



Ethnic Child Care,
Family and Community
Services Co-operative^{Ltd}

Understanding Domestic Violence 2014

A Report by Eastern Sydney Multicultural Access Project
(ESMAP)





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Zar Ni Lwin Oo,

Multicultural Project Officer



Introduction

“Many Australians are affected by family, domestic and sexual violence each year and the potential adverse effects of these experiences can be long lasting. Results from the crime victimisation survey in 2011-12 estimated that there were 6.4 million incidents of physical or threatened assault in 2011–12 that affected an estimated 1.1 million people” (ABS, 2013a).

In 2012 it was estimated that 51,000 people aged 18 years and over were victims of sexual assault, and less than a third of these victims reported the incident to police (ABS, 2013a). The low rate of reporting of sexual assault to police is supported by the findings from Recorded Crime, Victims Australia, where police recorded approximately 17,000 victims of sexual assault in 2011 (ABS, 2012). Acts of violence also attract significant economic costs for the Australian community. It is estimated that violence perpetrated against women alone costs the Australian economy \$13.6 billion each year. By 2021 this figure is predicted to increase to \$15.6 billion (FaHCSIA, 2009a). This is 14.6% increase in reported family violence incidents between 2010 and 2011.

Migration can be a significant influence on a person’s life, with differing effects due to the different experiences of pre-migration, migration and resettlement. While some migrants experience a relatively easy transition, most migrants come across some - if not many - challenges in adjusting to life and making adaptation in a new country. Their experiences in their country of origin vary, as do their reasons for coming to Australia. People including women may be visiting family or seeking better economic conditions or they may be refugees fleeing persecution. These women, in particular, may have experienced multiple forms of violence and trauma.

Some of the many post-migration stressors include: the stress of separation from homeland, family members, friends and support networks; racial discrimination; domestic violence, changes in lifestyle and socio-economic status; culture shock; language barriers; and the ongoing trauma of pre-migration experiences, which may have included war and political instability, physical and psychological abuse, and travelling as a refugee or living in a refugee camp. These experiences create challenges that contribute to a higher risk of domestic violence.

The complexity of the grounds for domestic violence is immense. For instance, violent behaviour may be caused by an interaction of situational and individual factors or influence of alcohol and other chemical substances. Plus, there are chances that children who witness abuse may use violence for resolution of their own conflicts. Domestic violence (DV) is one of the most common forms of violence against women including elderly people in Australia. The most common form of reported or suspected abuse of older people is financial abuse and the older person’s adult children are most likely to be the abusers.

However many of these domestic violence or abuse cases have never been reported and it is believed to be one of the most chronically underreported crimes. A study funded by Women NSW found that the most common reasons for not reporting domestic violence to the police were fear of revenge or further violence from the perpetrator (14%), feelings of shame or embarrassment (12%) or a belief that the incident was too trivial or unimportant (12%).



Based on anecdotal evidence, it is arguably believed that a high percentage of older people from CALD background do not understand what Domestic Violence encompasses and are not aware of how to report domestic violence and where to seek help.

This project aims to identify the level of understanding of Domestic Violence and abuse in elderly people (over 65) from CALD background in Eastern Sydney and increase awareness of different types of domestic violence in the community.

Definition

The Statement of the NSW Domestic Violence Committee defines it as “a range of abusive behaviours perpetrated by one partner upon the other to gain and maintain control”. However this understanding fails to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon.

Domestic Violence happens in many relationships takes many forms and can happen to anyone in any walks of life. It is not merely physical violence but it also involves other acts such as social, financial, sexual, emotional and other types of abuse. Domestic violence can happen in all kinds of cultures, backgrounds, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, religion, races, age groups, disability, and economic status or location. Women and children are overwhelmingly the victims of domestic and family violence, and perpetrators are overwhelmingly male.

Terminology

- emotional abuse—blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship, undermining the victim’s self-esteem and self-worth through comparisons with others, withdrawing interest and engagement and emotional blackmail
- verbal abuse—swearing and humiliation in private and public, focusing on intelligence, sexuality, body image or the victim’s capacity as a parent or spouse
- social abuse—systematic isolation from family and friends, instigating and controlling relocations to a place where the victim has no social circle or employment opportunities and preventing the victim from going out to meet people
- economic abuse—controlling all money, forbidding access to bank accounts, providing an inadequate ‘allowance’, preventing the victim seeking or holding employment and taking wages earned by the victim
- psychological abuse—making threats regarding custody of children, asserting the justice system will not believe or support the victim, destroying property, abusing pets and driving dangerously
- spiritual abuse—denial and/or misuse of religious beliefs or practices to force victims into subordinate roles and misusing religious or spiritual traditions to justify physical violence or other abuse
- physical abuse—direct assaults on the body, use of weapons (including objects), assault of children, locking the victim out of the house, sleep and food deprivation, and
- sexual abuse—any form of pressured/unwanted sex or sexual degradation, causing pain during sex, coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly and criticising or using degrading insults.



Methodology

The Domestic Violence Project aims to identify the level of understanding of Domestic Violence and abuse in elderly people (over 65) from CALD background in Eastern Sydney, St George and Sutherland Shire and increase awareness of different types of domestic violence in the community.

A measuring instrument was developed, herein called “The Survey”, to obtain information from CALD participants regarding their understanding of DV.

The research involved three methodology aspects:

- Consultations with CALD communities, including interviews over the phone and individual interviews
- Written Survey which was distributed to existing and potential clients
- Focus groups.

To prepare the questionnaire a number of DV services were consulted and were offered to make an input relating to issues faced in their dealings with CALD participants.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 topic areas. The questionnaire forms were translated and presented to the groups in community language.

Assistance with reading and clarification of questions was provided where necessary. The questionnaire captured basic demographic data as age, gender, place of birth, religion, LGA, type of accommodation. 51 participants were recruited from Greek, Italian, Maltese, Croatian, Jewish, Russian, Ukrainian and Armenian background to participate in the Project.

Multicultural officers facilitated focus groups and consultations, which were conducted in community language. 10-15 people were invited to participate in Focus groups; however, some groups consisted of many more participants. Each survey session lasted for approximately 2,5 hours. The majority of respondents were NOT able to complete the survey on their own; therefore Multicultural project officers assisted a number of participants.

Individual interviews were organised.

Participants were given the option to respond in English.

Confidentiality was guaranteed to all the participants of the survey

Participants of Focus groups and consultations were provided with transport if needed and refreshments were offered.

The following recruitment techniques were used to secure participants:

- invitations were forwarded to participants of focus groups
- flyers were distributed to potential participants
- members of ESMAP social groups were invited
- mail out was done to existing and potential consumers

Completed questionnaires were collected and analysed, based on that the following report was produced.



Report

The majority of respondents defined domestic violence as any incident involving repeated physical as well as psychological force. While the Russian group mentioned that sexual assault is also a form of DV, the Greek group regards financial issues as the main culprit of the crime. At the same time, the Italian group assumes that being violent and aggressive physically towards family members is the main form of domestic violence. Regarding verbal abuse, the Russian and Italian groups feel it is okay to yell and shout sometimes. It can vary depending on the degree. The Russian and Italian groups feel that DV happens to anyone from any society, whereas the Greek group thinks that it happens mainly to uneducated people.

Although the Greek group regards finance as the main factor that contributes to crimes, both the Italian and Russian groups put finance only as one of the main factors along with alcohol, substance abuse, and gambling. While the Greek group said if they have to talk about DV, they would rather talk about it with their adult children, the remaining two groups stated that they would rather keep it to themselves. All the groups in general assume that their views on the case do not necessarily reflect their cultures and it almost solely depends on the individuals. They all also recognised the facts that DV is wrong and unacceptable; and it happened back in their countries and they sensed it was wrong. They all also acknowledge that DV is the topic people would feel uncomfortable to talk about and it is under-reported crime.

Some participants stated that they would not report domestic violence as they were not sure of confidentiality issues as they did not want the whole community to know about issues in their own families.

There are reasons apart from alcohol, drugs, and finance given by all the groups that contribute to domestic violence. They are:

- Mental health issues, language barriers, intergenerational gap, being disabled, jealousy; people becoming increasingly more materialistic and being less confident about themselves.
- Too much expectations, pressure, over-controlling over many cases such as social and finance and selfishness are also contributing factors.
 - Abusive treatment of the family members such as: husband beating wife or children; calling names and punishing children inappropriately like forcing them to stand at the corner while facing the wall.
- When the family is being domineered by a family member.
- When people are forced to do something they do not want to do.
- Forced sex and rape
- Financial abuse, however it's okay when the husband trusts the wife with finances.
- When women need to seek permission to buy things from the husband (Russian)
- Abuse children or wives or family
- Wives abuse husbands
- Adult children abuse parents financially
- Drinking and playing rough on family members (Greek)





From participants' point of view, women and children are especially vulnerable to the effects of violence. They hardly ever disclose their sad experiences and seek help due to the following reasons:

- Cultural and linguistic barriers
- Lack of their extended family and family support
- Lack of knowledge of supporting services in Australia such as refuge, housing, financial services and services designed to assist women who experience family violence
- Being unaware of their rights, issues of confidentiality and of Australian laws prohibiting family violence in Australia.

Some participants stated that many young women or so called "overseas brides" fear that if they report their spouses, they can be deported from Australia. It was also mentioned that as they are financially dependent on their husbands and have no access to employment or education, they would rather accept and tolerate violence than jeopardise their family situations especially if they are coming from cultures where divorce is seen as disgrace and shame.

Recommendations

- More in-depth consultations and workshops with CALD communities need to be undertaken in order to ensure that all types of Domestic Violence are explained and understood by CALD communities.
- Better preventative strategies and educational campaigns for prevention of Domestic Violence should be undertaken in CALD communities especially for newly arrived migrants.
- Workshops and information sessions should include issues of confidentiality.
- Delivery of information sessions by Police forces in community languages should take place on a regular basis, the role of police in Australia, people's rights and responsibilities and Australian Law on Domestic Violence should be explained.
- Translated documents are of paramount importance in CALD communities. Translated material on DV should be written in plain language accompanied by the English version where appropriate.
- As language barrier is an issue, in order to educate people more effectively, documents translated in as many languages as possible is highly recommended. Besides, it is advisable that interpreting services should be made more available and easier to access for non-English community members.





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Appendix 1.

Consultations with CALD community members were designed to gather Information in regards to the following outcomes:

- To ascertain the knowledge of Domestic Violence in the community
- To ascertain cultural influence
- To ascertain how CALD communities perceive the effectiveness of the role of Police

Consultation with the Russian speaking group

Demographics of the participants:

- 8 participants took part in the consultation.
- 6 females and 2 males
- All over 60 years of age
- Most attendees have limited English
- They were assisted by the aid of an interpreter
- Participants reside in the Eastern Suburbs or Randwick LGA

A series of questions were asked to meet the outcomes outlined above:

Q1. What do you understand by 'Domestic Violence'?

Answers:

- Abusive treatment of the family members such as husband beating wife, kids; calling names and punishing kids inappropriately like forcing them to stand at the corner while facing the wall.
- When the family is being domineered by a family member.
- When people are forced to do something they do not want to do.
- Forced sex and rape
- Financial abuse, however its ok when husband trusts the wife with finances.
- When women need to seek permission to buy things from the husband.

Q2. In your opinion what is 'Domestic Violence' and what is not?

- If it is a rape, it is a crime and it is domestic violence.
- A husband beating/hitting his wife occasionally is acceptable whereas if it happens on a regular basis, it becomes domestic violence (5 out of 8 people supported the idea).
- People understand what domestic violence entails, but prefer not to talk about it and they do not want others to know if or when it happens in their families.
- Women are often afraid to call the police to report their husband's violence.

There are many issues involved in this situation, primarily if the husband would be jailed they would be left alone, the fear of having nowhere to go, the children involved would suffer and most of all the fear of the loss of financial support.

- Russians are generally very tolerant in their family life. They are quite used to live in this environment such as talking in a raising voice and swearing words.



- Many Russians brides/wives are putting up with domestic violence in Australia and they do not report it to the police because they are scared of their husbands as well as being deported.
- We do know about domestic violence, we prefer ignoring it as long as it is not very violent.

Q3. Why does Domestic Violence occur?

- Drugs, alcohol and financial problems caused by the perpetrator.
- When a person becomes disabled and cannot do things he used to do, family members abuse the person.
- When people are not allowed to live the way they wish.
- Verbal abuse.
- Parents have to put up with their sons-in-laws if they do not want to ruin the daughters' families in case they are being abused by in-laws.
- Mental health issues
- Language barriers
- Intergenerational gap
- Financial problems (One if the main factors contribute to DV)

Q4. What is your personal attitude towards Domestic Violence?

- Negative
- It should not be happening
- Usually women who live in abusive situations or in domestic violence often defend the husband or cover up the story
- Some women are being submissive to their husbands for the sake of the family
- There are quite a number of families where domineering wives or mothers control the family.

Q5. Why do you think people don't talk about Domestic Violence?

- They are scared of embarrassing themselves and the family.
- The neighbours are like the best counsellors and psychologists.
- However, it was accepted to complaint about domestic violence in USSR. For example, they could go to "Institute of Family", "Women Advisory Committee", "Committee of the Local Communist Party", and "Informal Court of General Public" and complaint and actions would be taken.
- When is it too much?
- When it becomes physical

Q6. How would you feel to talk about Domestic Violence?

- In Australia, Russian people in general would not talk about domestic violence to authorities due to lack of trust and in some cases, for example they are afraid that some psychologists or interpreters from the same background can possibly breach confidentiality.
- They would rather discuss about it to close friends.



Q7. Have you heard of Domestic Violence in your country?

- Yes, it was part of our life but unless it was becoming really violent, people would not be talking about it.

Q8. Do you think your attitude towards Domestic Violence could be influenced by your cultural background?

- Some participants said no. They assume it depends on individual.
- Some participants said yes. They believe culture does affect people.

Q9. If not police where do you think you would go to report issues you think are wrong or illegal?

- ESMAP
- Department of Housing
- Centrelink
- Our children

Q10. Would you feel safe to talk to Police about Domestic Violence?

- No, how can you report your family to the police?
- You cannot betray your own family.
- If we talk to the police and they take action, the perpetrator in the family will even get worse and take advantage again in the future.
- We feel safe talking to the police if perpetrators are not stopped, they can repeat and the consequences can get worse.
- We are afraid that if we report our family members or others to the police, the police will disclose who reported them and we will find ourselves in a difficult situation.
- I will definitely call the police even if I know that I would be stopped from doing so.
- Sometimes we do not understand what is going on, especially when people speak loudly, due to our limited English, we are not sure whether they are just talking or arguing. People are sometimes reluctant to call the police but if they hear disputes in neighbouring houses they could do so if they presume it is a violent and life-threatening situation.
- 5 people out of 8 will call the police whereas the rest will not.

Consultation with the Greek Community members

Demographics of the participants:

- 20 participants took part in the consultation.
- 19 females and 1 male
- All over 60 years of age
- Most attendees were proficient in English



- Some were assisted by the aid of an interpreter
- Participants reside in the Eastern Suburbs or Randwick LGA

Consultation:

A series of questions were asked to meet the outcomes outlined above:

Q1. What do you understand by 'Domestic Violence'?

Answers:

- When children, wives or family members are abused, screamed at or psychologically assaulted
- Sometimes wives abuse their husbands
- Adult children abuse parents financially
- Drinking and playing rough on family members

Q2. In your opinion what is 'Domestic Violence' and what is not?

- Egoism - 'I want everything for myself' attitude
- Putting pressure on people, forcing them to do things they don't want to do
- Emotional abuse
- Too much control and dominance over someone
- Too much expectation of the others
- Children speak abusively to parents
- Financial control
- Using all the money to feed gambling habit
- When someone stops you from having the things you need

Q3. Why does Domestic Violence occur?

- DV happens only with uneducated people all over the world
- Happens when people are under stress and can't control themselves
- Jealousy between husband and wife causes a lot of problems

Q4. What is your personal attitude towards Domestic Violence?

- Negative. We should seek help if it happens.

Q5. Why do you think people don't talk about Domestic Violence?

- People are scared to talk about it fearing that their situation can become worse
- People are ashamed to disclose any wrong and bad information about their families
- We like to keep it in the family and sort out between us, our families are our pride.



- Too much violence has to be reported.
- Some people feel that they are wrong and don't want to be exposed.
- Depends on the situation, some people would discuss their problems.
When is it too much?
- When it becomes physical

Q6. How would you feel to talk about Domestic Violence?

- I would talk to my adult children only.
- I won't talk about it as it would bring shame and embarrassment to the family talking to other people.

5 out of 20 attendees stated that they would not report Domestic Violence if even they were victims or witnessed it.

Q7. Have you heard of Domestic Violence in your country?

- Yes
- We didn't talk about it then, in Greece at that time, women kept it quiet, even here in Australia it was the same, we did not talk about it.
- The status of women in Greece was generally lower at that time, they depended on their husbands and husband's families.
- The situation is better and women are becoming increasingly independent and can divorce when the situations go bad.
- People were more interested in politics than DV in Greece.
- Once married women live with the in-laws, there are other things to worry about.
- Social status is different in this country. Women are independent and stronger.
- Yes, I knew about DV issues in Greece, but the law in Australia is strict, so women are more independent and they stand up for themselves.

Q8. Do you think your attitude towards Domestic Violence could be influenced by your cultural background?

- No, it is individual; culture does not have any influence
- Yes, culture does affect you. We have our "Greekness" so we have to keep our dignity on the top.

Q9. If not police where do you think you would go to report issues you think are wrong or illegal?

- Lawyer
- Priest
- Family



Q10. What are your concerns regarding reporting Domestic Violence to the police?

- More police offices need to talk to people so that people become more familiar with their work.
- It is doubtful that people will remain in dispute after police intervened and left.

Consultation with the Italian Speaking Group

Demographics of the participants:

- 7 participants took part in the consultation.
- 6 females and 1 male
- All over 60 years of age
- Most attendees have fluent English
- They were assisted by the aid of an interpreter at times
- Participants reside in the Eastern Suburbs

Consultation

A series of questions were asked to meet the outcomes outlined above:

Q1. What do you understand by 'Domestic Violence'?

Answers:

- Physical abuse towards spouse (both husband to wife and wife to husband)

Q2. In your opinion what is 'Domestic Violence' and what is not?

- People know it is wrong but they still do it, so it does not sound wrong as much as it should be.
- Any physical aggression that hurt other parties in the family can be called domestic violence.
- Sexual abuse is of most serious thing and the perpetrator should be prosecuted severely. It is also against the religion. (All participants agreed)
- We do know about domestic violence, we do not tend to talk about it.
- Being violent and aggressive to family members including children. It is very unacceptable but men sometimes tend to think it should not be categorized as DV.
- Blaming, yelling and shouting are acceptable to a certain extent.
- Stopping you from dealing with other people or group and practicing the religion of choice but it depends on the degree.

Q3. Do you realise that domestic violence does not have to be just physical abuse?

- Yes, it can be verbal and emotional abuse as well, however it also depends on the degree.



Q4. What do you think could be a reason for DV? Does it happen only in certain stratum of society?

- Drugs, alcohol and gambling
- Financial problems
- Jealousy in the family
- Control and taking advantage of the victims
- Cultural perceptions
- Perpetrator's self-esteem is being low and being insecure about themselves
- People in general became materialistic increasingly
- It happens everywhere and can happen to any person from any society

Q5. What is your personal attitude towards Domestic Violence?

- 100% wrong

Q6. How would you feel to talk about Domestic Violence?

- A male participant said it is absolutely ok to talk about it because it is wrong and you should talk about it.
- The remaining female audiences said they are not very comfortable to talk about it and rather keep it themselves.

Q7/Q8. Have you heard of Domestic Violence in your country and what was the attitude towards it?

- There were indeed domestic violence related cases but most of us were going through war and there were so many more things to worry about other than DV.
- We knew that it was wrong.

Q9. Do you think your attitude towards Domestic Violence could be influenced by your cultural background?

- To a certain extent only. It depends on the individual.