



'Consumed by fear and terror': Sydney woman's disturbing childhood secret

Jess lived in a nice house with a pool in the back yard but there was a "disturbing" reason why she never invited friends over.



Stephanie Bedo [stephanie_bedo](#)

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On average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner. *Source: News Limited*

It was the smallest of things that could set him off. Traffic on the way home from work or mess in the kitchen.

It meant Jess* and her family constantly walked on eggshells.

From the outside, the Sydney family seemed like anyone else's. But they were hiding a "disturbing" secret.

Jess's dad's rage — that could escalate into physical violence — became the reason why she didn't invite friends over.

Her family had a lovely pool and among the bad memories were good ones, but not being able to partake in a simple childhood joy is something that sticks in her mind now she has a family of her own.

On average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner.

Almost 10 women a day are hospitalised for assault injuries at the hands of a spouse or domestic partner.

Every day in May, as part of **Domestic and Family Violence Awareness Month**, news.com.au will tell the stories behind those shocking statistics.

"There were good and bad days over many years," Jess tells news.com.au. "The bad days were often triggered by something — whether that be a stressful day at work, traffic on the way home or an untidy kitchen."



Jess's childhood was littered with bad memories. Picture: Unsplash Source: Supplied

“That would soon escalate into a rage, verbal abuse and on the odd occasion physical violence towards the family.”

Jess would barricade herself in her bedroom and hope her father wouldn't take his anger any further.

“I remember incidents from when I was about six or seven years old,” she says. “The most frightening times were when he went into a rage.

“Nothing could de-escalate the situation. It then would turn into verbal abuse and you would begin to feel your body consumed by fear and terror that it was about to turn physically violent.

“I would try to escape to the bathroom or my bedroom and put all of my weight against the door.”

Jess says years later when she became stronger and braver to stand up to the “tirade of verbal abuse”, she would, but this would often make the situation worse.

“It was mostly verbal, but three or four times it turned physical where I was punched or kicked in the back or stomach,” she said.

RELATED: Domestic violence prevention receives \$1.1 billion funding boost

Domestic violence can have long-term effects on individuals and families, resulting in trauma, addiction, and mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, which is why experts say survivors need ongoing support.

“Experiencing and/or witnessing domestic violence is a form of complex trauma,” explains Alyssa Lalor, program director of South Pacific Private, a treatment centre in NSW.

“Children exposed to violence in the home are especially vulnerable and can experience profound impacts on their physical, psychological and emotional health and wellbeing.

“Research suggests that the younger the child, the more harmful the traumatic experiences are in terms of brain development.”

Children and family violence

11% of men

experience physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15

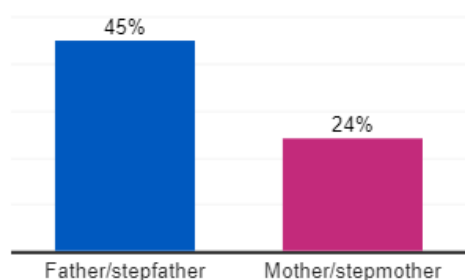


16% of women

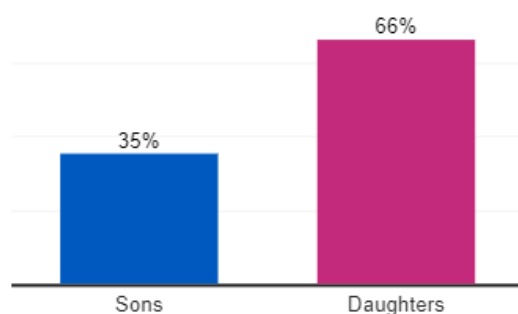
experience physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15

Physical abuse

Perpetrators of physical abuse



Victims of mothers/stepmothers



Perpetrators of sexual abuse



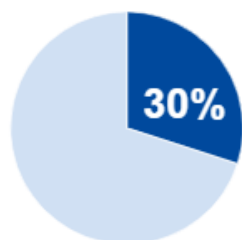
8 in 10 victims abused by relative, friend, acquaintance, neighbours



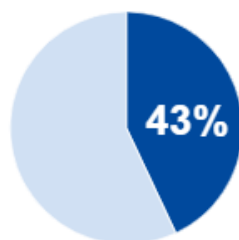
1 in 10 victims abused by a stranger

Filicide

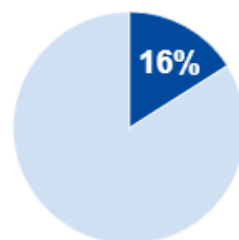
Murder or manslaughter by a parent or equivalent



Previous domestic violence between killer and their partner in 30% of cases



Male filicide offenders with history of domestic violence



Female filicide offenders with history of domestic violence

RELATED: [Horror map exposes impact of domestic violence in Australia](#)

Jess is passionate about making sure the next generation doesn't endure the pain and heartache families like hers did.

Ms Lalor says one study found that women who experience domestic abuse are three times more likely to develop a serious mental illness.

She says it's important for survivors to seek support from someone trustworthy and start taking minute baby steps to freedom.

"Sometimes it can feel like a game of chess — as they start to move pieces of their life around without being detected as the last thing they want to do is set off their abuser," she says.

"They are in a constant state of flight, flight or freeze. They need support, a lot of support.

"Our aim is to help build a survivor's sense of self and personal agency and safety by harnessing and growing the belief that they are 'good enough' and worthy of love — and do not deserve to be abused and hurt."

Where to find help

If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual abuse or family violence contact:

- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service 24-hour helpline [1800 RESPECT](#) on **1800 737 732**
- 24-hour Emergency Accommodation helpline on **1800 800 588**
- Safe At Home helpline on **1800 633 937**
- SHE (free and confidential counselling and support) on **6278 9090**
- Sexual Assault Support Services on **6231 1811**, or after hours **6231 1817**
- Family Violence Crisis and Support Service on **1800 608 122**
- Bravehearts – Sexual Assault Support for Children on **1800 BRAVE 1**

Don't go it alone. Please reach out for help by contacting [Lifeline](#) on **13 11 14**

- Men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues, should contact the [Men's Referral Service](#) on **1300 766 491** or the [Don't Become That Man](#) helpline on **1300 243 413**

**Name has been changed*

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<https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/news-life/consumed-by-fear-and-terror-sydney-womans-disturbing-childhood-secret/news-story/a1958c605af4faee102087cef3d64067>