> woman who applied for the job as a sexual assault counsellor talked about her experience of sexual assault. And the other members on the panel, went: 'Ooh, gee, we have a bit of a problem about boundaries here, and we have to think about that'. And it's just a really interesting sort of process – there is a huge challenge for us I think in dealing with it. And somehow I think the original sort of philosophy around women's refuges, and the workers in refuges coming from the experience of violence themselves was a very powerful thing that we seemed to have moved away from."

The establishment of this contemporary divide between workers and victim/survivors was also highlighted by Linda Osmundson in a very different context. She spoke of how a refuge worker herself had been a victim of significant physical and other abuses by her partner and on one occasion was nearly killed by him. The worker subsequently moved into the women's refuge. Almost immediately this prompted other staff to question the way the refuge was run, particularly the rules that are imposed on women (whom Linda said were sometimes referred to as "inmates") when they are escaping violence, now that their colleague was a resident. The "refuge rules", she argued, in many ways had come to replicate the power structures within society that disempowered women and further regulated their lives. The workers subsequently reviewed the "rules" sparking greater attention being given to the issue of how the women's movement more generally was moving away from a practice-driven approach that relied heavily on women's first hand experiences, both individually and collectively, in structuring their services, and in advocating for systems to change the way they understand and respond to violence against women.

The debate around "who's the expert" and what counts as "expertise" was very much at the forefront of many of the discussions that took place both formally and informally at the conference. The next section draws further on some of these issues.

HOME TRUTH FOUR

Specialist sexual assault and domestic violence services are in danger of being diminished due to mainstreaming

The fourth "Home Truth" theme raised by conference delegates concerned the extent to which "mainstreaming" was increasingly jeopardising the quality of services delivered to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Two different types of mainstreaming were discussed: the shift away from a gendered analysis of anti-violence work; and mainstreaming through the professionalising of the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors.

The shift away from a gendered analysis of anti-violence work

First, delegates identified the mainstreaming of service responses as a move away from using gendered or feminist analyses to inform the frameworks that were specifically designed to meet the needs of (mainly women) victims of male violence. A feminist or gendered approach to anti-violence work is one that primarily sees violence as the outcome of a society that is structured around unequal power relations between men and women. Feminist inspired approaches were concerned with challenging traditional systems' responses that tended to blame victims for their own abuse or to minimise the harm caused by perpetrators. Calls

for reform based on this analysis led to changes both within the law and in how police, doctors and support services would be expected to respond to women who reported violence. The use of a feminist or gendered approach resulted in greater attention being given to strategies that might increase victims' willingness to seek support or to make a police report.

The shift towards mainstream service delivery has meant that funding and programs for specialist sexual assault and domestic violence responses has increasingly been redirected to more generic health and welfare services. The concern is that mainstreaming service responses will remove the focus from ensuring the safety of women and children to reintroducing approaches that result in victim-blaming, or in strategies that are designed to place some responsibility on women to help change the behaviour of violent partners. At a societal level the danger of losing a feminist or gendered analysis, according to Kersti Yllö, is that we allow sexist ideas to go unchallenged and good practice to be diminished.

Although the perceived dangers of mainstreaming were often raised, there was also a recognition that violence against women and children needs to be discussed and addressed in all areas of society and within the broader health and social sectors. This ideal incorporation of a feminist or gendered analysis into all areas of policy, community development and service provision is often referred to as "gender mainstreaming", particularly in international forums, making the terminology of "mainstreaming" confusing. For example, there are important moves in many states for general practitioners to be trained in recognising and responding to domestic violence which will promote strategies of early intervention for women experiencing violence. However, there is a difference between incorporating a gendered analysis into mainstream services, and mainstreaming specialist services where a gendered analysis would be lost. It was argued that it is not necessarily the loss of specialist services that is feared, but the loss of a feminist or gendered analysis in structuring appropriate service responses that is likely to impact most heavily on women.

A number of speakers at the conference called for services to reclaim a feminist analysis – indeed, for the services to reclaim the word "feminism". Mayet Costello, from Yarrow Place (South Australia) argued, however, that feminism is being rejected by young women, even those who have gravitated towards more socially liberal professions, such as social work.

Linda Osmundson was also vocal on this point stressing that:

> "We're now struggling to have a gender-based analysis of the work that we do. We now talk about the domestic violence movement, don't we? Not the battered women's movement. We're talking about clients, not just women. We're talking about sexual assault survivors, not rape. We talk about incest, as though it was different from rape. We need to look at our language, we've taken the gender out of it. We've talked about the fact that we are failing to respect the lives of women who brought this movement to us today, who brought us to where we are today . . . But we are women who need to work together to remember that if we take the gender out of our movement, then we have really taken the essence of what we are doing out of this work . . . We've forgotten that we are a feminist movement . . . So yes, I am a dangerous woman, and we are all dangerous women, because we are here today to really start, or continue, a revolution. Because that's what we're really talking about here, we're talking about revolution, because that's what it will take to really create equality for women – to end battering, to

> end rape. And that's frightening and dangerous to the men who have not joined us in our movement."

It was not necessarily, however, a reclamation of the term "feminism" that was called for. In fact, although Linda was highly in favour of the "F-word", as she called it, she also recognised that "feminism" is largely a white middle-class academic term, and noted that in the United States, in the non-white communities the term "womanist", originally coined by author Alice Walker, is often preferred. What Linda and other speakers were calling for was that the feminist spirit, the "ability to be outrageous":

> "Today, because we've been called male-bashers, man-haters, what's happened to our fierce advocacy for battered women? Are we nice girls against rape? Are we nice girls against battering? Are we afraid to stand in front of the prosecutor and say, 'You are dropping too many cases?' Are we afraid to tell the police they are arresting too many women? Are we afraid of what the father's rights movement will tell us? Are we afraid that they might sue us when we in fact say, 'Yes, domestic violence is women battering, it is about women?' Are we afraid to stand up to them? Have we forgotten our politically gendered analysis? Or have we become so service-oriented that we no longer have political discussions? . . . Are we sanitising our work to make it so politically palatable that we no longer remember that we are about the gendering issues, we're no longer serving women? And finally, are we being inclusive of all survivors?"

Mainstreaming through the professionalising of the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors

The preoccupation with direct service and all things therapeutic that Linda referred to lies at the heart of the second form of mainstreaming identified by conference delegates: the shift towards the "professionalising" of the sexual assault and domestic violence sectors. Linda argued that this shift has meant that the important work carried out by many women without professional/academic credentials is devalued by their peers and others in society and, as a consequence, their voices are being lost. Linda talked about the meaning of the term "expert" within the world of the professional counsellor:

> "As we began to organise, as we began to talk to each other, we began to look for credibility. After all, the only credentials we had – the only credentials I have – is that I'm just a battered woman. And that doesn't play very well in court when I go in to talk about it, as an expert. And so it was always ironic to me, that as I went to court to be an expert on domestic violence, the mental health worker who was 24 years old, and who had talked to a couple of battered women when she was an intern, had more credentials than I, with 20 years of experience in the field of domestic violence."

As previously outlined, a concern of some conference delegates is how the voices of those who speak from experience are being silenced or delegitimised as a result of this contemporary valuing of professional/academic qualifications over lived experience. As Linda noted:

> "As we search for our credibility we need to be very careful not to leave the voices of battered women on the floor. We need to be very careful that as we work together to establish credibility, that we don't leave the voices

> of the people – the women – who founded our work, behind us. That, as we go for government funding for instance, we don't say to the lesbians who've always been involved in our work, 'Well it's okay that you're involved, but just go under the table again, be quiet, be silent. We don't want anybody to know who you are.' We have to be very careful, because as we get more credibility in our work – and we have – we need to be careful not to forget to bring along all of our sisters, most of whom are the founders, the very basis of our work, the reason that we exist at all."

Jon Conte also noted his concern that if we become too professional, too caught up in developing "elegant" models to work with issues around violence, and too concerned with our research grants, that as a sector:

> "We're moving further and further away from the lived experience of survivors. And you know if our community, if our white community, had elders, Judith Arnott would be an elder – because she reminds us, much more powerfully than any elegant model like PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], of what the lived experience of survivors is . . . And so, I'm suggesting that we need to kind of get back to basics. That we really essentially have to have a profound understanding and appreciation that goes beyond PTSD, goes beyond our papers, goes beyond our research models, and recognises, and does not ever lose sight of, the truth that can only come from those who have actually had the experience. And so what I'm going to go home with is a profound appreciation that there is a community in the world, here in Australia, that understands how important the political is. And I want to remind us what Judy Herman said in the early 1990s: awareness of trauma will not survive without a political movement."

Interestingly, this shift towards a de-gendering of sexual assault and domestic violence services in Australia runs contrary to international trends. Both Kersti Yllö, when speaking of the United Nations, and Kate Gilmore, when speaking of Amnesty International's *Stop Violence Against Women* campaign, noted how these organisations have embraced a need for a feminist or gendered analysis of violence. Kate Gilmore referred to Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, who notes that:

> "The greatest challenge to this scourge [of violence against women] has come from individual women and women's groups who have stood up and spoken out, often at cost to their lives. They have organised themselves to demand justice. They have called for their human rights to be respected, protected and fulfilled. Thanks to their efforts, important breakthroughs have been made in terms of international treaties and mechanisms, laws and policies." (Amnesty International 2004a: iv)

Kate argued that it was specifically this feminist approach to activism that allowed wife rape, for example, to be identified as a human rights abuse; that without a gendered account of this phenomenon, it would still be considered an acceptable, or at least as a lawful, experience of women in marriage.

Indigenous women

While many of the conference participants were in favour of promoting a "gendered agenda", and of rejecting the push towards mainstreaming, there was also recognition of how feminist accounts have often excluded the voices and experiences of particular groups of women. Although many Indigenous women, for

example, see a feminist or gendered analysis of family violence as a necessary component to their anti-violence work, other Indigenous women have suggested that gender cannot alone explain the nature and extent of family violence in their communities, and are wary of solely advocating the benefits of a gender-specific response. Indigenous people have written at length about the effects of colonisation and race oppression by white Australians and see these as having direct links with the disproportionately high rates of family violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities. Understanding the effects of colonisation as a contributing factor to the causes of family violence has certainly been helpful for Indigenous activists to counter claims by some non-Indigenous people, particularly in the context of the legal system, where it has been argued that violence in Indigenous communities is "cultural" and therefore to be accepted.

In their presentation, Greta Jubb and Terrie Stewart from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Cooperative (VALS) suggested that:

> "The underlying causes of family violence within the Indigenous Australian community are broader than gender inequality and are unique to Indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians stress that family violence within the Indigenous community is *not* part of Indigenous culture."

They continued to clarify the position of VALS as follows:

- "The legal justice system, meaning police and Court processes, is in many respects failing Indigenous Australians experiencing family violence.
- Indigenous Australians' experience of family violence has distinct characteristics.
- A trend towards a pro-prosecution approach to family violence is concerning for Indigenous Australians. We want to make it clear that VALS is not advocating the de-criminalisation of family violence. VALS criticism of the pro-prosecution approach is that it means that the legal system is dominant over alternative responses to family violence that are appropriate because they involve the Indigenous community.
- Space should be created for intervention in family violence that: is based on an Indigenous community-led approach or involves the Indigenous community; is holistic in approach which means dealing with underlying issues; and provides alternatives to the legal justice system that operate either in a stand alone capacity to the legal justice system, work in conjunction with the legal justice system, or both."

> "The greatest challenge to this scourge [of violence against women] has come from individual women and women's groups who have stood up and spoken out, often at cost to their lives. They have organised themselves to demand justice."

Indigenous women at the conference argued for service responses to domestic violence and sexual assault that recognise the importance of family and kinship in Indigenous communities. They called for responses that also recognise the realities of living in remote communities where everyone knows everyone's business and the women running the safe houses may well be related to the perpetrators of the violence. Some of the presenters also spoke of how many Aboriginal women are still reluctant to access non-Aboriginal services, given how culturally inappropriate they remain. For example, hospitals are seen as places to die, not to heal. It is well documented that Indigenous women avoid generic services given the role they are seen to have played in the destruction of Indigenous communities, in terms of imprisoning their men, in removing their children, and in alienating them from their lands and communities.

Another pressing issue for Indigenous women was the lack of funding to meet service requirements to address sexual assault and domestic violence, which in some areas has reached epidemic proportions (Gordon, Hallahan and Henry 2002). Janine Warren from Warndu Watlhilli-Carri Ngurã Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service Inc. (South Australia) spoke of running a sexual assault service in a remote area of South Australia with no resources, other than her wage, and with little or no assistance from other organisations. Janine found that getting support for her work was made extremely difficult as she is mandated to report child abuse, and Indigenous organisations are very wary of working with people who may be involved in the removal of children from their families. While the feminist debate is topical in some areas of the country, for Indigenous women the additional effects of institutional racism means that Indigenous-specific services, where they exist, are appallingly under-funded and in urgent need of resourcing and support.

Hence, for Indigenous women, the issue of mainstreaming is not just about having sexual assault and domestic violence services subsumed within generic services, but is also related to how services that are considered culturally appropriate are in danger of being subsumed within non-Indigenous services.

Women from non-English-speaking backgrounds

There were a number of speakers who also highlighted the specific issues that affect immigrant women in this context. Diana Orlando and Luba Tanevski from the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (Victoria) spoke about their report (to be published early in 2005) in which immigrant women in regional Victoria were asked about their understanding of domestic violence, where they would seek assistance, and about the barriers they experienced.

Diana and Luba also talked about the difficulties faced by women from newly arrived communities and the devastating and compounding effects of unemployment and minimal education opportunities.

Some of the findings Diana and Luba reported included that: women in small rural communities feared that if they were to disclose the abuse, their confidentiality would be broken and rumours would spread among the community; women had a low level of knowledge about service options; some women felt afraid to access services, fearing that their problems would be openly discussed and that they would be forced into action by services; a number of women reported receiving discriminatory treatment from professionals and workers from their own communities; and women felt fearful of the police.

Diana and Luba also talked about the difficulties faced by women from newly arrived communities and the devastating and compounding effects of unemployment and minimal education opportunities. The women in one newly arrived group feared for the safety of their children because of racist behaviours. Further, the lack of female doctors was seen as a huge problem. There were also requests for doctors who could speak the relevant community language and a number of women spoke of services being culturally inappropriate.

Diana and Luba's research also canvassed the experiences of workers in regional areas in responding to the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse women in their areas. They identified the following priorities needed to improve their ability to develop more culturally appropriate responses:

- the introduction of cultural diversity training for workers;
- more resources in different languages;

- the development of professional networks;
- interpreter training for professional staff;
- recruitment of diverse staff;
- the development of responses to violence that involve all members of the community;
- the development of strategies to work with women that value cultural diversity;
- the provision of options for women for action, safety planning and/or escape;
- improved relations with police;
- the delivery of more service information to women; and
- addressing issues around interpreting and translating needs.

Women with disabilities

The "mainstreaming" of specialist services also poses particular risks to women with disabilities. As Sue Salthouse pointed out in her presentation, in a recent mainstream government campaign targeting domestic violence, "there was no evidence that the information was made accessible or available to women with disabilities in supported accommodation or who resided in institutions". Moreover, women with disabilities within these households are often dependent on their carers to take action or to advocate and speak out about incidents of domestic violence. However, carers may also be the perpetrators of violence, leaving victims with few options to safely disclose what might be happening to them, particularly for those women living (and being subjected to abuse) in hospitals, psychiatric wards or nursing homes. As one conference participant observed, the more marginalised a group, the greater the need for specialist services.

This is certainly true for women with disabilities. However, as Sue Salthouse suggests, not only are issues for women with disabilities largely excluded from most generic policies by the limits of an "able-ist" perspective, but "women with disabilities are largely invisible in both the disability and women's movements". Therefore, while the separate concerns of the disability and women's movements are indeed in danger of being diminished by "mainstreaming" of services, the concerns of women with disabilities are in danger of being ignored altogether.

HOME TRUTH FIVE

Those working to end violence against women need to collaborate more

The conference brought together workers from the sexual assault and domestic violence fields in recognition of the need for services to work more collaboratively in terms of providing adequate responses to intimate partner and family violence. Historically, there has been a tendency for domestic violence and sexual assault services to function as silos, "together but distinct in terms of their service delivery, and in coordination of systems' responses to the issues women face" (Heenan 2004: 24). This has resulted in women being arbitrarily positioned as *either* a victim of domestic violence *or* sexual assault, rather than services acknowledging the extent to which these issues regularly overlap. Kersti Yllö has previously described (1999) how this failure by services to better coordinate their responses to male partner rape has further compounded the difficulty women themselves face in terms of defining their experiences as rape. According to Heenan (2004), services must take more of a leadership role in re-educating policy-makers, researchers, and the wider community about the prevalence of male partner rape in the context of violent relationships.