A domestic violence program’s turn towards philosophical, theoretical and discursive integration: A response to how domestic violence is gendered through language.

Dear Participant

We invite you to participate in a research study looking at how domestic violence is viewed, discussed and reported on at an organizational level. This study is part of my Honours Degree in Psychology, supervised by Associate Professor Ngaire Donaghue at Murdoch University.

Nature and Purpose of the Study

Research has acknowledged that both our personal and organisational theoretical and philosophical points of view in relation to domestic violence influences the particular way we talk about and report on domestic violence/abuse, victims of abuse and those who choose to use abuse in their family and intimate relationships.

Current domestic violence research has highlighted the effects, consequences and power of particular language and terms practitioners use in conversations with clients and professional colleagues and questioned whether these ways of talking about domestic violence accurately describe the acts of abuse, acknowledge the victim’s experience of abuse and locate responsibility for the abuse with the perpetrator (who is predominantly male). These studies have called for an increasing awareness in counselling organisations to the power of certain terms and ways of speaking about domestic violence to minimise abuse and the victim’s responses to abuse, conceal responsibility for the abuse and create certain ways of seeing victims and perpetrators of abuse.

Therefore the aim of this study is to investigate how Relationships Australia’s Domestic Violence Program has changed in response to the findings of this current language research. Specifically, the degree to which these findings have influenced practitioner’s ways of working with and talking with clients, colleagues, other agencies and documenting and reporting on domestic violence. Additionally, changes from an organisational perspective in regards to how this research has influenced program theoretical perspectives, policy and procedures, staff training and ways of working with other agencies will be explored.

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the interview you will be asked to complete. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

What the Study will Involve

Participation in the study will involve being interviewed in regards to your knowledge and opinions of aspects of recent developments and changes to the practises of Relationships Australia’s Domestic Violence Program. Of particular interest are the staff perspectives on how changes in the program have impacted counsellor’s/supervisor’s and manager’s practise, how they view their work with their clients and how they perceive their role within...
the program. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to volunteer for an interview and it is estimated that the interview will take approximately 1.5 hours to complete.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice. All information is treated as confidential and no names or other details that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from the research. If you withdraw, all information you have provided will be destroyed.

**Privacy**

Your privacy is very important. Because participants and researcher are staff members associated within the same organisation, whether you elect to participate or not will be kept entirely confidential. It is important to note that the Senior Domestic Violence Manager will consent on participant’s behalf to be approached to participate in this study; however your responses will remain anonymous. As the Senior Domestic Violence Manager is a singular position in the organisation, the participation in this study is done with the informed knowledge that they will be identifiable.

Any participants who are associated with you in other roles (eg. group or individual counselling programs) will not know whether you have elected to participate and will view only anonymous data. It will thus not be possible to identify you; neither will you be identified in any publication arising out of this study.

**Benefits of the Study**

There may be no direct benefit to you from participation in this study; however it is possible that your knowledge of the impacts of the language used when working with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence may be enhanced in regards to how language has the power to constructs certain ways of viewing and positioning victims and perpetrators of abuse/violence; as well as organisational practises. This study may also highlight how some representations of victims and perpetrators are privileged over others and why.

While there is no guarantee that you will personally benefit, the knowledge gained from your participation may help others in the future. The knowledge gained in regards to the impacts of language in our work with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence may further engage organisations to discuss and reflect on the effects of their language use in talk and report writing. This study could contribute to an increasing professional acknowledgement of how language use, in the context of domestic violence, has strong historical links with patriarchal views and increase the recognition of how these perspectives could reduce help seeking and engagement in programs for men and women. At a theoretical level I believe this study may challenge accepted versions of victims and perpetrators of abuse and offer different and alternative ways of talking about domestic violence/abuse centred on dignity.

**Possible Risks**

There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Tania Whitelaw on mobile 0411 514 296, or my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr Ngaire
Donaghue, on ph. 9360 6450. My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have about this study.

On completion of this study an executive summary of the findings can be viewed on the Murdoch University Psychology website http://www.murdoch.edu.au/School-of-Psychology/ and search current research results.
You can expect to receive this feedback late 2012.

If you are willing to consent to participation in this study, please contact me at tania.whitelaw@wa.relationships.com.au to arrange an interview time at your convenience.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely

Tania Whitelaw

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval xxxx/xxx). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 (for overseas studies, +61 8 9360 6677) or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.