

### CLEARINGHOUSE NEWS

## Literature review on the establishment of domestic violence fatality review teams

*Julie Stewart, researcher with the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, provides an overview of a paper she recently authored.*

In late 2004 the Clearinghouse, on behalf of the New South Wales Attorney-General's Department, undertook to review available literature on domestic homicide review teams. The literature review covered a number of domestic violence-related death review teams in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. It also examined other death review processes, for example, child death reviews.

The literature review identified and analysed a range of models, processes, methods, protocols and legislation for the operation of domestic homicide review teams, which have been developing in the United States since the early 1990s: 71 county-based domestic homicide review teams were operating as at mid-2004.

Generally, domestic violence-related fatality review teams consist of representatives from law enforcement; health and welfare government agencies; lawyers, including the equivalent of our Directors of Public Prosecutions; the coroner's office; and a range of non-government sector services, including victim advocates and women's services. Typically the chair of the review team is a senior public official – for example, a judge, with well-resourced infrastructure support to facilitate the gathering of relevant information and dissemination for the purpose of the review. The process

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of information gathering is complex and legislation to enable the release of information (along with many other issues) has proven to be essential to ensure safeguards.

The commonly shared position of domestic homicide review teams is that they examine the features of, and events leading up to, the killing of an intimate partner or spouse and/or family members and/or suicide of the perpetrator, on a background of domestic violence; this includes the killing of a perpetrator of domestic violence by the victim in response to domestic violence; and the killing of a sexual rival by the perpetrator of domestic violence. The killings of 'collateral' victims (family members, friends and others who have assisted the primary victim of domestic violence) may also be the subject of review.

Overseas, domestic violence-related homicide review teams share the position that domestic homicides are preventable, given that risk factors are usually present prior to the ultimate response of homicide. The purpose of these review teams is to understand whether there were gaps or shortfalls in service delivery in response to any problems that had been presented to agencies prior to the homicidal event and thereby to learn from the experiences. Domestic homicide review teams focus attention on victims' contact with, and access to, intervention strategies and their effectiveness. Above all, these domestic homicide review teams are not about *blaming* service providers but are about understanding agencies' roles and constraints in order to move forward, for the improvement of service delivery and for effective risk assessment and management to prevent such killings in the future.

In Australia, in the fourteen-year period between 1989-1990 and 2002-2003, 38% of all homicides were domestic homicides (Mouzos & Segrave, 2004). This figure does not include collateral victims, sexual rivals or children who died due to neglect, abuse or maltreatment within the context of domestic violence.

Of these homicides, 1066 or 58% were intimate partner homicides – an average of 76 per year. 74% involved a male partner killing a female partner and 24% of all cases involved an indigenous victim or offender, or both, a staggering over-representation. In 25% of cases of intimate partner homicide the offender committed suicide and most of these were male offenders (22%). In the same period, 323 children (an average of 23

children each year) were killed within the context of domestic violence – that is, 18% of domestic homicides in Australia (Mouzos & Segrave, 2004).

At the time of writing, a number of jurisdictions were considering the establishment of domestic homicide review teams. Some preliminary work has been undertaken in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales.

For those jurisdictions in the process of establishing review teams, the literature review conducted as a part of this study was useful in demonstrating the need for a comprehensive package of legislation to address a number of issues and to amend legislation in relation to others. For example, prescription of terms of reference, powers, membership, host agency responsibilities and reporting arrangements; confidentiality; indemnity of members with immunity from liability or prosecution; current privacy and freedom of information legislation.

In the course of the literature review, the complexities arising from access to, and provision of, information to inform the review were identified. Maintaining confidentiality and security of information were found to be important concerns. As well, the literature review identified important ethical and legal dilemmas surrounding the selection of cases to be reviewed, so as not to prejudice or compromise investigative processes undertaken by police and the coroner.

Before a domestic violence-related death review is undertaken, a thorough consideration must be given to the sources of information required to be obtained concerning the antecedents to the homicide incident, including family, friends and acquaintances. The literature provided valuable guidance on the delicate issue of interviewing friends and family members for the sake of a thorough review of the death. However, this issue, and the merits or otherwise of this line of inquiry, are still open for further debate.

There is limited literature on the evaluation of domestic homicide review processes. However, it appeared from the available literature that, if such reviews were developed, established, and protected by legislation and resourced with great care and forethought, they would prove to be of great value – especially in relation to providing governments with insights into the realities of domestic violence, into the issues of access to

appropriate services and into methods to adequately assess the real risk, and to therefore save lives and spare families the horrendous levels of pain, suffering and terror they currently endure.

### Reference

Mouzos, J & Segrave, M., 2004, Homicide in Australia: 2002-2003 National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) annual report. Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

## Health services for domestic violence and sexual assault in the United States and Canada

*As part of a range of activities to acknowledge International Women's Day the Clearinghouse, in conjunction with the Centre for Gender-Related Violence Studies at the University of New South Wales, hosted a seminar with Jo Spangaro, NSW Health Manager of Child Protection and Violence Prevention. Jo received a Churchill Trust scholarship to study Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Programs and domestic violence responses, including routine screening programs and emergency department response in the United States and Canada during November 2004. The following is a summary of her presentation.*

In her investigations, Jo travelled to Chicago, Boston, Richmond, Baltimore, Memphis, Minneapolis, Seattle and Vancouver. While the service delivery context in the United States and Canada are very different to the Australian context she felt that there were some useful initiatives that could be applied within health services.

Research and implementation of routine screening for domestic violence within North America has been occurring since the early 1990s, with screening mechanisms now widespread within emergency departments as a requirement of hospital accreditation obligations. The success of implementation varied across the cities visited, with wide-ranging approaches taken to issues such as training and the development of protocols. This could explain the diverse incidence rates identified by the screening process: 22% of women presenting in emergency

departments in Baltimore as compared to 2% of women attending antenatal services in Vancouver. Workers reported to Jo that women were appreciative of being asked about violence and breaking the secrecy surrounding such violence was the key to enhancing their safety.

Research undertaken by Judith McFarlane, University of Texas, was highlighted in the presentation. 360 women identified violence during the screening process and 87% were then followed up by McFarlane 24 months later. She measured the differential effectiveness of two methods:

- Screening and a referral card OR
- Screening, a referral card and 4 X 20 minute case management sessions.

After 24 months results found that both groups reported significantly fewer threats of assault, fewer risks for homicide and fewer events of work harassment. There were no significant differences between the groups but compared to baseline data both groups adopted significantly more safety strategies. At the time of follow-up, usage of support services had declined. It was suggested that further exploration is required to account for this.

In addition to routine screening initiatives in health settings the practice of documenting strangulation injuries has also received attention. The motivation for this development is strongly grounded in evidence suggesting that women who experience strangulation are ten times more likely to be murdered. A more considered approach to documenting such injuries has been necessary as the majority of women who have been strangled during the domestic assault present to health services and police with no visible injury. Health provider observations concluded that serious complications can result from strangulation injuries and that these may result in consequences such as slow onset of airway obstruction and miscarriage. As a consequence, it was identified that during any domestic violence screening or risk assessment process, all women should be asked about whether they have been subjected to strangulation during the assault. When asked about strangulation, it was also found that women reported serious threats made by their partner concerning the safety of, and access to, their children and that they also reported threats that

they would not see their children again. Checklists and recording charts are being refined to assist in the documentation of soft tissue injuries that cannot be seen. In addition, women are encouraged to stay with supportive family or friends for 36 hours after discharge from hospital, as complications can often occur during this time.

A further area of interest was the criminal justice response to violence against women which included the Court House Watch program. This program consists of volunteers who attend the court to ensure that the justice system is responsive to the needs of women who have experienced violence. Volunteers undergo a two-day training program before they can participate in this program. A quarterly newsletter and annual report are published with a view to making the justice system (legal and court staff) more accountable.

Sexual assault initiatives were also a focus of the study tour. Health services in North America have a long history of using Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) to conduct forensic examinations when women have been sexually assaulted. Such initiatives were first introduced in the US in the 1970s and then followed by Canada in the 1990s. They were also introduced in the United Kingdom in 2002. Such services remain the predominant model of health care response at the time of presentation at hospital. The International Association of Forensic Nursing has developed standards and a certification process.

SANEs conduct all adult forensic examinations for sexual assault and are based in emergency department settings. Counselling for victims of sexual assault are provided by non-government and volunteer organisations. SANEs are required to undertake 40 hours face-to-face clinical practice as well as 10 forensic assessments (five examinations where they are an observer and five performed by themselves). To further contextualise their work and enhance their understanding of the legal process SANEs are also expected to conduct visits to key agencies and personnel in the criminal justice process, such as court, police and crime laboratories. SANEs routinely give evidence in court and are highly credible in managing the chain of evidence. SANEs are accepted by juries as expert witnesses and it would appear that prosecutors and police are supportive of their work. Their expert testimony is regarded highly and the high plea-bargain rates are evidence of this.

**For the final report on this study tour go to:**

[http://www.churchilltrust.com.au/public\\_html/03flwsrpts\\_s9.html](http://www.churchilltrust.com.au/public_html/03flwsrpts_s9.html)

## New Good Practice database entry – Safe Beds for Pets

*Maria Hole, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, reports on a recent addition to the Good Practice database that highlights the use of emerging research on the link between the abuse of women and threats of harm, and actual harm, to pets.*

The 'Safe Beds for Pets' program, operated by St George Hospital Domestic Violence Counselling Service and the RSPCA is providing safe housing for pets belonging to victims of domestic violence.

Last September, Belinda Cooley, Service Manager for the St. George Domestic Violence Counselling Service and Bernie Murphy, the CEO for the RSPCA NSW, signed an agreement to support women leaving domestic violence situations by providing a secure and affordable boarding service for their pets at the Society's Yagoona Shelter.

'Concern for the fate of the family pet is often a major reason why women and children delay leaving a domestic violence situation' said Jill Davidson, Director of Social Work at St. George Hospital.

RSPCA Chief Veterinarian Dr Mark Lawrie said the Safe Beds for Pets program will provide safe housing for pets of victims and will help stem the cycle of violence towards people. 'Pets rely on people for protection', he said. 'But because perpetrators of violence usually attack those most vulnerable or defenceless, they often target the family pet because they know it will add to the distress of their human victim.'

The service agreement sets out a clear pathway for women who need to seek accommodation for their pet. When women and children are referred to the St George Domestic Violence Counselling Service the assessment will now include a question relating to family pets and abuse. If the

client is planning to leave their current accommodation and they need safe housing for their pets – and if they have no options within their own network of family and friends – the clinician will provide a form to be completed, then faxed to the RSPCA. Arrangements for delivery and accommodation for the pet can then be organised between the client and the RSPCA.

This service is not limited to the St. George area, and can be accessed by other health and welfare agencies or counsellors through the St. George Domestic Violence Counselling Service.

As part of the project, the St George Domestic Violence Counselling Service has provided three separate training sessions for RSPCA inspectors, counter staff and veterinarians on the identification of, and response to, domestic violence and its links with animal cruelty. The training was well received. The Safe Beds for Pets Project was presented at the RSPCA NSW Shelter Managers' Conference in March 2005 and also at the Central Coast Connections Conference, Think About the Links: Violence, Abuse and Neglect, held in NSW in December 2004.

Between September 2004 and March 2005, six women in St George area have used the program. Women already in refuges have been able to collect their pet when threats have been made by the violent partner that he will not care for them. Other women needing to go to a refuge or to relocate completely have been able to do so.

Research in the USA, Canada and Australia shows that between 20% and 48% of women had delayed leaving a domestic violence situation because of fear for their pet's safety. An Australian study found that 44% of those abused women reported that their partner had killed or hurt pets and 52% of abusive partners had threatened to harm a pet.

For further information about the service agreement contact Lisa Annesley, Acting Service Manager, St George Domestic Violence Counselling Service on (02) 9597 2644.

### Further information

An opinion piece written by Nicholas R. Fawcett and Eleonora Gullone from the Department of Psychology Monash University, *'The relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence: implications for animal*

*welfare agencies and domestic violence organisations'*.

Judy Johnson, 'Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service' in the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Newsletter no 10, pp 4-7. This newsletter can be downloaded from the publications page on the Clearinghouse website.

## Staff changes at the Clearinghouse

It was with great sadness that the Clearinghouse farewelled Cristina Scott our Librarian who has worked at the Clearinghouse for the last three years. Cristina was instrumental in the development of the Legislation Database located within our State Resources page. She has been a very hardworking and committed member of the Clearinghouse team and we wish her well in her position with the National Centre in HIV Social Research.

### PRACTICE NOTES

## National strategy needed to eliminate violence against women: Amnesty International

*Diva Guash, Amnesty International Australia (AIA) highlights AIA's most recent campaign to improve responses to domestic violence within Australia.*

A new campaign aimed at securing widespread support for a national strategy to stamp out the scourge of violence against women has been launched by Amnesty International, as part of its global Stop Violence Against Women campaign.

The human rights organisation used the occasion of International Women's Day to call for women's organisations, other groups and individuals across Australia to unite in supporting a National Plan of Action (NPOA) to eliminate violence against women.

'In Australia, as in other parts of the world, there is a clear need for cohesive action to address the appalling levels of violence against women,' said

Kate Lappin, Amnesty International Australia's spokesperson on violence against women.

'This ongoing crisis is happening day in, day out in homes, offices and public places across Australia. The time has come for national leadership to address what is nothing short of a human rights scandal.'

Amnesty International has identified violence against women as a human rights abuse of the most serious kind, and has embarked on a six-year campaign – Stop Violence Against Women (SVAW) – to tackle the epidemic.

The campaign for a National Plan of Action seeks to emphasise the responsibility of all to stop violence against women – individuals, communities and governments across the world. It particularly aims to highlight the responsibility of governments to respect, protect, fulfil and promote the rights of women to live free from violence.

Governments, including the Australian Government, are obligated under international law to uphold these responsibilities and actively work towards achieving them.

A number of strategies, programs and services already exist to address violence against women at both the federal and state levels. A National Plan of Action would enable these existing programs to continue under a coordinated, strategic, and comprehensive strategy.

Amnesty International Australia launched its campaign for a NPoA, along with a petition addressed to the Senate, in Melbourne on

7 March, the eve of International Women's Day.

A diverse range of women attended, both from the community and the women's sector. Among them were the comedy performer Corinne Grant, Vanessa Swan from the National Association of Services against Sexual Violence, and Rhonda Cumberland, director of the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria (DVCS).

The speakers emphasised the prevalence of violence against women in Australia, and spoke of the need for more to be done by government at all levels to address this human rights scandal.

Launching the campaign, Kate Lappin said: 'Much has been done over the years, but the statistics demonstrate that the epidemic is still out of control. Recent research indicates that violence against women is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for women aged between 15- 44 years of age in Victoria (Vic Health 2004).

More than half of all Australian women experience sexual or physical violence throughout their lifetime, and one in three women who have been in relationships have experienced violence at the hands of a partner (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004).

The figure is even more alarming for indigenous women, who are 15 times more likely to die a violent death, and 10 times more likely to be hospitalised, than non-indigenous women.

Amnesty International Australia has recognised a need for national leadership on this important issue', said Kate Lappin.



*Participants attending the campaign launch calling for a National Plan of Action*

Vanessa Swan noted that although there have been national initiatives in place to work on the issue of violence against women in Australia, in recent years these initiatives have had a short-term lifespan, with a number scheduled to end in June this year.

This year, International Women's Day marked an important milestone – falling during the 10th anniversary year of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. During the conference, delegates from women's organisations and NGOs joined

with 189 governments to develop the Beijing Platform for Action, a global blueprint for the safeguarding of women's rights.

The Beijing Platform for Action sets out a program for governments and the community to address and prevent violence against women. One of the objectives it sets for government is to:

*Formulate and implement, at all appropriate levels, plans of action to eliminate violence against women [125(j)].*

A National Plan of Action would be a mechanism by which there could be an effective, coordinated response to violence against women in Australia.

It would also contribute to fulfilling Australia's international obligations under the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

A National Plan of Action is needed to ensure:

- all forms of violence against women are addressed;
- an integrated, consistent strategy across states;
- the needs of women from geographically isolated communities, indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, lesbian women, and women with disabilities are all addressed;
- a coherent, sustained approach to prevention that addresses underlying causes of violence like structural inequality; and
- adequate funding to combat the current levels of violence against women.

The NPOA should be a fully-funded and properly resourced nationwide strategy to address and end violence against women in all its forms. It should cover all relevant government departments and bodies, and be regularly and independently monitored and revised. Responsibility for implementation and reporting must be clearly located to ensure the plan is implemented faithfully.

While efforts to stop violence against women are being made in Australia, a 'whole of government' approach is needed. Amnesty International Australia believes that it is time to give this issue the national prominence, recognition and coordination it deserves.

### For further information

or if you are interested in supporting Amnesty International Australia's call for a National Plan of Action, go to:

[http://www.amnesty.org.au/whats\\_happening/stop\\_violence\\_against\\_women/home](http://www.amnesty.org.au/whats_happening/stop_violence_against_women/home)

or to sign AIA's online petition go to:  
[www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/NPOA](http://www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/NPOA)

## Staying Home Leaving Violence – Bega pilot

*Ludo McFerron provides an update on the development of the Staying Home Leaving Violence pilot outreach model located in the Bega Valley.*

One of three NSW pilots to support women and children who choose to stay home rather than leave because of family or domestic violence is being established in the Bega Valley, on the far south coast of NSW. These pilots were recommended in *Staying Home Leaving Violence*, the landmark study by Robyn Edwards on behalf of the Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse. Bega Women's Refuge is managing the SAAP-funded two-year pilot, which is now in the six-month establishment phase and, in April, will begin providing support to families throughout the Bega Valley. The response to the pilot has been unanimously positive. Comments such as 'This is commonsense', 'It's about time' and 'This is the just thing to do' are standard. The overwhelming feeling is that the time is right for women and children to be the ones who get to stay home.

While NSW is piloting, programs have been running successfully in Victoria, the ACT and SA for over three years. Drawing heavily from their experiences, the Bega Valley Pilot has found that there are a number of elements required for a successful outcome:

- a change in community attitude to who it is that is expected to leave the home, a change that in the Bega Valley will be assisted by an intensive community education campaign.
- a clear united community stand on the right of women and children to stay safely at home, built on a close working partnership between key agencies, formalised by written agreements.
- the extension of practical outreach support to women in their homes.

On 8th and 9th February Bega Women's Refuge hosted a Forum and a Dinner with guest speaker the local Magistrate, David Heilpern, on the issue of Staying Home Leaving Violence. Over 100 attended the two events, from across the south-east region of NSW and with guests from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. The success of the pilot will depend on close cooperation across a broad range of departments and services, and this was reflected in those who attended, with representatives from Housing, Police (including four Domestic Violence Liaison Officers and two Aboriginal Liaison Officers), a large Health contingent, DOCS, Bega Courthouse, Centrelink and a significant Corrective Services presence. Bega Valley Shire Council Councillors and staff attended as well as representatives of five women's refuges, ten community-based counselling services, Court assistance, the local childcare centre, the local women's centre, Aboriginal Medical service, ALS and CDEP. One feature of the events was the large indigenous presence.

The purpose of the Forum events was to share knowledge and experience about the possibility of staying home. Vanessa Kearney from the Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service in Melbourne gave a considered report on their program, which supports up to 60 women a year, protected by exclusion orders granted without fuss, and where financial sustainability rather than threats from the violent partner have a greater impact on staying home safely. Robyn Holder chairs the ACT Family Violence Intervention Program, a model of interagency programs, and workshopped the elements of good partnership building with the audience. Assistant Commissioner of NSW Police, and corporate spokesperson on domestic violence, Reg Mahoney, gave his unqualified support to the pilot, as did the local Magistrate, and the Mayor.

Robyn Edwards briefed the Forum on key findings of the research. Stephen Kelly from the Katungal Medical Service took an uncompromising position on the responsibility of indigenous men for their violence, and spelt out the devastating impact on indigenous children. This theme was continued by Melody Maher, a local working woman with four children who lost her home nine years ago. She described the ongoing damage done to her children even though they are now adults.

The last section of the Forum was spent in open discussion, with many practical aspects being

clarified such as the role of the Housing Department in providing temporary accommodation to the removed partner, or the recent policy change that makes available a Centrelink crisis payment to a partner leaving home as a result of their violent behaviour. That this crisis payment is not available to women staying home caused some outrage at the Forum, and advocacy will be required to remedy the anomaly that government pays people to leave home but not stay there. In the meantime, funding will cover costs such as security upgrades (phone alarms, changed locks and better lighting), the costs of transferring utility accounts or buying out bonds, but only for pilot clients.

Some heat was generated at the Forum over what happens to the men. A pressing issue for the Bega Valley community has been the lack of service options for the removed partners. This is a rural area with no crisis or medium-term accommodation for men (which in NSW is concentrated in metropolitan Sydney), no programs addressing violence and men, and limited counselling skills for working specifically with men and violence. There is local consensus that appropriate services for men would assist women to feel more positive about having their partner removed, particularly amongst the significant indigenous community. Interestingly this has not been such an issue in Victoria, which years ago began developing a funded network of anti-violence programs for men. NSW chose not to take this path, and we are now reaping some of the effects of that decision.

NSW lacks other programs and features which have helped make 'staying home' a real option in other states. Victoria has a state-wide domestic violence outreach program for women and children. The ACT has a concentrated administration in a contained geographical area. The initiatives in SA are being actively driven by the police force. The ability of the Bega Valley and the other NSW pilots to implement successful outcomes in these less conducive conditions will rely heavily on the political will of all the key players, locally, regionally and in Macquarie Street.

### Contact details

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# Are men and women equally violent? Understanding claim making

*By Stephen Fisher\*, Chisholm Institute of TAFE, Victoria*

*In December last year, local domestic violence committees in South West Sydney joined together to conduct a forum to tease out a variety of issues that were being raised within their community concerning men as victims. The committees' initiated the forum as a way to highlight and discuss the key issues, which include the acknowledgement of men as victims, establishing referral pathways and the importance of accurately reporting on research findings regarding prevalence. Stephen Fisher was one of nine panellists who participated on the day. The following are his thoughts on the issues raised by this contentious debate.*

*Are men equally violent?* This was the title of a well attended forum conducted by combined South Western Sydney local domestic violence committees one very hot day in Liverpool in November last year. In fact the 42-degree heat blast symbolically mirrored the contention surrounding claims made about men, women and interpersonal violence.

*'Are men equally victims of domestic violence?'* The actual forum title is so loaded it is at risk of tipping over. While the answer is easy – NO – the question itself requires deeper interrogation, because there is no rigorous or legitimate research to support such a claim. Consistently, crime victimisation studies typically find that domestic violence is serious, escalates over time, and is largely perpetrated by men (Kimmel 2002). While the complexity of human behaviour defies definitive generalisations there is a high degree of consensus among researchers that around 85% of intimate partner violence is committed against women (Dubin 2003). Recent research undertaken by Access Economics found that 87% of victims of domestic violence are women with 98% of perpetrators identified as men.

Australian research has investigated claims made about the mutuality of men and women's violence. Bagshaw and Chung (2000) undertook

a review of research findings about intimate partner violence and found that the nature and extent of such violence was different in the following ways:

- There is a far lower reporting rate of men as victims
- Violence against women perpetrated by men is more severe, and more likely to inflict severe injury
- Male victims of violence did not report living in an ongoing state of fear of their partner.

What is puzzling about claims made about violence against men is that, despite such evidence, claims continue to be made to the contrary. Indeed the community, media and some men's organisations respond in a variety of ways including challenging the research and asserting that men and women are equally violent.

One key source that is repeatedly cited to claim equality in violence is the work by Straus and Gelles (1986). This work measures partner violence using the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) f. Various researchers, including Flood (1999), and DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) find the CTS as a dubious methodology for measuring partner violence. Flood (1998) highlights that '...It leaves out important forms of violence, it treats violent acts out of context, and it depends only on reports either by the husband or wife despite poor interspousal reliability.' For example, there is no recognition of female violence as self-defence, and minor acts (such as breaking a teacup) are given equal weight to major aggression (such as breaking a rib). DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) argue that the CTS methodology ignores the seriousness of psychological forms of violence, does not recognise the gendered nature of intimate partner violence, and does not contextualise intimate partner abuse as an array of power and control tactics used in an ongoing fashion to intimidate and instil fear.

Other deliberate tactics are used to discredit or refute claims that men are not equally victims of domestic violence. One such tactic involves the strategy of polarising debate and then moving the centre ground to a position more favourable to the view that men and women are equally violent. Further still, protagonists are able to refute claims made about women as victims because they are aware of cases where women have assaulted their partner. In this case offering

a defence is very difficult because as soon as women start to refute the equality of domestic violence, the credibility of their claims are undermined.

In our attempts to move this issue forward in the future there is a need to understand the research and be wary of that which de-contextualises violence that men and women are subjected to. It is necessary to conduct further research that does use credible methodology and helps us to understand the nature of men's experiences. Importantly, discussions concerning men as victims should not be degraded by exponents wanting to compete about victimhood. There is a benefit for all by applying a pro-feminist male-positive stance.

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<http://www.vaw.umn.edu/documents/vawnet/ctscritique/ctscritique.html>

\* Stephen Fisher teaches community development to adult students at Chisholm Institute in Melbourne. He has been speaking, writing and teaching about men's issues for the past 15 years. He has a particular interest in issues related to men and violence and has recently conducted training on violence prevention for male professionals in Fiji and Vanuatu. Stephen also teaches a course in men, masculinity and gender relations at RMIT University. He is currently undertaking PhD research regarding teaching for gender equity.

The above article is an abridged version. For further reading on this issue go to:

<http://www.xyonline.net>

### For more information

The Combined Domestic Violence Committees of South West Sydney have released a DVD, which recorded the forum and includes Vox Populi segments from the audience.

Copies are available from:

Liverpool Women's Resource Centre

Ph: (02) 9607 7536

Cost: \$25.00 including GST.

## Domestic violence fatality reviews and the Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group, Queensland

*Betty Taylor, Gold Coast Domestic Violence Service appeals for the introduction of a Domestic Violence Death Review Team in Queensland.*

Tragically, domestic violence takes a significant toll in human lives each year in Queensland. In 1993, 19 adults and 9 children lost their lives as a result of domestic violence. Domestic homicides are not random acts and often follow a history of abuse and violence. Often many domestic homicides have predictive elements to them. Victims and/or perpetrators may have intersected with any number of agencies and systems prior to the homicide, with varying degrees of success.

The key to the prevention of domestic homicide is gaining a better understanding of patterns, prior indicators and gaps in current responses. Conducting fatality reviews is one way of gaining a better understanding of the nature and pattern of lethal domestic violence and abuse. A fatality review brings together representatives from various agencies: police, courts, coroner's office, community corrections, health, domestic violence services, shelters, perpetrator programs and child protection agencies and other professionals with relevant expertise.

This multi-disciplinary team conducts a detailed review of public records and other documentation regarding domestic violence related homicides in order to identify gaps in community responses to domestic violence and barriers to effective intervention. The purpose of the fatality review is not to assign blame but to create change. Information from fatality reviews combined with other sources of information (research, crime data etc) allows for the identification of patterns in domestic violence fatalities. Conducting fatality reviews also enables the team to identify gaps in services and accountability structures and formulate recommendations for policies, services and resources to fill those gaps. While many overseas countries have had fatality review boards/committees operating for sometime, there is now a move from states across Australia to adopt a similar process.

In Queensland, the **Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group** has been established to lobby the Queensland Government to establish a comprehensive process for domestic violence death reviews.

The Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group is seeking the support of the community in our lobbying and advocacy endeavours. On 9 June 2005 around 50-60 women gathered outside Queensland State Parliament to hand over the Domestic Violence Death Review Petition to the Member for Burleigh, the Hon. Christine Smith. The paper petition was signed by around 1450 people and the electronic version by about 500.

That domestic homicides occur is a shocking tragedy – that nothing changes is also a tragedy.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS/REVIEWS

### Pet abuse and domestic violence – Making Links: The cruelty connection?

*Dr Nik Taylor and Dr Tania Signal, from the School of Psychology and Sociology, Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, highlight research plans to further investigate the linkages between domestic violence and pet abuse.*

Recent research has shown numerous links between interpersonal violence, aggression and animal cruelty (eg Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). More specifically, research has shown that there is a link between domestic violence, child abuse and companion animal cruelty (Ascione & Arkow, 1999). Adams & Donovan (1996, p. 64) argue that there are a variety of connections between intimate violence and harm to companion animals – for example, the threat or actual killing of an animal to establish and/or maintain control which she calls 'the women-animal abuse connections'.

Furthermore, it has also been shown that companion animals may provide emotional comfort to both women and children during psychologically traumatic times and that women will often remain in violent and dangerous situations rather than leave their pet behind with their abuser (Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997). In the US, for example Ascione et al (1997) surveyed 38 women entering a refuge to escape violence and found that, of the 74% who had pets, 71% had experienced their partner either threatening to harm or actually harming their pet. In addition, Ascione (1998) and Flynn (2000) found that approximately one-fifth of women significantly delayed leaving their relationship and seeking a place in a shelter because of concern for their companion animal's health and welfare.

There has been much interest in this and related topics in Australia, and there are currently a number of projects which are addressing links between violence to humans and violence to animals within Australia (eg, RSPCA Qld 'Breaking the Cycle of Abuse' project). Researchers from the School of Psychology and Sociology at Central Queensland University would like to develop an understanding of the prevalence of, and links between, animal abuse

and domestic violence from the perspective of 'frontline' domestic violence service providers (in any capacity).

Here's your chance to have your say by contributing to research in this area.

The researchers will soon be mailing out a brief questionnaire to all domestic violence service providers asking for your experiences in this area. Your responses will be used to develop a deeper understanding of this topic and it is intended that findings will be published in newsletters and academic journals/conferences once the results have been analysed.

### For further information

Please contact Nik Taylor on ph: 07 4930 9433 or email: n.taylor@cqu.edu.au

Adams, C & Donovan, J (Eds.), 1996, *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explanations*, Durham & London, Duke University Press.

Ascione, F, 1998, *Battered women's reports of their partners and their children's cruelty to animals*, *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 1(1), 26.

Ascione, F & Arkow, P, 1999, *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention*, USA: Purdue University Press.

Ascione, F, Weber, C, & Wood, D, 1997, *The abuse of animals and domestic violence: A national survey of shelters for women who are battered*, *Society & Animals*, 5(3), 205-218.

Flynn, C, 2000, *Battered women and their animal companions: Symbolic interaction between human and non-human animals*, *Society & Animals*, 8(2), 99-127.

Lockwood, R., & Ascione, F. (Eds.), 1998, *Cruelty to Animals and Interpersonal Violence*, Indiana: Purdue University Press.

### New Issues Paper

Look out for our next Issues Paper No.10 – **Specialist Domestic/Family Violence Courts Within the Australian Context**

written by Julie Stewart, Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of New South Wales. We welcome your comments and feedback.

## Putting violence against women back into public policy – an update

*Mythiley Iyer, Dr. Lisa Bradley and Assoc. Prof. Kerry Brown, School of Management, Queensland University of Technology.*

Positioning violence against women as an issue of public policy significance at both federal and state levels of government is considered a key achievement of feminist activism in Australia. However, the nature of changes that have taken place in recent times in this policy arena is perceived by feminist activists as a signal that the policy attention given to this issue by government may be in decline. The weakening of this policy arena is considered by feminist commentators and researchers as mirroring the overall decline in women's policy development

In early 2002, the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Inc, in Queensland, together with the School of Management, Queensland University of Technology embarked on a research project to investigate the nature and cause of the decline in political attention given to violence against women as a public policy issue, and, the impact of this decline on future policy development.

There are two aspects of the study. The first is to determine the types of engagement with the state utilised by Violence Against Women proponents/advocates/workers. The study uses the notion of political opportunity structures which are the points of access, opportunities and constraints which social movements confront in making their claims to the state. Feminist researchers like Louise Chappell (2002), who studied the strategies chosen by Australian feminists and their Canadian counterparts, showed that activists shape their strategies in response to institutional opportunities and constraints with which they are confronted. Establishing women's policy machinery in government is an example of feminists increasing their access to government by *institutionalising* their interests and engagement with government.

The second focus has been to study the links between feminist activism and advocacy and the nature and conditions underpinning violence against women as public policy. Laurel Weldon (2002) undertook a comparative international

analysis of domestic violence policy and suggests that an autonomous women's movement working with government machinery is instrumental to the development of appropriate policy reform.

The research first undertook a comparative analysis of federal government violence against women policy documents. The study compared policy from 1988 to 1996 under a Labor government with Coalition government policy developed between 1997 to 2001. The research found that there were a number of differences. These included: fundamental shifts in the way violence against women was represented; strategies for responding to violence changed; there were changes to institutional arrangements; and the role of women in policy processes adapted as a consequence of the changing political environment.

These changes were found to match the effect of accelerating neo-liberalism combined with the rise of political and social conservatism.

This part of the research showed that the institutions developed and established in the 1980s to facilitate and enable engagement between feminist activists and their counterparts in government were no longer identified in later policy. Under a conservative government policy, institutional roles were confined to managing programs and information. Further, it was found that policy-making became the sole province of government and of elected officials. Women's organisations became direct service deliverers and informants to policy, rather than their previous role as policy advocates or decision-makers. This research found that the political opportunity structures confronting women's organisations between the two time periods could be construed as having shifted from facilitative to constrained.

The research also analysed submissions produced by Queensland women's organisations addressing policy reform and legislation during the same time periods. The most significant difference identified between the time periods related to representation of violence against women and the way in which women's organisations identified as policy agents. The findings showed that the language of women's organisations shifted from violence against women in the early period to domestic and/or family violence in the latter period. However, these organisations continued to maintain that the violence was caused by the abuse of power by men.

Significantly, women's organisations changed from identifying themselves as knowledgeable and as policy advocates in the earlier time period to being organisations with information to give to government in the latter time period. This change in approach is considered to reflect the political opportunity structures which are, at best, constrained.

The process of analysing documents provided some insights into the nature and conditions for engagement and link between feminist activists and government. In-depth interviews were conducted with women working in the role of public policy advocates in feminist violence against women agencies in Queensland. The aim was to learn more about political opportunity structures under conditions of ideological change. It appears that, while the political opportunity structures are constrained, feminists consider that there are new ways of articulating policy relating to violence against women.

Women identified that the opportunities had to be created and developed from within the sector itself. The sector had to be recognised as allies and an alliance based on feminist analysis of violence against women had to be built from the ground up. The advent of world-wide strategic alliances which have shown some measure of success in addressing trade and economic issues were identified as strategies that the violence against women sector must take up. Women felt that these strategies of building the back-blocks to activism would result in the ability of the sector to use instruments of the state to create institutional opportunities in which to advocate violence against women policy in the future.

Interviews with women working in government in positions relating to violence against women policy will also be conducted in the near future. The aim of the interviews will be to explore women's experiences and perspectives about the nature of relationship between government and feminist organisations, the conditions and relationships which may facilitate or constrain interaction, the nature of policy agency, their role in policy advocacy, and the conditions under which they have influence on policy development.

### For information

Contact Mythiley Iyer (Meeta) by email: [m2.iyer@qut.edu.au](mailto:m2.iyer@qut.edu.au) or ph 07 3864 9423

## NEW RESOURCES

## 101 Ways Great and Small to Prevent Family Violence: A Resource Kit

*The Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre highlight this Resource Kit, the first of its kind in Australia to provide a practical overview of community education plus prevention projects to address domestic and family violence.*

*101 Ways Great and Small to Prevent Family Violence* is a Victorian Resource kit bursting with community-based education projects to end family violence. Produced by Victoria's Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, with contributions from across Victoria, other states and overseas, the kit documents, for the very first time, the diversity of extraordinary and innovative community based education projects to end family violence from Melbourne to the Mallee, Gippsland to the Grampians. The projects, involving rural and metropolitan communities throughout Victoria, are as diverse as those communities themselves. They work with children, in schools, with men, women, survivors and through changing policy and law. National and international projects have also been included that have set benchmarks for diverse and effective approaches to this problem.

The kit is an Australian first. An extraordinary documentation of achievement, often by small organisations with very limited resources, the kit shows what has been done and how. Many of the projects included in the kit have won national and international awards for violence prevention.

### *The projects in the kit*

The 59 projects discussed in the kit range from award winning schools-based anti-violence projects, to an extraordinary quilt making project with survivors of family violence. There are projects that have worked with media; with the local police force to change procedure and policy; on a national and international level to change the law as it relates to family violence; and on painting a community bus in Warrnambool. A 70 metre scarf has been knitted by a rural community to make a united stand against family violence; partnerships have been

forged between schools, churches, local government and sporting clubs to prevent family violence, and a state-wide Western Australian campaign to change men's attitudes to family violence demonstrates lessons relevant in every state and internationally.

*'Eighteen months ago I walked out of a house where my children had seen me beaten and terrorised. Today they see me open new doors to new horizons every day and they see that I have a voice.'*

A participant in the Victorious Quilt Connection project, one of 59 projects featured in *101 Ways*.

### *The kit is an action resource*

Most of all, the kit is an action resource, drawing out the ways in which the projects work, the lessons learned along the way, resources, issues, and hot tips for those working in this area. It is a quick and easy source of facts and figures, and recent reports on family violence; contains fundamental family violence statistics and information principles for action; hot tips issues and lessons for everything from campaign messages for working with men to planning and evaluation; and over 10 pages of local, national and international web resources for those working to end family violence.

*101 Ways* will be useful to people working in community based organisations, health centres, community legal centres, health promotions, church groups, schools, and in government. It is a great resource for journalists.

*101 Ways* is a resource for action, inspiration and information.

### To order the kit

#### **COST:**

**Victoria:** Kit Free. Postage and handling \$10.

**Other States:** \$45 (incl. postage and handling)

To order from DVIRC please phone 03 9486 9866 or email: [dvirc@dvirc.org.au](mailto:dvirc@dvirc.org.au)

#### **Remember:**

If you have undertaken some work in addressing domestic violence that would be useful for others to know about, contact our **Good Practice** worker on **(02) 9385 2990**.

## PADV Resources to inform the development and integration of programs for men who use violence

*Recently the Office for Women, under their Partnerships Against Domestic Violence funding program, published a number of significant reports that make a worthy contribution to the field of practice concerning the development and integration of programs for men who use violence against their intimate partner.*

These reports can be ordered from the Office for Woman by completing an order form at: <http://www.nationalmailing.com.au/national-mailing/osw/>

### *A comparative assessment of good practice in programs for men who use violence against female partners*

This report outlines processes and practices in maintaining a quality program for men who are violent towards their female partners. Methodologies involved: literature reviews (including international programs, conceptual or theoretical approaches), program reviews (perpetrators of domestic violence, other offenders such as for sexual assault, drink driving and juvenile justice), a national survey of agencies with programs for men who use violence against female partners, and case studies. Stage 1 identifies good practice interventions. Stage 2 gives a comparative assessment of service components. Key findings and recommendations should be examined with the Continuum Matrix of Practice, which outlines good and unacceptable practices, and details aspects that do not promote the principles of *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*.

### *Development of competency based standards, to an advanced level, for practitioners working with men who use domestic violence and abuse*

This project identifies units of competency in the work of practitioners who provide interventions for people who use domestic violence, and develops materials to support their implementation. Methodologies involved: national consulta-

tions with training bodies; data from focus groups, critical incident interviews, consultations and a development workshop. Final draft competency units have been developed for practitioners working with heterosexual men who use domestic violence and abuse. Key findings and recommendations look at issues relating to practitioners' work, lack of services for specific groups, relationship between the field and the vocational education and training sector, training and assessment of worker competence, and parity between practitioners working with women and those working for men. Competency units include maintaining focus on the safety of women and children through to promoting accountability by men who have used violence and abuse.

### *A national review of integrated program for perpetrators of domestic violence*

*Research and Education Unit on Gendered Violence, School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia, Domestic Violence Clearinghouse.*

The project team from the Research and Education Unit on Gendered Violence within the School of Social Work and Social Policy at University of South Australia conducted a review of programs within Australia and reported on the structures, processes and practices that are critical to the successful implementation of programs accessed by men who use violence against their intimate partner. Of key importance to the research team was the prioritising of the safety of women and children and its influence in the development and delivery of such programs. During the project it was found that perpetrator programs differed greatly in content, length, structure, expertise, agency practice and service delivery context. A Continuum Matrix of Structures, Processes and Practices identifying unacceptable, minimum and optimal standards was developed as a consequence of this project and is outlined in detail in Section 6.

**! Please refer to our publications page for deadlines regarding contributions to the next Newsletter.**

- We will publish details on the website as soon as they are known. Brief, newsworthy contributions are invited.

## INTERNET SITES & DOCUMENTS

**WEAVIN** Is a web based project where you can raise awareness of your campaigns, gain information about other campaigns, network with other workers and get links to other sites, and obtain information and training on web skills. Submit your stories and experiences.

[www.weavin.org.au](http://www.weavin.org.au)

### *Intimate Partner Violence Risk Assessment*

Danger Assessment Tool Online

<http://www.dangerassessment.org/WebApplication1/secure/da/DAEnglish.pdf>

### *US Department of Justice – Office on Violence Against Women*

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/>

### *New E-Journal*

Family Violence Prevention and Health Practice: An E-journal of the Family Violence Prevention Fund

<http://endabuse.org/health/ejournal/>

## FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

**'Refocusing Women's Experiences of Violence': Examining the policies, protocols and procedures that support a woman's right to safety and security**

**Wednesday, 14 September 2005 –  
Friday, 16 September 2005**

**Bankstown Town Hall, Bankstown NSW**

Presented by the Combined Domestic Violence Liaison Committees of South Western Sydney, the conference will apply feminist theory and approaches to service delivery models responding to violence against women. We will build a dynamic picture of what service provision models work for a range of women, drawing on women's own experiences as well as from practitioners in the field. We will investigate effective preventative strategies at a local, national and international level.

A key goal of the conference is to promote best practice, identify gaps and be a catalyst for social action in responding to and preventing violence against women.

While the Conference has national relevance it will be underpinned by an examination of issues relevant to south-west Sydney. This means we will be looking at issues including cultural diversity, immigration, indigenous women, women with complex needs, and working-class women.

See the website below for more information on what is required for presentations.

Themes:

- Working with women from diverse communities
- Best practice principles in service delivery supporting women's and children's safety
- Partnerships
- Social Action
- Children and Domestic Violence
- Women with complex needs
- Women's Voices

Call for papers deadline: **Friday 24 June 2005**

### **For further information, contact:**

Bankstown Women's Health Centre

Email: [bwhc@swhs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:bwhc@swhs.nsw.gov.au)

Visit this website:

[http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/News/Refocusing\\_Call\\_for\\_Abstracts.pdf](http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/News/Refocusing_Call_for_Abstracts.pdf)

**!** **The Clearinghouse** is keen to ensure that workers are kept informed about activities that are occurring in each state and territory. Please email us with details about key events so this can be added to our **News** page on the website.

The views expressed in this Newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* Taskforce.

Whilst all reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of this publication, no liability is assumed for any errors or omissions.

The Clearinghouse is linked to the Centre for Gender-Related Violence Studies, based in the University of New South Wales School of Social Work.

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