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# **Men's Violence Against Wives and Partners: The State and Women's Experience, 1960-1984**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in History

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## ABSTRACT

While men's violence against wives and partners is universal and transhistorical, the various terms used to describe it have been, and remain mutable, constructed and contested. This thesis traces how men's violence against wives or partners was once constructed as a private or domestic matter and how and why these constructions have changed over time; and what effects, if any, the changes might have had on the way the violence was responded to, and experienced by victims. The thesis is particularly concerned with state practices and how these impacted on women's capacity to resist a husband's or partner's violence.

The thesis begins with marriage in the medieval period because marriage and the family have been central to the concept of "domestic" as it emerged in Western society. The principal temporal focus of the thesis is the 1960s – 1984. The 1960s were a period marked by rapid social change that provided a foundation for the construction of "domestic violence" in the 1970s. The thesis ends in 1984, two years after the Domestic Protection Act which marked a radical shift in the construction of men's violence against wives or partners from a private matter to a public one, and one year after the state began to fund places of refuge for women trying to escape violent partners.

The central concern of this thesis is the operation of both dominant and resistant discourses that structured social practices in particular fields that affected women's capacity to resist violence by a husband or partner. How men's violence against wives or partners is constructed is crucial to social responses to it and women's experience of it. Discourse analysis is especially suited to this project because it can reveal which discursive practices created and upheld particular forms of social life. Importantly, a discursive analysis can explain the difference between rhetoric and practice. Although the thesis is underpinned by a legislative trajectory which appears linear and progressive, the discourses which swirl around legislative measures are constantly evolving, sometimes in regressive and internally contradictory ways. Exploring the discursive field of men's violence against wives or partners provides an understanding of historical actors and practices, and has a contemporary value. Current discourses of domestic violence are shaped by discursive practices that occurred in the period under study. Multiple contesting and contradictory discourses continue to undermine gains made by women in resisting domestic violence today.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AHH	Auckland Halfway House for Women
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
AJHR	<i>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</i>
ANZ	Archives New Zealand
BWSG	Battered Women's Support Group
CWR	Christchurch Women's Refuge Centre
DNZB	Dictionary of New Zealand Biography
DPB	Domestic Purposes Benefit
DPBRC	Domestic Purposes Benefit Review Committee
DSS	Department of Social Security
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
DWR	Dunedin Women's Refuge
HL	Hocken Library
HFS	Home and Family Society
IWY	International Women's Year
MBL	Macmillan Brown Library
MHF	Mental Health Foundation
MP	Member of Parliament
NCIWR	National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges
NCW	National Council of Women
NOW	National Organization of Women
NSW	New South Wales
NZLJ	<i>New Zealand Law Journal</i>
NZLR	<i>New Zealand Law Reports</i>
NZOY	<i>New Zealand Official Yearbook</i>
NZPD	<i>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</i>
NZS	<i>New Zealand Statutes</i>
NZSW	<i>New Zealand Social Worker</i>
NZULR	<i>New Zealand Universities Law Review</i>
NZWW	<i>New Zealand Woman's Weekly</i>
PNWR	Palmerston North Women's Refuge
RCC	Royal Commission on Courts
RCSS	Royal Commission on Social Security
SPWC	Society for the Protection of Women and Children
SROW	Society for Research on Women
TH	<i>Timaru Herald</i>
VUWLR	<i>Victoria University of Wellington Law Review</i>
WWR	Wellington Women's Refuge
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association



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