



MULTICULTURAL  
CENTRE FOR  
WOMEN'S HEALTH

# Bilingual health education: An essential tool to prevent violence against women

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**The Safety and Support in My Language Project** demonstrated that bilingual health education is an effective tool in multicultural communities to prevent family violence against women. Receiving information in languages other than English strengthened migrant and refugee women's understanding of family violence and healthy relationships in a culturally safe and empowering way. Migrant and refugee women were better able to make the links between gender inequality and family violence as well as recognise the early signs of violent or abusive behaviour.

# Why bilingual health education works

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Health educators who speak the same language and share similar experiences of culture, gender and migration are more effective because they can draw on culturally relevant examples, understand cultural context and navigate nuanced group dynamics. Using a feminist approach to create **a safe, non-judgemental and enabling environment** encourages migrant and refugee women to speak openly about their thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Bilingual health education creates a space for women to discuss **gender equality** in a culturally safe and meaningful way. In some languages there is no direct translation for terms such as gender equality, so health education in the preferred language of the participants enables discussion of key concepts within the context of their daily lives.

## 1. It makes information about family violence accessible

Bilingual health education makes information about family violence clearer and more meaningful for migrant and refugee women. Bilingual educators clarify key concepts, discuss issues within the context of women's lives, and provide relevant and understandable information and resources.

## 2. It effectively makes the links between family violence and gender inequality

Gendered inequality is a key driver of violence against women. Bilingual health educators can better explain the links between gendered inequality and family violence in the preferred language of participants. Learning that family violence is a shared social issue, rather than an isolated, individual experience is powerful. It is especially relevant to migrant and refugee women whose migration status can increase their isolation and dependence on male partners or extended family members.

## 3. It increases migrant and refugee women's confidence identifying violence

Migrant and refugee women are less likely to access family violence services at an early stage, which can mean they face escalating abuse for longer with more severe outcomes. Participants in bilingual health education sessions reported increased confidence in identifying family violence and navigating support services.

“After attending this session, I feel more confident in evaluating my relationship with my partner [and] knowing early warning signs. I am also more confident in navigating the support services. Before this session, I was blaming myself if anything happened. This session has changed my attitude as it is not my responsibility alone.”

“After attending the session, I feel more confident in identifying all types of family violence especially the financial and spiritual types. Also, I feel more confident in navigating the support services.”

“Now I have learnt something about family violence in a whole and systematic way; I know how to protect myself. In the past, I would not know how to protect myself as there was no chance to learn what family violence is.”

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“I will tell my friends who didn’t have the opportunities to get help from relevant organisations. There are lots of people [who] are enduring family violence and are controlled by the violence. It was not clear to me how to get help in the past and where to get help.”

#### 4. It strengthens women’s leadership and advocacy capabilities

Bilingual health education empowers migrant and refugee women to advocate and raise awareness about family violence within their social networks. This is critical, as migrant and refugee women commonly seek health information and support through family and community. Almost all participants said they would now try and help other women, by sharing their new knowledge about the links between gender inequality and family violence and providing information and contacts of family violence services.

- Most Arabic and Hindi-speaking participants said **they felt confident** to share information from the education sessions with friends and family.
- Most participants stated feeling more **“empowered”** and **“determined”** to make changes and spread knowledge in their homes and communities.

## 100%

of Arabic and Hindi-speaking participants preferred education in their language rather than in English.

## 69%

of all participants said the lack of bicultural workers in the family violence system is a major barrier to accessing support and information.

## 55%

of all participants said that health information delivered in English or with interpreters was difficult to follow.

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## 100%

of Arabic-speaking women received information about the links between gender equality and family violence for the first time.

## 86%

of all participants learned that family violence is not only physical but can also be emotional and financial.

## 77%

of Hindi and Mandarin-speaking participants said they had learned much more about gender equality and healthy relationships through the project.

**Find out more about bilingual health education and prevention violence against women**

The Safety and Support in My Language Project delivered bilingual health education sessions in Arabic, Chinese and Hindi to 35 women on the topics of **Gender Equality, Healthy Relationships and Family Violence** between June 2020 and February 2022. Following each session, follow-up interviews and focus groups with participants were conducted.

You can learn more about the MCWH model of bilingual health education and read the full **Safety and Support in My Language Project Report** on our website at [www.mcwh.com.au](http://www.mcwh.com.au)

**Multicultural Centre for Women's Health** (MCWH) is a national, community-based organisation, led by and for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. With the help of our funders, partners and supporters we advocate and educate to strengthen the health, wellbeing, safety and leadership of migrant and refugee women in Australia. For more information about this Report or how you can work with us, contact [info@mcwh.com.au](mailto:info@mcwh.com.au)



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