

'What Doesn't Kill Me' – Domestic Abuse and the Family Courts

Project Team

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Project Aim

To raise awareness of the plight of abused mothers and children in the family courts with a view to contributing to cultural and practice change, and to strengthen links between Brunel University London and local organisations supporting victim/survivors of domestic abuse.

January 2021

Brunel University London and the Temple Women's Forum co-hosted an online film screening of British film-maker, Rachel Meyrick's, award-winning film, 'What Doesn't Kill Me', which sensitively exposes the harrowing ordeal mothers and children experience in the family courts in the USA, including losing custody of their children to their abusers.

A recording of the associated panel discussion is available to view at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1fuuCvfyh4>



Film Screening and panel discussion

15 June 2022

The panel discussion was chaired by Ruby Sayed, family law barrister at One Pump Court Chambers, chair and lead member for Safeguarding, City of London Corporation, and trustee and chair of the Asian Women's Resource Centre.

The discussion was opened by Her Honour Judge Sapnara, co-chair of the Temple Women's Forum. The first speaker was Nicole Jacobs, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, whose role has now been put on a statutory footing by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

Professor Evan Stark, the next panellist, was well known to many of the audience for his innovative work on domestic abuse and his seminal book on coercive control.

Marai Larasi MBE, consultant community organiser and educator and former Director of Imkaan, shared vital insights about the way in which racism can be deployed in the family court context to impugn black and global majority women's credibility.

The final panellist was Natalie Page, founder of #thecourtsaid Campaign for Survivor Family Justice which reaches half a million survivors each month around the world.



Project Feedback

15 June 2022

The screening was viewed by 1200 people from the UK and abroad.

Following the screening 900 people attended the presentations and discussions from a high-profile panel of experts.

The associated panel discussion has been viewed in excess of 1500 times on YouTube.

800 comments were posted on the film streaming platform and over 500 on the Teams panel discussion platform.

Comments included:

“I am a social worker and the film should be essential viewing for social work students”;
“...can't wait to use this in training”

A post-event survey which was administered to all attendees through Eventbrite received 72 responses.

- The average rating of the film was 8/10.
- The average rating of the panel discussion was 7/10.
- The information presented at the event was given an average rating of 7/10.



Post Event Feedback Comments

15 June 2022

“Influence how I work with the families that have experienced domestic abuse.” (Social Worker)

“It will definitely impact on my work and how I approach the courts and representing victims of domestic abuse.” (Barrister)

“As a legal assistant in this area of law this has really inspired me to try and change things both in America and the UK.” (Legal other)

Many respondents suggested that the film should be made more widely available including to the judiciary and family court professionals.



Follow up activities

15 June 2022

As a result of attending the event, Hillingdon Women's Centre and London Borough of Hillingdon held online film screenings of 'What Doesn't Kill Me' during the week of International Women's Day (8th March 2021), with assistance from Sebastian Jenner.

Additionally, also as a result of attending the event, Bath Spa University, together with Voices charity, also held a screening event of the film on International Women's Day and invited Dr Adrienne Barnett to speak on the panel: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/bathspalive/t-xkmnxi>

Dr Adrienne Barnett and barrister Ruby Sayed (who chaired the panel) were invited to write an article about the event for Family Affairs (the magazine of the Family Law Bar Association). The article was published in the Winter 2021 edition of Family Affairs.

