

Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence

My Story:

I am a survivor of intimate partner violence. I was 22 when I met [REDACTED], who I usually refer to as [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] because after what he put me through he really does not deserve a name. For the purpose of this Royal Commission into Family Violence submission I will force myself to use his name. I had never experienced violence or abusive behaviours in my life before I met [REDACTED].

Stalking and harassment:

- Calls, texts, clothes cut up on clothes line, followed around.
- Rape by stranger

GP response:

- Presented with stress-related illnesses and broken bones and disclosed abuse. Never received a referral to a FV service. This compounded my feelings of isolation

Experience of the legal system when applying for intervention orders:

- [REDACTED] Magistrates Court experience vs Heidelberg
- Court Support-[REDACTED]'s lawyer
- Berry St Referral
- FV specialist court
- Open vs closed court
- Police representation vs representing myself
- [REDACTED] re-traumatised me deeply and left me feeling at risk

Police:

- Held hostage at gun-point on my birthday and unable to leave the house, I barricaded myself in a bedroom and called police. [REDACTED] hid the gun when they arrived and they did not follow up and check on its existence when they arrived. No arrest occurred, and he was not removed from the house. Instead the police offered me a lift to Southern Cross station. The lease and all bills were in my name at the rental property that we lived in, and the majority of the possessions in the house

belonged to me. I returned back to the house as I was scared he would damage or destroy things if I stayed away.

- Lack of police investigation when I reported threat to kill in 2006
- Lack of police representation when applying for intervention order at [REDACTED] Magistrates Court
- FOI process- having to pay to access docs. FV/child abuse/sexual assault survivors who require these documents for legal cases should not have to pay for them.

VOCAT claim process:

- Lack of referrals for DV-related incidents to VOCAT, only discovered eligibility through making claim for rape that I was also eligible to lodge a claim based on being a victim of DV.
- The length of claim assessment process was extremely long.
- Difference between maximum amount of compensation for sexual assault, as opposed to DV.
- Positive- closed court hearing

Access to counselling:

- Need to be referred to appropriate fully-funded counselling as soon as possible after leaving abusive relationship.
- Need for FV counselling to be funded through Medicare for in excess of the current 10 sessions annually, including psycho-therapists/ trauma specialists to have a greater capacity to bulk-bill their services for FV survivors.
- Effects of trauma often do not lessen over time, however can manifest in many different ways. There is a very strong need for FV survivors to be able to access long-term subsidised specialist counselling services. Many women will need to access this at different times throughout their lives because there will be different things that can cause a woman's trauma to be triggered.
- PTSD, Depression

Impact on employment:

- Difficulty of obtaining personal leave to attend Magistrates and VOCAT court hearings. There was a general lack of support and it was extremely embarrassing and intrusive to have provide verification and discuss the circumstances surrounding requiring leave to attend court with Centrelink's Attendance Manager.

Safe Steps Media Advocacy Project for the Prevention of Violence Against Women:

- Empowerment
- Regaining my voice
- Mazlow's Hierarchy of Needs- Self Actualisation

Conclusion:

- Need for integrated response
- Housing- safe, affordable, long-term housing is integral to women and children being able to commence the recovery process after leaving an abusive relationship.
- Specialised Case Management
- Greater disclosure by Centrelink for FV crisis payments and other supports available.
- Web of bureaucracy