

6 July 2026

Dear Legal Practitioner

I am writing to invite you to participate in a qualitative research study examining legal professionals' understandings of domestic violence. This research is being conducted as part of the Sydney Law School and ODPP Prosecutor in Residence program. The project explores how legal practitioners understand the dynamics of domestic violence and how these understandings shape decision-making and practice. It is anticipated that interviews will be conducted with judicial officers, defence solicitors and counsel and prosecutors.

Your insights as a practitioner are important to developing a nuanced understanding of current practices and perspectives. Participation involves a confidential, semi-structured interview of approximately 60 minutes, conducted at a time convenient to you, either in person or via Teams.

All data will be de-identified (other than by role, for example, Judge of the Local Court, defence practitioner, prosecutor), and no individual will be identifiable in any publications or presentations arising from the research. A transcript of the interview will be prepared and available, on request, for your review. It will be de-identified with the recording deleted once the transcript is settled. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time prior to analysis of the results.

Please find also a Participant Information Statement and Participant Consent Form for your consideration. If you are willing to participate or would like further information, please feel free to contact me. I would be pleased to provide additional details or answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for considering this invitation. Your contribution would be greatly valued.

Yours faithfully

Elisabeth Sercombe

Prosecutor in Residence at The University of Sydney Law School and Sydney Institute of Criminology (elisabeth.sercombe@sydney.edu.au), 2026/HE000604.

Participant Information Statement

Research study: Understandings of domestic violence in NSW among legal professionals

Chief Investigator: Professor Rita Shackel

Sydney Law School and Institute of Criminology

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Researcher: Elisabeth Sercombe | Email: elisabeth.sercombe@sydney.edu.au

1. What is this study about?

We are conducting a research study about how the nature and dynamics of domestic violence are understood and responded to by legal professionals in criminal justice settings. The study aims to explore ways to enhance understandings so to reduce re-traumatisation of complainants in court and improve justice outcomes. Taking part in this study is voluntary.

Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything you don't understand or want to know more about.

2. Who is running this study?

The study is being carried out by the following researchers:

- Elisabeth Sercombe, Public Prosecutor-in-Residence at the University of Sydney Law School
- Professor Rita Shackel, Professor of Law and Ethics, Sydney Law School, The University of Sydney

This study is being funded by the ODPP Prosecutor-in-Residence program, and the University of Sydney Law School. Ms Sercombe is an employee of the ODPP (NSW).

3. Who can take part in the study?

We are seeking the participation of approximately 30 legal practitioners who work in the criminal jurisdictions of the Local, District and Supreme Courts.

4. What will the study involve for me?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an approximately 60 minute semi-structured interview discussing your experiences and perspectives on domestic violence and the criminal law.

The interview may take place online or in person at a location convenient to you. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Transcripts will be available for review after the interviews. Responses will be de-identified in the transcript but will include the cohort of legal practitioner to which you belong, (eg, Judge of the Local Court, defence practitioner, prosecutor). Responses will be de-identified in any publication of the results other than by reference to your professional cohort as long as this does not identify you. Recordings of the interviews will be deleted once the transcript is finalised.

5. Can I withdraw once I have started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

Your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

Your decision will not affect your relationship with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind, you can withdraw by emailing Elisabeth Sercombe prior to the deidentification of transcripts.

If you take part in an interview you may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You may withdraw or edit responses after reviewing the transcript. You may exit the interview at any point.

After the transcript has been de-identified, it may not be possible to separate your responses from other participants and information that we have already collected may be included in the study results.

6. Are there any risks or costs?

Domestic violence is a sensitive topic. The research is interested in exploring your professional experiences, but discussion of domestic violence may cause discomfort or distress. If this occurs you may request to pause or finish the interview. Should this occur, the following support lines may be of assistance: Lifeline 13 11 14, 1800 RESPECT (National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling Service) 1800 737 732, NSW Domestic Violence Line 1800 65 64 63.

Participants will be requested not to disclose confidential, sensitive or identifying information pertaining to any other persons especially those involved in court processes, unless that information is publicly recorded.

Participants are not to disclose illegal or unethical activity. Should this occur the researchers are obliged to report or otherwise act upon such disclosure in accordance with the law.

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any other risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

7. Are there any benefits?

You will not receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

It is hoped that the study may be of benefit to the broader community by informing policy and law reform initiatives.

8. What will happen to information that is collected?

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting information from or about you for the purposes of this study.

Any identifiable information you provide us (such as the consent form) will be stored securely and will only be disclosed with your permission unless we are required by law to release information.

We plan to publish the study findings.

You will not be individually identifiable in any publication or presentation of the research results. Results may refer to the cohort to which you belong, (eg, Judge of the Local Court, defence practitioner, prosecutor) provided that this information does not identify you.

The de-identified transcripts will be securely retained in accordance with the University of Sydney document retention procedures for the minimum retention period of 5 years.

We will use transcription software such as Zoom AI or Microsoft Stream to transcribe interviews. This will involve sharing your information with Zoom or Microsoft. We will not share this information with anyone else without your consent unless we are required to do so by law.

We will store this information and dispose of it securely following the University's Recordkeeping Policy. For more details about how your information will be handled please see the University's [privacy webpage](#).

9. Will I be told the results of the study?

You have the right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can indicate that you are interested in receiving feedback by answering the relevant question on the consent form and providing contact details. This feedback will be in the form of any publication of generalised group-based results.

10. What if I would like more information?

When you have read this information, the following researcher will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have:

- Elisabeth Sercombe, 9351 0445

11. What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of The University of Sydney [ethics reference: [2026/HE000604](#)] according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the University:

Human Ethics Manager
human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
+61 2 8627 8176

This information sheet is for you to keep

Participant Consent Form

Research study: Understandings of domestic violence in NSW among legal professionals

Chief Investigator: Professor Rita Shackel

Sydney Law School and Institute of Criminology

Phone +61 2 9351 0368 | Email: rita.shackel@sydney.edu.au

Researcher: Elisabeth Sercombe | Email: elisabeth.sercombe@sydney.edu.au

Participant Name _____

I agree to take part in this research study. In giving my consent, I confirm that that:

- The details of my involvement have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written Participant Information Statement to keep.
- I understand the purpose of the study is to investigate understandings of the nature and dynamics of domestic violence and how these inform decision-making and court practice.
- I acknowledge that the risks and benefits of participating in this study have been explained to me to my satisfaction.
- I understand that in this study I will be required to participate in a 60 minute (approximately) interview.
- I understand that participation involves audio recording if meeting in person and audio-visual recording if meeting online.
- I understand that if I provide consent my interview responses may be used in future research.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary.
- I am assured that my decision to participate will not have any impact on my relationship with the research team, the University of Sydney or the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time and that I can choose to withdraw any information I have already provided (unless the data has already been de-identified and analysed or published).
- I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be protected and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information identifying me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

- I understand that the results of this study may be published, and that publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me. Publications may refer to the cohort of which I am a part, (for example, Judge of the Local Court, defence practitioner, prosecutor) if this information will not identify me.

- I confirm the following:

I consent to recordings.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I would like to review my interview transcripts.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to my de-identified interview responses being used in future research.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I would like feedback on the overall results of this study.

Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered **yes** to receiving feedback, please provide your preferred contact details (email/telephone/postal address):

- I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher, and that I may request a copy at any time.

Participant Name

Signature

Date
