



Submission to the National Plan 30 July, 2021

B.1. What does your organisation see as the major issues for people experiencing family, domestic, and sexual violence?

The causes, nature and prevalence of family violence in Muslim families is significantly under-researched, which substantially limits our ability to generalise the degree to which we share similarities with other at-risk groups beyond the experience of our own work. However, over 30 years experience in the sector, we have identified the most pertinent issues:

- Limited community led specialised service providers that can work to break down cultural barriers and stigma, and advocate for cross cultural agency for victim survivors who navigate systems of power and control such as police, justice and child protection.
- Cultural biases and institutional racism experienced when accessing support services.
- Crisis accommodation that victim/survivors and their families experience as unsafe, culturally inappropriate and unable to accommodate family needs.
- Limited access to long-term, secure, and affordable housing.
- Need for greater mental health investment to access culturally specific support, including capacity building in mental health literacy and engagement.
- Need for holistic longer-term supports readily available for therapeutic care and recovery.
- Family services that support a cultural lens to family relationships, parenting and mediation.

Muslim women are often conceptualised as being a sub-group of the CALD population. While Muslim women face many of the same challenges in their vulnerability to violence and challenges accessing services, this view fails to recognise key differences that are crucial to both the phenomena of family violence and efforts towards its eradication.

Muslim women experience challenges that are complex and intersectional and mainstream approaches, which broadly work with CALD communities, overlook the particular politicisation, visibility and vulnerability of Muslim women.



B.3. Are there any other priorities that your organisation feels would make a difference to prevent family, domestic and sexual violence beyond those listed in Question 2?

Structural challenges that face CALD communities only go part of the way in recognising factors that need to be addressed in tackling family violence for Muslim communities, which include:

- Language barriers that can define every aspect and step of seeking service support and legal redress, therefore multilingual workers in all settings are vital investments to making the services and systems more accessible.
- Socio-economic disadvantage.
- Limited knowledge of rights and protections available in Australia.
- Structural racism and Islamophobia both in experiences and apprehension when seeking support services and legal redress.
- Insecure migration status and increasing number of migration legislation that is significantly limiting women's rights, linking them to their abuser/s.
- Anti-terrorism laws, often perceived as unnecessary and draconian by many Muslims, has in turn developed into apprehensiveness about the Australian legal system and a mistrust of both government, police and the legal system, undermining women's confidence to engage in a system perceived to be targeting their community.
- Cultural and gender mainstreaming of services has increasingly limited the number of services available to Muslim women.

The above noted barriers contribute to the under representation of Muslim women in preventative services and their over representation in crisis services.

Muslim women need:

- Resources, workers and information (in print and online) in languages other than English
- Resources for women with little to no literacy in any language i.e. audio
- Culturally relevant and targeted prevention programs, instead of generic messaging to CALD communities which do not have resonance to any community
- Access to appropriate early intervention and prevention programs
- Culturally appropriate or sensitive response services such as legal supports that can support across civil, criminal and family law
- Access to appropriate interpretation and translation services to women.



B.5. What is working well to prevent of family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia?

Funding organisations like ours enables women facing immense structural barriers or culturally specific forms of abuse and violence, to be supported as they identify, disclose and access the family violence and justice systems. Since we started receiving funding for specialised casework support, we have contributed to sector capacity building through secondary consultations as well as formal consultations in developing MARAM and other reforms. Culturally specific organisations can work towards providing support on culturally specific issues such as religious divorce and forced marriage, contributing to better understanding to those with lived experience as well as sector and government understanding of the issues.

Sector training and availability, affordable access for practitioners and service delivery staff.

Family violence Crisis Brokerage and Flexible Support Packages has enabled services to respond to risk, trauma and issues of financial dependence in a flexible manner, meeting the needs of the individual in meaningful ways. These additional resources provided, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has changed lives and created sustainable longer-term outcomes for Muslim women who have experienced family violence.

MARAM framework has created a broad shared understanding of family violence and the intersectional nature of risk in highlighting the unique needs of every individual that accesses a service. It is a start towards embedding a collaborative practice and recognising the important work specialised community services offer people outside mainstream services as well as the broader family violence sector.

Victorian reforms that have incorporated issues such as forced marriage, spiritual abuse and coercive control into the family violence definitions.



B.6. What should be done to improve the prevention of family, domestic, and sexual violence in Australia?

Similarly to other work in this sector, it is heavily reliant on funding opportunities which can mean there is no consistent and comprehensive approach to family violence. This is because organisations are forced to move from one funding source to another and are vulnerable to changes in policy or funding directions of donors. Sustainable, long-term and consistent resourcing of projects is highly desirable if substantial attitudinal change is to take place with regard to family violence.

Based on our experience working with Muslim women and communities, we offer the following reflections and recommendations on family violence prevention strategies, policies, programs and best practice:

1. Allow and support community ownership by supporting community capacity building and prevention programs be led by communities. Ensure community education and community led initiatives receive immediate and consistent support and recognition at the policy, funding and research level. These initiatives should have targeted messaging for Muslim communities and be led by women community leaders with expertise in family violence.
2. Incorporate wider definitions of family violence to include issues of migration abuse and systems abuse in which people who use violence, utilise systems of policing, mental health and family law to continue their abusive behaviours, exert power and control over their victims.
3. Capacity building for service sector workers and professionals should include professional development and training sessions for:
 - Frontline service providers
 - Teachers and educators
 - Hospital staff
 - Child Protection services
 - Members of Victoria Police
 - Partnership and advice on individual complex cases, including early and forced marriage.



B.7. If you could recommend three priorities for a strategy to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence for all Australians, what would it be?

Prevention work must be led and located in community settings, schools, community hubs including health, education and social support contexts. Any prevention work must also be multi-generational, culturally meaningful, therapeutic in addressing trauma, migration and social disadvantage for marginalised groups.

Integration of family violence services is important. However, it is important that integration does not result in mainstreaming of service provision. Integration and coordination must occur through/with the following in mind:

1. Support and resourcing to community organisations and CALD specific organisations to, not only inform and consult, but partner and lead on issues related to violence against Muslim women and their children, Muslim women's leadership and capacity building and community capacity building, working inter-generationally and inclusive of men and women, boys and girls.
2. The intersection between issues around settlement, gender inequality, socioeconomic disadvantage, family breakdown, intergenerational trauma and conflict associated with the refugee experience need to be catered to, through integrated responses.
3. Plurality and diversity within Islam needs to be acknowledged. As well, it is important to acknowledge that CALD communities are not homogenous. They are diverse in terms of culture, religion and levels of religious adherence and practice, level of education, language(s) spoken, and social and political backgrounds.



B.8. Is there anything else you would like the next National Plan to include or address?

Family violence services funding should match demand, with a focus of the funding being the quality of the support provided in breaking the cycle of violence rather than meeting funding targets.

Racial violence prevents women from seeking assistance for family violence, and the way in which it is an equally binding narrative of Muslim women's lives in Australia. Racial violence is also used by perpetrators and communities to dissuade women from seeking assistance in a country that is perceived and experienced as a 'hostile and racist system'.

We have undertaken research on women's experience of racial violence and religious vilification to explore spikes in the reports of abuse. Our research and subsequent publications cite abuse and violence that has come to feature in the life of Muslim women in Victoria, specifically: daily forms of racism and incivility, such as being ridiculed and insulted; verbal abuse including intimidating and threatening behaviour; acts of discrimination; and physical violence, including having their hijab removed and spitting in women's faces.

The majority of incidents were in public spaces usually perpetrated by people unknown to the victims. Work opportunities were significantly limited because of their religion or because they wore the hijab. Women were particularly concerned for the welfare of their daughters, believing that discrimination would significantly limit their daughters' educational and work opportunities.

Community led initiatives must focus on:

- Undertaking community awareness and education campaigns on family violence
- Developing programs to shift attitudes and beliefs to prevent violence against women
- Intersection between settlement, migration, and cultural-religious factors that interact with family violence in Muslim communities
- Role of gender inequality in family violence
- Role of racism in preventing women from seeking assistance
- Ensuring equal partnership with mainstream service providers.