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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Canberra, ACT, 2600

Re: Senate Inquiry into family violence

SUBMISSION

Introduction:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations. This is not an academic work, nor is it written to support any single-interest group.

The views expressed herein are from the perspective of a thinking man. I have over 16 years experience working in Child Protection. In addition I am a father and a grandparent, and have been a husband, a single parent, and a 'Mr Mom' in a blended family. I have spent several years working with less-able people, and in schools, both as General Assistant, and as Teacher's Aide Special, as well as earning a University Degree in Social Science. These experiences and studies inform my views.

Reports on family violence overwhelmingly identify males as the perpetrators of physical violence. Family violence also includes many other forms of abuse, including damage to property, financial control, isolation, and psychological, sexual, and verbal abuse, as well as other actions including threats against children, pets and relations. What is rarely reported is that a significant percentage of abusers are not male but are female, or grandparents, and a very few are minors of both genders. The victims are the aged, children, the disabled, men, and women. Children living in family conflict can experience life-long damage, and all too often become offenders themselves. We are told that one woman dies every week in Australia at the hands of their partner or previous partner, which is horrific. This has to stop.

This scourge can not and will not be solved by punitive methods or education alone. The solution must be to identify and eradicate the root causes, exploring the reasons behind all forms of family violence. I trust that your inquiry has access to a wide range of information and statistics unavailable to me. What follows may be confirmed or challenged through the resources available to the committee.

Gender Equity:

One of the most significant base factors is the lack of true gender equity in Australia (while noting that females and males are very different and this should be cause for celebration). Unless we achieve as close as possible to truly equal rights, responsibilities, respect, criminal laws, life choices, education, pay, Family Law, employment and other opportunities, no solution can possibly be found.

Female perpetrators must be held as equally accountable as are males, and angry children need understanding and increased Child Services rather than the current Government trend in reducing social budgets. The children in families where the mother is the offender are arguably more gravely affected because their plight is frequently hidden. Fathers are much less likely to report any form of abuse, and are less likely to be believed. These Dads can even be removed from the home as the presumed perpetrator if they do inform.

Community Supports:

There are almost no community supports specifically for men. Women have multiple options, from informal friendship networks, to a very wide range of formal funded female-only health and refuge services. In our society, women are also much more likely to be believed and supported than men.

The few predominately male organisations that do exist, like the Men's Shed with female members, are not geared to support in crisis situations. Beyond Blue and Lifeline do provide at least an ear for desperate men and women. Yet male-specific supports like DiDS and Mensline are woefully underfunded and urgently need significant Government assistance.

Child Protection:

In my Child Protection experience, the female dominated workforce and at times misandrist culture rarely recognises or addresses female perpetrators of family violence. Child Protection services may not even gather statistics by gender. If this is true, all their DV (domestic violence) figures may be assessed as being male perpetrators. The frequent DV training packages exclusively address the perceived 100% innocent female victims, subjected to abuse by the 100% of violent male perpetrators. The truth is that the vast majority of men are good, gentle, supportive and protective partners and fathers.

Drugs and Alcohol:

By far the greatest *immediate* cause of violence in the home is a direct result of the use and abuse of alcohol and illegal substances, in particular ice and other amphetamines. My child

protection experiences show me that this abuse is roughly equally shared by females and males. Statistics may clarify this. Regardless, it is certain that abuse, neglect, crime and the violence that results from addiction is perpetrated by both genders.

Education:

When observing school playgrounds or young people gathered in public places, it is rare these days to see boys pushing or hitting girls. Yet it is alarmingly common to see boys being pushed, punched, slapped or abused by girls, albeit often in a playful and flirtatious way. Boys seem to be getting the message. However it appears girls are not expected to show an equal level of self-responsibility and restraint.

Our Education system does have a role, and needs to take the lead (along with parents) in teaching children from infancy that there is “No excuse, never ever” for either females or males to be violent with each other. Some rough-house play is essential for young children's development, but it should have similar boundaries for boys and girls. And for that matter we need equality for all humans no matter what their colour, appearance, race, height, health, creed, age, sexuality, ability or lack of, as well as gender or other differences.

Education also needs to address the bias toward meeting girl's needs, both sociologically and academically. This is evidenced by boredom, misbehaviour, poor completion rates and lower academic achievement by boys.

Media:

Perhaps one of the biggest indirect causes of discord and gender inequality is contemporary media.

Advertising is geared to the consumer, who in the most cases in Australia is female. Hence the majority of ads that disparage or show disrespect to any human, are targeted to debase men. There are virtually no ads which make women look “funny”, or stupid, or ugly, or aggressive, or clumsy, or in any way less than perfect. Yet almost all “humorous” ads degrade and insult men. It is hard to find ads which depict males as the fine and positive role models which our children need to see.

These daily and hourly media images portray an impossibly high expectation of perfection on girls and women. And of course, boys are inculcated to growing up as a dumb, angry, second class citizen. Though often veiled as humour, the sub-conscious and maybe subliminal message is incredibly dangerous, and can find an outlet as violence in later life.

Our society happily accepts advertising that humiliates males by ridiculing their genitalia. Examples include the limp little finger “...no one thinks big of you” and the “...get your hand off it” respectively targeting speeding and the use of mobile phones while driving.

Females are arguably more prone to “multi-tasking” while driving than males, and may be close to equal in the speeding stakes. Research shows that women are more likely than men to be caught shop-lifting, yet we will never see a campaign suggesting they are “stuffing things up there” for example (and nor should we). Imagine the outrage if female genitals or any other aspect of womanhood was ridiculed in the way we accept this type of abuse of men.

News stories generally identify culprits as male, but will often use gender-neutral terms like “the driver” when a woman is involved. Stories of mothers killing their children or partner are often spoken of with sadness and sympathy, seeking reasons and asking how to help and what could have caused her to do that? Men who commit similar acts from anguish and despair, are described negatively without consideration of the catalysts or causes behind the disaster.

Advertising and the media in general make a huge impression on young minds, and mature viewers alike. There are many other examples of negative stereotyping in movies and on TV which de-value men and relationships, while placing expectations on woman to achieve a flawlessness that is unattainable.

Conclusion:

You may consider some of these points as side issues to the main and honourable mission of saving women's lives, however each has a place in the jig-saw puzzle of the root causes of discord in the home. Your job must be to delve into the history, reality and reasons behind all forms of family violence, investigating the causes of both female and male perpetration, as well as the residual child abuse and neglect, and elder abuse, which are hidden factors in this national blight.

There are many, many, more inequities in society, for and against both females and males. I realise that trying to fix them all is beyond your brief. However it is essential that the factors of gender inequality, along with drugs, education, and media influences are given full weight in your deliberations.

I'm looking for radical and revolutionary thinking in your recommendations.
(Please read this succinct submission one more time).

With sincere thanks,

John G McRae, JP. B.SOC.SCI

7 January 2015