

# Refugee Settlement, Safety and Wellbeing: Exploring Domestic and Family Violence in Refugee Communities

Paper Four of the Violence Against Women Community Attitudes Project

4

# Refugee settlement, safety & wellbeing



IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE INC.

Exploring domestic and family  
violence in refugee communities

by Susan Rees & Bob Pease

Published by IWDVS

*Refugee Settlement, Safety and Wellbeing:  
Exploring Domestic and Family Violence in Refugee  
Communities*

*Susan Rees and Bob Pease*



IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE INC.



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*Disclaimer*

*The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the research team and do not necessarily reflect the views of VicHealth.*

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## **IWDVS Chairperson's Acknowledgements**

The underpinning philosophy of the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (IWDVS) is that the culturally and linguistically diverse communities have the capacity to critically reflect about and challenge the beliefs, attitudes, traditions and culturally values, that perpetuate domestic and family violence and to reflect on the traditions, attitudes and values that promote safety and prevention of family violence. IWDVS aims to be the voice of women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds affected by family violence. This research project provided us with the opportunity to build a relationship built on cooperation and commitment to address family violence with the refugee communities.

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The Board is especially appreciative of the IWDVS staff that acted as research assistants. The dedication, commitment and expertise of our staff contributed greatly to the success of the project. For the first time in its history, IWDVS employed male research assistants for the project. This enabled us to engage men from refugee communities and to learn more about barriers that may men from culturally and linguistically diverse from addressing domestic and family violence. It is important for IWDVS to understand this as these barriers directly impact on our risk assessments and safety planning with women. Our thanks to the male research assistants for their contribution and for being pioneers in the field of working with refugee men around the issues of domestic and family violence.

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The research and engagement process was enriched through the collaborative efforts of all those involved in the project. I trust that you will find much of interest and value in the following pages.

Slavia Ilich  
Chairperson

## **Research Team Acknowledgements**

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We would like to thank our Reference Group consisting of Kate Jones from Footscray Settlement Services, Danny Blay from No To Violence, Anthony Abate from the Multicultural Advisory Unit of Victoria Police, Annette McKail from the Refugee Council of Australia, Chrisoula Kanaris from South Central Migrant Resource Centre, Ida Kaplan from the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture and Trauma and Tania Farha and May Farah representing the IWDVS Board of Management.

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

This study was designed to examine the significance and inter-relatedness of cultural, psychosocial and economic factors in the safety and wellbeing of refugee families experiencing domestic and family violence and to produce knowledge that could inform the development of effective settlement supports for refugee families.

An action research methodology, utilising story-board group work to elicit pictorial and written data and individual interviews conducted by culturally competent research assistants, was developed. Participants from Ethiopia, South and North Sudan, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia and communities from Iraq were recruited by expert sampling and data was analysed through the lens of human rights and intersectional feminism.

### **Overview**

While domestic and family violence occurs in most societies, it has been identified that immigrant and refugee women are particularly vulnerable. Thus, whilst some features of domestic and family violence are universal (for example, community acceptance of violence against women and the low social status of women), many are more specific to the experiences of refugee or immigrant women.

The notion that domestic violence is ‘cultural’ for some communities and therefore does not warrant a serious response from authorities such as police and magistrates has also been documented as a factor placing immigrant and refugee women at greater risk from violent partners. Our review of the literature did not find that domestic violence was higher among refugee communities. However, it was specific experiences, including lack of host-language skills, unemployment, isolation from mainstream society, and prior experiences of trauma related to oppressive political structures, fundamentalist religious beliefs and civil wars that reinforced strategies by perpetrators and prevented women seeking assistance and early intervention.

Whilst giving voice to those who arrived as refugees from different ethnic groups was central to our objective to examine the contextual factors in domestic and family violence in refugee

communities, we also recognised that structural inequalities such as gender, class oppression and residency status shape the lives of refugee women and men. Our research emphasised that refugee cultures also have to make adjustments to the dominant culture in Australia and that some of these adaptations increase the risk factors for domestic violence. The findings of this research support the supposition of Krug et al (2000) that intimate partner violence is usually at its highest point when communities are in transition, when women begin to assume non-traditional roles or enter the workforce, or when men are less able to fulfil their culturally expected roles as providers and protectors (2002:99-100).

## **Review of the Empirical Literature**

Numerous studies demonstrate the influence of immigration and refugee status-related factors on the experience of domestic and family violence. However, few comparative cross-cultural or transcultural studies have been undertaken, with the notable exception of the World Health Organisation Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence.

The majority of studies are culture specific and focus on immigrant and culturally and linguistically diverse populations rather than refugee communities. Refugee families face additional risks beyond those faced by migrant families and culturally-diverse communities. Culturally-mediated factors such as class, caste, interfamily structures, religion and socially produced disadvantages and exclusions associated with refugee status are seen to impact on the subordination of women in refugee communities and are important in understanding the nature and prevalence of domestic and family violence in those communities. It is noted, however, that Western interventions into domestic and family violence often do not take into account the cultural complexity of violence and the dynamics impacting on refugee communities.

## **Towards an Intersectional Conceptual Framework**

African-American and Third World feminists introduced the concepts of 'intersectionality' and interlocking systems of oppression to move beyond the experiences of white middle-class women to explore the impact of class, ethnicity and culture on women's lives. Intersectionality theory posits that gender oppression is modified by intersections with other forms of inequality and oppression.

While intersectionality theory focuses on those who are subordinate at all levels of social division, it needs also to explore the experiences of those who occupy positions of both subordination and privilege. Because men do not benefit equally from patriarchy and white people do not benefit equally from racism, most people cannot be categorised solely as privileged or oppressed. We have to move beyond these static categories to realise that many people who are oppressed also have access to some forms of privilege. An intersectional analysis can help to deal with this complexity and assist oppressed groups to challenge exploitation and domination affecting their communities.

### **Applying Intersectionality to Understanding Men’s Violence Against Women**

A number of writers argue that there is a different meaning to male domination when it is experienced through the lens of race, colonisation and class oppression. In acknowledging cultural variations in men’s violence against women, however, we have to be careful not to blame the culture of the immigrant or refugee family. The focus is to understand how male domination manifests itself within each culture to explore the connections with men’s violence in those cultures.

Definitions of what constitutes violence against women will vary from culture to culture and we need to be conscious of these variations that are subject to change as communities are dislocated, encounter social upheaval and transformation. Nevertheless we should not accept cultural justifications for abusive practices. Intervention strategies against domestic and family violence in refugee communities need to both ensure that they don’t reinforce cultural values that tolerate violence against women and simultaneously be mindful of not undermining cultural differences that can promote wellbeing and enhance settlement.

### **Intersectionality and Responding to Men’s Violence Against Women**

We need to understand the ways in which masculinities are influenced by class, racism and ethnicity in challenging the violence of marginalised men. Considering the influences of class, status and inequality does not excuse men of their responsibility for their violence. While we need to be aware of how men can use experiences of injustice to avoid responsibility, these

experiences need to be acknowledged in engagement with these men. A cultural model which locates responsibility within the context of multiple oppressions arising from colonialism and racism represents a way forward.

## **Summary of Key Findings**

The study highlights the relationship between the refugee and settlement experience interrelated with patriarchy and male domination.

### ***Isolation, 'cultural betrayal' and language skills***

Isolation from family support emerged as an important factor preventing women from speaking out about domestic and family violence. Many women and men said that women who seek assistance for domestic and family violence are betraying their culture. Inadequate English language skills was also a significant barrier to women negotiating and communicating with the broader community and in seeking help in relation to family violence.

### ***Unemployment and downward mobility***

The impact of unemployment on men was strongly correlated by both women and men as being related to family conflict and domestic and family violence. Work was seen by the men as symbolically representing them as the head of the family. All of the men spoke about the male breadwinner role in relation to their culture but did not perceive it as related to patriarchal beliefs that are mediated through culture.

### ***Trauma and alienation***

Trauma, mental illness and alienation were all related by participants to negative settlement experiences and domestic and family violence. Many women experienced high levels of torture and trauma without becoming aggressors, thus indicating that men's responses to trauma are interconnected with patriarchy and sanctioned violence against women.

### ***Gender roles and cultural change***

While many of the women became more aware of their rights and felt more empowered by the changes in their status, many of the men felt disempowered. Many of the men did not accept the socially liberal changes in the women's roles in Australia, or the role of government in

supporting women who have been abused. Many of the men attributed 'family conflict' to women becoming more dominant and independent.

The Australian way of life was associated with being individualist, rushed and antisocial. Individualism and lack of community cohesion and contact were said to be important factors in explaining the difficulties and conflicts experienced by families.

Psychological, social, cultural and structural factors all combined to increase levels of risk of domestic and family violence. A framework for addressing domestic and family violence in partnership with refugee communities needs to take into account individual, community, organisational and structural factors.

## **Recommendations**

- That social policies and health and welfare practices concerning refugee communities and domestic violence recognise the mediating aspects of culture, class and refugee experience on the impact of violence in refugee families.
- That a more in-depth and concerted effort be undertaken to welcome refugees into communities by ensuring access to knowledge, the dominant language, education and employment.
- That while refugees need to be more aware of the social norms of the dominant society, their traditional lifestyles, beliefs and norms need to be protected without sacrificing contemporary rights for women.
- That refugee, health and welfare policies incorporate an understanding of the intersections of culture, traditions, class, gender and contemporary social contexts.
- That settlement theory and practice takes account of negative outcomes for women during settlement, particularly in relation to isolation and reduced opportunities to learn English and secure paid employment.
- That resources be increased for ethnic groups welcoming new refugees.
- That refugees be centrally involved in the development of policies and programs related to migration and settlement and in specifically addressing domestic and family violence.

- That this study be used to inform a community-based and managed project concerning multi-level empowerment-based interventions to support refugee communities and to prevent domestic and family violence.

## Foreword

Domestic violence or violence against women perpetrated by male partners, or ex partners, has been articulated as one of the most concerning and prevalent public health issues in the world today (Krug et al, 2002) and is a major cause of injury and mental illness among women and children. Domestic and family violence occurs in most societies irrespective of culture, socio-economic status or religion. Nevertheless, it has been identified that immigrant and refugee women are particularly at risk (Walter, 2001; Easteal, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 2000; Perilla, 2003; Kang, Kahler and Tesar, 2003; Narayan,1997). Involving a sample of people who arrived as refugees from Iraq, North and South Sudan, Ethiopia and Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian communities, this study examined refugee settlement and domestic and family violence with the intention of revealing the significance and interrelatedness of cultural, psychological, social and economic factors.

Domestic and family violence does not occur in isolation of social or cultural factors, and with an emphasis on the wellbeing of those who arrived as refugee or humanitarian entrants in the first five years of arrival, we have necessarily focused on the settlement experience. Australia's Offshore Resettlement Program assists refugees and others in humanitarian need and for whom resettlement in another country is the only available solution. Australia accepted 13,000 Humanitarian entrants in 2004/5. The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (IHSS) is the Federal government program provided to entrants to provide short term orientation and information, accommodation support, household material support, health care support, and community support through a volunteer support program to the recently arrived. The findings from this research are relevant to future IHSS policy directions and other related settlement policies and programs.

We acknowledge that the term 'intimate partner violence' is becoming the more accepted term globally. However, we ascertained that the term 'domestic and family violence' is better appreciated in the Australian context, particularly among culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Based on this rationale we have used the term domestic and family violence for this study. If we are to advance interventions to reduce the prevalence of domestic and family violence we need to understand the beliefs, attitudes and experiences of men (WHO, 2005). This study is unique because it involved refugee men as well as refugee women participants.



‘Culture’ is commonly described as a system of shared beliefs, customs, behaviours and values that are used by members of a society to make sense of their world and of each other. We have operationalised ‘culture’ to be constantly emerging, influenced by contemporary imposed or welcomed changes, rather than a static entity that could somehow be blamed for domestic and family violence. Unlike many culture-focused studies into domestic and family violence, our study included a holistic appraisal of culture including traditional and contemporary social and structural factors. The reader will note that our interest in culture in this broad context is consistent with a critique of patriarchy in an analysis of domestic and family violence. We want it to be explicit that although this research has investigated the complex field of domestic and family violence, culture, trauma and historical and contemporary disadvantage, it has a fundamental prerequisite standing that, regardless of past and current experiences, men must take responsibility for their violence against women. Furthermore, we remain committed to viewing the right of women to safety from domestic and family violence as primarily important in any analysis or intervention.

Whilst focusing on a social problem that affects all communities we are mindful that refugee arrivals are particularly at risk of being typecast in a negative light. Australia is a culturally diverse country built on migration, with four in ten Australians being migrants or the children of migrants. Migration stimulates the economy. Migration creates employment, increases consumption of food and household goods and increases spending (HREOC, 2003). Cosmopolitan Australia would not be what it is without the richness and ethnic diversity that has emerged from migration. Our study highlights the wealth of knowledge, insight and expertise that refugees in particular contribute to Australia, and underscores the importance of ensuring that the skills and talents of refugees are recognised, valued and nurtured.

## **The Empirical Studies**

In the literature review we endeavour to make sense of the compounding factors in relation to violence affecting or at risk of affecting refugee women by reviewing the empirical studies. In the later part of the review we intentionally focus on a conceptual framework informed by intersectional feminism to theorise the relationship between gender, class and ethnicity. The review of empirical studies should serve to provide the reader with a systematic review of the

literature concerning the immigrant experience and domestic and family violence. For the purposes of this part of the review, we have emphasised the findings of each study rather than detailing the theoretical approaches or methodologies in each.

Studies emphasising immigration or refugee status-related factors impacting on the incidence or experience of domestic and family violence have been undertaken and include the work of Easteal (1999); Menjivar and Salcido (2002); Jang (1994); Jang et al (1990); Krishnan et al, (1997); Rees (2004); Perilla, (1999); Pittaway (2004); and Sharma, (2001). Statistical evidence of prevalence among specific immigrant or refugee communities in receiving communities such as Canada, the US and Australia has not been forthcoming (Kaplan and Webster, 2003, Mc Ginn, 2000, Easteal, 1994, Goldman, 1999). The deficit of prevalence data reflects the complexity and sensitivity of the problem of domestic and family violence in immigrant communities, including the known under-reporting of incidents and potential misuse of data to stigmatize particular communities as deterrents for researchers. Furthermore, despite evidence that domestic and family violence is highly prevalent worldwide, few comparative cross-cultural or transcultural studies have been undertaken because of the existing disparities mediated by distinct methodologies and definitions (Gondolf, 2004). A notable exception to this is the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence. The WHO prevalence study involved 15 sites in 10 countries (2005). The study found wide variations in prevalence and patterns of violence from country to country and emphasised the socially and culturally determined nature of domestic violence with the issue of gender inequality being a pivotal factor (WHO, 2005).

The majority of studies in this area are therefore culture-specific rather than cross-cultural, and focus on immigrants and visible minorities (or culturally and linguistically diverse populations) rather than refugee communities. The standpoints of authors differ according to whether the prevalence of domestic violence, in particular immigrant or culturally and linguistically diverse groups, is perceived as higher than in the general community, or whether prevalence is similar and it is migrants' specific experiences that make them less likely to seek or find effective interventions (see Menjivar and Salcido, 2002). Regardless, the relatively sparse literature invariably finds that cultural values and immigration status enhances the complexities normally involved in cases of domestic violence. The theoretical literature concerning domestic violence in culturally and ethnically-diverse populations living in developed western countries is concordant that cultural difference, gender roles, familism, shame and collectivism often

combine with factors related to the experience of migration to place immigrant and refugee women at heightened risk from domestic violence. Issues including social isolation, low-socioeconomic status, racism, inadequate access to, or knowledge of, services and supports have been duly identified (Goldolf et al, 1998; Yoshioka, 2003; Sharma, 2001; Bui, 2003; Bui and Morash, 1999; Easteal, 1996). Similarly, the process of acculturation is described as a stressor on families, increasing the risk of domestic violence. Caetano et al. (2000) found that negotiation of values and norms in the country of settlement heightened stress within Hispanic families, particularly where support networks were absent or reduced. She found that this heightened stress contributed to more violence in families that were moderately acculturated as opposed to those who had recently arrived, or had been living in the USA for longer periods of time. Dasgupta (2000a,b, 1998) has written extensively about the South Asian community in the United States. Dasgupta argues that the lives of women of color, and the experiences of domestic violence in this particular community emerge from intersections of race, class and residency status.

Some authors encourage the importance of focusing on cultural specificity when analyzing domestic violence (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Yoshioka et al., 2001). In culture-specific studies, some factors vary according to cultural background in preventing women from seeking assistance or disclosing abuse. These culturally-mediated factors that are commonly more strongly articulated than in contemporary white western contexts include the fear of losing face and shaming family, and community and marriage commitments taking predominance over individual welfare. Research with South Asian women in the United States substantiates the importance of understanding that domestic violence be viewed within the context of cultural, historical and economic relationships. The forces of class, caste, interfamily structures, and religion impact on the subordination of women, and these are often reinforced by community elders (Preisser, 1999:692). Lack of a support system, being isolated from community and family as a consequence of being a migrant or refugee, financial deprivation, lack of job skills, and unfamiliarity of laws and customs in the new country, are also described as factors that prevent women from leaving abusive relationships (Jang, 1991; Jang, 1998).

A study undertaken by Barcelona de Mendoza (2001) underscores the importance of understanding the cultural perception of family and its predominance over the wellbeing of the individual woman and her experiences of abuse. In the case of Latina women in the United States the importance of understanding the myth of martyrdom, or *marianismo*, in preventing

women from putting their own interests before those of her family is described (Barcelona de Mendoza, 2001). Perilla also described the concept of *marianismo* among Latina women as an important factor in understanding the abuse they receive from their husbands and its general acceptance, including in the American Diaspora. Perilla writes that despite levels of acculturation, socio-economic status or country of origin, the expectations and attitudes related to male power and female submission are evident. Perilla analyses cultural mandates for women (that are expected by men and family members), including women remembering their place in the home, being responsible for passing on traditions, putting the needs of others before her own, standing by and supporting the husband regardless of his behaviour, being a good mother and keeping the family together (1999:123). From subsequent research Perilla described the importance of understanding the centrality of family in the lives of many refugee women, and that the role of wife and mother is often the core of their identity (2000: 3).

In a study examining the barriers to health care for abused Latina and Asian immigrant women Bauer et al. (2000) described social, political and cultural obstacles. Socio-political barriers to help-seeking included social isolation, language barriers and in some cases discrimination and fear of deportation. Dedication to the children and family, and shame related to the abuse and the stigma of divorce, were also factors preventing women from seeking assistance (Bauer et al., 2000:33). Isolation itself has been revealed as a complex issue affecting the immigrant experience of domestic violence. In a study of South Asian immigrant families and domestic violence in the United States, Abraham identified three levels of isolation including the quality of a woman's relationship with her partner, the frequency and quality of social interaction with her friends, relatives and co-workers, and access to and participation in the ethnic community and other social functions (2000:221).

Clearly, culture is an important factor in understanding the nature and occurrence of domestic violence among culturally and linguistically-diverse populations. Yoshihama (2000) (as well as Ho, 1990) have argued that some western feminist analyses have offered a mono-cultural analysis of domestic violence, without regard for socio-cultural variations in the experience and manifestations of domestic violence across cultures. Yick (2001) agrees with the limitations of social science theories from Anglo-Western perspectives in capturing the realities of domestic violence among ethnic minority groups. Yick examined feminist theories and their application to domestic violence in Chinese immigrant families and found that interventions should include a broader analysis of the family, where the individual woman is often required to protect the

family as the crucial aspect of her social identity, and the associated risks of ostracism and criticism she might encounter as a result of help seeking for violence perpetrated by a partner or spouse (Yik, 2001: 552; Ho, 1990). The Yik study supports the findings of previously discussed culture specific studies (for instance Perilla, 2000).

Reflecting on her research with Samoan communities in New Zealand, Crichton-Hill found that the western interventions in domestic violence that centred around the Duluth Model did not adequately take account of the cultural complexity of domestic violence and the unique dynamics of Samoan culture (2001:203). Similarly, Bhuyan et al. (2005) found that Cambodian women in the US that had sought assistance as victim/survivors of domestic violence did not want to leave their abuser despite that being the focus of the mainstream service providers. Consistent with the views of many women in the general community, the women in these studies wanted help in resolving family problems, in stopping the husband's violence and in keeping the family together. Other women in the study said that if the violence did not stop they would then seek assistance to divorce their abuser (2005:913).

Yoshioka et al. (2001) examined wife abuse attitudes among a sample of 507 Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Cambodian adults living in the United States. The findings showed that 24% to 36% of the sample agreed that violence is justified in certain situations, a finding that reflects the significance of patriarchy despite cultural variations. Although comparison between the ethnic groups showed some disparity, the research exemplified factors relating to the normalisation of violence, the power status of men, and the corresponding sub-status of women, that might prevent Asian women from seeking assistance for violence. Bui and Morash (1999) compared the responses of Vietnamese women in physically abusive relationships with those from women in non-physically abusive relationships to determine factors associated with wife abuse. Male domination in family decision making, family conflicts over changing norms and beliefs, and husbands' lack of educational attainment and patriarchal beliefs, were correlated with violence. Culture (or culturally mediated male dominance) was found to be a prevailing factor, despite the increased independence of women engaged in wage earning. In effect, the status of women was not altered or improved by the experience of migration. This finding was also described by Yoshihama (2000), who found that despite some financial independence, the culture of being Japanese most influenced the experience of domestic violence among Japanese women. Conflict avoidance, the value of endurance, acceptance of male domination, the value of collective family welfare, and aversion to help seeking were predominant factors (Yoshihama, 2000:214).

In writing about domestic violence interventions with Korean women, Song (2003) proclaims that the status of women in Korean society is critical to understanding the help seeking behaviour and intervention needs of Korean women in Australia. Song compares the status of women in the United Nations Gender Empowerment Index (2000), highlighting that women in Australia were ranked 11th in the index whereas women in Korea were ranked 63<sup>rd</sup>. Despite the significance of the relationship between culture and the status of women, Song warns against stereotyping Asian women as having low gender awareness and less independence. In contrast to Yoshihama (2000), Song discusses the importance of length of time in Australia, level of integration, individual factors and language skills as mediating factors in women's independence (2000).

Shirwadkar (2004) found that despite progressive policies of multiculturalism and domestic violence policies in Canada, Indian women continue to experience oppressive gender roles and restrictive marriage relationships, extreme isolation and limited options as immigrants (2004:861; see also Abraham, 2001; Dasgupta and Warriar, 1996; Banjerjee, 2000). Shirwadkar found that abused immigrant Indian women in Canada do not have the same knowledge or access to the justice system as other women, and that many Indian women do not report violence to the police. The threat of deportation and of racist treatment from police were factors preventing women from seeking assistance (Shirwadkar, 2004). Similar to other studies with immigrant and refugee women, Shirwadkar revealed the importance of (and dangers associated with) family for Indian women, including the risks associated with being married and of upholding marriage at all costs. Furthermore, the issue of isolation of women, and the risk of losing community status and support networks if they were to leave the husband's house, were factors preventing women from seeking assistance or going to domestic violence shelters (2004).

Refugees and humanitarian entrants by definition have escaped persecution in their home country or have been subject to substantial discrimination amounting to gross violation of human rights in their home country. Literature referring to the domestic and family violence and the experiences of refugees settling in developed countries is sparse, despite concerns from service providers and policy makers that these communities are experiencing domestic and family violence, and that this is negatively affecting wellbeing and the chances of successful settlement (Pittaway, 2005). Most of the issues affecting migrant families are also relevant to refugee families in that experiences during migration and the predominant social policies present challenges and barriers during settlement. Nevertheless, for refugees there are additional issues

that compound an already complex set of cultural, social and economic factors impacting on the experience of domestic and family violence (Rees, 2004).

Within a human rights context, Rees presents a discussion of the multiple factors placing refugee women and families at risk of domestic and family violence. She argues that many of the issues increasing the risks associated with domestic and family violence for immigrant families are compounded for refugee families who are more isolated, have reduced opportunities to learn English and find employment, and for those who experience ongoing mental and physical effects of torture, rape and trauma (2004). Pittaway (2004) describes the pre-arrival experiences, traditional masculine identities and the settlement challenges and barriers as important factors in the incidence and manifestations of domestic and family violence and the safety of women in wealthy receiving countries. Unlike some migrant women who have experienced domestic violence (Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Kudat, 1982), refugee women are unable to flee domestic violence by returning home because of state persecution and the other significant risks to their wellbeing and lives.

Friedman (1999) focused her study on the rape and sexual assault of refugee women and the psychological trauma and physical health effects including injuries, venereal disease and pregnancies. Because refugee women have fled hostile environments where rape and the abuse of women was a weapon of war and persecution, or a common occurrence in refugee camps, the effects of abuse among refugee women need to be accounted for in health and welfare policies and interventions in receiving countries. Friedman argues that where women's chastity and honour is viewed as the property of men, rape is seen as a violation in the eyes of husbands and communities and can lead to increased violence against women. Friedman also contends that refugee men witnessing rape and experiencing violence suffer from a 'heightened male vulnerability' that when combined with the stress of settlement in a different country can lead to domestic violence as a means of gaining control and re-establishing power (1999:65).

Anita Sharma (2001) similarly argues that some refugee men tend to use violence as a means for solving problems and dealing with stress and expressing their feelings. Living under dictatorial regimes, where violence has been used to dominate and control were extenuating factors (2001:1414, see also Pressman, 1994).

Sharma examines interventions for immigrant women from culturally-diverse populations in cases of domestic violence in Canada. Whilst acknowledging the strengths of feminist interventions that consider the social context of abuse, demystify power relationships, and focus on women's empowerment, Sharma contends that such interventions fail to acknowledge the entire spectrum of diversity that exists among women, including race, ethnicity and religion. Economic hardship and financial dependence on the husband, racist and discriminatory practices within community services, and the attitudes and behaviours of police and shelters can exacerbate the risks for immigrant women (2001:1413). Like Bograd (1999) Sharma writes that immigrant and minority women are often reluctant to contact the police if they are experiencing domestic violence primarily because of institutionalized racism. Furthermore, racism and xenophobia among officials can combine to disadvantage women accessing or continuing to gain support from mainstream health and welfare services.

The notion that domestic violence is 'cultural' for some communities and therefore does not warrant a serious response from authorities such as police and magistrates has also been documented as a factor placing immigrant and refugee women at greater risk from violent partners (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). Menjívar and Salcido's review of the literature found that domestic violence was indeed not higher among refugee communities. However, it was their specific experiences, including lack of host-language skills, cultural ignorance and racism, unemployment, uncertain legal status, and prior experiences in their home countries, that reinforced strategies by perpetrators and prevented women seeking assistance and early intervention (2002:901).

Rees (2004) argues that refugee women, originating from countries where the state has persecuted them and their families, may continue to associate the authorities of the receiving country with violence rather than as potential avenues for assistance. Fear of authorities is also evident in Jang's (1994) work focusing specifically on the status of immigrant women and the ramifications of domestic violence on immigrant women who choose to leave a relationship. In particular, Jang explores the justice system and civil legal system in the US and the fear immigrant women have of being deported if they seek legal intervention.

Dasgupta argues that a 'slew of personal, institutional, and cultural barriers commingle to form roadblocks for battered South Asian women, who attempt to escape family violence' (2000:173). Despite the lack of reliable statistical data Dasgupta provides evidence of the high prevalence of



domestic violence in South Asian homes. Significantly, she also argues that migration has not promoted gender equality or changed gender dynamics privileging men in South Asian communities. This problem combines with factors of migration status and adaptation to make South Asian and other immigrant communities more vulnerable to the abuse of women (FREDA, 1994; Abraham, 1999; Jang, 1991; Bhattacharjee, 1997; Bograd, 1988; Easteal, 1996). In 1993 Macleod and Shin wrote that without having the key to cultural understanding, adaptation and integration the extra burdens women who are abused experience are rarely documented or translated into policies. Like some of the other studies, the authors emphasise the importance of English language skills and avenues for social inclusion for women to reduce the risks associated with isolation and dependence on men (Narayan, 1997; Easteal, 1996).

## **Towards an Intersectional Theoretical Framework**

From our review of the empirical studies it is evident that western feminist analyses have been charged by some commentators with ignoring socio-cultural variations in the experience of domestic violence across cultures. This has led some commentators to argue that white western feminist frameworks are unable to capture the complexity of violence against women in culturally and linguistically-diverse communities. However, our reading of the literature has uncovered a history of feminist-inspired theory of cultural difference in the context of gender and class.

While historically some expressions of western feminist theory gave insufficient attention to women of colour, in the late 1980s African-American and third world feminists introduced the concepts of ‘intersectionality’ and interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1991; Mohanty, 1991). These feminists argued that some expressions of white western feminism were unable to analyse the complexity of women’s lives. By failing to sufficiently acknowledge the experiences of marginalised women, gender relations were granted a primary status and other forms of inequality were seen as secondary. It was argued that one outcome of this neglect is that women who were relatively privileged were insufficiently aware of the problems faced by working-class and black women (Zinn et al., 1986). To fully understand gender inequality then it would be necessary to move beyond the experiences of middle-class white women and to explore the impact of class and ethnicity on women’s lives.

During the 1980s and 1990s, African American feminists explored how the intersections of race, gender and class impacted on the lives of marginalised people. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) and others emphasised the importance of seeing race, gender and class as ‘interlocking systems of oppression’. These feminist perspectives, grounded in the diversity of women’s lives, explored the interconnections between class, gender and race as they were experienced by women in specific contexts. Feminism was thus faced with the challenge to develop a theory that is able to address the complexity of how these different dimensions of women’s (and men’s) lives are woven together.

The main premise of intersectional theory is that gender oppression is modified by intersections with other forms of inequality and oppression (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). It is notable, however, that most of the uses of intersectional analyses are focussed on the intersections of oppression. As Joan Acker (1999:55) has observed, we ‘know more about how gender, class and race are intertwined in the lives of members of relatively subordinate groups than we do about the lives of those in more influential positions’. Intersectional analysis needs to move beyond the study of those who are subordinate on all levels of social division, in order to explore the experiences of those who occupy positions of both privilege and subordination, as is the case with refugee men.

Not all men, for example, benefit equally from patriarchy and not all white people benefit equally from racism. This means that most people cannot be categorised solely as privileged or oppressed. While immigrant men, for example, may exercise power over their female partners at home, in the context of the public sphere and paid work, they are likely to be dominated by white men.

What an intersectional analysis makes clear is that almost everyone experiences both privilege and subordination. Black feminist criticisms of white feminism draw attention to the fact that while white women are oppressed by their gender positioning, they also receive privileges through their whiteness. Similarly, we would add, that while non-Western immigrant men are oppressed by class and racial hierarchies, they still receive some forms of gender privilege. These examples demonstrate just two of the ways in which one may be both privileged and oppressed at the same time.

While many people find it relatively easy to identify their experience of oppression because it feels painful and uncomfortable, they often find it harder to recognise how their thoughts and actions oppress others because they are often normalised in their culture. Given that most people can be seen to exhibit both some degree of penalty and privilege, it is equally necessary for individuals to see themselves as belonging to privileged groups as well as to oppressed groups.

We have to move beyond these static categories to realise that many people who are oppressed also have access to some forms of privilege. In most people's thinking about oppression, however, people are seen as either privileged or subordinated and they ignore these contradictions. An intersectional analysis can help to deal with this complexity and assist oppressed groups to challenge exploitation and domination affecting their communities.

## **Intersectionality and Understanding Men's Violence Against Women**

What does an intersectional framework mean for understanding men's violence against women in refugee communities? Crenshaw (1997) was one of the first theorists to apply intersectionality to men's violence against women. She argues that domestic violence services designed for white middle-class women will be of limited value to women from culturally-diverse backgrounds. Donnelly et al. (2005) suggest that the notion that violence affects all women equally is a form of 'colour blindness,' and that service provision flowing from this idea is embedded within white privilege.

Hunter (1996) argues that feminist theory is incomplete if it ignores race and ethnicity. She notes that there is a different meaning to male domination when it is refracted through the lens of race, colonisation and class oppression (Hunter 1996:140). In her view, some radical feminist approaches to violence against women have been centred on the experiences of white middle-class, heterosexual women.

While it is clearly evident that women from all classes and ethnic groups, and in all societies can be victims of men's violence (Dasgupta, 2005), there is an implication in this premise that violence against women is the same 'across class, ethnic, cultural and other divisions' (Eggar, 1993:3). Richie (2000:2) acknowledges that the feminist view that 'any woman can be battered'

was part of a strategy of not stigmatising the class and race of the victims of men's violence. However, she argues that this strategy was 'based on a false sense of unity around the experience of gender oppression' and that it has not come to terms with the analysis of race and class (Richie 2000:2). As a consequence, the experiences of low-income women and women of colour have been neglected. In the United States, such women 'are the most likely to be in both dangerous intimate relationships and dangerous social positions' (Richie, 2000:2).

Clearly, there are dangers in acknowledging cultural variations in men's violence against women. We do not want to contribute to the false belief that violence against women is only something that happens to 'others' (Crenshaw, 1997). We have to be careful not to simply blame the culture of the immigrant or refugee family. All women, whatever their cultural or ethnic background, are at risk of experiencing violence (Ely, 2004). Sokoloff and Dupont (2005b) note that when we acknowledge that culture may be a part of the problem, there is a tendency to blame culture and to regard non-white cultures as more tolerant of men's violence than white cultures. West writes that there is simply no evidence to suggest that ethnically-diverse families are more violent (West, 2005).

Our concern is to understand how male domination manifests itself within each culture and emerging, changing cultures in the Diaspora, to explore the connections with men's violence against women within the unique domain of the refugee experience. Strategies for violence prevention will thus need to be mindful of culturally-specific factors in particular communities (Nayak et al., 2003). We are not attributing culture itself as a key determinant of violence against women, however, we are interested in how gendered violence is shaped by other forms of oppression that cross cut gender divisions (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005b) including during settlement for recently arrived refugees. We also want to examine how patriarchy functions differently in diverse cultures (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a). Almeida and Dolan-Delevecchio (1999), for example, illustrate how patriarchy takes a different form in many Asian cultures. In this research we further develop the theory that domestic violence is a manifestation of gender inequality and that the institution of patriarchy manifests both universally and differently through cultures. In advocating an intersectional analysis, we are proposing that it is important to identify both similarities and differences in men's violence against women in diverse cultures and communities (Cousineau and Rondeau, 2004). Some areas of commonality that seem to transcend particular cultures include community acceptance of violence against women and the low social status of women, although these common factors are likely to be expressed in

culturally-specific ways. Importantly, these factors are likely to be exacerbated in the context of oppressive political structures, fundamentalist religious beliefs and civil wars (Ely, 2004). Our research highlights that refugee cultures also have to make adjustments to the dominant culture in Australia and that some of these adaptations increase the risk factors for domestic violence (Cousineau and Rondeau, 2004).

Definitions of what constitutes violence against women will vary from culture to culture (Gartner, 2000). We need to be conscious of these cultural variations without necessarily accepting cultural justifications for abusive practices (Cousineau and Rondeau, 2004). We know that cultural explanations can be used to legitimate men's violence against women (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005; Volpp, 2005). As Olkin (1999) points out, while some cultures and religions do appear to be in opposition to gender equality, we should not conclude from this that they are necessarily more patriarchal than Western societies (Volpp, 2005). In exploring the role of culture in relation to violence against women, we must also recognise that white norms and behaviours are also cultural (Volpp, 2005).

On the one hand, intervention strategies against domestic violence in refugee communities need to ensure that they don't reinforce cultural values that tolerate violence against women, while on the other hand they need to be mindful of not undermining community integration (Gartner, 2000). Refugee women may be reluctant to name their experiences of violence because of their awareness of how their male partners have experienced oppression both in their home communities and in Australia (Donnell et al., 2005).

A number of feminist writers have drawn attention to the implications of these differences between women's experiences of violence for understanding men's violence. Bograd (1999:2), for example, argues that men's violence 'is not a monolithic phenomenon.' In her view, intersectionalities and multiple oppressions shape the meaning and nature of men's violence. Thus class, ethnicity and sexuality will impact upon women's experience of violence through the victimisation of classism, racism and heterosexism. While it is clear that all men who use violence 'exercise some form of patriarchal control, men's relationships to patriarchy differ in patterned ways depending on where they are socially located' (Bograd, 1999:2). In a similar vein, Coker (2002:129) talks about the importance of introducing what she calls 'anti-subordination processes' to respond to the intersections of oppressions that affect women and men in disempowered and subjugated communities.

## **Intersectionality and Responding to Men's Violence against Women**

We need to understand the ways in which masculinities are influenced by class, race and ethnicity in challenging the violence of marginalised men (Coker, 2001). There is a complex debate about the relationship between class and racist oppression and men's violence against women. To consider the influence of class and inequality related to ethnicity could be interpreted as 'colluding with the man in helping him find excuses for his violence' because it moves away from the notion of 'sole responsibility' (Watson, 2001:92). However, this ought not to be interpreted as an argument for excusing men of responsibility for their violence. As Mama says, in relation to black men in the UK: 'Racism does not take up the hands of the black man and oblige him to beat up his partner' (cited in Itzin, 2000:362). This argument is not to suggest that class and racist oppression can explain men's violence. As Kappeler (1995) notes 'not everyone experiencing the same oppression uses violence. That is, that these circumstances do not 'cause' violent behaviour. They overlook in other words that the perpetrator has decided to violate, even if this decision was made in circumstance of limited choice' (1995:3). Thus while the power structures must be addressed to significantly reduce men's violence, we still need to address the behaviour of individual men within the constraints of those power structures (Kappeler, 1995).

There are only a few examples of the implications of an intersectional analysis for working with marginalised men who are violent to their women partners. Augusta-Scott (2001) says that many of the men he works with are oppressed by racism and poverty. In his view, these men are 'often both powerful and powerless at the same time' (Augusta-Scott, 2001:40). While they have power and control in their relationships with women, they experience powerlessness outside of these relationships. As noted above, while facilitators need to be aware of how these men can use their experiences of injustice as a way of avoiding responsibility, these experiences need to be acknowledged in the engagement with these men.

A number of male writers who have emphasised the importance of race and class in working with violent men have tended to do so from a position that holds feminism responsible for what they regard as a simplistic gender analysis (for example, Watson, 2001 and Hurst, 2001). Such men fail to acknowledge the diversity of feminist analyses and the recognition over the last thirty years that most feminists have given to the intersections of racism, class and gender (Collins,

1991; Mohanty, 1991; Crenshaw, 1997; Stubbs, 2001). McLean (2001) also suggests that some of these omissions may be less to do with feminists ignoring class and ethnicity and more to do with men's misinterpretation of feminist theory and practice. As Kelly (2002:2) rightly notes in discussing feminist theory in the 1970s and 1980s: 'We do our history a disservice if we neglect to remember that at this earliest stage there was awareness of differences between women [in relation to] race, class and sexuality'. Laing (2002:2) also observes that 'feminist writing and activism has attempted to grapple with the 'interaction' of gender, race, class and ethnicity in order to more fully understand all the dimensions of the socio-political context in which violence against women occurs'.

In spite of the developments in intersectional theory, Laing (2001:4), in citing Almeida and Durkin (1999), says that most services for both women and men 'have failed to address the intersectionalities of race, class, culture and sexual orientation'. She advocates Almeida and Durkin's (1999) 'cultural model' which locates personal responsibility within the context of multiple oppressions arising from colonialism and racism as a way forward. Despite evidence that men's power and control should be a centrally informing feature of all interventions, there is a need to develop programs and interventions that recognise the impact of class, racism and ethnicity on men's lives. Almeida and Lockard (2005) advocate the development of 'culture circles' and the importance of building communities that promote collaboration and non-violence. Community-based, culturally-competent interventions in specific communities, supported and funded by the state, provide the most promise in ending domestic and family violence (Smith, 2005).

## **Introduction to the Refugee Settlement, Safety and Wellbeing Study**

As we have demonstrated, there is evidence that refugee families who have survived torture and trauma as part of the refugee experience are likely to be particularly affected by domestic violence (McGinn, 2000; Friedman, 1999; Sharma, 2001; Pittaway, 2004). Anecdotal reports from community workers and health professionals indicate that domestic violence is a significant problem in Australian refugee communities. These workers report that they do not have the resources to deal with this problem and that they often do not have the cultural knowledge necessary to work at this level with these communities. They have also indicated that adequate training and models of practice are not available, and report that government and non-

government service provision is under resourced and is not adequate to offer services for these women and their families. Workers from refugee specific services have identified the need for training and skills development in the area of domestic violence, whilst workers from the services designed to work with the victims and survivors of domestic violence have identified the need for training and skills development in working with refugee families (Pittaway, 2005).

The complex and multifactorial issues related to the problem of domestic and family violence in refugee communities was identified in 2004 as an area for further study (Rees, 2004). Studies concerned with domestic and family violence in migrant and to a lesser extent refugee communities, have identified probable risk factors including challenges to identities; mental health problems primarily associated with prior trauma; isolation from social networks; economic insecurity and unemployment (Easteal, 1999; Menjivar and Salcido, 2002; Jang, 1994; Perilla, 1999, 2003; Sharma, 2001; Bui and Morash, 1999; Yoshiola, 2003). In the early scoping phase of this study, the authors hypothesised that when the apparently complex problem of domestic violence in refugee communities in Australia is examined within an intersectional framework, appropriate policy responses and interventions could be developed and implemented. At the same time, in the prevailing climate of conservatism, and religious and racial controversy, the risk of research concerned with problems in refugee communities could be used to support an existing agenda to vilify or denounce refugees, particularly those arriving from Muslim countries. The authors determined that the involvement of the community sector and of refugee communities in particular, was essential to ensuring that the applied research objective (including the right of refugees to define their own needs) would be more likely met, and that the direction and involvement of refugee groups and advocates might safeguard against the pathologising of refugee communities.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The study was designed to examine the significance and inter-relatedness of cultural, psychosocial and economic factors in the safety and wellbeing of refugee families experiencing domestic and family violence, and to produce knowledge that could inform the development of effective settlement supports for refugee families. The objectives of the study were to:



1. Investigate the relationships between domestic and family violence and gender, traumatic history, social and economic context, cultural difference, and changed identities. Ethnic groups identified for inclusion in this study were communities from Iraq, North and South Sudanese, Ethiopian and Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian communities.
2. Identify contextual factors in domestic and family violence affecting refugee families.
3. Articulate the settlement support needs of refugee families and to inform the training needs of health and welfare professionals working with refugee families.

An action research genre was chosen for this study because it allowed the researchers to emphasise community inclusiveness and participation. It was determined that the objectives of the study, that were concerned with gathering in-depth and complex data from individuals and involving community agencies, advocates and refugee groups, would not have been attainable by a solely quantitative research design.

The authors undertook the study in collaboration with the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (hereafter referred to as IWDVS), the key Victorian agency for supporting immigrant and refugee women victim/survivors of domestic and family violence. IWDVS undertook the formal management of the project and administered the funding from VicHealth. Ms Cherry Pehar, Projects Officer at IWDVS, coordinated the training of research assistants and data collection, and arranged focus group and other meetings. Four men and four women (seven of whom arrived as refugees) were recruited to research with participants from Ethiopia, North and South Sudan, Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian communities and communities from Iraq. The research assistants were specifically trained for the project and have received certificates to recognise their participation and learning. Dr Eileen Pittaway from the Centre for Refugee Research at UNSW was engaged with training research assistants in the 'storyboard group work' methodology. The group-work sessions were based on a model that Dr Pittaway had developed and trialled with refugee groups in Australia and in Africa, Thailand and Burma. The methodological concept of 'storyboards' is used as a medium for gathering pictorial and written data on large sheets of paper for exploring identified themes (<http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au/>). The research assistants were trained in research process, ethics and data collection, including focus groups and interviews.

Representing Ethiopia, South and North Sudan, Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and communities from Iraq, eight focus groups involved 78 participants. Additionally, face-to-face interviews from

across the participating groups involved 17 men and 25 women. The focus groups sessions were held with separate groups of men and of women from each community (using the story board methodology), and in-depth interviews with men and women from the participating communities were conducted with the appropriate male or female interviewers from that community. The authors provided support and guidance to ensure that the research assistant training, project methodology, data collection, and ethical commitment were consistently and effectively implemented.

Participants were recruited by expert sampling, a subset of purposive sampling that allows for participants considered to have specific expertise in a certain area to be targeted for participation. In this case ‘expertise’ represented knowledge associated with the refugee and settlement experience. The study involved refugees who had been in Australia for three, and not more than five, years. Direct experience of domestic and family violence was not a prerequisite, however participants were aware that the study would ask them about settlement, wellbeing and domestic and family violence in their communities. The trained research assistants from each community promoted the studies within their communities and were responsible for recruiting participants. It was also the case that some of the women participants were recruited through contacts with the Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service and would therefore have a higher likelihood of direct exposure to domestic and family violence. Research assistants were committed to the ethical dimensions of the study, including to ensure that all participants were fully informed, that they were participating voluntarily, could withdraw with support at any time, and to protect confidentiality and safety.

Domestic and family violence does not occur in a social or cultural vacuum and the study was on that basis necessarily concerned with qualitatively exploring the broad structural issues associated with domestic and family violence and social context with an emphasis on settlement experience. The interviews and focus groups were conducted in the primary language of the participants, and translated into English following completion. Data was cross-checked in multi-lingual forums held with men and women participants.

Our analysis was undertaken through the lens of human rights, intersectional feminism and critical theory, although we were also committed to privileging the voices of refugee men and women despite their own varying degrees of critique of structurally-based oppression. The

resulting tension between these two often-opposing conceptual frameworks is evident in the findings and discussion of this research.

Qualitative data derived from both the interviews and the focus groups was analysed together using cross-tabulation of themes and issues and an analysis of consistencies, dissonance and ambiguities emerging from within the thematic areas. Data was cross-checked with self selecting participants in a language specific forum designed for sharing research insights and findings. Qualitative data from refugee women and men was analysed separately and then compared and contrasted. The research process was undertaken with a rigorous commitment to consistency and reliability. The process produced rich, descriptive insights and findings that can be applied to the broader refugee population and to other similar refugee contexts. In other words, the qualitative research has a sound degree of transferability (Guba, 1992).

To protect the safety of women participants from potentially abusive husbands and partners, the study was carefully promoted and publicly discussed as a study into ‘Settlement, Wellbeing and Safety.’ It was only in confidence and prior to people consenting to participate, that the focus on domestic and family violence was revealed. As another measure to protect women, the study did not involve both partners from one relationship. Participants identified if they would like to be involved in cross checking data, to have copies of the final report sent to them, or if they would prefer no further involvement with the study.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The following sections detail our findings including compared and contrasted data from men and women participants and an analysis undertaken within a critical and human rights framework. In this study we have emphasised the structural underpinnings of domestic and family violence and problems during settlement rather than differentiating between the cultures represented in the study. In fact, the study found that the cultures represented shared similar differences to dominant Australian culture, and it was these differences and worldview contrasts that we prioritised in our analysis and discussion. The decision not to differentiate between ethnic groups represented in the study was also made to guard against one group being compared with another and subsequently maligned as being, for example, ‘more violent’. Patriarchy is found in almost every culture and despite illusions of ‘liberation,’ women’s health and lives remain at great risk

from domestic and family violence in Western developed countries. It is also important to be consistent with viewing ‘culture’ as a system of shared beliefs, customs, behaviours and values that is constantly emerging, influenced by contemporary imposed or welcomed changes, rather than a static entity that can, in isolation, be blamed for domestic and family violence.

Unlike many culture-focused studies into domestic and family violence, our study included a holistic appraisal of culture including traditional and contemporary social and structural factors. Whilst giving voice to those who arrived as refugees from different ethnic groups was central to our research objective, we also recognised that structural inequalities including gender, class oppression and residency status shapes the lives of refugee women and men (see Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005b) and on that basis we did not want to ‘undercut social change by privileging ethnicity or culture over the structural issues that influence it’ (Hill Collins, 1998a:149).

### ***Domestic and Family Violence Identified***

Whilst some women were not aware of domestic and family violence occurring in their communities, most were. Domestic and family violence was intentionally not defined for participants however we found that the forms of domestic and family violence articulated by the participants did not differ from those identified by women in the broader community. Women primarily described domestic and family violence that they had heard about, witnessed or experienced as being physical, and including kicking and hitting. Additionally, emotional abuse and controlling behaviour was mentioned directly as a form of domestic and family violence and indirectly, when describing the ramifications if the expectations of a husband were breached, or when describing the implications of behaviour that was not dutiful. Reflecting on her husband’s treatment of her since arrival in Australia a woman participant said *‘he treated me without any affection. The time I arrived in Australia he said I have nothing to do with you. Constantly he used to put me down never encouraging me to do anything. We separated’*.

A small number of women described insulting and quarrelling between partners, rather than victimisation by one more powerful partner. Regardless, some women viewed this behaviour as a form of domestic and family violence. In general, women and men often used the terms ‘family conflict’ and ‘domestic and family violence’ interchangeably. There was not an opportunity to continually clarify terms and meanings during fieldwork and this was made more difficult with

the effects of translation from the spoken language back to English. Every effort was made to discern the intention of participants and to reflect this honestly in the analysis and findings.

Financial abuse was also mentioned explicitly as a form of domestic and family violence, where men control women through dominating financial resources. The perceived risks as well as protective benefits of women having control of shared finances, or generating their own incomes, are described in the section ‘Vast and Overwhelming Cultural Change’.

Social isolation was also identified as a form of domestic and family violence affecting refugee communities, where women were intentionally kept from social and community contact. Significantly, the study found that the experience of being a refugee is frequently isolating because of unemployment, limited finances and inadequate English language skills. In this respect, the strategies of violent men can be assisted by the process of settlement. Women identified the experience of isolation as more of a serious problem than male participants did.

None of the male participants volunteered information about the type or nature of domestic and family violence in their communities. They identified family conflict as an issue associated with women’s increased independence. However, most of the men did not regard ‘family conflict’ as violence. Furthermore, in most cases they regarded government intervention to address this issue as undermining their authority and family cohesiveness.

### ***Isolation and Increased Risk***

He would ‘isolate her, he’d go out and keep her at home and would tell her that she has no right to ask anything’ (Female participant).

Isolation is one predominant risk factor, emerging at multiple sites, including the abuse of power and the strategic isolation of women; and isolation associated with the refugee experience. Qualitative data showed that isolation can result from withdrawal associated with posttraumatic stress disorders, fear of racist violence and intimidation, inadequate English language skills preventing social integration, and poor social networks exacerbated by poverty preventing social

outings. The point was made that the widespread isolation experienced by refugee women means that they are not aware of services or the laws about domestic and family violence.

Women who stayed at home caring for children, or were unable to gain entry to the workforce, felt restricted from learning about Australian society and how it functions. In effect, these women were alienated from the new society, its values, laws and expectations, and as a result became more socially reliant on their male partners. The participants said that social support networks for women were much more diverse and integrated into daily life in the country of origin.

Isolation from family support emerged as an important factor preventing women from speaking out about violence. It was viewed that without the traditional support of family members women have fewer options to talk about violence. Women were seen by many participants as being more at risk of domestic and family violence in Australia because they do not have family to support them. A woman participant said *'yes woman are at risk (in Australia), they don't have family to protect them'*. Another participant said *'unfortunately woman are at more risk (in Australia), they don't have family'*. A poignant comment was *'in {our home country} women have family to defend them, here they know they have no one to defend them, they beat them, they are at risk here'* and *'here there is no one to protect them, so they (men) beat them'*.

In support of our findings, refugee women have been found in prior investigations to experience isolation (Easteal, 1996; Kang, 1992) including at a higher rate than the general population (Narayan, 1997). Isolation is a known risk factor, and strategic form of abuse, in cases of domestic and family violence (Hegarty, 2000). We conclude that there are increased risks associated with domestic and family violence and isolation for refugee women.

### ***Laws and Decreased Risk***

In contrast to the view that women are more at risk of domestic and family violence in Australia, an almost equal number of participants felt strongly that women were less at risk of domestic and family violence in Australia because it is not legally permissible. Participants felt that women could use civil orders and the criminal justice system to prevent their partner's violent behaviour. Often it was men's awareness of the legal ramifications of domestic and family violence in

Australia that was enough to deter them, and to give women confidence to challenge violence against them. A woman said *'I feel as though I can defend myself now.'* Another woman said *'Here (in Australia), men can't exercise the violence as much'*. Reflecting the view of others, a participant said women are less at risk in Australia *'because the law protects those who are at risk'*. Many women thought that they have more protection from domestic and family violence in Australia *'I feel supported by the Government, my husband can not hit me as he used to'* a woman explained. A woman said *'he used to severely abuse me physically now it is minimise to almost none'*.

### ***Seeking Assistance for Domestic and Family Violence***

Whilst there was evidence of women who had left violent relationships and were as a result safer and more satisfied, it was widely held by men and women that women who seek assistance for domestic and family violence usually have a negative experience as a result of their actions. A male participant said that women or men who seek assistance for domestic and family violence are betraying their culture, claiming that *'men and women who try to call for help for domestic violence are considered to be the betrayers of their own culture'*. A woman said something similar, that *'those who ask for assistance are seen as the people who have changed their true culture'*. To be perceived by your own community to have denied your culture can have socially alienating and potentially more serious consequences. This was viewed for many women as a risk not worth taking. For mainstream health and welfare service providers this is important knowledge. As Stewart (2005) explained in relation to refugee women, how a woman assesses her risks and relative safety might be very different to the sorts of risks that those of us who are not refugees usually think of. Women agreed that many women generally do not talk about their experiences of domestic and family violence and if they did it would be to a friend of a family member. Initial disclosure of abuse to family and friends is common in mainstream communities of women, however the opportunity for sharing problems is necessarily reduced when women are isolated from social networks, unfortunately a common occurrence for refugee women and a situation that was clearly reported in this study (refer to the section on Isolation and Increased Risk).

Women believed that if they sought assistance for domestic and family violence externally from within the mainstream community they would not be believed. Our data supports the view that most women try to cope alone for cultural reasons, predominantly shame, and for fear of the

isolation and poverty that they believed would affect them and their children if they did speak out. Women also said that there is a risk of increased violence from partners if women contact the police or talk with friends. A lack of trust in mainstream domestic and family violence services emerged, where seeking assistance would result in family breakdown or having to move the children from school. Women said that mainstream service providers should be able to speak languages other than English, and require an enhanced knowledge of cultural differences. One woman described a dire experience of accessing assistance from a women's refuge. She said that it is better to address domestic and family violence in the family than go to a refuge.

### ***English Language Skills***

Having inadequate skills in the English language emerged frequently as an issue and was inter-related with many other findings. Inadequate English language skills impacts on and can exacerbate the isolation of women, and prevents women and to a lesser extent men, from learning more about Australia. Our theoretical connection between isolation and increased risk with respect to domestic and family violence implicates inadequate English language skills as a risk factor in domestic and family violence. English language skills are a barrier related to negotiating daily life and communicating with the broader community. The federally funded Australian Migrant English Service (AMES) was not seen as adequate to learn English. Proficiency with the dominant language was important for employment. A woman participant explained *'I can't be what I once was. I can't find the job I want, I don't speak English well'*. Another said *'I feel handicapped to live my daily life. I don't feel secure because of my lack of English'*. Not speaking English was viewed as a burden and having an interpreter for every service interaction was not seen as the best option.

Language skill is fundamental to successfully negotiating and understanding complex social contexts. Inadequate English language skills were probably also a factor in refugee's experience of alienation from the dominant culture – a predominant finding in this study. Because of the association of English language skill deficit with isolation and vulnerability of women we can conclude that inadequate skills in English is a risk factor for refugee women. Men were less significantly affected by inadequate English language skills, probably a reflection of the increased opportunities that men have to socialise more broadly and to learn English unimpeded by the constraints associated with family caring responsibilities. The prevalence of racist intimidation and violence affecting women (discussed later) also compounds the limited



opportunities and confidence that women have to learn English in the context of community immersion.

### ***Alcohol and Gambling***

Alcohol was strongly associated with domestic and family violence and the culture of drinking and availability of alcohol and gambling were highlighted by many women as problematic. A woman said *'there are more money in Australia and therefore more temptation. Men attend nightclubs, pubs, gamble. Everything is normal. Social norms have changed and everything is more acceptable. It all contributes to violence and conflict in families'*. In response to a general question about the causes of domestic and family violence, a woman reflected on cultural change and opportunities to drink and gamble as precipitating factors and said *'men have too much freedom in Australia'*.

None of the men who were individually interviewed identified alcohol or gambling as a problem. However, one of the men's focus groups did list *'gambling, alcohol and drugs'* as a negative change associated with their refugee experience.

### ***Unemployment, Education and Downward Mobility***

Unemployment affecting men was strongly correlated with family conflict and domestic and family violence. Making the connection, a participant said *'my husband is not working, sometimes we have family problem'*. A woman participant explained how her husband was not content in Australia because he could not get a job. Now they are divorced because, she explained, he had become aggressive and abusive as a result of his dissatisfaction. Significantly, employment was articulated as fundamental to men's identity and self-worth whilst at the same time unemployment or under skilled employment in the male cohort was prevalent.

Women were generally of the view that men who are not occupied outside the home during the day are more likely to be dissatisfied with their lives and to be violent toward their partners. It is a truism that if men are at home during the day there is a greater opportunity for them to be violent toward their spouse if they choose to be. In this respect employment is a protective factor against domestic and family violence because it reduces opportunities for men's violence.

Culture appeared to play a strong part in men's attitudes and identities towards employment. In all of the countries represented, the men were traditional 'bread winners'. Even among the small number of women who were professionally employed, the women were responsible for childcare and housework as a priority. The men talked about being '*in control*' as they supported their families financially, while the women were concerned with supporting their families emotionally. Failure to find a job commensurate with their knowledge and skills led many of the men to talk about being '*depressed*' and feeling '*worthless*'.

All of the men emphasized how important paid work was to them. As one man said: '*it is a source of power which can sustain his dignity*', while another man added '*work means life to me*'. Work was seen by the men as symbolically representing them as '*the head of the family*', as one man said '*as a head of the family, it's important. A man should have a job all the time*'. The importance of the breadwinner role was culturally determined. A number of men spoke about this role in relation to '*our culture*'. Thus, these gendered beliefs and practices were seen by the men as pertaining to their culture rather than to patriarchal beliefs and practices mediated through culture.

During settlement women are sometimes able to secure employment before their male partners, causing a challenge to traditional gender roles and, according to this study, placing great stress on relationships. In some cases the stress caused by challenged gender roles was associated with domestic and family violence. Despite this knowledge, our research also revealed that women, particularly skilled and educated women, were similarly unable to find employment in their area of expertise. Living with refugee status and the associated difficulties with inclusion and adaptation appeared to limit opportunities for women to enter the workforce and highlighted the importance of social status along with gender and culture (particularly racism) as factors mediating refugee wellbeing, access, inclusion and wellbeing.

Employment is difficult without adequate English language skills. Not surprisingly factory work and similar low skilled positions emerged as the common employment types. Many women and men had professional qualifications that were not recognised in Australia and indicators of education and skill within the cohort were indicative of a high level of formal and informal knowledge and capacity. A lack of recognition of skills and prior knowledge and experience was a predominant finding. Both men and women who were previously employed in a professional capacity have experienced a complete denial of their prior skills. In the Australian media people

who arrived under the Refugee or Humanitarian program are either viewed as ‘opportunistic’ or typecast as ‘in need’ rather than having skills and knowledge to offer. Furthermore, evidence of racism experienced by refugees would transfer, in some cases, to distrust that could impact on acceptance in employment. With a shortage of skilled labour in Australia the importance of recognising the high level of skill in the refugee population makes economic sense as well as sound policy concerned with the settlement of refugees.

Education and awareness of the mainstream Australian society, cultures and worldview were convincingly established as being important factors in preventing violence in families. Women said that more educational opportunities designed for refugee women was specifically required. A woman said that ‘*education leads to confidence for women*’. In relation to knowledge and education during settlement, another woman participant said ‘*those who understand the Australian way of life can cope with changes and support their families*’.

With respect to refugee men and successful settlement, a male participant said that the men who cope are more educated, less strict with their religious beliefs and less rigid with adherence to traditional cultural norms. A male participant said that the ‘*men who cope are clever, educated and enjoy life wherever they are*’. Another participant said ‘*those who understand the Australian way of life can cope with changes and support their families*’. Echoing a view that men need positive role models the participant went on to say ‘*we learn from the ones who cope. Changes are important for a better life*’.

### ***Trauma and Violence***

Physical and mental health problems, including insomnia, anxiety, heightened emotions, worries, re-experiencing trauma and flashbacks from the past, were directly described in the qualitative data and evidence of mental illness was persuasively described.

Trauma and mental illness was also firmly related to negative settlement experiences, with unemployment and alienation from the mainstream community appearing to be the most commonly associated. Mental illness was described by women and men when considering and describing their own health status. A male participant said ‘*it (depression) affects me so much and it is hard to find a solution, the antidepressant tablets are not enough*’. Expressing her vulnerability a woman said ‘*I feel there is a noise in my head especially when I feel upset*’.

Recurring key words or phrases that were related to mental health and that arose throughout the qualitative data included *'withdrawn; depressed; isolated; so bored; difficulty sleeping; headaches; stress; depression; sleep disturbance; pains and aches – they affect my daily life.'*

Considering the relationship between mental health and violence, a woman said that *'men are becoming depressed and aggressive'*. Trauma associated with torture and other forms of persecution were perceived by women and men as a factor causing domestic and family violence. A participant said *'from my experience as a support worker, I find that many men who commit violence are affected by war trauma. Most of them have been imprisoned and have been at the frontline'*. The data supports other evidence that people who arrived as refugees can continue to be affected by past torture or trauma in their lives (Porter and Haslam, 2005). *'Psychological effects are hard to forget'* a woman participant emphasised. Trauma *'causes alcoholism, psychosis, and violent behaviour'* said another. Reflecting the general view among women, a participant said that men who have been traumatised *'turn to violence rather than leniency with partners to solve family problems'*. Another woman said *'the hardship and trauma remain in their memory and affects their mental well being'*.

Women who have experienced life in refugee camps, rape and hardship often carry their abuse in silence and accordingly statistics often under-represent the extent of gender based violence encountered by women (Jansen et al, 2004:843). It is important to remember that the effects of gender based violence, poverty and deprivation including lack of access to health services prior to arrival can continue to negatively affect women's health and wellbeing during settlement (Kaplan and Webster, 2004).

Although the connection between torture and trauma and the male victim becoming the perpetrator of domestic and family violence was made in our study, it is pertinent to recognise that the women's cohort also experienced high levels of torture and trauma in the country of origin, without correlating evidence of them becoming aggressors. This finding supports an argument for a more complex analysis of the causes of domestic and family violence, involving an awareness of the effects of patriarchy and sanctioned violence against women by men with legitimised power and privilege.

Women were also found to be responsible for providing emotional support to men experiencing the negative effects of torture and trauma. Ironically, in some cases it was those women partners of abused men who then became the victims of domestic and family violence. One woman told a story about her husband who was a prisoner of war prior to coming to Australia. When he was released he was suffering depression and she felt obligated to keep him happy and content, commenting that *'I felt pressured to cheer him up and provide for everything. He relied on me for everything'*. Now in Australia he has a job and she is isolated, depressed and emotionally abused, evident in her comment *'my husband works and is in contact with people. I feel isolated. I put on weight and he often told me he was embarrassed to take me out'*.

It is recognised that people who arrived as refugees have special health needs that are related to their unique experiences of deprivation, abuse, trauma and reduced access to health care prior to arrival (Lamb and Cunningham, 2003). Men and women identified their health status as generally poor and many were worried or anxious about their health status. A variety of illnesses were listed, some related to past poverty and deprivation, and others probably related to the effects of trauma. The illnesses included *'vitamin D and calcium deficiency; depression; dental problems, general health problems; poor health; swollen legs; dizziness; diabetes; high blood pressure; swollen feet; backache; headache headaches; difficulty sleeping; high cholesterol; rheumatoid arthritis and sleep disturbance'*. Prior trauma, it was articulated, causes mistrust of strangers, including interpreters and translators, and impacts on how women access (or do not access) health services and domestic and family violence services. Despite some concerns regarding access, medical services in Victoria were considered to be of an almost invariably high standard.

### ***Racism***

Many participants were positive about their interactions with other Australians and said that racism was not a significant factor in their lives. However, racist violence and intimidation was also clearly described, particularly by women. We theorise that women were more affected because their clothing makes them visible target, particularly women wearing Hijabs. The predominance of racist violence and intimidation affecting women can also be explained by evidence that women are more often the objects of all forms of violence (Krug et al, 2002). Women, and in a few cases men, described being verbally assaulted. However, only women described being physically assaulted, which included being spat on and having head scarfs

(Hijabs) torn off them. September 11 was viewed as the event that had increased racism. The western media has contributed to the creation of negative images of Muslim people (Hassan, 2006) and this has undoubtedly had a profound impact on refugees and their capacity to experience social inclusion.

Racism intersects with many of the issues identified as risk factors with respect to domestic and family violence. For instance, racism and the fear of racist violence and intimidation discourages women from leaving their homes, and the negative portrayal of ‘refugees’ in the media often prevents refugees from gaining employment or from feeling safe in employment.

A poignant response from the research participants was for non-Muslim Australians to understand and appreciate more about Muslim Australians and Islam.

### ***Vast and Overwhelming Cultural Change***

Broader sociological problems associated with differing world views were established. The belief-conceptual theory of culture refers to the interpretation of ideas that people have about the world around them, their role in it, the nature of time, and behaviour. The complexities of worldview, or belief-conceptual dimension have been largely ignored in settlement policy and clearly emerge in our study as an issue of critical importance to settlement theory.

Cultural change was a predominant issue for refugee women and men, although there was evidence of gendered agreement and disagreement with respect to the positives and negatives of cultural change associated with settlement. Having safety, freedom of speech, human rights, opportunities for children, access to food and shelter were pervasively described in both male and female cohorts as highly valued aspects of Australian society. Reflecting the general experience a woman participant said ‘*yes, I felt independent, I have freedom, I can say what I want without fear*’. Most participants were generally positive about Australia and what it can offer them and their families.

### ***Rights***

Nevertheless, the positive aspects of living in Australia were offset by significant difficulties associated with living in an alien, dissimilar and often excluding culture. Women commonly

articulated family and individual problems with inadequate knowledge about the dominant society; isolation, loneliness and marginalisation. A woman participant said *'in Australia we don't have to think about food. However it is lonely here'*.

Social norms were viewed as dissimilar in Australia; which is socially more liberal than the countries represented in the study. Some refugee men attend nightclubs and gamble more than prior to their arrival, women have opportunities outside the home, such as education and employment, that they did not have before. These changes are viewed as negative, causing or with the potential to cause violence and conflict in families. The general view from both genders was that cultural change associated with identity loss and loss of status as head of the house for men, and change associated with opportunities for women in employment and a more liberal lifestyle, was causing personal and relationship problems. A woman participant said *'cultural clashes affect spousal relationships in a negative way – ends up in separation and divorce'*.

Nevertheless, whilst many of the men felt disempowered by the changes to their status, there was a perception that many women become more aware of their rights and are more empowered. Many women felt protected from domestic and family violence in Australia, both from the laws that can support them and from the increased opportunities provided to them to become more independent. Evidence confirmed that in Australia, many refugee women did find greater independence and opportunities than in the country of origin, and they reflected on those changes in a positive light. In some cases the positive changes related to the sense of independence that women experienced following the breakdown of, in some cases, violent relationships, and through this lens the benefits associated with women's new found independence would be magnified. In contrast to this, the evidence that many women remained isolated, without social supports and felt more at risk of abuse in Australia, underscores the importance of not approaching refugee and settlement issues in a general or universal way, and for service providers to be aware of the multiple experiences for refugee women during settlement.

Many of the men did not accept changes in women's roles - either associated with what they witnessed of women in the broader Australian society, or reflected in the behaviour and opportunities encountered by their spouses. Some of the men perceived government intervention as destroying family life. In the words of one man, government was *'making men less dominant and decisive in the family'*. Another man said that *'I am with the freedom of the individual as long as it helps the unity of the family'*. One man commented that *'my wife is more independent.'*

*I am no more the dominant one. The government and the society are always beside my wife's rights'.*

### **Finances**

Men felt that women and children were encouraged to be independent from their spouses in Australian society. Separate payment for women from Centrelink was put forward as one example of reducing the status of the man in the family. A participant said *'in [country of origin] I used to work but here only the social security supports my wife and children and they know that this is their money'.*

A male participant pragmatically reflected on the change, *'in Australia, my wife and me decide how to spend the money. In [country of origin], I was in charge of everything'.*

Financial support for women was also seen as changing women's power in the relationship. A man said *'now she has her own account. She is more assertive and decisive. She has become more bossy'.*

In response to a question about reducing the likelihood of male partner violence a woman said *'for my husband, if I follow him blindly and he keeps all the money (there will be less violence). But other men I'm not sure'.* Financial control was mentioned explicitly as a form of domestic and family violence, as well as described frequently as a problem, particularly now in Australia where women often do have a source of their own income, either from employment or from Centrelink. Some women felt that their own income was or could be a source of strength and independence, resulting in less reliance on their partners and an increased capacity to make decisions on their own terms. Other women identified that having a separate income was a risk factor for violence, indicating that men felt undermined as a result of women managing their own money, and that there was a loss of male status in the relationship when women had money. Domestic and family violence was associated with men subsequently taking action to regain control and power. A participant stated *'Men like to control everything, especially finances'.*



## ***Government Supporting Women***

Financial and other support for women to leave men and relationships was raised by the men. A male participant said *‘our wives are falsely encouraged and thus promised that they will be given support in terms of money if they decide to leave their family... Since we arrived in Australia, our wives and children are being falsely talked over. We come to believe that these institutions are giving us help with one hand and try to break our family with the other hand’*.

Most of the men commented on the increased freedom and status of their wives. Almost all of the men saw women as *‘becoming more dominant and seeking independence’*. In their view, men were subsequently neglected *‘because the women are financially and legally secured’*. As a result, men inferred that family conflict increased. The following comments are illustrative of this view:

*‘We share responsibilities equally. The husband’s role in the family and the workforce has diminished. Feminist propaganda in Australia has a negative aspect’*.

*‘My wife is more independent. I am no more the dominant one. The government and the society are always beside my wife’s rights’*.

*‘She feels that she is equal with me. She is less dependent on me as we were in [country of origin]*.

*‘Living in Australian culture helped her to think independently’*. This latter comment was perceived by the man as a problem.

Talking directly about the consequences of supporting women in cases of domestic and family violence a male participant said, *women are the ones who get most help from the Australian system. Instead of finding around the table solutions to problems, women prefer to go to the police seeking for solutions’*.

From the point of the view of the men, there were *‘no dominant roles for males in Australia’*. Men perceived that in Australia it was a truism that women have greater power than men in the family, or that the society was egalitarian with respect to gender. While there is an ideology of

gender equality in Australia, numerous Australian studies (Goodman and Bowes 1994; Bittman and Pixley, 1997; Dempsey, 1997; McMahon, 1999 and Goward et al., 2005) demonstrate the division of domestic labour in Australia is far from equal. Our analysis revealed that with high levels of marginalisation from mainstream Australia, fuelled and exacerbated by unemployment and social exclusion, it was understandable that the predominant ideology of gender equality in Australia would be accepted as the norm by refugees who have by comparison emerged from societies with more stringently defined gender roles and expectations. In cases where there was domestic violence in a relationship, and where women left the relationship with the support of government funded agencies, the obvious chasm between societies that condone violence and those that have some legal and social avenues for protecting women was manifest.

### ***Traditions***

Religion, praying and maintaining traditions in Australia was raised as an important factor in addressing domestic and family violence. Most women said the praying and asking elders to intervene is recommended for assisting families where domestic and family violence is an issue, although they were strident in their agreement that men must respect women and stop their violence. With respect to traditions, men agreed that God was centrally important; that in the hierarchy of rights, men should maintain their status and that the government should assist them if they want to reduce violence. A male participant said, *‘Jesus is the head for the man. Man is the head for the women and the house. This is fundamental for spiritual life. Therefore, the government should give more attention to make the man the head of the house’*.

Reflecting on the capacity to maintain cultural values in Australia a male participant said *‘that new families can also be encouraged to respect and live faithfully with their own cultural heritage as Australia is a multi-cultural society’*.

Cultural values were called on to stop women reporting domestic and family violence. Men in this group believed that in most cases domestic and family violence was exaggerated, evident in the following comment, *‘men and women who try to call for help for domestic violence are considered to be the betrayers of their own culture. Those who report it to the authorities are faced with the problem of isolation from the rest of the community. The group thinks that there is always exaggeration in what people say about it. They say that ordinary quarrels among the refugee families should not be considered as violence’*.

## ***Gender Equality***

Notwithstanding the men's resentment, most of the men said that they now shared domestic responsibilities and financial decisions equally. Role reversal that was divergent from traditional cultural expectations was again prominent, revealed in this comment '*now it is more likely that men are obliged to do a lot of things. Women become decision makers contrary to our culture back home*'.

Some men felt that this meant that they were no longer respected as men. As one man said, '*in [country of origin] the man is the head of the house and women looks after the children. However, in Australia, due to the system, there is lack of respect for the husband. Children do not respect the father either. In particular, if the couple divorce, the system does support and is mainly on the women's side*'.

A few men regarded the changes to gender roles in a positive way. One man commented that in response to the effects of cultural change on gender roles that he now dealt with his wife and children '*in a fairer way*'. Another man said that he now had a '*better understanding of women's rights*' and that he now '*dealt with his children as friends and not as a dominant father*'. These views were predominantly from educated men who were very positive about their lives and opportunities in Australia. The link between education, cultural adaptation and reduced violence was subsequently raised in the study and is covered in the section Unemployment, Education and Social Mobility.

Certainly, education in refugee communities appeared strongly as a factor associated with adaptation and capacity to better manage social change. Cultural or social change favouring decreased rights for women is not something we envisage should, or will, occur in Australian society. In fact, patriarchy is the most strongly correlated factor in the incidence of domestic and family violence and therefore to advocate for less power for women is an absurd proposition. Nevertheless, the issue of refugee men's disempowerment and disaffection, linked to violence against women, is something that requires an urgent response from policy makers and settlement service providers. Coping and managing with cultural change and how much it impacts on the person's sense of identity or changing identity in Australia is an area for further study. These issues can not be separated from a broader critique of structural factors such as unemployment

and relative poverty, and the effects of torture and trauma, that continue to affect the wellbeing of refugee men in Australia. In response to the importance of adaptation, a woman participant said that *'life changes, so you must change'*. Successful coping and adjusting strategies were directly related to existing education and awareness. Isolation and lack of support networks and social opportunities were subsequently an additional risk factor in adapting to cultural change.

### ***Conceptions of Time and Leisure***

Acculturative stress is further intensified for women from cultures less congruent with the culture of the adopted country (Ahmad, 2004). *'Life (in Australia) is a speed line you feel there's no time'* explained a woman participant. The Australian way of life was associated with being individualist, rushed and antisocial. When both partners are in employment it is felt that relationships suffer. *'We are becoming strangers'* said one woman. People described the difficulty of finding time for meals together, impromptu meeting of friends and family or outings. Another participant said *'we work too much here, not enough time for family and friends. Everything is on the run. Too much pressure to achieve'*. It was also said that the existence of domestic and family violence in Australia is due to the fact that everyone works too much.

The men spoke personally about the experience of pressure related to time, and relationship changes due to the changes in lifestyle. One man commented that the *'hectic way of life affects sexual desire'* and some other men complained about having less sex since they had arrived in Australia.

Certainly, participants were aware of a pressure to achieve and succeed in Australia. The importance of success was related to significant aspirations for a better life in a prosperous and democratic country, the visibility of wealth in the media and wider society, and access to money that many did not have access to in their country of origin. It needs to be noted that in relative terms the refugee community at the early stage of settlement encountered financial hardship and in many cases poverty. The reality of poverty in Australia for some in the cohort was made more difficult because they had been financially secure in the country of origin. With low incomes, menial jobs and limited opportunities for a meaningful existence, some participants felt degraded.

There was a general consensus that in Australia you have to change to cope with the demands of a different environment and busy lifestyle. The individualism of western society impacts negatively on those from more communal societies. A woman participant said *‘Australia is a consumer society and women spend too much time in shops instead of socialising, community gatherings, picnics’*. The issue of finances and spending of money was a cause of widespread concern as detailed in the preceding sub-section on ‘Finances’.

Individualism and lack of community cohesion and contact were said to be important factors in explaining the difficulties and conflicts experienced by families. Expressing the commonly held view, a woman participant said *‘the community itself used to support us back home and even in the refugee camp, but in the new country the people here are changed and adopted the new system. They become individualists and lack a sense of trust and love, not to mention the less support and caring for others’*.

These cultural differences and worldviews do need to be taken into account in supporting refugee and humanitarian entrants in health and welfare services. Although basic needs are universal, opposing worldviews and perceptions can challenge refugees and affect their wellbeing as they attempt to adjust and simultaneously confront new values that are not always perceived as conducive to their wellbeing. The refugee vision of a good life indeed appeared at times to be different to those of the mainstream Australia. In examining individualism and collective lifestyles, materialism versus community support as they arose in this study, it seems clear that mainstream Australia could have much to learn and benefit from the diversity of cultures and alternative worldviews (Kirmayer, 2003).

## **The Contextual Factors**

The research highlighted the importance of an additional and specific in-depth appraisal of psychological, social and cultural factors in policies related to refugee wellbeing during settlement, reducing risks associated with domestic and family violence, and ensuring interventions reflect specific knowledge of the refugee experience. These contextual factors emerged at different sites, including the individual psychosocial level, group level community issues, and the need for interventions at a social and structural level. These levels are necessarily

interrelated; however it was advantageous to operationalise our findings within a multi-level framework.

Individual contextual factors included experiences of trauma, loss, anger, sadness, depression and anxiety. These were associated with negative experiences of settlement and could in effect reduce the likelihood of women seeking assistance for violence and impact on how men might act to prevent their violent behaviour. For both men and women, these psychological issues were seen as inhibiting opportunities for successful settlement. At an individual and group level, cultural dissonance and insufficient support to manage cultural change were related to vastly different belief conceptual dimensions (world view), causing significant problems for many people who arrived as refugees. Australia's individualism and materialism is at odds with worldviews emphasising collective wellbeing. Patriarchal gender roles, expectations and perceived liberty for women was raised a significant stressor in communities where men are traditionally responsible for decision making, and earning and managing money. The effect of unemployment on men and their identity was profound. These issues were viewed as related to disharmony in relationships and in some cases violence against women. The intrinsic value of depleted social networks and leisure time combined to isolate those who arrived as refugees from positive social experiences, as well as from seeking support and assistance from health and social welfare services.

At a group level, the capacity to share experiences with each other was reduced by isolation related primarily to low socioeconomic status, and unemployment. Lack of confidence in, and capacity to connect with, the broader community, was related to lack of opportunities for education and inadequate English language skills. Inadequate knowledge of the broader culture and society was viewed as inadequately addressed by current orientation programs as part of the Integrated Humanitarian Support Scheme and other settlement policy and program infrastructure. The isolation of women from community supports and interventions was viewed as a risk factor for domestic and family violence.

At a structural level, the importance of acknowledging and valuing the skills and knowledge of refugee and humanitarian entrants was identified. Racism and racist intimidation emerged as a prominent issue inhibiting successful settlement, related to limiting employment opportunities and eroding the confidence and capacity, particularly of women, to adapt and live productively and well within the broader community. Racism promotes isolation, and for women this

compounds the existing risk factor of isolation in domestic and family violence. People who arrived as refugees are aware of the negative portrayal and perceptions of them in the broader community. Structural change is therefore required to change community views and opinions. Our research team has identified additional evidence of a putative link between a perceived injustice and expressions of disaffection and anger. In effect, the research has shown that cultural dissonance, and marginalisation as a result of social and culture blind policies, impacts negatively on the health of refugee communities, leaves them vulnerable to domestic and family violence and at risk of family breakdown. The social consequences of marginalisation, violence and family breakdown on the successful settlement of refugee communities extends beyond the wellbeing of those who arrived as refugees, to the wellbeing of all Australians.

## **Recommendations: A Contextual Framework for Addressing Domestic and Family Violence**

We have designed a table using a multi-level framework to illustrate violence prevention strategies in partnership with refugee communities. The contents of this framework have emerged from our analysis of the data; including information from a direct question to participants regarding what they think should be done to reduce domestic and family violence.

Our study showed that communities of people who arrived as refugees are articulate about what refugees require for improving settlement and reducing family violence. In this context, we can argue that there is a need for “bottom-up” community empowerment based approaches to engage communities directly in addressing violence. Our study has highlighted the value of education as well as criminal justice responses in reducing family violence. These findings support the need for “top down” approaches from the criminal justice system and educational systems to meet the identified needs of refugee communities.

## Violence Prevention Strategies in Partnership with Refugee Communities

Personal/Individual	Community	Organisational	Structural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Ensure that men take responsibility for their violence within the context of their intersecting identities. This includes criminal and civil justice outcomes, counselling and perpetrator programs.</li> <li>●Encouraging women to talk with family and friends about violence.</li> <li>●Ensure that all women have access to the civil and criminal justice system in cases of domestic violence.</li> <li>●Counselling for past torture and trauma.</li> <li>●Enhance opportunities for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Document what communities are already doing to facilitate improved settlement and to address domestic and family violence.</li> <li>●Educate non Muslim-Australians about Islam and Muslim values.</li> <li>●Access to education, including about domestic and family violence and the links with structural issues.</li> <li>●Building and supporting family and community networks.</li> <li>●Increasing leisure time and opportunities for socialising.</li> <li>●Increase access to dominant social knowledge and language.</li> <li>●Knowledge sharing and communication about the Australian way of life, including women’s rights to employment and financial management.</li> <li>●Support and action groups for refugee men.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Committees of elders and respected members to provide support and counselling to community members who have marriage and family crisis and violence in relationships.</li> <li>●Appreciation of women’s histories of abuse and of their courage when designing interventions.</li> <li>●Involve refugee women in developing and influencing the justice system with respect to family violence responses.</li> <li>●Resource mental health services to provide culturally sensitive and effective support for refugee women and men.</li> <li>●Re-consider IHSS in terms of the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Challenge patriarchy rather than cultural specificity.</li> <li>●Address institutional racism in Australian society.</li> <li>●Value collective pursuits over individual or material pursuits.</li> <li>●Recognise and value the skills that refugees bring to Australia.</li> <li>●Ensure legal outcomes for perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Improve settlement services provision, particularly to focus on community capacity building and domestic and family violence prevention.</li> </ul>



<p>refugee men and women to feel valued and included.</p>	<p>Emphasising empowerment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Support and action groups for refugee women emphasising empowerment.</li> <li>●Promote opportunities for refugee men to be role models for other men.</li> <li>●Facilitate employment for refugee men as a specific priority.</li> <li>●Support refugee men and women to gain meaningful employment that reflects and builds on their prior skills.</li> <li>●Increase civic participation opportunities for refugee women in both refugee communities and mainstream communities.</li> <li>●Community capacity building to enhance opportunities to address the challenges of settlement and the risk factors associated with domestic and family violence.</li> <li>●Engage elders and community leaders in developing all interventions and capacity building strategies.</li> </ul>	<p>content and period of time allocated to refugees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Education as a key to reducing violence and facilitating settlement.</li> <li>●Ensure a gendered approach to settlement policy reflecting the need to address poor educational and language proficiency outcomes for women.</li> <li>●Educate and resource mainstream domestic and family violence services to work with refugee women in a framework that takes account of the intersections of history, culture, gender and social status impacting on refugee women and their families.</li> <li>●Introduce human rights based discourse into a critical analysis of refugee settlement.</li> </ul>	
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This study has underscored the importance of thinking about refugee communities, settlement and domestic and family violence in more complex ways than have previously been evidenced. We argue that many feminist theorists have included an analysis of ethnicity and class in considering domestic and family violence; however these theories have not filtered through to influence policy or practice in Australia. Our study supports the view of Crenshaw (1994), that domestic violence is only one form of oppression and control. Our research suggests that social injustices impacting on refugee communities, occurring at multiple sites, requires urgent attention if refugee women are to feel safer in their own homes. This is not to imply an argument of causality, but rather to emphasise the compounding factors that can make refugee families vulnerable to violence, its effects and outcomes. In this context, a fundamental shift from locating and responding to domestic and family violence as something that occurs only in the private sphere needs to be made. For refugee and humanitarian entrants, the act of domestic and family violence intersects with systems of gender inequality including culture, residency status, class, prior trauma, cultural alienation, social exclusion and racism in particular ways. Domestic and family violence manifests through universal patriarchal foundations, as well as with culturally and socially mediated causes. On these grounds the responsibility for violence needs to remain with the perpetrator as well as with governments and societies that perpetuate inequalities and disadvantages extending beyond gender. For example, it would be unproductive for violence against refugee women to be viewed as the product of racism and consequently diminish the responsibility of refugee men to address it.

Our study did not marginalise the voices of refugee women or men by re-enacting the too common model of research that is developed and undertaken solely by socially-advantaged white researchers. Although whiteness and relative privilege did exist in this study, the effects of it were tempered by the study being co-developed and managed through the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, where most research assistants were originally refugees from the respective communities involved, and where findings were cross-checked with communities before finalization. Another unique aspect of the study was that it involved refugee men and male research assistants who were refugee men, to research with refugee men from their respective communities. The inclusion of refugee men added dissonance and complexity to the research data, and facilitated an analysis of the role of men as sometimes perpetrators of violence and simultaneously as victims of persecution, and as people who grapple with the challenges of settling in a foreign and often unjust society.

Our recommendations are elucidated in the preceding section titled ‘Violence Prevention Strategies in Partnership with Refugee Communities’ There are, however, some overarching recommendations that must be made.

Firstly we recommend that a theory of intersectionality informs policies and health and welfare practices concerning refugee communities and domestic violence. There is more than a need to widen services to make them more culturally appropriate; there is a requirement to develop models and practices of social change (Pratt and Sokloff, 2005) that reflect the complexity of issues that impact on the lives of refugees during settlement. Analysis of domestic and family violence in the refugee context requires a specific appreciation of patriarchy as it manifests *through* cultures, as a way of ensuring that critique remains focused on the factors that place women at risk, rather than on pathologising broader cultural frameworks. We encourage the use of human rights discourse among refugee groups, women at risk of domestic and family violence, community organisations and policy makers. Human rights discourse reveals the collusion of male privilege, racism, colonialism and class privilege, and helps to facilitate a critique of our own intersected identities (Pratt and Sokoloff, 2005).

Whilst we acknowledge the impact and effect of the civil and criminal justice system in making women who arrived as refugees feel safer, we also recognise the effects of state inflicted violence and the importance of promoting opportunities for genuine inclusion of refugees into society, access to its dominant epistemology, and its economy. As a priority, we recommend a more in-depth and concerted effort to welcome refugees into communities by ensuring absolute access to knowledge, the dominant language, education, and access to employment for men and women. Certainly education in refugee communities appeared strongly as a factor associated with adaptation and capacity to better manage social change, and unemployment was clearly correlated with mental distress, identity confusion and financial stress. All these factors were interrelated with domestic and family violence. The findings highlighted the importance of allowing adequate time for refugees to gain the support required for orientation and acculturation. Current orientation offered to refugees under the IHSS is not viewed as adequate. The point needs to be made that cultural orientation should not be limited to a short term period and instead should be ongoing.

Social contexts that facilitate acculturation need to reflect genuine opportunities for inclusion, including the expulsion of racism and the promotion of respect and equality. The critique of western cultural lifestyles, particularly related to work, leisure and time, as well as the experiences of racism and exclusion from employment should form part of a critique of expectations associated with ‘acculturation’ or ‘integration’ in refugee settlement policies and practices. Whilst some of the findings showed that education and awareness of the Australian way of life and its laws were positive factors in refugee wellbeing, including as factors in preventing domestic and family violence, the critique of western values and hegemony indicated the need for a more selective process of acculturation to occur. Refugees should be able to discern the social norms they require from the dominant society and have their traditional cultural lifestyles, beliefs and norms promoted and protected in a system that does not continue to privileged dominant cultures or genders. A less intersectional model of this approach has been called segmented assimilation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) and (Hirschman, 2001).

Importantly women need to access the laws and services to provide them with support and protection in cases of domestic and family violence, whilst refugee men and women should be able to re-establish cultural norms that they believe promote wellbeing. Ultimately the issue of women’s rights and men’s power, and the schism between traditional cultural norms and contemporary rights for women will need to be addressed. The emphasis on moving toward a shared appreciation of gender equality among refugee men and women can be facilitated through a process that promotes access to education and social inclusion, and where refugee policies incorporates an understanding of the intersections of culture, traditions, class, gender and contemporary social contexts. The health benefits for men in moving toward less patriarchal roles and rigid expectations of women have been documented (Stainstreet et al, 2005).

We recommend that settlement theory and the practice of settlement takes account of negative outcomes for women during settlement, particularly isolation and reduced opportunities to learn English and secure paid employment.

We recommend increased resources for ethnic groups, particularly those welcoming new refugees. The research emphasised the importance of elders and church leaders in assisting new families, and in supporting couples that are experiencing conflict and violence. Religious and traditional structures, however, need to confront the cultural manifestations of patriarchy that put women at risk of domestic and family violence. They also need to be mindful of broader

Australian social and legal expectations in relation to the rights of women, opportunities for the inclusion of women in the workforce and the law in relation to domestic and family violence. We recommend further investigation and developmental work with ethnic groups, elders and church leaders in relation to their roles with refugee communities, families and couples.

People who arrived as refugees should be centrally involved in the development of policies and programs related to migration, settlement and to specifically addressing domestic and family violence. Strategic engagement of communities should be undertaken and reviewed to ensure effective engagement and impact from this target group is occurring.

We recommend that this study mark the beginning of a community-based and managed project concerning multi-level empowerment-based interventions to support refugee communities and to prevent domestic and family violence. With the empirical evidence revealed, the challenge now is to ensure some action. Our suggestion for a multi-level empowerment-based intervention will ensure that the needs of communities are addressed collectively and holistically, including the individual, community and social/structural contextual factors. The actual direction of this suggested intervention will be determined by the communities that will be involved.

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