

The Insight component of [Insight Exchange](#) shares a person's **lived experience** of **violence and abuse**, highlighting a person's responses and resistance to violence and where **'social responses'** were helpful, unhelpful or harmful. This reveals the roles that individuals, organisations and communities play in people's experience of violence.

The Insight Exchange team have inserted content from the [Follow My Lead](#) resource as headings to help orientate the reader and to build understanding of the lived experience of violence. The following insights are from a person with lived experience of domestic and family violence.

JANINE

The relationship was really short. The whole thing lasted six months from the time that I met him to the time that the violence happened, so it was in a really short period of time.

I had worked in a corporate job back home in South America and I had been doing volunteer work with children. When I came to Australia, I decided I wanted to take a break from the corporate world and I found working with children was positive to that. When I came here, I was living with a family as an au pair; they were a lovely family.

By the time I met this guy, I'd been with the family for a while and was seeking some more independence, some more privacy. I wasn't keen to keep living with the family. I'm not sure if that was one of the reasons that I rushed into a relationship.

We started this relationship, and we were getting along quite well. We were from the same country. But he was living on the other side of the city from me, so it was quite hard for us to keep seeing each other. We had the intention to be together, so we decided that we were going to live together.

We rented an apartment and things escalated very quickly. I started noticing some behaviours, like red flags. For example, he had picked up the keys to our new apartment and we went to a pub and we had a few drinks. That night we had a fight.

He had the keys and he wouldn't give them to me. He was very drunk and yelling in the middle of the street and he would just hold control of the keys. Someone walked past, I think it was a police officer not in uniform, and he approached me and said, "this guy is yelling at you, so I want to have a conversation with him." And my ex ran away because he saw that a guy was approaching me and trying to help me. The guy identified himself as a police officer, and he tried to help me on the street.

"This guy is yelling at you, so I want to have a conversation with him."

One of my friends also walked past by chance and saw me crying. She tried to support me because she saw me cry, she saw me stressed, and she knew that I had this fight with him. I think she tried to open my eyes. She said, "are you sure you want to stay in this relationship?" And I thought, "It was a fight. These things happen." We had just rented an apartment, so I want to give it a try. Let's keep going.

Another example, we were both very busy with study and work. So, I could see that he started pushing me to stay home with him, rather than to see my friends. I was always a really social person with plenty of friends. But he'd say, "that's the only time that we can be together, and you're going to go out with your friends?" or "are you going to leave me alone here again?" I noticed that I was staying home more often, just denying invitations and stuff like that.

The image that I had of an abusive guy, was a guy that's always cranky and just smashing walls around everyone, whereas my ex was a social and pleasant person to be around. He was the typical charming guy. My girlfriends used to like him a lot, because he was social, approachable, keen to talk to everyone, nice to my friends, always joking around, and next to other guys, nicer to be around.

He did have this impulsive behaviour. I remember having these discussions that would get a little bit intense, especially if we had a few drinks. We used to joke about this neighbour, because we could see the neighbour through the window and he was always shirtless, so we used to call him the “naked neighbour”. And there was this day that we were cooking together, and the guy had someone over, and I’m like, “did you see the naked neighbour has some company tonight?” And he said, “are you so interested in him? Go there, check if he wants to stay with you. Go. Move closer.” And then he grabbed my arm, and I’m like, “what the fuck is this guy doing grabbing my arm?” I was shocked. I tried to get him to let go. We’d joked previously, and now he was aggressive.

The risks I face change over time and can change rapidly. *Follow My Lead*

The night when the violence happened, I was going to have a catch-up dinner with the family that I had previously lived with, that I was an au pair with. But he convinced me to stay home. It was really cold and he was like, “we can just stay home and have some pizza together. Are you sure that you want to go?” And then he started with all that talk, trying to keep me home. So I made it the way he wanted and I stayed. I had to cancel plans with the family, and that was when everything happened.

We had this recurrent argument because I’ve always wanted to stay in Australia, and he wanted to go back home. He comes from a wealthy family - I don’t know how much, but his family had a certain amount of money back home. So, we were building up a relationship, but we knew we were going to face this change of destiny over time or a change of choices.

We used to like to have a few beers and wine together. But I would notice that when he was drinking, his behaviour was changed and more aggressive. On the night that the violence happened, he had a video call with his family back home, and whenever he had a chat with his family, we would always end up back in this argument about where we’d live. He couldn’t convince me to go, I couldn’t convince him to stay, and we could never find a common ground.

I decided to stop drinking, just in case.

That night, I saw him outside on the balcony, talking to his family and drinking wine. I decided to stop drinking, just in case he’s angry when he comes inside or upset for some reason. I thought, “I’m going to be the one that’s not drinking anymore.”

He came inside after the call, and we were going to have pizza and sit in front of the fireplace. The fire was an old, gas operated one where sometimes you press the button and it doesn’t actually work, so you have to press a few times. He tries to turn it on. He tries once, twice, three times, four times. It’s not working. He gets super frustrated, and he starts to punch the glass door of the fire. And I’m like, “no, what are you doing? Calm down. I can help you. Don’t do that.” But then, he starts to kick it, because it wasn’t working. And I said, “hey, stop.” Because I was concerned that, first, the thing was going to break, get him hurt or the whole thing could even explode because it’s gas, and second, we would lose our bond.

So, I touched him on the shoulder. “Hey, stop.” And I squeezed his shoulder, so he would stop. When I did that, the first thing he did was just turn back and throw me on the floor. And he started punching me and kicking me straightaway. I had two glasses of wine before I stopped so I was a bit tipsy and trying to understand what was going on, I did what I could to defend myself.

When I realised that he wouldn’t stop, that he wasn’t just trying to take me off his shoulder, it was a continuous violence. I tried to fight back, because then I was angry as well. I was being punched and kicked. I started fighting back, and I did what I could: I scratched him. I bit him. Really, just trying to defend myself. But he wouldn’t stop hitting me. He wasn’t a big build, but he was still way stronger than me.

He kicked me lots of times, especially around my ribs. Whenever I fell on the floor, he would try to suffocate me putting his forearm across my neck; pressing hard against my neck. He literally said, “now I’m going to kill you,” a couple of times. When he was trying to suffocate me, I was just

wiggling myself, trying to get off, I realised that I wasn't going to get away, unless I pretended that I was actually, gone. And then, I remember clearly having the movie of my life. Like a near death experience. I started thinking about my family and how if I'm gone like that, how they would receive this information. I think that's maybe where I got the strength enough to get off his arms. I thought, no, I can't. This is not how this is going to end.

I had the idea of pretending to be unconscious and ... he finally let me go.

So, I had the idea of pretending to be unconscious and I did that and then he finally let me go. When he let me go, I could run to the door, and when I ran to the door, I opened it and started just banging on all the other

doors on our floor. It was a studio apartment, so the doors were really close to one another. When he realised that I was doing that, he grabbed me by the hair and pulled me back to the apartment. I ran again, and luckily one of the neighbours opened the door. And when the neighbours opened the door, I went straight in. I said, "please help me, he's trying to kill me." And by that time, I was bleeding. I had lots of scratches and marks on my face, so the neighbours allow me to come in.

There were two neighbours that helped me. A couple of guys that live in one apartment, and in the other apartment, the guy heard the screams and called the police. So, by the time I was safe in the couple's apartment, the police were coming. From then, I didn't quite black out but it's a bit of a blur when I try to remember this now. I know that the police told me that they got him trying to run away from the apartment after. So, the police took him away and came to my apartment to collect evidence and to collect my statement. They collected my statement on video and took pictures of the whole thing. They took pictures of the fire. They took pictures of my place. It was a bit of a mess, because obviously a struggle had happened there. And then we went to the hospital.

I texted my friends that I was a victim of domestic violence and I just needed someone to come with me to the hospital. I'm obviously devastated, and I needed some company.

The police left his phone with me and I knew his password and his family was calling non-stop to know what happened. So, I told them what happened. I sent his Mum an audio message because I wanted his family to know what he did after that call he had with them. I really wanted them to know what kind of person we were dealing with. His brother-in-law was the only one who wasn't too upset to ring me, so they put him on to talk to me to convince me not to press charges, or not to go ahead with anything that I was going to do. I remember him saying, "I know it's not what it looks like, but he is a good person, he is a good man." And I'm like, "the 'good man' you're talking to me about; I'm literally waiting to see if this 'good man' broke my ribs. You're telling me that this guy is a 'good man?'"

"I know it's not what it looks like, but he is a good person, he is a good man."

His family was trying to convince me not to do anything, because they thought I was going to ruin his life.

In the hospital, I met my friend there. I was still in shock. I'd been through some exams and stuff and I remember being really embarrassed to tell the nurses what happened, to the doctors, and everyone looking at me with that sorry face, and saying how sorry they were for me.

After the hospital, I went to stay at my friend's place; the friend that was there with me. The next day, I went to the police station to do some more procedures for evidence. They took some more pictures of my body, because by then the bruises started to come up, and I had bruises all over my body. I had a really black eye, I had scratches.

The police said they had issued a restraining order to keep him away from me, so he wouldn't be able to stay in contact or be anywhere near me. This didn't help me feel relieved or anything. I was in panic. I thought he was going to come back, because I didn't know what was going to happen to him. Although he got arrested that night, he got released the day after. And his phone was with me. He had nowhere to go, no money. He didn't have his documents.

Anyway, the next day, he tried to contact me, so he breached the order straight away, and I just panicked. When he rang me, as soon as the phone started ringing, I gave the phone to one of my friends, and I remember them saying, "he's ringing, let's go to the police station." Luckily, I live really close to the police station, so we went straight there.

I am always aware of the actual and possible responses of others, from professionals to my friends and family members. These responses inform how, or if, I reach out to others. *Follow My Lead*

I had some dark times there. For the next three weeks I had no contact with my family because I couldn't tell them. At that time, I had been in regular contact with them, so it was unusual.

I think I'm only here now because I had this group of friends.

All my girlfriends came to my place, and they would take turns to sleep in the apartment with me, and to look after me. I remember being in this vegetative state, the most depressive days of my life. Everyone was making decisions of what to do; who was going to sleep there, who was going to bring food. I just remember

feeling as if I wasn't there. I think I'm only here now because I had this group of friends.

I didn't know what to do, but this solid group of friends from my culture, were making these decisions for me. They were so supportive, they did everything for me, even reminded me to have a shower because that was the state I was in. They took care of everything. One friend got all his stuff packed up and took it to the police station, so he couldn't come to the apartment. And that was the end of the relationship.

The police officers directed me to a domestic violence service, a couple of services I can have assistance from. Their advice was that I should leave the place, because I wouldn't feel good there, but I had nowhere to go, and I wasn't feeling in any condition to plan to move out or anything like that. So, I decided to stay and have a few friends stay with me.

I lost my job because I couldn't work for a while. How are you going to show up at work? I wasn't myself. I had to stay away for a while.

I went to see a psychologist because I was provided these psychological services. I went to two sessions. But the professional that saw me, I don't think she had an idea of what it is to be an immigrant student woman here, relying only on herself.

“You don't have to worry about jobs. You can't. You need to focus on your mental health.”

I shared with her my concerns, like how I need to find a job. I'm really concerned about getting a job, and on the other hand, my psychological and mental health is definitely not good. But I'm still concerned because I have no one to rely on financially. The first thing she said was, "you don't have to worry about jobs. You can't. You need to focus on your mental health. Stop worrying about that. Go find some activities that would just contribute to your mental health. Maybe dancing."

What advice is that? She doesn't understand my reality at all. I wish I could just go walking on the beach and go swimming or whatever, but that felt really insensitive. And I felt like, okay, this is not for me.

Once I started to walk on my own two feet again when I was feeling good enough, I could stay by myself again in the apartment and after a while, I started looking for a flatmate. I couldn't afford it by myself.

Months later, I got some financial support, but it was a long time coming between applying for this financial support and actually receiving it. In the meantime, I was relying on the money I had saved, which was only a small amount. I was paying for my studies here, and all the bills by myself. I didn't have financial support from my family back home.

I may experience supportive, unsupportive or oppressive systems and environments. *Follow My Lead*

I think the first court appointment was maybe a month after the violence, and that was a nightmare. His family had hired two lawyers. The information I had about appearing in court was like, "you don't have to worry, you're going to be represented by a public lawyer. You're the victim. You don't have to worry about that." I was warned of how rough things were going to be, so I was obviously super nervous when I had to go in court and to testify.

I went up to testify and they said that they were going to play the video record that they collected from me. And I'm like, I'm all right to answer any questions, because I'm going to be telling the truth. So, I was up there, and his lawyer was super aggressive. He tried to make me look as bad as he could. He tried to put me as a big liar, as if all my intentions were to make him look bad. He would ask me questions like, "but how many times did he punch you?" And I'm like, "I was being smashed on the floor. The guy was literally kicking me on the floor, how am I supposed to count how many times he hit me, or which hand he used for this, which hand he used for that?" They kept circling back to these kinds of question. I would stutter a bit. And I cried a lot during seeing my own image on the recording, and then with all of these questions. It was a really stressful thing.

"How many times did he punch you?"

The court had two appointments, so this was the first one, and I was being represented by a woman lawyer who seemed really good. She said, "look, don't worry about that, this is just the first appointment. Basically, today is just to hear your testimonial, and then the next appointment, they're going to interrogate him. So, don't worry about that. I'm going to be here."

The second appointment was a couple of months later. On the second one, when I went there, I didn't have much information, because apparently, I didn't "have to worry about that." I had a couple of girlfriends with me in both court appointments.

On the second appointment, when we went there, they have the domestic violence department, so I was separated, waiting for the time of the appointment to start. So, I was looking for the lawyer from the first appointment, but she wasn't there. I was only informed on that same day that she was sick and they had to send another person to represent me.

The new lawyer didn't even introduce himself to me.

This new guy, the new lawyer, didn't even introduce himself to me. When they said, "that's the guy", I looked over and saw him chatting in a really friendly way with the aggressor's lawyer and I started panicking. Where's the lady that assured me that my turn was going to come today? I thought it was really bad and so unprofessional that he couldn't even introduce himself and say, I'm the one representing you today. He just sat there having a friendly chat with the other lawyer and then I saw him opening my case in front of the judge. She starts asking these questions, and he couldn't answer. Literally, for me, it looks like he just opened the case right there, at that very exact moment, because he just started turning the pages and reading one thing or another to answer her back.

He calls me out of the courtroom to ask me a couple of questions, and that was all. And then the judge even made a joke in front of him, "Okay, so I'm going to do your job for you. I'm going to break down the events, so I can understand the case, because apparently, you can't do that." And that's exactly what she did, because it was the first judge from the first appointment, so she had plenty of information already. But he would literally just turn the pages in front of the judge. And the impression that I got was, this guy just arrived here, they just threw this bunch of papers in front of him, and he's just opening my case in front of this lady right now.

I'll be looking to see whether the person abusing me will be able to influence your thinking and make you think differently about me. *Follow My Lead*

And it turns out that the aggressor lied and made this whole rubbish story in front of the judge, that I was the one to be violent to him in the first place. That he was just trying to defend himself, because look at him, he has a mark of a bite on his arm, so he was just trying to defend himself, so he punched. Everything he did was just to defend himself. After all, I'm super strong and super violent, and I just wanted to make him look bad.

So, I had this really rubbish guy representing me there. I had my abuser with his lawyers telling all these lies about me and making up this ridiculous story, saying that all he did was just hold me by my waist and put me away from him, because I was hitting him violently. And I had to stand there, watching it happen in front of me, and being really upset and angry.

I didn't do anything, obviously, because I was in court. I wouldn't do anything, anyway. Then at the end, the judge just said, look, "I can't say that this guy is guilty, because you didn't give me enough information," and she pointed to my incompetent lawyer. Her summary was longer than that, but basically, she said, I don't have enough evidence.

It was so frustrating, because for me, it was so obvious. There're all the pictures, there's all my body destroyed, all the bruises, everything. It was really upsetting afterwards. The case was so obvious, they made me feel like I didn't have to worry about that. Even if I did have to worry about that, I couldn't just hire lawyers as he did. I didn't have the money. I'm pretty sure his family spent heaps of money to try to get him out of the situation.

The good part of the story is that the police had his passport from when they arrested him, so he wouldn't leave the country. In the meantime, he didn't renew his visa. So at the end of the court session, the two lawyers were with him and they were celebrating that he got away with it. I was really upset, with my friends and stuff. And then, all of a sudden, someone comes to whisper to the judge or to someone, that there are a few police officers waiting for him outside, because he's an illegal in the country. He can't stay. He's going to be deported.

The police officers were waiting by the door of the court, and he looked surprised, and he actually was arrested again and put into the police car, in handcuffs.

Now, that makes me more upset because when you think about it, him trying to kill me is not bad enough from the point of view of the law, but him not being able to renew his visa, it's a good enough reason for him to be deported. "Domestic violence? Sorry, I can't deal with that, I don't have enough evidence. But oops, you didn't renew your student visa. Out of the country you go."

And that's how he went.

Acknowledgement and thanks

Insight Exchange (Domestic Violence Service Management) would 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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