

I am writing this submission at 'the last minute', commencing at 11:20 pm on the 28 of May 2015.

I had considered submitting earlier but had thought 'what's the point.' But will give this a go anyway.

I am a male. For some years and following a traumatic personal experience I have been disturbed at the tendency to reduce all matters of family violence to 'violence against women'.

I write in out of concern for the failure of the community to adequately face the in full the problem of family violence. We are constantly told that this problem must not be suppressed or minimized, yet many of those stressing this point deliberately do precisely that. I know from personal experience that the failure to acknowledge the role of women's aggression and violence destroys people's lives.

I note that the terms of reference state that: "While both men and women can be perpetrators or victims of family violence victims of family violence, overwhelmingly the majority of perpetrators are men and the victims are men and women."

The terms of reference state that there were 44 family related deaths in Victoria in 2013. No gender breakdown is given for these figures. And indeed while it is regularly mentioned that a woman is killed by a partner or former partner once a fortnight in Australia, figures are not given on male deaths. Indeed it is very difficult to discover what the figures are by means of an internet search.

By chance I saw a newspaper article some years ago which stated that The Australian Institute of Criminology reported that in 2006-7, 65 people were killed by a spouse lover or former lover. Of the victims 42 were women and 23 men, while 44 offenders were men and 21 were women. This would indicate that some of the deaths involved same sex partners but it would appear that in approximately one third of cases, the perpetrators were women and the victims men.

A Domestic Violence Resource centre document, discussed in more detail below states:

"The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) has found that domestic violence plays a significant role in the lead up to lethal violence perpetrated within the family. Domestic violence accounted for 27% of all homicides in Australia between 1989 and 1996.²⁵ Another AIC study found that of the 129 family homicides each year, 77 related to domestic disputes, and 75% of victims were women. Further, 25% of these incidents occurred after the partners had separated or divorced."

The above figures indicate that the number of male homicide victims of female partners is between one third and one quarter of the total.

Homicide is unlikely to suffer from the problem of underreporting. Other forms of family violence may not be reported. According to the Domestic Violence Resource Centre document:

“21,618 family violence incidents were reported to police in the year 2000-01; approximately 80% of the victims were female. In the same year, nearly 20,000 children were present at reported family violence incidents.”

So one in five *reported* victims of family violence not resulting in homicide are men. Given that the almost the entirety of publicity on family violence is about women as victims, the social expectation that men should be tough and to complain about being attacked by women is likely to be viewed as sooking and the probable perception of men that reports against women will not be taken seriously, or that they may find themselves being cast in the role of perpetrator (I can personally attest to the reality of this perception). I suggest that men are far less likely to report such incidents and the 20% figure should be considered a lower bound of the real rate of female offending.

So while female victims of male violence may be the majority of cases in family violence it is not, I would suggest, an overwhelming majority such that this category of victim and perpetrator can be ignored.

And even if these figures are wrong, or out of date, this should not be a numbers game. What excuse is there for ignoring part of the problem because of the gender of the victims and the perpetrators?

And ignored it is. I once came across The Victorian Domestic Violence Resource Centre's kit *101 Ways Great and Small to Prevent Family Violence*. Like the terms of reference for the commission, at the beginning it acknowledges in one sentence that men may be victims of such violence and indeed the wording is very similar to the statement in the terms of reference:

“Although women can be violent towards their male partners and violence also occurs between partners of the same sex, the overwhelming burden of partner violence is borne by women at the hands of men.”

It pursues that aspect of the problem no further.

There are however sections acknowledging the role of women as perpetrators, but only where the victims are women.

There is a section addressing the problem of women in abusive lesbian relationships. There is even a special section for aboriginal women in abusive lesbian relationships. There is no section dealing with men as the victims of female perpetrators.

If violence by women against other women is serious enough to be addressed in this publication, and violence between indigenous women deserves special consideration, why is violence by women against men ignored?

I suggest that it statistically highly unlikely that the number of female perpetrators in lesbian relationships, let alone the number in indigenous lesbian relationships, is greater than those in heterosexual relationships, the latter being a much larger percentage of all intimate relationships. So why the silence?

In spite of the statement in the publication welcoming feedback, my letter to the DVRC drawing attention to their failure to adequately cover the problem of men as victims of female perpetrators went unanswered.

I also note that the web page of Domestic Violence Victoria has that organization subtitled as "Peak body for domestic violence services for women & children" Once again men as victims are rendered invisible.

There is also a failure to recognize that in cases of violence against children, the perpetrator is as likely as not the mother. The Safe Horizon group in the US states:

"Of the 2012 child abuse cases 45.3% of the perpetrators were male and 55.3% were female.

I confess that much of the preceding content of this letter has been prepared by cutting and pasting from a letter I prepared and intended to send to Victorian Police commissioner Ken Lay. I did not send it but here is another part addressing Mr Lay directly.

"I viewed on television prior to last Christmas your plea for people to be aware of the potential for domestic violence over that period in order that women and children would be safe. On Boxing Day a woman allegedly stabbed to death a man in a domestic dispute. There was another report a day later of a woman who picked up a puppy during a domestic argument and threw it off a second floor balcony."

I think I will end there. I wish I was confident that my submission and the dimension of family violence that involves female perpetrators will receive proper recognition, but experience has taught me otherwise.

The media release announcing the proposed terms of reference for the commission was headed "Nothing off limits in Family Violence royal Commission" but I am not convinced that will be the case.

I will conclude with this observation. Each victim is an individual who deserves equal protection under the law and each perpetrator held to the same level of responsibility regardless of race, religion, gender or any other categorization by social scientists and statisticians. The impression given by family violence groups and the media that women as perpetrators are a statistically nonexistent or rare occurrence is false.

If covering up family violence is recognized as an evil, that should apply to male victims as much as female. I wonder how many men's lives have been destroyed and will be in the future by what seems to be a deliberate strategy to ignore this aspect of family violence.

This should not be viewed as an aspect of gender politics, or that solutions are part of a zero sum game, with any attention given to male victims and female perpetrators will be at the expense of dealing with female victims and male perpetrators.

Sincerely,

