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MEDIA RELEASE



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NEW RESEARCH SHOWS A DISTURBING INCREASE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SYDNEY'S AFFLUENT NORTH

A new report released today highlights a steady increase in domestic violence against women in higher socio-economic families on Sydney's North Shore. With one in four women said to be affected by some form of domestic violence, the report indicates that the full extent of violence in affluent families is hugely underestimated.

The report has been prepared by the Northside Women's Services, which is a new service of the Salvation Army. It records that there are unique factors related to domestic violence in the northern suburbs of Sydney – including the stigma attached to the victims and financial dependence on partners.

Additionally, the report highlights the fact that women in affluent areas find it difficult to take the initial steps to free themselves from the violence they are experiencing. This fact is reinforced by statistics that indicate that up to 70% of North Shore women withdraw from taking out an apprehended violence order (AVO) against their partner, some of the highest case withdrawal rates in NSW.

Part of the problem, the report's author Amy M. David said today, is that "women in higher socio-economic communities fear they will not be believed, because of the perception that violence doesn't occur in more affluent households."

The report also details the general lack of funding and support available to victims of domestic violence on the North Shore. Amy M. David underlined this by saying that "support agencies cannot cope with the increasing demand from women suffering abuse from their partners."

The Northside Women's Services (NWS) began as a 2 year pilot project in 2003, funded by a sole benefactor. Prior to the establishment of NWS, women's services in the north were limited to women with children only. NWS caters for all women over 18, and provides advice and guidance, as well as greater options with suitable emergency accommodation than were previously available.

One woman who has been helped by NWS is Barbara,* aged 57, who said that "it was such a relief to find someone who understood. I guess I was just expecting more counselling and I didn't expect the practical support that I got. I haven't found that anywhere else at all."

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However, it is clear from the report that greater funding is needed to prevent ongoing problems for these families. Major Colin Hagggar oversees The Salvation Army's crisis accommodation services in the Sydney area. He emphasised the importance of supporting victims of domestic violence, saying today that "there is an undisputed link between domestic violence and homelessness – nearly every case of homelessness is associated with some form of domestic violence.

Women experiencing domestic violence are urged to call the police and report any recent incidents. Information and advice is available by calling the 24 hour Domestic Violence Crisis Line on 1800 65 64 63 or Northside Women's Services during business hours on (02) 9411 7728.

** Victim's name has been changed to protect her identity.*

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Full report available on our website (<http://salvos.org.au/home>).