



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

Domestic Violence

SPEECH

Monday, 30 March 1998

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Macklin, Jenny, MP

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Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (1.41 pm)—Briefly I want to raise some questions about our current approach to dealing with violence against women and children, about the kinds of services we need to maximise women's choices and opportunities, and about the kind of society that we need if women's independence is to be strengthened. Ultimately, that is what this agenda has to be about. Violence against women and children has to be looked at in a broader context if we are to see the end of it. That means having governments that actually understand that improving women's position in society requires consistent action on a number of fronts—that is, jobs, wages, education, child care and so on.

What we have seen from this government is in fact a token gesture when it comes to domestic violence. The \$25 million that has been talked about is a token gesture over three years—27c a week for the 500,000 women who experience violence each year. It does not replace even one-fifth of the money that was taken out of legal aid and services for women escaping domestic violence in the last two budgets. The amount of \$135 million has been taken out of legal aid and the Family Court.

Quite clearly, we need a better approach—a policy approach that actually starts from the position that women need the support that governments can provide, and when governments make decent laws and provide services they are actually strengthening the position of women in society. If we isolate women, as this government seems so intent on doing, we are going to make it impossible for them to participate actively in so many aspects of society.

We need to take a similar approach when it comes to reforms to services for women and children escaping violence. Too often in the past we have had to resort to isolating women and children to protect them. This was necessary in the environment where we saw the legal system unable to guarantee women's and children's safety and where their economic and social vulnerability left them little choice but to flee a situation where they had no power. We even had the language for it—women and children escaping violence.

What I would say to the government is that we have to envisage a system where the perpetrators of violence bear the burden of disruption to family life which occurs after an incidence of violence. In such a system it is the perpetrator of violence who should be removed from the situation, leaving the women and children in the home, the children at school, and friends, relatives and services nearby able to help women in their homes. Put simply, women and children should not have to pay a double price for violence: first, the devastating affect of the violence itself; and, second, the disruption of life that occurs as a result of leaving the family home, their job and local networks.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—Order! It being 1.45 p.m., the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 101. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.