

Raped by a Partner:

a research report by

Women's Health Goulburn North East, supported by

Upper Murray CASA

SUSIE REID

Good morning, my name is Susie Reid I am the /Executive Officer of women's Health Goulburn North east. This morning I feel will be an emotional one for all of us.

Emotional and possibly confronting for a whole lot of reasons. Emotional for the women who are here and who have told their very powerful stories. Emotional for Deb Parkinson our researcher who has worked on this research for over 2 years and for the workers who supported her. Emotional because it's the end of one journey and the beginning of the next. It was never our intention to leave this piece of research gathering dust on a shelf

And finally emotional for all who are attending today and who will hear real women telling real stories.

On with the speech:

Rape within marriage is no longer private terrain. The intention of this research is to unequivocally state this fact to the men who are raping their partners; to the women who feel they must submit; and to every person in our workforce and community who is complicit in allowing the misconception of 'private terrain' to linger. Rape is a crime. Rape within marriage or an intimate relationship is a crime.

The law is clear:

Sub-section 62(2) of the Crimes Act 1958 states:

'The existence of a marriage does not constitute, or raise any presumption of, consent by a person to an act of sexual penetration with another person or to an indecent assault (with or without aggravating circumstances) by another person. (The Crimes (Amendment) Act 1985 s 10)'

So why did WHGNE do this research?

Our previous research into women leaving violent situations, 'A Powerful Journey', alerted us to the issue of partner rape. When we went looking for existing research, we found a gap in the evidence base, particularly in relation to Aboriginal women and rural women; and to its prevalence. The research we found tended to address domestic violence or sexual abuse generally but not by a partner.

Partner Rape is not recognised as a serious problem. It appears that it's often not even recognised at all. No research can state how many men are convicted for partner rape; and little is known about how workers respond to a women disclosing partner rape. This doesn't mean that it doesn't happen.

One recent book, '*Real Rape, Real Pain: Help for women sexually assaulted by male partners*' gathered stories from 30 women in the US, England and Australia. It described the problem and pointed to ways women could recover. We gave a

copy to each of the women who participated and it was a fantastic way for them to hear that they were not alone in their experience of partner rape.

However, we felt that research was needed to move the focus from the individual woman to the society that allows men to rape their partners – apparently with impunity. Too often, the violent man becomes invisible as we wonder why she doesn't just leave. Well, she stays because of disability, exhaustion, trauma, pregnancy and mothering, complete erosion of confidence and self-autonomy and fear of further violence. But, surely the real question is, 'Why doesn't he stop?'

Why are there so few societal consequences for his illegal actions? Why don't we [as workers and as people] care enough to recognise partner rape as existing and then censure it? Deakin University's Bob Pease writes that, although we may not be **perpetrators** of violence, we are **perpetuators** when we do nothing and say nothing. By pretending it does not exist, we are complicit in partner rape going unnoticed and uncensored.

The aim of this research was to recognise and address partner rape. To do this, we undertook qualitative research which involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with:

- 21 women
- 23 health and community sector workers, including 7 working with Aboriginal communities, and
- 30 police – from uniformed branch, the Criminal Investigation Unit and SOCAU (the sexual offences and child abuse unit)

The location was the Goulburn Valley and north east of Victoria. Consultations were held in and around Seymour, Shepparton, Wodonga, Benalla, Wangaratta, Myrtleford and Numurkah.

To be involved in the research, the women had to be aged over 18 and to have named their experience as rape. Some responded to local newspaper advertisements and some contacted us, after seeing a flyer at various counselling agencies. Workers were invited by telephone to participate.

And what do we know about the 21 women who told us their stories. Well:

- They came from a range of settings including main rural centres, small towns and farms.
- The age range was between 27 and 70 with a median age of 51.
- Four women were Aboriginal. One woman married an Aboriginal man and lived in his community for 11 years; two women migrated to Australia in their early 20s.
- For five women, the rapes were recent with two cases before the courts. For the other 16 women, the rapes took place more than 5 years ago – but were still raw in their impact.

Ethics approval was gained from:

- The Centre's Research Ethics Committee, registered with the National Health and Medical Research Council, and
- The Victoria Police Research Coordinating Committee.

We believe this research has the great potential to raise awareness – amongst all of us – of the experience of rape within relationships, drawn from the lived experience of women in rural and remote communities, and to offer recommendations for improved service provision from health and community services.

We are privileged here today to have some of the women who participated in this research. Five women will speak, and others are audience members.

But first, I would like to introduce Marie, who is a La Trobe University student, and student-teacher at *Sharyn Hill School for Speech and Drama* in Albury. Marie picked up the partner rape postcard at uni, and found the words she read deeply moved her. She was inspired to interpret the issue dramatically to reach people in a different way.

MARIE'S VIGNETTE WILL SOON BE AVAILABLE FROM HERE

JANET

I had been married four times. My first marriage lasted seven years and began when I was 16 years old. I had five children by the time I was 23.

'When we were leaving the hospital [after I'd given birth] he said to me, "Well, sex is normal after you've had a baby. I mean you won't feel anything after you've stretched that far". I'd been having lectures from the doctors. I was to abstain for six weeks at least to make sure I wasn't going to get pregnant immediately. He was there when that conversation took place. He just completely ignored it.

'The one we just talked about was the first husband and he raped me continually. The second husband raped me a couple of times. The third one raped me once only.

'[With second husband] We started a sexual relationship and it was fine until the ring went on the finger. After that, there came a time when I said no. I was tired. I had five kids, a sick husband, I was sick myself, and I had a daughter who knew when something was on. This time I just said no, and it was the worst thing I could have done because from then it was worse. I learned fairly early on that if I said no, I was going to get it anyway so I might as well lie back and enjoy it as the old saying goes. I recognised it was rape, and I also recognised it as rape when you wake up in the morning and they're already doing it. There's no consent. No, "Do you want it?" It's just happening. What do you do then? That's probably when I recognised it as rape in marriage.

JACQUI

I want to thank everybody who was a part of this research project especially the woman who shared their stories. I found sharing my story for the research was very empowering and it has given me the power to speak about the sexual assault to others and not feel ashamed of myself because it happened. It is amazing how many people do not see this as an issue and how much damage it does to the woman involved – low self esteem, feeling we have to do it as it is part of the relationship we have chosen to be in.

A very empowering situation for me has been my friendship with a couple of police persons in Wodonga and sharing my story with them, they have made me feel so powerful for the simple fact that they believed me, they told me to stand up and let people know this is happening. I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart.

In my work I see woman constantly who are being sexually assaulted by their partners, but they are not recognizing it as a crime – I have been their with one woman as she has got help for the issue – but she did not want any police involvement.

We must change the attitudes in society and in the police force about this issue as well as helping to make woman feel more comfortable with reporting to the police.

After spending a couple of hours with the other woman in the research, I feel stronger and I want to thank them for that. I would also like to thank everybody who is here today for recognizing partner rape is an issue in our society and it is about time we stood up as woman and let the world know that this is happening.

KIM

I was drugged and rendered helpless when I was sexually assaulted by my husband. I felt violated, ashamed, and did not know what to do. I had been married to this man for 26 years and believed we had a respectful and honest relationship. We are both well known in the area where we've lived for many years. He was the Governor of a very large International Organisation and seen to be a really good bloke with community interests at heart.

He established and developed, with my help, a very successful business, that is still owned, and I worked, the whole time I was married, for a very large organisation as the Occupational Health Manager.

I was terrified about reporting the assault and firstly sought advice from a solicitor who instructed me to go to the Police. Because of living in a small town with people knowing about this very private issue, I did try to sort the matter out at home but was left with no choice as he reneged on leaving the property.

I reported to the Police and was advised to seek an intervention order for my safety. The next day I was placed on the witness stand for nearly three hours. My treatment in that court that day felt like another assault. I was made to feel dirty and that I was lying. I was accused of being an alcoholic, a drug taker, and trying to get his money. The Magistrate said there was not enough evidence presented at the time and adjourned the case for 6 weeks. I asked the Police prosecutor, 'Where to from here?' He told me not to go back to my home, as in six weeks time, I would certainly not be granted an Intervention Order.

So there I was out of my home of over 26 years.

I raced home, grabbed some clothing and left the house feeling confused and bewildered. I was taken in by friends. We have since been back to court. He pleaded guilty and has been remanded on bail to re-appear in court later in July.

Intimate partner sexual assault is very difficult to prove, my reason for being successful in him pleading guilty was after I discovered he had drugged me, I convinced my doctor to conduct a drug test on my urine. The test result came back with a very high contamination of benzodiazepines. I told my husband that this was the case and he needed to talk to me about it. All the time, I had a tape recorder hidden in my pocket (thank goodness), and he finally admitted to it. There were a lot more contributing factors that we had as evidence, but his admission on the tapes (those precious tapes) was enough for the police to take the case on.

In the courtroom I heard things like ...

'Your Honour; this is a private matter and it does not belong in the court room'.

'This poor man has gone through enough with his public fall from grace in the community and his picture placed on the front page of the newspaper'.

'This is the act of a sad, lonely and sexually frustrated man'.

'She only wanted him out of the house and she wanted a property settlement'.

My client has endured considerable distress after his previous court appearance generated media coverage. '(He's) a person with an exemplary reputation, very well known, who has had the most embarrassing and humiliating, and completely awful fall from Grace'.

His solicitor apologised to me on his behalf, after stating he thought the apology was unnecessary. It meant absolutely nothing to me as he then continued to insult and twist the truth. The apology should have come from the perpetrator.

It appears he feels no shame and seems to be in denial as he continues to lie about the events, even in the court, and to the wider community. To add insult, he was seen at a very public function where he flaunted around with a woman at his side only four days after the court case was publicised on page 1 of the local newspaper.

After the initial courtroom experience, my anger and frustration gave me courage to write a letter of complaint to the Police as they had not explained the court processes to me, and therefore I went into the court totally unprepared for the onslaught. My complaint was followed up by a very professional police woman who visited me at my home. She set up a referral for me to seek counselling from CASA and it was then, and only then, that the healing process, slowly but surely, began.

There have been severe consequences for me as a result of this heinous crime committed against me by my husband. I had to move out of my beautiful home. I have since been diagnosed with depression and hypertension. Earlier, before I had counselling, I contemplated suicide and it was the face of my beautiful grandson

that came as a very strong image. I was driving at the time. I parked the car and sat on the roadside for a very long time and just sobbed and sobbed. I am so grateful for my loving family and beautiful friends around me to support me. I now know that taking my life would serve no purpose and give more pain for everyone.

There is life after sexual assault and I do have so much to celebrate and live for. I have my beautiful family and friends; a new home; very little money; a very old car; but I have my life back and I am safe.

During all this, I am, as well, going through the Family Law Courts to try and get a property settlement.

Living in a rural community where you are well known has its disadvantages. The media actually named me in the press release, and that is against the law - to name the victim - and now my very private life is out there for all to read and make judgment on published issues that were not true or accurate.

When asked by a member of the Police force, would I do this again? My quick reply was, 'Yes, I would!', as this behaviour needs to be stopped at all costs. I have since thought about it, knowing the hell I've been through over the past eighteen months and hope I never have to make that call ever again in my life.

And now, I wonder, if indeed I would say 'yes' in the future. He is still ensconced in the former matrimonial home and hanging onto his precious possessions and his money. All I can say is 'I wish him a long and lonely life'. AND: He does not deserve to have me in his life.

ZOE MORRISON – KEYNOTE SPEAKER (Notes currently not available)

KERRY BURNS

In setting out to research partner rape, sceptical colleagues asked 2 questions:

- What makes it rape?

(its compromise isn't it?)

They said things like:

- ◆ 'Hmm, it's such a grey area.'
- ◆ 'What's the line between rape and just getting it over and done with?'
- ◆ 'You don't feel like it, but you do it for him.'

What makes it rape is a culture of fear and control in the relationship; knowing 'No' is not an option; and that consent is not gained. The law is clear that it's rape when there is no consent. In fact, recent changes have increased the onus on the man to give 'thought to whether the person is consenting or might not be consenting'.

All 21 women in our sample were raped according the legal definition:

- 17 women **said no**
- 1 could not because she was unconscious
- Another because she was drugged by her husband
- One cannot remember because she has Post traumatic stress disorder, and has lost chunks of her memory
- One said she did not say no – because she had learned it was either rape or a beating. Rape was quieter and would not wake the children

The second question colleagues asked was:

'What's the prevalence?'

(It would be one in a million, wouldn't it?)

So, how prevalent is it?

Police disagreed about prevalence. Health professionals disagreed. Perhaps it comes down to an individual's willingness to hear?

If we look to statistics,

The ABS 2005 Personal Safety Survey reported 0.4% of women experienced rape by a current partner since the age of 15. We do not accept this figure.

The survey has significant limitations. It excluded remote Australians, and excluded rapes from more than 20 years ago – so only women who were raped within the past 20 years were counted. Nine years earlier,

In 1996, the ABS Women's Safety Survey reported that 10% of women ever in a relationship disclosed an incident of sexual violence in a previous relationship – in our estimation, a more credible figure.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that 0.4% is not credible. It is interesting to note, though that this figure is 15 times the rate of the road toll in Australia! And we care about the road toll.

Why 10% seems more likely than 0.4%

- (i) With very little advertising (once in 13 rural newspapers and word of mouth from regional services) there was no difficulty attracting participants. We had to turn people away.
- (ii) 4 of 23 workers mentioned it happened to them personally
- (iii) 17 of the 23 workers stated it was very common to hear of such experiences
- (iv) Other statistics show high rates of violence against women, e.g. the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) found that:

- o 57% Australian women experience physical violence in their lifetime, and

o 34% experience sexual violence¹

IVAWS was conducted across Australia between December 2002 and June 2003. A total of 6,677 women aged between 18 and 69 years participated. The Aust. Institute of Criminology contracted Roy Morgan Research to conduct this research. As an independent and well respected research company, their task was to ensure the sample was representative.

The final reasons for guessing that prevalence is more like 10% are that rape is under-reported and conviction rates are low. Specifically,

- (v) The IVAWS survey states that women under-report partner rape
- (vi) ABS (2006) estimates only 19% of ALL sexual assaults were reported in 2005
- (vii) From 2000-2003 in Victoria, police laid charges in only 15% of cases (Heenan & Murray, 2007)
- (viii) Conviction rates were 4.2% in Victoria between 97-99 (Heath, 2005) for all sexual assaults. Rates are not known for partner rape.

There is indeed: Nowhere to go, no-one to tell. There is such shame surrounding rape, and this is exacerbated in partner rape. More than half the women in our sample talked **to no-one** about what was happening to them. Of the 21 women interviewed, only 6 actively sought help from anyone at the time of the rapes. This is a profound failure of our society.

Perhaps the most startling thing we learned from every woman in this research is they believe their partner would not have recognised his actions as rape – even in the most stark circumstances. For example, where one woman had her back broken by her husband anally raping her; where another woman thought she was going to die as her husband held a pillow over her face while raping her; and when, after 12 months in a happy relationship, a young woman's partner raped her in a public park and then incarcerated her for two weeks. When she escaped, he stabbed her several times at the railway station. She was helped by the quick action of railway employees. None of these women thought the man would recognise his actions as rape.

What kind of man does this? It seems they are mostly 'Good citizens and great blokes'

- The men were farmers, business men, military officers, shift workers, tradesmen, health workers, fruit pickers and two held very senior and respected posts within community service organisations
- 16 of the 21 women also suffered other forms of violence from their partner
- 15 woman lived in fear or felt threatened by their partner

¹ 'Sexual violence' Includes any form of non-consensual or forced sexual activity or touching including rape. It is carried out against the woman's will using physical or threatened force, intimidation or coercion. Includes sexual touching.

- 9 women still do

Why don't these men see it as rape? The women thought he saw it in these terms – that women are their property and sex is their right:

- She's mine
- I married her
- I'm entitled
- I work hard
- I can do what I want with her

Do community leaders agree?

'[It's basically] domestics with a bit of sex thrown in.... No, men would not call their actions rape, they would classify it as their right. If they had to be 100% honest they'd say, 'I did take advantage of her but stuff it, she's my wife, it's Saturday night ...'
(Police officer)

We heard from health professionals and women that police, ministers, nuns and doctors knew what was happening and did nothing.

Worse, we heard that women who spoke up would suffer recriminations from their local community – the smaller the community, the worse the recriminations.

'One woman in a small country town was raped very badly by her husband. She told the local minister and the local police about it and they counselled her to keep her mouth shut, and that if she revealed this it would affect a lot of people in the community and she would get a very bad name.' (HP #9)

'It's the reaction from police and people in high places – you think the whole point of them being there is to help and you'll be treated fairly and all that sort of thing, and then ... they doubt you ... [you're] turned away and not believed.' (HP #7)

DEBRA PARKINSON

Aboriginal women

Professor Mick Dodson said:

"Let me make the point that violence is not and never was part of Aboriginal tradition ... We have no cultural traditions based on humiliation, degradation and violation." Professor Mick Dodson, ANU Institute for Indigenous Australia, Address to the National Press Club, 'Violence, Dysfunction, Aboriginality', 11.06.2003

Aboriginal people have a common cultural history of suffering, loss and injustice. Historic and current discrimination against Aboriginal people from police, health professionals and other figures of authority can prevent their reporting partner rape or seeking help from mainstream agencies. A different style of work is required to work effectively with Aboriginal communities. There is a great need for more Aboriginal workers. One said:

"We've been through a lot. With most Koori families, there's always something in their family ... from way, way back that has impacted on us in such a way that we go through all this stuff. It's a cycle that's gone around and around and nothing's really changed. The only way it's going to change is if people like me come to work in mainstream organisations ." (HP #7)

As well as more Aboriginal workers, there is a need for greater sensitivity from non-Aboriginal workers.

"With Koori women, when they do go to a mainstream organisation, it's the way people look at them and talk to them that turns them off. They'd rather just walk away than have to deal with that sort of stuff." (HP #7)

The four Aboriginal women in our sample had similar experiences to the other 16 women. Three of the four had non-Aboriginal partners. One of the 16 other women was married to an Aboriginal man. Race does not give us a different story. The data certainly did not lead us to thinking Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women are affected differently by partner rape.

The Police

In recent years, the Victorian Police have implemented changes to improve the response to women experiencing family violence and sexual assault.

SOCA units (where police specialise in Sexual Offences and Child Abuse) have increased police understanding and sensitivity over many years now. Newer changes are that:

- Family Violence liaison officers are located at all 24 hour police stations and there are 14 Family Violence advisors in Victoria
- There is a new *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence* and a new code for *Sexual Assault*
- The proposed *Family Violence Bill 2007* will be enacted in December this year. It strives to prevent family violence, maximise safety, and promote accountability of the violent perpetrators.

With few exceptions – only 2 of 30 – the police we spoke to indicated that partner rape **is** a serious crime.

Yet there are complicating factors in its investigation.

In a stranger rape case, DNA proof of sexual activity is evidence. But DNA proof is no evidence at all in a relationship because defence can argue that consensual sex occurred. If the woman is called as a witness in a case against her husband, she has the right **not** to give evidence against him. In these circumstances, police no longer have a case – they have lost their witness.

Put simply, it is harder to prove partner rape. Police may fully support a woman in her allegations and believe her, but the Director of Public Prosecutions will only take a case to court if it can be won.

Of the 21 women

- Only 4 went to police regarding rape at the time. It is heartening that three cases made it to court. In one, the charges were dropped after the perpetrator said he would never do it again and agreed to go to counselling. In another, the case was heard and he was found not guilty – this was after about two years of preparations and adjournments. In the third, there was a guilty verdict, now awaiting sentencing.

17 women did not go to police. Some did not trust the police. Some wondered what police could actually do. Some felt shame and did not want their private suffering to be made public. Several women mentioned they had closely followed rape cases that had been reported in the media, and after seeing the way the cases were handled, they decided not to pursue legal action.

'I thought of taking him to court for rape. It was in the mid '80s. Because of the nature of it, I wasn't discussing it with anyone... At the time, there was a case in the courts and in the media of a woman who had taken her husband to court for rape within marriage. Given the public exposure, I thought, she's a tough cookie dealing with that. On one hand, this needs to be in the public realm, but on the other it's such a private thing you don't want others to know ... The guy was acquitted. Why would you put yourself in that position, with that exposure in the courts, recounting that experience? It's the whole trauma of going through the court. Then what?'

The police reiterated these concerns, citing the length of time before reaching court, and the damaging treatment of women once in court.

We asked police if they would advise someone they loved to report partner rape. Only six of the 30 said they would advise to report.

The main reasons suggested by police for women not reporting are fear of not being believed; a misconception that there is no rape in marriage; self blame;;concern for children; the hardship in establishing a new home and a new life; and fear of escalating violence

Those who do report, do it out of concern for other women; to hold the man accountable for his violence; and to say what's happened to them – and be believed.

It is logical that reports of historic partner rape are more common:

- The barriers to immediate reporting are no longer there
- Children have grown
- The relationship has ended
- Elements of fear and control have reduced, and
- The legacy of time passing means that women realise they were not to blame and are stronger within themselves

While SOCAU officers have in-depth understanding of sexual assault – officers from the uniformed branch and the Criminal Investigation Unit understood and emphasised the importance of believing the woman. One said the single most important reason women don't report partner rape is the fear of not being believed.

It follows then, that the attitude of individual officers in being open to hearing about partner rape will determine whether women tell them or not.

One uniformed police officer said, 'I don't think I've ever been involved in intimate partner allegations of rape. I was in the CI (criminal investigation unit) for a long time. In all my experience, I don't think I've ever had one'.

Another CIU officer said, 'We see so much of partner rape, a fair bit of it happens. I don't think the community is aware of how many sexual assault offences occur against women and children'.

The health professionals

Many health professionals acknowledged their own reticence to address partner rape. At one end of the spectrum, one women's health nurse said she never came across it. At the other, several workers came across it so often they had sought professional development to deal with it – both for themselves and for their clients.

Rape is a dangerous word. There is controversy about whether workers should use the word, 'rape'. Inconceivably, this reluctance emanates even from within the domestic violence field. If women are affirmed in their euphemisms – *that 'he had his way', 'he took me', it was just 'something that happened'* – by individual counsellors and health professionals, and this approach is sanctioned by the very sectors that are meant to work to stop violence against women, nothing changes. The man continues on, believing his criminal actions to be nothing more than his conjugal rights. The woman continues on, thinking it is her role to be abused. The status quo is preserved.

Some health professionals felt using the word 'rape' was an assault to an already vulnerable woman and could further erode her sense of self. Others said they would be complicit in denying the existence of partner rape if they didn't name it for what it is. They believe naming it can be empowering for women.

We believe the workers who refuse to pick up on signals from a woman seeking help deny her an opportunity to address rape by her partner. They leave her alone with the consequences of her partner's violence. They confirm that she indeed has no-one to tell and nowhere to go.

The health professionals described an array of effects on women of partner rape: agoraphobia; self-harm; low self-esteem; depression; anxiety; and suicide ideation.

Health professionals said they wanted:

- Training in partner rape
- To understand the concept of it as a crime
- The theory of how it plays out in a reluctance to disclose or report, or even leave.
- To know the questions to ask and the actions to take with women disclosing partner rape

Rurality, Complicity, Patriarchy

This research is particularly interested in rurality as a factor. A culture of violence against women is nurtured by the combination of rurality, complicity and patriarchy.

Patriarchy allocates particular roles to people based on gender and values these roles differently. The power structure is based on gender. Within patriarchy, women are seen to be lesser and subject to the will of men. Patriarchy is strong in country towns and strongest in isolated rural areas.

"I initially came out to the country after doing a Masters degree in mental health and I specialised in rural counselling ... I would say most of the women I counsel, it's for the effects of abuse. I think the drought exacerbates it but it's the culture, the patriarchal 'women have their place' which is to meet the sexual needs of men and raise the children and clean the house. Women are very, very silenced here."
(Health professional #9)

A health professional we interviewed said:

"We don't have zero tolerance here ... We have 100 per cent tolerance of violence." (HP #12)

Our findings confirmed other research showing that increased isolation means increased risk of violence for women. There is more opportunity for entrapment and monitoring and a greater prevalence of conservative attitudes towards gender roles. To exacerbate this, there are few support services for women in rural and remote areas, and the ever-present 'tyranny of distance'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations emerged from this research in six broad categories.

1. Know partner rape exists
2. Name it as rape
3. Educate health professionals and community members in how to respond. You can do this in just four steps.

1. ASK: Are you safe within your relationship?
2. NAME IT: What you've just described to me is rape and it's a crime.
3. RESPOND: Give contact details of the local CASA, Domestic Violence Service and Victoria Police SOCA Unit
4. FOLLOW UP: 'Last time you spoke about your safety. I'd like to know how you are now.'

4. Hold men accountable

We have to stop ignoring partner rape and finally hold these men to account for their criminal behaviour. They should be under no illusion that what they are doing is acceptable. It is irresponsible to allow conditions in which women and their supporting friends and family are left to contemplate how to find justice.

5. Prevent it

As parents and community members, we have a pivotal role in bringing up young men and women to understand what makes a healthy relationship. We need to model it, to state it, and to live it. The message for children is simply about respect.

The final category of recommendations is to

6. Increase services to rural areas

This research points to a stark deficit in services for rural women.

We need:

- more rural police officers and SOCAU officers
- more access to counselling services, particularly after hours and telephone
- more trained Forensic Medical Officers or forensically trained nurses,
- and we need accessible rehabilitation programs for sexually violent men.

Today's event launches the report, and launches the implementation of these recommendations. This gathering begins the awareness raising. We are left in no doubt that partner rape exists and we know that it's a crime that does great harm. From today, let's give women somewhere to go and someone to tell.

ELIZABETH

My husband and I would have been married 24 years in October.

Up until 3 years ago I believed that I was a very lucky woman in this day and age as we see and hear of some of the terrible things that are happening in society.

I was married to a wonderful man who really loved and respected me. He was happy with our life together. We had a good marriage – love – trust, open and honest with each other.

What more could a woman want?

My Husband:

- Respectable family – the old school (Landed Gentry)
- Money and respected position in the community
- Local Government
- Rotary – Paul Harris Fellow

- Citizen of the year
- Never ever raised a hand to me or was violent or abusive
- Loving and thoughtful (Frugal, but none of us a perfect)

My Background:

- Hairdressing Salon for many years in Mooroopna
- Horses - racing and breeding (very successful)
- BA Degree – Local government
 - Councillor – Shire President
 - Commissioner
- BPW – Woman of the year
- Victorian Award for Breeding/racing
- Many and varied positions in the community
- Respect!

A successful – stable – happily married couple!

That night:

I confronted him over an affair. He pushed me. I woke up in my bed with a towel under my head to protect the pillow from the blood. He had had sex with me. I know he had. And there was a cup of coffee beside the bed. He use to always leave me a coffee.

The Aftermath:

- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Guilt / shame / self blame
- Sleepless nights
- Always tired
- Crying
- Depressed – I just wanted to die – go to sleep and never wake up

Post traumatic Stress & acute depression

Doctor:

My description - "He had his way with me." The doctor said "Its rape"

Community:

Acceptance, that's the way he behaves

Police:

Aware of his behaviour but hands are tied - 'the system' - reports - but victims to afraid to press charges - money - position - power.

Friends/Acquaintances:

Don't get involved

Family:

His family - "We don't want to know"

My true friends - I found that I could count the number on my hands and I treasure them - but nothing was done.

Conclusion:

I believe that Society and my friends let me down.

How would I have acted if I had been aware of the happening to someone I knew?

I don't know!

However

I know now what I would do.

Therefore -

It is now up to us to speak out and make the broader community aware of this unacceptable behavior which can have such a devastating effect on our lives.

There **are** things that we can do!

It will **not** go away if we ignore it!

It is not acceptable behavior!

JULIA

I was married for one year and three days when I left my husband and took my five month old child.

I would tell him to stop and he wouldn't. I would tell him, ask him not to and he just didn't care. I'd be crying, screaming and yelling for him to stop hoping that one of the neighbours would complain and come knocking on my door but no body ever did. I said no, telling him to stop, telling him it hurts. He repeatedly did it when ever he wanted. It wasn't once or twice or even three times. It was constant. He knew it hurt. I told him it hurt. He was really rough. It wasn't like a love thing. It was rough and if I didn't cooperate he would just hurt me more. In the end I'd just lie there and cry and he would do what he wanted, because if I struggled he would just hurt me more. It happened heaps.

My biggest problem was getting other people to believe me and say, 'This is wrong you don't have to take this'. I believe that the way to changing people's attitudes is through education and if you think that your opinion cannot make a difference consider this:

In counselling my husband said, 'There's nothing wrong with my marriage. It's perfectly normal.

A family member said, 'If you don't give him what he wants he will go some where else. You just have to put up with it'.

The doctor who I trusted said in front of my husband, 'Women are built for sex. It shouldn't hurt and if it does it won't hurt for long'.

The church that I was going to at the time said, 'Pray for him'. I said, 'But I think he is going to kill me". Their response was, "Well, at least you will go to heaven then."

And the Neighbours just did not want to get involved.

As a Christian I found this very hard to take. Where was the love? My experience did not make me give up on God but it did make me give up on people for a long time. I was so afraid, lonely and heart broken. I didn't know that help was out there and everywhere I turned people just didn't believe that rape within a marriage was wrong or existed. If just one of the people had have stood up for me things would not have got so bad.

I got out when my child was 5 months old and it was an interesting observation that when he thought that someone was hurting me or getting me upset he would scream his head off until they stopped whatever they were doing. Violence in the

home affects the children no matter how old they are. And if you think they do not know what is going on, then think again.

People only started to believe me when he slipped up in public in a big way. We were at a family birthday party and he got drunk. He then showed everyone his true colours and got violent and abusive. People then started to ask, 'Is he always like this?' And I said, 'Yes'.

I have a history of Epilepsy and when I found that I was pregnant I went off the drugs so I would not hurt my unborn baby. I started having seizures again and was not allowed to drive. As a result I lost my independence and ability to get away on my own. As soon as I was offered help I planned my escape. I could not store boxes because my husband would get suspicious. So I bought a roll of garbage bags and hid them. As soon as I knew in advance that he would be out for the day I called the people and they came with a small trailer on their car. We just stuffed things in garbage bags and the only furniture I took was baby furniture. This was all done very quickly as my neighbour rang my husband and told him that his wife was leaving. By the time he got back we were gone.

The only other help I got was when I went to the women's refuge for a couple of days and then spent a couple of months with my mother till I could get a place of my own. I was so stressed that I had a seizure every 10 days for the next six weeks. The women's refuge helped me get out of the lease that I was in with my husband and the court gave me custody of my son and an intervention order. Other than that I was pretty much on my own.

About a year later I started going to counselling, had a different church, a different doctor and started to look people in the eye again. About three years I started working for Uniting Care at the church I am in and found that there are people out there that will listen and help. You just have to know where they are. The amount of people that I came across in similar circumstances, looking for help was huge. That's where education is so important. I just didn't know that places like Uniting care and Upper Murray Family Care were out there.

If you are being raped, you don't have to put up with it. Speak out and if that person won't help, find someone who will.

If your abusive husband does leave because you won't give it to him, all the better.

If you do go to the doctor, make sure your rapist is not with you and request he stays outside for the visit.

And if religious leaders are critical of you leaving the relationship, go to a different church. We worship the same God. The main difference will be the people and their attitudes.

Is your attitude towards abuse going to stop someone else from getting help?