

- P Doneman and M Ware, '[Desperately seeking the victims](#)', *Courier Mail*, 17 August 1996, p 23:

THE Mens Rights Agency was set up in 1994 to help right what the founders, Reg and Sue Price, saw as a bias against men under family law.

But the range of tactics and practices it uses have been criticised as endangering the safety of women and children victims of domestic violence.

The Courier-Mail's seven-month investigation has revealed the MRA refers members - some of whom have domestic violence orders against them - to private investigators in a bid to locate their estranged spouses.

And former MRA members have divulged to The Courier-Mail that the agency's inflammatory and fatalistic "counselling" - alleged to have incited Peter May before the Hillcrest killings - is common practice in the organisation's dealings with perpetrators of domestic violence.

MRA is a private company, with Reg and Sue Price registered as the sole directors and shareholders.

The agency offers counselling and referral services to men facing family court action, or whose spouses have left.

The Prices claim the organisation has anywhere from 900 to 2000 members nationwide.

Neither Reg or Sue Price have any formal qualifications to counsel, assist or work with men in the domestic violence intervention process.

As a privately funded organisation, the MRA is exempt from the domestic violence minimum standards practice and public scrutiny of its activities.

Described by one former member as "doom merchants", the MRA's practice of informing distraught men of the "evils" of the family court and espousing allegedly distorted statistics has been widely condemned.

Dawn Llewellyn, co-ordinator of the Domestic Violence Regional Service at Ipswich, claimed a female client was tracked down by a MRA-referred private investigator.

Sue Price also told The Courier-Mail's private investigator, Mark Kelly, the organisation had identified the locations of a number of secret women's refuges restricted to police, courts, domestic violence workers and Family Services Department staff.

But she said the MRA was "not interested" in the shelters' locations and "if they (women) want to go and closet themselves away in refuges that's their problem, we will work at it another way".

The organisation advertises each week in The Courier-Mail and holds irregular recruitment and information meetings in Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

Members pay an initial \$150 fee, of which \$100 is promoted as giving "immediate access" to family law specialists.

However, it has been alleged the professional firms and practitioners rarely, if ever, receive any payment from the MRA.

The specialists include family law solicitors, psychologists, counsellors, accountants and "worldwide" private investigators.

MRA literature claims one of the organisation's aims is to "monitor the performance of all "professionals" to ensure an adequate standard of service is provided, complying with the interests of our members"

It also claims the MRA does not receive any commissions from the "professionals" to which members are referred.

"We preferred to retain our independence and integrity so that we could perform a monitoring and, in some cases, a critical role."

The MRA is said to have an extensive network of sympathisers and contacts in a number of government departments, police stations and within the legal and medical communities.

Sue Price admitted to a private investigator she had obtained restricted information on the employment of two male domestic violence workers held by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training.

One of the men has begun formal proceedings to determine the source of the information leak.

The Prices told Kelly they had personally contributed \$10,000 and taken out a \$15,000 overdraft on their Bethania home to fund the organisation.

MRA literature declares its primary aim "is to fill the very obvious void that exists in the assistance provided for men experiencing all forms of discrimination, with particular emphasis given to the Family Law arena".

"We stress that we are not a radical group and we never suggest any action that may not be within the law or within an accepted code of conduct of normal behaviour."

The MRA's use of private investigators has come under close scrutiny by police and Family Services Minister Kev Lingard following suspicions raised about the organisation's involvement in Peter May's alleged use of private investigators to try to find his wife and children.

Kelly rang Sue Price in early February, informed her of his occupation and offered his services to the organisation.

She then invited him to attend the MRA's first meeting for the year at Southport Bowls Club.

More than 10 members were subsequently referred to Kelly by the MRA.

At 3.02pm on March 29, Sue Price telephoned Kelly on behalf of a member and asked him: "Do you have any contacts that would enable us to locate someone in a refuge?"

Kelly said no and asked if the man had a domestic violence order against him.

Sue Price told him there was no order and the man was not violent.

She claimed the man's wife and daughter had left the family after their son committed suicide.

"He just wants to talk with her.

Once he gets to see her he says that he can calm her down," she said.

Kelly said he would take the man's details and if "something pops up via general inquiries" he would let them know.

Then, in April, an MRA member with a domestic violence order against him called to ask Kelly to track down his wife so he could serve court papers on her.

When the member asked if Kelly could access restricted Social Security records Kelly told him he could only use "legal and discrete means".

Kelly asked why the domestic violence order had been granted and the member replied: "She got one and extended it so I can't see my daughter - but that was the domestic violence act - that I bloody smacked her in the head with an ashtray - not hard enough (laughs)."

"The order says I'm not allowed to stalk her, not to try and find out where she's living.

I am not allowed to know her address.

Well it's a load of shit."

Kelly told the member he would have to have a letter of instruction from the member's solicitor, but Kelly never made any inquiries.

Another MRA member rang on April 24 seeking Kelly's advice on planting a listening device in his house to record evidence of his wife's assaults on him.

He said he wanted the bashings to stop.

Kelly said planting listening devices, or "bugs", was illegal, but he advised the man he could simply tape record the conversations.

In a conversation with Sue Price in May, Kelly asked her "how do you handle it when these guys have DVOs?"

Sue Price said: "Usually we say you've just 'blown it', haven't you?"

You know you have committed domestic violence.

Now don't do it again because if you do it will be a criminal charge this time."

She told Kelly her safeguard was that "if it's a domestic violence order you can do it for his own safety, you can give the address to the solicitor but don't give him the address.

And whether the solicitor decides to release where she is, is up to him."

Llewellyn said the use of private investigators was dangerous to the women and children.

"The danger is...

some of these organisations using private investigators to track down women because that is the most dangerous time for the perpetrator of domestic violence.

it's been demonstrated quite clearly throughout the world that that's when women and children are more likely to be killed."

At an April 2 MRA recruitment meeting at the Mt Gravatt showgrounds - the first in Brisbane - during a conversation about women leaving the family home, Sue Price told Kelly: "I hate the bitches that leave."

The MRA advises its members to cross-register domestic violence orders against their spouses regardless of whether the violence has been reciprocated by the women.

Domestic violence workers claim the MRA's unprofessional counselling is "feeding" men's anger and creating an "unsafe environment" for women and children living in refuges.

One former member, who cannot be named, said while the MRA facilitated the process of making contact with a solicitor, the counselling he received from Reg Price "terrified" him and made him feel angry about what his wife might do.

He said when he spoke to Reg Price he was in an extremely vulnerable state.

"He (Reg) pointed the grimmest picture possible of the legal proceedings that were in front of me," he said.

"I think they are dangerous.

I was prepared to forget about them and just advise people I knew not to have anything to do with them."

Another former member, who had a domestic violence against him and went to the MRA after learning of the agency during the Hillcrest furor, said he appreciated the limited support they gave him but it was the Relationships Australia counsellors who helped him understand his situation.

The former member, who said he was both a victim and perpetrator of domestic violence, felt if it wasn't for Relationships Australia he "would have done what Peter May did".

Gold Coast Domestic Violence Resource Centre co-ordinator Betty Taylor said: "The harm that is being done (to men) is that (the MRA) take an extreme view of things and they are not trying to walk the middle ground.

"When violent men are going to where their anger is continually fed and they are not challenged to address that violence then they will seek to act that out.

"Anyone who has contact with men who have committed acts of violence against their family, then their individual rights have to succumb to the rights of the family to be safe," Taylor said.

"I subsequently read a letter-to-the-editor of the Bulletin where Sue Price was saying the violence occurred because men don't have access.

Peter May had access and used that access to commit the most atrocious of crimes by killing his children, his wife and parents-in-law."

A male family care counsellor, who spoke to The Courier-Mail on behalf of three former MRA members, said the MRA's counselling had left the men despondent.

"So if you have an organisation (MRA) that may be inflaming the situation for a guy who is really feeling the effects of what's going on, it's going to create an environment of unsafeness."

The agency has also been accused of publicly "crucifying" domestic violence workers and organisations in a bid to undermine what they describe as the "femme-Nazi" conspiracy hijacking government funding and institutions.

During Domestic Violence Week, Sue Price verbally attacked guest speaker Denise Brown, sister of OJ Simpson's murdered wife Nicole Simpson.

An outraged audience had asked Sue Price be escorted from the forum after she called on Brown to acknowledge what she said were United States Department of Justice figures purporting that 55 percent of men were victims of spousal homicides.

Llewellyn labelled the MRA's practices as extremely dangerous and said their "for Right thinking" is "more about bringing down women's services than providing services for men".

"It seems they're interested in litigation and legal action and frightening people.

it seems to me that the MRA uses the same tactic of power and control on women in the domestic violence sector, and men in the domestic violence sector, as the perpetrators of domestic violence," she said.

Members of the legal fraternity condemned the MRA for fuelling men's anger towards their spouses and the courts, instilling unrealistic expectations in their members and hindering Family Court litigation.

One family law specialist, senior counsel Graeme Page, said the advice MRA gives to its members is "downright mischief and very, very harmful".

He said while the MRA, and associated men's groups, were raising valid issues, the negative impact of their inflammatory advice and the behaviour it sponsors is placing dangerous pressures on women.

Mr Page said it is a "proliferation of the threat" of violence.

