



Multicultural and Settlement services  
Supporting women experiencing violence:  
The MuSeS project  
*Key findings and future directions*

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

RESEARCH TO POLICY & PRACTICE  
ISSUE 11 | MAY 2020

ANROWS Research to policy and practice papers are concise papers that summarise key findings of research on violence against women and their children, including research produced under ANROWS's research program, and provide advice on the implications for policy and practice.

This is an edited summary of key findings from ANROWS research *Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS Project*. Please consult the ANROWS website for more information on this project and the full project report: Vaughan C., Chen J., Sullivan C., Suha M., Sandhu M., Hourani J., ... Murdolo A. (2020). *Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS project* (Research Report, 11/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

#### **ANROWS acknowledgement**

This material was produced with funding from the Australian Government and the Australian state and territory governments. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from these governments, without which this work would not have been possible. The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to the Australian Government, or any Australian state or territory government.

ANROWS research contributes to the six National Outcomes of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. This research addresses National Plan Outcome 4—Services meet the needs of women and their children experiencing violence.

#### **Acknowledgement of Country**

ANROWS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present, and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge. We are committed to standing and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, honouring the truths set out in the [Warawarni-gu Guma Statement](#).

#### **Acknowledgement of lived experiences of violence**

ANROWS acknowledges the lives and experiences of the women and children affected by domestic, family and sexual violence who are represented in this report. We recognise the individual stories of courage, hope and resilience that form the basis of ANROWS research.

Caution: Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing. Recommended support services include 1800 RESPECT—1800 737 732 and Lifeline—13 11 14.

#### **Suggested citation**

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: the MuSeS project* (Research to Policy and Practice, 11/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

IN BRIEF

# Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS project

This study explored how multicultural and settlement services can better support women experiencing violence.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Multicultural and settlement service providers regularly encounter and support clients experiencing family violence.
- Services' capacity to respond is strengthened by staff training, organisational support structures, and community connectedness.
- Services' capacity to respond is constrained by limited funding and service scope, and limited options for referral.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Recognise multicultural and settlement services as an integral part of the family violence system.
- Build the bilingual/bicultural workforce within the family violence sector.
- Within multicultural and settlement services, embed protocols for risk assessment, ensure training for staff and volunteers, and address stress and staff turnover.
- Strengthen collaboration between the family violence sector and the multicultural and settlement services sector.

# Migrant and refugee women experiencing violence face barriers to accessing support

Migrant and refugee women experience domestic and family violence at least as much as women in the wider population, and they face particular barriers to accessing the services that can help.

These barriers include:

- difficulty finding information about services
- lack of multilingual information and limited interpreter use
- financial barriers
- social isolation
- potential ostracism from their cultural community
- threats of deportation made by perpetrators
- concerns about discrimination within child protection services
- fear of being arrested (particularly for women from countries where arbitrary arrest is common)
- a strong motivation to resolve family violence without breaking up their families.

# The role of multicultural and settlement services

Migrant and refugee women may engage with multicultural and settlement services soon after their arrival in Australia, and the services often play an ongoing role in migrant and refugee families' lives.

Multicultural services include a wide range of government and non-government organisations that work primarily with multicultural communities, as well as ethno-specific community organisations and groups. The assistance offered by multicultural services includes information about pathways to citizenship; education and employment; mobility (including driving lessons); social participation and inclusion; support for parents, families and young people; and support groups, including gender-specific support groups.

Settlement services are agencies that are funded by the Australian Government to deliver programs to newly arrived migrants and refugees holding permanent visas. Settlement services offer a range of supports including on-arrival reception, assisting new arrivals to obtain accommodation, language courses, and providing an introduction to the legal, education, healthcare, and banking systems of Australia. Specialist refugee mental health services can also be considered a part of the settlement services sector.

Multicultural and settlement services may receive disclosures of family violence, or otherwise become aware of violence in the family. They have an important role to play in responding to the issue, supporting women and referring them to specialist family violence services.

## THE ANROWS RESEARCH PROJECT

“Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS project” by Cathy Vaughan, Karen Block, Claire Sullivan, Jeanine Hourani, Sarah Khaw, Yara Jarallah, Lana Zannettino, Carolyn Gregoric, Linda Murray, Mariyam Suha, Jasmin Chen, Adele Murdolo, Monisha Sandhu

This project sought to identify how multicultural and settlement services can be better supported to assist women and children experiencing violence. The research was conducted by university-based researchers in partnership with the Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health in Victoria. It involved consultation workshops, focus groups and interviews with service providers and with migrant and refugee women in Adelaide, Hobart and Melbourne, as well as a national online survey of multicultural and settlement service providers.

See [anrows.org.au](http://anrows.org.au) for the full report.

Quotations given in this paper are taken from the research report (with emphases added).

# Key findings

## Multicultural and settlement service providers regularly encounter and support clients experiencing family violence

Multicultural and settlement service providers regularly encounter women and children experiencing violence and feel compelled to go well beyond the scope of their role in their efforts to assist them. Supports offered include:

- providing education and information about family violence
- receiving disclosures, or identifying signs of violence
- referring to specialist family violence services
- working with men who use violence.

You see [through] the kids that something's not okay. There is fear in that relationship. There is controlling ... Then sometimes you see some marks. So, then it's after that that you make a separate appointment for that client and have the in-depth conversation with her in a safe space where she feels comfortable and can disclose any issue. It's after you build a good rapport with that client. Usually, *it's up to the case manager to pick up on those cues rather than the client coming forward* and expressing them. That's my experience. (Settlement service provider, Victoria)

*As you start working with them on other things the clients might tell you, for instance, that they don't get to make the decisions about anything really, or that they don't have access to money. In some cases that they have been shouted at and beaten by a partner. I have had a client, for example, who separated from her husband for that reason and then was shunned by her community. That is one of the things that she wanted to talk about in counselling.* (Specialist mental health service provider, Tasmania)

The most important thing we can do is to make sure they don't regret telling us and that they feel safe and they feel in control because it's also a higher risk time when you're seeking help. They don't understand how the system works. They could come to [organisation] saying, "He's a really bad man. He's done this and this and this and this and I'm disclosing it." They are playing it forward in their mind thinking, "So what you're going to do is you're going to get the police to come to the door and say, 'You're really bad. You're not allowed to do it', and tell him off or whatever and he'll just stop and then it will be okay." They might think that's how it's going to play out but then it's a pro-prosecution state so if there's actual evidence of a crime being committed then the police will charge the person, there'll be an order, blah, blah, blah. It can quickly escalate out of their control in ways they can't foresee. *Part of our role is helping them understand the system so that they can make informed choices* about how they actually engage with it 'cause we know it's pretty high risk that they'll be making judgements that might not really be what they actually wanted because they don't really understand their potential consequences. (Settlement service provider, Tasmania)

'Cause there's positives as well. There's a family unit, [and a client might think,] "*We've been through so much together. The children need their father. I need the support. If I leave him, I'll be ostracised, I'll be judged.*" There are so many things entwined, that "This violence is worth putting up with compared to what life would be like without it, and compared to what I've been through." (Specialist mental health service provider, Victoria)

## Services' capacity to respond is strengthened by staff training, organisational support structures, and community connectedness

Services are most able to identify and respond to family violence when they have:

- access to training that is funded for staff and volunteers
- formal and informal organisational support structures to protect workers' wellbeing, including debriefing and supervision
- connectedness to migrant and refugee communities, which is achieved through a strong bilingual/bicultural workforce and low staff turnover.

I do believe that *there could be a lot more training*, even if it's just a basic understanding of family violence of, as you say, when the client comes into that service and they build that rapport with that staff member, that's often when they'll disclose. So, *even things like how to respond to a disclosure in a safe and respectful way ... I think family violence is quite daunting for a settlement worker and it's quite unknown.* (Settlement service provider, Victoria)

Different workplaces I've worked in obviously the level of supervision and the level of training has been different. I think *definitely having a good supervisor*, having that training. Having that space to have that peer supervision, *being able to talk, bounce ideas with your colleagues* [is helpful]. (Mental health service provider, South Australia)

*We have bicultural/bilingual workers that are pivotal to the work that we do. They are our bridge, both cultural bridge and language bridge.* It enables our clients to connect with us maybe a bit more quickly than if they went somewhere else, and it is an issue of trust. Unless you have safety and trust, you can't work with people, especially people who have been traumatised before coming here. Safety and trust go hand in hand. You can provide a safe environment but if they don't trust you, you can't work with people at all. (Settlement service provider, South Australia)

The interpreters are useful but they often get it wrong. They make things up. *It would be much better if there were case workers who spoke our language.* (Refugee woman, Victoria)



## Services' capacity to respond is constrained by limited funding and service scope, and limited options for referral

The factors that most challenge services' capacity to respond to family violence are:

- insufficient funding to provide time and support to women experiencing violence
- eligibility constraints that mean organisations must limit their services to clients who live in particular geographic regions, or hold particular classes of visa
- limited referral options for women who are not in immediate crisis, or do not wish to leave their partners
- limited referral options for men who are using violence, as well as general supports for men and primary prevention programs.

So, how do we, as settlement services and ethno-specific services, just support those women? How do we? We don't ... To work with just one woman with her family around that, particularly if they don't want to leave the relationship, *it's beyond the current means of funding*, because we are—because we've got—we have hundreds of clients that we need to support. *You cannot case manage a family like this without having the resources and the funding and the expertise and the skills and all of that.* (Ethno-specific settlement service provider, Victoria)

We have more and more people coming through the door and less and less volunteers who actually do that work. *We have only a certain amount of time to sit with everyone and it's going more and more towards us managing people instead of having very in-depth conversations and having—and being able to be present with that person without thinking about I need to go, I need to tick off the next person and it's very stressful and it's very—also there's also a feeling of guilt that you might miss out on certain cases [of violence].* People experience so much more misery in their everyday life and you could help them but ... you can't. You don't have the time to get it out of them. (Volunteer, Victoria)

*Organisationally, trauma recovery services work very, very differently to family violence services.* So, family violence services work with an empowerment model where the expectation is that the woman calls in, and trauma recovery services work with an assertive outreach model. It's completely different and there's a gigantic gap between the two and it—as a worker, it's really hard to bridge, it's really hard to support the family violence services to be a bit more flexible about how they reach out to women, and they have to reach out in these situations, that *women in these situations who are also experiencing trauma need continuity of care, they need the same worker with a relationship focus reaching out to them, which is not how family violence services have traditionally worked.* (Mental health service provider, Victoria)

It's all based on needs, but we tend to work with men and women and families if there is—obviously there's a huge need with newly arrived communities to work with

just men, not just women, but men as well, because sometimes—*men do tell us that there's so many support services for women—when you think about men, men are left on the back burners*, and they seem to say, well, everywhere you look, there's—all—for women, women, women, and there's not enough work for men. So, we do have some men's—group, we run some men's—group—around family—relationship, respectful—relationship, all of that. (Ethno-specific settlement service provider, Victoria)

# Recommendations for policy and practice

## Recognise multicultural and settlement services as an integral part of the family violence system

Additional funding should be allocated to multicultural and settlement services to conduct:

- early intervention and referral for family violence
- family violence education
- tailored, bilingual programs for migrant and refugee men who use violence
- tailored programs for migrant and refugee young people that focus on respectful relationships and mental health
- programs to build the capacity of migrant and refugee women to navigate the service system.

## Provide training and support structures for multicultural and settlement services staff

Additional funding should be allocated to multicultural and settlement services to:

- provide ongoing, comprehensive training to all workers (including volunteers and front-of-house staff) to equip them to identify family violence risks and respond to them in culturally sensitive ways that prioritise women's safety
- embed robust protocols for identification, assessment and management of domestic and family violence risk, including referral frameworks
- strengthen management and peer support structures to reduce stress and staff turnover.

## Build the bilingual/bicultural workforce within the family violence sector

Family violence services should:

- recognise that bilingual/bicultural workers not only support their clients but also support the non-migrant workforce to understand and meet the needs of migrant and refugee clients
- support equitable recruitment and workplace practices to expand the bilingual/bicultural workforce.

## **Strengthen collaboration between the family violence sector and the multicultural and settlement services sector**

Multicultural and settlement services and family violence services should strengthen their collaboration by:

- holding two-way training
- developing shared risk assessment frameworks
- developing shared referral protocols.

# Further reading

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2016). *Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia: The ASPIRE Project* (Project page). Retrieved from <https://www.anrows.org.au/project/promoting-community-led-responses-to-violence-against-immigrant-and-refugee-women-in-metropolitan-and-regional-australia-the-aspire-project/>

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Best practice principles for interventions with domestic and family violence perpetrators from refugee backgrounds* (Research to policy and practice, 09/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Constructions of complex trauma and implications for women's wellbeing and safety from violence*. Retrieved from <https://www.anrows.org.au/project/constructions-of-complex-trauma-and-implications-for-womens-wellbeing-and-safety-from-violence/>

Chen, J. (2017). *Intersectionality matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women*. Retrieved from <https://www.mcwh.com.au/downloads/Intersectionality-Matters-Guide-2017.pdf>

Connolly, M., Healey, L., & Humphreys, C. (2017). *The Collaborative Practice Framework for Child Protection and Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Services—The PATRICIA Project: Key findings and future directions* (ANROWS Compass, 03/2017). Sydney: ANROWS.

Koeth, M., Serova, N., & Trojanowska, B. (2020). *Prevention of violence against women and safer pathways to services for migrant and refugee communities: Ten research insights from the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Projects with Action Research (CALD PAR) initiative* (ANROWS Insights 01/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

© ANROWS 2020

**Published by**

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS)  
PO Box Q389, Queen Victoria Building, NSW 1230 | [www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au) | Phone +61 2 8374 4000  
ABN 67 162 349 171

***Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS project / ANROWS (Ed.).***

Sydney : ANROWS, 2020.

Pages ; 30 cm. (Research to policy and practice, Issue 11/2020)

I. Family violence -- Australia -- Prevention. II. Women immigrants -- Services for -- Australia. III. Women refugees -- Services for -- Australia.

I. Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety.

**Creative Commons Licence**

Attribution-Non Commercial



CC BY-NC

This licence lets others distribute, remix and build upon the work, but only if it is for non-commercial purposes and they credit the original creator/s (and any other nominated parties). They do not have to license their Derivative Works on the same terms.

Version 3.0 (CC Australia ported licence): [View CC BY-NC Australia Licence Deed](#) | [View CC BY-NC 3.0](#)

[Australia Legal Code](#)

Version 4.0 (international licence): [View CC BY-NC 4.0 Licence Deed](#) | [View CC BY-NC 4.0 Legal Code](#)

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of this paper.

Please check the online version at [www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au) for any amendment.

ANROWS

# ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY

*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

