

RCFV - ANONYMOUS

Submission

Royal Commission into Family Violence

I am a [REDACTED] year old female that has experienced significant family violence in my lifetime. To discuss or write about these personal, distressing and significantly painful matters is something I'd prefer not to do. It is extremely uncomfortable to think about and relive these horrifying experiences, but I believe it is necessary if we genuinely want to tackle this issue, in the hopes of eradicating or at least minimising the incidents and affects of Family violence, and in particular violence against women.

When I was [REDACTED] years old I became involved with a man seven and a half years my senior. My cultural heritage is [REDACTED] and it was expected that one would choose a life partner at this relatively yearly age. My family not only approved, they were actually very encouraging of this life choice. You may even say that one was conditioned to make such choices as it was the cultural expectation and norm, at that time. This relationship was extremely dangerous and very unhealthy, it was characterised by significant verbal, emotional and physical abuse. I lived my life in a constant state of anxiety and fear. At such a young age I was not prepared to deal with it, or even comprehend what was happening to me. My abuser threatened to do physical harm to me and/or my family if I discussed or disclosed what was happening to me. If I ever considered confiding in someone, I felt I'd be putting their life at risk, therefore I did not disclose the abuse to anyone for a few years. At times I considered suicide as a means of escape, as I was extremely tired of living in constant fear. Luckily I didn't act on those desperate and dark thoughts. One day the abuse escalated to a point where I ended up having a loaded shotgun held to my head. This was the end of the line for me. I knew if I didn't escape it would only be a matter of time before I would be killed. Once I'd realised I must escape this cycle of fear and physical harm I decided to leave town and break off the relationship.

After spending six months away from my ex-boyfriend he made contact with me, he promised me he would never physically abuse me again and asked me to return. We resumed our relationship and we subsequently got married and had [REDACTED] children. We have been married for over [REDACTED] years now, and he has kept his promise. What I realise now after many years of reflection and trying to understand how I ever allowed this situation to transpire, I realise that my immediate family, the broader communities attitudes, and the law, is where much of the blame must lie. I agree with the opinion and suggestion that respectful relationships and personal boundaries must be taught to children in primary school. If I'd learned that this was not ok, and that society and the law would have offered me some level of protection I may have had more confidence to speak up. I also believe young people should be taught how to manage anger and that physical harm MUST NOT be tolerated and MUST be reported. I also believe that we must share stories and shed light on the issues. A major part of not wanting to speak out is the shame and embarrassment the victim feels, but also not wanting the world to think that the perpetrator/partner is a bad person. Considering the victim lives in hope the abuser will stop doing it one day, they avoid telling anyone of their shameful secret, as well as being too scared to tell as I've already mentioned. The victim needs reassurance that it's not their fault, and it's not acceptable to allow someone to abuse you.

I also believe we should look at ways we can offer hope and assistance to abusers. Ideally if they had some positive role models and realised if they changed their behaviour, their life, their partner's life, their families and the community will all be much better off. Although there has been much physical and emotional damage, you can heal. There are such things as happy endings. We must stop the perpetual cycle of family violence breeding more abusers.

Thank you for your time.

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