

## Royal Commission into Family Violence

Submission by Leonie Davey

The Family Violence Prevention Act 2008 (Vic) defines (for the purposes of the Act) as being:

- a) *Behaviour by a person towards a family member of that person if that behaviour –*
  - i. *Is physically or sexually abusive; or*
  - ii. *Is emotionally or psychologically abusive; or*
  - iii. *Is economically abusive; or*
  - iv. *Is threatening; or*
  - v. *Is coercive; or*
  - vi. *In any other way controls or dominates the family member or another person; or*
- b) *Behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of, behaviour referred to in paragraph a).*

This definition fails to address the full extent of Family Violence (FV). Other categories of FV abuse not adequately addressed in this definition are:

- a) *Social*
  - i. *Isolating the victim from family and/or friends;*
  - ii. *Denigrating the victim's family and/or friends;*
  - iii. *Preventing the victim from having/seeking social and/or employment opportunities;*
  - iv. *Not allowing the victim access to transport and/or a licence;*
  - v. *Controlling the victim's appearance;*
  - vi. *Sabotaging social outings;*
  - vii. *Needing total attention from the victim;*
  - viii. *Monitoring the victim's phone calls, messages, and/or internet usage;*

- ix. *Damaging or removing the victim's mobile or not allowing the victim access to a mobile.*
- b) *Verbal*
  - i. *Insulting/putting down the victim;*
  - ii. *Giving the victim the silent treatment;*
  - iii. *Calling the victim names;*
  - iv. *Finding fault with the victim;*
  - v. *Lies;*
  - vi. *Humiliating the victim in public;*
  - vii. *Dominating the conversation;*
  - viii. *Yelling/shouting at the victim;*
  - ix. *Whispering;*
  - x. *Being indiscreet;*
  - xi. *Always correcting the victim.*
- c) *Spiritual*
  - i. *Denying the victim choices;*
  - ii. *Demanding the victim take on their beliefs;*
  - iii. *Ridiculing the victim's beliefs;*
  - iv. *Using their beliefs to justify their behaviours;*
  - v. *Not allowing any negotiation in children's spiritual education.*
- d) *Stalking*
  - i. *Excessive phone calls or SMS, emails or letters;*
  - ii. *Driving past the victim's house or place of employment;*
  - iii. *Reading or taking the victim's mail;*
  - iv. *Turning up at places frequented by the victim.*

Given all of this, it is obvious that the definition of what is FV (or domestic violence) is rather extensive and includes many behaviours that many people would not be aware of as abusive behaviour. Ask any individual who has not experienced FV, either personally or as a witness, and they will most likely tell you that a victim of FV is a woman who is repeatedly beaten by her husband/male partner: a bruised, beaten and bloodied woman. It took me eighteen months *after* I left my abusive ex-partner to fully comprehend that I had been in a FV relationship. I, too, held the misconception of the stereotypical FV victim and, whilst, I was aware I had been abused, as far as I

was concerned, this was not FV. As a result of this, I did not feel as though I deserved to access FV support services because, I believed, I had not experienced it so I was taking the time my case worker spent with me away from a more deserving woman. It was not until I had to fill out an application for an intervention order myself that I finally realised that, yes, it was FV. I was shocked by this realisation and extremely troubled that I was not aware of this. If I was not aware of what FV really is, how many other victims are not aware that what they are living through or have lived through is FV? Media has an extremely large part to play in the perpetuation of the stereotype of a bruised, beaten and bloodied woman. This is what they report. The media is not interested in the real face of FV. As a result, society continues to believe the stereotype. They laugh if you tell them that you had to hide \$10 under the mattress just so you had money if you needed it because you knew there would be nothing left after he had spent it on his needs. They do not understand the severity of such actions, nor that there are potentially dangerous repercussions if you are found out, and they do not equate it with FV.

How many more victims of FV would come forward if they knew that FV goes far beyond the stereotype?

How many more would be saved from a potential FV relationship if they were aware of the warning signs before a major commitment was made?

It is important that the community is made aware of the 'red flags' that appear early in a potentially abusive relationship as well as the warning signs that the relationship has become one of those classified as FV.

'Red flags' that appear early in the relationship include:

- a) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] comes on very strong to begin with, is extremely charming and a smooth talker.
- b) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] gets very serious very quickly in a relationship.
- c) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] gets extremely jealous of other people.
- d) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] isolates you and tries to make you feel guilty for wanting contact with family, friends or for participating in activities outside the relationship.

- e) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] never takes responsibility for himself/herself, always blames others or something else.
- f) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] abuses drugs and/or alcohol.
- g) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] acts hurt when he/she doesn't get his own way.
- h) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] takes offence when other people disagree with his/her opinion.
- i) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] has been cruel to pets or other animals in the past.
- j) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] has threatened you with violence.
- k) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] calls you names, puts you down or swears at you.
- l) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] is extremely moody and switches quickly from being nice to explosive anger.
- m) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] intimidates others.
- n) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] holds you against you will to keep you from walking away or leaving the room.
- o) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] has abused children.
- p) [Your boyfriend/girlfriend] has hit a previous girlfriend/boyfriend.

(from [www.domesticviolence.com.au/pages/warning-signs-of-dating-violence.php](http://www.domesticviolence.com.au/pages/warning-signs-of-dating-violence.php) )

How many potential victims would have walked away from a relationship that raises these red flags while they still had the strength to do so?

Much of this behaviour will continue well into the relationship but, still, many people would not recognise these as warning signs of FV. When it comes to determining if the relationship you are in is FV, you need to ask yourself a number of questions:

Does your partner:

- a) Expect you to spend all your time with him or to 'check in' with and let him/her know where you are?
- b) Act extremely jealous and/or possessive of you?
- c) Isolate you by controlling where you go, who you see and talk to, what you wear?
- d) Treat you with disrespect and put you down?
- e) Put down your family and friends, your dreams, ideas and/or goals?

- f) Lose his/her temper frequently over little things?
- g) Make you feel as if you are walking on eggshells to keep the peace?
- h) Makes threats to hurt you, leave you, hurt your pets, destroy your property and/or commit suicide if you don't do what he/she wants?
- i) Play mind games or make you feel guilty?
- j) Refuse to take responsibility for his/her actions? Blame you, drugs or alcohol, his/her boss, parents, etc for his/her behaviour?

(from [www.newhopeforwomen.org/red-flags-for-domestic-abuse](http://www.newhopeforwomen.org/red-flags-for-domestic-abuse))

How can you ask yourself these questions if you do not know them?

The community must be educated in what FV is, it's real extent, not just the stereotypes. Education should start early, in schools, so children can learn what respectful relationships are. A child brought up witnessing FV will learn that violence and abuse of any kind is 'normal' in relationships. The cycle needs to be broken and the only way to do this is to start educating our children as early as possible. When my eight year old daughter told me that, if a boy likes you, he hurts you. She was told that by a friend. This needs to stop and the only way it can be stopped is through education. Schools, kindergartens and, even, child care centres have anti-bullying policies and procedures in place so why not policies and procedures that address FV. If one in three women experience FV, how many children in one school are affected? Educating children about FV needs to be a compulsory part of the curriculum. It needs to be continuously reinforced so that our children do not grow up to be perpetrators or victims of FV.

Whole of community awareness of FV needs to be raised as well. This is vital if we are to encourage victims to come forward and to have perpetrators face the consequences of their victims to come forward and to have perpetrators face the consequences of their behaviour. The community needs to be made aware of the red flags and warning signs that begin early in a potential FV relationship and continue throughout. The myths and stereotypes need to be replaced by the true extent of FV, including why victims stay in the relationship. If we can have hard-hitting advertisements against the use of ice or drink driving, why can we not have similar advertisements about FV? We need to encourage the media to expose FV for what it is, not only the stereotypical

image. We need to stop the victim blaming and making victims feel ashamed, embarrassed and guilty for their situation. We need to tell them we know it is not their fault and they did what they had to do to survive. We need to tell people that FV can happen to anyone. It doesn't discriminate according to gender of either the victim or the perpetrator; socio-economic class; level of education; place of residence; cultural background; ethnicity; race, etc. We can only do this by raising community awareness and the only way to raise community awareness is to make the full extent of FV more visible than it is now. Basically, the community needs to face the hard facts about FV by having it 'put in their faces'. Victims and survivors know the horrific truth about FV. It is about time that the rest of society does too.

Regards

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