

*The Grafton Concerned Parents Group (GCPG)
 supplementary submission to the inquiry into child
 custody arrangements in the event of family separation.*

House of Representatives Standing Committee
 on Family and Community Affairs

Submission No: 1654

Date Received: 27-10-03

Secretary: _____

Committee Secretary
 Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
 House of Representatives
 Parliament House
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 AUSTRALIA

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Dear Committee Secretary,

My name is Brian Mahony and I am here today representing a group of concerned parents from Grafton.

We thank the committee for this opportunity to address this important Inquiry.

We would like the committee to reflect on all of our submission, which is before you under the name of Grafton Concerned Parents Group, and today I will focus on the issues of domestic violence and conflict.

When comparing the community response to domestic violence against the epidemiological evidence, a clear bias emerges in the services and sympathies towards women.

As an example, we have attached a flier, which appeared as a full page in the Clarence Valley TV guide and only supports women victims of domestic violence.

This has a detrimental effect, in that, the Family Court then often leaves children at risk in the hands of abusive mothers.

There have been several cases where this action has lead to the death of the children. One last year where two children died after the Family Court counsellor approved them being given to a delusional woman. And more recently where an 11 yr. old girl was murdered by her mother. Just last week a woman was sentenced for the killing of her four children which occurred over a 10 year period.

Unfortunately we seem to have little consideration for "the best interests of the children" in these cases, and many women are diagnosed, either before or after the event, with mental problems based on former abuse so as to receive lighter sentences.

Fathers however receive 20+ year sentences despite being a victim of long term abuse.

Only one mother that we know of has ever received more than 10 years.

Society makes Excuses!

If we really want to protect our children, the best model is "shared parenting" except where there is clear psychiatric or medical evidence.

Just because the current law allows shared parenting to occur does not mean it is used, even when it is in "the best interests of the children". This is because:

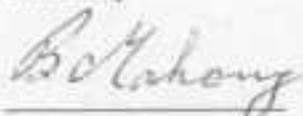
- a. Fathers are not informed of, or are discouraged from this option.
- b. Fathers find both administrative and legal opposition to this option.
- c. Under the current system, exercising this option, places children 'at risk', because one way to get the Court to refuse it, is for a parent to create conflict.

We have received a letter from a concerned father, which emphasises that the current system continues conflict, as changed circumstances have returned him to the adversarial Court system.

He would like to submit the letter to supplement his previous submission number 385.

Shared physical parenting through mediation will reduce violence and conflict, as no one stands to gain by creating it.

Sincerely



Brian Mahony
Chair
Grafton Concerned Parents Group

Domestic Violence

Domestic Violence has become one of the most endemic and pervasive forms of violence existing within our society today. Its impact on families in both the short and long term can be devastating.

The Pattern of Domestic Violence: There is a sequence of events which may lead to extreme violence and which is common enough to be seen as a pattern. While these events usually occur in the following sequences, some stages may not occur, and the timing in moving from one to the other will vary from couple to couple, depending on a variety of factors.

1. A violent incident occurs where the man may use some form of physical force against his partner. The woman or her partner may not see this as 'violence' or may believe that the behaviour is appropriate.

- It was "just a slap/shove".

- They both may believe "she deserved it".

2. These violent incidents may increase in severity and/or frequency.

Other forms of abuse may occur - sexual abuse, psychological abuse, social abuse, financial abuse.

3. At some point in time, the woman may realise something is "wrong". However she may believe she is responsible for the family's stability, for his happiness, wellbeing, and good temper.

They may both believe she has "provoked" the violence and abuse. They may both believe something else is the cause of the violence and the real problem is: work, the children, stress, alcohol, etc.

4. She may consider telling someone, but...

- She doesn't think any one will believe her because he is charming to everyone else.

- She doubts her own judgement about how serious the situation is. He has told her she is too sensitive/neurotic/over emotional.

- She has kept the secret for so long that she fears she will be asked "why haven't you left if it's so bad?"

5. She may consider leaving him but e threatens that if she

leaves she won't get care of the children; will get no money; will lose the house.

6. She may try harder...

- To please him;

- To not provoke the violent behaviour and abuse;

- To make things the way he wants;

- To work out what she is doing wrong.

7. The violence and abuse may continue/escalate in spite of her efforts.

8. When she has done everything possible and the violence continues, she may leave. Or some incident might bring home to her the seriousness of the situation and prompt her to leave - him hitting the children, almost killing her.

9. Once she leaves she may experience guilt at having failed as a wife and mother, fear of being alone, the attitude of family and friends who still won't believe anything has happened.

10. The man may respond to her leaving by...

- Pursuing her;

- Buying her presents;

- Telling her he needs her;

- Getting angry about the fact that she is not there.

11. She may want to believe him. She feels needed and valued at last and guilty. She feels pressure to go home from the children, financial difficulties, housing problems, physical and emotional isolation, social attitudes to single parents, others.

12. At this point she may go home. If she does friends and family may think it's all sorted out or that she must be crazy to go back. The pattern starts again.

13. If she doesn't go home, the man may escalate his pursuit, become angry and use...

- Physical violence;

- Threats to abduct the children;

- Create legal obstacles to residency orders and property settlements;

- Create problems with family and friends.

14. If she resists and stays away he may find someone else, and the pattern begins again with his new partner.

Is this happening to you?

Where you can find more information:

Legal

Police	000
Domestic Violence Advocacy Service	1800 810 784
Indigenous Women's Legal Contact Line	1800 639 784
Legal Aid Helpline (Youth)	1800 806 913
Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women's Legal Ctr	1800 639 784
Women's Legal Advice Line	1800 801 501

Financial Assistance

Centrelink	13 10 21
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Accommodation

Aboriginal Homeless People	02 9799 8446
Homeless Persons Information Service	1800 234 566
Women's Information & Referral Service	1800 817 227

Counselling

Domestic Violence Line	1800 656 463
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Support & Services Information

DoCS Helpline	13 21 11
Kids Help Line	1800 55 1800

Lifeline	13 1114
Parentline	13 20 55
Sydney City Mission	1800 819 816
Salvo Crisis Line	02 9331 2000
Youthline	13 11 14

Who you can talk to in local area:

Community Health - Grafton	6640 2402
Maclean	6640 0123
Community Programmes Incorporated	66427257
Court Support	6643 5997
Grafton Community Services Centre	6643 2525
Grafton Court House	6643 1325
Grafton Police	6643 0222
Neighbourhood Centre (School of Arts)	6643 1242
Women's Refuge	6642 4955
Women's Resource Centre (Maclean)	6645 1135

This article is sponsored by the Clarence Valley and Maclean Domestic Violence Committees