



Submission to Royal Commission into Family Violence

ANONYMOUS

I would like to share my experience, and that of my daughter, in the hope that this may assist the Commission.

My daughter's experience

My daughter (25 at the time) was living in a violent relationship. She did not confide in me about this.

One night she called me asking for help. Her partner had knives and guns and was threatening to rape and kill her and he had locked her in a room in the house. I won't go into detail but I called the police who attended, arrested and charged him, and took away the weapons. They applied for a 12 month intervention order. My daughter and I attended [REDACTED] Court the next day and the order was granted.

The time in court was traumatic. The day after fearing for her life, my daughter was forced to see the perpetrator at court. While he was required to wait downstairs, we had to walk past him outside the court, but also to be in the court at the same time. I am a bit confused about what happened at each of the three hearings, but at one time we were required to leave the court for a short time and my daughter and I found ourselves sitting almost next to the perpetrator. A court support worker came and took my daughter to another room, but this was extremely traumatic for my daughter and me.

The fact that the police turned up when they did, and applied for the intervention order, probably saved my daughter's life. However, the police could have provided a lot more information, referral and support for my daughter who was frightened and in shock. My daughter did go to her GP, who referred her to a psychologist and noted that she had PTSD and was very helpful.

However, it was 12 months later when my daughter became pregnant (to a new partner) and she visited the [REDACTED] Hospital for her anti-natal checkup that she really obtained the kind of support that she needed.

Once she mentioned the terms of the intervention order at intake, she was referred to the social work department who were very supportive and who referred her to a free lawyer who worked within the hospital.

This lawyer provided a range of assistance which helped my daughter feel much more confident and safer. She referred her for some property law assistance, to counseling, made application for victims of crime compensation and compiled a case (which was successful) to argue for a 5 year intervention order. The lawyer even asked for detail about my daughter's house layout and obtained crimes compensation to increase the security in the house including security doors, gates and security cameras.

My daughter would not have thought of seeking legal help, however it was really the legal and practical assistance from this lawyer that made my daughter feel safe and that she could move on with her life.

My daughter has not seen the perpetrator since, apart from in court.

My main points in relation to my daughter's case are:

- The benefit of having a community (free) lawyer based in a women's hospital who can give help to victims of violence when they need it (because they might not otherwise think of getting legal help);
- The need to make courts much safer for victims of family violence and their families;
- The need for police who attend family violence to provide basic information and referral; and
- Information about victims of crime compensation should be given to all victims of family violence because this compensation can be used to make them safer and to provide counselling or other services they need.

My experience

I am ■■■ years old and am the mother of ■■■ children (the youngest is ■■■). I recently separated from my husband of ■■■ years and have a current family law property dispute. I am receiving some free assistance from a community legal centre. I am also receiving some support from a friend, who advised me of the opportunity to make this written submission, and has assisted me to put my story and my thoughts in writing.

I tend to think of my husband as having been abusive and controlling rather than violent. However, I am aware now that some of his behavior is considered as "family violence" in the law.

Three times during our relationship my husband agreed to attend men's behavioural group sessions following pressure from me. Each time he attended his behavior changed, but this was short-lived. The contact person from the program mentioned to me that financial abuse may be an issue, but this was never followed up with my husband (within the group) and he denied this when I mentioned it to him. Looking back, it may have been helpful for me if this issue had been followed up in detail, at least with me.

Having left the relationship I can look back and see how I have been affected by my husband's tendency to be verbally abusive to me and the children, to "put me down" and constantly tell me I was stupid and useless and that I couldn't do things, and to control our entire finances and prevent me from going to work.

I am now experiencing the outcome of being 'kept in the dark' about the finances, including the signing of contracts. Despite my husband telling me that a loan we obtained was to repay all money owed to his father, my husband and his father are arguing that my father-in-law still owns 50% of the family home.

I never knew how much money was in the bank accounts, what bank accounts we had, what money was coming in or going out, or the value of any assets in my husband's name such as shares and superannuation. He allowed me to take about \$250 per week for housekeeping (including to pay for petrol and the [REDACTED] children) and I had to ask for any other money if I needed it.

I had not worked for many years, but my husband said he wouldn't allow me to work until our youngest child was at high school. At that time I enrolled in a [REDACTED] course and for the last [REDACTED] years I have been working in [REDACTED].

If I had had some financial independence earlier I would have left the relationship much sooner. However, I had no money of my own, I had [REDACTED] children to support and I didn't know whether I'd be able to get a job or not. I also lacked confidence and felt that I couldn't survive on my own.

My main points in relation to my own experience are:

- I support the concept of men's behavioral programs, but my experience was that the benefit was short term;
- The impact on women of men who control the finance – both during and after the relationship;
- I had little idea while I was in the relationship, just how abusive my husband's conduct in relation to the finances was;
- An abusive/controlling relationship can make it very difficult for a woman to leave as she is likely to have very low confidence and to lack skills in managing finances etc;
- Some women, including myself, sign finance contracts based on the word of their partner or pressure from their partner, that can cause long-term problems;
- Access to adequate legal help is a problem for someone in my situation where I have walked out with no money and where my husband and his father are fighting to give me as little share of the family home and other assets as possible. While advice is important, women like me need a strong advocate because I'm being pressured to accept less than a quarter of the equity in the family home and without someone speaking up for them many women may accept what is offered;
- The need for somewhere where women in my situation can have someone explain the financial issues to them. I have a friend who is helping but other women in my situation may be disadvantaged because they don't understand their financial position;
- The fact that if a man has kept you in the dark about financial and other matters, and insists on doing things for you (such as setting up your emails or paying bills) and telling you that you wouldn't understand, means that you lose confidence in your ability to do these things which can make it very difficult once you leave the relationship;
- Even if a woman realized that she was a victim of financial abuse, it would be very difficult for a woman to, all of a sudden, tell her husband that she wanted to see bank statements and contracts etc without the husband being suspicious and thinking she may leave;

- The importance of encouraging young women to take control of their finances from the start so they don't get into a situation where someone else is in control;
- It was only after my relationship ended and I made enquiries about property settlement did I find out that as a home-maker and mother my contribution to the finances/assets was generally considered to be 50 percent. Having this information more generally known might help women in controlling relationships understand that their contribution to a family has a financial value (my husband always told me that because he went out to work I would receive very little if I left);
- Services that can provide basic practical information and referral to women once they leave a relationship (or is planning to leave a relationship) should be better promoted. I had no idea where to start or of what services were available – financial, legal, housing, personal support etc.

