



HELEN TOWNSEND

22nd June 2018

Department of Veteran Affairs
Productivity Commission Enquiry

Submission for the Department of Veterans Affairs Productivity Commission Enquiry:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit information that I feel is important for the Productivity Commission to consider within the context of the enquiry which relates to the future health and mental well being of Veterans.

I am the wife of a Vietnam veteran and as such I feel, in most cases, Veteran Affairs provides a service to established TPI ex service men that is supportive and productive to meet most of the needs displayed by persons suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is not to say all veterans have their needs met in this context but rather the support my husband has received has served him well.


My issue relates to the way male Veterans are treated and thought of by the general public in relation to being perpetrators of Domestic Violence.

I am a retired social worker of 30 years experience and have mostly dealt with domestic violence and child protection issues during this time. I am also a published author of Violence in a Box published under my maiden name of Helen Austin. Copies of this book can be found in the State Library and on Amazon.

My issue relates to the common stereotype that serving on a war front automatically makes a Veteran a violent person once you return to civilian life. This is of particular concern to domestic violence and I am mainly referring to male Veterans in this context.

It has been said to me time and time again in relation to war Veterans that 'he is a crazy Vet, be careful of him'; 'watch out for that Vet, he could kill you'; 'all Vets are crazy'; Oh, that explains why he is violent to his partner and children – he is a mad Vet' and the statements go on and on with little regard as how these unfounded beliefs affect the Veteran. This stereotyping of Veterans understandably can play havoc with their mental health and adds to their experience of being pushed further into isolation from society and communities who believe these misnomers to be factual.

These generalized statements could not be further from the truth and only serve to harm the Veteran who is struggling to create and maintain a normal life in the community and with their family once they are no longer in the services or participating on a war front.



This often held view of a soldier who has been trained in combat to kill or be killed who will remain violent once they are removed from a war front forever spills over into the everyday life of a soldier while they may be battling with their own mental health capacity. When general people in the community hold these unprofessional, mistaken and unproductive view of the way ex soldiers or those still serving deal with issues in their life that cause them stress or conflict of opinions, a soldier will always struggle to be recognized for the person they were prior to going to war. This is not to say soldiers do not commit domestic violence but studies on this topic would more than likely show it would be at the same level of the community in general, not an over representation of the soldier.

I encourage the Commission of Enquiry to borrow a copy of Violence in a Box from the State Library and read the Chapter titled 'Does Serving on a War front Make a Person Violent' from page 103 to 109. The Enquiry will discover there is sparse Australian research on this topic and therefore Australia owes it to soldiers who served in War to correct this myth that soldiers are domestically violent when they return home to their wives and family. If soldiers are to recover and move forward with their mental health, it is imperative the Department of Veteran Affairs support and fund Australian research which explores soldiers and non service personnel with the hypothesis that 'soldiers commit domestic violence at higher rates than civilians because they have served on a war front'.

It is imperative no stone is left unturned in respecting and validating that soldiers are not turned into violent monsters who run amok in their home and community because they have served their country on a war front. Research can contribute heavily to dispelling this myth and helping soldiers heal and go forth with their life in ways which make a difference to how they approach and respond to community stereotypes where violent personas of soldiers exist.

Soldiers cannot move forward in a mentally strong and healthy way when the general community holds this view.

I am strongly recommending the Commission of Enquiry recommend Australian Research be carried out on this topic to de bunk this myth and help soldiers meld back into the community without the added stress of being an easy target for communities to see them as a domestically violent person. We owe this to the brave men and women who served our country to help us live a life free of violence, God knows where we would be without them

I am available for further comment should this be desired.

Yours Sincerely

Helen Townsend