

# Recognising and Responding to Domestic and Family Violence

Presented by Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic  
Violence



# Introduction

## Presenters

- Vanessa Coady – Domestic & Family Violence Support Worker (May 2001 – Present)
- Rebecca Shearman – Child & Young People's Worker (August 2003 – September 2006)

Ipswich Women's Centre Against Domestic Violence

# Introduction Continued

## This presentation will:

- Focus on the impacts of domestic and family violence on women and children as this is the presenters' area of expertise (however, a lot of these skills are transferable to survivors of different types of trauma);
- Assume a certain level of knowledge about domestic and family violence, including the types and range of abuse (this is due to time constraints);
- Provide extra information about domestic and family violence in the form of booklets that you can take with you;
- Present some statistics and with the audience highlight some of the impacts of domestic and family violence on women, children and young people;
- Using case studies and role plays, identify best practice in relation to recognising, raising and responding to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence

# Facts about Domestic/Family Violence


- According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics:  
*“23% of Australian women who have ever been married or in a defacto relationship experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship”*  
(ABS 1996)
- Domestic violence can result in severe physical injury (which can cause permanent disability); and its ultimate result can be murder
- ***Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women***, more than auto accidents, rapes and muggings combined. Women’s independence in making the decision to leave may be compromised by her partner’s need to dominate her and control many aspects of her life

# Facts about Domestic/Family Violence- Cont'd


➤ Of all the *murder-suicides in Australia from July 1989 – June 1996, 43% were committed by partners or former partners of the victims. Of these, 73.6% of victims were women and 91.4% of the offenders were men*”  
(Australian Institute of Criminology March 1998)

➤ We regularly hear on the news of “domestic disputes” where people are killed. We do not hear how these people were victims of ongoing domestic violence, which culminated in their murder. Instead, the issue is masked as being an argument gone wrong, a once off dispute. Domestic violence is rarely a once-off incident. It is an ongoing cycle of abuse


# The Effects of Domestic & Family Violence on Women and Children – Brainstorming Exercise

- In your experience, what are some of the effects of experiencing domestic or family violence on adult women?
  - What have you noticed are the impacts of witnessing or experiencing domestic or family violence on children or young people?
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# Effects on Women

- Isolation
  - Poor self-esteem
  - Poor self-confidence
  - Loss of freedom and rights
  - Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
  - Difficulty making their own decisions
  - Minimising or denying the abuse
  - Silence
  - Attempting to please others
- 

# Effects on Women- Cont'd

- Feeling ashamed
  - Sadness and frequent crying
  - Confusion
  - Stress-related illness
  - Exhaustion
  - Eating issues
  - Abuse of alcohol or drugs
  - Depression
  - Anxiety, fear and panic
- 

# Effects on Women- Cont'd

- Anger
- Feeling paranoid and crazy
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling as though they are responsible for the abuse
- Feeling like they have failed
- Many women that we see at our Service are not only coping with the present violence and abuse but also the effects of the domestic violence they may have experienced as a child. The impact of domestic violence can also be significantly greater for women from non-English speaking backgrounds, Indigenous women and rural women. Women survivors of domestic violence are also experiencing the effects of mainstream society that tends to blame and isolate women in domestic violence situations

# Effects on Children/Young People

## Infants

- Poor health and sleeping habits
- Excessive Screaming
- Attachment to mother may be disrupted leading to emotional deprivation
- Permanently altered development of the infant's central nervous system resulting in ongoing levels of anxiety, hyperactivity and mood disorders[1]  
Infants show clear disturbances in response to domestic violence from at least six weeks of age[2]

[1] Critical Directions (2001), Vol 1 No 1

[2] Zeanah (1998) in The Way Forward: Children, Young People and Domestic Violence (2000)

# Effects on Children/Young People- Cont'd

## Toddlers

- Frequent illness
- Low self-esteem and shyness
- Fear
- Social problems such as hitting or biting
- Withdrawn, passive, clinging, anxious (most often girls)
- Aggressive behaviour (most often boys)

## Pre-Schoolers

In addition to the above characteristics:

- Somatic complaints
- Blaming themselves for the violence and feeling guilty

# Effects on Children/Young People- Cont'd

## Primary School Aged Children

In addition to the above characteristics:

- Difficulties with school work and school attendance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor social skills and fighting with peers
- Rebelling against adult authority
- Aggression and poor anger management (most often boys)
- Anxiety and withdrawal (most often girls)
- Depression
- Low self esteem and lack of confidence
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

# Effects on Children/Young People Cont'd

## Adolescents/Young People

In addition to the above characteristics:

- Depression
- Aggression
- Violent “delinquency”
- Adolescent boys (more than adolescent girls) may model the perpetrator’s behaviour by assaulting their mother or siblings

# Case Scenario

- Sarah, a 28 year old woman, presents at your workplace with her 2 children – her 10 year old son Jake and her 7 year old daughter Emily
- You find a quiet place to sit and talk but Sarah's two kids refuse to leave her side to go and play. It is a very hot day, but Sarah is wearing an oversized jumper and long baggy pants. She has a scarf around her head . You notice that she is very thin and her fingers are inflamed around her nails
- When you begin talking with her, she sits hunched over with her arms crossed and constantly bites her fingernails. The 2 children are dressed in very good clothes and Sarah seems overly concerned with keeping them clean
- Emily insists on sitting on her mum's lap and studies you intently but will not make eye contact with you or answer you when you offer her some food. Jake begins running around the room pulling things off shelves and constantly interrupting. When Sarah asks him to play quietly, he says "Shut up you idiot! Dad said I don't have to listen to you!"
- Jake tells you he wants to take home the calculator he sees on your desk. When you explain that he can't have it, he begins pleading with you and eventually throws a tantrum.

# Case Scenario – Cont'd

- When you manage to talk to Sarah, she says she needs some money because she's stupid and doesn't know how to manage the budget that her husband gives her. When asked about her husband, Sarah describes him as an extremely intelligent man, saying she doesn't know why he puts up with her
- Despite the fact that Sarah has come asking for money, you suspect there may be some violence going on in the home. What gives you these suspicions?
- Discuss your responses in groups of 4-6. There will be approximately 15 minutes of discussion

# Recognising Domestic Violence

A Woman victim/survivor of domestic violence may display one or more of the following characteristics:

- She may have frequent physical injuries – bruises, broken bones, wrist or ankle sprains, cuts
- She may have inconsistent or implausible explanations for her injuries
- She may appear quiet, afraid to speak, anxious, depressed, withdrawn, continually devalue herself. She may have no self-confidence
- She may appear to be under the control of her partner
- She may be socially isolated, reluctant/unable to participate in community activities/events, unable to go to work or to study and she may always be seeking her partner's permission before committing to activities
- She may appear fearful

# Recognising DV- Cont'd

- She may usually wear very concealing clothing in order to hide bruising and injuries
- She may be unable to talk on the phone for any length of time and makes excuses to finish the conversation quickly
- She may stop seeing family and friends and makes excuses for not attending family gatherings
- She may often be without money
- She may look stressed and worn out
- She may become defensive if people express concern about her well-being
- Her partner may ridicule her or put her down in front of others

Source of information: Queensland Domestic Violence Services network, 2002, " Reaching Out-a domestic violence information session for family and friends"

# Recognising DV- Cont'd

A child who has experienced domestic violence may:

- Appear tired and stressed
- Be distracted and unable to concentrate at school
- Be withdrawn and isolated, emotionally detached and unavailable
- Be hyper-vigilant and watchful
- Experience physical symptoms such as stomach ache, head ache
- Be restless, emotionally distraught and have difficulty managing stress or tension
- Be abusive and aggressive (eg with siblings, peers or parents)

Source of information: Queensland Domestic Violence Services Network 2002, "Reaching Out- a domestic violence information session for family and friends".

# Raising the Issue of Violence

- There is often anxiety amongst workers regarding how to raise the issue of domestic violence if they suspect that this is what is occurring. In addition, there is the compounding factor of clients who do not disclose violence because the workers do not ask them
- Listed below are a series of questions, which may help workers to provide their clients with the opportunity to disclose the violence:
  - Does your partner ever make you do things which make you feel uncomfortable, or which hurt you?
  - Has your partner ever forced you to have sex when you didn't want to?
  - Has anyone ever forced you to do sexual things when you didn't want to?
  - Are you afraid for your safety or that of your children?
  - You mentioned that your partner uses drugs/alcohol. How does he act when he is drinking/on drugs?

# Raising the Issue of Violence- Cont'd

- Are you (have you ever been) in a relationship in which you feel you are being treated badly? In what ways?
- We all have disagreements sometimes. What happens when you and your partner fight or disagree?
- I noticed you have a number of bruises. Could you tell me how they happened? Did someone hit you?
- Are you ever frightened of your partner?
- Many clients tell me they have been hurt by someone close to them. Could this be happening to you?
- Your partner seems very concerned and anxious. Was he responsible for your injuries?
- You seem frightened of your partner. Has he ever hurt you?
- Sometimes when others are over-protective and as jealous as you describe, they react strongly and use physical force. Is this happening in your situation?

# Raising the Issue of Violence- Cont'd

- Have you ever been in a relationship where you have been hit, punched, kicked or hurt in any way? Are you in such a relationship now?
- You mentioned your spouse loses his temper with the children. Does he lose his temper with you?
- Does he become abusive when he loses his temper?
- What happens when you and your partner argue?
- Does your partner ever call you names or put you down?
- Does your partner destroy things you care about?
- Has your partner ever threatened to hurt you when you disagree with him?
- Have you ever been forced to engage in sex that made you feel uncomfortable?

# Raising the Issue of Violence- Cont'd

- Who controls the finances in your house?
- Who makes the rules? What happens when you don't follow the rules?
- Because abuse and violence are so common, I ask many female clients about it routinely
- Does your partner watch your every move? Accuse you of having affairs?
- What's your social life like? Do you have any friends here?

(Taken from Office of Women's Policy, Kelly, P. 1996, Domestic Violence Helpful Comments & Questions, 7th International Congress on Women's Health Issues)

# Raising the Issue of Violence with Children & Young People

- Many of the skills for raising violence with women also apply with children, in that it is more beneficial to be clear and direct, whilst remaining sensitive and ensuring that the child is not coerced into saying more than they are prepared to
- Generally children who have witnessed or experience violence in the home find it difficult to trust other adults, so you may need to spend some time building trust before you can expect a child or young person to disclose violence or abuse
- That said, it is important to honour a child's trust when they tell you about abuse by responding appropriately (we will talk more about this in the next section)

# Raising the Issue with Children & Young People – Cont'd

Some suggestions for questions or openers that you might use are below:

- **How are things going at home for you?**
- **Sometimes adults can hurt each other when they fight – does this happen in your home?**
- **I have noticed that you often have bruises and marks on your body. How did you get these?**
- **Sometimes children live in families where there is violence, and people get hurt. Has this ever happened to you?**
- **Are you scared of anyone at home?**
- **I have noticed that you often look scared/sad/angry/anxious. Is there anything that you would like to talk about with me?**
- **Often children misbehave because something is going wrong at home. Can you tell me more about what is happening in your home?**
- **I just wanted to let you know that if anything upsetting was happening for you that you can talk to me about it.**

# Responding to a Disclosure

## Be aware of who SHE is:

- Allow her to tell her story. Let her know that you believe her and want to hear about her experiences. Be non-judgemental
- Help her identify her feelings. Support her right to be angry. Don't deny any of her feelings
- Communicate to her that she is not responsible for the violence
- Be sensitive to the differences, realise that no woman is a stereotype and each has different life experiences
- Respect the cultural values and beliefs that affect her behaviour. Know that these beliefs may have been a source of security for her in the past and their importance to her should not be minimised
- Be aware of the differences between rural and urban women. Be aware of the physical isolation and cultural values of rural women

# Responding to a Disclosure- Cont'd

- Know that she does not need rescuing. Help her to identify her own needs
  - Explore and dispel myths
  - Provide accurate information
  - Ensure that she has the opportunity to make decisions about events which affect her life
  - Accept differences of opinion while remaining supportive
  - Provide appropriate referral
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- Remember, a victim of domestic violence is in crisis that prevents her from using her coping skills and problem solving abilities. Help her get in touch with her strengths and emotional resources, and the decision she makes will be her own

# Responding to a Disclosure- Cont'd

## Be aware of who YOU are:

- Be aware of your own attitudes, experiences, and reactions to violence
- Know your own limits of time and energy. Be aware of your agency's policies and services so you can be realistic
- Be aware of own need to be a powerful expert. Do not give advice. A victim of domestic violence has had countless people tell her what to do. She needs someone to care
- Be conscious of your own cultural biases, beliefs, and prejudices when supporting women from different ethnic backgrounds
- Do not diagnose. Focus on concrete problem solving and emotional support, not subjective interpretations of behaviour
- Do not convey disappointment if the woman elects to return to the violent relationship. Be honest and explain your fear, but let her know she can always come back and that you still care about her

# Responding to a Disclosure- Cont'd

- Remember, you may be one of the first people in her life to show respect and support at a time when she needs it most. What you get in return is the knowledge that you have been helpful to someone.

Source of information: Brain Nelson (2002) DV Resources from Academic Family Medicine Mail-list Archive-Counselling Battered Women, USA

# Responding & Intervention with Children & Young People

- All of the points raised in the previous section in relation to responding to women generally apply to children and young people. However, it is important to raise a number of additional points:
- One of the most therapeutically beneficial interventions is the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the child, where the counsellor establishes good rapport, builds trust, and models appropriate interactions between adults and children;
- As children often struggle to articulate their feelings and thoughts, interventions with children are less reliant on the “talk therapies”, and usually need to focus more on play therapies or symbol work. For example, in my work I utilise games, sand-tray, worksheets, art & craft, symbol exercises, strength cards and directed play. Also, my practice framework is influenced by feminist, narrative, strength-based, expressive techniques and Jungian perspectives

# The ABDCE Model of Intervention

**A - Ask to be alone:** This is to ensure that the survivor is able to disclose if they choose to do so. A disclosure is highly unlikely if the worker attend to the survivor with their partner present

**B - Believe the disclosure:** No matter how unbelievable or bizarre the story, believe it, as survivors rarely lie about the violence they have survived, if anything they minimise it

**C - Call in resources:** Be aware of agencies that can assist the survivor for example- women's refuges, domestic violence counsellors, sexual assault referral centres

**D - Document history and injuries:** This is vitally important as this documentation may be used in court to support a survivor's case

**E - Ensure safety:** The safety of the survivor and any children involved is paramount. The worker should ask the woman if she fears for her safety or for the safety of her children. The worker should always be aware that the severity of

# The ABCDE Model of Intervention- Cont'd

previous violence is no indicator of future violence, and that many survivors minimise the violence. Research has clearly shown that violence generally escalates both in frequency and severity. Never treat any threat that a DV offender makes as idle

Source of Information: Health department of Western Australia, "Family and Domestic Violence Training Package-Participants Kit, Australia

# Referral & Safety Planning

- Developing a safety plan for women escaping domestic violence is very important, as it will allow her to leave safely, feeling organised and in control of her circumstances. Some women may develop their safety plan over a period of time, however, it is more common that a woman will leave in a time of crisis and only part of this plan will be developed and put into action
- In assisting a woman to develop a safety plan consider the following:
  - If possible, deposit money into a bank account each week, or take small items out of the house in preparation for leaving
  - Hide a bag in a safe place, for example a neighbour's place, under the bed, on top of the cupboard or in any safe place. In a bag have things such as:
    - ✓ Spare clothes
    - ✓ Cash
    - ✓ Birth certificates (hers and the children's)
    - ✓ Marriage certificate
    - ✓ Travel documents (hers and the children's)

# Referral & Safety Planning- Cont'd

- ✓ Residency documents
- ✓ Drivers licence
- ✓ Bank cards and account details
- ✓ Medication (hers and children's)
- ✓ Centrelink documents
- ✓ Copies of any domestic violence orders
- ✓ Insurance policies
- ✓ Copies of any deeds to the property
- ✓ House keys
- ✓ Tax file number
- ✓ Awards from school/university/TAFE

# Referral & Safety Planning- Cont'd

- ✓ Jewellery and valuables
- ✓ Personal items-toothbrushes, cosmetics etc
- ✓ Sentimental items/special photos-especially of/for the children
- ✓ Address book
- ✓ Any other important documents

- Advise her to keep with her at all times important phone numbers, such as family, friends and emergency services such as a Domestic Violence Crisis Phone Number, Lifeline or Salvation Army
- Talk to her about when would be a safe time to leave and help her to plan where she would go. When he is out on business or at work? Attending doctors or other appointment? Shelter accommodation is an option for women and their children who feel they are in immediate danger. Women need to contact DV Connect on 1800 811 811 for shelter placement
- Inform her about Protection Orders, assist with Centrelink payment

# Referral & Safety Planning- Cont'd

- Does he have firearms? Consider hiding bullets
- Advise her not to tell anyone that she is intending to leave until she has left and is in a safe place, as family and friends can sometimes pressure a woman to stay
- Inform her that she can consider changing her name and opening a bank account in a new name. She needs to advise Centrelink about the reasons why she changed her name
- Inform her about support services, such as Regional Domestic Violence Services, DV Connect-24hr service, Immigrant Women's Support Service, Indigenous women's services, Legal services and generalist services such as hospitals, Life Line, Salvation Army

## **If she lives in a remote area:**

- If the woman you are supporting lives in a remote area, her geographical isolation may be compounding the isolation typically felt by victims of domestic violence. There are additional aspects that affect domestic violence in remote areas, including the following:

# Referral & Safety Planning- Cont'd

- Lack of access to services- there could be a shortage of community services including those which respond to domestic violence. Some women may also be reluctant to speak with their local doctor or the police because of the relationships between people in the community, for example a local police officer could be a close friend of the woman's abusive partner
- Lack of transport – access to public transport may be minimal or simply non-existent. The perpetrator might also be preventing the woman from using family vehicles by hiding the keys from her or disabling the car when he is not using it. Long distances from properties may decrease her chances of accessing help in emergency situations
- All these additional aspects need to be considered when assisting a woman who lives in a rural area to develop safety plan

Source of Information: Domestic Violence Resource Centre (1999) " Reaching Out-a domestic violence resource for family and friends", G & E Printing, Australia

# A Safety Plan For Children

- Often children are present during violent arguments. Further, even if the family is now in a place of safety, children are often required to spend time with their violent parent or continue to witness violence on contact handovers. In these cases it is worthwhile to talk with the child or young person about keeping themselves safe

**Examples of some things to highlight with children are:**

**DO:**

- Get away from where the violence is occurring and go to a safe room, another part of the house or a neighbours place;
- If it is not possible to leave the room safely, stay as far away from the violence as possible;
- Take any younger siblings with you, if it will not place you in any more danger;

# Safety Planning for Children- Cont'd

- If it is safe for you to do so, call a family member, a friend or the police;
- Remember that the violence is not your fault or your responsibility;
- Tell someone about what is happening in the home, like a teacher, doctor or counsellor;

## **DON'T:**

- Try to intervene or stop the violence as you may get hurt;
- Don't try to call for help if it will draw attention to you or cause you to become a target for the violence;

# Working with Survivors- Do's and Don'ts

## DO:

- Believe the woman when she tells you. Its hard for her to reach out, as she may feel ashamed or believe that the violence is her fault
- Reassure her that the violence is not her fault, and that she does not deserve it
- Ask the woman how you can support her
- Offer information and options about help available- including phone numbers such as DVConnect 1800 811 811 for information and refuge referral
- Take fear seriously as threats are often carried out
- Take abusive behaviour seriously- domestic violence is unacceptable under any circumstances- murder is the ultimate form
- Emphasise safety- help her think through a safety plan and escape route
- Encourage her to call the police. If you witness/hear violence, you call the police

# Do's and Don'ts- Cont'd

- Be patient and understanding about her indecision- she will decide what she wants to do when she is ready to
- Realise your own limitations. You can't control the violence any more than the victim can. It may be impossible to do anything except offer your support

## **DO NOT:**

- Reassure her that everything will be OK
- Volunteer as a “go-between” as you may increase the problems (and your own)
- Take any actions which may increase the violence (e.g. leaving phone numbers where he may find them)
- Tell her to leave or stay. It is her decision. She needs your support and will not trust you if the only way to get it is to leave the relationship or stay in it. She is the expert over her own life

# Do's and Don'ts- Cont'd

- Blame her for what has happened. It is not her fault
- Take over for her. She needs to act on her own behalf to rebuild her self-esteem
- Belittle or condemn the abuser, but still put the responsibility for the violence on him. When you agree with her negative sentiments towards the abuser, she may feel uncomfortable talking to you if she changes her mind or if she still has some feeling of love and attachment to him
- Pressure her into making decisions. She needs time to sort out her feelings and make reasoned decisions
- Minimise her feelings or experiences, or divert the focus to other problems due to your discomfort. She will lose confidence in your ability to understand/help her
- Attack her as a parent. She may have difficulty acting for her children's safety as well as her own
- Tell her how to change her behaviour in the relationship to stop his violence. She does not control his violence and she cannot cure it

# Do's and Don'ts- Cont'd

- Think assertiveness skills will stop the violence. Being assertive may increase the danger for her. Trust her gut feelings about what she can safely do or say

# Self-Care

- Caring for yourself will enable you to be better able to support and care for others. Caring for yourself shows that you value and respect yourself
- It is not easy to see someone that been abused and who feels powerless. Remember it is not up to you to change her situation, she is the only one who can do that. However, you can be there to listen, to provide information, help her to find resources and services, and to support the decisions she makes about her life
- Without self-care you are less able to care for others
- Self-care involves:
  - ✓ Being clear about the limits of your role and your responsibilities
  - ✓ Not having too high expectations of what you can achieve with regards to the other person. If you will, you will become frustrated, stressed, and it may result in you giving up on her when she needs you most
  - ✓ Getting outside help-talk to a domestic violence worker to get support for yourself and further information. You don't have to identify the woman to do this

# Self-Care- Cont'd

- ✓ Not giving up on her. If she leaves him and then returns, this is her choice. Even if you feel that she may get abused again, remember this is her choice as it is her life, not yours. This does not mean that you have failed. It is important that you remain open to supporting her, otherwise she may feel that she cannot ask you for help next time she needs it. Talk to her about a safety plan. Talk to her about her not being a failure for returning
- ✓ Remembering that most women do what they can to survive and know their situation the best. Try not to be judgemental, be encouraging but not controlling
- ✓ Never placing yourself at risk, call the police if necessary
- ✓ Not feeling that her well-being or her children's well being is your sole responsibility. Don't expect you can do everything for them
- ✓ Knowing your own limits in terms of time, energy and knowledge
- ✓ Understanding that we each have responsibility to care for others but we are not totally responsible for another person's well being. Be guided by the woman regarding her needs, but also look after yourself

# Self-Care- Cont'd

- ✓ If you are feeling overwhelmed by the situation, take a break, talk to someone about it or seek counselling for yourself
- ✓ Making sure that you can live your own life and take time to care for yourself
- ✓ Making sure that your work does not affect your relationship with your partner, children or other important people

Source of Information: Domestic Violence Resource Centre (1999) “ Reaching Out-a domestic violence resource for family and friends”, G & E Printing, Australia

# THE END

- Thank you for your time and participation

