

**Exploring social supports/support services and decisions to leave or change
with women who have experienced domestic partner violence**

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A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

Submitted October 15th 2014

Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library**, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. **Unless an Embargo has been approved for a determined period.

Acknowledgements

Most importantly I acknowledge and thank the 12 women who courageously offered to tell me their stories of experiencing and ending domestic violence. I also wish to acknowledge and offer my gratitude to the 25 professionals who participated and shared their knowledge and experience during three focus groups.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my two supervisors Associate Professor Deborah Loxton and Doctor Colin James. Your patience, perseverance, guidance and wisdom were immeasurable. I also wish to acknowledge my many colleagues at the University of Newcastle, and elsewhere, who provided support and advice.

I acknowledge Jane Todd for professional copy editing and proofreading advice as covered in the Australian Standards for Editing Practice, Standards D and E, and Lana Prendergast for the final formatting.

Undertaking a PhD is not an easy passage either professionally or personally. I thank all my family and friends who shared this journey with me. In particular I thank my husband Jim Francis who has been right beside me during all the ups and downs. I also acknowledge my three sons Russel, Logan and Shane and their partners and children. My grandchildren helped to keep me grounded during this pilgrimage! To my dear mum and son Russel who passed away during this journey I love you and I thank you.

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Abstract

This research examined how women perceive their experience of ending or leaving domestic violence and help seeking during that process. Additionally this research investigated how service providers identified their professional role in assisting women to end abusive relationships.

Domestic violence continues to occur worldwide with the long term consequences to health for woman experiencing such abuse being well known. Many women do not recognise their situation as violence and they may choose not to disclose violent behaviour or seek help. Social support provided by informal sources or professional support providers has been associated with a decrease in health effects for women experiencing abuse, particularly where the support provided is matched to the woman's perceived needs.

The research process was undertaken using a narrative inquiry framework with thematic analysis utilised to identify themes. I conducted twelve interviews with women who had experienced and ended violent relationships (Phase 1). Additionally I conducted three focus groups with professionals whose work includes assisting women experiencing domestic violence (Phase 2).

This project identifies and describes the difficulties for women experiencing domestic violence in identifying or acknowledging the abuse in their relationship. Self-blame and other barriers were identified as preventing disclosure but also led women to normalise the violence to enable women to feel 'safe'. This 'culture of pretence' inhibited disclosure and help seeking. This research explores how women overcame the culture of pretence and other barriers in order to leave or end domestic violence. The professional's identified role in this process is reported and analysed.

This project articulated what women said they needed in order to support them in making stay/leave decisions regarding the violent relationships. The provision of tailored support and the difficulties inherent in providing support specifically tailored to women's needs were correspondingly explored. The strength of this narrative research approach included the identification of issues by women and service providers that are pertinent to providing tailored support, including a multipronged approach which incorporates a variety of services that vary depending on her individual requirements at that point in time.

Glossary

AVO/ADVO – Apprehended Violence Order. In NSW AVOs protect people by ordering the defendants not to do specific acts which are set out in a list. Women experiencing abuse from an intimate partner relationship would be seeking a specific type of order called an Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (ADVO) although the participants in this research referred to these orders as ‘AVOs’ hence the use of this term in this research. In other states different terminology may be used including ‘restraint order’ which is also referred to in this research.

CALD – culturally and linguistically diverse

CAS – Composite Abuse Scale

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act NSW (1998) – shortened to ‘Care Act’ 1998

CLE – community legal education which may be provided by the NGO sector to others in the NGO sector, the public and/or women experiencing domestic violence.

DOCS – Department of Community Services; this NSW government department changed its name to Family and Community Services (FACs) however participants in this research still referred to them as DOCS.

DOH – Department of Health NSW (name changed to Ministry of Health NSW in 2012 following change of government)

DV – domestic violence

DVLO – domestic violence liaison officer. Police officer with additional training or qualifications in order to deal with domestic violence matters.

HREC – Human Research Ethics Committee (University of Newcastle)

IVAWS – International Violence Against Women Survey

NGO – non government organisation. They are smaller organisations who are not part of the government sector although rely on the government for funding in addition to raising funds from donations or the private sector. Called the ‘third sector’ in some countries (first sector government, second sector private).

PSS – Personal Safety Survey (Australia 2005 and 2012)

SOC – Stages of Change model

TTM – The Transtheoretical Model also called the Stages of Change (SOC) model

US – United States of America

WAST – Woman Abuse Screening Tool

WHO – World Health Organization