

Witness Statement of [REDACTED]

I wish to write to the Royal Commission from the perspective of a child growing up in a household of domestic violence and abuse. I want to write concerning the impact of domestic violence and abuse from the perspective of a then child, now adult who observed domestic violence and abuse and its impact upon myself as a child and now as an adult. I also want to draw upon the interactions of lead agencies in the response to disclosures I had made as a child and the lack of intervention or assistance.

I grew up in a country town with my mother and father. My mother was a stay-at-home mother, caring for my sister and I and my father worked long hours as a [REDACTED].

My childhood can be best characterised as one of violence; perpetrated daily. I cannot recall a time where I did not see violence, hear violence or feel anxious about the next violent episode. The violence was perpetrated by my mother towards my father, but also to us as children. I am not sure if that will be within the Terms of Reference for this Royal Commission, but I suspect neither my sister nor I could complete this Witness Statement without acknowledging that our lives have for ever been transformed by the abuses we suffered.

Unlike what you may read, the violence in my household was perpetrated by my mother towards my father. I would routinely see physical assaults of him, either with her hands, punching him, or with her feet, kicking him. She would use weapons, cooking implements, such as saucepans, utensils or furniture. I recall as well where she tried to kill him, running behind him with a garden fork directed at his back. If my sister had not screamed, he would have been seriously injured or killed.

In addition to physical harm, my mother would use emotional abuse and blackmail and I recall multiple occasions when she would threaten to make allegations against my father for non-existent behaviours. I recall also how my mother would sabotage relationships with relatives. The vitriol against my fathers' parents, the manipulation of us against those relatives was incredible. My strong bond between myself and my fathers' mother was damaged because of how my mother told me to treat her. I cannot believe as a child I was used in that way, or what my grandmother would have thought at the time.

My father was subject to horrific words, and vile statements about him as a man. He was routinely called pathetic, useless or worthless. These were regular, consistent and targeted attacks and often in front of other people. My father would simply ignore the statements and carry on doing what he was instructed to do.

I distinctly recall seeing the devastation of the room(s) after episodes where he would be victim of such terrible, horrific attacks. Furniture upturned, plants thrown, household items damaged or destroyed in the torrent of physical harm perpetrated against my father.

The attacks were certainly very loud and audible beyond the boundaries of our property. I know that my neighbours would often look at the house, hearing the noise inside as I was looking out of my bedroom window, or at the rear of the house in the garden. I also know from memory that I made several disclosures to the family General Practitioner, Teachers, an Orthopaedic Surgeon and Dentist about the relationship I had with my parents and what I had observed at home. I sadly lacked the

lens to differentiate between what was normal and not normal, so I was passively openly talked about what went on at home as if it were normal.

General Practitioner

I recall visiting my General Practitioner over a number of appointments in my teenage years. I suffered from mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. He was a young General Practitioner and I found his calming, patient manner approachable. I didn't know of an adult who was like that to me and I inappropriately relied upon him for solace, even for low level stresses.

Sadly I could not differentiate between his role as a medical practitioner and my few social relationships and I saw him as a person I could turn to even when I felt low in mood. I recall visiting him after multiple times and being told that I should be looking elsewhere for support. I cannot recall the extent of my disclosures of the abuse, but on reflection, I am surprised that there was no thought or consideration as to why I might be attending so much. There was certainly no assessment of my mental health to any great extent.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

I saw CAMHS workers on three different phases during my childhood. I cannot recall the first time I went there but in receiving copies of my medical records, it was apparently for [REDACTED]

The second and third times related to anxiety. I do not recall disclosing during these sessions why I was the way I was, but I am surprised my notes indicating anxiety were not explored in more detail, or any consideration as to the origins of that anxiety.

I am a Clinician and I am fastidious about the analysis of behaviour; the origins and function of why a person behaves, or presents the way they do. I cannot account for the CAMHS workers I saw, but it is something that I have not been able to reconcile.

Orthopaedic Surgeon

One particularly poignant event came during my childhood when I had to see an Orthopaedic Surgeon for damage to my spine following an assault at school. I went with my mother to the appointment and recall being asked how or why I had welts on my back. I explained that that is where my mother hits me with a horse whip. I also described it being used in the house often, following that I do not ever recall getting a visit from a social worker, or police officer.

School Life

My school life was very poor. As a victim of abuse at home, at school I very much resigned my life to accept whatever was going to happen. I was ostracised by the mainstream school community and had few friends. I did not value relationships and was very much introverted and thought of myself as worthless.

Ridiculed by my peers, I tended to avoid large groups, sports events or engaging in groups' altogether. I would sit at the rear of the class against a wall so no one could come up behind me, or so I could see any impending assault.

My teachers would criticise my poor academic performance that would then flow into the events that occurred at home. It was mostly cyclical and one event would lead to another, to another.

I recall how after a particularly bad phase in my childhood how I attended school and had to engage in football for PE. I recall the teacher saying that to differentiate one side from the other, one side had to remove its sports top. I couldn't do this; I hated myself, my look and I had marks on my body that I did not want to show. I recall having to ask my teacher not to force me to take my shirt off because of "how I looked". He didn't force me but as an adult, I wonder why it didn't lead to a conversation later on about why I was reluctant, or what was happening for me. I see it now as a window of opportunity that was lost.

Some of my teachers were very engaging and I forever remember my history teacher who would nurture me in my interest in history. He was remarkable man but I found it hard to tell him what was happening. I did not want to be rejected.

Scouts/Cubs

My routine "hobby" was attending my local Cubs and Scouts. I went to the Cubs far more than I ever did to Scouts, namely because of bullying. However, as a child with clearly presenting issues around poor social skills and anxiety, I'm surprised there were never any attempts or interactions (that I can recall) that brought out any of the issues I have raised in this Witness Statement.

Police

I can only remember three visits from the local Police Officers.

I think from memory one occasion related to a report that had been made, but I have never sought a copy of the reports from my childhood or the cause of those referrals.

I do remember vaguely a Police Officer and a General Practitioner attending my home and talking to my mother who was appearing to have some psychotic episode. I recall that General Practitioner talking to me while I was playing with a toy at the dining room table, but I can not recall the content of that conversation. I do recall him being sympathetic – distinctly remembering his face and how he spoke to me.

I remember at some point soon after attending a hospital where my mother had been placed, only to have her return in the car and back to the family home. There was verbal abuse on the way home directed at my father.

The last significant event was when my mother attacked my father and my sister. The attack was evil and I see visions of that attack to this day. I recall my father trying to get my mother off of my sister, the three of them fighting. My father was trying to release the hands of my mother off of my sisters hair while she was being beaten. When she released her hands, she started on my father and my sister and I were screaming for it to stop.

I called 000 but no one came.

The impact of domestic violence upon the children.

My mother was and is an aggressive, powerful woman. She has, I suspect, mental illness or personality disorder(s) that have caused much of this. My father in contrast was very passive; non-violent, never complaining or retaliating or indeed arguing with my mother. He would never raise his hand to my mother save to stop being hit.

My father is now dead. He died of natural causes some [REDACTED] years ago. My mother is still alive, and continues to manipulate and abuse those around her including me as an adult.

I must acknowledge and apologise if I sound condemning of my mother, I don't mean to. I have tried to write this Witness Statement with a degree of neutrality. I am sorry for my mother who has mental health issues. To some degree, I recognise this has played a part in her behaviour. Sadly however my mother has only acknowledged that she "was the way she was because of post-natal depression". Sadly I do not believe my mother's actions for the past forty years can be solely attributable towards post-natal depression.

The impact of domestic violence has been a profound one, on both my sister and I. I do not know if my sister will make a submission, but I needed to at least represent the views of a child as I saw it and how I see it now.

My life now as a [REDACTED] year old single man is a difficult and complex one.

Professionally, I have strived forward in my academic and professional life to be the best I can in what I do. I do interact on a remote level with children but I have removed myself from working with children now because I cannot cope with the harms they use to disclose to me.

As a professional I find it hard to trust people, particularly women. I have some very good female friends but my relationship with them is not as strong as it is with male friends.

Personally, I have battled with emotional and psychological problems all of my life and I am in a weird space now of not being able to have a relationship with anyone, for fear of what may happen in that relationship. I am petrified of intimacy and I cannot ever see that abating to the point I could ever have a relationship. For a period of my life I thought I might be homosexual, but it was clear after several years of psychotherapy that the origins of my beliefs laid more squarely with my history as a victim of abuse.

Over the past [REDACTED] years, I have developed a coping strategy to my trauma and that my work has become my personal life so much so that I live to work and that it is my sole endeavour. I feel on a personal level that I am hollow inside, petrified of my own shadow and unable to handle closeness from anyone. People who have attempted to display warmth or affection towards me I have struggled to accept and I have often run away and rejected that.

I have spent years in counselling and psychotherapy but I have never been able to move beyond the fear of what a relationship might be like.

My mental health continues to be a problem to this day and while I continue on medication and therapy, I feel that it is pointless and unfulfilled.

I cannot comment on why my father did not leave and take the children with him, or why services in existence did not respond to allegations or explore what might be going on.

I hope that this Royal Commission will explore not only the services and systems that are in place to support victims, but additionally explore who early services such as schools, medics and police might explore a little deeper to understand the origins of behaviour and identify the early signs that there may be harm perpetrated within a home and ensure victims of domestic abuse are protected.