

Senate Select Committee on Men's Health

Submission
Ross C Mitchell

To whom it may concern,

The first issue I wish to raise is the limited time to make submissions to this enquiry, the announcement date being 18 Feb and the closing date being 27 Feb. This gives people 9 days to prepare a full and concise submission and have it ready to place with this committee before closing. I feel this is a ridiculous limitation to try and discuss the many issues surrounding men's health. Most Senate Standing Committees have a good 3 months of input.

The second issue, and one I take extreme offence at, is the ⁱ termination of Warwick Marsh as Men's Health Ambassador, a man with much experience in the area of Men's Health, to be replaced by the partner of a politician, for stating facts about a very small minority of the population, less than 1% according to the ABS, those facts were taken as being offensive, and as homophobic. The whole situation reeks of nepotism, there are many more qualified people than Ms Gillard's hairdresser partner, Sue Price or James Hickey come to mind.

Of even more concern is his no show at his first public appearance ⁱⁱ.

Women's health policy started in 1989 and now 20 years later, we are looking into a men's health policy, about 20 years too late.

The third issue that needs looking into is Government, whilst it could be argued that the Office for the Status of Women (OW) is necessary, there is no Office for the Status of Men, arguably when the Government makes legislation, the Senate should consider how that legislation will affect all areas of the population, not just women, homosexuals, aboriginals or children, which seems very much how the Senate works, totally ignoring the backbone of families, community and the entire country, the average working class father.

I see the OW as discrimination at the highest level, until and unless we either drop the OW or institute an Office for the Status of Men, my views won't change, and nothing in the areas of funding for men's health will change either.

The main issue I wish to discuss with this enquiry revolves around family separation and male suicide rates, which the government has long failed to link to legislation and departmental practices. In 2005 an MP asked the then Minister for FACS the number of males who left the Child Support Scheme due to suicide (Hansard 18/08/2005). The response was along the lines of "we don't keep those statistics" which raises the question WHY NOT? The CSA then disclosed that in 2002/03, some 1527 clients of the CSA left the scheme due to death. ⁱⁱⁱ

Does the government care so little about the father's of this country that we can't put a few dollars into researching why the men in these age groups, as CSA parents, are dying at a much higher rate than population statistics would allow.

There is even some failure in getting accurate suicide figures because if someone intentionally takes his or her life in an automobile, that death is attributed as a road fatality and not a suicide. At the moment ABS statistics reveal males suicide at 5 times the rate of females. Males successfully suicide at a higher rate than the national road toll without taking into account those who suicide in a motor vehicle.

The vitriol men face in the media also needs to be looked at, from news reports titled "Deadbeat Dads owe \$1b in Child Support"^{iv} based from a media release from Mr Ludwig, to the recent Darcey Freeman tragedy. The media, whilst arguably doing the job of reporting the news, never fail to miss when a father takes a child's life, yet totally ignore most situations when a mother does this.

No minister of parliament should be denigrating any member of society. Especially in the media, society tends to now view all separated fathers as deadbeats, when the truth is the numbers are a very small percentage. Including fathers who lawfully pay less than \$40 per week in Child Support (of which I am one, with 2 Child Support children in shared care and both parents on similar incomes) assimilates myself with fathers who might be hiding some income.

The recent Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) report into homicides in 2006/2007 reveals that single mothers take twice as many children's lives as biological fathers, yet I can not find out the name of a young boy killed when his mother jumped of the Westgate Bridge some 7 months prior to the Freeman tragedy. There was no outpouring of world grief for this baby boy; it is like it is a hidden sin when a mother takes her child's life yet world news when a father does.

For me, this makes the media culpable when a mother takes the life of a child, and our legal system also, fails to condemn. When sentencing Yeeda Topham for the death of her son James in Perth, the Judge ruled that time served was sufficient, with the words "where justice ends, mercy begins". History shows that men don't receive the same justice, and only time will tell if Darcey Freeman's father gets any mercy from the courts.

Now our state education departments are changing the goalposts on educating children, removing competition based education. Boys and girls learn in different ways, even from an early age, boys need a competitive environment to learn to the best of their capabilities, whilst the new methodologies might advantage girls in our education system, it's disadvantaging young boys, to the extent that we now find the systems drugging them to behave more like girls.

More than 30% of boys in the state education system are on some form of mind-altering drug, Ritalin or Dexamphetamine to make them behave during classes, then Catapres to reverse the effects so they can sleep at night. Less than 3% of girls are on these medications.

Some might think most of the above is irrelevant in a discussion about men's health, but a male in today's society faces all these misnomers, from "deadbeat dads" to "all men are violent", to some of the reasons people come up with for why men commit filicide. These issues can and do affect men's emotional health.

The Family Law Act and the United Nations, whilst recognising that children have autonomous rights, fails to realise that most fathers want an active involvement in their children's lives post separation. Having lost a child in 1983 to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and having faced losing involvement in my 3 daughters lives post separation, the emotional torture of the death of a child is nothing compared to your children basically being dead for 12 out of 14 days of the fortnight.

Another issue that needs looking into is "anger issues" that most men allegedly have according to the media and the Government with its bias campaign "Australia says no to domestic violence against women". My experience with dealing with SIDS gives me some insight into anger as an emotion. Those helping me through that nightmare said to me that anger is a natural emotion that results from some pressure, or frustration and not expressing anger is both unhealthy and dangerous.

Last year we had the federal Discrimination Minister tour the country asking women how they were discriminated in Australian society today. The few men she spoke to were basically ignored. Just as the Discrimination Minister discriminates men, so to do our laws, judges and politicians. This enquiry, the piss-weak extension of time to respond, and the outcome will be pointless, unless we start doing something about the gender inequality in today's society.

From the 1900's feminism started asking for equality for women, the right to vote, equal pay for equal work, etc. It appears today we have come full circle. When a male is sentenced from a crime he receives on average double the sentence a female would for the same crime. We still here women's groups (including the OW) claiming women get paid less, however that fact is based on average incomes.

Women's groups receive hundreds of thousands in federal funding each year, for the most obscure reasons "socialising" being one a Victorian section of the Council for Single Mothers and their Children, and some \$18,000 to produce a history of the CSMC Vic^v, yet Dads In Distress, who work hard in small community groups trying to reduce male suicide are struggling to survive due to a disgusting lack of federal funding.

Men's mental and emotional health are closely linked to their physical health, it is foolhardy to blame men for the total lack in educating men to alternatives when it comes to their health. Few men want to undergo a rectal exam for prostate problems, yet even fewer are aware there are alternatives, such as a simple blood test.

All these issues and many more need looking at by this committee, why men suicide at 5 times the rate of women, why 95% of work related deaths are men, why men die on average 7 years younger than women. Why when men make up less than 50% of the population do they lead in so many different areas, related to health issues?

Perhaps this committee could do well to read some victim impact statements from children who have had a parent murdered or parents who have had a child murdered to closely understand what fathers and children go through in our family law system.

In 2004 the then Liberal Government made changes to Family Law to come close to equal parenting, yet didn't quite get there. I believe that post separation, until such times as a court sorts out any access issues, the law should refrain parents moving out of the locality, and set shared care as a base to be worked away from. There is also a need to remove the greatest cause of conflict and expense in Family Law, legal representation.

We have this presumably wonderful system of "no fault" in property and divorce matters yet we allow fault to be raised in parenting issues and to outweigh an adults autonomous rights with those of their children. This system is killing men, the working backbone of this country, the majority of taxpayers that fund and keep this country afloat in these hard economic times, and then we financially rape these separated fathers with Child Support.

It would be an interesting study to find out just how many small businesses have been bankrupted that were run by CS parents.

ⁱ <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24718346-5006784,00.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.theage.com.au/national/mens-health-ambassador-no-show-at-first-outing-20081127-6k2j.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://forum.dadsontheair.com/viewtopic.php?t=12668&highlight=1527>

^{iv}

<http://news.google.com.au/archivesearch?q=Ludwig+%2B+%22Deadbeat+dads%22&btnG=Search+Archives&hl=en>

^v <http://www.vwt.org.au/grants/projectsfunded.php>

<mailto:menshealth.sen@aph.gov.au>

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Mr Ross C Mitchell