



## Prepared by the Social Justice Committee of the Anglican Diocese of Ballarat

# Domestic Violence Occurs in this Town Too!

Domestic violence occurs at all social levels, in many cultures and across a wide range of ages. However, victims of domestic violence are usually women with low self-esteem who are dependent on their partners. Some groups of women - aboriginals, those in rural and isolated areas, those from non-English-speaking backgrounds and 'Asian-brides' - are seen to be in special danger.

Victims report multiple types of violence including:- beatings, sexual assault, and verbal and psychological abuse.

Psychological violence suffered by thousands of women can begin with occasional comments designed to make the women doubt themselves and their abilities. Abuse then increases until the victims never feel adequate about their intelligence, appearance and roles as mothers and wives.

Nevertheless, many women remain in violent relationships trying to resolve their problems by themselves on the grounds of love and hope for change.

### **Complex causes**

The causes of domestic violence are complex. They may be related to illness, psychological disposition, predisposition due to childhood experiences, pressures of environment and circumstance, or presumption of male superiority.

In a culture where men have been encouraged to accept aggression and violence as part of the process of being 'masculine', men with a shaky gender identity often

overcome their insecurity by controlling someone - usually their partner - with physical violence and sustained psychological abuse.

### **The Victims**

Given the high incidence of domestic violence it is important that Christians are alert to signs of violence, that they are ready to believe people who say they are victims, and that they help them, as fellow human beings, to see what is happening to them and what they can do if they leave.

### **Viable church responses**

Victims of domestic violence require a range of services which may include medical attention or health care, physical protection, separate accommodation, financial support, child care, and legal advice.

Women unable to cope with family violence can make appointments to meet with a chamber magistrate to obtain an Apprehended Violence Order to restrain or evict their violent partner. In cases where they fear living at home where the perpetrator can find them, victims may be provided with refuge.

Temporary shelter, respite care and refuges are the most useful assistance to victims of domestic violence. Secure refuges are often full, however, and many women are forced to return to violent partners because they cannot find affordable accommodation in the



private rental market or public housing. The provision of shelter, therefore, becomes a viable area of church involvement.

Local churches also can help organise support groups. The major task of such groups is to provide support without taking sides - to look for possibilities to alleviate the situation and to find positive ways to release any anger. And they can help by providing access to counselling which will examine underlying attitudes and the basis of anger.

### **Service not selfishness**

The Bible reference often used to justify men's control over women is Ephesians 5:22, 'Wives, submit to your husbands...' This passage, however, continues to say that, while wives must honour and respect their husbands, 'husbands ought to love their

wives as their own bodies' - to feed them and care for them just as Christ loved the Church.

Marriage is not meant to trap people in intolerable relationships of a 'love' that is little more than self-centred demand. Love, in the Bible, is not based on selfishness. It is seen in terms of service towards another. Christ loved the Church 'and gave himself up for her.' Violence and anger are opposites of love. They stem from sin, from a mistrust of God and a fear of the vulnerability that service implies.

Church members, while ensuring the safety of the victims of violence, also face the challenge of educating society. As well as educating the community that violence against women is both criminal and unacceptable we should work to deny male acts of violence a place in any definition of 'manliness'.