

We can't do much unless she leaves: rethinking the assumptions of domestic and family violence related laws, policies, programs and practice

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1. Abstract

Much of our domestic and family violence legal and service system relies on women separating from a violent partner in order to be safe and protected. At the same time it is increasingly well known that when escaping a violent partner a woman and her children are often at greatest risk of further physical harm and most likely to be killed. In a recent national survey undertaken with colleagues it was also found that the majority of women escaping a violent partner also experience various forms of 'post separation' violence and abuse (Chung et al 2015). In essence what is then required of women is that they make themselves 'more unsafe' by separating before they can be offered a full suite of protection and support to be safer. Whilst this may be a necessary process for some women and children escaping violence, it is not possible for all women. In this presentation we will explore two key areas concerning the underlying assumptions of domestic and family violence responses. Firstly, we critically analyse what is meant by 'separation', contrasting the legal-rational assumptions about ending a relationship and 'separation' that are embedded in law, policy and practice in contrast to women's lived experiences of the multiple and ongoing processes associated with separation from a violent partner. Secondly, we consider how these underlying legal and program assumptions narrowly define 'separation' and how service eligibility being premised on separation compromises the safety and the right to safety for particular groups of women in the Australian community. The presentation concludes by considering the implications for future policy and programming for domestic and family violence responses.

Key Words

Service systems						
Lived experience						
Culture, society, challenges						

Research Themes

1. Experience and impacts
2. Service responses and interventions

References

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Learning Objectives

1. To increase awareness of the ways in which particular orthodox domestic and family violence policies and practices can exclude some groups of women and their children from seeking help to live free of violence
2. To identify areas for future policy and practice reform which are more responsive to women's lived experiences of separation from a partner who is violent and her need for safety

Biographies

Donna Chung is Professor of Social Work at Curtin University and has conducted research in the area of men's violence against women for twenty years. Damian Green is a consultant and research associate at Curtin University. Damian has extensive experience in domestic and family violence working with men and as an executive manager of domestic violence services. He is currently involved in research concerning men and domestic violence. Angela Hartwig is the CEO of the WA Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence, she is a leading advocate in the area and a researcher at Curtin University.