



QCDFVRe@der

March 2021





Director's Message

Here we are in 2021 and the world has by no means returned to 'normal' despite our fervent wishes at the end of 2020. All of us are adapting to a changed, and still changing, landscape – one that blurs the boundaries between the personal and the professional, with a significant cohort of the population still working from home offices. In these days of the 'new normal', more than ever, all involved in responding to domestic and family violence (DFV) need to bring a *nuanced understanding* of the complexities of lives impacted by this violence, and 'new normal' ways of working.

One of the issues that does, indeed, signal the need for a deeper understanding is that of women who use force in a DFV context. On **page 3** you can read more about this topic as we summarise key findings from contemporary sources. With more women being named as respondents in domestic violence judicial matters, those who adhere to the notion that 'women are as violent as men' are likely to glibly take these rising numbers as a justification of their stance... but the facts speak to a different perspective and in this edition, we investigate findings from the latest studies.

Nuanced understanding, too, is extended in the Research Summary presented on **page 9** where a paper by our colleague Dr Silke Meyer and PhD Candidate Ms Rose-Marie Stambe is abridged. *Indigenous women's experiences of domestic and family violence, help-seeking and recovering in regional Queensland* gives voice to women and stakeholders experiencing multiple challenges who still retain an optimistic outlook.

The voice of a male brings another layer of nuanced understanding. On **page 13**, Mr Nolan White shares his perspective on being a First Nations facilitator of Men's Behaviour Change Programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. Nolan's commentary follows that of previous editions where the Re@der has provided a platform for men to speak out against violence and advocate for change. Regular readers may recall that our colleagues Mr Mark Walters and Dr Brian Sullivan have, in the past, contributed their insights from practice, teaching and research. Mark and Brian, like many other men, have a mission to make a difference and take every opportunity to do so. It has been wonderful working with, and learning from, Nolan - another man who wants to improve the lives of First Nations families through his behaviour change work. In particular, Nolan's reflections about the value of working

with a First Nations woman in men's behaviour change programs is thought-provoking.

At QCDFVR we regard it as a privilege to constantly learn from what is happening in frontline services and regular readers know we dedicate pages in each edition to the 'At the Coalface' segment. Susie O'Brien, Community Services Manager, Lutheran Services kindly spent time with us to share her story about the work of Mary and Martha's Refuge. On **page 19** Susie provides insights into the refuge model of her service, touches on women's and children's experiences and issues and suggests advice for others who respond to the complex needs of this client group.

Finally, in this edition we shine a light on ourselves, and seek to tease out nuanced understanding of some contemporary learning and teaching developments. Contemporary research and first-hand experience are presented by Suewellyn Kelly, Associate Lecturer, in 'Reflections of a Zoom-er' on **page 25**. Suewellyn spent much of 2020 in front of a camera, an experience, no doubt, shared by many of our readers! However, while many of us have been Zoom-ing for the purposes of meeting with colleagues or clients, our team has been delivering training using virtual delivery (almost exclusively) since last March.

More broadly, CQUniversity has expanded its range of online learning options, including the delivery of micro-credentials. This is a term that seems to be receiving much 'air play' and in this edition we explain a little more about what this means in our context. Online learning, through the successful completion of micro-credentials, is an area QCDFVR sees as a potential means to offer sustainable, easily accessible, and affordable 'bite-sized' professional development. You can learn more about this on **page 29**.

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By way of closing on this theme of ‘nuanced understanding’, many readers will be aware that at QCDFVR we’ve embarked on developing podcasts as a way of enhancing awareness of aspects of gendered violence. Series Two of *The Bulb*, the QCDFVR podcast will be commencing shortly, after the successful release of Series One in late 2020. We are excited about bringing you more conversations with and between academics, researchers and professionals working in the field. I take this opportunity to encourage you to tune in at your leisure or subscribe to ensure you don’t miss the latest editions as we continue to ‘shine a light’ on gendered violence through *The Bulb*.

To tune in, search CQU Podcasts on your podcast platform (Apple Play/ Spotify) and you will find our channel there alongside other CQU podcasts. Alternatively, head straight to the QCDFVR ‘The Bulb’ episodes on our website - [click here](#) and the episodes will be listed for you. Happy listening!

Until our next Re@der, please stay safe and well,



Dr Heather Lovatt

Director
Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence
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Women who use force in a domestic and family violence context

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Women who use force in a domestic and family violence (DFV) context, is an emerging area of research, with contemporary findings shedding light on the complexities surrounding this issue (see Nancarrow, Thomas, Ringland & Modini, 2020; Wangman & Laing, 2020; articles by Kertesz & Humphreys, 2021). This segment provides an overview of the latest findings highlighting the need to understand the nuances and differences between men who perpetrate DFV and women who use force in a DFV context.

Definitions:

Domestic and family violence (DFV) is abusive, threatening, or coercive behaviour used by one person to control or dominate another person.

The **respondent** is the person who has used abusive, threatening, or coercive behaviour against the other. The **aggrieved** is the term for someone who is a victim/survivor of DFV.

Domestic Violence Order (DVO): A DVO (also referred to as a protection order) is an official document issued by the court. A DVO is an extra safety measure to protect those who have experienced or are experiencing DFV, it outlines consequences for the respondent if they commit DFV against the aggrieved or anyone else listed on the order.

Coercive behaviour: forcing a person to act in a way they do not want to by use of threats or force. It can also include humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten someone.

Introduction: What is the ‘issue’?

The topic of women who use force in the context of DFV is a complicated and contested one, often provoking extremes in rhetoric (Larance, Goodmark, Miller & Das Dasgupta, 2019, p. 73; Wangmann, Laing & Stubbs, 2020). These arguments are typically about whether women and men are capable of being equally violent towards each other. Such arguments tend to obscure the nuances surrounding the reasons why women come to use force and the implications for these women. Failing to unpack women’s use of force in DFV contexts is to ignore the multifaceted and complex lives, experiences, and needs of those who have or continue to live with DFV.

What do we know about it?

DFV is most often perpetrated by men against women with whom they are in an intimate partner relationship; however, anyone can be a victim or perpetrator of DFV (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017; Queensland Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012). Women are overwhelmingly victims of DFV, and men are predominantly perpetrators of DFV (ABS, 2017; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2019). While a growing number of women are being named as respondents, it is still disproportionate in relation to men. In 2013/14, 23,492 unique respondents were identified in DVO applications lodged in Queensland, males accounted for a larger proportion (80%) of all respondents compared to females (20%); however, among Aboriginal and Torres people, women’s share of respondents was slightly higher (23%) (Douglas, 2018).

At the same time, there is a need to understand more about the growing number of women who are being named as respondents on protection order, with many being jailed for breaching these orders through acts of force that are either “minor infractions in self-defence or retaliation against men’s attacks” (Gleeson, 2019). Specific to Queensland, there is an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women being remanded in custody for protection order breaches and related offences, with many women incarcerated for breaching orders as their first offence (Gleeson, 2019).



Further a high proportion (44.5%) of female adult DFV-related fatalities had been previously identified by police as a respondent on at least one occasion. Additionally, the Queensland's Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board (2017, p. 82) found that "nearly all of the (female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) victims had a prior history of being recorded as both respondents and aggrieved parties, in both their current and historical relationships".

In addition to these statistics, in mid-2020 the QCDFVR conducted a project commissioned by the Queensland Government exploring current responses to women who use force in DFV contexts in Queensland. Via consultation with a sample of DFV service providers, most providers stated that upon referral as a respondent, it was identified that a high percentage of women had a history as the primary victim (not as a primary aggressor) in their current or previous relationship(s). Service providers noted that the reasons or motivations for use of force are important to unpack, as well as the context and history of violence.

Therefore, this topic is one that needs to take into account the complexities and intersecting oppressions that shape women's lives, including ethnicity, age, religion, disability, and poverty (Bograd, 2005; Hayes, 2013). This is particularly so when women using force are predominantly victims but may also have a "mixed and complex experience of victimisation and perpetration" (Wangmann et al., 2020, p. 18). As highlighted by Dr Margaret Kertesz and Professor Cathy Humphreys, both eminent academics on the subject of women who use force in DFV contexts,

"...responses to gender-based violence have created a clear distinction between victims and perpetrators... in recent years it has become increasingly clear that a black-and-white victim/perpetrator distinction does not work in the best interests of those women who do not conform to the community's conception of how a victim behaves."

Kertesz and Humphreys (2021) highlight this 'grey' area, in which a woman presents with dual experiences of victimisation and perpetration, and the gap in service responses for these women. Discussions about women's use of force with a current or past partner should be considered with what is currently known about DFV as a gendered form of violence. While some women have a highly assaultive pathology and some use mutual aggression in their intimate relationships (Johnson, 2006) these women are not the focus of this article.

Characteristics

Contextual and situational characteristics paint a picture of the situations in which women are most likely to use violence and who or what type of women are most likely to use force. Recent reports by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) highlight characteristics common to women who use force and homicide incidents in which women have killed their partners in Australia (Boxall et al., 2020; Voce & Bricknell 2020). These characteristics are:

- A history as either a perpetrator or victim of violence, but more likely to have had contact with police as a victim of DFV rather than as a repeat respondent (Boxall et al., 2020, pg. 9).
- Prevalence of current or past experience of DFV/victimisation.
- Relationship with the victim (married or de-facto).
- Substance use during DFV or homicide incident.
- Unemployment.
- Prevalence of self-defence/violent resistance during DFV or homicide incident.
- A common finding in both reports was that the characteristics associated with women who use force are amplified or exacerbated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Motivations for using force

There is a debate surrounding what motivates women to use force within DFV contexts (Elmquist et al., 2014; Das Dasgupta, 2002; Larance et al., 2019). There are clear gender differences regarding the use of violence and experience of victimisation between males and females (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Wangmann, 2020; Swan et al., 2008). Within DFV contexts, there is a consensus that many women who use force against their intimate partner are motivated by self-defence or retaliation. Several studies indicate that in circumstances where a woman uses force in response to a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviours her violent resistance does not usually cause fear in her partner, nor does it involve an ongoing pattern of control (Bair-Merritt et al. 2014; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Swan et al., 2008; Johnson, 2006). Additionally, women defending themselves can find themselves in a more dangerous situation because their partner is likely to be physically stronger (Abraham, 2005; Rajah, 2007).

Ultimately, the literature indicates that the motivations and experiences of violence used by women within intimate partner relationships differ from those of male perpetrators (Wangmann et al., 2020; Swan et al. 2008, Larance and Miller 2017; Bair-Merritt et al. 2010; Mackay et al. 2018). Exploring these motivations does not condone the use of violence but sheds light on the reasons for its use. A summary of the motivations, use, and experiences of force perpetrated by women, is highlighted in the graphic to the right:

Overall, the literature highlights that anger, self-defence, and retaliation are common motivations among women who use force in DFV contexts. Many studies report women describing the use of force as driven by feelings of anger (Bair-Merritt et al., 2010).

Respective papers by Wilson et al. (2017), Elmquist (2014), Guggisberg (2019) as well as others also note the prevalence of expression-based violence among women who use force in DFV contexts. In investigating the nature of violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, Guggisberg (2019) notes that retaliation can be informed by anger, frustration, fear and serve the purpose of feeling less helpless and promote feelings of short-term control. As shown in an interview extract within this paper (2019, p. 196):

I have been pushed to the limits and actually did a bit of jail time recently. You know, I've been so pushed that I picked the knife up and I actually threw it at my partner of 13 years. And because of that moment I ended up in prison. I was angry. I got so enraged with anger that I just retaliated. So it was anger. I retaliate when I get angry, definitely. . . I learned a lot when I was in prison about domestic and sexual violence, you know, I did some courses. . . (Interview participant, in Guggisberg, 2019, p. 196).

Self-defence based use of violence.	The use of violence as protection from immediate harm is cited as a significant motivation for women who use force in DFV contexts.
Fear-based use of violence.	Use of violence driven by imminent fear of fatal harm or death. Although fear is more likely to deter victims from using violence, it can be a mobilising factor for the use of violence as a form of self-protection or retaliation against anticipated victimisation.
Expression-based use of violence. Within this category, there are several violent responses used by women as expressions of retaliation, frustration, and anger.	Violent resistance or retaliation to victimisation is typically a response to a systematic pattern of abuse. The literature agrees that violence can be used as an expression of a variety of negative emotions such as anger, humiliation, frustration, or jealousy for example.
	Use of violence as a result of a 'breaking point'. Victims reach a breaking point typically after experiencing repeat and systematic patterns of victimisation. An event/situation may trigger a victim to 'snap' and use violence.
	Use of violence as retribution for previous verbal, physical, or psychological abuse, or in response to real or perceived wrongdoing.
Control-based use of violence.	Use of violence as short-term control of situation/abuse, establish autonomy. It is also noted that resistance or retaliation to violence is also about the victim trying to assert their dignity.
	Control and compliance of a partner's behaviour used as a means to 'get through to partner' or 'make them listen'. Much of the literature corroborates that women who use violence do so because of control-based motives; however, a number of studies highlight that the type of control and particularly coercive control is not a major motivator for women who use violence.

Summary of sources from the diagram: Bair-Merritt et al., 2010; Boxall et al., 2020; Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Guggisberg, 2019; Elmquist et al. 2014; Johnson, 2006; Kernsmith, 2005; Knight & Summers, 2018; Larance and Miller, 2017; Miller & Meloy, 2006; Pence & Das Dasgupta, 2006; Swan, et al. 2005; Swan et al. 2008; Swan & Snow, 2003; Wilson et al. 2017.

Similarly, in discussion with incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women about their use of force within their intimate relationships, Wilson et al. (2017) note that some women spoke of using violence out of frustration. Expression-based violence has also been described in other papers as a motivation for women's use of force, but specifically in the context of women reaching a 'breaking point' or 'snapping'. Victims reach a breaking point typically after experiencing repeat and systematic patterns of victimisation. An event/situation may trigger a victim to 'snap' and use violence. As noted by Boxall et al. 2020,

In the context of ongoing violent relationships, the seemingly innocuous or trivial actions of their abusive partner may foreshadow the use of violence and trigger a 'fight or flight' response in women, which may manifest as lashing out with aggression (Boxall et al., 2020, p. 5).

It is important to recognise that the motivations and experiences of violence used by Indigenous women are also informed by the distinct social, historical, political, and economic realities of this group. These realities are derived from the pervasive modes of lateral violence as a result of colonisation, dispossession, and discrimination of Indigenous peoples. These factors are significant in understanding how colonisation and continued institutional discrimination affect the lives of Indigenous people in contemporary society (Atkinson 1990; Wilson et al. 2017). Violence is not inherent in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture; however, its prevalence is complex and intertwined with the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. As emphasised in interview extracts from a study by Wilson et al. (2017)

I'd been getting flogged all my life by him and plus watching my mum get flogged. There was no way I was going to stand back and let a man flog me... so I gave just as much as he tried to give me (Wilson et al. 2017, p. 7).

This particular quote highlights themes of violence as an expected reality and a normal part of life where females use violence as a tool to address violence; for those who have witnessed intergenerational violence, using violence as a means to reject the passive victim narrative.

A number of studies highlight that women's use of force is not motivated by intentions to coercively control, however control is expressed by different intentions and feelings. Force can be motivated by the desire for short term control of the situation, to 'get through' to their partners and make them 'listen' or to establish autonomy and restore dignity (Swan et al., 2008; Larance & Miller, 2016; Dasgupta, 2002; Wilson et al. 2017; McMahon & Pence, 2003). Women may also use violence for other reasons, such as jealousy or retribution. Swan et al. (2010)



Women Who Use Force Continued.

highlight that women may be motivated to use force for real or perceived wrongdoing. Forty-five percent of the women in the Swan and Snow (2003) study stated that they had used violence to get even with their partners for something they had done (Swan & Snow, 2003, p. 95). Statistics, such as the one above, should never be conflated with men's use of violence.

Women's use of force does not have the same dynamics, impact of fear, hospitalisation, or death, nor the ongoing pattern of coercive power and control that men's violence does.

Given the differences between men's and women's use of force, understanding the context and history of violence to make accurate assessments is imperative in identifying the predominant aggressor. However, incident-based assessments can be flawed and there are "serious questions about the misidentification of female perpetrators of violence by police and the courts" (Keretsz et al., 2019). A recently published ANROWS report (Nancarrow et al., 2020) expands on this and identifies areas of improvement for police and court practice regarding accurately identifying the person most in need of protection in DFV contexts. This research stems from the concern regarding the inappropriate use of DFV legal sanctions, and misidentification of women who use force in response to the violence perpetrated against them, as the primary respondent. Similar to Keretsz et al. (2019), the authors highlight that police practice is guided by a response to single incidences of visible or physical violence, and that this does not always support the appropriate application of the DFV legislation.

Nancarrow et al. (2020, p. 31) outline that the impacts of being misidentified are far-reaching and can increase vulnerability to violence and the risk of associated harms. For example, when misidentified as a perpetrator,

- A woman may be mandated to attend a behaviour change program. There is a scarcity in Australia of specific programs for women who have used force - most programs for DFV perpetrators are commonly associated with male perpetrators.

- If someone experiencing DFV is identified as a respondent, they may also miss out on risk-screening because they are not seen as a victim. They may be unable to access critical support services (such as shelter, social services, or counselling) because they have been labelled a perpetrator.
- A woman may be subject to a DVO as a respondent. This has implications for the residence of children, engagement with the criminal justice system, and most importantly victim safety. Protection orders can result in temporary homelessness and losing contact with children.
- If women are truly the victims rather than the offenders, then arresting or making an order against them when they refuse to submit to additional physical abuse is victimising them a second time.

To prevent misidentification, the authors recommend:

- Creating guidance for police on identifying patterns of coercive control.
- Improving processes of decision-making and accountability between police and courts.
- Creating guidance for magistrates on how and when they can dismiss inappropriate applications and/or orders.

As emphasised, this is a developing area of research, with contemporary findings shedding light on the complexities surrounding women's use of force in DFV contexts. Keretsz and Humphreys (2021) summarised this aptly, *As we continue the work to prevent men's violence against women as the most prevalent form of domestic and family violence in our community, we must always be sensitive to the nuances of experience in the lives of those using force or violence, whoever they are.*

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Indigenous women's experiences of domestic violence, help-seeking and recovering in regional Queensland

Research Summary

Amended and abridged article

Source

Meyer, S., & Stambe, R-M. (2020). Indigenous women's experiences of domestic and family violence, help-seeking and recovery in regional Queensland., *The Australian Journal of social issues*, 2020-08-19. doi:10.1002/ajs4.128.

This study does not aim to generalise the findings to the wider population of women affected by domestic and family violence. Rather it contributes to the limited research evidence around women's experiences of domestic and family violence in the context of social and cultural marginalisation, family life, residential mobility, and the role of cultural and spiritual connectedness in the resilience and recovery of Indigenous women in the Australian context and beyond.

Domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a serious and widespread problem but it is important to reiterate that violence is not a part of Australia's First Nations cultures. Rather, violence should be understood in a "historical context of colonisation, oppression, dispossession, disempowerment, poverty, and cultural, social and geographical dislocation" (Cheers et al. 2006, p.52). The purpose of this paper was to extend the existing research by generating a nuanced understanding of Indigenous women's experiences in regional settings.

Other research has already highlighted the multiple structural factors that affect how a woman experiences DFV in a non-urban context. The lack of amenities, especially public transport, hinders women's efforts to leave violence or access support services. Women face longer waiting periods to

access services and may not have accommodation post-crisis. Those who have been financially dependent on their partners or welfare-reliant may be limited in the types of independent housing they can afford, which is hampered by a shortage of supply of affordable housing in non-urban areas. Further, a lack of employment and education opportunities in non-urban settings reduces women's ability to obtain financial security.

In small close-knit communities, women may not feel comfortable disclosing or seeking help in relation to their experience of violence. Regional service providers may have multiple roles and overlapping relationships with victims/survivors and perpetrators. The visibility of living in a small town raises concerns around privacy and confidentiality and women may fear social rejection. The challenges associated with fear, stigma, and service access, are often "amplified" for women in non-urban locations.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait women living in non-urban areas, the issues experienced by non-urban victims/survivors when trying to escape or take respite from DFV are further compounded by historical, social and political contexts. Specifically, First Nations women risk facing community anger when reporting perpetrators of DFV to the police, thus contributing to their removal from the community into



custody. They may want to seek safety from gendered forms of family violence but fear retributive community violence, shame, and stigma for reporting on men who have equally been marginalised and victimised by White government policies and interventions. Consequently, some have argued that the available statistics on Indigenous DFV are a substantial underestimation of the level of violence affecting Indigenous women as their help-seeking is disproportionately hindered by community perceptions, wider experiences of discrimination and marginalisation, and the limited availability of culturally responsive support services.

The lives, identities, and experiences of women in this study are constituted at the conjunction of multiple elements: Indigeneity, colonisation, dispossession and disconnectedness, gender, and socioeconomic disadvantage. In this study, the focus was on how these various components come together in regional settings in complex ways to shape First Nations women's experiences of and recovery from DFV.

The data analysed for this paper were collected in two Queensland regional centres. All but one of the women participants (n = 13) identified as Aboriginal, with one identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. All but two women identified as mothers. A total of 18 stakeholders (including eight identifying as Indigenous) representing four areas of community service provision also participated across the two research locations.

Hence the findings are based on a small sample of community stakeholders (service providers and community Elders) and women who had been or continued to be affected by DFV in regional settings in one Australian jurisdiction. Yet some of the experiences shared by women in this study may also be shared by Indigenous women living

in urban, rural, and remote settings and by non-Indigenous women in regional centres.

Like other researchers in this area, the authors acknowledge that knowledge is situated and partial, and despite their aim to voice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants' challenges and resilience, First Nations women remain experts and may not agree with their White academic interpretation.

Findings

The analysis process generated four themes related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's experiences of DFV in regional settings: structural and social disadvantage; spiritual disconnectedness and exhaustion; family as both a stressor and a source of support; and optimistic future outlooks.

01

Structural and social disadvantage

The layers of disadvantage intersect with, and are compounded by, the realities of regional and remote living.

Research participants described the experiences of women escaping (or trying to escape) DFV within layers of structural and social disadvantage. Poverty limits women's ability to leave a violent situation, and in a regional setting, the lack of affordable or appropriate housing exacerbated this. Women have to compete for private rentals, especially three-plus-bedroom properties to house a family (and perhaps even an extended family as this was often described as a cultural expectation by women).

As well as financial constraints, Indigenous women also faced the problem of perceived and actual racial discrimination in the private rental market. Being a single mother of multiple children on a low income already decreased their competitiveness in the private rental market, but Indigeneity was also a barrier to access. Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders in both regional research locations described the chances of Indigenous women with multiple children securing adequate housing for themselves and their children as minimal.

Another challenge identified by women was the size of the community and the limited availability or absence of public transport in cases where victims/survivors, perpetrators, and often both parties' extended family reside nearby. Most women in this study did not own or have access to a family car, and without public transport, women were forced to rely on family or friends giving them a lift, paying for cab fares, or walking. Besides the inconvenience, significant safety concerns for victims/survivors may arise as "women and children are very visible when walking to and from school or the shops". Especially in smaller towns and communities, women's ability to hide from an abusive (ex-) partner and/or his family is compromised.

02 Spiritual disconnectedness and exhaustion

Spiritual disconnectedness and related emotional exhaustion or depletion were manifest in women presenting as "spiritually beaten".

The women experienced high levels of, at least temporary, dislocation and disconnectedness. Stakeholders described women as lost at times when seeking refuge due to their "loss of family support, loss of spiritual connection, disconnection from land". Most of the women had, at one point or another, left their land, kinship, and community ties. Such experiences of "forced" mobilisation may be related to the moving back and forth between extended family, communities, and crisis accommodation, at times to be closer to family, sometimes to secure accommodation and remove themselves from violence.

Some women talked about recurrent feelings of being homesick, eventually drawing them back to their community. Residential mobility can help women achieve safety, but for women in this study, it often came at the price of remaining in familiar surroundings and near kinship support. Some women discussed the broader impact of this pattern and how it has affected women and families for generations, contributing to adverse outcomes for Indigenous families and children over time, including unemployment, homelessness, alcohol misuse, and intergenerational transmission of DFV-related trauma.

03

"Family is everything", both a stressor and a source of support

The complex networks of familial connections are not simply a support or stressor but part of the interconnected and fluid relationships in women's stories of leaving and living with DFV.

The family network could provide housing support, but staying with family could lead to overcrowding and in return jeopardised the tenancy of family taking in other family members. The shortage of public and private housing options in regional communities meant that there was security in knowing that family would help when needed. This included assistance with child-care and emotional support, and connecting women back with services – all of which could give a woman hope.

Yet family created additional stressors in women's lives. Being in family accommodation may create tension both for the women and for extended families. Stretching household resources further often heightened interpersonal conflicts in close crowded living arrangements. Moreover, if women found independent housing themselves, they were equally expected to take in family members, not only putting stress on their immediate family but also jeopardising their rental agreements. **Women bear the burden of caring not only for their own children but supporting family members in general.**

Further, as noted previously, family connectedness and communication in regional settings limit victims/survivors' ability to hide from an abusive (ex-)partner when they decide to leave or seek temporary respite. Retributive violence from their ex-partner's family was experienced by some women in the study. Limited services (such as ATMs or supermarkets), especially in small regional towns, made it geographically impossible to avoid running into (his) family members. Moreover, the risk of retributive violence was seen as particularly high where extended family felt that the victim/survivor was to blame for criminal justice actions taken against the perpetrator. **Women therefore often live within the extended family gaze with nowhere to hide in regional towns and small communities.**

Optimistic future outlook

04

Despite the complex and multilayered challenges associated with their circumstances, women managed to retain optimistic outlooks about their futures.

Women were optimistic that their welfare payments would cover their living costs, that they would eventually secure appropriate and affordable housing, and that they would (re)gain employment. Others reflected a sense of optimism because they had had to get through similar situations before.

Overall, women were optimistic about the family support available to them. As much as family was seen as a stressor at times, the general consensus among women was that family would always be there to support them. Family was an available backup accommodation option if needed and as a support mechanism.

Despite the cumulative effect of adverse experiences over the life course and often intergenerationally, women in this study were on a trajectory to recovery. Here, the availability of trauma-informed, culturally responsive support services, also emphasised in other Australian research examining the experiences of Indigenous women affected by DFV (see, e.g., Cripps 2007; Atkinson et al. 2014; Fiolet et al. 2019), will play a crucial role in women's long-term physical and social recovery along with spiritual healing.

The findings presented in this paper have a number of implications for policy and practice. Firstly, the level of adversity experienced by women in this study highlights the transgenerational impact of colonisation on Indigenous communities, families, and individuals. While addressing this aspect is beyond the scope of this paper, future responses to DFV experienced by Indigenous women in regional settings may be informed by this work.

The optimistic outlook of victims/survivors and the strength drawn from family and kinship connections highlight the significance of supporting cultural and spiritual connectedness for women and children affected by DFV. The importance of this observation, also made in other research, cannot be underestimated and needs to be understood and supported in an intergenerational context.

As it may not be safe for all women to remain in the same regional community as their abusive ex-partner and equally not be feasible for all women to leave their community in an attempt to escape DFV, wraparound support for Indigenous women affected by DFV needs to be available within and outside of their communities. Further, holistic responses to Indigenous women's experiences of DFV must consider the marginalised and disempowered position of Indigenous men as perpetrators if we want to create meaningful opportunities for Indigenous family and community well-being.

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“How many stars are in the sky?”

Mr. Nolan White

Nolan’s traditional people are traced back to the southwest clan groups of the Noongar Nation of Western Australia. Having been raised on the Gold Coast, he has the honour and privilege of being accepted and welcomed by the Kombumerri Saltwater people. Nolan has committed much of his working life, both in government and NGOs, to improving the lives of First Nations Peoples in criminal, child protection, and domestic and family violence matters. He is a senior facilitator in Men’s Behaviour Change Programs having been trained by founders and mentors in the Duluth model and is experienced in both court-mandated and non-mandated program delivery. Nolan currently works for YFS at Logan for their Responsible Men Program and is one of the very few First Nations facilitators currently engaged in mainstream program delivery across Australia. Nolan is married with two teenage children and spends most of his free time attempting to keep up with his children’s sporting and artistic endeavours.

When I was asked by the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research to contribute to the *Reader*, immediate trepidation surfaced. This trepidation was mixed with the archetypal attached emotions that most First Nations Peoples suffer in many aspects of life – emotions attached to the notion that “nothing will ever be good enough measured against mainstream society”. This was compounded somewhat in my case because I never had the opportunity to attend university and I speculated that people from academia will be reading my text. I have been fortunate, however, to have exemplary support from the QCDFVR staff who continue to ensure that First Nations Peoples’ perspectives hold integrity in their practice especially in the Domestic and Family Violence sector.

When I’ve been asked to deliver presentations, write articles, provide First Nations Peoples’ perspectives or Acknowledgements of Country, I’ve been quietly amused to be also asked to provide a ‘Bio’. To truly know Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, a forum in which we tell you how good we are is something that sits quite uncomfortably and is culturally inappropriate. Of course, you will have met many First Nations Peoples who will happily rattle off a list of accomplishments, ensure you know the seats they hold on boards and whose “ears” they have to influence and persuade - but I encourage you to consider that this is a learned behaviour for a variety of reasons ranging from the admirable through to the utterly distasteful.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are, by traditional values, modest, unassuming, and humble people. What elevates our people in community is the respect community hold in us, not the western-learned notion that we must self-promote to achieve success. In my writing, there will be acknowledgments of some of my work, but I do not do so hypocritically. Rather I seek to indicate and share some learnings I have come to know in my own journey especially in respect to facilitating Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) with First Nations participants, within a larger cohort of non-Indigenous participants.

As a facilitator in MBCPs, many industry professionals ask me “What do we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?” The question alone is interesting enough and would be great to explore given so many First Nations Peoples are asked this question. However, unfortunately, this would side-track from the intent of my writing. The answer to the question is akin to asking me to answer “How many stars are in the sky?” and along with it, “How do you explain unknown galaxies beyond our own?” One comment I usually make is that it would be ruinous practice to assume any non-Indigenous person, professional or otherwise has any real concept or deep understanding of the lived experience of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participant, and equally disastrous to presume any comprehension of the layers of complexity associated with, and impacts of, what the participant, his forebears, and ancestors have endured in the past two hundred and thirty-three years.

The following is an excerpt of a cultural awareness presentation I deliver to final year law students in considering First Nations Peoples clientele:

...Colonisation has disrupted the knowledge pathways and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have endured systemic disconnection from traditional ways. Past government, education and church policies have prohibited the conducting of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ceremonies and the speaking of traditional languages. There was also the wholesale



rounding up of entire tribes and removing them from their respective traditional lands across Australia, forcing them on to designated missions or communities. No consideration was given to the traditional discourse this practice created, placing peoples from different lands with diverse traditions, language, and ceremonies into one melting pot. This often was inclusive of tribes with 1000s of years of warring history.

Up until 1967, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were devalued as lower caste, unable to vote, not recorded as ‘people’ on the census, and often deemed incapable of raising children – an approach which led to the infamous period now referred to as the ‘stolen generations’.

Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have never had the opportunity to gain knowledge from Elders and much of the synergy, respect for, and sustaining of the land, nature and human life is now lost due to this disconnection. In two hundred and thirty-three short years, colonising practices have almost severed a database of learned knowledge and experience spanning more than fifty thousand years. The First Nations Peoples of Australia survive but are, sadly, in the main, largely shadows of people that have had the substance of what makes them whole forcibly and systematically removed.

To add to and exacerbate this decimation, western influences have introduced previously unknown concepts and practices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Materialism, ownership, substance addictions, misuse of water, destruction of the land, and the unnecessary killing of animals are but a few of these foreign concepts and practices.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the main, have been displaced, disconnected and confused post-colonisation and we are lost - deprived of our identity. I hope you can appreciate that we as a people are, in the most, coming from lives that have been embedded in the intergenerational trauma of violence, child removals, sexual and emotional abuse, criminality, and substance addiction. There exists an accepted standard of inequality

in health, education, employment opportunity, and legal representation and an appalling apathy in, or any real concern from, the wider community.

I went to a conference just outside of Dubbo in 2019 and it broke my heart to hear an Aboriginal Elder when she spoke. She said Aboriginal people have been the caretakers of our land for tens of thousands of years, but Aboriginal people are now broken. As a result, she said, our land is dying. Our land is crying out for her people to heal her, but we do not come, we are broken...

Whilst these carefully placed emotive words may provide a better appreciation of some of the issues, being better informed does not automatically gain credit with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Cultural awareness presentations are simply that – presentations to allow the listener a better appreciation of Australia’s First Nations Peoples. They do not provide the audience with a magical toolkit to suddenly generate connection and respect.

For those familiar with MBCP work, you will know well the term ‘Past Use of Violence’ and the ultimate uncertainty that aggrieved women will ever overcome the betrayal of intimate relational trust broken through the use of violence and abuse. I ask you to please overlay this thinking with the horrors First Nations Peoples have endured since colonisation - a vulnerable people well accustomed to repeated failures by systems’ agencies, NGOs, religious organisations, natural resource companies, and society as a whole. Only then will you begin to have some understanding of how difficult it is to gain any semblance of trust with First Nations Peoples.

Specific to MBCPs, it should be remembered that First Nations men will usually be either court-mandated or otherwise ‘referred’ into a program under some form of leverage - albeit Court Ordered in stated DVO conditions, Court Ordered by Intervention Order, conditions imposed by Queensland Corrective Services as part of a probation or parole requirement or a specific caseplan requirement through the Department of Child Safety. Consider, reader,

that most First Nations men carry with them entire lifetimes of power and control leverage, leverage that has been held over them since the day they were born. A conclusion could be drawn that their 'leveraged' participation in MBCPs is simply an extension of their oppressed lives and therefore, is it any wonder that there may be extremely poor outcomes from their participation in such programs?

Unfortunately, many clients find themselves in situations where they are unable to avail of a specific MBCP for First Nations men. This may be due to inadequate funding, based on a poor understanding of their needs, and the absence of appropriate culturally informed program development. This results in First Nations men being referred into mainstream programs along with non-Indigenous men. When this happens, not only is the First Nations man dealing with the leveraged participation I described earlier, a constant reminder of his oppressed existence, but he is now invisible in a group, facilitated by non-Indigenous facilitators. In this cohort of non-Indigenous men, he is exposed to immense cultural imbalance and cultural danger. It is common for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander man in a mainstream MBCP to remain silent for the entirety of his participation in group with little to no interaction. In addition, most facilitators are ill-equipped to comprehend the real gravity of trauma, oppression, and cultural nuances that a First Nations man carries with him into the room - in what is, in the main, a non-Indigenous-based program environment.

In reading Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Ch.3, p.75; Continuum 1999 he states:

"Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly directed."

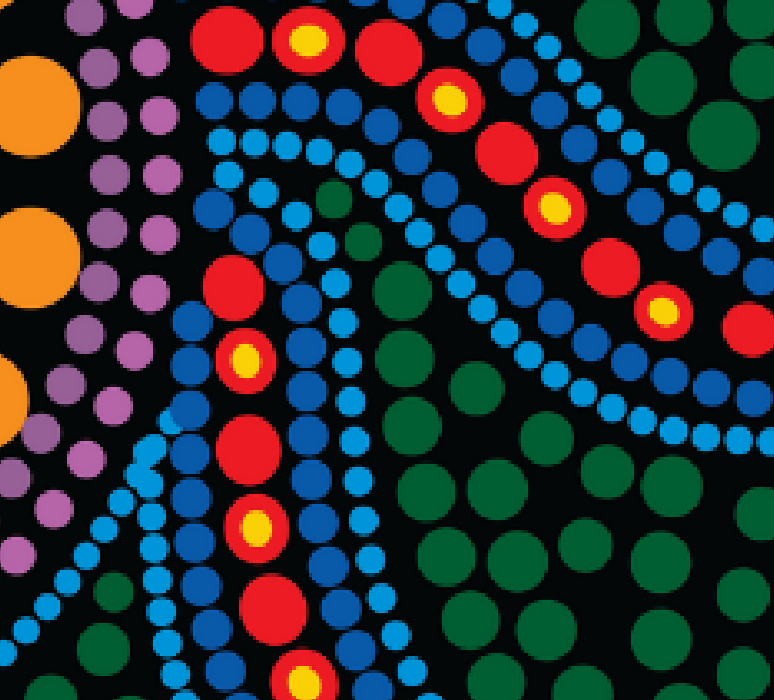
And further, at Ch.3, p.77; Continuum 1999:

"It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realise that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of 'banking' or of preaching in the desert."

Freire captures much of the essence of what is integral to mainstream MBCP work in that true dialogue cannot exist without all participants of that dialogue (inclusive of facilitators) engaging in critical thinking. His work, however, goes much deeper and is of particular application to First Nations men who have never enjoyed the freedoms and privileges of non-Indigenous men. Most current MBCPs fail to operate - or rather, do not have the resources to run - programs solely for First Nations men and therefore they are silent in the majority, their needs are invisible in the space. There is no specific design that accounts for the First Nations men's journey from 1788 until present day and program delivery is in effect, a lot of white noise.

Programs embedded in systems' agency leverage impose a non-Indigenous program. They do not take into account the lived experiences of First Nations men and their view of the world.

It may appear that the odds are well against First Nations men ever finding a forum in which they could safely have the opportunity to challenge their belief systems in order to effect change. As previously mentioned, the take-up and engagement by First Nations men in MBCPs is extremely poor. It is my experience, however, that this does not always have to be the case.



There is the blanket assumption within industry that a First Nations facilitator in MBCPs would have immediate traction with First Nations men and from my own experience, there is some truth to this. As such, I would certainly encourage all service providers to actively recruit First Nations Peoples for this difficult work. However, there still exists a common thread that many community workers face across many First Nations Peoples' interventions in the exercise of their jobs, and that is the cloud of suspicion - always present - that you have sold out your Aboriginality. In other words, depending on your motives, dedication, approach, and engagement, you may be regarded as being black on the outside but in your client's truth, you are just another white person on the inside.

I find it interesting having worked in different programs that some colleagues and program administrators have implied or cautioned me in the relationships I've established with First Nations participants, and some non-Indigenous participants, whilst they attend program. There has been a surmising that somehow I am colluding with participants. As a First Nations man, connection to our land, language, and people is a cultural paramount but it should be clearly obvious that this connection should never compromise the higher value all facilitators should hold - namely the keeping of women and children safe. Recognising humanity in the room lays the foundation for critical thinking but in my view, it does not constitute collusion.

This relationship I have with my First Nations participants, who have joined a mainstream cohort, is built on my understanding they have been placed in a forum of cultural imbalance and cultural danger. This is also the case for some CALD men. I ensure they know all possible measures are taken to reduce this danger and seek to create a safer space.

Some of these measures include:

- 01** Each program commences with an Acknowledgement of Country delivered on a volunteered basis by any participant in the room;
- 02** First Nations issues are openly spoken about providing new perspectives and insight to the non-Indigenous cohort;
- 03** and First Nations men are encouraged to speak about their own truths, whether it be about growing up on missions, in foster care or otherwise, and the impacts of living as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person in Australia.

It has been my experience that observing, and implementing, these base notions of acknowledgement, respect and truth-telling, organically elevates First Nations men in the group to their rightful status as meaningful participants with the capacity to make invaluable contributions through their lived experiences. The men then feel they are on equal footing with other non-Indigenous participants. This equality in the room respects them as being as capable as any other participant to navigate the program proper, with much-improved opportunity for change. In many cases, this is the first time in a First Nations man's life that he has enjoyed real equality with non-Indigenous people, and it is truly warming to observe his new-found confidence.

In addition, I work in a program that predominantly administers aspects of the Duluth model, an approach that is largely embedded in challenging the power and control tactics men use in their intimate relationships. First Nations men immediately connect and identify with these behaviours because they have the lived experience of being victims of power and control, they well understand what

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Modern life as we know it has been irrevocably altered in 2020 and we wake up each day in 2021 facing new challenges and having to adapt.”

it means to be vulnerable. In terms of program progress, this resonance enables our men to track extremely well - they realise all too well the impacts of their imposition on their partners and children of the very forms of 'lateral violence' that they themselves have fallen victim to for most, if not all, of their lives. However, for non-Indigenous men, whose lived experience is one of vastly more privilege and opportunity, the tactics of power and control may be invisible or intangible and this key aspect of the program does not gain traction in the same way.

In reading this writing, you might be tempted to make a gender-based assumption that, in the cultural sense, male First Nations facilitators would be the optimum agents for creating change with First Nations men. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have worked in highly effective programs using a co-gendered co-facilitated model, working with a female First Nations facilitator for over nine months. Although it would be inappropriate for me to expand on her personal perspectives on the work, for me this experience was a profound privilege.

My First Nations colleague carries the heavy responsibility of being a Traditional Custodian of a matriarchal people almost 'wiped out' post-colonisation and therefore, she brings a unique lens to trauma-informed work with First Nations participants. My assessment of our unified work was one whereby her cultural authority as a strong Aboriginal woman permitted her to challenge, "dig deeper" and connect with First Nations men to a far richer cultural level than I ever could. Perhaps this stems from traditional ways in which First Nations lived: Women were integral to the very fabric of sustaining life as hunters, gatherers, providers, educators, mothers, and valued Elders sitting on tribal councils – good strong women accountable for the tribe's collective survival. Men were hunters of large game, providers, educators and

valued Elders sitting on tribal councils – good strong men who respected women and children and were also accountable for the tribe's collective survival. Whilst many First Nations men may not possess a whole traditional lens, the undeniable and immediate respect that a connected First Nations woman commands is difficult to put into words. I believe this power that she holds can only be understood through witnessing.

It is a wonderful thing to see that 'light bulb' moment when a First Nations man is provided the culturally safe forum to hear and realise the man he is today. The man embroiled in a life of violence, criminality, and substance abuse stemming from the impacts of post-colonisation is not the good man he once was in traditional ways. The safe space allows a First Nations man time and place to view his own life through a traditional microscope on who he really was, who he has become, and who he now should be. It is the conduit to reflection, to feel and deal with the attached shame and pain and opens the pathway for facilitators to bring him back through equality behaviours that gives permission for him to once again be a good man. It is extremely heavy work for all involved and may require men to repeat program blocks, but the potential for change is enormous – he may finally break the intergenerational cycle of trauma and violence.

Service providers should actively recruit First Nations People for this difficult work.

You may detect a certain thread of frustration in this writing. I wrote a culturally appropriate MBCP in early 2019 that formed submissions for funding to both State and Federal governments. This initially received good interest at Ministerial level but ultimately failed, married up against programs of a 'higher' priority. I know of some good unfunded work being done by committed people in



North Queensland and a funded service in Townsville is, like at least one other, in its establishment phase. I'm curious to know if, in 2021, the government regards this as an adequate response. If only one First Nations man were to change his violent behaviour, what are the positive safety, social and economic impacts? What if ten, a hundred, or a thousand men were to change?

Modern life as we know it has been irrevocably altered in 2020 and we wake up each day in 2021 facing new challenges and having to adapt. The world of Men's Behaviour Change Program work is also undergoing significant change. With every new case of a woman, child, or man being killed due to Domestic and Family Violence, governments and industry attempt to play "catch up" by implementing new practice standards, rigour around service agreements, integrated responses, research, development, and evaluations. The invisibility of appropriate First Nations Peoples' programs in these domains, despite the appalling mortality and injury statistics, is once again indicative of misplaced priorities and a largely forgotten people. Balanced against society's response to Domestic and Family Violence, when a black woman dies it feels as if she is quickly forgotten. She is yesterday's news. Why does it feel as if the death of a white woman is different? When a white woman dies, a foundation is set up, and marches are conducted.

If by some miracle, there was an adequate and proportionate funding response, that inappropriate question will once again rear its ugly head. "What do we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?"

Perhaps approaching the small number of people already doing the work would be a good start.

This writing is not intended to be an authority on MBCPs involving First Nations men but I hope it has provided an appreciation of some of the issues. It forms part of my journey but you should know it is not part of your journey. Many First Nations Peoples are quite reluctant to expose their cultural and intellectual property as it is so easily taken, used without consent, twisted, used out of context, and manipulated. I was astounded to hear one of my personal stories formed part of a podcast without my consent and tracing it back, discovered a person listening to one of my presentations gave himself permission to pass my story on via this means. My perspective is such that any forum that promotes bettering the lives of First Nations Peoples is something I actively support, but common courtesy dictates I am asked first. Our people have had more than what is regarded as sufficient taken from them.

If in reading this writing, you have developed a curiosity and discovered you have more questions than answers then you may find yourself a good candidate to become a MBCP facilitator. If you have questions of me, please make contact via CQUniversity's QCDFVR.

At the Coalface



Susie O'Brien has been with Mary and Martha's Refuge for more than 18 months. Prior to this she had a diverse work history in Victoria, including a career as a police officer, and working in Integrated Family Services, group work, and community development.

Before coming to Queensland Susie managed a large domestic and family violence (DFV) service with multiple program areas. These included intake, assessment, and response to domestic and family violence police incident reports; children's counselling; outreach case management; case management of refuge and transition housing; the personal safety initiative; community development roles in the mental health and alcohol/ other drug areas to enhance service responses through improved referral pathways across the three sectors.

Susie led the organisation through Victoria Royal Commission into Family Violence reforms including the enhanced responses to women and children in motels and collaborating in the operationalising of Victoria first Support and Safety Hub (the Orange Door).

Thank you to Susie O'Brien, Community Services Manager - Domestic and Family Violence, Lutheran Services for talking with us about Mary and Martha's Refuge.

Mary and Martha's Refuge operates during business hours, Monday to Friday, with an on-call service available during non-business hours.

What are the origins of the Refuge?

Mary and Martha's Refuge is the only Lutheran Services' domestic and family program and we're quite a small team.

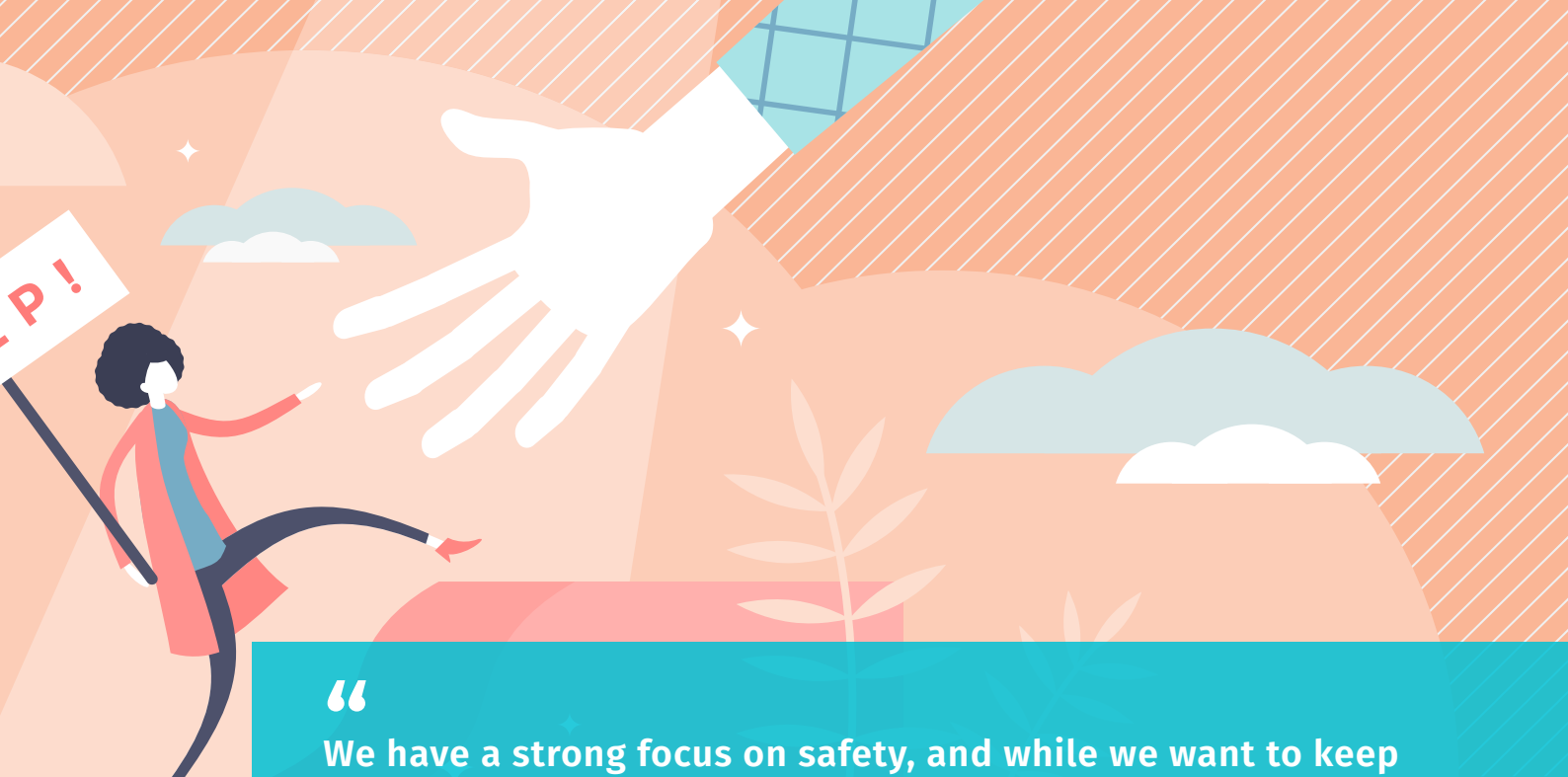
The origins of our Refuge go back to 1980, thanks to a group of women from the congregation at the Lutheran Nazareth Church at Woolloongabba. They accessed a small amount of government funding to support establishing the Refuge. Later the service moved to Bulimba where it was until 2012. Back then it was more like a shared house environment, with one communal living area, and one communal kitchen.

We've been in these premises, that is a core-and-cluster designed model, for eight years.

What is the size of your Refuge service?

We have five accommodation units here, and three Department of Housing properties in the community as well as two cap head lease properties that we rent privately, and then rent out to women at a reduced rent.

Since we have 10 properties, we can accept 10 families. Over the last 12 months, we've supported something like 120 women and children. At the moment we have 11 women and 24 children receiving a service. Obviously, this is more than 10 because sometimes women return to our service since things don't always go 'smooth sailing' after they leave us. We let the clients know that they can return anytime for another episode of service, they just need to contact us.



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We have a strong focus on safety, and while we want to keep the whole family in the same area, mum needs to be able to go about her day-to-day life safely.”

How would you describe your service model?

We provide case management after we receive referrals through the Queensland Homelessness Information Platform. We assess referrals based on risk and needs and appropriateness—whether we can manage the risk which depends on a number of factors including the location of the perpetrator and/or his associates. I think that we’ve got very skilled, empathetic case managers who are asking the right questions, in a respectful and safe manner and are really professional in the way they assess and manage risk.

If a woman does contact us for follow up, we’ll do another risk assessment and a needs assessment with her. It could be something as simple as she’s having trouble negotiating with school around children with external traumatised behaviours. Then we’ll re-open her case and do another episode of service with her.

We operate within an empowerment model, a trauma-informed, feminist, strengths-based framework with women, and we work with children as individual clients in their own right. If a woman’s got children, it doesn’t matter how old they are, or if they’re girls or boys—they’re her children, so we support the whole family, and sometimes that includes pets.

On these premises at the moment, for example, there are five families, a dog, and two cats. We have had Guinea pigs, birds, and a fish in the past too.

We have a strong focus on safety, and while we want to keep the whole family in the same area, mum needs to be able to

go about her day-to-day life safely. We can’t manage the risk if she’s going to bump into him in the supermarket or the doctor’s surgery.

That means we look at things such as “Where is the perpetrator? Has he located her in the past?”. In other words, it’s very perpetrator-focussed.

Because I was in Victoria after the Royal Commission into Family Violence, we use the MARAM - the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Risk Management tool. It covers intersectionalities such as LGBTIQ – and there is good context, as well as questions around children’s risk. It’s a really clear framework, based on contemporary evidence, and it comes from a space of case coordination on an everyday basis.

It’s so important to have a common language and consistency when we’re working with the police, for example, or child protection, and talking about the risks to women and children. For example, if we don’t all use the same language, then we need to explain the risks and the health implications of strangulation.

There’s no such thing as a “typical client journey” but what is the refuge experience like for women?

I think it’s about six weeks into refuge that we see the difference in them, in the way that they present to you, in the way that you might see fingernails polished. It’s a roller coaster, but little wins, that they might seem small or insignificant to anyone else, are so huge for the women.

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What tends to happen is that a woman will be given time to settle into her unit. Then we'll do the intake over the next few days. There will be appointments with her around safety planning and meeting her immediate needs – this could be access to prescriptions or medications, or getting food.”

What tends to happen is that a woman will be given time to settle into her unit. Then we'll do the intake over the next few days. There will be appointments with her around safety planning and meeting her immediate needs – this could be access to prescriptions or medications, or getting food. We have women from different cultures who will only eat certain types of food, so we make sure they've got all the right spices that they need for their own cooking.

Then she will usually stay in her unit for two to three weeks and not go out much. Later she'll start to come out, with her head starting to lift. As the days go on and she starts progressing through her goals, she lifts her head higher.

You might be doing a risk assessment with her and she'll still be shaking, absolutely shaking, shaking uncontrollably, just from emotional abuse.

So we're constantly checking in with her and she'll say things like "I don't deserve to be here. Do you want me to go because I don't deserve to be here? There are people who deserve this more than me."

That's heartbreaking, and it goes on for weeks. I said to one woman, at about the six-week mark "You know what I haven't heard you say lately? I haven't heard you say to me 'Do you want me to go? Because I really don't deserve to be here there are other families that need it more.' Do you still believe it?"

She said "No I don't believe that. I DO deserve to be here."

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

We are prioritising the high risk that's coming through. It's not all of our clients but sometimes it will be just one after the other after the other.

Of our 10 main clients at the moment, five of those intakes over the last four months have all been referred straight to the HRT. I'd be worried if referrals weren't being put through to the HRT because it just means that we're assessing the risk and the women are happy to have the support and be referred to the HRT.

We're seeing significant sexual abuse not only to mum but also to the children over multiple periods of time and not just one, but multiple, perpetrators. A lot of the sexual abuse has been going on for years, but the kids haven't disclosed, because they weren't in a safe place to disclose what was happening for them. Generally, the kids' fathers are the perpetrators, and we recognise, and are seeing first-hand, the co-relationship between really high risk perpetrators of violence against women and child abuse, including abuse of their own children through images and pornography.

The sexual abuse - and the nature of the sexual abuse - to both mother and children is horrendous and trying to get services for children - sexual assault counselling for children - is just so very hard. There is one organisation that's funded to do this, where there's no fee for service, but they only take referrals from child protection.

This means that if there are no protective issues - because the mother is not with the perpetrator, and the kids are in the care



of their protective mother - we actually can't access the funded specialist services. We don't want to run the risk of sending the kids to a service that doesn't specialise, so that's very hard.

How do you work with children?

I was chatting with a little 12 year old girl about her experiences and looking at tools and resources to give people like her mum on an intake. I was showing her what we had, and I said "What do you think? You know your mum. What do you think should be in the information that she gets about trauma and protecting children? What's enough and what's too much?"

When she saw the information about protective behaviours, she explained that she'd been exposed to this repeatedly at school. I was curious about this and said "But you never said anything (about the sexual abuse), even though you were at a school going through the protective behaviours program - you said nothing to anyone. What changed for you, to be able to talk about what happened to you?"

The little girl responded "Going to a refuge - it was when I went to refuge that I felt safe."

Because we have a children's consent and confidentiality agreement that we go through with the kids when they first come into our service, the same girl said to me that she was so happy to sign. She said "In all those years that child protection and other services and refuges have been involved with me, and all the domestic violence services that have supported Mum, no one has ever asked me to sign anything and I'm so glad that you asked me to sign something."

What advice would help other services to respond appropriately to the often complex needs of women and their children?

We create safety and we risk assess everybody who arrives - women and children. The little girl in my story was part of a feedback session in a client meeting where she said "I've been in nine refuges in the last six months and this is the first time that I've actually felt safe".

For us to respond appropriately to the needs of women, as leaders we need to look after our own people. Recruitment is really important - getting the right people - having the right people in the role is absolutely critical because then everything else works. As I said, we work through a trauma-informed framework, and in a refuge we need to actually be a really tight team because we live together with our clients.

Our staff are women, parents, people who have been drawn to this work for their own reasons. If my team is listening to the women's stories and then doing it again the next day, that means as a leader I need to notice and check-in, particularly with our younger staff. This means ensuring they have appropriate skills, knowledge and training, but also caring for them, and taking care of them has to be our number one priority.

“It's like being on a plane, and if the plane's crashing you need to put your own face mask on first because if you don't, you can't help anybody else.”



The clients we see have been broken, just completely broken- yet often he's never laid a hand on her... They are just so brave, they are amazing - their courage is unbelievable. Their trust in us is so freely given, it's incredible. I am in awe of them all the time. ”

Is there a time limit on how long a woman can stay at your refuge with her family?

As long as she needs us, we're here, until she's got appropriate and affordable safe accommodation. Then just because she moves out doesn't mean we 'close her'. If it's within a reasonable distance, we will continue to support her until she's settled into her new community.

For example, we had a woman here who had grown up in a refugee camp in Africa. She had two words of English when we picked her with her little girl. She'd grown up in a refugee camp where food was delivered. Here he had isolated her so that she was completely dependent on him. Can you imagine the guts and the courage this woman had - to seek support with no English, no experience of the service system over here?

This mum and her daughter were with us for about eight months and during that time mum did English language classes. We actually 'closed' with her about six weeks ago when she moved into a multicultural community. However, just because she moved on, she still needed to have support to access services in that local area and she was really nervous about that at the start - about moving out.

They are just so brave, they are amazing - their courage is unbelievable. Their trust in us is so freely given, it's incredible. I am in awe of them all the time.

COVID-19 impacted on all services. How did it affect your client group?

Those who were hit particularly hard were the ones who didn't have transport. Women need to be able to get to court, or go to look at rental properties, or keep their medical appointments. Thankfully the (then) Department of Child Safety Youth and Women was just amazing. They provided us with COVID-19

flexible brokerage, which has just been a godsend. We could pay for taxis, medical bills, car insurance and repairs. Supporting families of four where there's actually no income whatsoever is tough, and the woman might be in a professional role such as an architect or engineer and he's frozen all the assets. Here she is with us, having to be fully supported by a service with petrol and food vouchers, and there's no dignity in it.

What gives you hope in the work that you?

When we have a positive experience with the broader service system or the criminal justice system, I have hope. I know that there's much discussion currently about identification of the primary aggressor, but so much more can be done so that police and courts, and the justice system understand the lived experience of a woman. It would be good if they understood more about gaslighting, and the impacts of emotional abuse.

The clients we see have been broken, just completely broken- yet often he's never laid a hand on her.



If I can teach you in a Room, can I teach you in a Zoom?

Reflections of a Zoom-er

Suewellyn Kelly, Associate Lecturer



Besides being a lead educator in domestic and family violence responses to women and their children, including assessing risk and planning

for safety, Associate Lecturer Suewellyn Kelly is a highly experienced practitioner who has contributed extensively to CQUniversity's continual improvement processes. This includes her role in maintaining the quality of the vocational accredited units CHCDFV001 (Recognise and respond appropriately to Domestic and Family Violence) and CHCDFV002 (Provide support to children affected by Domestic and Family Violence). Her previous roles have included both advocacy and program development, addressing domestic violence, sexual assault, homelessness, mental health, substance misuse, generational trauma, as well as educational, social, and financial exclusion. Suewellyn is committed to integrated, holistic work practices that reduce 'silo' responses in young people and families facing complex issues in their lives. She is currently teaching an undergraduate unit with a focus on violence against women.

Like so many other aspects of life, the teaching world that evolved through the COVID-19 pandemic was one underscored by the urgent need to move from face-to-face to virtual engagement, in our case, for the delivery of professional development opportunities related to responding to domestic and family violence. In 2020 hundreds of learners participated in our various training opportunities, but I wonder how many considered the realities of what preceded the 'click on the link to join the presentation' that so many of us encountered in the past 12 months? In this brief article, I draw on the literature and reflect on what it's like to be a teacher in the virtual world.

Amongst other issues, the concept of virtual learning seemed to cause confusion in terminology and understanding – wasn't it the same as on-line teaching? Part of our work in 2020 was making the distinction: 'on-line learning' is a term pertaining to education that is asynchronous in nature, whereby learners and teachers do not meet in real-time and the learning platform is fully mediated by the internet (Rapanta et al., 2020). On the other hand, virtual delivery - through applications such as Zoom - is a synchronous option in that learners and teachers interact and share information in real-time (Gordon, 2020).

This move from 'being in a room' to 'being in a Zoom' required our team to make several adaptations. Transferring the delivery method from face-to-face workshops to virtual sessions initially necessitated a review of the content and design changes to allow time for meaningful interactive activities to strengthen participation and provide active learning opportunities (Gordon, 2020; Henderson, 2020 & Scull et al, 2020). I was thankful that there was time allowed within our team schedule to accommodate this, as it was



difficult, for example, to condense the material for a full two-day workshop into three two-hour Zoom sessions while maintaining the integrity of the content. Further, it became apparent early in the re-design stage that unlike face-to-face delivery, there was much more reliance on visual instructional tools such as PowerPoint and audio-visual content in the form of videos and websites.

“ This move from ‘being in a room’ to ‘being in a Zoom’ required our team to make several adaptations. Transferring the delivery method from face-to-face workshops to virtual sessions initially necessitated a review of the content and design changes to allow time for meaningful interactive activities to strengthen participation and provide active learning opportunities. ”

Every training session requires set-up time, but in the world of virtual delivery, this took on new meanings indeed. One of the first delivery challenges I noticed was that while I had been an attendee in many Zoom meetings, most often I was not a presenter at these sessions and consequently, I was not as cognisant of my own appearance ‘in the square’. It is one of life’s ironies that the functions of Zoom do not allow a facilitator to actually zoom (Pike et al, 2020) so because of the vagaries of the year that was, there was a constant search for the optimum teaching position and background, which was not necessarily also the most comfortable option. A reader could be forgiven for thinking that having

done this once, the setting for presenting via Zoom in a professional, credible manner would be established... but no... Our Mackay team has the great fortune to be located in a building that enabled safe social distancing, so while I could work, on occasions, from both my ergonomically comfortable work office and home office that became my teaching room, I was mindful of ensuring I had time to create the best aesthetics in each location.

It also became evident during practice sessions that a team approach to teaching was required to effectively facilitate synchronous learning activities, including monitoring of the chat function comments and questions, and keeping participant/educator interactions flowing (Scull et al., 2020). As such, it was agreed within the team that a two-teacher model, where possible, was the preferred Zoom option to offer to our learners. This worked well, as did other aspects of our approach. Feedback from participants consistently indicated, for example, that the use of videos as prompts for group work in break out rooms was the most constructive form of connection with peers during the training sessions. Another aspect of Zoom that encouraged participants to ease into engaging with the learning material, was the use of anonymous Polls as icebreakers.

For Zoom sessions to run as efficiently as possible, the educator needs to develop and follow a well thought out lesson plan, while maintaining some balance to allow for spontaneity, but this may be difficult within a very contained window of time (Gordon, 2020). Another key consideration is that the timing of Zoom teaching sessions needs to be fixed to avoid peak internet times and to monitor learner and teacher fatigue. Virtual teaching can

be exhausting, in part because the presenter needs to operate the many moving components of an interactive Zoom lesson to ensure that people remain stimulated and engaged but also because it's important to pay much closer attention to learners' non-verbal cues (Sander & Bauman, 2020). However, please don't take that as an excuse to turn off your camera! As a facilitator, it can be very grueling to deliver sessions to "invisible" learners on a regular basis.

On a related note, unlike face-to-face learning - where lesson timing is important too but there may opportunities in refreshment breaks to connect with others - in the virtual world, the facilitator's imperative to manage the timing may afford less opportunity for participants to engage with their peers or for additional conversations to occur near the end of the session (Gordon, 2020; Pike et al, 2020).

As an educator in domestic and family violence, virtual delivery has opened up a rich diversity of experiences and sharing from practitioners in the field from remote, regional, and South-east Queensland services. The COVID-19 situation provided the opportunity to refresh existing teaching content, to be creative, collaborative, and adaptive to the almost daily new information that became available relating to resources and online support services. While there is no 'one size fits all' approach to teaching, I believe that in the future there will remain a need for both face-to-face and synchronous virtual delivery to meet the needs of learners who are not able to attend traditional full-day classroom-based workshops (Gordon, 2020).

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Micro-credentials – the way of the future?

Humans have lots of reasons for learning.

We may want to reduce the deficit in our knowledge because we are curious, or think that if we know more, we can be more independent, and perhaps improve how we do things.

It may be that, in a competitive job market, we want to give ourselves the “edge” over others in the recruitment race.

In a time of rapid change, it feels like every week in our professional - and personal lives- we encounter areas that are new to us!

When frontline services and agencies face emerging issues, such as adolescent to parent violence, they grapple with how best to respond. Learning more about the topic is a means to build confidence in deciding how best to act – in this case, intervention options with families.

There are many ways to learn. You could sit at your desk and access reputable websites for hours, but having invested the time and energy in seeking out knowledge, how is your learning effort recognised?

Another way to learn at your desk is through accessing an online option through an education provider. The benefit of undertaking this approach is that your time and energy may be recognised through the completion of, for example, a micro-credential.

For the more ambitious, of course, there are study options that require more of your time and energy – such as studying an individual unit, or a number of units that constitute a course.

In this article, we’ll explore more of the former and learn about micro-credentials available at CQUniversity (as at February 2021).

Get to know micro-credentials at CQUniversity

01 Micro-credentials vary to meet the wide variety of professional development needs of students, employers, industry, and business.

02 In August 2019, Emeritus Professor Beverley Oliver (p. 18) wrote that “there is as yet no universally agreed definition (or spelling) of ‘micro-credential’. A casual search of Google Scholar suggests the term first appeared in about 2013, often in connection with digital badges, and it... is now generally used to describe all manner of shorter form learning experiences, using a variety of names and brands, of all types, modes and sizes.”

03

In line with the global movement towards flexible learning, CQUniversity recognises that micro-credentials are a certification of “assessed learning that is additional, alternate, complementary to or a component part of a formal qualification” (Oliver 2019, p. 19), and as such, they may be non-credit-bearing or credit-bearing*.

04

A ‘non-credit bearing’ micro-credential is one that is not aligned to an approved award course by nature of learning outcomes and assessment, so this type of micro-credential does not contribute to gaining a formal qualification. However, this is not to say that non-credit bearing micro-credentials do not constitute high-quality professional development and they may be accredited or recognised by industry.

05

Digital Badges are a digital visual recognition of learning achievement, and depending on the study undertaken, represent the completion of non-accredited and/ or accredited learning.

06

CQUniversity’s Centre for Professional Development has a range of micro-credential options available. These span diverse areas, including communication, leadership, and social innovation.

07

CQUniversity’s internal, peer assessment process at the relevant Course Committee is responsible for the approval of micro-credentials. This ensures that each course meets its stated objectives and that its constituent units/modules achieve optimal learning outcomes for students. CQUniversity strives to maintain rigorous standards in approving its academic courses to meet its mission and strategic goals.

FREE MICRO-CREDENTIAL:

PDC78319: The First 1000 Days - Stronger Foundations

Summary: This three-hour online micro-credential provides you with an understanding of why the early years of a child’s life are critical in impacting on a range of outcomes throughout the life course. It provides a non-creditable micro-credential and digital badge which can be shared to your social networks and displayed in your professional portfolio. To learn more [click here](#).

**A ‘credit-bearing’ micro-credential is one that is a subset of an approved award course, by volume of learning. It has a discrete assessment, that if completed, aligns to and maintains the integrity of the learning outcome of the award course from which it is derived. In other words, it may be recognised towards completion of an award course. At this stage, there are no Domestic and Family Violence Practice related micro-credentials that are ‘credit-bearing.’*

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Reference

Reference: Oliver, B., 2019, Making micro-credentials work for learners, employers and providers, Deakin University



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