**Media Release   
For immediate release: 18 March 2014**

**DV victims suffer double abuse through legal system**

Women’s Legal Services NSW today launches an exploratory study of its 2010 experience of representing women who were defendants to Apprehended Domestic Violence Order (‘AVO’) proceedings.

‘We see this as the start of building an evidence base that will lead to a better understanding of this issue and improved practice for all in the legal system’, says Ms Helen Campbell of Women's Legal Services NSW.

The 2011 NSW Parliamentary inquiry report into domestic violence trends and issues in NSW commented upon the significant trend of rising female arrest rates in relation to domestic violence. The report notes that between 2001 and 2010 there was an average yearly increase of 10% of females arrested as offenders compared to the average yearly increase of arrest rates for males of 2%. ‘It is important to analyse why this is happening,’ says Ms Campbell.

The research was carried out in order to better understand what appeared to be a growing phenomenon.

The study findings include that over two-thirds of our women clients defending AVOs reported that they were the victims of violence in their relationships. Fewer than 40% of these clients had a final AVO made against them when the case came before the court.

In the majority of cases where women were defending AVOs, the other party's complaint related to a single incident only. In several of these cases injuries to the other party could be indicative of self-defence, such as scratching or biting on the arm or hand.

Although further research is needed to determine the frequency with which inappropriate AVOs are pursued against women defendants, it is clear from the study that in a number of cases, the applications initiated against women defendants appeared unnecessary for the protection of the other party.

‘The report also sends a clear message to the legal community that we need to be aware that just because people may have applications for an AVO against each other, this does not mean there is ‘mutual violence’, says Ms Campbell.

The report calls for others to gather data about women defendants of AVOs so there is an evidence base with which to inform policy and legal practice in the area of domestic violence and intervention orders.

With the implementation of the NSW government Domestic and Family Violence justice strategy it is important to keep this issue at the forefront.

For a copy of the report see: [www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au/wlsnsw/wp-content/uploads/womendefAVOsreport.pdf](http://www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au/wlsnsw/wp-content/uploads/womendefAVOsreport.pdf)

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Women’s Legal Services NSW is a community legal centre that aims to achieve access to justice and a just legal system for women in NSW. We seek to promote women’s human rights, redress inequalities experienced by women and to foster legal and social change through strategic legal services, community development, community legal education and law and policy reform work.