

**Senate Inquiry into domestic violence in Australia
Submission by Dr. Elizabeth Celi
Psychologist, Author and media commentator**

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee for Inquiry into domestic violence in Australia. It is encouraging to see this review occur at a time where over four decades of public campaigning has reached a cross roads in how best to manage this issue moving forward.

A summary of my professional background informing this submission will be provided. Followed by the perspective from which I shall be addressing the Terms of Reference (TOR). Three (3) TOR will be addressed, each in a succinct table, summarising important factors applicable for this Senate Inquiry into domestic violence in Australia. Please note that TOR (e) will be addressed first as it provides the basis for subsequent factors addressed in TOR (b) and (c) to follow it.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] for any further inquiries. Having been called to give evidence at a previous Senate Inquiry for Men’s Health circa 2008/2009, I would welcome the request to give evidence at a public hearing for the Senate Inquiry into domestic violence in Australia.

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My professional background

I contribute this submission as a psychologist in private practice over 11 years, working with both male and female adults. I am a published author of two books in men's health "*Regular Joe vs. Mr. Invincible – The battle for the True Man*" and "*Breaking the Silence – a practical guide for male victims of domestic abuse*". Further details of my work and media interviews can be found at www.drceji.com.au.

My second book clearly addresses men's experience of abuse and violence by their female partner. This shall not be my only perspective for this submission however, to be further detailed in "The perspective of my submission". At this point, my second book, "*Breaking the Silence – a practical guide for male victims of domestic abuse*" was and continues to be an important resource for;

- a. men unaware of the extent of their relationship difficulties & how to safely manage it
- b. A pleasant surprise has emerged with female readers, at first reading the book out of curiosity, realizing their behaviours have been unproductive and/or abusive and no one had ever educated them as such. This effected positive change in how they managed themselves and therefore their relationships for beneficial outcomes
- c. men's friends and family observing unhealthy dynamics but unaware of what it was nor how to best assist the situation for, and with, their loved one
- d. Workers in the domestic violence space eagerly seeking resources and guidelines for also assisting men and both parties children exposed to this issue in their relationship.

Overall, my book has been a pragmatic and equitable resource, which has created a win/win for many men and women.

Following the release of this book, I have conducted many print, radio and TV interviews on this topic. Media hosts, listeners and viewers, on air and in subsequent unsolicited emails, have expressed relief to finally hear a professional speak on an issue they've seen their son, brother, mate, uncle or father go through. Men they love on the receiving end of unproductive and unchecked behaviour by a known female in their life.

I have contributed to several Australian and overseas conference panel presentations, listed in Table 1 on the following page. My overseas conference panel presentations have been alongside prominent and academically published researchers, investigating male victims of domestic abuse and violence. I have provided the clinician's perspective and highlighted important yet overlooked psychological dynamics & misperceptions – on individual, social, treatment and systemic levels, throughout these presentations.

In 2013 I spear headed an international collaborative study with researchers in the USA, UK and Canada. We are academically designing and collecting further data on male victims of abuse and violence by their female partners using innovative methods, incorporating study design to overcome the barriers men have previously faced in recognising and/or reporting their experience. Please refer to the Men's Advisory Network Executive summary for a listing of some of these barriers and how we've partially adopted this report to facilitate men's communication. Data analysis for this international collaborative study is not yet complete for presentation.

The perspective of my submission

Whilst I have clearly focused my psychological advocacy toward raising awareness and fair resources for men experiencing domestic abuse and violence, my submission to the Senate Inquiry on Domestic Violence will address this matter on a more strategic level. That is, overarching strategic issues that I have consistently observed with both my training in academic research and as a clinician.

I will be addressing three (3) Terms of Reference in this Submission from two strategic perspectives;

1. Academic comment on research methodologies enabling or hindering true prevalence figures to be captured for male victims
2. The psychological blind spots & misperceptions resulting from public campaigns to date, rightly assisting female victims of domestic abuse and violence. However at the expense of other victims.

Table 1. List of Australian and overseas conference presentations by Dr. Elizabeth Celi

Year	Conference/ Presentation	Presentation title
2013	American Psychological Association annual convention, Hawaii, USA – Panel presentation	<i>Male victims of domestic abuse/violence – personal therapy and social education</i>
2013	Monash Business Associates – panel alongside two HR professionals discussing whether ‘domestic violence’ really should be included in EBA’s	<i>“Domestic violence becoming a workplace issue – another item on the HR agenda”</i>
2012	International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research Conference, Portsmouth, USA – panel presentation	<i>Individual and social psychology influences on male victims and female perpetrators of intimate partner abuse & violence.</i>
2011	University of New Hampshire School of Law, Social Justice Institute Ending Domestic & Sexual Violence; Innovations in practice and research conference, Portsmouth, USA	<i>Working therapeutically with male victims of intimate partner abuse and violence – The Masculine Window</i>
2011	Australian Institute of Criminology, Meeting the needs of victims of crime, NSW Australia	<i>Meeting the needs of male victims of family violence</i>
2010	International Congress of Applied Psychology, Melbourne, Australia	<i>Emotional violence toward male victims by female perpetrators – let’s open the door</i>
2010	Invitation by Men’s Advisory Network, Perth Australia. Launch of Australia’s first qualitative research report of Intimate Partner Abuse of Men – refer their Executive summary attached.	<i>My work with male victims of intimate partner abuse</i>

Before detailing each Term of Reference, I encourage you to watch this very short video, just under 2 minutes. This video by the Mankind Initiative succinctly demonstrates the psychological blinds spots I am referring to. While this video was filmed in the UK, data indicates it’s applicability for men in the USA and Australia. Further comments will be noted in the appropriate Term of Reference. Please take a moment to view the video - <http://www.buzzfeed.com/candacelowry/watch-how-people-react-when-they-see-a-woman-abuse-a-man-in>

The misperceptions and blind spots that have led to this kind of social response, have developed over years for reasons detailed in the Terms of Reference, now requiring strategic shifts. Importantly for this Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence, it has been a significant contributor stalling the rate of progress, true progress, in managing the issue of domestic violence for all victims, including women.

Term of Reference (e) – 1 of 2

How the Federal Government can best support, contribute to and drive the social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children

Current problem	Proposed solution				
<p>Management of domestic violence has become over-reliant on the variable of “gender” as the main determinant;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This has polarised the issue & created a “women vs. men” paradigm, limiting the assistance <i>women</i> get, not least men - It perpetuates the dynamic of women being a victim. There is a difference between being a “victim on the receiving end of unproductive behaviours” and being “in a victim ROLE”, which the polarising of domestic violence by gender is doing to <i>female</i> victims, further disempowering women - Respecting history, gender was relevant in the late 20th century to raise awareness for female victims in a disadvantaged social position. This continued approach in the 21st century is now irrelevant & actually a siphon on resources as it limits women’s opportunities for empowerment beyond being a “survivor”, therefore psychologically tied to their history. - Domestic violence is not a gender issue, it is a mental health & social health issue <p>There’s now been <u>over four decades</u> of this gender polarised approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This has helped raise awareness & much needed help no doubt - It is NOW however, stifling the <u>rate of progress</u> for appropriate resourcing to assist skills training in overcoming unproductive behaviours, by either gender - Refer to problems above, perpetuated as a result of this pendulum swinging on one direction ONLY for simply too long 	<p>Key variables to form as a foundation & framework for progressing the management of domestic violence would include;</p> <p><i>Mental health issues in both victim and perpetrator, male or female</i></p> <p>** Mental health issues don’t always mean “psychopathology” or “antisocial”. It can also simply include a significant lack of psychological skills, some detailed in my book. Power and control are <i>not</i> primary influences in these psychological factors.</p> <p>** Clearly perpetrators have mental health concerns, however in order for a perpetrator to <i>continue</i> their behaviour, a victim <i>mentality</i> needs to be present <i>enabling</i> it. This is different to blame, it is instead a basic fact <i>underlying</i> the bidirectional & interactive dynamics of psychological abuse, for both male and female initiators and victims. Safely breaking this cycle minimises a victim simply seeking another abuser in their life, consciously and/or unconsciously.</p> <p><i>Social health</i>, e.g. socioeconomic status, number of children involved, living arrangements, support network, legal-administrative <i>abuse</i>.</p> <p><i>Unproductive behaviours</i> - recognize abuse and violence is a series behaviours back & forth, not a “bad man/woman”. Behaviours include psychological variables.</p> <p>Policy wording, and resource development, from here on to simultaneously reflect the <i>full</i> spectrum of intimate partner possibilities, expanded in the inserted table.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="335 1232 406 1859"> <tr> <td><i>Male toward female</i></td> <td><i>Female toward male</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Female toward female</i></td> <td><i>Male toward male</i></td> </tr> </table> <p>Finite resources CAN be utilised more effectively and efficiently by developing policy and programs that attend to the central underlying dynamics referred to above, fairly & equitably applied to all four possibilities <u>at once</u>. <i>Additional</i> guidelines can THEN be developed to address unique variables relevant to each.</p>	<i>Male toward female</i>	<i>Female toward male</i>	<i>Female toward female</i>	<i>Male toward male</i>
<i>Male toward female</i>	<i>Female toward male</i>				
<i>Female toward female</i>	<i>Male toward male</i>				

Term of Reference (e) – Continued (2 of 2)	
How the Federal Government can best support, contribute to and drive the social, cultural and behavioural shifts required to eliminate violence against women and their children	
Current problem	Proposed solution
<p>Continuing to use the label “domestic violence”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - while this may seem trivial, it contributes to reinforcing outdated images of what domestic abuse and violence is about - this label carries with it decades of polarised images, namely of “heavily bruised women” and “violent men” - ONLY. While there is no denial of this reality, it is no longer the <i>only</i> image to be considered. The public and workers in this field need to refresh their orientation in progressing this matter. 	<p>Update this term with;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. “Intimate Partner Abuse & Violence”, as the current literature now uses. As highlighted in the proposed solution above, current literature recognises the four “intimate partner” possibilities that abuse and violence can occur within, refreshing the perspective and openness to updated public education and resource development. b. Additionally, this term opens awareness to “psychological abuse”, differentiating the important cognitive, emotional, social and financial abuse within this matter, regardless of physical violence being present.
<p>Lack of public education about the existence and unique experiences of men experiencing domestic abuse and violence by their female partners.</p> <p>Lack of public education about the existence of female perpetrators and what verbal, emotional, social abuse looks like by females, toward men or women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ignoring the existence of these well-researched topics is simply archaic in today’s day and age. The 46-page bibliography can be accessed here - http://www.drceli.com.au/breaking-the-silence - to even question whether male victims and female perpetrators exist anymore is a perpetuation of misrepresented research addressed in TOR (c) <p>Lack of resources for male victims and female perpetrators to address their difficulties, therefore being able to genuinely re-establish productive and healthy living.</p>	<p>Universal media campaigns, TV, radio, posters, bus posters etc that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - using the four intimate partner possibilities outlined above, ensure images and accurate information pertaining to the interactive dynamics of each partnership is highlighted - given the scarcity of information/images/accurate education people have on how male/female victims are affected by the <i>unproductive behaviours of female perpetrators</i>, some equilibrium needs to be established. The video link provided on page 3 is a prime example of far more effective public education. It would assist in diminishing the psychological/perceptual blind spots the public have developed. - My professional and media experience have shown how many people in the larger community have been relieved to see the acknowledgement of male victims and/or simply female perpetrator dynamics, which many young girls/woman have also been subjected to. If not for personal relief, but for their loved one they’ve seen through a hard time. Ultimately instilling faith and rapport in the medium tackling this issue equitably.

Term of Reference (b) – The factors contributing to the present level of domestic violence (1 of 2)	
Current problem	Proposed solution
<p>Lack of appropriate research design for prevalence studies on a national level, capturing objective, non-ideological data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While rightly maximising the ability to report domestic abuse/violence by females, variables that will facilitate men reporting the same are not factored in. This then gives an erroneous view that female victims are more prevalent than men - The study design didn't objectively enable data collection by men as an equitable part of the subject pool, standard scientific research protocol for national/population level studies, therefore study design skewed the data collection and naturally, limited the data results - True scientific research critiques the limitations of study design/methodology yet the skew of the ideological orientation/design is not critiqued, despite its significant impact in representing the situation - Justifying resource allocation based on "prevalence" data under these circumstances becomes questionable. - Instead, allocating resources for the <i>common</i> underlying causes and variables, regardless of the gender of the victim or perpetrator, can legitimately and efficiently assist more of the population. The fear around female victims losing resources is unfounded when a non-ideological approach guides the process as females will of course continue to be assisted. 	<p>Ensure national research, policy and resource development is informed by the multitude of literature already in existence for the full spectrum of intimate partner abuse possibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plenty of independent research exists to justify male victims and female perpetrators being factored into national level studies. Assumptions of "only female victims exist" and "prevalence of male victims is negligible" is simply archaic in today's day and age. To keep arguing on this is a waste of time. <p>As Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) quoted, "<i>Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored</i>".</p> <p>Employ non-ideological and competent academic researchers to conduct scientifically valid and guided research, maximising data collection and critiquing its outcomes, productively. For example, Professor Alfred Allan and his team at Edith Cowan University conducted the research for the Men's Advisory Network on Intimate Partner Abuse of men. While this was oriented toward men, previous research justified it and the study design was non-ideological.</p>

Term of Reference (b) – The factors contributing to the present level of domestic violence – Continued (2 of 2)

Current problem	Proposed solution
<p>Having an exclusive Office for Women (OFW), as contentious as this sounds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whilst it is important for certain matters, intimate partner abuse and violence is not one of them - The impact detailed for TOR (e) regarding the (1) gender polarisation of this mental/social health issue and (2) the pendulum swinging in ONE direction ONLY for far too long, are simply perpetuated by having an OFW. <p>How does this "...contribute to the present level of domestic violence"?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a result of policy and inequitable attention to the full spectrum of intimate partner abuse, at the very least female perpetrators and their impact, men and both their children have nowhere to go for help or relief from the psychological abuse and/or violence. - "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored"! (Aldous Huxley) - By not assisting men and both their children in these predicaments, the ongoing cycle/prevalence of abuse continues with the social and system ripple effects. Most importantly, perpetuating the significant risk of the cycle continuing into the child/children's generation of intimate relationships. <p>A lack of resources is no longer an excuse because even the finite resources CAN be used more efficiently in addressing the <i>underlying</i> source of domestic abuse and violence, mental and social health variables, not gender. An important beginning to curtailing this issue for all.</p>	<p>Replace the OFW with an Office for Mental and Social Health,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with domestic abuse and violence being <i>but one arm of it</i>, not it's full focus, thereby positioning the issue appropriately. - Abolish feminist policy when it comes to domestic abuse and violence - refer TOR (e) for rationale. Feminist policy while relevant in other matters, has regrettably stagnated the rate of progress for domestic abuse and violence. - Why continue to strain finite resources when this very perspective <i>continues</i> to report "prevalence figures still show a significant problem"? Yes it is a problem, just not only for the reasons being claimed. After four decades of work with this approach, the rate of progress has significantly lagged given the significant time frame. <p>Ensure this Office for Mental and Social Health is informed by competent, <i>non-ideological</i> academics, health policy professionals and experienced clinicians who objectively follow a health framework. For example, Prof. Alfred Allen and his team who conducted the Men's Advisory Network.</p> <p>Incorporate overview and accountability processes, such that the resources and public education this Office produces, are truly reflective of non-ideological skews in its wording and framework for service delivery. It's one thing to have a policy worded in a non-discriminatory manner, but another matter to translate it into fair and equitable services implementation and education for the community at large.</p> <p><i>"Science is organised knowledge. Wisdom is organised life"</i> (Immanuel Kant, 1724-1804)</p> <p>Subsequently, this issue is primarily addressed as a mental health and social health issue, with gender but one variable considered where appropriate. There are other very important variables to be prioritised above gender, such as psychological skills and appropriate social education.</p>

Term of Reference (c) – Adequacy of policy and community responses to domestic violence (1 of 2)	
Current problem	Proposed solution
<p>Ignoring that women and children are also victims to <i>female perpetrators</i> of abusive and violent behaviours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the female victim who had her face bruised and hair ripped out, demeaned or bullied by another woman (actual experiences) “less of a victim” or “less deserving of help” because her perpetrator was female? - Is a child watching Mum kick, scratch, yell, control and manipulate Dad (actual experiences) “better off” or “less affected” than a child watching Dad behave that way toward Mum? <p>The gender polarising issue already discussed has unfortunately created this mentality of who is the “better victim” or “more deserving victim”. There is no place for that kind of judgement in this issue. Psychological and physical safety is important for anyone, adults and children.</p>	<p>Clear and accurate education is key to raising awareness and reducing blind spots. Therefore using multiple mediums, from policy documents, service development and universal media campaigns. Raising awareness as to how women’s verbal and emotional literacy can become abusive and violent, is an important start.</p> <p>As a series of unproductive behaviours over time, abuse is abuse regardless of gender. For several decades, men <i>only</i> have been shown as perpetrators. This has created several psychological misperceptions & blind spots in the community which negates females as perpetrators. Subsequently, in the <i>early stages</i> of public education, clear images and accurate information of what abusive and violent behaviour by females looks like, is necessary. Until such time that recognition of female perpetrators exist, enables easier detection for any victim or their loved one observing.</p> <p>Psychological abuse is less “visible” <i>initially</i>. However, in light of the interactive dynamics of psychological abuse, over time, the patterns and directionality can be assessed and attended to.</p> <p>Psychological abuse uses mental, emotion and verbal literacy as a gateway. This is a common avenue for female perpetrators to create an abusive dynamic (in addition to physical violence), with the intention of controlling and manipulating people and/or situations.</p> <p>The video link on page 3 and below provides a simple example of this, with the added benefit of the social misperceptions being clearly observed.</p> <p>http://www.buzzfeed.com/candacelowry/watch-how-people-react-when-they-see-a-woman-abuse-a-man-in</p>

Term of Reference (c) – Adequacy of policy and community responses to domestic violence – Continued (2 of 2)	
Current problem	Proposed solution
<p>Misrepresentation of research results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research data, both accurate data and questionable data (refer to problem described for TOR b.), being stated out of context - Data points catastrophized and amplified to induce unnecessary fear. Apparently walking past ANY man is a danger in the common day! - Young girls are being induced into defensiveness around their male friends - Young girls receiving education about unproductive male behaviours are simultaneously being denied information of how to protect themselves from females with unproductive behaviours. Additionally, young girls/women are inadvertently “endorsed” to behave unproductively themselves, because there’s no accountability for females behaving abusively/violently. 	<p>Pure and simply, instate accountability for how research is consumed and portrayed to the public, non-academic community in relation to domestic abuse and violence.</p> <p>The problems addressed above are perpetuated with any misrepresentation of the data and dynamics to the general community who may not have the skills or awareness to critique the information they are fed.</p> <p>At this stage, the www.oneinthree.com.au website has a formidable collation and summary of where data has been misrepresented. Among other valid information of male victims of abuse and violence, including contexts beyond intimate partner abuse/violence.</p> <p>From an academic perspective, I have observed & worked with Greg Andresen, the Senior Researcher behind the www.oneinthree.com.au site. His consistent professional diligence is commendable. His impartial statistical review of data, stating objective facts overall without ideology as well as (mis)representation to the public, is impressive.*</p> <p>So it is with confidence that I recommend that the www.oneinthree.com.au website link be an additional inclusion in all public information, education campaigns, resource pamphlets/websites and service delivery locations. This is an easy, yet important and effective initial step in managing the broader issue of domestic abuse and violence in Australia through public education.</p>

** Be advised Mr. Andresen is currently unaware of my submission and these comments I have made with regard to his work. I trust the www.oneinthree.com.au campaign will also be making a submission to this Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence.*

Summary

My professional background as a psychologist over the last 11 years, published author of two mental health books and presenter at several academic conferences on domestic abuse and violence, provides a professionally informed platform for my submission to the Senate Inquiry for domestic violence in Australia. Further detail on my professional background can be viewed at www.drceci.com.au.

The Senate Inquiry for domestic violence in Australia Terms of Reference (e), (b) and (c) have been addressed, in that order, to enable a coherent presentation of the multiple strategic issues and recommendations I have put forward.

The strategic issues expanded upon within these three (3) Terms of Reference, have been addressed from two overarching perspectives;

1. Academic comment on research methodologies and research presentation to the public, discussing;
 - the enabling or hindering true prevalence figures to be captured
 - the dubious nature of public representation of both accurate and questionable research data
 - the impact of this in managing the broader issue of abuse and violence at the service level and public education level.

2. The psychological blind spots and misperceptions that have resulted from public campaigns to date, rightly assisting female victims of domestic abuse and violence. However at the expense of other victims.
 - This has cost the Government in less efficient use of finite resources
 - Resources that could now more effectively address the *underlying* dynamics of abuse & violence for *all* victims and perpetrators, regardless of gender. Instead, as a mental health and social health issue
 - The flow on will naturally help children exposed to domestic abuse and violence in their household, regardless of who the perpetrator and victim is.

Proposed solutions for each have been recommended and delineated.

Should the Senate Inquiry for domestic violence in Australia call me to give evidence at a public hearing, I would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this Submissions stated problems and proposed solutions. Having attended a public hearing for a previous Senate Inquiry, I would welcome the Senates request.

Contact details

I am best contacted on 

Please email me for a direct phone number should it be required.

Kind Regards,


Dr. Elizabeth Celi
Psychologist, Author, Media commentator