family violence after natural disaster

PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK
Acknowledgements

Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) was established in July 2000. Previously known as NEWomen, Women's Health Goulburn North East is the government funded, specialist women's health service for the Goulburn Valley and North-East Victoria.

Our heartfelt thanks to the women who spoke of their experiences of violence after Black Saturday. Their courage in speaking to us has enabled changes to service provision which will ensure better response to family violence in future disasters. Sincere appreciation, too, to the workers who gave their time and expertise so generously.

We would like to thank the Victorian Department of Human Services, Emergency Management Unit. We would also like to thank Tricia Hazeleger for her invaluable work in bringing our research on family violence after disaster to the attention of the Emergency Management Unit.

Authors:
Claire Zara, Rachael Mackay and Debra Parkinson are the authors of this work which is based on The way he tells it … Relationships after Black Saturday (2011) by Debra Parkinson and the Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (also known as the Common Risk Assessment Framework or CRAF).

Training design and development:
Scott & Associates Consulting, Phone: 0408 415196,
Email: judy@scottandassociates.com.au, Web: www.scottandassociates.com.au

Artwork:
The Blackened Trees are Greening painting, is by Ona Henderson © Phone: (03) 9712 0393

Copyright: © Women’s Health Goulburn North East, 2013

The information contained in this publication is copyright. When copying or reproducing any part of this document, please acknowledge Women’s Health Goulburn North East as the source and include the title, year and page number.

For more information please contact:
Mail: PO Box 853, Wangaratta, Victoria, 3677
Phone: 03 5722 3009
Fax: 03 5722 3020
Email: whealth@whealth.com.au
Web: www.whealth.com.au
# Table of contents

- About the workshop ................................................................. 3
- PowerPoint slides ................................................................. 4
- Types of family violence .......................................................... 13
- Family Violence Quiz ............................................................. 15
- Women in the world ............................................................... 16
- Approaching a woman about family violence ......................... 18
- 4-Step process ................................................................. 18
- Scenario 1 ........................................................................... 19
- Scenario 2 ........................................................................... 20
- Does violence against women increase in disasters? ............. 21
- Violent death prompts restraining order rethink ..................... 24
- References and resources .................................................... 27
About the workshop

The *Family violence after natural disasters* workshop is designed to increase service organisation staff and volunteers understanding of family violence after natural disaster.

The workshop offers:

- information about family violence after natural disasters based on current research
- practical skills for responding to family violence after natural disaster
- information about safety and referral pathways.
Workshop overview

- The relationship between natural disaster and family violence
- Defining family violence
- Examining the causes of family violence
- Reviewing the prevalence of family violence in Australia
- Identifying the factors influencing family violence after natural disaster
- Talking about family violence
- Disclosing family violence
- Approaching a woman about family violence
- Keeping records.

Workshop aim

- To assist in ensuring that the safety needs of men, women and children are met after natural disaster.

About family violence

- Most men are not violent; however, the majority of violence involves men – this includes male-to-male violence as well as male-to-female.
- Severe female-to-male violence is unusual; when it occurs the same care and attention should be provided to the victim.
- Family violence is an increasing problem worldwide.
- The effects on children are extensive and can cause lifetime harm.
- Family violence is a community issue, not a private issue, or a women’s issue.
International research

- 2010 study shows a 53% increase in family violence call outs on the weekend of Christchurch earthquake.
- 2009 study shows four fold increase in family violence after Hurricane Katrina.
- 1989 Increase in family violence after Exxon Valdez oil spill.
- 1992 Hurricane Andrew – spousal abuse calls up 50%.


The way he tells it ... Relationships after Black Saturday research report

- Involved interviews with 29 women and 47 workers.
- Found that family violence increased for some women who had already experienced it.
- Found that family violence began for other women.
- Identified that family violence was another risk factor for support workers to be aware of during natural disasters.
- Recommended that identifying and responding to family violence is one important way to minimise the potential for vulnerable people to be hurt further after a disaster.

Definition

Family violence includes violent behavior that is repeated, controlling, threatening and manipulative and that occurs between people who have had or are having an intimate relationship or in a family relationship. Family violence can include: physical assaults and a range of tactics including intimidation, direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, financial control, property damage, social isolation and any other behaviour that causes a person to live in fear.

**Definition**

Family violence is any behaviour that in any way controls or dominates a family member that causes them to fear for their own, or other family member’s safety or wellbeing. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic abuse and any behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of that behaviour.


**Types of family violence**

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Emotional/psychological abuse
- Social abuse/isolation
- Economic/financial abuse
- Racial, spiritual or cultural abuse
- Threatening to harm another family member or pet
- Stalking.

**Family Violence Quiz**
Prevalence of family violence

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey 2006:
- approximately one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence during their lifetime
- nearly one in five women have experienced some form of sexual violence
- nearly one in five have experienced violence by a current or previous partner
- females are more likely than males to experience an act of physical or sexual violence (actual, attempted or threatened) at the hands of a current or former partner.

Prevalence of family violence

For 2007–08, 80 people were killed as a result of intimate partner violence. Of these, the majority (78%) were females (Virueda & Payne 2010).


Intimate partner violence is the leading preventable contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15–44, being responsible for more of the disease burden than many well-known risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.


Causes of family violence

The causes of domestic violence include deeply held beliefs about masculinity.

Men who abuse members of their family also tend to blame other people, alcohol or circumstances for their violent outbursts.

Determinants of violence against women

- Belief in rigid gender roles (can be more prevalent in rural areas)
- Masculine orientation or sense of entitlement
- Male dominance and control of wealth in relationships.


Some factors contributing to family violence after Black Saturday

- A return to traditional stereotypes/roles
- Living in close contact
- Reduced or no employment
- Grief
- Frustration with local council and government directives
- Confusion over grants entitlements
- Hyper-masculinity e.g. risky behaviour including reckless driving or other ways of achieving an adrenaline rush and spending on expensive boys’ toys
- Media attention
- Drugs and alcohol
- Rebuilding
- Trauma.


Euphemisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Word</th>
<th>Euphemism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad behaviour</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>Stressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets short</td>
<td>Tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wound up</td>
<td>Edgy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking a bit more</td>
<td>Loses it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad mannered</td>
<td>Controlling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bit physical</td>
<td>Demanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons women do not disclose family violence

- He may have been a hero during the disaster
- Her whole world is turned upside down
- Excuse by community
- Hierarchy of loss – others have suffered more
- Fear
- Children asking her to stay
- Fewer options
- No childcare
- Schools closed
- Full time care of children
- No work or unable to work due to childcare and access issues
- Not being supported – family, community, agency
- His vulnerability.


Reasons for workers not disclosing family violence

- No reporting mechanism
- Sensitivity
- Fear of tipping the man over the edge
- Not my job
- No real knowledge of family violence
- No idea what to do
- Fear of being implicated
- Fear of retribution.


Approaching a woman about family violence

- Universal approach – presenting everyone with an information pack that includes family violence information such as the resource cards. The least invasive way of presenting this is to go through the whole pack and point out all the information.
- Direct approach – directly approaching a woman about family violence is not easy. Having a prepared approach can sometimes make this initial approach easier.
4-Step process

1. **ASK:** Are you safe at home?
2. **NAME IT:** What you’ve just described to me is violence and it’s a crime.
3. **RESPOND:** Give contact details of the local family violence service and/or sexual assault service and police
4. **FOLLOW UP:** Last time you spoke about your safety. I’d like to know how you are now.

---

**Scenarios**

- How would you respond?
- How would you broach the subject with the woman?
- When would you broach the subject with the woman?
- What would you say?
- What would you ask?
- What information would you give her?
- What if she says nothing is wrong?

---

**Why collect data?**

- Historical information for the staff member collecting the information.
- The woman may need help at a later time and staff may have changed at the service.
- To build on the evidence base that shows the incidence of family violence during and after natural disasters – without this incidents remain anecdotal and cannot be used as proof of the need for resources and support.
Data and the 2009 Victorian bushfires

- Department of Human Services data after the 2009 fires showed only nine cases of family violence in the Hume region. In 2008 this region had some of the highest statistics in Victoria.
- During the 2009 bushfires workers were recorded as saying that they felt sensitive to the men and had deliberately noted down other main issues such as stress instead of family violence out of respect to the man.
- The interviewers for The way he tells it … Relationships after Black Saturday noted that both women and workers often used toned down words and phrases when talking about family violence.

What should be recorded?

- Date
- Your name
- Person’s name
- Suspected family violence
- Your observations
- Your actions
- Follow up – what needs to be done.

Key points

- The relationship between natural disaster and family violence
- Defining family violence
- Examining the causes of family violence
- Reviewing the prevalence of family violence in Australia
- Identifying the factors influencing family violence after natural disaster
- Talking about family violence
- Disclosing family violence
- Approaching a woman about family violence
- Keeping records.
Whereas he would hold it back if we were in front of people normally, he really embraced the whole, ‘I can be an absolute prick to everybody and I can get away with it because I can say I’ve been through the fires and I’m traumatised.’

I didn’t want him to break. I didn’t want him to die. He was pretty fragile, he was pretty angry and I didn’t want him to go and smash his car into a tree or something stupid like that.

… when women went to family, they were ignored, accused of over-reacting and blamed for not caring well enough for their men. Friends and work colleagues did not want to get involved and sometimes fearful of violence or confrontation themselves, leaving the woman unsupported and making excuses for the man.

Sometimes, women just kept trying to get help from different people, different services. The women told of health professionals failing to follow up on initial conversations, and willing to drop the issue if the man denied any violence or pass the woman on to some other service. Ultimately, many women gave up. One woman, after finishing our interview, said, ‘I’ll get out of here in a box’, revealing her level of fear and surrender.

I hadn’t said anything, but it was one of those days when I thought I can’t do this anymore that’s it. OK, I’m shooting baskets with [my son] and he says to me, ‘I can understand why you would want to’ and he didn’t finish his sentence, ‘but please don’t leave we’ve been through enough’.

Well, they say, ‘We know that it’s hard for you, we can see that, and we don’t want it to continue but at the moment we’re not set up enough to move out so when we move out you can move out, Mum.’

A lot of people struggled with putting that sort of information down … and you know, somebody might have disclosed something to them … it’s just about how do you define that and how do you report that in your case notes … I think the difference is getting through it and knowing what it is but actually respecting the client and recording it in their words.

Types of family violence
Write some examples of how each type of violence may be exhibited.

Physical violence
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Sexual violence
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Emotional/psychological abuse
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Social abuse
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Economic abuse
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Racial, spiritual or cultural abuse

Threatening to harm the person, children or another family member in order to intimidate

Damage to property

Stalking

Notes
Family Violence Quiz

1. What is the greatest risk factor for experiencing family violence?
   a. Poverty  
   b. Race  
   c. Religion  
   d. Gender

2. When is a woman in most danger of being killed?
   a. When the user of violence is drinking  
   b. When she fights back  
   c. When she attempts to leave  
   d. All of the above

3. What was the cost of family violence to the Australian community in 2008–09?
   a. $13.6 million  
   b. $1.3 billion  
   c. $13.6 billion

4. How many children in Australia are affected by family violence?
   a. One hundred thousand  
   b. One million  
   c. Two million  
   d. Two hundred thousand

5. Early and repeated exposure of children to family violence may result in:
   a. Chronic emotional and behavioural problems  
   b. Familiarity and acceptance of violence  
   c. Apparently calm and placid child  
   d. Withdrawn and isolated child  
   e. All of the above

6. The number of people who believe that victims would leave the relationship if they really wanted to is:
   a. One in ten  
   b. Four in ten  
   c. Eight in ten  
   d. Ten out of ten
Women in the world

**World view**

Women are approximately 50% of the world population. Women represent 40% of the world’s labor force but hold just 1% of the world’s wealth. (Source: The Wall Street Journal, *New Facts on the Gender Gap from the World Bank*, 8 September 2012).

Women own less than 2% of all titled land. (Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1997, FAO Focus on Women and Food Security, FAO <http://www.fao.org/focus/e/women/sustain-e.htm>).


In 2008, just over 18% of the seats in national parliaments were held by women. (Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008, <www.ipu.org>).

In 2011, 10% of world leaders were women. (Source: United Nations Women, <www.unwomen.org>).

In 2011, less than one in five members of parliament were women. (Source: United Nations Women, <www.unwomen.org>).

**Australian view**

Women comprise less than one-third of all parliamentarians in Australia and occupy less than one-quarter of all Cabinet positions. The number of women in the Senate reached its highest point after the 2010 Commonwealth election, while the number of women in the House of Representatives declined. When comparing the proportion of women in national parliaments internationally, Australia’s ranking has slipped from 21 to 38 over the past decade.


The labour force participation rate of women in Australia was at 59% in November 2011. Despite this having increased significantly over the last thirty years, women remain under-represented in senior leadership and management positions in virtually all sectors. Women are just as well educated, skilled and interested in leadership roles as their male counterparts, yet they make up only 8% of senior executives, and 12.5% of directors of Australia’s top 200 companies.

Why women don’t talk about family violence

Why women in rural areas don’t talk about family violence

Why women don’t talk about family violence after natural disaster

Why workers don’t identify family violence
Approaching a woman about family violence

You suspect a family/woman may be experiencing some sort of family violence.

1. Write a couple of sentences to introduce your concern.
2. Practice with a partner.
3. Create a different approach for the following situations:
   a. when a woman arrives at a recovery shelter
   b. when giving general information on family violence
   c. when you respond to a request or if help is sought directly
   d. when you suspect something, but no verbal request or acknowledgement has been made
   e. when you are in a woman’s home and her partner is present.
4. List other situations where you might approach a woman about family violence.

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

4-Step process

1. **ASK:** Are you safe at home?
2. **NAME IT:** What you’ve just described to me is violence and it’s a crime.
3. **RESPOND:** Give contact details of the local family service and/or sexual assault service and police
4. **FOLLOW UP:** Last time you spoke about your safety. I’d like to know how you are now.
Scenario 1

On the day of the natural disaster you are working in the recovery shelter. In a corner of the room you see a family. The man stands behind the woman. Her head is bent and her shoulders slump as she hunches over the child on her lap. He is speaking quietly but forcibly to the woman. You can tell by his face that he is angry. She seems upset or afraid. Alarm bells go off.

You suspect something is not right.

- How would you respond?
- How would you broach the subject with the woman?
- When would you broach the subject with the woman?
- What would you say?
- What would you ask?
- What information would you give her?
- What would you do if she says that nothing is wrong?
**Scenario 2**

You are a new caseworker. Two weeks after the natural disaster you are in a meeting with a client. She tells you that her partner has been *more stressed than usual*, that he *gets angry all the time* and that his *drinking has increased*.

You suspect family violence.

- How would you respond?
- How would you broach the subject with the woman?
- When would you broach the subject with the woman?
- What would you say?
- What would you ask?
- What information would you give her?
- What would you do if she says that nothing is wrong?
Does violence against women increase in disasters?

Domestic violence is a social fact contributing to the vulnerability of women to disaster. Women in violent relationships are a vulnerable population less visibly at risk than poor women, refugees, single mothers, widows, senior or disabled women. Indeed, violence against women in intimate relations crosses these and other social lines, impacting an estimated one in four women in the US and Canada and as many as 60 percent in parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia.¹

Violence against women is unlikely not to be present after as well as before disaster, but does it increase? Barriers to reporting increase in the event of widespread damage, but some indicators suggest that it does, though the data are very limited:

- Sexual and domestic violence are often identified as issues for women refugees in temporary camps.²
- Some field reports of social impacts include abuse, as in this account of an Australian flood: “Human relations were laid bare and the strengths and weaknesses in relationships came more sharply into focus. Thus, socially isolated women became more isolated, domestic violence increased, and the core of relationships with family, friends and spouses were exposed.”³ Increased violence was also noted in field reports from the Philippines after the Mt. Pinatubo eruption.⁴
- The national Canadian press reported domestic violence increasing during the massive 1998 ice storm in Quebec and Ontario. A Montreal Urban Community Police Chief reported that one in four calls he had received the past week came from women about abuse. Crisis calls were not up at the local shelter but the hot line had been closed by the storm for two days.⁵
- The director of a Santa Cruz battered women's shelter reported requests for temporary restraining orders rose 50% after the Loma Prieta quake. Observing that housing shortages were restricting women's ability to leave violent relationships, she urged that "when the community considers replacement housing issues, battered women should not be overlooked."⁶ Five months after the earthquake, a United Way survey of over 300 service providers ranked “protective services for women, children, and elderly” sixth among 41 community services most unavailable to residents.⁷ Reported sexual assault also rose by 300%.⁸
- A quarter (25%) of all community leaders responding to an open-ended question about the effects of the Exxon Valdez oil spill on family problems cited “increase in domestic violence” first, in contrast to increased child neglect (4%) and elder abuse (4 %). Asked if spouse abuse increased after the spill, 64% agreed; they also reported increased child physical abuse (39%), child sexual abuse (31%), elder abuse (11%), and rape (21%).⁹

⁷ Ibid, 25.
Following the Missouri floods of 1993, the average state turn-away rate at shelters rose 111% over the preceding year. An existing federal grant was modified to increase funding to 35 flood-affected programs in an innovative disaster recovery grant targeting both substance abuse and domestic violence. The final report notes that these programs eventually sheltered 400% more flood-impacted women and children than anticipated.  

After Hurricane Andrew in Miami, spousal abuse calls to the local community helpline increased by 50% and over one-third of 1400 surveyed residents reported that someone in their home had lost verbal or physical control in the two months since the hurricane.

A survey of US and Canadian domestic violence programs reported increased service demand as long as six months to a year later in the 13 most severely impacted programs. In Grand Forks, ND, requests for temporary protection orders rose by 18% over the preceding year and counseling with on-going clients rose 59% (July 1996-July 1997).

Police reports of domestic violence in the 7 months after Mt. St. Helens erupted increased by 46% over the same period the year earlier.

After Hurricane Mitch, 27% of female survivors (and 21% of male survivors) in Nicaragua told surveyors that woman battering had “increased in the wake of the hurricane in the families of the community.” Among community leaders (68% of whom were men), 30% interviewed reported increased battery as did 42% of the mayors (46 men and 2 women) who were interviewed.

Conflicting data are reported by journalists contacting selected shelters about the possible impacts of September 11, 2001. In some communities very far from Ground Zero physically, shelters reported receiving increased calls for help, while in other cases shelters reported reduced case loads as families reunited. National Public Radio reported that increased calls for help were made to the Loveland, Colorado crisis center in the weeks immediately following.

Both domestic violence and sexual assault were widely reported to increase in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Examples from Sri Lanka cited by researchers include women battered because they resist their husbands’ sale of their jewelry or disputed their use of tsunami relief funds and mothers blamed by fathers for the deaths of their children. One NGO reported a three-fold increase in cases brought to them following the tsunami.

The Women’s Refuge responding to women affected by a 2005 flood in Whakatane, New Zealand reported a tripling of its workoad immediately after the flood; Victim Support, a national advocacy group working closely with law enforcement, reported a doubling of front-line officers called out on domestic violence cases in the months following.
• Four New Orleans shelters and 2 nonresidential programs were closed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and advocates reporting “women are being battered by their partners in the emergency shelters.” In the first four months after the US Gulf Coast hurricanes, 38 rape cases were reported to women’s services that initiated documentation projects to capture sexual assaults of disaster-displaced women.¹⁹

• Hurricane Katrina displaced thousands of poor and African American women into temporary camps where one survey found that rape rates since displacement were triple the national expected rape rate.²⁰

• In a UNIFEM-led effort to monitor sexual assault after Haiti’s quake, outreach workers tracked 230 cases of rapes in 15 camps, or 15.3 incidents per camp. As some camps range up to 20,000, this suggests very large numbers of rapes, which confirms accounts from survivors and women’s advocates in the field. The ages of those raped in this sample range from 10 to 60, the majority of them teenagers.²¹ A major Haitian women’s health organization reported 718 cases of gender-based violence against women and girls reported to its clinics between January-June, 2010, among these 114 rapes and 540 reports of abuse.

• Following the BP oil spill on the Florida coast, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana recorded 32 domestic violence reports in the first quarter of 2010 and twice that (68) in the second quarter after the spill.¹

Compiled by E. Enarson, last revised 7/2011. Feedback to: enarsonE@gmail.com.


Violent death prompts restraining order rethink

7.30 By Guy Stayner, ABC News, Updated Wed Oct 24, 2012 9:52am AEDT

The violent death of a woman in Melbourne last month has highlighted systemic flaws in the use of restraining orders designed to protect women from abuse.

Last month, around the same time Australians were horrified by the murder of Melbourne woman Jill Meagher, another woman was also killed in the city.

But her death went largely unnoticed.

Sargun Ragi, 23, appeared in court shortly before her death to extend a restraining order against her husband, Avjit Singh.

She was initially too scared to be in the same courtroom as him.

Magistrate John O’Callaghan expressed his concern at the time.

“I’m a bit concerned that she’s not in court. I mean, I can understand people being scared of someone, but we’ve got police protection here,” he said.

Mr Singh had been banned from any contact with his wife but had breached the restraining order eight times in three weeks.

Ms Ragi told the court her husband was pursuing her relentlessly.

“He called me from locked calls,” she said.

“He spoke to me and he was telling me to ‘take your case back’.

“He was speaking to me but I was not speaking to him.

“And he has been giving my number to his friend and his friend was also calling me.

“After that... he hacked my Facebook password and Yahoo mail so I didn’t control it in my Facebook account.”

Ms Ragi and Mr Singh had an arranged marriage, but a year later things turned sour and she was being held prisoner.

Court documents allege Ms Ragi was locked away in the couple’s unit in Melbourne’s inner-north without food or a phone for a week, at the mercy of her violent husband.

She managed to escape but only when a landlord came to visit.

Police then sought to protect her with a restraining order.

“The AFM (Sargun Ragi) is in fear for her life and believes her husband will kill her. Police have grave concerns for the welfare of the AFM and believe she is vulnerable and in imminent danger,” Constable Jessica Egan wrote in the police application.

“If she refuses to have sex with him, he beats her. The respondent (Avjit Singh) has showed controlling behaviours and is believed to have committed serious sexual assault.”

Ten days after Ms Ragi spoke in court, her body was pulled from a house fire in the Melbourne suburb of Kew.

She had been repeatedly stabbed.

Mr Singh was also pulled from the blaze and died later in hospital.
Six weeks before she was murdered, Ms Ragi had told police her husband had committed a serious sexual assault.

Mr Singh was arrested and released on bail.

**Domestic homicides**

Ms Ragi’s murder is just one of about 70 domestic homicides that happen around the country every year. Thirty per cent of all murders stem from domestic violence, and in some states those numbers are on the rise.

In Western Australia, the number of domestic homicides has doubled in the past 12 months.

And last year there were more than 11,000 breaches of domestic violence orders in New South Wales alone.

Sahar Ghaly knows all too well the limitations of court orders. She lives in a mini fortress, hoping security cameras provided by the Victims of Crime Association can give her peace of mind.

“I was married at 24, it was an arranged marriage, and since I got married the violence began - physical, sexual, financial, all sorts of violence,” she said.

“One day he came back and he realised that the clothes weren’t folded, the children were quite young and I didn’t fold them in his timeframe, so he dragged me down the corridor, he kicked me and I lost a few teeth.

“He just kicked my face in because he thought it would be funny to have less teeth.”

Ms Ghaly’s ex-husband has breached his restraining order 218 times.

“Someone needs to be made accountable when breaches are made,” she said.

“Once he gets charged, it’s either just a slap on the wrist, a warning or a $200 fine; in fact, threats to kill is only worth $200.”

Domestic violence experts say that is because the offenders are not perceived as a risk to society. Maryclare Machen from Eastern Domestic Violence says it is a problem with the system that needs to change.

“They’re released on bail because they’re not seen as a risk to society; the risk that is there is to the women and or the women and children,” Ms Machen said.

“And while we have one woman or women and children at risk, we have a problem with our system.”

**National dilemma**

Ms Ragi’s death, and stories like Ms Ghaly’s, have raised concern that not enough is being done to protect women who take out domestic violence orders on their partners.

While each state has its own system, the problem of enforcing the ever-increasing number of restraining orders is a national dilemma.

“What we know from our experience is a lot of men don’t really care all that much what a piece of paper might say, particularly those men who might believe they are a victim of a particular conspiracy,” Danny Blay from No To Violence said.

“It’s just another part of the jigsaw puzzle that’s against them and they’re going to win the war, if you like.”
Gaby Marcus from the Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse says it is the implementation of orders that is the problem.

“When orders are breached, often the follow-up of the breach is insufficient,” Ms Marcus said.

“If the perpetrator has got away with breaching the order once, he feels he can get away with breaching the order on subsequent occasions.

“So it’s the implementation of the order that’s problematic, not the orders themselves.”

Angela Hartwig, chief executive of the West Australian Women’s Council, says the number of deaths there has doubled.

“We’ve had 20 deaths since last November, which is an increase on the 10 deaths the year prior,” she said.

Ms Hartwig has been campaigning against domestic violence for decades and now and wants to trial tracking devices for men who breach intervention orders.

“I've seen fines for damaging property and graffiti that are far greater than what we are seeing for breaches of restraining orders,” she said.

“We'd like to see a trial brought in to WA of tracking devices where the actual responsibility and accountability of the violence is put where it needs to be - on the perpetrator.

“So if they have been put on a VRO and they breach it, then it’s at that point the court will order a tracking device.”

**Tracking devices**

Ms Marcus agrees tracking devices would be useful.

“We've looked at that idea and in some circumstances I think that could be a useful additional strategy," she said.

“In some circumstances it might give the woman prior warning of the approach of the man and it might give her an enhanced feeling of safety, but that strategy on its own isn't going to save someone's life.”

Two weeks ago, the Victorian Government was quick to cite the death of Ms Ragi when it increased the maximum penalty of breaching a restraining order to five years’ jail.

But it has so far refused to fund the state’s coronial review process into domestic homicide.

“We think it’s ludicrous,” Dr Chris Atmore from the Federation of Community Legal Centres said.

“We owe women like Sargun Ragi system accountability.

“That is exactly what the Family Violence Death review is about.”

The coronial review costs $250,000 a year.

Every domestic homicide costs more than $1 million.

Anti-domestic violence campaigners say the coronial review is a crucial process in preventing future murders like Ms Ragi’s.

References and resources


