

Rough handling issue tackled by high profile panel

A recent public forum in Darwin on violence in relationships highlighted the depth of community concern with the issue.

The forum, *Rough Handling*, attracted about 200 people to hear a panel of prominent Territorians tackle the difficult issue of coercion in marriage.

Panel members included Justice Mildren of the Supreme Court, Bishop Appleby of the Anglican Church and Commander Etter, Dean of Studies, NT Police.

Counsellors of both perpetrators and survivors of abuse were represented.

The forum was moderated by Jenny Blokland, Senior Lecturer at the NTU Faculty of Law.

The basis of the discussion was the controversial South Australian judgment of Mr Justice Bollen who, in summing up to a jury in a rape trial, stated that "rougher than usual" handling of a woman by her husband could be acceptable in the eyes of the law.

Discussion at the forum covered legal, political, religious, psychological and social perspectives of violence in relationships.

"The aim of the forum was to raise awareness in our community of violence in relationships, to air different perspectives and develop ideas for change," said Sally Gearin, President

of the NT Women Lawyers Association.

"The forum offered the Darwin community an opportunity to contribute to a vital public debate and to inform themselves of the options available to battered women in our community."

Forum participants were surveyed for their opinions.

The following priorities emerged from the forum:

- * 73 per cent supported education for judges, magistrates and lawyers on violence in relationships;

- * 73 per cent supported the introduction of practical measures to assist and support complainants in dealing with police, medical staff and the court process;

- * 70 per cent considered that there should be an increase in support services in remote and rural areas;

- * 66 per cent supported improved police training about violence in relationships;

- * 66 per cent supported the establishment of perpetrators' counselling services;

- * 62 per cent supported the establishment of a 24 hour crisis service to accompany police call-outs;

- * 58 per cent supported change in the laws in relation to evidence from complainants in sexual assault cases;

- * 23 per cent supported increased police numbers.

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