support Agency is certainly a service that is required so that parents are held accountable and responsible for their children's financial well-being.

The payment of Child Support causes many parents much angst, since it is a payment which is strictly monitored by the Agency, as well as the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). It also seems to come at the worst possible time, since this is when people have separated, and probably have extra expenses to cater for (such as renting an apartment away from the family home).

Most people I believe are happy to pay for their children, so that they have all their needs met. However, I do believe that people are not happy to pay for their ex-partners life style. There needs to be a system put in place that guarantees that Child Support Payments can only be used to provide food, clothing, school books etc. for the children. Since this is currently not the case, an unscrupulous parent may not use the money for the children at all.

If the Child Support Agency can find a way of ensuring that payments are only used for the children, then this will help alleviate angst (and therefore reduce confrontations between parents).

## Section Three

### Conclusion

Throughout this submission to The Royal Commission into Family Violence I have covered many varied topics. Some of this is based on my own experiences throughout my married years, as well as during Family Law matters (Child Support, custody, access visits etc).

I have also gained a great insight into this area by listening to other people and their experiences in their lives, as well as the wealth of knowledge I have gained by participating in an Anger Management Course. The people I met during these times have been an inspiration to me.

There are so many other areas which I would love to write about. There is unfortunately not enough time to be across all of these.

I am more than happy to discuss any issues in this submission with people from the Commission.

In summary, I am hopeful that my submission may enable people to look at the issues of Family Violence with open hearts and minds, to ensure that together as a society we can end the scourge of violence within our homes and families.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to write this submission.