

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](#).

AMRITA

I started a relationship with Parth about ten years ago. I met him while I was working in Manchester in England. Parth was a friend of a friend of mine. It turned out that Parth lived only ten minutes away from the place I was working. Before I met him, it used to take me two and a half hours to get to work. I was looking for a place to stay closer to work and it went from there. At the start of our relationship, he was quite charming and he could be generous. He did have his kids over, but he told me that they weren't his kids, they were his cousin's kids. Although all the kids called him "Papa". He also told me he wasn't married. I obviously believed him. But what do you do? You don't recognise these things.

Parth sexually abused me. I didn't have anyone in England to talk to and I didn't know what to do. So, I just kept my mouth shut. About a month later I was feeling pretty sick, so I arranged to go and see a specialist. I told the specialist exactly how I was feeling, and he did an urgent blood test and that's how I found out I was pregnant. I didn't know how to take it or what to do.

I decided that I was going to keep the baby. But Parth tried to get rid of it by hitting me and being violent towards me. He didn't want the baby at all.

"I never told them about the sexual assault because I was ashamed. In our culture it's just something we don't talk about."

So, I ended up in this shelter, a transitional home. I was really weak and started to lose a lot of weight. I ended up at the women's and children's hospital. The doctors actually wanted me to terminate the baby, because they didn't believe that the baby would survive. They did all the tests like, genetic tests and every other test you could think of and

they put the baby's chance of survival at just 5% and my chance of surviving the pregnancy at about 25%. In that situation any girl would say "no I'll terminate it". But I had heard the baby's heartbeat and that changed everything. I gave birth to a healthy baby girl and I named her, Devira. She was very weak when she was born but the all the hospital staff were so good.

As soon as Devira was born, the police, immigration, the shelter, hospital staff, everyone helped me get back to Australia. Devira and I landed in Sydney to start a new life. But Parth kept ringing me up and verbally abusing me. He pressured me to go back to him in England. So, I did. The first time I went to go back, I forced the aeroplane to land. I got off the plane and came back to Australia. I didn't want to go. But in the end, my family took me there. They made sure I sat in the plane and didn't get out. So that's how I ended going back. My family had no idea what had happened. I never told them about the sexual assault because I was ashamed. In our culture it's just something we don't talk about. No matter what happens, you've just got to keep your mouth shut.

My mum has been somewhat supportive. But the rest of my family still doesn't know what happened. My sisters and my brothers don't know and my mother doesn't want to tell them. They all just said "well, you married the guy and you have a kid with him. So, that's your problem. You deal with it", and that was the end of it. We are an Indian family and normally Indian families are supposed to be very close together. But when there's a problem you're "just no good". Especially because I'm a 'single mum' now, so I'm "really no good".

“Well, you married the guy and you have a kid with him. So, that's your problem. You deal with it”.

Once I was back in Parth's house, the whole thing just started all over again. He drank a lot. He was basically an alcoholic. But he was also a very religious person. He prayed every morning, every night. I wasn't going to stay there. I was supposed fly back to Australia but he cancelled our tickets. He just kept cancelling our tickets. Parth never gave us any money whatsoever. He just would not let us get out of there.

“He only married me so he could keep me as a slave. I was tricked into marrying him.”

I wasn't even married to Parth until I went back to England. He only married me so he could keep me as a slave. I was tricked into marrying him. I actually didn't know I was getting married. Parth took me and Devira to the Temple by surprise. He told me that he wanted to take Devira to meet the priest that he always deals with. In front of all his gods and everything he told me to sign a paper. I

just went ahead and signed. Mind you I had my jeans on. In Indian culture if you go to Temples you have got to wear a formal Indian outfit and make sure that your head is covered. I didn't, because I didn't know I was going there. I felt pressured into it.

My marriage was not valid because Parth was already married. He didn't tell me he was married to someone else. So, our marriage was not valid because he wasn't divorced from his first wife. But we were stuck with Parth. He locked me and Devira in the house for two months. He wouldn't let us get out at all. He took everything off me including my phone and he locked the doors.

I was sexually abused by him and then on a few occasions he abused Devira, physically and in other ways. He tried to burn Devira's eye lashes. He threw her down the stairs with her nappy on. He took Devira's milk with him to work and if Devira was hungry, he said that she would have to wait for him to come home before she could eat anything. Devira was so tiny. She didn't understand what was going on, she was only 10 months old.

Whenever he went out, he locked us in the house. I was always scared. Goodness knows what time he used to come home. I never had a clock to look at, so I had no idea what the time was. The house was quite barren. In England, they have basements. Parth would sometimes keep us locked up in the basement. But most of the time he would keep us locked between the laundry and the kitchen. All the windows in the house were locked shut as well. The kitchen had a little living area. Just a tiny one. It just had one couch in there and that was it. Everything was tiled. It was very cold, especially when it snowed. Parth would not let us have the internal heating. We were only allowed to use a small portable heater. We stayed in the kitchen the whole time. From morning till whenever he got home. He expected all the cleaning to be done in the kitchen, all the washing to be done, cooking done, everything. He would come home and if Devira was asleep, he would wake her up. He would slap her and wake her up no matter what.

At first, I didn't have the will to survive. I absolutely didn't. You know, what I mean? I was bleeding from everywhere you could think of, broken ribs and I had a bump on my head. I didn't know what to expect next. I just don't know what gave me the courage to escape.

Devira started to get really ill. Her asthmatic breathing was terrible. She was really ill and that's when I found the courage to do something about it. I just wanted to protect Devira. To get her better and get things done. I didn't have that much willpower though. Mentally, I just wasn't there. But, as soon as Devira got sick, my heart just went "nup". Then I started to fight.

One day, Parth left the window open and somehow, I managed to get out. I ended up calling the police and they came so quickly. The police took us straight to the transition home.

“Somehow, Parth turned up to the café and that's when he took Devira at gun point.”

We were settling into the transition home and I took Devira to a nearby café. Parth must have got someone to follow us. Somehow, Parth turned up to the café and that's when he took Devira at gun point. It wasn't a pretty sight. It took three days for me to get Devira back. I'm sure the police wouldn't have slept either, knowing that a child was with him.

When Devira was taken at gun point, I rang my mum and I cried and I cried and I cried. My mum lives in Australia and she booked a flight and came to England. But by the time she arrived, Devira was back with me. It was lovely that she made an effort to come. I mean, if it wasn't for my mum, I don't think we would've made it, we probably would've starved to death. My mum was also a witness for the Court Case. I needed a witness. I didn't have any witnesses but Parth had seven witnesses. I asked my mum if she could do me an affidavit and she did. Soon after that she went back to Australia.

I did not get out of the transition home at all, not even to see a lawyer. That's how scared I was. The lawyers used to come to us. The transition home also got the welfare people to come over and then the child support people. A worker from child support came and she asked me if I wanted to apply for child maintenance. I said "look I'm really scared to do that". Finally, we got a place of our own and so we could leave the transition home. The police were aware of where we were living. The police considered Parth to be extremely dangerous. Constable Ling always used to try and call me in the afternoon to make sure that we were okay.

The court gave the order for Devira to be with me, but at the same time they wouldn't allow us to leave the county. I could have, but Devira wasn't allowed to. Parth wouldn't sign the Court papers and because of this, we were not allowed to get out of the country. All I wanted to do was to get back home to Australia. Parth delayed everything because he didn't sign the paperwork. God was looking after us obviously. As much as I was angry that Parth didn't sign the Court papers, I had the custody court case that I needed to be there for. If he signed the court papers earlier, then I would have got out of the country straight away. But I would have been worried about the custody case for Devira.

I had to fight for Devira's custody. I googled most of the stuff. I did my own affidavits. I did everything. I had three lawyers. Legal Aid only gives you two. I had to do this because unfortunately Parth kept jeopardising all the lawyers. He kept going to their office and threatening them until they dropped the case.

“I fought all the way with minimal financial support... The government gave us \$900 a month but the rent was \$800 a month. So, we only had \$100 left, for the month.”

I fought all the way with minimal financial support. At this point, family maintenance paid our rent. We were just very lucky that the government were looking after us in that sense. At least our rent, medical and health bills were was paid for. So, if we got sick, I would just ring up my caseworker and say “Devira's not feeling well” and she would take us to the doctors and then get medication for us. The government gave us \$900 a month but the rent was \$800 a month. So, we only had \$100 left, for the month. That's all I had. We survived on noodles. We did that until I decided to put my story in the newspaper because there was absolutely not enough support for us. I didn't know where to get additional support. From the

newspaper story we had so much food donated to us. I don't think I've ever had that much food in my life.

I finally found a lawyer who was really good. She was a female lawyer and she wasn't going to take crap from anyone. She wasn't scared. She ended up being our only lawyer and she won the case and so we were able to leave for Australia. When we eventually went back to the Court, and the Judge just signed off the papers without Parth's signature. Two weeks later we left the country and flew to Australia. We had an Australian Consulate-booked car and an Australian Consulate official making sure that we were fine and that we had all our passports ready and that we were safe.

When Devira and I were back in Sydney, Parth tried many times to make contact with me. He also tried to contact my family. My mum had to change her phone number. I was just very lucky that an Australian domestic violence service accepted me here pretty much as soon as we arrived. They got me into a housing place and helped me out with a Post Office Box number. The lawyer that I was dealing with in England was still doing my case work in England because he kept putting applications in. But I was in Australia and there was no way I was going to go back. I kept doing all my affidavits here and sending it to the lawyer. She would do the case, which I had to pay for because I was no longer able to receive Legal Aid.

Finally, the Judge that did the final order of our Custody Case, simply said that anything that Parth submitted, would be thrown out of Court. So, he was done. There was nothing in the final custody arrangement about us having to go back to England for him to have contact with Devira. There's nothing about phone or online contact visits or anything like that either. So, now he cannot contact me in any way unless it is through a lawyer via email or through another authorised person such as a counsellor.

Devira has been attending a mental health inpatient unit for children and young people. She's been with them almost three years. Of course, she needed help, that's why they kept her for so long. I needed mental health support as well. Devira just turned five. She's going to school today. I'm so excited. But at the same time, so sad. I mean, what do you do? Kids do grow up. You can't stop them. I patted myself on the back the other day. I did so well - considering everything that happened. Devira is doing so well too. I am so proud of her.

“We do deprive ourselves of a lot of things. But whatever is happening for us, we are glad that we are safe. That's all that matters.”

We still do struggle when it comes to food, but we have some really great charities who can help us out. Although, I can't ring them up all the time, I feel really bad ringing them. We do deprive ourselves of a lot of things. But whatever is happening for us, we are glad that we are safe. That's all that matters.

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.

Insight Exchange would also like to thank the person with lived experience of domestic and family violence who has generously shared their insights for the benefit of others.

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.

Handle with dignity

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