

# ANROWS

# Footprints

ISSUE 04 | NOVEMBER 2015

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

ANROWS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and future; and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge.

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## **Design**

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

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## **Footprints is published by**

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS)

## **ISSN: 2204-5864**

PO Box 6322, Alexandria NSW 2015

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

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ABN 67 162 349 171

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it receives from the Commonwealth Government and all Australian state and territory governments, without which this work would not be possible. Findings and views published by ANROWS cannot be attributed to the Commonwealth Government or any Australian state or territory government.

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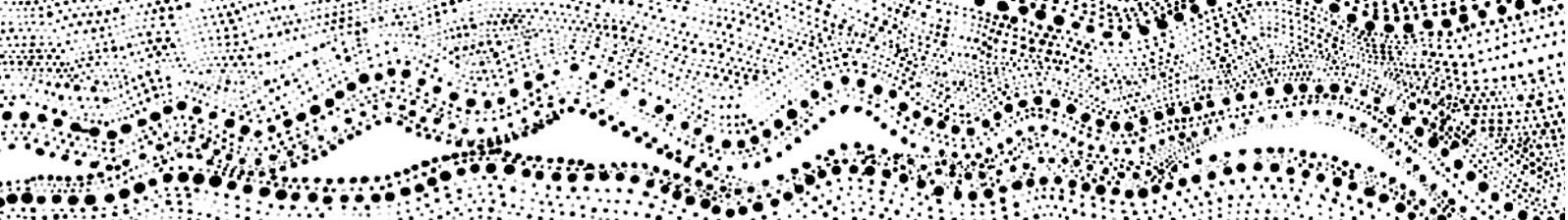
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# ANROWS Publications

ANROWS produces and publishes new, innovative and relevant research on domestic, family and sexual violence through its suite of publications.

## Subscribe

Subscribe and receive updates to your inbox, including:

- ANROWS Notepad: Our fortnightly update on the latest research on domestic, family and sexual violence, upcoming events and training, and more.
- ANROWS Footprints: Our thematic quarterly publication, communicating new, innovative and emerging research, policy and practice aimed at reducing violence against women and their children.

[www.anrows.org.au/subscribe](http://www.anrows.org.au/subscribe)

## Join our networking database

The ANROWS Networking database is a national online community bringing together practitioners, policy-makers and members of the community with an interest in reducing domestic, family and sexual violence.

Join online to share your knowledge and expertise with a national audience; find people with particular expertise, organisations working on similar or complementary projects and/or potential partners for research project grants.

[www.anrows.org.au/networking-database/register](http://www.anrows.org.au/networking-database/register)

## Available now

### **ANROWS Compass: Research to policy and practice papers**

Concise papers that summarise key findings of research on violence against women and their children, including research produced under ANROWS's Research Program, and provide advice on the implications for policy and practice.

### **ANROWS Landscapes: State of knowledge papers**

Medium length papers that scope current knowledge on an issue related to violence against women and their children. Papers will draw on empirical research, including research produced under ANROWS's research program, and/or practice knowledge.

### **ANROWS Horizons: Research papers**

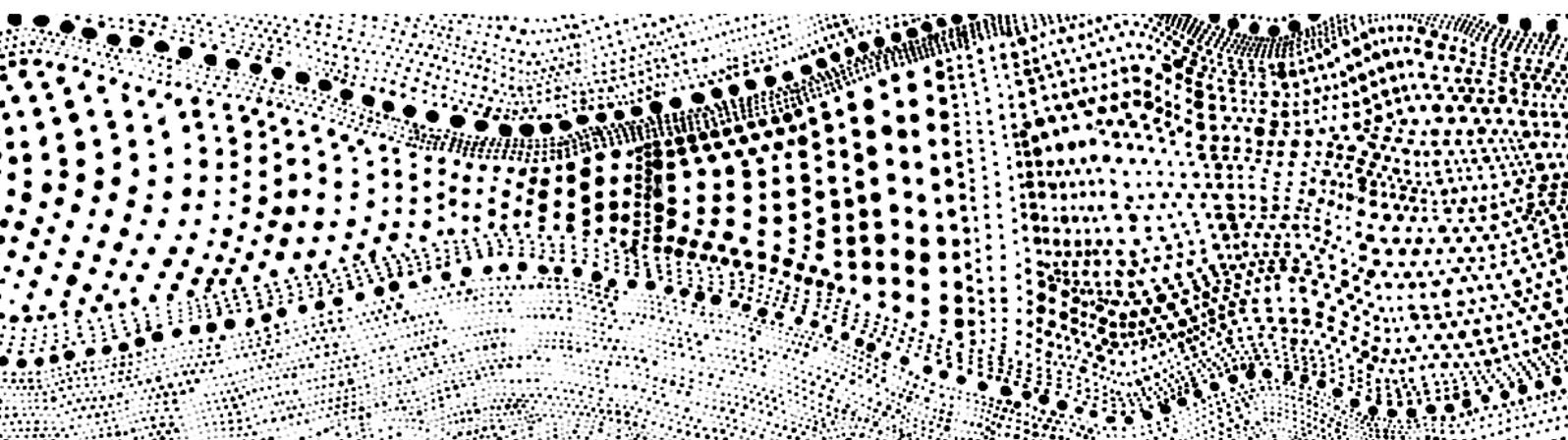
In depth reports on empirical research produced under ANROWS's Research Program. Papers will include state of knowledge work completed in the Landscapes paper for that project.

### **ANROWS Fast Facts**

Key facts and figures on topics related to violence against women and their children.

### **ANROWS Notepad**

Fortnightly email update on the latest research, events, training, stakeholder news and issues in the media.





## thisQuarter

Empowering women can have extraordinary impact. Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, has shown incredible strength and wisdom in her advocacy work, and she has been a powerful catalyst for community engagement on stopping violence against women and their children. “Cometh the hour, cometh the woman” said Andrea Mason, (CEO, NPY Women’s Council) about Rosie, when we met in Canberra recently. No-one, least of all Rosie, would have wanted that time to come, but sadly it did. Rosie has risen to the challenge of turning an absolute tragedy into a triumph, of sorts, as we inch towards the monumental structural and cultural change needed. Community engagement on broad-based change could perhaps be considered the last frontier of the violence against women movement. The goals of the movement, and of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children cannot be achieved without the wider community on board. The long road towards change has been paved over many years of advocacy, which has established services, policy, programs and legislation across the nation, and laid the foundations for the current journey.

In this edition of Footprints we highlight the importance of empowerment through various articles.

The Spotlight feature article showcases work from a number of organisations using technology in innovative ways to reach and empower women across Australia. These initiatives are only a snapshot of the fantastic work happening every day; we encourage you to contact us with programs and initiatives so we can continue to share knowledge and best practice from across Australia.

You will also find:

- The launch of our first Horizons research report analysing data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) 2012 Personal Safety Survey (PSS); and a creative piece by the report’s author Dr Peta Cox on how data can tell a story on women’s experience of violence.
- An overview of projects looking at the impact of domestic violence on parenting, particularly the mother-child relationship; and women’s economic security following domestic and family violence.
- Researchers reflecting on their joint ANROWS research projects and the value of collaborative working relationships to their work.
- An article from Michelle Deshong, Director of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service and Fair Agenda, reflecting on her experiences at this year’s Commission on the Status of Women.

Recently we released the first ANROWS Horizons (empirical research) report: *Violence against women in Australia: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ Personal Safety Survey, 2012* by Senior Research Officer Dr Peta Cox. This report provides a statistical starting point for policy and practice conversations on women’s experiences of violence; it was very exciting to release to our stakeholders. A Compass (research to policy and practice) paper and infographics are also available on our website. As always we encourage your feedback on additional knowledge translation and exchange products from this project that may be useful to your work.

Many of the research projects in the inaugural ANROWS research program examine ways we can empower women and children at an individual and systems-based level. At the time of printing there were twelve Landscapes state of knowledge papers on topics such as trauma-informed systems of care; tertiary responses to violence against women and girls with disabilities; and innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women. We look forward to more papers being released in the coming weeks, as well as our second empirical research report later this year.

Heather Nancarrow  
Chief Executive Officer

# Coming up



## 4th Indigenous Health Conference 1-3 December 2015. Shangri-La Hotel. Cairns, Queensland.

Indigenous Conference Service's 4th Indigenous Health Conference embraces the philosophy of Indigenous community control and mainstream service providers through promoting an informative forum of research, health education and training of staff for the betterment of Indigenous health.

This deadly conference has attracted high quality international First Nations' speakers from Canada and New Zealand and abstract submissions from every state and territory in Australia. More than 50 percent of the accepted papers are from community-based organisations, wishing to share successes in programs implemented within their communities.

To register, please visit the conference website at [www.indigenousconferences.com](http://www.indigenousconferences.com) or send us an email at: [admin@indigenoushealth.net](mailto:admin@indigenoushealth.net)



## The 4th National Elder Abuse Conference 23-25 February 2016. Pullman on the Park. Melbourne, Victoria.

The 4th National Elder Abuse Conference 2016, hosted by Seniors Rights Victoria, aims to prevent and resolve elder abuse by showcasing new knowledge to use in practice, raise awareness and influence system change. The Conference will provide a high level of education with internationally acclaimed speakers from medical and allied health, education, government and aged care sectors, as well as arresting discussion on a range of topics. The social events will provide an opportunity for important networking.

For more information please see: [www.elderabuseconference.org.au](http://www.elderabuseconference.org.au)



## The 2015 Australian STOP Domestic Violence Conference 7-9 December 2015. Rex Hotel, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory.

The Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association (ANZMHA) will host the inaugural 2015 Australian STOP Domestic Violence Conference at the Rex Hotel in Canberra.

The conference theme Connecting the Dots will look at domestic violence holistically and developing collaborative approaches within the sector. This multi-disciplinary program is suitable for administrators, program coordinators, social workers, therapists and all external providers impacted by domestic violence. The co-occurrence and prevalence of mental health and domestic violence will also be addressed.

The conference will attract delegates from a wide range of backgrounds including: policy-makers, Government, practitioners, NGO's, councillors, academics, mental health specialists, service providers, HR professionals and victims support groups from Australia and New Zealand.

For more information, please see: [www.stopdomesticviolence.com.au](http://www.stopdomesticviolence.com.au)



## Nursing Network on Violence Against Women International Conference 2016 26-28 October 2016. Melbourne, Victoria.

The Nursing Network on Violence Against Women International in partnership with the Judith Lumley Centre, School of Nursing and Midwifery, La Trobe University are excited to invite you to the 21st NNVAWI Conference, which will be held 26-28 October 2016 in Melbourne, Australia.

The theme of the conference is "Strengthening healthcare systems to promote safety and health of women and families".

For more information, please contact [jlc@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:jlc@latrobe.edu.au). More details will be available soon at [latrobe.edu.au/jlc](http://latrobe.edu.au/jlc)



# ANROWS

## Inaugural National Research Conference on Violence against Women and their Children

Tuesday 23 - Thursday 25 February 2016

Grand Hyatt Melbourne, 123 Collins Street

**ANROWS, a key initiative of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 - 2022*, is hosting its Inaugural National Research Conference on Violence against Women and their Children in February 2016.**

Translating ANROWS research into policy and practice is the specific focus of this conference. Each session will feature one of 19 ANROWS research projects (under four strategic research themes).

Researchers will present key findings to kick-start facilitated discussions on how the findings are currently being used, and how they might inform future work. Policy-makers, practitioners and researchers will be encouraged to share experiences, ideas and advice on how research can drive policy development and service responses and practice.

**This conference is a fantastic opportunity to *connect, reflect and innovate.***

### Who should attend?

**Researchers and research organisations:** criminology; sociology; health; social work; psychology; law; political science; and science.

**Policy-makers:** ministers, senior officials and executive management from federal, state, territory governments and agencies, and local government.

**Peak bodies:** peak bodies and networks; domestic and family violence services; sexual assault services; strategic Indigenous expertise services; women's health sector; CALD, multicultural, and migrant services; broader community services sector; prevention and education.

**Indigenous support practitioners working in the areas of:** the effects of colonisation, trans-generational trauma, the importance of Indigenous cultures and law.

**Practitioners:** sexual assault, domestic and family violence; women's refuges; judicial support; immigrant; refugee; and CALD services.

**Intervention and service providers:** Social services; the legal justice system; first responders including police, emergency and medical services.

**REGISTER NOW**

We look forward to seeing you there!

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

Left to right: Heather Nancarrow, CEO, ANROWS; Dr Peta Cox, Senior Research Officer, ANROWS; The Hon Pru Goward MP, NSW Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.



## inHouse

### Launch of ANROWS's first research report: *Violence against women in Australia: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, 2012*

On Thursday 22 October the Hon Pru Goward MP, NSW Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, launched ANROWS's first empirical research report, *Violence against women in Australia: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, 2012* by Dr Peta Cox, Senior Research Officer at ANROWS.

The report analyses data collected in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) 2012 Personal Safety Survey (PSS). One of the many new findings is that an estimated one in four women in Australia has experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner.

The PSS is the most comprehensive quantitative study of interpersonal violence in Australia.

Other key findings from the report include:

- Gender is the most substantive variable across patterns of victimisation and perpetration.
- Two-thirds of women who experienced sexual violence had also experienced a separate incident of physical violence.

- Of women who were sexually assaulted by a man, one in three reported they were physically injured. 31,600 women experienced fractures or broken bones/teeth as a result of the assault.
- Two in five women experienced violence while temporarily separated from their most recently violent former partner. A third of these women experienced an increase in violence while temporarily separated.
- Seven out of ten women left property or assets behind when they moved away after their final separation from their most recently violent former partner.

The report will be a useful resource for policy-makers, practitioners, advocates and the broader community to access detailed information on violence against women.

Please find the Horizons (research report) and Compass (research to policy and practice paper) on our website. Data tables and infographics are also available for download.

Thank you to our subscribers for supporting our work. Please feel free to contact the ANROWS team if you would like further information or clarification about the report. ●



## Letting the data tell a story on violence against women

BY Dr Peta Cox, Senior Research Officer, ANROWS.

Australia's most authoritative and robust quantitative survey of interpersonal violence is produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics every four years. For the most recent Personal Safety Survey (2012), more than 17,000 women and men participated in face-to-face interviews.

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) has recently published a significant new analysis of the PSS. *Violence against women in Australia: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, 2012* provides several hundred new statistical items related to violence against women. Almost all the data in this report is new – not only has this information not been in the public domain before, but the data tables themselves have not been generated previously.

There are four main parts to the report, each providing new data:

- violence experienced by men and women;
- sexual assault;
- partner violence; and
- multiple victimisation.

For each topic, we answer the following questions:

- How many people does this happen to? (Prevalence of violence).
- Who does it happen to? (Victim demographics).
- Who made it happen? (Perpetrator characteristics).
- What happened? (Incident characteristics).
- What happened next? (Post-incident actions and impacts).

ANROWS has reported data related to a definition of intimate partner that includes both cohabiting and non-cohabiting intimates. This new definition captures the nature of relationships within which women may experience intimate partner violence and helps demonstrate the full extent of violence against women.

This report also provides substantial explanation of the conceptual structure of the PSS. By embedding discussions of definitions and data structure throughout the report, we hope that you will be more easily able to understand what the statistics do (and do not) mean.

The complexity of lived experiences of violence is emphasised in this report, as is the way violence is embedded in the day-to-day existence of a substantial minority of women.

Jane's story comes from some of the key findings of the report. It shows how the data can help us to understand women's complex experiences of violence.



Source: unsplash/RobertoTumini

## Introducing Jane...

Jane is like **one in four women** in Australia in that she has experienced at least one incident of violence by a partner she may or may not have been living with.

Jane had a good start in life, and like two-thirds of women who eventually experienced partner violence from a partner she lived with, she **did not experience abuse as a child**.

Jane is now 28 years old, meaning that she is in the **age range** (25-34 years) with the **highest rate of partner violence**. Her risk of sexual assault is statistically equivalent to the national average.

Jane has been in her relationship with David for a few years and the relationship has been rocky for the last year and a half. The

first time David hit her was about a year ago – this means that, like **eight out of ten** women who have experienced violence in the last 12 months by a partner they live with, she has been **physically assaulted** by her current partner.

Jane is also like approximately 40 percent of women who have experienced violence by a partner, in that David had sexually assaulted her. Similar to about a **quarter of a million other women** in Australia, her most recent **sexual assault** by her cohabiting partner happened **in her home**.

Since the age of 15:

**1 in 4** women  
have experienced violence  
by an intimate partner

they may or may not have been living with.



**1 in 6** women  
had experienced violence by a  
partner they were living with.

**1 in 9** women  
had experienced violence by a  
boyfriend, girlfriend or date.

Like one in 11 women who had experienced violence by a partner they were living with, Jane's most recent incident of violence happened in the last year – in her case it was a sexual assault a few weeks ago. Jane got in **contact with the police** about this incident, which, as a woman who had experienced more than one incident of violence, she was more likely to do.

about this type of sexual assault. Like one in four women, she sought advice and support from her GP or health professional.

Since her assault, Jane has been feeling **anxiety** – this is like **three quarters of women** who were sexually assaulted by their cohabiting partner and like two thirds of women who had been sexually assaulted by a stranger.

Since the age of 15:



**1.8 million** women  
experienced **physical violence**  
by a male intimate partner.

**0.9 million** women  
experienced **sexual violence**  
by a male intimate partner.

If Jane decides to leave David, she is likely to have several temporary **separations** prior to the final separation. If asked about why she returned, she would probably say that it was because David promised to stop the violence and because of her commitment to the relationship. When she does leave for the final time, and like seven out of ten women in a similar situation, she **leaves assets or property behind**.

Jane was in the minority, in that, like **only a third of women**, she believed that this most recent sexual assault **was a crime**. Resembling 60 percent of women who thought this, she chose to contact police. However, like most women in her situation, her partner was not charged.

Since the age of 15:



Over  
**half a million** women  
left property or assets behind

when they moved away after their violent  
relationship ended.

Regarding their most recent incident of sexual assault by a male:



**1 in 3** women  
sexually assaulted  
by a known male  
thought the sexual  
assault was a crime.

For the full report, go to: [www.anrows.org.au/PSS](http://www.anrows.org.au/PSS)

For a summary of the report and infographics for download, go to: [www.anrows.org.au/publications/compass/PSS](http://www.anrows.org.au/publications/compass/PSS)

Jane first told a friend about the assault – and in this she was consistent with about half of women who had experienced cohabiting partner sexual assault who first spoke to a friend, family member, work colleague or minister of religion. Jane wasn't like the **one in five women who never told anyone**

# ANROWS Projects

Each edition we examine several projects from the ANROWS Research Program 2014-16 to communicate the research endeavour and its intended outcome.

## Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs

This project focuses on the impact of domestic and family violence (DFV) on parenting. The aim of this project is to improve understanding of how DFV affects parenting capacity to reduce the negative impact of DFV on women and children.

Specifically, it addresses three key questions:

1. How does a reported history of DFV affect mother-child and father-child relationships?
2. How do mothers who have experienced DFV perceive it has affected their relationship with their children?
3. To what extent have these mothers had contact with relevant services and was this contact helpful or unhelpful?

The project will apply a mixed method approach incorporating: a literature review, a quantitative element using three existing, large-scale databases (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families and the

Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012), and a qualitative element providing insight into the experiences of mothers who have used services across a range of areas in the context of a history of DFV.

A range of publications for the general community, policy-makers, practitioners and researchers will be developed from this project to inform policy and practice strategies that respond to the needs of mothers and children who have experienced DFV. The project will also support the further development of approaches to working with DFV perpetrators in the context of their parenting.

This project will provide evidence on:

- the impact of domestic and family violence on parenting; and
- how to strengthen mother child relationships following domestic and family violence.



### Principal chief investigator

Dr Rae Kaspiew, Senior Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

### Chief investigators

Professor Angela Taft, Director, and Ms Leesa Hooker, Lecturer, Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University; Professor Jan Nicholson, Inaugural Roberta Holmes Professorial Chair, Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University; Dr Lixia Qu, Senior Research Fellow, Demographic Trends Analyst, Australian Institute of Family Studies; and Professor Cathy Humphreys, Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Social Work, University of Melbourne.

### Research partners / team members

Ms Ruth Weston, Assistant Director (Research), Family Law Evaluation, Work and Family, AIFS; Dr Fiona Buchanan, Lecturer, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, University of South Australia; DV Victoria (DV Vic); National Network of Women's Legal centres; Women's Legal Service Victoria; No To Violence; SA Uniting Communities; Anglicare WA.

**Approximate project length** 2 years

**Budget** \$294,683



Dr Rae Kaspiew (far left): Senior Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

Professor Angela Taft (middle): Director, Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University.

Professor Cathy Humphreys (near left): Alfred Felton Chair of Child and Family Social Work, University of Melbourne.

## sidebyside

Partners on the ANROWS Research Program project *Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs*, Dr Rae Kaspiew (RK), Professor Angela Taft (AT) and Professor Cathy Humphreys (CH) speak with us about how their project was conceived and why collaboration between researchers and service providers is so important.

### *How did your interest in researching the area of violence against women develop?*

**RK** When I was an undergraduate law student in the mid-nineties, I had an opportunity to undertake a subject that was based on an original piece of research. My supervisor, Professor Jenny Morgan from the Law School at the University of Melbourne, supported me to negotiate access to Department of Public Prosecutions files involving sexual offences. Out of that piece of work, I published an article called *Rape Lore: Sexual Violence and Legal Narrative*, which examined how women's experiences as victims/survivors of sexual offences were dealt with in the criminal law process.

This led me to become interested more broadly in gender and legal frameworks. On that basis, I decided to do a PhD (under the supervision of Professor Jenny Morgan and Professor Belinda Felhberg) to examine the application of amendments to the *Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)* that changed the legal approach to post-separation parenting. Family violence emerged as a main focus in that piece of work because of the issues that separated parents bring to court.

Since that time, I have continued to do research with a focus on family law and family violence. I joined the Australian Institute of Family Studies in 2007 and have had the privilege of working in a multi-disciplinary team on a range of diverse projects.

**CH** My interest in research was galvanised by doing my PhD on women whose children had been sexually abused. Prior to that point I had been always interested in issues of violence against women but as a practitioner and advocate. Research opened my eyes to new dimensions for advocacy.

**AT** Women's issues have always been a strong interest of mine. When I returned to Australia after 17 years in London I worked in the Women's Health Unit where I was responsible for sexual assault and family violence services. I knew I wanted to move into applied research so I went back to study a Masters of Public Health. One of my subjects was on violence against women, the more I read the more I became interested in women at the time of pregnancy and childbirth. My research looked at women's experiences of going to the GP and the implications for themselves and their children. That was profound for

"Research opened my eyes to new dimensions for advocacy."

Professor Cathy Humphreys

me; you can't go and speak to 27 women and not hear some extraordinary things. So I decided to keep going in this area of research. That was over 20 years ago.

I've been fortunate never to have experienced intimate partner violence. When you're in a gender equitable relationship, one of the things you hope for as a feminist is a more gender equitable society. I'm motivated by the idea that we must do whatever we can do to change the situation for women who are being violated by their intimate partner.

### *Can you tell us about how this project came about, and how the research partnership was formed?*

**RK** When the ANROWS grant round was announced, Cathy Humphreys, Angela Taft, Jan Nicholson, Lixia Qu and I recognised an opportunity to combine our different skills and expertise to examine family violence and parenting.

“[We] recognised an opportunity to combine our different skills and expertise to examine family violence and parenting.”

Dr Rae Kaspiew

Leveraging our different methodological and disciplinary orientations, we developed a project plan with three different aspects that will draw on our combined skills and knowledge in health, law, social work, psychology and qualitative and quantitative research.

**AT** We had just started to build a relationship with AIFS when ANROWS released this grants round. I'm the director of this small research centre, we've been funded to set up a new program called “Transitions to contemporary parenthood”, which explores the new challenges faced by a diverse range of families. We met with AIFS to build a collaboration and broaden our knowledge.

**CH** Since undertaking the “Talking to My Mum” action research project in the UK almost a decade ago, I have been deeply interested in the impact of domestic violence on the mother-child relationship and the complex issues of parenting. The ANROWS funding for exploring these issues further seemed such an exciting opportunity. I knew that Angela Taft and the team from the Judith Lumley Centre with their centre focused on research about the mother-child relationship and Angela's specific interest in domestic violence would contribute greatly to the project. Rae Kaspiew also has all the socio-legal background and the family law lens. I felt that together we would make an excellent team.

*How do relationships and research partnerships between researchers from different organisations contribute to the evidence base on violence against women?*

**AT** Our centre is multi-disciplinary, we have doctors, social workers,

scientists and others, but we do not have lawyers. This was a chance to strengthen a multi-disciplinary collaboration and bring in new skills and different perspectives. In this research project, we can complement each other in shedding light on the different pathways and challenges for women experiencing intimate partner violence.

**RK** As a researcher, it is critical to continue to grow and develop in subject matter and methodological expertise. Violence against women raises many cross-disciplinary issues and collaborating with researchers from other organisations and disciplines bring the breadth of expertise that the topic requires. Approaches and understandings that may be based on disciplinary orientation can be challenged and shifted. It also means that the researchers don't replicate the systemic silos that impede the development of effective responses to violence against women.

One of the big strengths of this project is that we also have an advisory group with membership from diverse agencies: Domestic Violence Victoria, SA Uniting Communities, Anglicare WA, the National Network of Women's Legal Centres, Women's Legal Service Victoria, the federal Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria. Our research will be closely informed by practice knowledge and an understanding of practice; deepening the researchers' understanding of the issues to be examined in the research and therefore strengthening the methodology.

**CH** Each of the Chief Investigators on this project bring with them different

research skills, different disciplinary backgrounds and different research relationships and partnerships. This will be a great strength in the project. Without the research partnerships it is not possible to undertake the research – particularly the qualitative aspects of this research project.

*This project will apply a mixed methods approach which incorporates a literature review, and a quantitative and qualitative component. Why is it important to have this mixed methods approach?*

**AT** The state of knowledge paper provides insight into the strength of current evidence on the impact of violence on parenting and what works to heal the relationship between a parent who has been a victim of violence and their children. It's important to look at what is happening in courts, in healthcare systems, and in the broader community to get a comprehensive understanding of women's experiences and perpetrators' behaviours.

**RK** The quantitative element is based on new analyses from existing large scale data sets (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families and the Survey of Recently Separated families 2012) and each of these data sets will make an important contribution to the project. The qualitative component – interviews with mothers who have used services against a background of family violence – will provide deep and rich insights into experiences in this context and what kind of service approaches are helpful or not helpful. Given the varied nature of family violence and the different systems that mothers may have to engage

with when they have experienced family violence – child protection, family law and personal protection orders systems – it’s very important to have detailed qualitative data. Together, these different elements of the project will support better understanding of what mothers need to support their parenting when there has been family violence.

**CH** I prefer mixed methods for a lot of the research projects I am now involved with. As someone who is interested in making research count, it needs to be applied and speak to different audiences. Mixed methods allows the answering of different questions and the data and findings can speak to different policy and practice audiences. Undertaking the literature review provides the foundation for the program.

*A state of knowledge paper from this project will soon be published. Have there been any surprising findings from this review of current knowledge on the impact of domestic and family violence on parenting?*

**CH** I think it is enriching to see an overview of what is out there that has been the focus of research and evaluation. I guess the surprise is how little has been evaluated and the need to develop the evidence base for the field.

**AT** In writing the state knowledge paper we were struck by the lack of good quality evidence about what works to heal the relationship between a mother and her children, or even a father and his children. There was a significant discussion in the literature about the impact of violence on parenting, but very little evidence to show what can be done to fix it.

There were some good indications from abroad, unfortunately as is often the case there was very little for refugee and migrant families. It was promising to read about healing strategies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We’re also waiting on a report from the Family Court, it will be very interesting to see what changes are proposed there.

**RK** One of the main messages from this literature review is that we need to understand a lot more about men who perpetrate family violence and what kind of fathers they are. There is very little systematic knowledge in this area.

*This project will provide evidence on the impact of domestic and family violence on parenting; and how to strengthen mother-child relationships following domestic and family violence. How do you envision this research will be used by policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and the general community?*

**RK** We hope the findings will support the development of effective policy and service responses for women and children in this situation. The knowledge will be relevant in the health, child protection and family law areas, as well as for services and practitioners who provide therapeutic services to women and children in this context. If we understand more about how family violence affects parenting and how any effects can be mitigated through more effective services, we are on the way to better outcomes for women and children affected by family violence.

From a community perspective, better understanding of these issues among the general community and among women

“We care deeply about safety, but it’s not the only thing and we need to be mindful that women really care about their parenting. We can do better at helping them with it.”

Professor Angela Taft

who experience family violence, will lessen stigma and empower women to seek help.

**CH** The attention to the ways in which domestic violence involves an attack on the mother-child relationship has been a marginalised area of practice. The research shines a light on this particular aspect of domestic violence intervention. I hope that it will also re-invigorate the practice base and drive a policy agenda which recognises the significance of attending to the mother-child relationship in the aftermath of domestic violence.

**AT** I hope it will lead to the development of more programs to heal the relationship between women and their children. More good-quality evaluations and replications of promising strategies from the UK and the US will give governments the potential to roll out programs and policies that will improve the lives of women and children who experience violence.

This area of research is so important and currently under-researched. We care deeply about safety, but it’s not the only thing and we need to be mindful that women really care about their parenting. We can do better at helping them with it. ●

# ANROWS Projects

Each edition we examine several projects from the ANROWS Research Program 2014-16 to communicate the research endeavour and its intended outcome.

## Building effective policies and services to promote women's economic security following domestic and family violence

Economic security is central to the capacity of women to transition from violent relationships, and to achieve wellbeing following domestic and family violence. Poor economic wellbeing also has adverse national impact and costs, including income support payments and lost productivity.

Combining rigorous quantitative and qualitative methodologies and an employment-focused research-to-practice partnership with Jobs Australia (the national peak body for non-profit organisations that help unemployed people find and keep jobs), the project brings together a focus on structural factors, policies and practice, to fill gaps in the evidence base, and translate knowledge into practical strategies to improve outcomes for women. This research will build new evidence about the economic dimensions of domestic and family violence; women's economic circumstances and financial needs following violence; the impact of the income support, employment services, and financial support systems; and international best practice in building women's economic security following violence.

A key contribution will be analysis of women's economic pathways following violence, including their experiences of financial wellbeing and stress, and their use of various services and supports. Through interviews with practitioners and sector leaders, the project will assess the efficacy and impact of income support, employment services, and other services and supports for promoting economic security, and will identify

ways services can better work together to improve job search outcomes and employment retention following domestic violence. Results will improve the targeting, timing, adequacy and coordination of services and supports to promote women's economic wellbeing.

This project will provide evidence about the economic dimensions of domestic and family violence and how systems and services can best support the financial security of women who have experienced this violence.

### Principal chief investigator

Dr Natasha Cortis, Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

### Chief investigators

Dr Trish Hill, Senior Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales and Dr Jane Bullen, Research Associate, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

### Research partners / team members

Jobs Australia

**Approximate project length** 18 months

**Budget** \$159,113





Dr Natasha Cortis (far left): Research Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Dr Jane Bullen (near left): Research Associate, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

## sidebyside

Partners on the ANROWS Research Program project *Building effective policies and services to promote women's economic security following domestic and family violence*, Dr Natasha Cortis (NC) and Dr Jane Bullen (JB) speak with us about how their project was conceived and why collaboration between researchers and service providers is so important.

### *How did your research interest in violence against women develop?*

**NC** I've been researching the status and wellbeing of women and children, and the quality and sustainability of the community service systems, for many years. But I'm fairly new to violence against women (VAW) research. My academic roots are in feminist political economy, looking at how the undervaluation of women's skills and social roles underpins gender-based inequalities in the families, the labour market and welfare state. Studying economic inequality in the formative years of my research drew me to the feminist social sciences more broadly, and VAW. In 2012 I worked with Ludo McFerran to evaluate the introduction of domestic violence protections in industrial agreements. This opened my eyes to how violence both feeds off and feeds economic disadvantage for women, and how improved protections in the workplace can help address violence. It made sense to leap on the opportunity to develop further research into the economic aspects of violence against women.

**JB** I became a researcher relatively recently. I worked for many years in non-

government organisations that assisted women who had experienced domestic violence, including financial abuse and the financial repercussions of leaving a violent relationship. I was aware of the financial challenges faced by women who have experienced violence, in particular high housing costs. Issues of housing, homelessness, domestic violence and gender inequality continue to be research interests for me.

### *How did the idea of this project develop?*

**JB** When I saw that ANROWS was seeking research on women's financial situation after domestic violence, I was keen to speak with Natasha because I thought our combined backgrounds would bring a good range of knowledge and skills to this research. The economic side of domestic violence is not as well researched or understood in public debate as some other aspects of violence – yet it has enormous ramifications for women and their children. I thought it was a very important area of investigation, and one that might ultimately lead to positive change.

**NC** I saw this as an opportunity to do research that would have an

impact on policy and practice. It would bring together my interests in gender inequality, women and work, industrial relations, social security, and community service systems. It would also be a way to work with and learn from colleagues with expertise in violence against women, as well as Jobs Australia. Employment services have been outside the usual boundaries of VAW research; we felt we could design a project that would help strengthen connections between the various systems which support women's economic wellbeing.

*This project will combine rigorous quantitative and qualitative research with an "employment-focused research-to-practice partnership". Can you tell us about this partnership and how it will contribute to the project's outcomes?*

**JB** Existing research indicates that employment is an important means for women to improve their financial situation after domestic violence, yet we know very little about the role of employment services in assisting women in this situation. Jobs Australia has provided us with advice and assisted us in contacting employment providers who are one of the key groups participating in

“I am keenly aware of the importance of knowledge exchange between different sectors. Each brings a different perspective to understanding complex social policy problems such as violence against women.”

Dr Jane Bullen

the qualitative part of the research.

**NC** Women’s economic wellbeing depends on access to good quality, stable employment. Our previous research into employment services highlighted the opportunity to expand the boundaries of VAW scholarship, which tends to focus on crisis responses, by bringing employment services into this area of research. We also wanted to help improve providers’ awareness of violence among their clients, and their capacity to support who have experienced violence. Jobs Australia was the logical partner for the research as the peak body for non-profit employment services. They’ve given us some great contacts for the qualitative study and

have kept us up to date on changes and priorities in the employment service system. They also have terrific insight into the challenges that women who have experienced violence face in looking for and keeping jobs.

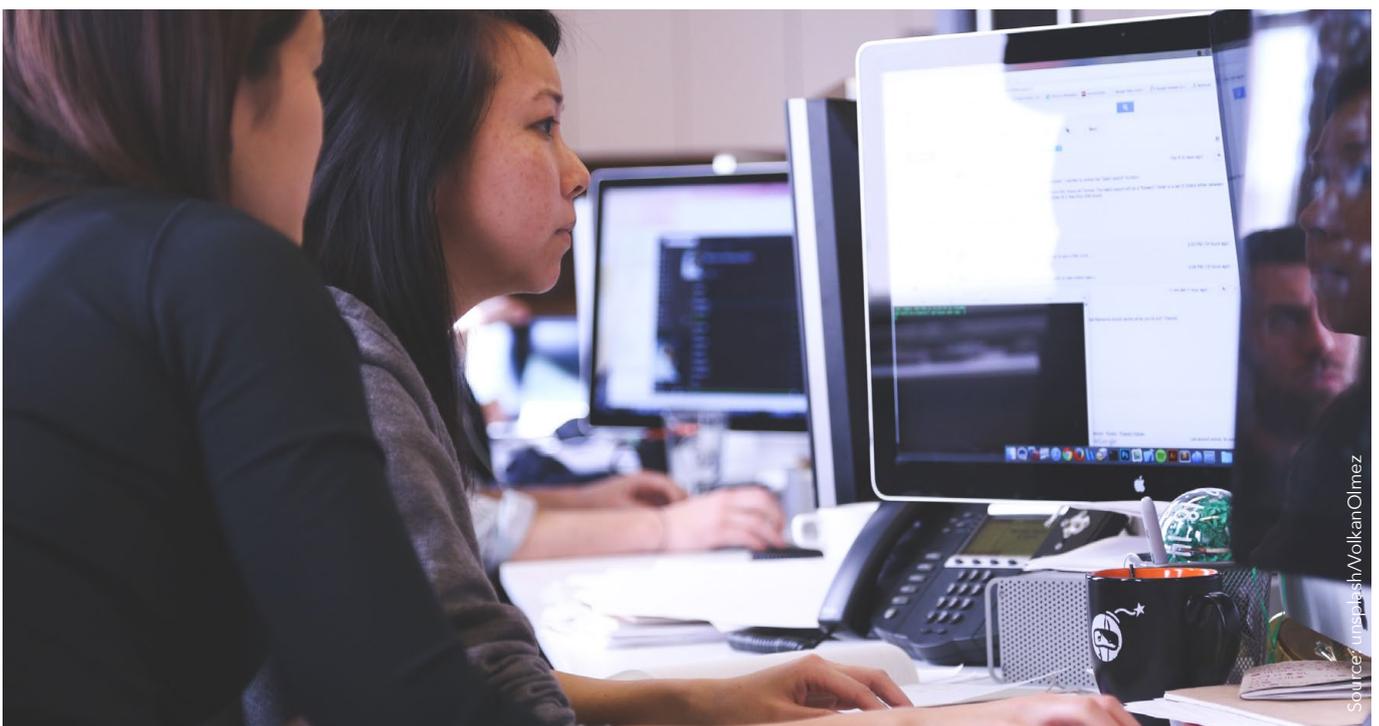
*How do relationships and research partnerships between researchers and service providers contribute to the evidence base on violence against women?*

**JB** As someone who has worked in both service provision and research, I am keenly aware of the importance of knowledge exchange between different sectors. Each brings a different perspective to understanding complex social policy

problems such as violence against women. It is a case where the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts!

**NC** Service providers help keep researchers focused on solving real world problems. Researchers can help document practitioners’ experiences and knowledge, put practice in broader experience, and prompt reflection and learning. I also have to say that doing research with service providers, policy-makers and clients also makes the day-to-day work of social policy research much more interesting!

*Two main components of this project involve analysing women’s economic pathways following violence and assessing*



*the efficacy and impact of services and supports promoting economic security. Why are these two elements important to delivering results that will help systems and services to best support the financial security of women subjected to violence?*

**NC** These two components are important to delivering results in both understanding the economic pathways women take following violence and what social services and other systems do, and could do better, to improve these pathways. These components also align with different data sources in our project. We are analysing women's economic pathways using a longitudinal dataset (Journeys Home) which provides information about exposure to violence and financial wellbeing every 6 months for 3 years. We can use statistical techniques to measure how women's economic wellbeing is associated with exposure to violence. The information about services in the dataset isn't enough for us to identify questions of service efficacy and gaps. For that we need interview data from service practitioners and leaders who are working directly with women. The two components provide different kinds of data, both of which we need to answer our questions.

**JB** We expect that analysing statistical data about women's pathways will provide us with more detailed information on how women's financial situations are impacted by domestic violence. Together with information from service providers about the efficacy and impact of service responses, the findings will provide

better evidence about where systems and services can improve.

*The Landscapes (state of knowledge) paper for this project found that according to current literature one of the key challenges in promoting women's economic security following violence is the need for increased services and integrated responses across a diverse range of policy areas to respond to the multifaceted nature of domestic violence. How do you hope the outcomes of this research project will inform better integrated responses across policy areas?*

**JB** Promoting women's economic security following violence could be described as a "wicked problem", because of the complex factors that need to be addressed and the different systems involved. On a positive note, there is a growing understanding in the community of the impact of domestic violence and the need for increased and better integrated responses. We are aware from examining the current literature and from the qualitative interviews so far, that there has already been valuable work done on various aspects of this problem. We hope that by drawing together and building on this work, we can provide information that will underpin better resourced and integrated responses that will have real benefits for women's economic security.

**NC** The state of knowledge paper drove home how women's economic wellbeing depends on intersections

"Employment services have been outside the usual boundaries of violence against women research; we felt we could design a project that would help strengthen connections between the various systems which support women's economic wellbeing."

Dr Natasha Cortis

between so many systems: legal, housing, employment and counselling, as well as consumer protections such as banks and utility companies. It can seem overwhelming because each system is huge and complex, they don't always work together, and change is so overdue. By informing integrated responses I hope the research will both improve how women's economic wellbeing is protected in crisis responses, but also by preventing violence and building women's status over the long-term. ●



# Spotlight

## Technology as a tool to empower women who have experienced violence

COMPILED BY Jess Gregory, Communications and Media Officer, ANROWS.

Source: unsplash/ThomasLefebvre

Technology has been described as a “double edged sword”<sup>1</sup> in relation to violence against women. While it is used by some perpetrators to stalk, harass, intimidate or humiliate a partner or ex-partner<sup>2</sup>, it is also a vital tool to empower women who have experienced violence.

In this Spotlight, we showcase several projects that use technology to inform, support and give power to victims/survivors at a state, national and international level. We encourage you to share other similar initiatives with us so we may share and build knowledge across the country.

### Women’s Services Network (WESNET) partnership with the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)

On 10 March 2015, the Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations organised a panel discussion on preventing violence against women and girls in the digital and technological age. In her opening address, Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash, then Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women said that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it’s vital that technology “be part of the solution” to ending gender-based violence.

As part of the discussion, Julie Oberin from Women’s Services Network (WESNET) and the Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) spoke about WESNET’s partnership with the US based National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) to increase awareness and training in how technology can be used to empower women experiencing violence through the Safety Net Australia project.

On a practical level Ms Oberin said that technology can be used to keep women safer, provide women with information about where to find help, and to collect evidence on the perpetrator to hold them to account.

Since WESNET first began its partnership relationship with NNEDV in 2008, WESNET contributes to the awareness in Australia about the prevalence of technology-facilitated abuse and provides training through webinars, conferences and face to face sessions. Four days of training are scheduled for Canberra in November and December 2015 funded by the ACT Government.

1 Speech by Natasha Stott Despoja AM, the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls, at Preventing Violence Against Women in the Digital and Technological Age, CSW 59 side event. Retrieved 6 November 2015 from: <http://dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/preventing-violence-against-women-in-the-digital-and-technological-age.aspx>

2 Technology facilitated domestic violence against women, presentation Discussed in Technology-facilitated stalking and abuse: Putting our legal framework to the test by Charissa Sun. Retrieved 6 November 2015 from <http://www.wlsnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/LSJ-Article-Charissa-Sun-June-2015-LSJ.pdf>



Ms Oberin said an important aspect of this training was encouraging support workers to help women to use technology safely and effectively, rather than informing them that they should disconnect from technology. She said women's safe access to technology is an important step in achieving gender, social, political and economic equality.

Cindy Southworth from NNEDV said their work with NGOs and government agencies on implementing technology thoughtfully was an important part of their work, and an effective way to include broader information on violence against women. NNEDV also advise US technology companies on improving the safety of their products.

In Australia, WESNET has developed a partnership with Telstra called SafeConnections. As part of this project

WESNET developed a written training package on basic technology safety to go along to its member services along with 5000 smart phones provided by Telstra for women who needed a safe phone. The specialist family violence support workers on technology safety helps them to help women to use the phones safely as part of developing a safety plan.

Ms Oberin commended Telstra on its assessment and implementation of its own domestic violence and gender related policies; she said they had instigated practical and structural change as a result of their increased awareness of the pervasiveness and prevalence of family violence. Telstra are very happy with the project as it is increasingly being rolled out across Australia and she is pleased that the recently announced Women's Safety package included strengthening this work.

## Re-focus app by Women's Legal Services Queensland

Re-focus is a free, easy to use and interactive app, developed by Women's Legal Service QLD.

It's for women who have, are, or thinking of separating. It covers legal information about domestic violence (DV), arrangements for children, financial and property matters, options for reaching a legal agreement and safe accommodation. It also provides helpful referrals and coping tips about separation.

Sometimes, the only thing some women have when separating in circumstances of DV is their phone.

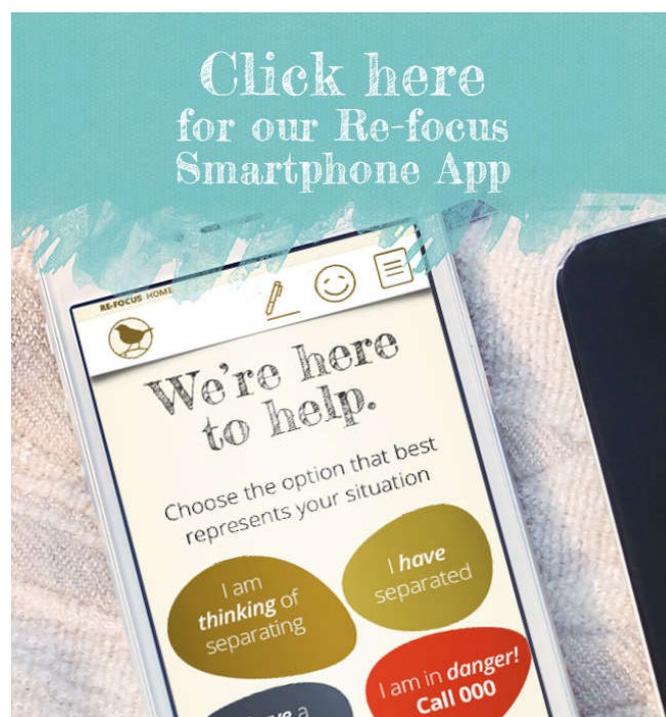
Often, they don't know where to go to get free legal advice and much-needed referrals. Re-focus, fills that information gap. Access to legal information and advice is an essential component for women's safety planning.

The prevalence and use of smart phone technology in the Australian community has increasingly enabled users to be able to access information at a time and location that was suitable and safe for them and allows a degree of anonymity and privacy.

Funding for this project was provided by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services as part of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

### How does Re-focus work?

Re-focus will take the user through a simple quiz about their situation. Re-focus will use the answers given to provide information directly relevant to them. A comprehensive quiz about DV is provided.



Women will then have all the information, referrals and coping tips relevant to them at their fingertips to go back to whenever they need. They can update their situation as it changes.

### Is Re-focus safe to use?

Separation is widely recognised as the most dangerous time for women and children escaping violence. Danger for women and children peaks again when women take steps post-separation towards permanent separation e.g. the finalisation of family law matters that can take place 12-18 months after separation.

Recognising this, safety issues have been incorporated into the app's development. A comprehensive warning is given prior to download to consider safety issues and further warnings are given throughout the app.

Women thinking of downloading the app should always consider their safety before downloading, especially if they are in a relationship characterised by domestic violence, controlling behaviours or if their partner might monitor/track them or make them feel unsafe.

Users are reminded that if they do not want others to access their device or know that they are using the app a secure password should be used at all times.

There will undoubtedly be occasions where it is simply not safe for women to download the app themselves. In such circumstances the app can still be a useful resource for counsellors and workers to download on their phone, and use with clients that way.

#### How do I download Re-focus?

##### Step 1:

Tap the App Store or Play Store Icon on your phone and type "Re-Focus" or "Women's Legal Service" in the search area.

##### Step 2:

Tap the option "Re-focus" – and find the Re-focus App in the options (it's the one with the brown bird top left).

##### Step 3:

Read "about this App" and decide whether it is safe for you to download and right for your situation.

##### Step 4:

If it is safe then follow the prompts to install.

Link for Apple: <https://appsto.re/aukkeG0.i>

Link for Google Play: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.wlsq.legalask>

## Links to Justice by Women's Legal Service Victoria

*Link virtual outreach*, a collaboration between Women's Legal Service Victoria (WLSV), family violence and community agencies. Link provides a safe and secure way for women across Victoria experiencing family violence to access legal advice and representation via internet video conferencing.

Women's access to legal advice can be compromised by many factors including fear, geographic isolation, lack of access to transport, disability, cultural isolation and economic disadvantage.

It is widely understood that the period immediately after separation is the most dangerous for women experiencing family violence. Access to legal advice at that crucial time empowers women with knowledge about legal options and protections - leading to safer outcomes and quicker recovery.

With the use of technology, including video conferencing and document sharing, WLSV enables women to overcome these barriers by providing legal advice to women, with the support and assistance of their family violence worker, in surroundings familiar to them.

Link (then known as 'Women Lawyers Workers') began in 2012 as an 18 month pilot auspiced by Women's Health in the North (WHIN), Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHNGE) and Berry Street Family Services, funded by Legal Services Board.

The impetus for this pilot was a research conducted by WHGNE following the Black Saturday bushfires which identified a lack of access to legal services for rural women experiencing family violence.



At the completion of the 18 month pilot, the research found that delivering legal services using video conferencing, was found to be an effective and feasible method to resolve legal issues for many women. Preliminary findings indicated better outcomes for women. Within the interviews, there was evidence that episodes of violence have in all probability been prevented through this intervention.

The initial pilot involved six family violence agencies, three of which were located in the Goulburn North East region.

WLSV now has 20 Link partners from the very north of the state in Mildura to the south west coast and from the South Australian border to East Gippsland. Our partners include community health centres, community support agencies and women's refuges. We currently provide private and safe consultations 3 days each week, and have assisted over 500 women since the project began in June 2012.

This collaboration between WLSV and the Link agencies is vital for women's access to justice. Very often, the first point of contact for women escaping violence is a community worker.

Yet, community workers are not lawyers and women experiencing family violence often have multiple pressing legal matters that must be dealt with in different courts, in different jurisdictions and under different legislation.

To guide community workers in identifying these legal issues, WLSV Legal Education team developed training and a unique set of tools (Critical Legal Issues Map) guiding community workers to identify their client's critical legal issues, take action and make referrals.

The Map, likened to a decision tree, leads community workers to:

- ask specific questions at the right time;
- prioritise legal issues to prevent a legal crisis;
- make timely and appropriate referrals to lawyers and other services; and
- use checklist to prepare clients for court.

Participants trained in using the Map have reported that they value it because:

- they can confidently identify and respond to their clients' legal needs;
- it provides clarity about urgent issues therefore saving time, stress and money;
- it is very accessible and provides a quick reference; and
- it prepares them and their clients for what lies ahead.

WLSV is researching technology methods so community workers can access these tools on-line.

women's legal  
service victoria

## Daisy app (updated)

The updated Daisy app helps more women experiencing the impacts of sexual assault, domestic and family violence – including those in rural and remote areas of Australia, or where English is not their first language.

With new features increasing accessibility, Daisy is now connecting more women to vital information and services.

Daisy – developed with input from all state and territory governments and funded by the Australian Government – has been downloaded approximately 100 times each week since its launch in March. In total, there have been more than 2000 downloads nationally.

The updated app has new features including translated information across 28 language groups, text-to-voice functionality

for women with a vision impairment (or low literacy) and an SMS function for women living in rural or remote areas.

Special features of Daisy include a “Get Help” function that allows users to quickly call 000 and a “Quick Exit” button to leave screens containing service information.

In June 2015, Daisy won a 2015 Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) Victorian iAward for government innovation. Daisy was recognised for the easy, intuitive and safe way it enables users to find a wide range of services – from specialist services, legal support or financial counselling, through to housing providers.

Daisy is free to download from Google Play for Android phones and the App Store for iPhones. Find out more at: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/daisy/>.



(Left to right): Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Kristy McKellar and Rosie Batty.



## inFocus

### Working collaboratively and leading change: Reflections on Commission on the Status of Women

BY Michelle Deshong

As I write this article I am in Johannesburg, South Africa where I am attending an international conference focused on tackling issues related to violence against women and girls (VAWG)/gender-based violence (GBV). The conference is bringing together advocates and policy developers from across the world to change attitudes, behaviours and adopt strategies to end VAWG/GBV. It is a timely reminder of how much work we have yet to do as violence against women continues to be an epidemic sweeping the world. Sadly it is also a stark reminder of the situation in Australia and the many challenges we are continuing to face. The scourge of domestic and family violence does not wane and now more than ever we require a national and global response. So it is of little surprise that this international conference also allows me to reflect on the work at the global level through the United Nations and in particular the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

I have attended the CSW for the past 4 years. In 2013 the theme for CSW57 was *Elimination of all forms of violence against women*. In her opening address Michelle Bachelet, then United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director, remarked:

*It is time for action when up to 70 percent of women in some countries face physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. When intimate partner violence accounts for between 40 and 70 percent of female murder victims in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States.<sup>1</sup>*

Delegates from around the globe worked tirelessly at CSW to achieve substantial recommendations for member states to carry forward. It has been reassuring to see a community dialogue and flow-on actions by state and federal governments on this issue. These actions are an important development, not only in making our societies safer but continuing to progress the recommendations made at international forums.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/3/opening-statement-of-michelle-bachelet-at-csw57>

“We need to ensure the ongoing visibility of Indigenous women in the feminist debate is one that has consistency and authenticity.”

In 2013, the Indigenous caucus (a collaboration of Indigenous women from across the globe) brought to the fore the unique and challenging issues faced by Indigenous women, including their heightened vulnerability to violence, often caused by foreign occupation of traditional lands, extractive industries and continued marginalisation and oppression. The Indigenous caucus developed an international media release and held press conferences to disseminate their information and to grab the attention of member states. By distributing the position statement widely amongst CSW delegates, engaging the media, and undertaking well-informed advocacy work, the Indigenous caucus’ political strategy was met with great results. The CSW57’s *Agreed Conclusions* recognised the unique position of Indigenous women, stating: “*The Commission reaffirms that Indigenous women often suffer multiple forms of discrimination and poverty which increases their vulnerability to all forms of violence; and stressed the need to seriously address violence against indigenous women and girls*”<sup>2</sup>.

The conversation about specific measures to target and address the needs of Indigenous women still remains a relevant conversation for the government. Changes need to continue to ensure that culturally appropriate services and support are provided for Indigenous women. As much as we have now gained national attention on the issue of violence against women, Indigenous women’s stories are less visible.

As an Aboriginal woman one of the main reasons that I work in the gender space is to engage in critical conversation from the perspective of intersectionality, the unique situation that emerges when race meets gender. Indigenous women continue to be a minority across the world and therefore it remains absolutely imperative that there is substantial representation by Indigenous women through national and international forums. The outcomes of CSW57 demonstrate how important and strategic this engagement can be. We need to ensure the ongoing visibility of Indigenous women in the feminist debate is one that has consistency and authenticity.

This brings me to my recent attendance at the CSW59 earlier this year. 2015 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which has been seen as a roadmap to gender equality.

In many ways the CSW59 was distracted by competing priorities. One of them was the adoption of a Political Declaration amongst the member states which would recognise the Beijing Platform for Action and continue to call for action on gender equality. Going against traditional processes, CSW

negotiations with governments on the Political Declaration commenced some 2 weeks prior to the CSW meeting in New York. This lack of engagement with civil society was an unfortunate decision, as it meant they missed out on the invaluable contribution brought to these discussions by non-government organisations (NGOs). From my perspective it was especially disappointing as the exclusion of Indigenous representation in the consultation meant that our voices were once again marginalised. This sense of frustration was shared among many of my colleagues. We participate at CSW to permeate these political spaces in a way not possible through government hierarchy, structural challenges and poor engagement processes. Our opportunity to be consulted is therefore paramount.

However, I was inspired by the persistence of NGO representatives in reminding the official delegates of our presence. We literally camped in the hallways of the United Nations while negotiations took place behind closed doors. Each time an official walked out they would see the diversity of faces that in the end would have something to say. I felt liberated to be a part of a collective force of likeminded, empowered women.

That feeling is created every time I get to attend a CEDAW or CSW. Every dialogue is one that frames a critical lens to our societal attitudes, norms and behaviours, and invites us to continue to work hard on effecting change. In particular our conversations bring forth the intersectionality of issues faced by Indigenous women across the world.

I was very pleased to be a part of a parallel event, *Leading Peaceful Revolution: Indigenous Women at Beijing +20*. This was the only panel at CSW59 that bought the voices of Indigenous women to the forefront. It began in a way that honoured our Indigenous protocols of acknowledging traditional owners and our spiritual connection to land and place. A welcome song was performed by Young Medicine, a First Nations duo from Alberta, Canada. We told stories of our homelands, our culture and our connection to identity as part of our introductions so the audience could appreciate our perspectives, our values and ideas.

Importantly we spoke about important issues that affect our lives. From grassroots movements like *Idle No More* to climate change to violence against women, 20 years after the Beijing Platform Indigenous women are leading movements for change worldwide. The lively and insightful discussion addressed calls to action for Indigenous women. We raised questions about structural control and debated oppression and marginalisation. We considered whether the political participation of Aboriginal women can ensure greater

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2013/L.5](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/CN.6/2013/L.5)

“These international forums are only one part of a large and complex political system. But they also offer an enabling space for many women to work collaboratively and lead change.”



Michelle Deshong (third from right) with fellow delegates of this year’s Commission for the Status of Women in New York.

inclusivity and engagement in decision-making. We discussed how globalisation, including multinational resource extraction is connected to violence against Indigenous women; and how the global phenomenon of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada is a national crisis, but sadly a story not unfamiliar to Indigenous women across the world. It was a reinvigorating inter-generational dialogue about inherent rights, respect, reciprocity and reconciliation.

Our event closed with an Honour song and dance that tells the story of the interconnectedness and loss felt for missing sisters and about a spirit weeping. At the end everyone embraces as one and feels the sense of belonging and common value amongst us. Many in the audience spoke about how important and insightful the presentation was. They said they had been awakened to new knowledge and new perspectives on gender issues. Those moments were a reminder of how powerful an opportunity it is to participate actively at this level. This is not an opportunity afforded to many, and I feel a keen sense of responsibility to present an Indigenous woman’s perspective wherever possible.

Through engaging in feminist debates, we have the capacity to effect change. Whether this change is in attitudes, behaviours, social norms or perceptions they are all equally important. In doing so we have to acknowledge the historical consequences that have created the world we now live in. We can also identify where and how power has impacted our lives and develop strategies for future capacity building. While important, these international forums are only one part of a large and complex political system. But they also offer an enabling space for many women to work collaboratively and lead change. ●

# latestLiterature

Latest publications on understanding violence against women and their children. The ANROWS Research Database contains a comprehensive collection of resources.

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