
Leanne Francia – PhD Candidate
Dr P.M. Millear – Supervisor
Dr R. Sharman – Supervisor

(Disclaimer – This presentation contains references to family violence)
Family violence costs the Australian government $13.5 billion each year.

The prevalence of family violence claims in parenting matters has led to family violence being described as the core business of the family court in Australia.
**METHODOLOGY**

- Qualitative - face to face interviews

**Participants**

- Sample \((N = 40)\)
- Separated mothers \((n = 36)\)
- Separated fathers \((n = 4)\)
- Children in care of separated parents \((n = 84)\)

**Analysis**

- Thematic analysis
FINDINGS – AUSTRALIAN FAMILY LAW SYSTEM

1. Gendered narratives
2. Concerns around family violence not taken seriously
3. Inadequacy in knowledge of experts and decision makers about family violence
4. Coercion from some professionals
5. Aftermath of trauma
“So, it was a whitewash and I paid $500,000 in legal fees to be abused further.”
(Mother, 50 years)

“I didn’t even know I was sick with cancer … and everyone threatening to remove her from me for so long, that I didn’t even know that I was nearly dead.”
(Mother, 43 years)

“I feel really disempowered. I had no one to turn to. I still have no one to turn to … no one cared … they just don’t understand that you just don’t get over these things and it hasn’t even ended yet.”
(Mother, 46 years)

“Oh, I am not half the parent to my kids that I should be. My time is monopolised by him and his ongoing abuse.”
(Mother, 45 years)
AFTERMATH – CHILDREN’S EXPOSURE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

... knife held to her throat ...
... barricaded in a house by a parent who threatened to burn it down with them in it ...
... attempted suicide ...
... ended up in adult refuges ...
... sexually abused ...
... struggled at school ...
... alcohol dependent ...
“… but the damage is done, and all of the children have severe depression, anxiety, PTSD. I have got a 12-year-old on Prozac who is suicidal.”
(Mother, 44 years)

“Like a whole lot of trauma responses thanks to the family violence they experienced and violence through the courts.”
(Mother, 44 years)

“And on top of that I think (child’s name) is going to need help and support because she is just so damaged, she is a damaged, damaged child, and in my way of thinking they have done this to her. Not just her original trauma with him (father). The family court’s traumatised her, and re-traumatised her, and re-traumatised her, to the point where she can’t function in the world properly.”
(Mother, 43 years)
MISSING WHAT MATTERS

“There has got to be a support system in between when DV services step out, which is when you leave, and right through until there is an outcome, there needs to be services in there that are supporting and actually keeping track.”

(Mother, 44 years)

“Effectively, you need a system that understands family violence, and takes it seriously, and actively identifies the perpetrator, and deals with the perpetrator.”

(Mother, 42 years)
“Because a child can spend a lifetime trying to forget a few minutes of their childhood”
References


