

# Submission for the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

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## Background

I was born to migrant and refugee parents who fled the former Communist ██████████ and came to Australia in the late 1950's/early 1960's. I grew up in the Eastern Suburbs in ██████████ South until the age of ██████ until I moved to Queensland and have an older brother and younger sister, who still live in Melbourne.

I have been exposed to family violence from as early as I could remember. A contributing factor was that both of my parents were alcoholics. My father was very dominating in the early years of marriage and I believe my mother resorted to alcohol as a coping mechanism. She grew to resent her marriage to Dad, but most likely because of her loyalty to her children, strong traditional family values, and not knowing where to go for support, she stayed in her marriage until the last year of her life at the age of ██████████, after being diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She separated from Dad and moved in with my sister who became her primary carer and nursed her towards her final passing.

Although she was never diagnosed, I also believe that my mother suffered from depression, and I remember her telling me that she wanted to kill herself when I was a child and also overdosing on pills when I was a teenager. There were many occasions where there were blow ups and my Dad would start yelling, swearing and hitting my mum. We were incredibly scared and frightened as children, and I remember my sister calling my Aunties on several occasions who would rush over and try to intervene. As us siblings grew, we were able to physically intervene and hold them off.

My mum's resentment grew along with her alcoholism, and she took out her resentment on us children, in the form of physical and emotional abuse. I remember many times coming home from school and mum was drunk and I would always be scared at night time (as they alternated working night shifts- they were both nurses). She would swear at us, often calling us children 'fucking bitch' or 'fucking bastard' and hit us usually with wooden spoons, when she was drunk. I remember trying to confront her many times as to why

she always gets drunk and she would often reply “Fuck off- you are drunk yourself.” Her denial of her alcoholism was so deep that it caused me to resent and hate her many times. I remember a few years ago when I was visiting from interstate, Mum being very drunk one day and when I told her that I was going to visit a friend, she immediately went out to the car, started it up and crashed it through the garage, breaking the car door off. She told me I was ‘the Devil’ that I had made her do it. She did not talk to me for close to a year afterwards. She often said similar things to myself and my brother- that we were ‘evil’ or ‘the Devil’ and that it was all our fault.

Swearing was the norm in our household- whether in English or in [REDACTED] and this both embarrassed me and caused me to feel shame when I compared my family to others. This both happened in and outside the house and my Mum’s insults would cut me very deeply like a knife. I convinced myself that she hated me.

My Dad was both manipulative and abusive towards my mum threatening to kill her and seemed to better tolerate and hide large amounts of alcohol consumption. He would often say “I know my limit” and did not display overtly drunken behaviour. He convinced me that he wasn’t drunk and that Mum was the bad one. I also grew to believe that the domestic violence was largely mum’s fault. During the violent outbreaks, after us siblings physically separated our parent, I could see Mum following Dad around insulting him and even started believing that she was ‘asking for it’. I did not believe my mum after she told the police she he was threatening her. I only found some court documents in Mum and Dad’s room that detailed the threats that Dad had made against Mum which also detailed that Dad had broken her ribs. Mum never showed or talked about the physical bruising or pain she suffered.

My brother over time developed mental health issues, being diagnosed with Bi-Polar disorder as well as being hospitalised twice. He became very emotionally abusive to my parents and to me and my sister. He also attacked my mum nearly choking her to death on one occasion. Family tensions also grew even as adults after myself and my sister moved out. My brother often resorted to threatening behaviour towards my sister, in the form of stalking and I remember her ringing me in tears, frightened for her life.

### The impact on me

As a childhood and adult survivor of Domestic Violence, I developed low self-esteem, embarrassment and shame. I have been diagnosed with Depression and Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD). This has affected all areas of my life, my relationships to my work. I have had several bad episodes of depression, one of which I became very suicidal, which was after the birth of my first child [REDACTED] years ago. I felt totally incompetent to be a father and a provider and felt like a failure in my work life too, as I had recently burned out.

Over the last [REDACTED] years I have also struggled with an addiction to internet porn, which has caused much grief and pain to me and my partner. I also developed compulsive eating patterns which has also amplified my depression and low self-worth. I didn't want to go down the same path of becoming an alcoholic as my parents and was too afraid to experiment with drugs, so food and internet porn became an escape for me.

My Dad in recent years has developed Alcohol Induced Dementia as well as other numerous health problems, which has resulted in my brother and my sister being Dads carers. This has taken an enormous toll on them both and Dad's drinking still continued, but only recently has my sister been able to ween Dad off, with help from the GP and from a supplement called Thiamine (used for alcohol withdrawal).

Fortunately, I have had the support of a loving partner as well as my psychiatrist and psychologist. My sister and I have also become more close in recent years. I feel blessed to be alive and healthy with two beautiful boys. However, I still battle my inner demons, many of my dysfunctional patterns of behaviour run very deep. I have been told by my Doctor that I am likely to be suffering depression over the long-term. It is really one day at a time but I do feel hopeful and optimistic about my future.

### Some suggestions/potential solutions

#### BETTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN POLICE AND CULTURAL SERVICES

- Growing up in a family from a different cultural background. There was very much a culture of 'what happens in the family, stays in the family'. There didn't seem to be any available support for us from the [REDACTED] Communities or any migrant resource/support centres. I remember the police coming and they would struggle to understand my mum's accent when she was speaking to them. **There needs to be**

**more collaboration between police and migrant/refugee communities as well as availability of interpreters. Police need more training in cultural awareness/sensitivity for whatever demographic is in their area.**

#### FOLLOW UP SUPPORT AFTER POLICE INTERVENTION

- There was also no follow up support from the Police for our family. They simply came, intervened and left. **There needs to be better collaboration between Police and social workers/psychologists.**
  - (1) It would be ideal if every Police station employed a social worker(s)/psychologist(s) who could do follow up work and support with families affected by family violence.**
  - (2) Early intervention is critical to stop the cycle of violence as well as healing the trauma suffered. It can assist perpetrators to attend counselling/anger management as well as provide counselling for women and children.**

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AFFECTS CHILDREN IN THE SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM- BOTH BOYS/MEN AND GIRLS/WOMEN. The fiscal costs alone to the economy in terms of lost productivity, mental health issues, retraining, re-schooling would be devastating. We had NO SUPPORT in either primary school or high school. Teachers were either too busy and/or didn't seem to notice or care. There no counsellors in primary school and the guidance counsellors would only give career guidance- they were pretty much useless – and had zero training.

- **There needs to be more education/awareness raising at both the primary and secondary school level. Please look to the campaign started by 'Rachel' a 14 year old survivor of family violence whose mother committed suicide recently. Rachel also developed major mental illnesses including Depression, Anxiety and Bullimia.**
- **Rachel has said in her campaign "*We need the education system to teach their students about Domestic Violence. Nobody deserves to go through what I have been through. By doing so children/adolescents will begin to speak up and get the help their family needs*".**
- **There needs to be adequate resourcing and training for school counsellors and Chaplains- who are linked into the appropriate services that they can refer students and their families too. SCHOOLS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE EARLY INTERVENTION PROCESS.**
- **Teachers also need training and awareness raising to identify the 'warning signs' in students and to encourage/refer them to school**

counsellors.

- There also needs to be adequate training in Family Violence and funding and resourcing of public Child and Youth Mental Health Services in Victoria as well as collaboration/linkage with schools.

#### WOMEN'S SUPPORT GROUPS, REFUGES AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

- There needs to be more advertising through television and the media of support services available to women to encourage them to seek support as early as possible.
- There also need to be more education and awareness training in the workplace as well as guest speakers, so that employers can play a critical role in supporting/referring employees who are victims of domestic violence to appropriate services
- This especially includes training and appropriate resourcing for Human Resource Staff who can play a critical role in supporting women.
- There is a chronic shortage of Shelters/Refuges for Women and children escaping family violence. Urgent Auditing of the situation needs to happen to ensure there is adequate resourcing and staff available.

#### MEN'S SUPPORT GROUPS AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

- There needs to be more advertising through television and the media of support services available to men to encourage them to seek support as early as possible.
- More men who were previously perpetrators but now reformed, need to be supported by the Victorian Government to tell their story. This could also be incorporated into the school education system as well. **WE NEED TO HEAR FROM MORE MALE ROLE MODELS.** This will be incredibly affective for men who are struggling with their anger/stress etc. Men are not born violent and desperately need the support as much as female victims who are fleeing.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEAVE FOR VICTIMS

- Victoria can lead the way by incorporating 10 days domestic violence leave for workers covered by an award. This would go an incredibly long way to help victims retain their employment whilst they re-build their lives.
- The economic cost of not doing this would be far greater.

LINKAGE AND COLLABORATION WITH ALCOHOL/DRUG SUPPORT SERVICES

- **There also needs to be better collaboration and linkage between police, family violence support services, migrant support services and Alcohol/Drug treatment and support services.**
- **If my parents were able to get the support and services to treat their alcoholism early, this would have been a huge step into reducing the family violence situation at home.**
- **Alcoholism was a huge problem in my family and I suspect it is the case with many other families experiencing domestic violence.**
- **We are starting to realise the impacts of alcohol induced violence out in the community and need to also do the same in the context of family violence.**