ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria

Women Surviving Violence

Cultural Competence
in Critical Services

ECCV Policy Research Paper

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria. It is a community based, member driven organisation committed to empowering people from diverse multicultural backgrounds. We are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For over 35 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

The organisation advocates and lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities in areas like human rights, access and equity, improving services, racism and discrimination, community harmony, employment, education and training, health and community services, disability, child protection law and justice, and arts and culture.

We also help build the capacity of new and emerging communities and develop policy on a wide range of issues including undertaking original research in collaboration with major tertiary institutions

Contents

Acknowledgements

Acronyms & Abbreviations

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria	ECCV
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse	CALD
Non-English speaking background	NES
Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship	DIAC
State Government of Victoria Department of Human Services	DHS
Australian Bureau of Statistics	ABS
The Victorian Health Promotion Foundation	VicHealth
InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	inTouch
Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups	VICSEG
International Violence Against Women Survey	IVAWS

Foreword

The ECCV is very pleased to be able to present the following Policy Research Paper, something we would not have been able to do without the generosity of the many women who contributed their time and expertise to this project.

Although there is no evidence to suggest that male to female violence is more endemic or profound in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds are often misperceived, essentialised and depicted in ways that serve to obscure the complexity of their experiences and underestimate their agency, strength, and skills of advocacy and activism.

This paper aims to alert policymakers and program developers to the innovative practice models and expert knowledge that can be found in our multicultural communities, where women and other stakeholders are working tirelessly to ensure that their mothers, sisters and daughters and friends are safe and free to reach their full potential.

As we begin to make the important journey mapped out by *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children 2012-2015*, we hope that the case studies and recommendations provided here will provide insight and inspiration.

We also hope that the following pages will provide some indication of the invaluable innovation, imagination and determination that is to be found among the dynamic and diverse women and communities of this State.

It gives me great pleasure to commend this report to you.

Joe Caputo OAM JP
Chairperson

Executive Summary

This paper highlights that, while there is no evidence that family violence is more endemic, or profound in CALD communities, when it does occur, the Australian justice and protection services are not adequately accounting for the additional complexity that can be embedded within CALD women's experiences of violence. These service gaps have led to lower rates of reporting and disadvantage in access.

Responding to this disadvantage will require investment in strategies to expand the options available to CALD women.

Strategies highlighted in the paper include:

- Developing cultural competence within critical services;

- Supporting community owned prevention programs, acknowledging the expertise of CALD women;

- Strengthening the capacity of services run through community and migrant resource centres, as a means of ensuring a diversity of services; and

- Investing in engagement programs to enhance familiarity between State service providers and CALD communities.

For these strategies to succeed, CALD communities will need enhanced support and resources. That is an ideal and sustainable way to expand the options available to women leaving violence, to prevent future violence and to combat disadvantage in access to support servcies.

Summary of recommendations

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria recommends:

1. That the State Government creates multiple pathways for CALD women experiencing family violence to find safety in the short, medium and long term.

2. That a Victorian cultural competence 'tool kit' is developed for family violence response service delivery agencies, to encourage providers to actively reflect on their values, attitudes and cultural responsiveness.

3. That all State Government Agencies and related service delivery agencies embrace the fundamental principles set out in the 2008 *Victorian Government Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework* and recognise their universal value.

4. That alliances are strengthened between the advocates for gender equality in CALD communities, State Government agencies and related service delivery agencies.

5. That the State Government resources and strengthens community based CALD women's leadership and family violence prevention programs to build on existing support structures and pathways.

6. That the State Government takes action to build the capacity of ethno-specific organisations and migrant resource centres, building strong family violence service capacity into a diversity of settings.

7. That service delivery agencies, responding to family violence, take time to invest in partnerships to enhance their familiarity and build relationships with CALD communities.

1. Introduction

Family violence is the leading contributor to disease, disability and death for women aged 15-45 in Victoria (VicHealth 2004; 8). Violence drains the social and economic capacity of Australia and for this reason it is an issue of national significance.

This report builds on the identified needs and issues raised during Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) consultations addressing Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women and Children 2012-2015). It will discuss the additional barriers that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women face when accessing family violence justice and protection services, clearly define cultural competence as a key element in addressing these barriers, and highlight promising areas of investment and engagement. The overall aims are:

- To strengthen the capacity of CALD communities to respond to family violence; and

- To enhance cultural competence within organisations, such as the police, the family courts, crisis response counselling, refuges and related service delivery agencies.

- To demonstrate that CALD communities have a key role in educating family violence, justice and protections services.

The ECCV proudly recognises that Australia is continuously shaped and strengthened by its multicultural reality; a fact that is also acknowledged across government departments. As has been observed by the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), "[m]igration makes a major contribution to today's society. It is addressing the challenges of an ageing population by increasing workforce participation, adding to productivity and boosting economic growth" (DIAC 2011c; 1). The ECCV encourages all levels of government to stand strong in their commitment to multicultural vitality, commending:

- The Multicultural Victoria Act 2004 and the Multicultural Victoria Bill 2011;

- The Australian Government's Multicultural Policy 2011-The People of Australia; and

- Australian Government's Access and Equity Strategy and Framework 2008-10 (ECCV 2011; 2).

In the context of family violence, the ECCV believes "it is time to shift our focus from simple multicultural definitions about 'the right to maintain one's culture and identity' to how Australian policies, programs and services are better able to respond to cultural and linguistic diversity" (Ibid; 1).

In negotiating this shift, this paper will draw on the spirit of the ECCV aim, to "create inclusive community education methodologies and pathways [that respond to family violence]" (ECCV 2012a). To achieve this we will need to draw out the elements of the multicultural framework that prioritise the rights of CALD communities to full social participation and justice.

2. Mind the Gap: Prevalence, reporting and access barriers

Family violence is vested in gendered applications of power, which manifest in different ways, in different cultural settings. Family violence is often not reported by women of CALD backgrounds for very legitimate reasons (inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch) 2010; 7 & Chadwick et al 2009; 5). While there is now academic consensus that the prevalence of family violence is consistent across culture, ethnicity, language group and socio-economic class, unfortunately the support women receive is not as undiscriminating (Polski 2011; 11). This section will reflect on the complexity embedded within CALD women's experiences of family violence and the associated gaps in support services. There are common barriers that have led to lower rates of reporting and disadvantage in access to justice and protection services.

For reference, a limited selection of statistics can be found on the prevalence of family violence within CALD, refugee background and non-English speaking communities. However, the following figures can only reflect violence that is reported and recorded; resulting in some statistics suggesting that women from non-English speaking background are over-represented in family violence support services and others signalling the opposite.

The Australian component of the 2004 *International Violence Against Women Survey* (IVAWS) compares the experiences of violence among women of English speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds. This study found that violence is experienced in slightly higher rates within the English speaking population, but highlighted limitations in the available records (Makkai et al 2004; 32). The 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS*) Personal Safety Survey* compares prevalence of domestic violence between Australian born and overseas born population groups. The study found that 1% of the Australian born population experienced family violence in the preceding 12 months, compared with 0.8% of the population with a non-English speaking country of origin and 0.5% with an English speaking country of origin (ABS 2006; 15). Again, it is noted that the preceding statistics hold a "relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution" (Ibid; 15). Comparatively, the client records of the Women's Domestic Service of Victoria indicate that overseas born women of non-English speaking background are over-represented in domestic violence support services. They represent 37.5% of women accessing the service (Bedar et al 2011; 15) and only 17.3% of the total Victorian population (DIAC 2008; 53). If we are to take one message from this collection of statistics, let it be that we need to look beyond whether violence is occurring, towards the way it is experienced by different people and their relative access to critical services. These issues will be explored in the following sections.

2.1 Information barriers

Information on rights and service navigation needs to be delivered with consideration given to appropriate format, language and the timing of delivery (Fisher 2009; 81). In launching *The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy* in 2011, the Australian Government made a commendable commitment to "strengthen its access and equity policies to ensure that government programs and services are responsive to the needs of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse communities" (DIAC 2011b; 5). Following this commitment, DIAC has recognised the need for stronger community support beyond the 6-12 month comprehensive support period (DIAC 2011a; 8).

This recommendation is built on the understanding that settlement in Australia is met with a wave of new information addressing education, the law and a wide range of social services. ECCV consultations with key community stakeholders have highlighted the need for focused attention on the five-year settlement mark. When

the basic needs of arrival have fallen into place and routines have been established, opportunities need to be created for communities to share their cultural needs and receive information on how to ask for help (VicHealth 2009; 51).

The following statements highlight the rush of information during settlement:

"The settlement process is absolutely difficult, this is a new system, new values, and everything is different. It is expected that as soon as you come you will know about this and this and this…Those as the parts where I am thinking, something is missing here" (Multicultural representative, ECCV consultation 2012)

"We do 5 minutes orientation on second day of arrival on domestic violence, when even the jet lag is not gone, along with other things like registering with Centrelink, opening bank account, obtaining Medicare, using ATM card etc. They are given no education on what is Centrelink, what is that money to be used for. That's the way it is... What more can we expect from them?" (Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy worker cited in Venkatraman et al 2010; 49)

It is important to remember that, for all Australians, understanding of legal rights and social support services develops gradually. We incrementally become more familiar with such information and services through a myriad of life experiences, including school programs, informal discussion with parents and peers and direct interaction with social welfare as students and young workers. Literature discussing legal information barriers in migrant and refugee communities indicates that many women do not know where to begin (Women's Legal Services NSW 2007; 20). To ensure new and emerging communities in Australia receive equal access to social support, information should be shaped for delivery via community networks, ethno-specific media sources and other familiar sites of information and assistance (Ibid; 20).

2.2 Language barriers

The availability and consistent use of interpreters remains a priority issue, as gaps in this area or the use of multiple interpreters can create significant problems, including lost information. If an interpreter is not present when police are first called to attend a violent incident, issues can emerge surrounding different accounts of events and assumptions that the woman has already been briefed (inTouch 2010; 21). It is important to recognise that this break down in communications can lead to a subsequent break down in trust.

On a case management level, our consultations with key community stakeholders highlighted the need for professional development training for working with interpreters. We recommend that these training opportunities are made readily available to all service providers who may be called upon to work with interpreters. If a service provider is ill-at-ease, it will impact on their ability to establish a trusting relationship with their client. At a minimum, we encourage service providers to watch *Hints and tips for working with interpreters*, a short clip developed by DIAC (2011d).[1]

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[1]Hints and tips for working with interpreters is available at:http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/help_with_translating/promotional-dvd.htm

2.3 Housing concerns

In 2012, the Footscray Community Legal Centre launched *Making it Home: Refugee Housing in Melbourne's West*, which highlighted that services engaged by survivors of violence do not end with the police and the family courts (Berta 2012). Studies show that the most common causal factor in female homelessness is family violence (Homelessness Australia 2012 & Cutler et al 2008). Coupled with the additional barriers faced by CALD communities in securing tenancy, housing services are thrown into the centre of crisis response. *Making it Home: Refugee Housing in Melbourne's West* (Berta 2012; 19) addresses the housing disadvantage faced by refugee communities in the short, medium and long term. Awal's story, republished below, highlights the consequences that housing insecurity can have for survivors of family violence, and the importance of including the housing services in this discussion.

Awal's story: Seeking safety

Awal is a single mother of 4 dependent children who arrived in Australia from Sudan 5 years ago. Awal was referred to our clinic by a domestic violence worker because her 16-year-old daughter, Katie, was being verbally and physically abused by her ex-boyfriend, Peter. Peter made verbal threats to burn down Awal's house, threatened Katie and her 3-year-old brother with a knife and caused serious property damage during several altercations at Awal's house.

Police obtained an intervention order on Katie's behalf 6 months earlier, however Peter continued his threats. Several weeks before approaching our clinic, Peter followed Katie home from the train station, strangled her until she fell unconscious and stole her handbag. Awal approached our service for assistance in breaking her 12 month lease because she feared for her family's safety. There were 6 months remaining on Awal's lease. We advised Awal that we could assist her to get out of the lease, but she would need to access housing services for assistance to secure alternative housing.

Our clinic negotiated a lease break at no cost to Awal, allowing her 4 weeks to find housing. Awal immediately sought the assistance of her local housing service. The housing worker advised Awal that she would need to find private rental accommodation on her own. Our clinic spoke to the housing worker and explained that Awal spoke little English, was highly distressed and had no capacity to secure private rental accommodation without assistance. At the end of the notice period, Awal had nowhere to go.

The housing agency paid $1,000 to accommodate Awal and her 4 children in a one bedroom motel room as emergency housing for a week and continued to refer her to private rental. Awal was forced to pay for the second week at the motel from her Centrelink income and went into deficit. On the third week, the housing agency paid the motel, although Awal had great difficulty arranging it. On the fourth week, a different housing service intervened. They nominated Awal for a transitional housing property and she moved in several weeks later. Awal is now receiving complex case support from a settlement agency and her life has improved.

Source: Berta, L. (2012*). 'Making it home: Refugee housing in Melbourne's west',* Footscray Community Legal Centre. Footscray. pp. 15. *Awal's courageous story was republished with the permission of Footscray Community Legal Centre.*

2.4 Social isolation

A significant barrier to all women leaving abusive family environments is their potential to be socially isolated. When women have limited access to social networks outside their immediate family, this barrier can be exacerbated. In these circumstances it is essential not to trivialize concerns or to ignore statements such as the following:

"Reporting to the police is like 'opening up your house' and there is shame in divulging 'family secrets'. 'If I leave my husband where will I go, what will I do, what will my family back home say?'" (inTouch 2010; 16).

"[Just imagine], I have no extended family networks, I have no money, I have no home and I will lose any community support that gives me my social linkages and ability to participate. . . [We need to recognise that] we are dealing with a far greater level of complexity than we understand." (Multicultural representative, ECCV consultation 2012)

"..Traditional models of village are gone. Village was the support for the family. Informal counselling came from village and extended families. Even debriefing happened at extended family level. Here there is no family counselling that is provided in the models that they know. Office bound counselling is scary. It's interpreted as 'something wrong' with me" (Sri Lankan, Female Participant cited in Venkatraman 2010; 44)

If the goal is to genuinely enhance safety, we need to consider what options can be provided for safety in the short, medium and long-term. Given the challenges that can confront CALD women leaving a relationship, safety in the short-term may involve strategies to enhance their community networks, or to build a new skill base. Safety in the medium term may involve engaging with a familiar service in the community or multicultural resource sector.

In carrying out Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children (2012-2015), it would be beneficial to explore multiple pathways to address family violence by providing opportunities for CALD women and community groups to make recommendations in this area.

2.5 Negative Stereotyping & Misrepresentation

In addition to personal concerns relating to judicial access, some women are unwilling to seek support due to fear of cultural, religious or ethnic misrepresentation. In order to feel secure in seeking out personal support, CALD women need to be assured that reporting will not contribute to negative stereotyping of their community and culture (Doney 2011; 17). There has been significant political discussion around anti-racism strategies; the most recent development being the *National Anti-Racism Strategy* (Australian Human Rights Commission 2012). We hope that this strategy will help to create an improved quality of life for all Australians. In particular, we need to respond to the concerns articulated in the following statements:

"Since September 11th, it has become increasingly difficult to work on issues of family violence without communities feeling that they are the target of a collective racial assault" (Bedar et al 2011; 27)

"If my community is being threatened externally, the last thing I'm going to do is draw attention to it." (Multicultural representative, ECCV consultation 2012)

"You can have the best legal information and education program in the world, and women and communities can know everything about the law and their rights but if they are frightened because of the racism that is in the media and the community, then they just won't use the law to deal with domestic violence. You have to understand that the last thing victims will want to do is to make it worse by letting the media say that now these communities are more violent than other communities. It really does have a big impact" (Community Educator, Justice for Refugees cited in Dimopoulos 2010; 4)

In the context of family violence, we have found that negative stereotyping creates personal barriers for women leaving violence and wider barriers to the willingness of communities to openly discuss and engage with the issue. The ECCV recognises racism as a recurring barrier to access, positioning cultural safety as a central element of appropriate support services.

In this area service providers have a significant opportunity to act as champions, by ensuring that CALD women and the general public understand that violence against women is not caused by culture, but by men, in all communities, who make the unacceptable choice to be violent. This is an important step in breaking down myths that particular cultures are more violent than others.

2.5 Immigration

Just as the relative income or economic status of the victim is frequently used by perpetrators of family violence, as a means of exerting control, uncertainty in immigration status can narrow the path to safety. Particular concern has been raised over the heightened vulnerability of women on family visas and those who hold secondary visa status. In these cases the woman's residency status is dependent on her relationship with her sponsor (partner/parent) or with the primary visa holder (inTouch 2010; 17-18). There is a recognised risk that this level of dependence can place additional pressure on the settlement process, leading to power imbalances within the family, and leaving the dependent partner vulnerable to threats of deportation.

In the early 1990s, Family Violence Provisions (FVPs) were incorporated into the *Migration Regulations 1994* (Cth) (Immigrant Advice and Rights Centre 2011; 1). Their aim is to ensure that women, within the visa streams mentioned above are offered separate permanent residency applications when family violence is evident, this is done with a view to ensuring that family violence is not endured due to fears of deportation (The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009; 97). Whilst FVPs offer valuable support, unfortunately barriers still exist. A major concern is the effective delivery of information, clearly outlining the FVP eligibility requirements and application process. Studies indicate that many women who could be protected by these provisions are not even aware of their existence (Ibid; 97). Additionally, the FVPs are not currently applicable to women on student or subclass 457 visas (inTouch 2010; 17-18). The following table, developed by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, highlights high numbers of women residing in Australia on

temporary visas (Poljski 2011; 19). The Australian Law Reform Commission's *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws - Improving Legal Frameworks* report recommends an expansion of the FVPs to consistently account for vulnerability across different visa streams (2011; 499-503).

Figure1: Number of permanent and temporary visas issued to women from non-English speaking countries 2006-10 (primary visa holders only)

Type of permanent visa	Number issued to women	Top non-English speaking (NES) countries
Refugee and humanitarian visa	19,763	Iraq, Burma (Myanmar), Afghanistan
Skilled visa	144,910	China, India, South Africa
Family	127,733	
Spouse	*108,889*	China, India, Philippines
Parent	*14,000*	China, India, South Africa
Other	4,844	
TOTAL PERMANENT	**292, 406**	
Type of temporary visa	**Number issued to women**	**Top NES countries**
Subclass 457	157,068	India, South Africa, Philippines
Student*	320,460*	China, India, South Korea
Bridging (excluding those for asylum seekers)	74,750**	China, India, South Korea
TOTAL TEMPOARY	**552,278**	
TOTAL NEWLY-ARRIVED	**844,684***	China, India, Philippines

Source: Poljski, C. (2011). 'On her way: Primary prevention of violence against immigrant and refugee women in Australia', *Multicultural Centre for Women's Health.* Melbourne. pp. 19

2.6 Misunderstanding of the concept of domestic violence

Family violence is not culturally determined; however, ongoing variance in attitudes towards the concept of family violence highlights the need for community owned and culturally appropriate education strategies. The VicHealth *National Community Attitudes Survey on Violence Against Women* found distinctions between the general community and selective CALD (SCALD) survey samples attitudes towards the justification of physical force (VicHealth 2009; 38-41). This distinction is highlighted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Are there circumstances in which physical force can be justified?
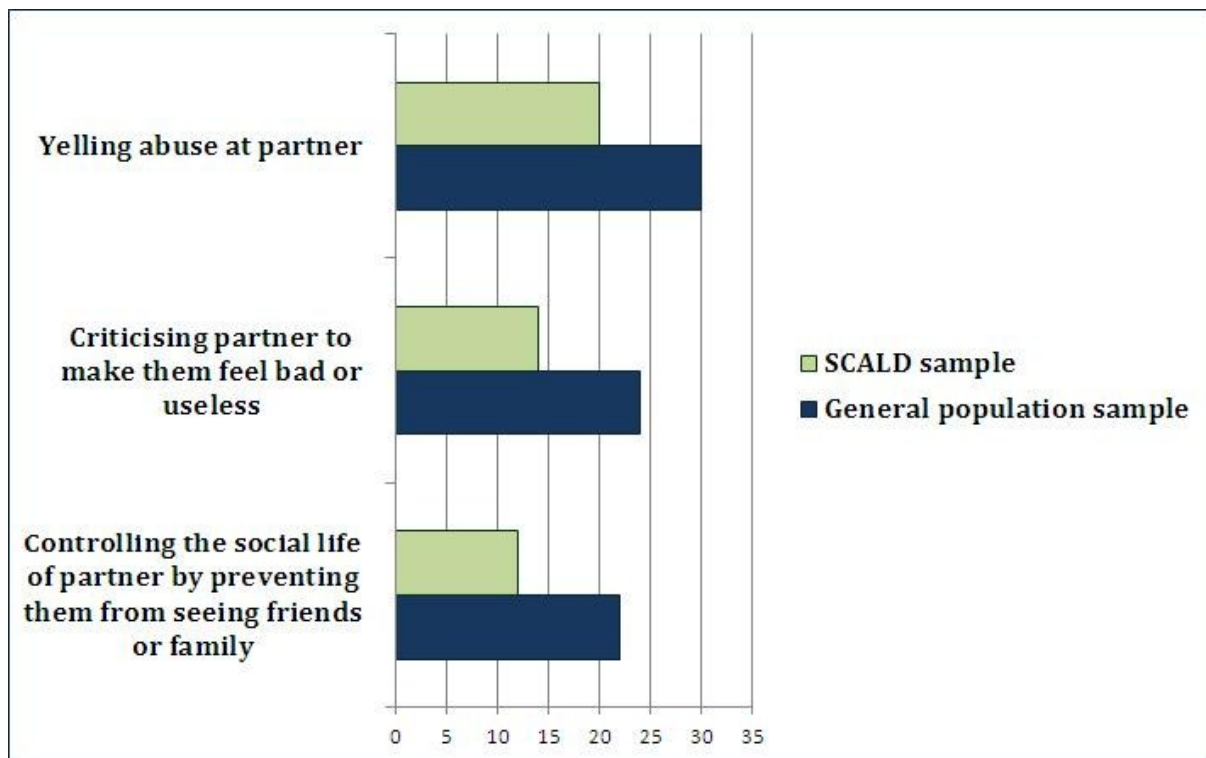
Source: VicHealth (2009). *National Community Attitudes Survey on Violence against Women: Summary of findings.* pp. 38-41. This table displays the percentage of respondents that stated physical force could be justified in the following circumstances.

An important conclusion drawn by the 2009 VicHealth survey was that gender equality is the most powerful determining factor in an individual's attitudes on violence against women. This finding was consistent across the general community and SCALD surveys (Ibid; 54-56). This link is outlined in Figure 3. It is also recognised that to ensure national strategies for the promotion of gender equality do not isolate sections of the Australian population, we need to assess whether communication campaigns are culturally inclusive and reinforced by opportunities for community-based advocacy work (Ibid; 63).

The following sections of this paper highlight the value of strengthening the movement for gender equality from the ground up by:

- Building alliances with the advocates for gender equality in CALD communities;

- Strengthening their movement to ensure that they influences the strongholds of patriarchy; and

- Developing an understanding of the common elements of human rights across cultural value systems.

Figure 3: Interpretations of violence and attitudes towards gender equality

	Support for gender equity					
	Low (N=2,271)		Medium (N=4,542)		High (N=3,291)	
Are these behaviours 'always' domestic violence/ violence against women?	%	95 CI	%	95 CI	%	95 CI
Slapping or pushing partner to cause harm or fear**	56	53-58	72	70-73	83	81-84
Forcing partner to have sex**	70	68-73	84	83-85	94	93-95
Throwing or smashing objects near the partner to frighten or threaten them**	62	59-65	75	73-76	84	82-85
Threatening to hurt family members to scare or control partner**	75	73-77	85	84-86	91	90-92
Yelling abuse at partner**	28	26-31	38	37-40	49	46-51
Controlling the social life of partner by preventing them from seeing friends or family**	39	37-42	51	49-53	65	63-67
Criticising partner to make them feel bad or useless**	35	32-37	49	47-50	63	61-65
Controlling partner by denying them money**	23	21-25	33	31-34	49	47-51
Are these behaviours violence against women?						
Stalking**	54	51-57	66	64-68	78	76-79
Harassment by phone**	45	43-48	56	54-58	68	66-70
Harassment by email**	41	38-44	51	49-53	63	61-65

Source: VicHealth (2009). *National Community Attitudes Survey on Violence against Women: Summary of findings.* pp. 55
Note: 95 CI (95% confidence interval) indicates the probability is 0.95 that the true population figure lies within this range
**Gender equity difference within sample significant to $p<0.01$

3. Key areas of exploration: Addressing the barriers and expanding options for CALD women

Drawing from a range of available literature, as well as discussions with leaders and experts in the field, the following sections will:

- Investigate the theory of cultural competence;

- Highlight the importance of supporting community owned programs, acknowledging the expertise of CALD women;

- Recommend greater valuing of services run through community and migrant resource centres, as a means of ensuring a diversity of services; and

- Recommend strategies of best practice engagement between State service providers and CALD communities to enhance familiarity.

A common theoretical grounding is threaded through each of these key areas. Each piece fits together to illuminate the path towards enhanced cultural competence of crisis response services and strengthened community capacity to address violence (Kim et al 2010; 186).

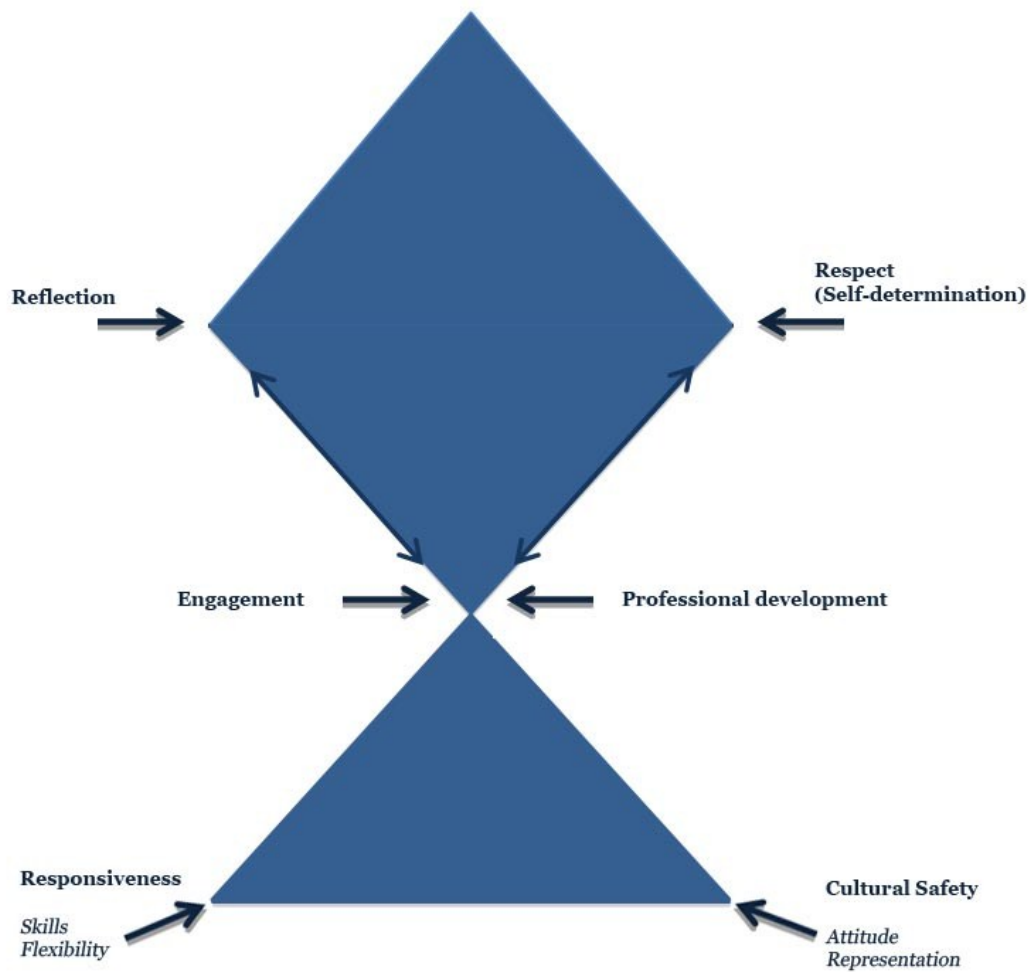# 4. Cultural competence within justice and protection services

From the outset it is important to recognise that cultural competence is not a discrete set of skills. It is a commitment to an ongoing process of reflection and cultural awareness. Sheetal Rana articulates cultural competence as,

> "A process that involves individual practitioners and systems responding to their clients in ways that recognize, value, and respect the clients' cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors" (Rana 2012; 1).

As a starting point, it may be helpful to view cultural competence as a navigation tool, directing service providers to reflect on personal and institutional biases, to support the client's right to identify a service pathway to suit their needs, and to invest in culturally safe and responsive services. This paper takes the position that all services are culturally informed, but additional commitment is required to ensure cultural flexibility.

As outlined in the following section, reflection, respect and responsiveness are essential elements in the provision of culturally competent services.

Figure 4: A pictorial representation of cultural competence

Reflection

Respect
(Self-determination)

Engagement

Professional development

Responsiveness

Skills
Flexibility

Cultural Safety

Attitude
Representation

Source: An original diagram, drawing on the key themes outlined in the State Government of Victoria Department of Human Services (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*

The intention of this diagram is to capture the vivacity of cultural competence. To ensure responsiveness and to foster cultural safety, service providers will need to think on their feet, and most importantly return regularly to the principles of reflection and respect.

4.1 Reflect

This paper takes the position that the fundamental principles of cultural competence can be shared across different service delivery agencies and all cultural groups. For instance, the same principles outlined in the cultural competence diagram could be applied to a police department in Japan responding to the distinct needs of an Australian woman of Anglo-Saxon heritage. With this flexibility in mind, this paper draws on the fundamental principles discussed in the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework.* This framework highlights the importance of building an acute awareness of dominant cultural norms and their impact on minority cultures. This process is described as a "critical cross-cultural skill to limit the influence of one's own cultural bias" (DHS 2008; 28). It is only through reflection that we are able to understand why specific justice and support pathways exist, and in turn, the assumptions made about clients who request alternative options. Our stakeholder consultations highlighted the need for service providers to receive training to enable them to start the process of critical questioning. One participant captured the essence of this process of reflection in the following way:

> *"Cultural competence is continuously reflecting on you own cultural lens and your own cultural biases and stereotypes. . . from the moment we meet, without even knowing it on a conscious level I am beginning to form assumptions about you. That's how we operate as human beings and we don't question that enough. Cultural competency is having the emotional intelligence to question the inferences we make about others and recognising our assumptions are based on our own distorted view of the world." (Multicultural representative, ECCV consultation 2012).*

We advocate that all service-based organisations ask themselves the following questions:

- What are my values?

- What are the values of my organisation?

- Why does Australia have certain laws or processes?

- What assumptions do I make when I meet someone of a different cultural background to my own?

4.2 Respect

Respect and the creation of space for self-determination is a core element of the *Victorian Government Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework* (DHS 2008; 26). In respecting self-determination we acknowledge two vital elements of cultural competence:

- That CALD communities are the experts of their past, present and future; and

- That their culture is a respected part of Australian society.

In the Community Policing Partnership Project[2] report, the Australian Human Rights Commission observes that:

> Australians today are a mixture of peoples who over time have developed a layered and complex culture that draws on many ancestries – often without awareness of their contribution. Cultures interact and produce new perspectives, sensibilities and capacities. Much of Australia's creativity and energy come from these interactions. Such contributions enhance the social fabric of our nation as well as increase economic development" (Australian Human Rights Commission & Australian Multicultural Foundation. 2010; 1).

In the context of family violence prevention, this social contribution is seen in the unique manner in which different CALD communities shape and direct movements for gender equality. In order to enable service providers to draw their understanding of cultural competence from women in CALD communities, the Victorian Government needs to provide the space and resources for these communities to take the lead in prevention, and to shape the discussion in their own words.

4.3 Responsiveness

Services responding to CALD women experiencing family violence have the opportunity to support women on their journey to a safer environment, but it is critical that service providers receive professional development training to confidently and appropriately to meet the needs of their clients. If you zoom into the service provision level, or the community level, the stories convey a very complex picture. The details of this picture are different for every service, every community and to an extent, every family. Despite the complexity and difference, there is benefit in stepping back to capture the common trends. It is in these trends that we begin to understand where flexibility can be incorporated. Some preliminary culturally responsive questions include:

- Where is the most appropriate place to meet with a client?

- Is an interpreter needed?

- Do I have the skills to work with an interpreter?

- Where can I get the support I need to support my client?

A key element of responsiveness, which will be reiterated in section five, is the ability of workers to identify where they need additional support from specialist services. The *Victorian Government Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework* emphasises the critical need for flexible, responsive State services, but also notes that, "no mainstream service can express the voice of an Aboriginal community. No mainstream service can be Aboriginal in its approach" (DHS 2008; 32). This lesson can be carried across and applied to explain the need to create multiple options for CALD women experiencing family violence.

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[2]The Community Policing Partnership Project was launched in 2007 by Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Multicultural Foundation, Australian police services and the community. It sits within a growing portfolio of initiatives run through State Police Departments across Australia.

4.4 Cultural Safety

Embedding cultural safety as a key principle in codes of practice, employee training sessions and in the physical features of support facilities can make a significant difference to accessibility and to the willingness of CALD women to access support. Cultural safety is a demonstration of the understanding that "women need assurance of their cultural and spiritual safety following violence" (Kim et al 2010; 180). Cultural safety is the active recognition that loss of culture and personal identity can have a profound impact on one's sense of self.

In the discussion of cultural safety it is important that we don't make assumptions about what a survivor of family violence will want or need, based on snap shot view of their religion or cultural heritage. In a recent submission regarding the Victoria's Action Plan for Addressing Violence Against Women and Children, the ECCV highlighted the danger in assuming that "female safety and female empowerment are exclusively Western, or Australian values" (ECCV 2012b; 12). With this in mind, the best strategies for ensuring cultural safety have created space for clients to articulate their personal cultural needs without fear of judgement or scrutiny.

4.5 The ECCV recommends:

1. That the State Government creates multiple pathways for CALD women experiencing family violence to find safety in the short, medium and long term.

2. That a Victorian cultural competence 'tool kit' is developed for family violence response service delivery agencies, to encourage providers to actively reflect on their values, attitudes and cultural responsiveness.

3. That all State Government Agencies and related service delivery agencies embrace the fundamental principles set out in the 2008 *Victorian Government Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework* and recognise their universal value.

5. Cultural diversity of the service sector

Fostering cultural competence and safety within policing, justice and crisis support services is vital. At present, support services are limited in their ability to respond to diversity. If adequately resourced, migrant resource centres or local community organisations can assist to fill this service gap.

One of our consultations described the benefits of a 'no wrong door' approach to service provision, whereby comprehensive counselling, legal and general support services can be accessed through the organisation that the woman feels most comfortable engaging with.

Within policy discussions, domestic violence has been identified as a 'wicked' problem, as it demands multiple government and non-government agencies working together to deliver a coordinated response (Ramsey 2007; 6). The details of coordination have been expressed at different times with reference to joined up service delivery, collaborative service delivery, multiagency and whole of government response (Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse 2010; 6). Given the complexity of the issue, greater attention given to ease of navigation between services and common goals is a welcome addition to *The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021* (The National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009). However, collaboration can take a number of forms, and now is the time to critically assess whether the current trajectory is the best way to address the barriers discussed earlier. We encourage action that forges strong links for resource sharing between all services responding to family violence, building strong service capacity into a diversity of settings.

5.1 Connection without co-option: Lessons from the UK

The basis of the UK Home Office multi-agency approach to family violence is that services will be improved through the sharing of resources and models of good practice, but service access can only be ensured if a diversity of organisations are responding to "local needs and conditions" (UK Home Office 2000; 21). This approach retains service coordination, but prefaces local decision-making and service design. In doing so, it creates multiple doorways to comprehensive support, allowing survivors of family violence to walk through the door that best meets their needs.

5.2 Opportunities for partnership

In Victoria, migrant resource centres and ethno-specific services are continuously enhancing their capacity to address the unique concerns of their clients. There are significant benefits in recognising the capacity of these organisations through partnership initiatives that strengthen the financial sustainability and infrastructure of this sector (Browning et al 2008; 21). InTouch notes that, "Ethno-specific services are highly trusted by communities, however as they are not specialised in family violence issues, partnerships and collaborations between services are vitally important" (inTouch 2010; 28). By investing in the multicultural sector via partnership initiatives, we are creating a new doorway to comprehensive support for women who face multiple access barriers.

In recommending this partnership, the ECCV is advocating for local situated services that are resourced to guarantee equal safety and support. By enhancing the capacity of the multicultural sector we can expand the options available to women seeking safety and enhance the efficiency of service delivery by drawing on the expertise of the sector. It is vital that we do not allow this partnership initiative to segregate CALD services, or assume all CALD women will seek protection via locally situated services. Our intent is to position CALD services within the broader Victorian framework of agencies responding to domestic violence, to strengthen the framework and to address existing access barriers for CALD women. Just like all other survivors of family violence, CALD women who ask for help are asking for understanding, safety and an assurance of stability. When structuring justice, protection and support services, these three elements must take priority. However, given the complexity and the diversity of their stories, many CALD women could benefit from tailored support.

5.3 Lessons from the child services sector: VICSEG

The Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG) has been an active participant in the discourse around cultural competence and increased collaboration between early childhood services. VICSEG developed a strong service position through its supported bilingual playgroup programs, run in partnership with Playgroups Victoria. The first playgroups were established by Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese and Somali communities from Melbourne's North-West regions (Bracey et al 2011; 44). Managed and facilitated by professional bilingual community leaders, these groups play three key functions:

- Acting as a site for social inclusion by providing new parents in Australia with a doorway to early childhood service that they *know* will be welcoming and non-judgemental;

- Providing professional development pathways for parents through referral to VICSEG's certified vocational courses in business, childcare, health services, disability services and aged care; and

- Creating a community leadership network that can inform the development of cultural competence in other early childhood services through roundtable discussions and tailored training (VICSEG 2011; 7).

VICSEG can only maintain this role if the value of a multi-agency response is adequately supported at the State level. This requires recognition of the fact that "no single agency is capable of providing the broad range of resources and services that are needed by many families who experience multiple disadvantages and barriers to fully participating in society" (Ibid; 28). A commitment to flexibility within and collaboration between early childhood services was made in the launch of the 2009 Australian Government Family Support Program (Ibid; 27-29). A more detailed study of this program could highlight the benefits of valuing the multicultural resource sector as not only a site of information, but also of creative and critical services.

6. Community ownership of programs addressing domestic violence

Prioritising community ownership of project design and initiation connects education to pre-existing social capital, local expertise and trusted networks. As the issue of family violence is sensitive and complex, preventative responses need to be situated in the experience of the individual and the values and culture they share with their local community network. One of the key conclusions of the VicHealth Community Attitudes survey was that "ensuring a high level of community ownership" was critical to facilitating social change (VicHealth 2009; 62).

6.1 The theory: Values based learning

Values based learning, or transformative learning in academic circles, highlights the significance of culturally meaningful education. Jack Mezirow's seminal work in this field put forward the idea that good education models will take account of the learner's value base and build in opportunities for personal reflection (Mezirow 1997; 9-10). Mezirow describes this value base as a frame of reference that facilitates an understanding of our experiences and helps us to navigate modern society. He states, "[frames of reference] selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (Ibid; 1). The key benefit of recognising the learner's value base is the enhancement of their likelihood to take ownership of the information and transform it fit their cultural context. This process is essential to the primary prevention of domestic violence.

In the practical space, this approach has been adopted as the guiding principle of the training programs developed by MyriaD Consultants and delivered to a diverse range of clients across government, private, community and legal sectors. Their commitment to values based learning is captured in the following statement:

> "At MyriaD we believe that adult learning is about taking ownership of our social and personal roles by taking control of our own thinking and that the ability to do this helps our broader organisational and social communities to become better places through our greater understanding and awareness of our operating environment, thereby helping us to improve our lives and those of others" (MyriaD Consultants 2012).

Based on this theory of learning, allowing local CALD communities to shape and direct primary prevention is not only desirable, it is non-negotiable for any serious national strategy responding to family violence.

6.2 Opportunities for Partnership

Support for local primary prevention and leadership initiatives is an important means of valuing CALD communities as active contributors to efforts to prevent violence against women. As described above, the best practice approach to these programs is to allow them to be designed and directed by the local CALD community. This approach ensures community ownership of the issue and the creation of a strong local leadership network.

This paper clearly outlines the importance of self-determined, locally situated responses to family violence, focussing on culture as a point of strength and resilience. To ensure that this side of the equation is not lost, service providers, at all levels, need to be exposed to community strength, innovation and expertise.

6.3 Values based engagement: Best practice study

The Self-esteem, Identity, Leadership and Community (SILC) program, developed by the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (formerly the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria), is an excellent

showcase of this strength. While facilitating engagement between communities and service providers is not the focus of the program, it is an important best practice example of 'values based' community engagement.

Best Practice Example

SILC: Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights

SILC was launched in 2002 with the aim of supporting Muslim women and "improving their capacity to participate in their communities to respond to disadvantage, particularly violence against women" (Poljski, 2011; 43). The program is divided into four modules, delivered through interactive workshops over an 18-month period. These modules focus on community leadership, leadership in education and training, gender equality through parenting and leadership against family violence and family reparation (Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria 2005; 16). Starting from this leadership base allows women to own the issues and to seek out prevention pathways that suit their community, as well as their personal cultural experience.

Guiding Principles

The program workshops are guided by the principle that, "people will believe more in knowledge they have discovered for themselves than in knowledge presented by others, such as in a plenary session" (Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria 2005; 22). It is recognised that Muslim women and, indeed all individuals, hold complex, multilayered identities. To ensure that discussions around domestic violence are culturally meaningful, time is allowed for women to reflect on their culture, values, community identity, level of social participation and migration experiences (Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria 2005; 21).

The SILC program is the product of over a decade of experience working with and supporting the needs of Muslim women in Victorian (Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria 2005; 12). As knowledge such as that embedded in this program could not be gathered or interpreted overnight, it is important for service providers to look for ways to support and complement existing initiatives at the community level.

6.4 The ECCV recommends

4. That alliances are strengthened between the advocates for gender equality in CALD communities, State Government agencies and related service delivery agencies.

5. That the State Government recognises the strength of community based CALD women's leadership and family violence prevention programs by enhancing the resources available to these existing support structures and pathways.

6. That the State Government takes action to build the capacity of ethno-specific organisations and migrant resource centres, building strong family violence service capacity into a diversity of settings.

For service providers, a major incentive to work directly with communities is the potential to improve trust and familiarity. For policing and court services, often viewed with apprehension and mistrust, investment in community relationships are critically linked to the effectiveness of their social mandate (Australian Human Rights Commission & Australian Multicultural Foundation. 2010; 1). The Community Policing Partnerships Program and the Family Court of Australia's Living in Harmony Partnership (described in the following section) highlight the benefit of this investment and its importance as an ongoing allowance in budget allocations.

It was noted in a recent VicHealth study that, "some stakeholders felt that greater familiarity with relevant support and advocacy services was likely to influence whether women might take formal action, outside of their immediate communities in relation to violence and harassment" (VicHealth 2009; 45). This statement captures the core purpose of partnerships to enhance familiarity; to strengthen CALD women's capacity to confidently approach and navigate major avenues of the Australian justice system. This form of partnership does not replace supported leadership programs or holistic support services run by the community, on the contrary, pre-existing leadership networks and strong community organisations provide the doorway for external service providers to engage effectively. Direct engagement between service providers and CALD communities is about building trust and developing relationships, to ensure CALD communities feel connected to the services designed to support them.

7.1 Programs to strengthen relationships: Service partnerships

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Best Practice Example

The Family Court of Australia: The Living in Harmony Partnership

The *Living in Harmony Partnership* in initiated by the Family Court of Australia worked with CALD community groups across Australia to explore the family court structure and issues around family violence through a range of mediums. The project ran from 2004-2008 with the aim of enhancing the Court's capacity to understand and respond to Australia's new and emerging communities by:

- Helping Court staff to understand the importance of trust and relationship building;

- Enhancing familiarity and building trust between new and emerging communities and the Court;

- Engaging in a process of mutual learning that legitimises the voice and concerns of local CALD communities and helps the Court to enhance the inclusivity of its processes
  (Family Court of Australia 2010: 3).

Guiding Principles

At the forefront of the planning was an understanding that attention would need to be given to information delivery. Each project was run with the understanding that knowledge and expertise can be conveyed in a variety of forms (ibid; 6). For example, the use of playback theatre was a powerful tool of expression for the Eritrean and South Sudanese communities of Launceston, but may not have been appropriate for other African communities based in Melbourne.

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Best Practice Example:

The Community Policing Partnerships Program

Launched in 2007, the *Community Policing Partnerships Program* forged a partnership between police services, a diverse collection of Australian Muslim communities, the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian Multicultural Foundation. The program created a funding umbrella, capturing 38 diverse projects across Australia. The projects included summer camps, site visits to local services, informal discussion groups and sporting activities.

Guiding principles

The guiding principles of this program are best conveyed through its stated objectives. These are to:

- Improve relationships and increase trust between Muslim communities, police and support services;
- Promote awareness among Muslim communities of their rights, responsibilities and avenues of complaint;
- Demonstrate good-practice examples of partnerships that improve relationships between police and Australian Muslim communities, and can be used as models that may be replicated in other communities and in other locations;
- Improve awareness of the diversity of Muslim communities, an understanding of Islam and issues relevant to Australian Muslim communities across the general ranks of police through education, consultation and other activities;
- Provide a two-way flow of experience, information and direction for police and Muslim communities to identify emerging issues and address common questions and challenges, to break down stereotyping on both sides; and
- Develop training and resources for law enforcement agencies to assist in responding to complaints of discrimination and abuse (Australian Human Rights Commission & Australian Multicultural Foundation 2010; 10).

These objectives address access barriers and recognise that trust is critically linked to familiarity. Similar objectives are reflected across ongoing activities of the Multicultural Advisory Unit of Victoria Police, which aims to build relationships with CALD communities and by doing so enhance their access to policing services. It is particularly encouraging to see relationships developing with young men and women within CALD communities (Victoria Police, undated; 8).

7.2 Key Elements of partnerships

Whilst there are immense benefits in creating partnerships and inclusive engagement strategies, we need to be mindful that there is a pre-existing power gradient between the community and State service sector (Feldman 2010; 34). Based on our consultations and the literature available, the most successful partnerships have given CALD communities a role in design process, placing the recognition of their value system and preferred learning style at the forefront of project planning (State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2011; 13 & 24). Figure 5, originally developed by the State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, highlights different dimensions of engagement. We recommend that initiatives that aim to build trust and familiarity sit firmly in the upper-right category: collaboration/empowerment. It is essential that programs engaging CALD communities' active work towards building sustainable long-term relationships.

Figure 5: Stakeholder analysis tool
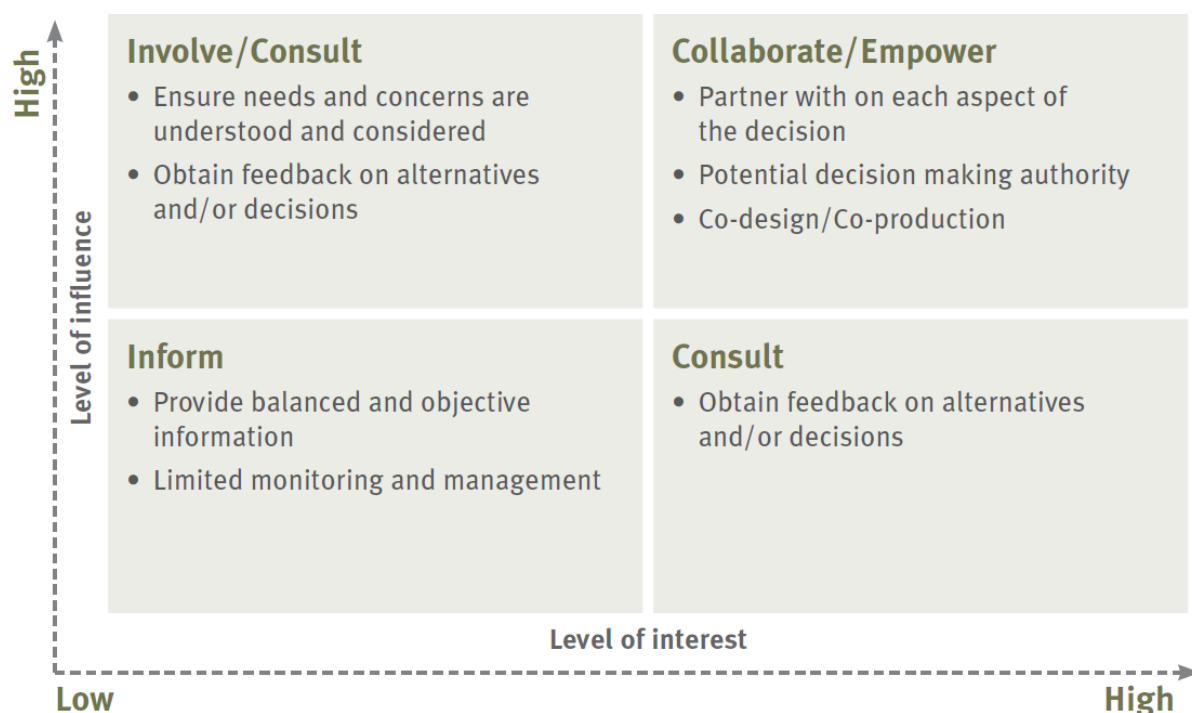
Source: State Government of Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2011). *Stakeholder engagement framework*. Melbourne. pp. 13

7.3 The ECCV recommends

> 7. That service delivery agencies, responding to family violence, take time to invest in partnerships to enhance their familiarity and build relationships with CALD communities.

8. Conclusion

In order to address family violence in Australian society, and particularly the disadvantages faced by CALD women, justice, support and protection services need to be ready to work across a diversity of circumstances and experiences. To build this capacity within service delivery agencies we need to be asking the right questions and really listening to the answers we receive. Navigation of the referral pathways is one of the key issues faced by all survivors of family violence accessing support. It is important to recognise that each time a women is asked to explain the details of her case it takes an incredible emotional effort on her part. The difficulty of this process is heightened if she also asked to explain and justify her culture or religion. This highlights the need to bring different services and community organizations closer together.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the additional complexities and distinct challenges that can limit CALD women's access to appropriate support and to set out some key areas of exploration, identifying ways to expand options for CALD women.

These include:

- Developing cultural competence within critical services;

- Supporting community owned prevention programs, acknowledging the expertise of CALD women;

- Strengthening the capacity of services run through community and migrant resource centres, as a means of ensuring a diversity of services; and

- Investing in engagement programs to enhance familiarity between State service providers and CALD communities.

The ECCV acknowledges that family violence occurs within all cultural and socio-economic contexts. We also recognise that social and political efforts to address and prevent family violence are present in all cultural communities. Long-term partnerships need to be established between service providers, government agencies and the leaders of these social movements. Once this foundation is in place, service providers will be far better positioned to develop internal cultural competence and to engage directly with communities to enhance familiarity and respond to access barriers faced by CALD women.

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