

**Faculty of Health Sciences
School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work**

***‘Having the Violence Leave: Women’s experiences of the Safe at
Home Program in Western Australia’***

Angela June Hartwig

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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for an award for any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number HR 121/2011).

Signed:

Dated: 25 October, 2015

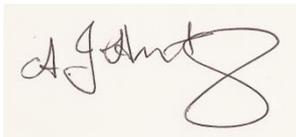
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ABSTRACT

This study examines women's experiences as participants of the "Safe at Home" program in Western Australia. It also has provided the additional opportunity to review its overall efficacy through the analyse of secondary data such as progress and evaluation reports. The "safe at home" program now provides an alternative option for women, other than fleeing their homes, to escape domestic and family violence. It began operating in July 2010. The model now provides specialist case management support for up to twelve months to women (with or without children) who choose to remain in their own home, without the perpetrator, following an incident of domestic and family violence.

The aim of this exploratory research was to gain insight into what women believed assisted with keeping them and their children safe and/or what elements of the "safe at home" program contributed to reducing further risks of violence. By exploring specific narratives collated through face-to-face interviews, this study examines the level of police response to the domestic and family violence incident; whether the further risks of violence were minimized; the role of the "safe at home" services in enhancing women's safety and stabilizing their housing; and how the lives of women and children changed as a result of remaining in their own home and having the violence leave. A sample of sixteen women were interviewed through the six "safe at home" sites in metropolitan and rural locations.

Women spoke openly and candidly about their experiences of "safe at home", in particular, the supportive role of the specialist domestic violence workers. They gave

examples of where positive social responses were received from agencies also and spoke about where their safety had been compromised due to negative social responses from authorities. By exploring narratives of women's experiences and their perception of the service it enables us as to examine the implications for policy and program developments now and into the future.

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CHAPTER ONE -INTRODUCTION

1.1 Impetus for “safe at home” programs

Intimate partner violence and rape are among the most pervasive forms of violence against women in Australia, as elsewhere. Domestic and family violence and sexualised violence continues to be the most common forms of violence experienced by women throughout the world. In 2012, the Australian Bureau of Statistics carried out a Personal Safety Survey, providing the most up to date figures of domestic violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). The following findings estimated:

- Women were more likely than men to have experienced physical assault by a male in their home;
- Women were more likely than men to experience violence from a partner;
- Women were more likely than men to have experienced emotional abuse since the age of 15; and
- Women were more likely to have experienced an episode of stalking during their lifetime (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

For too long, the only option to women experiencing domestic and family violence was to leave their home in order to escape their violent partner and protect their children. This put many women in a precarious double bind. If they did not leave their homes they might be seen as “failing to protect’ their children often deserving of the violence. If they did leave, they would face other negative consequences, including the possibility of more extreme violence by the perpetrator (Richardson, 2013).

The growing number of women and children who become homeless as a result of having to flee their own homes to escape a violent partner is widespread and of major concern. A recent report, *Domestic and family violence and homelessness 2011-12 to 2013-14*, examined multiple years of homelessness data, and found that from a total of 520,000 Australians who accessed homelessness services over a three year period that 187,000 (36 per cent), were adults and children seeking assistance due to domestic and family violence (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016).

Research findings by Access Economics in 2004 found that domestic and family violence costs Australia \$8.1 billion and concluded that women and children bear the largest burden at an estimated cost of \$4.05 billion (Access Economics, 2004). There are significant and long term health risks for victims of domestic violence and The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation found that violence against women was a leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years (Access Economics, 2004). Latest figures show that that violence against women and their children was estimated to cost the Australian economy \$13.6 billion in 2008-09; and this is expected to rise to an estimated \$15.6 billion in 2012-22 if steps are not taken to address this issue (KPMG, 2009).

Leaving home to escape a violent partner, perhaps relocating to another community entirely, brings with it many practical and life-altering problems; lack of appropriate housing, transience and instability, moving belongings, loss of belongings, difficulty keeping employment and attending educational programs, poverty, lack of transportation, disrupted education and social life for children, and isolation from supportive social networks and institutional actors. As a result many women are left

with little choice but to return to their home and to the violent partner, where they and their children are likely to face continued violence (Chung & Hartwig, 2012).

From the early 1990's until the present day advocates have maintained that women should have the right to stay in their own homes following domestic and family violence and that perpetrators should be the ones to leave (Chung, Kennedy, O'Brien, & Wendt, 2000; Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre, 2002; McFerran, 2007a). The program's underlying assumption challenges the notion of women being responsible for managing men's violence by escaping the family home. Instead it aims to ensure women's and children's safety, by supporting and empowering women to live as full citizens, and remain at home without the perpetrator.

"Safe at home" as a social response

"Safe at home" was developed to provide an effective, and socially just response in cases of domestic and family violence, to help victims recover in a safe and timely manner, and to hold the perpetrator to account. According to (Wade, 2004):

"Victims who receive negative social responses from authorities, friends and family tend to experience more intense and lasting distress, and are less likely to report the violence a second time; they are also more likely to blame flaws in their own character for the abuse and are likely to receive a mental health diagnosis after the abuse has ended, than are victims who receive a positive social response."(p.4.).

An effective social response depends in part of clear analysis of information and language used to describe violence, stress the importance of accurate use of language in all documents, including police domestic violence incident and court reports.

Who Should Leave? The Rationale for 'Safe at Home'

The expectation that a woman would leave her home when subjected to violence by her male partner originated in patriarchal beliefs about a man's entitlement to the family home because women contributed less financially to the household, regardless of other contributions such as domestic labour and child-care (Murray & Powell, 2011). Because it was assumed that men would remain in the home – “their” home the onus was placed on the women to leave. This in part accounts for the (rhetorical) question that is so often used to blame women: “Why doesn't she just leave him?” It was taken for granted that he, the violent partner, should not be forced to leave.

(McFerran, 2007a) observed that police and courts have ‘shown a deep reluctance to remove a man from his home’ (Horin, 2004). (Edwards, 2003); (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2003) found that when courts were considering orders for excluding male perpetrators from the home, a key consideration was often whether they had alternative accommodation. According to (Chung, 2011), ‘responses to family violence have typically constructed women as victims who need protection and seclusion rather than as citizens with rights which can be enforced’ (Murray & Powell, 2011).

The program not only provides another option for women, other than fleeing their homes to escape the violence and challenges the notion that ‘a man's home is his castle’ which saw the reluctance of the Australian criminal justice system to remove the violent partner from the home (McFerran, 2007b).

(Edwards, 2003) research also highlighted when courts were considering orders for excluding male perpetrators from the home a key concern was whether they had alternative accommodation, not a consideration accorded women and children seeking safety. This highlights the paradox where the community often asks: 'Why do women stay if the men are violent?' with little evidence of concern about where they might go. Whereas the question: 'Why are men able to continue to use violence against women?' is rarely posed.

Research to date has found that where a "safe at home" response has been provided, there is far less disruption to women and children's lives and they are far more likely to maintain their housing, employment, education and social supports within their community. Women and children who have to leave their homes as a result of domestic and family violence find that leaving their community further exacerbates feelings of social dislocation and disadvantages them both financially and socially. Whilst making a total fresh start away from their community may be the safest and preferred option for some women and children, the decision to stay and have the violence leave is often a choice that women wish to explore and programs such as "safe at home" have been developed to respond to this gap in available options.

The design of "safe at home" models reflect and promotes this change in perspective: from the view that the victim should leave the family home to the view that the violence partner should leave (McFerran, 2007b); from the view that women 'deserve' the violence if they do not leave, to the view that women 'deserve' practical help in finding safety and justice. "Safe at home" challenges the greater

entitlement of men to their home, especially men who use violence instead of asking, ‘Why doesn’t she leave?’ ‘Safe at home’ asks ‘Why should men who use violence be allowed to remain in the home with their female partner and children?’ That is, ‘Why doesn’t he leave?’

Establishing and securing safety for a woman and her children to remain in her home is integral to stabilizing their housing options. This in turn helps her maintain their employment, education and social networks in ways that are more easily disrupted when women have to escape to a refuge or try to secure alternative affordable housing. This risk of becoming caught up in cycles of homelessness and poverty is high for thousands of women and children who leave their homes to escape a violent partner. Increasing awareness of the social disadvantage caused by homelessness is now leading to a view by policymakers and other that this is an unjust outcome of escaping violence.

The ‘Safe at Home’ Program: An Alternative to Fleeing Home

The Federal Government has adopted a position on key issues impacting on women’s lives such as domestic and family violence and homelessness. It aims to significantly reduce the levels of violence against women and their children by 2022; and halve overall homelessness by 2020 through two National Plans, *The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009) and *The Road Home, The White Paper on Homelessness* (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008b) which will have the capacity to strengthen existing services and develop new responses to domestic and family violence.

The Safe at Home program now provides a real option for women and children to remain in their own homes where it is safe to do so. Research to date has found, where this occurs, that there is far less disruption to women and children's lives and that they are far more likely to maintain their housing, employment, education and social supports within their community (McFerran, 2007b) Women and children who have to leave their homes as result of domestic and family violence find that leaving their communities further exacerbates feelings of social dislocation and disadvantages them both financially and socially.

Whilst making a total fresh start away from their community may be the safest and preferred option for some women and children; the decision to stay and defend their homes and have the violence leave is often a choice that women wish to explore and programs such as "safe at home" have been developed to respond to this gap in available options. This growing policy interest in the right of women and children to remain in their own homes, has led both nationally and internationally to the development of service responses designed to prevent their homelessness (Blandy & Spinney, 2011).

After years of trying to develop strategies and positive social responses to women who have been victims of violence and abuse it appears that the "safe at home" program could provide a new alternative and direction...this research has provided the opportunity to engage with participants of the "safe at home" program to gain vital feedback on the effectiveness of this option now available to women and their children in Western Australia.

This research provides a breadth and depth of qualitative data which has not been explored before in Western Australia. Feeling safe and actually being safe are inter-related but different states. Just because a woman feels safe doesn't mean that she actually is and vice versa, as her perception of safety may be influenced by the myth that she deserved and/or caused the violence perpetrated upon her. This may often lead to women minimizing the frequency and severity of the violence she is experience (Paymar & Pence, 1986; Walker, 1979) .

The key objectives of this study are:

1. To evaluate the efficacy of “safe at home” programs in WA by exploring narratives of women’s experiences and examine current data on how programs are progressing overall
2. To gain insight from a client’s perspective into what assisted with keeping women and children safe and/or contributed to reducing further risks of violence
3. To inform policy and service delivery reforms that support women and children to maintain their dignity and live safe and free from violence

In order to pursue this research in a safe and acceptable way to women, it was necessary to explore the safety of women living with violence. A review of the literature has been undertaken, including current policies and legislation in WA relevant to domestic and family violence.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Acknowledging the Herstory

Women's refuges and shelters across Australia were established through the work of the women's movement in the late 1960's and 1970's. Refuges arose not only in response to violence in the home, but also due to the growing awareness of how few options women had other than to leave their homes to escape a violent partner.

Women's refuges during this time were lonely voices speaking out about violence in the home. They provided crisis accommodation and support for women and children within a sanctuary of safety and non-violence, and refuge staff work with women to empower them to take control of their lives.

They worked collectively, often using social activism as a form of intervention not only to raise consciousness about the seriousness consequences for victims, but to also break the silence around what was deemed a very 'private' issue. Women have often found strength in sharing their stories of resistance, resilience and defiance to the violence; and mobilized to bring about social change 'in numbers too big to ignore' (Burton & Reddy, 1972).

Out of the home and into the public face, activists and supporters marched side by side; rallied on steps of Parliament house; and used their assertiveness to influence decision-makers and politicians to commit to a well-resourced plan of action to address the endemic issue of violence against women and children. Politicians and bureaucrats began to take notice from the 1980s and, over time, service responses have improved, but refuges alone are unable to deal with the plethora of issues that

face women and children when they flee their homes in search of safety and protection from their violent partners.

Refuge workers and their allies both within government and the community recognised that asking the violence to leave, was not such a radical concept, it was an attempt to seek socially just responses for women and their children who had suffered abuse and violence at the hands of their partners and uphold their rights to live in safety free from violence in their own homes. These unsung heroines have all been part of making HERSTORY and paving the way for future generations to create equal gender power relationships and the elimination of domestic and family violence in our society.

In Western Australia, it was not until 1986, that the 'Break the Silence' report squarely placed domestic and family violence on the State Government's policy agenda. The report with over one hundred recommendations, called for swift and immediate action in the area of legal reform and greater levels of support to women and children as victims of domestic and family violence (Domestic Violence Taskforce, 1986) . It was a time when advocates were calling for recognition of the so -called 'private violence' that was occurring for women and children at the hands of violent partners (behind closed doors) to become of public concern.

Domestic and family violence homelessness services, previously now known also as women's refuges and/or shelters, funded through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) provide short term crisis accommodation and support to

women and children for up to three months. After this time they often have to relocate to an unfamiliar area, build new relationships with service providers, and form new networks of social support. The refuge model aims to provide safety and protection was developed as a positive social response to victims of violence.

2.2 Overview of domestic and family violence

Prevalence of Domestic and Family Violence

As of 31 December 2015, the 'Counting the Dead' social media site recorded that a total of 80 women in Australia, had lost their lives as a result of violence, the majority by a current or former partner (Destroy the Joint, 2015). Evidence also suggests that four out of ten women and five out of ten men in Australia have experienced at least one incident of violence since the age of 15 (ANROWS, 2015).

The Personal Safety Survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012) found that men were most likely to experience violence in the public sphere such as entertainment locations, whereas women were most likely to experience in a private location such as their homes. One in four women in Australia have experienced at least one incident of violence from an intimate partner who they may or may have been residing with and less than 20 per cent of women who experience violence from an intimate partner, report it to the police (ANROWS, 2014).

Domestic and family violence differs from street crime in the sense that victims know the perpetrator and is usually in an intimate and/or familial relationship with that person. This means it is likely that:

- Feelings and emotions will be heightened;
- The victim may be economically dependent on the perpetrator;
- The victim and perpetrator may be parents of the same children;
- There is a high chance that the crime will go unreported;
- An act of domestic and family violence will be repeated; and

Safety of the victim and her children will be compromised (Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services WA 2012).

The demographic of both victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence cuts across all spheres of our society, it knows no, geographical, socio-economic, cultural or religious boundaries. Victims may often choose not to disclose the violence to friends, family and/or professionals for fear of not being believed and/or being met with violence-supportive attitudes, that often result in women receiving a negative social response, such as 'you must be doing something to provoke him'.

Perpetrators will take steps to conceal their use of violence, by making excuses, threats, and/or exploiting weak social responses to the violence; all making it difficult for a victim to report to the authorities for fear of not being believed (Wade, 2011).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ASTI) people prefer the term 'family violence,' which encompasses all forms of violence within intimate and family relationships; which can include violence from extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins and in-laws. 'Family Violence' also highlights the

fragmentation of the holistic relationship between spiritual, cultural and environmental dimensions of ASTI life that has taken place since colonization (Hovane & Cox, 2011).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women are over-represented in domestic and family violence data; and whilst ASTI people make-up 3.1 per cent of the West Australian population, it is estimated that they experience violence at two to five times the rate of non-Aboriginal people (ANROWS, 2015). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 45 times more likely to be a victim of family violence than non-Aboriginal women (Department of Child Protection, 2013). It is also estimated that ATSI women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalized as a result of injuries from family violence and 10 times more likely to die as a result of family violence than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Aboriginal Family Law Services, 2015b).

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women

In WA, the Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service (part of the not-for-profit Women's Health and Family Services) assisted more than 250 clients from 78 countries in 2013-14 through its offices in Fremantle, Gosnells, Mirrabooka and Northbridge (Women's Health and Family Services, 2014).

Language barriers, the lack of knowledge about their rights and fear of being deported can render women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds less likely than other women to report abuse to the authorities and/or seek help. In particular, women on Section 457 visas who are deemed being a member of the

primary visa's applicant's (usually their spouses) family unit face extreme difficulties in cases where the woman may be a victim of domestic and family violence. Due to their temporary residency status within Australia, they fall outside the Family Violence Provisions under the Immigration Act; and are ineligible for health, housing and income support benefits. This impact has dire consequences for women who are sponsored into Australia under this visa category, as they are often threatened by the perpetrator with deportation if they speak to anyone the violence they have been experiencing at the hands of their partners.

Returning women to their country of origin is often not a safe option, particularly in cultures where it is deemed the woman has brought shame onto the family and/or community and she will often be alienated and may be at risk of further harm and/or so called 'honour' killings. Carol Kaplanian highlights that, honour crimes are acts of violence, mostly murders, committed by a male family member against a female family member perceived to have dishonoured the family for refusing an arranged marriage, being the victim of sexual assault, seeking divorce or committing adultery (Kaplanian, 2010).

Women with disabilities

Although research concerning the prevalence and incidence of violence and abuse against women with disabilities is limited, the weight of evidence consistently points to women with disabilities being vulnerable to higher rates of both physical and sexual abuse from both those closest to them and strangers, when compared with other women (Plummer & Findley, 2012). A recent survey of 367 women and girls

with disability found that 22 percent had been affected by violence in the past year (University of New South Wales, 2013).

Children and Young People

In 2013-14 Western Australian Police responded to over 40,000 calls for assistance in cases of domestic and family violence. In over 65 percent of these cases children were present or known to reside with the victim or perpetrator. Of concern is that the number of people seeking assistance from police for domestic and family violence has increased by more than 40 per cent in five years (Department of Child Protection and Family Support, 2014).

Professionals often refer to children or young people as “witnessing” violence or being “exposed” to violence. These terms minimize their experience of the violence. When a child or young person, sees or hears one parent, use violence against another parent, they experience the violence in a very real and direct way. Thus violence, by one parent against another is a form of child abuse is a deliberate move by the perpetrator to disrupt the mother-child bond Therefore we refer to children who “experience” violence to highlight this fact (Richards, 2011).

Even the healthiest of children and young people can experience significant harm by exposure to abuse and violence in the home. This is due to their sensitive stages of development being at risk through such a vital period of growth, especially younger children. Children and young people respond to, and resist the abuse in a number of different ways depending on their age and other factors. They may avoid eye contact with the perpetrator, scream, hit, protect their siblings and injured parent, distract the perpetrator by pretending to agree with them, to calm them down (Richards, 2011).

Young People being abused by their Partners

70% of young people aged between 12 and 20 will experience a romantic relationship. Of those young people, one in three is abused by their partner (Indermaur, 2001). Violence by adolescents against other adolescents in the context of “dates” is a form of domestic violence that can include verbal, physical, psychological, social, economic, and spiritual abuse. Given the increasing use of technology by adolescents via platforms such as Face book and Twitter, cyber-stalking may also be used demean, humiliate, threaten, control, or manipulate a “partner”, and/or their friends (Hartwig & Newbigin, 2009).

Defamatory remarks and lies are used to socially isolate a partner from their social groups. Others may side with the offender against the victim, denying the victim the social responses they deserve, and negatively influencing their ability to develop a healthy social and individual identity (Wade, 2013). These forms of abuse typically involve abuse by one person (usually the male) exercising control over their partner. This is done in a number of different ways. Examples are when the victim of the abuse is told:

- Who to have as friends;
- What they should be wearing;
- How to act and what to say;
- When to go out; and
- To answer constant calls or texts to explain where they are.

Children and young people who grow up in environments where there is violence, usually in the family home, too often learn how to justify unhealthy and even abusive behaviours. This may include the notion that:

- It is ok for men to hit women;

- Violence is the way to get what you want;
- Adults have power they misuse;
- Men are bullies who push women and children around;
- Expressing feeling signifies weakness;
- Not to talk about violence;
- Not to trust and not to feel

It is also important to note that children and young people may respond to violence in various ways which can include, a tendency to take steps to resist or stop the violence by attempting to protect their mother and any other young siblings; blame themselves for the violence (it must have happened because I did something wrong); these beliefs may require professional support to reaffirm to the child that the violence is never their fault and the person responsible for the violence is the perpetrator (Wade, 2013). This is an important message for counsellors when working with children and the traumatic impacts of living in a home with violence and abuse.

Research shows that most children and young people who experience violence do not go on to commit violence against other adults. Children and young people are much less likely to commit or experience violence as adults if they receive positive social responses from authorities, friends and family (Wade, 2013).

The Importance of the Lived Experience and Survivors Sharing their Story

Former Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, consolidated and captured the hearts and minds of millions of people around the nation when she spoke of the years of abuse and violence she suffered at the hands of her son's father, Greg Anderson. The ultimate act of violence was committed against her and Luke in February 2014 when Luke was murdered by his father. Rosie's pleas for help from authorities were largely ignored. The Inquest into Luke's death (Coroners Court of Victoria, 2015) identified that Police Officers, Child Protection and Batty stated that they never believed Anderson would harm Luke, as although he had a history of violence against Batty, he was not violent toward his son (Davey, 2014). The murder of Luke Batty gained significant media attention.

The importance of hearing directly from survivors of domestic and family violence is imperative if we are to be guided in our responses at both a policy and practice level. The importance of survivors sharing their stories cannot be underestimated as it provides us with knowledge that must be validated and accepted as the essence of their lived experience.

Over the last few years, government agencies have made changes to policy and practices on how they respond to victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence; but is it enough? This study is timely to engage with women as participants of the "safe at home" program who are experiencing domestic and family violence to explore what type of responses they have received from authorities such as the police, courts, child protection and others to seek help and to find out what is working well and where responses can be improved.

National Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women

A recent nationwide Vic Health survey of 17,500 people about their attitudes towards violence against women reveals that whilst most people understood that family violence was a crime, a sizeable proportion believed there were circumstances in which it could be still be excused.

Table 2.1 **Survey Results:** *What we think of violence against women*

78%	agree it's hard to understand why women stay
51%	agree most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to
98%	were prepared to intervene if a known woman is being assaulted
92%	were prepared to intervene if an unknown woman is being assaulted
9%	agreed a woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a sexual relationship with
64%	agreed men are unable to manage their anger
46%	agreed that tracking a partner by electronic means without consent is acceptable
19%	agreed if a woman is raped while drunk she is at least partly responsible
43%	agreed rape resulted from men not being able to control their need for sex
17%	agreed domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family

The survey involved more than 17,500 telephone interviews with a cross-section of Australians aged 16 years and older. An alarming number of Australians believe that violence towards women and rape can be excused, particularly if the victim is drunk. Survey results found that one in five (19 percent) Australians agree that a woman is

partly responsible for rape if she is intoxicated, and one in six agree with the notion that when women say "no" to sex they actually mean "yes". Current attitudes about rape found that approximately two thirds (64 percent) of survey respondents agreed that rape was the result of men not being able to control their need for sex, while more than half agreed that women could leave a violent relationship "if they really wanted to" (Perkins, 2014).

About 80 per cent of people agreed that it was hard to understand why women stayed in violent relationships. Most people recognised that partner violence was usually perpetrated by men, but since the first survey in 1995 there has been a decrease in understanding that women are at greater risk of sexual assault by a person they know than a stranger. More than half agreed that women often fabricated cases of domestic violence to improve their prospects in family law cases. And about 30 per cent of Australians agreed that women preferred a man to be in charge of the relationship. Although most young people (84 per cent) agreed that tracking a partner by electronic means without her consent is serious, nearly half (46 per cent) believe that it is acceptable to some degree compared to 35 per cent of those aged 35-64. Young men are more likely to agree that young women 52 per cent v 40 per cent (Vic Health, 2015). These results support the need to continue to raise awareness about how this behaviour can constitute a form of ongoing stalking, harassment and bullying when used by perpetrators to violate and abuse victims.

On a positive note, the survey results also found, that 98 percent of people agreed they would step in if they saw violence against a woman they knew; and that there

was no significant difference in attitude between the various states or territories in Australia or between low, middle or high-income earners. Nonetheless, the main influence on people's attitudes to violence against women was their understanding of the issue and how supportive they were of gender equality. The survey found that young people between 16 and 25 generally had poorer attitudes about sexual assault, while older people (65 and older) were less likely to support gender equity and had rigid ideas about a woman's role in a relationship. <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/media-releases/many-young-people-ready-to-attribute-blame-to-victims-and-think-tracking-a-partner-is-acceptable>

WA Domestic and Family Violence Data

The serious nature of domestic and family violence cannot be underestimated. Between 2000 and 2009, there were one hundred and eighty deaths in Western Australia, due to domestic homicide, an average of 18 per year. Of these cases, 59 per cent of the victims were women and 76 percent of offenders were men. On average two of the victims each year are children (Department of Child Protection Family and Domestic Violence Unit, 2011).

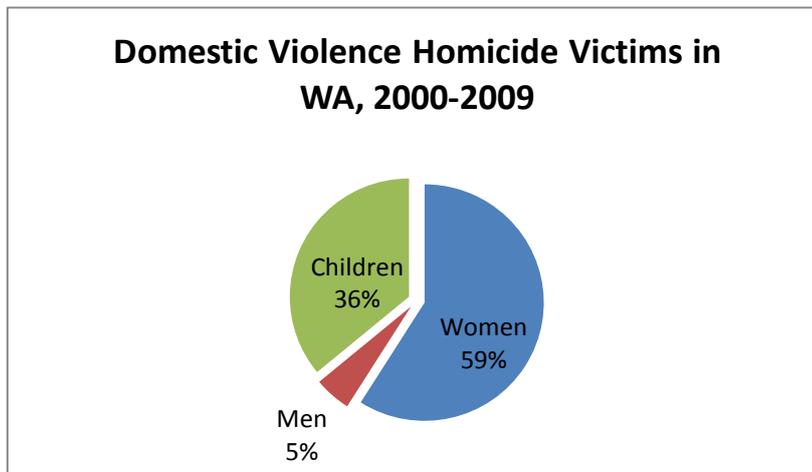
Table 2.1 below clearly shows that number of calls out to the police for domestic and family violence incidents have steadily increased by 10% each year from 2005-2013. It is well documented that domestic and family violence is highly unreported, due to negative social responses and lack of seriousness that victims receive from authorities, friends and/or family members. Often there has been a history of violence by a partner or ex-partner over a number of years before a victim reports to the police.

Table 2.2 *Number of Domestic and Family Violence Incidents Reports*

Calender year	Crime Reports	General Reports	Total
2005	11,726	10,654	22,380
2006	13,849	13,858	27,707
2007	13,362	16,728	30,090
2008	12,914	18,902	31,816
2009	13,117	20,730	33,847
2010	13,327	22,700	35,027
2011	15,068	24,229	39,297
2012	18,239	26,708	44,947
2013	21,000	26,000	47,000

Source: WA Police 2014

Figure 2.1 *Domestic Violence Homicides in WA, 2000-2009*



Source: Department of Child Protection, Family and Domestic Violence Unit, 2011

Western Australia has the second highest rate of reported physical and sexual violence perpetrated against women in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. The largest cohort of women who report experiencing violence are between 18 and 24 years of age. In more than 60 per cent of cases the perpetrator is known to the woman (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

The complex nature of domestic and family violence continues to be a challenge, calling for more effective approaches and coordinated efforts. Even more concerning is the increased number of deaths as a domestic of interpersonal and family related violence. Police data provided to the WCDFVS each year indicate that there has been the following number of domestic violence related deaths in WA:

- 29 domestic violence related homicides in 2012;
- 16 domestic violence related homicides in 2013;
- 16 domestic violence related deaths in 2014;
- 14 domestic violence related deaths in 2015.

Source: WA Police 2015

An article by ABC News reported that Sandra Wolfe was “gobsmacked” when her ex-partner was sentenced to five years in jail after trying to run her down, an act of extreme violence that had also been recorded on camera by a another person. After 28 years of horrific abuse and violence; Sandra struggled to tell anyone.

Consequently, the court determined there was no other evidence of violence by her ex-partner, as she had never approached the police before (Martin, 2015).

A WA study interviewing 44 women about their experiences of Protection Orders highlights the ‘fraught nature of civil orders as a response to domestic and family violence, reinforcing the importance of an integrated response to domestic and family violence that includes a protection order system that is accessible and enforceable (Goulding, 2007).’ Expanding the definition of what constitutes domestic and family violence in WA would also allow for greater protection against all forms of violence used by perpetrators against victims, such as such acts

using cyber-technology, economic abuse and threats to disseminate naked photos and videos, often referred to as ‘revenge porn’ as means of emotional blackmail to stop a victim from leaving or a means of having them return to the relationship.

Violence Restraining Orders

A Violence Restraining Order is designed to stop threats, property damage, intimidating behaviour and emotional abuse in the future. It is an order of the court and requires the offender to stay away or to stop behaving in certain ways. There are two types of VROs:

- 1 VROs against a person you are in a domestic or family violence relationship with (Police Orders, Interim and Final VROs)
- 2 VROs against a person you are not in a domestic or family violence relationship with (Misconduct Order)
- 3 The law in Western Australia states that an act of domestic and family violence includes assaults, injuries, threats, stalking, damaging property, hurting animals or pets, acting in an ongoing intimidating, offensive or emotionally abusive manner.

Physical violence, stalking and threats of violence are crimes. Significantly, not all acts of family and domestic violence are contrary to criminal law and therefore not deemed liable for state intervention. In the absence of a violence restraining order, the victim may be unprotected. (Legal Aid of Western Australia, 2013).

A first time study in Western Australia interviewing men who had breached a Protection Order, found they exhibited a lack of understanding about how their

violence towards their intimate partner, children and family could result in restrictions to their contact with their children and/or exclusion from their property. Their perception around the unfairness of being served a VRO or Police Order was exacerbated by a lack of understanding about the process and grounds in which an order can be made. The men minimized their use of violence and externalised responsibility to 'the relationship' and/or their partner (Chung & Leggett, 2013).

Given that the men had been recruited through the completion of a behaviour change program, this in itself raises concerns for ongoing victim safety, and questions how successful the re-education process is within behaviour change programs if men are still minimizing and mutualizing their use of violence post program.

Consistent with international trends, Western Australia has been progressing partnership models of responding to domestic and family violence with joint assessment, information sharing and case management. The research findings indicate there is potential to expand this model of working further to enhance the safety of women and children, through the provision of an early, proactive point of contact service for men who are subject to VROs offering telephone and face-to-face contact and user-friendly information about the process and consequences. The model could also include, contact with relevant agencies where men are deemed to be at high risk so that safety plans can be implemented and risk management strategies increased (Chung & Leggett, 2013)

By examining the intersection between fatherhood, domestic violence and family safety (Mandel, 2014) highlights that violent behaviour towards partners, ex-partners

and/or children cannot be seen as responsible fathering. The Responsible Fathering Initiative focuses on behaviour assessments to learn about risk and safety, along with case meetings, discussions and interventions with perpetrators to reduce the risk of harm to children. The perpetrator-centred approach aims to ensure that child welfare agencies become more informed about the level the risk posed by offenders, providing authorities with greater capacity for more accurate assessments of the safety concerns for children to take place, thus reducing unnecessary removal of children from the non-abusive parent (Mandel, 2014). This type of analysis could extend to key decision-makers within the Family Law Courts, when considering Contact and Residency Orders applications, and also Corrective Services when considering bail and parole conditions.

A key focus area now embedded within Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, Second Action Plan 2013-16, *Moving Ahead*, is the need to improve the evidence base on perpetrator interventions. This will require researching and evaluating legislation, behaviour change programs and responses both here in Australia and abroad. Finalizing and setting in place national outcome standards for good practice will be an essential driver to both guide and improve capacity for meaningful change in this area.

There is emerging evidence of effectiveness, as outlined by (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015, p.45) in *Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programmes (DVPPs): Steps Towards Change*: Project Mirabal's Final Report whereby two key areas were examined; do DVPPs actually work in reducing men's violence and abuse; and how does change happen? This qualitative research included in-depth interviews with 64 men in perpetrator programs and 48 women (ex-partners), and 13 children, aged 7-16. The findings highlighted that,

“physical and sexual violence was not just reduced but ended for the majority of women in this research, whilst everyday abuse and harassment, unsurprisingly, was more difficult to curtail, as men admit and women regret.’ Group work was identified as process for men to change, to see themselves through the eyes of others, being challenged by peers and having skilled facilitators. (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015, p.45)”

The research concluded that, ‘there is no evidence that men either increase or shift to completely new, more subtle forms of abuse. At the same time while some men took small steps towards change, ending the physical and sexual violence was insufficient for some women to feel at ease and restore their freedom (Kelly & Westmarland, 2015, p.45).

“Safe at Home” model requires a whole of government response

Sadly, many victims have continued to lose their lives due to negative social responses from authorities before and after “safe at home” was an available option in Western Australia. Suffice to say a “safe at home” response cannot be seen as a panacea for having the violence leave in all situations. Andrea Pickett’s (12 January 2009) and Saori Jones’ (22 December 2010) violent deaths at the hands of their ex-partners continue to stand as a stark reminder that much more can be done in Western Australia at legislative, policy and practice level.

As outlined in the WA Law Reform Commission’s Discussion Paper (Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2013), the deaths of Andrea Pickett and Saori Jones by their violent ex-partners were clear catalysts for change. So much was the community outrage about their deaths that ABC 4 Corners came to Perth to report about the systems failures. Quentin McDermott’s investigative report on ‘A Matter of Life and Death’ was screened nationally in Australia in July 2012, and was a finalist in the Human Rights Media Awards 2012 and went on to win in 2013. See

the following link to view the program:

<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/07/26/3554420.htm>

Review of Domestic and Family Laws

WA Attorney General, Michael Mischin announced a review *Enhancing Laws Concerning Family and Domestic Violence* in September 2013 and the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia released their Discussion Paper on 19 December 2013. A total of 53 proposals, seeking feedback and comments to key questions were put forward within the Discussion Paper with a key focus on the need for the heads of each Western Australian court to ensure that regular training delivered by a range of agencies with expert knowledge of the contemporary nature and dynamics of family and domestic violence – including specific issues in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI), people with disabilities and the challenges for those living in rural and remote locations – be provided for judicial officers in Western Australia, who deal with matters involving domestic and family violence.

The LRCWA report also noted that Magistrates are uneducated about the social science and the evidence base that would enable them to readily identify risks associated with violence and abuse in families. Furthermore, they are not held accountable for judgements that impact on victims and children (i.e. homicide whilst on bail, VROs not being granted or poor sentencing for VRO breaches). Not having an up to date understanding of family and domestic violence is likely to

impact on how Magistrates interpret the legislation.

The legislation already provides quite a few provisions or mechanisms intended at promoting victim safety and court efficiency, but unfortunately are misinterpreted, not known about, or rarely used in practice, which often leads to ineffective outcomes for both victim's safety and perpetrator accountability. Furthermore, the LRCWA final report called for regular legislated training from relevant experts, combined with minimum selection criteria for Magistrates; and the development of a WA Bench Book on good practice around identifying and responding to victims and perpetrators. It is believed this would greatly assist Magistrates with providing a greater level of information around programs such as "safe at home" and the need for a greater focus on the rights of victims to remain in their own home where it is safe to do so, and issuing of a VRO/Exclusionary Order to remove the perpetrator of violence from the home.

Law Reform Commission of Western Australia- Final Report

The LRCWA final review resulted in a total of 73 recommendations which was submitted to the Attorney General, the Hon. Michael Mischin in June 2014. Some of the key recommendations that would provide an enhanced service system response to victims of domestic and family violence include:

The introduction of a new Act, to be called *Family and Domestic Violence Protection Act*. This act would include the recognition of the key features of family and domestic violence and definitions of 'family and domestic violence' and 'a family and domestic relationship'. It would also encompass all the court processes

dealing with applications for and hearings of family and domestic violence protection orders including applications for variation or cancellation of such orders. The current definition of family and domestic violence should be widened to include intimidation, coercion, emotional and psychological abuse, economic abuse, use of cyber- technology and children who witness domestic and family violence.

Evaluation of the Family Violence Courts in Western Australia

In an article published in the West Australian newspaper on 17 April 2014, entitled, *Domestic violence courts fail*, conveyed that the Department of the Attorney General's review of the family violence courts has demonstrated that the specialist courts are not as effective in reducing recidivism as mainstream courts, that they are generally more expensive to run and that their viability is therefore being reconsidered. Concerns from advocates reiterate that their understanding of the purpose of the family violence courts is that they are not primarily aimed at reducing the rates of recidivism; rather, they are aimed at enhancing victim safety and increasing perpetrator accountability. Therefore saying they fail to reduce recidivism, does not necessarily mean they are failing at their intended purpose. Additionally, given the primary aim is victim safety, it appears that victim safety has been excluded from the evaluation.

Domestic violence fatality review model

After the death of Andrea Pickett, and in the led up to the Annual Silent Domestic Violence Memorial March held in April 2009, the Women's Council for Domestic

and Family Violence Services (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse), the non-government peak body released a media statement calling on the state government to establish a Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee in WA. At this time other states in Australia such as Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria had recently established similar review structures. The state government responded positively and later that year held a consultation forum with key stakeholder around the establishment of a Domestic Violence Fatality Review model in WA.

In July 2012 the Western Australian Ombudsman commenced a new function to review family and domestic violence fatalities. The purpose of this function is to ‘identify the circumstances in which and why a person died; identify patterns and trends arising from the fatalities and to improve public administration to prevent or reduce family and domestic violence fatalities (WA Ombudsman, 2013).’ In the two years of its operation, 2012-2014 the Ombudsman reviewed 35 deaths; and the the Ombudsman began a major own motion investigation in relation to family and domestic violence fatalities in 2013-14 (WA Ombudsman, 2015).

New Emergency Response by Police

From August 2014 WA Police will introduce an upgraded duress alarm system for high risk victims of domestic and family violence. Alarms will be registered through the victim’s mobile phone and calls to a dedicated 1800 number will activate the alarm. The new mobile duress alarm solution replaces the black box duress alarm which was physically installed at the victim's residential address. The family & domestic violence duress alarm module has been incorporated into the police

Computer Aided Dispatch system (Stoecker) which allows Victim Support Unit personnel to manage their domestic violence duress alarms.

The 'red file' policy was developed as a result of key recommendations from the Coroner's Inquest into the death of Andrea Pickett, where it was identified that Kenneth Pickett had made it known to the prison psychologist that he could not guarantee Andrea's safety if released on parole. Nonetheless, he was released and subsequently breached his parole conditions and his VRO by travelling from Narembeen to Perth, tracking her down and brutally killing her front of her four year old child and family members. The Coroner was concerned that no plan had been put in place for Andrea's safety upon Kenneth Pickett's release on parole.

Consequently a practice for dealing with sharing information between the Department of Corrections and the WA Police has been put in place to deal with cases where it becomes known that a victim is at extreme risk of harm or imminent danger from a perpetrator upon their release from prison. The two departments have agreed to share this information, and put in place a safety plan for the victim/s and take immediate steps to apprehend the perpetrator, thus reducing the potential risk of serious harm or homicide. This applies particularly where a perpetrator has made threats to kill, either directly, or via a third party and may also be in breach of their parole or bail conditions.

Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRARMF)

Victoria introduced a domestic and family common risk assessment and risk management framework in 2007; the DCPFS received permission from the Victorian

Family Violence Reform Coordination Unit to adapt this framework for use in WA. The development of the Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework in 2011 also provides professionals with a standardised approach to identifying, assessing and responding to domestic and family violence. Whilst most Women's Refuge and Domestic Violence Outreach Services had their own screening and assessment tools in place, any areas for improvement were provided through, the CRARMF and encouraged both mainstream and specialist services to operate under the 'common framework' to ensure service responses are client and safety focused, seamless and streamlined (Department of Child Protection, 2011).

The existing Minimum Standards developed by the Department of Child Protection have been designed to guide practice and professional judgement when working with both victims and perpetrators and programs such as "safe at home" for screening, risk assessment and risk management. The following definitions below outline the minimum standards for the CRARMF.

Screening

Mainstream and specialist agencies actively screen for domestic and family violence where indicators are present

Risk Assessment

Agencies have a role in responding for domestic and family violence will use a common approach to risk assessment that includes key risk indicators, professional judgement and victim assessment of risk.

Risk Management

Agencies work within an integrated systems response that prioritizes adult and child victim safety and well-being, manages the risk through interagency collaboration, and holds perpetrator accountable for their behaviour (ibid).

In 2014 the CRARMF was reviewed and two additional minimum standards have been developed to reflect recent changes in policy and practice. They are:

Information Sharing

Agencies share relevant information to support referral, risk assessment, risk management and monitoring, prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of adult and child victims, and holding perpetrators accountable.

Referrals

Agencies will use an active referral process to support adult and child victims and perpetrators of family and domestic violence to access appropriate services.

The development of the CRARMF has been deemed critical to the success of an integrated response to domestic and family violence, particularly in supporting the following three outcomes:

1. Eliminating Service Gaps;
2. Keeping responses client and safety focused;
3. Supporting multiagency collaboration and coordination

In the domestic and family violence field, risk assessment is conducted to:

- Evaluate the risk of re-assault and evaluate the risk of homicide;
- Inform service responses and criminal justice approaches;
- Help victims understand their own level of risk and/or validate their own level of fear
- assessment; and provide a basis from which a case can be monitored by service providers (Laing, 2004).

The key components of the CRARMF are shared principles, common minimum standard of response, referral and information sharing and a shared commitment to perpetrator accountability and risk management. It appears to be a valuable

framework that aims to assist service providers to assess risk and safety concerns for victims and of domestic and family violence and make more appropriate and referrals to agencies such as Police, Refuges, Community Legal Centres and “Safe at Home” programs.

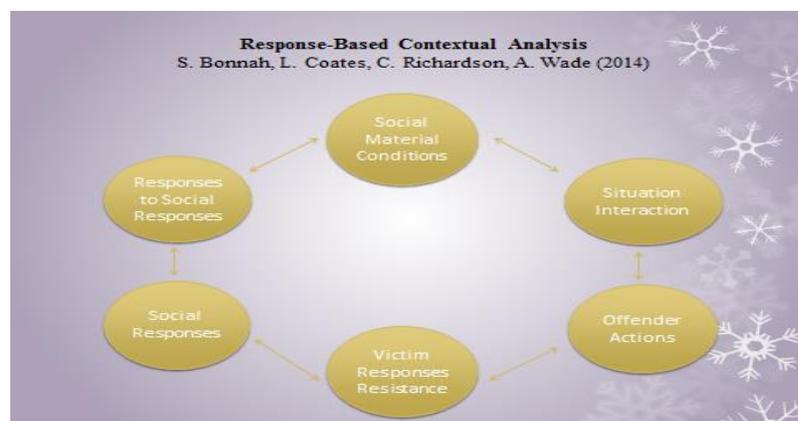
2.3 Understanding and responding to domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence refers to acts of violence whereby one person intentionally uses physical violence, threats, force or intimidation to control or manipulate a family member, partner or former partner. The central element of domestic and family violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and be both criminal and non-criminal. Domestic and family violence includes physical, sexual, emotional, economic and psychological abuse (Hartwig & Newbigin, 2009). Perpetrators often use advantages in power to manipulate and exploit social responses such as isolating the victim, secrecy, social deception, threats and surveillance aimed at reducing the access to the victim to positive social responses, not strictly at exercising power over the victim. Thus Hyden, Wade and Gadd argue that social conditions and social responses must be taken into account in analysis of violence (Gadd, Hyden, & Wade, 2012) .

Furthermore, when considering the ‘Response-Based Practice’ (RBP) analysis Coates, Todd and Wade argue that violence acts are social in that they occur in specific interactions and involve at least two people; they are unilateral and they

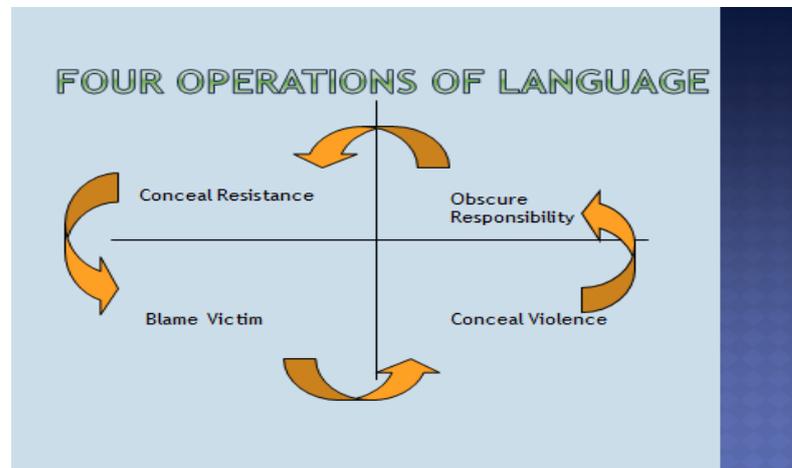
entail actions by one person against the will and well-being of another. RBP also highlights that perpetrators will anticipate resistance from victims and take deliberate steps to conceal and suppress it. Often, so-called “explosive” or “out of control” acts of violence involve choice and controlled, deliberate action (Coates, Todd, & Wade, 2007). Victims may often chose not to disclose the violence to friends, family and/or professionals for fear of not being believed and/or being met with violence-supportive attitudes, that might result in receiving a negative social response, such as ‘you must be doing something to provoke him. Perpetrators will take steps to conceal their use of violence, by making excuses, threats, and/or exploiting weak social responses to the violence; all making it difficult for a victims to report to the authorities for fear of not being believed (Wade, 2011).

Figure 2:2 *Response-Based Contextual Analysis*



The four operations of language highlighted in Table 2.3 below outline the importance of the use of language when assessing both victim and social responses to domestic and family violence. It provides a framework from which to examine how the victim’s resistance and the acts of violence have been concealed by the perpetrator, often leading to negative social responses from authorities or what is often referred to as ‘victim-blaming’ responses (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Figure 2.3 *Language and Violence: Analysis of four discursive operations*

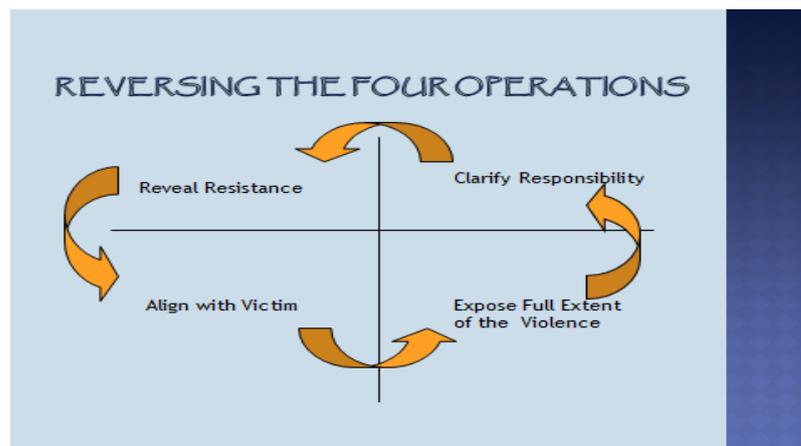


Since 2010, a number of practitioners and advocates have attended RBP training workshops in Perth. Drs Allan Wade, Linda Coates and Cathy Richardson, from the Centre for Response-Base Practice in Vancouver, first presented their work at two day training conference in Perth entitled, *Reframing Practice: Building on Our Strengths* which was attended by over 300 practitioners, who worked in the area with victims and/or perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services have embraced RBP as it believes this model provides a clear philosophical framework which enable advocates and practitioners to examine their own attitudes, beliefs and practices and emphasises the important use of language about violence at an interpersonal level and when writing case notes and reports, such as accurately describing the violence and victim resistance to the violence such as ‘Tom repeatedly hit Susie and she sustained injuries from trying to escape the violence’ as opposed to mutualizing accounts such as ‘Tom and Susie had an argument and they began to fight.’ RPB has also been utilized by advocates when dealing with the media and as useful way to

articulate consequences of negative social responses and within formal settings such as the Coronial Inquest into the death of Andrea Pickett, when providing expert advice.

Figure 2.4 *Reversing the Four Operations of Language*



By engaging with a woman and allowing her to tell her story around her experience of domestic and family violence and asking key questions such as ‘how did you respond to the violence?’ (Coates & Wade, 2007) believe that you not only get a more accurate description of the violence that took place but you are able to honour the woman resistance to the violence that took place.

Implications of Victim Blaming Responses

Gender –neutral language, such as ‘violence and abuse between adult partners’ not only mutualises the act of violence between a victim and a perpetrator, but results in victim blaming responses from authorities. This example not only highlights how language can be used to mutualize the violence. It clearly does not identify who is the victim and who is the perpetrator, and may give an inaccurate description of the

violence that occurred. Gender neutral language can also negate the need to view violence against women as a gendered crime, resulting in gender neutral policy and program responses. Whilst it is acknowledged, that some men are victims of domestic and family violence, women are overwhelming the majority of victims of male violence, thus a gender specific focus is required, to redress the impact of such inequity. Historically, society's response to domestic and family violence has been to blame the victims, predominantly women, for their own victimization and to exonerate men from taking responsibility (Herman, 1992).

(Featherstone, 2004) argues that the use of neutral terms like 'parenting' and 'family functioning' by policy makers, practitioners and researchers obscures the reality that it is women's actions that are scrutinized and different gender expectations placed on mothers and fathers (Heward-Belle, 2013).

Mothers meanwhile, continue to be the subject to scrutiny in line with discourses that position them as solely responsible for ensuring children's well-being' and are often faced with the responsibility for escaping and/or returning to their violent partners as a 'failure to protect.' The implication for this type of response to victims is that they may not report the violence to authorities for fear of having their children removed from their care (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009).

2.4 The link between Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness

Domestic and family violence is one of the typical pathways into homelessness for women in Australia (Johnson, Gronda, & Coutts, 2008), and has been the leading cause of homelessness for nearly a decade amongst women escaping domestic and family violence with 55 percent of women who sought assistance from homelessness services doing so to escape violence in the home. (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2008).

In 2014, there were 9,595 people who were currently homeless in Western Australia (Homelessness Australia, 2014). Domestic and Family Violence holds the biggest portion of homelessness, with 34 percent of the 21,359 clients supported by Specialist Homeless Services (SHS). Of these clients, 6,866 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and 12, 616 were non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. One in two people who request emergency accommodation are turned away because of high-demanded or under-resourcing. The demand for Specialist Homelessness Services continues to outstrip the supply of beds; services are operating at or beyond capacity. The high number of individuals with children being turned away, majority being women, shows that domestic and family violence remains a significant casual factor for homelessness amongst women. Just under 50 percent of women aged over 25 presenting with children cited domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance (Homelessness Australia, 2014).

One of the major concerns for women and their children fleeing their homes is the risks of them becoming homeless both in the short and longer term; and may be also

be vulnerable to losing their employment if the perpetrator continues to stalk and harass them at their workplace. This in turn can lead to a woman's decision to return to the relationship, feelings of entrapment and /or being unable to break away due to lack of financial security, indicating the ongoing impact of men's violence following separation (Chung & Hartwig, 2012)

“Safe at Work’: Domestic Violence and the Workplace

Domestic and family violence is a serious problem for women at work, and therefore for their employers. Research in 2011, conducted by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse at the University of New South Wales also found that out of 3,611 women surveyed in workplace, 30 per cent reported that they had personally experienced domestic and family violence with 5 percent experienced in the previous 12 months. Nearly half of those who had experienced domestic violence reported that the violence impacted on their capacity to get to work, the major reason was physical injury or restraint (67 percent), followed by hiding car keys and/or other parent failing to care for children. For 19 percent nearly one in five, the violence continued in the workplace, with the majority being harassed by abusive phone calls and emails (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2011).

In response, employers and unions in Australia, aided by women's organisations, have worked to create workplace specific domestic violence clauses for workers. More than 2 million workers are now covered by over 150 agreements which entitle victims to paid leave. Like “safe at home” programs, Safe at Work initiatives aim to reverse the vicious cycle of homelessness and poverty that results in many women

when they are forced to leave home to escape a violent partner.

Tenancy Rights for Victims of Domestic and Family Violence

Supporting women and their children to remain in their homes reduces the need for women to be rehoused within the community. It also minimizes the disruption in women and children's lives along with costs associated with being rehoused. In April 2014, Tenancy WA lodged its first law reform submission response to the Western Australian Law Reform Commission's discussion paper, "*Enhancing Family and Domestic Violence Laws*" published in December 2013. Tenancy WA's submission responded to question 12 within the discussion paper which asks,

'Is any reform required to enable a court (and if so which court) to remove the name of a person bound by a family and domestic violence restraining order from a tenancy agreement'

Tenancy WA has suggested that reforms be put in place to assist victims of domestic violence with appropriate options to manage their housing situation by introducing mechanisms to terminate a tenant's interest in the lease due to an interim Violence Restraining Order; create a new tenancy; and be able to deal with bond and other financial matters. Provide procedural protections in domestic violence related Applications and the ability for victims of domestic violence to change locks. (Tenancy WA 2014).

Tenancy WA also conducted a comparative analysis of legislation across Australia and New Zealand and found that every state has legislation affording victims of domestic violence with a restraining order some form of tenancy rights. The legislative reforms across the country are in keeping with national and international

policy changes, moving away from the historical requirement for the victim (often with children) to leave the home whilst the perpetrator remains (Tenancy WA, 2014). The LRCWA made a recommendation in their final report to the Attorney General which stated that the Department of Commerce undertake a review of the interaction of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 and the family and domestic violence orders to consider whether any reforms are necessary or appropriate to accommodate the circumstances of tenants who may be subject to or protected by a family and domestic violence protection order (Tenancy WA, 2014).

2.5 Review of existing ‘safe at home’ initiatives

Over the last decade Australian governments have introduced models of service aimed at supporting women who have been subject to domestic and family violence to stay safely in their homes. Research and literature of this service model to date have indicated positive outcomes, for example in New South Wales, the Bega model has shown that where women had some equity in the home, were employed in the local community and had a strong emotional attachment to the home; they reported,

‘staying at home allowed time for considered choices and for a planned transition to the next accommodation choice (McFerran, 2007b)’

The risk of becoming caught up in both the homelessness and cycle of poverty is a harsh reality of what happens to thousands of women and children who flee their homes to escape a violent partner. Increasing awareness of the social disadvantage causing by homelessness is now leading to a view by policy-makers and others that this is an unjust outcome of escaping violence.

Major initiatives such as the “safe at home” programs have now expanded accommodation options for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence by supporting victims to remain safely in their own homes where it is safe to do so, and have the violent perpetrator removed (Edwards, 2004; McFerran, 2007a). Given the adverse impact for women and children affected by domestic and family violence, and the threat and reality of homelessness, advocates argued that this issue be given greater prominence in the public policy arena (Culter, Faulkner, Slatter, & Tually, 2008; Women's Health Goulburn North East, 2004).

From the early 2000s, women’s domestic violence specialist services commenced trials of “safe at home” programs including the Eastern Region Domestic Violence Outreach Service in Melbourne, the Bega Program in country New South Wales and the South Eastern Sydney and Mt Druitt pilots (Edwards, 2011). In recent years a number of Safe at Home (SAH) models have been funded through the Commonwealth and State-Territory National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (COAG, 2009).

Mapping and evaluation of “safe at home” programs

Phase one of a national mapping and meta-evaluation has recently been completed by researchers in Australia who have examined the key features of effective “safe at home” programs which enhance safety and aim to prevent homelessness for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015). Their state of knowledge paper identified four philosophical pillars which provided a platform for implementing and suite of “safe at home” responses focus on maximizing safety utilizing a combination of legal,

judicial, policing and home security provisions to exclude the perpetrator from the home and protect victims from post separation violence; have a coordinated or integrated intervention response involving partnerships between local agencies; a focus on "safe at home" as a homelessness prevention strategy which includes ensuring women are informed about their housing options before the time of crisis, at separation and provides support for women to maintain their housing afterwards; and recognition of the importance of enhancing women's economic security (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

The following summaries provide a snapshot of the range of "safe at home" initiatives which may differ in terms of their histories, legislative and/or policy contexts but ultimately have key elements that aim to keep women safe at home.

Tasmania

Tasmania's Family Violence Act 2004 provided a strong basis for their government driven integrated criminal justice response to domestic and family violence called "Safe at Home," enabling police and intervention orders to exclude the perpetrator from the family home. It aimed to improve the safety for women and children as the primary victims and by highlighted the criminal nature of domestic and family violence within their policies and practices (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

The Tasmania legislation which formed part of their Safe At Home strategy includes offences of *economic and emotional* abuse which can incur fines of up to \$5,200 or imprisonment of not more than two years. The criminalization of these acts offences

formally recognises the understanding of domestic violence as a gendered crime characterized by an ongoing power imbalance; that is not just about physical violence or threats (which are already crimes), but is also a pattern of controlling behaviours permeating other areas of the victim's life. The economic abuse has significance relevance particularly when examining how we can prevent domestic violence and homelessness for many women and children in society at large. This requires a massive shift in beliefs, values and violence-supportive attitudes about the women's status in society at large, in particular in relation to gender inequality and social disadvantage to that of their male counterparts. There has been significant moves to support a whole of service system approach to ensure victim safety and hold perpetrator's accountable for their use of violence (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

Victoria

Early beginnings of "safe at home" models began whereby staff placed gold stars on the back on their office door when they managed to support a woman to remain in her own home following a stay at the local Refuge. Executive Officer of Eastern Region Domestic Violence Service, Maryclare Machen recalls these early days of the late 80s and early 90s, highlighting that changes to locks, safety planning and follow up support to ex-resident women and children, provided an embryotic start to the further develop and creation of a viable "safe at home" model (Machen, 2010).

Since that time, a restructure of the of the Victorian domestic and family violence sector provided the impetus to provide a multi-agency and integrated response to

domestic and family violence which was underpinned by a Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence in 2004 and continued under the government's commitment to *A Fairer Victoria* in 2006, prioritizing support for women and children as the primary victims to stay in their homes and for violent men to leave (McFerran, 2007b).

Changes to the Family Violence Protection Act and Residential Tenancies Act 1997 aimed to increase women's safety and reduce levels of homelessness for victims by increasing police powers and allowing victims to change locks on tenancies. Family Violence Safety Notices (FVSNs) placed temporary conditions on the perpetrator, excluding them from the home where the police believed the safety of the woman and her children remained at risk. The use of brokerage funds also assisted with security up-grades and/or access to private rental.

New South Wales (NSW Community Services)

The Staying Home Leaving Violence Program (SHLV) was initially developed as an outcome of SHLV research project completed in 2004, by the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Centre for Gender-Related Violence in New South Wales. The NSW Department of Family and Community Services funded three pilot "safe at home" sites in Bega, Eastern Sydney and Western Sydney (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

The Bega pilot found that engagement with key stakeholders along with the ability to influence community attitudes that victims of domestic and family violence should

have the right to remain in their own homes was integral to gaining support from police and courts to have the perpetrator removed and/excluded from the home (McFerran, 2007a). As a result of the evaluation of pilots, the NSW government rolled out the “safe at home” model to 18 service providers across 22 separate locations within the state, which included nine in the metropolitan and 12 in regional and rural locations.

The SHLV model is a specialized domestic violence program aimed at preventing clients from becoming homeless by providing intensive long term case management support that is needs-based and has the cooperation of a number of key agencies which include police, local courts, women’s domestic violence court advocacy services, housing and community services. Key elements include flexible use of brokerage funds; intensive case management support varying in duration dependent upon client needs; support to obtain legal protection and other mainstream services; along with an SOS Response System Safety Alarm to improve DFV victims sense of safety (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zuffrey, 2015).

Building on from the SHLV models were further opportunities within the NSW Action Plan 2009-2014 (HAP) which focused on achieving better outcomes for people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. The HAP DV Services provides women and children experiencing domestic and family violence with integrated housing support and case management. Together with the Start Safely private rental subsidy scheme, greater levels of support are offered to clients of

SHLV and HAP and can be accessed by any woman leaving a violent partner, seeking to secure safe, affordable housing.

Queensland (QLD)

Queensland (QLD) “safe at home” initiatives include Safety Upgrades services through the regionally based services such as the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response and Dovetail in North QLD. The safety up-grade responses are incorporated into a broader range of supports provided by domestic and family violence services (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015). In 2009, Queensland released a whole-of-government strategy for addressing family violence. *‘For our sons and daughters’: Strategy to reduce domestic and family violence 2009-2014* (Queensland Government, 2009). This policy framework focused on key areas of reform such as early intervention and prevention for both victims and perpetrators and set the context for safe at home strategies aimed at keeping women and children in their home, and reducing the risk of further acts of violence from the perpetrator. The Domestic and Family Violence Act 2012 in Queensland can also now be used to support “safe at home” and improve integrated responses from both government and non-government agencies (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

South Australia

The earliest “safe at home” program in Australia was the Rapid Response Program in Port Lincoln, South Australia funded through a SA Crime Prevention Grant, Attorney General’s Department. Security up-grades such as phone alarm system, replacement of door and window locks were put in place; along with the introduction

of a centralized monitoring system alerting local police and the domestic and family violence on-call worker providing a response within five to ten minutes (McFerran, 2007c).

The current funded program in SA is “Staying Home Staying Safe,” which is run by the Victim Support Services. It commenced in March 2001, and is funded through the State-Commonwealth National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (COAG, 2009). The overall aim of the program is to reduce the risk of homelessness for women with or without children who are experiencing domestic and family violence. The program provides risk assessment, safety audits up-grade to home security and mobile phones. Multi-agency case management is led by the Office for Women’s *Integrated Family Safety Framework* and Family Safety Meetings with a range of agencies for cases deemed as imminent high risk (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

Australian Capital Territory

The Family Violence Intervention program commenced in 1998 with the aim to support women to stay safe in their homes. It is an integrated, coordinated model to improve criminal justice responses to family violence and increase the number of women staying in their homes which is supported by the women’s safety policy *‘ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2011-2107-Our responsibility: Ending violence against women and children* (ACT Government, 2011).

The key elements include maximising victim safety and perpetrator accountability by focusing on operational policing polices that are pro-charge, pro-arrest and

presumption against bail, provide support to victims, coordinated case management and information sharing and services for offenders (Cussen & Lyneham, 2012).

The key elements of a proposed ‘safe at home’ program in ACT for women staying home post violence, where separation has occurred within the last 12 months include: the need to recognise the complexity of needs of ATSI, CaLD and women living with physical, mental health problems and disabilities; an assessment based on safety, presence of children, economic hardship and risk of future homelessness; be a program with multiple entry points; provide outreach case management support for 12 months (similar to NSW & WA, Vic have 6-12 months); have a lead agency responsible for case management, outreach and advocacy; the lead agency to be decided by family and resources; involve multiple key agencies (including CALD, ATSI, criminal justice and DVCS); MOU between key agencies; develop a memorandum of understandings between services; hold regular case coordination meetings, outreach and advocacy, and a governance structure to provide a review of processes and accountability .

Northern Territory

Whilst there are no specific ‘safe at home’ programs in the Northern Territory, the government has committed to continue to fund 14 Women’s Safe Houses. These services are essential part of a remote service system response to victims of domestic and family violence and act an act as a vital safety net to provide crisis accommodation and outreach support, allowing women to remain living in and connected to family and friends in their local communities (J Breckenridge, Chung, Spinney, & Zufferey, 2015).

In the next chapter I will outline the methodology used for my study with 16 women who were participants of the “safe at home’ program in WA. Given the program had only commenced in July 2010, policy-makers and agencies believed it was timely to undertake this exploratory piece of research so as to gain insight into women’s experiences as participants of program.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the prevalence of the issue of domestic and family, it was imperative that the methodology chosen for this study ensured women and children's identity remained confidential. This chapter will explain the intended design of the study and how it was undertaken. It will also discuss the following:

The Research design and why feminist research methods were chosen to conduct face-to-face interviews with women who had experienced domestic and family violence at the hands of a violent partner.

The Study Population chosen for this study to ensure that experiences from women and children in both metropolitan and rural locations were represented as part of SAH participant population for this research.

The Scope of the study so as to create new knowledge for WA and contribute to existing literature on SAH programs in other states and territories of Australia such as Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales.

The Accessing of the sample and what process was used to recruit women to volunteer for the study.

Data Collection which included collating demographical information such as age, number of children, relationship status, income, education, employment, as well as qualitative data collation through exploring specific narratives collated through face-to-face interviews and analysis of transcripts.

Ethical Issues to ensure safety, confidentiality and access to counsellors for research participants given the sensitive nature of the research.

Methods for data collation; and Data analysis which included non-identifiable information stored safely in a password protected software file to ensure confidentiality and the use of NVivo9 to upload transcripts to organise key themes into nodes and sub-themes into tree nodes.

3.1 Design of the study

This study was guided by feminist research methods as a means to ensure that the knowledge gained from the women is validated and accepted as the essence of the research topic. By exploring narratives of women's experience and perception of the service, it allows us to gain insight into how effective the "safe at home" programs are from a participant's perspective. Feminist research is best understood by considering the values that inform it rather than the methods used. It endeavours to provide a location from which women's voices can be heard, to empower women and to create equality in research relationships. As feminists researchers draw on a range of techniques to conduct their work (Millen, 1997) feminist inquiry aims to focus on gender and gender inequality and is grounded in women's experiences (Hester, Malos, & Skinner, 2005). It examines factors in society that oppress women and other groups, whereby they feel in a position of powerlessness or been invaded e.g. colonization, domestic and family violence. It seeks to minimize any power imbalance between research and subject and is committed to creating new knowledge and influencing social change (Cancian, 1992; Oakley, 2000; Renzetti, 1997).

A feminist perspective presumes the importance of gender in human relationships and societal processes and orients the study in that direction.(Thompson, 1992) and (Guerrero, 1999) highlight that feminist inquiry includes explicitly acknowledging and valuing "women's ways" including integrating reason, emotion, intuition, experience and analytic thought; resulting in knowledge about women that will contribute to women's liberation and emancipation.

A qualitative research method was chosen as the most appropriate way to engage with and listen to women's experiences of leaving a violent partner. Due to the sensitivities involved in asking women to report their experiences, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured face-to-face interviews. As a way of building rapport a number of brief questions were asked to gathering demographic information such as age, number of children, race/ethnicity, type of housing, education and employment and how long they were living with a violent partner. An interview guide was designed with a list of key questions used as prompts by the researcher during the interviews allowing women the opportunity to tell their story in their own way and at their own pace.

'In-depth interviewing and description-oriented observations are especially useful methods for supporting collaborative inquiry because the methods are accessible to and understandable by people without much technical expertise. Interest in participatory research has exploded in recent years, especially as an element of larger community change efforts' (Stoecker, 1999).

This forum opened the door for women to discuss their experiences, opinions, feelings and perceptions about the "safe at home" program and its effectiveness. (Kushner, 2000) also believes that the personal nature of qualitative inquiry is derived from its openness and is often the preferred measure of examining the efficacy of a program. In-depth interviews, communicate respect to respondents, by making their ideas and opinions (stated in their own terms) through narratives, and provides important data from which the perspective of the participants is given primacy. By gaining insight into women's experiences and perceptions of the program the implications for improved policy and program developments can be considered.

This approach assisted with redressing any perceived power imbalance between researcher and participant, flowing more as a conversation between two people interested in a similar topic. As a result the interviews were not rigidly controlled but still purposeful and provided a location from which women's voices could be

heard. Whilst the qualitative data collated from the interviews was used to identify thematic issues, the author also found that often immeasurable variables such as the victim's resistance to the violence remains largely untold within research, victim impact statements and transcripts of court proceedings.

Principles of feminist inquiry can include:

- A sense of connectedness and equality between researcher and researched;
- Explicitly acknowledging and valuing “women’s ways” including integrating reason, emotion, intuition, experience and analytic thought;
- Participatory processes that support consciousness-raising and researcher reflectivity

This research is an exploratory study using a collective case study approach; with data from relatively small sample of women, but by examining the qualitative nature of their narratives, this will lead to a better understanding, perhaps better theorising, about a still larger collection of cases (R.E. Stake, 1989). The number of participants will be determined when data collection reaches saturation; that is, where the same experiences and themes keep emerging and no new information is apparent in participant's narratives.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were held to collate data from “safe at home” participants. The questions focused on two key areas, the first, gathering data such as the types of protection orders in place; employment and educational status; equity and/or emotional attachment in the home, so as to gain some insight into the socio-economic demographic of the study cohort. The second area explored the participant's perception of the ‘wrap around’ service model of case management and what specific elements of the program they found most useful; and whether the risks of further violence were reduced. An opportunity was also provided for participants to reflect on how their lives may have changed as a result of remaining in their own homes and having the violence leave.

The study design also included participation of service providers in that “the researcher invited members of the setting to join her in creating the study. Managers from Women’s Refuges were invited to provide feedback and comment on the questions participants would be asked about the efficacy of the Safe at Home program. Whilst, advocates have been calling for the introduction of a SAH model in Western Australia, the need to explore how effective this type of service model is at a practical level is vital, as there is growing interest in the development of service responses both nationally and internationally designed to prevent homelessness (Blandy & Spinney, 2011).

3.2 Study Population

It was intended that up to twenty women with or without children who met the research criteria would be drawn from one of the six “safe at home” programs across the four metropolitan and two rural sites within Western Australia. Sixteen women participated in the exploratory study; fifteen were face-to-face interviews, with one interview conducted by telephone, due to geographical location. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, special consideration had to be given to the way in which survivors were contacted. Refuge Services agreed to email out the Participant Information Form to women who met the criteria, and were listed as participants the program, either currently or since the program commenced. The researcher stayed at “arms-length” and women could nominate voluntarily to participate in the study; and make direct contact with the researcher. Nine women were recruited from the metropolitan region and seven from rural locations.

3.3 Scope of the study

This study was based upon creating new knowledge and contributing to the existing knowledge of Safe at Home programs in other states of Australia such as Tasmania,

New South Wales and Victoria. It is therefore envisaged that this thesis will contribute to the small, but emerging, body of literature and research in Australia on SAH models. Given that Federal Government has also commissioned a National Evaluation of all National Partnership Agreements on Homelessness (COAG) programs, this study was also timely in terms of its findings may be able to further contribute to the exploration of women's experiences as participants of SAH programs in Western Australia.

This exploratory research aims to gain insight into what women believed assisted with keeping them and their children safe and what elements of the SAH program contributed to reducing further risks of violence. By exploring specific narrative collated through face-to-face interviews, this study was able to seek victims' feedback on their experience of police and the court's response to the domestic and family violence incident; whether the further risks of violence were minimized; how did the role of the SAH services in enhance women's safety and assist with stabilizing their housing; and how have the lives of women and children changed as a result of remaining in their own home and having the violence leave?

3.4 Data collection

Both qualitative data and demographics were accessed relatively easily through the face-to-face interviews and were aided by an Interview Schedule which covered two areas thought to be relevant to the topic. The Interview Schedule (see Appendix "C") was developed with a list of questions used by the researcher as prompts during the interview. The use of an interview schedule also assisted in carefully deciding what

questions would be asked and how to best use the limited time of one hour available with participants. The Interview Schedule was designed with two areas, the first was gathering descriptive data such as types of Protection Orders in place; employment and educational status; equity and/or emotional attachment in the home. The second area explored women's experiences and of the "safe at home program; their perception of the 'wrap around case management response' and they found most useful and whether the risks to further violence were reduced.

All women who took part in the study agreed to the interviews being recorded and signed off on the relevant Consent Form (see Appendix "B"). A security password coded file was established whereby all interviews were downloaded from the recording device to enable the interviews to be transcribed into written data for the researcher. Similarly, pseudonyms were allocated to participants to conceal their identity and used within the research when discussing women's narratives from the interviews. Whilst participants were informed that they would receive a small fee of \$30 to assist with cover any associated costs such as child-care and/or travel to the interview, they were also aware there was no guarantee they would benefit personally from the research. However, they were informed that the research could contribute to the further development of knowledge and interventions to assist families experiencing domestic and family violence. All women expressed a keenness to tell their stories, particularly if it would help to contribute to a greater body of knowledge for victims experiencing domestic and family violence.

Engaging with women about the types of social responses to the violence they received, enabled the researcher to explore specific narratives from which thematic issues were drawn along with any unique experiences they may have encountered. Information gained from the literature review was used to develop questions to and formed the basis of the Interview Schedule. For example, similar types of research and evaluation of “safe at home” models in the Eastern states found that supporting women and children to stay in their own homes and having the violence leave, greatly benefit women who had equity in and/or a strong emotional attachment to the home. Therefore, by asking questions about women’s employment and housing status, the researcher wanted to explore whether there were any similarities or differences with participants of the “safe at home” program in Western Australia.

Data from interview transcripts was uploaded onto Nvivo9, a qualitative research software program. Text from the transcripts was clustered into thematic nodes from which specific narratives from participants were derived. As a result of further data analysis of the text consistent with identified themes; which formed the basis of thematic issues presented within the “Findings and Discussion” section of this thesis in (See Chapter Four and Five).

Data Collection Procedures

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the researcher did not initiate direct contact with women to arrange interviews. Therefore, the researcher engaged in discussion with Refuge Managers, who auspice the “safe at home” program, about ensuring that recruitment of participants be conducted at ‘arms-length’ to the researcher as participation in the study was voluntary. A Participant Information Sheet (Appendix “A”) was emailed out to the services to disseminate to women who met the criteria

with details of how to make direct contact with the researcher to discuss the study further and/or make a suitable time for an interview at a safe venue. Interviews were held at a number of venues of choice for women, which included:

- Women's Refuges in the metropolitan and rural locations;
- City West Lotteries House meeting room;
- Participant's home where it was safe to do so;
- Participant's workplace, in a meeting room
- Via telephone due to the costs associated with the researcher having to travel approximately 700 kilometres to conduct a face-to-face interview in a rural location

Prior to the interviews all women received a participant information sheet (See Appendix A) which outlined the purpose and aim of the study, and details around consent, privacy and confidentiality of data collated. A consent form (See Appendix "B") was also given to women to read to ensure they were giving their informed consent to be part of the study. A participation fee of \$30 was also provided to cover any out of pocket expenses. Where women consented, the researcher recorded the interviews and recordings were transcribed by an external source. Interview tapes were erased and non-identifiable codes were used to maintain confidentiality of participants in the research.

Data Storage

Data with non-identifiable information was stored safely in a password protected software file for the length of the analysis. The transcripts were coded and placed in secure storage at Curtin University and will be permanently destroyed after 7 years.

The objectives of the study will be met by exploring both demographic and qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews. A small reference group made up of key stakeholders which included the WA Police, Department of Child Protection,

Family and Domestic Violence Unit and the WCDFVS was established to assist with providing secondary data such the number of referrals from the Police to the DVOs; the number of women and children who have been supported to remain in their own homes and relevant data from the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (COAG) evaluation report; so as to inform the overall progress of the “safe at home” programs in WA.

3.5 Ethical issues

Before commencing this research project it was deemed necessary by the researcher to gain the support of the Refuge Managers at SAH sites. Firstly, the researcher did not want to proceed with the research if Refuge Managers and CEOs felt it was too invasive for women survivors to participate in; as the subject matter is of a sensitive nature and may result in causing further distress for survivors. Secondly, the researcher believed that the process of engagement with service providers allowed them to ask questions about the aim of the study, as well as make decisions and choices as a service about whether they were happy to provide support to the research and what this would require? As all of the service providers are very busy and often under-resourced to deal with demand, the researcher did not want to put any additional burden on staff at the services. Most communication between the researcher and Refuge Managers in the lead up to interviews was via email and/or phone.

Finally, the study relied upon having access to women who were past or current participants of the “safe at home” program, the engagement process was a critical component of success in terms of recruitment of participants and offering women a range of options to hold interviews. Being able to fit interview times in with

dropping off or picking up of children from school was a paramount consideration, for women, in terms of ability to participate. A copy of the draft research proposal was emailed out to Refuge Managers and CEOs seeking their feedback and initial response to the study, given that elements of the research design were based on a level of support in a number of areas such as:

- Provision of venue option for research interviews to take place;
- Support with recruitment strategy; and
- Follow-up counselling/and support where required by the participant

Some sites had to discuss the study and gain approval with their Management Committees before they were in a position to pledge their organisational support. All six refuges saw the importance and value of this study and they pledged their support for the research project as they believed they would gain further knowledge from participants on the effectiveness of the SAH program and suggestions for improved outcomes. Consequently Refuges agreed to disseminate the Participant Information Sheet electronically to women who met the criteria; who were advised to make contact with the researcher directly, if they were interested in participating, in order for the researcher to answer any questions and to organise a date, time and place to be interviewed.

Five of the seven interviews at one of rural locations all took place at the Refuge; and staff provided transport to the venue for up two of the women as they did not have transport and it was deemed unsafe to interview them in their homes. In one of those cases, the extended family of the perpetrator had blamed the ex-partner for their son committing suicide; and she spoke how this resulted in “pay-back” from the family

members, consequently, she felt very unsafe in the town; and was in the process of re-locating as she was fearful of walking down the street or going to the shops. ¹

A minimum of three months in the program was chosen as a sufficient length of time in the program to enable women to reflect on their experience and perception of SAH program and provide insight into what types of responses assisted with stabilizing their housing and reducing further risks of violence. To minimize any perceived conflict of interest and to ensure the study remained objective, the researcher did not contact participants directly, but secured the support of the six SAH to disseminate the research information sheet to women who meet the selection criteria for the study.

As the research was sensitive and had the potential to induce psychological or physical stress in women, that arrangements were put in place to debrief with a professional with whom the participant had an existing relationship.

The researcher put in place strategies to ensure that the participant would be given a referral to a Domestic Violence Counsellor should it be required. All research participants were provided with both written and verbal information about the research project and advised that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any time without adverse repercussions.

Prior to the study, preliminary discussions were held with the Refuge Managers who

¹ Payback is when someone or a group of people take action towards another person or group of people to repay them for past hurt or mistreatment. The action is usually done with the intention to hurt or shame the other person or group of people (www.solidkidsnet.au/index.php/what_is).

auspice the “safe at home” programs, agreed that recruitment of participants would be through their agencies rather than a direct approach by the researcher, so that the decision to be part of the in the study was based on voluntary participation and not through any perceived obligation or duress.

This research project was conducted in accordance with Curtin University’s Guiding Ethical Principles; and complied with the following ethical guidelines outlined for a Research Project Involving Humans (Blandy & Robinson) was approved by Curtin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on 10 November, 2011, and is supported by:

- The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007
- The NHMRC National Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007
- The NHMRC Keeping Research On Track 2000

3.6 Accessing the sample

A total of sixteen women self-selected voluntarily to be part of this study and partake in an interview for up to one hour at a mutually agreed time and place. All initial contact occurred over the phone. As women frequently made contact shortly after receiving information about the study, most had a clear understanding of the purpose of the interviews. As such they asked few questions and were often tasked on negotiating an appropriate time and place for the interview to occur. All expressed a keenness to participate and a range of suitable venues for interviews were offered to women, which included the following options:

- The “safe at home” site within the Refuge;
- At their home where safe to do so; or
- In a private meeting room at the premises of the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services the non-government peak body for domestic and family violence; with in one of the available meeting rooms.

The majority of interviews took place between 10.00am and 2.00pm to fit in with the women’s schedule that often included dropping off and/or picking up children from school. One participant requested if she could be interviewed at her workplace in a meeting room during her lunch hour; which was also deemed a suitable option and the researcher was happy to accommodate this. The research sample was drawn from the six “safe at home” sites located within the four metropolitan and two rural locations. These six sites are managed by the following not-for-profit agencies within the community service sector:

1. North West Metropolitan (Pat Giles Centre)
2. North East Metropolitan (City of Stirling)
3. South East Metropolitan (Ruah Refuge)
4. South West Metropolitan (Lucy Saw Centre)
5. Wheatbelt Region (Northam Share and Care)
6. South West Region (South West Refuge)

The Participant Information Sheet was disseminated via email to women who met the criteria from the six “safe at home” sites; (four metropolitan and two rural sites) inviting participants be part of an in-depth interview of up to one hour duration. Interviews took place over a month period. A variety of venue options were identified for participants to choose from as the researcher was provided with the means to travel factored by a small budget provided by the Women’s Council for

Domestic and Family Violence Services. Interviews took place at the following venues:

- City West Lotteries House, 2 Delhi Street, West Perth
- Women's Refuge in the South West Metropolitan region
- Women's Refuge in the South West region;
- Meeting Room at the workplace of SAH participant during an organised lunch break;
- Homes of SAH participants, two metropolitan and one rural;
- Telephone

One participant was interviewed via telephone as she lived in a town hundreds of miles from Perth; and it would have required four hours driving each way and an overnight stay in a hotel within the town. After discussion with my academic supervisors at Curtin University, it was agreed that a telephone interview could take place as this woman was an integral part of the research sample population, but the costs involved were outside the small amount of funding provided for travel costs for this research by the Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA). The researcher travelled to two rural locations to conduct six of the interviews which proved to be an economically viable way to access over a third of the research sample and effective use of the researcher time.

3.7 Data Analysis

A working file was developed with each interview coded with a non-identifiable number; and the date of each interview was recorded at the beginning of each face-to-face interview with research participants. Once transcribed, the data from the sixteen interview participants were up-loaded on the Nvivo9 program. Once this

process was completed it provided the researcher with the ability to organise the key themes into nodes with sub-themes identified into tree nodes.

All interview transcripts were collated with the use of Nvivo9, a qualitative data software program. The sixteen transcripts were up-loaded onto Nvivo9 program and each transcript was coded with a non-identifiable reference number to ensure confidentiality of research participants. The data was up-loaded onto Nvivo9 from which nodes to nodes and tree nodes were developed. Using a thematic content analysis data from the interviews were analysed for common themes and differences, as well as any unique themes. There were ten key themes that emerged which became the nodes with a further six sub-themes which became the tree nodes. Data from the transcripts was also examined with a collective case study approach in order to examine across cases for similarities and differences in women's experiences of the "safe at home" program (R.E Stake, 1994).

The also author believes that her existing experience and knowledge within the domestic and family violence sector in Western Australia, enabled her to bring a depth of understanding to the analysis of data to this study, as an 'insider/outsider' at the policy and practice levels.

3.8 Summary

The study primary source of data used was gained from women who had been a participant of the "safe at home" program in WA within the period of 1 July 2010 and April 2012. A number of the women were also still receiving case management support at the time of the interview; and the researcher believes that this study was a timely opportunity to engage with those who utilized the service so their voices as participants could be heard and validated in the exploration of the effectiveness of

services along with any suggestions for improved outcomes. Secondary data sources from WA Police, Women's Refuges and the Western Australian NPAH Homelessness Evaluation Report have also been used to examine current data on how the "safe at home" programs are progressing overall.

CHAPTER FOUR – THE “SAFE AT HOME” PROGRAM

4.1 Development of “Safe at Home” in Western Australia

In this chapter I discuss data collection around the development and implementation of the “safe at home” model in WA; numbers and types of referral sources and women and children supported “safe at home” referral data from 1 July 2010-30 June 2012. There are a couple of narratives from “safe at home” participants in the which leads into the findings and discussion in Chapter Five.

The Changing of the Tide

The “safe at home” model reflects a sea change in community attitudes to domestic and family violence from the expectation that the victim would leave the family home to it being the violent partner who should leave (McFerran, 2007b). The “safe at home” response seeks to intervene in a safe and timely manner to provide safety and protection to victims of violence in the home; and aims to reduce the impacts such as homelessness and loss of employment. Furthermore it seeks to provide less disruption to women and children’s lives and eliminates any additional costs and stress associated with relocating in the first instance.

Finding alternative housing options which are appropriate and affordable is a major issue due to the lack of available public housing stock. Waiting lists of up to two years for priority listing with the Department of Housing in WA are increasing along with the high costs of rental properties. This compounded by the overall competitive nature of the market to secure a rental property, does not favour a woman with children escaping domestic and family as favourably tenants by landlords, due to

myths and beliefs that may be a high risk if the perpetrator finds them and may be also viewed economically unstable.

Consequently, the “safe at home” approaches seek to provide positive social responses to victims by working with women to put in place safety plans and security up-grades; along with legal protection to reduce the likelihood of further acts of violence by the perpetrator. It seeks to stabilize housing so as to minimize the risk of loss of employment and/or custody of their children.

In Western Australia, as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) six “safe at home” and six domestic violence outreach programs began operating in July 2010 (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008a). These innovative programs are framed around key strategies for early intervention and prevention and are aimed at breaking the cycle of homelessness for women and children escaping domestic and family violence; and connecting victims and perpetrators with services that provide ongoing support, counselling, advocacy and assistance (Department for Child Protection, 2010).

A “safe at home” policy response for victims must also be supported by perpetrator interventions that focus on reducing the ability of perpetrators to continue their violence and abuse. Supporting victims of violence to remain in their own homes and removing the perpetrator requires the implementation of systemic mechanisms such as a strong “no tolerance” criminal justice response to domestic and family violence; one which prioritises the safety of victims and holds perpetrators accountable for their use of violence. The “safe at home” program

provides “wrap-around” intensive case management and support for up to twelve months, through working collaboratively with a range of agencies to assist women and children to maintain stable housing and make a fresh start free from violence (Department for Child Protection, 2010).

Community Engagement

In 2009, the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services was funded by the Department for Child Protection to develop the SAH model in Western Australia building upon previous partnership pilot programs known as the Domestic Violence Pilot Outreach Programs (DV POPs); which has operating in Joondalup, Fremantle, Wheatbelt and South West regions from 2006-09. These initiatives were aimed primarily at providing early intervention and connecting victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence with support services to provide ongoing support, counselling, advocacy and assistance.

A state-wide forum was held in November 2009, organised the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services to engage stakeholders to determine if a “safe at home” model would be supported and what would be the key elements of such a model within a WA context. Ninety representatives attended the forum from both government and non-government agencies.

Ludo McFerran, Good Practice Officer, from the Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse as the keynote speaker presented an overview of “safe at home” models in other jurisdictions such as Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria; along with lessons to be learnt from research and evaluations of these models.

Following discussions held at the forum it was evident that there was strong support to move forward with the development and subsequent funding of “safe at home” models in WA.

Initial Development of the “Safe at Home” Model

The Department for Child Protection continued the funding to the WCDFVS to engage with twelve funded not-for-profit domestic violence outreach services to develop an appropriate model suitable for the WA context. This development phase was built upon previous partnership pilots between WA Police and non-government specialist domestic violence service providers, known as the Domestic Violence Pilot Outreach Programs (DV POPs) operating in two metropolitan and two rural locations from 2006-09. These initiatives were aimed primarily at providing early intervention and connecting victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence with support services to provide ongoing support, counselling, advocacy and assistance.

Key stakeholders from WA Police, DCPFS and Domestic and Family Violence specialist services met to identify the key policies and procedures that would form a “safe at home: response which included a referral process; risk assessment tools; the ‘wrap-around’ case management model; criteria for using state brokerage funds; draft job descriptions; and other relevant resources.

A key component of the preliminary work was the development of a *Memorandum of Understanding* (Department of Child Protection & WA Police, 2010) that outlined the objectives, principles and responsibilities between the WA Police, and the Non-

Government service providers funded by DCPFS with respect to responding to domestic and family violence incidents with the implementation of the “safe at home” program in WA. A greater level of detail about the content of the MOU is outlined further in this chapter. The developmental phase of the model was essential to the success of “safe at home” service providers feeling confident and job ready.

Subsequently in 2010, twelve Domestic Violence Outreach Program (DVOP) were funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness ; inclusive of six “safe at home” models, four in the metropolitan and two in rural locations along with one state-wide men’s intervention program. The remaining six DVOPs were located in rural regions of WA and provided outreach support and brokerage funds where appropriate.

Unique opportunities

Important learning from “safe at home” models in other states and territories informed WA practice and also provided the unique opportunity for the WA models to become embedded as an extension of the refuge service model. Those services who had previous experience, having operated the DV POPs had proven to be invaluable with refuges provide with the opportunity to further expand their specialist seamless services to women and children who became “safe at home” clients. During the service design phase it was identified that a key benefit of attaching a “safe at home” site to a refuge model was based on the recognition that women often faced ongoing risks from the perpetrator, which may change from ‘low’ to ‘high’ very quickly, therefore the opportunity to access additional crisis support and accommodation through the refuge system would be streamlined and continuous.

Partnerships and collaborative practices

One of the key factors highlighted by “safe at home” participants in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Evaluation of Western Australian Programs was the importance of the safety audits undertaken by “safe at home” workers, frequently in conjunction with the Police. Women identified that the audits were a key factor in enhancing their safety in their accommodation but was also vital to their physical and psychological well-being. The safety audit of the woman’s living arrangement became the foundation of the assessment and intervention and safety planning process; qualitative data from interviews conducted with SAH participants from the NPAH evaluation and this study found increased levels of confidence and feelings of safety (Cant, Medden, & Penter, 2013).

“Safe at home” data provided to the study by the six sites indicated they received 3,470 referrals from 1 July 2010-30 June 2012 and assisted 468 women and 771 children to remain safely in their own homes. Whilst this number falls short of the 500 target; many additional women who were not provided with case management received other types of services such as information, telephone counselling and/or practical and emotional support when attending a VRO hearing. Nonetheless, this is a significant reduction in women and children who may have had to leave their homes and face the risk of homelessness.

Addressing domestic and family violence is best achieved through a coordinated, collaborative and integrated response (Western Australian Police, 2010). This study explored critical factors such as:

- The level of Police response to the domestic and family violence incident and subsequent referral of the women into the domestic violence outreach and/or a “safe at home” program;
- Whether the ex-partner returned to the home and caused further violence?
- The role of the “safe at home” services in enhancing women’s safety and stabilising their housing;
- Benefits and advantages for women and children who remained in their home, along with any disadvantages; and
- How have the lives of women and children changed as a result of remaining in their own home and having the violence leave?

Memorandum of Understanding

The WA Police Commissioner and the Director General for the Department of Child Protection signed off on an agreed Memorandum of Understanding between the WA Police Service; Department of Child Protection and Family Support and twelve funded specialist services funded who delivered support services to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence. The development and implementation of the MOU was seen as a key policy to guide good practice by Police when responding to an incident of domestic and family violence; with the assurance that there would be a timely referral to specialist workers within 48 hours. The referral gave the victim’s consent to be contacted and engage in discussion what level of support would be helpful to ensure that the woman and her children to reduce further risks of violence from the perpetrator.

The MOU aims to provide both a policy and practice framework that supports a proactive, no tolerance approach when responding to victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence and is best achieved through a coordinated, collaborative and integrated response from the Police in a timely manner and by

having the violence leave (Department of Child Protection & WA Police, 2010). The partners to the agreed on the following principles:

- The safety of victims experiencing domestic and family violence is paramount;
- Perpetrators of violence and abuse will be held accountable for their actions through a criminal justice response;
- Women and children, who wish to remain in their homes, should where possible do so and have the perpetrator removed.

As part of a MOU between the WA Police and the Department of Child Protection and twelve not-for-profit service providers delivering the Domestic Violence Outreach Program, incorporating Safe at Home, in Western Australia, the Police agreed to:

- Make an offer of support when attending a DFV incident to both the victim and perpetrator if both parties are present.
- Attempt to obtain verbal consent from the victim to share information, which will be recorded on the Detected Incident Report (DIR)
- Attempt to obtain verbal consent from the perpetrator to share information, which will be recorded on the DIR
- Make a referral to the Domestic Violence Outreach Service Provider by email which will include:
- Email subject line: Detected Incident Report Number followed by victim's surname eg 120810 0800 10776 SMITH; and attached to the email will be the electronic copy of the DIR
- Work with the Domestic Violence Outreach Service Provider to assess risk to both 'Safe at Home; clients and workers, and to enhance the safety of women and children remaining in their homes (Department of Child Protection & WA Police, 2010)

Police response to an incident of domestic and family violence

When Police attend an incident of domestic and family violence they make an offer of support to both the victim and perpetrator if both parties are present. With verbal consent from the victim, the Police can make a referral to a domestic violence outreach worker who will make contact with the victim within 48 hours to discuss the level of support required by the client. Where the “safe at home” program has been identified as the most appropriate service to meet the client’s needs, specialist workers arrange to visit the victim’s home to carry out a thorough risk assessment and discuss home security options and safety planning (Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services, 2010). This process provides the opportunity for the woman to make an informed choice about whether she will continue to remain in the home and apply to the court for a Violence Restraining Order and/or an Exclusion Order. The Police currently have legislative power to issue a 72 hour Protection Order, excluding the violent partner from the home. The “safe at home” program provides “wrap around” intensive case management and support for up to twelve months, through working collaboratively with a range of agencies to assist women and children to maintain stable housing and make a fresh start free from violence (Department for Child Protection, 2010).

Dealing with major change in responses from one of protection and sheltering abused women to one of empowerment and citizens with rights to remain safely in their own home has required a shift in policy and practice by the government agencies such as the police, child protection and domestic and family violence support services. It has also required a strong commitment at the highest level of

leadership in particular heads of government ministers and their departments, members of parliament and all authorities and agencies who respond to victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. This included the WA Police Commissioner, the Director General of the Department of Child Protection, the Chairperson and CEO of the Women’s Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services and the Managers of the Non-Government Specialist Services who met over a twelve month period in the development phase with the key stakeholders to map out the and the “safe at home” model itself.

Other mainstream services who women may engage with as participants of the “safe at home” program included, Centrelink (agency that provide income support to unemployed and/or low income people), Department of Housing (public housing for victims of domestic and family violence), Tenancy WA, Magistrates, Family Law Court, Schools, Legal and Counselling Services, all of whom received information about the program and are part of the broader network of stakeholders who ‘wrap-around case management support coordinated by the specialist domestic and family violence staff.

In essence, the aim of introducing a “safe at home” model was to expand options available to women and children experiencing domestic and family violence in the home. This move was not to suggest any reduction in the provision of women’s refuges would be required, but as a strategy that would attempt to reduce the levels of women and children who were becoming homeless as a result of fleeing violence in their homes and communities.

Under the “safe at home” program women now have a right to remain in their homes and the violent partner must leave. Protection Orders such as Police Orders and Violence Restraining Orders are administered by the Police and Courts which seek to protect victims of domestic and family violence from further acts of violence and prohibit the perpetrator from contacting or being within the vicinity and is legally binding once the Police serve the Order on the offender.

Whilst making a total fresh start away from their community may be the safest and preferred option for some women and children; the decision to stay and defend their homes and have the violence leave is often a choice that women wish to explore and programs such as “safe at home” have been developed to respond to this gap in available options. The growing policy interest in the right of women and children to remain in their own homes, has led both nationally and internationally to the development of service responses designed to prevent their homelessness (Blandy & Spinney, 2011). It is acknowledged that some women will continue to choose to leave home, because of the high risk of remaining there or because the house is an ever-present reminder of the violence that took place there.

The “safe at home” embraces the need to transform existing violence-supportive attitudes from friends, family and professionals who respond negatively and often blaming victims for provoking the violence and therefore deserving of it.

The “safe at home” program was developed as an intervention for victims of interpersonal violence to support them to remain safely in their own homes without the perpetrator. The also program aims to provide a respectful and effective social response so as to help victims recover from domestic and family violence in a safe

and timely manner. Agencies such as the police, child protection and domestic violence outreach services work collaboratively to encourage women to seek legal protection, whilst providing a 'wrap-around' case management level of support for up to twelve months.

The "safe at home" program also directly challenges paternalistic beliefs and attitudes that a 'man's home is his castle' from which he cannot be removed. This surely cannot continue to be seen as a legitimate justification for authorities not hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. The "safe at home" policy response of removing the one who is violent sends a clear message that there are consequences for inflicting violence abuse upon women and children in the home.

The "safe at home" model seeks to minimize the risk of homelessness and the disruption when women and children are forced to leave their homes. It also eliminates the cost and stress of relocating, reduces the risks of unemployment and/or losing custody of their children due to not having stable housing . Being forced to find alternative, affordable housing often proves difficult due to the lack of housing which is often compounded by the perception held by some landlords that women with children escaping domestic and family violence are not good tenants.

The introduction of the MOU between the WA Police, Department of Child Protection and not-for-profit specialist services has resulted in better practice when attending a domestic and family violence incident. The creation of the Domestic Violence Incident Report 1-9, has contributed significantly to informing policy and practice when Police attend a domestic and family violence incident.

4.2 Implementation of the Model

In WA, the “safe at home” model began operating as of 1 July 2010, with key aims to:

- Support to women and children experiencing domestic violence to stay in their housing following a domestic and family violence incident, where it is safe to do so;
- Provide specialist workers to assess safety and support in consultation with victims;
- Provide brokerage funds to secure and stabilize housing and home security
- Work in partnership with WA Police through Memorandum of Understanding and local protocols;
- Provide up to twelve months ‘wrap-around’ intensive case management support working collaboratively with a range of agencies to assist women and children to maintain stable housing and make a fresh start free from violence (Department for Child Protection, 2010).

Communicare’s DV Outreach Breathing Space Perpetrator Response Service was funded through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) to provide the state-wide perpetrator response for the Domestic Violence Outreach program and to the Safe at Home program with consent from perpetrator to be contacted by a specialist non-government service provider is sought by Police when attending an incident of domestic and family violence; to offer support such as behaviour change and/or counselling programs.

Safety and Risk Assessment

Once the Police have attended a domestic and family violence incident and gained consent for a DVOS to contact the victim, the specialist workers will engage in discussion with the woman to determine what level of support is required. If it is deemed that she is eligible and interested in the “safe at home” program, one of the first tasks for the worker is to organise a home visit where it is safe to do so. At this face to face meeting in the home a thorough safety audit is informed by the women’s needs and fears around risk and safety to her and any children. As a result of the audit, additional safety and security may be installed and/or up-graded to make the home more secure from any further acts of violence and/or harassment by the perpetrator. The safety audit is informed by the women’s needs and fears around risk and safety to her and any children. All women in this study outlined that they were involved with assessing their risk and safety needs within the home. One woman said her level of safety on a scale of one to ten had improved from a two to a nine.

She said,

‘Now we have the duress alarm because every time our front gate opens, when that gate opens to the house we know that camera clicks on and it films if there is a breach of the VRO by him being at the house when we are not home.’

Another woman said,

‘I learnt to be alert and kept utilising my knowledge, how best to keep it safe at home. I wasn’t going to let anything stop me seeking help from the SAH worker, ringing the Police or my lawyer.’

Some of the security measures and/or modifications that women identified had been put in place to increase their safety and well-being included:

- Door, windows locks and a roller door to block access to back door;

- Security screens on windows and sensor lights;
- A dedicated ‘safe room’ (sanctuary) within the home;
- House alarms activated to mobile phones; and
- assistance with TAFE fees to maintain the woman’s a sense of connection to the education system and other types of peer support which ultimately improved her overall mental health and well-being by completing the course.

One of the key factors highlighted by “safe at home” participants in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Evaluation of Western Australian Programs was the importance of the safety audits undertaken by SAH workers, frequently in conjunction with the Police. Women identified that the audits were a key factor in enhancing their safety in their accommodation but was also vital to their physical and psychological well-being. The safety audit of the woman’s living arrangement became the foundation of the assessment and intervention and safety planning process; qualitative data from interviews conducted with SAH participants from the NPAH evaluation and this study found increased levels of confidence and feelings of safety

Use of Brokerage Funds

Each “safe at home” site was provided with additional brokerage funds by DCPFS to assist women to up-grade security measures within their homes, to reduce any further acts of violence from the perpetrator. It is important to note that women’s experiences found that the “safe at home” program is more than just the provision of hardware – changing of locks etc – as whilst this is critical, without the collaborative

partnerships and integrated community responses from support workers within agencies such as the Police, DCPFS, Housing and DFV Specialist, the safety of women and children is compromised and opportunities to stop further violence negligible.

4.3 Data from “Safe at Home” sites in Western Australia

Referrals to “Safe at Home”

Data from progress reports provided to this study by the six “safe at home” sites, indicates that there were of a total of 3,470 referrals between July 2010 and 30 June 2012. Of this total, police accounted for 53 percent of the referrals and 23 percent from women’s domestic violence services. The remaining referrals came from a variety of agencies including victim support, child protection, community legal, housing and self-referrals from individual women.

“Safe at home” Targets

The Service Agreement targets set as part of National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness for the each “safe at home” site was fifty clients and their children per annum. Not all clients referred became were case managed, but received various levels of support such as information on domestic and family violence and support services; assistance to develop a safety plan, phone counselling and support or accompanying a woman to the court for a VRO application. Data provided to the study by the six sites indicated that 468 women and 771 children had been assisted to remain safely in their own homes in the period. Whilst this falls slightly short of the 500 target a number of women were provided with information, counselling and support but did not require the case management support. Nonetheless, this is a significant reduction in women and children who may have faced homelessness.

Table 4.1 *Total number of “Safe at Home” clients*

Period	New clients	On-going	Repeat	All clients
July-Dec 10	73	-	-	-
Jan-June 11	162	54	1	217
July-Dec 11	172	143	-	315
Jan-June 12	162	181	1	344
Total individuals	569			

Source: *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Evaluation of Western Australian Programs-Final Report (Australian Bureau of Statistics)*

Table 4.2: *Total number of women and children assisted to sustain their housing from 1 July 2010 - 30 June 2012*

	PG	SR	LS	RH	SW	SC	TOTAL
Women	67	64	63	86	114	74	468
Children	140	133	82	130	167	119	771

Statistics provided by “safe at home” sites for the period 1 July 2010-30 June 2012
An additional 11 women and 23 children chose to be relocated due to safety reasons

KEY

PG=Pat Giles Centre; SR=Stirling Refuge; LS=:Lucy Saw Centre; RH=Ruah; SW=South West; SC: Northam

Source: *Data provided to the Women’s Council for Domestic & Family Violence Services (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse) by the six Safe at Home sites, August 2012*

Perpetrator Intervention Response Service

As mentioned earlier, women (ANROWS) being able to remain in their own homes is, in part dependent on services to the perpetrator of the domestic violence. Specialist services are provided by trained counsellors and therapists and offered to

men who want to change the way they relate to a partner/ex-partner and/or children. The service provides individual telephone counselling and an option of a referral through to Men's Breathing Space, which offers a three month accommodation and support service with individual counselling and group programs in a therapeutic setting. Partner contact with the victim is conditional upon participation in this program as it is viewed as an integral part of ensuring partner safety and provides a means of evaluating the efficacy of the program.

Since inception of the state-wide perpetrator intervention response, Communicare received 2,097 referrals primarily from police, for the period 1 July 2010 to 30 November, 2012. Except in a few instances, the service is limited to a telephone based referral service. The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Evaluation of Western Australian Programs found that the service is primarily active and supportive listening followed by referral to either the host agency (Communicare's) services or to other external agencies for counselling and support. The report noted, it was questionable whether this limited form of response is adequate to meet the needs of men who must leave and stay away from the family home for "safe at home" to be effective (Cant et al., 2013).

Securing and Sustaining Housing Model

By supporting and empowering women to live as full citizens, and remain at home without the perpetrator, the "safe at home" program aims to ensure women's and children's safety and housing is stabilized. When looking at what makes a difference in terms of evidence based client outcomes for homelessness, (Gronda, 2011)

research analysis of more than 125 national and international studies identified the need for a shift away from simply getting housing towards the long-term outcome of sustaining housing. The project found that an evidence-based 'outcomes model' could provide a way forward to manage the challenges and deliver the benefits of nationally consistent outcome measures, drawing on Duignan's outcome theory and learnings from the homelessness sector initiatives. OM describes the service system outcome steps that can make a difference to people experiencing homelessness. OM is structured in around two simple but critical outcomes

1 Housing Secured

2 Housing Sustained

If these steps do not lead to getting housing and keeping it, Duignan's outcome theory would indicate the service system is not making a difference to homelessness.

The model also specifies two specific areas of service system work that can assist those people experiencing homelessness:

1 Assistance to get housing

2 Assistance to keeping housing

These areas of work are sequential in achieving outcomes for people experiencing homelessness: however the outcome steps involved in the 2nd phase are strongly indicated for assisting people who are at risk of their first or further experiences of homelessness. In some cases, people at risk of homelessness need both phases of assistance, because their existing accommodation may be unsafe, for example women who opt to remain in their own homes in cases of domestic and family violence. Within the two phases of the outcomes model, getting housing and keeping housing, there are key components that will be more or less applicable in any individual circumstance. These components are the core steps in the outcomes model:

- Engagement with housing focused support;
- Effective housing work;
- Effective case management;
- Increased supply of housing and specialist support;
- Homelessness prevention;
- Complex health management; and
- Economic and social participation

The “safe at home” model provides assistance to women and their children to not only keep maintain their current housing but provide ‘wrap-around’ case management support which has provided improved outcomes in a number of the following ways;

- Security up-grades to the home;
- Court support to apply for a Violence Restraining Order;
- Women were able to maintain employment and/or higher education;
- No or minimal disruption to children’s schooling arrangements;
- Warm referrals to mainstream and specialist services; and
- Emotional support provided by “safe at home” workers

A key policy implication from this research is a recommended shift of focus towards delivering and monitoring the outcome of sustained housing. A second key policy implication, aligned with the direction of the government’s White Paper, *The Road Home*, to reduce homelessness is the need for partnership and coordination between specialist and mainstream services. This is a pivotal component of the “safe at home” model, suggesting that shared accountability for the housing sustained client outcomes could provide a mechanism to drive client outcome focused collaboration between housing, homelessness and mainstream support providers.

An example of this shared accountability and collaboration is visible in the MOU and the clear direction around both policy and practice for police and non-government domestic and family violence support services.

The significance of this research is to gain an understanding of the participant's experience and perception of the "safe at home" program, explore current gaps in knowledge and identify areas for improved outcomes for women and children in relation to policy and service delivery reforms.

In the next chapter I will be outlining in greater detail the circumstances families who took part in this study; data about the use of violence by their partners and/or ex-partners towards them and their children. It is only by examining the various forms of violence and how women responded to this, can we truly gain an accurate picture of the violence that occurred and how victims always resist violence and abuse (Todd, Wade, & Martine Renoux, 2004).

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

THE “SAFE AT HOME” FAMILIES

In this chapter I will outline the demographic features of the families (women and children) studied in order to provide an authentic context related to their individual circumstances and their history of violence; without identifying any individual cases.

5.1 The Families

Sixteen women volunteered to participate in interviews between December 2011 and April 2012; nine women resided within the metropolitan region and seven were from rural locations within Western Australia. All families had experienced a history of domestic and family violence and had given their consent to the police to be contacted by Domestic Violence Outreach Service (Machen) for follow up support within 48 hours. Once a risk and safety assessment had been completed, the DVOS would discuss with the how to maximise her family’s safety and what measures could be put in place to reduce any further acts of violence from the perpetrator. All of the women who participated in this study chose the option to remain in their own homes with the support of the “safe at home” program .

The age of the women ranged from 27 years of age up to 54 years, with the average age being 38 years. All women met the criteria of having been a participant of the SAH program for a minimum period of three months, with the majority having been a participant for a period of seven to twelve months. Fifteen of the women had children, some had many, including one woman with seven children. Five were employed either full-time or part-time and the remaining eleven were receiving income support through Centrelink (four were on a disability pension).

At the time of the interviews, five women had been a participant of the “safe at home” program for three to six months, with the remaining nine, for a period of seven to twelve months. A minimum of three months was chosen as a sufficient length of time for women to be able to reflect on their experience and perception of program and what assisted with stabilizing their housing and the reduction of further acts of violence.

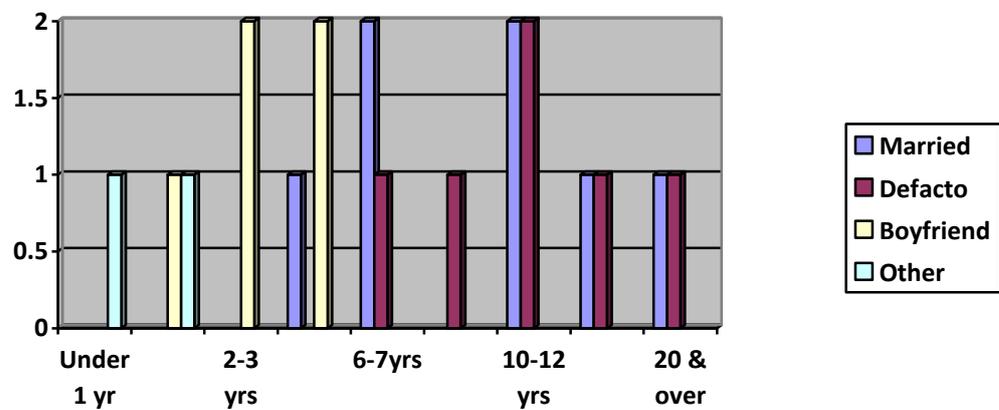
Marital Status and Length of Relationship

Of the sixteen women, five had been legally married with a further five in de-facto relationships. An additional five women identified their relationships as girlfriend and boyfriend; and one woman had known the perpetrator for many years, did not identify him as a boyfriend but the father of her child, stating that, he had been in jail for fourteen years off and on, he would be out for four or five weeks, re-offend and end up back in prison. Of the five women who had been married, the duration of their relationships had been between four and twenty years. Of these relationships women reported that the violence was present at various levels during the whole time, but intensified in frequency and severity over time, stating that the last two to three years had been the worst.

The five de-facto relationships also endured between four and twenty years of violence from their partners prior to separation. Two of the women reported that the violence had occurred throughout the relationship and the remaining four highlighted that in the last two to three years the violence had increased in frequency and severity. The women reported the violence had occurred during most of the

relationship, with on and off phases, often referred to as the honeymoon phase within the cycle of violence (Walker, 1979). Other times the perpetrator would chose to stop, conceal or minimize their use of violence in the short term to gain the women's trust again, promising them that it won't happen again and so they decided to give the relationship another try.

Table 5.1 *Length and number of years the women had experienced violence from their partners*



The Children and Young People

Fifteen of the women had children; some had many, including one woman with seven children. The sixteen women had a total of 35 children between them; most children living with their mothers with of a small number of adult children. Not all children respond in the same way to violence that they have either witnessed in the home or see the aftermath of their mother's suffering and anguish. One woman interviewed spoke about how she believed the physical violence by her abusive partner was often hidden from the children,

'They (the kids) would come back and see the mess and probably hear about it but they didn't actually see him do it.'

Another woman described how her older son would seek help to stop the violence when he and his brother were on visitation with their father,

'Often my older son would ring the Police and say their father is beating them up and then the Police would bring the children to my house.'

Children who witness domestic and family violence are more likely to experience physical abuse, intense sadness that is called depression, understandable fear and anxiety, regressed behaviours, and caution in trusting others. Such children are also more vulnerable to further abuse in adulthood where there has been no intervention or counselling support for the child or young person (Osofsky, 1999) .

Primary Source of Income

Out of the sixteen women, five were employed either full-time or part-time and the remaining eleven were receiving Centrelink payments. Six were receiving a Parenting Payment; four a Disability Pension and one was on Newstart. These Centrelink payment types included, the Sole Parent Benefit paid to those where the youngest child was under the age of eight years of age; and Newstart if their youngest child was over eight or where the women may not have children in their care but may be currently unemployed. Four women in the study were also recipients of a Disability Pension; indicating they had been assessed as having an intellectual and/or physically disability.

Employment and Education

Five of the women were engaged in employment full-time, part-time or casual, at the time of the interview. Ten of the women were full-time parents and one was studying. A number of the women had to give up work and or study due to the

ongoing stress and disruption to their lives caused by the perpetrator of the domestic and family violence. However, since their separation, six of the women stated they had plans to undertake further study and/or training at TAFE or University.

Country of Birth: Race/Ethnicity

Women were asked to identify their country of birth; ethnicity and/or if they were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent so as to reflect the cultural diversity of women represented within the study population. Of the sixteen women, nine identified as Anglo-Australian; three as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, two as English; one as Irish and one as Maori (Indigenous Aotearoa, New Zealand).

Tenancy status

Of the sixteen women, nine were living in public or community housing, four were in private rental accommodation, two had a joint mortgage with property settlement matters to be resolved with the Family Court and one had purchased a new property after relocating. At the time of the interview eleven of women were able to remain in their own homes, while five opted to be relocated due to either the high level of risks to their safety; to be closer to family; or there were too many bad memories, these women were still able to be provided with “safe at home” services.

5.2 History of the Domestic and Family Violence

In the interviews all women provided evidence that there had been a history of domestic and family violence, and also spoke about subsequent incidents and/or attempts by the perpetrator to continue their use of violence and threats post

separation. Prior to seeking support from agencies such as the police, courts and the “safe at home” program, all of the women had experienced many different forms of domestic violence and abuse including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional blackmail, withholding or controlling finances and various types of stalking and harassment including vexatious emails to their employers at their workplace.

In this section I will more in-depth information about the of the history of violence experienced by the women and children; as well examine the level fear they experienced, particularly when attempting to escape from the perpetrator and/or stopping the violence from continuing. Women spoke openly and candidly about their experiences of the program, in particular, the vital and supportive role of the “safe at home” workers; some highlighted where they had received positive social responses from agencies such as the Police, Courts and magistrates; but not all women had the same experiences, and talked about situations where their safety had been compromised due to a negative social responses from authorities. By exploring narratives of women’s experiences and their perception of the “safe at home” program it enables us to examine the implications for policy and program developments now and into the future.

Violence Restraining Orders (VROs)

Thirteen women had a current Violence Restraining Order against their ex-partners, one had an Interim Order, one had withdrawn the VRO and had no legal protection as she had was informed by Police she did not have enough evidence to apply for a VRO, as the violence was ‘not physical.’ In this case however, there had been

evidence of numerous other forms of abuse and harassment such as abusive text messages towards the victim such as psychological and emotional abuse; and kicking down of a back gate.² Even though she was deemed ineligible by authorities for a VRO, the woman took her own steps to protect herself and her child and organised for a 'safe room' installed within her home with support of the SAH program.

Family Law Court Orders

At the time of the interviews, four women had been granted Contact and Residency Orders, related to access and/or contact arrangements between the perpetrator and the children; two were in the process of applying; and ten women did not have any Family Court Orders in place. Only two women had Property Settlement applications lodged within the FLC. Recent changes as of 1 July 2012 to the Family Law Act, may encourage more victims to apply for Family Court Orders as there is now a stronger focus on the safety of children in cases of domestic and family violence; and as it applies to Contact and Residency Order applications from an alleged perpetrator of domestic and family violence.

Perpetrator characteristics

Six out of the ten women in this study indicated that their ex-partners had extensive criminal histories including armed robberies and were in prison at the time of the interview. They all had assault charges and had breached their VROs multiple times. One woman stated 'he was wanted by Police in relation to on 'criminal matters'. One of these six women said the perpetrator went to prison for two and half months and

² Psychological and Emotional Abuse Definition –Insults, name calling, belittling, constant criticism, humiliation, mind games, manipulation and making the person feel worthless.

then committed suicide when he came out and 'his family accused me of causing his death and want to get me now as part of 'payback.'

A number of the remaining ten women had intimate first-hand knowledge about the perpetrator's behaviour which included the use of alcohol and/or drugs as contributing factors to their use of violence and ; their increasing use of threats, stalking and surveillance post separation as a means to try and maintain control over the women's lives. Only four of the women had Court ordered child-contact arrangements in place, two were in the process of applying and ten had no child-contact orders in place. One of the women in the study had no children, so this was not a presenting issue for her. Most women indicate they had safety concerns for their children when they did go on access visitation and one woman indicated her disappointment in the father's apparent lack of interest in having any visitation with his son she said,

'In the last two years he has not been able to give up alcohol long enough to organise visits with his son, so clearly he's still an alcoholic, clearly the problems are still there.'

Most women reported some form of post separation violence, whilst they were participants of the "safe at home" program and had VROs in place. One woman felt the justice system failed her as her violent ex-partner was charged with forty two breaches of his restraining order and sexual aggravated penetration without consent and was sentenced to nine months in prison. He also was charged with aggravated stalking but the court dismissed this, 'cause they said he'd done long enough with his nine months for the forty breaches.' He was found not guilty to the rape charge.

5.3 Breaches of Violence Restraining Orders

Of the sixteen women interviewed, thirteen had a current VRO in place and one had a 72 hour Police Order. Nine of the thirteen women experienced a breach or multiple breaches of the VRO. Four of the thirteen women who had a VRO did not experience any breaches, although one decided to withdraw the order due to threats and intimidation from the perpetrator.

Six of the thirteen women had experienced more than one breach and five of those women had in excess of five or more breaches with the two highest being nineteen and forty two times. The penalty handed down by the Magistrate for the nineteen breaches was a \$500 fine and nine months in prison for the forty two breaches of a VRO which included an aggravated sexual assault. All of the women reported where their ex-partners were convicted of breaching a VRO, Magistrates often dealt with these offences with leniency. In Chapter five further data has been provided about the penalties perpetrators received for the breach or multiple breaches along with and any criminal offences handed down.

5.4 Women's experiences of violence prior to "safe at home"

Having the violence leave is not always an easy process and the perpetrator will try and find ways to continue the abuse and violence through continual harassment and intimidation. Women reported that violence and its impacts often continued in the following ways:

Intimidation

"He came back to the property and he was there for three and a half hours. Over twelve people turned up with three trucks and him plus two police

officers (this was to collect his belongings and work tools). The whole thing was done to intimidate me. They knew which room I was in, they were laughing and joking outside, they thought it was funny and he thought he was being clever. I ended up making an official complaint to the police which I got an apology for and was told certain procedures have now been put in place that it shouldn't happen to anyone else."

Violence is Deliberate

"Continual harassment no sooner I would ring the police and they come and check it out everything, he'd disappear. As soon as the Police disappeared he'd come back again."

Multiple Breaches of a VRO

"I remember my ex breached his Restraining Order something like nineteen times and he received a \$500 fine every single time. I ended up in hospital one day bleeding with head injuries and I was too scared to do anything. You know that was a bit scary where nowadays I think it's a bit different."

Psychological Abuse

"Because you're told constantly put down and told you are worthless, you start to believe that you couldn't make it on your own, you just did not argue or challenge his violent behaviour as he always told you it was your fault. You started to believe that perhaps it is me so you wouldn't say things. I mean my family knew that I wasn't happy but I think for a lot of it I tried to stay because of the children."

Monitoring and Surveillance

"I did not feel at all safe in my own home, 'cause I was constantly felt on edge and having to check out of the windows all the time, and I was aware he was sitting outside in his car and climbing over the back fence into the garden. But since we moved I've changed all my numbers and am very careful about giving out my address."

Use of Social Media

"Since he came out of prison he's breached a Family Court Order where he's not meant to contact the children and he was messaging my oldest daughter through the internet, he breached that fourteen times and I ended up having to go to the Magistrates Court and getting a VRO for my daughter as well."

Women and children supported to remain in their own homes

One of the key aims of this study was to explore women's perception as participants of the "safe at home" program and what factors they believed assisted with reducing further acts of violence from the perpetrator. Eleven out of the sixteen women were able to remain in their own homes, while five opted to be relocated, due to a range of reasons including either the high level of risk to their safety; to be closer to family; or there were 'too many bad memories' these women were still able to be provided with "safe at home" services.

5.5 Stabilizing housing and safety

Of the sixteen women, nine were living in public or community housing, four in private rental accommodation, two had a joint mortgage with property settlement matters to be resolved with the Family Court and one had purchased a new property after relocating. At the time of the interviews, eleven of women were able to remain in their own homes, while five opted to be relocated due to either the high level of risks to their safety; to be closer to family; or they experienced too many bad memories; were still able to be provided with "safe at home" services.

One woman described that she would wanted to relocate to make a fresh start in a new home and environment, she said,

'The bad memories outweigh the good memories and yeah it's just There have been too many bad things have happened in there, and I still get that sinking, sick, yukky feeling in the house and we've turned pictures around so you don't see him when you walk past.'

Analysis of the interview data suggests that "safe at home" is achieving one of its primary objectives, in preventing women's homelessness , through supporting them

to maintain their housing and having the violence leave. This model allows women to make informed choices about their futures post separation and put in place safety plans with confidence and support from the “safe at home” program and mainstream agencies.

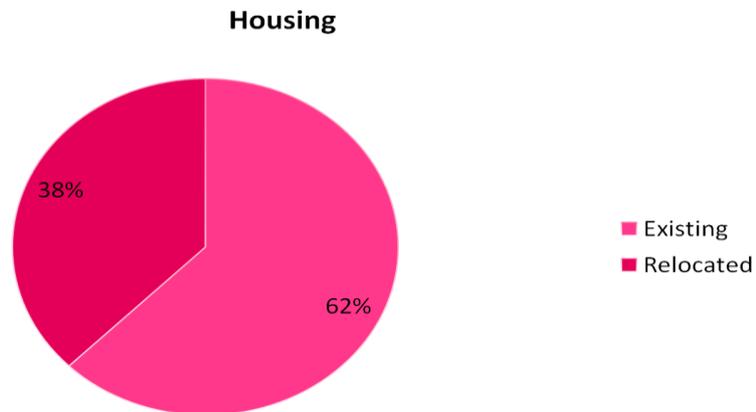
Maintaining housing; sustaining housing

Eleven of the sixteen women maintained their housing and were able to remain safely in their own homes, and whilst five of the women and their children were relocated to other housing, they were still able to continue receiving case management support under the “safe at home” program. This greatly assisted with sustaining stable housing whilst making a fresh start.

Key factors to maintaining housing

Thirteen of the women had a current VRO in place, which they identified as a key mechanism with being able to both maintain their housing and by excluding the perpetrator from the property. At the time of the study, six men were in prison for assaulting their ex-partners and/or other charges such as multiple breaches of a VRO. Those women reported they felt their safest when the perpetrator was in prison, and were able to remain in their own homes without fear of further acts of violence. Case management support from “safe at home” staff was an important factor for most women as they had support to plan accordingly around the renewal of their lease and gain ongoing advocacy through the “safe at home” staff to write letters of support to housing authorities and/or attending meetings with housing providers.

Table 5.2 *Number of women and children from this study who maintained their existing housing*



5.6 Summary

Prior to the implementation of the “safe at home” program, domestic and family violence was under-recognised and under-reported by women even more so. There was a real lack of consistency from authorities such as Police and the Court system; with many women reporting that they experienced ‘victim-blaming’ which often suggested to victims that there is flaw in their own character; and consequently they were to blame for the violence. This appears to have been largely due to a lack of understanding about what constitutes domestic and family violence and often depicted it as ‘family dispute’ or ‘fighting’ which often mutualizes the act of violence as being the responsibility of both parties. Therefore the ability to be able to identify who is the victim and who is the perpetrator is essential if authorities are going to respond positively to victims and ensures they receive important messages that affirms that the violence is never their fault. A greater level of knowledge is required by professional who respond to victims of domestic and family violence about the range of tactics used by perpetrators to try and stop victims from seeking support and intervention from professionals. (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2007) argue

that violence acts are social in that they occur in specific inter-actions and involve at least two people; they are unilateral and they entail actions by one person against the will and well-being of another.

There is little evidence to suggest in the past perpetrators have been held responsible for their behaviour; or that the criminal justice system has responded to victims of domestic and family violence in the home who have been seriously assaulted by their partners as similar violent assaults which have occurred in the public sphere.

The interviews with women from this study provided sufficient information and data about the circumstances that led up to women and children escaping the violence; such as a history of serious violence, threats to harm and breaches of Violence Restraining Orders ; prior to their access to the “safe at home” program which offered assistance for the women and their children to remain in their own homes with ‘wrap around’ case management support.

CHAPTER SIX – FINDINGS COMMUNITY AND LEGAL RESPONSES

6.1 Police and Court Responses to the Violence

Women's perception of Police attitudes towards them

As outlined in the National Evaluation of the NPAH Programs in WA, Violence Restraining Orders (VROs) were identified as a key enabling mechanism for women and children to stay in the family home (Cant et al., 2013). Their effectiveness is crucial to the program. Protection Orders, such as police orders and violence restraining orders, administered by the police and courts, seek to protect victims of domestic and family violence from further acts of violence by prohibiting the perpetrator from contacting them or being within their vicinity once the police serve the order on the offender.

Ten women in this study stated that the police conducted themselves in a highly professional and timely manner. These women also found that the police officers' attitude was positive at the time of the domestic and family violence incident and/or during the VRO process. The data from the interviews provided strong evidence of good policing practices. In addition, eight out of the ten women were referred to the program for ongoing case management support. It was noted that the police acted in a caring, compassionate manner when dealing with all the aspects of their case and provided women with both positive and supportive responses; which gave women confidence to report any future incidents of violence to the Police. All of these women were also kept informed of when the VRO has been served on the perpetrator and some had a 'red alert' set up between their home and the local Police

station as an added safety measure to ensure a quick police response to any threats and/or attempts of further violence.³ One woman stated,

“The police involvement I think these days is a lot better to back then. The police have been fantastic with me, my house was flagged, so they would drive round and do checks. They have kept in contact with me for years as well. I am getting stronger and stronger every day.”

Another woman who had not experienced direct physical violence toward her said,

“I was put on the police emergency list and if I dialled the police they would have someone come immediately to remove him”

This practice by police acknowledged that domestic and family violence is a serious issue, and it may not always include physical assault, but does include property damage, threats to harm, verbal abuse via phone calls and text messages and stalking. Further difficulties were taking place for this woman as the mortgage for her home was in joint names, so trying to legally keep her husband away from the property or entering and taking ‘whatever he liked’ was a challenge as he had joint tenancy rights. She said,

“We had a mediation agreement in place which stated he could come to the driveway in the car and that was it”

“So in his head (Buzawa & Hotaling) this is his house and he’ll do what he bloody well wants and that has included walking through the front door, kicking in the back gate, coming in the back door, letting himself into the house while I’m not there.”

“I tried to talk to his doctor to say he has come off the medication for depression and his behaviour was irrational and getting really aggressive. “The doctor could not speak to me because of privacy issues, even though I told him that he hit his daughter.”

“He refuses to tell me where he lives, he meets me on the street at his parent’s house and he takes our daughter to where he is living. I have concerns for my daughter’s safety.”

³ A ‘red alert’ is an arrangement set up by local police as added security measure for victims of domestic and family violence cases to provide quick response to a victim if a perpetrator is posing a threat or risks of further acts of violence. .

“I was really upset with the whole mediation process because it was not considering what I’ve been through and the impact of his behaviour on my daughter.”

This case was assessed by the “safe at home” worker and the police and warranted the woman with her six year child to be on the emergency response list. The conditions of the mediation agreement did not recognise the potential risks posed for the woman and her child in relation to the ex-partner’s ongoing abuse and violent behaviour, as he had obviously breached the conditions of this and had not been held accountable.

As a result of the specialist skills and knowledge of the “safe and home” worker and the police the woman’s case had been deemed serious enough to have her put on the emergency listing at the local police station. The woman’s level of fear was such that “safe at home” program provided a security up-grade which also included the installation of a safe room, equipped with its own phone, change of clothes, private documents, valuables and non-perishable food.

Six of the women did not have the same type of experience in terms of police responses and/or attitudes and felt they had not been supported adequately for a range of reasons which included:

- Length of time it took Police to attend the incident. One case, in a small country town, the perpetrator’s father was quite friendly with the police. The women felt this presented issues around confidentiality and conflict of interest in terms of duty of care.
- Inappropriate risk assessment where the police had issued a Police Order on the victim instead of the primary aggressor. The reason given by the police

was they believed it was safer to remove the woman from the home, as opposed to trying to remove the perpetrator

- Victim seen as not credible or worthy of support as ‘had a lot of help from the Police’ (been in three relationships with violent partners and had stayed at four Women’s Refuges)
- Interim Order application dismissed by Magistrate and an Undertaking for ‘both parties to refrain from further violence’ was offered.
- Had to chase up the police to find out if VRO had been served
- Further distress and intimidation endured by the victim/s as perpetrator took over three hours to collect his belonging from the home with police on stand-by and an additional twelve of his friends accompanying him.

Domestic and family violence and the law

Legal context is important because ‘law’ is a powerful normative discourse which distinctively brings into existence that which it utters’ (Blandy & Robinson 2001).

Laws demonstrate what society does and does not find acceptable behaviour and therefore set the framework through which policy responses are created (Blandy & Robinson, 2001).

Act Amendments (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse) Act 2004

In WA the maximum penalty as set out in the Acts Amendment (Family and Domestic Violence) Act 2004 for breaching a VRO is two years imprisonment or a fine of \$6,000 or both (s61 WA Act).

Key changes to Violence Restraining Order Laws in Western Australia, 2012

- Presumption of jail for third breach Police Order/Violence Restraining Order within 2 years
- Consent by victim cannot be used as mitigation in sentencing a person for breach VRO
- If you have breached your own VRO, the criminal court can set aside the VRO
- Police can make a Police Order for up to 72 hours even without consent of the protected party
- Section says police order can be shorter than 72 hrs if sufficient for protected person to get to Court
- Police Orders can be made against children if there is family/domestic relationship to victim
- The applicant can also apply to court to set aside a final VRO made where the respondent didn't object if the respondent had "reasonable cause" not to object and applies within 21 days of being notified of the final order or later if has a "reasonable excuse" for not applying earlier
- Breach offences and DFV offences are "serious offences" – this means police can/should charge by arrest
- If *convicted* of a third breach VRO or police order within 2 years, then court must sentence to jail (or juvenile detention), but has discretion not to only if: Imprisonment would be clearly unjust, AND
- The person is unlikely to be a threat to the safety of the person protected or the community generally

In 2011-12 Western Australia Police recorded 1,949 breaches of a Protection Order, and this is likely to be an underestimate of the overall rate, as many victims do not report a breach of an order to the authorities. (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2003) found that as many as half of protection order breaches were not reported to the police or authorities. Between May and August 2012, one hundred and five people were

convicted for breaching a protection order three times or more. Of those, twenty were imprisoned and eleven received suspended sentences (Moulton, 2012).

Protection orders are an important legal instrument for supporting the safety of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence. However, they are not always effective for stopping or containing a perpetrator's use of violence.

Thirteen out of sixteen women in this study had taken out a VRO and one had a 72 hour Police Order. Only three of these women reported that there were no further acts of violence towards themselves or their children, the remaining ten women experienced serious assaults and threats to kill, and six out of this ten experienced numerous breaches in the range of five through to forty two times.

The penalty handed down by the Magistrate for the nineteen breaches was a \$500 fine and nine months in prison for the forty two breaches of a VRO which included an aggravated sexual assault. All of the women reported where their ex-partners were convicted of breaching a VRO that the Courts often treated these offences with leniency. Women from this study reported the number of times their ex-partners breached their VROs, any other offences committed and what penalties the Magistrate handed down.

Whilst thirteen out of the sixteen women had taken out a VRO either before and/or during their time as a participant of the "safe at home" program, only three had reported that there were no further acts of violence towards themselves, or their children. A further three women had experienced one breach, two of which resulted in serious assaults and other women reported the violence escalated and included

vexatious emails and harassment at her workplace. One woman had experienced a breach two times which included physical assaults and threats to kill her. The remaining six experienced numerous breaches in the range of five through to forty two times.

Table 6.1 Penalties by magistrates for breaches of a violence restraining order

	VRO	Breaches	Other offences	Penalty
1	Yes	5 times	Nil	\$500 fine
2	Yes	Multiple	Nil	\$500 fine
3	Yes	No	Nil	Nil
4	Yes	19 times	Nil	\$500 fine
5	Yes	42 times	Sexual assault	9mths prison
6	Yes	Withdrew	Threats/intimidation	Nil
7	Yes	No	N/A	N/A
8	Yes	Once	Unlawful wounding	2yrs prison
9	No	Nil	Property damage	Nil
10	Yes	Multiple	Harassment	Ordered to leave town
11	Yes	No	Nil	Nil
12	Yes	Twice	Assault	\$260 fine
13	Police Order		Assault	12 mths prison
14	Yes	Once	Serious assault	2.5 yrs prison
15	No		Case dismissed, as no physical violence	Nil
16	Yes	Once	Physical violence	\$600 fine

One woman highlighted how her violent ex-partner continued to arrive at the house and start yelling, and bring things and dump them outside the door. She said,

“it was continual harassment, no sooner I would ring the police and they would come and check it out, he’d disappear. As soon as the police disappeared he would come back again. Finally, after 5 five years of harassment, he was finally charged and was fined \$500 and given a community service order as his penalty from the court.”

Another woman said,

“I ended up in hospital bleeding with head injuries. My ex had breached his restraining order nineteen times and only received a \$500 fine each time.”

Magistrates and the Law

Recent cases where Magistrates have handed down lenient sentences and/or failed to understand the serious nature of domestic and family violence on the lives of victims, concur with narratives collated from this study, particularly as it applies to the granting and/or the breaching of a VRO. I have highlighted a couple of cases that received media attention. Whilst it appears that some Magistrates have a better understanding about the serious nature of domestic and family violence, penalties and jail sentences for perpetrators of intimate partner violence are still by and large lenient. There have also been recent cases when a harsher penalty has been applied by a Magistrate, and the offender has appealed the decision to a higher court and won the appeal winning his case in a higher court.

For example, in an article in the West Australian entitled *\$50 fine replaces jail time for repeat wife basher*, the journalist, Kate Campbell outlined how, a repeat domestic violence offender had his eight month jail term for punching his wife overturned on appeal and was instead fined \$50. Magistrate Steven Malley had jailed Wungundin who pled guilty and had previous convictions for assaulting his wife, to eight months in jail. On Appeal, Supreme Court Justice John McKechnie disagreed with the initial decision, believing the assault did not warrant jail. He said

“It was a single punch that caused some pain but no lasting ill-effect within a relationship characterized by sporadic violence and reconciliation (Campbell, 2013).”

In the case of Baron vs Walsh, District Court Judge John Straude reversed a ruling by Magistrate Pamela Hogan who in May 2012 issued a five year VRO to William Arthur Walsh and ordered him to pay costs of \$33,606.65 in court costs. Mr Walsh

was aggrieved by the Magistrate's decision and appealed the VRO on 21 September, 2012. The Magistrate needed to decide whether Mr Walsh behaved in an ongoing manner that was intimidating, offensive or emotionally abusive; and whether text messages are acts of abuse. District Court Judge, Straude took the view that a violence restraining order 'brands a person on whom it is imposed as an abusive person, thus giving greater concern for the perpetrator of the violence than that of the victim' (Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2013). He believed that that by placing VRO on a respondent that may significantly curtail that person's personal freedom; and that 'the purpose of restraining orders is not to protect people from the emotional fall out of a failed relationship, which may be bitter, spiteful and unpleasant', but to protect them from violence and acts of abuse that are ongoing and continuous, threatening or intimidating (Thomson, 2012).

Challenging the Appeal

In June 2014, the Court of Appeal upheld Alison's Fay Baron's legal challenge after finding the a District Court Judge overturned the initial order and failed to appreciate the improper behaviour of William Arthur Walsh, made mistakes which undermined his assessment of acts of abuse, and ignored procedural fairness. Three Court Judges found Judge Straude erred in failing to recognise the impropriety of Mr Walsh's conduct as a whole (Banks, 2014). After a three and a half year legal fight, Alison Baron was given a Violence Restraining Order and Mr Walsh was ordered to pay court costs. This ordeal by Ms Baron to try and gain legal protection through the justice system, highlights the need for law reform in this area to include change laws ongoing threats and harassment through cyber-technology; and that Magistrates have

a better understanding of the impact for victims and their overall safety. A key component of keeping women and children “safe at home” is the ability to obtain a VRO through the courts, excluding the perpetrator from the home and further acts of violence towards the victim.

A frequent complaint received during consultation by the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia when undertaking the review into the domestic violence laws was that offenders who breach a VRO and Police Orders are dealt with too leniently.

It was contended that this undermines the restraining order system and does not provide adequate protection for victims of domestic and family violence (Campbell, 2013). In particular, there was particular concerns that the ‘third strike’ sentencing laws that were introduced in May 2012 to for a presumptive sentence of imprisonment for repeat offenders have not been effective.

Men’s Perceptions of breaching a VRO

Findings from the ‘Breaching Safety’ research report (Chung & Leggett, 2013) into why men breach VROs found that the men minimized their use of violence and externalised responsibility to ‘the relationship’ and /or their partner. They diminished or minimized the role and purpose of protection orders, commenting that they are ‘just a piece of paper; and ‘anyone can get one.’ Most men agreed that protection order were important for ‘those who really need it’ however they did not see their partners as being in need of protection describing them as being unreasonable and over-reacting. The authors also noted that men’s deflections and minimizations about their violence including breaches of protection order were reinforced (and strengthened) through, what they perceived to be, violence supportive responses by

police or service providers, for example when breaches did not result in police investigation or charges (Chung & Leggett, 2013). These findings are significant to consider as the success of “safe at home” responses is as much, reliant on the ability of the service system to hold perpetrators accountability through proactive policies and practice responses underpinned by a legislative framework that will aims to prevent perpetrators from continuing their use of violence.

6.2 ‘Wrap-around’ case management support

Aim: The “safe at home” program aims to keep women with or without children in the family home and remove the perpetrators of violence, providing it is safe to do so. All women referred to “safe at home” receive information and support to enable them to make choices that enhance their safety and well-being and women with or without children are supported to remain in their homes where it is safe to do so. Specialist workers from the program will liaise with the woman and organise a time to come and visit to conduct a risk and safety assessment. “Safe at home” workers engage with the woman to identify and prioritize her safety requirements and will provide financial assistance through “safe at home” brokerage funds for security upgrades and safety planning that maximise the woman and her children’s safety and reduce the risks of further violence.

The women were unanimous in describing the positive impact the “safe at home” services had in their lives and the lives of their children, and reported they were extremely satisfied with all the elements of the service. One woman said,

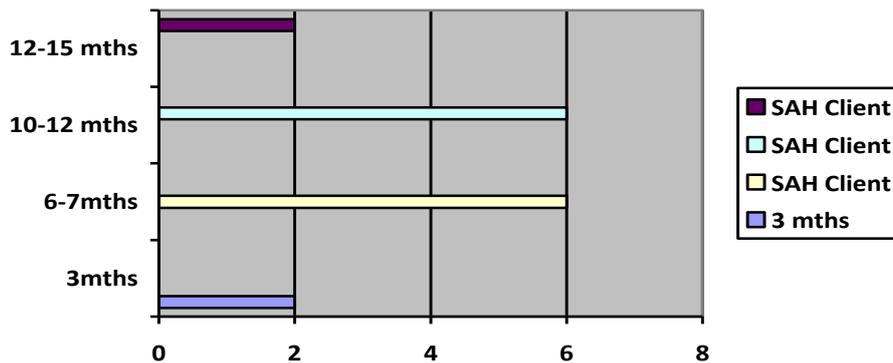
“They helped me today with getting legal information about getting a lawyer for the extension of the restraining order.”
“They helped me get security screens for my windows on my

Homewest house and they had some of their own funding to Put in a peep hole in my front door.”

“It’s just so nice knowing there is somebody there at the end of the phone that you can ring and say, I’m having a bad day and help you with something you need to know.”

Table 6.2 below outlines the length of time that women and their children received ‘wrap-around support services from “safe at home” at the time of the interviews the 16 women and their children had been participants for a varied length of time.

Table 6.2 *Length of time women in the study were participants of “safe at home” program*



Safety planning and follow up support

Integral role of “safe at home” workers and to facilitate a ‘wrap around’ case management support for women & children to remain in their own homes. All of the sixteen women interviewed received case management support for variable periods, a key component of the safety planning was the provision of safety audits in order to enhance the safety of women and children in their housing. Women consistently reported that this was part of their physical, psychological and emotional well-being. The audits were always carried out with the woman and the “safe at home” worker and in some cases in conjunction with the police. Each women in the study

provided positive feedback about their local “safe at home” site. In particular women spoke about the role of the staff in supporting them, one said,

‘when I went for my final hearing or my VRO I had my solicitor there and I was very nervous the whole time it was great to have SAH worker there, the emotional support was what I needed also.’

Other women felt reassured and supported by the “safe at home” workers and said,

‘it was just nice knowing I could call them for advice if I needed or was unsure what to do’

‘Safe at home” staff organised for my child to get some counselling and Support which really made a difference as she was struggling with her school grades.’

‘they helped me today with getting legal advice and representation for extension on my restraining order.’

All “safe at home” participants were linked to services while on the program which included:

- Domestic and Family Violence Counselling
- Domestic Violence Outreach
- Health Services
- Centrelink
- Connection to social networks
- Department of Housing
- Domestic Violence Advocate (DCP)
- Children’s Counselling
- Employment and/or Training
- Domestic and Family Violence Case Management Coordination
- Education Services
- Mental Health Services
- Housing Community
- Drug and alcohol services
- Disability Services

Use of Brokerage funds

The six SAH sites were provided with an additional \$25,000 as brokerage funds to assist stabilise housing and up-grade security measures. The ability to provide funds

to assist with this was an invaluable part of both stabilizing housing and enhancing women and children's sense of safety and well-being in relation to any potential threats or acts of violence from the perpetrator. Particular comments were made about how important the safety audits undertaken were to clients, as it became integral assessment as to their level of safety and whether it was safe to remain in their home with the relevant supports in place.

Some of the modifications made to the family home included security screens on windows and doors, providing a safe room in the house and mobile phones with a duress alarm. Additional support to assist women in additional areas such as installing a roller door on the carport to block access to the back door and vital car repairs were also ways in which the brokerage funds were assessed as necessary to assist the woman and children to maintain their safety and security in the midst of a deterring a violent partner. Without the access to brokerage funds these measures could not have been undertaken.

Supporting victims of violence to remain in their own homes and removing the perpetrator requires the implementation of systemic mechanisms such as a strong "no tolerance" approach to domestic and family violence; one which prioritises the safety of victims and holds perpetrators accountable for the violence. "Safe at home" provides "wrap-around" intensive case management and support for up to twelve months, through working collaboratively with a range of agencies to assist women and children to maintain stable housing and make a fresh start free from violence (Department for Child Protection, 2010).

Unique Opportunities

There were some unique aspects of the "safe at home" models in WA as opposed to those in other jurisdictions of Australia. Women's Refuge services in WA have

proven to be invaluable in terms of their ability to provide specialist seamless services to the women and children who become clients. During the procurement stage and service design phase with introduction of “safe at home” in WA, the benefits of positioning the sites as an extension of the refuge model in six sites was discussed and deemed the best way forward for the following reasons:

- The ground work around collaborative processes between the WA Police, Child Protection and Women’s Refuges had been a success through the evaluation of the DV Police Outreach Pilots (DV POPs);
- The recognition of that women often face ongoing risks from the perpetrator, which may change from ‘low’ to ‘high’ very quickly;
- Women and children could be temporarily housed while safety up-grades and a VRO being put in place;
- The opportunity for women to access crisis accommodation through the refuge system in timely and streamlined manner if the “safe at home” was no longer viable

Five women who had been interviewed as part of the Evaluation of NPAH programs in WA said, ‘that when their partner found out where they were living or when it just got too hard; they were able to enter the refuge and saw this as an important element of the “safe at home” service.’ One woman indicated, ‘going into the refuge for a brief period of time helped to stabilize her emotions and enabled her space and time to consider what was best for her and her children (Cant et al., 2013).

This direct connection to the refuge service has also provided a greater level of safety for the woman, even if she is no longer case managed through the “safe at home” program, as she can continue to receive domestic violence outreach support pre and post crisis. Some women may not be able to get into a refuge due to the lack of available or choose not to access crisis accommodation. Other women may request a specialist worker to accompany them to court when applying for a VRO, for both practical and emotional support; and there are those women who may prefer to

remain anonymous and seek telephone support to talk through their options if they considering leaving a violent partner, this can include, safety and risk assessment and/or safety planning.

Family and Domestic Violence Response Teams (FDVRT)

Additional safety and risk assessment is now conducted through a triage model now provided through the Family and Domestic Violence Response Team (FDVRT). This model is a partnership between DCPFS, WA Police and non-government domestic and family violence services. A FDVRT exist in each of the 17 DCPFS districts and in most districts the three FDVRT team members are co-located. The purpose of the FDVRT is to improve the safety of victims ‘through a collaborative approach that focuses on timely and early intervention following a police callout to a domestic violence incident (Department for Child Protection and Family Support, 2014).’ The FDVRTs undertake joint triage and assessment of Domestic Violence Incident Reports (DVIRs).

What factors contributed to with keeping women and their children safe?

- Police referral to DV Outreach for follow up within 48 hours
- Initial contact from the “safe at home” workers to visit the woman in her home to conduct a joint safety and risk assessment
- Court support for women for VROs and/or breaches of VROs from SA workers
- 12 month period of case management support facilitated by “safe at home” workers with mainstream agencies such as police, housing, legal, education and counselling
- Availability of brokerage funds through the “safe at home” program to assist with security up-grades and/or essential areas of need;

- Child-focused responses in relation to referral to schooling, counselling and/or ongoing safety concerns for children and young people re: contact arrangements with perpetrator.
- Being able to remain in our own home and have the violence leave; and/or support to relocate where risks were too high or too many bad memories
- Employer support when perpetrator harassing victims at the workplace granting time off and added security measures. Exclusionary zones of the VRO prevented her ex-partner from her place of employment.

Further acts of violence

It is important to note that the “safe at home” program in and of itself will not be able to stop perpetrators from continuing their use of violence and abuse, even for those women who had VROs in place. A number of women reported that their ex-partners made attempts to further harass and violate their rights and that of their children by:

- Breaching Violence Restraining Orders
- Acts of property damage
- Sending vexatious emails to the Employer at victim’s workplace
- Texting multiple times a day
- Ongoing emotional/ psychological abuse and torment to the children during contact visit with abusive parent.
- Psychological abuse by contacting victim to say eg, ‘the woman I was sleeping with before you has just contacted me and said she might have HIV’
- Contacting the victim asking them to pay for gifts that were given when in the relationship

- Ringing the Post Office/local business around town to get information on the victim's whereabouts or movements

As part of the “safe at home” program up to twelve months case management support was provided to address a range of needs including maintaining their employment, training or study pursuits, family court matters around contact and residency orders and or property settlement and support with their overall recovery after the experience of pre and post separation violence.

6.3 Supporting children and young people

Children and Young People

Professionals often refer to children or youth as “witnessing”, or being “exposed” to violence, but when a child or youth sees or hears one parent’s use violence against the other parent, they *experience* the violence in a very real and direct way. Thus, violence by one parent against another is a form of child abuse in and of itself (Richards, 2011).

Children who do not receive positive social responses when they experience violence are more likely to see violence as a viable form of behaviour that can be used without meaningful consequences. Children and young people may also:

- experience wakefulness instead of regular sleep;
- wet their beds or soil their clothing;
- become cruel to animals;
- focus more on the violence and less on other matters, such as school;
- unusual eating habits such as under-eating or overeating;
- sexualised behaviours if experiencing sexual abuse;
- self-harming; and/or suicidal thoughts

Some of these can also be seen as forms of resistance to violence and other forms of abuse and in response to having received negative social responses (Wade).

The violence distress responses that are labelled “disorders” or “mental health” problems do not arise from deficits or effects within the child- rather, are responses by the child to the complex and devastating experience of violence. They are a cry from the heart, so to speak. They reveal the child’s experience of the violence as wrong and adverse. And they reveal the child’s desire for safety, for themselves and their loved ones. By understanding distress as a normal, if painful and confusing, response to violence, we protect children from unnecessary labels and treatments that make them the problem and the focus of intervention (Wade, 2013).

If the social responses to the child involve include unnecessary labelling and treatments that exclude the child from normal activities, the focus is shifted from the perpetrator and the violence itself, and to the mind or brain of the child. Children of course sense this process when it occurs and are then forced to respond by preserving their safety and dignity in ways that adults may not understand. In the worst cases, the unnecessary labelling and inappropriate treatment of the child amounts to a form of re-victimizing. By the same token, children tend to respond positively and in healthy ways to positive and effective social responses.

Children can suffer more harm when they experience abuse at the hands of a trusted adult. In these cases, children sometimes learn they cannot trust the adult and must pull away, socially and emotionally. It is not safe to “attach” too firmly as the risk of violence and rejection is high. Wife-assault is often aimed at destroying the mother-child bond. The perpetrator may directly attack the mother as a parent and force the

child to disobey or even abuse their mother. As a result, children cannot experience or provide the necessary attachment, or bond, that is at the heart of parent-child relationships (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Kos, 1995).

The child may suffer the loss of this basic bond for many years and conclude, from the child's point of view, that they were not deserving of love and cannot invest their heart safely in others. Positive attachment relationships play a central role in the mother-child relationship and tends to predict how children function in the present and future (Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro & Semel, 2003). It is the actions of the perpetrator against the child's mother that serves to sever the close connections that the mother-child relationship fosters. Wife-assault is, in this sense, a form of parental alienation (Wade, 2013).

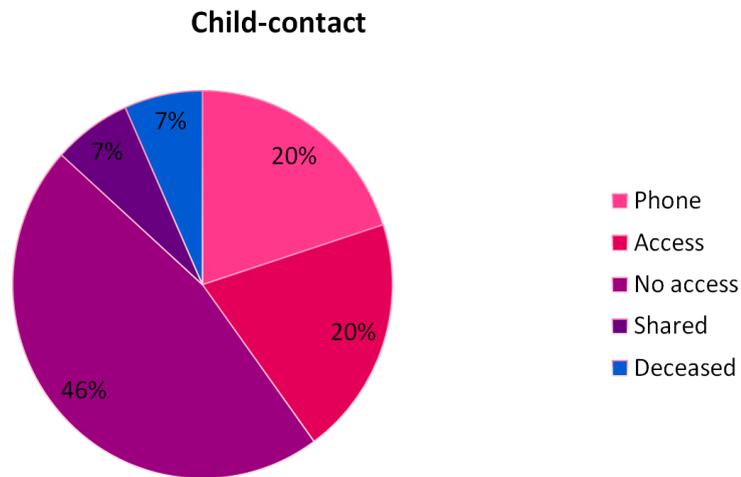
At the time of the interviews out of the 7 of the 16 "safe at home" participants had children and/or young people who contact with the abusive parent, either by phone or contact arrangements ordered through the family law courts or a parenting plan through a mediated service. Women raised serious safety concerns for their children and spoke about how the violence continued when they were on contact visits,

"Often my older son would ring the Police and say their father is beating them up and then the Police would bring the children to my house."

"What he's done to my daughter, calling her names, you know, you're a psychotic bitch like your mother."

"Your Mum and me are arguing again, it's your fault, you've caused this! He would blame everybody else but it's never him."

Table 6.3 *Types of child-contact arrangements with perpetrator*



All women interviewed spoke about how the violence has impacted on the lives of their children. They believed that child contact was used as a vehicle to continue the abuse and violence, interrogate the child about the mother’s movements and/or destroy the mother-child bond by berating the mother in front them. This behaviour resulted in the children often suffering emotional and psychological consequences.

‘My daughter, who is 15, had a mental breakdown and spent 3 months in Princess Margaret Hospital due to living with her father’s violence, she blamed herself for not protecting me.’

‘My son is very withdrawn because he is stuck in the middle, now that is 19, he has to make up his own mind up, his Dad is keep saying I have done nothing wrong and your Mum is putting us all through this. He is using emotional blackmail and treating him like he used to treat me and that’s not a good thing.’

What would have helped you to deal with this?

“More specialist Domestic and Family Violence Children’s counselling services in rural locations, as women had to travel hundreds of miles to access counselling services for their children.”

“Peer support and mentoring, it would have been helpful if my teenage daughter had someone she could email or text if she was having a bad day. Like a big brother, big sister type of thing, perhaps somebody older who has been through it and come out the other side”

6.4 Challenges for Families in Rural locations

Research over the past twenty years has explored women's experiences of domestic and family violence in rural and remote areas identifying factors that are different from women in urban settings. These studies have provided valuable insight into structural barriers that keep women trapped with a violent partner and prevent them from seeking help; along with insights into how women cope with domestic and family violence while living in socially and geographically isolated locations. Some of these structural barriers include geographic isolation, limited access to services, the absence employment opportunities, financial issues, insufficient housing and the absence of public transportation (Wendt, 2009a).

The sharing of personal information, in the context of living in a small town may occur quite innocently. Information that can put the victim at further risk of violence can be passed onto a perpetrator without realising the adverse consequences for the victim/s. Whilst it may be common knowledge for people to 'know everyone's business' It may not be common knowledge even within a small town that there is domestic and family violence occurring, as it can be silent and hidden behind closed doors. Women living in rural locations who participated in this study identified the following issues as specific challenges and issues that compromised and or put their safety at further risk:

- *Maintaining confidentiality and professional boundaries in a small community*

For example, one perpetrator 'asked around town' at the local post office and a number of local businesses in town, trying to get information about the victim's whereabouts and/or movements.

- *Increased safety risks*

Three out of the seven rural "safe at home" participants interviewed lived on

properties in isolated regions, the perpetrator had firearms licence and access to weapons which further increased threats and ongoing risks of violence.

- *Breaching a Violence Restraining Order*

Women identified an increased likelihood of perpetrator breaching a VRO if they come into contact with the victim/s at a local shopping centre, school, workplace or social outing. Some perpetrators used this as an opportunity to continue intimidating and stalking their victims. One woman who had a VRO to protect herself and her children and said,

“My son works at KFC and he rang me quite frightened, because he was serving customers at the drive-through, when his father drove past and yelled out oi, and then continued to drive very slowly and was looking at me.”

- *Police and Court Response*

One woman reported that she felt the police’s risk assessment and potential ongoing risks for further acts of violence was inadequate when they attended her home, after she phoned for help the second time. She said of her partner at the time,

‘he came over to my house and started getting aggressive and my son saw him grab me and chuck me on the floor, so I called the police for help and he then left and returned later and continued to yell and scream, calling me names and being aggressive.’

When he returned she called the police again and asked them to return. They took quite some time to come back, they eventually put a 24 Police Order in place. Subsequently, when woman applied for a VRO and was unable to obtain a also a final order as ‘he had a lawyer that dragged me through the mud and basically convinced the magistrate that he wasn’t a threat to me, and turned it around by saying he was afraid of me!’ The woman reported that the perpetrator’s father was also quite friendly with the police in town which she believed led to injustice in the

court. Where a family member may know the police or local magistrate, it can be perceived there is a conflict of interest and interfere with a victim's right to be protected under the law.

CHAPTER 7 –FINDINGS WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

7.1 How safe did women feel?

“Safe at home” participants reported feeling a sense of freedom, often taken for granted, by those living in safe and stable environments. It is important to note that women’s experiences found that the “safe at home” program is more than just the provision of hardware – changing of locks and up-grading of security measures– as whilst this is critical, without the collaborative partnerships and integrated community responses from support workers within agencies such as the Police, DCPFS, Housing and DFV Specialist, the safety of women and children is compromised and opportunities to stop further violence are lost. On a scale of one to ten, all women experienced a significant increase in their safety after participating in the “safe at home” program with 75 percent rating their sense of safety to below three prior to the program.

Five women who had felt very unsafe rating zero prior to “safe at home” stated that their feelings of safety increased to six and above once they had the support of “safe at home.” Women spoke about their level of fear and indicated the impact of the violence intruded into many aspects of their day-today functioning including eating, sleeping and overall well-being.

When asked on a scale of 1-10, how safe did women feel before they referred to “safe at home”, eleven women rated their feeling of safety between 0-3; with the remaining five rating their feeling of safety from 4-7. The following women felt very unsafe at before engaging with the “safe at home” program and reported feeling a

greater sense of safety from (6-7) after participating in the program.

Helen

“I wasn’t sleeping at all, I was really scared. He threatened to come around and have me killed, raped in front of my children.”

Jenine

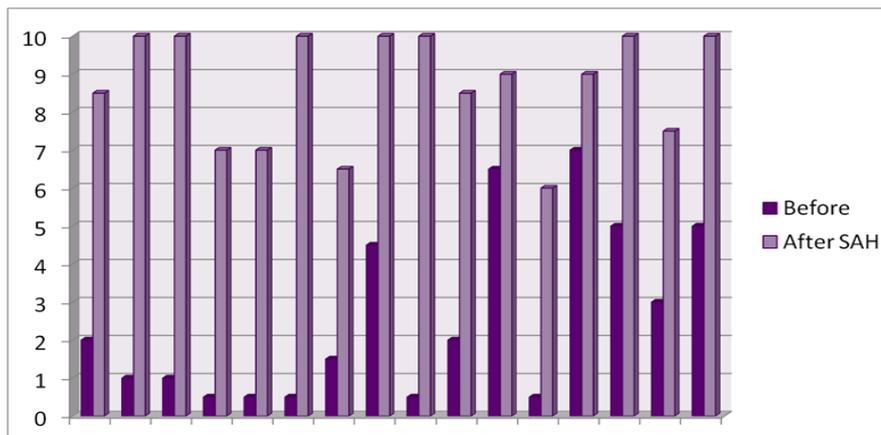
“I didn’t feel safe in my own home, cause I constantly felt on edge and having to check out the windows all the time and stuff because I was aware he was sitting outside the house in his car on a night and climbing over the back fence into the garden and stuff.”

Jackie

“He knew I was disabled and I couldn’t protect myself from the size of him. I was scared to close my eyes, I was just worried I was not going to wake up.”

Table 7.1 How safe did women feel?

On a scale of 1-10 how safe women felt before and after being referred to SAH



How safe do you feel now?

Helen

“Oh it just feels good to be able to know you’re not going to, you know, have someone come bashing through your door or, it’s just good to not have to worry so much and to stress all the time.”

Jenine

“When we got the alarm put in that gave me a bit of reassurance, we have since moved to a new property, but always aware of the risk of somebody dropping our address and phone number as he had been charged with

breaching a VRO 42 times and aggravated sexual penetration without consent.”

Jackie

“With “safe at home” workers guidance and that, and since I got advice what to do, it made me stronger and know what to look for in a man.”

One woman said her level of safety on a scale of one to ten had improved from two pre “safe at home” program to a nine post the program.

She explained,

“Now we have the duress alarm and every time our front gate opens, we know that camera clicks on and it films if there is a breach of the VRO by him being at the house when we are not home.”

Another woman stated,

‘I learnt to be alert and kept utilising my knowledge, how best to keep it safe at home. I wasn’t going to let anything stop me seeking help from the “safe at home” worker, ringing the Police or my lawyer.’

Aboriginal Women and Children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often prefer to use the term ‘family violence’ which includes all forms of violence within intimate and family relationships. This includes not only partners, wives, defactos who are victims of violence and abuse but also mothers, sisters, aunties, children, extended family and community. Therefore in addition to the consequences that all victims face, specific issues such as ‘payback’ and/or ‘family feuding’ may be occurring at the same time or as a direct result of a woman seeking help from authorities. It is within this context that women spoke about their experiences of family violence.

Three out of the sixteen women who volunteered for this study identified as Aboriginal; one woman of the three women was originally Kimberley region and the other two women identified as Noongar. Their voices have provided a valuable

opportunity to hear about their experiences of the “safe at home” program and family violence from an Aboriginal and Torres Islander perspective.

One woman disclosed that her ex-partner who had been extremely violent towards her and committed suicide a couple of months after being released from prison. She felt that his family had been a bad influence and enabled his use of drugs and alcohol which had exacerbated the severity and frequency of his levels of violence towards herself; and their children aged seven, six, four and two years of age. Below are some of the narratives from the woman who highlighted some of the issues faced with what she described as interference from extended family and ‘payback ’ after her ex-partner had committed suicide.

“I used to leave him a lot. But the only time he never used to hit me probably is when I was pregnant.”

“When we was away from his family, well he would be more of a decent person but when we was living here, there was too much drama going on.”

“Being around his family was too much for him as well, they were always interfering and he got involved in things that took him down a wrong path.”

“He tried to get help. He wasn’t violent when was just us two, yeah it was mainly the in-laws influence.”

“He got two and half months prison after assaulting me the last time when he breached the VRO; I had to go to hospital- I was light headed, he assaulted the side of my face and I had two black eyes as well.”

“Yeah I got accused of his death. So you know, in Aboriginal families they don’t know how to let it rest. I think sometimes I was lucky, cause with Aboriginal violence, yeah they could have taken my life but then they would have looked at my children and thought, they can’t be raised without a mother and father.”

“The “safe at home” workers were a big help, they wrote a support letter to Homeswest. I don’t really go out anywhere now, except getting the kids to

school, because I see his family around, it's getting too much too much living here. I have been trying to get a priority transfer."

7.2 Children and young people

The research also highlights that, children who live in a household where they are hearing and seeing their mother/primary care-giver being verbally and physically violated is a form of emotional and psychological abuse towards the children. During the interviews, women also voiced concerns for their children when on contact visits. Sally reported the her daughter had been verbally and emotionally abused by her father saying,

'you're a psychotic bitch like your mother.'

Julie also reported how her sons would be physically abused on contact stating,

'Often my older son would ring the Police and say their father is beating them up and then the Police would bring the children to my house.'

Pam highlighted the devastating impact for her daughter of living with a violent father and said,

'She had a mental breakdown at 15, and spent 3 months in Princess Margaret Hospital due to living with her father's violence as she blamed herself for not protecting me.'

Women expressed they still had ongoing concerns for their children's safety and well-being even after "safe at home". A recent study by (Heward-Belle, 2013) found that men who were violent to their partners and children were acutely aware of the immediate fear their behaviour had on their children , however fewer described being aware of the long-term implications for children, such as living in a chronic state of fear arousal. Many believed that their children had not been affected for a variety of reasons which included the age of the child when exposed to domestic violence;

their belief that their children had been asleep; or otherwise unaware of the existence of domestic violence. (insert reference).

Ongoing Safety Concerns

Women were asked if they had any safety concerns for their children when they went on access with their fathers. A number of the women raised concerns about the ongoing abuse, interrogation and neglect which was occurring whilst children were in contact with their abusive parent. As six of the fathers were in prison, concerns for those children were limited however, one father had phone access which was supervised by the child's maternal grandmother. Even though the phone was on loud speaker and the grandmother can hear what was being said conversation and could; the child's mother feared that he may find out her new location, through questioning the child. She stressed that if he wasn't in prison now she would be dead.

Another mother was less concerned for her two year old child's safety, now that he had 'come off the drugs' in prison and arrangements with DCPFS who take the child out to for the father to have are supervised access in the prison once a month. The mother's fears had been alleviated to a degree as she had been informed that when the father gets out of prison and part of his parole conditions will be that he has regular urine tests and attends counselling and he can prove to be a good father, it may work for him to have the child, when is a bit older, on weekends.

When asked about ongoing safety concerns for their children, a range of issues were highlighted. Another woman explained, 'when I did express my concerns about how he disciplined her with his physical slap, he says, 'it's his right a parent to decide

know he disciplines her.’ The mother spoke about her concerns about the physical and emotional abuse as well as neglect of her six old daughter by her father when on access visits, which was causing her extreme stress and anxiety as she was informed by the police that she did not have enough grounds in her case to apply for a VRO.

The mother was also concerned about not knowing where the father was living, as he said he had a right to privacy, and did not notify the mother when he took their daughter away outside the Perth metropolitan region for the weekend, he just did it. These issues breached the parenting agreement that they both signed. ‘He doesn’t pay child support, not even a Christmas gift, nothing, yet he thinks he is the best father in the world.’

Concerns were heightened in this case, as the father had a mental health diagnosis and suffered from depression and was not good at taking his medication. The child would come home with severe sunburn from being taken to the beach by the father on 37C day with no sun cream or protection. The mother was concerned and said, ‘he was totally not in a headspace of thinking about the child’s safety needs.’ Women interviewed also commented that whilst living with a violent and abusive partner they were often felt like they were living in a hostage situation. The perpetrators often used deception and isolated them because they knew others would disapprove of his actions and perhaps intervene to help the victims.

Another woman highlighted that prior to “safe at home” her ex-partner had damaged the property which was in her name to the value of \$7,000; and she was able to take some solace in the fact that her debt was now going down. ‘He did get a year in

prison for the assaults on me, and because the prisons were so full in Broome he was transferred to a 'boot camp' near Wyndham.' She also spoke about how he would often take his children to his mother's place as he 'did not want them to see the violence he grew up with and then would come back on his own and start on me, and just my son used to see everything.' She attributed her son's witnessing and exposure to the violence to his difficulties with completing his school work, which resulted in his low grades. The woman also spoke of her 'counselling' role with younger Aboriginal women when she was in the refuge, she said,

"I've been through domestic violence since I was young and now I'm at that stage of being a grandmother and I want to try and share that thing with other ladies-you know watch out for yourself and look after your kids and not let your partners take the kids from you, because if they can't get you they'll try and do something to the child."

"And I see a lot of domestic violence you know, and the ladies say, Who made men king?" That is true you know who made man king and put it over the ladies? Why do all other men rule all other ladies around the world, and hurting them. Show the whole world what woman's there for you know, not to be their slaves and stuff, they should be equal."

"I love the "safe at home" program, I wish it was spread out more, all over the places they do really do need it."

7.3 Strengths of the "Safe at Home" Program

Findings indicated there were a number of the contributing factors that assisted with keeping women and children safe which included, the prompt contact by the "safe at home" within 48 hours, safety audits based on a joint risk and assessment between the woman and "safe at home" staff; security up-grades and the provision of emotional and practical support to women, particularly with attending court to obtain

VRO and/or breaches of a VRO. Collaborative practices such as facilitating referrals and vital linkages with mainstream agencies such as police, housing, legal, education and counselling were also identified as key elements of the programs.

The “safe at home’s” ability to be able to provide specific child-focused responses with schooling, counselling and /or ongoing safety concerns re: contact arrangements with perpetrator were seen as integral to reducing further acts of violence towards the woman and that of her children. Employer support when the perpetrator was harassing victims at the workplace provided the much needed reassurance to women that they would not lose their job, and they were not responsible for managing their ex-partner violent behaviour.

7.4 How have the lives of women and their children changed?

Most women spoke about the loss of their sense of self when living with a violent and abusive partner. The “safe at home” program helped them connect with their sense of self respect, dignity and freedom. When asked how their lives and that of their children had changed, some women said,

‘I’m finally off my depression tablets and stuff because I am not freaking out so much anymore and my son was telling the counsellor that we’re safe now, and the school have seen a change in him for the better as we thought he might have been ADHD.’

‘Stability, I’m glad we maintained our own home and not had to move while all this was going on, it would have been such an extra burden. With the father in jail me keeping the house is the reason why I got my boy back so quickly.’

‘My son comes home now for contact visits with the family and my daughter is now getting better grades at school’

'This is going to be the first Christmas that there's not going to be rows and arguments and we will have a Christmas Day how we would like to have it, not being told how we are going to have it.'

'I feel like a mother again. I didn't just have the chance when I was pregnant to be happy about it at all, or even enjoy the birth, then losing her to child protection and getting her back. I just feel, yeah it a huge thing being able to do the things I missed out on, like taking my daughter to school now.'

'It is like having a big weight lifted off the shoulder you know. It was like a big cloud here when he was here, we did not invite anyone over or have any sleepovers for my girl, as you didn't know whether he was going to come out and start abusing us. Now it's calm, it's peaceful, it's happy.'

Women reported feeling a sense of freedom, often taken for granted, by those living in safe and stable environments. In the next chapter I will discuss some of the key findings and consider the implications of what women reported so as to provide feedback on the overall efficacy of the “safe at home programs in WA. The in-depth interviews with women sixteen women (9 from metro and 7 from rural locations) greatly assisted this study to gain insight into the types of services and responses women found useful. As the “safe at home” program in WA is still relatively new, women were able reflect on their experience of the “safe at home” response and be provide policy-makers and service providers with suggestions for improvement and research in this area.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

8.1 A ‘rights based’ approach

Dealing with the major change in response from women living with domestic and family violence from one of protection and sheltering to one that supports women to live as full citizens with the right to remain “safe at home” was reliant on buy in at the highest level of leadership within government in order for it to influence policy and practice on the ground. The WA Police Commissioner and the Director General of the Department of Child Protection worked in partnership with the twelve Non-Government Specialist Services to develop this commitment. Over a twelve month period in the development phase of the “safe at home” model in WA, a number of joint meetings were held with the key stakeholders to map out the content of the and the initial shaping of the “safe at home” model itself. An earlier study with women who had been participants of the Staying Home Leaving Violence program in NSW, found that where women had a strong attachment to their homes, they felt they had a right to remain. There were also wider social, economic and health benefits for women and their children and the wider community, such as reducing homelessness and keeping children out of the formal child protection system; and limited their exposure to further acts of violence by the perpetrator (J. Breckenridge & Mulrone, 2007).

8.2 Elements of “safe at home” that women found helpful

The key aims of the study was to gain insight into what women believed assisted with keeping them and their children safe; and/or what contributed to reducing further risks of violence. By exploring narratives of women experiences and

perceptions, of the service, the overall efficacy of the “safe at home” from a participant’s perspective were explored. The key areas of the “safe at home”

- The provision of safety audits and security up-grades;
- Being able to stay in their homes where it was safe to do so;
- Being able to stay in their communities and not have the expense of relocating;
- Children being able to continue their schooling and not be disrupted;
- Practical support to relocate if their tenancy became unsafe and/or held too many bad memories of where the violence took place;
- Support and understanding from employers to maintain their jobs;
- Ability to continue study or aspire to go on to higher education;
- Not living in fear and have a greater level of self-belief;
- Living free from violence and being able to manage their own lives; and
- The overall benefits of the integrated approach linked to the “safe at home” which facilitated mainstream services working collaboratively around providing a suite of services .

Women also reported the value of the “safe at home” having the flexibility to use state funded brokerage funds to secure and stabilize housing and home security; and other areas of priority as deemed important on a case by case basis, following assessment of safety and immediate needs.

Domestic and family violence is a serious problem for women at work and therefore for employers. Like Safe at Home, Safe at Work initiatives work to reverse the vicious cycle of homelessness and poverty that results for many women when they are forced to leave home to escape a violent partner. Women and children who have to flee their homes as a result of domestic and family violence find leaving their communities further exacerbates feelings of social dislocation and disadvantages them both financially and socially. Providing “safe at home” to women and children is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution but part of an overall safety, risk and needs assessment with the woman to determine what action is required to keep the family safe from further acts of violence from the perpetrator.

Women and children being able to remain in their own homes is, in part dependent on services to perpetrators of domestic and family violence. In WA, when police attend an episode of domestic and family violence; both parties are asked if they would like to be contacted by specialist agency for support within 48 hours. This policy response provides opportunity for both victims and perpetrators to seek help.

8.3 Messages for policy and practice

As a result of these findings, women identified the following messages for policy and practice:

1. The value of carrying out a joint risk assessment and safety audit in the home with both the woman and “safe at home worker, positions and honors a

woman's ability to assess her own safety needs, along with any other risks that may be identified by the worker. Operating from this perspective, allows victims of domestic and family violence to regain some control and restore a sense of dignity to their lives and that of their children.

2. A "safe at home" response requires collaborative practice between a range of agencies committed to supporting women and children to maintain housing of their choice and make a fresh start free from violence. This agencies include but are not limited to housing, centrelink, schools, medical, legal and counselling services and family law courts.
3. Information sharing between agencies is a vital key to ensuring the overall safety of women and children both in the short and longer term.

"Safe at home" programs must have the ability to link in with perpetrator programs and share information relevant to the safety risks of women and children where there is still partner or child contact; and as a means of monitoring progress of the perpetrator in relation to behavior change around the use of violence and abuse.
4. Address the challenges around providing a "safe at home" in rural locations may require a specific focus by government funders to review the costs and the time for required for staff to provide case management support women and children who may live in towns hundreds of miles away.

5. The timely follow up by a domestic violence outreach service within 48 hours to assess risk and ‘safe at home’ suitability.
6. ‘Wrap-around’ case management support provided from “safe at home” workers and mainstream agencies.
7. The specific ‘child-centre responses for children and young people as where there were ongoing concerns for their safety, particularly if required to have contact with violent and abusive parent.

Unique Opportunities for SAH model in WA

Important learnings from SAH models in other states and territories informed WA policy and practice; it also provided the unique opportunity for the WA SAH models to do things a bit differently. During the service design phase it was identified that a key benefit of attaching a “safe at home” site to a refuge model was based on the recognition that women often faced ongoing risks from the perpetrator, which may change from ‘low’ to ‘high’ very quickly, therefore the opportunity to access additional crisis support and accommodation through the refuge service system would be streamlined and continuous. For example, a red flag or indicator that could see a woman and her children go from ‘low’ to ‘high’ risk could be information that the perpetrator is being released from prison and there are concerns that he will try and track the victim/s to continue further acts of violence.

As a result of the Inquest into the death of Andrea Pickett and the Coroner’s recommendations a ‘red file’ policy and practice is now in place in the WA Police and the Department of Corrections whereby victims have been assessed as imminent danger and or extreme risk. This would apply in cases where a perpetrator has

breached his parole or bail conditions and it is known he has made threats or is intending to cause further harm to the victim/s. These cases will be jointly case managed and monitored in a timely manner.

The “safe at home” program supports women and children who choose to remain in their own homes. During the face-to-face interviews women were asked questions in relation to their children’s experience in relation to threats or acts of violence from the perpetrator; and what factors the “safe at home” program assisted keeping their children safer. They were also asked whether they had any safety concerns for their children when on contact visits. Whilst there appears to have been an inconsistent approach with the protection of children within the family law court, the Family Law Act was amended in June 2013 to ensure that in cases of domestic and family violence, safety of the child or children will be paramount over the presumption of shared parenting.

Women’s participation in this study has provided a powerful and valuable measure for evaluating its efficacy. This study was guided by feminist research methods as a means to ensure that the knowledge gained from the women is validated and accepted as the essence of the research topic. By having exploring narratives of women’s experience and perception of the service, it provided insight into how effective the “safe at home” programs are from a participant’s perspective. It is envisaged that the findings this study provide decision-makers and services with qualitative feedback from “safe at home” participants that can be considered as part of the continuous quality improvement of the program.

8.4 Participant’s suggestions for improvement

Areas identified for the “safe at home” program by women included the need for a greater level awareness about the “safe at home” within the community; additional “safe at home” sites in regions that have higher levels of domestic and family violence reporting to the police; the rights for tenants to be spelt out clearly, particularly where there may be joint tenancy or mortgage agreements with housing, the need to address the challenges around provided a “safe at home” within rural locations given the time required for workers to travel to women in towns that may be hundreds of miles away.

Given that the “safe at home program has only been operating in WA since July 2010, it is timely to evaluate its operation and whether it is a viable model of practice to keep some women and children safe in their own home and remove the perpetrator following an incident of domestic and family violence. During the interviews participants were asked if they had any suggestions or ideas on how the “safe at home” program could be improved for you and your children? The following narratives outline some of the responses expressed by women:

Tenancy rights and “safe at home”

Whilst victims have the ability to change locks and up-grade security. The WA Law Reform’s recent Report recommends that the Department of Commerce undertake a review of the interaction of the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse) and the family and domestic violence orders to consider whether any reforms are necessary or appropriate to accommodate the circumstances of tenants who may be subject to or

protected by a family and domestic violence protection order (Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2013).

Tenancy rights are unclear, as it can often put victims at further risk of violence and abuse, particularly where there is a joint lease agreement or mortgage. One woman who was told by police that because there was no physical violence, she did not have a case for a VRO, and consequently, the perpetrator continued his use of abuse, property damage and threats of violence. She was so fearful, she installed a 'safety room' within her own home to protect herself and six year old daughter and said,

'The legal rights for tenants need to spelt out clearly if there is no VRO in place as we had joint mortgage and he felt he could come and go over the last eight months as he pleased.'

This highlights the need for better levels of support for victims of domestic and family violence to remain in housing where there is a joint tenancy agreement.

Specialist services in rural locations

Due to the limited number of support services within a small rural community, women face particular challenges when seeking support from specialist domestic and family violence services. This lack of specialist services for women, children and impacts on their ability to seek support and stay safe; as well as the financial burden additional time of having to travel hundreds of miles to access children's counselling, community legal and/or mental health service. Women felt further consideration was required by funders and decision-makers was required on how this can be improved as a matter of priority.

These specific challenges faced by women and children in rural locations limit women's ability to access affordable, safe and timely support; and furthermore, compounds their feelings of geographical and social isolation. The following concerns were reported,

'As I worked during the day, it was hard for a "safe at home" worker to come and visit me, as it would have to be after hours or on a weekend.'

"Safe at home" staff often have to travel long distances for a visit with a client, and given the value of face-to-face case management meetings, it was suggested "safe at home" be offered outside ordinary working hours, eg Staff have the option to start at noon and finish at 7.30pm or operate on a Saturday until noon. Whilst women from metropolitan locations did not raise this as an issue, it could apply more generally on a needs case by case basis, where a "safe at home" client works or studies and cannot meet in ordinary working hours.

For "safe at home" to be able to reach a greater number of victims experiencing domestic and family violence, women made the following comments:

'There should be greater level of awareness about the "safe at home" programs within the community.'

'If there were more "safe at home" sites within regions where the calls out to police were high, then domestic and family violence incidents would go right down I reckon.'

Other feedback from women included:

'We need a greater level of understanding within the family law court about the serious nature of domestic and family violence and the further exposure of the risks and harm to children and young people where perpetrators when on contact visits and/or breaching of family court orders.'

'I was not comfortable with a male "safe at home" worker coming out for the first contact visit to do risk and safety assessment. For me to actually have a man in my house was weird and uncomfortable.'

When women were asked if they would recommend the "safe at home" program to other women as an option? They all responded positively and indicated as supported by some of the comments below:

"The women here at SAH have probably saved my life, I think, numerous times. Just having the support has been really good."

"Of course, they're the ones who have the experience to deal with things like this. Because a friend doesn't know what it is like, if they haven't been through (Aboriginal Family Law Services) or haven't been trained to do things like this."

"Oh, one hundred percent to everyone that's in a position even remotely like mine."

"I have already given out the card and brochure to friends of mine."

Specialist domestic and family violence children's services

Currently in WA, there are limited specialist services for children and young people who are victims of domestic and family violence. Children make up the majority of clients who accompany their mothers or caregivers into Women's Refuge Services. A snapshot of data from 10 Women's Refuge Services found that 228 women and 483 children and young people were supported during the period of 1 July-31 December 2013 (Women's Council, 2014).

Often refuges have a 'window of opportunity' to work effectively with children and young people and their mothers due to the limited amount of time they stay at a crisis accommodation service. Nonetheless, Child Support Workers and Advocates use this time to work with children and young people as clients in their own right. Being able

to work one on one and/or in group setting with children and young people during their stay at the refuge can assist with dealing with the trauma by exposing them to a positive environment that supports their ongoing development and educates them about respectful and safe behaviours; and who they can turn to when they feel unsafe.

The very real or impending lack of financial security can and does influence a woman's decision to return to a violent partner or ex-partner. Due to financial control, and/or control over whether a woman works or not, victims of domestic and family violence are often economically reliant on their partner (Anderson, 2003). It is therefore vital that service models such as the Safe at Home program are not only embraced by policy and decision makers but become part of viable option embedded within an integrated and multi-agency response to ensure women and children can remain safely in their own homes, as both a choice and as a right. This collaborative approach to dealing with domestic and family violence will further empower victims to remain in their own homes where it is safe to do so and provide the opportunity for less disruption when faced with having to flee their homes because of a violent partner.

The "safe at home" model in and of itself cannot achieve victim's safety if existing perpetrator interventions are not part of the equation in terms of violence prevention. Behaviour change programs; police responses to breaches of VROs and sentencing of perpetrators of domestic and family violence must all be working in tandem effectively if "safe at home" is going to become part of a systems response, that keeps women and children safe in their own homes.

“Safe at home” data provided to the study by the six sites indicated that 468 women and 771 children had been assisted to remain safely in their own homes in the period 1 July 2010-30 June 2012. Whilst this falls slightly short of the 500 target a number of women were provided with information, counselling and support but did not require the case management support. Nonetheless, this is a significant reduction in women and children who have had to flee their homes and face the risk of homelessness.

It is acknowledged that some women will continue to choose to leave home because of the high risk of remaining there, but many more women now have an option of staying home with additional security measures built in. Reducing the number of women and children who become homeless as a result of having to flee their homes is an ultimate goal of the “safe at home” program by challenging paternalistic beliefs and attitudes that a ‘man’s home is his castle’ from which he should not be removed. This belief cannot continue to be seen as a legitimate justification by authorities not to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence and abuse. Challenging this would send a clear message that there are consequences for such behaviour. “Safe at home” programs that focused more on case management or case coordination as the central element to support women to remain in a home of their choice often worked to ensure:

1. women’s and children’s ongoing safety;
2. prevent short- and long-term homelessness after escaping violence; and
3. assist to change societal attitudes to women remaining in their own homes to one of a fundamental human right.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

The “safe at home” model reflects a change in community attitudes from the expectation that the victim of family and domestic violence would leave the family home to it being the violent partner who should leave (McFerran, 2007b). It embraces the need to change and/or transform existing violence-supportive attitudes and responses from friends, family and professionals that have often sought to blame victims for provoking the violence and therefore deserving of it. “Safe at home” was developed as an intervention for victims of domestic and family violence to support them to remain safely in their own homes and have the perpetrator removed. The “safe at home” programs aims to provide a respectful and effective social response to help victims recover from the violence and abuse and reduce any lasting distress.

9.1 Having the Violence Leave?

It is recognised that a woman’s right to remain in her own home, is not a universal option, for a number of women, as this is not always a safe option. Some women do not wish to remain living where such violence and abuse took place and other are not in a financial position to remain in the home. Nonetheless, the women in this study reported that their lives changed significantly when the perpetrator of the violence left or was made to leave as a result of having and VRO served on them. Living free from violence provided women with the opportunity to improve both the social and economic well-being. Not having the flee their homes, women felt that they were not to blame for the violence and less likely to experience the long term impacts such as homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and chronic ill-health (Culter et al., 2008), supporting advocates call since the 1990’s to present day maintain that

women have the right to stay in their own homes following domestic and family violence and the perpetrators should be the ones to leave (Chung et al., 2000).

Having the violence leave is a relatively new shift in thinking over the last decade and can only be made possible by ensuring that a “safe at home” response is entrenched within policy and practices of police, courts and other agencies; and in some states such as Tasmania, has been driven by a legislative framework that supports women and children to live free of violent and controlling partners. Interventions that hold perpetrators accountable for their violence are also an integral part of the solution to preventing further acts of violence and or domestic homicides. These steps require policy and decision-makers to have a clear understanding what constitutes domestic and family violence in its various forms. This not only includes physical violence but a range of controlling and coercive behaviours used by perpetrators to violate, intimidate and harass their partners or ex-partners. The MOU between the police, child protection and the “safe at home” service providers established in the development stage prior to implementation became a key policy driver that informed practice of police when responding a callout of domestic and family violence; and the subsequent referral to the domestic violence support service for follow-up with 48 hours.

Service Responses to Prevent Homelessness

The “safe at home” program now provides a real option for women and children to remain in their own homes where it is safe to do so. Research to date has found that there is far less disruption to women’s lives and they are far more likely to maintain their housing, employment, children’s schooling and social supports within their community (McFerran, 2007c) Women and children who have to leave their homes

as result of domestic and family violence further exacerbates feelings of dislocation from their communities and disadvantages them both financially and socially.

Whilst making a total fresh start away from their community may be the safest and preferred option for some women and children; the decision to stay and defend their homes and *have the violence leave* is often a choice that women wish to explore and programs such as SAH have been developed to respond to this gap in available options. This growing policy interest in the right of women and children to remain in their own homes in cases of domestic and family violence has led both nationally and internationally to the development of service responses designed to prevent their homelessness (Blandy & Spinney, 2011).

Agencies such as the police and domestic violence outreach services agree to work collaboratively in a safe and timely manner to encourage women to seek legal protection, whilst providing case management support for up to twelve months.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the participants' experience and perception of the service; and explore what elements the program contributed to reducing further risks of violence and kept women and their children safe. Whilst there has been some research of "safe at home" models in other jurisdictions of Australia; it is envisaged that this study will provide an opportunity to better understand the experiences of women and children within a Western Australian context; as well as contribute to a larger body of research literature in this area. Data collated from participants has enabled the researcher to gain insight into their experiences and perceptions of the service and examine the types of social responses they received from government authorities, employers, family, friends, neighbours; and non-government service providers.

Whilst the qualitative data collated from the interviews has been used to identify a number of thematic issues, the researcher also found that intangible variables such as the victim's own courage, strength and resistance to stay and defend their homes, their children and their livelihoods; also became apparent during the interviews. Therefore, the researcher believes that in order to honour and validate women's experiences during often what they have described as horrific, stressful and traumatic times in their lives is vital. The researcher heard about the ways in which women and children resisted the violence from the perpetrator, and consequently, this provided a more accurate and true account of the level of violence that took place; and how victims make many attempts to escape and the perpetrator often takes steps to stop victims from seeking help. They do this in many ways, for example, withholding money, car keys, mobile phones and threatening to kill the victim and/or themselves. These accounts of violence must be told and be included in authorities and agency reports as the so called "passive" victim does not exist (Wade, 2013).

9.2 Messages for policy

Advocates have been clear from the beginning that introducing a "safe at home" response was never been about an 'either or' situation in terms of providing less funding for refuge crisis accommodation, but more so it was about increasing the range of options available to women experiencing domestic and family violence. As a social policy response, the "safe at home" approach has also focussed on the rights of victims and consequences for the perpetrators of the violence. Being able to provide this as a viable option for women to remain safely in their own home should not be seen as a one size fits all response, and only be offered as part of an overall

safety and risk assessment conversation with a woman as to what action will assist with keeping herself and her children safe.

9.3 “Safe at Home” as a positive social response

Response-based Practice principles acknowledges that ‘victims who receive negative social responses tend to experience more intense and lasting distress, are less likely to report the violence a second time, and are more likely to blame flaws in their own character for the abuse and are more likely to receive a mental health diagnosis after the abuse has ended, than are victims who receive positive social responses’ (Wade, 2004). Based on this notion, the “safe at home model was developed to ensure that social responses from authorities such as the police and child protection reiterated that victims were not to blame for the violence. It also sought to hold the perpetrator accountable and responsible for their acts of violence. Hence, the importance of using accurate language to describe the violence that has taken place between the victim and the perpetrator within is recorded within police domestic violence incident reports so as to ensure an appropriate referral is made to the specialist domestic and family violence service for follow up support.

This is the cornerstone of information provided by this research that should fully inform and lead to a fairer and more just social response to the victim from the criminal justice system. It should also fully inform courts and magistrates about the violence that took place; and clearly articulate who did what to whom, as domestic and family violence gets reported a “family dispute” or “abusive relationship. This type of language immediately mutualizes the act of violence and equally apportions blame to the victim. This is a misrepresentation of wife assault or sexualized

violence that needs to be challenged and re-examined so as not to become a system response that victim-blames and further minimizes, justifies and excuses the violent behaviour of the perpetrator. This type of approach often results in very lenient fines and/or jail sentences from the justice system and further jeopardizes the safety of the victims.

We need research that provides clear guidance about the effectiveness of the wide range of service responses and interventions to reduce the impact and incidence of violence against women. Although research in this area has the most comprehensive evidence base, developing good practice principles in responses and interventions should continue to be prioritised since it is an ongoing requirement of professional practice and is a primary concern for policy-makers. This context suggests, however, the need for meta-analyses of national and international research and knowledge translation and dissemination strategies that provide clear and concise information to bridge gaps between research knowledge and practice.

The findings of this study clearly indicate that the “safe at home” model has empowered women and children to remain in their own home, where it is safe to do so, without the perpetrator. As a result of the WA national evaluation and findings from this study, the “safe at home” model should be acknowledged as a positive social response and viable option that has provided a valuable contribution to the service system response to victims of domestic and family violence and contributed to the reducing levels of homelessness for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence in WA. The following six areas are based on the findings of this study and considerations for future directions by governments,

researchers, employers and specialist domestic and family violence services:

1. Roll out additional “safe at home” programs in a number of key regions within Western Australia as part of an expansion of this approach, similar to *Staying Home Leaving Violence* in New South Wales.
2. Work collaboratively with the police, child protection and the judiciary to support the provision of legal protection to victims of domestic and family violence applying for violence protection and/or exclusionary orders to enable women and children to remain safely in their own homes.
3. Provide opportunities for practitioners working with victims and/or perpetrators to participate in specific training on identifying and responding to domestic and family violence, with a focus on the micro analysis of the use of language and violence.
4. Explore further research as to the helpfulness of a “safe at home approach for Aboriginal and Torres within Strait Islander Women and their children.
5. Explore opportunities for longitudinal studies with “safe at home” participants to gain further insight into “safe at home” participant’s lives, post case management support.
6. Encourage employers to adopt workplace policies and practices for responding to employees who are victims of family and domestic violence to ensure they are adequately supported to maintain their employment, so as to remain safe at home and safe at work.

There has been considerable progress from the early 1970s when women and children had to escape to squats and sub-standard housing to escape violence. However, demand for housing still outstrips supply; the “safe at home provides an important option for some groups of women. The women’s responses are indicating that the WA “safe at home” initiatives are a valuable contribution to the response system. The outcomes achieved from the program in WA, include reaching a wide number of families and changing women’s lives, increasing their ability to participate in education and workforce, resulting in less disruption in their lives and that of their children. In order to progress options such as “safe at home” in WA, it requires the ongoing commitment, support and leadership that we have seen since its introduction in 2010.

Dealing with major change from that of protection and sheltering of victims to one that support women to live as full citizens with the right to remain ‘safe at home’ is reliant on ‘buy-in’ at the highest level of leadership within government. Key agencies such as the police, child protection domestic and family violence service providers have worked collaboratively to empower victims of violence to remain in their own homes without the perpetrator.

The overall efficacy of the model suggests that “safe at home” is positive social response that has reduced the impacts of domestic and family violence, homelessness and social disadvantage of women and their children. The program’s underlying assumption challenges the notion of women being responsible for managing men’s violence by escaping the family home. Instead it aims to ensure women’s and children’s safety, by supporting and empowering women to live as full citizens, and

remain at home without the perpetrator. Enabling women and children to remain in their home also provides a range of social, economic and health benefits to the whole community, such as reducing women's homelessness and potential poverty; keeping children out of the child protection system and with their non-violent parent.

The importance of this cannot be underestimated and as a state and nation if we are committed to bringing about the changes required to stopping domestic and family violence, homelessness and the social disadvantage of women. Programs such as "safe at home" must be seen as viable option and right that can be enforced, as a means to women and children being able to live safely and free from violence within their homes, places of employment and their communities. This can be achieved by ensuring there are legislative, policy and practice approaches that support having the violence leave.

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APPENDIX A

An Inquiry into Women's Experiences of the Safe at Home programs in Western Australia

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Angela Hartwig. I am currently undertaking this research for my Masters in Philosophy (Occupational Therapy & Social Work) at Curtin University through the School of Health Sciences. I have also worked in the area of domestic and family violence for the past twenty five years and welcome the opportunity to hear about your experiences as clients of the Safe at Home programs in Western Australia.

The Safe at Home model now provides another viable option for women to consider in addition to leaving their homes to escape domestic and family violence. In Western Australia, as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, six Safe at Home (SAH) program began operating as of 1 July 2010. This aim of this research is to gain insight from a client's perspective into what elements of the Safe at Home program may have assisted in keeping you and your children safe and/or contributed to reducing further risks of violence.

If you agree to participate, the interview should take no more than one hour. I understand that discussing issues relating to your experience of domestic and family violence may be distressing, so you will be given information about follow-up support, should you require this after the interview. When we have finished the study you will be advised of the results by letter and invited to attend a launch of the final report. All the information gathered during the interview will be coded and non-identifiable. The data will be stored in a password protected software file for the length of the analysis and permanently destroyed after 5 years.

This research has been approved by the Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Committee. I acknowledge your personal obligations and limited availability however your participation in this research will be greatly appreciated. Nevertheless, your participation is voluntary and therefore you have the right to withdraw at any time during the research without consequence. My email is: ahartwig@womenscouncil.com.au

If you are not happy about the way the research is conducted and want to lodge a complaint, you can contact my supervisor and/or the Human Research Ethics Committee

The contact details for my supervisor are:

Dr Carolyn Harris Johnson

Telephone: 9266 4360

Email: Carolyn.Johnson@curtin.edu.au

Human Research Ethics Committee

Curtin University, GPO Box U1987

Perth WA 6845

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor at any time should you choose to do so.

I greatly appreciate your consideration to be involved in this research and hope you decide to participate. All participants will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal record.

APPENDIX B

*An Inquiry into Women's Experiences of Safe at Home programs in
Western Australia*

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I _____

(Print Name)

The purpose of the study into the Safe at Home (SAH) programs has been explained to me. I understand it and agree to be interviewed regarding my personal experience as a client of the SAH program. I have read the information sheet and the opportunity to have any questions I had about the research to be answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that this research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee, and that my participation is voluntary; and that I am permitted to withdraw at any time without consequence. I accept that all communication in my interview is to be voice recorded, transcribed and kept on a protected software file for 7 years and after such time the file will be permanently destroyed. I also acknowledge that any data that could identify me will be removed from the final report or any publications pertaining to the research.

I understand that I am permitted to contact either the researcher or the supervisor should I choose to do so.

Therefore, I agree to participate in this research.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witnessed by:

Researcher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Participant's experience:

1. Can you tell me how you came to be involved in SAH? Did you seek help earlier? If yes, what and why didn't it work? If no, why not?
2. Can you tell me about the services you received from SAH?
3. Which service responses did you find the most useful?
4. What other services or responses could have been helpful?
5. How were you involved in assessing your levels of risk and safety needs?
6. What security measures were put in place through the SAH program?
7. On a scale of 1-10 how safe did you feel when you were referred to SAH?
8. How safe do you feel now?
9. What factors of the SAH program assisted with you keeping you and your children safer?
10. Are there any other factors that assisted with reducing further risks of violence?
11. How has the violence affected your children?
12. What would have helped you to deal with this?
13. Did you experience any further threats or acts of violence from the perpetrator?
14. Have there been any safety concerns for your children on contact visits?

Participant's perception of service:

What does 'safety' (being safe) mean to you and your children? How do you define it?

How has your life and that of your children changed as a result of remaining in your own home and having the violence leave?

Any areas that you could recommend for improvement:

Do you have any suggestions or ideas on how the SAH program could be improved for you and your children?

Would you recommend the SAH program to other women as an option?