

MEDIA RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Police response to family violence failing women who have been in prison, royal commission told

Women who have been in prison are being forced to stay in violent relationships because of police bias, inaction and misconduct in responding to violence, according to a submission by Flat Out to the family violence royal commission.

‘These women, who are often especially vulnerable through drug addictions and mental health issues, may be seen not to cooperate with police or fit into the current family violence service model, and are at significant risk of missing out on access to specialised family violence services,’ said Flat Out spokesperson, Amanda George, today.

‘They are often immediately presumed to be perpetrators when reporting family violence, without recognition of their victimisation. This indicates a systemic failing in the operationalisation of the Victoria Police Code of Practice.’

Existing police approaches to family violence are failing criminalised women, and the overwhelming majority of women who end up in prison in Victoria are victims/survivors of family violence.

Workers in the community sector engaged in support work with criminalised women recounted instances of police bias, misconduct and inaction that included:

- Police mistreating women reporting sexual assault or family violence and refusing to take reports when approached or called
- Police refusing to respond to family violence because they knew both parties and judged that both parties were ‘as bad as one another’, i.e. the woman was presumed to not be a victim because of her criminal record
- Police refusing to respond to male violence when called out, even in cases where the woman had visible injuries, but breaching the woman for outstanding warrants for ‘failure to appear’, for example, and then remanding her
- Violent male partners breaching IVOs multiple times without consequence
- Police pressuring women to testify against their abusive partners when women were terrified and intimidated by police

Workers report that criminalised women typically feel afraid to contact police on account of family violence. This is often compounded by the woman’s fear of having children removed by Child Protection if she reported family violence.

Criminalised women do not have equal access to justice in Victoria and the right to live safely in the community.

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