

# “Failure to protect” or “Failure to respect?”



# The plan

- Data from 3 research projects:
  - Women who have survived FDV
  - Statutory and non-statutory workers
  - Men who have perpetrated FDV

# Prevalence in the general population

Since the age of 15:

**1 in 4** women  
have experienced violence  
by an intimate partner  
they may or may not have been living with.



**1 in 6** women  
had experienced violence by a  
partner they were living with.

**1 in 9** women  
had experienced violence by a  
boyfriend, girlfriend or date.

Since the age of 15:



Over  
**half a million**  
women reported their children  
had seen or heard partner violence.



Over  
**400,000** women  
experienced partner violence  
during pregnancy.

# Prevalence in CPS & FL jurisdictions

- NSW – 26% of reports were EDV (92% by mandated reports of which 73% were police). 31% not referred for any further assessment (Cross et al, 2012).
- Victoria – CPS reported DV present in 31 % of cases (38% neglect, 37% physical abuse, 68 % emotional abuse, 20 % of child sexualized violence)
- 45-46% of primary caregivers receiving a child protective service had survived domestic violence (Cross et al. 2012).
- Allegations of EDV were present in 68% of matters in the Australian Family Law Court and 48% in the Federal Magistrates courts (Moloney et al., 2007).
- Allegations of DV were present in over 51% of litigated family law cases & over 70 % of cases that were not judicially determined (AIFS, 2007)



# Messages from research

“In colonial child welfare settings, the victim of violence is often held responsible for the violence, while the perpetrator is disappeared from the analysis” (Strega, 2009).

# Messages from experts

“They don’t really understand what it’s like and they (CPS & Police) treat women who are in domestic violence situations like they are stupid, uneducated and dumb basically.”

“Although I am grateful for the help that I did receive, I feel that what happened to me didn’t matter very much and I felt blamed.”

“They (CPS) didn’t even ask him anything about it (the domestic violence).”

“The child protection system is a punitive system that perpetuates power and abuse back on women.”

“This woman has a baby that she’s too scared to say anything about because child protection will use that to remove her child .”

“I see it as my job to protect women and children from the child protection system.”

Messages from professionals



# Gender inequitable, socially unjust practices

## What we look at with mothers

...

- ✓ Parenting skills
- ✓ Mental health
- ✓ Substance usage
- ✓ Relationship choices
- ✓ Meeting children's basic needs
- ✓ Kin network
- ✓ Employment choices
- ✓ Child care choices

## What we look at with fathers

...

- ✓ Employment
- ✓ Criminal history
- ✓ Substance usage



# Methodology

## ➤ Research Questions:

- What is the lived experience of fathering for men who are domestically violent?
  - What are men's perceptions regarding nature, extent and severity of domestic violence in their families?
  - How do men describe the impact on women and children?
  - How do they describe their fathering practices and experiences?
  - How do they describe their relationships with children?

## ➤ Methods

- Semi-structured in-depth interviews
- Demographic Questionnaire
- \*Violence Assessment Index
- \*Controlling Behaviors Checklist
- \*Injury Assessment Index

## ➤ Thematic construct analysis

# The Participants

- 20 men 26 – 46 years of age (mean – 35)
- Participants of Men's Behaviour Change Programs
- Had been physically, sexually and/or emotionally abusive to the child's biological mother
- Biological fathers to **53** children in total
- 8 stepfathers

# Coercive control

65% of fathers described physically assaulting their children's mothers in front of their child(ren) and/or step child(ren).





# Men's accounts of the impact on women & children

- Removal and placement of 23/53 (43%) children
- Death of an infant due to premature labour precipitated by physical assault
- Repeated suicide attempts
- Miscarriages
- Bowel cancer
- Ongoing fear & terror experienced by women and children
- Disruption to relationships
- Substance abuse, mental health issues
- Youth homelessness, teenage pregnancy



# Two major themes in the men's accounts

## Constructions of locus of control

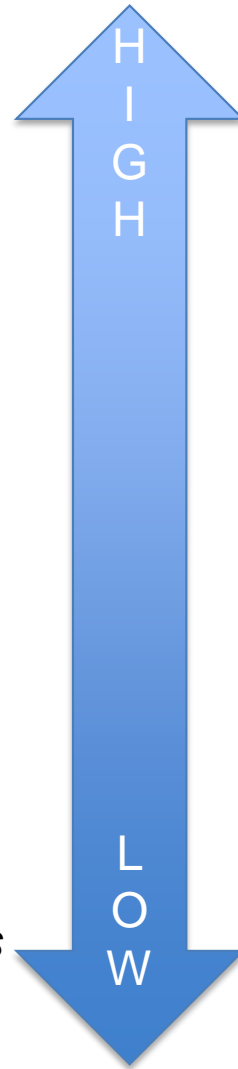
- ❖ 'In control' vs 'out of control'
- ❖ Accounts of coercive control

## Constructions of masculinity

- ❖ High to low adherence to hegemonic masculinity
- ❖ **Hegemonic masculinity** refers to the dominant, culturally idealized form of **masculinity** within the gender hierarchy. It refers to the practices that promote the dominant social position of men, and the subordinate social position of women.

# Hegemonic Masculinity

*“I had absolutely minimal respect for females period ... I’d just seen them for one thing and one thing only ... it’s sort of like well if you don’t like it well f\*\*\* there’s the door”*



*“I feel like a man when I’m hurting people that have pissed me off and just me strength like I’ve like pride in me strength”*

*“you hear men standing around talking saying I belted this one see that just I just feel like saying piss off, f\*\*\* that, that sort of thing you know I won’t let me son play with barbie dolls and that’s the biggest load of crap ... maybe they’re insecure I don’t know.”*

*“Sometimes you like to have that bit of power but ... if you’re in a relationship ... youse both have equal rights, equal power and to discuss things without one person thinking they’re the more dominant person.”*

# Locus of Control

*“I thought that’s how life is men show anger they get what they want. I like to be in power and control most of the time I get pretty shitty when she tries to take that back.”*

*“I was in such an angry state that I just switch off to all feelings and emotions and ... I’ve got blinkers on tunnel vision sort of thing.”*

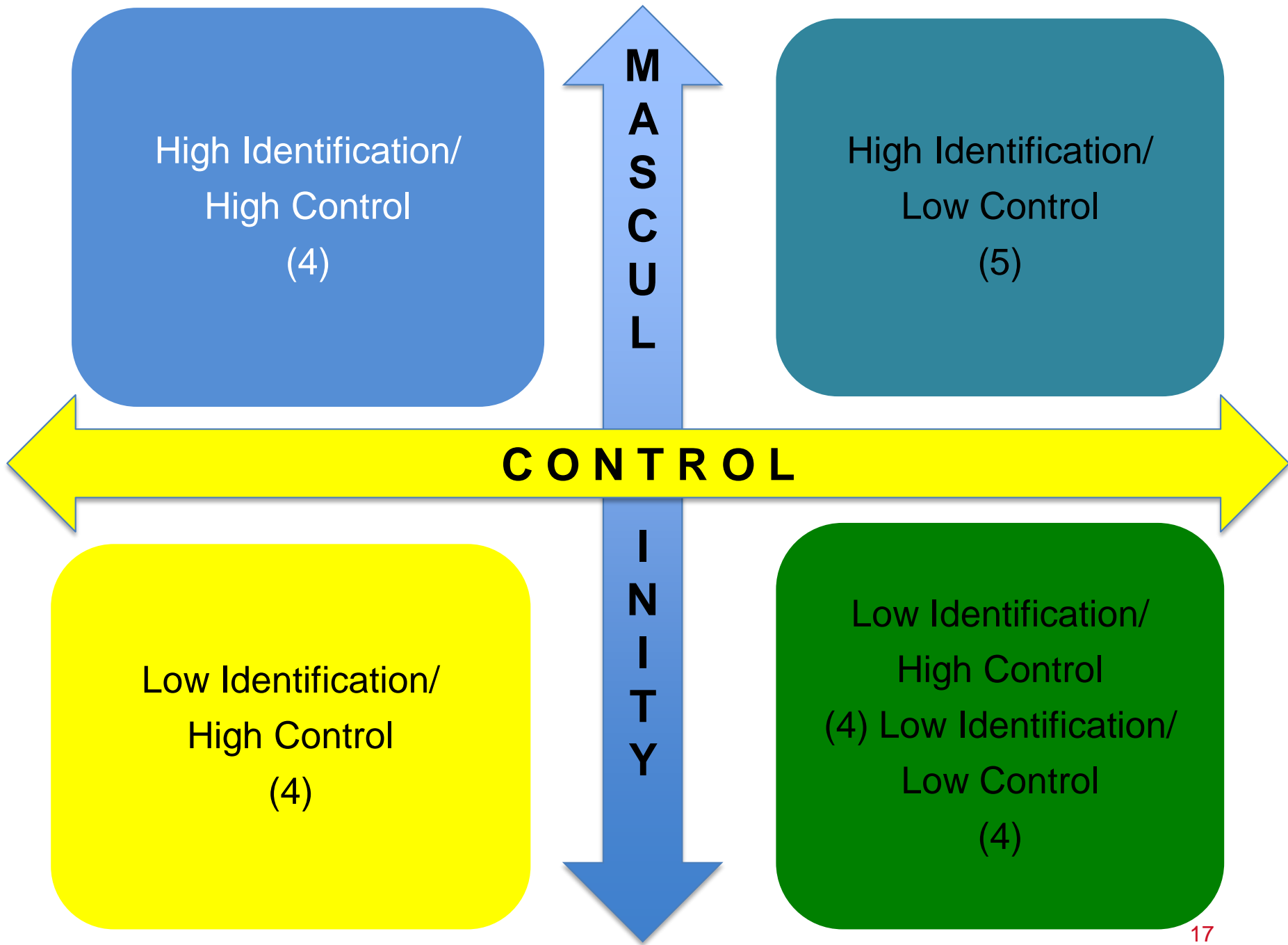


*‘That’s the way I’ve been through sport and work if there’s a physical threat it needs to be neutralized.’*

*“When I’m off the drugs I’m the most pleasant person.”*

*“I was probably influenced by the formative years in my own life.”*

*‘I certainly knew what I was doing.’*



## HIGH HM/HIGH LC

- Planned pregnancies
- 'Providers' & 'protectors'
- Authoritarian fathers/Patriarchal partners
- Rigid ideas about parenting and gender
- High expectations for obedience & respect - 'good children' respect and obey adults
- Predictable atmosphere of fear and anxiety



# HIGH HM/HIGH LC

## Effects on mother-child relationships

- *“they probably **hate their mother** cause she doesn’t really do anything about it ... they lose respect for her because she’s I’d say that they sort of see in a way that she’s **letting me do it** and hasn’t done anything about it so and the other thing too like she can’t .*
- *“I think that’s a result it creates he impression that I ... am the top dog so to speak that okay um mummy and daddy might say one thing but daddy displays a whole different attitude that when push comes to shove dad’s at the top of the food chain.’*

# HIGH HM/LOW LC

- Unpredictable landscape
  - Tense and frightening environment frequently punctuated with incidents of extreme and sometimes life threatening displays of violence.
  - Cold, hostile and cruel, especially towards step children.
  - Men described having less responsibility for, and control over their actions.
- *'It's come close to me punching him in the mouth a few times ... but I haven't like I'll walk past and I'll shoulder barge him and if he's like standing in me road trying to pee me off, he'll um stand there and just get in me face and call me names and that so I'll just drop the shoulder in as I'm walking past stuff like that ...*

# HIGH HM/LOW LC

- Lack of fathering explained as being due to drugs/mental health issues
- *'not really involved cause I suffer depression ... My partner does too ... I don't do much around the house.'*

*Interviewer: Did anyone notice his depression?*

*Participant: Me and J have known something about it for a while ... cause he's always threatened to I want to cut me arm off, I want to cut me dick off, I want to cut me , rah, rah, rah amputate my body, chop it up into pieces,*

*Interviewer: How long has he been saying that?*

*Participant: Over a year*

# LOW HM/HIGH LC

## RISKS TO CHILDREN

- Martyrs, sacrificing their own happiness, to satisfy their partners, to hold the family together, to honour commitments previously made, to be there for their children.
  - They perceived that they used violent and other controlling behaviours in order to save women and children.
  - Men described themselves as having liberal attitudes and promoting equality in relationships.
- *'I kicked in the back door cause she wouldn't let me have he kids one afternoon when it was my turn to pick them up and so I just kicked the back door in and grabbed them.'*
  - *'I told her she was a bad mother which I didn't mean it I said that to try and lower her self esteem and that.'*

# LOW HM/LOW LC

- Fundamental description of themselves as good fathers
- 2/3 experienced death of their mothers at an early age
- Denied risk they placed children in:
- Elevate relationship aspects over other aspects of fatherhood
- Favourite biological child
- *'I'd drink all day but it didn't affect me fatherhood at all ... swimming lessons I'd be at the edge of the pool drinking, sneaking grog in'*



# Conclusions

## “Failure to Protect”

- Why doesn't she leave?
- Why does she always pick “refrigerators with eyes?”
- Why doesn't she stop being so weak?
- What is she doing to predict, prevent and protect her children?

## “Failure to Respect”

- What is he likely to do if she attempts to leave?
- What does his relationship pattern look like?
- Why does he prey on women's vulnerabilities?
- What is he doing to behave respectfully and responsibly towards others?

# Failure to Respect

- the perpetrator's pattern of violence and controlling behaviour
- his perception of the aetiology, nature, severity and impact of domestic violence on women and children
- his ability and willingness to restrain himself from future violence
- his fathering capacity
- the existence of other complicating factors such as substance misuse, mental health issues, his social and cultural context
- His ideas about what he is prepared to do to learn another way to be a man that is non-violent and ethical

# Gender equitable socially just responses

## **What we look at with mothers ...**

- ✓ Parenting skills
- ✓ Substance abuse
- ✓ Mental health
- ✓ Relationship choices
- ✓ Meeting child's basic needs
- ✓ Kin network
- ✓ Employment choices
- ✓ Child care choices

## **What we look at with fathers ...**

- ✓ Parenting skills
- ✓ Substance abuse
- ✓ Mental health
- ✓ Relationship choices
- ✓ Meeting child's basic needs
- ✓ Kin network
- ✓ Employment choices
- ✓ Child care choices
- ✓ Supporting/respecting child's mother

Yes, domestic violence is in the headlines around the globe and there are strategies and systemic changes taking place as we speak, however the reality should never be lost in the jargon and backslapping of those who see it as an opportunity for vote counting. I believe continued improvement towards victim focussed services occurs when we name things for what they are, attach the appropriate level of seriousness to the issues and understand how things are related and therefore have repercussions elsewhere.

It should also be remembered that for those services on the ground, the women you work with, it is their lives and their children's lives that you impact either positively, or negatively. Always remember that you get to go home and forget about it, but they are left to pick up the pieces.

# “Failure to Protect” or “Failure to Protect?”

“We might possess every technological resource... but if our language is inadequate, our vision remains formless, our thinking and feeling are still running in the old cycles, our process may be 'revolutionary' but not transformative.”

Adrienne Rich



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