

CASE STUDIES

Supporting victim survivors who do not view police as a safe option for managing family violence risk

These case studies have been developed to support family violence practitioners to identify and implement tailored anti-oppressive responses for victim survivors who do not consider calling police to be a safe option.

You can use these case studies as a powerful part of evidence-based collective learning. Whether incorporated in independent or group supervision, when partnered with the reflective tool they will play a part in building your skills and knowledge to support practice.

Case Study One

Emma is a lawyer and works with police. Her partner Jon is a senior police officer and is violent and controlling at home. He is well regarded in policing circles and has been in the press. Emma has attempted to report Jon's violence to police and also sought help from the Police Association. Police did not record Emma's report and did not believe her, cautioning her to watch her words. Emma's report was conveyed word-for-word to Jon by police, resulting in him physically assaulting her. Emma's colleagues also somehow found out she'd reported family violence, and her boss told her he didn't think someone as educated as her would put up with family violence or experience it. Emma is feeling judged at work.

Emma called the new Victoria Police unit dealing with police officers who use family violence (SOFVU) and was told that SOFVU wouldn't deal with her because no report of criminality had been made by her. Emma became upset saying she had tried to report but got nowhere. The Police Association has provided Emma with access to a counsellor, but she now doesn't trust anyone associated with police.

Emma is scared about her information being shared again and resulting in further family violence at home and exclusion at work. Emma works in the justice system and has no confidence that it will hold Jon accountable, even if she can get police to believe her. Emma wants to leave Jon and wants to do detailed safety and escape planning for herself and her children, using options that don't involve sharing her information with police. Emma has asked you if she can use a pseudonym in seeking your help and has asked you to promise not to share her information with police.

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Case Study Two

Chrissy lives 20km from town on a rural property. She works at a supermarket stacking shelves part time. Her partner Dave is a mechanic in town. He uses violence against Chrissy when drunk, plays football with several police officers in the closest town, and often drinks with them after footy games and works on their cars. Sometimes the wives of Dave's police footy mates or the divvy van will drop him at the bottom gate of Chrissy's property if he's too drunk to drive home after games.

Dave has told Chrissy that those police officers and their wives know she has mental health issues and that she makes things up. He has told her no one will believe her and that police will charge her if she reports him. He blames her for his violence, saying if she weren't so crazy he'd not lose it and everyone will see that.

Chrissy has limited access to money, has old unpaid fines for driving an unroadworthy car with bald tyres, and speeding. Her car is unregistered because she can't afford to pay registration or the fines. Chrissy uses her car to get to work and to take her type 1 diabetic son to school and health centre appointments. She has no other way to get into town. Chrissy has spoken to a social worker about not feeling safe at home but is scared about police being told what she's said. Chrissy is scared that police will impound her unregistered car, arrest her for failing to attend court about her unpaid fines last year, and that she and her son will be trapped with Dave and unable to go to school and work. It is only when they are at school and work that they feel safe and can have any form of social connection.

Chrissy thinks police won't believe her or her son, or will excuse Dave's behaviour and care more about her unroadworthy car, unpaid fines and failure to appear in court. Chrissy is scared about what Dave will do to her son if police take her away and she's not there to protect her son. Chrissy doesn't want police involvement at all but wants assistance with safety planning, support and planning long-term options to leave once her son is in year 7. Chrissy wants to stay with Dave until her son is in high school.

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Case Study Three

Fiona was taken to the hospital after her partner Mike punched her in the face. Fiona told the doctors she fell down and hit herself because she did not want the police and Child Protection to get involved. Mike and Fiona are from Aboriginal background and had two other children who were removed from their care following Child Protection's involvement resulting from Mike's violent behaviour towards Fiona and the children.

Fiona reported being fearful of her six-month-old child (Alan) being removed from her care too as Mike's behaviour has not changed. Mike lost his job because of his drinking and Fiona reported feeling responsible for Mike as Mike experiences depression. Fiona has connections with her local Aboriginal service and has been attending social groups. Since she became pregnant, Fiona has stopped drinking.

Fiona describes her experience with family violence services, the Police and Child Protection as 'not great'. Fiona described to the writer past trauma with police and child protection, including being removed from her mother when she was a child and being labelled as 'aggressive' and 'uncooperative' by police. Given this history, Fiona does not want child protection and police involvement.

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Case Study Four

You are a practitioner at a metro Melbourne family violence service. You answer a call from Sascha and after asking what's prompted their call, learn:

Sascha, who has two children under five years with her ex-partner Jalen. Jalen and Sascha have been in an on-and-off relationship for the past eight years, throughout this time Jalen has perpetrated physical and coercive abuse towards Sascha and her children.

Sascha has recently ended the relationship and is living alone with her children in an address known to Jalen. At various times during the relationship, Jalen lived together with the family, and often during these times he would take Sascha's car – sometimes with permission, but often without – and leave Sascha without access to transport for herself and her children. This behaviour has continued despite the relationship being over, and due to the fear of escalating abuse from Jalen, Sascha is unable to stop him from taking the car.

Sascha has become aware of significant fines for driving on toll roads with a toll pass and speeding fines after being pulled over by a police patrol car as the number plate flagged as unregistered. Police advise Sascha's licence has been suspended due to the speeding fines and there is an outstanding warrant due to the amassed fines.

Sascha advises she tried talking to Jalen about the fines, but he refused to have a conversation and hung up on her. He has subsequently been sending threatening text messages to Sascha for days, threatening to hurt her if she tries to apply for the fines to transfer to his name.

You complete a risk assessment with Sascha and begin discussing safety planning for Sascha and her children. Sascha raises that the only thing that enables their safety is her car, as when she's worried at home she drives to her mother's house a few suburbs away. Sascha states clearly she will not call police if feeling in danger, as when she was pulled over recently she was forced to go in the police car to the local station and the judgemental comments from police made her feel so hopeless and weak that she doesn't want to experience that again, nor face further penalty or scrutiny for driving unlicensed.

It's apparent that the priority for Sascha is advocacy support regarding the fines and warrant, and you explore referral options for legal support. However, you realise this will take time and while trying to build on the safety plan, you feel stuck and unsure how to progress as you're concerned about the consequences if Sascha was to be caught driving again, but also recognise the protective elements of having access to a car.

If you were working with Sascha, how would you approach this? What aspects or questions might you want to consider in supervision to support client led safety planning and respect for choices?

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