

JAIL ABUSERS, DON'T BAIL THEM

It will take more than education to change the culture of violence in the home, writes **Kylie Lang**



THE needless slaying of a Gold Coast mother on Tuesday morning does more than expose the endemic ineptitude of our legal system.

It should – no, it must – fire up every decent human being in this country to send a collective shout out that enough is enough.

Teresa Bradford is the fifth Gold Coast woman to be murdered by her partner in the past 16 months.

Geography doesn't discriminate because nationally, two Australian women every week are killed by someone they are, or have been, in an intimate relationship with.

Where once police dismissed violence in the home as "just a domestic", a determined shift in culture has seen officers react appropriately to these crimes, bringing out into the open what was once behind closed doors.

The excellent work of counselling and rescue services such as

1800RESPECT, Women's Legal Service, Lifeline and DVConnect have also given women – and children – the courage to speak up.

Shame has gradually shifted from the abused to the abuser.

But all this comes to nothing if the legal system doesn't act strongly enough to stop these tragedies from occurring.

On November 28, police arrested David Bradford after he allegedly slapped Teresa, placed gaffer-tape over her mouth and punched her in the face until she blacked out.

Police allege she lost control of her bladder and bowels and was then dragged by the hair into the kitchen.

When she tried to call 000, her husband sat on top of her, threw away the phone, choked her with his arm and pinned her to the ground for 25 minutes.

He then went to get rope, a pocket knife and box cutter which he said he would use to

tie her up.

By the time police arrived, Bradford was holding a rope and threatening to kill himself.

Bradford was released on bail because he had no criminal history, there were no

independent witnesses to the November incident and he had been in custody for 44 days.

Police begged the courts to keep him off the streets, but on January 12 he was released into the community and this week he finished the job, stabbing his wife to death, before killing himself, in the presence of their children.

Bradford should have been rotting in jail but instead, the way bail is determined in this state, Teresa Bradford was let down in the worst possible way.

Bradford's lawyer's reaction to Tuesday's horrific crime was that he was "gobsmacked".

It's hard to understand how

anyone could be surprised by this result given all the signs were there of violence, instability and intent to cause harm.

As DVConnect chief executive Di Mangan says, choking a partner is a red flag when granting bail.

Yet once again, we see the rights of the abuser taking precedence over the rights of the abused.

Women aren't the only ones being belted up, emotionally abused and financially raped. Men cop it too at the hands of their partners, although less so, according to official statistics.

Violence is a whole-of-community issue.

It's fair to argue, as I and others have done in the past, that education is key to changing this culture of violence, which campaigner and 2015 Australian of the Year Rosie Batty rightly calls an epidemic.

But that will take years and it starts with small children, with situational-based learning about respect, boundaries, every human's right to feel safe and how to effectively deal with hurt and anger.

For the torturous bullies raging in homes around the country right now, education is too late.

The legal system must act to protect the most vulnerable in our society, and our leaders must see to it that this happens. Not tomorrow, next

week or next election but now.

We also have a role to play. As citizens, taxpayers and people who abhor violence, we must hold our institutions to account. I am sick of hearing politicians express sympathy after the fact.

Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath called Tuesday's

murder-suicide "an extremely tragic incident". No kidding.

She went on to order a briefing on the Bradford case, which is also pointless.

What needs to happen is an urgent and sweeping review of the Bail Act and changes to the way domestic violence cases are dealt with under it.

I am tired of soft legal minds reacting with rubbish like the killer "seemed fine" and that "there were no indications whatsoever that he would do what he did".

When police and anti-violence campaigners are working hard to encourage people to speak up about abuse – either their own or someone else's – we must have absolute confidence in the system to follow up and deliver a just result.

Women will continue to die for as long as society fails them.

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Kylie Lang is an associate editor at
The Courier-Mail