

## People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a study of the prevalence of violence in 2016. It shows that **women** are predominantly the victims of **physical** and **sexual violence** and **emotional abuse** perpetrated by a current or former male partner, however this study did not collect data regarding the ethnicity or origin of the survey participants [ABS PSS 2016].

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse (“CALD”) backgrounds may be particularly vulnerable to domestic and family violence. They may have their origins in a range of countries and ethnicities. They may primarily speak a language or multiple **languages other than English**. They may hold religious or cultural beliefs about gender roles and behaviours, particularly within marriage, that are inconsistent with speaking out about violence perpetrated against them and their children or with seeking legal redress. They may have come from circumstances of war or civil unrest where they have personally experienced violence, rape or sexual assault without redress or any expectation of redress [Zannettino 2013]. These factors, and the range of other cultural, linguistic, economic, and social factors associated with resettlement in a new country, heighten the challenges and barriers for CALD women who experience domestic and family violence, especially when they **engage with the legal system** to secure the protection of themselves and their children, and to seek legal redress [Allimantet & Ostapiej 2011].

Australian research in recent years reveals the depth and severity of the problems CALD women face. There is no single factor that puts CALD women at a greater **risk** of both experiencing abuse and being less able to seek redress for it. Rather, a raft of factors may intersect, each compounding the other. Overall, CALD women report similar forms of domestic and family violence to other women. However, the impact of violence is exacerbated by the stressors of the migration experience generally, and the constraints of visa status, which may increase women’s dependency on perpetrators for economic security and residency rights. Perpetrators in these circumstances are able to use misinformation about women’s visa status and threats of deportation and the removal of children as further means of control. For these reasons, CALD women tend to endure domestic and family violence for prolonged periods before seeking help and, as a consequence, risk negative **physical** and **mental health** effects. CALD women are also highly motivated to resolve domestic and family violence without ending relationships and breaking up families, for a range of reasons including immigration concerns and family and community pressures [Vaughan et al 2015].

For example, a woman with only temporary immigration status may not be eligible to work, may have no access to income support, health care or other public benefits, and may be legally, economically and socially dependent on her abusive partner. This forced dependency is likely to intensify if the woman has **poor English literacy**, is **caring for children**, is **isolated from family and social support networks**, or faces threats from her abusive partner that she and her children will be deported if they leave the abusive relationship [Allimant & Anne 2008]. These vulnerabilities are aggravated if the woman also experiences discrimination, disability, physical or mental illness, lack of education and other barriers to her wellbeing.

Whilst the Commonwealth *Migration Regulations 1994*, in the case of certain visas, exempt a woman from having to stay in an abusive relationship for two years before being eligible to apply for permanent residency, there are complex processes and evidentiary requirements that must be satisfied [Gray et al 2014]. A CALD woman who fears deportation or visa cancellation [JCCD, *Path to Justice (CALD) 2016*] may also fear engaging with the police or other authorities, and may remain in the abusive relationship rather than suffer the **stress and anxiety of seeking legal redress** [Taylor & Putt 2007].

In addition to the issues specific to immigration status, CALD women may for cultural or religious reasons [JCCD, *Path to Justice (CALD) 2016*] be reluctant to seek help for the domestic and family violence. They may feel shame in speaking openly about the violence. They may be unaware of their legal rights and unable to access linguistically appropriate information. They may be unwilling to disclose their circumstances to **interpreters** and counsellors who may sometimes be inadequately trained. Interpreters for particular dialects may not be available, and in small communities, the woman may know the interpreter and she may fear a lack of privacy and confidentiality. If counselled to leave the abusive relationship, CALD women may feel unable to face the cultural repercussions, which may include being ostracised from their family and community [George & Harris 2014].

The range of compounding factors may substantially delay a CALD woman from seeking help from legal or health services or the police, which may over time increase the risk of serious harm or death to the woman and her children. In the event that a CALD woman does report domestic and family violence, these factors may present as significant obstacles in her engagement with service providers and with police, legal and judicial processes. For example, as a result of experiences in her country of origin she may be mistrustful of authority and may need additional support in engaging openly and constructively with these processes [JCCD, *Path to Justice (CALD) 2016*]. Furthermore, access to appropriate interpreters at a cost the woman can afford is likely to be critical to her fair treatment and hearing [Cavallaro 2010].

Research indicates that whilst cultural origin is not a predictor of a capacity for violence [Mederos 2004], the perpetration of domestic and family violence in the CALD context should be considered having regard to surrounding circumstances and factors, including: the impact of protracted stays in refugee camps and related experiences of high levels of tension and violence [Pittaway & Eckert 2013]; the effects of isolation, unemployment, trauma, alienation and cultural change; and cultural communities' expectations of conformity with cultural norms and traditional gender roles [Rees & Pease 2006].