



Policy brief

# **Safe and Supported:** Addressing domestic, family and sexual violence in multicultural communities in Australia

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# Key messages

- Australia is now more diverse – ethnically, linguistically, culturally – than ever; yet concrete data on the extent of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) among these communities is lacking. What is certain is that the impacts of this violence are being felt in multicultural communities.
- There is growing recognition of the need to respond to the needs of victim-survivors who are children and young people, to develop targeted responses to sexual violence, and to work with men from multicultural backgrounds across the DFSV continuum – prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.
- While DFSV occurs across all cultures and communities, there are specific complexities and structural barriers for victim-survivors from multicultural communities that require tailored, culturally responsive approaches to promote community safety and wellbeing.
- Structural barriers to safety include aspects of the migration system where people on temporary visas can be subject to coercive control enabled by threats to cancel visas. Barriers to getting help also arise because eligibility rules for vital universal services and supports exclude people on temporary visas. Similarly, existing family violence provisions of the Migration Act do not extend protection against violence from a non-intimate partner or multiple perpetrators, such as extended family members.
- As well as structural barriers, people impacted by DFSV are commonly subjected to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation due, but not limited, to their gender, class, ethnicity, race and cultural background, religion, disability and sexual orientation as acknowledged by the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.
- An intersectional approach that identifies and responds to the multiple forms of structural oppression and discrimination that can create barriers to support for victim-survivors of abuse/violence is required.
- Multicultural community-led DFSV prevention and early intervention are critical. Building and sustaining the capacity of social responders (including faith and community leaders) is vital to leverage the protective factors of culture, faith and community and to build networks of respected and well-connected leaders equipped to safely support others within their cultural and community context. Prevention and early intervention initiatives must be designed with, tailored to and led by multicultural communities and delivered in places and settings trusted by refugee and migrant women such as settlement services, but only when those services have been sustainably resourced and upskilled to safely screen and respond to women experiencing violence.
- Culturally responsive practice is essential and, while there are DFSV services that specialise in supporting migrant and refugee communities, cultural responsiveness is a practice that must be prioritised and embedded by all, rather than be expected to be provided by multicultural organisations and settlement services.
- Services can build greater trust with victim-survivors from migrant and refugee communities by employing culturally diverse staff, partnering with communities, respecting cultural norms and autonomy, and offering options for safety, including recognising that some migrant and refugee women may choose to prefer family preservation over leaving a violent relationship.
- There also needs to be a permanent uplift of the capability of universal systems and services (such as education, health, police and the courts), staff and the systems they work in to facilitate early intervention in culturally responsive ways. Such uplift requires ongoing investment in:
  - Specialist DFSV services with dedicated expertise in supporting migrant and refugee victim-survivors;
  - Uplifting capability for culturally responsive practice within DFSV services;
  - Developing and sustainably maintaining a bilingual/bicultural workforce to reflect Australia's culturally diverse population, including within specialist DFSV services;
- Training and sustainably maintaining a workforce in the multicultural and settlement sectors.
- Initiatives targeting men, including men's behaviour change interventions, must accompany responses to victim-survivors. These need to be culturally informed and tailored, co-designed and delivered in-language, to ensure meaningful engagement and participation by men.
- Achieving the goals and targets of the Action Plans and fulfilling the purpose of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 needs a more coherent mix of culturally responsive mainstream initiatives alongside targeted initiatives for faith-based, ethno-specific and multicultural communities across the continuum of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.



# Recommendations

**1** Australian and State/Territory Governments should invest in building culturally responsive practice of universal services such as education and health and drive system reforms to enable them to facilitate improved early intervention with migrants and refugee victim-survivors.

**2** State/Territory Governments should invest in prevention and early intervention through community capacity building, training and support of community and social responders (including faith and community leaders) and ongoing partnerships with multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based communities. Multicultural faith and community leaders and organisations should be recognised and supported as key actors in the DFSV prevention and response ecosystem.

**3** The Australian Government should resource specialist migrant and refugee responses, such as through the settlement sector, to provide early intervention initiatives, given that refugee and migrant women already access these programs for a range of supports in the early stages of settlement. For example, the University of Wollongong and SSI tested early intervention through the Safety and Health after Arrival Research, SAHAR, in settlement services which showed promising results. Similarly, past investment by the Department of Home Affairs to fund specialist DFSV workers in settlement services should be restored and strengthened to ensure that the ongoing demand and need for support by migrant and refugee victim-survivors are met.

**4** The Action Plans of the National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 should adopt a more coherent and culturally responsive approach to support victim-survivors of DFSV from migrant and refugee backgrounds. While SSI supports the National Plan's Action Plan 2023 - 2027 goal to build DFSV and mainstream services' capability (e.g. health services, police and courts), committed action is inconsistent across jurisdictions. Enabling strategy, leadership and investment, alongside practical capacity building measures, is required to ensure a comprehensive culturally responsive approach across the DFSV sector.

**5** Australian and State/Territory Governments should invest in uplifting the capability of mainstream and specialist DFSV responses to provide culturally responsive, accessible and in-language support to migrant and refugee victim-survivors. This includes sustainable investment to recruit and retain a sufficient workforce, including bicultural/bilingual workers, across mainstream, specialist DFSV and multicultural and settlement services.

**6** State and Territory governments need to continue to resource tailored DFSV responses which reflect the cultural diversity of local populations and engage and involve victim-survivors in co-designing services: For example, SSI delivers 99 Steps, which provides tailored support to migrant and refugee women in the Logan and Beenleigh areas of Queensland.<sup>1</sup> In New South Wales, the Adira

Centre delivered by SSI includes a specialist multicultural DFSV service located in south-west Sydney, but with a statewide reach.<sup>2</sup>

**7** Sustained investment is needed for culturally tailored men's behaviour change programs delivered in-language: The Building Stronger Families program worked with culturally and linguistically diverse men who use violence and while the evaluation indicated it had improved safety and promoted behaviour change, it was constrained by limited funding. SSI has adopted the program learnings in its community co-designed, Safe Empowered and Relationships (SHER) program in Queensland.<sup>3</sup>

**8** The Australian Government should review access to income support, Medicare and other universal services to better support and protect victim-survivors of DFSV regardless of visa/residency status: This is consistent with the ways forward outlined by the Australian Government DFSV Commission following a recent Multicultural Communities Roundtable which included a broader review of residency/visa barriers to essential supports, including housing, expanding family violence provisions to more visa subclasses and creating bridging visa pathways for victim-survivors.<sup>4</sup>





## About SSI

SSI is a national not-for-profit organisation providing life-changing human and social services. With community at the heart of everything we do, our purpose is to help create a more inclusive society in which everyone can meaningfully contribute to social, cultural, civic and economic life. SSI was founded in Sydney in 2000 with the aim of helping newly arrived refugees settle in Australia.

Over time, our expertise in working with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds served as the foundation for a gradual expansion into other social services and geographical areas. In 2018, SSI merged with Queensland-based Access Community Services and opened in Victoria providing an extensive footprint across the eastern coast of Australia with a network of across Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, regional New South Wales and Queensland. Each year, SSI supports more than 53,000 people across almost 60 programs.

This policy brief is informed by SSI's broad experience in delivering services to migrants and refugees across a variety of contexts, including settlement, disability, employment and out-of-home care. In this work, our staff witness the strengths and challenges experienced by adults and children who are victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence. SSI's practice experience, expertise and research indicate that these forms of violence among migrant and refugee communities involve intersecting issues and structural barriers that require tailored responses to maintain and promote community safety and wellbeing.



## Overarching policy principles

- Domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) is a severe violation of a person's human rights. Every person has the right to feel and be safe at home irrespective of visa or residency status. Children can be victim-survivors of DFSV in their own right.
- Culture or ethnicity is not linked to violence, but the understanding of what constitutes violence can vary across cultures, and cultural barriers such as family and community pressures, shame and stigma may hinder migrant and refugee victim-survivors in seeking safety. As such, effective approaches to address and prevent violence may need to be tailored to be responsive to these variations.
- Migrant and refugee women and children experiencing or at risk of DFSV also face systemic barriers to achieving safety, compounded by cultural, institutional and structural inequities. These barriers often restrict their ability to seek help, disclose abuse, and access supports, thus undermining safety and wellbeing.
- Experiences of migration and the migration system fundamentally shape migrant and refugee communities' safety and access to support. Some migrant and refugee communities may experience higher levels of risks associated with DFSV which can be barriers to help-seeking including pre migration trauma, post migration stressors, disruptions and changes to the family structure in settlement, trauma, social isolation, poverty and a lack of understanding of Australian pathways to address DFSV.
- Equitable access to DFSV prevention, early intervention and services is an important human right for all. This requires commitment at all levels of government to affirm the shared responsibility to deliver more culturally responsive DFSV initiatives that address and dismantle structural barriers to safety and wellbeing.

# Why focus on addressing domestic, family and sexual violence in migrant and refugee communities?

## Australia is becoming more culturally diverse which underscores a need for intersectional approaches in DFSV policy and programs

The prevalence and impact of DFSV constitutes a severe violation of fundamental human rights. It undermines an individual's dignity, safety, and equality, breaching various international treaties designed to protect these rights including the elimination of violence and discrimination against women and safeguarding the rights of the child.

Against this backdrop of the challenge of DFSV, Australia is now more diverse – ethnically, linguistically, culturally – than ever before. The 2021 Census found just under 50 per cent of the population are migrants or have a parent born overseas.<sup>5</sup> Over five and a half million people – one in four households – speak a language other than English at home. Almost 26 per cent of children enrolled in first year of full-time school in 2021 were from multicultural backgrounds, up from 17 per cent in 2009.<sup>6</sup>

While there is a range of population-level data on the prevalence of DFSV in Australia, there is little or no breakdown of the extent of DFSV among multicultural communities. A recent landmark study worked to address this gap. It surveyed almost 1,400 migrant and refugee women across Australia.<sup>7</sup> The study found that one in three (33%) respondents experienced some form of domestic and family violence; of which more than half (54%) experienced controlling

behaviours, violence towards others and/or property and physical or sexual violence.

Generating a clearer picture of the extent and nature of DFSV across multicultural communities in Australia requires developing an agreed, consistent set of minimum indicators to better inform policy, services and programs and target investment to respond to DFSV. This data would shine a light on the intersections of gender-based violence with cultural background, ethnicity and linguistic backgrounds alongside intersecting experiences that may pose additional risks and barriers to accessing support such as living with a disability and identifying as LGBTIQ+.

In recent years, new legislation passed in several jurisdictions criminalises people engaging in patterns of abuse and violence to exert coercive control. While these developments are welcome, learnings from research and practice indicate that while DFSV exists across all cultures and communities, victim-survivors from multicultural communities experience specific complexities and structural barriers that require tailored, culturally responsive approaches to promote safety and wellbeing.<sup>8</sup> For example, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds may face language barriers; limited digital literacy; limited understanding of the Australian services and how to navigate them; insecure visas; pre-migration trauma; post-migration difficulties; and have concerns about losing custody of children.<sup>9</sup> Further barriers include a mistrust of mainstream services and institutions due to experiences of discrimination and racism, poor service

responses, and rigid service options that undermine agency. Cultural stigma and community shame surrounding DFSV create significant obstacles for migrant and refugee women seeking help.<sup>10</sup> Limited engagement of interpreters or lack of access to culturally responsive DFSV services exacerbate feelings of isolation and fear of judgment.<sup>11</sup>

As well as structural barriers, people impacted by DFSV are commonly subjected to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation due to, but not limited to, their gender, class, ethnicity, race and cultural background, religion, disability and sexual orientation. This is recognised in the National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032, which states that:

*“Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, can include specific forms of violence that may disproportionately impact women and girls from culturally, ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse communities and migrant and refugee women, such as migration-related abuse, dowry abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and trafficking of women and girls.”*

The National Plan points to a need for intersectional approaches that recognise that people can be subjected to different types of structural oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission recognises that there is diversity within multicultural communities that can be overlooked alongside the persistence of common stereotypes of men from migrant and

refugee backgrounds as violent, while women are too often seen as passive victims.<sup>12</sup>

Discourse and policy on DFSV in Australia has had a strong focus on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and the most severe forms of violence, including murder, are often perpetrated by intimate partners. However, as found in consultations carried out by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, women from multicultural backgrounds are more likely to be part of extended family households and can experience violence from other family members, such as siblings, mother-in-law, husband's siblings, and adolescent sons.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not the person using violence co-habits with the victim-survivor, the former can commit multi-perpetrator violence and coercive control through relatives within the household, community networks and through threats from or against family overseas. The lack of recognition of the particular ways in which DFSV can occur in multicultural communities is similarly reflected in, for example, the definition of family violence used to determine the eligibility to access family violence supports which is typically limited to intimate partner violence.

# Community-led prevention and early intervention can promote women's safety and wellbeing

**For prevention and early intervention to improve safety and drive change, we need to invest in partnerships with communities and social responders to build and maintain capability**

Primary prevention initiatives led by multicultural communities often require responses to disclosures, demonstrating that approaches to primary prevention and early intervention frequently overlap in multicultural contexts. Multicultural, ethno-specific and faith-based organisations play a critical role in preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) by embedding lived experience and community voices in local partnerships. These organisations are well placed to deliver culturally responsive prevention and early intervention, particularly through building the capacity of social responders such as faith and community leaders. When appropriately supported, these leaders can leverage the protective strengths of culture, faith and community, and provide trusted, safe pathways to support within their communities.

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## **Case Study:** The Train, Engage, Connect, Support (TECS) project

The Train, Engage, Connect, Support (TECS) project, supported by the Australian Government under the National Plan and being delivered by SSI in partnership with the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, seeks to engage and build the capability of multicultural community and faith leaders across Australia to respond to DFSV, in collaboration with specialist services.<sup>14</sup> Through consultation and co-design with community and sector stakeholders, the TECS project has developed culturally responsive learning resources to support leaders to take action to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) in their communities.<sup>15</sup>

**Early intervention needs to shift to places and settings already accessed by refugee and migrant women**

Existing mainstream early intervention initiatives often fail to reach multicultural communities, leaving migrant and refugee women that experience violence more likely to experience harm that reaches levels of crisis. These mainstream settings such as health services require stronger investment to develop in-language and culturally relevant resources, intersectional DFSV training and support for engagement of interpreters in early intervention.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, early intervention needs to shift to settings and services already familiar and accessed by migrant and refugee women where they have existing trust and rapport.<sup>17</sup> Migrant and refugee victim-survivors often have established relationships of trust with multicultural, faith-based and settlement organisations, and are significantly more likely to disclose DFSV and seek help from services where they experience ease of access, in-language services, cultural familiarity and a perceived alignment of values.<sup>18</sup>

For example, SSI partnered with researchers over three years in the Safety and Health After Arrival Research (SAHAR) study which adapted and trialled screening and responding to violence in settlement services. Coincidentally, when the SAHAR commenced, the Department of Home Affairs provided an enhancement to fund DFSV workers in settlement services who were critical internal referral points for risk assessment and safety planning for women identified by SAHAR as having experienced DFSV. However, the 2024-25 Federal Budget saw this targeted investment reduced, significantly limiting the capacity of these settlement services to respond to DFSV.<sup>19</sup>

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### **Case Study:** **From research to evidence-based practice - Safety and Health After Arrival Research (SAHAR)**

The National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children prioritises refugee women and children. However, to date, evidence-based early intervention strategies have been limited.

The SAHAR study, funded by the Australian Research Council and SSI, and led by researchers at the University of Wollongong is an example of leveraging community-based settlement services to implement domestic and family violence screening and response for refugee women.<sup>20</sup>

The study demonstrated the feasibility of implementing domestic and family violence screening in settlement services with refugee women, confirming that screening is accepted and supported by women, including those who themselves had experienced domestic and family violence.<sup>21</sup> For most women, the SAHAR study was their first experience of being

asked about domestic and family violence underscoring that settlement services could provide an additional setting to expand domestic and family violence early intervention and response.

Settlement staff reported that asking about domestic and family violence provided opportunities for disclosure and support and their practice was aided by clear and simple tools, dedicated training and tailored mentoring support. Central to this success of this trial of domestic and family violence screening and response were worker care and skills, language matching, the creation of safe spaces, and the use of female bilingual and bicultural workers.

While the findings are promising, there are challenges in scaling-up this approach to early intervention in settlement services which would require investment by the Australian Government and working closely with settlement services and the DFSV sector.

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### **Prevention and early intervention initiatives must be tailored to, and accessible for migrant and refugee communities**

For prevention and early intervention initiatives to be effective for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, they need to be tailored and accessible. Accordingly, the National Plan calls for services and materials to be provided in-language to reduce barriers for women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities seeking information and support.

A range of helplines and websites are part of the suite of mainstream prevention and early intervention resources available to women seeking safety. Helplines, such as 1800RESPECT, are one example of infrastructure that should be resourced to be accessible and in-language. Men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can similarly benefit from being able to access men's referral services; however, there are few in-language services that men can be referred to.

### **Case Study:** **The Championing Action for Tech Safety (CATS) program**

In response to an emerging manifestation of violence, the Championing Action for Tech Safety (CATS) program, funded by the Australian Government's eSafety Commissioner, worked in a targeted way to promote tech-safety and prevent tech-based abuse. SSI delivered this program in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland to increase the knowledge and understanding of this form of violence among women of multicultural backgrounds, with a focus on those who were newly arrived or are refugees. As part of its work, the program conducted over 60 education sessions to 12 community language groups (Arabic, Bahasa, Bengali, Burmese, Dari, Farsi, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Thai, and Vietnamese) reaching over 1,000 participants which include over 150 community leaders.<sup>22</sup>

# Embedding culturally responsive approaches in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence can build on initiatives that have already been implemented

## Culturally responsive approaches are essential

The Australian, state and territory governments' National Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 calls for a holistic multisectoral and culturally informed approach that is supported by the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders. Critical to this is collaboration and partnerships between specialist domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) services, other services and migrant and refugee communities.

Culturally responsive services play a crucial role in understanding contexts, dismantling barriers and improving access to services to improve safety and wellbeing for migrant and refugee women and children and address the behaviours of men who use violence. Specialist multicultural DFSV services generate trust and rapport by employing culturally diverse staff, partnering with communities, and providing support that is culturally safe while promoting autonomy and options for safety. While there are DFSV services that specialise in supporting migrant and refugee communities, cultural responsiveness is a practice that must be prioritised and embedded by all.

## Case Study: NSW Multicultural Centre for Women's and Family Safety - Adira

Adira promotes culturally appropriate, evidence-based and community informed responses to domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) in NSW, including in regional and rural areas.

Collaborating with specialist services and other support services, Adira aims to address the diverse needs of migrant and refugee women and children who are at risk of, or subjected to, DFSV.

Adira's tailored and comprehensive approach encompasses collaborative case management and support, community engagement and awareness raising, sector capacity building, consultation and research, development of evidence and good practice, and advocacy to drive systemic change.

Adira works across four focus areas: prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing.

Established in 2024, in its first year of operation, the Adira Centre has:<sup>23</sup>

- Delivered more than 50 community information sessions on healthy relationships and DFSV attended by more than 1,000 people, with interpretation provided in 15 different languages.
- Provided direct support to hundreds of women and children from multicultural backgrounds, including advice and referrals through to casework and counselling. Support was provided to women from more than 20 different language backgrounds.
- Delivered 13 capacity-building workshops on understanding, identifying and responding to DFSV in multicultural communities to organisations across both the DFSV and settlement sectors.
- Convened Learning Circles and delivered capacity building activities for women in migrant and refugee communities who are often the 'first responders' to DFSV in their communities.

Collaborative practice support is flexible, based on the needs, context and challenges of the services that Adira works with across NSW. While local services retain lead case management, Adira offers peer consultations and intra-professional advice, joint risk assessment and safety planning, case conferencing, co-case management and/or workshops addressing specific, recurring challenges. The intention is that, over time, practitioners in collaborating services develop experience and confidence to respond independently, thereby enhancing capabilities for culturally responsive service delivery.



To ensure seamless referrals between specialist multicultural domestic, family and sexual violence services and mainstream systems, including police, courts and health services, sustained investment is essential. Staff and systems must be supported to deliver culturally responsive practice for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While training is critical, one-off approaches are insufficient. Effective responses require an enabling environment that supports different ways of working and addresses intersectional, cultural and structural complexity. Improving access for multicultural communities also requires coordinated change beyond workforce development, including reforms to government policy, professional standards, and organisational policies and practices, backed by adequate resourcing.<sup>24</sup>

An enabling strategy, leadership and investment, alongside practical capacity-building are needed to fully implement a national cultural competence framework across the domestic, family and sexual violence continuum, from prevention to recovery and healing. This includes recruiting and developing a diverse workforce and strengthening engagement between settlement, multicultural and mainstream services to ensure culturally responsive support across the system.<sup>25</sup>

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### **Addressing contexts, barriers and enablers: Policy and programs can do more to support migrant women, regardless of visa status**

For migrant women in particular, the National Plan notes that access to essential DFSV support, regardless of visa status, is needed to promote and maintain safety and wellbeing. Accordingly, the Australian Government has gradually expanded efforts to improve protection for people on temporary visas experiencing family and domestic violence. For example, victim-survivors on a provisional partner visa may be eligible to apply for permanent residency under the Family Violence Provisions of the Migration Act. From July 2025, the Leaving Violence Program has been made permanent, providing eligible victim-survivors of intimate partner violence (including those on temporary visas) up to \$5,000 in financial support, including up to \$1,500 in cash and the remaining funds in goods and services, along with referral services, risk assessment and safety planning.<sup>26</sup>

While these developments are welcome, the Migration Act's Family Violence Provisions continue to insufficiently recognise all the contexts in which DFSV occurs and how these can create barriers for victim-survivors to seek help. For migrant and refugee women these can include:

- Violence that is perpetrated by family members other than a sponsoring partner is not recognised.
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- Requirements that the relationship must have ceased before a victim-survivor of DFSV can use the Family Violence Provisions; following which the victim-survivor is required to provide evidence that they were in a bona fide relationship with the person using violence.<sup>27</sup>
- Protection does not extend to victim-survivors of family violence on temporary visas other than partner visas, such as study visas.<sup>28</sup> This means that these temporary visas limit access to universal services such as Medicare, Centrelink benefits and emergency housing.
- Significant delays of several years in processing protection and partner visa applications compound the stress and trauma of women at risk of or experiencing domestic and family violence.

To resolve these issues establishing a victim-survivor visa for those who cannot access a pathway to permanent residency should be considered. Following a recent Multicultural Communities Roundtable, the Australian Government DFSV Commission has outlined ways forward including a broader review of residency/visa barriers to essential supports, including housing, expanding family violence provisions to more visa subclasses and creating bridging visa pathways for victim-survivors.<sup>29</sup>

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## Culturally tailored programs are essential in responses for migrant and refugee men

Addressing and preventing DFSV requires both responding to the needs of victim-survivors and to people who use violence. Ten to Men – an Australian Institute of Family Studies’ (AIFS) longitudinal study of boys and men – the first national estimate of male intimate partner violence perpetration in Australia.<sup>30</sup> It has found that more than 1 in 3 Australian men (35%) aged 18-65 years have used intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Ten to Men found high levels of social support and high levels of paternal affection in childhood both reduced the likelihood of men perpetrating intimate partner violence.

Men’s behaviour change programs are designed for men who have used violence, coercion or control in their relationships with their partner, children or other family members. These programs encourage men to be accountable for their behaviour and provide them with the skills and tools necessary to change their behaviour and maintain respectful relationships and are an important element in responding to DFSV.<sup>31</sup>

To ensure these programs are effective with men from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they must be culturally informed and adapted. SSI and Relationships Australia NSW’s Building Stronger Families program is an example of working to tailor an existing men’s behaviour change program. The evaluation of Building Stronger Families identified its greatest challenge was recruiting and retaining bilingual staff, who were regularly lost to more secure employment. The reliability of the program’s funding to operate as an ongoing service also impacted referrers’ confidence, pointing to the importance of sustained investment by governments.<sup>32</sup>

## Case Study: Working with men – Building Stronger Families

In multicultural societies such as Australia, culturally adapted Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) delivered in-language are required to effectively engage men from culturally diverse backgrounds who use violence. From 2018 to 2024, Relationships Australia NSW, in partnership with SSI and funded by the NSW Government, developed and implemented Building Stronger Families (BSF)—the first MBCP in NSW which was tailored with respect to both language and culture, beginning with Arabic and later expanding to Tamil and Farsi.

BSF involved an 18-week group program for men who use violence (“Taking Responsibility”), alongside an eight-week group for women who have experienced violence (“Women, Choice & Change”), with casework support for both men and women. The over 800 individuals reached in BSF learned about and received support to build healthier family relationships.

BSF exemplified the power of cultural adaptation. By working closely with community members, BSF achieved greater cultural safety, which increased participant engagement and helped men connect to the program’s challenging content. When messaging reflects participants’ lived experiences and

cultural contexts, engagement and responsiveness improve. Crucially, BSF acknowledged the potential traumas in participants’ backgrounds, adapting its approach to allow reflection informed by both personal culture and Australian norms. By presenting a comparative framework, men critically assessed their actions within their own cultural norms and the broader context of Australian society.

A process evaluation of BSF highlighted its capability-building approach, expertise developed across partner organisations, and the recruitment of bicultural workers, which strengthened workforce capacity and sector knowledge. Arabic, Tamil, and Farsi-speaking communities increased their awareness of family violence and contributed expertise to adapt the program further.

The learnings gained from BSF has informed SSI’s delivery of the Building Safer, Healthier Family Relationships (SHER) program in Queensland, which is a perpetrator intervention program focused on Dari-speaking men. The SHER program has been developed through consultation and co-design with community.

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