

Dianne Turner

Attn: The Research Director: LACSC

Dear Sir/Madam

My submission to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee is with regard to the situation of Domestic Violence within the community and what appears to be a real lack of understanding to the situations of victims. Although in this age of political correctness I realise that there should not be gender bias I am particularly concerned with impacts of domestic violence on women and children.

As a victim or more to the point a survivor of a domestic violence situation I feel much more needs to be done in this area. Firstly domestic violence should be acknowledged as a criminal act and should be dealt with in the criminal court not in the civil or family court. I think it is important for victims that perpetrators be held accountable for their crimes. Perpetrators need to know they risk a criminal record and not just a Domestic Violence Order that does not go on criminal records, but should. Many perpetrators of family violence generally are aggressive and manipulative by nature. They hold core beliefs that they have an inborn right to commit acts of violence against their families. Unless these core beliefs are challenged by the legal system, Government and society what hope do we have as a community of combating the escalation of such acts.

Also, if a woman is able to leave a violent situation her safety needs to be paramount. Women and children need places to go so that they can break free of a violent situation. More needs to be done with regards to accommodation facilities that can take children of all ages and their pets. Keeping the family unit together is imperative for the psychological well being as well as the physical safety of victims. All women regardless of whether they own property or not should have access to such facilities and help as for some women staying in the family home is not a safe option or there are ongoing traumas associated with remaining. Just because a woman may own or be paying off her home does not immediately mean they have the financial means to leave or stay. A roof over your head maybe a roof but it's not always a safe option. Most likely they will become victims of ongoing physical or financial abuse post separation.

Separating brings with it many difficulties for women. If they are working they risk losing their jobs due to injuries or psychological trauma from having to take time off work. If they have been stay at home mothers they have no means to support themselves and must rely on Centrelink payments.

Financial abuse makes it very difficult for women to get their lives back on track. It has devastating effects on health and wellbeing. Perpetrators not only get away with being violent they continue the abuse through financial means. Many women through no fault of their own see their credit rating being rubbed out and the deliberate refusal to engage in settlements on the part of the perpetrator

further weakens their financial resilience, all due to the vindictive nature of their abusive partners. How does a victim of such disturbed characters have any hope of regaining their independence when this is allowed to happen time and time again? Again I suggest this should be looked upon as a crime. It is not good enough in 2014 for this type of situation to be allowed to continue.

To address these situations legal advice and representation needs to be available for women in dire financial stress due to abuse. It would be a step in the right direction if there could be a one stop shop. All services could be available under one roof, a crisis centre available in every region of Queensland.

Nothing is more debilitating than having to go from place to place when in the middle of a major trauma and with little financial means. Any psychologist or counsellor will tell you that after being subjected to ongoing abuse and coercive control over a number of years has a damaging effect on self esteem and has other traumas associated with the abuse that effect decision making abilities. It is imperative to have services at hand and supports available to help women navigate these issues.

Such crisis centres could have programs to help women rebuild their lives by regaining their sense of self, their confidence and courses to help them get back into the workforce in a safe environment. Too often funding is cut to these most necessary of programs. Getting survivors back into the workforce you would think would be a high priority for any Government. The initial outlay would surely be a financial investment in the long run. As would ensuring perpetrators take full responsibility for all their actions.

Women who have lived through years of abuse are not weak minded individuals, they are strong women who have been able to live through, survive and protect their children but when trying to leave they are left vulnerable.

Whenever there is a major national crisis Australians rise to help each other. I challenge that domestic violence against women is such a national crisis. How can it not be when one woman a week dies in Australia due to an act of domestic violence? Of all the acts of violence committed against women in the family home that are reported there are many more that are not. I know because I didn't report the crimes committed against me. The major reason...fear. Perpetrators don't fear for they have nothing to fear when they don't even risk a criminal record or jail term. The system allows them to abuse and then abuse all the more. Unfortunately it seems that either a woman or child must die before the crime is taken seriously.

In conclusion the idea that domestic and family violence is a private matter between intimate couples can no longer be accepted by society. Also society and the law need to challenge the idea that violence between couples is mostly situational. This type of thinking does not help victims who are in a violent situation that may well have other ramifications that are not present or are not related to police at the time of the incident out of fear of reprisal. The costs of domestic violence on society are enormous the effects ripple through society and future generations. Although much has improved over the years with regards to this issue there is still much more that needs to be done. Bandaid measures are not enough to stave off the epidemic of family violence. In 2014 women and children should no longer have to fear living in their own homes.

Yours sincerely

Dianne Turner