

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

Submission for the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Author: [REDACTED] personal experience with Family Violence to herself and [REDACTED] children

I could write a book that would be 3" thick, but I won't. Here is a brief account, but there is a lot of material in here.

WHY I LEFT/ESCAPED

- After having children it became increasingly apparent that on a daily basis my husband pretended the children didn't exist, until they were old enough to 'entertain' him eg: aged [REDACTED] years old and able to follow him around and speak. But he neither fed or changed or washed them or attended to them in any way whether sick or well (or cooked, cleaned etc, only the garden maintenance).
- It got so he pretended we didn't exist, except to service him. He was out of work for [REDACTED] years deliberately, and any money he earned from temporary jobs he kept. The children and I were living on welfare. He was increasingly abusive to all of us. I don't know why. There was a 1000 events I cannot go into here, the neglect, the constant put-downs, the whatever I did was never good enough, if I dressed to go out up it was admonished, I studied [REDACTED] and he hated it, told "don't think you're going to get a job", I was good cook but he could acknowledge it, and on and on it went so I know I had to leave. I was pregnant with my [REDACTED] child and know I had to wait till it was born to leave otherwise I would be in very difficult or impossible circumstance as I had no idea where to go, and I knew he would get even nastier.
- I had to wait till the [REDACTED] child was well over [REDACTED] months old before I tried to discuss matters with him.
- He threatened to shoot us all with a [REDACTED]. I believed him as he enjoyed shooting animals. He doesn't have an ounce of compassion or feeling for anyone else, only childish, immature, extreme selfishness and bullying. He is a pathological liar, and was labelled by a psychologist as a dry alcoholic.
- I realised one day that he'd been intimidating me for years and it was increasing. It came in the form of daily 'put-downs' and whatever I was doing it wasn't good enough, and basic neglect of us.
- I packed up the children, [REDACTED] left a note for him to vacate the house and while I stayed at my mothers. He did and I returned to the house to live (as I had nowhere else) while we agreed to sell it and divorce. However he increasingly bullied, harassed and threatened me and the children.
- 2 months after I left my ex, my house (the family home) burnt down twice in one evening, to the ground. Although the fire brigade and police came, it was and not fully investigated by the police or fire brigade so no one was charged for the offence, to this day. I was coerced under pressure to sign a statement of events (for the first fire) that the police, the fire brigade and I knew, by evidence, had not happened, but it was convenient for them, and I was in shock. I stayed at a friend's house that night. The second house fire apparently started an hour later and burnt to the ground. It was investigated by Forensic, but neither the police, fire brigade or forensic would tell me or show me their reports on how the second (or first) fire started. According to them no one knows. However, I had been shown by Forensic as we inspected the fire aftermath, all the 'hot-spots' where the fire was 'deliberately' started, as it didn't start on its own. The police and fire brigade were completely silent on all of this. There was no insurance on the house or contents so I lost everything.
- I moved in with a girlfriend and her family. The [REDACTED] of us slept in one room and lived there for [REDACTED] months while the property was sold by me, as my ex wouldn't lift a finger to help or could be trusted, and he continued to bully harass and abuse, and neglect the children on access.
- All the Intervention Orders, and court Access and Settlement Orders did not take any of this into account (by solicitors, barristers or judges) what so ever, nor did it stop my ex from abusing us or playing 'cat and mouse' with the children's lives. A great, great, great deal of detail about the bullying and abuse could be said here, but I would fill a large book.
- Eg: I had written into the Access Orders that the children must wear [REDACTED] etc as he refused to do this, or buy them anything including clothes and bedding, as he would steal mine

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

and not bring them back. He refused to give the middle child, [REDACTED] medication, or believe he had [REDACTED] even when he was given a Doctors letter to prove it. The child had already been hospitalised in intensive care for a week with a serious [REDACTED] illness but my ex ignored all this

- Me ex would bring the children back from access in shocking states of filth, hunger, illness and accidents, as witnessed by the friends I lived with. Always many hours late the children would be in a terrible state. I would feed, bath them and bandage their wounds, listen to their stories and they would sleep in late from exhaustion. They could go to school so I would take them to the Doctors' the next day to document their burns and wounds. My Dr was furious as one time my eldest ([REDACTED]) had stepped on fence wire which went right through his foot, on access. He had been pulled off the wire and nothing done.
- The people I lived with witnessed all this and were appalled, and help me as much as they could. Without them we may all be dead or in a really bad state
- My ex brought the children back many times, so sick and wounded that he had to carry them into the house.
- Nothing I could do or say to him or anyone changed anything.
- He blatantly used the children as weapons of abuse to try to get back at me for daring to leave him. All legal and police completely ignored all this, pretending it didn't happen or that I must be exaggerating
- My ex's solicitor used very abusive and accusatory language, which my solicitor ignored, but made me think my ex wasn't getting the right advise, but just added to his stirring up endless trouble

SOLICITORS - PRETENDED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DIDN'T EXIST (A solicitors' picnic)

- I engaged 4 solicitors, one after the other because they were so ineffectual, [REDACTED] before finding a (younger) man who was at least a bit sympathetic and was actually acting for me for my benefit. The other (and older) solicitors were not acting in my best interest but seemed to be stuck in an attitude of male supremacy and the wife (and children) we just meant to be silent supporters of the man of the house.
- No one (professional) wanted or did coin the phrase 'domestic violence' so it was never actually identified or named as such, so solicitors kept acting as though the events didn't exist or never happened eg: house burnt down, threatened to shoot use all, my homelessness, no finances, continued threats and abuse, calling the police, were all completely and utterly ignored by the solicitors
- The older solicitor said that 'it was a pity he (my ex) was paying maintenance ([REDACTED] per week per child), after all, he wouldn't see much of the children (with access)" completely ignoring his behaviour
- The (better younger) solicitor said my ex had 'gone tropo' which was the closest to admitting his behaviour was in any way detrimental or violent
- The solicitor said "that no one will do anything until there's a body" in other words exactly that, until my ex murders one of us I will be completely ignored
- When my ex broke into my flat one evening (while I was in the lounge room) and took the children through the bedroom window, the solicitor arranged an Intervention Order ([REDACTED]), then said that they "weren't worth the paper they are written on", in other words, the police will do nothing even if you call them to an incident. I took out the order and the solicitor was right. The police ignored it

FINANCES – WELL BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

- I was absolutely forced by the solicitors to settle for Access Orders that allowed my ex to have the children, [REDACTED] of which he was incapable of caring for, every second weekend and half the school holidays, to be picked up at my residence. Also [REDACTED] per week per child, no CPI or any other raise built in, no spouse income, but I fought for [REDACTED] % of the property ([REDACTED]). I had assets when I came into the marriage.
- I was allowed Legal Aid to settle the property and access (Stage 1) and custody orders, but only on the condition that I had no money after I sold the property, so I had to very, very quickly buy a house with the balance.

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

- The [redacted] children and I lived on Centrelink Parent Payments of \$ [redacted] per week in total, as I had not worked of [redacted] years, only had [redacted] education and so I was unemployable. I had started a [redacted] course in accounting but had to give it up second semester as I couldn't get babysitting in the evenings.
- Stage 1 Maintenance was by court order but collected through Child Support office. Fortunately regularly, however my Centrelink was cut back because of Child Support, meagre as it was
- Solicitors fees were \$ [redacted] per minute plus costs

HOUSING – HOUSE FIRE, HOMELESSNESS AND CONSTANT MOVING

Briefly -

- I went back to the family home (there was nowhere else I could have gone) but [redacted] months after separation it was (deliberately) burnt to the ground with all contents and no insurance (and no investigation by police)
- I had to live with friends for [redacted] months while settlement went through
- I rented a one bedroom flat (for [redacted] of us) for several months while the property was being sold
- I had no money other than Centrelink payments and waiting for the property to be sold
- I was forced financially to buy a house in order to get Legal Aid, otherwise I would have been pushed into eternal rental poverty (the court cases were costly as they were always dragged out by me ex)
- We lived off second-hand and donated clothes and furniture as I had no money
- After [redacted] months of continuous abuse and bullying by my ex we left the house I had bought and moved in with my mother into a one bedroom flat on the [redacted] in desperation to get away. I rented the house out while I decided where to go
- I rented a one bedroom flat in country [redacted] for [redacted] months while I decided where to go, as we had to put distance between my ex and the children and I if we were to survive at all
- All the time the children were being put into one school after another each time we moved
- Because he increased the abuse, harassments and threats, we had to move a long way off
- [redacted] months after I separated I moved back to [redacted] where I grew up as there would be familiarity and a lot of opportunity for myself and the children to study and work and make a decent life for ourselves
- I stayed with my brother in A [redacted] for a short while I found a small house to rent
- The owner wanted to sell so I found another house to rent in A southern suburb
- I was accepted into [redacted] university [redacted] to study so I sold the house in [redacted] and bought a very small house in the [redacted]. Unfortunately the house was very old and only 8-9 squares, 2 bedroom with a bungalow, as that's all the money I had left after my ex took me to court again. I took a small mortgage out on Parenting Payment. You can't do that now.

THE POLICE – IGNORED DV AND IGNORED RESTRAINING ORDERS

- I went to pick the 2 oldest children ([redacted]) up from school. And my ex was waiting there. He did not have access that day so should not have been there. He grabbed the two children by the arm and was going to march off with them when I stopped him. I asked him what he was doing (but knew it was just one of his many bullying tactics) so I took one of the children's hands, but my ex pulled him away, making it look like a tug of war with the children. This was outside the school gate in front of many young children getting on the school bus with teachers. Some of the children watching were upset and started to cry at the scene and teachers were upset. One went to get the principle who phoned the police. They came straight away and I explained the situation. The police just gave in and said let him have them. So again I was walked all over by the police and my ex. showing my ex that he had all the power as even the police backed up his abuse. When I went back to the car a few paces away my ex had already taken the youngest out of my locked car. I changed the lock of the car after that. This sort of thing happened many times.

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

- Years later after [REDACTED] years of separation and divorce and moving to [REDACTED] my ex was still abusing, harassing and literally terrorising us at every opportunity. The children were having a birthday party with friends at home, when my ex suddenly showed up and started bagging on the front door and demanding the children. The children didn't want to go with him. I called the police, but instead of explaining the situation and having them ignore me, I just said there was an intruder in my house. They came straight away. I showed them 2 previous Restraining Orders and explained the constant harassment over the years. They threatened him with jail on the spot and had the hand cuffs out. They said they explained to him what the Restraining Orders meant (I don't think anyone else had as his solicitor was also very abusive to me). They said he was extremely angry. However this had the effect of making him 'back off', and he reduced the harassment after that. He was still given the children by the police, in tears, halfway through their birthday party.

CENTRELINK

- When I first separated the very young social worker just said "well you have had a difficult time, we'd better get you some payments" and that's all the help I got. No referrals.
- Subsequent years with Austudy for the children, has had its own problems with Centrelink being rude, and losing your paperwork, again and again. As a single parent you don't have time for their stuff ups
- I then made Centrelink stamp, sign, date and copy anything I lodged with them, and they hated it
- They also said I owed them money when the Howard government decided to 'attack' sole parents and disability by going back over their records, in my case [REDACTED] (yes [REDACTED]) years and coming up with an impossible figure, for which I had no paperwork going back [REDACTED] years. When I enquired at Centrelink they added another 10% on for my impertinence. I didn't realise this till years later. I didn't know how to challenge it either. I rang Legal Aid but the volunteer person there was no help. Centrelink demanded I pay them \$100 per week and they were very nasty about it, even though I had 3 children at school, worked fulltime in a low paying job ("in the recession we had to have") paying HECS off, and no other means of support. We were just surviving financially.
- Parenting Payment needs to be restored and taken to when the last child finishes VCE or equivalent as a backup to survival as most female single parents are left without an income if they are on the run from DV, which can be for years, like myself
- Job Services job agencies do very little to genuinely help anyone (at any stage or age of life) find a job. They just tick boxes, are poorly trained and often just harass people to make their figures look good

COUNSELLORS – LISTENING POSTS THAT DON'T HELP

- I sought counsellors in [REDACTED] Lifeline on the phone was a listening ear, but no help.
- A young male counsellor employed by the Council didn't know much and just kept saying (just before we split up) make really good sex with him and he'll be OK. I said it was way past that, but he just kept insisting.
- I spoke to a Minister of religion and while he was sympathetic he could offer not help.
- In Melbourne a young counsellor employed by the Council listened passively for an hour and said, well I'm sorry you'll have to explain this to the next person, I'm going on maternity leave now.
- No one at any time offered any referral to any agency, welfare, social work etc, ever. Maybe they didn't exist then. I'll never know.
- All I wanted was someone to tell me how to handle his behaviour and what I could do to stop him abusing us
- Years later while studying at university, again, student counsellors were useless listening posts with no help at all. I came out of these sessions feel 10 times worse than when I went in. I was completely wound up with no answers to anything
- A professor of psychology at Uni finally told me to keep all my contact with him as brief as possible. So in answer to his long accusatory lying letters I would just say 2 lines about when to pick up the children.

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

Brilliant! It took 7-8 years of counsellors to find that out. Unbelievable. This stuff should be taught in high school.

SOCIAL WORKERS

- I never came across any during my time on the run, no one referred me
- Centrelink won't let you see one of theirs unless you are nearly dead – I've asked
- Since Uni I've heard so many complaints (I've worked in the helping industry) about 'young, just out of Uni' social workers appointed and they seriously don't know anything about life so are often quite ineffectual or give the wrong advice
- I would recommend that ANY social workers, counsellor, case workers or mediators be of mature age and experienced in life.
- Social work degrees at Uni were only for the well healed because they were the only people who could take that sort of time off without working. Uni demanded that all paid work was to be quit (for years) while they undertook a social work degrees –
- I tried several times to get into a social worker degree, first they said I didn't know enough about the SW world I was to work in (really?), and secondly with [REDACTED] children at school and a P/T job I was to immediately quit and we were to live on thin air for years
- Therefore the common complaint was that many social workers came from wealthy families and didn't have a clue about the people they were presumed to be helping

A PSYCHOLOGISTS' ASSESSMENT OF HIM

- One psychologist called my ex a dry alcoholic, with all the mindless abusiveness that comes with that. He is also a pathological liar and bully since young, according to his mother. I didn't know all this when I married him.
- He did tell me once that he'd thrown a knife at his older slightly mentally retarded brother and it had lodged in his back, with not serious consequences.
- My ex also enjoyed killing [REDACTED] by slitting their throats. He also enjoyed shooting any cats he saw, wild or someone's pet. Consequently we didn't have pets while living with him.
- I knew later from all this that shooting all of us was a possibility. He had no real compunction about these things.

FAMILY LAW COURTS - ATTITUDE PROBLEMS (12 months worth of proceedings)

COURT MEDIATORS – A WASTE OF TIME

- When I moved to [REDACTED] he was living in [REDACTED]. Crossing the border into Victoria when I moved to [REDACTED] meant lodging Custody and Access Orders all over again.
- He went for custody of the children, and I tried to stop access until he stopped his abusive behaviour. The children were afraid of him, and constantly wet their beds, and cried when they had to go on access with him
- For some reason he continually failed to show up in court, costing me a fortune in solicitors fee and costs
- The judge asked me to explain myself regarding stopping access (I and the children had gone away when my ex arrived for access, as the only way to make the point about his behaviour)
- I stood on oath and explained about the constant abuses and that my ex refused to give my child (his child) his [REDACTED] medication since he was [REDACTED] years old.
- My solicitor was waving her hands for me not to say these things, and to appear remorseful for denying access, but I had had enough of everyone sweeping domestic violence against the children under the carpet, and spoke up

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

- I then heard a loud clapping and cheering from behind me, as I didn't realise there was so many people in the courtroom listening to me. I was nearly in tears
- The judge looked very uncomfortable and reproached, shuffled papers and finally spoke, quietly saying, "well don't let it happen again"
- The judge finally issue a warrant to bring my ex down from [REDACTED] in a divisional van to face court. So he showed up next time
- We were to have a family counsellor/mediator. I was told nothing about why or what it was all about. I had no one to come with me or help me in any way. I was studying at university and working part-time. I could only study one subject at a time due to this constant abusive court goings on
- The first mediator ignored the Restraining Order and sat us together. I told her about the threats to shoot us all, and my ex confirmed it. She calmly scribbled something on a card and went on to the next question, completely ignoring this fact. The whole 1 hour session was extremely stressful and a waste of time
- A series of mediations was set up by the judge. A different mediator. She was even worse. Young, inexperienced in life, she ignored the Restraining Order, and didn't like anything I said. She was completely intimidated by my ex, who was laughing under his breath at her incompetence.
- I told her about the refusal to give the middle child his [REDACTED] medication and refusal to believe he had [REDACTED] and showed her the Drs' letter explaining his [REDACTED]. She ignored all that and continued to give me dirty looks, I presume for daring to speak out.
- I explained about the many, many other neglects and abuses but she did want to know and just kept glaring at me.
- The whole thing was a waste of time and only proved to my ex that everybody was on his side and he could get away with anything abuse possible because no one wanted to know about it, even if it came from his own mouth, or a Drs' letter, or a Restraining Order.
- She refused to talk to me afterwards. I've no idea why. She wrote a scathing report about me to the judge.
- My solicitor said I shouldn't have mentioned any abuses as it makes me look like 'the complaining wife, or the over protective mother' and goes against me (for God sake!)
- Apparently that was the attitude of the day that the family court was taking (and had been for a very long time)

IN THE FAMILY COURT MELBOURNE

- I had a solicitor and barrister to present my case, to protect my children's future
- He represented himself
- He stood up in court after [REDACTED] months of procedures, and said "of course I don't want the children, I just want to stop paying maintenance, and get her to move back to Large country town in"
- The judge nearly stood up and was quite angry – the first time anyone has stood up for me!
- He told my ex that he would do no such thing as ask me to move, and awarded me some of the court costs against him, and continued my custody of the children, the maintenance (still at [REDACTED] per week and on CPI) and him to have [REDACTED] access, and told him to, "and get a proper job". My ex had deliberately worked part-time in order to not pay too much maintenance
- Of course my ex did not pay my court costs and I had to chase it up through a Sheriff years later

FAMILY ATTITUDES

- My mother (my father was dead) wasn't all that interested in my problems, and took a 'you made your bed you lie in it' attitude
- My ex's family didn't want to know either, as they were religious ([REDACTED], and in the country) and so divorce was a taboo subject, and family violence didn't exist, and I was an 'outsider' so they could

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

comfortably cut me loose from all ties, and did as they didn't lift a finger for the children, and praise their lying father

- If it did, then it was always 'her' fault no matter what
- My studies in sociology proved that family are not to be relied on for support in divorces/family violence and often are the opposite of support leaving the victims worse off

STUDY and WORK with ■ YOUNG CHILDREN

- As a mature age student then, I could only apply as someone with a disadvantage in education, which I did.
- Most courses including ■ were strictly full time only which precluded me from what I could study – its totally impossible to study full time with all that I had to do (no one of the face of this planet can do it)
- I got into ■ and did a ■ major as almost the only course I could do part-time while I worked part-time, raised ■ children, defended us against domestic violence and its ineffectual system, run a household, move house, and give the children some sort of normal family life
- Its took ■ years for me to get a ■ years degree
- No one can work, study and raise children without stability in their lives – safety, an income and a roof
- It doesn't get me much of a job, as I'm not specialised
- I work Not for Profit and government agencies, all of which have frequent funding cuts so I have been made redundant about ■ times in the past 13 years.
- Each time it takes longer to get a job as no one wants to employ you over ■ y.o.
- With young children jobs must be close to home so you can be there, and not spend many hours travelling as there are meals to get, washing to do, letters to open and homework to deal with etc, etc, etc, etc
- Even with teenagers you need to be there.
- This way they are well brought up with no (major) problems

HEALTH

- I lived with underlying stress for decades while we were being harassed and terrorised by my ex
- And the stress of the ineffectual system not believing me, not doing anything to help but making everything worse
- Centrelink caused a great deal of stress, as it is often understaffed, staff not trained, too young to understand, frequently getting it wrong and getting worse, but help sometimes
- Single parents are the hardest working people on earth, and I defy anyone to challenge this
- Poverty means you can't always buy good food, housing, clothes, proper shoes, heating, cooling or take a holiday for good health

THE CHILDREN AND I RELATIONSHIPS

- My ■ children and I have always got on very well together. I feel I am a very good mother and they are lovely children, right from the start. I have always been there for them, supported them in what they wanted to do and now they are successful in life, with studies, jobs and now making permanent relationships.
- I have always studied nutrition, child behaviour and good family relationships. I was brought up well in a nice middle class family with good parents and brothers. We have always worked and had good family and friendly relationships.
- Domestic violence was quite a shock to me as I had never come across anything like this in my sphere of life. I had heard about it in stories but that's all.

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

- My ■ children are boys, now young men. Gender makes no difference to good relationships. I believe I had shielded them well enough from my ex violence and abuses, and although they remember some of it as they got older, they have not let it affect their lives or relationships. We always kept everything in good humour at home, and home was always a cosy retreat from the world and a springboard in which to go out into the world from.
- This isn't to say, that if we had had a good husband and father, things could have been better. We have still been quite disadvantaged by the constant moving around, losing homes, and friends, strained relations with in-laws not to mention living on or below the poverty line for the past 20 years and missing out on a great deal of 'normal' life that others get when family pulls together instead of apart.

FRIENDS

- Friends often disappear overnight because it's all too much trouble to help
- I was lucky I had one good friend who I lived with and helped me enormously, just being with other good people gave me protection, and the children some stability. It can't be emphasised enough

WORK

- Work needs to be close to home and the children's schools to be practical and be their for the children, as usually, no one else will be
- It's extremely difficult to get this kind of work, and paying enough to raise a family as most single parents don't get little or nothing in child support money or in kind
- Men/fathers/perpetrators usually have jobs or careers which they continue with no matter what happens so they have money
- Women (with children) don't, they have 'some work' and if in family violence, they usually have to give that up to flee, move around, hide, making it very hard to work as well as everything else happening
- It can be an impossible lifestyle even for the best woman

CONCLUSIONS / SUMMARY

At no time did anyone in any profession say 'this is family violence' and acted upon it, but instead just completely ignored anything I described that would be considered family violence as if anything I said never happened. It was so convenient for them.

If a stranger had broken into my house he would be prosecuted by the police, but if my ex husband breaks into my house it's treated by the police as all OK and nothing will be said or done by the police.

If I had not had the Parenting Payment for as long as I did we would still be living in abject poverty, or dead, as I would not have been able to move so many times to get away from my ex, or study at university to get a better job as the sole breadwinner of ■ children, plus the enormous life difficulties that were constantly thrown at me, made worse by not just the ineffectual legal and justice system but the 'blocks' that were constantly put in my way by them, and by completely ignoring my plight

Single parents (from my ■ studies - 85% female) and their children are the last cohort to be recognised in society. They are just ordinary people like everyone you see out there in the shopping centre or street, and yet they are instantly maligned by all in society including if not especially the authorities of society.

Single Parents work harder and do more than almost any and every cohort in society, yet its ignored or maligned. They work (paid) often fulltime because they are the sole breadwinners, raise children, run the

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

household, garden, fix cars, handle all normal family matters in life, fend off abusive ex husbands and deal with all (often antagonistic) authority systems. No one else in society does this much. If you think young couples with children have it hard, single parents have it a great, great deal harder.

If you have not been through all this them, I'm sorry you don't know what it's like, and those who have been through it do, so listen to them, fully

I think single parents are ignored and maligned because it's predominantly a female cohort, with children, so are the most vulnerable and feared in society? Feared because the male bastion (and the females that support it, usually out of fear) are challenged by them. Challenged because they can't control single parents (women and children), mentally, emotionally, physically or financially, which is the usual control mechanisms of subduction in society.

We need a huge change right across society for women to be truly equal, and be recognised as the producer and nurturer of children, the next generation, and the freedom to pursue careers if they want, without saying, well you can do that as long as you also, raise the children, run the household and service the male as well. While the male puts in a token effort only.

Many men and women are doing this successfully and society needs to support more of this by supporting the WOMEN

All regions venerate the male and subdue the female and the children – this must change

It is a mature society who treats its women and children well, and not just those attached to males.