



The Impact of Domestic Violence on Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) in Australia

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Violence against women or domestic violence is a global problem and is a violation of human rights. It is prevalent in all societies and impacts all cultures. Limited research is available to determine the rate and prevalence of family violence. However, research has pointed out that women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds in Australia face significant barriers in accessing the support available to them. The following theoretical paper highlights the factors and impact of family violence on women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds in Australia.

Domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were in an intimate relationship. Violence against women is not always physical. It can include psychological or emotional violence such as isolation from friends and family, humiliation, economic/financial factors such as controlling their access to money; diminishing their self-esteem; sexual violence and abuse such as forcing them to have sex; technology abuse such as stalking, hacking emails, and a wide range of controlling, coercive and intimidating behaviours.

Family violence is a broader term than domestic violence, as it refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members. This includes, for example, elder abuse and adolescent violence against parents, and violence perpetrated by in-laws and extended family. In Australia, violence against women is called many different things, including domestic violence, family violence, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey in 2006 defined violence as "any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault; the report identified a range of disturbing and alarming statistics." Women are at least three times more likely than men to experience violence from an intimate partner (Australian Bureau of Statistics [2013], Australian Bureau of Statistics [2013], Cox's report (2015) on Personal Safety, Australia [2012], Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], Canberra). On average, at least one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia (Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], 2015). The "Violence Against Women in Australia" report (Anrows 2015) highlights that one in four women have experienced at least one

incident of violence by an intimate partner. One in three Australian women over the age of 15 years has experienced violence in partner relationships.

One in six Australian women has experienced physical abuse at the hands of a current or former partner. One in four Australian women has experienced emotional abuse at the hands of a current or former partner.

What Energizes Violence Against Women by Men?

In certain cultures, men are the dominating ones and feel the pressure to be in control of women in their lives. This could also include specified gender norms. For example: Only women are meant to cook, do the cleaning and look after the children in certain cultures. This imbalance is known as gender inequality. Violence against women is an easily accepted norm in societies where there is more gender disparity.

Some of the other causes are decision-making power by men, considering women as property which they are meant to take charge of, limits to women's independence in public and private life, exposure to violence as a child, and lack of awareness and understanding of Australian laws.

Violence Against Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD)

Women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (CALD) may often find that their needs and issues are neither recognized nor addressed, or are misinterpreted completely. CALD women are particularly helpless as their issues are complex; they have many other basic needs such as housing, immigration, overcoming language barriers, and navigating the family law court system. Many migrant women may hold cultural views about gender roles that are inconsistent with speaking out. Moreover, the assistance that they receive is also limited since they may not be eligible for government services or assistance or have very limited access to what is available. Women in this situation include recently arrived or temporary immigrants, especially those on 309 partner visas, the families of skilled migrants, and international students. Refugees from war-torn countries experience renewed unrest in their lives when family violence occurs; some of these women may have been living in Australia for only a short period of time. The factors are numerous and interlinked. Overall, women



from CALD backgrounds report more or less similar forms of family violence. Some of the challenges they face are:

Language barriers. Often women from migrant backgrounds face a language barrier in accessing support. Although support is available, still many migrant women are unaware of these support services. Weerasinghe and Williams (2003) pointed out that even among CALD families who are proficient in English, the use of professional jargon by service providers and practitioners, without accompanying explanations, can be a deterrent to their uptake of services. This may lead to several other problems such as feelings of helplessness and hopelessness leading to depression, anxiety and stress. Sometimes, there is external pressure from families back home to reconcile and reunite which leave women with more confusion.

Immigration. Sometimes migrant women come as a dependent of their husband on spousal visas. They may have little or no understanding of their visa. Often, women choose to be in the violent relationship since they fear being deported. Commonly, the perpetrators of violence use the visa as an excuse to threaten the women to stay in the violent relationship. Since the woman is on a temporary visa, she may have very limited access to the health care system and government benefits. These vulnerabilities are aggravated if the woman also experiences discrimination, disability, physical or mental illness, lack of education and other barriers to her wellbeing.

Housing. When a relationship breaks down, the woman may be rendered homeless. The lack of family support and friends adds to their isolation. The approach to housing in their home country may be very different from that in a western country.

Lack of knowledge or understanding about the system. Migrant women may have no access to services available or may not understand the system. Even though interpreters may be used, there may be issues related to interpreters. For example: A woman may not be willing to disclose sexual assault to an interpreter of opposite gender.

Stigma attached to divorce. For many migrant women, there is a stigma attached to divorce and a relationship breakdown can bring shame to their family which makes them likely to stay in an abusive relationship.

Social isolation and shame to community. Certain migrant communities are very small in number and a relationship breakdown is considered as a shame to the community. The women feel more isolated and start believing that they have brought disgrace to the community.

Cultural reasons. A migrant woman may not be aware of child protection workers who look after the welfare of children and insure that children are safe in their homes. Women may have a desire to keep the family intact for the sake of the children and may not be willing to separate so that children don't suffer and may love their partner in spite of the violence with the hope that things will improve.

It is important that practitioners, doctors, and lawyers are given adequate training in cultural sensitivity. Cultural behaviours may lead to stereotyping and prejudice which can lead to further breakdowns in communication.

References

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