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Family Violence in indigenous Communities; what is the impact of domestic violence on indigenous families

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Submitted for the award of Bachelor of Health Science (Aboriginal Health and Community Development) Honors Degree.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE OF STUDY</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART 1 - WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 DEFINING THE TERMS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 CATEGORISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 WHY DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OCCURE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART 2 - EXTENT OF THE VIOLENCE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 REPORTING VIOLENCE</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 STATISTICS</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART 3 - IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 WOMEN</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART 4 - ABORIGINAL CONTEXT</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 STOLEN GENERATIONS</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITIES</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART 5 - INTERVENTION</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 LEGISLATION</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 THE LAW</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 WOMEN’S MOVEMENT</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 INITIATIVES</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 PERPETRATOR PROGRAMS</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is recognized as the most entrenched and pervasive form of violence in society today. It is also one of the most serious social problems facing our communities, with enormous costs both to individuals and to society. Male violence against female partners is a widespread practice and recognition of this fact is occurring. Women are most at risk of murder inside their own homes: most female homicide victims die at the hands of their male partner, usually after a history of domestic violence. The impact of the violence results in psychological and physical trauma for many families.

Violence is generally seen as a manifestation of patriarchal values of male supremacy involving factors such as ownership, of property, power and control, female subordination, and the institution of marriage and the family. Male violence relates to gender inequity. Thus it is a political issue. It is not only women who are traumatized by the violence. Children do not only observe their parents' conflict, there is increasing evidence that the abuse of children is endemic in Australia.

The political action by feminists in 1974, of taking over an unused house in Sydney bought to the public attention the widespread nature of domestic violence and homelessness, and the inadequacy of mainstream responses to the phenomena. During the last 20 years domestic violence has come to the fore of public consciousness through the establishment of domestic violence services and the setting up of Ministerial Advisory Committees and Councils on the issue. In the 1980s, law reform addressed the
"problem" of violence in the home. This awareness has come about primarily due to the efforts of the Women's Movement, raising the issue of domestic violence. Through the continued lobbying of women, law relating to conjugal behavior now makes "wife battering" a crime. However male violence is increasingly problematic in society today. Regardless of the changing perception and policy development, domestic violence remains entrenched in our communities. Domestic violence is a social problem that has enormous social and economic impacts. All levels of Government and the non-government sector are involved at some level in responding to the problem. The financial costs to society are enormous due to the need to provide crisis shelters, counseling, income support, and other services to assist the victims. Statistics released cannot help but make us recognize the problem of violence in our communities and especially in indigenous communities. Safety from physical attack, harassment or other forms of aggression or abuse is central to a person's sense of well being and is closely associated with fundamental notions of human rights.

As an Aboriginal support worker, within a Women's Refuge for over ten years, I have had the opportunity to work with many women and children who were victims of domestic violence. One of the most difficult things I have found working within a women's service is witnessing the impact domestic violence has had on their lives, and the trauma suffered by women and children who have been abused. Domestic violence has a major impact upon the victims, regardless of the type of violence perpetrated upon them. Women who have lived within an abusive relationship experience more than just physical injuries, they experience mental and emotional trauma and suffer from stress related illness, which
inhibits their ability to be involved day to day activities and in effective decision making, results in a lack of self esteem and often experience a feeling of hopelessness.

Each woman experiences the effects of domestic violence in a different way, and in varying degrees, therefore they react in different ways. Often their reactions are misunderstood, they may be criticized for their lack of parenting skills, or ability to handle their finances. Many women turn to drugs and alcohol to deal with the violence, this in turn impacts upon their lives causing more trauma.

One of the intriguing questions often asked about domestic violence is why women continue to remain in a violent situation. A number of reasons have been identified. Despite the violence many women do not leave a domestic violence situation (or the home which violence is occurring) because they are still emotionally attached to a relationship with the perpetrator. They live in the hope that the violence will stop, for women who are abused, when the violence first occurs they believe that it will not happen again, they may also believe this after it has happened several times. Not all violence is physical and many women may not be aware that they are victims of domestic violence, until they are made aware of it through education programs or from other people. Another major reason women do not leave are the children, they believe that if they leave it will be the children who will suffer and the fear that they may loose them.

Many women in a domestic violence situation lack confidence in their ability to survive within the community alone, they display extreme fear that their partner may discover their whereabouts, they doubt their ability to remain strong enough to withstand pressure from
the perpetrator for them to return or that the perpetrator will be much more violent if she does leave, they also fear that the perpetrator may take the children and disappear. Many women experience feelings of failure because they have left their relationship, and they often have been made to feel that the abuse is their own fault that they have done something to deserve it, after years of being told things like this the women begin to believe it. Women often feel a sense of total hopelessness and this is particularly true for indigenous women who have also had to live with racism and discrimination most of their life.

For many women the violence is part of their normal lives, it is not something that is new to them as it has become an accepted part of their daily life. This is especially true if they come from homes where there has been domestic violence or if they have been abused by their parents. Violence in Aboriginal communities is accepted as part of the norm and because of this many Aboriginal women continue to live in violent relationships.

Because of the numerous barriers encountered by women escaping an abusive relationship, many women stay within the relationship, or return home after a few days away. These barriers include the lack of financial independence and in some rural areas lack of support services and options available to women because of the lack of employment, cheap housing. There may also be the need to become involved in legal issues with regards to protection, such as applying for an Apprehended Violence Order or for custody and access arrangements for children.

Whilst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women’s experiences of domestic violence are
often similar, proportionally more Aboriginal women are victims of domestic violence than non-Aboriginal women. For Aboriginal woman, many of the problem and barriers are compounded by complex social problems. Many Aboriginal women find that members of their local community are related to her or to the perpetrator, or both. This makes it much more difficult for them to flee the violence. Domestic violence for Aboriginal women may have its roots in institutionalization or incarceration, and may be compounded by loss of role, loss of parental role modal, and low self esteem and alcohol consumption. Whilst it can not be attributed to any one cause, domestic violence is increasing.

Due to the growing number of Aboriginal people reporting incidence of abuse, the situation is now gaining much wider attention by the public, government and communities alike. However Aboriginal people have displayed a reluctance to use services provided by the government, even if they had suffered domestic violence or sexual abuse. For many women, leaving the home and seeking assistance requires a great deal of courage, this in turn, adds to the impact the violence has already had upon them.

At present there are 55 refuges in New South Wales whose specific focus is on the support and advocacy of women and children escaping domestic violence. In the last few years there has been an increase in the number of refuges that are Aboriginal specific. The aims of these services is to offer all that other refuges offer but also meet the cultural needs of Aboriginal Woman and Children

**STRUCTURE OF STUDY**
This study will investigate domestic violence in Indigenous communities today.

- Part one will focus on what is domestic violence? It will attempt to define the terms of and categorize domestic violence and the factors contributing to domestic violence including alcohol and other drugs and the current economic situation of Indigenous people,

- Part Two will examine the extent of domestic violence. It will look at the level of domestic violence and statistical data

- Part Three will focus on the impact of domestic violence and what impact it has on women and children.

- Part Four will explore the historical context of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities, through the stolen generations and in contemporary communities.

- Part Five will review current legislation and law, in relation to domestic violence.

- Part Six will look at different responses by women’s service and Government Departments.

An important factor of the study is the overall impact the violence is having on Aboriginal families, and in particularly the extended family, most importantly on women and children.

What are indigenous people doing to address violence in their communities?
METHODOLOGY

The study is based on a review of published literature on domestic violence in both “mainstream” Australian and Aboriginal communities. Whilst there is a substantial amount of literature on “mainstream” domestic violence, from a diverse range of fields including psychology, sociology and women’s studies, there is a paucity of research literature on domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. Much of our knowledge of this field is derived from a few key studies and from what is known as “gray material” that is material in the form of advice to women from services, and relevant pamphlets, electronic media, and reports etc.

The study was carried out during 1999 and involved extensive library research in Fisher Library and the Law Library at the University of Sydney and Charles Stuart University library and Latrobe University. Resources were also provided from the NSW Women’s Refuge Resource Center, and individual refuges.

The literature search focused on key research questions concerning the impact of domestic violence on families. While much of the literature provided a comprehensive insight into what domestic violence is and emphasized the importance of the problem, few studies presented data which actually measured the extent of the problem. Literature from some international authors was included in this study and well Australian studies of relevance. This study does not deal with all domestic violence and does not only focus on violence in relation to indigenous context. In addition to the lack of quantitative evidence showing the extent of domestic violence in Australia, there is a further problem in relation to our
knowledge of domestic violence in Indigenous communities. Whilst there is a great deal of literature that identifies that violence and in particular domestic violence as a major problem in Indigenous communities, there are few studies that focus’s on the impact the violence is having on Indigenous women and children.

Other challenges in reviewing the literature on the topic was the difficulty in locating the literature. A considerable amount of information regarding domestic violence in Indigenous communities comes from papers presented at conferences and through reports conducted for government bodies or individual services.

PART 1- WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1.1 DEFINING THE TERMS

Domestic violence generally refers to behavior, which results in damage or injury to another person, behavior, which results in any person living in fear of another person’s behavior, violence does not refer to common household disagreements and arguments. Domestic violence was originally known as “wife bashing”. Other terms used to describe domestic violence are ‘Criminal assault in the home’, ‘spouse abuse’ and family violence. Family violence, spouse abuse, wife assault, and wife battering, are all used to mean the same thing. Domestic violence first began to be openly discussed and analysed within the academic, particularly medical and psychiatric, literature in the early 1960’s. At this time domestic violence was viewed as a medical phenomenon. It was not until the late 1960’s and early 1970’s that feminists raised public awareness of the broader issues of domestic violence and violence against women. This feminist interpretation was couched in terms of
the oppression of women. The term ‘domestic violence’ is now commonly used to
describe abuse by male toward a female in a relationship where there is unequal power,
and over the past few years the words “domestic violence have been further defined.

More recently the term ‘family violence’ has been used as an all encompassing term for all
forms of abuse within the family. “Domestic” has been replaced by “family” by many
service providers and funding bodies and the term, is now often used specifically in
relation to Indigenous communities, which have indicated a preference for this term as
more reflective of their experiences. Family violence is a term preferred by Aboriginal
communities because violence in their communities is acknowledged as including spouse
abuse as well as violence between relatives, neglect and abuse of children and elder abuse.

Catalini (1992)

There has been continuing debate within women’s service, regarding the need for a current
definition of violence against women and children. Edgar (1998) suggests that the very use
of the term “a Domestic” indicates both a trivialization of the use of violence and an
ideology which permits behavior inside the family which would be totally illegal and
unacceptable in the public arena. It has been argued that, by broadening the meaning of
violence to include sexual violence, violence against young women, and violence against

men, women’s services do not retain the focus that has been so successful in raising the
women and children' rather than 'domestic violence' illustrates the changes taking place.

The NSW Council on Violence Against Women. (1998), called for the term "violence" to be defined in its position paper on 'Programs for perpetrators'. This paper states the perpetrators of domestic violence use various tactics to gain control, including non-physical violence such as verbal, psychological and financial abuse.

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement and other services which primarily focus their service's to "domestic violence" continue to use the term "domestic violence" or in some cases "violence against women and children" in order to retain the strong identity that has been created regarding the issue and to maintain the results that have been achieved in addressing the violence perpetrated against women and children.

The effects of violence against women and children are immense, and regardless of what term is used, violence against women and children impacts upon all members of the community. Whilst the selection of words to describe the "phenomenon of "domestic violence" is been debated "domestic violence" is still a major problem in society.

1.2 CATEGORISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
Domestic violence is usually classified in the literature into five different categories, physical, emotional/psychological/verbal, sexual, economic deprivation and social isolation. The following definition provides a guide to what is generally meant by the five categories.

- Physical Violence includes punching, shaking, hitting, pushing, grabbing, kicking, biting, breaking bones, bruising, burning, and using weapons including knives, ropes and guns. Violence is not always visible as the abuser often takes precaution to ensure that the physical signs are hidden. Physical abuse can also involve the denial of the most basis human needs, like sleep or food.

- Sexual violence in the home can take the form of rape or other forms of sexual assault: that is forcing sexual acts on someone else. Sexual intercourse with out consent even in marriage, in some case sexual assault can just be the use of threats to force sexual abuse upon another person.

- Economic deprivation involves women been controlled by the mans insistence that her finances are handed over to him, they have no access to bank accounts or any independent means of money to buy even the necessities a woman needs, with out having to ask, sometimes to beg for money. When money is given there is an expectation by the abuser for the women to provided enough food, clothing and other needs for the family with what is a bear minimum, she is then criticized for been stupid and inept when she can not do it.

- Emotional/Psychological abuse refers to words and behaviors, which are intended to destroy or harm another person’s belief in them-selves. This includes verbal abuse, which is aimed at demeaning and disempowering the other person, for example, constant criticism like “you are stupid” and other slurs upon person’s abilities. The
• Verbal abuse usually happens on a regular basis sometimes incessantly and has the effect of eroding a person's belief in themselves and changing their self-concept. Threats are a very common form of verbal abuse, aimed at terrorizing the other person to such an extent that the abuser is in total control. Psychological abuse is particularly debilitating to women who have been socialized to believe that they can only really feel good about themselves if they have a man. (French, M. 1986)

• Social abuse can be psychological or verbal abuse delivered in public. When women are constantly demeaned in front of other people by their male partners, this is social abuse, in some cases women are totally cut off from the rest of the community, this is managed by locking the woman in the house, not allowing her access to money, telephone, transport. For women from non-English speaking background this form of abuse can be totally controlling and disempowering.

1.3 WHY DOES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OCCUR

The causes of domestic violence have not been satisfactorily identified, there are many theories as to why violence occurs. The most prevalent theory “is that domestic violence is a manifestation of male supremacy, whereby the male exerts his authority, by violence if necessary to maintain a hierarchical structure” (Seddon 1994) Domestic violence always involves a victim. McGregor suggests that an important distinction must be made between domestic arguments and domestic violence. She states that it would be true to assume that most relationships are troubled by conflict at some time, which can be caused by financial hardship, sexual infidelity, alcohol and drug abuse, work pressure, jealousy, differences in expectations about relationships, and so forth. These types of conflicts can lead to arguments, however, neither partner becomes an identifiable victim or abuser because neither party has more power or control than the other. (McGregor 1990)
Domestic abuse on the other hand, occurs in relationships where conflict is the continuous result of power inequity between partners and one partner is afraid of, and harmed by the other, which the primary tactics and behaviors individual abusers use in establish and maintain control in their relationships.

Seddon (1994) suggests that whilst a person can suffer one form of violence the majority of women often suffer from a combination of the different forms.

There are numerous explanations for violence in the home, however one factor that is always present in a relationship where there is violence is an inequity of power. Violence in the home is an abuse of power and is perpetrated by the more powerful member against a less powerful member.

Yilo (1993) suggests that despite the apparent complexity of the problem of domestic violence, the most fundamental feminist insight is quite simple: domestic violence cannot be adequately understood unless gender and power are taken into account. She suggests, however that “the feminist perspective has its origins in social action, and its strong practical programs and critiques of prevailing perspective’s”. Carden (1994) reinforces this view and suggests that from the feminist perspective “affirmative social and political action, community education, legal deterrence, and the education, protection and advocacy of battered women and their children take precedence over perpetrator treatment”. Carden (1994:565). Bennett (1997) argues that a primary feminist principal involves that notion of patriarchy, and that patriarchy which she defines, following Tuttles (1986) as “the universal structure, which privileges men at the expense of women. All
known societies, she says are ruled by men, who control and profit from women’s reproductive capabilities”.

Domestic abuse on the other hand, occurs in relationships where conflict is the continuous result of power inequity between partners and one partner is afraid of, and harmed by the other, which the primary tactics and behaviors individual abusers use in establish and maintain control in their relationships.

Bennett also states “that men also control women through the use of violence and intimidation, and that the aim of feminist intervention is to make the woman aware of patriarchy and move to change this control in her life”. Bennett suggests that the Indigenous response is that whilst patriarchy does exist; domestic violence is untimely about manifestation of sexism and racism bought about by colonization. This is supported by Duffy et al (1994)

Aboriginal women do not have a purely gendered experience of violence. That is they have also experienced violence from European systems such as law, government policies, social security, poverty and from European men and women themselves through racism, oppression, rape, discrimination, lack of education and employment. These same factors also impact on Aboriginal men and are considered to be the major factor for domestic violence. Labalister (1990)

Yilo (1993) suggests that the feminist perspectives have been criticized for not fully taking into account the intra- and interpersonal dynamics. She acknowledges that since the feminist theory is very much based in dynamic and practical realities it is not yet fully
developed framework for the explanation of domestic violence (Yilo. 1993; 47)

McGregor (1990) suggests that in Australia, although the law is gender neutral, there is widespread recognition that the victims of spouse violence are overwhelmingly women and that male violence in this context is most usefully defined in broader terms to include a whole range of behaviors which might cause physical or psychological damage to a woman. Therefore any definition of violence in this context needs to consider issues such as the total impact of violence on the victim, not just on actual incidences of physical abuse. (James; 1996 Brand, Unpublished: McGregor, 1990)

**1.4 ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS**

Alcohol and other drugs have often been linked to domestic violence. It is a common perception that alcohol and other drugs actually cause domestic violence. An Office of Status of Women study (1998) claimed, for instance, that over all 60% of Australians believe that alcohol is a major cause of domestic violence (Office of Status of Women. 1988)

A review of the literature suggests that whilst the use of alcohol and other drug is sometime involved in domestic violence situations, there is no single or simple reason for and no clear evidence to support the theory that alcohol and other drugs are the direct
cause of violence. However there is evidence to suggest that alcohol in particular and other drugs exists with, and may be seen to precipitate domestic violence. A 1994 Northern Territory survey called “Living with Alcohol” found that 85 percent of the group surveyed said alcohol is a major cause of domestic violence. However 98% said being drunk is no excuse for the violence. Alcohol was involved in three out of four callers to the Northern Territories Domestic Violence Phone In held in 1983.

It has been argued that domestic violence is significantly a male violence problem that rightly demands strong attention. They have also argued that to act against the substance alcohol is to blame alcohol and therefore deny or dilute the central role of underlying violence by some males to females. There is a very large overlap between domestic violence incidents and alcohol related domestic violence incidents. Research conducted by the New South Wales Police Service (Ireland & Thommeny, 1993) suggests that alcohol related violence is a phenomenon of large proportion. Some 40 per cent of domestic violence incidents were alcohol related. This result is similar to the conclusions of the Western Australian Task Force on Domestic Violence (1989) which found 42 per cent of incidents alcohol-related. Queensland Police Service research (Arro et al. 1992) found that 53.3 per cent of domestic violence incidents were alcohol-related.

A number of major studies argue that the link between violence and alcohol and drugs is
not as strong as commonly assumed. Gelles suggests that with the exception of amphetamines, there is little evidence to support casual connection between drug and alcohol and domestic violence, that the portrait of the alcohol and drug crazed partner or parent who impulsively and violently abuses a family member is a distortion (Gelles. 1993:194)

Australian research by Wallace indicates that as many incidents of domestic violence occur without alcohol as with alcohol. Further more, there are more similarities than differences in the patterns of abuse between men who drink and men who do not. The exception to this is Indigenous and rural communities where alcohol would appear to be present in a much higher proportion of cases where domestic violence has occurred (Wallace. 1993:3)

Domestic Violence Community Workers Kit, (1997:5) states that alcohol is used frequently as an excuse for the violence, but whilst alcohol may make a person less inhibited it does not affect attitudinal elements, which underlie the abuse. A dangerous aspect of the association between alcohol and domestic violence is the belief that if people are drunk they can not be held responsible for what they do. Judges and magistrates have been known to regard alcohol as a mitigating factor in violence. Women become dismopowered by this, as they believe that the man is not responsible for his violence that it is only because of the alcohol, if women believe this they will over look the real issue involved in the perpetration of the violence and hope that the drinking may stop, and therefore the violence will stop. This is a much more acceptable reason for the violence. (McGregor. Date unknown)
1.4 SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Domestic Violence cuts across all socio-economic, cultural and racial lines. Data indicates that family violence crosses all boundaries, Knight and Hatty's research undertaken in ACT found that 27 per cent of victims and 27 per cent of perpetrators had completed tertiary education. Thirty eight per cent were in professional or administrative positions.

For many abused women there is a choice to be made between violence and poverty, if they leave a violent home they may find themselves living below the poverty line and dependent on social security benefits. For many of the women it is difficult to find employment especially if they have children and have few job skills.

For Aboriginal women many of the problems finding employment can be even more difficult. Prejudice against their employment is still a problem, particularly in country areas. According to the Aboriginal Women's task force (Daylight and Johnson 1986) small business employers have demonstrated a preference to employ an Aboriginal with light colored skin.

Linked to economic dependency, is the difficulty of finding accommodation when leaving. If there are no family members or friends who can assist with accommodation, many women will have to rely on refuges and public housing. To someone who may be experiencing the debilitating effects of domestic violence abuse, these barriers often seem insurmountable.
PART 2 - EXTENT OF THE VIOLENCE

2.1 REPORTING VIOLENCE

It is difficult to establish with any great accuracy the extent of domestic violence in Australia. This is primarily the result of two factors. Firstly very limited data has been collected and secondly is the low rate of reporting by those affected. According to (James. 1994). It is estimated that as little as one in ten report, whilst workers in refuges would estimate that one in 50 or one in 100 is more accurate and closer to reality. (Second National Conference on Violence held in Canberra in 1993 as cited in Easteal in 1994). James also suggests that “the reluctance to report incidents to others, especially authorities, stems from a concern to avoid the legal consequences of criminal behavior as well as the guilt and shame usually associated with the experience. This is particularly true for Aboriginal women where the levels of violence, which Aboriginal women and their children are exposed to is extremely high. Statistical evidence shows that there is an over representation of Aboriginal women as victims, relative to the proportion within the general population. In 1990-91, 16% of all female victims of homicide were Aboriginal. (It’s not love it’s violence. 1999)

While there are many limited compilations of statistics on domestic violence topics in Australia, there are no population estimates of the extent of the problem according to the (Australian Institute of Criminology. 1999). Sources of available data include victim phone-
in surveys, research in targeted populations such as hospital outpatients or refuge residents
and collections of various criminal justice and agency statistics. Though these are very informative about both qualitative and quantitative aspects of domestic violence, they provide little information about the extent of the problem in the population as a whole. The Australian Institute of Criminology states that whilst they are aware that there are many others who are affected by domestic violence, there is only anecdotal details of their characteristics and circumstances. They may, or may not be, like the victims we already know about. There are many victims who either choose not to report the abuse for a variety of reasons, or do not even recognize certain behaviors as domestic violence, but the existence of domestic violence does not appear in client records. (Australian Institute of Criminology. 1998) The only national population research specifically targeted at estimating incidence and prevalence of domestic violence is that conducted by Gelles and Strauss in the USA. It is from their studies that the 1in 3 estimate became known. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, (AIC) there is no equivalent research in Australia, however the AIC is developing proposals for the collection of domestic violence incidence data.

2.2 STATISTICS

Accurate statistics are difficult to obtain because of the hidden nature of domestic violence, however anecdotal evidence and statistics from obtainable sources suggests that it is a serious public health problem of epidemic proportions.

Aboriginal Australians face a much greater risk of becoming the victims of violence than
do members of the general Australian population, and possibly up to ten times greater in the case of homicide. In 1990-91 it was reported that the overall homicide rate in Australia was 2.1 per 100 000 of the population, while for Aboriginal persons it was 17.8 (Strang 1992, p. 25).

Statistics regarding domestic violence/family violence grossly under represent the proportion of violence in our Indigenous communities. Research into the exact extent of violence in Indigenous communities has been fragmented at the best, despite the numerous calls from Aboriginal women working with domestic violence. The 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey: Law and Justice, conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics was the last major study to survey the extent of violence in Aboriginal communities, according to this report.

- In the Northern Territory where Aboriginal people make up about 22 per cent of the population, 56 per cent of all homicide victims were Aboriginal.
- In Queensland where Aboriginal people make up about 2.4 per cent of the population, 18 per cent of the victims were Aboriginal.
- In Western Australia where they comprise 2.7 of the population they made up 35 per cent of the homicide victims (Strang 1992, pp. 25-6).

It also revealed that the overall ratio of male victims to female victims in Australia for the year under review approached two to one, whereas 50 per cent of all Aboriginal victims were female.
The available data on incidence and prevalence of victims of battering in the emergency department is derived from studies, which vary in methodology. These studies indicate a Flitcraft 1993, Abbot 1995) In psychiatric settings, the prevalence appears to be even higher, accounting as shown above) for 25% of women who attempt suicide or who use a psychiatric emergency service. 50% of women psychiatric outpatients and up to 64% of women psychiatric in-patients. In one study, 58% of women over 30 years of age who have been raped in the context of an abusive relationship. In 45-59% of child abuse cases the mother is also being abused, highlighting the need to link child protective services with services for battered women. Among battered women who are first identified in a medical setting. Seventy five percent will go on to suffer repeated abuse. (Warsaw, 1993)

The 1996 Women’s Safety Survey measured the incidences of physical and sexual violence against women over the 12 months of 1996. In this survey violence was taken to mean any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault which occurred since the age of fifteen physical assault is use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten a woman. Sexual assault is any act of a sexual nature carried out against a woman’s will through the use of physical force, intimidation or coercion, or any attempts to do this.

On the other hand, threats are included only if a woman believed they were able and likely to be carried out. These definitions are based on actions, which would be considered as
criminal offenses under State and Territory criminal law in Australia. During the 12 months prior to the survey 5.9% of women experienced physical violence and 1.5% had been sexually assaulted incident of violence. Although small in percentage terms, this corresponds to a sizable number of women, 490,400. Women were more likely to experience physical violence than sexual violence (6% compared with 2%). However, 47,100 women had experienced physical and sexual violence on separate occasions. Women were nearly four times more likely to experience violence by a man than by a woman. 22% of women who experienced violence (109,100) reported incidents by more than one perpetrator in the previous 12 months.

Younger women were more at risk of violence than older women. 19% of women aged 18-24 had experienced an incidence of violence in the previous 12 months, compared with 6.8% of women aged 35-44 and 1.2% of women over 55.

PART 3 - IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

3.1 WOMEN

We know that familiar and intimate violence kills, injures and mutilates its victims physically and psychologically. (Knudsen and Millar. 1991). As stated by (Hilberman & Munson, 1978) The complexity of abusive relationships has been recognized since the topic emerged in scholarly journals in the 1970, since then the majority of research has targeted women in refuges and shelters for victims of family violence in an attempt to determine how battered women differ from non battered women (Griffin. 1998)
Some research has examined the combined effects of different forms of abuse such as (Rosen and Martin. 1996) who stated that one problem with research into abuse is that the research often focuses on only one type of abuse, which overlooks the combined effects of different types of abuse. In a study undertaken in the United States of 1,072 male and 305 female soldiers in the US Army, Rosen and Martin assessed childhood abuse and trauma and measured the psychological outcomes in adulthood. They found that females had more psychological symptomology than did the males, and that combined emotional and physical abuse produced the strongest psychological effects. Rosen and Martin also concluded that the adult psychological health is affected by physical and sexual abuse in childhood, and emotional neglect may be linked with reduced ability to relate to others and reduced ability in social functioning.

The general consequence of people living with violence is at a high portion of our population is suffering from a mentally disturbing contradiction between their reality and the reality of the publicized version of family life. McGregor as cited in, “In the Country” (1992). Scott et. al (1995) states that sexual assault within relationships is as devastating and degrading for the victim as being raped by a stranger. Significant trust issues can complicate the recovery process. If a person has been raped by their partner then they may be experiencing other forms of violence such as emotional and physical abuse. (Scott, Walker and Gilmore. 1995).

One of the most vulnerable groups in domestic violence situations are women with mental
health problems. (Foster. 1977) especially when there are accompanying children. In the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission “inquiry into the human rights of people with a mental illness”, highlighted the increased likelihood of women with a mental illness being abused as children and/or living in domestic violence situations. (Webster. 1996)

Researcher such as Smith (1991) suggests that domestic violence itself contribute to mental illness in women, citing mania in particular as being triggered by extreme emotional and physical distress. This is supported by the human rights and equal opportunity commission report, which highlighted cases where women presenting as severely agitated and distressed due to domestic violence, were assumed by clinicians to be psychiatrically disordered. The reason put forward included the women’s reluctance to disclose the abuse and the doctors and psychiatrists not asking questions about possible abuse. (Foster 1997)

Accurate research on incidence of mental illness experienced by Aboriginal women is unavailable, Foster (1997) However it is widely recognized that the history of oppression since colonization has resulted in high levels of mental distress, of particular concern are psychological disorders experienced by Aboriginal people who were removed from their families as children. (Foster. 1997)

Sexual assault in intimate relationships is as devastating and totally degrading for the survivor as is rape by a stranger. The recovery process can be complicated by significant
trust issues, such as trust of oneself and of others. In order to survive sexually violent relationships a person may use a number of strategies to minimize the violence and attempt to decrease their fear and anxiety levels. For example, sexual violence might be the norm in a survivors relationship so they do not identify it as rape, they might believe that it is a normal part of intimate relationships, or that it is their own fault or alternatively it was a result of external factors such as alcohol, stress and/or other drugs.

Sexual Assault within an intimate relationship is a crime. More often than not women are reluctant to report, and whilst the responsibility rests with the offender and not the survivor, women often feel that they are responsible and will be made to feel that they are the offender.

It is not unusual for women who have experienced rape by their partner to also be experiencing other forms of violence such as emotional and physical abuse (Scott, Walker, & Gilmore, 1995)

Battered wives syndrome is a defense that has been developed by the legal profession as a defense for women who kill their violent husbands. It provides mitigating defense for women who have killed their husband to protect themselves or their children from the violence usually these killings are not sudden, occurring after long periods of abuse and violence. These killings do not fit the pre-ordained category of self-defense. (Sneddon.1993)

Many abused women suffer extreme psychological trauma living with continuous fear and uncertainty. The impact of, and the potential for violence, serves as a constant reminder to
them that they must adapt themselves in an attempt to curb their partners behavior, 
Enduring such trauma affects the way they see themselves and the world around them. 
Placed in a position of powerlessness’ they have to maintain a posture of constant 
vigilance, always on guard for what their partner might do next. (Domestic Violence 
Resource Center. 1993)

Being physically and or psychologically abused can strip away a woman’s sanity and self 
worth, and often physical illness. Extricating themselves from domestic violence is a long 
process for most women. (Nunan, C. and Jones, L. 1996)

3.2 CHILDREN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Children who are witnesses to domestic violence are considered the victims of the abusive 
behavior. Studies have shown an overlap between violence toward women and violence 
toward women in at least 40% of cases. Straus et. al (1980) as cited in James (1994). 
James states that child abuse and domestic violence are not new social problems, nor are 
they haphazard or deviant activities. Both are considered an accepted part of our culture, 
James goes on to say that although domestic violence is now politically recognised as one 
of the most entrenched and pervasive forms of violence in our society today, child abuse 
issues have yet to receive the same degree of attention. (James 1994).

In Australia, there has been an historical separation of domestic violence and child 
protection issues. And whilst domestic violence was brought to recognition by the
women's movement in the late seventies, it was through the reports of refuge workers that people first became aware that the children could be severely traumatized by witnessing domestic violence and, indeed, that the children may also be victims of this violence. (James. 1994).

Children who live in a battering environment suffer from an insidious type of child abuse. There may not be physical scars, but the psychological wounds are deep and remain throughout ones life. Children who witness domestic violence are as much victims as the abused parent is. Witnessing violence in the home severely impacts on children in their relationships. Many have a difficult time trusting people and they do not learn problem-solving skills. Domestic violence often creates a cycle of violence where the children grow up to be a batterer. Studies have shown that patterns of violent behavior continue from one generation to the next. Research Strauss et al (1980) suggests that 60 to 80 % of male children witnesses of domestic violence become batterers in their adult lives and about 50% of female adult victims grew up in violent homes. In order to break this cycle; there must be an understanding of how domestic violence impacts on children. Some of the common effects of family violence on children include:

- Death by homicide or suicide.
- Emotional injuries, such as low self-esteem, and depression.
- Aggressive behavior towards others/delinquency. Poor school adjustment (education and peer).
- Alcohol and drug usage.
- Learned victim/aggressor roles.
- Physical abuse and neglect.
- Continuation of violent behavior in their adult relationships.

Not all children grow up to be abusers or abused. There are actions, which can be taken to help break the cycle of violence. A trusting alliance with a therapist who understands
violence promotes stability and normalcy for a child who has lived with chaos. (Bass, E & Davis, L 1988)

A study conducted by Forsstrom-Cohen and Rosenbum (1985) showed that the effects of living in a violent domestic environment persist past childhood and can continue into adult life. It was also identified that "exposure to parental marital violence negatively effects the witnessing children, and that these effects persist into young adulthood and that, males and females are effected differently. The results of the study found that both males and females showed elevated levels of anxiety, with females also demonstrating elevated levels of depression and aggression. However this has not been found in other adult studies, Strauss et al (1980) study of domestic violence found higher levels of aggression in males. They concluded that, "the scale of violence towards spouses seems to rise fairly steadily with violence these people observed as children between their own parents. Quite clearly, the more violence that took place between the parents showed that children tended to be much more violent toward each other. (Strauss et al, 1980).

Throughout the 1980s results from an increasing number of research-based studies, began to confirm and broaden the clinical picture that had emerged regarding children from domestic violence backgrounds. (Mathias and Mertin, 1991). Two studies that examined the impact of domestic violence on boys, were Hershorn (1985), and Rosenbum. (1985) have demonstrated a significant association between family violence and adjustment problems. In both studies it was found that boys witnessing parental violence showed significantly higher behavior problems including disobedience, lying, destructiveness and aggression, as well as emotional distress such as sadness and
worrying. *as cited in* Walker. 1987 stated that as a consequence of her research with a sample of 453 abused women that they were eight times more likely to hurt their children whilst they were living in a violent relationship, than when they were safe from violence. This is supported by Gelles and Steinmetz (1980), who found that mothers and fathers in violent marriages are both more likely than their counterparts in non-violent marriages to be child abusing parents. (Gelles and Steinmetz. 1980)

James (1994) states that there is now more literature emerging on the effects of witnessing violence on children's psychological development. Initially the literature was limited to clinical descriptions of children's behavioral and emotional problems. James states that these reports were from assessments of children in women's refuges. These assessments used a standardized checklist, which measures internalizing problems and externalizing problems. However studies have improved by including appropriate comparison groups and additional standardizing measurers, and by the examination of a wider range of dysfunctional and adaptive behavior. (James. 1994).

**PART 4 - ABORIGINAL CONTEXT**

**4.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

This chapter will now attempt to explore some of the specific issues related to domestic
violence as it occurs with Aboriginal communities. These chapter compares the violence in a traditional or historical context compared with violence in more contemporary contexts which have been described in the starkest terms by writers such as Colin Taltz writes of "a chain of behavior tearing Aboriginal communities apart: suicide, homicide, incest and child molestation" Tatz, C. (1994) ‘A Question of Rights and Wrongs’ in O. Mendelsohn and U. Baxi (ed’s) The Rights of Subordinated Peoples. Oxford University Press. Delhi. Pp160.

In seeking to understand some of the underlying causes of this violence as it relates to women and children in the home, it highlights the ongoing impact of the ‘stolen generations’ on Aboriginal people and communities.

When trying to understand domestic violence in Aboriginal communities, it is important to remember that people and culture vary from community to community, area to area and state to state. This diversity makes it difficult to generalize about the violence; it’s nature and extent. The difficulties in establishing with any great accuracy the exact extent of domestic violence in the general community as pointed out by James. (1996) in aboriginal communities which to date have no accurate measure of the incidence of violence.

Culture encompasses all relationships, knowledge, languages, social institutions, beliefs, values and ethical rules that bind people together and give the collective and its individual members a sense of who they are and where they belong. It is usually rooted in a particular place - a past or present homeland. It is introduced within the family and subsequently reinforced and developed in the community. In a society that enjoys normal continuity of
culture from one generation to another, its children absorb their culture with every breath they take. They learn what is expected of them and they develop a confidence that their words and actions will have meaning and predictable effects in the word around them. (Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1995 page 25 quoted)

According to Reynolds (1981) violence against women and children was practically unknown in traditional Aboriginal society. Men and women shared the food and hunting and gathering roles and thus had equal social and economic importance within society and that when acts of violence against women did occur they received severe punishment and condemnation (Reynolds 1981).

Every culture is continually changing and adapting to new conditions, what can be generalized about the role of women in all pre-contact Aboriginal cultures is that the white men and women were considered equals, with very different elements and very different responsibilities, each was necessary to make life complete. (Catalini, 1992)

The arrival of the European settlers dramatically altered the life styles of Aboriginal women. New elements of material culture were introduced: the cycle of economic activities changed, alien laws were imposed. Perhaps the most significant change in the lives of women was the new standard by which they were judged. The European settlers judged Aboriginal women by their own cultural standards, in which women were considered subservient to men and wives considered to be the property of their husbands. Unable to set aside they're own biases about the role of women. European historians recorded life
for Aboriginal women as merely laborers, submissive and inferior to men. These biases had a broad effect on Aboriginal women in their communities. (McGregor 1986)

In the period of contact history after 1788 conflict over women was a dominant theme in black and white relationships. The predominantly male white settlers raped and abducted Aboriginal women, who were bartered by Aboriginal men. whilst the courage of the men who went forward to meet European’s was clear, it was probably surpassed by that of young women who were frequently dispatched by the male to appease the sexual appetites of the strange and threatening white man (Catalini. 1992)

As a result of the above processes land and people were lost: cultural values and customs were forcefully removed. Aboriginal people were denied access to traditional languages and customs, and forced into missions and onto reserves. Their traditional ways were ridiculed by the white man’s system and their way of life was destroyed by racist policies and white religion. (Reynolds 1981)

4.2 STOLEN GENERATIONS

Government policies saw generations of children stolen from their families and forced to adopt completely alien attitudes and environments. The effects of this practice on both the children and their families have been devastating and, in some cases, have led to identity problems, difficulties in forming relationships and dysfunctional parenting skills. Those families which lost children have not only suffered intense pain and anguish, but have also learned not to trust government authorities, policies and workers. These factors, along
with other discriminatory policy and practices, led to disintegration of social and family structures, and the disintegration of women's social position within many Aboriginal Communities. (NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan 1991) Whilst there is no evidence to support this due to the lack of statistics, it would appear to be that the rise in domestic violence which has become apparent to service providers appear to be closely linked to this history of disruption.

While it is important to recognize the impact of white colonisation, on the increased incidence of domestic violence amongst the Aboriginal community, it is also necessary to consider ways in which Aboriginal people themselves are responsible for the acts of violence against women and children. Aboriginal communities today have a level of acceptance of domestic violence, which may not be tolerated in other communities. As stated by Mary Ann Sam

Not only have we been stripped of our land, but our pride and dignity and everything important to us, especially our family, we have lost our identity. This manifests itself in a number of ways: anger and frustration, low self esteem, loss of confidence, and self respect, feelings of isolation and alienation, alcohol and drug abuse, as well a family violence.....It is happening in our communities: the remote areas, bush and town camps, trust areas, reserves, country towns and big cities. It is no longer just wives who are being abused, but our kids, daughters, grandmothers, aunts, the elders and some of our men... Can we really afford to turn our backs? We are all hurting. Sam, M. A, (1991). Through Black Eyes; A handbook of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Communities. Pp 4-5
4.1 IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITIES

Violence within contemporary Aboriginal communities has been well documented, by historians, social scientists and activists, who first began to explore the subject in the early eighties. But while academics such as Dianne Bell, Marcia Langton, and others such as Judy Atkinson, Mary Ann Sam, Audrey Bolger have written extensively about the violence in Aboriginal communities few authors have addressed the impact on Aboriginal women and children and the communities they live in. (Russell. 1996)

Despite traditional equity the sexes within Aboriginal culture many Aboriginal women endure significant gender discrimination within their contemporary communities, The transition to sedentary life has had a shattering impact on all Aboriginal groups, but the effects are particularity disruptive for Aboriginal men. men, who traditionally had the role of hunter and warrior, saw the opportunity to exercise these skills shrink and in many cases vanish. Whilst the role of men underwent drastic change, women in societies retained much of their cultural. As a result of the culture and social degradation, the effect for women has been devastating. Catalini (1992). One in ten women in Australia is abused by their partner, yet for Aboriginal women the figure is closer to one in three (It’s not love its violence. 1998)

The violence in Aboriginal communities is not just violence against women but violence from man to man, it includes every member of an aboriginal community, however it is the women and children who are suffering the full effects of the violence. For Aboriginal
women, the issue of domestic violence has been particularly difficult to come to terms with because of their modern history has been characterize by the violence and control required by the very nature of colonization.

PART 5 - INTERVENTION

5.1 LEGISLATION

Within Australia there has been a major shift reflected in changes to the domestic violence laws, the recognition that domestic violence is a crime, and the subsequent strengthening of the response of the police and the criminal justice system, (Gelles 1998b) suggests that strong controversy in this area still exists in part because of the definitions of what actually constitutes “problem “ violence in the context of family or intimate relationships is still an issue of some debate. Gelles also refers to the lack of definition of what actually constitutes a problematic level of violence - what is criminal? What is tolerable if not acceptable, and to the ongoing debate in the field as to whether or not an analysis of the cause of family violence should be gender neutral.

In Australia from the middle of the 1880s, law reform addressed the “problem” of violence” in the home, it was an acknowledgment of the failure of previous interventions failure to do anything to stop the violence or even to reduce the incidence of violent assault, laws are now in place in all States, emphasizing the criminal nature of violent assault in the home and providing legal protection for victims of violence (McGregor. H. 1990)
5.2 THE LAW

The second broad social area of difficulty is that of the law. This operate on several fronts. First there has been a major shift in laws relating to marriage, divorce and matrimonial property. The law now asserts that both partners to a marriage are equal in their contributions and that matrimonial property shall be divided according to both contribution and future need. This is a major shift from the previous laws in which marriage was essentially a means by which male property rights were preserved, even to the extent of the "ownership" of children. The Australian Family Law Act 1975 (Commonwealth of Australia) now also insists that both parents must contribute financially to the support of the children.

Domestic violence used to be the crime nobody talked about, because it took place behind closed doors, and it was easy to pretend that it wan not happening. Often the victims felt too embarrassed to talk about it. Many women can not come to terms with the fact that they are being abused by someone they love and who is supposed to love them. In some cases, self-esteem has degenerated so far that women feel somehow responsible for the violence to which they have been subjected. Often women chose to remain in the relationship because of the fear of further violence.

It was a direct result of the feminist analysis of violence in the home that legislation was changed to re-criminalise the violence acts. (McGregor 1990). The spirit of the legislation is that nobody deserves violence and that people are responsible for their own behavior. There is a great difference between the spirit of the law and the way it is administered. (McGregor, 1990)
Since the South Australian government passed legislation specifically dealing with family violence in 1982, all Australian states and Territories have enacted laws intended to provide more effective protection to the victims than previously existing legislation and, in practice, been able to offer. (Unknown. Family Violence 1991) In all states it is now possible for a spouse to seek protection from family violence, by applying for the courts for an order restraining the alleged offender, or for the police to apply on their behalf.

Legislative changes specifically aimed at family violence is not the answer to the problem, while essential, it has only a small impact on the serious violence occurring in over 200,000 Australian homes each year (Learner, G. 1987).

A crucial factor in understanding the response of Aboriginal women to domestic violence is their profound reluctance to use the law, primarily due to the fear of their men being sent to prison. Whilst there has been numerous education programs to address the fear held by Aboriginal woman, there is still considerable fear. Even when services are available it is very hard to get Aboriginal people to go to legal services and to use these services. (Bonita Byrne. 1989).

Many women are unaware of the avenues of legal help that is available and are unaware of what I required to access the legal system, such as representation. Police often failed to arrest the offenders or to apply for AVO'S on behalf of the women, this caused further
distrust of the system and made women more reluctant to use the law as a means of protection.

5.4 WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

For over twenty years the women’s refuge movement has been addressing the issue of domestic violence. The women’s liberation movement of the 1970’s was responsible for the development of a range of services exclusively for women. The theoretical framework for feminist services is founded on feminist analyses of women’s oppression and critique of the traditional welfare state. Nunan.et al (1996) Feminism originates in the perception that there is something quite fundamentally wrong with societies treatment of women and that this must be remedied. Feminism is not a unified perspective, within feminism there exists a range of perspectives developed from different assumptions about sources of women’s oppression and thus implies different strategies for social change (Nunan. C. & Jones. L. 1996)

Violence against women was seen by all feminists as a key symptom of the power imbalances and a manifestation of the power of men within a patriarchal society. The political action of feminists highlighted the widespread nature of domestic violence and the need for women’s services for women. Australia’s first feminist women’s refuge was established in Sydney in 1974, when a group of feminist women took over an unused house they identified the needs of the women to be immediate. The theoretical framework for feminist services is founded upon the perception that there is something wrong with societies treatment of women and that this must be remedied. With a clear theoretical and rational for their services, along with a commitment to political action, women’s services
have been at the forefront in establishing innovative and responsive service models. Services were set up to respond to a women’s immediate need for safety and security. In situations of domestic violence, protection from the perpetrator is vital. (Wesnet: Raising the Roof on Women’s Homelessness. 1996)

A woman safety is considered paramount, therefore leaving the violent situation is an important part of any intervention, and returns some power and control to the woman (Larbalistier 1990) For Aboriginal women leaving the situation is often not seen as an option a they may have numerous barriers to overcome in order to escape from the violence. For refuges working with Aboriginal women it is necessary to identify the differing perspectives Aboriginal women have of domestic violence

Within the feminist framework is the inherent belief that women have a commonality of experience in oppression and patriarchy, this experience binds them in spite of culture or class. For Aboriginal women the experiences are somewhat different it is the direct result of colonisation and the loss of traditional law an the replacement of white races sexist norms. Aboriginal women see domestic violence as a community problem, and whilst feminist intervention does not usually focus on the perpetrator, there is some belief that in order to address the violence in Aboriginal communities, intervention must involve the perpetrator. Bennett, (1997)

5.6 INITIATIVES

There are number of different and diverse services that deal with domestic violence. the National Committee on violence has been set up to examine strategies for the prevention
of violence in our society, along with violence prevention councils, domestic violence regional specialists and violence against women.

One of the most significant recent organisations addressing domestic violence situations is the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council (AJAC) which was established in each state a result of the recommendation from the Royal commission into deaths in custody officially launched on 2 February 1999 by Deputy Premier Dr Andrew Refshauge, NSW Attorney General Jeff Shaw QC. It is proposed this structure will build more effective partnerships between justice agencies and Aboriginal communities. NSW established it’s committee and held its first meeting in 1994.

Speaking at the launch, the recently appointed chairperson of AJAC Winsome Matthew’s said "To fully address the problems Aboriginal people face in the criminal justice system, we must look beyond the system alone and creatively meet the challenge of dealing with the social and economic problems Aboriginal people face." And that one of the greatest Challenges will be to look at ways of merging elements of customary law with the current justice system. The first committee was restructured in 1998 and renamed the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council (AJAC). Funded by ATSIC, the NSW Attorney General’s Department, the Department of Corrective Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice and the NSW Police Service, AJAC is now the main advisory body to the NSW Government on law and justice issues effecting Aboriginal people. AJAC plays a key role in providing advice to the Attorney General on the relationships between members of Aboriginal communities and the justice system.
The NSW Domestic Violence Committee has addressed a number of problems relating to the law and the legal processes as they affect women as victims of domestic violence. Over the year it has monitored the implementation of legislative changes and in 1997 convened the Violence Against Women Law Reform task force which developed proposals for law reform to improve the availability of protection for women and children who had been victims of violence and abuse.

The domestic violence Committee has addressed domestic violence from a broad based perspective, going beyond the legal responses in order to ensure consistency and uniformity of policy, programs and training, it was clear that aboriginal communities warranted special attention. Special strategic need to be developed to respond to issues which are specific and unique to Aboriginal communities The Australian governments have come to regard the issue of domestic violence together with other forms of violence against women, as one of major importance requiring specific policies and intervention strategies. Over the last 20 years, major advances have taken place in response of government and the community to domestic violence and much has been accomplished in areas of law, services provision and public education. (Accommodating women, 1999).

Another recent government initiative is the Aboriginal family health strategy whose primary theme is to engage, enable and empower Aboriginal communities and relevant agencies to take control and work collaboratively to achieve a reduction in the occurrence of family violence, sexual assault and child abuse according to the communities unique and local needs. The Aboriginal family health strategy represents NSW Governments
commitment to provide action to address the matter of family violence, sexual assault, and child abuse within the Aboriginal community in NSW. The guiding principles of the strategy are bound in the spirit of Aboriginal community control and self-determination. Solutions to family violence, sexual assault, and child abuse must be found within the Aboriginal community. The NSW Government has committed $12 million dollars in recurrent funding to implement the Aboriginal Family Health Strategy program.

- The latest response, launched in November 1997 by the heads of government at the National Domestic Violence Summit, convened by the Prime Minister is Partnerships Against Domestic Violence. Partnerships is a three-year initiative between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to work together towards the common goal of preventing domestic violence across Australia. Partnerships will be a strategic collaboration between Commonwealth, states, and territories for testing new ways of doing things, enhancing and sharing knowledge, and developing good practice and responding to domestic violence.

A taskforce has been set up to coordinate Partnerships, the task force will meet three times a year to progress the work agenda.

Each year government spends over $200 Million dealing with the effects of domestic violence. Partnerships is underpinned by $25.3 million which is non-recurrent funding over a period of three years ending in June 2000. This money will be divided up into different
state and national projects.

One of the more significant outcomes of the summit was the agreement of the need to discuss model domestic violence legislation to ensure continuity of protection for victims across the country. The summit released model domestic violence laws for public discussion.

The NSW council set up to reduce Violence Against Women planning strategy for period of July 1999 - June 2000. The Council presented an overview of their work and that of each Regional Violence Prevention Specialist.

In January 1999 the Attorney General and the Minister for Women approved the Council plans for a statewide campaign aimed at reducing Violence Against Women.

This report provides a framework to guide organisations in developing, Implementing and managing intervention programs so that crime prevention Objectives are recognized and maximized. In some instances, crime Prevention will become a new objective of early intervention programs. In others, more emphasis will need to be placed on the evaluation and effectiveness of a program's stated crime prevention objective.

The statistics alone over-whelmingly support the need for both prevention and
intervention in the area of family violence

5.5 PERPERTRATOR PROGRAMS

Assaults on women by their male partners has been seen as a “problem” not as a crime, within our society, because we apply therapy and counseling to many of our social problems, this sort of analysis has led to the proliferation of inappropriate responses from doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists, who offer counseling and treatment to fix the “problem” rather than the appropriate legal response which crimes against a person warrant. Townsend (1991) In the wake of legal reforms and the development of support services for women in Australia there has been a burgeoning of counseling programs for perpetrators. In 1977, in the United States the first program, was developed. The first program was funded in Australia in 1983. And remains a part of, a multi-purpose agency providing services to both victims and perpetrators. Townsend. (1991). Perpetrator programs have always been controversial, people tend to feel strongly for and against supporting counseling services for men, primarily because it remains very unclear just how effective these programs are. Much of the criticism has reflected the concerns of victims and there advocates that perpetrator programs should not weaken any criminal justice responses to perpetrators. National Campaign Against Violence (1998)

In Australia many groups for abusive men have recently begun to establish themselves. Overseas, the most effective counseling occurs in men’ counseling groups. The groups help breakdown the isolation. It helps men to learn to recognize their feelings and take control their actions. Statistics have shown that the abuse will not stop, but will probably
get worse unless the perpetrator is willing to admit that he is responsible and wants to stop. This involves new ways of learning to cope with his feelings and learning to respect the worth of another person.

There is still a great unknown in the area of Perpetrator programs, especially within Australia, although there is some limited data made available through research. Research overseas is increasing. (Edleson et al. 1985)

To those outside the family perpetrators are often seen a respectable, responsible and affable and in control of their lives. In reality perpetrators tend to be none of these things and need to control others and usually they can only do this in the one place they feel full confidence to do so, in the family home, and the only way they can rely on through physical violence. (Stets. 1988)

Perpetrators usually recognize as a general principle that violence is “wrong” though they justify it to themselves when they practice it in their own home. Sometimes they say that their behavior is “out of control” and sometimes they feel they “have control” (Stets 1988), they tend to rationalize their violent actions as justifiable, or out of their control. Denial of the responsibility is vehement; they always find numerous excuses, such as the wife is to blame, or a hard day at work, alcohol or the fact that their father was the same. not violent men find separation devastating, they respond with helplessness, manipulation, and sometimes suicide threats. Perpetrators very rarely seek help, to address the problem even in crisis and usually only attend counseling or self help groups to get their wives back. (Mugford)
Easteal (1988) suggest that the advantage of further research on perpetrators “such material” she says “might enable self identification by violators, surely the first step to intervention and prevention”.

**CONCLUSION**

Domestic violence is a subject people would prefer not to think about. It is difficult to think that the sacred place we call home can for many women and children be a very violent place. More than anything else, violence cuts across the social values, which relate to family life. It is clear from the literature that there is an over-whelming need for more research into the impact of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. Domestic violence is one of the most insidious form of violence in our communities today, it has become a part of accepted daily life for Aboriginal people and although they know that it is not acceptable, it is so difficult for them to see how it can be stopped. It has been clearly identified by numerous researcher and government bodies and community workers and the communities themselves, that the violence must stop yet there still seems to have been little dome to actually address the need for more data on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence in Australia, and particularly in Aboriginal communities.
Alcohol consumption has been identified as a major cause of violence in Aboriginal communities, all statistic and reports support this, women themselves have stated that alcohol contributed to beatings and domestic violence. There has been many initiatives by community women to ban alcohol from there communities and whilst this is achievable in rural and remote communities it does not address the problem for aboriginal women in urban areas. It has become clear that the socio-economic situation along with alcohol have a huge impact upon the level of violence within Aboriginal communities. Although neither of these things alone causes the violence, they do have a large role in the levels of violence in aboriginal communities and in particular with domestic violence situations.

Whilst the inherent reasons for domestic violence occurring in communities is not been addressed in an holistic way there can be no move towards making long term and cohesive changes to the problem of domestic violence. It is not sufficient to just provided shelter or refuges, and whilst there is definitely a need for them, the violence needs to be addressed within the Aboriginal community and by the Aboriginal community as a whole. Strategies to address violence in communities needs a collaborative response from all stakeholders and needs to take into account the history of the Aboriginal people prior to colonization and through the stolen generation to what is happening with Aboriginal people today.

Aboriginal women in communities are taking control of the violence and speaking out against the lack of response from government services. Earlier this year a large group of Aboriginal Women from all over NSW, formed a delegation to parliament, to discuss the need for services and funding to provided those services. Questions such as why there voices were not be being heard, when they are crying out for the injustices in their communities to be addressed.
During the Commonwealth Government National Domestic Violence Education program, research indicated that there were specific issues to be acknowledged and addressed for women in Aboriginal communities. These require government to take action to prevent violence, but in ways, which address the complexities of Aboriginal society kinship and cultural values, the historical destruction of Aboriginal traditions by white man’s colonization and tyranny, and the extent of alcohol and other substance abuse.

Some Aboriginal women have publicly stated that domestic violence in Aboriginal communities must address holistically by analyzing, the problem with the context of disintegration of tribal and kinship ties. Skepticism about the ability of the police and criminal justice system will appropriately response to Aboriginal woman’s need for protection have also been expressed, given the over representation of Aboriginal prisoners in custody and the evidence presented to the inquiry into black deaths in custody.

For Aboriginal women the advent of perpetrator programs offers another alternative to dealing with male violence that does not involve the women having to access legal avenues. However accessing these services has proven not to be an option for aboriginal men as they are not openly accessible and there is very little know about them. Usually Aboriginal men will only access these services if ordered by the courts to do so. This is also problematic, as Aboriginal using the law is not a viable option for many Aboriginal women. Women have very little knowledge of and an inherent mistrust of the law. It is difficult for women to trust a system that has in the past worked against them and their men. Aboriginal women have clearly identify that the violence in their communities is a
community problem and a family problem it involves every one women, children and men.

Aboriginal men have suffered as well through discrimination, injustice and loss of self-esteem. Men have lost the power to make effective decisions and to run their lives. Aboriginal men must take responsibility for the violence and make it stop.

It became apparent from the literature reviewed, there was a clear indication for community education. Many women do not know their rights, or that they have the right to receive help. Most Aboriginal people today are involved with or know someone who is involved in a domestic violence situation, but are unaware that they are able to receive assistance to deal with the problem. There is often a general lack of support for women who speak out about the violence, women feel that it is time to put an end to the violence, they saying "enough is enough" but it is not stopping.

Our children need to be our greatest concern, they are been raised in violent homes where, it is normal for mum to have a black eye or to hear the neighbors yelling and screaming. Children suffer more from the effects of violent homes, they have trouble at school, and it is difficult to be attentive if you have been up all night, and in violent homes children’s sleep is often disturbed. In many violent homes the children are also abused. A lot of our children are being fostered out to other families.
In NSW there are now refuges and services whose primary role is to address domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. The women's refuge movement clearly identified domestic violence as a problem in Australia over twenty-five years ago and it is still keeping up the struggle to stop domestic violence. Continued lobbying has seen many new initiatives to stop domestic violence, but there is still a very long way to go.

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