

**INTEGRATED RESPONSE
TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
BY THE CRIMINAL
JUSTICE SYSTEM AND
SUPPORT AGENCIES IN
DUBBO**

Christine Foreman



18 – 22 February 2002, University of Sydney, Australia

INTEGRATED RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND SUPPORT AGENCIES IN DUBBO

Christine Foreman

History

For some time, there has been much dissatisfaction around the options available for dealing with incidents of domestic (family) violence and the issues involved. This dissatisfaction occurs across the board, from victims to service providers such as the police, courts and support agencies. Women from all ethnic backgrounds, but especially Aboriginal women, have expressed concern that the current methods of dealing with domestic (family) violence do not achieve their desired outcomes, victims have very little support and experience great fear and dislocation to their lives. Police officers become disheartened with 'repeat victims' particularly those who fail to turn up at court and who continually return to the perpetrator. For support services, there are few referrals from police, court staff or other agencies, due, in some part, to lack of awareness on the part of service providers of all persuasions of the existence of support organisations.

At a domestic violence forum, held in Sydney in November 1999, there was discussion on perpetrator programmes. One pilot was planned for NSW, but the forum resolved that there should be three, one metropolitan, one rural and one for Aboriginal men. The Macquarie Area Regional Reference Group with the Western Region Domestic Violence Collective decided to submit for either the rural or the Aboriginal programme.

However, funding through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence programme became available to trial innovative approaches to domestic (family) violence and a successful submission for the above project was duly written. The project is for ten months, and at its conclusion there will be a co-ordinated response to domestic (family) violence, which will greatly improve service provision for victims of domestic violence and their children. There

will also be a set of Interagency Guidelines in place. The project will operate within the context of high community and service provider awareness and education of domestic violence and its effects.

The project commenced on 4 June 2001, the first tasks being to invite participants and to write a project plan. Initially, thirty invitations were sent out to organisations who had a role, however marginal, in the area of domestic violence, and all agreed to take part. There have been a further three additions in the last two months, two expressed wishes to participate and one was invited. A draft project plan was presented at the first meeting which took place in early July.

At this meeting, management of the project was the main item. Monthly general meetings were decided upon with working parties being convened as and when required. Four working parties were set up with participants either nominating themselves or being nominated. The working parties cover the following areas:

- Survey working party
- Interagency Guidelines working party
- Focus Group/evaluation working party
- Service provision

The NSW Police Service and Department of Community Services are members of every working party. The interagency guidelines and service provision working parties meet in small groups as and when required when their particular areas of interest are being discussed.

Barriers

At commencement of the Project, communications were made difficult. The telephone service did not allow calls to mobile phones or interstate calls. A computer was not available for the first three weeks and the Internet was not connected for a further two weeks.

Whilst there was excellent communication and co-operation from the NSW Police Service, Dubbo Domestic Violence Team Leader, there was no Domestic Violence Liaison Officer until September 2001. Since then,

however, referral systems with feedback mechanisms have been put in place and remain operational.

When advertising for expressions of interest in taking part in the crisis on-call roster, a small number of Aboriginal workers put their names down; however, after further consideration, they withdrew due to expected backlash from community members against them and members of their families. It has occurred previously to support workers at Emergency Accommodation. This has huge implications for Aboriginal women working in the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault in rural and remote areas and those who employ them, with such important issues as possible areas of employment being further limited, for organisations who need the presence and knowledge of Aboriginal women in provision of service and for clients of those organisations. We are trying to develop strategies for coping with this, so far without much success.

Co-ordinated response

To achieve a co-ordinated response a number of strategies have been employed:

- Participation on project committee and working parties
- Completion of a survey
- Training/education/community awareness component
- Focus groups
- Ongoing evaluation
- Service provision comprises:
 - ◇ intervention
 - ◆ crisis on-call
 - ◆ follow-up
 - ◇ information/referral
 - ◇ support/advocacy
- Interagency guidelines comprise:
 - ◇ definitions of domestic violence

- ◇ organisations' mission statements
- ◇ roles and responsibilities of organisations
- ◇ aims and objectives
- ◇ policies and procedures around domestic violence, privacy and confidentiality
- ◇ referral pathways

Service provision is part of the interagency guidelines, but for training and evaluation purposes, initially it was treated separately.

Project operates in a context of high community and service provider education and awareness of domestic violence and its effects.

Several strategies have been employed to achieve increased awareness of domestic violence, its criminality and knowledge of related issues and support services, amongst service providers and members of the general public. The strategies include:

- A survey of service providers from most participating organisations to:
 - ◇ assess existing levels of knowledge and training needs;
 - ◇ workers' perceptions of their role in domestic violence;
 - ◇ existence and knowledge of domestic violence policies/procedures; and,
 - ◇ existence of debriefing/supervision protocols,

Training for crisis on-call workers includes:

- ◇ current Apprehended Domestic Violence legislation;
- ◇ Police Standard Operating Procedures;
- ◇ Protective behaviours and safety procedures;
- ◇ case management/data recording;
- ◇ roles, responsibilities and professional boundaries; and,
- ◇ recognition of escalating behaviour.

Other strategies which are used are:

- ◇ developing and maintaining links with the media;
- ◇ presenting the project to various community groups;
- ◇ developing and maintaining formal and informal links with stakeholders; and,
- ◇ ongoing assessment and evaluation which currently includes feedback sessions to be followed by focus groups and client, service provider and stakeholder satisfaction surveys.

Discussion on Survey results

There were 367 surveys distributed and 114 completed and returned. For collation and processing of data the surveys were divided into three groups:

- Criminal Justice System comprising:
 - ◇ Attorney General's Department:
 - ◆ Dubbo Courthouse staff
 - ◆ Violence against Women Special Unit Regional Violence Prevention Specialist
 - ◇ NSW Police Service-Dubbo
 - ◇ Department of Public Prosecutions
 - ◇ Probation & Parole
 - ◇ Juvenile Justice
 - ◇ Western Aboriginal Legal Service

The surveys received from these organisations demonstrated the most worker training. The general awareness and knowledge of types of domestic violence, together with understanding the meaning of the term 'integrated response' was very good. Knowledge of roles and responsibilities of organisations in the area of domestic violence was generally good, but shows the need for greater awareness.

- Government organisations comprising:
 - ◇ Macquarie Area Health Service including:

- ◆ Child, Adolescent & Family Health- Women's Health; Early childhood; Family Workers (PANOC); Sexual Assault; Speech pathology; Psychology & Social Work; Occupational Therapy; Emergency Department, Obstetrics Department and Welfare Departments
- ◆ Mental Health Service
- ◆ Drug & Alcohol Service
- ◇ Department of Education Student Welfare Dept.
- ◇ Department of Housing
- ◇ Department of Community Services
- ◇ Family Court of Australia – Commonwealth Government

The surveys received from this group of organisations demonstrated a great need for increased training and information dissemination around domestic violence. Again some service providers did not think they had a role in domestic violence. Service providers recognised and acknowledged this lack of awareness and knowledge and remarked that they would welcome ongoing training in this area. The level of knowledge of organisation roles and responsibilities in the area of domestic violence emphasised the need for ongoing training.

- Non-government organisations comprising:
 - ◇ Dubbo Emergency Accommodation Project
 - ◇ Dubbo Women's Housing Programme
 - ◇ Uniting Care Burnside Doorways (accommodation for 16-24 yrs)
 - ◇ Dubbo/Wellington Domestic Violence Counselling Service
 - ◇ Dubbo/Wellington Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme
 - ◇ JPET (job placement, employment & training)
 - ◇ Dubbo Children's Contact Centre
 - ◇ Interrelate
 - ◇ Community Legal Service for Western NSW

- ◇ Thubbo Aboriginal Medical Service
- ◇ Dubbo Family Support Service
- ◇ Reconnect
- ◇ Outreach Youth Counsellor

Most service providers in this group are aware of available services for women and children experiencing domestic violence, but would like more training. The understanding of the issues around domestic violence, together with knowledge of the types of domestic violence and the meaning of the term 'integrated response' while rating mostly good to excellent (measured on inclusion of key words and types of domestic violence listed) suggests that this group also needs ongoing training. Knowledge of roles and responsibilities in domestic violence scored well, but again showed need for greater awareness.

Of special note, in all groups, is the number of respondents who did not think they had a role in domestic violence. This is a concern, not only from a child protection point of view, bearing in mind that most respondents are mandatory reporters, but also the capacity of some service providers to appropriately respond to and assist women/children who disclose domestic violence. This particular result may be due to denial, attitudinal issues or a breakdown in induction procedures, but, as the survey did not test for these, a conclusion cannot be drawn.

General discussion of Survey results.

Training needs

Less than half the respondents had attended any domestic violence training of various types from a number of different training organisations. Those respondents who had received training still requested more.

When asked what they would like included in a training programme, 98 respondents requested information in extensive areas such as roles and responsibilities of various organisations, types of domestic violence, Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders, assessment and indicators of abuse as well as the social impact and the effect of domestic violence on children.

A training programme has been developed from the data collected in the surveys. Currently, a programme is being arranged with participating organisations. Many workers expressed a need for training in the area of domestic violence whilst completing the survey, the following comments were made: "This survey has raised my own awareness of how unaware I am about domestic violence and would be grateful if this results in additional training." "Am very interested in gaining more info." "There is a great need for domestic violence training in Dubbo including all agencies that work with d/v and discussing all of these issues."

Domestic Violence

Most survey respondents had a good to excellent understanding of domestic violence with most mentioning three to five types of domestic violence. The term 'integrated response' was well known overall, but with a few respondents stating they had no knowledge of the term. Most respondents thought they had a role in domestic violence and were able to adequately describe this role, however, some workers answered that they had no role, among them some frontline domestic violence service providers. Some of the roles not covered by the survey, but listed by respondents were - educating/resourcing isolated workers; protection of victim; issuing complaints/summons; arresting offenders; educating community; support for men; safe changeover of children and provision of supervised access. Overall awareness of the roles and responsibilities of organisations in the field of domestic violence was fair to good, but this is one area where information is needed. Most respondents were able to name some local domestic violence agencies, but fewer were able to list the 24-hour services. This is another area which requires education.

Policies

Most respondents were aware of their organisations' domestic violence policies and protocols, but a sizeable number were not. This would suggest that either workers do not read organisation policies or that orientation is ad hoc. Most policies were written and some organisations and other organisations had generalised violent behaviour policies. Some organisations have been prompted to develop written domestic violence policies and protocols where none existed whilst workers were completing the surveys. Most respondents became aware of their organisation's policies at training,

orientation or at other times. Very few found out at their first domestic violence incident.

Most supervision and debriefing is ad hoc and informal where it is present, so part of awareness raising will be discussion around the merits of having formal staff supports such as debriefing, supervision and targeted staff development programmes. It is not widely known that to replace a worker costs an organisation approximately \$70,000.00, so the importance of staff support mechanisms as being cost effective and efficient use of resources cannot be emphasised enough.

Miscellaneous Observations and Interim Conclusions

Domestic violence is, for many service providers, an insurmountable problem. Early research shows that it is so commonplace that many think it happens so extensively as to be normal. Many cannot understand why a woman stays, tending to dismiss her as stupid and deserving of what she gets.

Community education that ADVOs need not necessarily lead to the break-up of a relationship is a high priority. Such awareness will lead to fewer withdrawals from proceedings.

Many Aboriginal people prefer the term 'family violence' and whilst it does describe violence found in all relationships included in legislation, many service providers - Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal - think it also spreads the responsibility for violence. During the Aboriginal fora, it became clear that many Aboriginal women have trouble with the word 'domestic' thinking it relates to animals.

Legislative changes are required in the following areas:

- Linking of interim residency and contact orders with ADVOs – contact with children is a major issue especially with Aboriginal families and causes much acrimony. It is one of the pivotal causes in the failure of some women to continue with ADVO proceedings.
- A change in Standard Operating Procedures and appropriate legislation to allow Aboriginal men to be taken to a safe place by the Aboriginal Liaison Officer to be “talked down” and to sober up where necessary (anecdotal

evidence suggests that use of alcohol is present in the great majority of domestic violence incidents in the Aboriginal community).

- Inclusion of the term “family violence” in legislation.