

I lived in domestic violence for [REDACTED] years and have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result. I consider myself lucky to have survived. I was a single mother of [REDACTED] children under [REDACTED] years old, living in a very low socio economic rural neighbourhood, despite my [REDACTED] post graduate degrees and extended formal education. Emotionally I was desperate. I was exhausted with no self esteem. I fell victim to the charms of a sweet talking, funny man, who initially seemed too good to be true. Within [REDACTED] months he had moved in with me, had a [REDACTED] accident because he was drunk, and thus lost his job. I supported & rehabilitated him as well as run my house & raise my family, while he started to take things out on me physically & mentally. It went downhill from there.

One of the reasons I never reported it to the police or anyone in the medical profession is because I never had the opportunity to do so. In circumstances where I could have (eg when he was arrested for attempting suicide or when he was in the hospital afterwards) I was never alone with anyone where I could have spoken freely. I was *never* asked to leave the room, or have a private chat. His psychological hold over me was extreme, so I was fearful of being beaten later at home, if spoke out against him, in his presence. Authorities need to understand that in order for the women to speak out; they need to be in a safe position to do so i.e. they need to be away from the perpetrator. If a policeman had taken me aside and said to me "tell me what's going on & I promise he will never hurt you again. I will keep and your children safe" I would have not hesitated to tell him everything. Instead I was told continually by untrained councillors to compromise, be sympathetic, try harder and maybe consider anti depressants so I wasn't so stressed out.

The system could be greatly improved by people of authority understanding that in any situation where domestic violence may be present that both parties need to be spoken to separately. Even then, they many may not, unless they feel safe in the long term too. One of the other goals I think the commission could consider would be how to effectively remove perpetrators from their environments, so the victims can remain at home and be safe. It is so often the victim that is forced to leaves and this is all backwards. It is the person who has done wrong that should leave, not the victim. Many women stay in situations of domestic violence because they are unable to go elsewhere due to lack of finances and resources. So let them stay at home, make him go. Put the onus on the perpetrator.

In the short term, if I had been able to have him actually physically removed from my house, by speaking against him, I would have done so. In the medium term, if he could have an immediate restraining order against him, so I continued to feel safe, I would have told others what he had done

to me without hesitation. In the long term, if he had to answer to the court for his behaviour or even just had to have counselling (from a trained domestic violence case worker) and meet a series of stringent behaviour tests, before being allowed to return home, I would have willingly sought help.

An example of how the system isn't working at present. I remember talking to a policeman over the phone once. I was asking how to get an intervention order. I was trying to convey to him my fear of being killed by my partner and the number of times he had threatened to kill me and my children. The police officer said it was obviously just one of those things you say in a heated argument, that wasn't really meant, because he had obviously not killed me. He said I would not get one unless I could show medical records of having been physically hurt. I cried. He did not understand that I was terrified and not killed because in actual fact, I had done what he had ordered me to do. (I still don't like to talk about the specifics of what I had to do, but that's what caused the PTSD.) That phone call was a desperate plea for help and it was ignored. He should have picked up on key words and come to my aid. The system could be improved by training police how to help women who need it & the signs victims' exhibit. The system could be improved by providing women a means to get an intervention order easily, for violence other than physical.

With the benefit of hindsight, I now understand that his entire attitude towards me was based on entitlement. Its how he thinks, not how he feels. He believed *unquestionably* that he was entitled to take my money, my possessions, check up on me, belittle me, hit me, and rape me. He believed he was entitled to be violent towards me because he had such a hard life he had the right to get even and take it out on me, as if it was me who deserved the payback. Coincidentally, or not, he fit every known & listed trait of a sociopath. (I would tend to think the majority of perpetrators of domestic violence do.) What percentage of long term abusers are sociopaths? How is it possible for anyone with any authority to detect a sociopath quickly AND effectively? Is there a test? Can the Commission find or access one? Sociopaths are generally so smart, they usually know what to say to appear normal, which makes them very difficult to distinguish in the short term. Is there actually a test out there that is clever enough to get around that somehow? If sociopathic behavioural traits could be identified this way, then their ability to lie could be taken into account in court. That would be a huge step forward in allowing the woman in a "she said vs. he said" scenario to actually have some credibility, and an advantage over the perpetrator.

I know many women who have also lived in domestic violence and not one of them have ever exaggerated claims in court to influence outcomes. I think that anyone who thinks that is a perpetrator sympathiser. Claims of exaggeration are just that, claims. The onus should be on the perpetrator, not the victim. I am tired of men claiming this. It's just another manipulative tactic to

reduce the credibility of their victims. Yet another reason why sociopaths need to be identified. Another reason why women fear speaking out, because no one will believe them or presume they are exaggerating.

There is such ignorance in the community as to why women stay in violent relationships. From a neurological point of view, it's very interesting. I studied this to help me understand my own behaviour. I learnt that under traumatic circumstances that the brain completely re wires itself to *normalise* the traumatic experience and the bad behaviour. Thus, more abuse is then normalised in the future. Bad behaviour is less stressful because it's become normal. I lived in domestic violence for [REDACTED] years. I knew he hit me & raped me and numerous other manipulative things, but when I was told I was living in domestic violence I was absolutely shocked. I had no idea. It wasn't until it was explained to me how bad and wrong these behaviours were that I came to understand what had happened to me. I really didn't know. I thought I hadn't been trying hard enough to make it work. I thought I had provoked it because he said I did. I doubted my own mind because he continually called it into question. Many women are like me. They stay because it never occurred to them to go. It's become so normal, they just don't get that it's wrong.

Any suggestion that women who really want to go, can, is also ludicrous. So many women are stuck because of finances, children, a lack of alternatives, or a million other reasons. When I decided I wanted out of the relationship, it still took years to happen. He would not leave (I owned the house.) How do you make a man leave your house when he does not want to go? I couldn't. I have no father, brother or any family to help me. It took [REDACTED] months of careful planning with my psychologist, domestic violence caseworker (through EDVOS) & my councillor to enact a plan to get him out, without anyone getting hurt. I saw all those supporters [REDACTED] a week. I had to lie and act with my partner to make it happen. But it worked. I could not have ever have done that on my own. I find anyones suggestion that I could have just gone if I had really wanted to infuriating. I could not. It was not possible.

He then stalked me after that for a further [REDACTED] years. Leaving is just the first stage, not the last.

I cannot say that any of the recent changes & implications of laws have been effective by assisting me at all. Why was my partner not removed from my home for [REDACTED] days? Why was I never referred to ERCS? The only people that actually helped were the specific domestic violence councillor & the staff at EDVOS. Whatever training they have had should be more widely implemented. They were outstanding. They were the *only people* I ever spoke to who actually understood and believed me.

In all honesty, I don't know if men who perpetrate domestic violence can be rehabilitated. My understanding is that it is highly unlikely. Their characteristic traits are long term automatic responses. It's a way of being for them. I believe is all it does it teach them how to pretend better to pass for a normal person. I think the commission should look to see if there are actually links with sociopathic behaviours. Are all perpetrators sociopaths? If so how do you cure a sociopath?

He did attend a behaviour change program, [REDACTED] for [REDACTED] months, with a domestic violence councillor. After he left each session she would telephone me to get my side of the story, before he arrived home. It was fascinating to hear how easily & quickly he would and could lie about anything to make himself appear as the victim. She knew I spoke the truth and used my information to try & help him see alternate possible behaviours. He was encouraged to change his behaviour, but he couldn't see what was wrong with it, so really felt the class was a waste of time. I learnt a lot, but he learnt nothing and continues to blame me for everything. That's not the councillor's fault, and you can't blame anyone for perpetrators failing to change their behaviour except *the perpetrator*. The councillor told me in the decades she has been working with violent men, that none of them really changed. They just covered their tracks better. We cannot ensure they change and that it's sustainable. It's a completely unrealistic expectation.

These long term, sociopathic, serial offenders, *need* to be removed from society permanently in order for the community to be safe. Jail was the only thing that worried my partner. He went to great lengths to make sure he could avoid it on technicalities and I am sure the only reason I am still alive is because the councillor told him if anything happened to me, that he would be arrested & charged. Please consider serious jail terms to act as a deterrent to the actual perpetrators, rather than the passive early intervention phase of a couples counselling session.

There was a book I read that changed my life. It helped me recover. It's called "Why does he do that? Inside the minds of angry and controlling men" by Lundy Bancroft. He is a counsellor who has worked with these types of men for 15 years with over 2000 case studies. His insights were astounding as is his ability to distinguish men that want to change from those faking. If you want to know and understand how and why these men think as they do, this book is an absolute must. He is the expert you need to consult. After reading this book I understood what happened to me and why. I realised I was not going insane and that none of it was my fault.

I think the emphasis needs to be moved away from the victims and onto the perpetrators. There needs to be serious consequences for their behaviour and they need to be held accountable.