

***WHAT ABOUT US?:***

***SELECTIVE REPORTING AND SYSTEMIC  
ANTI-MALE GENDER BIAS IN THE MEDIA  
COVERAGE OF INTIMATE PARTNER  
VIOLENCE: A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE***

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## About the author

Craig Jackson is a former child and educational psychologist now retired who joined the New Zealand branch of *'Families Need Fathers'* in the late 1970s prior to the establishment of the Family Court in 1981. He also helped to establish the Wellington-based *'Equal Parental Rights Society'* and trained fellow psychologists to complete psychological reports to help guide the Family Court in issues affecting the custody of, and access to, children. He has maintained this interest over the entire 33 year history of the Court, also making submissions to the Ministry of Justice's Review on the Family Court. He made separate submissions on domestic violence and the repeal of the Bristol clause to the Electoral and Justice Select Committee hearing submissions on the Family Court Bill subsequently enacted in October 2013.

Craig was the lead author for the *'Fathers Report'* on intimate partner violence from the men's lobby groups perspective which included (unlike the ideologically driven Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports), a section, on intimate partner violence in same sex relationships.

This section was subsequently expanded into a second academic review of the New Zealand and international literature on intimate partner violence in female same sex (lesbian) intimate partner violence.

This third paper provides examples of the selective and allegedly gender biased anti-male reporting of I.P.V. in the media as well as examples of more balanced reporting. Together with the first two reports it will form the basis of a case to the Human Rights Commission of systemic anti-male bias against men across various sectors of society as a human rights issue.

## A definition of '*femicentric*' reports

“For the purposes of this paper *femicentric* reports are those reports that do not draw impartially on the wider literature; fail to cross-cite and discuss New Zealand studies which are well respected internationally; rely on questionable statistical databases to over-exaggerate the problem; and use ‘sensationalism’ to gain the sympathies of the public at large.”

“The radicalised feminist perspective on family violence is, arguably, a form of social conditioning that should be recognised as such so that Government and societal responses and solutions to family violence become more gender-proportionate and realistic.

Standards of good scientific analysis and reporting should not change because a topic is politically charged, an observation that is highly pertinent to the evidence of bias and ‘advocacy’ reporting in the Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports. Academic researchers have particular ethical responsibilities for objective reporting because of the risk that various vested interests may distort and misrepresent issues of vital importance to the welfare of both mothers and fathers and particularly, what best serves the interests and welfare of their children.

Academic researchers who draw their income from the public purse deserve particular criticism of their viewpoints if they do not fairly and in a balanced way, represent the viewpoints of both male and female people, and even our ‘little people’ caught up in our gender wars.”

From:

Jackson, C., Laven, H., and Roberts, V.  
**‘The other side of partner violence: A counter-balancing review of international and New Zealand studies on intimate partner violence’**  
Wellington: The Fathers Lobby Group.  
Unpublished mimeo, November, 2014, pages **29** and **30**.

## 1 Introduction and overview

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Two previous academic papers on intimate partner violence, *'The other side of partner violence'* (November 2014) authored by Jackson, Laven and Roberts, and *'Women can be violent too'* (Jackson, March 2015), have contributed to the debate on intimate partner violence (I.P.V.).

What has been described as a current 'epidemic' of domestic violence which, if left unchecked, will cost the country millions of dollars, are claims not completely founded in fact. The Glenn, Tolmie Death Review and Herbert reports all present a badly distorted picture of the dynamics of I.P.V. mainly describing the male as 'perpetrator' and the female partner as invariably the 'victim' of domestic violence. While it *is* true that male assaults female scenarios are more severe and more likely to result in fatal outcomes, the 'femicentric' reports deliberately exaggerate the problem; rely on the questionable use of statistical data and avoid mention of other I.P.V. scenarios including female assaults male; female assaults female; adolescent daughter assaults mother; sibling to sibling abuse, adolescent to adolescent abuse, and elder abuse all features which follow as a consequence of the disintegration of traditional family life and family values in our society, the glorification of violence in sport and the portrayal of violence on TV as a form of entertainment.

The purpose of this third paper is to critically evaluate how some media coverage of domestic violence has conspired to convey to the public at large, the same distortions that are to be found in the Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports as described in the November 2014 paper which includes on page **27**, section 4 a more limited coverage of examples of selective and gender biased media reporting on I.P.V.

While generous media coverage on press and radio media has been given to the women's lobby group 'world view' and perspective on I.P.V., the perspective from the smaller men's lobby groups has been largely absent or limited to 'Letters to the Editor' or 'opinion' pieces and not as an informative and factually based contributions to the current debate on domestic violence.

## 2 Absence of any media interest in men's issues and their own 'world view' and perspective on the domestic violence debate

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Of equal concern to the men's lobby groups is not only slanted coverage but no coverage of men's issues on intimate partner violence. For example, when generous coverage was given to the findings of the Glenn Inquiry to the views of the women's lobby groups no publicity whatsoever was given to similar press releases from spokespersons from the men's lobby.

A further example is provided of the attempts made recently by the men's lobby to interest the media in a seminar run in Wellington by Greg Millan, an Australian social worker on '*Working with men affected by violence*' on Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015. A member of Australia's '*one in three*' campaign, he based his seminar on the fact that at least one in three victims of family violence in Australia is male and that the detrimental psychological impacts of I.P.V. on men can be just as traumatic as the impact of male on female violence. Prior to arriving in Wellington Mr Millan issued a media release dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015 to dispel a number of commonly held misconceptions about domestic violence against men.<sup>1</sup>

Prior to arriving in Wellington he was advised to contact the Programme Manager of Radio New Zealand to offer a phone based interview in order to gain publicity for the seminar either on 'Morning Report' or the 'Nine to Noon' programmes. In addition a copy of his media release was made available. The editorial teams did not pick up on his offer, neither did the Editor of the *DominionPost* who had received as well, copies of the author's first and second literature reviews. Reporters did not attend or try to contact Mr Millan on the day of his seminar.

It should be noted that the *DominionPost* gives very generous coverage to women's issues and other items of interest to women but more limited coverage to men's views on the domestic violence debate.

A further example of allegedly biased and selective reporting in this Wellington newspaper is to be found in *DominionPost* reporter Andrea Vance's '*Faster way to untie the knot*' of 8 March 2014 covering the changes and reforms to the Family Court and occupying a full page. Half the space is given over in the foreground to an attractive and assertive young woman. Behind her is the obscured face of a young

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man partially in the shadows portrayed as a non-entity with mouth invisible and nothing to say, true too of the text which gives no column space to the viewpoint of the men's lobby group's response to Family Court reform although spokespersons willing to be interviewed were known to her employer.<sup>2</sup>

### 3 Gender-bias and selective reporting in the broadcasting media

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As a state-funded broadcaster *Radio New Zealand* has a particular responsibility to ensure that the contents of its various programmes, particularly 'Nine-to-Noon' and the 'Sunday Programme' and the more time limited 'Morning Report' are fairly balanced and gender-neutral in the content of any featured discussion on domestic violence.

Representations have been made over the past few years to its programme manager who has been provided with material from the Father's Lobby relating not only to the true dynamics of I.P.V. but on the related area of Family Court reform. Where programmes on I.P.V. have been run they have mostly featured the 'world-view' of female contributors most notably and frequently, Catriona MacLennan; Parliamentarian's Amy Adams and Anne Tolley; Jill Proudfoot from the '*Shine*' organisation; Heather Henare from the National Collective of Women's Refuges and Superintendent Tusha Penny from Police National Headquarters. Spokespersons from the Men's Lobby Groups when they have offered to be involved in the discussion have not been invited or permitted to contribute.<sup>3</sup>

The gender composition of these programmes fully justifies the claim that Radio New Zealand programmes on domestic violence are not fairly balanced and impartial by allowing dissenting points of view to be broadcast.

Earlier, in June 2014 the then named Family Court consumers group laid a formal complaint to Paul Thompson, Chief Executive of Radio New Zealand alleging that an item on '*Morning Report*' which featured another interview with Catriona MacLennan,

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To be found in Appendix 'B'.

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Most notably, Sunday's *Insight* programme which aired on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2015 from 8.05 am.

which had aired on Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> May was biased. The complaint was laid on the grounds that material sent via Mr Hewson to the Editorial team which contained other significant opinions which contradicted her comments and had shown them to be inaccurate and misleading were ignored. This was not the first time that a vocal Ms McLennan had featured on a number of radio programmes on domestic violence with her allegedly slanted and prejudicial perspective on the male on female, Duluth 'power and control' model, remaining unchanged.

Mr Hewson was placed in an invidious position because, while he could bring material provided by the men's lobby to the attention of his Editorial teams, he was not mandated to require this material to be featured on any of the programmes as their editorial independence had to be respected.

The longer term outcome was that Radio New Zealand continued to broadcast Ms MacLennan's comments as the complaint had been dismissed. The lead author of the letter of complaint, Hans Laven, a Registered Psychologist, supported by four other Men's Rights Advocates, had alleged breaches of Standard 4 and s 4 (9)(d) of the Broadcasting Act; Standard 5: Accuracy (as men are also victims of assaults from female partners); Standard 8, responsible programming, and Standard 9, good taste and decency, also contravening 5.4(9)(a) of the Broadcasting Act.

In a reply dated July 8, 2014 Radio New Zealand's Complaints Co-ordinator, George Bignall, ruled that the interview did not reach (sic) *"the threshold of a controversial issue of public importance"*.

Secondly, earlier decisions by the Broadcasting Standards Authority had ruled that not all 'angles' of a topic needed to be covered in short form news interviews and that therefore, there was not requirement on the Radio New Zealand Editorial team to give opposing points of view equal amounts of air time or that these viewpoints should be aired at the same time.

Nor was there any requirement for accuracy, since standards of accuracy does not apply to statements (by Ms MacLennan) as they were clearly distinguishable as analysis, comment or opinion.

Alleged breaches of Standard 8 were also dismissed, that of responsible programming on the grounds that the item only referred to violent behaviour as distinct from programmes that depict or contain violence. Thus not a single aspect of the complaint was upheld notwithstanding the fact that subsequently other programmes whose air-time would have allowed a broader coverage of the topic and

in spite of the complaint were still *femicentric* and involved solely female interviewees, continued to be aired. Correspondence on this complaint is to be found in Appendix 'C'.

#### **4 Domestic violence as a disaster? Sensationalism in the reporting of I.P.V.**

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As discussed in the 2014 paper, section 3, page 4, the plethora of recent reports on domestic violence followed by draconian recommendations to strengthen the domestic violence legislation is not a recent phenomena but a cyclic one dating from the mid-1980s with numerous reports then available and again in the mid-1990s following the Bristol murders and the subsequent judicial inquiry by Sir Ronald Davison. It resulted in the extension of the definitions of domestic violence to encompass 'psychological' abuse and the inclusion of the so-called Bristol clause, since repealed in October 2013 as repugnant to natural justice. Thus domestic violence 'panics' and the publicity thus arising have been cyclic in nature and occurs at approximately ten year intervals following domestic violence tragedies usually perpetrated by men and not women whose murdering of the male partner or their children is not greeted with the same outrage.

Subsequent efforts by the authors of the Glenn report to have the Bristol clause reinstated were ignored.

When Sir Owen Glenn and Patron Dame Catherine Tizard delivered the results of their inquiry, Sir Owen described domestic violence as '*a slow burning disaster*' with costs of inaction, already estimated at between \$4.1 billion and \$7 billion according to the second Snively report also issued in November 2014, a report commissioned by the Glenn Inquiry. Using the term 'epidemic' of family violence is also misleading as there is no evidence that family violence is an infectious disease to which this



term is inappropriately applied nor that unless the 'wicked' problem of domestic violence is resolved, costs within the next 10 years would escalate four-fold.<sup>4</sup>

## 5 Balanced reporting on I.P.V. from the 'New Zealand Herald'

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The value of eliciting the views of the men's lobby groups as well as the more powerful and arguably radicalised women's groups, is seen in social issues reporter Simon Collins piece entitled '*When Love Breaks Down*'<sup>5</sup> as it highlights the fact that spokespersons for women's groups rely on sensationalism; claim that the family law reforms are '*a backward and retrograde step*' (sic) which will expose women and children to danger; argues that the female's allegations of physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse towards her or, worse, towards her children, should be regarded as truthful and that accurate allegations to the contrary by the male partner and father are to be dis-believed and regarded as perjurous.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast, the viewpoints of the father's lobby are featured with their spokespersons describing our Family Courts prior to the reforms which they welcomed, as persecutory of men and anti-male both in policy and in law. Challenged also was the presumption that men, motivated by '*power and control*' over the relationship are most usually the perpetrators of I.P.V. and the female partner most usually the victim, a position taken by the authors of the Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports.

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Taken from Stuff Co. press release of 4 November 2015. '*Glenn Inquiry: Domestic violence a disaster*'. Reported by Michael Daly and Jess McAllen. See Appendix 'D'.

The manipulative use of language is a feature of the propaganda campaigns. See section 6, page 7 of the author's 2014 report. Another example of propaganda language is the use of the term '*people*' in the title of the Glenn Inquiry report implying that all people 'male' people as well as 'female' people support the findings of the report. Most men interested in men's rights with no criminal record or history of violence and dedicated parents of their children would not.

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Published in June 2015, website address  
 nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\_id=8vobjects=10878601

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This was the basis in law of the so-called Bristol clauses, repealed in October, 2013 because they were clearly repugnant to natural justice by assuming, on the word of the mother, that the male partner was guilty until he proved himself innocent. The Glenn Inquiry actually recommended that this clause should be reinstated to better protect women and children.

Feminist academics from the University of Auckland and others based in Auckland (Vivienne Elizabeth, Nicola Gavey, Julia Tolmie), are quoted and give examples of a father assaulting and badly bruising his pre-schooler; verbally abusing the mother at access change over times or other fathers turning up drunk to collect their children. In another case, the father sent his child back to the mother covered in his own urine and faeces. No counter-balancing recital is given of the delinquencies of motherhood including alienating her child from the affections of the father (legally described as schooling); falsely alleging that the father has sexually molested his own daughter or otherwise giving false witness in Court. A copy of this article is to be found as Appendix 'E'.

A further example of balanced reporting is provided by the same reporter, an article which describes the final report from the Glenn Inquiry team. Instead of the usual male assaults female scenario, there is a case history of a step-mother who has inflicted psychological violence (hostility and rejection) on her vulnerable step-daughter, yet another manifestation of I.P.V. left unspoken by University of Auckland academic spokespersons.<sup>7</sup>

## **6 The Ministry of Social Development's re-issued and updated '*Violence is Not OK*' promotional material on I.P.V.**

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In complete contrast to the narrow, paternalistic 'world view' focus on I.P.V. as portrayed in the three 'femicentric' reports issued in 2014 are recently issued attractively presented pamphlets covering a broader canvas of I.P.V. situations including, most notably, violence in same sex lesbian partnerships; other rainbow communities including transgender and inter-sex couples; violence in immigrant and ethnically diverse communities and elder abuse.<sup>8</sup> The Ministry officials responsible for this material are both male.

Some of this material is to be found as face sheets in Appendix 'F'.

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Other prominent Auckland-based activists are Janet Fanslow, Hilliary Lapsley and the mostly female staff of the Domestic Violence Clearing House. The so-called '*Shine*' organisation is also based there.

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Material which, arguably, also exposes and places into sharper focus the lack of representation of more diverse I.P.V. scenarios in the Tolmie, Glenn and Herbert reports.

## 7 The neglected studies on domestic violence from the Dunedin and Christchurch multi-disciplinary longitudinal studies on domestic violence

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Given that Professor David Fergusson is a well known and respected authority on domestic violence with an international publication track record and that the Dunedin Multi-Disciplinary Health and Development Study have published landmark articles on domestic violence as well, it is notable that of the three femicentric reports only one, Herbert's Impact Collective Report, cites one article, then only briefly.<sup>9</sup>

He, too, offers a balanced perspective on I.P.V. with the two main South Island newspapers giving accurate coverage of his important contribution to the need to take a broader perspective on the true dynamics of I.P.V. He is reported as saying that both genders are capable of violence and that the claim that males are nearly always to blame has been built into common social understandings of I.P.V. largely as a result of feminist rhetoric and the generous publicity always given to their claims.<sup>10</sup>

## 8 Changing family dynamics need changing responses to the problems of family violence

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More importantly, the women's lobby has not taken into account that our family structures are changing, more intimate partner relationships are breaking down often acrimoniously. There is an appreciation that women too can be violent towards their male as well as female partner, while violence between adolescent girls is increasing. Women are no longer as economically dependent on their male partner, power and control dynamics can equally apply to either partner and more fathers are

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From the Dunedin study refer to Silva, P. and Stanton, W. (Eds) **'From Child to Adult: The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study'**, Auckland: Oxford University Press (1996) and a representative article, Fergusson, M., Horwood, J., and Ridder, E. (2005) *'Partner violence and mental health outcomes in a New Zealand birth cohort'*, **Journal of Marriage and Family** 67, 1103–1119.

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As reported in *The Otago Daily Times*, article headed **'Children Most Often Killed by their Mothers'**, Tues, 25 September, 2013.

involved in childcare and, for some children, may be their main parent who wants to stay as an important part of his and his children's lives after his adult relationship ends.

## **9 What constitutes a common 'world view' on I.P.V. and how should this shape Government policy on a more effective response and solutions to domestic violence?**

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There have been a variety of different reports and recommendations for action arising from those reports dating back to the mid-1980s. The current inter-departmental working parties are led by the office of the Associate Minister for Social Development and Cabinet's Social Policy Committee. Its paper '**Family Violence: Achieving Intergenerational Change**' aims to develop a comprehensive long term, whole of Government approach to bring about attitudinal and community changes to reduce domestic violence. Originally expected to report back in December last year, the Minister of Justice advises that a public discussion paper will be released later this year inviting submissions that could be made to improve the legal response to family violence.<sup>11</sup>

An earlier paper issued in 2012/2013 entitled '**Training and Education for the Family Violence Work Force**' aimed to develop a national training framework for all I.P.V. stakeholders with the Ministry of Health commissioned to lead the project and to develop widely available online self-learning units.

Ruth Herbert stressed that all stakeholders should share the same 'world view' on I.P.V., the task force also appreciating that achieving consistency and content and well co-ordinated training experiences was essential. The Ministry of Social Development has led the way to a better appreciation of a wider spectrum and breadth of understanding of multiple I.P.V. scenarios as have media outlets which have done the same. That cannot be said however of the powerful women's lobby, their attempts now badly dis-credited, to gain prominence and currency to their narrow and slanted 'world view' of I.P.V. In Australia and New Zealand debate has been dominated by the more powerful women's lobby groups. No doubt lessons

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Personal communication to the author dated 18 June, 2015.

could be learnt from its report and the counter-responses from the father's lobby groups there, most notably from their 'One in Three' campaign.

## 10 Summary and conclusions

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- In her report from the 'Impact Collective' Ruth Herbert, former CEO of the Glenn Inquiry stressed the importance of all the stakeholders in the domestic violence industry sharing a common 'world view' of its causes and origins to ensure that the remedies for the problem met best evidence standards and shared content in common across all training courses for Government and community stakeholders.
- This paper has shown that efforts by some of the radicalised and more vocal women's lobby groups to impose their own world view of the '*male as perpetrator, women as victim*' scenarios, has been based on the Duluth model and highly selective reviews of the literature including the suppression of the literature on violence in lesbian relationships and the suppression of female assaults male I.P.V. incidents. This narrow paternalistic focus is thrown into sharp relief as misleading by the Ministry of Social Development's new pamphlet material and recently, more balanced coverage in some media of this pressing social problem.
- Described as advocacy research, where research supporting their position is highlighted and dissenting research findings are deliberately suppressed is also characteristic of the findings of the Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports. Thus objectivity is lost, content is slanted and prejudicial to men and men as fathers and even take on some of the recognised features of propaganda campaigns as a form of social conditioning which the public at large and even men themselves, have come to believe as true.
- As has been highlighted in the two previous reports, standards of good scientific reporting and academic rigour should not change, nor objectivity lost either, to advance a cause at all costs. It staggers belief that well regarded feminist academics should allow themselves to depart from these ethical standards in the sole interests of women and children rather than all those other 'people' victims of intimate partner violence as well. In the area of domestic violence there can be no place for any corruption of these values.

- The Human Rights Commission is already involved with secondary schools to quantify the extent of bullying in schools (adolescent on adolescent violence), one area at the root of the problem of violence in our society. It would be logical for the Commission to also treat anti-male gender bias in the media coverage of I.P.V. where it is occurring as part of its brief and to regard it for what it is, as a broader human rights issue.

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## **APPENDIX 'D'**

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## **APPENDIX 'F'**