

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 from an interview conducted by [Rosie's Place](#).

BELINDA

I was in a relationship with Brett just short of 20 years. Brett's been gone for about three and a half years now. But he thinks just because there is no AVO against him anymore, he can just turn up when he feels like it and do whatever he wants when he feels like it. One-time last year, he just turned up. My older boy was home and he went out there, told him to get lost. I walked out there and thought "who's my son yelling at", so I go out and have a look and realised it was Brett.

Brett was sitting in his car right outside my place. When I came out, he went to run me over. But my son stood in front of me to stop him. He saved my life and not for the first time. My youngest daughter saw the whole thing as well. I rang the Police and they said "well, where's your evidence, did you take a photo?". I was shocked, are you kidding me? Hang on, don't run me over yet, let me take a photo first! The Police were disgusting, just couldn't give two shits. I really thought they were here to help me. I said to them "he's smashed up the house, he has shot up the gas bottles, left me his homemade silencer and his empty bullet shells on the table, and left a gas bottle on. He has welded the garage doors shut". But they thought I was making it up. The system is so wrong. I'm lucky I'm not a statistic. Men like Brett just get away with it.

The violence started off infrequently. Only now and again. Brett always said "sorry" and "I won't do it again". When my youngest was born, the nurse said she was going to take my kids off me if I didn't do anything. I finally got the courage to ring the Police. They took him away for the night and could not get me and my three kids into a refuge. He was back the next morning before six o'clock. He broke into the house, grabbed me by the throat and said "if you ever take me from my kids again, I will kill you".

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I asked him to go to counselling. He went to one counselling session and said "I'm all better now. I thought you married for better, for worse". My mother beat the shit out of me all my life. So, I more or less jumped from the frying pan into the fire. I had spent most of my life looking after my nan and my brother as well. I actually I had my third child during a big car accident. Brett was nice to me for a few years after that accident because he thought about all that nice compensation money he was going to spend. Sadly, I was too blind to see it. He just left me high and dry.

The abuse got worse as I got older. Brett was all about control. It was his way or no way. Even when it came to buying something for the kids, what you cooked for dinner everything was control. He'd get cranky and take something out of the car so I couldn't drive the car. I

wasn't able to leave the house, shop or take kids to school without the car. He would do stuff like that. He was the controlling type.

He was physically violent too. I would go to sleep and in the middle of the night he would wake me up and start beating the shit out of me for nothing. Brett used to scream at me too, "think yourself lucky I married you, you fuckin', dumb, one-eyed bitch" and I said back, "nice... I'm the mother of your children". I used to walk up behind the shed, so he'd beat the

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shit out of me out of there, just so my kids wouldn't see it. Then I would come back into the house and say "yeah, yeah, I'm fine, let's do dinner or come on, you've got to go to basket-ball training". But you know it was easier to stand there and cop that rather than have my kids sleep in a cardboard box on the street, or God knows where and not have any food or not be able to get to school and just try to be half normal.

Brett even beat me in front of my neighbour who's six foot tall and built. My neighbour tried his best to stop him, but he couldn't. When my son, Josh, saw what was going on he ran up and crash tackled Brett to get him off me. He used to always beat me up when my sons weren't there to stop him. Normally Josh would go to work and then go to the gym. But every now and again, he forgot something or came home early and he would find me pinned up by the wall by the throat with Brett beating the shit out of me. Josh would just rip him off me; he never, ever hit Brett. But he would rip him off him and throw him and say "don't do that to my mum, you are not touching her!" The older Josh got, he realised he had to come straight home just to keep me safe.

"Don't do that to my mum, you are not touching her!"

If I took the kids to sports and I was five minutes late coming home, I'd get a flogging from Brett. If I didn't spend 2-3 hours cooking dinner for him, he would get the shits and throw the food. It was like walking on eggshells. I lived like that for years and years and years.

Once my son, was playing for the AFL then. Josh is an awesome player. They needed him, if they didn't win this game, they weren't going to the Grand Final. Brett said to Josh, "clean your room before you go", so he cleaned his room. Then Brett said "nup, you're not going now". I pleaded with him and said "he has to go". But Brett wouldn't back down. So, I loaded the other kids in the car and I said "come on, let's go". Josh, said "no, mum, I know what he'll do to you when you get home". But I forced him out there, I took the kids to the game. Josh won the game so they were in the Grand Final. I did cop a flogging when I got home. But Josh had to be at that game, you cannot play a team sport and then not turn up. It doesn't work like that.

Brett used to say to Josh, my oldest boy, "I took you to football all your life", but Josh said, "no you didn't, mum did!" He never turned up to one of my son's games of football till he was 15. Josh been playing since he was 4. I took them to training and my daughter to basketball. The one time he took her was because I had to take the boys somewhere else. He sat in the car during her game, didn't even get out and watch her.

Brett wanted to live beyond his means, but he still expected me to pay everything. Sometimes I'd have to borrow money off my sister or off my kids to get things done. Because Brett thought he was the boss. He wanted everything. He wanted a car but he couldn't get a normal second hand one, he had to go and get a brand spanking new one. He didn't realise that thing alone would cost \$700 a month in car repayments and insurance. I was like, "hang on, what about food?"

Brett would damage stuff at home. My house was half renovated, he would start something and never finish it. He was supposed finish it like, 15 years ago and he never got it done. All I have right now is my kitchen sink. I have one shelf on the bottom, that's it, but I can't afford to pay somebody \$300 to come and put a shelf in.

It was all about him, all about him! He would drink away all the money too. When we were together Brett drank a bottle of vodka a day and half a case of beer. I would think, "how the hell do you expect me to feed all these kids, pay all your bills, when you want to live like this". But if there wasn't money there for him, then he'd get the shits again. But then he'd say to me "oh, you have all the money". I didn't really. I had a joint account with Brett but he would empty out my account and I would pay all the bills with whatever was left.

He would say "oh fuck it, I don't feel like going to work today". I would say, "are you kidding me, you've got people relying on you". One of his bosses sacked him four times. His boss actually said to me, "Belinda, the only reason I am keeping him on is because I know you and your kids are gorgeous". Nobody could tell Brett anything. What he said was right and that was it.

I had nothing. I had to rely on donations from charities. I had no money for food, my older kids were buying the food. I didn't eat for six weeks. I lost 30 kilos and this starvation nearly shut my kidneys down. My daughter said "get with it mum we've only got you", because we have no other family or friends. I would go and do cash-in-hand jobs. Stuff like, I did some lady's ironing for twenty bucks for three hours. It was pathetic. I would put pamphlets out. Now, my boys help me do the pamphlet run and a paper run. I help them, they give me half their money to help pay for stuff. If I really run out of money, Josh gives me money.

A lot of people said "why don't you get up and go?". Well, I've tried that several times and nobody could help me and my three kids. I have no family support. So, where the hell do I go with three kids?

"why don't you get up and go?"

Brett tried to put me and the kids out on the goddamned street. This was after his massive spending spree which forced him to go bankrupt. I think he had a ninety grand bankruptcy debt. Brett blamed my kids for going bankrupt as well. He told my son, Daniel, he was only

13 at the time, that it was all his fault. Daniel's my soft one, my gullible one and it hit him hard. The school rang me. Daniel's teacher said, "You better, come and pick him up, he has completely shut-down and is totally withdrawn".

I had to take Daniel to counselling for months and months. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do is sit in a counselling session with my son. I found out he was having nightmares every night and waking up. He said "I'm not big enough. Dad's been hitting mum. I've seen him hold that gun to her head. He's beating mum up and I'm not big enough to stop him". When I heard this I just sobbed and sobbed. I couldn't even look at him, I just sobbed. My daughter was wetting the bed too. But the week Brett left, my daughter never wet the bed again.

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So, when I finally told Brett to leave and not to come back. The Police had taken him away. After he left, I had to get an AVO out to stop him abusing me on the phone every damn day. But when he couldn't get through to me, he would start on one of my sons. Brett would say, "if you don't get your mum to ring me, I'm never going to see you again" or "if you don't see me, I'm not giving you your birthday present". So, I had to involve the Police again and now the AVO also includes my kids to protect them as well.

When he left, the vacuum cleaner, the dryer, the freezer and the fridge all blew at once – I think he must have damaged everything. I had no money so I had to get a private loan and they gave me a card with ten-grand on it and no interest. So, I was able to get everything, but I am still paying it off now, but, it's interest free. My son pays \$25 a week for me, and I pay \$35 a week.

I went to Centrelink and I had not realised that I could have been on the Carer's Pension a long time ago. I had no idea. The Centrelink worker drew it all up for me. I was so relieved, "oh good, now I can have money, pay the bills, buy some food, feed the kids".

My mortgage payment is now \$565 a week. I get \$830 one week for my Carer's Pension. But I still have all my bills I have to pay. I've got \$300 in direct debits that come out every week. Because I only get \$830 and my mortgage is \$565 it makes life very hard. If my son needs a new pair of glasses, we're looking at five hundred bucks, just for a pair of glasses.

Brett took me to Court and tried to screw me over for a long list of things that he wanted. He wanted the car, the boat, the lawnmower, the whipper snipper. On top of everything he wanted me to give him the property. During the Court process he was forced to finally do his tax. Turns out he had lied to the tax department and said he only earned \$22,000 a year but he was actually earning \$80,000. He also has never paid any child support. So, this matter was thrown out of Court.

We had to go to Family Court to get the custody settled. You would think Family Court would be there to help the mother and children. But no is not like that, it's more like, you get "half and half custody, tough shit, see you later". They said "look, yeah, he can see the children as long as he doesn't drink". So, Brett went into court with a solicitor and lied to them saying he doesn't drink. Even my kids were dumbfounded. Brett turned around and said that I stop him from seeing his kids. So, we ended up with a Court order which allowed him to see my kids every two weeks from Friday to Sunday. But thankfully this hasn't really happened. He took the two youngest ones away for the weekend once. He brought them back sunburnt and blistered and he's never done it again. This was a blessing because he likes to screw with them psychologically. He tries to play one kid against the other. That's a lot harder to fix than sunburn.

But I was very unhappy with the Family Court Decision so, had to meet a barrister. He said "do an affidavit". So, I wrote up my statement, a very PG version of Brett's abuse over 20 years. But even that shocked my Barrister, he read it and said: "Oh my god. If that arsehole wants a fight, he's got one and by the way, I'm going pro bono, I will represent you' and I'm not going to charge you a thing". I just cried. The registrar said "I think your needs will be better met in the Federal Court". My Barrister actually said, "I'm so sorry the legal system has let you down, the justice system has let you down, the least I can do is try and help you".

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I was in Court for about 2 and a half years, it's only just finished this year. In one of our Court sessions, Brett was so angry at the judge but she continuously shot him down. She said, "you realise you're incompetent, don't you? Who do you think you are to speak to me like this?" The Judge forced him to hand over most of his superannuation – which was only a few thousand dollars. So, I got a better outcome than Family Court and I've got my kids. But don't have much else. I'm wearing \$4 shoes for God's sake, \$10 pants, damn, \$2 pair of socks, \$4 for a shirt. I live like this while he can run around in chinos and be well dressed.

I don't even eat some nights because I don't have enough food to cook for everybody, so I feed all my kids first. My kids ask me, "why aren't you eating?" and I just say "I am alright, I've just got a tummy ache". It's just not fair that we have to live like scabs, like paupers and he still gets to live like a king.

You know what, I've had to live on eggshells for years because of that man. I don't go out. I have never had another man in my house. One, I can't afford it and two I have to make sure my kids are safe. I don't go anywhere. But slowly things are getting better. My son said to me recently, "I'm glad you finally got it out and at least we don't have the Police at our house every week now". My daughter also said, "I'm glad he's gone mum, all he ever did was bloody drink and yell at you when you didn't make his favourite food". These were the sorts of things kids my kids were picking up on. They really lived through a lot and have seen a lot of things kids shouldn't have to see.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange 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.

The initiative to conduct the interviews was from an informal pro-bono collaboration by Rosie's Place, WASH House, and the Mt Druitt Family Violence Team. The narratives were provided by the individuals for the benefit of others. The narratives were obtained through interviews with Rosie's Place and assembled by the Insight Exchange team.

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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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