

Submission to the Victorian Royal Commission on Family Violence (May 2015)

Thank you for according me the opportunity to contribute my thoughts in relation to the pressing social concern that is family violence.

I am not a representative of any particular organization, and I have no pecuniary interest in the provision of services related to family violence. My motivation for preparing this submission is simply that of a concerned citizen who believes that every Australian man, woman and child should be able to live their lives free from violence and abuse.

In this submission I shall:

- provide a few brief comments in relation to certain specific matters raised in the Commission's Issue Paper
- address several myths regarding family violence and explore the linkages between the origins of those myths, and the implications of their widespread dissemination in terms of the prevailing policy response
- put forward a number of recommendations for consideration by the Commission

Within the context of the public debate and media coverage of the matter, family violence is usually portrayed as consisting of violent and controlling behavior by adult males directed at their adult female partners. Such behavior, however, constitutes only one piece of a large and complex jigsaw.

Academic researchers, on the other hand, generally consider family/domestic violence as comprising violence involving intimate partners that takes the form of man-on-man, woman-on-woman, man-on-women, or woman-on-man violence.

Such research has also identified a substantial incidence of bi-directional violence, whereby both intimate partners perpetrate violent and/or abusive acts against one another.

Others consider family violence to be even broader again including, for example, elder abuse, child abuse and neglect, and violence perpetrated by children/youth against other family members.

For the purpose of this submission I shall use the terms 'family violence' 'domestic violence' ('DV') and 'intimate partner violence' as being largely interchangeable.

Where-ever I use the terms 'victim' and 'perpetrator' I do so in a gender-neutral manner unless otherwise specified, bearing in mind that substantial numbers of people in both categories are male, female or transgender (and indeed many could be placed in both categories).

Some observations in relation to certain matters raised in the Commission's Issue Paper

I applaud the fact that the Commission's Terms of Reference and Issues Paper largely avoid the gender bias that is otherwise rampant within the social debate concerning domestic violence, as well as amongst many of the staff of relevant agencies and advocacy groups.

I wanted to address a few of the specific points mentioned in the Issue Paper now, but will do some only very briefly as I plan to address several key points later in my submission.

Point 14: *“Research shows that it is overwhelmingly women and children who are affected by family violence, and men who are violent towards them. For this reason, family violence is described as being ‘gendered’. Although family violence is gendered, men may also be affected by it”*

No, in fact only some research shows women and children as being victims in the “overwhelming” majority of cases. Most credible research shows the rate of male victimisation as falling in a range between 35% and 70%.

Similarly the claim that domestic violence is “gendered” is by no means universally accepted, with many researchers suggesting that categorising family violence as being gendered only deflects attention from its primary causes.

Further, the statement that *“men may also be affected by it”* is inaccurate, inappropriate and suggestive of gender bias. Men are affected by it. Every single day.

Point 21: *“Against this backdrop, community attitudes towards family violence are of interest, and concern. For example, in a 2013 VicHealth survey ...”*

The unfortunate aspect of this survey was that it was designed with an ideological agenda and particular findings in mind. It did not, but should have, adopted a gender neutral approach. There should have been equal numbers of both male and female respondents, and they should have been asked identical questions about each genders. Instead, this survey only asked about attitudes towards violence/abuse of women and not towards men.

This robbed the findings of the context that was necessary in order to use them to craft appropriate public policy. In others words, for example, we don’t know whether the public is equally or even more complacent about violence against men. Thus we don’t know if we are truly observing an ‘attitude towards violence against women’ problem, or simply an ‘attitude towards violence’ problem.

Point 23: *“The Royal Commission acknowledges the sustained and ground-breaking efforts of those who work in this field.”* And yet the only indicator of these “ground-breaking efforts” seems to be that more violence is being reported. There is no indication provided of the costs of these initiatives and their measurable outcomes. There needs to be, and this should start now

Point 25: But have not all violent crime rates decreased during this period? Is there any evidence at all that this was due to the strategies described at point 24, or is that simply wishful thinking? I note there is no mention of the homicide rate for men – why? Men are a part of most families.

Point 27: (As for point 21). The results of such surveys must be interpreted with caution as all too often they were designed to explore only one dimension of the family violence debate. Unless equal number of males and females were surveyed, and identical questions asked about violence towards men and toward women, then the findings cannot and will not provide sufficient context and coverage to provide the information needed to formulate an unbiased and effective policy response.

Point 32: This concerns the risks and challenges faced by people in particular groups and communities (see ‘Family violence and particular groups and communities’). On the one hand we are told that the focus of anti-DV efforts must be on abused women because that is where the bulk of the problem is seen to be. We are also told that men’s needs and issues are both lesser and

different. And consequently abused men are not acknowledged, their experiences minimised, and their needs mostly ignored.

On the other hand men are not accorded minority status (here or elsewhere) as are various other defined social groups. And so yet again abused men fall through the net and are ignored. This is hardly fair or in the spirit of gender equality.

Question 8: Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.

There needs to be greater recognition of the needs of abused men, particular those with children under their care and protection. There needs to be DV refuges that accommodate men, just as there are for women. There needs to be behaviour modification programs made available for violent women, as well as men. There needs to be gender-neutral and non-judgemental help-lines and avenues of support that do not assume that every man that approaches them is either an abuser, potential abuser or abuser in denial. Some are just victims.

Question 14: To what extent do current processes encourage and support people to be accountable and change their behaviour?

If you objectively evaluate the current systems of support and intervention, it will be observed that to a large extent, violent women are let 'off the hook' due to the almost exclusive focus of attention on violent men. There appears to be very little accountability imposed on women when the prevailing mindset is that women are only ever victims, women are not aggressive (except in self-defence), women's actions do not contribute to the incidence of DV, and so on.

Questions 18/19/20: What barriers prevent people in particular groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefiting from family violence services?

How can the family violence system be improved to reflect the diversity of people's experiences?
How can responses to family violence in these groups and communities be improved?

The biggest barriers are the endemic bias against recognising and supporting male victims, against recognising and intervening in the case of abusive women, and against ensuring transparency and accountability on the part of those allocating and spending public funds associated with the battle against family violence.

On an even broader level the shouting-down of anyone proposing theories or methodologies that are not closely aligned to the dominant feminist/Duluth model approach, is the single major constraint on moving towards a truly effective solution to family violence. Consider, for example, just these two recent instances of this aggressive ostracism by the feminist lobby:

Tanveer Ahmed: <http://www.fighting4fair.com/uncategorized/a-message-to-supporters-of-the-white-ribbon-campaign-feminist-version/>

Sallee McLaren: <http://www.fighting4fair.com/uncategorized/sallee-mclaren-must-write-on-the-blackboard-i-must-not-challenge-the-feminist-narrative-domestic-violence/>

So instead we continue to fund the same groups, providing the same services and campaigns, despite the fact that even they admit that DV rates appear to be moving up rather than down.

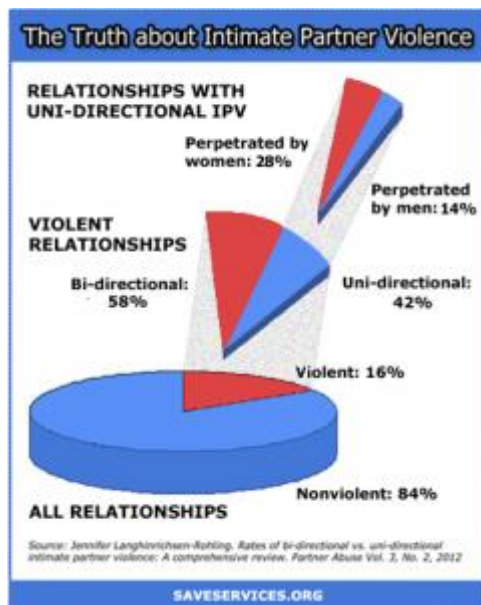
Myth #1 That family violence consists primarily of uni-directional violence perpetrated by men against women

Myth #2 That male victims of domestic violence are relatively rare and unusual

The US organization 'Stop Abusive and Violent Environments' (SAVE) examined DV research results from around the world and noted that "These studies show that rates of female perpetration are very similar to male perpetration rates.

The authors concluded that "*the results of this review suggest that partner abuse can no longer be conceived as merely a gender problem, but also (and perhaps primarily) as a human and relational problem, and should be framed as such by everyone involved.*"

These conclusions mirror other findings in the United States, where research tells us that men and women initiate most forms of abuse at equal rates, for similar reasons, and rarely in self-defense." ¹



The focus of the public debate on DV, violent men and their female victims, is more indicative of the pervasive influence of feminist ideology than being an accurate reflection of actual patterns of DV perpetration.²

The effect of this has been to minimize and discredit discussion of female perpetration and male victimization.

It is my position that this systemic gender bias constitutes a significant barrier to effectively addressing domestic violence and better supporting the welfare of all victims of DV.

It is my firm belief that a solution to the problem of domestic violence will continue to elude us as long as agencies continue to only acknowledge and address one piece of the puzzle.

Others who have advanced a similar perspective have been accused of seeking to ameliorate the behavior of male perpetrators and/or to downplay the suffering experienced by female victims. I wish to assure you, the Commissioners, that this is most certainly not my intention.

DV advocacy groups, social commentators, and even senior members of the public service, have repeatedly stated that "*the overwhelming majority of domestic violence in Australia is perpetrated by men against women*".³ This is quite simply untrue.

¹ <http://www.saveservices.org/dvlp/policy-briefings/partner-abuse-worldwide/>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pk25vBeHg> (Donald Dutton video)

³ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/misrepresenting-reality/this-is-what-a-lie-looks-like-domestic-violence/>

Numerous respected and non-ideologically biased researchers have found that between one and two-thirds of the victims of domestic violence are male.^{4 5} The variation in findings was dependent upon variables that included the country surveyed, sampling techniques and the definition of 'domestic violence' employed.

Other research has also highlighted the fact that large numbers of men commit suicide as a result of either being subjected to domestic violence, or after having been falsely accused of perpetrating domestic violence.^{6 7} It should be remembered that a man's separation from his children can and does occur regardless of whether the father is the perpetrator, the alleged perpetrator, and/or the victim of domestic violence (as for e.g. in the case where no emergency accommodation is available for fathers with children).

Indeed I can assure the Commission that much of the data about patterns of domestic violence that appears in the media, and in the web sites of DV agencies, is woefully misleading. This is unfortunate as suitable data, albeit sometimes imperfect or incomplete in some regards, is available for those who genuinely seek it. From this one might conclude that misleading statistics are at times being deliberately advanced in order to support a particular ideological perspective that, as previously noted, is held by many working in the field of DV. And in fact there is clear evidence that this is occurs relatively frequently and with complete impunity.⁸

One red flag for astute observers is the absence of comparative statistics for male victimisation within much of the literature about domestic violence. In some cases this is because men were not surveyed, or surveyors failed to ask the appropriate questions regarding female perpetration and male victims. In other cases the relevant comparisons were available but were not reported, presumably as doing so might undermine a predetermined narrative and/or preferred conclusion.

The view that is put forward by most within the DV sector is that their preoccupation with male violence is justified because the number of female perpetrators is minimal – that female abusers are virtually an insignificant aberration.

When provided with alternative research showing more similar rates of perpetration, the fall-back position is typically that a focus on male offenders remains valid because females only perpetrate violence in self-defence, that the physical violence they perpetrate is less severe, and/or that the impact of DV is greater for women than men.

The first statement is demonstrably false⁹ and the subsequent statements demand careful qualification to have any significance in framing an appropriate policy response.

⁴ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/misrepresenting-reality/domestic-violence-one-sided-media-coverage-and-bogus-statistics/>

⁵ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/uncategorized/on-the-experience-of-male-victims-of-domestic-violence/>

⁶ <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.5042/jacpr.2010.0141>

⁷ <http://mediaradar.org/docs/Davis-DomesticViolenceRelatedDeaths.pdf> See Conclusion

⁸ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/misrepresenting-reality/fudging-the-figures-to-support-the-feminist-narrative-domestic-violence/>

⁹ See for example http://www.mediaradar.org/docs/Dutton_GenderParadigmInDV-Pt1.pdf, See p687

Myth #3 That women rarely perpetrate violent and controlling behavior

The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) prepared a submission to the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. RAINN is the USA's largest anti-sexual violence organization. In that submission they wrote:

*"... an inclination to focus on particular segments of the student population (e.g. athletes), particular aspects of campus culture (e.g., the Greek system), or traits that are common in many millions of law-abiding Americans (e.g., "masculinity"), rather than on the subpopulation at fault: those who choose to commit rape. This trend has the paradoxical effect of making it harder to stop sexual violence, since it removes the focus from the individual at fault, and seemingly mitigates personal responsibility for his or her own actions."*¹⁰

Now change 'sexual violence' to 'domestic violence' and consider the implications for the DV debate. As stated earlier, many within the DV sector are loudly asserting that 'domestic violence is men's violence towards women', and devoting their resources to educating/shaming men as a collective group. But by doing so they are inadvertently sending a message to violent women that 'whatever you are doing must be something other than domestic violence', and 'given the inherently violent nature of men your actions might well be justified'.

It also follows that violent women would be less concerned about being prosecuted in the knowledge that they will probably be believed more readily than their male partner should the authorities become involved.

The claim that women are rarely responsible for domestic violence becomes all the more implausible when one considers recent trends showing substantial increases in violent crime by women and girls.¹¹ Such increases are now, in some jurisdictions, exceeding the trend in similar crimes by males.

On the implications of failing to properly acknowledge/support/counsel violent women and male victims of DV

The 'DV=Men's violence towards women' focus is reflected in language and in statements that paint a picture of all men as abusers or potential abusers. Web site content, even to promote help-lines, is written in such a way as to pre-judge visitors based on their gender. I will provide a link to one such site in a footnote, but the agency in question is by no means unusual in this regard.¹² The material posted online in most Australian federal, state, and NGO web sites dealing with DV is assiduously judgmental and anti-male in its nature.

Take for example the document the '*National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children*' which sets the scene for addressing domestic violence at both federal and state level. That document, as do many others like it, waves away the welfare of battered men within the first few

¹⁰ <https://rainn.org/images/03-2014/WH-Task-Force-RAINN-Recommendations.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/uncategorized/on-the-recent-increase-in-violent-crime-carried-out-by-women-and-girls/>

¹² <http://www.fighting4fair.com/misrepresenting-reality/addressing-anti-male-bias-by-an-australian-state-government-department/>

paragraphs. The Plan states *“While a small proportion of men are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, the majority of people who experience this kind of violence are women in a home, at the hands of men they know. Men are more likely to be the victims of violence from strangers and in public, so different strategies are required to address these different types of violence.”*

As a consequence of both the message being communicated by DV agencies, and broader social forces at work (i.e. anti-male bias and sex-role stereotyping), many male victims are discouraged from coming forward to report crimes and/or seek assistance. By the same token it is also entirely likely that the overt profiling undertaken by DV agencies results in fewer women coming forward to seek help for their own aggressive tendencies.

Under-reporting by male victims then has a flow-on effect of reinforcing the misconception that there are few female aggressors, that facilities for male victims are unnecessary, that survey question on male victims/female aggressors are redundant, etc.

There are many reports of male victims who do come forward being treated with suspicion, if not downright hostility. They claim to not have been believed, and that they were considered as abusers who were denied. Even when they are treated sympathetically, the next problem they encounter is that there are either nil or minimal services (e.g. beds in shelters) or assistance available to men, and particularly men accompanied by children.

When this mantra of ‘DV=men’s violence towards women’ is disseminated through the community via the media it encourages the view that men are inherently violent, and that should you see a man involved in a violent incident with a woman then the man is immediately assumed to be the instigator and perpetrator of violence.

This is clearly demonstrated in the videos available at <http://www.fighting4fair.com/promulgating-inequality/differing-public-response-to-partner-violence-depending-on-gender-of-victim/>

We need to mandate rigorous evaluation for existing programs as well as trialing new approaches

I believe that there is a role for educational messages but that these should be gender-neutral.¹³ The community should be truthfully informed that there are both male and female perpetrators, that there are male and female victims, and that in many cases both partners engage in violence and abuse. The community should be told that any/all violence or abuse in the home is inappropriate and harmful for everyone involved, and particularly for those children who witness that abuse.

I believe that there is no legitimate objective basis for addressing in isolation, let alone focusing resources on, any one particular group of victims or abusers. In particular I object to the current gender-based approaches to addressing domestic violence. I say deal with the whole problem. Fix the whole problem.

I believe that agencies or organizations active in the DV field should provide services, counseling and support to both male and female perpetrators and male and female victims. I believe that government funds should be allocated where they will be most effective, and that this may mean that most funds are directed towards government agencies who provide practical assistance, rather than to advocacy groups paying PR/marketing firms to develop and implement costly ‘shame and blame’ campaigns of dubious value.

¹³ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/uncategorized/two-awareness-campaigns-only-one-can-be-criticised-cowed-by-feminism/>

The need for good governance and accountability amongst DV service providers

Victorians deserve good governance, transparency and accountability with regards to public funds directed towards the fight against domestic violence.

It is a sad fact that when society places a particular group of people on a pedestal then the result is often a scandal, as normal common-sense oversight is relaxed, criticism quashed, people abused or taken advantage of, and public funds misspent or otherwise wasted. Unfortunately I believe that we are now beginning to see this happening within organizations driven by feminist ideology, and particularly in the field of domestic violence.

Millions of dollars of taxpayer funds and donations are already being poured into the fight against domestic violence, and this is rapidly increasing. A large proportion of this money is subsequently finding its way to feminist advocacy groups like 'Our Watch' and 'White Ribbon Australia'.¹⁴

We want to think that throwing money at a problem will make it go away, and that high-profile and politically-savvy advocacy groups should be well-positioned to use funds to good effect. There is a time to make decisions with the head and not the heart (or with an eye on short-term PR value), and the fight against domestic violence is such an example.

The Government should consider whether more might be achieved by greater funding of government agencies providing direct assistance to those in need, rather than for example directing funds to a non-government organization who may direct funds towards salaries, rent, conferences and securing the services of marketing/PR firms.¹⁵

This topic was recently addressed by well-known Canadian activist Karen Straughan:

"Violence against women in any form has been a HUGE cash cow for feminism. The more they inflate their claims regarding its pervasiveness in society, the more money pours in, and the more power they have to tinker with legislation and policy. Because it is such an emotionally charged subject, any rational scepticism of these claims (as to whether they are true in the first place, or whether feminists are accurate in their estimates of pervasiveness), is easily deflected by attacking the sceptic."

"You can demonstrate until the cows come home just how much certain feminists are profiting from generating an inflated fear of violence against women among the public (the average [almost always feminist] director of a battered women's shelter here in Alberta rakes in over \$100k/year, and in the US, that number can be significantly higher), and people won't care, because ending violence against women is THAT important. They won't see the people who claim to be working to end it as the exploitative con-artists or ideologically driven religious inquisitors that they are."

If you point out that a very lucrative industry has formed around these issues, and that like any organic entity, this industry will work to sustain and grow itself rather than the other way around,

¹⁴ <http://www.fighting4fair.com/uncategorized/so-what-exactly-is-the-domestic-violence-industry/>

¹⁵ White Ribbon Australia is simply provided here as an example of a NGO active in the DV field, and for which financial records are publicly available <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/publications/previous-annual-reports> and <http://www.acnc.gov.au/RN52B75Q?ID=D19DFBA4-B116-4C8A-B1CF-9509317B0877&noleft=1>

you get called a conspiracy theorist. Even though none of these claims require a conspiracy to be valid--all they require is human nature.”¹⁶

My recommendations to the Royal Commission

1. First and foremost, I would implore the Commissioners to consider this submission, and the linked references contained within it, with an open mind and in an objective manner.

Please be open to the possibility that the limited success achieved to date in addressing DV may be due in part to shortcomings in both the philosophical approach that is driving current efforts, and the fixed attitudes and preconceived notions of many of those tasked with addressing the issue.

Indeed I am very much aware of the ‘elephant in the room’ that is feminist doctrine, and of the combative ‘us and them’ approach often adopted by adherents to that movement. But as is usually the case, we can and must find a middle path that will lead us to a fair and workable solution to the scourge of family violence.

2. Please evaluate and modify all documents and web content produced by relevant agencies in order to identify and remove any bias that might be present in relation to gender or sexual orientation. None of this material should pre-judge who is or might be the perpetrator or the victim in the relationship, or their motivation for coming forward to seek help.
3. Ensure that possible bias in relation to gender or sexual orientation is removed from survey instruments and that research methodology is carefully vetted in order to ensure accurate, unbiased and truly representative findings.
4. Evaluate and adjust the composition of relevant sections within agencies, committees, and panels dealing with DV issues so that, as far as practicable, they are representative of the broader community, particularly in relation to gender and sexual orientation.

At the moment it is my impression that many such groups are currently overwhelmingly comprised of people in a very narrow demographic, typically tertiary-educated women aged 25-45 who identify as feminists. It is highly probable that this is introducing a degree of bias which could limit the scope of approaches being considered or undertaken to address the problem of family violence.

5. Initiate policies and procedures to ensure good governance and the cost-effective use of public monies related to combating DV. Grants should stipulate the need for key performance indicators, gender neutrality and natural justice, together with requirements for performance reviews and auditing. It is also important that any budget committee, steering committees or similar should contain representatives who are completely independent, in a financial sense, from any of the matters being considered. It would be naïve to assume, given the huge amounts of money directed towards domestic violence at the state and federal level, that there was no potential for financial considerations or self-interest to influence decisions regarding expenditure priorities.
6. Evaluate and adjust the allocation of funding and resources so that it is in accordance with the reality of the domestic violence problem in its entirety. In the first instance this would

¹⁶ <http://owningyourshit.blogspot.com.au/2014/11/false-allegations-are-rare.html>

almost certainly necessitate additional resources being directed towards male victims of domestic violence and counseling for female perpetrators of violence.

7. The manner in which the welfare of abused men has been largely ignored in the case of family violence is indicative, in part, of the lack of effective (or in fact, any) advocacy for the interests of men and boys within the spheres of both federal and state government.

This contrasts strongly with the situation for women where there are generously-funded agencies, or at least sections within agencies, to address and advance the interests of women and girls. This may not be the time or place to consider this issue, but if we as a community sincerely aspire to gender equality, then this it is a disparity which should not continue to go unquestioned.

Further matters concerning the topic of domestic violence, as penned by the author of this submission, can be found at <http://www.fighting4fair.com/#DomesticViolence>