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Understandings and responses to domestic violence in the African Great Lakes communities of Western Sydney



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The Problem

Domestic violence has been identified as a significant issue for the Great Lakes communities of Western Sydney. These communities have been impacted by the trauma of war, migration and resettlement, which can increase conflict and violence in intimate relationships. Community members affected by violence face a number of obstacles to accessing appropriate services, including cultural, structural and language barriers.

Migrants from the African Great Lakes region are from diverse backgrounds with different languages, cultures and norms. In Australia, people from the Great Lakes region are usually Christian, and most are deeply religious, belonging to various church communities. The major countries which make up the Great Lakes region are Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi. In the 2016 Australian Census, there were 10,459 people in Australia who were born in one of these four countries, 1,116 of whom lived in Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Migrants usually arrive under humanitarian programs, with some through family migration, most arriving within the last 20 years.

This project has examined understandings of domestic violence amongst Great Lakes community members, and will document the experiences and views of health and welfare workers delivering health services to the Great Lakes community. This approach will enable the research team to develop policy and practice recommendations to improve the access of Great Lakes community access to health and welfare services when they are impacted by domestic violence.

There is very little research on the experience of African immigrant women and their experience of violence against women (VAW) and almost no research on women from the Great Lakes area of Africa living in Australia. The existing body of knowledge about women in sub-Saharan Africa suggests they experience some of the highest rates of VAW in the world and the process of migration exacerbates their situation by increasing the incidence of violence due to economic stressors and changing traditional gender roles. Cultural restraints and lack of awareness of services and rights prevent women from seeking help, leading many women to remain silent about abuse. Many African immigrant women and men have experienced psychological trauma from living in post conflict settings which further impacts the likelihood of abuse and violence in the family context. In order to understand the experience of African immigrant women, particularly from the Great Lakes area of Africa, there is an urgent need to examine how domestic violence is being understood and responded to within their communities. There is also a need to interview service providers about their perceptions and experiences of working with women from Great Lakes communities who are experiencing domestic violence.

The project is a partnership between Sexualities and Genders Research (SaGR) at Western Sydney University and the Great Lakes Agency for Peace and Development International (GLAPD). An important aim of the project is to foster research collaboration between these organisations, augmenting and strengthening the research literacy and capacity of GLAPD.

Research objectives

The project is guided by three research questions:

1. What are the views and attitudes of Great Lakes community members on domestic violence within their communities?
2. What are the views and experiences of health and welfare professionals on domestic violence in the Great Lakes community?
3. How can health and welfare responses to domestic violence in the Great Lakes community be improved?

Background Literature

1. Violence against women in Africa

Violence against women (VAW) is a global problem contributing to poor physical and mental health (Ogunsiji, Wilkes, Jackson & Peters, 2011; Ting, 2010). VAW can be defined in numerous ways, however in this review it refers broadly to physical and sexual violence, as well as emotional, verbal, psychological and financial abuse (Mannell, Jackson & Umutoni, 2015; Buzawa & Buzawa, 2013; West, 2016). Research suggests VAW is a systemic issue across the African continent and closely linked to gender inequality (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005). Important considerations in the shaping of gendered violence in Africa are the impact of colonisation and war, different ways of conceptualising self and society, the disjuncture between collective obligations and the colonial imposition of individual rights (Bulbeck, 1997; Mama, 1995). Colonialism also brought the imposition of Western gender categories and systems (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Through the impact of colonisation in Africa, and the associated gendered separation of the public and private sphere, militarism and gender oppression operate to reinforce each other (Mama, 2017). In societies where men dominate the household as well as the political and economic arenas, it is plausible to expect power over women to be legitimised and considered normal (Yolandis, 2004). The implications of this power imbalance are illustrated throughout the literature on VAW in Africa, which highlights a number of specific factors impacting on women's wellbeing and safety across the continent, including:

- i. **Culture:** According to Uthman, Laoko and Moradi (2009), VAW has been normalised in many African cultures, and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although these countries differ vastly in religion, levels of education and economic development, VAW is still a consistent issue. They analysed data from seventeen Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) in sub-Saharan African countries between 2003-2007 to assess the relationship between socio-demographic factors and attitudes towards VAW. The results indicated VAW is considered to be justifiable behaviour across countries and social class, although this is also exacerbated by other structural factors such as lower education attainment, low socio-economic status, living in a rural area, and less access to media (Uthman, Lawoko & Moradi, 2009).
- ii. **Cultural practices:** There are a number of cultural practices in Africa that are strongly associated with VAW. For instance, female genital mutilation (FGM) is widely understood as a form of VAW, and indicative of traditional gender norms that are also a driver of VAW (Berg & Denison, 2012; World Health Organisation, 2008). The commodification of women is also a predictor of VAW. For instance, the exchange of a bride-price or dowry is often a precursor to domestic violence, since it situates the woman as a commodity that has been paid for and is therefore 'owned' by her

husband (Hague, Thiara and Turner, 2011). In the DRC, along with other sub-Saharan African countries, polygamy or having more than one partner has also been identified as an indicator of high risk of VAW (Myers Tlappek, 2016). Notwithstanding the potential for abuse around such practices, a more complex understanding of cultural traditions is necessary to avoid racially stereotypical and racist assumptions that indelibly link homogenous ideas of culture to VAW.

- iii. **Political violence:** Research indicates that exposure to collective violence such as civil war or genocide increases the risk of VAW. Verduin et al. (2013) conducted a cross-sectional study with a sample of 241 men and women who identified as either victims or perpetrators of violence or both in Rwanda, and found that men who had personally witnessed the genocide were more likely to engage in violence against an intimate partner. These findings reinforce research literature suggesting that psychological disorders resulting from the experience of war and conflict, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder, are associated with increased family violence (Catani 2010).
- iv. **Intergenerational violence:** Child maltreatment and intergenerational violence were identified by Crombach and Bambonye (2015) as a strong predictor of VAW in post conflict settings. In a sample of 282 people from Bujumbura (the capital of Burundi), split evenly between male and female participants, results showed a disturbing 94% of participants had experienced at least one form of childhood maltreatment. Participants who had less exposure to violence or intimidation were less likely to be perpetrators of violence. It was found that women were more likely to be violent towards their children if they experienced VAW, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence (Crombach & Bambonye, 2015).

Stafford (2011) emphasises the importance of acknowledging the historical backdrop to VAW in sub-Saharan African countries. In particular, she describes how the imposition of colonial law and religion on African cultures has impacted on patterns and responses to gender-based violence. In the colonization of Africa, European systems of governance, common law and religious beliefs interrupted traditional African gender relations and enshrined the subordination of African women to men within social, legal and spiritual structures. Misogynist aspects of European law, such as the marital rape exemption, have since been repealed in their country of origin, but remain in place in many African states (Stafford 2011). Other laws and policies introduced into Africa by European imperial powers allocated resources and opportunities to men at the expense of women, and constituted African women as the 'property' of their husbands. Contemporary analyses of gender inequality and VAW in Africa, Stafford (2011) suggests, should be mindful of the role of European colonisation and social and legal regulations in shaping gender relations on the continent.

2. Violence Against Women in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Great Lakes region

When investigating VAW in countries in the Great Lakes area of Africa, specifically Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi, a number of common themes emerge. These countries have comparatively high rates of VAW, accompanied by the normalisation of VAW. In post-genocide Rwanda, the prevalence of VAW is amongst the highest in the world. National estimates released by the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (2012) suggesting 55.6% of women have experienced physical violence and 17.5% have experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner within the previous 12 months (Mannell, Jackson and Umutoni, 2015).

A cross-sectional household survey in Eastern Uganda interviewed a sample of 452 women and conducted focus groups with a further 96 men and women. They found 54% of women reported a lifetime prevalence of VAW and the recurrent narrative in focus groups of both men and women confirmed that VAW was very common. (Ogland, Xu, Bartkowski and Ogland, 2014; Karamagi, Tumwine, Tylleskar and Heggenhougen, 2006). In a study carried out across Uganda to inform prevention programs for VAW, data revealed 68% of married women had experienced violence from their intimate partner and 40% of men reported being perpetrators. The data came from a nationally representative population based survey as part of the Uganda DHS (Speizer, 2010; Burgess and Campbell, 2016)

In the DRC, 35% of women report experiencing sexual violence from their intimate partner and 71% of women in the DRC have reportedly experienced either sexual or physical violence during their lifetime (Meyers Tlappek, 2016; DRC Ministry of Planning, 2008; Peterman, Palermo & Bredenkamp, 2011). Intimate partner sexual violence is a significant problem in the DRC, which is compounded by the lack of enforcement of laws against marital rape despite its criminalisation in 2006 (Peterman, Palermo & Bredenkamp, 2011).

The belief that VAW is justifiable is common in Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly amongst women. Surveys in Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC indicate many women believe VAW is justified in particular circumstances such as burning food, neglecting children, going out without permission or refusing sex with their partner (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda, 2012; Burgess and Campbell, 2016; Meyers Tlappek, 2016). In addition, Ogland et al. (2014) suggest that women who agree that it is a husband's patriarchal right to be violent towards his wife are at greater lifetime risk of intimate partner violence.

As in many other countries in the Great Lakes area of Africa, in Rwanda women are reluctant to report violence or leave violent relationships due to social structures and cultural norms (Rani, Bonu and Diop-Sidibe, 2004; Mannell, Jackson & Umutoni, 2015). This is illustrated in statistics from 2011-2012 indicating only 135 cases of IPV were reported to Rwandan Police, government one stop centres, or local non-government organisations (Mannell, Jackson &

Umutoni, 2015; Gender Monitoring Office, 2012). Many cases that were withdrawn by women were due to family or community pressure (Gender Monitoring Office, 2016). Grassroots strategies to address the issue of gender based violence in schools have been hindered by limited collaboration between schools and authorities and a failure to promote awareness about gender based violence or enforce rules (Gender Monitoring Office, 2016).

In Uganda, despite a high representation of women in parliament, traditional gender roles remain a major contributor to VAW (Burgess and Campbell, 2016). In relationships where a woman has a higher education than a man, or where a woman makes important decisions, she is at a higher risk of violence (Ogland et al., 2014). The feeling of insecurity that some men experience in these circumstances can lead to a sense of diminished autonomy and authority, with the result that they are more likely to use violence to exert power over their female partner to regain a feeling of control in the relationship (Ogland et al., 2014). These findings support the theory that traditional gender roles and norms are an integral factor to be considered in VAW (Ogland et al., 2014).

3. Violence Against Women in African migrant communities

Current research on VAW in African migrant communities is focused on the individualised coping strategies and help-seeking activities of African women. A comprehensive literature review that was carried out by West (2016) identified seven studies that used samples of African women who had experienced VAW. These studies were primarily qualitative and carried out in the United States, and found that African migrant women were disclosing multiple forms of severe violence from their husbands. The escalation of this violence was linked to women's increased English proficiency and participation in the workforce (West, 2016; Nilsson et al., 2008). West African women reported that men's control of household finances is one of the defining characteristics of African masculinity, and the disruption of this traditional family structure during the migration process has been identified as a major trigger for relationship stress and domestic violence.

In addition to the husband's adherence to patriarchal norms, risk factors for domestic violence against African refugee and migrant women included financial stress and limited access to employment or education. However, women's attempts to alleviate financial stress by seeking employment can be perceived by the male partner as a threat to his masculine honour and status (Mose and Gillum, 2016). Attempts to restore traditional gender norms include domestic violence and other forms of abuse, such as the use of immigration status or citizenship to intimidate and control female partners (West, 2016).

Cultural and language barriers to help seeking behaviour for women in migrant communities are common and well documented (Keller & Brennan, 2007; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016; Nilsson et al., 2008; West, 2016). These barriers include shame, self-blame, financial

dependence upon their partner, belief in the high value of marriage, cultural acceptance of VAW and a lack of knowledge of women's rights and services (West, 2016; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). Ting and Panchanadeswaran's (2009) US study with African immigrant women from sub-Saharan Africa (mainly from the west) who had experienced violence from their partner, found that participants faced specific cultural and religious barriers which prevented them from leaving abusive relationships. Participants placed a very high value on marriage, and emphasised cultural prescriptions against separation and divorce. In one of the very few Australian studies, Ogunisiji et al. (2012) found similar responses in their interviews with African immigrant women who had experienced VAW. Women reported 'suffering in silence' due to cultural beliefs in the absolute authority of husbands over wives, in conjunction with a range of other cultural and structural reasons to not disclose violence from their partners. In their African countries of origin, informal networks of family and friends could intervene in VAW, but since these networks were not present in Australia, they faced the choice of either keeping it to themselves or reporting it to formal services. As a result, they did not usually report VAW to police or health services due to cultural and economic constraints. Research with government and community agency workers in Victoria and South Australia regarding their experiences working with African refugee women experiencing VAW also emphasised women's tendency to 'paper over' domestic violence (Mason and Pulvirenti 2013).

Method

This is a qualitative study that included focus groups with Great Lakes community members, and interviews with professional stakeholders in the health and welfare sectors. The focus groups and interviews were run by GLAPD researchers, after methodological training conducted by the WSU team, alongside the provision of any additional research assistance and support. This is an appropriate methodology since the study aims to examine the social dimensions and experiences of domestic violence as perceived by Great Lakes community members, and the professional experiences of health and welfare stakeholders.

1. Focus groups

Four focus groups were held with adult refugees and migrants from the Great Lakes region of Africa living in Western Sydney. Two of the focus groups were conducted in Kinyarwanda, one for women (with six participants) and one for men (with five participants). These groups were made up of participants from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC. Two of the focus groups were conducted in English, one for men (with six participants) and one for women (with eight participants). These groups were made up of participants from Uganda. There were separate groups for men and women in order to facilitate more open discussion between participants on sensitive issues. It was likely, for instance, that women would feel inhibited talking freely about domestic violence with men in the room, while men would moderate their views on domestic violence if women were in the room. The focus groups each had two facilitators from GLAPD Int. One facilitator led the discussion, and the other facilitator observed the discussion and the dynamics of the focus group.

2. Interviews

A total of seven interviews, with a total of nine participants, were held with professional stakeholders from the health and welfare sectors delivering services to the Great Lakes communities of Western Sydney. Five of these interviews were held with people who were employed in the health and welfare sector of Australian service provision. There were a total of seven participants in these first five interviews because one interview was a group interview with three participants. After these five interviews and the focus groups had been conducted, it became apparent that it was important to include ministers and pastors from within the Great Lakes Christian communities in the professional stakeholder interview group. Two one on one interviews with ministers and pastors were then conducted. The interviewers were members of the WSU research team.

Themes

Five core and overlapping themes emerged from the findings in the pilot research. These were, broadly:

1. Cultural dissonance that results from migration and displacement;
2. Responsibility within and outside of communities;
3. Trust;
4. Cultural codes of shame and respect; and
5. Broader social and structural factors such as racism and socio-economic disadvantage arising from unemployment.

1. Cultural dissonance resulting from migration and displacement

Interviews and focus groups generated notable findings on the contrast between family and relationship dynamics in the cultural contexts of home countries, and in Australian cultural contexts. Specifically, it was found that the process of migration resulted in significant displacement; couples were forced to grapple with new cultural and structural frameworks that were removed from the familiar context of their extended support networks in home countries. This gave way to a shift in gender, relationship and family dynamics that had gendered consequences. For example, participants made specific associations between disempowerment and domestic violence.

The most common scenario outlined within focus groups and interviews, was of traditional nuclear family units consisting of heterosexual married couples with children, or married couples without children, migrating to Australia together. Women and men experienced the consequences of their displacement differently. The findings indicated that women, in particular, became *more vulnerable* in their marital relationships after migrating to Australia, because they have left behind their primary support networks of extended families. This had two main consequences: first, that there was less practical support for domestic duties and the raising of children; and second, that the consequence of this was isolation and lack of support, which was directly related to cultural codes of trust, silence, shame and respect that are important if or when relationships become abusive. These themes are outlined further under the heading of 'responsibility', and 'trust, silence, shame and respect.'

The domestic consequences of migration also fed into the idea that there is a fundamental disjuncture between everyday practices in home countries and the Australian context:

The problem is coming from a different setting of life ... you know, like two different rules. If we can say that there's two different values of life, where she is coming from to come to this place with a different set of values where the rule and the laws actually work. (Men's focus group)

Framed as 'two ways of life', participants indicated that the rate of adjustment to the new culture in Australia is generally slower for men than women. Gendered structural issues as exemplified in the difficulties in finding employment and therefore losing the status of male 'breadwinner', were blamed for the slower cultural adjustment of men. Broader issues of

structural racism in Australia, as manifested in gendered ways (such as through criminalisation), also factored into the slower cultural adjustment of men.

It was noted that traditional gender roles in home country cultural contexts were sharply divided. While men were generally 'heads of households' and managed finances, women managed domestic labour and childrearing. Women were assisted in their domestic duties by extended families, other community members and, if they were able to afford it, house servants. One woman in a women's focus group gave this advice for new arrivals to Australia:

Let them know that lifestyle here is different where back home (in Africa) we have grand mum, aunty living with you at home and helping to take care of kids no matter how the husband is a drunkard. But you are only two on your own here with difficult lifestyle that requires to support each other. (Women's focus group)

The loss of all domestic help upon migrating to Australia has meant that the entire burden of domestic responsibility, which often also includes childrearing, is placed on individual women rather than extended families or other forms of support. Within this context, men are asked to participate in a domain to which they have not traditionally contributed, and consider as antithetical to cultural notions of masculinity. This shift was expressed as:

Men from our home (country) believe that being a man is like being a god and that he must provide everything for the household (Women's focus group)

whereas in Australia,

The husband had become a monster instead of being a husband (Women's focus group)

Participants outlined this as a general decline in status and disempowerment for men from Great Lakes countries, who have migrated to Australia. Men go from being 'gods' to 'monsters' in their demotion from domestic leadership and provider status, to contributors to a woman's domain of menial domestic duties and childrearing.

It was suggested that this gendered cultural dissonance leads to marital problems in the form of increased arguments and, in some cases, hostility and abuse. Some men interpreted this shift in their domestic roles as signalling their disempowerment within the family context. This was also compounded by broader social and structural considerations around unemployment and disadvantage directly correlated with men's inability, in some cases, to be provider and leader for their families. One of the men's focus groups painted this picture of the disempowered man:

Speaker 1: He can barely speak English and ...

Speaker 2: ... and he has no job.

Speaker 3: That psychological effect on him already, he is already feeling he is not a man enough to provide

However, the broader cultural adjustment of women, in some ways, represented an inverse situation in which they were afforded more opportunities for education and employment in Australia. This placed them in a position to 'provide' through paid labour alongside their husbands, while demanding more of their husband's contribution to domestic labour. In this sense, women participants saw the broader Australian social and cultural context as more empowering for them, even after losing the support of wider familial networks. While 'African men, feel powerless when they come to Western world' (Service provider 4), women, on the other hand, 'adjust easily because you know, in the Western world, there are lots of opportunities for women as compared to Africa' (Service provider 4). However it is important to note that this was not a consistent experience for all women. For example, some women who arrived here on partnership visas were, by necessity, heavily dependent on their husbands and sometimes trapped in abusive relationships with little or no recourse to wider support or intervention.

These findings suggest that there are strong gendered elements in the degree of cultural displacement and reduced social capital in the migration context. It was strongly suggested by the GLAPD research team and participants that the relative dis/empowerment and reduced or increased social capital felt by men and women is either mitigated or enhanced by educational initiatives on norms and expectations in Australia. These sorts of educational programs are run by different organisations such as UNHCR (the United Nations Refugee Agency) and STARTTS (the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors). However, it was noted that there are deep inconsistencies between the programs run by different organisations. Additionally, the availability of such programs is heavily dependent on visa status, which means that some women, in particular, are less visible and therefore more vulnerable to enduring abuse.

2. Responsibility within and outside of communities

The theme of responsibility emerged at various points throughout the research, and in application to multifaceted structural, situational and institutional considerations. This theme was also articulated in terms of the chasm between Australian cultural and political emphases on individual responsibility, and African cultural understandings of collective responsibility. This disconnect between cultural articulations of responsibility align with the values of individualism that underscore Australian cultural norms, as opposed to the more communitarian norms, practices and lifestyles of African Great Lakes cultures.

Concrete examples of these differences in relation to communitarian norms can be seen in the roles and responsibilities of extended families and community networks in domestic duties and childrearing. As noted, these familial and community networks take responsibility for supporting women in their gendered domestic roles, while being collectively responsible for the raising of children. For example, men's lack of involvement in domestic labour in their home countries was compensated by familial and communal responsibility for children, along with the employment of "house servants" consisting of maids or "house boys" (for those who could afford it). This also brings a class dimension to cultural practices that cannot be replicated after migration. However, in Australia, as noted in an earlier section, the traditional dispersal of domestic and childcare responsibilities is replaced by an emphasis on the division of domestic responsibilities within individual family units. This redistribution of responsibility

particularly affects women, who were still expected to perform all domestic duties in line with the gendered cultural division of household labour, but without their traditional support networks. For some women, this was managed alongside the added burden of paid work. It was noted by participants that this exacerbated the problems and pressures of married life.

More significantly, extended family networks in home countries were collectively responsible for intervention in and resolution of domestic violence. In home countries, women who sought support for marital problems and domestic abuse would leave their husband and go into their parents' home, a practice called "*kwahukana*". In particular, "*gucyura*" was noted as an important ceremonial practice that requires a man who abused his wife to attend his estranged wife's family home, bearing gifts and drinks, to seek forgiveness from his wife and her parents. The husband's friends and family elders should accompany him, and the process would symbolise and convey remorse and respect for his wife and her family.

Such examples stand in stark contrast to the lack of familial support within the Australian migration context that leaves women (and men) disconnected from family and communal networks. It was also found that women who contacted their extended families (mainly their mothers) outside of Australia were advised to keep their marriage and family unit together and not report DV or share their marital issues with anyone outside of families. If women contacted their mothers back home, they were frequently told:

If he slaps you 'Don't mind, my daughter. Yeah, that's marriage, things will get better.' So we grew up under that training.' (Women's focus group)

Yet, in Australia, there is no extended family to support the idea that 'things will get better'. In this situation, women become individually responsible for salvaging abusive marriages since they no longer have access to communal support and cultural traditions such as *kwahukana* and *gucyura*.

In the absence of traditional interventions, a common response to DV matters in Australia is to involve police. However, for Great Lakes communities, police intervention is highly problematic. This is due to various intersecting factors including migration displacement, the trauma of experiences in war-torn home countries, and enduring structural and institutional racism in Australian social and criminal justice institutions, which criminalise racial communities. Cultural norms including codes of silence on family matters, the resistance to breaking up family units, and the shame that would be brought to families if husbands and fathers were charged with crime and/or incarcerated, also prevent recourse to police and criminal justice intervention (see "shame"). In sum, there is a fear of consequences in involving police and it is agreed by participants and researchers within GLAPD that the law must be an absolute last resort.

Following from a discussion of the law, participants also commented on the responsibilities and failures of the Australian institutional support 'system':

The blame is to be put to the country that received them. ... If the country welcomed them and enrolled them into English courses, they would have been busy with classes learning English and so they would be able to find jobs. (Women's focus group)

This is also relevant to the differing neo-liberal emphasis of Australian norms, which places responsibility on vulnerable individuals to avail themselves of 'opportunities' rather than blaming the lack of institutional and government support. It was noted that 'the System', which referred to immigration and humanitarian aid /refugee programs, does not educate women and men as much as they should. There are some detailed programs, but there are discrepancies in the quality and detail of the education offered to new arrivals from Great Lakes regions.

3. Trust

Trust is central to the many issues outlined around the generalised cultural eschewal of support seeking and any external intervention or mediation. In line with the cultural codes of each specific community of the Great Lakes region, only extended families can be entrusted to talk about intimate partner and domestic abuse along with any other marital problems. Divulging relationship issues, including domestic abuse, to anyone outside the family network is shunned and considered taboo. One participant summarised this sentiment:

talking about a husband's behaviour to external people out of the family is unforgivable sin. (Women's focus group)

Additionally, culturally delineated codes of respect for extended family elders, with the elders' shaming of abusive behaviours towards women, are expected to serve as a deterrent to intimate partner violence against women.

However, as stipulated under the heading of "migration", a key problem is that family elders did not migrate to Australia with their daughters. The unavailability of extended family networks within the migration context means that a significant prevention mechanism for domestic abuse is removed. This leaves women in the migration context more vulnerable to increased, and ongoing, incidences of DV and IPV.

In the absence of extended families and parents, friends from within the various Great Lakes communities could form a potential support network. However, in line with cultural codes, even close friends are not approached or trusted enough to discuss marital problems and domestic abuse. As one participant noted: '*We (Africans) have a complicated culture of hiding our issues*' (Women's focus group). Another participant gave this advice that could be taken to extend to both women and men in her community:

I think you need to work extra hard to create a form of trust ... reach out, reach out and say hello, hi. Are you okay? Even just keeping on asking, Are you okay? Talk about yourself, build a friendship and a level of trust where someone can open up and believe that they will be helped. (Women's focus group)

Furthermore, the findings of the study indicate that social and friendship networks only become aware of domestic abuse when it is obvious, for example, when the abuse occurs in public, or where there are clear physical injuries as a result.

Hence, within the cultural and social frameworks of Great Lakes diaspora communities, church and religious affiliations take on renewed significance. One participant explained (albeit for West Africans) that one way of breaking the silence around DV is to involve religious leaders:

if there's a DV situation in the house, what the African men believe is "okay, I'm gonna tell the pastor". Because most people from the West Africans, most of them are Christians. So they need to talk to the religious leaders say, I'm going to talk to the pastor, so the pastor or elders in the community to sit down to solve the conflict, rather than taking it to the system. (Service provider 4)

Religious leaders take the place of elders in extended families, as they are most likely to be trusted for discussing marital problems and disclosing domestic abuse. This is linked to the centrality of religion in Great Lakes communities and the respect that is given to religious leaders.

However, the church is not an unproblematic replacement for extended family and elders. For example, one participant revealed:

the church is the worst, if I can say that, they keep on telling you forgive him forgive him forgive him, but they're not giving you tools or even telling the man to go for counselling, anger management or what is happening they just tell the woman forgive him without addressing the issue. (Service provider 2)

Aside from consulting religious leaders and contacting families in home countries, some participants identified the value of Australian DV support services. However, domestic violence service providers noted that they rarely had African clients seek their support, particularly women from the Great Lakes region. As one service provider, an African woman, told us:

I've never had any clients from the African community. Well, I think one of my colleagues have had in the past, it's really like it's really locked up, doesn't exist. [I know that] it exists because I'm part of that community. But 80% of those cases aren't reported. (Service provider 4)

This reinforces the finding of cultural codes of silence, making it unlikely that women would avail themselves of such services and disclose domestic abuse outside of family and religious elders.

There are also major limitations within such services, which stem from a general lack of cultural understanding of Great Lakes communities and gender dynamics within them. Therefore, if Great Lakes women were to seek support from DV Services, they are not likely to lead to culturally meaningful solutions. In other words, the issues faced by women in these communities become lost in translation, with the Australian cultural perspective dominating any DV initiatives and resolutions. One of the women's focus groups captured this point:

Speaker 1: When people seek help, we get social workers from Australian backgrounds. They don't understand, understand exactly what I'm trying to tell them. You know, if you come out saying all this and they will be like oh, there is an organisation that will help you, but still that organisation will not understand what I'm telling.

Speaker 2: Australian organisations, they want to assume that "we understand you".

Speaker 3: They help you in their culture.

Speaker 4: And you feel that you are not helped.

To expand more literally on the theme of Great Lakes women's domestic issues being 'lost in translation', other participants noted that there was an additional reluctance to seek support because it is near impossible to explain emotional issues in English: 'a person expresses emotions in native language' (Women's focus group). This was cited by one women's focus group as an additional barrier to support seeking.

Other factors around trust arose within Great Lakes communities themselves, highlighting the heterogeneity between countries and their respective cultures within the Great Lakes region. Fragmentation and distrust between different national communities that result from ethnic and tribal tensions in home countries, coupled with the trauma resulting from historical and ethnic conflicts, was also cited as contributing to wider feelings of distrust. Some of the communities most affected by this were said to be Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi.

Participants spoke about separations within church communities, between Africans from different countries in this way:

Speaker 1: You go to church, you see different Africans, but then, you know, the priests will pray. The Lebanese know themselves, you see them talking, talking, we Africans just work and go home. You know what I mean? But other cultures get together, the priests will even talk about their cultures, there is an Italian mass. There is no African mass. So how people going to know themselves, you know?

Speaker 2: You will see people. A Ugandan will sit here. Not even a 'hi'. After church everyone goes home, but the Italians, Lebanese, all other cultures will come together after church, Africans? (Women's focus group)

The discussion that followed gave examples of where church communities had worked together to support Africans across culture and language, because 'Of course, the community has a role to play. ... we all Africans, we're all migrants' (Women's focus group). This was an important discussion that opened up the possibility of building trust within and between the different Great Lakes communities. It also highlighted the different cultural particularities that reside under a broader framework of African Great Lakes diaspora.

4. Cultural codes of shame and respect

Following on from codes of trust and silence, are cultural codes of shame and respect. As indicated, women cannot divulge such issues more widely to their friends or DV services. This includes the inability to 'talk back' or even discuss marital issues with their husbands. In

relation to divulging domestic abuse outside of families, the airing of a family's marital issues within communities will bring shame to the (nuclear) family unit and, in particular to the husband. In the context of gendered disempowerment emerging from migration, women are careful to protect their husbands' reputations. Furthermore, divorce brings shame to families therefore there is cultural pressure to protect and keep the family unit intact. One participant expressed it this way:

And the biggest [barrier to reporting DV] is shame. They all didn't want to report because of the shame I don't even want to leave my abusive relationship because of the shame of the community, what would the community say? Because most of the time when you leave... your closest friends they disown you, your family disowns you (Service provider 2)

Within these cultural frames, religious leaders have the potential to play a very important role since they are respected, revered and trusted (see under the heading of "Trust") in the absence of families. Religious elders therefore have significant power to shift the cultural paradigms of silence, shame and gender roles within migration contexts. There may also be potential for religious elders to perform the role of extended families in preventing domestic abuse through reproducing a variation of such practices as *kwahukana*.

5. Broader social and structural factors

Broader social and structural factors, within the context of Australia, must be considered in any robust understanding of the problems facing Great Lakes diaspora communities. These broader factors both shape and contribute to the internal problems raised by participants, such as:

- unemployment;
- lack of educational opportunities and the disempowerment associated with this;
- issues of trust/mistrust exhibited by community members towards Australian institutions, including the criminal justice system.

Australian society is built on colonial structures and institutions. Successive conservative Australian governments have promulgated a racist outlook towards immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees who have been treated with suspicion and criminalised. The racial structures that are perpetuated by Australian government, educational and criminal justice institutions perpetuate the reduced social capital of African Great Lakes migrants through unemployment, lack of consistent educational support, housing, health, and criminal justice outcomes. Racism is also apparent in the failure to recognise prior qualifications from home countries, or the failure to support those from certain professions to attain Australian accreditation requirements:

For example, somebody was a doctor, medical doctor, and now he's here cleaning, you know, toilets every single day. With maybe six, seven, eight years he have been studying Plus, you know ... they left their comfortable life and in the new system where they are not even accepted ... because they're not allowed to practice anything because, you know, you have to re- study or do exams or whatever depending on the

depending on your career or your profession. So I see a lot of frustration that comes with that as well. (Pastor 1)

In the absence of overt racist violence, there is an unwillingness to tailor criminal justice responses to cultural communities, while failing to recognise that Great Lakes communities have experienced trauma at the hands of authorities in war-torn nations marked by genocide and other atrocities:

most of the communities, the CALD communities, they fear the police, they fear the blue uniform, (Service provider 2)

sometimes you call the police and what they just do is split the family as well. They just end up taking the man to jail taking the kids away. (Men's focus group)

The lack of understanding of both the trauma experienced in home countries and the lack of cultural sensitivity, extends also to social workers within child and family welfare organisations:

We come from a background which is so family oriented, you want to raise your kids your house, with a male figure in your life. And then they you know, you've heard that the system will take you and the kids away fast, as they are dealing with you. So some people can't even live for the possibility of taking my child away (Women's focus group)

The possibility of having children taken away from their parents both generates and perpetuates a distrust of the system and carries the potential to replicate racist, sexist and paternalistic practices in Australia's history of stolen generations.

In terms of educational support, all groups are assisted by STARTTS, who provide detailed education about everyday life, norms, work, and expectations in Australia. However, it has been noted by GLAPD that different levels of education are given to those who come here through refugee/humanitarian programs, as opposed to those who immigrate. The refugee/humanitarian groups are given access to programs run by UNHCR and Australian Government Department of Immigration through presentations by the High Commissions given to refugee families prior to relocation in Australia. These programs contain broader, more general knowledge. The broad scope of these programs can sometimes lead to misinterpretation and, in some cases, the propagation of misinformation between refugee and migrant groups who have already been resettled. As suggested by GLAPD community representatives, the potential for misinformation can lead to false expectations and disappointment for newer immigrants and refugees.

An additional group that tends to be overlooked by the various government and educational support initiatives is those who arrive here, by marriage, on partner visas. This final group, mostly comprised of women, receives no education about life, norms, and opportunities within Australia. This group is the most vulnerable to abuse; they are the least visible and supported group within the extant systems, while having little to no education about their rights in Australia.

Recommendations

1. Education

Education needs to be comprehensive and aimed towards informing communities and community members on aspects of life in a new cultural context. This education should include language skills; gender relations and expectations; gender and work; a basic law, legal rights, and criminal justice program; and an overview of DV and other social support services.

Families and individuals need to be educated when they first migrate. This education should be consistent and consolidated across all visa statuses, so families and individuals receive the same educational outcomes. This requires broader Australian government support through the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 'Immigration and Citizenship' division; and include STARTTS programs, other NGOs DV services, such as ANROWS, and organisations for refugee women.

The Australian 'system' (comprised of various government bodies as specified) must be held responsible for alleviating some of the issues that come through lack of knowledge and disempowerment; including assisting, supporting and mentoring immigrants with prior qualifications to practice their professions in the Australian context.

Education programs need to occur in collaboration with the Great Lakes communities, their elders and religious leaders, and their organisations (e.g. GLAPD). Training needs to be run within culturally relevant community fora, such as religious sermons by pastors, church gatherings, and other social events, rather than in official 'workshops' or 'seminars', which may not be well attended by communities. In addition, support services within Australia require relevant cultural training, so that they can provide culturally sensitive, non-paternalistic and meaningful support that is not dominated by or filtered through Anglo-Australian perspectives. There is a particular need for culturally appropriate workers in frontline services that provide support for women experiencing domestic violence, and in the delivery of prevention interventions.

Education around gender norms and support seeking needs the involvement of the most trusted members of the Great Lakes communities. These are elders, community and religious leaders, for example, Pastors. Community religious figures will need to find ways of incorporating these educational imperatives, in collaboration with broader DV support providers, into sermons and church gatherings and other community cultural events.

2. Building Trust

In the absence of extended families as a result of migration, education programs need to reinforce that Great Lakes cultural norms of 'shame' and 'silence' should not get in the way of seeking support from multiple sources. These sources include friends, the church, and community and religious leaders.

Building men's and women's networks of peer educators within the Great Lakes communities, can function to break silences around domestic violence and build relationships of trust. Peer network initiatives need to be a prioritised as potential intervention strategies that can be integrated into existing community events and gatherings.

External support services, such as domestic violence services, and those who run programs, such as STARTTS, need to be involved in more frequent dialogue with community leaders, religious leaders and any potential peer support networks. Trust can then be built through engaging or employing culturally appropriate workers in service delivery and prevention interventions.

Overall, religion is of utmost importance, and religious leaders are key to effective intervention and prevention strategies in domestic violence. They need to be involved in all aspects of the processes of intervention and prevention, such as supporting disclosures, help seeking, and community peer education.

3. Legal Sanctions

When all else fails, the law must become involved. This must be an *absolute last resort* when *all* other avenues have failed and the violence is extreme.

Police as frontline responders (alongside other DV support providers) require compulsory professional development about cultural sensitivities and norms of Great Lakes communities in order to respond appropriately. This training needs to be delivered by Great Lakes community educators and should aim to include multicultural liaison officers, DV first response police officers, and officers involved in domestic violence intervention.

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