

## **Women's Domestic and Family Violence Services, the Expectations and Reality: Listening to women in the development of victim defined services and policy.**

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### **Abstract**

The pervasiveness of domestic and family violence (DFV) experienced by women in Tasmania has prompted an expansion of DFV services for women and their children across the state. An identified lack of adequately resourced, specialist feminist services is recognised as limiting capacity across the DFV service sector to meet the varied needs of women who have experienced DFV. Moreover, a significant lack of evidence and data representing the impacts and effectiveness of local DFV services is inhibiting the strategic and informed development of the sector. The objectives of this research have been to collate localised knowledge and evidence to inform service providers and policy makers and has been based on the foundation that survivor defined services produce the best outcomes for women. Preliminary findings have been used internally to inform the Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet in DFV service development and the project is mentored by Professor Bob Pease from the University of Tasmania.

Research methods have focused on the collection of compelling new qualitative data to better understand the challenges for women seeking help, alongside themes of intersection and marginalisation inhibiting service access. Seventeen women, currently engaged with a Southern Tasmanian agency offering specialised counselling and advocacy for women affected by DFV, participated in a questionnaire concerning their feelings on the range of DFV services in their community. A further eight women participated in longer, in-depth interviews, exploring their help seeking behaviour and experiences with DFV services. Three advocates and service professionals were also interviewed in relation to their view on the dynamics of feminist praxis, DFV service delivery and the help seeking behaviour of their clients. Furthermore, an investigation into the literature surrounding DFV and feminist service models was undertaken to connect the context of research findings and recommendations within established knowledge.

Results indicate that women who have experienced violence seek and benefit from services which engage in advocacy, have a zero tolerance attitude to victim blaming and whilst not explicitly defined, uphold feminist values. Participants spoke widely on themes of; developing services centred on women's empowerment; increasing advocacy for women; streamlining information and service provisions; improving police responses; the need for group programmes; increasing specialist and feminist counselling and case work and; the need for more public promotion of DFV services available for women. Preliminary analysis has also indicated correlations between women's education and socio-economic status and their help seeking and service access experiences. These research findings contribute significantly to our understanding of the intersections of service access, experience and expectations among women who have been marginalised by their subjugation to violence and abuse and will inform service providers and policy makers at both a state and national level.