



## **Policy Paper: The Need for a Tailored Strategy for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence Against Women, Especially Those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Queensland.**

### **What's the problem?**

Family and domestic violence has progressively become endemic in Australia, putting a significant number of women at risk. A study completed by Duncan, Mavisakalyan and Twamey in 2021 concluded that around 1 in 6 Australian women (17.3%) experienced physical or/and sexual violence at the hands of their family members or intimate partner since the age of 15. At these prevalence rates, it was estimated that more than 1.7 million women would have experienced family and domestic violence in the period between 2018 and 2020 (Duncan, Mavisakalyan & Twamey 2021). Later in 2023, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) indicated that 1 in 5 Australian women aged 15 or over experienced sexual violence (22%), 1 in 3 experienced physical violence (31%), and 1 in 5; that is 20 percent, experienced stalking.

Migrant women, particularly the most vulnerable cohorts such as refugees and asylum seekers, face additional challenges that heighten their risk of experiencing family and domestic violence. Their migration experiences, for example, involve a history of social isolation, lack of belonging, limited culturally appropriate resources and support available for the victims of family and domestic violence as well as being overwhelmed whilst they try to integrate into the new country and culture. They also face language barriers.

More alarmingly, migrant and refugee women living in Australia usually deal with multiple stressors at once, such as domestic violence, racism, and non-recognition of their overseas qualifications, leading to a chain of other vulnerabilities, including but not limited to, compromised employment opportunities (De Silva, Shepherd & McEwan 2024).

Family and domestic violence is a wicked problem in communities originally from war-torn countries, especially those who have lived in the refugee camps outside Australia for a long time (Ngendakurio 2017). This is because gender-based violence is identified by Wirtz, et al. (2013) as a continuing challenge for refugee women when they arrive in the refugee camps, putting nearly every woman at risk. On top of having to endure a tough life, these women also have to constantly worry about gender-based violence including beatings and rape. That's why, Anita Ho and Carol Pavlish (2011) notably postulate, promoting gender equality in refugee and migrant populations cannot be achieved unless women are empowered – the advocacy for women's and girls' rights requires an empowering environment that provides a formal process to hold perpetrators accountable, and this does not exist in the refugee camp settings.



Given the lengthy stays in the refugee camps before refugees are resettled to Australia through the offshore humanitarian programs, and the oppressions refugee women must endure, it can be anticipated that women in this cohort are forced to be submissive, making it hard to fight against family and domestic violence from within these communities (Ngendakurio 2017). Thus, arriving in Australia is not the end of misery for migrant and refugee women. Besides, migrant women in Queensland come from all over the world. They bring with them the culturally rooted identities as well as the learnt ideologies from their homelands (Ngendakurio 2017). Notably, gender inequality and related oppressive behaviours are common in most countries in the world. However, some cultures have stronger patriarchal practices than others, giving all the privileges, including, but not limited to, all decision-making powers to men. Women's roles are restricted to domestic and extended caring duties, limiting their social and economic participation as well as decision making ability (Ngendakurio 2017). The literature above aligns with many discussions and survey's responses by our members in the course of our engagement with the Women's Ethnic Network (WEN).

Through the WEN community engagement, we know that the complex and heavy-laden migration experiences shape how women live and their level of trust in authorities and government systems. Bad experience with the police in their home countries, WEN's members claim, could lead to distrust in the institution in general. This makes a significant number of women from the CALD communities reluctant to approach the police or service providers and seek help or protection. As such, it can be argued that, despite the government's efforts to prevent violence against women, a range of initiatives are not making a meaningful impact within CALD communities simply because CALD women are usually unaware of their rights and services available to them when they become victims of family and domestic violence. Furthermore, CALD men lack a proper understanding of what constitutes domestic violence, from the Australian context. This is because there are no educative workshops or spaces where multicultural men can safely discuss family and domestic violence, for them to broaden their understanding of the impact of the perpetrator's behavior on the health and wellbeing of the victim-survivors and their children.



## What's the ask?

We are asking the government to invest in Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland's (ECCQ) Women's Ethnic Network (WEN) through ongoing funding, because it is best placed to close the gap in the effectiveness of Family and Domestic Violence services. WEN has been in existence since 1978 and embraces the mantra of, "nothing about us without us." WEN has, historically, been heavily engaged in community awareness, bringing women from culturally diverse backgrounds together and identify gaps and opportunities in service delivery. WEN also strives to advocate for women's issues and develop policy papers to propose to the government, highlighting the needs and concerns of multicultural women in Queensland, from their perspectives based on lived experiences.

## Recommendations

The WEN membership have identified key recommendations as a part of their consultation with community and request that the government implements a policy that ensures:

- Migrant and refugee women are provided with culturally appropriate and quality services through respectful, responsive, tailored and holistic approaches, progressively eliminating racism and discrimination.



- Migrant and refugee women are made aware of what family and domestic violence entail in the Australian context.
- Migrant and refugee women know about their rights in Australia, the implication of their visa status and options available to mitigate related challenges.
- Multicultural women are empowered to participate and influence their own fate. They also need to be given a platform and a safe space where they can voice their own concerns, needs, and demand for their rights. This requires developing direct linkages between multicultural organisations and domestic and family violence support services.
- Women are given information about safe places to go along with their children when faced with a domestic violence situation.
- Migrant and refugee women are given meaningful jobs that recognise their experiences and knowledge, including overseas qualifications.
- Migrant and refugee women are given access to translated educative information on domestic and family violence. This information should be shared with immigrant women at different stages of their migration process through formal channels. Additionally, fact sheets regarding violence against multicultural women should be developed and presented to all migrant women at the time of their visa application.
- Information about violence against women is available in a simple and concise language.



## Case Study

Avleen\* is a 21-year-old Indian woman who is married to Veer\*, a 24-year-old Indian male. They live in Australia. Veer and Avleen come from the same state in India and arrived with his family and relatives. However, she is from a small rural village. Avleen travelled to Australia in 2019 on her own. Her English language skills are limited. Veer initially took very good care of Avleen until they realised that she could not conceive a child. From that time, she has been made to do all the household work, allegedly consistent with their culture. She is not allowed to go out and mingle with friends unless Veer is with her, or if she has a chaperone.

For a long time, Avleen was not allowed to go to work outside of the home. However, she could work from home, online. She progressively became lonely, and she was not able to express her feelings to her parents. Her parents are old, middle-class status in India. Her father has a terminal disease. Her mother is a housewife who has never stepped out of the house without her husband or son or someone with her. Avleen was constantly told that there was no money to visit India or her parents. Hence has not visited her parents for four years in a row. Since the husband did not have a full-time job, she was often told there was no money for her needs. Whatever she earned was put into a joint account which the husband was a primary account holder and the one who overlooked the finances for the household.

Since she did not conceive, she was taken to various clinics for check-ups and consultations. When reports returned as normal for her, the husband changed his behaviour towards her. He became more aggressive and had sex with her even without her consent at times. When questioned by others, he often said, "We are trying to conceive and start a family".



Veer often verbally abused Avleen by saying that her parents did not teach her household work properly, or she is not educated and cannot earn a living. He also often argues that she often spends money and does not bring any home. Her in-laws also never appreciate the work she does in the house. She is constantly questioned if she goes out or spends any money. Even if she wants to go for further studies in Australia, she is not allowed to achieve her dream, because her husband and his family claim it would be too costly. Instead, she has been told to work with a cleaning company. Her earnings are deposited in the joint bank account, and she is not allowed to operate it because her husband claims, she does not have the knowledge to do so.

She has now been given a mobile phone and freedom to step out of the house for work. However, her social media accounts are monitored. Every time she steps outside the house, her mobile phone is tracked. Her emails are also monitored. She is only allowed to go to functions and meetings that are approved by her husband. The husband has also befriended her boss who is also a fellow Indian. The boss has been tasked to control his wife daily.

This case demonstrates family and domestic violence cannot be quantified. Neither can it be visible because it is culturally masked.

We have used this family as a case study only. However, please note that similar cases occur in many multicultural groups.

\*Names have been altered for privacy reasons.

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