

# *Dying to be Heard*

## Media Reporting on Domestic Violence



**An Information Resource  
for  
Journalists and other Media Professionals**

*Produced by Betty Taylor*

*For*

*Queensland Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group*

*July 2009*

## **Queensland Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group**

Established in 2004, the Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group has been working towards the establishment of a Queensland Domestic Violence Death Review Board. Work undertaken to date has included a public petition campaign, the development of community education resources, the development of a discussion paper *Dying To Be Heard* and this media resource.

DVDRAG membership is comprised of service providers with many years experience in the domestic violence field, members of the Murri community, academic researchers, lawyers, family members and individuals who are concerned that people continue to die from domestic violence when we know, in all probability, with enhanced system responses, some of these deaths could have been prevented. In the five years since the Domestic Violence Death Review Action Group was established there have been over 100 known homicides related to domestic and family violence in Queensland.

DVDRAG is also keenly aware of the important role the media plays in reporting on and informing the community on issues pertinent to domestic violence.

### **Funding Acknowledgement**

WESNET Inc has provided funding, through the Capacity Building Grants Program, for the development of "*Dying to be Heard: Media Reporting on Domestic Violence*".

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### **Acknowledgement:**

This Media Resource has drawn inspiration from *Covering Domestic Violence: Guide for Journalists & other Media Professionals* developed by the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2008

**Disclaimer:** This media resource has been developed as an information resource for media professionals. Any references to research and the law are in general terms and we believe the information is correct as at the date of publication. Any person with a legal question should obtain advice from a lawyer. The author, steering committee of DVDRAG and Women's Legal Service Inc. accepts no responsibility for any loss suffered by any person who uses or relies on the information contained in this media resource, or for any loss which may arise due to error or omission in the information.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Domestic violence remains a serious social problem which unfolds daily within homes and communities across Australia. The impact is devastating on those who experience such abuse, taking an exacting emotional and physical toll which in some instances can result in death. Almost one in three Australian women experience physical violence and almost one in five women experience sexual violence over their lifetime. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005) The financial burden of domestic violence to the Australian economy is estimated at \$13.6 billion dollars a year. (The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women & their Children, 2009)

In March 2009, Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, publicly released the report of The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. The report, *Time for Action*, outlines key issues relative to the prevention of violence against women and their children, noting the critical role the community plays in condoning values and attitudes which support abusive behaviours. In this regard, the media has an important role to play.

Domestic violence can be a difficult issue to investigate and report. However, media reporting of domestic violence can have a profound effect on public attitudes and tolerance to domestic violence.

In 2007, *New Idea Magazine* conducted a survey of readers to gauge their experiences of violence. The results were published in November 2007. 76% of female respondents to the survey stated they had been victims of violence with 80% of these women naming their partner as the perpetrator. Of those women who stated they had experienced violence, 70% said they had been physically attacked and 50% said they had been raped or molested.

Given the extent domestic violence continues within the community, this information kit has been developed to assist media professionals gain an understanding of the nature and dynamics of domestic violence and to assist with media coverage of domestic violence including homicides and other related deaths.

**Betty Taylor**

***"As a nation, the time has well and truly come to have a national conversation ... about how it could still be the case that in the year 2008, half a million Australian women could have experienced violence from their partner.... And the objective is to turn this terrible statistic around. And it is my gender, our gender, Australian men who are responsible"***

***Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Daily Telegraph 2008***

## **UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Domestic violence is a term used to describe a pattern of coercive tactics, including emotional, physical, sexual, social and/or economic abuse, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners to gain and maintain power and control over them. The controlling behaviours which underpin domestic violence are what keep many victims trapped and isolated. Domestic Violence is not a random individual event, but rather a pattern of repeated behaviors. Unlike stranger-to-stranger violence, in domestic violence the abuse or assaults are repeated to the same victim by the same perpetrator often over many years. These acts of abuse and violence which leave victims feeling fearful and unsafe may continue long after the relationship has ended. Family violence is a term used when the same abuse tactics are used against other family members.

**Forms of abuse may include<sup>1</sup>;**

***Emotional Abuse*** is used to describe any behaviour which undermines the victim's sense of confidence and security of person – mind games, put-down, name calling, insults, undermining, criticising in front of others. Emotional abuse may also include threats to harm the primary victim, their family, friends, work colleagues and pets.

***Physical Violence*** is a continuum of behaviours which can include slapping, shoving, biting and hitting through to serious assaults, strangulation, homicide and other abuse related deaths.

***Sexual Abuse*** in any coercive or unwanted sex or sexual acts and may range from forcing their partner to pose for pornographic photos through to rape. There may also be constant accusations of sexual infidelity and expectations of availability as a '*matter of right*'.

***Social Abuse*** is controlling through isolation, i.e. not allowing contact with friends or family, enforced moves away from family support, controlling social life and monitoring their partner's mail and telephone calls.

***Cultural / Spiritual*** forms of abuse include stopping someone from participating in spiritual or cultural practices or forcing them to participate in spiritual or cultural practices against their will.

***Economic Abuse*** is controlling the finances to control the victim, i.e. depriving them of adequate money to support themselves and or their children.

***Stalking Behaviour*** may include their partner/ex partner, staying outside their home or work or repeated unwanted telephoning or text messaging.

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<sup>1</sup> These are commonly documented forms of abuse in social science literature but are not necessarily legal definitions of domestic violence.

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Irrespective of the type and frequency of abuse, **fear** is often the dominant feature of domestic violence.

- Fear that the threats made against them will be acted on
- Fear for their children
- Fear of not being believed
- Fear of reprisals if they report to police or other agencies or if they try to leave
- Fear of what the future may hold

### **MORE THAN AN ARGUMENT**

Domestic violence is more than an argument or someone '*letting off steam*'. Arguments can be a part of any interpersonal relationship. However, they are mostly resolved without one party using violence, abuse, intimidation and threats. Domestic violence is not an argument that gets '*out of hand*' or an '*angry out-burst*'. It is a wide-ranging pattern of behaviours that are on-going and sustained. The power imbalance is ever present and is a clear indicator of an abusive relationship.

### **WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?**

Victims of domestic violence come from all socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, sexual orientation, geographic, educational, age and religious backgrounds.

Victims of domestic violence also come from every possible professional background and it is important to consider that some of your media colleagues may also have had their own experiences of domestic violence.

Predominately the victims of domestic violence are women, with the Australian Bureau of Statistic (2005) estimating that almost one in three Australian women experience physical violence over their lifetime. The Personal Safety Survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that men who were victims of violence were far more likely to have been assaulted by another male who was either an acquaintance or stranger. Domestic Violence affects women of all ages, occurring in teen relationship while some women continue to suffer abuse in their '*golden years*'.

Some men are also victims of domestic violence either by a male or female partner and it is important to consider this also but not in the context of promoting domestic violence as '*mutual combat*' or '*she gives as good as she gets*'. This type of analysis does not help and fails to address the underlying causes of violence. The context, motivations, and consequences of violence must be included in the investigation. Within interpersonal relationships, women are more likely to use violence to escape, to self-defend against violence, or to go down fighting but not as a means of power and control.

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### ◆ Indigenous Women

Many Indigenous women and men prefer the term family violence as a better explanation of the dynamics in which violence occurs within their families and communities. The term family violence encapsulates the extended nature of Indigenous families and gives context to the range of violent forms occurring between family and kinship members.

A fact sheet on Aboriginal Family Violence is downloadable at:  
<http://www.noviolence.com.au/public/factsheets/indigenousfactsheet.pdf>

Indigenous women are at greatest risk of homicide with the 2005 data from the Australian Institute of Criminology showing 11% of all female homicides were Indigenous women. This is disproportionately high to the Australian population demographic.

### ◆ Women from Immigrant Backgrounds

While domestic violence affects women from all social and cultural backgrounds, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are often further disadvantaged through language and cultural barriers. They may have no knowledge or information on support services and legal processes. They may fear deportation, contact with police and courts. It may be difficult for them to access help within their own communities. Access to culturally appropriate services and interpreters is important in supporting and assisting women from culturally diverse backgrounds.

### ◆ Gay & Lesbian Relationships

Domestic Violence in same sex relationships shares many of the same characteristics as abusive heterosexual relationships.

There are however a number of differing aspects which include:

- 'Outing' or threats of 'outing' as a form of control
- Abuse that is associated with 'sexuality'
- Impact of community attitudes
- Confidentiality and isolation within gay and lesbian communities
- Lack of community support services

Source: *Another Closet*: <http://ssdv.acon.org.au/information/uniqueaspects.php>

**Important:** While there are specific issues to be addressed when responding to diversity, it is important to remember that domestic violence crosses all lines of race, class, sexuality, ability, age and culture. These factors may influence the specific tactics an abuser uses in order to maintain power and control in the relationship. Blaming class, race sexuality, age, ability or culture when an abuser kills or injures their partner reinforces myths that some groups are more violent than others.

### ◆ Women with Disabilities

**Women With Disabilities Australia** has highlighted the intolerable nature of violence against women and girls with disabilities which encompasses a range of abusive behaviours that form an almost endless list of injustices and maltreatment. Women with disabilities are at greater risk of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as well as other forms of violence, such as institutional violence, chemical restraint, drug use, unwanted sterilisation, medical exploitation, humiliation and harassment. There are a wide range of factors that increase the '*vulnerability*' of women with disabilities to violence, including:

**Dependence on others** - many women with disabilities are in positions where they are reliant on others to provide care and support for a range of need. The imbalance of power and control built into care giving relationships supports overt and subtle violence against women with disabilities by those closest to them.

**Fear of disclosure** - many women with disabilities are not believed when they disclose their experiences of violence.

**Poverty & lack of economic independence** - economic disadvantage increases a woman with a disability susceptibility to entering and remaining in a violent relationship.

**Lack of education/lack of knowledge** - disabled women and girls are regularly deprived of the skills to recognise and address violence. Many disabled women who experience violence do not know that what is happening to them is wrong.

**Social isolation** - is a major contributor to powerlessness in the lives of women with disabilities. Disabled women who are socially isolated may not learn about available services and resources or their legal rights.

**Communication** - limits in communication and language skills may interact with social factors to predispose women with disabilities to violence.

**Lack of services & support** - the lack of appropriate, available, accessible and affordable services, programs and support contribute to the tendency for women with disabilities to be subjected to violence for significantly longer periods of time than non-disabled women.

*Further information on violence against women with a disability can be found at: Women With Disabilities Australia: [www.wwda.org.au/](http://www.wwda.org.au/)*



## **WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?**

Perpetrators of domestic violence come from a variety of backgrounds and are not confined to any particular social, educational, racial, religious or ethnic group.

*(Department of Communities, Stop Abuse & Violence, 2005)*

In Australia, it is estimated that 87% of victims of domestic violence are women and 98% of perpetrators are male. (Access Economics, 2004)

### **Some points to consider:**

**Public vs Private Personas:** Perpetrators of domestic violence are not always angry and hostile and can be agreeable, charming and kind, making it difficult for those around the victims to believe that this person can be so unpredictable and dangerous. The violence they inflict is often kept hidden behind closed doors. Often the public persona of respectability is what allows them to escape accountability for their behaviour and reinforce the victim's fears that no-one will believe her.

**Blaming:** Many perpetrators can also avoid taking responsibility for their behaviour by blaming their partner, accusing them of 'pushing buttons' or 'provoking' them. This allows them to divert attention from their behaviour to the actions of their victims. They may also blame other factors such as drugs, alcohol and stress.

**Not an Anger Problem:** There is a common belief that domestic violence is a result of poor impulse control or anger management problems. While some perpetrators may claim that they just 'snapped', the reality is that domestic violence is not only about physical violence but rather a pattern of behaviours used to reinforce the perpetrator's position of power within the relationship. Most perpetrators do not use violence outside the family – the abuse can be controlled to the point that some know where to hit so the bruises don't show.

***“Men’s violence is always chosen behaviour. Men’s violence to women is intentional and instrumental. It is strategic, deliberate, and purposeful. It gets him what he wants and that is a position of male dominance, privilege, and entitlement over women and children”.***

**Dr Brian Sullivan PhD.**

## **WHY DO THEY STAY?**

A commonly asked question is:

***“Why do victims stay in abusive relationships?”***  
or  
***“Why don’t they leave?”***

Even asking these questions can reinforce the myth that women can easily exit a violent relationship.

Victims of domestic violence do not leave their abusers for a variety of reasons. They may be subject to many constraints which can include;

**Fear:** A significant number of women murdered by their partners are either estranged, separated or in the process of leaving the relationship. They may fear harm to children, other family members or supportive friends. Many also fear that they will not be believed or taken seriously.

**Financial Barriers:** Leaving an abusive relationship can result in financial hardship associated with the lack of affordable housing, child care cost, re-location costs, limited employment opportunities and costs associated with protracted legal interventions.

**Social Reasons:** Many victims stay for religious and cultural, family or community pressures to keep a family together.

**Prior Inadequate Service Responses:** A victim’s prior negative experience with intervention agencies can have a profound effect on whether they will remain or return to an abusive partner. *“Women will make on average, contact with 5-12 agencies before getting the help they require”*. (Chung, Colley and Zannettino 2004)

**Concerns for the Future:** A victim may have concerns for what the future may hold including ongoing family law issues, life as a single parent, homelessness, financial security and many other stressful issues.

***“I had no way of getting out. I had no job, no money and nowhere to go”***

***“Having somewhere affordable and permanent to live had such a positive impact. It was the major factor in not returning to the situation.”***

**Victim’s comments from “Effective Integrated Approaches in the Delivery of Services and Responses to Women Experiencing Domestic Violence” PADV 2004**

## **LEAVING DOES NOT EQUAL SAFETY**

For many women the abuse does not stop once they have left the relationship. In 2005, 25% of women who had temporarily separated from a violent partner reported experiencing violence during the separation. (A.B.S.,2007).

Not all women choose to leave or are able to leave and many others will return to the relationship. (Nelson, G., & Spalding, K., 2009) There are many reasons why women may return to an abusive relationship including fear, threats, reprisals, family pressures and lack of community support.

Leaving an abusive relationship is best seen as a process rather than a single decision or act. Moving on from violence, make take many months or years in which victims gain support, strength and coping strategies. The impact on women's psychological and physical health can have long terms consequences with some experiencing depression and post traumatic stress. (Nelson, G., & Spalding, K., 2009). It is estimated that one in four women who suicide do so against a background of domestic violence.

*However, it is **important to note** that many women do leave their abusive partners and are able to rebuild their lives in safety for themselves and their children. While these positive stories of women's journey from abuse often don't make it into the media spotlight, they can be a powerful inspiration for those women who may be currently experiencing abuse.*

### **MYTHS AND FACTS**

The historical and social beliefs that have normalised and justified domestic violence have given rise to a number of myths about domestic violence. These myths can often be unwittingly perpetuated by media. Factual information can serve to dispel these myths.

1. **Myth:** Alcohol and drugs cause domestic violence.

**Fact:** Although many abusive partners also abuse alcohol and/or drugs, this is not the underlying cause of domestic violence.

2. **Myth:** It can't be that bad or she would leave.

**Fact:** Victims may stay in a relationship for many reasons including fear. Ending any relationship is difficult, leaving a relationship that is underpinned with violence, threats and domination can be very dangerous and poses risks that need to be considered.

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3. **Myth:** Many women provoke the violence.

**Fact:** There is no excuse for abuse. No-one deserves to be abused regardless of what they say or do. Many perpetrators minimise their behaviour and the effect their abuse has on their victims.

4. **Myth:** Domestic Violence is a private matter.

**Fact:** This myth ensures that domestic violence stays behind closed doors. The reality is that domestic violence is a *'public'* issue impacting on the entire community. It is critical for the media to ensure that domestic violence comes out from behind closed doors.

(Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research, 2007)

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILDREN

Children are not passive witnesses to the noise, tension and violence at home. In homes where domestic violence occurs, children are also at high risk of suffering physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Whether or not they are physically abused, children who witness domestic violence suffer significant emotional and psychological trauma said to be similar to that experienced by victims of child abuse.

A child may experience domestic violence at a number of levels.

- ***As direct victims of physical abuse or serious neglect***  
At least half of all abusive partners also abuse to their children.
- ***As "indirect" victims of physical injury***  
Older children are frequently assaulted when they intervene to defend or protect their mothers. A child may be hurt when struck by a weapon or thrown object. Infants can be hurt if being held by their mothers when the abuser strikes out.
- ***As victims of emotional and psychological trauma***  
Ninety percent of children present in homes where there is domestic abuse had witnessed the violence.

Source: *Domestic & Family Violence Information Booklet: It Does Happen*  
Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast:  
[www.domesticviolence.com.au/InformationDownloads.htm](http://www.domesticviolence.com.au/InformationDownloads.htm)

## **LEGAL INTERVENTIONS**

Many victims of domestic violence may intersect with the legal system on a variety of occasions with varying degrees of success.

The most commonly applied legal intervention in Queensland is the seeking of a civil protection order under the *Domestic & Family Violence Protection Act 1989*. During 05/06, there were 20,284 protection applications lodged with the Magistrates Court. Information on domestic violence protection applications and final orders can be accessed at: <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/department/ig/quarterly/q1/comsup/index.html>

### ***How effective are these orders in keeping women safe?***

For some victims, the conditions placed on an order can work to enhance their safety and sense of well being. For many others, orders can be breached on a regular basis with impunity. When a domestic violence protection order is breached, this constitutes a criminal offence if proven. The Queensland Police Service Statistical Review states there were 8283 reported breaches of Protection Orders during 2007/2008. <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/services/reportsPublications/statisticalReview/>

However, research undertaken by Professor Heather Douglas found “*prosecutions of breaches of protection orders often result in no conviction being recorded or in trivialising fines*”. The study undertaken by Douglas found that 42 percent of breach matters resulted in fines and in 40% of the cases examined no conviction was recorded. This compares with statistics for all criminal offending in Queensland from 1998-1999 where 5 percent of matters resulted in no conviction being recorded. (Douglas 2008)

This trivialising of domestic violence by the justice system can result in perpetrators continuing to minimise their behaviour and blame their partners for the violence. The system fails to hold them accountable for their behaviour and domestic violence continues to be seen as a ‘lesser crime’ that carries little or no consequences. There is room for significant improvement in criminal justice responses if we are to stop domestic violence.

### ***Family Law – A long way to go***

It is well recognized that ‘leaving’ a relationship does not mean ‘leaving’ violence and many of the deaths of women and children have occurred post separation. Laing (2000) points out the risks victims face at this time including the expectation that they will negotiate parenting and contact arrangements. There is a lack of recognition within Family Law of the impact of domestic violence on victims and their children and as a consequence how parenting arrangements can continue to leave women and their children unprotected from emotional psychological and physical abuse.

### SOME STATISTICS

Domestic violence often remains hidden behind closed doors and much of the abuse and violence that occurs there goes unreported.

It is important for the media to have access to reliable data on which to base their reporting. Listed here are some available data and the electronic sources where further information and additional data can be sought.

- **National Data**

Australian Personal Safety - Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005

The 2005 study found that since the age of 15, there were an estimated 3,065,800 (39.9%) women who experienced violence compared with 3,744,900 (50.1%) men. However the data highlights the gender differences in the experiences of violence.

- ... 29% (2,243,600) of women experienced physical assault compared to 41% (3,031,800) of men.
- ... Of those men who were physically assaulted, 65% (1,507,400) were assaulted by a male stranger.
- ... Men were more likely to be physically assaulted by a stranger in the most recent incident since the age of 15, whereas women were more often assaulted by a current and/or previous partner.
- ... 17% (1,293,100) of women experienced sexual assault compared to 4.8% (362,400) of men

Further Information: <http://www.abs.gov.au>

- **Homicide**

Society still has a perception that violence in the public arena poses the greatest risk and is often then reported by the media accordingly. However, data from the Australian Institute of Criminology indicates that people are most likely to be killed in the home by someone they know. Male intimate partners pose the greatest risk to females, whereas males are more likely to meet their death at the hands of a male friend or acquaintance. Between 2006 and 2007, there were 260 homicide incidents in Australia involving the deaths of 266 people. Of these 266 deaths, 185 were male and 81 were female. 75% of incidents involving female victims were classified as either intimate partner or family relationship whereas 75% of male homicide victims were killed by someone outside of the family.

Further Information: Australian Institute of Criminology – National Homicide Monitoring Program. <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/F/F/B/%7BFFB9E49F-160F-43FC-B98D-6BC510DC2AFD%7Dmr01.pdf>

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- **Other Domestic Violence Deaths**

**Important Note:** The current data does not account for others killed in domestic / family violence related incidents including new partners, friends, work colleagues or bystanders. Nor is there an accurate account of those who suicide against a background of domestic violence.

When considering domestic violence related deaths, they could include:

- All current known homicides which include those identified as intimate partner or family relationship. This may not necessarily include girlfriend /boyfriend relationships.
- Homicides involving death of others known to either or both the victim/perpetrator – e.g. new partners, friends, work colleagues.
- Homicide of persons unknown to either but who die as a direct result of a domestic violence incident e.g. police officers, bystanders.
- Suicide of perpetrators either as homicide/ suicide or suicide.
- Suicide of victims of domestic violence.
- ‘*Accidental*’ deaths of victims of domestic violence e.g. drowning, car accidents, falls, drug overdoses etc where there is a history of domestic violence.
- Natural deaths of victims which result from the long term effects of physical injuries e.g. depression, eating disorders, high blood pressure, reproductive injuries, stress related cancers and heart disease. It is estimated that in 2002-2003 there were 37,437 years of healthy life lost associated with female victims of domestic violence.
- *Access Economics, 2004 The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy: part 1*
- “Missing Persons”. There are currently 1600 people listed as a ‘missing person’ in Australia. It is unknown the extent to which a missing person may have a domestic violence related background.
- <http://www.missingpersons.gov.au>

Source: B.Taylor *Dying to Be Heard* 2008

- **Protection Order Applications**

During 2005 – 2006, there were 20,284 protection order applications made to the Magistrates Court under the *Domestic & Family Violence Protection Act 1989*. Of these, 12,667 were applications brought before the court by the Queensland Police Service.

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### **Further Information**

Information on domestic violence protection applications and final orders across Queensland including a breakdown of individual courts can be accessed at:  
<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/department/ig/quarterly/q1/comsup/index.html>

- **Breaches of Protection Orders**

The Queensland Police Service Statistical Review states there were 8283 reported breaches of Protection Orders during 2007/2008. Other Police crime data is non identifiable by relationship or as domestic violence specific.  
<http://www.police.qld.gov.au/services/reportsPublications/statisticalReview/>

- **Domestic Violence Related Contacts with Community Agencies**

Data summaries from the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research show that 29,605 new client matters were recorded by the Centre. These statistics only relate to the 29 participating services across the state that provides data to the centre.

### **Further Information**

<http://www.noviolence.com.au/>

Dvconnect - Queensland state-wide 24hr crisis telephone service  
During the 2006/2007 year there were a total of 53,101.

National SAAP data for 2006 -2007 shows that 96.4% of Queensland women whether single or with accompanying children accessing emergency accommodation were homeless as a result of domestic violence.  
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/hou/hpissndcar06-07qld/hpissndcar06-07qld.pdf>

***It is important for the community including media to advocate for the safety of victims of domestic violence at a systemic and legal level. Community workers, academic researchers and others seeking positive change, would welcome collaborative relationships with the media.***



## **MEDIA COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Domestic Violence is a complex and difficult issue for the community to understand. However, a large body of knowledge has been developed by specialists in the domestic violence field and by researchers who have studied patterns and trends over time. There are many agencies and individuals who can be contacted for an expert opinion on issues relative to domestic violence. Contact details are listed further in this resource.

Media refers to print, broadcast and web journalists who face the difficult task in reporting on what are often the most tragic of cases.

At times, various media have provided excellent in-depth coverage of domestic violence, often drawing on the experiences of both victims and professionals.

Examples include:

***“Stop the Violence” New Idea 2007***

A feature article which provided: results of a reader poll on violence against women, help in developing a safety plan and promotion of community resources.

***“Power to Control” Courier Mail 8/8/07***

A feature article covering the power and control issues behind domestic violence which included interviews with academic experts.

***“Honour & Betray” Gold Coast Lifestyle Magazine Dec/Jan09***

An in-depth look at domestic violence focusing on the death of a young pregnant woman

***“Changing Men” ABC Four Corners 25/2/08***

A television program focused on violent men and whether behaviour change is possible. The program followed three men over six months to see if voluntary men’s programs can change their behaviour.

***“An Unspeakable Crime” Courier Mail 2/9/06***

An in-depth look at domestic homicide and the toll it takes on survivors. The article also details the case for the establishment of domestic violence death reviews.

***“Behind These Doors?” The Weekend Australian Magazine June30 – July 1<sup>st</sup> 07***

An article specifically focused on domestic violence orders and what difference they may or may not make.

***“Murder of a Law” The Courier Mail 7/07***

An article specifically looking at the defence of provocation and the call to review legislation.

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The above examples are only a snapshot of feature articles that have reported domestic violence in depth and allowed for a more comprehensive coverage and opportunity to gain expert comment.

In-depth coverage is often not possible when covering “news stories” of domestic violence. It is often homicide, rape or serious assaults which make it into the ‘news’. The media doesn’t report on or even hear about the vast majority of domestic violence that occurs. How the media reports domestic violence can have a profound effect on how society responds. Media views both reflect and shape public attitudes and these can either stimulate or stymie policies that might remedy domestic violence.

***“How women's deaths are reported is critical to the communities' understanding of the seriousness and lethality of domestic violence. In the dynamics of a violent, abusive relationship which culminates in murder- it does not happen out of the blue, nor is the result of a “brain snap”. The words you choose will either challenge a stereotype or reinforce it.”***

**Betty Green**

**NSW Domestic Violence Coalition**

### ◆ Context

Rarely are incidents of domestic violence ‘one-off unexplainable events’. The reported incidents of violence or other crimes including homicide and intimate partner sexual assault are often part of a larger pattern of controlling and coercive behaviours which may have been ongoing for some time. Exploring the history of abuse when reporting, can help to contextualise the story into the patterns of abuse which are ongoing, sustained and at times heightened.

Domestic violence homicides / suicides and other violent crimes are not inexplicable, unpredictable tragedies. In most cases, there has been a pattern of abusive

***“The portrayal of sex crimes in the media as stranger rape, distorts public perception and societal attitudes. Where rape has been committed by an intimate partner, it must be viewed through the lens of domestic violence in order to provide context and represent the reality”.***

**Di Macleod Director Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc.**

behaviours and risk indicators present prior to the incident. Often the community seeks to find an explanation for this behaviour by attempting to determine whether the perpetrator is ‘mad’ meaning are they mentally unbalanced, ‘sad’ meaning the relationship has ended and their partner has left or they were ‘bad’ meaning they had prior criminal histories. The context of domestic violence can be overlooked in mainstream discourse and the media can then further reinforce this.

***“ Brother tells court of murdered woman’s fear”***

***The Gold Coast Bulletin 29/11/06***

***“The last time Gold Coaster, xxxx saw his sister alive was when he changed the locks at her house in a bid to protect her from the man accused of her murder”***

This article puts into context the fear the woman had been experiencing prior to her death.

Even when there is ‘no reported history of domestic violence’, this does not necessarily mean the relationship has been free from abuse. It could indicate that the abuse has remained hidden until the current incident has forced it into the public spotlight.

### ◆ Naming The Behaviour

Many perpetrators of domestic violence will ‘*profess*’ they love their partners and may genuinely believe they do so. However, assault, murder, rape, beltings, kidnapping, smashing valued property etc, is not love. Such messages may convey that for most of the relationship he was a ‘*loving*’ person’ who had an unexplainable ‘*brain snap*’. Often the abuse is intentional, planned and sustained. This behaviour needs to be named for what it is.

Distorted notions of ‘*love*’ common in popular culture can result in some victims of abuse confusing jealousy and possessiveness as ‘*love*’. The controlling behaviours which can accompany jealousy can include stalking, constant phoning and monitoring, taking over decision making including deciding what clothes she can wear, where she can go, contact with friends and family and other obsessive actions which leave victims confused and vulnerable. The professions of ‘*love*’ by perpetrators can also mean that it is often hard for other family members, friends, work colleagues and others to believe that the ‘*caring and loving*’ person they know could also be someone who terrorises his family.

***“He loved his wife to death” The Gold Coast Bulletin 18<sup>th</sup> May 2000***

***xxxxx is described as a ‘gentle loving’ man who pleaded guilty of killing his wife by a hammer blow to the head. The judge said there was “ample” evidence the killing was pre-mediated and intentional”***

Naming behaviours can assist in dispelling myths associated with distorted beliefs about love.

### ◆ Avoid Victim Blaming

Victims of domestic violence are not responsible for the violence and abuse perpetrated against them. Questions which focus on the victim's behaviour i.e. "*what did she do to start the argument?*" or "*why did she stay?*", can shift the focus from the perpetrator and gives the victim the message that they are mutually responsible for what has happened to them and that no-one understands their situation. Domestic Violence is not '*mutual combat*' or a case of '*she gives as good as she gets*'.

The message should always be:

***"There is No Excuse For Abuse"***

The focus should be on the behaviour of the perpetrator and how the community can hold them accountable for their behaviour. Viewing victims as co-responsible leaves them unsupported and further isolated.

### ◆ Not A " Relationship Problem"

Domestic Violence is not '*conflict*' between two equal intimate partners. Statements which describe an abusive relationship as a "*violent relationship*" or "*domestic dispute*" masks the reality that one person is being abusive to another. Similarly this also gives the message that victims are mutually responsible and not worthy of help. A death of a woman in north Queensland in 2006 promoted the headlines:

***"Lethal Love Triangle" Courier Mail November 2006, online***

***"Deadly Love Triangle Claims Two Lives" [www.news.com.au](http://www.news.com.au) Nov. 2006***

Further reading of the above articles informs the reader that the perpetrator of the homicide is described as an ex-boyfriend and the relationship ended 6 to 8 weeks prior to the deaths. There was no triangle. Ending a relationship should not carry a death sentence either for the victim of domestic violence or any new partners.

Many domestic violence related deaths can be seen as the ultimate act of power and control whereby perpetrators decide to kill rather than see their partners leave and move on.

### ◆ Inappropriate or Incongruent Headings

At times, the heading of a media story on domestic violence may be either inappropriate or incongruent to the remainder of the article. Sometimes a well written article can be marred by the by-line. Members of the general public who don't necessarily read the entire article but have their attention captured by the heading or by-line can be left with an inappropriate or inaccurate message.

***“Disordered mind led to wife murder”  
The Gold Coast Bulletin 7<sup>th</sup> August  
2000***

***“xxxxx murdered his wife in a  
ferocious attack inflicting between  
200 and 300 blows”. The NSW  
Supreme Court was told that xxxxx  
had a history of ‘bashing his wife’  
which included her hospitalisation  
for injuries. The judge commented “  
that except for the attacks on his  
wife, he (the offender) had been a  
man of entirely estimable character.”***

### ◆ Warning Signs Of Abuse

Domestic violence homicides have been described as the most preventable of all homicides. Often there are many warning signs present prior to a death, serious assault or homicide.

These warning signs can include

- An escalation of violence
- Any attempted strangulation
- Stalking
- Jealousy or any obsessive/possessive behaviour
- Prior threats of homicide/suicide
- Increasing isolation
- Violence to children
- Rage towards police and others
- Pending or actual separation

Acknowledgement of these warning signs within media reports can ring alarm bells for victims and supportive family, friends and work colleagues. In doing this the media can improve the safety of victims by assisting them to develop safety plans for themselves and their children which may include applying for a protection order or accessing safe accommodation. Broader awareness of the risk indicators of domestic violence may also prompt positive action by policy makers.

Identifying prior risk factors has become a significant task of domestic violence death reviews. A Domestic Violence Death Review is a process of examination carried out

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by a multi-disciplinary board to examine a number of deaths over a defined period of time looking for common traits, trends and missed opportunities for intervention. The identification of patterns or trends or traits can then assist with the development of improved responses to domestic and family violence.

Websdale(2003) likens the domestic violence death review process to the examination of the 'black box' following an air crash. Following such events, the airline industry responds by conducting reviews to find ways to prevent future crashes. Such investigations may be expensive, sophisticated and systematic but carry many benefits, not the least of which are the specific precautions that are subsequently introduced to prevent similar crashes from occurring. Websdale suggests that domestic and family violence also claims a significant number of lives each year, and raises the question of why comparable amounts of time, money, and expertise are not applied to investigating the causes of domestic violence deaths.

Most intimate partner homicides are stylized killings that exhibit common patterns and antecedents. Although they share many of the characteristics of abuse cases that do not result in death, many of the cases that do end in death may be preventable.

The following article highlights the risks and both names and describes the behaviour and associated risks.

***“ She Feared For Her Life” The Courier Mail 31/1/07***

**The sub heading is *“ Gouged eyes, bruised arms, legs and hips, cut toe, swollen eyelid, scratched throat, punched head”*.**

### **◆ When Systems Don't Work**

Victims of domestic violence rely on various aspects of established systems to keep themselves and their children safe and adequately supported. This can include their interactions with police, courts including family court, child protection, health services, probation and parole, housing, income support and community services. When reporting on domestic violence, it is important to remember there are many women in the community trapped in domestic violence who may read your article and draw conclusions from it. Reporting on how systems can let victims down can have an unintended consequence of increasing the risks victims may experience.

By balancing the report, highlighting the problems that need addressing, but also saying in many cases, protection orders do work for many victims and that community agencies can offer a lifeline, mitigates against unsafe messages being received. This gives women some hope that it is possible to live free from fear.

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The importance of the media's role in highlighting and pushing for effective change cannot be underestimated. Whilst individuals and workers in the community sector experience those needs first hand and advocate for change, the media is able to gain the attention of the broader community and government.

Although the community understands the dangers of war and terrorism, they may not equate this with what happens in people's lives behind closed doors. There are women and children in particular who are living in what can only be described as a warlike situation. When women manage to escape this nightmare, they can then find themselves caught up in a situation where they are handing the children over to the same perpetrator to co-parent. The media can and does play a role in bringing into the public spotlight the effectiveness of service systems, government policies and legislation as well as identified gaps and trends.

Some examples of how media have done this include:

***“ Murder of a Law” The Courier Mail 7/07***

An article specifically looking at the defence of provocation and the call to review legislation.

***Victim's family call for justice” The Gold Coast Sun 4/6/08***

An article which looks at the sentencing handed down on repeat breaches of a domestic violence order.

***“ Betrayed by the System” The Sunday Mail 24/5/09***

This report highlights a research undertaken by Professor Heather Douglas into breaches of protection orders.

***“ Read this if you are game” Gold Coast Weekend Bulletin, 27&28/5/06***

Report on the Mental Health Systems with specific regard to a woman who was “*strangled by her de-facto husband*”.

Governments today are often responsive to media and ‘bad publicity’ about existing policies and systems failure.

### **◆ Promote Community Supports**

Media promoting of domestic violence support and crisis services can have far reaching benefits to the community, giving vital information to not only those who experience abuse but to relatives, friends, neighbours and others who may be currently supporting someone they know.

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*"Media reporting on what others in the community can do to help women in domestic violence can be very effective as many people, whether friends, neighbours or the local school don't often know how best to respond".*

Pam Godsell, Women's Legal Service

There are a range of services which can offer assistance including a 24 hr 7 day telephone service, funded women's shelters, counselling and advocacy services, children's counselling, court support for both men and women and behaviour change programs for men who use violence.

The funded Queensland state-wide service which provides links to other agencies is Dvconnect whose contact details are:

- **Women's Line:** 24hr crisis response on **Ph:1800 811811**
- **Men's Line:** Counselling for men – 7 days – 7am – midnight **Ph:1800 600636**
- **Sexual Assault Line:** **Ph: 1800 010120**

*"Media reporting of domestic violence can raise the issue of domestic violence within the community and this in turn can prompt many victims of abuse to consider their situation and safety and take the first steps in seeking help. It can also prompt perpetrators of violence to call Mensline for help with their behaviour. The promotion of community services within media stories is important to facilitate this."*

Diane Mangan, CEO DV Connect

### ◆ Reporting Guidelines

The International Federation of Journalists has developed guidelines for reporting on violence against women.

Key points in the document include:

- Accurately identifying violence against women through internationally accepted definitions.
- Use of non-judgemental language.
- Avoid labelling those who experience violence.



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- Ensuring media contact meets the need of the survivors.
- Treat survivors with respect.
- Use statistics and social background information.

Source: IFJ [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org)

### **◆ Positive & Pro-Active**

There are many examples where various media organisations have engaged in bringing domestic violence to the public's attention in a positive and pro-active manner with specialist stories and feature articles.

We acknowledge the work undertaken by the media to-date and recognise the valuable role that the media plays in ensuring that the crimes of domestic violence don't remain hidden behind closed doors.

Future opportunities for positive and proactive media promotion include:

- ◆ Domestic Violence Prevention Month: annually in May
- ◆ Sexual Violence Awareness Month: annually in October
- ◆ National Domestic Violence Remembrance Day: annually 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday in May
- ◆ White Ribbon Day: annually 25<sup>th</sup> November
- ◆ 16 days of activism against gender violence: 25<sup>th</sup> November to 10<sup>th</sup> December
- ◆ Child Protection Week: annually 1<sup>st</sup> week in September

***Media & Community  
working together to  
create safer communities.***

## **Dying to be Heard: Media Reporting on Domestic Violence**

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### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MEDIA CONTACTS**

The following organisations are able to provide expert comment to media.

#### **State Wide**

##### **Women's Legal Service**

Ph: 07) 3392 0670

Email: [admin@wlsq.org.au](mailto:admin@wlsq.org.au)

Website: [www.wlsq.org.au/](http://www.wlsq.org.au/)

##### **Dvconnect**

24 hr Domestic Violence Assistance for Victims

Mensline - Free counselling and referral service for men

Ph: 07) 30088294

Email: [mail@dvconnect.org](mailto:mail@dvconnect.org)

Website: [www.dvconnect.org](http://www.dvconnect.org)

##### **Queensland Centre for Domestic & Family Violence Research**

Ph: 07) 49497834

Email: [enquiries@noviolence.com.au](mailto:enquiries@noviolence.com.au)

Website: [www.noviolence.com.au](http://www.noviolence.com.au)

##### **Immigrant Women's Support Service**

Ph: 07) 38463490

Website: [www.iwss.org.au](http://www.iwss.org.au)

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#### **Regional Contacts**

- **Gold Coast**

Gold Coast Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Inc.

Ph: 07) 5591422

Email: [info@domesticviolence.com.au](mailto:info@domesticviolence.com.au)

Website: [www.domesticviolence.com.au](http://www.domesticviolence.com.au)

- **North Queensland – Townsville – Mt Isa**

North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service

Ph: (07) 4721 2888

Email: [nqdvrs@nqdvrs.org.au](mailto:nqdvrs@nqdvrs.org.au)

Website: [www.nqdvrs.org.au](http://www.nqdvrs.org.au)

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- **Cairns**

Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service  
Tel: (07) 4033 6100  
Email: [manager@DVCAIRNS.ORG](mailto:manager@DVCAIRNS.ORG)  
Website: [www.dvcairns.org](http://www.dvcairns.org)

- **Roma**

Domestic Violence Service (Far South West)  
Ph: (07) 4622 5230  
Email: [dvs@romanc.org](mailto:dvs@romanc.org)

- **Ipswich**

Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic Violence Inc.  
Ph: (07) 38163000  
Email: [manager@iwcadv.org.au](mailto:manager@iwcadv.org.au)  
Website: [www.iwcadv.org.au](http://www.iwcadv.org.au)

- **Sunshine Coast**

SCOPE Domestic and Family Violence Service  
Ph: 07) 5430 9300  
Email: [jdunstan@centacarebrisbane.net.au](mailto:jdunstan@centacarebrisbane.net.au)  
Website: [www.scopedv.org](http://www.scopedv.org)

- **Caboolture**

Caboolture Regional Domestic Violence Service  
Ph: 07) 54989533  
Email: [infor@crdvs.org.au](mailto:infor@crdvs.org.au)  
Website: [www.crdvs.org.au](http://www.crdvs.org.au)

## **Organisations or Individuals able to comment on specific issues**

### **Sexual Violence**

Gold Coast Centre Against Sexual Violence  
Ph: 07) 5591164  
Email:  
Website: [www.stopsexualviolence.com](http://www.stopsexualviolence.com)

### **Men & Violence**

Dr Brian Sullivan  
Director  
TAVAN Institute - *Training Against Violence Abuse & Neglect*  
Ph 0402 538 158  
Website: [www.tavan.com.au](http://www.tavan.com.au)

## **RESOURCES & USEFUL LINKS**

### **➤ National**

#### **WESNET – Women’s Services Network**

<http://www.wesnet.org.au/>

Publications and Information – Events - Policy

#### **Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse**

<http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au>

Information – Research - Best Practice Programs - Policy

#### **Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault**

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/>

Information

Research

#### **Another Closet: Domestic Violence in Gay and Lesbian Relationships**

<http://ssdv.acon.org.au/information/uniqueaspects.php>

Information and referral

#### **Australian Institute of Criminology**

[http://www.aic.gov.au /](http://www.aic.gov.au/)

Research and Statistical Data – Reports - Conference Papers

#### **Australian Institute of Family Studies**

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/>

Research - Information - Journal – Family Matters

#### **Australian Federal Police – Missing Persons**

<http://www.missingpersons.gov.au/missing-persons/profiles.aspx>

#### **Office for Women Canberra**

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np\\_time\\_for\\_action/immediate\\_government\\_actions/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np_time_for_action/immediate_government_actions/Pages/default.aspx)

Report - National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

Report- Economic Cost of Violence Against Women and their Children 2009

Policy and Funding

#### **White Ribbon Campaign**

<http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au/>

Information

#### **Family Court of Australia**

<http://www.familycourt.gov.au/>

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### ➤ **Queensland**

#### **Queensland Centre for Domestic & Family Violence Research**

[www.noviolence.com.au](http://www.noviolence.com.au)

Statistical information

Downloadable Fact Sheets

Information on Indigenous Family Violence  
Research

#### **Dvconnect**

[www.dvconnect.org](http://www.dvconnect.org)

24 hr Domestic Violence Assistance for Victims

Ph: 1800 811811

#### **Mensline**

Free counselling and referral service for men

Ph: 1800 600636

#### **Women's Legal Service**

<http://www.wlsq.org.au/>

#### **Department of Communities**

<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/violenceprevention/>

Domestic Violence Information

Legislation

Programs

Funding

Policy

Information Gateway – Information on Protection Orders

[www.communities.qld.gov.au/department/ig/quarterly/q1/comsup/index.html](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/department/ig/quarterly/q1/comsup/index.html)

#### **Queensland Police Service – Statistical Review**

<http://www.police.qld.gov.au/services/reportsPublications/statisticalReview/>

#### **Elder Abuse Prevention Unit**

<http://www.eapu.com.au/>

#### **Office of the State Coroner**

<http://www.courts.qld.gov.au>

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### **➤ International Resources**

#### **Domestic Abuse Intervention Project – Duluth Minnesota USA**

[www.duluth-model.org](http://www.duluth-model.org)

On Line Resources

Training

#### **Centre for Children & Families in the Justice System - London Ontario Canada**

[www.lfcc.on.ca](http://www.lfcc.on.ca)

Publications

Journals

Research

Training

#### **Center for Court Innovation – New York**

[www.courtinnovation.org](http://www.courtinnovation.org)

Information on a variety of innovative court responses

#### **Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence**

[www.caepv.org](http://www.caepv.org)

Information on workplace responses to domestic violence

#### **Family Violence Prevention Fund**

[www.endabuse.org](http://www.endabuse.org)

Information on all forms of abuse

Resources

Publications

#### **Family Justice Centre Alliance**

[www.familyjusticecenter.org](http://www.familyjusticecenter.org)

Information on Family Justice Centres

#### **National Domestic Violence Fatality Review Initiative**

Located at Baylor University Texas

[www.ndvfri.org/index.php?id=37945](http://www.ndvfri.org/index.php?id=37945)

Information on domestic violence death reviews

Research

Publications

Protocols and tools

#### **UK Home Office – Domestic Violence Mini Site**

[www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/dv/dv01.htm](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/dv/dv01.htm)

Information

Research

Publications and Resources

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