

 QCDFVRe@der

Autumn 2020



Director's Message



It is with a heavy heart that I write this introduction to our Autumn edition. Since our last Re@der the country has been gripped by fires and floods. Then, February brought us the news of the murder of Hannah Clarke and her children, Aaliyah, Laianah, and Trey. This unspeakable multiple murder, committed in a quiet suburban street, saw the country gripped again – this time with profound sorrow and outrage.

In our focus on the loss of these innocents, many paused to reflect that these were not the only women and children to die at the hands of a loved one. Our selection of a red rose as the cover motif of this edition is our commemoration of not just Hannah and her children, but our way of honouring all lives that have been stolen too early through family violence.

So much about the Clarke family deaths resonated with many of us, including the invisible nature of a particularly insidious component of intimate partner violence: coercive control. Hannah Clarke endured years of such control but the fact that it was not physical abuse meant it was unseen, by even those closest to her, until too late. It is so easy for us to overlook or not recognise that which is not a physical manifestation of domestic violence and, in turn, not understand the huge impact of such abuse. We feel very strongly about raising awareness about emotional abuse and other forms of coercive control. This will be a focus of upcoming work.

We also know that following the Clarke family deaths there was an outpouring of grief, sadness and anger about such senseless violence. For our part, we waited and looked for the voices of men reflecting their outrage about these deaths across the media. Frustratingly, it seemed much-needed male voices were conspicuous in their silence. Our two male lecturers felt beholden to speak out and this edition leads off with the voice of these two passionate advocates. Let's all call on more men to speak out if we are truly to make a difference to the appalling situation that sees on average one woman killed a week. You can read Dr Brian Sullivan's words on **page 3**, and the thoughts of Mr Mark Walters on **page 5**.

Our attention has also been drawn to the role of technology in our rapidly changing world. This is a good thing - as you may be reading this edition online - but there is a downside. Perpetrators of violence have access to an additional arsenal of weapons to use in their victimising. The issues of technology-facilitated abuse, and ways to respond to these forms of abuse are also explored in this edition. Firstly, we draw on contemporary research to explore current knowledge and challenges in responding to technology facilitated sexual violence on **page 7**. A review of the eSafety Commissioner's website follows on **page 11**, shining a light on helpful resources from what we see as a highly valuable toolkit for all practitioners.

Technology is also playing an ever-increasing role in service delivery as the world has been hit by COVID19. Specialist services have moved to provide support using phones and technology in unprecedented times. This most recent pandemic has also brought to the fore the dilemma for those who understand the power and control exerted by many men over their partners. Containing the spread of a virus may, indeed, be creating the conditions that put women's lives at risk, imprisoning them in environs of their abusive partners. Our colleague, Adjunct Associate Professor Silke Meyer, recently published an exploration of this issue, which we reproduce on **page 15**.

The need for specialist services responding to the increasing scourge of domestic and family violence and sexual assault has never been greater. We must remind ourselves that there are services to help. In our 'At the Coalface' segment on **page 17** we hear more of the wonderful services available at Zig Zag. The work of the Zig Zag team also highlights the importance that the voice of survivors holds in developing responses and programs that make a difference in their lives. To this end, we provide a summary

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of messages from longer term survivors to new survivors, presented in a research summary on **Page 21**. The implications of this American study provide food for thought for us, particularly in illuminating the lessons we may learn from those who are “long term” survivors.

Lastly, as we have move into such uncertain times with COVID-19 may I wish all our valued readers well. These are indeed challenging times for all of us.

Dr Heather Lovatt

Director
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Stones of Hope

Dr Brian Sullivan, Senior Lecturer
Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research



I am sharing what I said at a Red Rose Rally in Brisbane, shortly after the death of Hannah Clarke and her children. At that event, I acknowledged that I had no words of wisdom, or consolation, or solutions, or answers. There are no excuses for this violence. But as a man and a father, I also stated I was not free to walk away from this into my own private sadness and hopelessness. Weeks on from that rally it is more important than ever that as men, and fathers, we speak out - however inadequate and feeble we may feel.

When anyone dies like Hannah and her little ones, and especially when we lose children, there is an overwhelming sense of tragedy, unfairness, and unnecessary loss... and tears that seem endless, unbearable pain, questions without answers, powerlessness and hopelessness. There is just sheer exhaustion at the incredible work the domestic violence sector does and then this. Maybe this is a brief glimpse of what a victim of domestic violence lives with every day?


If this is not a deafening wake-up call or turning point for Queensland/Australia – then nothing will change the status quo. How do we transfigure and transform this death, darkness and despair into hope and life?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, speaking about justice in another violent context, said a situation will not change until we first speak the truth. Let's as a society tell the truth, be honest and face up to the reality of men's violence without listening to the uninformed ranting about this violence being equal between men and women. Let's move on from the mindless 'whataboutery' that distracts from the

crisis facing women and children living with abusive men. I call it uninformed, but it is more than that - it is dishonest. We need to correct these false narratives and lies. Domestic violence is the most serious form of human rights violation in our country and it is men's violence towards women and children that is the core of this. Fact!

These killings are not about a father being 'driven to the brink' – these wicked acts of violent, cruel murder are deliberate, purposeful and planned; they are about winning the contest, winning the battle, winning the prize - which is power over other's lives; they are about having the last word, calling the final shot. This is nothing more than brutal revenge and payback from a man at not getting his way, and the cost to a woman just wanting to live an abuse-free life was a vicious ambush that resulted in her murder, and that of her children.

- **A father sacrifices himself for his children - he doesn't sacrifice his children.**
- **A father respects his children's mother, especially when that intimate relationship between the man and women may be over.**
- **A father can never say he loves his children if he harms their mother.**
- **A father de-centres himself and centres those he loves – it is not all about him anymore.**
- **A father would rather suffer himself than see his children suffer.**
- **A father knows that his children are not his trophies, his property or possession – they are through him but not from him – they are not his to own.**
- **A father is an optimist for his children's futures, not a narcissist about his own superiority, entitlement and rights over others.**



When the Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board analyses the events leading up to and surrounding these murders, I am sure that the same old characteristics will emerge: a system of intervention that knew the danger but where information wasn't shared; a system that didn't take the danger seriously enough; a system that doesn't seem to be able to contain a man intent on murder.

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When will we as a society wake up from our denial, blame and minimisation (in men's groups we see this all the time)? Yet we are so guilty of it too. When will we speak the truth instead of making excuses - even though there were histories of extreme coercive control, threats, breaches, a recent separation, grievous bodily harm, abduction and stalking? The writing was on the wall, and we didn't read the wall. If these recent murders are not a wake-up call, if they are not a turning point in how we contain violent offenders, then keep your calendars free on Fridays for Red Rose Rallies because we will be returning here again and again and again.

While we mourn the senseless loss of life, while we piece together the clues as to how this tragedy could happen, let us recommit ourselves to justice, to safety, to accountability, to changing the ending for the next women, the next family, the next children. They are not strangers - they are our neighbours and friends when all is said and done.

Suggestions

Martin Luther King said, “out of a mountain of despair (we need to find) a stone of hope”. Here are some stones of hope that I think could help stem the tide of domestic violence and abuse:

- **Our best police for our worst and most dangerous offenders – a state-wide task force focused on recidivists who breach and breach again.**
- **A special unit in Probation and Parole focused on close supervision of domestic violence offenders, ensuring they attend programs**
- **A criminal justice system that has serious consequences not suggestions for offenders. A supervisory system that watches these men and works with them for as long as it takes.**
- **Governments who resource more men's programs, longer programs, programs that have the capacity to supervise these men and keep them under surveillance.**
- **Well-funded services for children who are victims of violence and trauma to help and heal them with the non-offending traumatised mothers – to change the next generation.**
- **What about Ryan's Rule for women who are domestic violence victims who are not getting adequate services and responses for their safety needs, so that she can escalate this to those who can oversee the domestic violence responses, ensuring she gets what she needs for safety?**



Seeing Dangerous Men Takes A Developed Analysis

Mr Mark Walters, Associate Lecturer
Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research

When confronted by the actions of Rowan Baxter in the past weeks I was hoping that the service system, that I work in and contribute to, hadn't failed in containing him and left Hannah and her children vulnerable.

As awful as it sounds now, part of me hoped that he was unknown or invisible, as some of the perpetrators of this awful type of violence occasionally are.

But that wasn't the case.

He and his actions, particularly after they separated, had become known to the system and orders were in place. Interventions and referrals were made that ultimately hadn't been able to contain Rowan Baxter.

There has been the legitimate commentary on the challenges of containing violent men and their propensity to find a way, if they are really motivated, to kill.

But as someone invested in building the sector's capacity to recognise and respond to domestic violence, I can see the hallmarks of a skilful manipulator. I can see his strategic efforts to conceal his behaviours and his ultimate intent.

In a robust and critical analysis of 'what went wrong?' we would need to see that at certain points of the system response, his dangerous potential was not seen and maybe not understood.

Kidnapping your eldest child and taking her out of the state is not the act of a caring, kind dad acting out of grief but more of a dangerous man intent on inflicting maximum distress on the partner that dared to want something better, a partner, who dared to leave.

Professionals, particularly within the legal spaces, have pointed out the dire consequence of losing sight of the potential for dangerousness. We lose sight when dangerous men's threats and tactics of intimidation can be framed or interpreted as legitimate responses to the suffering of separation from children. We lose sight when we fail to challenge a separated father about his language, threats and his adversarial tactics.

As a member of the Queensland Domestic Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, I reviewed cases where it seemed apparent that, in some parts of the service system, *suffering* can have the effect of dulling or blurring the safety system's 'senses'. This, at its worst, misinterprets and then excuses those expressions of hostility, revenge or hate, seeing them instead as grief and loss responses.

This misinterpretation is a serious practice, and a safety problem. Much as we may hate to admit it, neglecting to see those threats, failing to respond to those expressions, minimising and excusing the impact on their separated partner, is collusion.

Rowan Baxter was in contact with individuals within systems that are designed to increase safety, justice and accountability. If those working within these systems can't truly see the intent behind kidnapping a child, or consider monitoring an expression of concern for the family's welfare or perceive hostile references as just 'letting off steam', then it becomes easier to accept the invitation to collude and buy into the perpetrator's convincing rhetoric that he is actually the victim here.

Dr Alan Wade, from the Centre for Response Based Practice suggests that until we embed courses in understanding the dynamics of interpersonal and family violence into the curricula of law, medical, social work, policing, psychology and other allied health and education fields, we will continue to misread perpetrators, and we will continue to make mistakes.

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A skilled responsive workforce needs both men and women engaged in best practice but the lack of men willing to come to even the most basic training is of course concerning.”

He suggests that by getting a better understanding of violence we get a better understanding of a range of possible medical, social and psychological presentations. In fact, he posits that without such an in-depth understanding built into training and workforce development, this could be likened to not learning about cancer or diabetes in medical school (Wade, 2018).

Of course, we need to respond to those men who have recently separated, whose pain is legitimate and who should have immediate access to the best interventions possible. However, as practitioners like Rodney Vlasis have been saying for some time now unless women's and children's voices remain central to those interventions, a minimally trained practitioner can focus on "issues" of self-esteem, family of origin or substance abuse and signal to the man that his use of violence is not the most important issue to address. (Vlasis 2014)

There are many well-meaning practitioners who need to be able to conceptually, and in practice, link the **"work"** done on the man's "issues" to the safety and wellbeing of the women and children in his life.

I admit to holding a bias: a training and development bias. I hold that bias, not from a theoretical perspective, but a practical perspective. It has taken a long time, the influence of great role models and much exposure to direct and indirect training to have enabled me to see interpersonal and family violence as it is. It has taken a commitment and analysis to really see it and understand how violence is used... and, sadly, how it is missed.

As a man in the domestic and family violence sector, I can't help but feel concerned when I see jobs go unfilled because it's not possible to recruit men to work in behavioural change programs. A skilled responsive workforce needs both men and women engaged in best practice but the lack of men willing to come to even

the most basic training is of course concerning. Their absence may reflect individual or organisational decisions but regardless of the reasons behind the absence, the invisibility of men speaks volumes to me.

From the work I have done in delivering the evidence of the gendered nature of domestic and family violence to male audiences, I can see that there is often an immediate collective defensiveness. It becomes apparent that to keep the audience engaged and open, they must get over the common misconception that the violence is about adversarial couples who share the same power, arguing and assaulting each other (e.g. their recent break-up).

There is often the cry that men who are being hurt in these exchanges are not receiving the responses they need. Getting over the misconception that domestic violence is only about people 'being nasty to each other' and that 'women can be just as bad as men', is an obstacle that requires energy to surmount. It takes much work to guide people to see, own and do something about that perspective. It can be challenging to help people accept the evidence that male violence in relationships is different in intensity, intent, frequency, type and severity and is not the same as reciprocal violence between equals.

Final Thoughts

Perhaps that is why men are so silent generally about violence to women? Perhaps that is why they don't want to come into training settings and have those preconceptions tested? But I can say that the sector and the community needs more well-informed men. We need more men willing to go the training miles and overcome their sense they are being oppressed when privilege and entitlement are called out. We need more men being vocal, using whatever sphere of influence they hold to reflect the evidence, to signal to their female colleagues, their daughters, their nieces, partners and sisters that they have become informed through evidence. We need more men who share the conviction that women share an equally fundamental right to safety, justice and accountability. We need more men to be part of a web of accountability that recognises, calls out and contains violent men.

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Current knowledge and challenges in responding to

Technology facilitated sexual violence

This article reflects on three Australian research studies, one of which illustrates that the use in online communication technologies to perpetrate sexual violence is a phenomenon that has been with us for the last decade.

The use of technology to facilitate abuse is not a new topic within understandings of domestic and family violence (DFV). Online harassment, stalking, control or monitoring of devices and social media are considered a part of DFV, as typically these types of abuse are informed by the dynamics of gender-based violence and perpetrated with intent to coerce or control (Douglas, Harris, and Dragiewicz, 2019). Technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) is usually defined within the context of online abuse. However, there is debate surrounding the definitional place of TFSV regarding other forms of online abuse such as hate speech, cyberbullying and online harassment. Powell and Henry (2018, p. 292) describe TFSV as “sexually characterised behaviours where communications technologies are used in some way to facilitate or extend the harm to [a] victim”. The same authors (Powell and Henry, 2018) further conceptualise TFSV as including online sexual harassment, gender and sexuality-based harassment, cyberstalking, image-based sexual exploitation (including ‘revenge pornography’) and the use of communications technologies to enable a sexual assault and/or to coerce a victim into an unwanted sexual act.

There are a number of ways both service providers and police support victims of TFSV. Yet, in light of the ubiquity and generally unregulated nature of technologies and the internet, the current issues in responding to TFSV must be highlighted. The following segment presents findings from three articles, two of these are recently published and explore the current nature of TFSV and dynamics of this type of abuse in DFV contexts. The other article by King (2011) is not recent, but seminal in highlighting the challenges faced

by police and service providers in responding to TFSV. King (2011) draws upon interviews with Victoria police members that discussed some of the key issues police encounter when undertaking a report of technology-facilitated sexual assault.

Amended and abridged research summary from following texts:

Douglas, H., Harris, B.A., and Dragiewicz, M. (2019) Technology-Facilitated Domestic and Family Violence: Women’s Experiences. *British Journal of Criminology*, 59, 551-570. doi:10.1093/bjc/azy068

Powell, A., & Henry, N. (2018). Policing technology-facilitated sexual violence against adult victims: police and service sector perspectives. *Policing and Society*, 28(3), 291-307. 10.1080/10439463.2016.115496

King, R. (2011). Online communication technologies as vehicles for sexual violence: Challenges for police. *Australasian Policing*, 3(1), 24-30 and Family Violence in Queensland.

Virtual nature of TFSV and real impacts for victims

The real-life harms and severity of TFSV for victims are frequently minimised due to the virtual environment in which many of these offences take place. Powell and Henry (2018) note that the impacts of digital abuse are typically minimised, in part, by conventional conceptualisations of criminality that prioritise harms to the physical body as opposed to structural, social, emotional, or psychological harms. As a result, violence that occurs in virtual domains



is typically perceived to be less severe or harmful to victims compared to contact abuse. However, the reality and impacts of TFSV for victims are severe and enduring. For example, interviews with police and sexual violence service providers highlighted that victims of image-based sexual exploitation may experience repeated and extended psychological harms, as once images are shared online, they are rarely ever completely deleted (Powell and Henry, 2018).

Experiences of TFSV can manifest as “ongoing harms” for victims, due to the ease with which images (and other content) can be distributed to online public platforms, along with the unregulated digital footprint of media (Powell and Henry, 2018, p. 300). In this example, the non-consensual distribution of images highlights how TFSV can instil fear and loss of control for victims, particularly regarding who has accessed the image(s) and what will be done with the image(s). Powell and Henry (2018, pg. 299-300) point out that among interviews with police and service providers, a sexual assault investigator likened the harms of image-based sexual exploitation to the harms of a sexual assault itself, as illustrated in the interview extract:

They [victim of TFSV] feel that they've got no control then of when it is going to be posted next or who has seen it and that embarrassment too. A lot of them worry about when they go for jobs, is it going to be seen? It's posted on Facebook and ends up on the internet ... It's quite debilitating for a victim to be honest. The range of feelings ... is not that different from a victim of a contact sexual assault. They both have that feeling of being violated. (Interview 18, Police)

This excerpt emphasises the invasive ways TFSV can produce prolonged harms for victims, despite this type of abuse not being a contact abuse. Powell and Henry (2018) also note the prevalence of TFSV in DFV contexts. Due to the

interconnectivity between technology and daily life, and the reliance on technologies for communication, perpetrators can exploit how victims use technology as well the very function of technologies (GPS, monitoring apps, recording) to further exercise control over victims.

Douglas et al. (2019) explore the ways technology can be used to perpetrate DFV. Although this paper does not specifically focus on TFSV, Douglas et al. (2019, pp. 556-557) argue that under the legal definition of DFV in Australia, “a number of behaviours and forms of abuse are captured. These include actions that aim to isolate the survivor, monitoring and stalking, sexual abuse (through the sharing of or threat to share sexual images), emotional abuse through the use of social media and harassing behaviour”. Thus, Douglas et al. (2019) overall focus on abuse that is facilitated by technology in DFV situations. The authors outline the experiences of technology-facilitated DFV for 55 victims from Brisbane, Australia.

Technology can be used to isolate, monitor, stalk, harass and facilitate image-based abuse and social media-based abuse (Douglas et al., 2019). A number of DFV victims within the study identified the use of technology to facilitate image-based abuse. Women reported that cameras were used to monitor their activities, and recounted perpetrators using digital images to control, instil fear and manipulate. One interviewee noted that although she and her partner had consensually taken intimate pictures together, later – in light of a forthcoming protection order hearing – her partner threatened to upload these images to the internet to coerce her to change her evidence at the hearing.

Similarly, another interviewee with an intellectual disability described how she was pressured by her partner to let him take intimate pictures of her and then used threats of dissemination to control her. Douglas et al. (2019, p. 563) note that “image-based abuse deploys ‘gender entrapment’ via micromanagement of gendered expectations for behaviour and sexual double standards that can be used to shame and coerce the woman whose image was

captured”. These cases not only emphasise the harmful ways technology can be used in DFV contexts, but they also highlight the ways technology can be used to continue the perpetuation of violence, including sexual violence, even after victims are in the process of removing themselves from a DFV setting.

Challenges in responding to TFSV

Both Powell and Henry (2018) as well as King (2011) outline the unique challenges to addressing TFSV, with some overlaps identified in each paper. These challenges are particularly important in highlighting the complexities of identifying and holding accountable perpetrators of this type of abuse, as well as the difficulties in obtaining justice for victims. These challenges apply to contexts in which TFSV is perpetrated, that is, in DFV and non-DFV situations.

Limitations of sexual offences legislation

There is limited Australian legislation that recognises the long-lasting harms of TFSV, and as a result, ambiguities are surrounding the legal structure to police the diversity of sexual offences that occur online. Further, sexual offences legislation has been criticised for not adequately reflecting the diversity of TFSV crimes and experiences of victims, particularly in light of the rapidly changing ways technology can be used to facilitate sexual violence.

Cross-jurisdictional environments

The internet, including social media and public forums, transcend state, national and international borders. Due to this, offences committed online can be difficult to address due to the offence being ‘located’ at many different legislative and jurisdictional levels. This has implications for the legal ‘reach’ of police and makes it challenging for police to trace the origin of the perpetrator.

Lack of cooperation from internet and telecommunication providers

Police identified the difficulties associated with obtaining assistance from telecommunication providers to get information access, data and history from online sites. Police mentioned long wait times to access information, as well as high costs. Telecommunication providers are generally private companies, therefore obtaining access to their information can be costly especially if large volumes of data are required (Powell and Henry, 2018).

King (2011, p. 28) highlights an interview extract from Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT) investigators that outlines the operational challenges in obtaining data from telecommunication providers:

“...many Internet servers only retain their records for very short periods of time (i.e., anywhere between just a few days to a few months). Some mobile phone companies do not retain logs of Internet use on mobile phones. This process can, therefore, take between six and 18 months ...”

Evolving crime environments

The virtual nature in which online offences take place further complicates a number of policing operations that are normally integral in investigating a physical crime scene. King (2011, p. 28) emphasises that “police are faced with situations in which the technology significantly complicates gathering evidence, or can mask the offenders, especially if the offenders are equipped with specialist knowledge”.

Additionally, the speed with which new technologies are developing and the advancements in the functions of these technologies, such as location sharing on social media and GPS tracking, means that police “are faced with anonymous, mobile offenders working in decentralised spaces” (King, 2011, p. 28). Powell and Henry (2018) also documented in interviews that service providers and police acknowledged the difficulties in keeping up with the developments in technology.

Developing internal ‘resources’

Developing resources and training for police to use these resources that target TFSV are both costly and time-consuming, especially due to the rapid development of new technologies. For example, King (2011) highlights that alongside the development of new technologies, police require equipment to access and engage with these technologies, and training to use this equipment. Therefore, resourcing extends to developing expertise among police personnel.

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The virtual nature in which online offences take place further complicates a number of policing operations that are normally integral in investigating a physical crime scene.”

Limited resources, time constraints

Gathering evidence for TFSV offences is generally complicated and lengthy. King (2011, p. 29) notes that in Victoria (the location of the study), at the presentation of online sexual assault, “investigative teams normally charged with sexual assault complaints must contact a specialist computer crime squad to undertake forensic analysis of evidence, as sexual assault investigative team members generally do not have the specialist expertise to mine for and gather such evidence.

This significantly extends investigation time, sometimes up to several months”. Powell and Henry (2018) also corroborate on this point and outline that in interviews, police noted the increasing demand for forensic services for the analysis of electronic evidence and hardware. The lengthiness of this process was captured in one of the interview extracts from this paper:

“As soon as there’s any talk of computers or using a computer in relation to the offending or to assist with his offending, we have to do warrants straight away. Go out and grab them all [the devices] and then ... we have to log it on through E-crime; book it into the IT specialists at E-crime, and you might not get that [device] analysed for eight months. (Interview 16, Police)” (Powell and Henry, 2018, p. 302).

Where to from here?

In light of the challenges in responding to TFSV, the articles by King (2011) as well as Powell and Henry (2018) provide a number of recommendations to adequately address TFSV and reduce harms to victims of TFSV. These include:

- **The need for clarity in Australian state criminal legislation for responding to the exploitative use of sexual images (Powell and Henry, 2018). This is so particularly concerning the development of clear community standards that recognise the misuse of sexual images and other sexual content.**

“Building on the views of our stakeholders reported here, we also support their recommendation for consistent and specific criminal offences recognising the harm of image-based sexual exploitation of adults, where an individual creates, distributes and/or hosts a website containing sexual images without the expressed consent of the person depicted” (Powell and Henry, 2018, p. 304).

- **A need to consider non-criminal law responses in addressing TFSV, particularly considering the role of telecommunication providers and social media services (Powell and Henry, 2018)**
- **Expand training and resources for police to respond more effectively to victims of TFSV. This includes resourcing for intelligence practitioners to adequately conduct online research identifying and documenting malicious online behaviours that are domestic violence or stalking related (Powell and Henry, 2018).**
- **Targeted prevention efforts to address online sexual assaults before they occur. Prevention efforts pertaining to education programs, legislative reform, industry products that provide protection from perpetration, and cross-jurisdictional collaboration (King, 2011).**
- **Multi-level and cross-disciplinary response to interception and prevention of TFSV, policing organisation working with communities, government and industry and vice versa (King, 2011, p. 29; Powell and Henry, 2018, p. 305).**

eSafety Commissioner website review: did you know?

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The eSafety Commissioner website is a valuable repository of information, support and advice regarding online safety and abuse. This brief segment shines a spotlight on the site in case you haven't had a chance to explore what's available through the Commissioner. You're likely to find it's very useful in responding to people experiencing technology-facilitated abuse, or when you're educating your community about this type of abuse.

Technology abuse can take many forms and impact on the lives of people of all ages in our community. However, the focus of this article is providing a taste of resources relevant to those who work with female victims of online abuse.

Background

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is a national independent regulator for online safety. Developed in 2015, the activities of eSafety are governed by the Commonwealth's Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015. The entity leads and coordinates online safety efforts across Commonwealth departments, authorities and agencies, and engages with online safety stakeholders internationally.

Educators, frontline service providers, parents, young people and particularly, victims of online abuse will find much of interest on this site. It is a compendium of great links, videos, news and research papers that address a range of issues that can affect the safety of online users. The eSafety website enables users to filter and retrieve data related to themes, and in addition, the homepage categorises targeted materials for different groups, so users may select information relevant to: educators, kids, young people, parents, women and seniors. The 'key issues' and 'about us' tabs provide further information about online safety which are tailored to the target audiences. For example, within the educators' tab, some of the available resources listed are relevant for training for professionals, or as classroom resources and there is an eSafety toolkit for schools.

A vital part of eSafety is the range of links and a service that lets victims report abuse, providing a step-by-step guide on what needs to be included in such reports. For instance, victims can make a report about abuse pertaining to cyberbullying, image-based abuse or illegal and harmful content.

Indeed, the eSafety website prioritises victim safety with a number of 'stay safe' prompts and 'quick exit' links that appear on the site pages. As well, the site recognises the triggering nature of some of the topics mentioned, and throughout informational sections, there are signposts to victim-sensitive support such as;

Signposts

No one deserves to be abused, threatened or stalked by someone using technology

If you have experienced image-based abuse, the most important things to remember are that it is not your fault and you are not alone

If these stories trigger a strong response, please connect with support.

Stay safe prompt:

If you are feeling unsafe right now, call the [police on Triple Zero \(000\)](#) or contact [1800RESPECT \(1800 737 732\)](#). Remember your safety is important. If an abusive person learns that you are seeking resources and information, their abusive behaviour may get worse. Learn more and connect with support.

If you are the target of online abuse, remember it is not your fault. Everyone should be free to interact online without the fear of abuse. Below we outline different types of abuse and what you can do to take action.

eSafetywomen

eSafetywomen includes a variety of information resources for women about their online safety. Within this page, there are two sections on 'Connecting safely' and 'Being social' for women to learn about

- [Safety tips for when they get a new device, download an app or go on a website for the first time.](#)
- [Phones and tablets – How to protect the personal information they store on devices and in the apps they use.](#)
- [Laptops and computers – Keep themselves safe while accessing the internet on laptops or computers.](#)
- [Email – How to keep an email account safe and the various options for setting up email accounts.](#)
- [Life admin – Protecting financial and personal information when shopping or banking online.](#)
- [Social media – Advice on how to have a safer experience on social media and stay connected.](#)
- [Online dating – How to safely use online dating apps and websites.](#)

Of particular interest to our readership will be the resources available within the key issues section: domestic and family violence

[https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/domestic-family-violence\) and image-based abuse](https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/domestic-family-violence) and image-based abuse)

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/image-based-abuse>

Critically, the complex ways the online realm can be used within domestic and family violence contexts is conveyed in 'plain English' throughout the site.

The domestic and family violence page, for example, has a number of eSafety information resource links including:

- **What is technology-facilitated abuse?**
- **What are the warning signs?**
- **Online safety planning**
- **Get help and support**
- **In your language – provides essential advice and information is available for download in 12 different languages to assist people who are experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.**
- **Training for frontline workers**
- **'How to' videos**
- **Know the facts**
- **Safety quizzes**
- **Your stories**

Additional pages enable each of these topics to be explored in more depth. It is important to note that eSafety's links to different resources within the website make some important distinctions. For example, when looking at information on image-based abuse there are specific sections for users experiencing image-based abuse as part of domestic and family violence, and separately, material for anyone else who is experiencing image-based abuse. This simple but important delineation acknowledges the intricacies of image-based abuse in domestic and family violence contexts, and the notion that image-based abuse can occur within a range of alternative situations and relationships, including long and short term heterosexual and homosexual relationships, casual encounters, via dating apps, in instances of sextortion (a form of blackmail where a perpetrator threatens to reveal intimate images of you online unless you give in to their demands) and revenge porn.

Domestic and family violence-related online abuse: resources, links and information

As in other parts of the site, the domestic and family violence-related online abuse section contains a number of resources for users to learn about the phenomena of domestic and family violence and technology abuse, and how to seek help. As well, frontline workers can follow links to register for workshops or to access online training.

Frontline workers may also be interested in working with their clients to create an online safety plan. Within this section, there is also a guide for family and friends of persons experiencing domestic and family violence and technology-facilitated abuse to support, and ultimately protect, the person experiencing abuse.

Users can select the 'online safety checklist' which sets out essential online safety steps for anyone in a domestic and family violence situation. Separate checklists are provided for persons 'living with an abusive partner' and 'after leaving an abusive partner'. In this section, a link is also provided to eSafety 'how-to' videos, such as, how to clear browsing history on desktops and phones, how to employ privacy settings on various apps like Instagram and Snapchat and how to turn off photo location on mobile devices. This part of the site also highlights to users some of the tell-tale signs that indicate a device has been fitted with spyware or tracking apps.

Within this section, there's also a 'social media checklist', a tool to help website visitors think about how to use social media more safely, including:

Checking the privacy settings of software, social media, and if applicable children's online accounts

Being cautious about who you accept as a friend or follower online

Setting personal rules about what to post

For example, personal rules could include asking friends and family not to check you or your children in, 'tag' them or post anything about you publicly, and changing settings in order to prevent others tagging you or checking you or your children in without your approval.

The 'keeping children safe' panel provides a variety of information about offline and online safety plans, support services for children, and suggestions for staying safe rules. In this section, links are also provided regarding support services for children and links to information about 'how to have tricky conversations with children and teens' within the eSafety website.

Other relationships: resources, links and information

A number of links, resources and information are listed for persons experiencing technology-facilitated abuse in

non-domestic and family violence contexts. For example, eSafety provides extensive support and information regarding cyberbullying and illegal or harmful content as well as online safety and prevention resources in general. The image-based abuse section has significant resources for victims of this type of abuse, and suggests ways for victims to take action. Some of these options and resources are outlined below – particularly helpful resources are starred:

Get help to remove images and video

There are two main ways to remove images and video:

01 Report an image or video to eSafety Commissioner

- Highlights to the reader who can make an image-based report to eSafety
- Step by step guide to make this report
- FAQs about making the report
- How eSafety handles the reports

02 Report an image to the website or social media service it is posted on

- Step by step guide to report to social media service
- Step by step guide to collect evidence

Deal with sextortion

- What are the warning signs?
- What can I do? Step by step guide
- Tips to protect yourself when experiencing sextortion

Manage abuse sent via text or email

- How to collect evidence
- *Links to support service for your device (to block, report etc.) – Apple, Android
- *Links to support service (to block, report etc.) for email
- *Links to contact main telecommunications providers.
- *The Handling of Life-Threatening and Unwelcome Communications Code may also be helpful if you are unable to block the phone number or email address and the communication is frequent and repeated over some time.

*Civil penalties scheme:

a scheme allowing victims of image-based abuse to make a report (complaint or objection notice) to the eSafety Commissioner, which may result in action being taken against the person who shared, or threatened to share, an intimate image without consent.

Contact the police

- Links to local police station by state and territory
- Information about how the police can help – links to laws in each state and territory
- Preparing to go to the police, advice

eSafety also provides users with the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on how to improve the website's resources. This option allows victims of technology-facilitated abuse, and service providers, to contribute to the current knowledge base on this topic.



Coronavirus:

Fear of family violence spike as COVID-19 impact hits households

Reproduced from Monash Lens

Featuring:

Kate Fitz-Gibbon

Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre

Silke Meyer

Associate Professor (Research), Criminology, Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre

Dr Silke Meyer is a QCDFVR Adjunct Associate Professor we thank her for sharing this text with us.

We are living in the increasingly uncertain and frightening time of a global pandemic; one that, during the coming months, will almost certainly see Australian households and individuals experience higher levels of stress and financial uncertainty, and health threats previously unimaginable.

More than ever during this time, we must not forget that family violence remains a national emergency and a major public health concern in Australia.

As yet there's been limited consideration given to how the coronavirus will affect family violence rates in Australia, but evidence from the aftermath of other state and federal crises, such as the recent bushfires and other natural disasters, suggest a spike is looming.

As measures to curb the spread of the disease tighten, such as families being confined in their homes, that threat is expected to increase, with women and children being at greatest risk of harm.

The Australian federal and state governments must devote immediate resources to ensure their safety during and post the crisis.

The stress and financial impacts on families

Financial stress arising from a change in employment and income has been recognised as a precursor to family violence, femicide and filicide. This is particularly critical in the rapidly changing context of the coronavirus pandemic, which will see many families affected by a reduction or loss of income.

While this will affect households across the board, low-income families and those with insecure employment arrangements will be disproportionately affected by financial stress.

The risks of social isolation

As self-isolation becomes the recommended but temporary way of life, it's important to recognise that for a large number of Australian women and children this poses significant health and safety risks.

In a country where one woman a week dies from male violence, and where one child a fortnight is killed by a parent, we cannot underestimate the combined risks of social isolation, financial stress and family violence during this pandemic.

For some women and children, safely isolating at home will simply not be an option.

Residing with elderly parents, family or friends, on the other hand, presents a different set of heightened health risks. Homelessness will become a fear and a reality for some.

We know that family violence is already the leading cause of homelessness for women in Australia, and it's a fear that has created substantial barriers to them seeking help to leave an abusive relationship.

This coronavirus global health pandemic presents a new barrier to exiting abusive relationships, and increases the risk of pushing many Australian women and children to remain in violent and unsafe homes.

Federal and state governments must move now to prepare for an increased demand for safe housing options for women and children experiencing family violence, along with adequate resourcing of telephone helplines in times of increased isolation. Women and children should not be forced to choose between their personal safety, housing stability, and the health risk that coronavirus poses.

The impact on children and shared care arrangement

There are also risks unique to children and families navigating shared care arrangements and ongoing family violence.

Research evidence has repeatedly highlighted perpetrators' strategic use of children and child contact arrangements to exercise ongoing abuse and control over the non-abusive parent post-separation.

While we don't underestimate the dire global health and financial crisis that has emerged, the lives of Australian women and children will be at a uniquely higher risk during this period.

The rapidly changing preventative and reactive measures considered by state and federal governments to manage the spread of coronavirus, including self-isolation and potential community shutdowns, will offer a welcome tool for perpetrators of family violence to further manipulate, control and terrorise women and children who are subject to shared care arrangements.

Federal and state governments need to ensure access to free legal advice and facilitate the safe returns of children to the non-abusive parent in the event of community shutdowns to minimise the trauma experienced by children who would otherwise be forced to spend extended periods of time with the abusive parent.

The need to adapt service system responses

It's essential that family violence specialist services (men's services, community legal services and other relevant support services), are sufficiently resourced to ensure they are accessible and available remotely during this period.

This will require some innovation, including new service delivery and design, as well as funding to resource the sector to work remotely, and to respond to what is likely to be a peak in service need.

The merits of different service delivery models should be explored with the needs of diverse community groups in mind. Lessons can likely be taken from models used to deliver support services to those living in remote and rural communities.

What our federal and state governments must do

We call on the federal and state governments to commit additional resources to ensure the safety of victim survivors, including children, during this time.

Specifically, we call for a commitment to:

- provide additional secure housing options for women and children experiencing family violence
- resource the specialist family violence sector, including men's and mental health services, to adapt their delivery models to be remotely accessible and to meet a likely heightened demand
- resource police services to be adequately equipped to maintain visibility of high-risk perpetrators and families during periods of isolation
- increase funding of 1800 Respect, the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling, information and referrals telephone service to meet increased demand
- increase funding of community legal services to meet the demand of shared-care related inquiries to minimise the risk of children being isolated with an abusive parent
- ensure police are resourced and prepared to facilitate the safe return of children subject to shared care arrangements to the non-abusive parent, to minimise the impact of child trauma associated with extended exposure to an abusive parent during self-isolation or community shutdowns.

While we don't underestimate the dire global health and financial crisis that has emerged, the lives of Australian women and children will be at a uniquely higher risk during this period.

Not only do they face the health risk posed by COVID-19, but a significant number will also face an increased risk of violence in the home.



At the Coalface

Stephanie Anne is the manager of Zig Zag Women’s Resource Centre Inc, a specialist service offering “a place of healing, support and social action for young women aged 12-25 years”. She has over 20 years’ work involvement in specialist non-government organisation services in Queensland, bringing to her Zig Zag role experience in service provision relating to sexual violence; domestic and family violence; women’s and youth homelessness; women’s health; refugee health and settlement, and torture and trauma.

Stephanie has held multiple representative, convener and secretariat positions at local, regional, state and national levels. In this At the Coalface segment, Stephanie provides insight into some of the current and forthcoming services and resources Zig Zag provides to young women, as well as highlighting the complexities and barriers young women face at the intersection of economic and social disadvantage, domestic and family violence, sexual violence and homelessness.

What are the origins of Zig Zag, and what services does Zig Zag offer eligible clients?

Zig Zag celebrated 30 years of working alongside young women for their healing, support and social action in 2018. Zig Zag is an incorporated community-managed organisation that was established to address the unique identified needs of young women. We respond to sexual violence, domestic and family violence, homelessness, and provide a safe and confidential place for young women to obtain information, support and advocacy.

Zig Zag currently receives recurrent funding from the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW) to provide three specialist sexual assault support and prevention programs to young women aged 12 – 25 years. These three

“

Zig Zag is an incorporated community-managed organisation that was established to address the unique identified needs of young women.”

programs cover the Wider Brisbane, Brisbane North, and Brisbane Southwest regions and we now operate from three service locations at Camp Hill, Richlands and our newest service site in Nundah. Two of our specialist sexual assault support and prevention programs are in formal partnership with other specialist services.

Zig Zag also receives recurrent funding from the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) to provide a specialist homelessness program to young women aged 16 – 25 years in the Wider Brisbane region. We manage nine units of Supported Accommodation for young women and their children and offer limited centre-based and outreach support services to young women who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. Women with or without children, women who have a low income, women who have some independent living skills, women who wish to live on Southside Brisbane and women who require support within this age range are eligible for these services.



At Zig Zag, we provide supported accommodation which means young women who are housed with us will have a housing support worker to meet with regularly. Young women and support workers will work together to find long term housing and young women can access support, resources and information around many areas of life

How might your client group contact you?

Young women can contact us directly to access information and support, and Zig Zag does not require parental consent to work with young women under 18 years of age. Zig Zag also receive referrals through family members, friends, carers, schools, youth services, and a broad range of support services. We are also listed on the Queensland Police Service (QPS) community referral system for direct referrals from QPS and are on the Queensland Homelessness Information Platform (QHIP) as a specialist homelessness service provider.

Because Zig Zag offers free, confidential, support to young women, we often provide flexible outreach to meet young women where it is safe for them to access. For example, we may attend their school to provide counselling services if preferred; or meet at a local shopping centre to provide housing assistance. Within our specialist, sexual assault support and prevention programs young women are provided with information, advocacy, referral(s), support and counselling services.

What do you see are the key issues for your client group at the moment?

Our services prioritise support to young women who are marginalised and experiencing significant economic and social disadvantage, particularly in circumstances where women are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The most common causes of homelessness identified by young women seeking housing support at Zig Zag continue to be domestic, family and sexual violence; family/relationship breakdown due to complex, intergenerational trauma; limited family and/or community support; unplanned pregnancy and early school leaving; increasing poverty and financial disadvantage; racism, discrimination and a lack of affordable housing.

Our Supported Accommodation is primarily for young pregnant and/or parenting women, and approximately 50% of young women accessing this aspect of our service identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, with about 40% being from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds. These are primarily young African women with refugee backgrounds.

As a service, we have worked hard over many years to build trust, relationships and a positive reputation in providing culturally safe and responsive support with young women from diverse cultural backgrounds as is reflected in our work.



Within our sexual assault support and prevention programs, we identify pervasive systemic barriers. We see these reflected in the fact that sexual violence reporting, investigation, prosecution, and conviction continues to have the lowest rates of any violent crime in Australia. ”

What do you see as emerging issues for young women today?

Increasing rates of poverty, endemic male violence, homelessness, and systemic barriers are the primary issues impacting on young women today. For example, we continue to see primary homelessness being narrowly defined as ‘sleeping rough’. This definition does not recognise young women’s experiences of primary homelessness: they are more likely to be “couch surfing” or sleeping in insecure and unstable temporary accommodation and hence more vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

Zig Zag is also very concerned by recent changes to the eligibility criteria for social and community housing within the DHPW. The unintended consequences of these policy changes are an increasing number of highly vulnerable young women becoming homeless, re-entering homelessness, and / or remaining in homelessness services, like Zig Zag, for extended periods of time as private rental is not an available option.

Within our sexual assault support and prevention programs, we identify pervasive systemic barriers. We see these reflected in the fact that sexual violence reporting, investigation, prosecution, and conviction continues to have the lowest rates of any violent crime in Australia. It is of significant concern to Zig Zag that the majority of reported crimes of sexual violence are not advancing through the criminal justice system and the attrition rate of these reported cases remains high for these types of offences.

Zig Zag welcomed the recent launch of the Sexual Violence Prevention Framework “*Prevent. Support. Believe. Queensland’s Framework to address Sexual Violence*” in October 2019 and the current review by the Queensland Law Reform Commission (QLRC) on consent laws and the excuse of mistake of fact in relation to sexual offences in Queensland. Zig Zag provided a detailed submission to the QLRC as we believe there is a critical need to change the current laws in Queensland, however, we believe that change needs to be wider if we are to see significant improvements in the criminal justice system.

New partnership Law Right and DLA Piper

Free legal clinic – Female LawRight worker at Camphill service one day per week.

Comprehensive case management and legal representation in instances where young women may have more complex legal issues or multiple matters – DLA Piper.

Client case study, LawRight:

A young woman who had experienced homelessness had received a Centrelink robodebt of \$2,000 and began to pay through a payment plan despite experiencing significant financial hardship.

Following legal advice from LawRight, it was determined that this robodebt was made in error and through LawRight’s advocacy efforts this debt was waived.

Continued legal support and advocacy resulted in a full review of Centrelink payments, revealing that she had not been receiving Child Support payments as required over several years.

This young woman has now received \$25,000 in Centrelink back payments for child support. She and her children are now in long term independent housing, debt-free, and more financially secure.

Could you share a case study or client experience that you think embodies the values and mission of Zig Zag?

We believe that young women are best placed to share their stories and experiences for the promotion of key messages to the community on violence prevention. We believe their encouragement of their peers to seek support and assistance and to create social action and attitudinal change, are necessary to address the disproportionately high incidence of sexual violence perpetrated against young women.

With these foundational values, we commenced the V.O.I.C.E.S (Video of Ideas, Collective Experiences and Stories) for Change projects in 2016-17. These projects facilitate storytelling workshops with young women to create digital and print resources for the prevention of sexual violence. The first V.O.I.C.E.S for Change project was funded through a BCC Grant in 2016-2017 that specifically engaged with young African women to share their wisdom and lived experiences relating to violence (sexual, domestic and family violence) and homelessness with other young women from the African continent. Our second V.O.I.C.E.S for Change project was funded through a Sexual Violence Prevention Grant in 2018-2019, and this year we have been fortunate to receive a Myer Community Grant to facilitate a third V.O.I.C.E.S for Change project with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The community messages developed by young women are extremely powerful and visually compelling. The young women involved in each project decided they wanted to convey both messages to their communities and messages of support for other young women. All of the digital and print resources from our V.O.I.C.E.S for Change projects can be accessed via our website and are a great conversation tool that can assist services to engage young people and communities in developing appropriate community responses for the prevention of sexual violence.

What advice would help other services to respond appropriately to the (often complex) needs of

As a feminist organisation, we acknowledge the social, political, cultural and economic contexts that limit young women's power, creating vulnerability and disadvantage.

We continue to identify multiple barriers for young women in accessing specialist services as many services are not responsive to the needs of young women, and do not recognise the developmental challenges that young women may experience, or work in ways that are trauma-informed. Unless services understand and respond effectively to the impact of trauma, they risk replicating the dynamics and effects of trauma and causing further harm. For example, we see a real gap in funded support services (including specialist domestic and family violence support services) meeting the specific developmental and cultural needs of young women, as services may be unwilling to provide flexible services, assertive outreach support, and sustained engagement.

Not only are young women disproportionately more likely to experience domestic violence and sexual assault, but they are also more likely to minimise violence and less likely to seek help in instances where domestic and family violence may be escalating. They are often less resourced and so unable to physically access specialist support services due to lack of transport and financial barriers. Zig Zag would love to see specific domestic violence support services funded for young women to improve their access to essential, life-saving, emergency services; and as an invaluable investment in reducing the cost of homelessness and responding to the present and future needs of women in our communities.

What gives you hope in this area?

I think what largely sustains me in this work over 20 years in the women's service sector are the relationships I have developed with colleagues within and across organisations. Women who work in this sector consistently demonstrate an incredible level of energy and flexibility in managing complexity and crisis responses. Their continuous, fierce advocacy work is so essential for improving the outcomes for women and young women. This is challenging work that requires a high level of attention, reflection, and recognition of the multiple effects of colonial oppression, and systemic, intergenerational trauma; and in negotiating the inherent barriers to 'protection' and 'justice' within both civil and criminal in/justice systems.

Messages from long term survivors

For victim/survivors of domestic and family violence, the journey to safety and well being is a long one. In recognition of this and the support that is needed beyond crisis responses, the Queensland Government has funded a diverse range of Women's Health and Wellbeing Support services across Queensland. QCDFVR is working with these services, and the funder, the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, on an evaluation of how women are being supported on their journey to recovery. Along the way, friends, family, service providers of various types will be critical to help women in their healing. It is important that those seeking to support survivors hear, and listen to, their voices. This recent American study shares meanings and lessons learned from long term survivors.

Amended and abridged article

Flash, P., Fall, K., Stice, B., Easley, R., Murray, C., & Crowe, A. (2020). Messages to New Survivors by Longer-Term Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 35(1), 29-41

The study

The focus of the study was an examination of specific messages of encouragement and advice from 263 survivors to those who had recently left violent relationships. The survivors were mainly heterosexual women, all who had been out of their most recent abusive relationship for at least two years. The study was part of two larger studies that examined stigma and recovery experiences of survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Findings were derived from one specific open-ended question, part of an electronic survey.

Key messages

Eleven categories emerged when data were analysed in answer to the question: *what message would you want to send to people who have recently left an abusive relationship?*

1. self-love and inherent strengths,
2. healing is a journey and process,
3. value of social support
4. importance of leaving the abusive relationship behind,
5. focus on self-care,
6. guidance for new relationships,
7. practical issues and resources,
8. recommendations about children,
9. religious and spiritual messages,
10. obtaining education about IPV, and
11. advocacy and social action.



01 Self-love and inherent strengths

There were 170 statements made about survivors' inherent strengths and being worthy of love and happiness, which also emphasised:

- **having strength and courage;**
- **loving, accepting, and forgiving yourself;**
- **deserving happiness and dignity; and**
- **that it is not your fault.**

There was also praise for new survivors along with encouragement for them to channel their inner strength.

02 Healing as a journey and process

This category captured 137 statements urging new survivors to view healing as a journey and to trust that things would get better. Subthemes included

- **it's hard now, but it gets easier;**
- **small steps; and**
- **post-traumatic growth.**

Within the subthemes there was advice for new survivors to be patient and allow for healing over time, to take it "one day at a time" and the difficulty of leaving IPV relationships was normal. New survivors were assured that small steps that sometimes seemed insignificant were important to the overall progression of healing.

I know this seems difficult and like the world is crashing down around you. However, the only thing that has crashed is the darkness and pain of a future not worthy of you. I know right now you may be scared, but after every storm, there is a rainbow and there is a dawn that comes right when it seems the darkest, and the light breaks to show all the beauty of this world.

03 Importance of social support

This theme was reflected in the 76 responses about the need for and importance of informal social support, such as friends, family, and mentors. Advice within this category included:

- **finding a support system;**
- **allowing yourself to get support;**
- **seeking out other survivors;**
- **avoiding withdrawal;**
- **recognising unhelpful people; and**
- **getting involved socially (e.g. finding a hobby).**

Longer-term survivors assured new survivors of the simple fact that help exists.

There is help out here for you. Look for it and keep looking for it. Sometimes it can be hard to find. Just insist. It will arrive.

People will want to impose their views of your journey and when you are vulnerable... be aware.

04

Leaving the abusive relationship behind

This category included 68 statements advocating for new survivors to leave their abuser. Advice included:

- **don't go back - sever the connection;**
- **abusers don't change;**
- **love is not supposed to hurt; and**
- **learn from the abusive experience.**

They will call for a while and probably show a more human side of them to appeal to your heart because they know you are a caring person. Don't give in to the manipulation, they just want you to think that you made the abuse seem worse in your head than it was. It sounds painful but don't forget the abuse.

Remember, love means trust, respect, and honour.

05

Focus on self-care

There were 59 statements associated with physical and emotional healing, in addition to suggestions for strategies for moving forward. Messages included:

- **empowerment/ self- esteem/ finding self;**
- **expression; and**
- **physical and mental health.**

Participants suggested ways in which survivors could heal by focusing on their mental wellbeing.

Counselling is very important since the deepest wounds our abusers leave are the emotional ones.

Begin to identify things you love about yourself and grow that list daily.

Work with the practicals, i.e., [your] main needs are to eat properly regardless of how you feel, take your vitamins, monitor any disturbing sleeping patterns, [such as] if you have nightmares or simply can't sleep.

06

Guidance for new relationships

This category included 36 statements focused on guidance for new relationships, warning signs, and what love looks like after abuse. Subthemes in this category included

- **there is love after IPV;**
- **focus on self before getting involved; and**
- **notice warning signs in new partners.**

There is someone out there who will truly love you AND make you feel safe. Don't settle.

Learn to love yourself before jumping into another relationship.

You have to be alert to all the signs of abuse and if you see just a spark... get rid of that person quickly.

Find someone who treats you with respect and loves your brain and who you are as a person.

07

Practical considerations and resources

This category included 28 statements outlining tangible suggestions for new survivors. Survey respondents pointed out practical tips for securing and maintaining safety as a foremost priority. Subthemes in this category included

- **safety first;**
- **invest in self (e.g. financial independence);**
- **legal support/ rights; use all resources available; and**
- **document everything.**

Have a safe person and check in with them throughout the day, until things settle down. Have a safe word or phrase that will let them [know] you need help (just in case).

...hiding their address and phone number etc., and ensuring against tracking devices, is imperative for the safety of them and their children.

Get an education so you can be totally independent.

Learn to be in charge of your financials. Get a job.

Learn your rights!

Take advantage of all of the services offered by domestic violence organisations.

08

Recommendations concerning children

This category included 16 statements encouraging new survivors to prioritise the safety of themselves and their children. New survivors were encouraged to consider the effects of IPV, and leaving, on children; and there were suggestions about how to handle issues arising concerning children. Subthemes included messages about children being better off, along with the need to advocate for an advocate for children.

New survivors were warned of the dangers that staying with an abuser posed to their children and reinforced the thought that children should never be left behind or used as an excuse to stay.

Yes, my children may have small scars from their father not being in their lives but I honestly feel they have become much better individuals than they would have if he had been in their lives...

If you have children, they will one day thank you, and be assured that they will grow up to be happier and healthier adults.

If you won't change for yourself, do it for your kids or they will grow up to walk in your footsteps.

You can't care for your children until you first care for yourself.

09 Religious and spiritual support

Less than five percent of the participant cohort (13 statements) urged new survivors to use religious and spiritual support as a means of coping, restoring belief in love and trusting that things would get better. Subthemes included you are loved by God; pray; forgive the abuser; and spiritual encouragement.

10 Obtaining education about IPV

Eight statements shared the importance of becoming educated about abuse and prevention in addition to exploring healthy relationships. Learning about abuse,

and about what is healthy, were subthemes apparent in this category. Respondents provided encouragement to participate in support groups, listen to music, read books, and seek out conferences and other learning opportunities to increase survivor knowledge of IPV.

11 Advocacy and social action

Eight statements noted the power of giving back and the value that each individual's survival can play in helping others currently involved in IPV relationships.

There is a piece of you in every woman, and a piece of every woman in you.

When you leave and stay away from an abusive relationship, you are empowering other women too.

I am grateful to have experience[d] domestic violence because I am able to help others in a different way than someone who does not understand where the victims are coming from.

Volunteering is a great way to get some self-esteem back and help someone less fortunate while doing so.

Implications for practice

The authors express the hope that the themes identified will generate encouragement and practical strategies for individuals during the critical time immediately after leaving abusive relationships. They suggest that the findings of this study may serve as potential content for those who provide counselling to this population and/or used to craft intervention materials that could be incorporated in counselling. Specifically,

- Interventions and support services could be developed to target the most common themes. The category that included the greatest number of statements focused on the encouragement of self-love and inherent strengths. Knowing that survivors find these aspects helpful can facilitate the integration of these messages into treatment in the form of affirmation exercises or the development of support groups as a preferred counselling modality.
- Strategies could be developed aimed at providing social support and other resources to new survivors so they can obtain help, including from long term survivors, so they realise they are not alone in the struggle. As a response, agencies could explore developing a mentorship program where long-term survivors are paired with those new to the process.
- The findings of this study serve as a valuable resource as a foundation for a group curriculum.



We encourage readers to contribute to the QCDFVRe@der. If you have any information or articles you wish to publish, please contact QCDFVR Staff.

HAVE YOUR CONTACT DETAILS CHANGED?

We have become aware that some recipients of the QCDFVRe@der have relocated or changed contact details, including email address. To enable us to update our records and ensure that you receive our quarterly publication, please contact us at the listed phone number or email qcdfvronline@cqu.edu.au with your change of details. Please be assured that the Centre does not release your details to any third parties without your permission.

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