

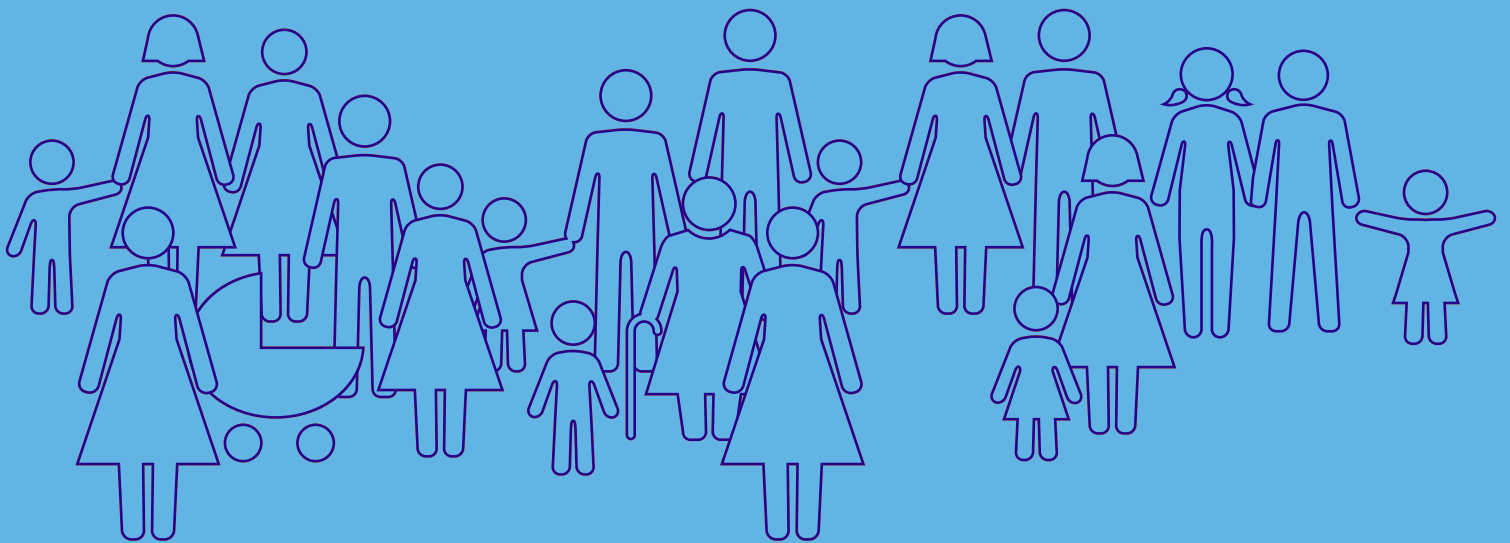
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# Hearing her voice

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**Report from the kitchen table conversations  
with culturally and linguistically diverse women  
on violence against women and their children**

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# Foreword

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We are pleased to present this report, *Hearing her voice: report from the kitchen table conversations with culturally and linguistically diverse women on violence against women and their children*.

Violence against women is a scourge on the Australian community. For too long, issues such as domestic and family violence and sexual assault remained a problem that women were afraid or reluctant to speak about.

This report is the result of women from more than 40 ethnic and cultural backgrounds from around Australia speaking out against violence in their homes and their communities.

The kitchen table conversations were established under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* and the *Second Action Plan 2013–2016: Moving Ahead*, which focuses on deepening our understanding of diverse experiences of violence, including the experiences of women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Violence against women is a whole of community issue and is everyone's business. All sections of our community — and people from all backgrounds, cultures and religious beliefs — must be united in ensuring that women and their children are safe.

We are resolute in our commitment to achieving a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and encourage all Australians to raise their voices to say that violence against women and children is never acceptable.

The Hon. Scott Morrison MP  
Minister for Social Services

Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash  
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women  
Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection

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## Executive summary

In Australia, one in three women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and almost one in five has experienced sexual violence. All Australian Governments are strongly committed to reducing the alarming rates of violence against women and their children in this country.

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan) is a 12-year strategy that aims to make a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children.

Under the *Second Action Plan 2013–2016: Moving Ahead* (the Second Action Plan) of the National Plan, Commonwealth and state and territory governments have committed to deepening our understanding of diverse experiences of violence, including the experiences of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. We have also committed to working with communities to prevent violence, ensure that the voices of CALD women are heard, and support women and their children who may require a range of targeted responses.

In 2014–15, CALD women leaders hosted 29 kitchen table conversations throughout Australia with women from more than 40 ethnic and cultural backgrounds about violence against women and their children. The hosts invited women from their networks and communities and provided a culturally appropriate and accessible setting, supported by the Department of Social Services (DSS).

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the key issues and some suggested responses raised by participants in the conversations.

At the conversations, there was general agreement that CALD women share many issues and experiences in common with other Australian women in relation to domestic and family violence and sexual assault, such as finding affordable accommodation, achieving financial independence, undertaking employment, obtaining legal advice and locating appropriate childcare. However, these difficulties can be exacerbated by factors such as not being able to speak English, having no independent rental history, lower employment rates, lack of transport, and having few friends or family members in Australia who can provide support.

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There was agreement that CALD women are less likely to report violence, can experience more barriers in accessing support services, and are less likely to leave a family violence situation than other Australian women.

At the same time, it was important to recognise that CALD women are not victims, but courageous and successful survivors with a capacity to flourish.

Given the commonalities between CALD and other Australian women, this report focuses on 11 interrelated issues and themes which were identified as specific to CALD women and communities:

1. Understanding Australia's laws, rights and cultural norms and new arrivals.
2. Gaining familiarity with and knowledge of support services.
3. Enhancing the availability and accessibility of support services.
4. Resolving immigration status and eligibility for support services and payments.
5. Reducing women's isolation and promoting community participation.
6. Recognising cultural beliefs and norms about gender and marriage.
7. Building the capacity of community and religious leaders.
8. Raising professional standards in interpreting and translation.
9. Improving police interventions.
10. Engaging and educating CALD men to inspire behaviour change.
11. Recognising the intersectionality of issues for CALD women.

The valuable feedback from the kitchen table conversations will be used to inform the ongoing implementation of the Second Action Plan and shape the future direction of the National Plan.

This report is not the end of the conversation, but seeks to bring the insights from the participants into our national conversation on reducing violence against women and their children.

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## Definitions of violence against women

Violence against women can be described in many different ways, and state and territory laws each have their own definitions. The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* observes that the term ‘violence against women’ means:

*‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’*

**Domestic violence** refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship. While there is no single definition, the central element of domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening.

**Domestic violence** includes physical, sexual, psychological and emotional and financial abuse. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics used to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal.

**Family violence** is a broader term that refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. It involves the same sorts of behaviours as described for domestic violence.

**Physical violence** includes slaps, shoves, hits, punches, pushes, being thrown down stairs or across the room, kicking, twisting of arms, choking, and being burnt or stabbed.

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**Sexual assault** or **sexual violence** includes rape, sexual assault with implements, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, forced prostitution, and being made to have sex with friends of the perpetrator.

**Psychological** and **emotional abuse** can include a range of controlling behaviours such as isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.

**Financial abuse** can include control of another person's money or other assets. It can involve, for instance, stealing cash, not allowing a victim to take part in any financial decisions or preventing a victim from having a job.



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## Introduction

In Australia, one in three women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and almost one in five has experienced sexual violence. All Australian Governments are strongly committed to reducing the alarming rates of violence against women and their children in this country.

In the national conversation on violence against women, a range of voices are speaking — but how are the voices of the most vulnerable being heard?

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan) is a 12-year strategy that aims to make a significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children.

Under the *Second Action Plan 2013–2016: Moving Ahead* (the Second Action Plan) of the National Plan, the Australian Government and state and territory governments have committed to deepening our understanding of diverse experiences of violence, including the experiences of women from CALD communities. We have also committed to working with communities to prevent violence, ensure that the voices of CALD women are heard, and support women and their children who may require a range of targeted responses.

From 24 October 2014 to 12 March 2015, CALD women leaders hosted 29 kitchen table conversations throughout Australia with women from more than 40 ethnic and cultural backgrounds to discuss violence against women and their children. The hosts invited women from their networks and communities and provided a culturally appropriate and accessible setting, supported by DSS.

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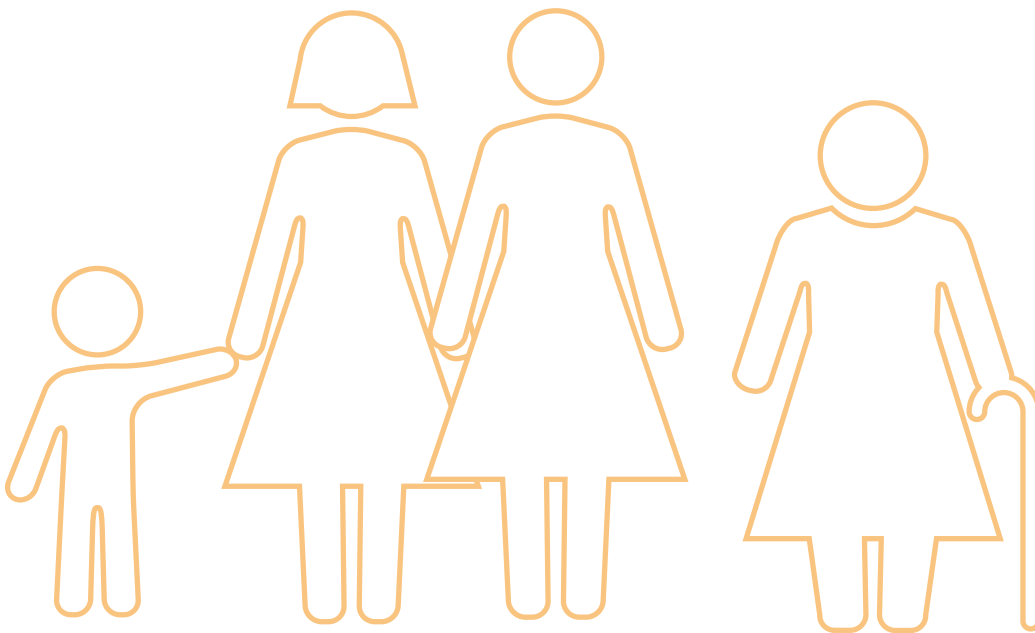
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The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the key issues and some suggested responses raised by participants in the conversations. The findings of the consultation process will inform implementation of the National Plan.

This report is not the end of the conversation, but seeks to bring the insights from participants into our national conversation on reducing violence against women and their children.

DSS would like to thank all those who led and participated in the conversations. They are quoted throughout this report and its findings would not have been possible without their active involvement and willingness to share experiences and perspectives.



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## CALD women and communities in Australia

Australia is a culturally and linguistically diverse nation. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are around 275 cultural and ethnic groups recognised in Australia, with this figure growing over time.<sup>1</sup> Within this diverse population, each community has its own history and culture, adding value to Australian society.

The term 'CALD' is generally defined as people born overseas in countries other than the main English speaking countries.<sup>2</sup> It can be used more broadly to refer to people who are Australian-born and have at least one parent who was born overseas, or those who speak a language other than English at home. It is also increasingly used to refer to religious diversity.

DSS acknowledges that the term 'CALD' correctly refers to the Australian population rather than to individuals or particular ethnic communities. However, for the purposes of this report, both people and communities will be referred to as CALD. This is the preferred approach by many government agencies and community organisations.

There is limited information and no uncontested national data available on the prevalence of violence against women from CALD backgrounds. Nevertheless, women from CALD communities who experience violence may face significant difficulties. These can include a lack of support networks, socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers, community pressure and limited knowledge about their rights and Australia's laws.<sup>3</sup> Cultural values and immigration status add a further layer of complexity for CALD women experiencing violence. These factors may explain why women from CALD backgrounds are less likely to report violence, and may find it more difficult to address or escape violence.

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1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), *Australian standard classification of cultural and ethnic groups (ASCCEG)*, cat no. 1249.0, accessed 18 May 2015, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1249.0>>.

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), *Defining the data challenge for family, domestic and sexual violence, Australia*, 2013, cat no. 4529.0, accessed 21 July 2015, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4529.0/>>.

3 Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (2014), *National research agenda to reduce violence against women and their children*, accessed 18 May 2015, <<http://www.anrows.org.au/about/national-research-agenda>>.

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Domestic and family violence and sexual assault can also be interpreted differently across cultures. In some cultures and languages, there is no direct translation or agreed definition of domestic violence or concept of sexual assault within a marriage, which makes communication of the issues more challenging.

Cultural norms and beliefs are subject to change pre and post-migration, and the degree of change may vary within families and communities. A view that violence is 'normal' can be based on past experiences from the country of origin which are not grounded in culture, but are specific to particular events.

Qualitative studies conducted in Australia suggest that domestic violence may be a particular issue for women from countries affected by war and civil strife.<sup>4</sup> Some families immigrating to Australia are escaping terror or trauma in their home country or have been exposed to endemic violence. As a result, violence may be considered normal and an acceptable practice in the home, from the perspective of the perpetrator and the victims.<sup>5</sup>

Attitudes which support violence contribute to the prevalence of these crimes in Australia. According to the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS), people's understanding of gender equality has a significant impact on their attitudes to violence against women.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, earlier literature published on this issue has identified that maintaining family privacy and 'keeping the family together' is a common barrier to women ending a violent relationship. This often transcends women and children's own right to safety.<sup>7</sup> While these beliefs may be declining in importance, they still persist, especially in some communities.<sup>8</sup> Such beliefs are part of broader collectivist cultures in which the preservation of family and community is valued over the safety and needs of individuals.<sup>9</sup>

4 Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland (2015), *Not now, not ever: putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland*, accessed 21 July 2015, <<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/dfv-read-report-recommendation/index.html>>.

5 See Footnote 4.

6 Harris, A, Honey, N, Webster, K, Diemer, K & Politoff V (2013), *Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: national community attitudes towards violence against women survey for respondents 16–24 years*, Melbourne: VicHealth.

7 Schneider, EM (1991), 'The violence of privacy,' *Connecticut Law Review*, 23: 973.

8 McGlade, H (2012), *Our greatest challenge: Aboriginal children and human rights*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press; Nash, ST (2005), 'Through black eyes: African American women's constructions of their experiences with intimate male partner violence', *Violence against Women*, 11(11): 1420–1440.

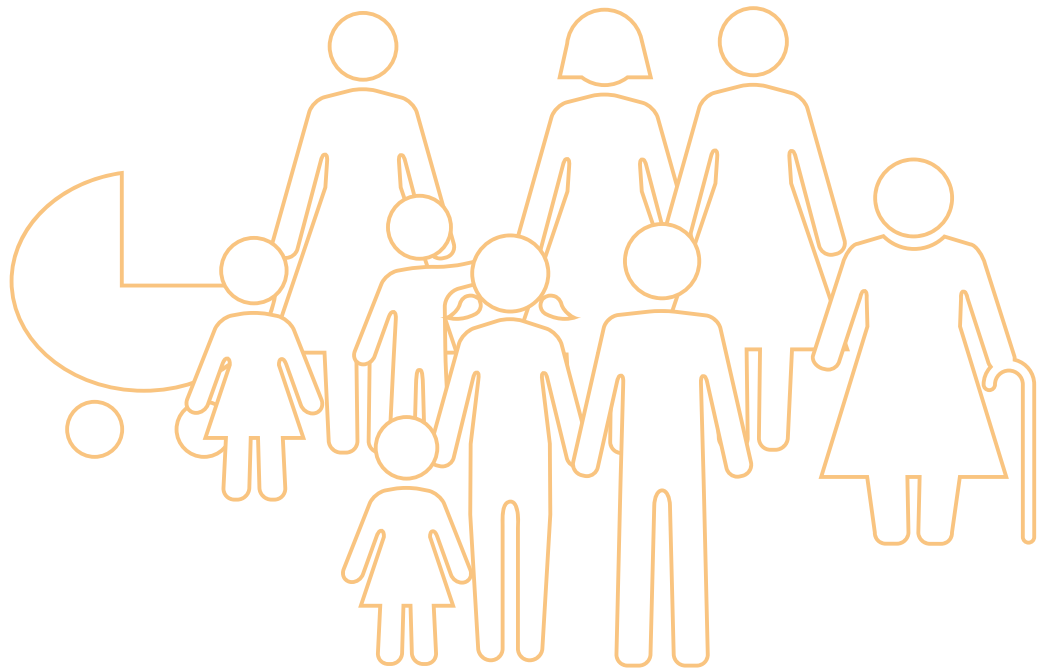
9 Yoshioka, MR & Choi, DY (2005), 'Culture and interpersonal violence research: paradigm shift to create a full continuum of domestic violence services', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(4): 513–519.

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*“A woman is brave and she will fight for her life and her children — she just needs some help.”*

DSS acknowledges that CALD is a very broad category which encompasses a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. It is critical to recognise that, while CALD women and communities may share certain characteristics and challenges, they are not homogenous.

It is even more critical to acknowledge, not only the disadvantages and challenges, but also the strengths and resilience of CALD women and communities. In some cases, the focus is on the trauma experienced by women and so there is a risk of them being defined primarily as victims. An alternative perspective acknowledges that CALD women experiencing violence are not only victims, but courageous and successful survivors with a capacity to flourish.



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## The CALD kitchen table conversations

In 2014–15, CALD women leaders hosted 29 kitchen table conversations throughout Australia with women from more than 40 ethnic and cultural backgrounds about domestic and family violence and sexual assault. The hosts invited women from their networks and communities and provided a culturally appropriate and accessible setting, supported by DSS.

*“Kitchen tables are where women talk — we eat and we feel comfortable and we share our lives.”*

The majority of the kitchen table conversations were multicultural, involving participants from a number of communities. Others were multi-faith and faith-specific, some were ethno-specific, one was youth-specific, one was for women with disabilities and three were for women from refugee backgrounds and their service providers. Participants mainly included CALD community members and leaders, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, service providers, bi-cultural workers, domestic violence and sexual assault workers and community workers.

Views of CALD women living in regional locations were also sought. Five conversations were held in four regional locations: one each in Townsville, Launceston and Shepparton and two in Coffs Harbour.

The conversations focused on issues of domestic and family violence and sexual assault, including:

- issues and challenges
- the role of the community
- the role of government
- what works well
- good ideas
- engaging with CALD men.

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## Themes from the kitchen table conversations

There was general agreement that CALD women share many issues and experiences in common with non-CALD Australian women in relation to domestic and family violence and sexual assault.

Opinions varied on whether CALD women in general, or CALD women from particular communities, were more likely to experience violence than other women in Australia. Participants noted the terms 'domestic violence' and 'family violence' are not often used in CALD communities; instead, the issues are more likely to be framed in terms of 'family problems'. Nevertheless, they agreed that these issues are pervasive in Australian society and in their own ethnic communities.

Conversations reflected a nuanced understanding of the range of behaviours that constitute domestic and family violence. Participants referred not only to physical violence, but other behaviours aimed at exercising power and control over women, such as isolation from family and friends, threats against children, control of finances and emotional abuse.

While intimate partner violence was the most frequently identified form of violence, there was significant acknowledgement that domestic violence can and does occur between other family members. Participants noted that CALD women are more likely than other Australian women to live in extended family households and referred to violence and abuse by mothers-in-law (often in tandem with a husband or a husband's siblings), adolescent sons and other family members.

Participants observed that as the CALD population in Australia ages, abuse of parents and other elderly relatives, particularly those with reduced mobility or dementia, is becoming more common. Abuse of men and boys, whether by other men or by women and girls was also acknowledged.

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Sexual assault, particularly by a spouse or partner, was less readily spoken about or identified by participants. Participants noted that some CALD communities do not recognise forcing a spouse or partner to have sex as sexual assault, because sexual access is considered 'a husband's right'.

Participants agreed CALD women share with other Australian women the practical difficulties of escaping violence, including finding affordable accommodation, achieving financial independence, undertaking employment, obtaining legal advice and locating appropriate childcare. However, they noted these difficulties can be exacerbated by factors such as not being able to speak English, having no independent rental history, lower employment rates, lack of transport, and having few friends or family members in Australia who can provide support.

There was agreement that CALD women are less likely to report violence, can experience more barriers in accessing support services, and are less likely to leave a family violence situation than other Australian women.

Given the commonalities between CALD and other Australian women, this report focuses on 11 inter-related issues and themes identified as specific to CALD women and communities:

1. Understanding Australia's laws, rights and cultural norms and new arrivals.
2. Gaining familiarity with and knowledge of support services.
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## 1. Understanding Australia's laws, rights, cultural norms and new arrivals

Participants agreed that people arriving in Australia from CALD backgrounds may have limited or no understanding of Australia's laws in relation to domestic and family violence and sexual assault, or their own rights in Australia. They may also be unaware that the cultural norms and laws which existed in their country of origin are significantly different to those of Australia, particularly in relation to family life, sexuality and gender roles.

In some countries, domestic and family violence is not considered a crime and sexual assault may not be recognised within a relationship or marriage. In others, family violence is against the law but may be condoned or considered to be a 'private' or personal matter. For these reasons, CALD women and men may not understand that violence in the home is subject to state scrutiny in Australia and is against the law.

*“Family and domestic violence is a taboo subject.”*

Discussions also highlighted that understanding of Australian laws and cultural norms can be particularly weak in relation to sexual assault. In some communities, sexuality is not openly discussed and sexual assault can be a forbidden topic. Where it occurs outside of a marriage relationship, a community may consider the assault to be the woman's fault due to the woman exercising 'too much freedom' and not being under male protection.

During one conversation, newly arrived women noted it is considered 'rude' to discuss sexual matters within their community. This makes education about Australian law and issues such as consent very challenging. Young girls who have been sexually assaulted are likely to be isolated at home by their parents in order to 'protect' them and the reputation of their families, rather than being encouraged to report the assault to police.

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Participants noted that the concept of sexual assault within marriage is not widely accepted in CALD communities. Many CALD women believe it is their duty as wives to engage in sexual intercourse with their partners and do not consider their husbands' insistence to be sexual assault. Significant concerns were expressed about the influence of pornography on men forcing their wives to perform sexual acts the women found degrading against their will. In some cases, women were unaware they could consent to some sexual activities while still being able to refuse others.

Settlement service providers expressed particular concern for young people entering Australia under the Humanitarian Programme. Some of these young people have routinely witnessed extreme sexual violence against women in their countries of origin and need focused education and support to fully understand this is not acceptable in Australia. Service providers regarded this as an area of risk and an important focus of prevention and intervention.

Sexual harassment in the workplace was also clearly identified as an issue for CALD women, particularly for those in insecure, casual or low-paid employment. Some participants felt Asian women are particularly vulnerable to harassment due to the stereotyping of Asian women as sexually available and submissive.

Many were concerned that reporting violence or sexual harassment could result in loss of employment and increased family tensions. Others commented they would not tell their husbands about sexual harassment in the workplace, as this could result in demands to quit their jobs or place them at risk of increased surveillance and violence at home.

Many of the participants suggested targeted information must be developed to increase understanding of Australian law among new arrivals and CALD communities, including an awareness of women's rights. Participants cautioned there is a risk that, where physical violence is known to be against the law, other forms of control and abuse may increase. This pattern has already been observed in some CALD communities. Nevertheless, women in particular need to understand the laws that protect them and how to access support services and the justice system.

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*“We need to make it clear that, in Australia, domestic violence is not a private matter — it is a public matter and it is a crime.”*

A number of women proposed information could be delivered in the pre-migration phase, with suggestions including information sheets, a handbook, or educational sessions with a segment about domestic and family violence and sexual assault. They noted that overseas Australian embassies are considered to be authoritative sources of information about life in Australia and their advice is listened to and respected. For refugees and others arriving under the Humanitarian Programme, the pre-arrival Australian Cultural Orientation Programme could include a stronger emphasis on violence against women and Australian law.

Some participants were recent clients or workers from Australia’s settlement services and felt that initial awareness-raising could be subsequently reinforced through settlement services. They suggested orientation programmes for new arrivals and the Adult Migrant English Program could provide an appropriate setting to further explain Australian law and cultural norms in relation to family violence and sexual assault. Programmes could also support discussion of differing expectations regarding gender roles and ensure that clients understand how to access support services. Other settlement and multicultural programmes could support events such as family camps and information days where discussions about such issues are integrated into broader material on ‘strong families’ or ‘family life in Australia’.

*“We can talk and say: This is our new life — how can we keep our family strong?”*

Participants recognised that the majority of women arriving in Australia have limited contact with embassies and settlement services. They felt it was important for all women and men living in Australia to be aware that violence against women is a crime under Australian law and is not acceptable.

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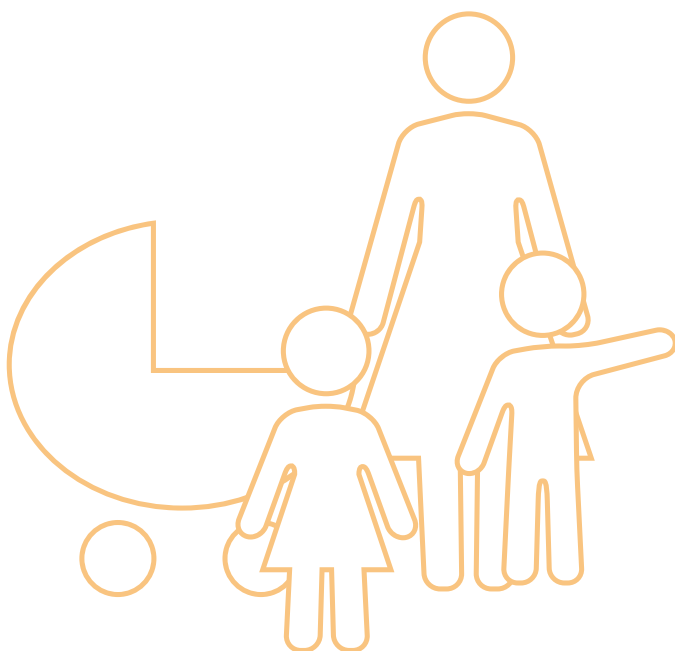
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There was an identified need to provide information more broadly to CALD communities, with the key challenge being to ensure that the message is conveyed in a culturally appropriate manner, using language and concepts easily understood by CALD groups and communities. In communicating key messages, participants saw an important role for cross-cultural, non-text formats such as pictures, symbols and diagrams that are simple to understand.

In addition, the use of social media including YouTube clips, audio-visual technology and other innovative methods of communication could be effective in overcoming the language and literacy barriers that exist in some CALD communities. A number of participants felt that ethnic radio and other multicultural media should also be employed to reinforce messaging.

In order to emphasise the importance of these topics, participants suggested that questions about domestic and family violence and sexual assault could be incorporated into the Australian citizenship test and the accompanying citizenship study book.



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## 2. Gaining familiarity with and knowledge of support services

The impacts of domestic and family violence can be particularly severe for CALD women who cannot find support services and experience cultural pressure to stay in an abusive relationship.

Lack of information about or familiarity with available support services is a significant barrier for CALD women seeking assistance. The problem is acute for newly arrived women, who may arrive in Australia with little or no knowledge of available services and no understanding of how to navigate the complex service system. In many cases there are no equivalent support services in their country of origin and it takes time to understand the role of specialist services such as domestic and family violence support services, sexual assault crisis centres and counsellors.

Even among participants who have lived in Australia for many years, there were many who were unaware of who to contact after experiencing domestic and family violence or sexual assault. They were not accessing 1800RESPECT, which is Australia's national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service, or other support services. Some participants did not know that police could be contacted by calling 000 if they or another person was in immediate danger.

Service providers agreed that this limited knowledge of the service system contributes to CALD women being overrepresented in crisis situations. Lack of early intervention from support services means that violence tends to escalate into a crisis that requires police involvement.

A number of participants had eventually accessed support services and noted if more information was available about support services and they felt more confident in using them, they would have taken action much sooner. Even when they chose to remain in the relationship, having the information would have been empowering and helped them to change the dynamics of the relationship at an earlier stage.

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Many participants suggested that there is insufficient translated information on how and where to access services. In addition, the information is sometimes overloaded with technical language not understood by those with limited English. In some CALD communities there is a high level of first language illiteracy, which means that some people are not able to read in their own language. In some sub-Saharan African refugee communities, for example, many have had significantly disrupted educations and are not literate in any language on arrival in Australia.

More generally, participants observed that they need more than a general understanding of the support services available. Instead, they need specific information and contact details or a contact person in their local area.

*“I need to know who can help me where I am.”*

General Practitioners (GPs) were felt to be an underutilised but important information and referral point for CALD women. Participants noted due to the nature of communal life, CALD women may rarely be alone with a professional person they can confide in except at medical appointments. Information targeted at CALD women could be made available in GP clinics and the offices of allied health professionals who are able to support CALD women in disclosing experiences of abuse and violence and refer them to appropriate support services.

Overall, participants felt that services need to be more proactive in approaching CALD communities to offer support, rather than expecting individuals or the community to find them. Information about these services could be circulated throughout CALD communities rather than relying on mainstream advertising. Partnerships between specialist support services and local settlement and multicultural services would also assist CALD clients to become familiar with the kinds of support available.

Discussions highlighted it is the total service system that was difficult for CALD women to understand and navigate. Women suggested that local networks of professionals with cultural competence could be formed by frontline services such as police, healthcare institutions, crisis support providers, housing assistance and legal services. These networks could provide information about all the available services in their location and assist women to make informed decisions.

Other options proposed by women included either dedicated CALD women's websites and telephone services, or the greater incorporation of CALD content and expertise within existing services. Some participants advocated for face-to-face options such as the establishment of CALD community 'drop in' centres for women.

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### 3. Enhancing the availability and accessibility of support services

Participants agreed CALD women share with other Australian women the challenges of limited availability of support services. However, it was highlighted that CALD women have specific needs for services to be accessible and culturally responsive and for services to include post-crisis support.

Participants observed the support framework for domestic and family violence services is predominantly mainstream with a focus on high risk or crisis situations. There was a perception that such mainstream services are not for CALD women and 'mainstream' in practice means 'Anglo'.

More specifically, participants felt such services are not able to meet the basic needs of CALD women. For example, some Muslim women can find that their religious needs are not provided for in terms of food preparation and prayer facilities. Lack of responsiveness is a particular concern for women in regional or remote areas where only one mainstream support service may be available.

Participants acknowledged that some CALD women have low levels of trust in government and other services, often due to pre-migration experiences. This means that initial impressions of mainstream family violence services are critical. Their observation is that these services do not always understand how to present or elicit information in culturally appropriate ways, and this can cause women to disengage at an early stage.

As an example, one participant explained that CALD women's experience of violence does not necessarily follow a 'cycle of violence' model. This cycle is generally portrayed as a build-up of aggression resulting in a violent incident, followed by an apology from the perpetrator or 'honeymoon period', followed by a further build-up and further acts of aggression. She indicated that, in CALD communities where domestic violence is considered 'normal', the women rarely receive apologies for violence or promises of change. CALD women may not see themselves reflected in models such as these and feel that the service cannot understand and help them.

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Service providers noted that their services have strong commitments to supporting CALD women. However, financial constraints or changes in broader policies around domestic and family violence services can have significant impacts on their capacity to offer appropriate case management, employ bilingual workers and offer crisis accommodation. This can also result in a limited ability to reach out to CALD communities and assist them effectively. Service providers need bicultural or community-specific workers who speak the language and understand the cultural issues and family dynamics for CALD women. They also want to be able to fund professional development for bicultural workers so that services are able to continuously improve.

Beyond family violence support services, discussions highlighted that CALD women experience significant difficulties accessing more general services and support. Securing crisis accommodation can be a lengthy process for CALD women leaving a violent partner and finding longer term accommodation that is affordable may be even more challenging. CALD women may find themselves in crisis accommodation for lengthy periods due to greater difficulties in accessing the private rental market, having few family and friends to assist, and long waiting lists for public housing. They may also need a range of other supports including financial and welfare assistance, mental health and physical health services, counselling, legal assistance, and services for children and youth.

*“I want us to be safe but I cannot take my children to be homeless on the street.”*

According to some participants, there was a perception mainstream service providers and government agencies lack compassion for women experiencing violence. They may not believe a woman's experience of violence and may assume she has ulterior motives such as claiming benefits she is not entitled to. This can be challenging for a victim of violence as she may not be able to prove she has been abused, especially if the abuse is not physical.



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Participants made a number of suggestions to improve the availability and accessibility of support services.

In relation to family violence services, they emphasised that CALD women are often seeking support to end the violence, but not to end the relationship. CALD women may hope that the services will explain Australian law to the perpetrators, intervene in specific situations, or provide ongoing personal support and safety planning, rather than encourage separation, divorce or an end to contact with violent family members. It was acknowledged that such hopes might prove to be unrealistic. Nevertheless, participants emphasised the appropriateness of framing initial discussions with clients in terms of establishing 'healthy relationships' and 'strong families' rather than encouraging separation.

*“We should say — be strong, as you are not alone.”*

CALD specialist services and bicultural workers highlighted many CALD women require comprehensive support, from the first emergency call they make, and throughout the process to post-crisis support. Few mainstream family violence support services provide other general support services, which can make it difficult to address the complex needs of CALD women who do leave violent relationships. They advocated for support models which recognise women may need assistance, for instance, to obtain a driver's licence, develop financial management skills and gain confidence in their ability to live independently. Connections need to be made to services that respond to multiple challenges such as education, employment, health issues and social isolation, empowering women to 're-enter society' after escaping violence.

*“CALD women need a continuum of support and services, from early intervention and education to crisis support, with post-crisis support for sustainable benefits.”*

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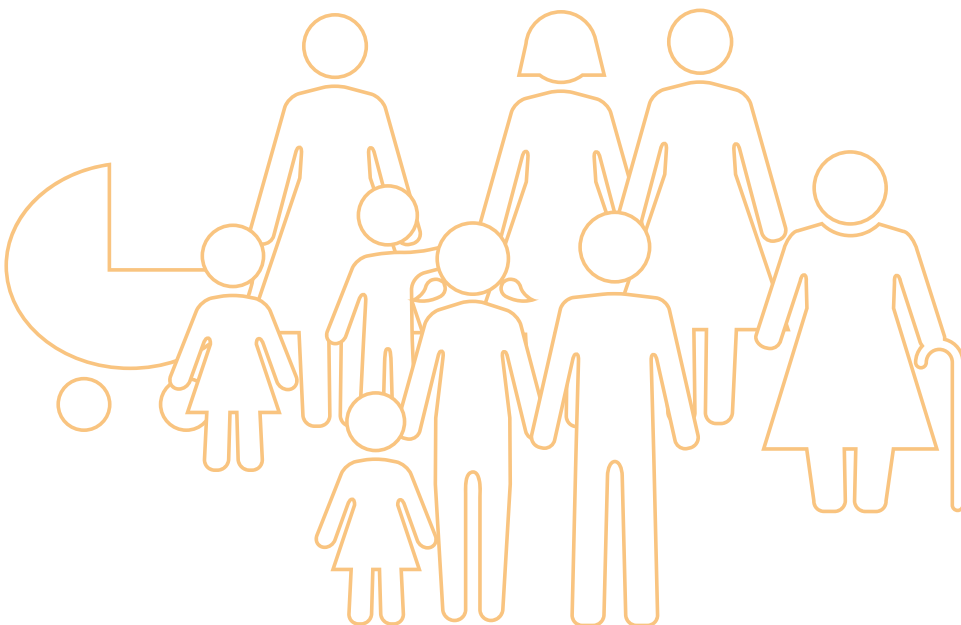
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A number of participants felt that issues of violence should be integrated more strongly into general family support programmes. They noted good practice examples, such as the Relationships Australia model, under which all workers undertake two days of domestic violence awareness training and 'cultural fitness' training.

More broadly, participants considered that services need to be culturally competent, non-judgemental and recognise that mainstream options may not be appropriate for CALD women. There were calls for cultural competency training for all frontline services, including police, hospital emergency staff, social workers and Centrelink officers. In addition, participants considered that all services should use professional interpreters, rather than relying on children or perpetrators to provide interpreting about acts of violence or the wellbeing of the victim.

Participants wanted to be part of the solution to the issues raised. For example, one group suggested that community members could establish a network of private homes where CALD women escaping violence are welcome, offering temporary accommodation, personal support and referral to professional services. These could be modelled on the Children's Safety Houses for children escaping bullying. A register of such homes could be provided to local police as a culturally appropriate option for CALD women in crisis. A community 'friendship fund' could be created to provide financial and other help to these women.



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#### 4. Resolving immigration status and eligibility for support services and payments

The challenge for women escaping violence while living in Australia on temporary visas was raised in the majority of kitchen table conversations. The fear of losing the right to remain in Australia, whether real or perceived, was a significant factor in a woman's decision-making, especially for those on partner visas or dependants of other temporary visa holders such as international students or skilled workers.

Participants pointed out that perpetrators of domestic and family violence use the threat of losing the right to remain in Australia as a means of controlling women, and motivating them to stay in violent relationships.

For some CALD women, returning to their countries of origin carries the threat of strong disapproval and even violence from their families and communities. Others fear having to leave Australia will result in losing custody of their children.

*“Visa status and vulnerability is commonly used by men to threaten women.”*

Partner visa holders may be able to use the family violence provisions to apply to remain in Australia. Under these provisions, if a relationship breaks down as a result of family violence, the applicant can still be considered for permanent residence if they can provide evidence of family violence while in a genuine relationship. However, women may not be aware of these provisions and the process of proving violence can be challenging where there is no intervention order or police report.

For other temporary visa holders, where a relationship between a man, who is the primary visa holder, and a woman, who is his dependant, breaks down, the reason for the visa no longer exists. In most cases, the woman must return to her country of origin and can only remain in Australia if she is able to qualify for another visa with a pathway to permanent residence in her own right.

In addition, eligibility issues in relation to immigration status and welfare benefits can raise significant barriers to leaving violent situations and accessing assistance. For women remaining in the relationship, any income support payments are received by the sponsor and not the sponsored partner. This gives the sponsor significant financial power and control.

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For those who leave a violent relationship and are not yet permanent residents, there are limited options for income support payments. Most income support payments have a two year waiting period and some pensions, such as the aged pension and disability support pensions, have a 10-year qualifying residence requirement.

These eligibility issues can affect the capability of domestic and family violence support services to assist these women, who do not have ready access to income support, are not subsidised for medical visits or public transport, and are unlikely to be eligible for other support services such as public housing or homelessness programmes. In many cases, agreeing to accept these clients imposes significant costs on already-stretched support services.

A high risk group identified during the discussions were young women brought to Australia on partner visas for marriage. This group can have a significant lack of knowledge or understanding of their rights. Some are threatened with deportation and have their passport confiscated by their partner. In some cases, there is a belief that visa sponsorship has to be 'paid back' either in personal care, in the case of older partners or partners with significant health issues and disabilities, or in sexual services including providing paid sexual services for the man's friends and associates.

Some women also reported sponsoring men on partner visas, and finding the men became violent once they had achieved permanent residence and no longer required sponsorship. In some cases, participants felt that exploitation of CALD women to obtain a visa and permanent residence in Australia was itself a form of abuse.

Some CALD communities in Australia include high numbers of temporary visa holders and their dependants. These communities are disproportionately affected by the complex interaction between family violence, immigration status, income support eligibility and cultural expectations. For example, a significant number of Pacific Islander women who have come to Australia as partners of New Zealand citizens on Special Category visas have been unable to qualify for permanent residence in their own right and remain 'in limbo'.

An emerging issue is presented by asylum seeking women from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, who are living in Australia on bridging visas. Support workers noted these women can be reluctant to report their partners for family violence or sexual assault due to fears they could be re-detained under code

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of behaviour requirements for their visas, and that this may affect protection claims.

Participants felt that many of the ideas raised under other issues could be applied to these issues; in particular, the provision of more information to women and men pre-migration and post-arrival. They noted that many CALD women on temporary visas have limited information or are confused about their visa status and specific visa conditions such as their right to work or study in Australia.

Women suggested online tutorials or face-to-face information sessions about relevant visas and the rights of people living in Australia on those visas would be helpful. They also felt that more promotion of family violence provisions and better information about the process for making claims would assist women to make informed decisions.

*“There is an urgent need for information about their visas, their rights in Australia if the relationship breaks down, their right to work and support services.”*

Women felt that existing mechanisms for informing permanent migrants about life in Australia could be utilised for women on temporary visas. For example, migrant resource centres and other multicultural services could provide information on support services and options such as interim intervention orders that enable women affected by violence to stay in the family home.

Participants also saw a significant and growing role for the private sector and employers in supporting the safety and wellbeing of temporary visa holders and their dependents. For example, praise was given to the growing number of companies offering victims of family violence extra paid leave to attend medical appointments, counselling and other supports. They also suggested that, since some sponsoring employers pay for initial establishment costs for temporary workers, they may be willing to provide some support to dependents in cases of relationship breakdown.

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## **5. Reducing women's isolation and promoting community participation**

Participants agreed that social isolation is a key problem for CALD women in family violence situations. Perpetrators may deliberately isolate women from support in order to control them. Fear of isolation as a result of disclosing violence can act as a deterrent to CALD women seeking help or wanting to leave a violent relationship. Social isolation from family, community and Australian society can be an ongoing challenge for women who are leaving or have left an abusive relationship.

CALD women may be prone to isolation if they do not have other relatives or contacts in Australia beside their partner. In some communities or families, they are not 'allowed' to leave the house unaccompanied and have very little contact outside their family or ethnic community.

Physical and social isolation is a particular issue for some women living in regional and rural locations with typically small populations. There can be large geographical distances to police stations, support networks, healthcare professionals and other services. CALD women living in these communities may find it harder to seek help or leave a violent relationship due to limited access to services, a perceived lack of confidentiality and anonymity, the stigma attached to the public disclosure of violence and lack of transport and communications. Women living on rural and remote properties are potentially even more isolated, and in addition can be affected by dangerous factors such as the availability of guns.

Discussions highlighted that some CALD women are at risk of isolation from their family and community if they disclose family violence, leave a violent relationship or call the police. When CALD women discuss their experiences of violence with someone outside the family, members of their family may consider this to be disloyal and ostracise them. Women who leave abusive relationships may also experience isolation as their communities may blame them for the violence and refuse to be supportive of their decision to leave. Some participants reported significant instances of harassment and even violence by other community members following separation from violent partners.

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*“I did not come to Australia to die.”*

Such isolation can reduce CALD women’s feelings of social inclusion and connectedness with friends, family and community and lead them to tolerate violence. In some cases, women feel it is better to endure violence than to live a solitary life without family or community support. In other cases, CALD women have nowhere else to go as the abusive partner is the only person they know in Australia and the partner’s family and community is complicit in the violence.

Cultural isolation is also a concern for some CALD women as in some cases, traditional practices or being visibly ‘different’ are not fully accepted in the broader Australian community. For example, some Muslim women participants described abuse and discrimination they experienced while wearing the hijab in public at times of heightened tensions over terror threats in Australia. This limits their ability to integrate into Australian society and makes them feel more isolated. Some Muslim women do not want to discuss or report family violence or sexual assault in case the issues are framed as specifically Muslim problems and increase prejudice against them.

Participants reflected deeply on the isolation of many CALD women. Placing a high value on the importance of family and community, they also saw a need to empower CALD women by connecting them more strongly to the broader Australian community. They felt that CALD women should be encouraged to pursue English language, education and employment goals as well as family and other responsibilities.

*“Once a woman has a job, she can have more confidence to leave a domestic violence situation.”*

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One option raised in a number of the conversations was to make English language learning compulsory for new arrivals and to support and subsidise it for people who have been living in Australia for some time. Women noted that programmes such as the Adult Migrant English Program provide a major opportunity for women to learn English, practice conversation, acquire knowledge of Australian society and make friends. Yet, women they knew were prevented from attending by husbands who feared they would lose power in the family if the women learned to speak English well and became more independent and socially connected. Participants believed this problem could only be overcome by programmes being made compulsory.

A number of participants felt that CALD women should be encouraged to understand and use mainstream support services as well as specialist CALD services. While the availability of CALD-specific services and community supports are important, mainstream services can offer benefits such as neutrality, greater assurance of confidentiality and an 'outside' perspective in situations of family violence, sexual assault, community pressure and harassment.

Participants also saw an important role for CALD women in empowering and supporting one another, including through social events specifically for women. The groups reflected on the value of occasions such as women's dinners, sewing circles, craft groups and playgroups for making friends and finding personal support. In some cases, such events had led to the establishment of friendship cafes and self-help groups improving women's confidence, self-esteem and independent decision making. They were also leading to online chat groups for women who have significant carer responsibilities, are less able to leave the house, or are geographically isolated.

***“Empower CALD women and they will end the violence.”***



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## 6. Recognising cultural beliefs and norms about gender and marriage

Culture was a challenging subject for many participants in the kitchen table conversations. There were concerns that culture would be perceived as the cause of domestic and family violence and sexual assault and this was felt to be an oversimplification of complex issues. There were also concerns that particular CALD communities could be stigmatised as more violent than other Australian communities.

Nevertheless, there was recognition that culture can be fundamental to the ways in which CALD women, men and communities respond to violence. In particular, cultural beliefs and norms regarding marriage, separation, divorce and gender roles can prevent women from leaving a violent relationship or seeking assistance. In addition, cultural beliefs can underpin more complex forms of violence such as forced or underage marriage, dowry demands and female genital mutilation (FGM).

In a number of cultures, the needs of the family and the community are placed above those of the individual. Some women noted that out of respect for cultural beliefs they focus primarily on their responsibilities as wives, mothers and carers rather than caring for their personal health and well-being. Within this context, they may endure violence by a partner because they feel obligated to fulfil family responsibilities.

Discussions highlighted the ways in which traditional gender roles deeply rooted in culture can create a pathway for some men to control and abuse women, trapping them in violent relationships. In many cultures, men are considered the breadwinners and heads of households. When the woman finds employment, learns English or gains confidence in her own views, the man may feel his position is under threat and respond by exercising increased power and control, including through violence.

*“In my culture, men are the boss and women are expected to suffer in silence.”*

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When violence occurs, CALD women may be expected by others to prioritise keeping the family together over their own safety. A strategy used by perpetrators and their families is to make the victim feel guilty about leaving her partner as it is considered sinful in some cultures and religious communities to break up the family.

Participants observed there is a strong distrust among some CALD communities of domestic and family violence services due to a perception these services favour separation and divorce. Confiding in counsellors and social workers may also be discouraged for the same reason. Such pressures can lead to women experiencing violence for decades before finally taking action, sometimes with support from grown up children who no longer depend on their mother for care.

Some women fear they will lose access to their children if they separate from their violent partner. This fear is particularly strong where women come from a culture where the father traditionally takes sole custody of the children if the couple separate. These women can have a realistic fear their children will be removed from Australia by their ex-partner and they will not be granted custody or access.

Discussions highlighted that, in some communities, there are strong cultural stigmas in relation to sexual assault and seeking support from a sexual assault support service. Sex outside of marriage, even where it is the result of force, is considered to bring shame upon the woman and upon her family. Women can be afraid to disclose sexual assault due the impact on their own reputation, on their family's standing in the community, and the resulting unwillingness of other community members to associate with them and intermarry with them.

***“The honour of the family is at stake.”***

Some participants observed the emphasis on heterosexual family life in CALD communities can render CALD women who are experiencing abuse and violence in same-sex relationships virtually invisible. Same-sex relationships are not widely accepted in some CALD communities and this can lead to specific forms of abuse such as ‘outing’ or threatening to ‘out’ the woman to family, friends and the community.

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Harmful cultural practices such as forced and underage marriage were also highlighted, as marriage under these circumstances may be accompanied by domestic and family violence. In some cultures women are expected to get married at a young age and begin having children shortly after marriage. Participants indicated some families choose to marry their daughters at an early age to prevent them from engaging in sexual relationships outside of marriage, or from entering into relationships considered culturally or religiously inappropriate. In such cases, a religious ceremony may be performed while the daughter is below the Australian legal age of consent and the marriage may not be legally registered until she is 18 years old.

Young women acknowledged that forced marriages are different to arranged marriages, in which both parties freely consent. However, they felt it is sometimes unclear whether an arranged marriage is in fact a forced marriage due to the significant emotional and familial pressures involved. Young women are taught to defer to their parents' wishes and find it difficult to refuse a marriage.

*“Schools should look out for signs of forced marriage, like young women suddenly ‘deciding’ to leave school and looking upset.”*

Dowry demands were also raised as a cultural practice some women, particularly from South Asian backgrounds, are subject to. This practice is common overseas (although illegal in countries such as India and Bangladesh) and some women indicated Australian residents who marry women from overseas also demand dowries. Once in Australia, dowry demands can pose a significant risk of violence against women whose husbands consider the dowry to be insufficient and punish their wives until more is provided.

Cultural notions limiting women's freedom of movement were raised as these can exacerbate financial and other forms of control and abuse. For instance, some women advised they are expected to ask their husbands' permission for most things, including leaving the house. They must also ask for money for basic necessities such as food or items for children. This places the women in a situation where they are completely reliant on their partners.

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*“We need more freedom.”*

FGM was a practice discussed in some kitchen table conversations. FGM is the partial or complete removal of the external female genitals as a means of control over women and their bodies. It mostly affects women and girls from particular countries such as Somalia, Guinea, Egypt, Eritrea, Mali, Sierra Leone and Sudan.<sup>10</sup>

While FGM normally occurs prior to arrival in Australia, participants felt it is critical to raise awareness in CALD communities about FGM being an illegal practice with no medical benefits. This education should be targeted at younger generations so they can learn about the negative health consequences associated with FGM including obstetric, gynaecological and mental health problems. Some participants indicated that in order to stop this harmful cultural practice, FGM needs a much higher profile in broader Australian society.

Many participants suggest that culture can be changed and media and other campaigns could help to change violence-supportive attitudes in CALD communities. They suggested that anti-violence campaigns are most effective when they use messaging that is created by the community, reflects concepts that are important to that community, and are disseminated through community networks. For example, in newly arrived migrant communities, the fact that violence is a crime that has serious consequences is an important message. For other communities, where education is greatly valued, communicating domestic violence affects children’s ability to be successful in school would resonate more strongly. In some religious communities, the most effective message could be that God forbids violence against women and that those who use violence are committing a sin.

Materials for such campaigns could be developed by CALD community members and utilise multicultural and ethnic media. The critical role of SBS TV and radio in disseminating advertisements and other messaging was acknowledged, and participants noted that many migrants have their local ethnic community radio station playing for much of the day. In addition, Facebook messages and YouTube clips circulate quickly through community networks and help to create positive momentum towards change.

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<sup>10</sup> WHO (World Health Organization) & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 2010, *Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Against Women: Taking Action and Generating Evidence*, Geneva: WHO

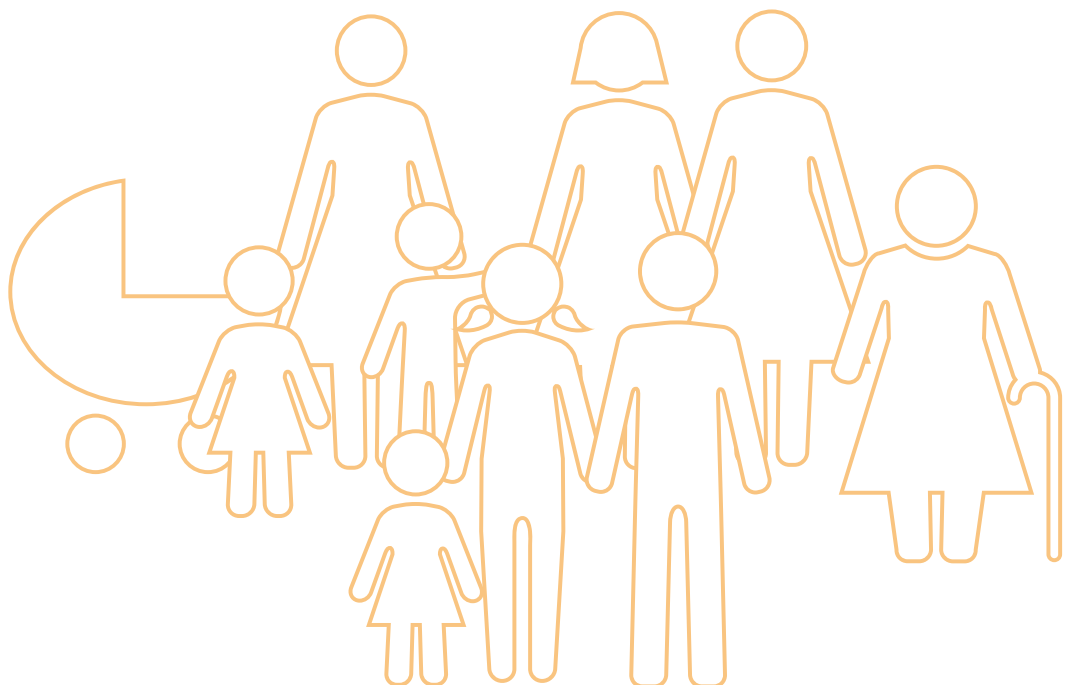
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Women requested that campaigns not only address issues of violence and other forms of emotional and financial abuse, but also promote positive attitudes towards women and gender equality. They saw a great need for positive messages for and about CALD women and communities.

*“We should have posters, radio spots, TV ads and Facebook memes which show CALD men saying: I want my daughter to be Prime Minister one day.”*

A number of participants also proposed that ‘champions of change’ networks be created comprising CALD women who have survived family violence and sexual assault. Participants felt it is important to celebrate good news stories about addressing and escaping violence so that women feel more hopeful. Such women could be effective mentors and sources of inspiration for other women who are experiencing or at risk of violence. This reflected a strong belief in the power of storytelling and real-life examples in creating change.

*“Celebrating women who have escaped violence sends a powerful message of hope to victims.”*



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## 7. Building the capacity of community and religious leaders

The role of CALD community and religious leaders in addressing violence against women was a contentious topic in the kitchen table conversations. Much of the discussion reflected the reality that CALD women who experience violence are likely to confide in these leaders as a first point of contact or for ongoing support, and yet leaders are not necessarily equipped for this role.

Community leaders are generally trusted and authoritative individuals with a broad range of skills and experience. They are often consulted on a range of family issues such as marriage, parenting, intergenerational conflict and other issues. In this context, they may be approached to provide advice, intervene and mediate in family violence situations, sometimes in combination with parents and extended family. Religious leaders may be approached to provide spiritual guidance to women experiencing violence and to grant a separation or divorce.

*“Some community leaders are good and broker real solutions to violence between the couple.”*

The cultural and religious knowledge of such leaders and their ability to influence the community were highly valued by participants. Some noted that young women often feel more comfortable discussing personal matters with a friend or family member. However, older women tend to prefer disclosing their situation to leaders they know and trust, who speak their language and who understand the cultural and religious factors influencing their decision-making.

Some participants provided examples of very positive action and support by community and religious leaders. Women community leaders who have experience and expertise in issues of family violence and sexual assault were considered particularly helpful. Some Imams and other religious leaders were praised for the ways in which they integrate content on respecting women, domestic and family violence and sexual consent into contexts such as pre-marriage education, marriage guidance and sermons. Some noted that, in leaving violent relationships, they were able to draw strength from their spiritual beliefs and this was supported by their religious leader.

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In contrast however, other discussions highlighted that many community and religious leaders are not able to provide effective support to women experiencing domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Some leaders have limited knowledge of support services available and are unable to refer victims to support in their local area. Some have a preference for resolving family violence issues within the family or the community and do not understand when they should involve police and specialist services. Others do not fully respect the confidentiality of those who confide in them. Most leaders are male and considered likely to believe a man's story rather than a woman's story.

Religious leaders were perceived to be especially highly motivated to keep marriages and families intact, sometimes at the expense of the woman's safety. Preventing family violence may be a secondary consideration even though it is critical to the safety and wellbeing of the women who have sought help. Participants noted there is generally a reluctance to support separation and divorce and a preference for offering relationship guidance and ongoing support for behaviour change. Within this context, religious leaders may try to persuade women to return to their husbands after a violent incident to give them a 'second chance'. In some instances, religious leaders may refuse to grant a divorce to a victim of violence and instead may persuade the woman to reconcile with her violent partner.

Some participants felt that religious leaders play a broader role in supporting attitudes that condone the exercise of power and control over women. These issues were not specific to any particular religious community, but were raised by women from a number of religious backgrounds. For example, some Christian participants noted that particular scriptures urging wives to be submissive to husbands are emphasised in ways that perpetuate family violence when other, more equal interpretations of those scriptures are possible. Concepts of 'forgiving' perpetrators are confused with continuing to live together as a couple. Others considered that violence has very little to do with religious concepts and beliefs. They felt that controlling and violent people are attracted to religious settings where gender hierarchies are supported and use religion as an excuse for violent behaviour. Overall, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that religion is interpreted in ways that uphold the equality and dignity of women.

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*“It is important to interpret religion in a way that respects women.”*

A number of participants felt there is considerable scope for religious leaders to play a greater role in preventing and addressing violence, and that religious concepts can be helpful as they are valued by men and women. Women of Christian faith suggested that women and men are both made in the image of God and this should underpin ideas of gender equality in Christian churches. Some Hindu women felt that men could be told that they are accruing bad karma and disrespecting Shakti and other goddesses when violent towards women. Some Muslim participants believed that Imams should help women to understand their rights within Islam as this knowledge will empower them in their relationships and help them to leave violent marriages.

Overall, participants felt there is an important role for community and religious leaders in preventing violence and supporting women who are in violent relationships. Leaders need to know how to recognise the warning signs of family violence and respond effectively to disclosures about violence. They also need to play a broader role in preventing violence through speaking out against domestic and family violence and sexual assault, promoting healthy relationships and encouraging violent men to change their behaviour. Some leaders are already playing these roles, while others require significantly more education, training and professional development in order to do so.





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## 8. Raising professional standards in interpreting and translating

The critical importance of interpreting and translating services for CALD women with limited English was a focus of every kitchen table conversation. Interpreting and translating services are crucial to CALD women experiencing violence. They enable the woman to make first contact with frontline services, disclose violence and seek help. They have an ongoing part to play as she navigates a complex support service and legal system. Challenges include interpreter availability and cost, a perceived lack of female interpreters, and issues of confidentiality, impartiality and cultural insensitivity. Overall, there is a need to increase the availability and raise the professional standards of interpreters.

Discussions about professional standards took place in the broader context of concern that professional interpreters are often not used in family violence situations. This may be due to low availability of interpreters after business hours, or due to the cost to the service that is supporting the women. For example, participants indicated that interpreters are most needed when they contact police and hospitals; however, violent incidents may occur in the early hours of the morning when few interpreters are available. Services may have a limited budget for interpreting services and staff may need to seek approval before arranging for interpreters. As a result, services may not use interpreters in all cases.

Women can find that friends, family members and even their children are called upon to interpret for them, despite the sensitive nature of the interaction. This was reported in relation to government services such as police, hospitals, child safety services and the courts as well as by community agencies. Women considered that, generally speaking, all services should use professional interpreters in family violence and sexual assault situations.

Participants also highlighted issues around availability of interpreters from small language groups and especially from new and emerging communities. Some CALD communities can grow very quickly in a short time due to factors such as changes to Australia's Humanitarian Programme. As a result, there may be few or no qualified interpreters and translators in their languages. More commonly, there is low availability of female interpreters for sexual assault situations and of face-to-face interpreting in regional and rural areas.

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Participants recognised that interpreting and translating in situations of family violence and sexual assault can be very challenging. In some cultures and languages, there is no agreed word or phrase for concepts such as domestic violence or sexual assault within marriage. In addition, participants who were also interpreters noted that some interpreters avoid interpreting on such matters due to the confronting nature of the work and the risk to the interpreter of vicarious trauma. Such interpreters are often from the same or similar background as the client and find their own trauma is triggered through the interpreting session.

In relation to raising professional standards, women were particularly concerned when interpreters appeared to take a personal view by inserting their opinions into the woman's statements or arguing with the woman over what is appropriate to say. Furthermore, women noted instances where interpreters have distorted statements so that incidents of violence in their community are not exposed. Not only is this misleading, but it can have damaging effects on women seeking assistance or providing evidence of a criminal offence.

Some interpreters were reported as trying to influence women and encourage them to stay in a violent relationship. This is not an appropriate role for an interpreter. Participants felt that interpreters should not try to instruct victims of violence on how to manage their situation but rather, they should translate correctly so that these women can receive appropriate advice.

There are instances where interpreters are known to the victim and also to the perpetrator. This raises significant concerns around conflict of interest and doubts about whether they can remain objective when translating for a victim of violence.

*“Some interpreters don't interpret – rather they try to solve the family problem and they're not qualified for that.”*

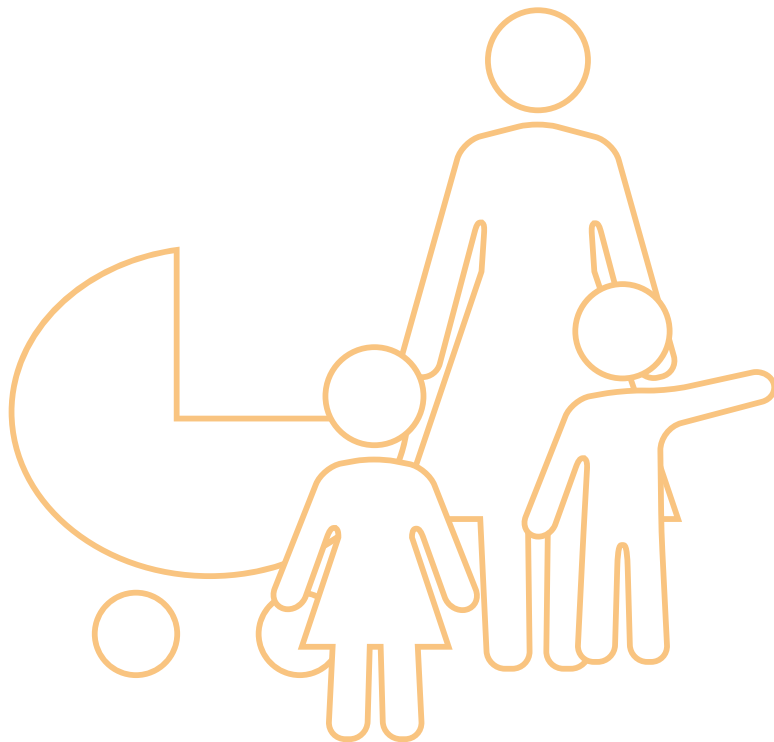
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Participants were often knowledgeable about the interpreting and translating industry. They had realistic expectations about the professional standards that could be expected from interpreters working within an irregular and casualised work force and with few incentives for unaccredited interpreters to gain or upgrade qualifications. As a result, they made positive suggestions for raising standards that they felt might be achievable.

These included domestic violence training so that interpreters are more aware of what constitutes appropriate and professional behaviour and show a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in family violence situations. They also suggested training bilingual workers, adding interpreting content to training for family violence workers, and recruiting more female interpreters.



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**Hearing her voice:  
report from the kitchen table conversations with culturally and  
linguistically diverse women on violence against women and  
their children**

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## 9. Improving police interventions

Improving police interventions in domestic and family violence and sexual assault situations was also a strong focus of every kitchen table conversation. Participants agreed that effective policing has a critical role to play in assisting women experiencing violence, conducting investigations to support prosecutions, laying charges against offenders, and supporting the woman's safety and wellbeing. Police also play an important role in holding perpetrators to account and preventing further crimes. Furthermore, police may attend violent incidents in which children are present and determine whether the child is at risk of harm and needs to be referred to other services such as child protection services.

Nevertheless, improving police interventions can be challenging, partly due to negative pre-migration experiences with police. In some cases, people from CALD backgrounds have been traumatised by the actions of police in their country of origin and are uncomfortable with Australian police unless those police demonstrate they are a safe option.

Contacting police can place a victim at greater risk, as this is usually the time when the frequency and intensity of violence can escalate. In some states and territories, there can also be consequences to calling the police that women are not aware of, such as removal of the perpetrator from the home or an automatic referral to child protection services. In addition, women can feel their community is likely to disapprove of violence being reported to police. A combination of these factors means that many women are reluctant to call police unless at the point of crisis or in acute danger. As a result, incidents where women had called the police and the police did not respond loomed large in the thinking of participants.

*“Women can be blamed by the community if they go to the police.”*

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Inconsistencies in use of interpreters were clearly identified as a serious issue in relation to police. Like other services, police experience challenges in finding professional interpreters outside business hours. Police are often called out late at night or in the early hours of the morning when few interpreters are available. Alternatively, police may have a limited budget for interpreting services and may not use interpreters for all cases and at all times, despite state and territory government commitments to access and equity policies.

*“Frontline police need to be trained in recognition of family violence, referral to support services and use of interpreters.”*

Women reported a number of challenges with law enforcement. They expressed particular frustration with police in relation to intervention orders. They felt that failures to comply with orders were not always pursued by police, with many breaches not followed up and warrants left outstanding.

Another challenge identified was the perception police do not always understand the cultural contexts of violence against women. Women from African communities, in particular, felt that police do not treat their experiences with sensitivity. At times, they feel they have experienced racism. In the event that victims of violence feel disrespected or mistreated by police, they tend to lose trust in law enforcement.

Lack of diversity in the police force was also considered a major concern. Some participants indicated that more female officers are necessary to handle sensitive cases and more police from CALD backgrounds should be recruited. It was suggested that more women would seek assistance from police if they were confident their experiences and cultures would be understood and respected. Multicultural community liaison officer programmes and similar measures received positive feedback for their role in helping police to understand cultural issues, gain support and trust, facilitate communication and strengthen links with CALD communities.

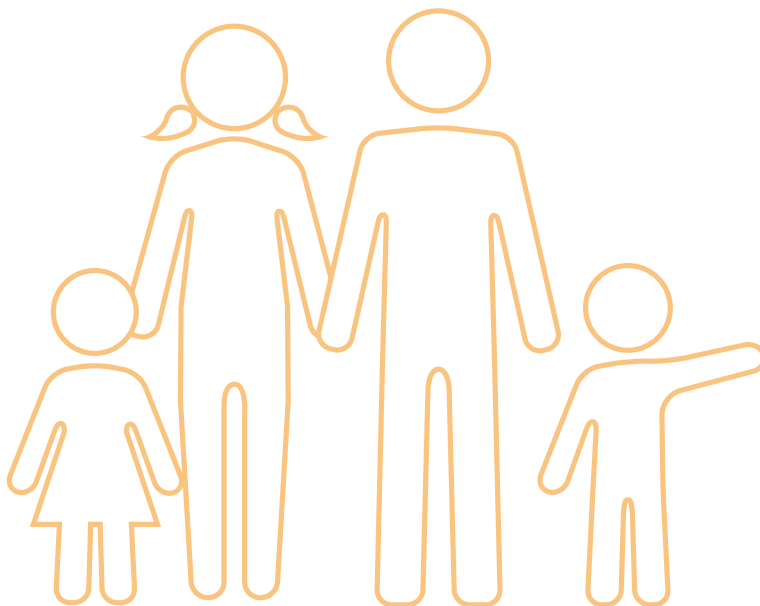
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Participants made a number of suggestions for improving police interventions in family violence and sexual assault situations. These ranged from mandatory use of professional interpreters to cultural competency training. In some communities, police had clearly formed positive partnerships with local CALD leaders and workers and this had helped to reduce mistrust of police and support more culturally appropriate interventions.

*“There is a need to build on positive initiatives such as partnerships between police and community workers.”*



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## 10. Engaging and educating CALD men to inspire behaviour change

A recurring theme was the need to engage and educate CALD men to reduce violence against women. Participants felt that working to change the attitudes of CALD men and to establish specific perpetrator interventions is critical to making progress. Women were critical of the general tendency to direct anti-violence messages towards women when, from their perspective, it is mainly men who need to change their attitudes and behaviour.

*“CALD men need to be part of the solution.”*

A number of participants noted that engaging CALD men on the issue of violence is particularly challenging due to culturally ingrained gender roles. Some men from CALD backgrounds find it difficult to adjust to an Australian environment where norms in relation to gender roles can be very different. They can struggle with new experiences such as unemployment and their partner’s access to economic independence. The women saw a need for these men to learn non-violent ways of resolving family conflicts. Participants commented that training for men on ‘healthy relationships’ could be offered in non-threatening environments in order to inspire self-reflection.

*“Some men are happy to update their cars and their sound systems, but they don’t want to update their attitudes.”*

Despite the importance of engaging with CALD men, there was limited consensus on the best ways to do so. In some cases, women saw a need for a harder-edged approach by government to family violence and sexual assault. Given the criminality of much of the behaviour, they felt that governments should adopt a compliance approach to violence and abusive behaviour, especially through the suspension of Centrelink benefits for repeat offenders who do not participate in perpetrator intervention programmes.

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A key observation was there are generally few or no culturally appropriate perpetrator programmes for CALD men. Service providers noted the needs of CALD men are generally not met by mainstream perpetrator programmes. Some programmes use interpreters or provide options such as one-on-one sessions. However, more commonly, CALD men are screened out through the intake process due to the difficulties envisaged.

CALD-friendly family support programmes are more available, but are not appropriate for families gripped by violence. Women thought that CALD-specific perpetrator intervention programmes could be created for CALD men, both voluntary and court ordered, including programmes specifically aimed at perpetrators of sexual assault.

Women saw a need for intervening early in the formation of male attitudes and took a particularly positive view of proposals to embed education for healthy and respectful relationships in schools and the Australian curriculum. They felt the exploration of these topics could begin in primary schools, and increase in complexity to include discussion of how to respond to violence in the home and issues of sexual consent, as the children progress to high school.

They also felt the most effective way to educate adult CALD men is for community leaders who are non-violent to lead by example. If well-respected CALD men were to lead by example, speak out against violence and support the need for change in the community, more men would listen and take steps to change their behaviour.

Others saw a need for positive media messages, which place the responsibility for stopping violence on men rather than on women. They felt that simple slogans such as 'real men don't bash' could send a powerful message and leave a lasting impression on men. Media messaging could be accompanied by advocacy delivered by men, for men, to send a message that violence against women is a shameful act and not condoned by the community.

At some conversations, this became a broader proposal for such leaders to become champions for women's rights. Women suggested communities could establish a network of CALD male advocates for gender equality similar to or as part of the White Ribbon campaign. They thought this might encourage generational change, as the younger generation of boys receives encouragement from leaders that they admire and consider to be their mentors.

*“Explore what it means to be a male without using violence.”*



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## 11. Recognising the intersectionality of issues for CALD women

Recognising intersectionality means recognising that women may experience violence and abuse in varying configurations and to varying degrees of intensity due to factors such as race, ethnicity, country of origin, class, sexuality, age, disability and other factors. For a number of reasons, participants felt that CALD women arriving in Australia as refugees, as young people, or with disabilities may be more vulnerable to domestic and family violence and sexual assault. Their experiences of violence may also be more complex and may go unnoticed by the broader community.

Participants emphasised that recognising intersectionality of issues for CALD women is important to establishing the kinds of cross-sector collaboration necessary for addressing violence against women.

### Women from refugee backgrounds

It is common for refugee women to take time to adjust to life in Australia. The settlement process may be highly stressful, particularly if pre-migration experiences include lengthy periods of deprivation, uncertain accommodation in camps, physical and sexual violence, or torture and trauma. The effects of this violence may continue after migration.

In the case of asylum seekers, many have endured dangerous journeys to escape their country of origin. Upon arriving in Australia they may feel uncertain about their visa status and fear being sent to an onshore or offshore detention centre. Considering these circumstances, some women do not report violence they experience in Australia.

Refugee women may consider family violence and abuse to be normal or less concerning than other issues they may be facing. Others are powerfully affected by living with male refugees who excuse their use of violence with reference to their past suffering and current settlement challenges.

*“Our men are affected by trauma and stress from war — this makes them angry.”*

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## Young people

While adolescent dating violence has become a key issue in the broader Australian community, young CALD women expressed the view that they are more vulnerable to family violence and to abusive and controlling behaviours from parents, siblings and other family members, than from intimate partners. In general, they are discouraged from casual dating so they may not establish intimate relationships until they are much older.

Young women expressed frustration that family violence services are designed principally for adult women experiencing intimate partner violence. On the whole, they sought alternative support from friends or from CALD youth services rather than from mainstream domestic violence services.

Young women also described the effects of parental expectations and community pressure to marry young and have children early. In contrast, they aspired to finish their education, including higher education, and establish careers before marrying. They felt that education and financial independence would empower them and prevent violence from occurring in their own future relationships and feared this option becoming closed to them.

*“Education is the key to empowering CALD women.”*

Service providers suggested that many adolescents who use violence in the home have been exposed to family violence as children. They emphasised the importance of ensuring young people from CALD backgrounds have role models who respect gender equality and reject violence. In the absence of such role models, violence may be normalised in their families and communities.

Other participants expressed concerns that young people can rely on media and pornography as a source of information about sex, particularly in communities where sex education is discouraged and sexual matters are not openly discussed. They considered that popular culture has become overly sexualised and sexist, with young people becoming confused about what constitutes a normal and respectful relationship. There were fears that this could lead to young people perpetrating sexual assault and other forms of violence or becoming a victim of violence.

Overall, it was felt young people are particularly vulnerable to perpetrating and accepting violence as they are still forming their ideas about life and relationships. Prevention strategies which educate young people from CALD backgrounds about gender equality and respectful relationships may be effective as long as they are delivered in culturally appropriate ways.

*“Encourage young people to learn the positive side of their culture and link it into Aussie culture.”*

### **Women with disabilities**

Particular challenges for CALD women with disabilities were highlighted during the conversations. Women with disabilities were felt to be highly vulnerable to violence, especially where they have developmental or intellectual disabilities as well as physical disabilities.

Participants with disabilities highlighted that, in addition to their vulnerability to common forms of violence, they could also be subjected to specific forms of abuse such as withholding of food, medicine and disability aids, use of sedation and restraints, and forced sterilisation. Quite often, victims are dependent on the perpetrator for care and assistance and are therefore reluctant to report violence. In some cases, disability payments are paid directly to the carer, particularly if the carer is a family member. Financial abuse may be used to control people with disabilities and prevent them from speaking about the violence inflicted on them.

*“Emotional abuse is when carers use threats like: No one else will love you.”*

Participants indicated that some women with disabilities are unable to communicate violence is occurring or are not believed by family members or workers, which can have adverse effects on the victim. Disability support workers are not trained adequately to recognise violence.

Women with disabilities escaping violence may also find it particularly challenging to secure crisis accommodation due to a lack of physical accessibility in the form of ramps, lifts, accessible showers and toilets and appropriately trained support staff.

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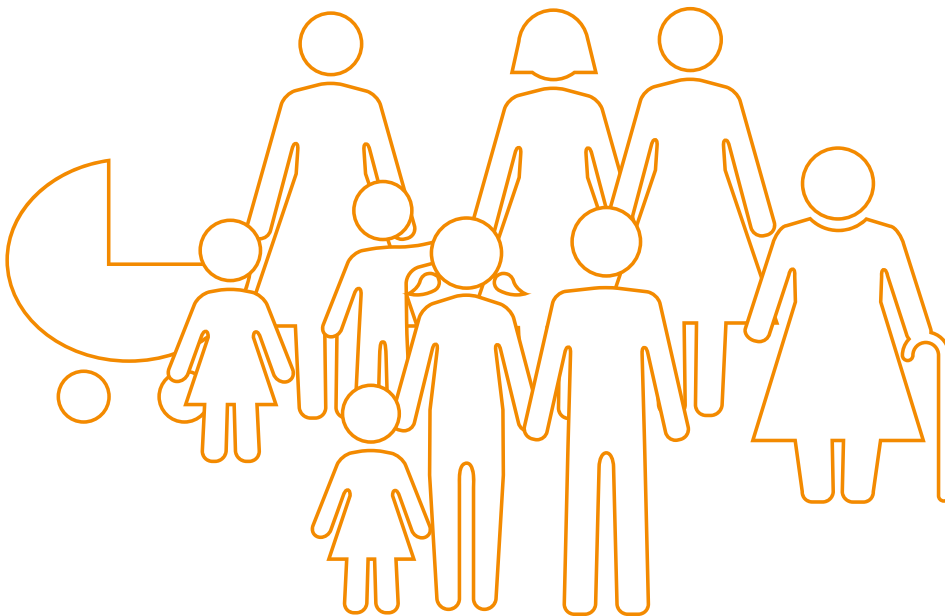
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Many domestic and family violence support services are not equipped for CALD women with disabilities and are not able to respond to their particular needs.

Participants noted that it is difficult to collect data on women with disabilities experiencing violence since abuse may occur in non-traditional 'domestic' settings, such as in institutionalised care. In these environments, violence experienced by people with disabilities is frequently not identified or responded to effectively.

In addition, while there are perceptions CALD women prefer to be supported within their own family and community, women with disabilities can experience significant discrimination and stigma within CALD communities. As a result, they can be socially isolated and have few friends and support networks to help them speak about their experiences and seek assistance.

Participants wanted to see more consultations with CALD women with disabilities informing both effective policy and anti-violence campaigns that empower women with disabilities to speak up and seek help.



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## Conclusion

The kitchen table conversations with CALD women have laid a strong foundation for understanding diverse experiences of violence. This report will inform further, focused consultations with key stakeholders on how best to move ahead in improving women's safety.

DSS would like to thank all those who led and participated in the conversations, ensuring the voices of CALD women are heard as we work together to reduce violence against women and their children.

*“Nothing for us, without us.”*

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### **Links**

A copy of this report, as well as accessible information on the Second Action Plan, and a fact sheet on how the Second Action Plan is working to support CALD communities and documents translated into a range of community languages can be found on the DSS website at [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au).

### **Do you need help?**

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic and family violence or sexual assault, get help by calling:

- The police on **000** if you, a child, or another person is in immediate danger
- 1800RESPECT – **1800 737 732**

### **Do you need an interpreter?**

Call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on **131 450**.

### **Contact us**

If you would like more information on the kitchen table conversations, please email [CALD.womens.safety@dss.gov.au](mailto:CALD.womens.safety@dss.gov.au). Please note that if you wish to remain anonymous, your confidentiality will be respected.



NATIONAL PLAN TO

**REDUCE VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN  
AND  
THEIR CHILDREN**