



Women's Safety after Separation Project

The *Women's Safety After Separation Project* is a joint effort between the National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children and the Australian Coalition of Women Against Violence.

Research by the Family Court of Australia and the Family Law Council, as well as a number of other researchers, has highlighted concerns that the intersection of federal and state jurisdictions in matters in the Family Court involving allegations of violence and abuse fails to recognise the serious risks to the safety of women and children (Brown, Sheehan, Frederico and Hewitt 2001; Rhoades, Graycar and Harrison 1999).

This research indicates that women who leave relationships where they have been subject to abuse and violence are at risk of escalated violence. Some women may experience difficulty in achieving safety for themselves and their children in negotiating children's matters after separation in the context of current system provisions. While the Family Court, counselling and mediation agencies, and state child protection departments provide some services for families, the research confirms that abuse and violence of women and children can continue post-separation (Brown et al. 2001; Rhoades, Graycar and Harrison 1999).

The consequences for women may be numerous, adverse and severe. They include: higher risks of continuing violence and abuse of themselves and their children; the high cost of legal action; the significant time demands required to undertake legal action and to respond to other relevant agencies; greater health risks arising from exposure to violence and abuse; anxiety and depression from being unable to protect their children; and the added stress and concern for their distressed children (Rendell, Rathus, and Lynch 2000).

Survivors of violence and abuse begin recovery when they are in a safe and secure setting, when their rights to safety are recognised, and there is an absence of danger. However, women who are continually being re-exposed to danger both directly, and through their children, are in the difficult position of being unable to recover or to achieve safety (Rendell, Rathus and Lynch 2000).

What is required is the development of more effective and accessible resources and approaches by the criminal justice and family law systems in order to better meet the needs of women and their families subjected to violence and abuse.

Project aims

The *Women's Safety After Separation Project* focuses on cases involving violence and abuse and aims to:

- develop a network of organisations assisting women negotiating children's matters after separation;
- develop resources to support individuals and organisations assisting women negotiating children's matters after separation;
- identify policy approaches to support women negotiating children's matters after separation;
- publish a web-based resource for access by individuals and organisations supporting women negotiating children's matters after separation;
- support research into assisting women negotiating children's matters after separation; and
- provide a continuing focal point for the support of individuals and organisations assisting women negotiating children's matters after separation.

Anticipated project outcomes

The anticipated outcomes of the *Women's Safety After Separation Project* are as follows:

- the formalisation and extension of the National Abuse Free Contact campaign;
- an e-list network of organisations and individuals supporting women to negotiate children's matters after separations involving violence and abuse;
- a virtual web-based resource with downloadable materials, references and links to assist individuals and organisations supporting women to negotiate children's matters after separations involving violence and abuse;
- increased capacity of organisations and individuals supporting women to negotiate children's matters after separations involving violence and abuse; and
- system reforms to reduce women's exposures to violence and abuse of themselves and their children through the Family law system.

The hidden dynamics of domestic violence

A commonly held community myth is that domestic violence is only physical abuse. *Through New Eyes: Exploring the Hidden Dynamics of Domestic Violence* is a new resource that aims to increase awareness of the non-physical violence, such as emotional abuse, that is also a facet of domestic violence. In homes where domestic violence occurs, children exposed to it are also at risk of suffering psychological and emotional abuse, which can happen without actual physical abuse.

Supported by the New South Wales Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, *Through New Eyes* is designed to "open Australia's eyes to the insidious nature of emotional abuse as a core component in domestically violent relationships," says Carol Skye, Project Manager, Hunter Women's Centre.

Through New Eyes consists of four videos, a CD ROM and detailed facilitator handbook. The video package explores the emotional, verbal, psychological, social, financial and sexual aspects of domestic violence. It is a generic resource designed for use across a range of human services, education and business, including universities, TAFEs, welfare, health and police.

The *Through New Eyes Video Package* comprises: Video One – "More than just physical"; Video Two – "Barriers to leaving"; Video Three – "Wising up"; Video Four – "Continuous play"; CD ROM – Video One and Two. A "Facilitator handbook", which discusses the aims of each section, step-by-step strategies, learning outcomes, and possible discussion questions and answers, is also included.

The cost (including GST) of the *Through New Eyes* resource is: For-profit organisations: \$385.
Not-for-profit organisations: \$275.
Postage and handling is \$15.

For further information, contact:
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Consultation

Consultation has been underway between NCSMC and the Australian Coalition of Women Against Violence in developing the project proposal. The proposal draws on continuing discussions between other groups – including the National Women’s Justice Coalition, the Women’s Services Network, the Abuse Free Contact Group (Qld), community health and family support services, women’s legal services, the Family Court of Australia, the Family Law Council, legal services commissions across Australia, and the Office for the Status of Women at both state and federal levels, which have enabled the development and extension of the National Abuse Free Contact Campaign.

These consultations have further highlighted the importance of developing an initiative that would better enable women to express their needs in relation to Family Law Court matters involving children. In sum, it is argued that the family law system does not adequately recognise the risks to the safety of women and children who have been subject to violence and abuse, potentially putting women and children at further risk.



It is argued that the failure of the family law system does not adequately recognise the risks to the safety of women and children who have been subject to violence and abuse.

References

Brown, T. Sheehan, R. Frederico, M. & Hewitt, L. (2001), *Resolving Family Violence to Children Family*, Violence and Family Court Research Program, Monash University, Victoria.

Rhoades, H., Graycar, R. & Harrison, M. (1999), *The Family Law Reform Act 1995: Can Changing Legislation Change Legal Culture, Legal Practice and Community Expectations?* Interim Report, University of Sydney, NSW.

Rendell, K, Rathus, Z. & Lynch, A. (2000), *An Unacceptable Risk*, Women’s Legal Service Inc, Brisbane, Queensland.

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Childhood sexual abuse and women’s experiences of pregnancy, birth and mothering



A report has been published by the South Australian Women’s Health Statewide entitled: *For the first time somebody wants to hear: Adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse*. Written by Tanja Stojadinovic, the report is designed to be used as an information resource for health professionals who work with women during pregnancy, birth and mothering.

This report shares the stories about the experiences of pregnancy, birth, mothering and the health system of women survivors of childhood sexual abuse across South Australia. These experiences and the issues raised were compared with those documented in the literature and a set of recommendations were developed.

Medical and health workers were also consulted about their opinions about what resources and information they would need in order to assist them work more effectively with women survivors of child sexual abuse.

Copies of the report can be downloaded from www.whs.sa.gov.au/pages/publications

For more information contact Women’s Health Statewide. Phone: (08) 8239 9600. Email: info@whs.sa.gov.au