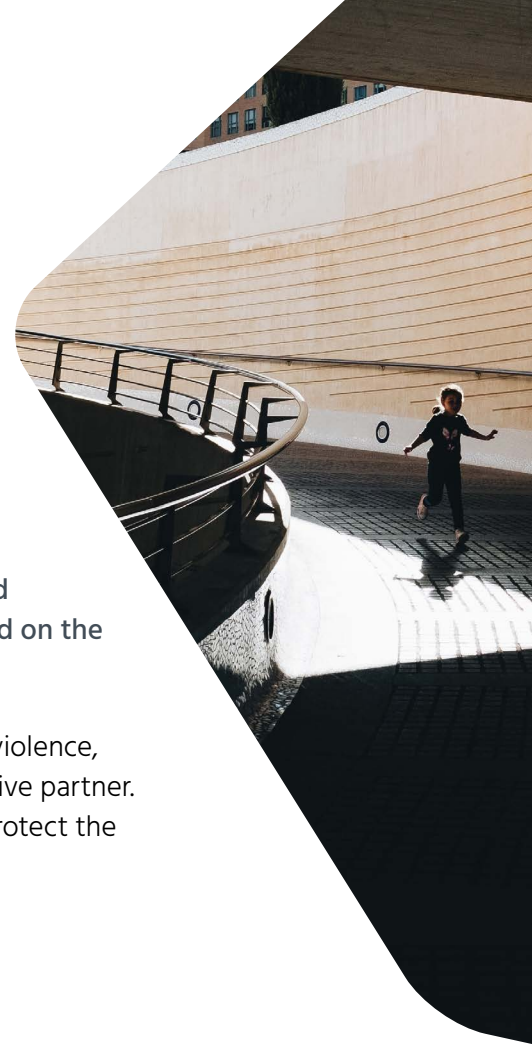


SADIE'S STORY:

A case study of the impacts of domestic and family violence on women and their children



This case study is drawn from one of the interview participants in the 'Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs' research report led by Dr Rae Kaspiew and published by ANROWS. Further information about this report can be found on the [ANROWS website](#).

This case study focuses on one woman's experience of domestic and family violence, and her subsequent experiences of the service system after leaving her abusive partner. Pseudonyms have been used and some details have also been changed to protect the identities of the research participant and family members.

Sadie's Story

- Sadie decides to leave, but with nowhere to go
- A lack of stable housing adds to her financial stress
- The impacts on Sadie's children continue
- Sadie's disappointment with the family law system
- Child protection involvement
- Where to from here?
- Reflective questions
- References & further reading

Sadie's story

Sadie (not her real name) is an Aboriginal woman and a mother of two children – a young daughter with high needs and a teenage son. Sadie experienced intimate partner violence perpetrated by her ex-partner/father of her children that included verbal and physical abuse. After separating from her ex-partner, Sadie accessed multiple service systems, including family law, housing and child protection. Navigating these complex systems created further challenges and was traumatic for Sadie. On top of these challenges, her ex-partner sometimes used the service system to continue his perpetration of domestic and family violence.

Sadie decides to leave, but with nowhere to go

When Sadie made the brave decision to leave her ex-partner, she experienced homelessness because her ex-partner refused to leave the property. In order to find a place to stay, Sadie couch surfed and accessed short term overnight accommodation. However, this meant her young daughter, who has high needs, could not stay with her and remained living with her ex-partner and his new partner.

Sadie continued to look for suitable accommodation and sought assistance from housing and accommodation services. After a lengthy period, she was provided some accommodation through a domestic violence service. As Sadie reflected:



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"I have [indistinct] through women's housing for domestic violence. Yeah, not so nice. It's for—I moved in. It was filthy, full of needles. Everything was disgusting. Like, you couldn't—it was putrid. It had a dead smell in it. It was bad...It was really—but I've cleaned it up. I have—of course, you're going to clean it up. I live normally...And yeah, I've made it a home." (Sadie)

A lack of stable housing adds to her financial stress

Prior to leaving the relationship Sadie was working two jobs and the sole breadwinner for the family. She also paid for the home mortgage, as Sadie describes:

"I was paying the mortgage and you know, I can't—you know I was making myself sick. I was going without to pay the mortgage for them...And really, I couldn't do that and—look, I was paying it right up until [date]... And buying food and everything and working two jobs... But it got—it became so hard for me because I had no—I was homeless...I was—do you know what I mean? I was couch surfing." (Sadie)

Sadie's financial insecurity was exacerbated further in dealing with the stressors of homelessness and couch surfing. In the end, Sadie lost her job because her employer became frustrated.

The impacts on Sadie's children continue

Sadie's children were impacted by the domestic and family violence. Sadie's teenage son started displaying aggressive behaviours towards her:

"I asked [12-17 year old son] to stop and he actually—pardon me, threw the bong water all over me and went to hit me and I said to him, "you get out of here". And then I tried to rebuild with him...but it's him standing over me. It's him abusing the shit out of me." (Sadie)

Sadie's daughter, who had remained in the care of her ex-partner, experienced physical abuse and neglect from Sadie's ex-partner and his new partner:

"I get her from Friday till Monday...And in that time I clean her. She's got nits. She's got bruises all over her, on her face everywhere." (Sadie)

She was also exposed to sexual activity and drug use while in their care.

Sadie's disappointment with the family law system

After leaving her abusive partner, Sadie tried to engage with the family law system, including via mediation and the Family Law Court. However, she found the system did not assist her:



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"I tried mediation three times. He never turned up. I went with the police and he'd pissed all over my clothes. I gave my child a hug and I could just tell by her face that she [the child] wasn't happy...because she hasn't seen her mother for 3 months. It's not for lack of trying. I've tried to do it the court way." (Sadie)

The matter went to the family law courts and Sadie attempted to regain care of her child to ensure their safety from her ex-partner and his new partner's abuse. However, Sadie found her legal representative lacked the necessary expertise and did not prepare adequately for court by obtaining evidence to support her case:

"Because it's court-ordered. This court system, bunch of bumbling fools, I tell you. They do not care. 'Cause I didn't—what happened is my lawyer didn't do an affidavit. I didn't do it. So, that's, they didn't have the background information. So we got to court and it was a nightmare... It's—like, I was devastated. [Youngest child] was crying. She thought she was living with me. And then I said, "No, you gotta go back", and she said, "Mummy, I'll be all right". (Sadie)

Child protection involvement

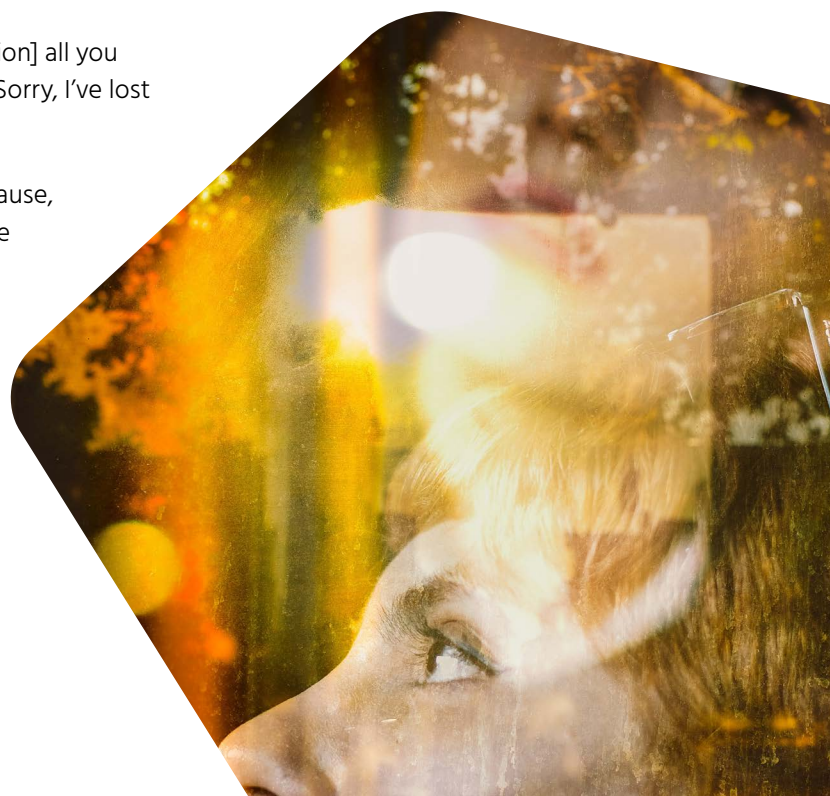
Child protection became involved with Sadie and her family due to concerns about domestic violence, as well as concerns about the abuse and neglect of her daughter in the father's household. While Sadie had a more positive experience with the Aboriginal Child Protection team, she felt her overall involvement with services was negative. This is because she felt that allowing her daughter to continue to live with her ex-partner was unsafe:

"You know, you can complain to [state child protection] all you want, do you know what I mean? They're jack shit. Sorry, I've lost faith in everything." (Sadie)

The child protection agency had limited involvement because, with Family Law Court proceedings already underway, the question of the child's residence was being handled in that jurisdiction.



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Where to from here?

This case study provides a glimpse into Sadie's experience after leaving her abusive partner. Like many women, Sadie's story is continuing to unfold. However, through reflecting on this case study, we can learn about the challenges the system creates and areas where practice can improve.

For further discussion about this case study, please see the related webinar hosted by the CFA information exchange in collaboration with ANROWS: [Sadie's story: Helping women affected by domestic and family violence navigate a fragmented system.](#)

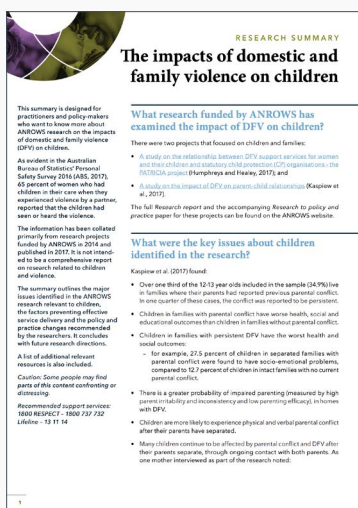
Reflective questions

- How did the fragmented service system impact Sadie?
- What practice approaches could services employ to better meet Sadie's needs?
- The needs of Sadie's daughter were not receiving the focus that was necessary. How could practice change?

References

Kaspiew, R., Horsfall, B., Qu, L., Nicholson, J. M., Humphreys, C., Diemer, K., ... Dunstan, J. (2017). [Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs: Final report](#) (ANROWS Horizons 04/2017). Sydney: ANROWS.

Further reading



Research summary:
The impacts of domestic and family violence on children



Practice guide:
Invisible Practices – Working with fathers who use violence



The PATRICIA Project:
Pathways And Research In Collaborative Inter-Agency working