

Meeting the needs of children

FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE
(CALD) BACKGROUNDS IN THE CONTEXT OF
DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE (DFV)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

SSI and Myriad Kofkin Global (MKG) acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which we meet, live, work and learn. We pay respect to the Elders of each Nation – Past, Present and Future – and promote the continuation of the cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

ABOUT SETTLEMENT SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (SSI)

SSI is a community organisation and social business that supports members of the community to achieve their full potential. We work across the eastern seaboard with people who have experienced vulnerability, including refugees, people seeking asylum, migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, children, families, people living with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and LGBTQIA+ communities to build capacity and overcome inequality.

In the context of this work SSI is committed to amplifying the voices of children and young people from CALD backgrounds who are impacted by domestic and family violence (DFV) so they are no longer invisible in the development of public policy and programs that affect their lives.

ABOUT MYRIAD KOFKIN GLOBAL (MKG)

Myriad Kofkin Global is an impact advisory business partnering with purpose driven organisations to maximise their impact and future sustainability. MKG support organisations to build inclusion capabilities across culture, systems and structures using intersectional analysis, and work collaboratively with communities to co-design sustainable solutions that reflect community needs and expectations. MKG are passionate about driving bold and innovative impact with social conscience.

Our principal consultants have made a significant contribution in ensuring family and domestic violence responses at policy, systems and practice levels are inclusive of the voices and needs of multicultural women and their families. These efforts have included advisory roles to government, representation on peak bodies and working with organisations to embed intersectional approaches to programs and services.

ROUNDTABLE CHALLENGES

CALD TERMINOLOGY

The target group for this work is children and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds (aged 0-under 19yrs), who we refer to in this document as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD).

We recognise the commonly used term ‘CALD’ sets up a dynamic that positions ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity as ‘other’, and that it groups all people from non-Anglo backgrounds together under the one label, undermining the inherent complexity in ‘difference’. We also recognise this over-simplification can result in misunderstandings and culturally inappropriate policy design and program delivery.

We note the Diversity Council of Australia (DCA) has started to use the term culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) which aims to capture the structural marginalisation of people and communities from cultural and racialised backgrounds. However, this term is new and not yet widely used. In the absence of terminology which more concisely illustrates the rich multicultural tapestry of children in our society we have followed current CALD convention.



LACK OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN GENERAL

There is growing recognition that many domestic and family violence (DFV) services are not designed for children, and that children’s voices in general are not influential in DFV policy making. Children from CALD backgrounds are even less visible in service delivery and policy formulation. Public debate in this area is new, so little formal research, data, and best practice information is available. It was difficult to keep the discussion focused on CALD children specifically, given that DFV services for all children are limited across the board.

DFV CLASSIFIED AS CHILD PROTECTION

There is often a perception that domestic and family violence is inseparably linked to child protection. However, there is not always a need for children to be removed from families if they can be effectively assessed and properly protected. Keeping children safe with a non-offending parent can enable ongoing family attachment and have a less-severe impact than the trauma of removal. There are risks in classifying children into child protection, which are regulated systems in all states for good reason.

COMMUNITIES IDENTIFY DIFFERENTLY

Individual and collective identifies are complex. There are differences between communities and within communities, and one-size fits all solutions don’t work. Strategies need to be informed and endorsed by the people they impact. Findings from the Pasifika Communities Roundtable (see case study attached) clearly illustrate these principles.

ROUNDTABLE SCOPE AND APPROACH

To build on publicly available material and the current understanding of how DFV impacts children from CALD backgrounds, SSI developed and ran in partnership with Myriad Kofkin Global (MKG), a series of three roundtables (QLD, NSW, VIC) that focused on amplifying the voices of children and young people (aged 0-under 19yrs) from CALD backgrounds impacted by DFV.

The roundtables brought together people with lived experience, academics, and experts from across government, DFV, community, legal, multicultural and children's services to:

- ✓ focus on service delivery gaps, opportunities and solutions
- ✓ identify potential policy, planning and funding levers
- ✓ identify where collaboration might be possible.

Approximately 150 people attended the roundtables across the eastern seaboard, including keynote speakers, panel members and participants.

CALL TO ACTION:



The wellbeing and voices of children from CALD backgrounds need to be elevated to the national agenda as a matter of urgency.

It is time for decision makers to:

- ✓ take the experiences of migrant and refugee children impacted by DFV seriously
- ✓ include children with lived experience in the identification and development of policies, practices and programs that ensure they are protected from harm
- ✓ respond to the root causes of DFV challenges and trauma that children from CALD backgrounds face.



Pasifika Community Roundtable – June 2023.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SSI and MKG would like to thank the following people for their support and participation at the roundtables:

QLD

Presentations:

1. Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commissioner – keynote address
2. Jatinder Kaur – presenter

Panel:

1. Cecilia Barassi-Rubio – DFV Practitioner
2. Maree Foelz – Settlement DFV Project Officer, SSI
3. Racheal Kirabo – young leader, Multicultural Youth Queensland
4. Professor Silke Meyer – Chair Child and Family Research School, School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith University

NSW

Presentations:

1. Zoe Robinson, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People
2. Dr Hannah Tonkin, NSW Commissioner for Women's Safety
3. The Hon Natalie Ward, MLC, former Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Panel:

1. Rebekah Grace – Director TeEACH, Western Sydney University
2. Synthia Huynh – lived experience
3. Jess Harkins – DFV Practice Manager, SSI
4. Kathy Karatasas – Multicultural Child and Family Program Lead, SSI
5. Nemat Kharboutli – Linking Hearts Service Manager, Muslim Women's Association

VIC

Presentation:

1. Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commissioner – keynote address

Panel:

1. Françoise Le Gall – Program Manager, Multicultural Foster Care, SSI
2. Elvis Martin – lived experience
3. Michal Morris – CEO, inTouch
4. Liana Papoutsis – Board Director, RESPECT Victoria; Academic, Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre
5. Deb Tsorbaris – CEO, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

THIS REPORT

This report provides an overview of the key themes identified through the three roundtables. It synthesizes the exchange of knowledge at each event, with a particular focus on the status of, and response to, children from CALD backgrounds impacted by DFV across the states.

These insights form an important anecdotal evidence base and the grassroots foundational work required to develop a strategic approach to influencing the national debate and State and Federal Governments' frameworks, policy and funding decisions impacting children from CALD backgrounds, that derive from the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. We recognise the variation in policy levers and service delivery systems across the three states will require different responses tailored to each of the jurisdictional settings.

We also understand there are viewpoints that sit outside the roundtable process and do not suggest this content provides an exhaustive picture of eastern seaboard knowledge and experience. However, we are confident that the report's insights strongly reflect the challenges, gaps and opportunities identified in formal mainstream contemporary research and public policy debate as they relate to children from CALD backgrounds in the DFV domain in Australia.

Throughout the report the importance of including children's voices in all discussions and decisions related to them is highlighted as a fundamental consideration. However, few children are sufficiently supported to participate in difficult and sensitive conversations of this nature at this time.

In lieu of children's voices, we are deeply grateful for the contributions from young adults with lived childhood experience at each of the roundtables.

We also extend our deep appreciation to all Roundtable participants; your willingness to talk about the challenging realities, as well as the wide-ranging opportunities and solutions, is what makes this report substantial and authentic.





HUMAN RIGHTS

SSI and MKG view the insights in this report through the lens of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC is a legally binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, regardless of their race, religion or abilities. Australia is a signatory to the UNCRC.

We also recognise the commitment under *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* that:

“Children and young people in Australia have the right to grow up safe, connected and supported in their family, community and culture. They have the right to grow up in an environment that enables them to reach their full potential.”

SSI and MKG see children as individuals in their own right, not as an extension of their parents, and believe their opinions and perspectives should be heard and clearly reflected in government policies that affect them. If we ignore the voice of children, we abandon our duty of care, and we miss the opportunity to influence and develop robust, informed policies that can lead to wide-ranging positive impacts for the community at large in the future.

A strong focus on children is more critical than ever. We live in increasingly turbulent times with growing environmental, climatic and economic stress around the world. Australia remains an attractive destination for many adult migrants and their children who arrive via different visa pathways and who experience settlement in their own unique ways. They bring their life experience from abroad, sometimes already affected by DFV, and sometimes they fall victim to violence that emerges post-arrival for a multitude of possible reasons.

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

Nelson Mandela

BACKGROUND TO DFV AND CHILDREN

Despite 24% of the Australian population being under 19yrs of age, there is no Minister for Children responsible for developing a holistic and consolidated vision that co-ordinates children's policy across government. Instead, this work is widely dispersed across portfolios and jurisdictions.

In the DFV context, where responses most often concentrate on the needs of adults, this uncoordinated approach can result in children being invisible and missing out on the help they need. Yet, children impacted by DFV are some of the most vulnerable in our community, and structurally marginalised children from CALD backgrounds, are even more so. To improve their safety, welfare and future, we need to work better together.



WE MUST BE GUIDED BY VICTIM-SURVIVORS AND PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE



THE NATIONAL PLAN TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The National Plan commits to 10 years of sustained action, effort and partnership across sectors and levels of government towards our vision of ending violence against women in one generation. It outlines what needs to happen to achieve this vision, including building the workforce, growing the evidence base and strengthening data collection systems, while delivering holistic, coordinated and integrated person-centred responses. To achieve this, we must listen to and be guided by victim-survivors and people with lived experience¹.

The *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children* (the National Plan) released in October 2022, acknowledges that women and children from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds and migrant and refugee women and children, including those on temporary visas, can face particular challenges. It specifically identifies migrant and refugee women and children as target communities across the four National Pillars (Prevention, Early Intervention, Response, and Recovery and Healing) and the need to co-design activities with, and tailor activities to, these communities.

The National Plan also acknowledges children, including LGBTQIA+ children, as victims of gender-based violence in their own right and identifies actions to prevent and address this violence in each of the four domains. Making sure that all children in Australia can access age-appropriate consent and respectful relationships education and supporting recovery from childhood trauma are important strategies for ending gender-based violence.²

The insights in this report align with the National Plan's strategic vision and the work that needs to be done to bring the vision to fruition. The development of the National Plan's five-year Action Plan presents a timely opportunity to spotlight the DFV challenges children from CALD backgrounds face, and to commit to working collectively with them to build, implement and evaluate solutions.



EMERGING RESEARCH

The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) which surveyed 8503 random Australians aged 16-65+, released in April 2023 generated the first nationally representative rates of all five types of child maltreatment (physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence) and their associated outcomes in Australia.

The ACMS found that those who experience maltreatment are substantially more likely to have:

- ✓ mental health disorders
- ✓ health risk behaviours
- ✓ higher health service utilisation.

The study found that child maltreatment was widespread among survey participants, with exposure to domestic violence the most common for of all types of child maltreatment (39.6%). As the study highlighted, *“these findings underscore the moral and economic imperative for Australian governments to develop a coordinated long-term plan for generational reform”*³.

According to the National Plan, the cost of violence against women and their children is estimated at \$26 billion per year, and children exposed to DFV may experience trauma symptoms including PTSD and other long-lasting effects on development, behaviour and wellbeing.⁴

In 2019–20, there were 376 hospitalisations of children aged zero to 14 for assault injuries; 277 of these were perpetrated by a parent, and 99 by another family member.

Over the longer-term, children who are victims or witnesses of intimate partner violence can be twice as likely to have a psychiatric diagnosis, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and impaired language skills at age 10.

Recent longitudinal data showed that any exposure to domestic and family violence from infancy to 10 years was associated with poorer health outcomes.

Reports of child abuse and neglect indicate that violence often happens when parents have alcohol and other drug issues and mental health issues. These three risk factors often precipitate child protection involvement.⁵

According to the National Plan, the cost of violence against women and their children is estimated at \$26 billion per year.



39.6%
of those surveyed in
the ACMS have been
exposed to domestic
violence

1. National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, p18
2. IBID, p44
3. Findings – The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS)
4. IBID, p17
5. IBID, p41





Research on the serious impacts of DFV on children in later life is also emerging. A 2022 ANROWS report⁶ is building the evidence base for connections between DFV and young people's problem behaviours, particularly mental health. We know that problem behaviours can be indicators of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and should ring alarm bells. ACEs is a term used to describe very stressful events or circumstances that children may experience during their childhood, and which can have serious impacts on later life, including the development of chronic diseases, mental health issues and problematic social functioning.⁷

Although there is still little research in this area, some of the other long-term consequences identified include:

- ✓ premature birth
- ✓ delayed skill development
- ✓ physical health issues
- ✓ crime
- ✓ use of violence later in life.

It is wrong to believe that once the immediate abuse is resolved the impact of DFV ends; it can affect people's pathways, decisions and opportunities throughout their life. While research in this area is still limited, initial findings give cause for concern.

6. Research summary: The impacts of domestic and family violence on children (2nd ed.)
- ANROWS – Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety

7. Emerging Minds & Australian National University, 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ROUNDTABLES



PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION

**THE PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION
TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS TO:**

support the establishment a national body for children from multicultural backgrounds which would include a national advisory group to focus on the needs of children from CALD backgrounds impacted by DFV

The national advisory group would provide advice on a range of matters, including those identified in this report, which are presented as sub-recommendations and grouped under areas of proposed responsibility: Australian Government (A), State Government (S) and Territory Government (T).



SUB-RECOMMENDATIONS - SUMMARY

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT TO:

- ✓ develop innovative and inclusive practices that place children from CALD backgrounds at the centre of **all** co-design processes undertaken as part of the National Plan
- ✓ develop materials that better educate migrants, refugees and all new visa holders on Australia's legal system and its response to DFV, including a focus on children

AUSTRALIAN, STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS TO:

- ✓ develop consistent data parameters and increased data capture on children from CALD backgrounds presenting at DFV related touch points
- ✓ develop an agreement on how jurisdictional data can be collected and shared more freely and effectively within and across jurisdictions
- ✓ map workforce cultural responsiveness skills across the jurisdictions, with a view to mandating cultural responsiveness training for all roles that interface with clients and children from CALD backgrounds, with priority given to child protection stakeholders (government and non-government)
- ✓ commence reforms to funding models and service systems that result in improved access to robust, coordinated, culturally specific DFV responses for children
- ✓ provide increased funding for community organisations to design and deliver (with DFV specialist support) grassroots DFV prevention programs for children from CALD backgrounds
- ✓ review DFV risk assessment tools to ensure child-specific questions or separate child-specific risk assessments are implemented in jurisdictions where they don't exist, and upskill staff accordingly
- ✓ develop specialised child-focused DFV training for interpreters
- ✓ increase % of DFV communications budget to include in-language and child focused materials, and increase social media presence across ethnic communities' and mainstream communications channels
- ✓ increase funding for culturally, linguistically and religiously responsive change behaviour, prevention and support programs for men

STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS TO:

- ✓ map educational and therapeutic community supports available to mainstream children, with a view to increasing their reach and cultural responsiveness
- ✓ map educational and therapeutic ethno-specific and multicultural community supports available to children from CALD backgrounds with a view to expansion
- ✓ develop cultural plans (in states and territories where they don't already exist) that put children from CALD backgrounds at the centre of out of home care services
- ✓ provide funding for key DFV services to employ culturally responsive child specialist workers to deliver support, including casework and counselling
- ✓ implement a **no-closed door** policy for parents and children from CALD backgrounds (regardless of visa status, length of time in Australia or age) presenting for emergency assistance

KEY THEMES

CHILDREN ARE INVISIBLE IN DFV

Since 1990, Australia has been a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child yet many roundtable participants are not convinced these rights underpin government policy on domestic and family violence.

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, provides an opportunity for government to embed children's rights in all related policies and initiatives developed as part of the plan going forward.

“ How can domestic violence services keep children in view, how can children's services keep domestic violence in view? ”

Roundtable participant



RECOMMENDATION (A):

Australian government to support the establishment of a national body for children from multicultural backgrounds which would include a national advisory group to focus on the needs of children from CALD backgrounds impacted by DFV.

HEAR THE VOICES OF CHILDREN FROM CALD BACKGROUNDS

Community leaders and ethno-specific workers emphasised the importance of understanding that children within ethno-specific and/or faith communities are not homogenous. Individuals can hold varying beliefs, values and attitudes, and will have different life experiences that inform their sense of identity and belonging. They cannot be viewed as 'all the same'. On this basis, we cannot make simplistic assumptions or develop one-size-fits-all solutions that undermine the complexity in difference.

The unique voices of children from CALD backgrounds must be loud, clear and central to debates about issues that affect them. Children need support to contribute to more and varied opportunities to speak for themselves, and adult decision-makers need to listen better and act on what they hear. Academics and other practitioners who work with children expressed the need for decision makers to get better at hearing uncomfortable and different truths, and to refrain from pushing adult-informed agendas that might not be relevant or effective. The National Plan's strong focus on co-design methodology needs to involve and integrate the lived experiences of children, and decision makers need to hear what children say and take steps to change systems responses that do not work.



RECOMMENDATION (A):

Australian government to develop innovative and inclusive practices that place children from CALD backgrounds at the centre of **all** co-design processes undertaken as part of the National Plan.

“ This is not about doing things for children but doing things WITH children. ”

Roundtable participant

Panel members shared key messages emerging from engagements with children and young people in NSW. These messages are consistent, and show priorities for children are **love, connection, and safety**. To build trust and help children disclose their experiences, children’s services and DFV eco-systems need to lead and work with these values. Children don’t think in terms of government frameworks, they think of their reality in the moment and won’t always share their truth for fear of exposing the people they love. We heard that some young people don’t trust that adults will believe their stories so they don’t reveal their family circumstances. This hesitation may demonstrate loyalty to others, but it can also see victims withholding difficult experiences they don’t feel they can share.

When the service system does not reflect children’s needs or interests or children feel unsafe, they are even less likely to disclose. Child practitioners are urging the sector to focus on ‘the positive’ in children’s lives, and to create more trusting environments and opportunities where difficult stories can be shared, and professional responses can be trauma-informed.

“ When children have positive experiences, they’re at less risk of experiencing long term negative outcomes as a result of adversity. ”

Roundtable participant

A lived experience advocate talked of some of the avenues that empowered young people of CALD background have found to convey their DFV experiences once they have grown up, including government and NGO youth committees and advisory councils. These mechanisms can provide a platform to help educate and advise the broader community and decision makers in specific settings. However, younger children living with DFV almost invariably remain voiceless, and schools in particular, were identified as environments where culturally safe spaces, programs and supports that enable children’s voices to be heard could be developed through ‘social support hubs’. This concept requires further thought, but some aspects of this idea are already operating in primary schools that work in partnership with the *Community Hubs* program.



DATA MATTERS

A consistent concern raised across the roundtables is the gap in cultural diversity data. Where there is no data, there is no evidence of an issue and therefore little or no action. While participants understand that collecting data risks communities being labelled, they also agreed that reliable information is key to service provider and government planning and the delivery of targeted resources and programs.

“ We know that many government DFV services do not collect consistent CALD information so there is little understanding of the prevalence and impact of violence on children in these communities. ”

Roundtable participant

SSI's DFV Practice Unit saw over 200 clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds, from 21 countries of origin (not including Australia) in an 18 month period. Support has been provided to 247 victim survivors, of which 96 were adults and 151 were children and young people under 18yrs. Of the 151 children and young people, 30 were on temporary visas. SSI's Multicultural Child and Family Program also collects language, faith and ethnicity data, identifying children from 50 ethnicities, 40 language groups and 50 faiths. Data of this nature needs to be replicated across broader government and NGO services.

We heard that the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP) records some family violence data but it is not disaggregated and does not provide a holistic client picture. The Data Exchange (DEX) system is said to be a potential avenue through which information about the safety and security of children from CALD backgrounds could be captured. This system currently collects data on children and parents who access Australian funded early intervention services, and it was suggested that data parameters could be expanded.

Participants also expressed the need to access and analyse intersectional data from relevant databases that capture visa status, recency of arrival, ethnicity, disability, LGBTQIA+, socio-demographic and economic dis/advantage, and DFV presentations (eg police, hospitals, DFV services). This would assist in identifying service access trends by different cohorts and developing robust evidence bases that make the complexity around children and DFV more explicit.



RECOMMENDATION (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to:

1. develop consistent data parameters and increased data capture on children from CALD backgrounds presenting at DFV related touch points
2. develop an agreement on how jurisdictional data can be collected and shared more freely and effectively within and across jurisdictions whilst ensuring privacy and protecting identity.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Concerns were raised about the use of ‘victim/survivor’ terminology and its inclination to reinforce trauma and pathologise the children we need to support. Child experts highlighted that communication with children impacted by DFV should always be sensitive to context, and that affirmative and respectful language that recognises the value of the child in their own right, and not solely through the DFV lens, is essential.

Brief reference was also made to how language can be manipulated by perpetrators to disguise and misrepresent what has actually happened so that victims appear complicit in the violence.

This is a complex area that can be further complicated by the English language skills and the cultural frames of reference of victims and/or perpetrators.

“Linguistic and cultural diversity is a strength, not a barrier. It is inflexible and unsafe environments that create barriers.”

Roundtable participant

BUILD CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Roundtable participants stressed that understanding children as unique individuals with their own cultural and spiritual frames of reference, their own lived experience, and their own strengths is critical to positive outcomes. This approach sees children and their families as the ‘experts’ with a sense of agency in their own situation and creates the space to develop trusting relationships with service providers.

Taking this strengths-based approach in the CALD context requires workers to acknowledge and value difference, to avoid making assumptions and to communicate effectively across cultures. DFV is not a homogenous experience; it requires flexible, culturally nuanced responses. Yet some participants raised concerns about possible low levels of cultural responsiveness in the DFV and children’s services sector, as well as ongoing structural and systemic barriers that maintain discriminatory practices.

Many participants mentioned there is a perception that DFV and children’s services are not designed or delivered by people who reflect the ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the community at large. In the longer term, the aim would be to close this lived-experience leadership gap, with the expectation that services become more representative and inclusive. In the shorter term, it was agreed that widespread cultural responsiveness, domestic violence and trauma informed training should be delivered across DFV and children’s services touchpoints.



LIVED EXPERIENCE SPOTLIGHT:

On arriving in Australia from overseas, Sam* was shocked to find herself living in a family impacted by DFV. She had lived refugee experience and felt very unsafe when she became aware of the violence, and had thought that human rights would be strongly upheld in a country like Australia.

Although she was fearful for herself and the family members she lived with, Sam realised there were multiple barriers to speaking out about what was happening. She didn't know where to get help or what damage the disclosure might cause to the family. She also understood that children most often want their parents and siblings to be together, so keep the violence hidden even though they know they are in danger. This was compounded by the cultural expectation in her community that children respect their elders, making it taboo to speak out against their parents.

Some victims don't know that violence perpetrated in the home is unlawful, or they may be fearful that speaking out will cause the violence to escalate. Other barriers such as cultural stigma and shame stop people from revealing what's happening, and in this case, Sam was fearful that seeking help might lead to family breakdown.

When the violence was finally disclosed to colleagues at work, they were caring but they didn't know how to assist. A safe space to disclose the trauma to culturally responsive workers who could help to plan a way forward just didn't exist for Sam.

*name changed to maintain privacy.

Understanding the challenges of migration, settlement, intercultural and intergenerational differences, and the roles that faith and language play in the unique experiences of children who are often torn between their home and Australian cultures, are just some of the many considerations in working with children and families in a culturally responsive way.

The *'Safe and Together'* program, which is not child-specific, but which supports families that choose to stay together, is said to be working but is not widespread. The *Women's Hubs* program provides safe spaces and helps to build trust between services and the community, and children from CALD backgrounds in DFV refuges are reportedly receiving more tailored responses in recognition of their unique needs. However, much more work is needed to support children effectively. Reframing support services to use culture and faith as a strength, in a way that respects and empowers children and families, is critical to developing appropriate, successful support.



RECOMMENDATION (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to map workforce cultural responsiveness skills across the jurisdictions, with a view to mandating cultural responsiveness training for all roles that interface with clients and children from CALD backgrounds, with priority given to child protection stakeholders (government and non-government).

BETTER CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSES

As demonstrated in the previous Lived Experience Spotlight and in the section on children's voices, we know that children will often avoid disclosing their experiences of DFV because they are loyal to their parents and community, and untrusting of authority. They may also worry about being taken away from their families.

Some practitioners shared their understanding of the relatively low rate of screening for children from CALD backgrounds at child protection and DFV touchpoints, despite anecdotally high notification numbers. It was agreed that many services do their best to respond, but they are often not sufficiently staffed or skilled to support CALD-specific disclosures. In this environment, practitioners agreed that children's voices are often lost in the chaos.

“ There are huge gaps in services for CALD specific needs; even when we get disclosures through respectful community engagement the support system just isn't there. There are long waiting lists everywhere. ”

Roundtable participant

Some commented that mandatory reporting professionals, such as teachers, are largely unable to continue supporting children beyond initial notifications, leaving them subjected to rigid mainstream administrative processes that aren't sensitive to culturally specific needs. In these circumstances, access to culturally responsive mainstream supports and community-based culturally appropriate supports would assist child protection workers to develop more suitable referral pathways.

“ There are hardly any therapeutic support services for children of culture. ”

Roundtable participant

Participants reflected on the need for more support to keep children connected to the protective parent and with their extended families, including non-abusive relatives such as siblings or grandparents. In crisis scenarios, families are often split up and these relationships are regularly overlooked by caseworkers whose main aim is to find a physically safe environment away from imminent danger. However, language and culture are critical to a child's sense of belonging, and affinity can most easily be found in families where ethnicity, language, culture, and faith are shared and celebrated. In cases where family members do take on caring roles they should be made aware of the additional financial and emotional support they may be eligible to receive.

“ Understanding the setting, keeping the whole family visible in decisions (even if they may be not physically present) and asking the right questions is crucial. ”



RECOMMENDATION (S, T):

State and Territory governments to:

1. map educational and therapeutic community supports available to mainstream children, with a view to increasing their reach and cultural responsiveness
2. map educational and therapeutic ethno-specific and multicultural community supports available to children from CALD backgrounds with a view to expansion
3. develop cultural plans (in states and territories where they don't already exist) where culture is placed at the centre of all care plans for children who identify with a CALD background who are accessing out of home care services.

CONNECT THE SERVICE SYSTEM

Another universal concern raised across roundtables was fragmentation in the DFV service system. It was agreed that people are re-traumatized by having to re-tell their stories at multiple different access points because information is not easily shared, services are not well-connected and waiting lists are long. The key to achieving better outcomes is the right support at the first point of contact through good case management and expert systems' navigation.

“ Clients constantly have to advocate for themselves, and we have to advocate for them as well. It's exhausting. ”

Roundtable participant

We heard how privacy laws obstruct the disclosure of critical information about people's circumstances causing key decisions to be made without 'the full picture'. This can lead to extremely adverse outcomes, including the misidentification of the protective parent.



LIVED EXPERIENCE SPOTLIGHT

An example of the complexity of some cases was demonstrated through the story of a young LGBTQIA+ DFV survivor who arrived in Australia as an international student (temporary visa holder) at 17yrs. Charlie's* life fell apart and was endangered on disclosing their gender diversity to their parents, who sought their return to their country of origin, and a public execution.

No DFV or LGBTQIA+ support was available for Charlie from within their local cultural community, which resulted in a period of homelessness and attempted suicide. Health, mental health, immigration, justice, housing and other social services were all required in Charlie's case, but the support was disjointed, inconsistent and culturally uninformed.

At no point did any of the services respond as though Charlie was a victim of DFV; had this occurred, they may have received DFV counselling, financial and housing support. Without culturally specific LGBTQIA+ services to access, some help was provided through inclusive mainstream services. Charlie's journey back to health and safety was problematic, fragmented and took four years.

*name changed to maintain privacy.

“ How to track clients along each touch point? What is their journey? At what point is there a ‘breakthrough’, do things start going well, do things get on track? ”

Roundtable participant

Some practitioners felt there should be greater focus on ‘whole of family’ approaches and increased tracking of client journeys from the first point of service contact. Better understanding of how clients use and experience the spectrum of interventions could assist in the design and implementation of more seamless service delivery models in the future.

It was agreed that centering children in mapping processes is critical to understanding their experiences and responses, and to making child-centered changes to the system. It was also recommended that more conversations within the sector and with children from CALD backgrounds about how this might be achieved, what different services of care might look like, and how they might be measured should be part of any systems review process.

“ Co-design should also be about co-producing and co-evaluating; we need lived experience of children across all program touch points. ”

Roundtable participant

REFORM CURRENT FUNDING MODELS

Most participants believe that a key challenge to delivering support through the NGO sector is insufficient funding. Despite the many DFV services available, demand continues to outweigh capacity, and marginalised groups are often not catered for in mainstream settings. While funding to the NGO sector can deliver more targeted, culturally responsive supports, it is not currently deemed sufficient to meet need. It is also most often distributed through competitive, siloed, inflexible and short-term funding models that restrict organisations from pivoting to address new and emerging gaps in real time.

In one community legal sector, for example, some 70% of clients are identified as victims of DFV. However, due to contract constraints, the sector is unable to re-allocate funding to provide DFV related assistance at the point of contact, despite the service knowing what is needed. In rigid funding environments, it was agreed that stronger collaboration within and across sectors is required to build referral pathways. However, it was also acknowledged that collaboration can be difficult when organisations are regularly required to compete for the same funding pools.

“ Individuals working in support services often go above and beyond their scope of work because there are limited agencies to make appropriate referrals to, or adequate funding. ”

Roundtable participant

A move to service commissioning practices that reward greater flexibility, non-competitive partnerships, client-centred service design and integrated service delivery was proposed; this would be a win-win for services who could leverage off each other to build pathways and capacity, and also for clients, who would benefit from more holistic, joined-up, person-centred, and efficient approaches.



RECOMMENDATION (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to commence reforms to funding models and service systems that result in improved access to robust, coordinated, culturally specific DFV responses for children.

“ What do different services of care look like? How do we continue to link to client outcomes and satisfaction? In building this knowledge we need to hold ourselves accountable. ”

Roundtable participant



LIVED EXPERIENCE SPOTLIGHT

The first 20 years of Sophie's* life was spent living in an alcohol-fuelled, controlling, and abusive home with her mother, younger sister, and father. She attended five high schools and lived in five women's refuges across Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. Her mother often described this part of their lives as 'tù lóng'. In English this translates to 'loose prison'. Even before she was born, Sophie's mum had experienced physical violence at the hand of her father and at one point deciding that taking her life was the only way out.

Throughout her primary and high school years, Sophie felt like a lonely wanderer, there was not a single person she could confide in. Even her teachers didn't know what to do and advice such as 'why don't you run away from home' didn't help. This was a phrase that she heard repeatedly. From the doctor in Emergency who stitched up her head, to the GP who took out her stitches. When she did think about leaving, where was she to go. The streets?

The multiple times that she, her mum and sister turned up to the police station in the early hours of the morning escaping her father, they were swiftly connected to a women's refuge. From there, it was a matter of moving into transitional housing and the process of rebuilding their lives began, again.

To be surrounded by strangers and a system that cared is something she is eternally grateful for.

*name changed to maintain privacy.

ELEVATE THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

Community leaders reminded participants that most ethnic community organisations are an extension of the diaspora communities they serve; they are place-based and informed and delivered by people with lived experience. Their knowledge and networks are critical to the service eco-system and the development and implementation of tailored programs, yet we know there is no stable government funding or formal commitment to working in partnership to identify and address the needs of children within ethno-specific communities.

“Community leaders speaking about issues with their communities at grassroots level is very effective across the state, including in the regions.”

Roundtable participant

While some smaller organisations have reportedly received funding for DFV programs in the past, they have focussed primarily on women and DFV prevention. Participants acknowledged the need for stronger collaboration between government, multicultural service providers and ethnic and faith-based organisations to build the focus on children, and to ensure their voices are captured appropriately across the National Plan's prevention, early intervention and recovery initiatives going forward.



RECOMMENDATION (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to provide increased funding for community organisations to design and deliver (with DFV specialist support) grassroots DFV prevention programs for children from CALD backgrounds. Appropriate levels of funding should be quarantined from government budgets and be ongoing.

IMPLEMENT RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR CHILDREN

Participants advised for example, there are currently only five questions about children in the NSW DFV risk assessment process (DVSAT) and none of these questions are aimed directly at children. Although it was stated that some progress has been made in assessing risk for women, assessing risk to children has not been a priority since they are often viewed as an extension of their parent. This contradicts the commitment under the National Plan to recognise children as victims in their own right.

“ We know threat/risk to children is high even when they are not directly targeted. ”

Roundtable participant

It was agreed that children should be assessed separately given they are individuals and their experiences are unique. A review of how 'safety' measures in DFV risk assessments are interpreted, with particular consideration given to cultural background, life experience, and length of time the person has spent in Australia, was also proposed. A measure of safety for a newly arrived refugee, for example, may be based on their recent freedom from war, rather than safety within the immediate family dynamic. A trauma-informed approach by culturally competent assessors would help to identify any misunderstandings, and children should be assessed by someone skilled in working with youngsters in their age group.



RECOMMENDATION (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to review DFV risk assessment tools to ensure child-specific questions or separate child-specific assessments are implemented in jurisdictions where they don't exist, and upskill staff accordingly.

A practitioner shared that in NSW there are minimal numbers of counsellors across the state for all children aged 0-6yrs in Victim's Services. If we overlay this resource shortage with the lack of child-focused questioning and the complex needs of CALD communities, we get a clearer picture of how unlikely it is that children from CALD communities will receive the tailored care to which they are entitled in the current operating environment.



RECOMMENDATION (S, T):

State and Territory governments to provide funding for key DFV services to employ culturally responsive child specialist workers to deliver support, including casework and counselling.

VISA IMPLICATIONS

Participants talked about multiple barriers that women and children on temporary visas can face and the consequences they sometimes endure, including living in unsafe environments, living in ad-hoc, short-term accommodation or having to leave the country. Some migrants have never been informed of their rights and responsibilities, so are unaware of services or the consequences of their actions if they break the law. For example, in situations where children on insecure visas are eligible for permanent visas but residency has not been sought, there is a risk of visa cancellation if they come into contact with the criminal justice system.



RECOMMENDATION (A):

Australian government to develop materials that better educate migrants, refugees and all new visa holders on Australia's legal system and its response to DFV, including a focus on children.

Community leaders talked about different types of DFV such as forced marriage and dowry abuse and shared how women can be maltreated by multiple abusers including their parents, in-laws and siblings, as well as their partner. Multifaceted, multi-perpetrator abuse can be widespread and is not unique to the contexts mentioned. Children raised in environments of entrenched, structural violence are at risk of believing that violence against women and girls is normal and shifting the patriarchal behaviours and beliefs that reinforce male dominance can take generations.

Participants agreed that given the unpredictable nature of DFV, services should be available to all people in crisis. They should be intersectional, trauma informed and take the nuance and complexity of each individual, child and family into consideration when tailoring responses.

“What matters most to migrants in their culture and their migration experience is that systems and services are flexible and reflective of the multiple needs they may have.”

Roundtable participant



RECOMMENDATION (S, T):

State and Territory governments to implement a no-closed-door policy for parents and children from CALD backgrounds (regardless of visa status, length of time in Australia or age) presenting for emergency assistance.

INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATING DFV MATERIALS

We heard many comments about the lack of a national interpreter service for children and the apparent lack of nuanced training for interpreters working with children in the context of DFV. Participants felt that interpreters are not currently seen as part of ‘the response team’ so are often an after-thought and can be called to crisis scenarios without the necessary child-focused expertise.

“Well-trained, culturally responsive and trauma informed interpreters could give children a strong, clear voice.”

Roundtable participant

A lack of translated DFV campaign and service information on ethno-specific communications channels was also identified. This is an equity issue that unfairly impacts non-English speaking communities.



RECOMMENDATIONS (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to:

1. develop specialised child-focused DFV training for interpreters
2. increase % of DFV communications budget to include in-language and child focused materials, and increased social media presence across ethnic communities’ and mainstream communication channels.

SERVICE GAPS FOR MEN

An increased focus on the role of men in DFV was another key theme raised across the states. Many believe there are insufficient culturally responsive services for men who perpetrate violence, as well as for those who are victim/survivors.

“ There is not enough emphasis on perpetrator accountability and education programs for men. ”

Roundtable participant

While a small number of programs and support services are funded to change offender behaviour in the early intervention and response periods, there is inadequate funding to scale and adapt programs to suit culture and/or language. A focus on young men is especially important because children who bear witness to, or are subjected to violent behaviour by men, can grow up believing their actions are normal and acceptable.



RECOMMENDATION (A, S, T):

Australian, State and Territory governments to increase funding for culturally, linguistically and religiously responsive change behaviour, prevention and support programs for men.



PASIFIKA COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY

In June 2023, community leaders representing a number of Pasifika communities, came together to discuss the specific needs of Pasifika children in the context of domestic and family violence (DFV). This forum responded to community requests that they be given ‘a seat at the table’ as those best placed to understand DFV issues in their communities and to identify solutions informed by ‘cultural nuances and sensitivities’.

PASIFIKA COMMUNITIES CONTEXT

The population referred to as Pasifika communities represent over 26 countries in Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia¹. As of the 2021 census² there were 337,000 people of Pacific heritage living in Australia, twice as many as in 2006. Pasifika communities now make up 1.3% of Australia’s total population, growing more than twice as fast as the total Australian population. New Zealand has had a significant impact on patterns of Pacific migration to Australia with communities from Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands migrating to New Zealand and then on to Australia. These three countries make up over two-thirds of the increase in the Pasifika population in Australia between 2016–2021.

Community leaders and advocates at the forum highlighted that communities do not necessarily identify with the term Pasifika as a reference to ‘people from different countries and cultures’. Data collection continues to group them into the New Zealand born category which not only assumes homogeneity but also limits the potential for data collection and service access within specific Pasifika communities.

“We don’t know the extent of the issue and this makes it hard for us to even respond.”

In framing the specific needs of Pasifika children in the context of DFV, it is important to understand the contextual factors that intersect with this issue. These include, racism, residency status and family structures as explained by communities:

“We are individual countries but our own ways of dealing with things is ignored. We are often dealt with as ‘Pasifika’. This is a real problem. The racism that impacts often doesn’t get understood.”

“There are issues around the family structures in Australia where young people are sent to live with aunties and uncles. Supporting families to understand inter-generational issues can provide more understanding.”

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Community experiences of racism and discrimination have served to silence potential for disclosure and help seeking around DFV. Community representatives explain that attempts to discuss DFV are difficult with families reluctant to engage around issues that further serve to stigmatise them.

“A major obstacle is the culture of pride and shame for our people. They would rather close ranks than openly admit to abuse of our young ones. They would rather hide their shame than let their communities or church know what’s happening.”

These psycho-social factors present ongoing challenges for community advocates working to promote improved understanding on the impact of family violence on children. They are also not well understood or considered in ‘mainstream’ prevention, early intervention and response efforts.

“It is hard for our community to hear the word ‘violence’. We would like to see it replaced with words like ‘behaviours’.”

UNDERSTANDING OF DFV

Understanding of different forms of DFV generally remains limited within Pasifika communities who mainly associate the term with physical violence. It is also seen as a private issue that is not appropriate to discuss outside the family.

“Our communities often don’t identify family violence as an issue. We think about domestic violence and we think about people being put in hospital. It has been far too normalised in our communities and it’s not until someone is killed or seriously injured that it gets taken on board.”

Perpetrators of violence are also ‘parents, brothers, aunts, uncles, and community leaders’. There is a reluctance to disclose and seek help as it is perceived to be detrimental to family and community who have already experienced considerable trauma and marginalisation.

“Yes some of our community members and parents are perpetrators but they are also victims. We have a history of colonisation as well and a history of war and trauma. Our culture is about being physically strong and dominant to protect it.”

1. In the 2021 Census, the Pasifika countries represented in Australia include Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Niue, Norfolk Island, Nauru, Tokelau, Kiribati, French Polynesia, American Samoa, Tuvalu, Guam, Marshall Islands, Oceania and Antarctica (NFD), Micronesia (NFD), Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, Federated States of Palau, Wallis and Futuna, Pitcairn Islands, Polynesia (NFD) (excludes Hawaii), Polynesia (NFD) (also excludes Hawaii).

2. ABS 2021 Population Census.

CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE

Community representatives are concerned at the language that young people use which normalises violence. They believe the work being done around respectful relationships in schools is important but children are then returning to homes where those messages can appear contradictory to what they see – *“this becomes a source of cynicism”*.

Young people from Pasifika communities who are engaged in the justice system are also likely to have experienced violence in their childhood. There are a high number of children entering the criminal justice system who have experienced trauma and don't know how to deal with that trauma.

“There are some parents that we need to get to who think that children have no voice. This is a real barrier.”

A clear message from communities is that a DFV response for Pasifika communities must be holistic and understood within a family context, not separating issues around children.

EFFECTIVE RESPONSES

A consistent message throughout the forum was the criticality of messages and responses being delivered from within communities, and reflective of trauma-informed approaches.

“We know that the problem and the solutions to this issue lie within our own community.”

Creating safe spaces for young people to tell their stories, engaging parents to explore ways of addressing challenges in their own families and acknowledging the positives that give communities pride and strength were all messages that reinforced the importance of a strengths-based approach.

“Our leaders in the community need to be involved. If they are involved then that is half the battle. They can be great advocates and it goes a long way to spreading the message.”

Connection to culture and opportunity to be part of the solution for diaspora Pasifika communities were highlighted as critical to effective responses. A ‘village response’ creates safety to engage in truth telling and promote healing for families.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a village response model is adopted for DFV prevention and early intervention work with Pasifika communities. This model has been developed and used effectively in Victoria and is informed by a strengthening family approach.
2. That a DFV awareness campaign specifically for Pasifika communities is designed and rolled out. Such a campaign must be developed in collaboration with communities and be culturally responsive.

CONCLUSION

The insights and concerns of roundtable participants paint a clear and troubling picture of the current DFV ecosystem as it relates to, and impacts on, children from CALD backgrounds. The messages we heard highlight the importance of centering children in future initiatives developed as part of the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*.

The current commitment and efforts of so many services cannot be underestimated in their attempts to support marginalised children caught up in DFV, but greater political will, increased resources, and a proliferation in cultural responsiveness skills are required to do things differently, better, and together.

The development of the first Action Plan associated with the National Plan provides a timely opportunity to act on the findings of this report and develop specific responses for children, with nuanced responses for children from CALD backgrounds. No organisation or sector can solve these problems alone. It requires us to recognise and respond to the unique context and challenges children from CALD backgrounds face in their efforts to seek help and culturally responsive services.

We need to make space for new ways of thinking, new ways of listening and new ways of connecting and working together if we are to build a better, more equal and socially just society for the most marginalised children in our community.



