

The following insights are from a person with lived experience of domestic and family violence focused on the financial abuse they experienced. The narrative highlights the **lived experience of violence and abuse** including their responses and resistance to violence, and where **social responses** were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. It has been assembled by the Insight Exchange team from the transcript of an interview conducted by [Rosie's Place](#).

HELENA

I've been in two relationships where I experienced domestic violence.

My first husband was very violent and manipulative with money. Any time he was giving me any money or lovely presents, I knew there was something that I was about to find out about. When things were going okay with us, he was tight with the money. But if there was something else going on, he would give me just about anything.

I didn't work when I had my first three children. We were living in a small town in Tasmania and it was very hard to get a job, so I was a stay-at-home mum. My first husband always had the cupboards full; the fridge always had food in it. The kids were well taken care of. My husband let me do that. He was good that way with the kids; not so much my son. I don't know what that was all about. He was a lot harder on him than the girls. My son is a very angry man these days. We were having an argument and he wanted to hit me, and I just lost it, I thought, "I took this from your father, there's no way I'm taking it from you."

My Dad did have a go at my husband before we got married when he found out that he was smacking me. But it was all played down. I didn't tell him half of what was going on. But my Dad warned him, "don't do that." But then, once we were married, it was like my parents started minding their own business. So, I just started taking care of my own business.

My Mum used to say, "you've made your bed, you lie in it." Oh, I hate that saying! I can't stand it, but it was the saying of the day, back in the day. So I did. I tried, I tried really hard to stick it out and not tell them everything that was going on, but you can only walk into so many doors.

"You've made your bed, you lie in it."

I had a sister living here in Sydney. When I came over for a holiday, she said "Helena, come back and live here," and I thought "oh, that would be so awesome. Such a different life altogether." I'd barely left my little home town. So, I said, "I'll think about it." I went home, and things were just so crap, I really wanted to come over here where it looked nice. So, I did that. I let my husband know, "we're done." He didn't really didn't take me seriously until I started making all the moves and let my parents know I was going. Then he started harassing me. He said, "all right, well, we'll go up there, and we'll see how it goes, if it doesn't work out, we'll get a divorce." I said "oh, okay."

So we came up, we both got jobs and everything was okay, but I was just so full of wanting to leave him, wanting to start fresh with my kids. After a couple of months, I said to him, "you know it's not working," I said, "we're done, you have to go." And he beat me up so badly. I was calling out to the neighbours to call the police, but nobody did, not for a long while. We were there for hours, my children and I and he held a knife on us, and he did all the terrible things in front of them. Then he said to me, "Alright, this is what we'll do," he said, "you finish up work, sell all this stuff," because we'd bought furniture and everything. He said, "sell everything, come back and we'll get divorced," and I said, "yeah righto," and so he said, "I'll take the kids back to Tasmania with me."

So he went back to Tasmania, took the kids with him and I was supposed to be selling up and everything, chucking in my job, to go home and finalise the divorce, and my sister said “Are you serious?!”

I had only been at my job about five months and they had already promoted me and when my boss got wind of me thinking of going home, he said “come and talk to me.” So I did and he asked a couple of things and I said, “I’ve got to go, my husband’s got my kids, and I can’t leave them,” and he said, “why don’t you go and get them, and come back here?” And I thought, “Why don’t I?” He said, “your job is fine here.” He said “look, go back – take as long as you like, but as soon as you find out you’re definitely coming back, ring me.” He said, “ring here and let me know,” and “I’ll get someone to fill in until you get back.” So that’s exactly what I did.

“Your job is fine here ... go back, take as long as you like ... I’ll get someone to fill in.”

When I told my husband over the phone, I said, “I’m coming home but I’m coming back to get those kids.” He said, “when you get back to Tasmania, I’m going to fucking kill you.” I rang my brother and said “you’d better meet me at the airport, ‘cause he’s going to kill me.” So my brother met me at the airport. When we got back, I spoke to my parents and told them, “I want to go back to Sydney and I want to get away from him, and I want my children.” So, they just let me know, “well, we’re here. We’re not going anywhere if you need us.”

The day that I was to fly out with my children, my husband followed us and I thought, “oh my god,” and I didn’t know how I was going to do it. But I knew I had made my plans: “I’ll keep the job, I’ll keep the unit we’re in, I won’t be selling anything and I’m going to have my children, and everything will be fine.” But he came back. He came back to Sydney. He said, “look, I just want to stay for a bit,” he said, “I might even get my own place,” and I’m thinking, “I just don’t want you here.” But he came back, and he tried several times to be nice to me, and, and let me know everything was going to be just wonderful. I let him know, “it’s too late, you’re way done. You should’ve done this a long time ago.” So, he gave me another good hiding.

I said to him later, “you have to go, you can’t keep doing this to me, you can’t keep doing it to us. You’ve got to go home, sort yourself out. You can keep in touch with me, so that you can see the kids.” So he went back to Tassie. Then he met another woman. One week before he married her, he rang me and said, “I get married next Saturday; this is your last chance.” I said “Nah, I’m good.” What a bastard. I nearly told his wife too. She and I became quite good mates. She was a nice lady. He hurt her too and eventually she divorced him.

I had another partner more recently, Rory, and he was terrible as far as the money went. We were together for 12 years. We didn’t have children together. All my children are grown up now.

It wasn’t long after I’d been going out with Rory that he started his abuse. As soon as he’d get drunk, he’d want to punch me, and because of my first husband, I just started fighting back straight away. I thought, “nup, nup; I’m not doing this again!” So I used to physically defend myself, and was able to get him out of the house. I never even called the police until right towards the end, when I decided, “no, that’s it, you’ve got to go.” After all the years of copping this kind of thing, never ringing the police, I finally rang them, and they were wonderful.

He would deliberately leave me without money. He used to work on one of the mines up north. He

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only came home fortnightly. He would take the key to the car, to leave me without the car. One time, I got the locksmith out and I didn't tell him; I let him think I hadn't had the car for the last couple of weeks. He eventually found out that I'd been taking the car, 'cause he checked the odometer, so then he started taking something out from under the bonnet, to stop me using the car.

I didn't know anything about mechanics or what goes on under the bonnet, so I don't know how he did that.

We always had food in the house. There was not a problem as far as food and the bills being paid. He had that sorted and I worked as well. We were paying \$350 a week rent and I was bringing in about \$550. He worked it so that the rent was coming out of my wages, as a direct debit from my account, and he would take care of the rest of the bills and that kind of thing. I didn't mind that. I went along with that because as long as there was food in the house and things weren't too bad, I'd go along with whatever game he was playing at the time.

My youngest child – I left her with her Dad. He was my partner between the two violent partners. He was a good man and a really good Dad. When I wasn't doing too well emotionally, I asked him to take her and I'd help out each pay day. I said to him, "look, as soon as I can get my head together, I want to take her back with me," and he said, "not a problem". She was his only child. But I didn't want my daughter to come and stay with me because of my partner being the way he was. I was hiding it.

None of my children knew what was going on and yet, they were visiting. I was very good at hiding it. But I just couldn't let my youngest, Sarah, come and stay with us because it would kill me for her to witness what was happening. She'd be surprised if I was to sit down and tell her, how "all those times that you visited; this and that." She'd be so surprised, because he was really good at hiding it too, from her.

I said to him, "the day that she finds out what you're doing to me, you're out of here." I said, "it's one thing you doing this to me, but I don't want you putting her through this." My first three kids went through that with their dad in Tasmania and it was just torture for them. That's why I left him and ran away here, to get away from him. I just didn't want them having to cop that stuff anymore. And because Sarah's Dad was so good, I thought, "I'm not going to put her through this either."

One time, Rory and I were doing some shopping at the supermarket, and I spotted a friend I hadn't seen in a long time; a parent of one my kid's friends. We were just getting back in the car when I saw him. And I went, "how you going?" And we had a little hug and "how are you?" Next minute, my husband's driving out of the carpark and he left me there. So I started walking out. I knew it was another one of his games. And he waited in the car outside the carpark and he looked at me through the window, and he wouldn't unlock the door. I said, "what's your problem now?" And he says, "you're going with him." And I said to him, "it's a friend of my kids. I look at him like he's one of my kids."

Some of the things that he did were stupid things. It annoyed me when he would be so tanked and then he'd come at me, trying to scare me. I kept warning him, "go on then, do your best." I said, "you come at me again, I'm going to ring the police" and he came at me. I could feel it coming and

he came at me. The first time I called the police, I thought, “you know what, I'm not fighting you anymore. From now on, I'm going to let ‘Danno’ do it, ‘book him Danno.’” And I rang triple-0. By the time the police got there, he was really worried because he's never been arrested or anything.

As soon as the police came, I said “well, we've had a domestic,” and they said, “is everything all right?” And I said “well you tell me Rory. Is everything all right? Or do the police need to take care of stuff?” And he just stayed quiet. I said, “well, I'll take that as a yes,” so, they didn't have to take him away. When they were leaving, they said to me “Helena, if you have a problem, just ring again.” And I said, “thank you for that.” And it was only the next night I called again. So when I rang for the second time, as soon as I opened the door, I said, “he has to go. He has to go.” So the policeman started taking down notes, and another policeman, a real big one, he's just standing there while Rory is sitting in a chair. And I'm just quietly telling them what had happened, and Rory starts talking, straight away. They both looked at him, they wanted to hear what he had to say. And he said, “She's the violent one, she broke my arm, she broke my ribs, she broke my thumb,” and he's rattling them off, and I'm thinking “oh my god.” They never said a word, they had just stopped and listened, and they're just listening away there, and then when he'd quietened down, I gave them all the details, and they said to Rory “all right, up you get,” and they put handcuffs and everything on him. I knew it was upsetting him but I thought, “you should've been taught this a long, long time ago.”

I left the house spotless, so he couldn't come back and say, “oh she made a mess.”

I used to think “if you only knew what you had in me; I'm loyal, I never play around, I clean the house, I like to have a laugh, so, you know, you don't have to come home to a miserable household.” But he couldn't appreciate it.

In the end, I took my stuff while he was away. I took everything I wanted; the nice TV, the nice fridge and the washing machine. I thought, “we're done. I'm taking what's mine.” But I also left the house spotless, so he couldn't come back and say, “oh she made a mess.” I don't work like that: I was really mad at him, but I didn't have to be mean about it.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) would like to thank [Rosie's Place](#) for conducting these interviews and providing these transcripts to Insight Exchange to ensure the voices of lived experience are able to help inform and strengthen social, service and systemic responses to Domestic and Family Violence.

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We acknowledge that despite our best efforts to assemble with a person a more accurate representation of some of their experiences of violence, we can never fully understand all that their experiences mean to them now or through their life. We understand that no one's life experience can ever be fully represented in language or any other form.

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