



‘Stop Talking and Start Doing’: Rosie Batty on Trolls, Accidental Advocacy, and Treating Domestic Violence for What It Is: Terrorism

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It is ten years since Rosie Batty’s 11-year-old son Luke was murdered by his father during cricket practice. Last week, amid a national crisis of violence against women, Batty reiterated her plea for family violence to be called what it is: intimate terrorism.

There is, argues Batty,

an unconscious minimisation of violence when we put domestic or family in front of it. When we hear the word terrorism, it makes you abruptly consider something more sharply.

Intimate terrorists rely on the use and threat of violence, along with coercive behaviour, to instil fear in their victims and to establish and maintain control. Perpetrators often attempt to justify their behaviour through some broader philosophy. Like most forms of terrorism, offending is predominantly committed by men.

In Australia this year, 27 women have been violently killed – one woman every four days on average – almost twice as many compared to this time last year. A decade ago, when Batty bravely fronted the media after Luke’s death, unwittingly embarking on her advocacy career, that statistic, though still devastating, was marginally better: one woman every 11 days.



February 9 2014: Rosie’s birthday and the last picture of Luke alive.

Marches against gendered violence took place around the country on the weekend. The rallies were attended by politicians including Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and several state premiers. But in her new memoir, *Hope*, Batty reflects on her “absolute despair” at our nation’s ongoing failure to protect women and children from gendered violence, as well as her frustration at the lack of progress and reform promised by politicians.

She writes:

Despite my campaigns, despite the hundreds of speeches I’ve given, despite marching, crying, and shouting from the rooftops about family violence, despite a royal commission and millions of dollars of resources to prevent violence – women and children are still being murdered at an alarming rate.

Batty and other advocates insist our national prevention strategy isn’t working. The prime minister has convened a national cabinet meeting on Wednesday this week to discuss the problem.

But Batty, utterly drained and exhausted, says deep and meaningful discussions about family homicide are not enough. She wants a stronger and more coordinated national commitment to preventing it: in short “big policy, budget, and cultural changes”.

Specifically, Batty wants long-term, guaranteed funding for support and crisis services specialising in family violence as well as reform of the family law system so children are better protected.

She wants politicians “to stop talking and start doing.” As journalist and educator Jess Hill has separately argued, we won’t stop violence against women with conversations about respect.



Prime Minister Anthony Albanese addresses a rally calling for action to end violence against women, in Canberra on Sunday.

Read more: National cabinet to meet on violence against women, with Albanese saying everyone 'must do better'

Finding a new way forward

In her first memoir, *A Mother's Story*, published in 2015, Batty retraced the series of events that led to her son's death, recounting the system failings and sliding door moments that spiralled into a nightmare from which she would never wake. In slow motion, she tells how despite her best efforts to keep her child safe, she ultimately became “the person no one wants to be: the mother who has suffered the insufferable”.



Luke loved animals. Pictured with his dogs Lilly, Zac, and Sydney.

Batty's grief ignited the national conversation about domestic violence. However, her story, while unique, is not uncommon. As she says in *A Mother's Story*: "There are a hundred, maybe a thousand Rosie Battys out there".

In *Hope*, Batty fixes her gaze forward, taking stock of the progress we have made so far. The victim-blaming narrative, she writes, is shifting. We now recognise and understand coercive control. Media reporting of gendered violence has improved.

Read more: How Australian media are changing the way they report violence against women

But for Batty, as for many advocates, only when we start to treat family violence with the same degree of seriousness as terrorism will we finally see change. Without more assertive action from the federal government, including stronger forms of perpetrator accountability, the cycle of violence will continue.

Accountability measures might include strategic policing that targets perpetrators with a history of domestic violence and high risk of offending, or blocking bank access for those who engage in financial abuse.

Since Federation in 1901, more Australian women have been killed by domestic violence than domestic terrorism. Yet, it is easier for police to attain a control order against extremist terrorism offenders than a domestic violence protection order.

According to Brendan and Catherine Walker-Munro, researchers in national security law, a police officer needs only to "reasonably suspect" the subject of a terrorism-related control order has engaged in proscribed conduct. When it comes to applying for a domestic violence protection order, however, police need to "reasonably believe" domestic violence has been committed.

A 2015 poll found most Australians believe domestic violence is as much or more of a threat than terrorism. In *Hope*, Batty calls (again) for domestic violence to be funded in proportion to the scale of the problem.

“Family terrorism poses more risk to our local communities than the terrorism we are terrified of from overseas,” she says. “We have to readjust our priorities.”

Read more: We won't stop lone-actor attacks until we understand violence against women

The trolls and the personal toll

Six months after Luke died, Batty told writer and journalist Helen Garner that she was worried her halo might slip down and strangle her.

In *Hope*, Batty explores her complex relationship with advocacy, including the physical and emotional toll of her 2015 appointment as Australian of the Year – work that reads as a desperate improvisation – and her unresolved grief at closure in 2018 of the foundation she started in Luke’s name.

With candour, she reveals the psychological cost of being a woman with something to say: the political and media manoeuvring, the relentless online bullying and the “vile and vicious” trolling accusing her of male bashing, milking her tragedy, and most hurtfully, profiting from Luke’s death.

While Batty has grown a thick skin, it’s clear the “anonymous naysayers” have hurt her.

I've learned to brush the negative comments off. However, the one that still pours salt onto the wound is 'she's benefiting from her son's death'. It's beyond my comprehension that anyone could think I was in any way better off after my child was killed.



Rosie Batty addressing the National Press Club in early April 2024.

Batty has since shut down her social media accounts and no longer maintains an online presence.

But not all of her critics hide behind a screen of anonymity.

In 2019, John Setka, then leader of the Victorian branch of the CFMEU, reportedly claimed Batty's work had resulted in Australian men having fewer rights.

Mark Latham, now a New South Wales independent MP, has repeatedly accused Batty of leading a war on men, charging her with demonising Australian men and ultimately causing more harm than good.

In Hope, Batty's response is considered, if not restrained.

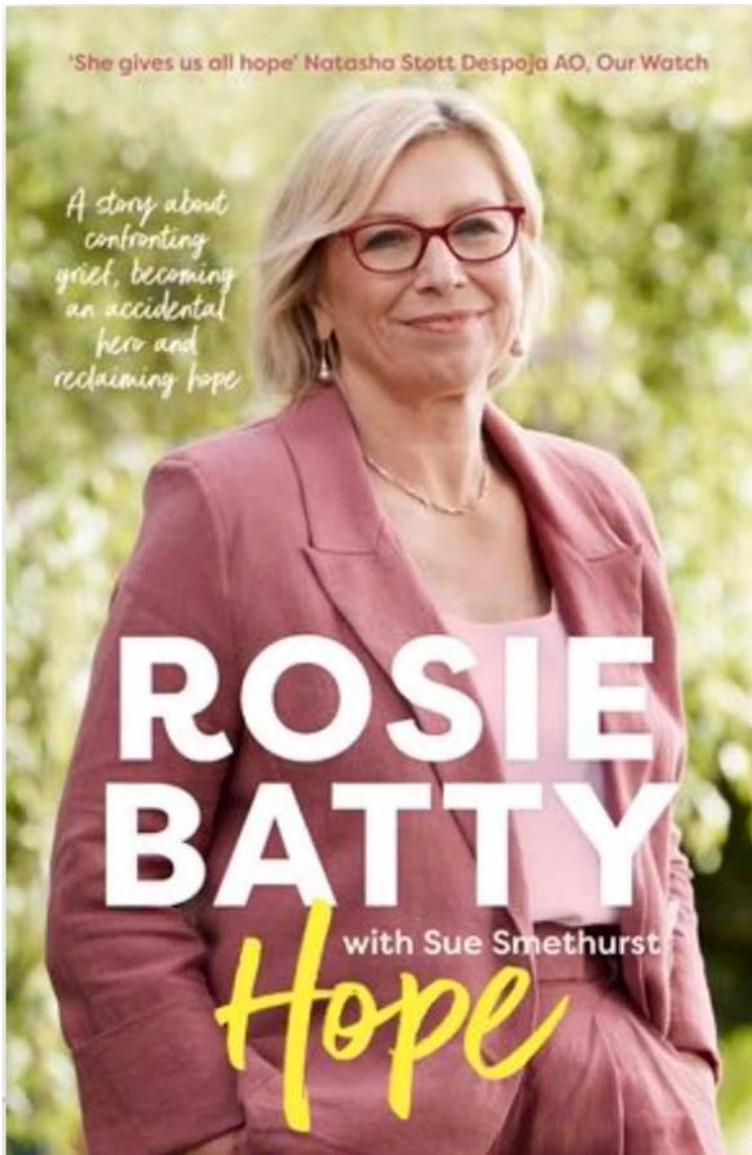
She describes a 2015 Latham column calling her grief "feminist life-babble" as a "bizarre rant", and dismisses his editorials as hateful, misogynistic commentary. "Poor Mark," she writes:

I'd obviously given him a lot to worry about. Perhaps he could've been a bit more worried about the 80 women who died in Australia in 2015 due to family violence, because that's what kept me up at night.

'I often think of Lindy'

Rosie is the first to admit she suffers from imposter syndrome. She describes herself as a "tragic type of celebrity", as a woman who is plagued by crippling self-doubt and even self-loathing.

The trolling she has endured is part of a culture of gendered online abuse designed to demean, censor, and ultimately silence women's voices. It also reflects our country's longstanding problem with grieving mothers.



Batty feels an affinity with Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton, who also lost a child in very public circumstances. Like Batty, Lindy was “that woman no one wanted to be, in a club no one wanted to join.” Unlike Lindy, however, Batty was not subject to a trial by media. She was always believed – a fact she is painfully aware of.

But Batty’s public grief has not been without public scrutiny. In the aftermath of Luke’s death, she was accused of being suspiciously composed. Over the years, journalists have commented on her sophisticated language for grief, and its unusual marriage of articulacy and precision, perhaps expecting hysteria instead.

In *Hope*, Batty recognises the cultural expectations of how grieving mothers are expected to behave and refuses to apologise for the complexity of her grief, for her “overwhelming rage, sadness, and fragility”.

She isn’t religious, but she is deeply spiritual. She believes in reincarnation – “that you never truly die” – and says humour and hope are what help us survive.

In a way, Hope is about what happened after the worst day of her life.

Indeed, the most powerful observation in Batty's new book is a personal one. "If I went off quietly and gave it away, what would happen to me?" she asks. "What would my future be? The very thing that keeps me going is the thing that causes me grief."

Batty's hope is ours as well. All we can do is move forward.

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