



So...podcast – Episode #29 Amy Warren

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John: Greetings. John McKenna, So...podcast, 2021, the first episode for this year. What a journey I've had, just approaching 30 episodes. Had some amazing conversations with some great people. Obviously my heart goes out and my appreciation goes out to people who have listened to my episodes and given me feedback. Thank you so much for that.

I do want to reflect because it's a new year and all those people have been so supportive. I also want to remind people, my podcast episodes are always available on my website, which is www.johnmckenna.com.au and don't forget Spotify, also available on YouTube and other podcast platforms. A lot of my episodes are transcribed and I do urge people to look at the sponsors who give their time to help me transcribe. OutScribe is one organisation I'd like to mention. They transcribe all my episodes. Thank you OutScribe for doing what you do and it's one of those things where it's done manually. Can I talk about that? It's not just done by automatic robot doing it. The people have done it. This is a great thing for people who do not have the ability to hear what I'm talking about and they're able to read, and even people whose English is second language.

While I'm thanking people I must, and I gave him a heads-up earlier, Jian. He's the guru behind all of my episodes because it makes it happen. He's done every episode with me. He's an amazing guy. I'm not putting you on the spot, because I gave him a heads-up but I just want to thank him right now because this guy comes in to my studio in Melbourne, Australia at different times of the day and night, depending on the availability of my guests. So Jian, a bit thank you to you and also your family and your wife. You've made all this happen because you've been a bit like a mentor and a coach, but you've also done some magic with





regards to getting rid of those annoying dogs and barking and telephones and trains. There's a whole lot of little things that pop up during an episode, so thank you. And can I just ask you really quickly, because you don't say many words, brother, do you?

Jian: Not at all.

John: I know. But how's the journey for you been? What's it like?

Jian: Well all I could say is that I'm glad we met each other in 2020 and it's been a pleasure working with you. So it's always been interesting. So looking forward to more episodes to come.

John: Thank you, Jian. That's famous! He's never, ever spoken on the podcast. That's good.

My first guest for 2021 is Amy Warren. Amy is PhD candidate with Curtin University who is doing an amazing research project as part of her PhD. The title is *Violence Against Women Across the Lifespan*. Before we start this episode I also would like to acknowledge the fact that the content of this episode may have concerns or may trigger concerns for people who are listening. I'd like to share a couple of phone numbers with you.

There's an organisation called Lifeline and their phone number is 13 11 14. And there is also another organisation in Australia, 1800RESPECT and the phone number is 1800 737 732. So please, do not hesitate to reach out to those organisations if something may have triggered a thought or a concern during the conversation I'm having with Amy.

So Amy, welcome to So...podcast. I've mentioned who you are and what you're doing. Can you tell us a bit more about you, please?





Amy: Sure. So like you say, I'm a PhD candidate at Curtin here in Western Australia. I've got a background in social work, so when I'm not working on my PhD I also work as a hospital social worker here in Perth.

John: Violence against women across the lifespan. Yep, we all know what violence against women is, we hear it too often. The word 'lifespan' is interesting because everybody has a lifespan. It can be long, it can be short. When exploring this topic with lifespan, what are you focusing on?

Amy: Yeah, so the lifespan for my project is really from birth to death. So exploring a person's entire life and the reason for taking that approach is that in Australia, and also internationally, we see abuse occurring across three different points in the lifespan. So as a child, and we have the child abuse sector, then in adulthood, and that's generally what we would call domestic and family violence here in Australia, or internationally we use the term intimate partner violence. And then as an older person as well we have what we would call elder abuse, so that's generally abuse from a family member or another loved one, or even a friend or someone providing care towards an older person.

John: So Amy, I think it's really good that you've identified those three sectors because each sector has a whole lot of people who are doing research and exploring. Just again remind me. First one was child abuse, the second one was..?

Amy: Domestic and family violence.

John: And the third one was?

Amy: Elder abuse.

John: I'm presuming that you're weaving all of these in together as part of your project, is that right?





Amy: Yes, that's what I'm trying to do. And that's really come from, so my background in research has been researching in domestic and family violence and in elder abuse. As I was working across those two areas I saw some similarities as well as some differences. I also had workers who mentioned to me through some of my other research that we really need to be working together to address these issues, rather than working separately. So that's what I'm trying to do here.

John: So we will keep mentioning those three sectors because what excited me about, when looking at your research project, it does involve the lifespan, and also a strong acknowledgement of child abuse and partner abuse and elder abuse. And of course all of those sections have basically a fear and a stigma approach, and even for a child for instance. Is he or she, or they, being abused? Or are they just being a naughty kid? And there are so many other examples where you could even look at the wife who's got her scenarios, and is it appropriate that they go and share and who to and who do they trust? And of course you've got the elder abuse and these are just things that I'm making very broad statements about and I respect your view on this as a person who looks at it through the academic lens but I see and observe – and I'll talk on a personal level where I've lived in aged care facilities – there are a whole thing about “oh they're being like this because they've got dementia so they've got to be guided and this is how we do it”.

In saying all this, how do we work with the area of fear and stigma to help these people?

Amy: I think the biggest thing is having conversations about it and even if we look, particularly at domestic violence in Australia in the last five, ten years, the conversations around that have just boomed. Part of that can be attributed to some of the work done by Rosie Batty when her story first came to light and her with as the Australian of the Year, and that kind of thing. Just raising that public awareness that this is an issue that can be happening in your own home, if not right next door, and these are conversations that we need to be having. And I think the more that





we speak about it the more that we normalise talking about it, the easier it makes it for someone to reach out for help and not worry about that stigma and not have that fear of not being believed, and not receiving the help that they need.

John: So you've got internal fear and stigma as a person who, and I don't like the word victim but it's a very broad word when you hear the word victim, and for those people who are looking and observing and seeing what's going on, how do we give those people courage and the strength to either approach or react or do something?

Amy: Yeah and that's really tricky as well. Obviously like you said, sometimes we make assumptions and we don't want to be seen to be making assumptions, so we don't want to think that is that child being abused or are they just being naughty? Is there something else going on here? But I think it's making it clear to the people in our lives that we are safe people to come to and to talk to. And also if you, once you have that information, once someone has reached out to you or you've reached out to someone you're concerned about, actually knowing what you can do to help them, you know where you can go for help. 1800RESPECT that you mentioned at the beginning of this conversation, they're a really great resource for people to reach out and they can point you to other local organisations or support services. That's a really important thing. I think it's something that I've been struck by since I've started doing this work, is the more I talk about violence against women and how it's unacceptable and how we are working to stop it, the more people I've had in my life who have actually reached to me and let me know that they have been victims, or we also use the term victim survivor. And they'd experienced something in their life, either as a child or earlier in their adulthood that wasn't okay with them. That they would consider violence now.

John: Amy, thinking about law enforcement, the police and the role that they play in supporting people, once again whether it be a child or an adult or an elder. This is putting you on the spot, you'll answer it as you want to.





Are you comfortable with how overall the police are dealing with receiving issues such as this?

Amy: Look, it's a tough one because we hear mixed results. I've actually been fortunate enough to work with some really fantastic police officers as part of my studies, who were really well trained and really just amazing working with these women who were coming forward, or when they were being called out to homes to resolve what they would term like domestic disputes. That's the term that was used back in the day as well. And they were really fantastic. But we also hear a lot of stories about people going to the police and not receiving the response that they would want, especially when we start talking about regional and rural communities where the police officers are often really imbedded in the community, they know members of the community quite well and it can be really hard to remove that personal relationship, I guess. So it really does depend on who you see. I think there's a lot of focus at the moment on police reform and making sure that police officers are trained in violence and that they know what to do and how to respond when they are receiving these disclosures and these reports, and when they are visiting these families who are known to police for having these kinds of issues and this kind of violence going on.

John: When we were talking off air we did say to each other, this conversation could anywhere, it could go for hours. As I'm listening to you I'm saying "oh I've got to ask you this" and I'm going to substance abuse, drug and alcohol has to go into the mix doesn't it? Because we talk about stress and people having a bad day, had a couple of beers and now there's the instant. What's the go there? How do we fix this? We don't fix it, but yeah.

Amy: It's so tough because we obviously, we say there is this discourse around substance abuse being the reason for violence and that's something that we really, we don't agree with. And when I say 'we' I'm talking about people who are working in this area, who are researching in this area, because using substances is not an excuse for abusing someone. But





then on the flipside we see people who are experiencing abuse, who are using substances as a way to cope and that then becomes even more difficult to reach out for help because you've got that double stigma of not only are you someone who's experienced violence but you're also someone who has been using, particularly drugs. If you've been using drugs that makes it really hard to reach out for help. So it's absolutely something that we need to be considering. And there is some ongoing work around how do we get more links between particularly the domestic violence sector, the alcohol and other drugs sector and also the mental health sector, because those three issues really do go hand-in-hand.

John: Who's leading that in Australia? And I agree, we can all work in our areas of being a bit silo, which means I only want to talk about what I'm doing right now but I love what you've said. They're three hot topics and they have to intertwine don't they.

Amy: Yes, they do. I can't think off the top of my head on who's leading that. I think it's a growing body of work that's going on and I know it's coming to the conversation more around how do we actually do this, how do we work together.

John: Looking globally, Amy, no doubt part of your research, you've looked at what's happening out there. Any great news stories that you want to talk about? A particular country that's doing some great innovative things?

Amy: I mean I think whenever we look at the United States they're always doing some great work around what they call intimate partner violence. There's been a huge amount of research over the years that's come out of the US on intimate partner violence and looking at the various types of violence that might occur and how do we best address these. I know of a particular, some of my other work has been in economic abuse and the United States has done a lot of really good work around that, as has the United Kingdom as well.





John: We do like to look over the ocean to see what others are doing. But overall I think Australia is up there isn't it, in this area?

Amy: Absolutely, absolutely. And we're also really good at thinking about, okay these things work in other countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada is another one that we look at as somewhere similar to our context. But also we have a very different context here when we think about the types of cultures that we have here, the types of cultural groups. And particularly when we think about our Indigenous population here as well.

John: Once again, culture is huge isn't it.

Amy: Yeah.

John: Because of language?

Amy: Yes.

John: Not everybody speaking English and we all communicate in different ways and of course I'll throw into the mix, women with disabilities as part of their circumstances require assistance. And I say this as a brother and a sister in the disability world, it's those people also that have often come up in conversations that I've had around domestic violence and inappropriate touching, blah, blah, all of that. It's a tough one.

Amy: Yeah. And that's something we actually see in the elder abuse sector as well, when we start thinking about older people who may be losing their function or when we talk about people who have dementia or some other kind of cognitive impairment. It makes them more vulnerable to experiencing abuse from someone who they trust, which is a key part of our definition of elder abuse, is that it comes from someone you trust. And that's what we see is that they're actually, they're more likely to experience different kinds of abuse than say younger people who are





able to, they have the mobility to be able to care for themselves. They're not relying on someone else to provide that care, so they're not open to those kinds of abuses.

John: Going back to the word lifespan of an individual. Having a bit of a think about lifespan, it starts off as a baby and then as an elder and you die. We all know that. Where's the safe spot to be? [laugh] If I can say that in a funny. I know it's a weird question but when you think about the lifespan. Where would you like to sit?

Amy: I think in terms of accessing services, because I don't know if there's really a safe time, especially for women where we're not vulnerable to abuse. We're not at a higher risk of experiencing abuse, is probably a better way to put it. But I think in terms of receiving services as a younger adult, particularly if you've got children as well, that's what a lot of our domestic violence services are geared towards, is those younger women with children. So it's once you sort of start getting towards middle age and then towards older age, that's when you find that the services are generally not as available. And I'm making a generalisation here. Or they're not necessarily as suited to your circumstances as they would be if you were younger and still had young children in your care.

John: One would hope, and tell me if I'm wrong, but this will be highlighted in your research?

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. And that's one of the things I really want to look at. Because we're experiencing some new types of abuse as well. So one of the emerging areas is around adolescent abuse, so that's around adolescent children who are being abusive towards their parents. Usually their mothers. And it's very similar to what we would see in elder abuse in terms of adult children abusing their older parents but these women whose adolescent children are abusing them, they still come under family and domestic violence services, and it's just such a different area to what these services normally work within that we don't necessarily have the infrastructure there to help them in a way that we





would if they were older and eligible for elder abuse services. And that's one of the key things I wanted to look at in my research, is what happens when you don't fit one of these three categories, if you don't fit into the child abuse sector, you don't fit into the domestic and family violence sector and you don't fit into the elder abuse sector? Where do you go?

John: So we're talking teenagers, are we?

Amy: Teenagers, yes.

John: And it's an emerging trend is it, concerning and emerging?

Amy: Yeah. It's definitely an emerging area and when we say emerging, that doesn't necessarily mean that it's a new type of abuse that's just starting now. It's more that it's a new type of abuse that we are aware of, because that's the other thing that we know is that just because an abuse is new to us doesn't mean it hasn't been happening for years, it just means we're hearing about it now.

John: Okay, Amy. It's time in the interview where I'm going to hand you the magic wand and ask you the really interesting question as far as you can look back, you can look forward, also the present where we are now. What's the first thing you would do to change the world in the area of making life a bit safer so we all enjoy life in a safe environment?

Amy: I think one of the biggest things when we're talking about violence against women is gender equality. Because when we get down to it a lot of the attitudes that allow abuse to continue come down to gender equality and our ideas about gender. So that would be a big one for me. I kind of like to joke as a social worker, we're one of the only professions where we'd like to work ourselves out of a job. So that's the aim here and we could do that by addressing gender equality.





John: I congratulate you and wish you all the best with your exciting research. I'll mention the name again, the research project is called *Violence Against Women Across the Lifespan*. I'd also like to remind people who may have concerns after listening to this conversation, there are some great organisations, one being Lifeline on 13 11 14. Another organisation called 1800RESPECT and the phone number is 1800 737 732.

Thank you for coming on So...podcast. For people who do want to follow your journey in this space, Amy, do you want to tell us some social media areas they can follow you?

Amy: Yeah absolutely. And I'll just say thank you for having me as well. So in terms of social media you can follow the project and the work that I'm doing on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. And the handle for all of those, it's the WEVAL Project, which is Women's Experiences of Violence Across the Lifespan.

John: Amy, thank you for coming on So...podcast and talking about this important topic.

Amy: Thank you for having me.

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