



Refugee Council  
of Australia



## NATIONAL SETTLEMENT POLICY NETWORK TELECONFERENCE

# Domestic violence and settlement:

## REPORT

### TELECONFERENCE

The National Settlement Policy Network (SPN) is a joint initiative of the [Refugee Council of Australia \(RCOA\)](#) and the [Settlement Council of Australia \(SCOA\)](#) to enable our members (organisational and individual) to participate in planning joint advocacy on settlement issues. RCOA and SCOA co-host quarterly National Settlement Policy Network teleconferences that focus on specific themes. The teleconferences provide an opportunity for members to hear from guest speakers with expertise in particular areas of settlement policy, raise issues of concern and share ideas for ways forward.

The SPN teleconference which was held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2013 was on the issue of domestic violence and settlement. Participants dialled in from hubs in ACT, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Northern Territory, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia.

Speakers included:

- Maya Avdibegovic, CEO, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence; and
- Sky de Jersey, Executive Officer, Settlement Council of Australia.

### BACKGROUND

Migrant and refugee communities from CALD backgrounds settling in Australia have unique experiences prior to and throughout the settlement process that impacts upon their understandings of domestic violence. They may share common experiences such as unplanned departures, long periods without access to health or education, have different understandings of family violence, law and justice, lack familial and social support networks and may be dependent on an Australian sponsor. These experiences create challenges that contribute to a higher risk of domestic violence. Policies, strategies and practices formulated with a multicultural perspective are needed to address domestic violence in these communities.

### PRESENTATIONS

#### **Maya Avdibegovic (CEO – inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence)**

- inTouch was originally established in 1984 as an immigrant women's domestic violence service. It mainly focused on crisis intervention for women and children in CALD communities experiencing DV. Three years ago the Centre rebranded itself and expanded its strategic directions to include a more holistic approach including early intervention, support for both victims and perpetrators, post crisis support, building sector capacity, advocacy and research.
- 80 per cent of the Centre's workers are first generation refugees and migrants and speak more than 25 different languages.
- The Centre receives 1,000 clients annually from more than 90 countries including Vietnam, China, Sudan, India, Macedonia and Australia. One-third of clients have been in Australia less than three years and 11 per cent were born in Australia. While many are from newly arrived

communities, a large group of clients are from established second generation migrants and refugees.

- The Centre provides all its services under one roof to reach multiple needs of its clients and to address the multiple barriers to addressing DV.
- Its programs include: crisis support, complex case support, court support and a legal centre with a part time centre manager. The legal centre takes a therapeutic lawyering approach which seeks to establish a relationship with clients to build trust. Recovery programs include therapeutic group work, support groups, individual counselling and family fun days.
- A men's behaviour program has been piloted and is in its fourth year. Funding has been received to replicate it in other areas.
- A small research program has been developed which is subject to funding. It focuses on legal barriers CALD women are experiencing in relation to DV and provision of recommendations to address the barriers. The legal centre came about from this research.
- The Centre is seeing a need to increase support for women without permanent residency. These are mostly women on spousal visas. The centre has an on-site registered migration providing information about family violence and the migration act, collating DV evidence for visa applications, writing visa applications and liaising with DIAC.
- There have been some international students seeking services but the Centre doesn't have a lot to offer because they are not eligible for services.
- inTouch is working on increasing its DV prevention programs and activities. Last year a new prevention project began which will work with four different communities under the premise that prevention and awareness programs need to be tailored to the different communities.

#### **Sky de Jersey (Executive Officer – Settlement Council of Australia)**

- SCOA prepared a Domestic Violence Discussion Paper in collaboration with Myriad Consultants.
- The discussion paper focuses on key factors impacting DV and family violence in CALD communities during settlement and key areas that need to be addressed to improve responses.
- Key factors impacting DV and family violence included:
  - Stress of settlement and the refugee journey and settlement issues compounding existing issues;
  - Cultural and religious factors around disclosure;
  - Barriers to accessing information;
  - Institutional and structural barriers in service awareness and access and the importance of keeping all stakeholders involved with accurate information;
  - Lack of knowledge about the legal system; and
  - Conceptions power.
- The discussion paper's recommendations include:
  - Provision of culturally appropriate information on Australian legal system offered at critical stages of settlement;
  - Ensuring access to justice by addressing barriers to its access such as provision of community translated legal material and making information available on an ongoing basis in accessible community locations;
  - All stakeholders have an awareness of laws impacting DV and family violence in CALD communities including policy makers, legal agencies and community sector; and
  - Criminalisation of forced marriage.
- Cultural competency should be mainstreamed to assist all working with a wide range of cultures to understand the tensions and nexus between home and cultural norms which impact on family dynamics and DV.
- There is a need to move beyond the pilot programs and support their expansion.
- Research should to underpin all programs.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Q&A for Maya:**

*What were the community groups selected for the new inTouch men's behaviour change program and prevention project?*

- The prevention program is the first of inTouch's longer term projects. Different community groups were selected including: Sudanese (newly arrived community), Vietnamese (established community), Croatia (mostly elderly) and Indian. The next men's behaviour change program is expected to include Arabic communities.

*What is the relationship between mental health and DV risk factors for male or females?*

- Mental health is a risk factor for both genders. Mental health makes women more vulnerable to DV, especially newly arrived women who may have serious mental health issues from experiences prior to settlement in Australia.
- Mental health is a risk factor but being violent is a matter of choice and it is about gender inequality and power

*What were the outcomes of the men's behavioural change program?*

- Participants were attending because it was in their language.
- It is difficult to evaluate long term outcomes of the program. Outcomes were evaluated through feedback from participants and their partners. Positive outcome feedback included changes in regards to parenting and changes in behaviour towards their children.
- See Men's Evaluation Report link in the Resources section of this report.

*How does inTouch connect with Community Associations and CALD communities?*

- inTouch doesn't do any work on its own and is always working in collaboration with local communities and ethnic organisations.
- Task forces were set up to develop plans and actions with community leaders.

*Are inTouch clients mostly female?*

- inTouch is a women's service so the majority of work is supporting women experiencing family violence. Men who are experiencing DV are referred to other services.

*How do you manage bicultural workers from the local community and how their community and culture influence their work?*

- All workers are trained family violence workers and many have degrees in social work or community development.
- There are policies and procedures in place to ensure bicultural workers do not experience issues in their communities as a result of their work. If a client or worker does not want to work with individuals from a specific cultural background that is respected.

*How do you manage community leaders that may have beliefs not in line with inTouch's aims?*

- inTouch looks for community leaders who are champions and understand the issues well and support the work.
- There are some community leaders who will give the wrong advice to those experiencing DV. But because they are community leaders you need to work with them as many people experiencing DV may go to them first and you don't want to lose anyone experiencing DV. It is difficult to change their values and small steps are needed.

*What contact do you have with settlement services in Victoria?*

- inTouch has contact with most settlement services but service area is limited to Melbourne's metro area due to limited resources.
- inTouch provides training to settlement agencies on how to work with those experiencing DV.

## **Q&A for Sky:**

*SCOA's DV Discussion Paper describes a need to use a multicultural approach to DV (see page 5 paragraph 2) more information was requested to understand what this approach means?*

- More information about what a multicultural approach to DV encompasses was promised to be circulated with this report, and it is detailed below.
- A multicultural approach to DV takes into consideration the contextual and exacerbating factors that impact the potential for DV particularly in the settlement process. This approach takes into consideration issues such as vulnerability as a result of isolation, language barriers, economic barriers, fear of deportation, perceptions of the law, racial and religious vilification, limited knowledge of support systems and impacts on family etc.. It in NO way suggests that DV is influenced by ethnicity or religion but rather it recognises that the dignity and safety of women and their children is a universal value. A multicultural approach to DV is informed by an understanding of the complexity of communities and the specific issues that emerge in the settlement process and intersect to increase the risk for DV. A multicultural approach recognises the unequal position of people socially, economically and politically and the social hierarchies and material inequality that intersect with gender, ethnicity, race, disability etc to compound risks for migrant women.

*Did preparation of the DV Discussion Paper include consultations with DV services that work with immigrant women?*

- The discussion paper was focused on settlement agencies and included some consultation with SCOA members.
- The paper is a discussion paper and feedback from the DV sector is welcomed including feedback on how the settlement sector engages with other sectors to address the issue.

*DV Discussion Paper feedback:*

- There is a need to include the DV sector's point of view.
- The paper should include more up to date literature and reports.

### **Overview of issues discussed:**

*Intersection between DV and child protection:*

- Ensuring child protection is a big issue in CALD communities and those working on DV issues need to work closely with child protection agencies.
- If a woman experiencing DV is not willing to leave the situation then child protection agencies must be involved.
- Culture impacts parenting practices and relationships need to be established between child protection agencies and the ethnic communities.
- The Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS) in Perth run an African origin refugee community program to addressing DV and child protection issues. It offers a six week awareness raising training program that targets community leaders and educators. The program is seeking to address the communities' tendency to sort out DV and child protection issues amongst themselves. It utilises a strengths based approach.

*How do you engage parents to attend events/workshops?*

- A strengths based approach is needed when working with the community. Use events that showcase their culture and contain messages. Never use family violence as a topic, instead use Healthy/Respectful Relationships, Parenting Activities, as you don't want to be too heavy handed because this creates an incentive not to attend.
- There may be a need to build upon events and have a range of activities over time.
- It is important to allow for an open forum that doesn't place judgement on people, even if what they believe is not appropriate. It needs to be a safe space to discuss issues.
- Options can be to have separate groups (ie- men and women's groups).
- Community leaders are gatekeepers and it is important to use them but ensure you do not to alienate them or overuse them.

*DV and Culture:*

- We are dealing with family violence issues, but it is about the safety of women and children and this is a primary concern. Culture should never be an excuse for violence.
- Educating those from different cultures about the laws of Australia is important as client's home countries may be guided by tribal law or community law.
- It is important to educate services providers about communities.

*Provision of Legal Education:*

- AUSCO pre-resettlement education program is limited to maximum five days and provides very little time to educate new arrivals. It only allows for very basic information to be provided. It may not be the best place to provide education on the Australian legal system and DV.

*Perpetrator Education:*

- In a large percentage of DV cases the perpetrator is an Australian born man married to a migrant. This has implications on who the training and education programs should be targeting.
- The focus needs to be on perpetrator education and accountability.

*Crisis Intervention - What do you do if a client does not want to get out of a DV situation?*

- It is the client's choice to refuse assistance and nothing can be done until there is a police incident reported. The police can undertake regular welfare checks and the caseworker can undertake site visits.

**NEXT STEPS**

- SCOA welcomes further feedback on its Domestic Violence Discussion Paper
- Maya welcomes further questions on inTouch's programs

**RESOURCES**

*inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence- About Us, Pamphlet*

*inTouch Annual Report 2011-2012*

*"I lived in fear because I knew nothing" Barriers to the Justice System Faced by CALD Women Experiencing Family Violence, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence*

*Vietnamese Men's Family Violence Program – Evaluation Report Men's Behaviour Change Program, inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence*

SCOA Domestic Violence Discussion Paper: <http://www.scoa.org.au/submissions-1/scoa-domestic-violence-discussion-paper>

**CONTACTS**

Maya Avdibegovic (CEO – inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence) email: [ceo@intouch.asn.au](mailto:ceo@intouch.asn.au)

Sky de Jersey (EO – Settlement Council of Australia) email: [eo@scoa.org.au](mailto:eo@scoa.org.au)