



***Beyond the Royal
Commission into Family
Violence***

***Best Practice for Faith-Based
Organisations***

The Honourable Marcia Neave AO

Family violence under State and federal law.

- ▶ Definition covers
 - Physical abuse or threats of abuse
 - Economic abuse
 - Emotional or psychological abuse
 - Anything else which controls or dominates a family member and makes them fearful
 - Causing a child to hear or witness, or be exposed to the effects of family violence against another family member
 - Broad definition of 'family member' - Abuse by carers who are not relatives sometimes covered.

FV in Australia

- On average one woman a week is killed by a current or former partner
- In 2016, 42% of all murders recorded Australia-wide were family violence-related (includes child killings)
- In 2015-2016 more than 78,000 family violence incidents (all types of victims) were reported to Victoria Police. Numbers are increasing
- Females are almost three times more likely than males to experience violence by a current and/or previous partner that they have lived with: 17 per cent (1.6 million) of women compared to 6.1 per cent of men (547,600)
- Major preventable cause of mortality and morbidity for women 45 or under
- Lack of data on emotional, economic or technological abuse or on prevalence of family violence in faith communities - RCFV was told that it is an increasing concern

Sources of data: Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Crime Statistics Agency

Royal Commission into Family Violence

- Considered all forms of family violence:
 - against older people by their children and other family
 - by and against children/adolescents
 - against disabled people by carers
 - in rural and regional areas
 - in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and CALD communities
- Considered mechanisms to make victims safer, policing, court processes, housing, psychological and other supports, economic support, community education, early intervention and behaviour change programs

How did the Royal Commission do its work?

- ▶ Called for submissions (about 1000). People could get assistance in writing.
- ▶ Roundtables in Melbourne and regions with victims/those who assisted them eg health workers, child protection, police, specialist services, church workers (43 in total)
- ▶ Meetings with groups to examine proposals including judicial officers, heads of NGOs, heads of government departments, faith leaders
- ▶ Information subpoenaed from government departments.
- ▶ Commissioned research eg on reported family violence
- ▶ Evidence given at hearings (preceded by witness statements) Mainly from experts) 'Hot tubbing' to clarify points of disagreement.

Some key recommendations

- ▶ Emphasis on prevention, early intervention, recovery of victims and perpetrator behaviour change
- ▶ Focus on children (may be affected or perpetrators)
- ▶ Encourage and support for victims facing special difficulties (eg people from ATSI and CALD communities, people with disabilities)
- ▶ Specialised court responses to ensure safety and support of victims and help perpetrators to change.
- ▶ Better information sharing between courts (including federal and state courts) and between courts and other agencies to keep victims safe
- ▶ Need to break down silos between systems, e.g housing, child services, mental health and drug and alcohol services

What did religious leaders and victims of violence tell us about faith responses.

- ▶ Women looked to religious leaders for support but leaders told us they had a poor understanding of family violence and did not know how to help or where to refer victims for advice about housing, legal remedies etc
- ▶ Religious leaders sometimes gave good advice but bad examples included
 - trivialisation of violence even when extreme
 - ‘learn to cook better’
 - it is your duty to submit
 - excuses made for abuser
 - pressure to stay in relationship, including encouraging disapproval of others

Why faith communities are an important part of family violence response

- faith communities can engage people who might not approach formal service providers, eg people newly arrived in Australia
- by discussing family violence, faith leaders can help to prevent/discourage abuse and violence and to make victims feel valued
- faith-based organisations can refer people to other services or may already provide services to support victims of family violence and/or to support perpetrators to change
- belonging to a faith-based communities can help victims of family violence to recover from its effects

Some questions for faith -based communities

- ▶ Are religious leaders trained/knowledgeable about family violence. What help do they need?
- ▶ How can communities work with others to prevent family violence? How can gender stereotypes be challenged within faith communities? Do theological ideas help/hinder discussions on these issues?
- ▶ What procedures should faith-based bodies put in place to identify/deal with bullying and other violent behaviour?
- ▶ What mechanisms exist within faith communities to encourage women and others to report family violence. Do communities have processes to respond to victims of FV.
- ▶ Can communities learn from approaches in other religions and if so how? Does this lead to an ineffective 'one-size fits all' approach.