



# Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce



## Your submission

The Taskforce is interested to hear from you in relation to either or both of the following:

- The experience of women across the criminal justice system:
  - as victims-survivors of sexual violence
  - and also as accused persons and offenders.

The full Terms of Reference for the Taskforce are available at the following link:

[https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/672706/womens-safety-justice-taskforce-tor.pdf](https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/672706/womens-safety-justice-taskforce-tor.pdf)

## Privacy Statement

The Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce (the Taskforce) is an independent taskforce established to examine: coercive control and the need for a specific offence of commit domestic violence; and the experience of women across the criminal justice system.

The Taskforce is collecting your personal information in this form, including information about your experiences, work, and opinions, to inform the Taskforce's review. Your name and contact details (if you choose to provide them) may be used to update you about the work of the Taskforce including any further opportunities to participate.

You do not have to disclose any information you don't want to. The form gives you the option of providing an anonymous submission and asks you about how you would like your information treated. We will only use your information in the way that you agree to. However, in line with our legal obligations, we may need to disclose, or keep confidential, certain information. For instance, if your submission discloses immediate or imminent harm to a person, we may be obliged to refer the matter to police.

The information you provide in this form will be disclosed to the Taskforce and the Taskforce Secretariat provided by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and will be managed in accordance with the Information Privacy Act 2009.

**Please select at least one option from below**

- I have lived experience of domestic, family or sexual violence and/or of the criminal justice system
- I have supported a friend or family member experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence and/or engaging with the criminal justice system
- I work with people experiencing domestic, family or sexual violence and/or engaging with the criminal justice system
- I am an interested member of the public
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

**Are you able to advise a timeframe for when most of the lived experience/observations in your submission occurred?**

- In the past two years
- In the past five years
- In the past 10 or more years
- I will be speaking in general terms and not referring to a specific timeframe

**How would you like us to use your information?**

As stated in the Privacy Statement on page 1, we will only use your information in the way that you agree to. However, in line with our legal obligations, we may need to:

- Redact (black out) part of your submission
- Pseudonymise (use different names); or
- Not publish your material, even if you would like us to do so.

If your submission discloses immediate or imminent harm to a person, we may be obliged to refer the matter to police.

**(please tick one of the options provided below)**

- Identified – published on website**

If you select this box, your submission may be published on the Taskforce's website. Your submission may also be referenced in reports and any other public document prepared by the Taskforce.

Your name and other identifying details about you may be included. However, your contact details including your phone number and address will not be published.

The whole or part of your submission may be quoted or paraphrased. Your submission may also be developed into a brief narrative to tell your story, without mentioning your name or other details that would identify you.

- Anonymous – published on website**

## About you

The following questions are optional.

### What is your age range?

- I am under 18 years old
- I am between 18 – 25 years old
- I am between 26 – 35 years old
- I am between 36 – 45 years old
- I am between 46 – 55 years old
- I am between 56 – 65 years old
- I am 65+ years old

### What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Intersex
- Transgender
- Indeterminate, unspecified
- Prefer not to say
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your current postcode?

What is your main language other than English spoken at home? ENGLISH

In which country were you born? AUSTRALIA

### Do you identify as a member of any of the following groups? (Please tick all that apply)

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person
- Person from culturally and linguistically diverse background
- Person who identifies as LGBTIQ+
- Person with disability

Part 1: Cross cutting issues

1. .
2. .
3. .
4. There is very little support. A counsellor comes in from the women's centre when she is able to but it takes months to see her. As a prisoner within the system and a victim of sexual assault inside the facility, it is painfully obvious that the rules do not protect women from unwanted sexual advances but rather serve as a tool for offenders to use to keep them quiet. A Victim of sexual assault in Prison is not able to easily come forward. The strict rules against sexual relations in prison fuel secrecy and stand overs. Victims are harassed into stating they were willing participants worthy of breaches and discipline. Very rarely are sexual assault claims taken seriously by staff. When a sexual assault occurs in the prison and the victim comes forward they are shunned by both other inmates and a lot of the staff. This is exasperated by the fact that some girls when they are caught participating in sexual acts become scared of the consequences and claim they were threatened into complying simply to avoid punishment.
5. As stated above because of the rules against inappropriate behaviour (sex) and disciplinary action faced I caught some girls are wrongly accused of assaulting their cell mates. The fear of disciplinary action triggers a reaction in some to claim their were assaulted to avoid punishment.
6. The impacts of trauma for women and girls may be understood but is not acted upon nor taken seriously. Police a quick to disregard the natural fight/flight response of accused and further traumatise the individual by insulting, belittling, and degrading them. Courts claim to take trauma into account however the rulings handed down do not actually vary from those where no trauma was noted. Prosecutors and lawyers exhaust accused women and girls to the point many enter plea deals not because they are guilty but because they have no more fight left in them. They also attack women and girls in the courtroom for making any trauma related claims and accuse them of seeking unwarranted pity. Often women receive harsh excessive sentences for acts that were a direct result of mental breakdowns and then once are denied access to therapeutic mental health treatments. The psych staff in the prisons serve only to maintain positive behaviour and life, women serving sentences are left to fend for themselves often being stripped of their medication that they have come to rely on outside to maintain their mental health.
7. See above
8. see 6
9. It is good to see that most correctional officers and police officers are sensitive to women victims when conducting pat downs and strip searches. These officers reassure the woman during the process and are tactful in their choice of words. Sadly not all officers take this seriously but most do.  

Police are quick to dismiss allegations of sexual assault and rape when the victim is guilty or accused of breaking the law themselves. Many women arrive in jail and open up to their peers that they have been assaulted or raped and tried to tell the police only to be accused of trying to milk sympathy . These women don't come forward again because they believe that they won't be heard, some believe that the police believe they deserved their abuse because they themselves are criminals.
10. -
11. -
12. -
13. There is limited but good community based support in most major towns and cities however there is a gross lack of support in remote towns and indigenous communities.
14. There needs to be better access to counselling and support services especially for women in incarceration. Women who have been charged with breaches of the law need to be treated with more compassionately and opening when raising that they have been assaulted or raped.
15. This information needs to be more readily available and defined.

16. -

17. -

18. Where the charges don't directly involve the assault or rape, prosecutors are quick to dismiss it's relevance in the accused woman's behaviour. Defence lawyers do not do enough to argue the known effects of sexual violence.

19. Simple- Complaints are either squashed or given an unhelpful "we are doing the best we can" or "you can contact us if this response of we followed all the policies is unsatisfactory".

## PART 2

20. Yes, women involved in illegal drugs are often considered sluts willing to fuck anything for drug money so when they claim they have been assaulted or raped their claims are dismissed.

21. Some people understand that consent means exclusively if the person says "yes" and is mentally capable of making the decision to say that yes. Too many however still believe that consent is implied if the person is dancing in a sexual nature, is intoxicated and responds in a moan, previously agreed to have intercourse, has gone to a party where its known that most attendees plan on hooking up, or is caught masturbating in private.

22. YES. It needs to be explained not just defining what consent is but define and specifically list what IS NOT consent.

23. -

24. YES, gender stereotypes and misconceptions about individuals with diverse genders fuel the lack of understanding about consent.

25. -

26. by themselves not at all, however misuse of all of these uses for technology has opened up a whole new avenue to invade individuals comfort zones and breach the rules of consent.

27. Whether they will be believed. Whether they will be safe. Where to go. Will it effect their family if it comes out in public?

28. Same as 27. however they also consider whether they feel up to being further exposed. Opening up to health care workers often means consenting to being violated again adding to the emotional pain already being felt.

29. Demolish stereotypes, educate police on risk factors and how to respond to allegations appropriately.

30. Establish policies that ensure they are actually heard not just dismissed or accused of making it up.

31. Encourage survivors to speak publicly and proudly outing their abusers and showing their strength and rallying to support other victims.

32. - Media only shows an opinion and generally fuels stigma and discrimination.

33. Risks would effect both, Victims and accused persons both lose the ability to rebuild their lives once cases become public. Accused persons who are not guilty lose their freedoms and acceptance in the community because of the doubts in the community. Accused persons of DV who genuinely wish to make amends are not given the support and opportunity to do so. Victims are not actively encouraged to become survivors. -

34. As above

35. NO.

36. Many refuse to report because of the risk of their story reaching the media.

37. -

38. -

39. I was told not to pursue my case because I didn't have any proof.

40. -
41. Police attempted to do a recorded phone call to get the accused to admit to guilt talking to one of the victims however the call failed and the police didn't want to try any other avenues.
42. -
43. -
44. -
45. -
46. Was never allowed to have one.
47. In my own experience I had to source my own support, non was ever offered to me.
48. Training to be more culturally sensitive and aware when talking to aboriginal and Torres strait islander women. Training to be more aware of how women and girls react to trauma and how to support them when making statements.
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67. Yes definitely
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69. -
70. Address the stereotypes, stigmas, and lack of public knowledge
71. yes, this would be better and closed courts would make victims feel safer to come forward.
72. Include trauma-information into court waiting areas, and include education for ALL professionals working in the court process. Supply easy to understand information to victims and accused. Allow victims to appear remotely or have support persons remain with them both in waiting areas and the courtroom.

### PART 3

73. Abuse, lack of support, lack of accessible education programs for young women eg. employment, home keeping, cooking, budgeting etc, poor mental health, financial stress, The trauma experienced in juvenile and adult incarceration facilities fuels the cycles of re-offending especially when the victims are prone to turning to illegal substances to dull their pain. Lack of appropriate behavioural guidance for adults with disabilities.
74. Because more women and girls are alone trying to make it in society without support. Women are fighting back when they are abused and are being punished for it while their abusers go untouched. There is a severe lack of therapeutic responses in jail.
75. They aren't, generally they are simply told to get their shit or get help themselves. Support services offer aid but it is often considered shameful for them to have to do so.
76. Traumatic. In my own experience only one officer treated me with care and encouraged me to make this a learning experience and turn my life around. The other officers refused to provide basics in the watch house including blankets, soap or a cup to drink from. When first charged I was released from the police station at midnight by myself with a flat phone and no-one to pick me up, I was forced to walk home the distance of 6+ km fearful that I might be attacked on my way.
77. -
78. Outside the prison it is hard. Legal advice changes with lawyers and barristers. If you are forced to change part way or have duty lawyers representing you the advice you receive can be contradictory and the whole scenario is stressful and confusing. Inside prison Legal advice is near impossible to obtain. Legal services aren't easy to access and prison staff are not informed on supporting prisoners in accessing or contacting them.
79. Barriers exist yes, women who end up in the jail's safety unit are not given any information or support to access legal advice. Often coming in as new receptions they end up in Safety and do not even know what happened in court. The isolation boxes and video appearances do not allow women to "hear" what is happening when they are sentenced and they come to jail needing advice and info.
80. There is limited support available. Women in jail have no choice but to rely on their peers for the majority of their mental health, welfare, and children's concerns and needs. The services within the centre exist to offer support but they are over stretched and unable to meet the demands.
81. Sentencing does not take into account children's best interests especially where community based sentences could apply they are discarded in favour of incarceration putting further strain on the child safety departments. Women who have had lengthy bail while their matters have been in the courts may have already taken action to redirect their lives, and correct the wrongs they've done. This is not taken into account and women who may have just obtained employment and gotten clean for the first time in their lives are thrown into incarceration to be further traumatised and lose access to all forms of therapy based support. Sentencing in women's cases does not taken into account what lead to the offending. Sentences handed down do not reflect the actual weight of the intention of the female offender but rather reflects a weight of a stereotype created for the said crime not accounting for the causes.
82. Prisons need therapy based supports for rehabilitation. Communities need safe places for women to go to learn basic life skills.
83. -
84. Watch house – was denied basic hygiene products and clean blankets, when threatened by another inmate was told to deal with it myself.

Jail SECURE – Some officers make it their duty to encourage positive behaviour providing firm by fair treatment but an equal number of officers deliberately insult and taunt women who are either new or suffering from poor mental health. Women in secure are unable to speak in privacy to officers or psychs instead being forced to speak in front of the whole unit or ask loudly for a private conversation and risk being bashed and labelled as a "dog" for telling on other inmates.

Jail RESIDENTIAL – Offers more privacy when seeking support however officers attitudes and treatment of prisoners is no different than secure. In my case when going through an exceptionally traumatic event I sought

help from officers after I realised I was suicidal. I had already begun self-harming. The officers noted my behaviour had curbed and instead of referring me for support they berated me and told me to "suck it up and get over myself". My only life saver was fellow inmates who risked being sent to DU to help me. It took over 6 months for any staff in the prison to acknowledge the severity of what I had gone through and I still have not been offered any professional referrals or support now 14 months later.

85. -

86. There is limited support usually strictly available to mothers who's children are either approved to be with them or have their children in the custody of child safety. Mothers who do not fit this category find it difficult and at times impossible to access any information or support. Information that is difficult to access or sometimes given out incorrectly is how to access photos, how to contact their children when dvo's apply, how to get visits with their children. A great deficit exists where mothers become aware that their children are being abused or neglected. It is near impossible to file welfare reports and when you can those reports are not taken seriously by the department leaving the mothers suffering worse self-esteem and stress then when they were simply just incarcerated.

87. Through phone calls, letters, visits. This could be improved if phone calls could be made cheaper, if getting visits with children was better promoted and visits building provided for the children during visits.

88. Accommodation is OK at best. Cork display boards and mattresses are ridden with bird lice who are seemingly immune to the pest control used by the prison, outdoor areas in residential accommodations provide only 4 seats where there are 6 residents. The accommodations on the male side and at the farm do not offer air conditioning despite the climate. Women are not informed as to the hormone changes that happen to them living in close confines with other women and overall anyone who has a health complaint has to fight and beg repeatedly for months before they are taken seriously.

89. -

90. Hygiene is encouraged but affordable toiletries are not always available. For women who are unable to hold employment it is almost impossible to supply their own toiletry needs. Soap free and hypoallergenic options are not available for purchase without special permission which can take months to get. For women allergic to pads and tampons there is no substitute and currently management does not approve the use of Diva cups even at the prisoners own cost. Clothing is worn until it literally falls off. Winter months are hard to endure as women are provided with a single jumper and single pair of track pants which once in the wash means she is forced to wear light cotton shorts and shirt until the dryer finishes. Women are provided with 2 hospital style blankets which is sufficient in summer months however for inmates with air con vents directly above their beds winter is unbearably cold.

91. -

92. Kitchen employment needs to offer more training and better supervision. Overall remuneration does not compensate the prisoners for the actual level of work they do nor does it cater to any budget inside the jail covering toiletries, buy-up or phone money.

93. Transitioning to university whilst in custody has been more negative than positive. The few positives have been engaging in an activity to pass time, gaining confidence in using certain literacy and numeracy skills, and being able to set clearer goals for the future. Entering into these studies both optimistic and confident it has been good to build those foundational skills. The negatives that have arisen mostly revolve around the social division and lack of support within the centre. Only individuals in a certain social circle known within the centre as the "plastics" are encouraged to study and have access to support among student peers. Anyone who fails to fit in with or be accepted by the "plastics" not only suffers the exclusion but also heavy bullying from cell mates for being a nerd. Another negative is that when a student is struggling to understand a concept or needs clarification and seeks helps from the education staff at the centre, the student is told to simply send in what they think and wait for feedback from their marker. As the marker seldom comes back with feedback that explains a concept or clarifies information for students the students are left feeling depressed and in some cases almost like the University is engaging in practices that further punish the inmate for making mistakes. Another negative experience has been directly relating to the learning resources provided. Being provided with a laptop with the required programming is meant to make studying easier for students. However with no user instructions or manuals provided for these programs, students are faced with losing marks over mistakes made using the software wrong, which makes them feel frustrated and less motivated to



continue trying. Being incarcerated students face a large number of daily challenges, set-backs, and disappointments. This sad fact especially applies to those seeking to change their lives for the better, while studying does offer a foundation for a better life, it takes a lot of commitment and resilience on the part of the incarcerated student to maintain engagement.

94. -

95. The health service is present but as I previously stated it is difficult to access support. Women coming into jail are often taken off all their prescribed medication and are not easily able to get back onto any of it even with letters from their treating professionals on the outside. Something as simple as haemorrhoid cream is often denied because of misuse even after the woman exposes herself and shows medical staff her hemorrhoids.

96. The food handling is not monitored effectively in the kitchen, prisoners are often seen picking boogies and then directly putting their hands into food meant for the entire centre. The food is often under cooked, over spiced, or rotten. Food allergies are not treated seriously food is prepared together and the offending food item is simply picked out leaving traces behind. Complaints are dismissed and prisoners who continue to complain are labelled trouble makers. Some women attempt to eat only the food available on buy up however there is not enough variety of protein and vegetable based foods on buy up to provide an healthy diet, these women are living on rice, tuna, sardines, and noodles.

97. I myself was granted parole over 3 months ago. I am still in jail because there is NO accommodation for me.

98. -

99. -

100. -

101. OTHER INPUT

As I started to elaborate under number 4, the prisons have strict rules against any form of inappropriate behaviour inside the prison. Women are told these rules are for their own safety to protect them from assaults and rapes. They are told that statistics show that rapes have drastically reduced in prisons. Many prisoners do not believe this to be true. The rules haven't stopped sexual assaults and rapes the rules have however made it harder for women who are victims to come forward. The rules also discriminate against Lesbians who, serving long sentences over years fall in love. According to policies and rules women are prohibited from having any kind of relationship in jail even a healthy one. In a healthy prison environment women would be encouraged to have positive relationships and provided education on what that looks like. Women would be safe to report sexual assaults and rapes because they won't be bullied into silence or fearful of being punished if they aren't believed. Lesbians who fall in love would be accepted not punished for what is ultimately never planned intentionally. I myself have been sexually assaulted more than once in my 20 months and neither of those events led to consequences for my attacker, instead in both situations the officers said they did not believe me because I had previously been seen hanging out socially and having fun with my attackers therefore they told me they believed that I simply regretted breaking the rules and I was told if it happened again I would be breached and lose privileges. Now I am in a solid relationship which has been tested from every angle imaginable and my partner and I struggle with the fact that our relationship is constantly compared by staff to instances of rapes and assaults because they have blurred the lines in here.