



Speech by

**JOHN MICKEL**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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Hansard 11 November 1999

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (FAMILY PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (12.24 a.m.): I think that it is a measure of the maturity of our change in attitude to this horrible occurrence that tonight's debate has been conducted by all sides with a great deal of maturity and understanding without lapsing into relating myths that so often used to surround domestic violence. The most difficult myth to overcome is that domestic violence is a private matter and is no-one else's business. That kind of violence impacts upon society in ways that reach well beyond the home. All too frequently we have seen and been left with those horrible images of total relationship breakdown, that numbing impact when domestic violence explodes into homicide of not just a partner but also the children. No electorate is immune from that.

I hope that we will be spared that ultimate violence. Some years ago, that ultimate violence was inflicted upon my electorate in the suburb of Hillcrest. Today, people in that suburb still speak about what a dreadful experience it was. It is why I have opposed any relaxation of gun laws, particularly when domestic violence can become murderous reality in a blinding flash.

In 1988 in Queensland, 14% of victims who contacted a phone-in said that domestic violence had been threatened upon them or that they had been injured by a gun. Domestic violence can also result in breakdown for youth. Tonight, we have already heard about child abuse. However, domestic violence also impacts upon the youth, who either suffer from it or who personally experience it. The result is youth wandering the streets at night, sometimes as a direct result of domestic violence, because by staying at home they are no longer safe. It becomes safe to get out of the house. We should never lose sight of that.

In my electorate, there is a constant search for safe houses for women particularly suffering domestic violence. I recognise the fact that domestic violence is suffered by something like 13 or 14% of men. However, tonight I want to focus on the women who suffer from domestic violence. As I said, there is a constant search for safe houses to which women can be evacuated. I do not want to pretend that that is easy. I make this appeal: once a safe house is established in an area, it should be only temporary, it should not be regarded as a long-term activity for that street. I say that for this reason: inevitably, that particular house becomes well known for being a safe house not just by the other residents in the street but also because in these situations inevitably some women are forgiving and try for some reconciliation. I have been told that incidents occur in the street and the neighbours are impacted by it. Once the secrecy of that house gets out, it is no longer a safe place for the women who are trying to escape from a domestic violence situation. My appeal is for safety houses to be updated and, where possible, constantly relocated so that the incidence of trouble within the house and trouble within the street is overcome.

There are many reasons why women try for reconciliation. It can be frustrating for the authorities, and I have had regard to what the previous two speakers have said. I know that it is particularly hard for the police. Women try and do return to desperately violent situations. However, they deserve our understanding and our empathy, not our condemnation. Despite what is written from time to time about it, it is not easy to walk away from a marriage. In these situations, women may face financial difficulties, they may face accommodation problems, they may simply face the nightmare of a family breaking up. In some instances, they also face threats by husbands. In some instances, they may also face lack of confidence in wanting to move out of the house. They also—and this has not been mentioned tonight—face influence from parents, from parents-in-law, culture and even religion.

The plain simple fact is that, in some instances, too, women simply love their husbands. As the Minister said in her second-reading speech, in some instances people simply do not want the relationship to end; they just want the violence to stop.

What are the causes of domestic violence? Mythology suggests that domestic violence occurs simply among poor families and minority groups, but the reality is that the whole spectrum of society is involved. The causes and contributing factors are varied and complex, ranging from unemployment and poverty, excessive drinking, job pressures, marriage expectations, violence as a learned behaviour and a belief by some men in their power or ownership over women. It is a combination of these factors, of which alcohol abuse is a trigger and not a cause.

The impacts upon society as a whole have been discussed. However, as the member for Caboolture reminded us, reports indicate that after fatalities police are told variously by friends and neighbours that a household may have had problems for years but nobody contacted the police. As the member for Caboolture so rightly pointed out, the police are in a very difficult situation.

There is another myth that spouse abuse cases should be handled by social workers or civil courts. There is a role for those people, but initially it is a police role and it is never an easy role. The Queensland Police Service put the annual cost of domestic violence to the Police Service at between \$2.5m and \$4m a year.

The Browns Plains and Logan Central police services have been working with the local community group WAVSS, a group dedicated to assisting people in domestic violence situations. In a community partnership, WAVSS brings together the major domestic violence stakeholders in the Logan

district, including the police, Legal Aid, the courts, counselling organisations, community corrections and non-Government and Government organisations to improve and coordinate the local response to domestic violence.

The Logan River Valley Integrated Community Response to Domestic Violence group has received funding via the Community Renewal Funding Program to implement the Fax-Back project. This is the culmination of years of work. Fax-Back forms the first phase of a four-phase model of an integrated community response to domestic violence in Logan. I look forward to the launch of this program in Browns Plains. Above all, I thank the Minister for funding the WAVSS group to enable it to carry out the very important work that it undertakes in the Logan district.

Recently I launched the Sexual Violence Awareness Week in Logan City. It was moving to hear of the valiant struggles of women to put their horrendous experiences behind them after years of trauma and counselling. This gave domestic violence and sexual abuse a very human dimension for me. Many of those women have experience of violence problems from childhood and are now putting those problems behind them. I thank those tremendous community organisations in Logan for the work that they do.

I know that this topic is one that the general public does not want to hear about and sometimes does not want to speak about. Anything that we as a society can do to reduce this trauma for couples helps us all as citizens. I thank all the people in Logan who daily work to assist women and men in times of enormous difficulties. This Bill goes a long way to addressing what has been a very human problem. It is a very real and an emotional problem. The Bill deserves the support of the House.

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