UCL Remarkable Stories

Season 2 episode 5 – Carol and domestic abuse

Transcript

**Gia Lulic**

We are UCL and these are our remarkable stories. I'm Gia Lulic and I work in the UCL organisational development team. In each episode, I will be in conversations with the UCL guests as they share with us their remarkable stories, experiences and life lessons. In today's episode, we'll be speaking to staff member Dr. Carol Rivas about her experience with domestic abuse and where she is today.

Please be aware that this episode will delve into experiences of domestic violence and emotional abuse which some listeners may find distressing.

Carol, thank you for taking the time out to speak to us today.

**Carol Rivas**

No worries.

**Gia Lulic**

So before we dive into any questions, I just wanted for our listeners, if you could give us a little bit of background and just a brief summary of your story, and then we'll dive into kind of picking it apart.

**Carol Rivas**

Okay. So I'm not sure what to include, but so, so I'm a senior researcher at UCL. And I've been doing research for about 26 years, with brief pauses when I had my children. And my first husband, during this time, was physically abusive. And I didn't stay with him for very long. We were married for, I think, six years, but only lived together for about two. I then entered into another relationship, I married someone else, and they were psychologically abusive, rather than physically abusive. I stayed with them for much longer. For reasons I can discuss, I think physical and psychological abuse are quite different in character. So that is the main reason. I had two children from each of my husbands. And I left my second husband around eight years ago, or I made him leave the house rather, eight years ago. So I can improve on that and just say, I made my second husband leave the house about eight years ago.

**Gia Lulic**

So, you mentioned that your first husband was physically abusive, and your second husband was emotionally abusive. How do those two differ? And what was the experience of each of those experiences like?

**Carol Rivas**

So, my first husband terrified me the whole time, I would record the episodes I tried to say it quite early on. And it was, I wasn't met with much sympathy from services. This was a long time ago. So I just started recording everything in case I actually got killed. And I was worried all the time, that I would be killed. And it seems quite strange that I might have even stayed with him for two years in that situation. But when you have young children, it's quite hard to leave I felt. But yeah, he would just snap at the slightest thing, and that irritated him. So, if you had a bad day at work, he'd come home and physically hit me he broke my nose, for example. The pressure on everyone from outside of this visible abuse was mostly well, he is sorry he has done it. So, when the ambulance men took me to a hospital with my broken nose, they said he feels genuine remorse, and you should forgive him. So that sort of thing. Whereas the psychological abuse is totally hidden from other people. So, if you say anything, it just sounds like you're whinging, and it's just a normal life that you're moaning about. So, it was much harder to seek help for psychological abuse because it's invisible. And when I talked about it to other people, it just sounded like I was whinging, and moaning about something that was normal. And also a manipulative man can make you think that it's your fault. So gaslighting. So, I began to lose friends, because I started to tell them, I think I'm the one at fault. I'm a terrible wife. And friends dropped away at that point.

**Gia Lulic**

And Carol, Is that why you stayed with your second husband for longer because it was hard, harder to kind of identify that type of abuse?

**Carol Rivas**

Definitely. It had a controlling effect on me. In fact, I was terrified that he would leave me at one point early on in the relationship because I thought it was my fault, and that if he left me no one else would consider me worthy, which is exactly what psychological abuse does. I went and sought psychological support from counselling at that point because my children and other people were telling me that wasn't so and that helped me to get stronger, but initially, it just helped me to cope with the situation rather than to leave.

**Gia Lulic**

And did that psychological abuse ever turn into physical abuse in your second marriage?

**Carol Rivas**

Yes, after the first two years of purely psychological abuse, he did start to hit me, but it wasn't very frequent. And when the law changed, so that it was much easier for police to arrest an abuser, it became even less frequent, but it did happen about once a year still. It would be things like pushing me over and then banging my head against a cupboard or the floor.

**Gia Lulic**

And was there a point at which you did something happened to make you say, right, this is enough, I need some serious help to get out of this relationship,

**Carol Rivas**

I began to see that it was damaging my children, which I was oblivious to for a long time, which is terrible in retrospect and upsets me. And there were a couple of incidents where, as my children got older, they were able to fight back against my husband. So, for instance, when they, when he was abusive, they would tell him off, and at one point, he then manipulated the situation. So, for example, one of my sons took a knife from the kitchen drawer and said, if you don't stop this, I'm going to kill myself. And my husband, then called the police and said that my son was threatening to kill him with a knife. And when we talked to the police, they wouldn't believe us. They believed his story. And they told me, that's because my son did have a knife in his hand. And they then took each child separately into their bedroom and interviewed them, which I objected to, because the youngest was only eight, they were all quite young, still, they were in their early teens, the oldest and they wouldn't believe the story. So, at that point, I thought, well, I can't use the police to end this, in terms of psychological abuse, if I try to go to court and get a court order, no one will believe me. And so I just simply waited for the next physical attack to happen. And the moment it did, I phoned the police. And they booted him out of the house. And that's when the relationship ended. So, it was the effects on my children once they reached adulthood, I think really made me realise and question things.

**Gia Lulic**

And I know this is a difficult question, but what is that impact that you think it's had on them?

**Carol Rivas**

So this is the worst thing, and I'm still seeing impact today, we discussed it a lot. At one point, my children absolutely hated me, they blamed me for staying with him. So, I think the first two years after he left, they said I was the one that had ruined their lives, not him, because he was psychologically ill. But I should have done something more about it. And I've had long conversations with them, I pointed out, I did go with them even to professionals when they were younger, but it was very hard to get the professionals to fully accept the situation. And because he was mainly psychologically abusive, it was hard to get good evidence. And I also explained to my children about exactly what psychological abuse entails and to get my children to fully accept the situation. And to accept that I didn't have as much agency, as I should have, in retrospect, I've had to tell them about some of the abusive episodes that they hadn't been aware of, which isn't very nice or comfortable for me, but it has made them understand exactly what happens in an abusive relationship that even the children don't see. But in terms of the direct effect on them, they have, some of them have had counselling, as well, in adulthood. And I think it's just made them, this affected the way they have relationships. They're nervous about having relationships. I think they have anxiety because of what's happened in the past.

**Gia Lulic**

And I know there was an incident that happened in relation to like a holiday you went on, and that happened in your second marriage. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

**Carol Rivas**

So that was in the first marriage. That's when I actually left. So in my first marriage, I had a family friend ran to dinner at one point, so an older person who happened to be a psychologist, and he saw the dynamics in the relationship and he called me afterwards and said you need to leave otherwise, within five years you'll be dead. And that made me start divorce proceedings, that was quite a shock to hear someone else say what I had been worried about. But we were still living in the same house. And I boarded up half the house and sort of put cabinets against doors when I was in them and things like that, and kept the children with me. And I went to a solicitor, and I did get support from a social worker at that point. But one of my children won a prize to go on a family holiday. So I got the tickets for myself and my two children. So, I only had two children then. And I got the tickets. And I told the travel agent that they shouldn't send things in the post to us that we would collect things. But unfortunately, the travel agent didn't listen and posted the tickets to us, my husband intercepted all my mail. So he opened them, saw what was happening, went off to the travel agents and said, oh, you've forgotten to send my ticket. I'm the husband. And so, he was very charming. So, he charmed the travel agent in to giving him a ticket. So we ended up being on the holiday together. Once we got to the destination, which was Corsica, he managed to take all our passports, and he hid them. At that point, I got really scared. And he started being physically abusive all the time, he was following us around, we tried to keep away from him. So I contacted the travel agents, and they arranged for me to flee the country with the children without a passport. They said that they were obliged to tell him what they had done once they had done it. And so that we only had a two hour advantage over him between the flight we were on and the next flight that he was likely to get, which he did get. So I had to arrange in England for people to help me and quickly go to my house, take things from my house, and we just fled to my parents house. And that's when I fully left that relationship.

**Gia Lulic**

So just to touch on that a little bit, Carol, how instrumental do you think the external people that you turn to were in helping you to get out of both of these situations? And do you think that the, there's more support nowadays than there was when you were going through all of this?

**Carol Rivas**

So I do research on domestic violence. And I would say the support is very variable, and often still not there. And it does depend on individuals and the way individual professionals react. Certainly, it's improved, and the police have to pay more attention. But when I called the police to my house, the law had changed. And they still were not fantastic, I have to say. So it is very much it is very dependent on the individual, in terms of people helping me to get out as being instrumental. I don't think so actually, I think it has to come from within the woman in the end. And from research I've done as well. That's what other women have told me, it's when you reach that moment when you really realise that things are not right, and that you can leave and that it is better to leave and it is safe to leave. Because I think you're always worried that if you leave, that you will be killed as part of the leaving process, which occasionally happens, but not often. But it's such a fear. But of course, if you stay, then you might be killed as well, or your children might be permanently destroyed. So I think it's what came from within, the sudden turning point, a moment of realisation that really I should not be putting up with this and that it would never change because that's another thing. You're always hoping that it will change for the better.

**Gia Lulic**

And what were some of those elements, if you could list that kept you in both of those relationships for as long as you were in them? What were the things and stories that you were telling yourself that kind of kept you in place.

**Carol Rivas**

In the first relationship my husband actually worked away from home quite a lot. So I was able to avoid him. And so I felt well, it's best to stay married because I've got two children. And he's actually not around much. So most of the time, it wasn't that bad. It was when his work away from home ended that it became really bad and that's when I started to tape record everything and that's when this family member told me that I'd be dead in five years if I stayed and I think with extreme physical abuse, it's much easier to come to that realisation because you are absolutely terrified. Whereas psychological abuse is more insidious. So, with the second husband, at first, I thought that his attention, and his worrying when I was late from shopping, for example, was flattering. It showed that he cared. That's what I thought for the first two years. But I used to work in the same place as him. And it was when I got a job in a different place that I began to realise that it was abnormal, because he would start phoning me during the day to find out what I was doing, which was a bit weird, so I realised, but he was still genuinely charming. And it would be two weeks of absolute caring charm, followed by one week of abuse. And so the charm outweighed the abuse in my head for a long time. And of course, as the effects carried on and on, I began to blame myself for the bad moments, which were not my fault at all.

**Gia Lulic**

And did you at the time, did your family and friends know what you were going through? Or did you keep all of this very much to yourself until you decided to leave?

**Carol Rivas**

For the first few years, I didn't tell people. But as it got worse and worse, and I began to not be able to go out at all, I had to tell people, it became obvious to my friends. So if I met them and went for a meal, he would phone me as soon as I got to the restaurant and say I had to leave. And I'd be so scared, I start shaking, because I knew if I didn't leave, I'd be beaten up. Those would be the sorts of times when he would beat me up. So I had to avoid being beaten up by going home. So I had to tell people, and they were sympathetic, and they were supportive, but not with action. They felt that they couldn't do anything. And I think people are often afraid that they don't know the dynamics of the relationship and could do more harm than good if they interfere. So I think that's why but they were supportive and that gave me the emotional strength. So that was helpful in that sense.

**Gia Lulic**

And I guess one of the things that, I wonder with both your first and second marriage was now looking back, were there any hints at the beginning of the relationship of this was going to, this was how it was going to kind of unfold for both your first husband and second husband, can you now look back and go, that should have been a warning sign or that should have been a red flag, or I should have paid more attention to that.

**Carol Rivas**

With my first husband, I realised, actually, just before I got married in the month before I married him, that he was abusive. So I hadn't lived with him at all, and we bought a marital house, or whatever you want to call it, just before we got married. And so, I moved in a month before the wedding. And I immediately realised he was abusive. And I immediately tried to stop the relationship. But everyone told me at the time, it's nerves, it's wedding nerves. And so, I carried on, they persuaded me to stay. And I should have listened to myself at that point. I didn't get support I should have had, I think from friends, they misread it. So, from the very start, I knew that it was a problem relationship with the second husband, as I say, my second husband was very attentive. And I just misread the attentiveness because I'd already been in an abusive relationship that had been different in character, I went from one extreme to the other, if you want, I just absolutely misread it. And when I began to realise that there was a problem, he started to apologise and say, he realised that he was being abusive, and he would change. And so that stopped me leaving because he wasn't physically abusive on the whole, I wasn't afraid. And so there wasn't anything major that was pushing me to leave. And so he sort of just stay with the familiar, especially with the promises, and it was only after about 10 years of marriage, that I realised that he would never change. But it took me a while longer to actually leave after I'd realised that

**Gia Lulic**

Yeah, it's, I wondered also how it sounds like, you know, being in this situation and listening to people looking into your relationship and giving you advice. It sounds like it's probably kind of best to go with your own intuition when you know, things are not right. So wondered how important it was for you to actually listen to your intuition in both of these relationships and just do what you knew was right, as opposed to, you know, kind of listening to other people's advice and using that as comfort.

**Carol Rivas**

So, in the first relationship, my intuition was immediate. So once I had actually married him, it took someone else telling me to go. So my intuition wasn't working. Once I got into this legal relationship and marriage, my intuition wasn't strong enough to actually leave, because it meant a huge process, it wasn't just leaving the house at that point, it was ending a legal relationship. So that didn't need outside support for me to leave still, in the second relationship. Again, although you have the intuition, actually trying to do something about it, you still need some big thing to make you realise. So it would be ideal to listen to your intuition. But I think the whole point of abuse is that it stops you doing that.

**Gia Lulic**

And just on that note, control is obviously a huge factor in all of that. Tell us about how important control is in that whole situation, and how that was a big factor in making you stay and not kind of push to get out.

**Carol Rivas**

Control is very important. My first husband was actually quite a powerful person in business, etc. So my first husband was quite a powerful man externally. So when I did actually leave, he was able to contact friends in the judiciary, which sounds terrible. And, and manipulate things for a while, just for a short while, because obviously, that I'm not saying the judiciary is corrupt. I'm just saying that he was able to, for example, get hearings, in particular locations for a while. And reset because he knew the systems.

**Gia Lulic**

And was he a very kind of respected and admired person outside of the relationship? What were both your first and second husband's kind of exterior personalities? What was it like two different people, or, you know, were they both very charming outside of this other abusive persona.

**Carol Rivas**

Both husbands very charming. And what I found really off-putting actually was friends that I told about the abuse and who supported me, and believed me, would nonetheless fall for his charm. And they met him and I just couldn't understand it at all. So. So they would be really nice back to him when he was charming, when he was charming to them.

**Gia Lulic**

It sounds like it was like two different people.

**Carol Rivas**

Yes, very much, very much.

**Gia Lulic**

What kind of positions did they have in their careers? And, you know, what did they do in their careers that might put them in that space where they have, like a very good reputation? Or do you think their position in society kind of helped them to get away with that sort of thing?

**Carol Rivas**

So my first husband, yes, my second husband was, if you want, “less powerful” than me, so no, I think that was a problem actually, in the relationship. And helped him to be the way he was, without making excuses.

**Gia Lulic**

And now looking back on both of their behaviour, do you think they're drivers for behaving the way they did? Do you think it's like a similar driver for both of them, that they had sort of similar things that were, they were more inclined to this behaviour? Or were they completely different? Like, are there similarities between the two, between the two personalities, I guess.

**Carol Rivas**

The two personalities were extremely different. But both of them had had difficulties in their childhoods. I don't want to psycho-pathologize abuse, because certainly, I don't know, I haven't talked to my first husband about the abuse. He's now dead. But my second husband, he has talked to me, I've actually become quite friendly with him since he left, so he stopped the abusive behaviour, and I'm just seeing the better side of him. And he has admitted that he knew exactly what he was doing, and that he was trying to control me. So, although he might have had problems in his childhood, he was fully aware and could have stopped what he was doing.

**Gia Lulic**

And did he get help for his behaviour? Or did, did he just, do you think that the behaviour is now no longer an issue because you're no longer in a relationship with him?

**Carol Rivas**

Yeah, he's never sought help. And it's exactly that. So, he told me that his behaviour was because he always thought I was better than him, or could find someone better than him, and that he was always afraid that I was going to leave him and therefore he tried to make sure I wouldn't do that with his behaviours. So now that we're not in a relationship like that, he doesn't have that fear. And so we can have quite a normal relationship as friends now.

**Gia Lulic**

And how is his relationship with the children?

**Carol Rivas**

The children see him as quite a nice person underneath it all. They recognise that what he's done has been terrible, and they know that he knew what he was doing. But they see that he is a victim of his own mental condition.

**Gia Lulic**

And do you feel that you've forgiven him and can now kind of move on? And what were the, you know, what was the process like to get from having, having someone in your life that all you want to do is get away from them to kind of now having them in your life and, you know, sharing that responsibility and raising your children,

**Carol Rivas**

I don't think that either the children or myself will ever forgive or forget. So it's not a question of that it's just living comfortably with the current situation. Rather, I still sometimes have PTSD episodes where I have flashbacks to what is done in the past, and things can trigger that. So there's absolutely no chance to time I ever forgive or forget, and also the effect that it's had on my children remains.

**Gia Lulic**

I want to talk about your, you know, your journey to recovery and your journey to kind of piecing your life back together. But before that, I just want to ask, how, how did that come about that your, your latest ex-husband got back into your life? Like, what was that incident? or how did that happen?

**Carol Rivas**

So for the first couple of years after my husband left, I think I hadn't fully moved out of the relationship. Because we had had temporary separations in the past. But he was he remained abusive at that time. So clearly, he was in the same situation of not having moved on. And it was only after two of my children got diagnosed with having disabilities, that he became much nicer. And as he puts it, he needed to make sure that I would be healthy and okay, because I needed to care for them.

**Gia Lulic**

So, just to go back to, you know, your own mental recovery, what were the what was the process that you've been through in terms of seeking help, or seeking counselling or dealing with your post-traumatic stress disorder? And what are the things that kind of were most helpful to you during that process?

**Carol Rivas**

Yeah, once our relationship had finished, I did not seek counselling, it was actually a strange situation, because just after I had him thrown out of the house, for good. I actually fell down some stairs at work. And in retrospect, this is probably because I was just highly stressed because of everything. And I concussed myself quite badly. So I nearly died. And I had post-concussion syndrome for a year. So I was actually seeking counselling for that. And the issues around the abuse sort of took second place, I think, to my recovery, so it was a very odd situation. But nonetheless, I don't think I would have sought counselling once, once I had got rid of him because that was quite cathartic for me. And I have had mixed results with counsellors in the past. So I was a bit nervous about choosing someone who might end up making me think I should go back to him. So I just dealt with it on my own. But at that point, my friends all supported me. They came out and they said, We'd always wanted you to do that. And now we support you. So they started taking me out to places because I hadn't been able to go out because of the abuse. And they got me into the rhythm of a new life. So that instantly changed my whole aspect. It changed my confidence. So, I think it was around that getting a new confidence because he had destroyed it. Totally.

**Gia Lulic**

So it was really like your close net of friends who kind of showed you like a new way of being I guess.

**Carol Rivas**

Yeah, exactly. So, I lost some friends along the way, but I still had a lot of friends and they had marvelously stood by me even though they never saw me. And they just all came out in force and were really helpful.

**Gia Lulic**

And you mentioned the post-traumatic stress disorder, what are some of the things that you find are triggers? Or what are some of the situations that you try to keep yourself out of at this point in kind of trying to deal with this, you know, long term.

**Carol Rivas**

So, if I ever try and reflect on the past, and you don't have to worry about this interview, but if I reflect in details, so I might see an object that makes me remember an episode, for example, and then I will start to think about it, I can normally block these things out. So it's, it's actual physical triggers. Usually that will start me off. Or there might be something someone says, one of my children might say, oh, do you remember the time when, and it could be a trigger to me remembering something that they're not aware of associated with that episode? So yeah, it's, it's, I think, when I when those when I get the triggers, the first feeling I have is absolute shame and incredulity that I actually went through those things, and that I didn't walk out the moment the first of them happened. So, he would totally humiliate me in front of other people, he'd flirt with other women, for example, in front of me in a very humiliating way, so that they would treat me badly as well, they would treat me like that, like, he didn't care about me. And yet, he would tell me afterwards, that he would run those women down and insult them and say that he was only doing that to make me feel bad, because he knew that they weren't great women. And that, therefore, that must make me feel bad. Whereas if he had flirted with fantastic women, I could have said, well, okay, they're great, so I can understand that. So he tried to make me feel that I was the lowest of the low beneath women that he ran down.

**Gia Lulic**

It just sounds like there's so many different behaviours and elements to that emotional abuse, it's not just the obvious things. What are some other ways that he kind of tried to manipulate you that are not so obviously, emotional abuse, but something, you know, something that you would consider to perhaps not be that bad, but is actually a sign of that? The need to control?

**Carol Rivas**

Yeah, it's quite a difficult thing. I mean, there are the intimate moments. So if I wasn't intimate enough with him, or if I didn't sound loving. So, for example, he would he said that I had to open the front door when he came home, and say, hello, darling, how was your day at work? And if I didn't do that, it would suggest that I must be having an affair with someone because I wasn't showing enough love for him. So that was quite ridiculous. But I knew it was ridiculous at the time that I did it.

**Gia Lulic**

Are you seeking counselling now for this, this area of your life?

**Carol Rivas**

So I am not seeking counselling, you could argue that it's possible that I need it. I don't think that I have fully recovered for certain I'm scared to have another relationship, for example. So, it may be that I need counselling for that. But I'm also scared to have the counselling because it will reopen things. And I think one way that abused women show the resilience to continue is by being able to block off what's happening. So, for instance, these terrible things that now I recognise are absolutely awful, and that I shouldn't have put up with for one minute, at the time, I would block that they were happening so that I didn't have to deal with them. So, I'm just afraid that going to counselling could open up issues, when actually, most of the time I feel perfectly okay. But I think that counselling is probably a good thing for people to do. And they just have to be careful to choose the right counsellor because as I say, I do still feel damaged. So, it's been several years since my husband left, and I still feel some damage. But it's just that my general everyday life is so much better than it was that I don't feel the need to disturb it, which might sort of be a bit similar to when I was in the relationship and I'd reached the status quo. So I'm certainly not suggesting people should not have counselling, but I think you need to choose the counselling that works for you. And if it's not working to leave it at once and not end up in a counselling situation that kind of replicates the abusive one because sometimes when you seek help, there's a power differential that can replicate that.

**Gia Lulic**

And just to touch on your other point about being afraid of other relationships, do you think you'll ever be in another relationship?

**Carol Rivas**

I would like to be in another relationship. Finally, I was taking me up till now to think that maybe partly because my children are grown up now. So yes, but it is a bit scary, because I've had two abusive relationships. So I guess that's at that point, maybe I will seek counselling to make sure that I'm not going to enter into another one. Because clearly, I don't feel confident about recognising the science fully. Despite being able to reflect on the past. I'm not confident that I will not, it will not happen to me again.

**Gia Lulic**

And just from what you've learned, you know, if any, any, any of our listeners happened to be in a similar situation, or know someone who's in a similar situation, is there any advice that you would give them, just from your own experience, what you might have learned looking back.

**Carol Rivas**

For people who know someone in a situation, I think the most important thing is to believe them and show you believe them, whatever they say. And always be there so that they can talk to you because it's up to the individual to actually make the move, you can never force that. So you should never impose your own judgments, that's really the worst thing you can do. As soon as people did that, I would stop confiding in them, for example, because the very reason that people sometimes won't get fully involved is because they don't know the full situation. So, the best they can do is just listen to everything you say. And when you have the confidence, you'll say more and more and more. And at that point, it might be some small thing that someone says to you, that actually makes you realise. So it's just having those conversations and keeping them open with someone who's being abused. So, for someone who is being abused at the moment, I think it's just to keep questioning whether you should actually be putting up with this and asking other people what is normal because you lose a total sense of what is normal. And I think it's trying to keep that understanding of what normality is in a relationship by talking to other people.

**Gia Lulic**

I just wonder as well has, I know that you do some counselling and helping others yourself. Do you feel that your experience has in any way kind of assisted you in that role that you now, you know, help others has it made you more empathetic has it kind of done anything to kind of help you in that role that you have now.

**Carol Rivas**

So I am certainly much more sensitive to people's needs because of my situation. But I also recognise that every person has individual experiences. And so I will never put myself in their shoes because I, I initially did that at the start and I say things like, this happened to me blah, blah, blah. And then they'd say, oh, no, it's totally different. So I think that's first off-putting for the other person to hear. And also, you could be imposing around judgments. So it just made me aware that I need to listen and listen and listen. But it doesn't make me able to give better advice. I don't think despite my doing this interview, all that I can hope to achieve is but as to get people to reflect on their situation, but the actions that people do, are always going to be based on their own particular circumstances and what they're comfortable doing.

**Gia Lulic**

I think from someone looking outside into what your approach is like, I can probably say that you are probably a much better listener, even just saying that you can't walk in people's shoes, even though you may have experienced something similar. I think that's probably, you know, something that most people wouldn't think. And I guess that gives you kind of a, you know, more open-minded view on what other people might be going through. And the fact that you probably can't relate to them, even though you've gone through something similar. So I'm sure there's a lot there that maybe you haven't reflected back on yet.

**Carol Rivas**

So yeah, so I avoid reflecting back on things. And that's perhaps a problem. But something else that I think it's given me is the understanding that leaving those relationships is not necessarily right for people. And sometimes these relationships can be improved with the right support. So it does need the man going along and getting the support as well and that may still not be effective, but it can be but yes, leaving might not be the answer. If you are in particular situations such as in a very isolated community, or in a particular cultural community. I think that was one thing that affected my leaving as well, originally, it would have been very difficult for me to leave because my family are actually migrants. So I didn't have much of a supportive network from the people who I would have felt I would mostly be able to depend on that is family.

**Gia Lulic**

Do you think that the, you mentioned that you when you went to the police, they weren't as receptive as maybe they should have been? Do you feel that that's changed now? And do you overall, do you think the support for people in your situation has increased over the years?

**Carol Rivas**

There is no question that the support has improved over the years. For example, give you two examples. With my first husband, I actually ran into the street once to escape from him. And a passing car stopped, asked me what was happening, I said that my husband has just hit me because my 15-month-old son has just wet himself. And he blamed me for bad parenting. So, this person called the police, the police came along, told him the same thing. And they said, Well, you are a bad parent, aren't you? And if he's wet himself, and they sided with my husband against me and told me I was a bad wife. And so that was many years ago. But when I actually called the police when I got my husband to finally leave, they were fully supportive. They didn't take any nonsense from him. They didn't believe him, they arrested him, they took him to the police station, they interrogated him, they fed back to me that they believed me. They were immensely supportive. There was a policewoman there to make sure that I didn't feel threatened by men. so fantastic. So yeah, absolute change.

**Gia Lulic**

So just in relation to people that might be going through this situation now, which is exacerbated by the fact that, we are supposed to be self-isolating this entire year and staying within our homes and trying not to socialise with everyone else. Do you have any kind of advice or words for people who might, you know, not be able to actually leave their homes and have to be in the space with their abusive partner?

**Carol Rivas**

It's obviously difficult for me to talk for everyone. But I think there are a couple of things I can say. The first is that, I think it would be incredibly difficult because what you're doing is losing any external support that might relieve your day, for example, if you go to work, you're not having that other environment to see what's normal within. So it becomes all encompassing, if you're just stuck in the home. So I can see what a huge problem that is, I think, women or people in that situation should try and seek help if they feel that they need it if they do need it. And I know from my own experience, that it's very difficult to do that if the person is around all the time. So they might be monitoring you online, for example, you might not be able to have a space where you can talk privately. So I think the only thing you can do is to try and seek medical support for something like a woman's condition. And there are different codes that people can use, I think, that that will alert the clinician, for example, that they need to talk privately away from an abuser. So yeah, asking for something where an abuser might be asked not to attend. So usually, a gynaecological consultation is something like that. So I think the pandemic could offer opportunities as well. So, for example, if someone who's being abused goes off and stays with relatives and uses that as an opportunity to get space or to leave. And of course, I can't give advice that is relevant to different people, because everyone's situation is different. As I said, it might not be appropriate to leave. And you don't want to exacerbate the situation, but you can at least get respite if you do that, and a bit of support from other people, and maybe use that space to plan what to do next that you are safe.

**Gia Lulic**

And, Carol, just before I ask you my last question, I wondered, is there any particular message that you think is really, really important to get across any final words or comments or advice, so anything that you want to that we've kind of missed?

**Carol Rivas**

So I think one of the most important things is to not make excuses for your partner if you're being abused by them, and to not try to explain things away when you notice odd behaviours, always think that actually what you're seeing is what you're seeing. And so for example, my husband would come home with hairs, long hairs on his coat, and I'd say, are you having an affair? and he'd say, oh, no, someone must have brushed against me on the tube. And I believe it, even though my first reaction have been, he must be having an affair. So it's, it's, I think, that you said, you know, do go with your instincts. In that sense. You do go with your instincts, if you're seeing clear signs, don't talk them away. And don't excuse the partner for being abusive.

**Gia Lulic**

I think that's incredibly, you know, that's going to be incredibly helpful, especially, as you said, how it becomes like a reality, becomes its own version of reality, and you forget what normal is. So I just want to say thank you so much for being so open and candid, it sounds like this is still very raw, you know, experience for you. So I want to say thank you for being so open and be willing to, you know, be willing to talk about anything really. So the final question is, and this is the question that we ask everyone in remarkable stories, and that's what would you tell a younger, you may be at the beginning of this journey, or you know, in the middle of it, what's something that you would tell a younger, younger you.

**Carol Rivas**

I would tell a younger me that I should never be persuaded by the people, when I see something wrong, that but I am mistaken. I should go by my own judgments and be strong within my own judgments.