

GCPG

House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Family and Community Affairs

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***The Grafton Concerned Parents Group (GCPG)
submission to the inquiry into child custody arrangements
in the event of family separation announced by the
Government on 24th June 2003***

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GRAFTON CONCERNED PARENTS



Who are we?

The Grafton Concerned Parents Group is made up of ordinary parents of both genders from both intact and separated families who are concerned with the damage on future generations from the inappropriate social experimentation with our children and how they live.

We believe that our children's lives and the values they are to learn for our future society are too important to be simply case-managed by an ever-increasing myriad of taxpayer funded public servants who appear to be disconnected from an individual child's welfare but who earn very good incomes from the divorce services they provide..

Significantly, one of our members is a separated father.

Executive Summary

Custody

1. *Joint Physical Custody is the preferred child care model after divorce as it (a) more closely resembles the working of an intact family and (b) would have fewer negative affects for most children*
2. *Custody should not be determined by who does the most ironing or cooking or other household chores just as it should not be determined by who does the most paid work. Both are important in intact families and should be equally important concepts for children to learn.*
3. *Joint Custody is not warranted when*
 - *Either parent is sufficiently violent or abusive towards the children to warrant criminal convictions*
 - *One parent voluntarily moves away (the moving parent should forego custody)*
 - *Either parent does not want custody (the other parent should be the preferred custodian)*
 - *If one parent deliberately and consistently impedes the other parent they should lose custody*
 - *False statements or accusations made in the Court for malicious purposes should be dealt with like criminal perjury.*

Child Support

4. *Child support should reflect the true cost of raising that family's child*
5. *Providing false information to Government agencies to gain more Child Support should be a criminal offence*
6. *One parent should not be expected to pay the full cost of the provision of two residences for the child*
7. *In-kind payments from the state should be considered as part of Child Support to avoid "double dipping"*

Education and Research

The Government should ensure Judges and other Court and support staff are adequately trained in the difficulties men uniquely face when dealing with the Family Law Court in a similar manner to the current practice for women. [e.g. in "women's" and "domestic violence" conferences, the Court is informed only from a woman's perspective].

Research should highlight some of the problems men face with the Family Law Court as it currently does for women.

Government and decision making bodies should ensure research presented to it on Social issues accurately represent the reality of what was actually measured. In particular Government should ensure that

8. *Researchers are measuring what they say they are measuring and*
9. *Researchers do not make conclusions that cannot be substantiated from the measurements they made.*

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Terms of Reference for this submission

TERMS OF REFERENCE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

INQUIRY INTO CHILD CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS IN THE EVENT OF FAMILY SEPARATION

Having regard to the Government's recent response to the Report of the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group, the Committee should inquire into, report on and make recommendations for action:

- (a) given that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration:
 - (i) what other factors should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with their children post separation, in particular whether there should be a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent and, if so, in what circumstances such a presumption could be rebutted; and
 - (ii) in what circumstances a court should order that children of separated parents have contact with other persons, including their grandparents.
- (b) whether the existing child support formula works fairly for both parents in relation to their care of, and contact with, their children.
- (c) with the Committee to report to the Parliament by 31 December 2003.

Comments on the terms of reference

As a matter of principle we are not happy with the inclusion of the word "other" as the second word in part (a)(i) of the terms of reference. It implies that having equal responsibility to physically care for the child is an addition to "the best interest of the child".

There are numerous well-conducted studies indicating that children have best outcomes on a variety of measures when both parents are actively and equally involved in raising them. To even imply that parental equality be an "add on" to the best interest of the child is an unwarranted presumption without evidentiary foundation. We suggest that shared parenting where both parents have equal say in raising the children is central to the child's best interest.

The Government is already aware that providing one of the two parents with the final say on parenting matters is NOT in the child's best interest as such cases are known to have poorer outcomes on a variety of measures. This was the reason the Government gave for making shared responsibility the theme of the 1995 changes to the Family Law Act.

Why Community Involvement?

Divorce is no longer about simply the families involved. It also affects relatives and the entire community. While the terms of the enquiry specifically mention relatives, such as grandparents, we would like to point out that the "best interests of the child" are also the best interests of the community as a whole.

Social Values

The entire community wants all children to grow up to be good citizens. Families that are still intact endeavor to bring children up into a better world than our own. The values we hold dearly make up that world they, our children, will forge. These values include integrity, honesty, truth, justice, fairness, and reasonable expectations for the effort made.

Unfortunately the existing Family Law System is influencing and teaching negative values to our children. It tolerates, rewards or fails to punish unethical behaviour. It teaches by example to observant children that secrecy, self-justification and sexist stereotyping over-ride ethical standards of social and interpersonal behaviour.

What the Family Law Courts (FLC) teach our children and many of their parents are:

1. **Honesty is unimportant** – When allegations of abuse are proven to be false and/or malicious, no action is taken to ensure the person(s) making these false claims are punished. Indeed the Court's decisions made on the basis of these false allegations are upheld.

We believe that the best interest of the child is the same as the best interest of the community with regards to honesty. People who lie should be punished and not benefit from lying. We do not believe it is in the interest of any child to create a world for them where dishonesty is rewarded and honest people are victimized. We are at odds with Justice Nicholson's public statements and the FLC in this core belief.

2. **Selfishness and disregard for others** – The **BvB Case**¹ demonstrates that the FLC views "the best interest of the child" to be the mediated only by the happiness of only the mother. The long term effects of teaching (by example) this selfishness to children were not considered by the FLC.

We believe that the best interest of the child is the same as the best interest of the community with regards to selfishness. Children should be taught that it is important when they become adults that they consider others in the community. We do not believe it is in the interest of any child to create a world for them where they are taught that they can do whatever they want and not consider others. Children's best interests are not served by creating a class of people who are selfish.

We, as a community, are very concerned that the FLC appears to be instilling social values in parents – and hence their children – which are contrary to the social values of the society we want our own children to grow up in.

Abuse of Our Money

Another thing we are concerned about is the amount of money that is taken from both the community in general and from divorced parents, that would otherwise go to support children, in order to pay for the myriad of "support", "welfare" and "legal" services that comprise the Divorce Industry.

All these costs have to be paid from somewhere and are usually paid either by the community (i.e. taxes from intact families) or by the father (as he is usually the primary source of family income). The Family Law Pathways Advisory Group Report noted that financial trouble was a major issue in divorce. Yet there are proposals that demand even more money. Intact families be burdened with more taxes to pay for more people in the burgeoning Divorce Industry. To sceptical outsiders it appears that the Divorce Industry wants to create financial friction in intact families because it causes more divorces thereby increasing their

¹ B v B (1997) FLC 92-755

own job security. Their rationale is the best interest of the child (served best by living in an intact family) but their expensive proposals are almost calculated to destroy intact families.

It is noteworthy that such proposals tend to originate from groups that predominately support women or view all social issues from primarily a woman's perspective. They include Judges, Legal Aid Lawyers, the Domestic Violence Industry, Social Security advocates, Court Counsellors, Child Support activists and so forth. Those in this enquiry will no doubt get submissions from many of these groups demanding more money for more services. We encourage the committee to critically examine not just the submissions themselves but their self-serving motivation.

Most fathers in contrast to most women who are typically supported by the previously mentioned groups, are personally charged for the services supplied by the Divorce Industry thereby diverting money from what would normally go to supporting their children. This group of fathers comprises the poorest group of men in society. 76% of fathers on social security benefits are divorced yet these men are somehow expected to have money to pay lawyers to challenge administrative decisions against them and pay counselors to deal with the emotional consequences.

The Divorce Industry, particularly the Government funded support services for women, has a financial stake in creating and maintaining adversarial legal systems designed to maintain high conflict in post-divorce relationships. These services would go out of business if they did their job correctly. The Government has in the past taken their arguments more seriously than those of struggling parents and their small unfunded associations.

Abuse of Our Social Views

The Domestic Violence Industry uses what is becoming more widely recognized as "Feminist Advocacy Research" to justify its existence. Such research is actually designed to produce a particular outcome in order to persuade politicians to take certain actions. It is not objective research. Feminist researchers feel no empathy towards males. A few even admit to such prejudice, "various feminist researchers argue that feminist research must be emancipatory" for women.²

We would argue that when considering issues that have deep concern to men, women and their children, other views should be actively sought and given equal weight in making policy. Feminist research and opinion will no doubt be presented to the inquiry. We hope the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs is savvy enough to recognize the deficiencies in "advocacy research".

More on this will be discussed under the heading "Domestic Violence" and "Poverty Measurements"

Our Views on Custody (Part Ai)

We believe that children have a fundamental right to know and be loved by both parents. Each parent has an equal stake in the child's upbringing. There is no credible research that one gender is superior to the other in raising children. Therefore there is no credible reason why one parent should be preferred or routinely excluded by administrative order from the lives of their children AS IS CURRENTLY THE PRACTICE.

- There is a need to change to a presumption of equal physical custody so that each parent can raise their own children in their own right without being blackmailed into doing things by their ex-spouse. This change not only needs to be set in law but instituted in the attitudes of**

² "A feminist response to issues of validity in research" by Elise J Dallimore in Women's Studies in Communication, ISSN 07491409, Volume 23 Issue 2 pages 157-181

those working in the area of Family Law who currently benefit from the current adversarial and destructive system.

Arguments Against this Positive Change

We expect that the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs will receive arguments against any change. Some of the arguments to be anticipated are listed below along with counter arguments.

1. A One-size-fits-all policy is not good for all cases

Opponents to change argue against it on the grounds that the change will result in a “one-size-fits-all” and thus inflexible system. A rebuttal presumption of joint custody is no less flexible than the present system. Indeed the use of the word “rebuttable” recognizes that the presumption may not be appropriate in all cases. The proposal changes only the starting point to a presumption of equality and from which parents can then negotiate on an equal footing. Presumptive inequality (the current scenario) as the starting point encourages one parent to find or even manufacture excuses to exclude the other completely from any meaningful relationship with the child.

2. There is an increasing number of residency orders awarded to fathers

This claim plays loosely with statistics. Few fathers are financially able to apply for residency orders by the Family Court. In fact, the Family Court prides itself in that few such cases are heard by it. Upon examination however, it is only those few fathers who are wealthy enough and have powerful grounds who challenge the Court’s mother custody doctrine.

The reported numeric increase is small. Opponents of change will quote a percentage increase in order to make the figures seem significant. Fathers still receive residency in only 20 percent of cases heard. The numeric increase hardly constitutes a dramatic shift towards recognition of equality in ability to care for children. It could represent more the fact that all fathers other than those with a very strong case have given up on challenging the mother custody doctrine. We hear that many fathers are advised not to pursue legal action as the odds remain heavily stacked against them.

Shared care is currently the least favoured option. We believe this is largely because those who control the Family Law system do not favour it. It has little to do with the powerless children or parents involved. In those US states where a presumption of shared custody exists in law, that option has resulted in better outcomes for children and a lower divorce rate.

3. Overseas research indicates that not all cases of shared parenting works

This fact is hardly surprising. It is however, not a valid argument for not pursuing an ideal. Not all cases of sole parenting work either as indicated by long term studies. Indeed, not all intact families provide ideal living situations for children. The best model to choose would be the one that instinctively seems both fair and also works BEST. There is no indication that shared parenting is any worse for children than sole parenting and because it involves two parents, like an intact family, there is every reason to believe that it is better than sole parenting.

We find it disturbing that some people take great pains to point out the negatives of shared parenting without acknowledging the proven greater negatives of the current regime.

4. Women do most of the domestic work prior to separation

We wonder why vacuuming and hanging out clothes are seen as important aspects of raising children while paid work is not. What has labor sharing in the household got to do with how well a parent can teach a child the moral values they need to be taught for adult life? What special qualities has cleaning and washing got over paid work that makes those who do such domestic work more suited to teaching children how to interact with and respect others?

Is the amount of domestic work a good measure of which parent is best suited to raising children? Justice Nicholson in his many public pronouncements on behalf of his Court clearly believes it is. We question why is it so only when it is the woman who does the domestic work? When the roles are reversed and the man quits his job to take up the full time care of children while the wife pursues a career, the gendered opinions are suddenly reversed. Chief Magistrate Bryant stated that "it is important for the children to have the opportunity to see one of their parents (the mother) engaged in full time employment" when rejecting a sole custody application by a stay-at-home father.³

It would appear that for those with the ultimate authority when making judgements about "the best interests of the child", the importance of "domestic work" is dependent on the gender of the parent doing that work.

5. Single Mothers are Poor

We believe that claims will be made that single mothers live in greater poverty than anyone else, particularly the fathers of these children. We would like to point out that poverty measurements and research done in Australia (and overseas as well) misrepresent the true financial resources available to single mothers. Most such studies use outmoded and inappropriate measurements that give a very false indication of disposable income and discretionary spending. More will be discussed under "The Measurement of Poverty"

A recent French study by Bourreau-Dubois *et al.*⁴ indicated in Table 4 that by far the most effective way for a woman to get out of poverty was to get a job. With women nowadays making up higher grades in schools and being in a majority of graduates from universities, women today are better qualified than men to find a job. Indeed of the number of jobs that went to women over the last five years has outstripped men more than five fold. Moreover these jobs often have the advantage that they are part-time flexible jobs and therefore more suited to managing family commitments.

Many women's groups claim that women want to share in paid work equally with men. State and Federal Governments have instituted systems of positive discrimination for women in the areas of paid work through Affirmative Action programs. It could be argued that the major factor stopping single mothers from getting themselves out of poverty is their full time care of children. The proposal to equally share child custody could be a logical way of freeing time for women to pursue paid employment and thereby getting out of poverty.

The proposal for presumptive shared parenting offers women what women have wished for:-
(a) Fathers take equal responsibility in child rearing
(b) Fathers take equal responsibility in household care
(c) Women have equal opportunity to earn an independent income

It appears strange that feminist groups are opposing this proposal while making these demands of men.

³ FMCAfam 154, CvC, Judgement by Bryant CFM 7/5/2003

⁴ "Poverty Dynamics, Family Events, Labor Market Events in Europe: are there any differences between Women and Men?", Cecile Bourreau-Dubois, Bruno Jeandidier, Frederic Berger. The 2003 Conference of the European Panel Users Network, 3-5 July 2003 Colchester, UK

6. Many women are victims of Domestic Violence

The Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs will no doubt hear the infamous statistic: “23% of women who have ever been married or in a defacto relationship had experienced violence in that relationship representing a total of 1.4 million women.” This figure was falsely manufactured from the Australian Women’s Safety Survey (1996). The survey did not collect data from 1.4 million women. The surveyed women were not a representative sample despite being performed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The latter criticism was made about the study in an editorial of the Canberra Times even before the survey was conducted.

The Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs ought to be made aware that the presentation of such manufactured results is intended to skew perceptions of the truth. They have similar shock value to a Canadian study frequently quoted by abuse shelter advocates. This claims that a woman is the victim of domestic violence every 15 seconds. This statistic is deduced from a well conducted piece of research published in the Journal of Marriage and Family, a well respected professional journal of marriage and family therapists. Abuse shelter advocates routinely quote only one of the conclusions from this study, i.e., 1.8 million women suffer an assault from a husband or boyfriend per year.

What abuse shelter advocates avoid is another finding from the same study, i.e., 2 million men are assaulted by a wife or girlfriend per year, which translates as, a man is the victim of domestic violence every 14 seconds.

The Australian research group who designed the Domestic Violence Survey in 1996, presumably knew of this Canadian ‘equal violence finding’. An application was granted by the Equal Opportunity Commission for exemption from having to study male victims. Furthermore the Australian study widened the definition of violence to include verbal abuse and threats in a successful attempt to bolster the shock value of their predictable results.

So under the definitions within Australian Women’s Safety Survey (1996) if a woman was slashing a man with a knife and he even threatened to respond, the study counted it as an instance of violence against women. Significantly the study did not explore the causes of violence in a gender neutral manner and further assumed the perpetrator was always male. Given the prejudiced design of this study, and its wide promotion, we have no way of realistically dealing with the spectrum of family violence. In particular women perpetrators are uncharacterised and unsupported. This is despite women being the primary abusers of children⁵.

We feel there is likely to be a decrease in male on female Domestic Violence with a change to a rebuttable presumption of joint custody as the existing power differential in the control of children between partners will be partially alleviated.

More will be discussed under “Domestic Violence”

⁵ Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-3) US Department of Health and Human Services –

Table 6-4 shows that females are 78% of the perpetrators of fatal child abuse [read: child murder], 81% of natural parents who seriously abuse their children, 72% of natural parents who moderately abuse their children, and 65% of natural parents who are inferred to have abused their children.

Table 6-3 shows that natural mothers are the perpetrators of 93% of physical neglect, 86% of educational neglect, 78% of emotional neglect, 60% of physical abuse, and 55% of emotional abuse.

7. Role models are not always good for young men

Some advocates of the current system argue against more father involvement by suggesting that boys already suffer from an excess of destructive male role models. We hope that Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs will recognize that classing male role models as destructive is derogatory stereotyping. Pathologizing the male gender in this manner should be recognized by civic leaders as sexist in the extreme.

We would not tolerate the reverse, namely suggestions that female role models are destructive.

8. It privileges parents over children

A rebuttable presumption of shared equal physical custody does not privilege parents over children. It improves children's rights to know and be cared for by both parents. The current situation, where one parent is given exclusive rights over a child, privileges the parent more than the child as seen the **BvB** where the mother's "happiness" was the rationale for separating the child from a caring father.

9. It ignores the factors listed in the Family Law Act

A rebuttable presumption of shared equal physical custody does not ignore important principles already contained in the Family Law Act. It would add a further element of fairness to the Family Law Act by explicitly stating that both parents are equally capable of raising their children.

Rebuttable would be invoked when it is not in the best interest of the child. The proposed changes merely provide a new starting point from having to prove that a mother is unfit to a position where both parties are initially seen as fit to provide good care. Presumption of shared custody in no way infringes on any rights of the child.

10. Current provisions of the Family Law Act already include ability to award shared parenting

While this is true, the attitudes of those administering and enforcing the Act is that they will not award shared parenting if one parent does not want it. Unfortunately the objecting parent is usually the person who, from years of precedent, knows she will receive full control over the children. The freedom to hurt their ex-partner by merely objecting to shared parenting means it will be used. This freedom to object is not in the best interests of the child.

A rebuttable presumption of joint custody will reduce the possibility of using children as pawns in adult games of revenge.

11. Men already participate actively in their children's lives

It will be claimed by some women's groups who oppose the proposal that it is mainly mothers who want fathers to participate more in their child's life. Yet it is predominately father's groups who appear to want joint physical custody by supporting the proposal.

Many fathers report that the mother is willing to have him look after the children for up to 100 nights per year but will not allow more than that magic number. This happens to be the number where Child

Support payments start to be affected and the father's proportion of care is recognized in the financial arrangements. It is apparent to us that in these cases, the amount of contact with the father allowed by the mother is not set by "the best interest of the child" but by inflexible Child Support regulations⁶. This common phenomenon also indicates the over-riding control that recipients of Child support have over contact issues and all post-divorce relationships.

We suggest that both mothers AND fathers actually want fathers to participate more in raising their children. The proposal of joint physical custody would appear to be more satisfactory to both parents. We find it strange that some women's organizations are opposing the proposal.

12. It reduces families abilities to make their own decisions about parenting

Currently many fathers have their parenting arrangements dictated to them as the mother is usually given total and final control over the arrangements because of the prevailing presumption of sole custody. Many separated fathers we speak to, say they have no control at all about how they can parent their own children. If the current definition of "families" includes fathers it is difficult to then claim that they are currently in a position to make decisions about parenting when the sole power with regards to the children rests with the mother.

A similar argument is often put forward by the Chief Justice of the Family Law Court, Justice Nicholson, when he claims that "What is not always understood is that many couples sort out differences over their children between themselves"⁷. In reality however, this sorting out takes place in the backdrop of mothers dictating to fathers what parenting arrangements will be made.

A rebuttable presumption of joint custody will ensure that parents are less able to use the children to dictate parenting conditions to the other parent and thereby increase the parents' abilities to make their own decisions about parenting arrangements.

13. It does not reflect care practices of intact families

On school days, children are at school from 9am to 3pm and during that time fathers work from 9am to 5pm. There are 2 hours in the afternoon when a stay-at-home mother alone cares for the children when the father is not available. Furthermore during the evening, fathers are available to care for children while the mother is free to engage in other activities. While fathers tend to have a different approach, being more supervisory and instructing, this difference in style should not be misinterpreted as not nurturing or caring.

A rebuttable presumption of joint custody more accurately reflects the approach taken by intact families than sole custody (or sole primary care) as both parents have almost equal time with children after school age.

14. It will increase the litigation

A large proportion of Family Court litigation is due to blocking access to children. Fathers report they must repeatedly go to the FLC when access orders are breached. Furthermore fathers report that the burden

⁶ Child Support payments from the non-resident parent are not reduced until they have the child for more than (about) 30% of the nights. That is, the current "formula" assumes there is no cost to the non-resident parent in raising their children if they have them one third of the time.

⁷ "Joint custody is not always the best arrangement for the children, writes Chief Justice Alastair Nicholson of the Family Court of Australia", The Age, June 21 2003

of proof of intent of the breach is placed on them. Fathers not only have to prove that the breach of the Court order occurred but also that the mother breached it for an invalid reason. The FLC is the only Court in which a civilian not only has to prove that its orders were breached, but also the only Court that allows its orders to be breached so consistently.

Even worse, when the orders are proved to be breached and for malicious intent, for example to disrupt the parent-child relationship, the FLC rarely punishes the female offender. It is not surprising that the offences are often repeated. This consistent failure to enforce orders INCREASES conflict and subsequent detriment to children.

Even though going to court is the only option available to fathers to see their children, the FLC has consistently viewed fathers who do so in a dim light. Chief Justice Nicholson has publicly stated on many occasions that he believes that fathers who repeatedly go to court to have access orders enforced are "abusive" and "harassing" women by using the court system.

Thus we are opposed to current court practices and the prejudiced views of the court's leaders. We do not believe that the child's best interests are served by such prejudice that amounts to a deliberate disruption of the father-child relationship.

With a rebuttable presumption of joint physical custody we believe that the amount of litigation will be reduced as one parent will have less power to abuse a child's relationship with the other parent.

Domestic Violence

The treatment of Domestic Violence is a large issue and is intimately involved in Family Law so we deal with it separately here. It is important that the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs understands what Domestic Violence is and how it is measured.

There are many ways to collect data on Domestic Violence and they include things like Number of Deaths, Domestic Violence Hotline calls, Hospital / Medical Treatment required, number of DVOs / AVOs issued, Controlled trials, Questionnaires, etc.

Measuring Domestic Violence

By measuring what is happening in the community (epidemiology) and what the community's response is, some significant patterns emerge.

Epidemiological measurements

- Controlled Trials using common definitions and scales (CTS) - 50% DV victims are male
- Emergency Hospital Treatment - 35% to 50% male victims
- Number of Convictions – These figures are unreliable because very few spousal murders of men result in convictions. This is not the case when women are murdered by their male partners. The reasons are complex.

Society's response

- Calls to Police - 17-20% male victims (Qld & Vic, 1999)
- DVOs / AVOs issued – 13% male victims (Qld, 1999)
- "Surveys" – 95% female victims (Even though the Women's Safety Survey excluded males from the questions and asked only about female victims, it found that 5% of the victims of DV were male)
- DV Hotline calls – This is a Women's Only Service (100% female victims)
- Calls to other DV services – General DV services (Court/hospital/legal) are only for women -> 100% female victims
- Use of DV facilities / refuges – these are only for women with one sole exception in Canberra. (Its referrals for help dropped dramatically after a controversial takeover by feminist sympathisers.)

It can be seen that despite a large proportion of men being victims of Domestic Violence, including men who need medical attention, the response from our society is less than sympathetic. At every step of investigation and intervention, male victims have to endure a climate of non-support. The figures from these data sources indicate that women are directed towards DVOs/AVOs and given public support whereas men are not. When men fight back or are angry about how they are socially victimised by DV propaganda, they are automatically treated as the guilty party.

Examples of Bias

Example 1

One example of public bias is what was arguably the most horrific case of Domestic Violence/Murder in Australia⁸. Mr Price (in the Hunter Valley) was tortured for several hours in while his skin and flesh were cut off by his girlfriend. His body was then cooked and fed to people she knew. Apparently she did this after Mr Price had called police for help and sought a Domestic Violence Order -- help which police refused. Police themselves admitted to this at subsequent court proceedings. Yet no Judge, no Member of Parliament, no government official and no newspaper ever questioned why police failed in their duty to protect Mr Price. It is difficult not to conclude that Domestic Violence is noteworthy only if the victim is female.

Example 2

During the 1990s many public hospitals studied those who sought emergency treatment to determine the gender ratio of medical attention from domestic abuse. They consistently found that 50-30% of those requiring medical attention for Domestic Violence were males (e.g. NSAHS⁹). Despite this the NSW Health Department has instituted a Domestic Violence screening and assistance policy for women only¹⁰. The department uses other data sources and ignores their own research to justify these discriminatory policies.

●* **Health Policy makers and Governments expect hospitals to treat women who have heart attacks the same as men. One third of heart attack victims are female. Yet policies are written that specifically exclude males from proper assistance even though they constitute one third of Domestic Violence victims who require medical treatment. It appears that gender is irrelevant when treating medical conditions but is relevant for preventive measures for Domestic Violence in the NSW Health System.**

This has a huge effect on both the male parent AND the children during family breakdown because Domestic Violence is not correctly identified when male victims suffer and children end up in the hands of abusive mothers.

Definitions

We would like to refer the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs to the "Duluth Wheel of Power and Control" (Next Page) that is used as the model for all Government Funded Domestic Violence services in NSW. A person can walk into any public hospital, for example, and find a similar picture on a poster on the wall.

The main thing the Committee should note is that abuse is defined as abuse only if it happens to a woman. For example if a woman abuses a man it is NOT listed in the "Wheel" as Domestic Violence. But if he wants to escape the abuse and threatens to take the children and leave, he is said to be the abuser and can be charged with Domestic Violence. Of course if the genders are reversed and the mother threatens to leave and take the children (even if there was no provocation) the Domestic Violence Industry regards that behaviour as legitimate. The DV Hotline will refuse to help men as will DV shelters. The police will say the children are hers as well as his so she has every right to take them – not so if the genders are reversed. And the FLC currently rewards this similar parental behaviour differently by giving sole custody to the mother when she takes the children from the father.

When a male threatens to leave a bad marriage he is said to be committing Domestic Violence because of the emotional harm it does to women. But if a woman threatens to leave a man, as happens in 90% of the

⁸ The Newcastle Herald, November 9, 2001 "Life for an evil killer".

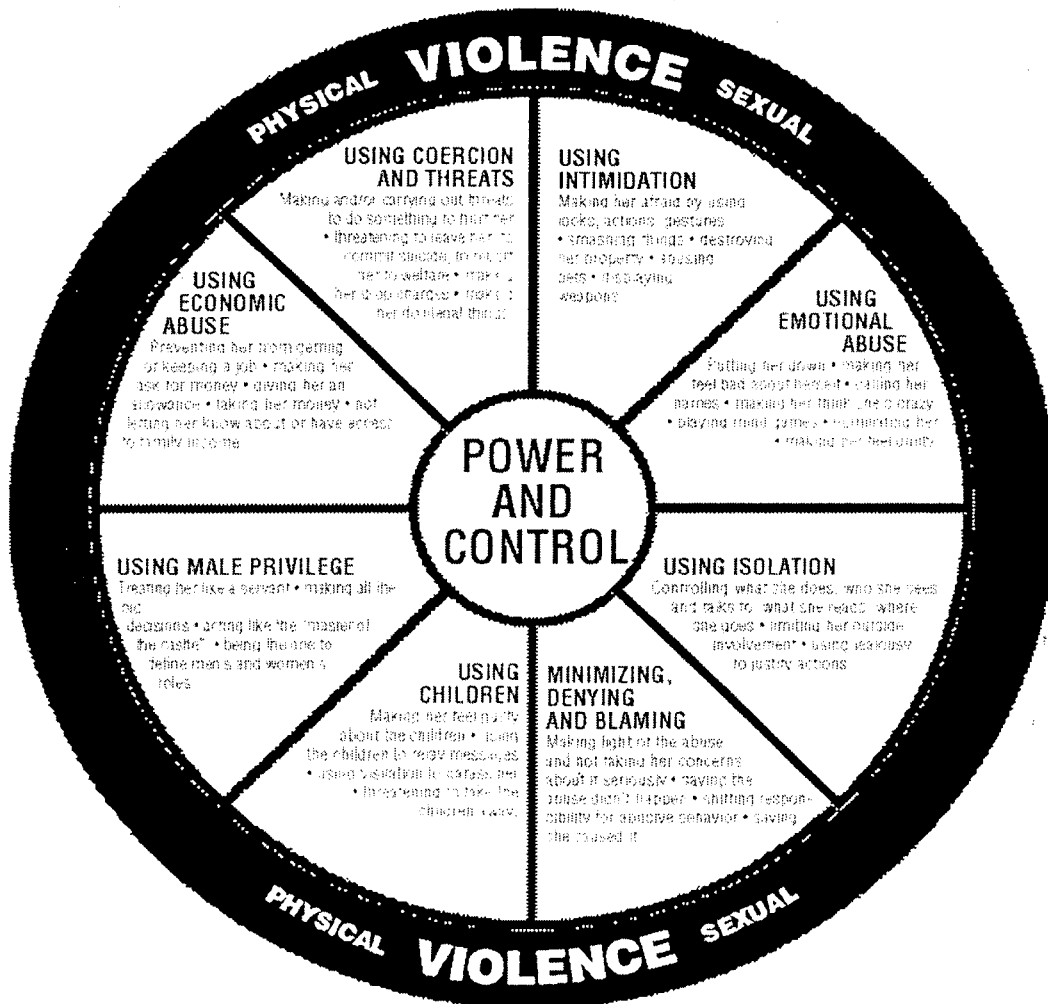
⁹ Northern Sydney Area Health Service (NSAHS), 1995

¹⁰ <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/domestic-v/>

cases involving children, then she is given full support of legal aid, the courts, welfare and the community. If the man gets upset, he is described as "just another male angry about the loss of his power". Clearly with this model it is difficult, if not impossible to find anything that women do that is classified as Domestic Violence, from threats, controlling access to children, damaging property etc. Yet virtually anything a man does can be considered violence. Only his behaviour is considered to be Domestic Violence. This is grossly unfair.

The NSW Men's Health & Wellbeing Association notes "many and arguably as many men have problems with male anger. It is often, wrongly, viewed as a precursor to or an expression of male violence." "Many people find it hard to stand in the face of anger, acknowledge it as a legitimate expression and then deal with the feelings and the circumstances that aroused them in a supportive/non-combative way. Some men and arguably more women, have limited ability to express their own anger."¹¹

One thing that would make any parent angry would be to take their children for no apparent reason. Yet we expect men alone to face this devastating circumstance without showing any anger and to face charges of Domestic Violence. Is this reasonable?



Duluth Wheel of Domestic Violence used by all Public Funded Domestic Violence Services in NSW

¹¹ <http://www.peerleadership.com.au/Anger.nsf/0/b51a71312ae89d28ca2564f400408a03?OpenDocument>



Further

We note that the Report of the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group acknowledged the inappropriate use of the Domestic Violence Industry (including false allegations of violence and abuse) as a cause of the feelings of anger, frustration and hopelessness in men. We hope the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs acknowledges this and takes it on board. We note specifically that the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group reflected concerns about bias in such things as immediate and long-term effects that untested allegations of family violence can have on family law outcomes for the whole family.

Recommendations

We suggest that family violence may be a reason to rebut equal physical custody under the following conditions:

- (a) Only if there is clear evidence that the harm done by continuing contact between the parent and child is more than the harm done by separating the child from the parent.
- (b) That the gender of the instigator of abuse and violence has been correctly identified and is not simply assumed to be male in all cases.
- (c) That there is evidence of violence – that it is not a false or exaggerated allegation
- (d) That the violent person does not intend to change their way
- (e) That the violence was not provoked by abuse of the Family Law System (such as taking, hiding and not allowing access to children or using the children for spite or revenge).

Furthermore

Given the serious nature of child abuse and sexual abuse, if there is sufficient evidence for the Family Law Court to remove a parent from contact with the child, then the Court has a moral obligation to recommend criminal prosecution in every case.

We are of the opinion that if a vindictive parent uses their control over children in a manner designed to hurt the other parent, then violent behaviour is far more likely to occur. As in preventive medicine, the most appropriate and long-term solution is to study and address the precipitating causes. Vindictive behaviour is a potent precursor of Domestic Violence which breeds more violence in return.

The Measurement of Poverty

The Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs is likely to hear much about "Poverty", particularly with regards to single mothers.

Unfortunately many researchers define poverty based solely on taxable income not the amount of discretionary money available to spend. Items not taken into account when calculating poverty include:

Money transferred not measured

How much tax is paid – if you earn \$100,000pa, the maximum disposable after-tax income is about \$65,000. Yet many studies reporting on poverty assume that such a person has the full \$100,000 at their disposal.

What Child Support is paid or received – An average separated family has two children. This equates to 27% of the total income using the current Child Support criteria. So a separated father earning \$100,000pa has a disposable net income of \$38,000pa and is said to be living in luxury on a huge salary by current advocacy research methods. The recipient separated mother has ~\$7,000 pension plus tax-free \$27,000 child support, a total of \$34,000, but is said to be living in poverty.

We would like to point out that the major household costs for the separated paying father remain the same because he still has to maintain a house for "visitation". This is the major single cost item in a family.

In-Kind money not taken into account

There is a lot of taxpayer money given to those deemed "in poverty" even if they do get \$34,000pa (Australian median salary) tax free.

Housing support – The average 'paying' father must still maintain a house because he has to live somewhere and also have somewhere for his visiting children to stay. The average mortgage in 1999 was \$10,660 [the value of the house]. Sole mothers on NSW are given priority in State housing where the average rent is \$3,276pa¹². This equates to an in kind payment from the taxpayer to the mother of \$7,384pa to make up the value of the house as the father no longer has this amount available as "discretionary money"

Medical Costs – sole mothers on the pension are provided a healthcare card. The taxpayer subsidizes all healthcare costs, such as medical, pharmaceutical and so forth. Yet when fathers have care of the children they are forced to pay FULL medical costs and cannot even claim the Medicare rebate because they do not get a Medicare card with the children's name on it. While it should be clear that medical costs for children incurred by separated fathers could easily be higher than for mothers, no studies have been done to determine by how much.

Other In-Kind monies – once a pension card is obtained there are multiple other services subsidized by either the taxpayer or general consumer. These range from public transport subsidies (with up to 4 free train trips a year plus subsidies on all other rides) to entertainment and movies. We

¹² <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookupMF/ABB5849D48BA5D7FCA2568A900139426>

will not even attempt to estimate this In-Kind contribution by the community (but recommend that the Government does so in the near future).

It can be seen from just the first few major items above that post separation, a person earning \$100,000pa could have \$27,240pa (\$525pw) for "discretionary spending" while the other party said to have an income of only \$7,000pa can, in fact, have \$30,720pa (\$590pw) for "discretionary spending".

☛ Yet almost all studies that measure "poverty" will classify the person earning \$100,000pa as extremely well off (actual \$525pw). At the same time they will report the other person receiving \$7000 as living in poverty (actual \$590pw)

In our opinion this is a gross deception. It provides a false view of what is happening to people in the real world. Governments use the results of such studies in formulating wide-ranging policy including that relating to the CSA. These studies are rarely challenged because those social scientists who continue with fundamentally deceptive economic analyses have become politically very powerful indeed.

Recommendations

We would like the Government to insist that researchers present information in a manner that will not mislead. We would like Government to insist that the Social Sciences lift their standards to at least report what they say they are reporting.

We would like to see Government making policy using accurate, unbiased information. We challenge the current classifications for, and measures of poverty. We are concerned at the trend in the social sciences which appears to be designed to maintain a deception that does not reflect the true circumstance for divorced people.

Selected References Supporting a Presumption of Joint Custody

Research on Shared Parenting and Joint Custody Joint custody and shared parenting have been studied for more than a quarter-century, with the majority of studies indicating significant benefits for children. About a third of existing studies show no difference between joint and sole custody for children's adjustment to divorce. The critical factor appears to be conflict between parents. When parents cooperate and minimize conflict, children do better with shared parenting. If there is significant conflict between parents, however, shared parenting provides no benefits and children do no better (and no worse) than they do in sole custody.

This section summarizes some of the research published in the past decade.

1. Adolescents After Divorce, Buchanan, C., Maccoby, and Dornbusch, Harvard University Press, 1996.

A study of 517 families with children ranging in age from 10.5 years to 18 years, across a four and a half year period. Measures were: assessed depression, deviance, school effort, and school grades. Children in shared parenting arrangements were found to have better adjustment on these measures than those in sole custody.

2. Division 16, School Psychology, American Psychological Association, Report to the U.S. Commission on Child and Family Welfare, June 14, 1995.

This report "summarizes and evaluates the major research concerning joint custody and its impact on children's welfare." The report concludes that "The research reviewed supports the conclusion that joint custody is associated with certain favorable outcomes for children including father involvement, best interest of the child for adjustment outcomes, child support, reduced relitigation costs, and sometimes reduced parental conflict." The APA also noted that "The need for improved policy to reduce the present adversarial approach that has resulted in primarily sole maternal custody, limited father involvement and maladjustment of both children and parents is critical. Increased mediation, joint custody, and parent education are supported for this policy."

Note: This report was approved and submitted by Division 16 of the APA, and is a part of the public record. However, it is not listed among official APA publications; it was quashed because it did not fit the political ideology of those at the top of the APA.

3. Wilkinson, Ronald Richard, "A Comparison of Children's Post-divorce Adjustment in Sole and Joint Physical Custody Arrangements Matched for Types of Parental Conflict" Doctoral dissertation, 1992; Texas Woman's University

This study included "forty boys and girls, ages 8 to 12, in attendance at selected private secular and parochial schools in a large Southwestern metropolitan area participated, along with their middle to upper-class parents." The study compared adjustment of children in joint and sole physical custody, controlling for level of conflict between parents, to determine if parental conflict would be more detrimental to children in joint or sole custody. The author summarized findings as follows: "Overall, no significant difference between joint and sole physical custody groups was found."

4. Rockwell-Evans, Kim Evonne, "Parental and Children's Experiences and Adjustment in Maternal Versus Joint Custody Families " Doctoral dissertation, 1991. North Texas State U.

This study compared 21 joint custody and 21 maternal custody families, with children between the ages of 4-15.

Results showed that misbehavior and "acting out" were more common among sole custody children: "A multiple regression analysis of these data found children in joint custody families had fewer behavioral adjustment problems with externalizing behavior than children in mother custody families." "Regardless of custody arrangement, parents with low self esteem were more likely to have children with behavioral adjustment problems when predicting the child's overall behavioral adjustment and internalized behavior."

5. J. Pearson and N. Thoennes, "Custody After Divorce: Demographic and Attitudinal Patterns", American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. 60, 1990.

"Consistent with other studies of joint and sole custody [citations], our joint legal and residential noncustodians were decidedly more involved with their children following divorce than were non-custodians in sole custody arrangements. . . . Lastly, respondents in joint custody arrangements were more apt to perceive their ex-partner as having a good relationship with the children and to report satisfaction with that person's performance as a parent."

" . . . conflict between divorcing parents in our sample did not appear to worsen as a result of the increased demand for inter-parental cooperation and communication in joint legal or joint residential custody arrangements. To the contrary, parents with sole maternal custody reported the greatest deterioration in the relationships over time."

6. Glover, R. and C. Steele, "Comparing the Effects on the Child of Post-divorce Parenting Arrangements," Journal of Divorce, Vol. 12, No. 2-3 (1989).

This study evaluated children aged 6 to 15 in the areas of locus of control, self-concept, and family relationships. The children were divided into three groups: shared custody, maternal custody, and intact families. Intact family children had averaged higher than divorced family children on self-concept and father relationships, and shared custody children averaged higher than sole custody children in these areas. Intact family children had fewer least-positive responses in all areas than divorced family children, and shared custody children had fewer least-positive responses than sole custody children in all areas except mother relationship. This study indicates that, on average, a two parent intact family is the best arrangement for children, and a shared parenting arrangement is better than a sole custody arrangement, i.e., a two-parent family is better even if parents are divorced.

7. Ilfeld, Holly Zingale "Children's perceptions of their relationship with their fathers in three family constellations: mother sole custody, joint custody and intact families" Doctoral dissertation, U. of California, Davis 1989

This study evaluated children's perceptions of their fathers at least four years post-divorce, comparing joint custody, sole custody and intact families. The subjects were 43 latency-age children: 11 from maternal custody families, 14 from joint custody families and 18 controls from intact homes. Results: "There was a significant difference in the perceptions of children in sole and joint custody. Joint custody children reported spending more time with their fathers in childcentered activities, activities which were considered pleasurable and important to children. " And: "No differences were found as a function of custody arrangements in children's perceptions of emotional closeness to the father, acceptance by the father, or fathers' potency or activity."

8. Lerman, Isabel A. "Adjustment of latency age children in joint and single custody arrangements" California School of Professional Psychology, San Diego, 1989

This study evaluated 90 children, aged 7 to 12, divided equally among maternal, joint legal, and joint physical custody groups.

Results showed negative effects for sole custody: "Single custody subjects evidenced greater self-hate and perceived more rejection from their fathers than joint physical custody subjects." Conflict between parents was found to be a significant factor, which may explain the better adjustment for joint physical custody children: "Degree of interparental conflict was a significant predictor of child self-hate. Higher conflict was associated with greater self-hate; lower conflict was associated with lower self-hate." "Higher father-child contact was associated with better adjustment, lower self-hate, and lower perceived rejection from father; lower father-child contact was associated with poorer adjustment, higher self-hate, and higher perceived rejection from father."

Extreme Situations: In situations with high levels of conflict, mental illness, or domestic violence, joint physical custody is no better (and no worse) than sole custody.

Surviving the Breakup, J. Wallerstein and J. Kelly; Second Chances, J. Wallerstein and S. Blakeslee; and other publications.

Judith Wallerstein and colleagues have produced many publications on a 20+ year study of 184 families that had been referred to her clinic for therapy. The parents were predominantly mentally ill, with approximately half the men and half the women "moderately disturbed or frequently incapacitated by disabling neuroses and addictions," including some who were "sometimes suicidal." An additional 20% of the women and 15% of the men were categorized as "severely disturbed." Approximately one third of the

sample were considered to have "adequate psychological functioning" before divorce. Although there was a significant level of attrition, with families dropping out of the study when problems were resolved, some conclusions emerged from the remaining families. Children in joint custody situations did no better than those in sole custody, indicating that parents must be reasonably psychologically healthy for shared parenting to benefit children.

Johnston, Janet R., Marsha Kline, and Jeanne M. Tschann, "Ongoing Postdivorce Conflict: Effects on Children of Joint Custody and Frequent Access," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Oct. 1989).

Johnston et al. studied 100 low income families involved in ongoing custody disputes that included frequent verbal and physical aggression. Approximately one third of the children were in joint physical custody arrangements averaging 12 days per month with the less-seen parent, with the others in either mother or father sole physical custody averaging 4 days a month with the less-seen parent. The study found that "there was no clear evidence that children are better adjusted in either custody type", and that "mean scores for the Child Behavior Checklist lie within the normal range for all custody types." Also, "there was no evidence that the clinically disturbed children were more likely to be in joint than in sole custody." However, the study did find that more frequent contact between parents in either joint or sole custody arrangements was "associated with more emotional and behavioral problems in the children." Johnston's study indicates that shared parenting may not reduce disputes between parents in extreme high-conflict situations, but also shows that sole custody does not protect children from the effects of conflict between parents. In high conflict situations, it is probably better to reduce interaction between parents. For example, parents can pick up children from school instead of from the other parent's house. The study did find one significant benefit from shared parenting even in these cases: "Only one parent with joint custody ceased contact with her child, whereas 12 parents of sole custody children 'dropped out'." Thus joint custody does appear to protect children from the complete loss of a parent, even in high conflict situations.

Joint Legal Custody: Although not as beneficial to children as equal shared parenting (joint physical custody), joint legal custody helps to some extent. The main benefits of joint legal custody are in reducing visitation interference and improving child support compliance.

Joint legal custody has been consistently linked with more parental involvement, higher child support compliance, and less conflict between parents. Until recently, however, it was not clear whether these benefits occurred as a result of joint legal custody, or simply because more cooperative parents chose joint custody in the first place. The 1997 study by Seltzer provides strong evidence for a cause and effect relationship between joint legal custody and the benefits associated with it.

9. Seltzer, J. "Father by Law: Effects of Joint Legal Custody on Non-residential Fathers Involvement with Children," NSFH Paper No. 75, Feb., 1997, U. of Wisconsin-Madison, <<http://ssc.wisc.edu/cde/nsfhw/home.htm>>

Seltzer used data from the National Survey of Families and Households, a survey of over 13,000 families that collected data in two waves, 1987-88 and 1992-94. Because the study included data on the quality of family relationships, it was possible to study the effects of joint legal custody while controlling from pre-separation family relationships by analyzing data on families that had separated between the survey waves. Seltzer concluded that "Controlling for the quality of family relationships before separation and socioeconomic status, fathers with joint legal custody see their children more frequently, have more overnight visits, and pay more child support than fathers in families in which mothers have sole legal custody." She suggests that joint legal custody helps reduce visitation denial: "By clarifying that divorced fathers are 'by law' still fathers, parents' negotiations about fathers' participation in child rearing after divorce may shift from trying to resolve whether fathers will be involved in child rearing to the matter of how fathers will be involved." [emphasis in original]

10. Gunnoe, M.L., and S.L. Braver, "The Effects of Joint Legal Custody on Family Functioning, Controlling for Factors that Predispose a joint award," Child Development.

This study evaluated 273 families, controlling for 28 variables that influence a predisposition to agree on joint legal custody. Controlling for these factors, children in joint legal custody families had more time with their fathers and fewer adjustment and behavior problems. The custody type, however, did not affect the adjustment of fathers or mothers post-divorce, conflict between ex-spouses, or child support compliance.

11. Sanford Braver, "Determining the Impact of Joint Custody on Divorcing Families", Study consisted of 378 families; some with unmatched partners, in various custody arrangements. ". . . Sharlene Wolchik, Iwrin Sandler and I found in 1985 that children in joint custody had higher feelings of self-worth than children in sole maternal custody."

"Our results showed considerable benefits for joint custody, even when equating predisposing factors. After this adjustment, children in joint custody were found to be significantly better adjusted, and to exhibit less antisocial and impulsive behavior than sole custody families. Fathers also visited more, and were more involved in child care, as well as more satisfied with the divorce settlement. Mothers, however, were significantly less satisfied with the custody arrangements in joint custody families."

"When the couple disagrees initially, which is better for the family, for the father to get his preference (joint [custody]) or for the mother to get her preference (sole [custody])? We found that the groups differed significantly in terms of how much financial child support was paid: when sole custody was that arrangement despite the fathers' wishes, 80% was paid (according to what the father reported; the figure was 64% by mothers' report), while when joint custody was awarded despite the mothers' preference, it zoomed to almost perfect compliance (97% by fathers' report; 94% by mothers' report) . . . A similar relationship was found for fathers' contact with the child. It was significantly highest for the group in which joint custody was awarded despite the mothers' preference." "Joint custody, even when awarded despite the contrary preference of the mother, leads to more involved fathers, and almost perfect of financial child support; controlling for predisposing factors, it leads to better adjusted children. . . We believe these findings call for policy makers, in the best interest of the children, to adopt a presumption that is rebuttable for joint legal custody, that is, a judicial preference that both parents retain their right and responsibilities toward their children post divorce."

Child Support

The general rules for Child Support that we would like to see the Government adopt are :

Reference tables used for Child Support calculations should reflect the true cost of raising the child

Many fathers report that the Child Support Agency still insists on using the "Lee" tables despite the fact that the 1995 enquiry found them to grossly over estimate the real cost of raising children. The Government of the time (Labor) promised to start using new, more accurate, tables when the Budget Standards Unit (BSU) at the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, had completed the work on them.

The BSU tables have been available for some time now, yet the Government has not instructed the Child Support agency to change to these tables. Neither the Child Support Agency nor the Family Court use them in many cases.

It appears that these agencies use whichever tables they feel like to extract as much money as they can from the non-custodian parent.

We demand the Government do what it promised to do over half a decade ago. To ensure the most up to date and most accurate information is used for child support calculations. We acknowledge the Government has a bad track record in this as they have known about the errors that cause overpayment for more than a decade.

One parent should not be burdened with the responsibility of financially supporting two separate households.

We believe that the premise of the current Child Support ideology should apply. That is both parents should pay to support their children to the best of their ability. That does not mean, as currently viewed, that it should be primarily the "non-custodial" parent who works. If the custodial parent (or primary carer) has the ability to work they should be required to do so just as many intact families have both parents work.

Single income families are amongst the poorest in the country yet, under the current system, these are the ones who are required to financially support two complete households.

All the studies on the costs of raising children, including the Lee tables and the BSU study, include a cost for housing the children. This housing cost is a significant proportion of the total cost as it is in intact families. Yet housing costs are also subsidized by the taxpayer at the state level in the form of "housing commission" for many single mothers. Clearly this represents a 'double dipping' of claiming the cost of the child raising. Both the non-custodial parent AND the taxpayer, in many cases, are paying the sole parent for the cost of housing the child despite the sole-parent only having to pay once.

What makes this more senseless is that the non-custodial parent usually pays the FULL cost of raising the child(ren) – so the full cost of their housing. Yet the sole-parent is expected to have and maintain a second residence with money that they have given to someone else. So on one hand the custodial parent obtains double payment for housing the children and on the other the non-custodian has no resources to house the children when in their care.

We would like to recommend that when in-kind contributions are made by us (the tax-payer) to support children from divorced families that the child support required of the non-custodial parent be reduced by

that amount. We believe that removing this dollar prize from our (tax-payer) money may remove some incentive to "win" child custody for financial reward.

One parent's role should not be limited to being only a financial resource for the other parent.

While keeping to the basic principle that both parent should pay to support their children according to their ability we are not happy with the current method which allows custodial parents to earn over \$30,000 pa before having to support their own children. Despite this represents almost the median Australian earnings these parents expect others to pay for their children. We believe this is wrong in concept.

Both parents should support their children according to their ability.

Furthermore, with women achieving higher in education at the secondary and tertiary levels, there is no real reason so suggest that males have a greater capacity to earn money as is currently done by the Family Court and Child Support Agency. Our taxpayer funded investment in education is being lost from the workforce because there is no incentive for custodial parents to find employment.

We recommend that after school age sole parent pension should be reviewed with the view to that parent supporting him or herself. As taxpayers we are happy to provide assistance for those who need it but are not happy with those who apparently abuse our kindness.

Accountability

Currently only the non-custodial parent is accountable for their support of the children. Be it financial or social – but mainly financial. The concept of the Child Support Agency is solely to make the non-custodial parent conform to what is expected of them with regards to financial support of children.

Unfortunately there is yet to be any accountability on behalf of the custodial parent.

How do we know what proportion of the Child Support money is actually spent on the child?

We would like to see some accountability built into the Child Support System to ensure the support paid from the non-custodial parent to the custodial parent is actually used for the child and not used as a hidden spousal support.

Support

There is currently a large number of support groups for women undergoing divorce that we, as taxpayers, pay for. These groups not only support women but also use our money to act as advocates for women. On top of this there are many outspoken women in parliament who are sole mothers and advocate on behalf of sole mothers.

We note that the Report of the Family Law Pathways Advisory Group identified the lack of support for men as a major concern. We suggest that support be modeled around what is **currently available** for women. That being:

- Direct financial support for groups advocating father's view points
- Encouraging non-custodial fathers to have an active role in parliament and decision making processes
- Training of decision makers (judges etc) on the difficulties fathers face in their jurisdictions

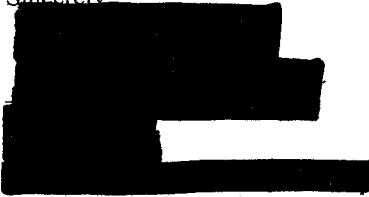
- Direct assistance to fathers.

Thank you

We would like to thank the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs for this opportunity for input into this important enquiry. The enquiry that not only affects those directly involved in marital breakdown and their relatives but also every taxpayer in the country. We believe this enquiry will ultimately shape the type of society that our children will live in.

We hope that each member of the Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs can put aside politics and their personal prejudices and look to the future so we can build the kind of society that children of today would be better off being in.

Sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature and any text that might have been present below the word 'Sincerely'.

(Hard copy posted)