



Protective
Mothers
Alliance
INTERNATIONAL
Ensuring The Rights Of Children And Protective Mothers In Family Court

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Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Inquiry into Suicide in Australia

Dear Sir/Madam,

As the recently appointed Australian director of the international protective mother's alliance, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Suicide in Australia. With over five years of hands on experience working with young people and their families often affected by suicide, I am able to provide the balance required to acknowledge the needs young people and their families affected. I would first of all wish to join the caution of resolving suicide by increasing contact with parents previously ordered "no contact"¹. It is my view that this is a major mistake that has cost lives in other countries and is beginning to cost more lives here. I am aware that fathers rights groups have circulated widely amongst their networks advising² to contribute submissions to this inquiry to push this agenda³ and greatly concerned that the consequences of adhering to their recommendations without considering other stakeholders may be of detriment to young people and their families.

I refer to the numerous findings and trends in United States in relation to the climb of murder suicides⁴ that are now linked to the high suicide rates⁵ and findings that most of these are post separation where victims have not received adequate protections that they deserved when signs of these consequences were apparent. With recent changes in family law reflecting Americas trends⁶ on forced contact, Australia has the same ability to follow the same consequences and has begun to show similar results.

¹ The Politics of Father Rights Activists – Do persistent critics of the Family Court behave in a way which stands up to scrutiny? By M. C. Dunn

² News, Articles & Press Releases: Inquiry into Suicide in Australia by SPCA Secretary 15th October 2009

³ Children must see dad, like it or not: Family Court Australian news article by Caroline Overington

⁴ American Roulette: Murder-Suicide in United States. Violence Policy Centre

⁵ Forensic Pathology Reviews, Volume 3: Murder-Suicides by Roger W. Byard

⁶ Family Law, Volumes I and II Edited by Harry D. Krause, Max L. Rowe Professor of Law, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Also of concern is the links⁷ between child abuse and suicide that has been well documented as a major issue that is not been currently addressed when a major focus is shifted to the agendas of these groups. In a longitude study⁸ on the long-term impact of child abuse, adult women who said they were physically or emotionally abused as children were more likely to have mental problems, suffer from depression and to have attempted suicide. There is also recent scientific evidence⁹ that in people who had been abused and later committed suicide, more genes were "switched off" in brain tissue taken from the hippocampus - a region involved in mood control - compared with people who had not been abused and who had died in other ways.

In system that gave priority to fathers rights groups funding, legislation and policies emerged a famous case by the name of Nathan Greco who was forced with contact despite repeated allegations of abuse. His mother found him kneeling on the floor by his bed, a leather belt around his neck, blood spilling from his mouth. He was dead.¹⁰ There is currently no public data available that is specific on youth suicide and the link to custody arrangements in Australia.

I also note that despite our indigenous community being the highest population group¹¹, the ABS data states that it is not accurate due to it being underreported¹². It has become very clear that suicide statistics need more specifications to clarify which group is in most need and also acknowledge emerging changes in system policies and laws that may impact on the rise and fall of such data. I support the notion that the indigenous community genuinely does have a higher level given that data on indigenous populations in other countries have similar records¹³. What is problematic is when this data is not clear and provides opportunities for other groups of less need to galvanize funding sources that were set out to lower the suicide rates amongst high risks groups¹⁴. If the Australian is genuinely dedicated to lowering the rates of suicide, then more effort needs to be made in examining all areas that contribute to suicide and ensure that minority groups are not being discarded in favor of over voiced agendas.

Sincerely,

Melanie Shambat

Melanie Shambat
Australian Director
Protective Mothers Alliance

⁷ Sexual Abuse and Suicide Risk, Published in Journal Watch Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine March 11, 2002 — Harlan R. Gephart, MD "Many studies have shown that emotionally or physically abused children, and particularly sexually abused children, are at increased risk for adolescent suicidality".

⁸ Mullen, P.E., et. al., "The Long-term Impact of the Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse of Children: A Community Study," Child Abuse & Neglect, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 7-21, 1996 (Pergamon)

⁹ Child abuse may leave 'suicide marks' on genes 02 February 2009, Magazine issue 2697 (New Scientist)

¹⁰ Casualties of a Custody War: What's best for the child? - Steve Mellon, Post-Gazette

¹¹ "In 2001, the death rate among the Australian indigenous population was more than twice that of the total population and indigenous age-specific death rates were higher than for the total population for all age groups." -Overview of Suicide in the 20th Century, Wesley Mission

¹² "In addition, the overall number of deaths registered as Indigenous is likely to be an underestimate because not all death registration records correctly identify Indigenous people." (Page 108, para 3), The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples by R.W Edwards, Acting Australian Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Richard Madden, Director, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

¹³ "Indigenous peoples remain on the margins of society: they are poorer, less educated, die at a younger age, are much more likely to commit suicide, and are generally in worse health than the rest of the population". (Source: The Indigenous World 2006, International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), ECOSOC Consultative Status, p10)

¹⁴ Hull welcomes dads in distress service to Wagga, The Nationals For Regional Australia Web site News, 24-November-2004