LEAVING THE WAR ZONE—FIFTY (THREE) WAYS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER

A feminist analysis of fifty–three women's pathways to leaving a male partner who assaulted them

by

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Leaving the war zone

'Well (it's) like, all my life, I've been living in a concentration camp because my father is still living in the war zone, right. It was just a continuation on from that…When you step out of it, you know, it's just like a big explosion of colour or something. I can't explain it any other way…It was like finding a rainbow, like a peaceful thing or something…It was just like Dorothy and The Wizard of Oz, you know, like as if you put a pair of red shoes on. I even bought a pair of red shoes! It's like you've got something to be happy about' ("*Yasmin",* interviewee 2001).

Why feminism?

'When the six o'clock news is a litany of men being oppressed, murdered and raped by women; when a female Taliban confines Afghan men to their homes; when African women emasculate boy children and call it "tradition"; when two men a week are routinely killed by their female partners; when boys are monthly molested, strangled and left to die in a ditch by female assailants; when the female equivalent of Eminem becomes the world's fastest selling popular singer with her songs about killing and mutilating men—come to me then…and complain about man-haters. Until that day, concern yourself with the reality: that every day, in every way, in every country and in every culture, men are hating women to death. And getting away with it' (Burchill 2001).

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how women were able to leave a male partner who assaulted them, and the common critical success factors of leaving and establishing a new life for themselves and any children in their care. Conducted from a feminist standpoint, a qualitative exploration of 53 women's perceptions of being able to leave was undertaken, using a non-probability purposive sampling method and semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Applying a thematic analysis, the results indicated that women used a variety of strategies to 'manage' and resist the abuse and violence, encountering numerous barriers to stopping the violence and/or to leaving, before reaching a final turning point. The pathways out of the violence included formal and informal support, supportive beliefs and information and underpinning structural supports, including relevant policies and laws. The study's findings highlight the importance of developing strategies that focus on men taking responsibility for their use of violence, effective government and community responses, and changing societal attitudes.

The study provided examples of individual good practice in the responses of a range of workers, and identified a number of characteristics of good practice. Based on these characteristics, the study identified a generic framework for practice suggesting good practice at each of five identified phases of leaving. The study highlighted the importance of specialist domestic violence services and, in particular, mobile domestic violence crisis services, as an effective domestic violence service model. Integral to their effectiveness were: (a) their formal liaison with the police, through police Standing Orders; and (b) regional locations. Four key issues emerged requiring urgent attention: (1) women having to leave their homes; (2) the impoverishment of women who leave a violent partner; (3) the need for a consistent and integrated response across the service system; and (4) the importance of understanding both the role of hope and the concept of relational autonomy when responding to women who are assaulted by a male partner. The study discusses these findings in relation to contemporary social work practice.

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