



Australian Muslim Women's
Centre for Human Rights
Equality without Exception

Framework for Engaging Muslim Men in the Prevention of Family Violence



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Publication Details

Published by: Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights

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ISBN: 978-1-7337330-8-3

This framework was supported by the Victorian Government.

This framework was supported by the Victorian Government. This report does not constitute Victorian Government policy. The content of this publication is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the views of the Victorian Government.

About us

This Framework has been developed by the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR). AMWCHR is an organisation of Muslim women leading change to advance the rights and status of Muslim women in Australia.

We bring over 30 years of experience in providing one-to-one support to Muslim women, young women and children, developing and delivering community education and capacity-building programs to raise awareness and shift prevailing attitudes. We also work as advocates - researching, publishing, informing policy decisions and reform initiatives as well as offering training and consultation to increase sector capacity to recognise and respond to the needs of Muslim women, young women and children.

As one of the leading voices for Muslim women's rights in Australia, we challenge the most immediate and pertinent issues Muslim women face every day. We promote Muslim women's right to self-determination - recognising the inherent agency that already exists and bringing issues of inequality and disadvantage to light.

AMWCHR works with individuals, the community, partner organisations and government to advocate for equality within the Australian context. This report is designed to highlight learnings and insights from our work in community to contribute to greater awareness and understanding of the unique challenges and barriers facing Muslim men in relation to family violence prevention, and identify opportunities to increase men's engagement in this area.

Acknowledgement of Country

This framework recognises that gender, race, and religion intersect to create multiple forms of discrimination and violence against Muslim women, particularly in a context of growing Islamophobia. It also recognises that preventing prejudice in all forms is bound to the struggles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Before we can successfully tackle issues within our communities, we must address the ongoing impacts of colonisation, systemic racism, and discrimination in all its forms in this country.

AMWCHR acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands our organisation is located on and where we conduct our work. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. AMWCHR is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters, and seas and their rich contribution to society.



Special thanks

AMWCHR acknowledges and expresses sincere gratitude to all AMWCHR staff who contributed to the Voices for Change project. Their contribution and expertise were invaluable throughout the project.

AMWCHR would also like to acknowledge and extend our gratitude to Dr Asha Bedar and Hala Abdelnour whose advice, expertise, support and guidance was instrumental to the development of this framework.

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Background

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) has been working in the family violence space for over 30 years. We work across the family violence continuum, ranging from primary prevention to early intervention, response, and recovery. In 2021, AMWCHR was funded under Victorian Government Family Violence Prevention funding to deliver its Voices for Change (VFC) project. VFC sought to raise awareness and build capacity amongst Muslim communities in Victoria to prevent family violence.

The first part of the Voices for Change project consisted of group-based programs for Muslim women, including young women, which explored family violence, healthy relationships, parenting for equality, and the role of culture, religion, and community on understandings of gender equality. The final element of the Voices for Change project is the delivery of a framework for engaging Muslim men in family violence prevention, informed by a research project which aimed to improve our understanding of how to engage Muslim men as active participants in family violence prevention. The findings of the research, combined with AMWCHR's extensive experience working with communities on family violence, create a robust evidence base for the framework presented below.

Introduction

In the last few decades, the importance of men's and boys' role in violence prevention has received significant attention. A pro-feminist theoretical paradigm provides a strong rationale for this work (Flood, 2017). Namely, that men must be engaged in order to end violence against women because they are its primary perpetrators and because adherence to unhealthy notions of masculinity is associated with greater rates of such violence (Our Watch, 2019).

In 2022, the Commonwealth Government released a new National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (The Plan), with a commitment to 'ending violence against women and children in Australia in one generation' (Department of Social Services [DSS], 2022). To do this, the Plan denotes the importance of addressing the intergenerational nature of violence and violence-condoning attitudes through prevention work inside the home.

A major gap in these initiatives, recognised by both federal and state governments, is that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, particularly those with recent refugee experiences and/or non-European migrant groups, are significantly under-served by existing family violence prevention initiatives. Including these groups in family violence prevention efforts requires more meaningful and specialised support, and they have therefore been highlighted as a priority (DSS, 2022; Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC], 2016). As Muslim communities, according to the government, are considered a subset of 'CALD' due to religious affiliation, language, migration status, and cultural/ethnic ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2022) these targeted provisions are also intended to fill services gaps for Muslim communities.

This approach is inadequate because while there is much in common between the highly

diverse Muslim community and the broader 'CALD' community, there are also key differences related to their political positioning, which have implications for all such work. The absence of a focus on Muslims can pose a problem in two ways. Firstly, the failure to meaningfully engage and cater to Muslim men in prevention initiatives means that family violence in Muslim communities will persist, with rates potentially becoming stratified compared to the Australian population. Secondly, a generalist approach to family violence prevention will miss out on the many diverse talents, knowledge, and strengths that Muslim men and communities can bring to move the needle further on reducing family violence in Australia. Creating more dynamic, inclusive, culturally appropriate, and adaptive prevention initiatives, keeping in view a range of intersectional factors that affect diverse communities, may well be the answer that the sector and society are looking for when it comes to ending men's violence against women.

About the framework

This Framework has been developed in response to a long-standing need - frequently expressed by Muslim women and more recently also men engaged in our programs - to upscale initiatives against family violence by engaging Muslim men and boys. While we recognise that men's involvement in the family violence domain is critical for sustainable social change, the process is complex and multilayered, particularly in the context of migration and diverse ethno-religious and political identities. This document is therefore a collection of principles to ground our collective work and develop practice that can move the process forward. It is intended for use by community workers and/or services considering, or already engaging Muslim men in family violence prevention work. While there are aspects of this Framework are relevant to work with wider migrant and refugee communities, it is designed to shape the development of new, or strengthen existing, initiatives targeting Muslim men and boys - both migrant and non-migrant.

The framework contains the following sections:

- 1. Start by setting prevention goals**
- 2. Identify your audience**
- 3. Engage appropriate facilitators**
- 4. Create tailored and responsive content**
- 5. Guiding principles for engagement**

Throughout this Framework, we have provided some case examples of what programs may look like in practice. However, specific initiatives and practical strategies adopted by services and workers can vary greatly and are not included. Instead, the aim of this Framework is to outline key considerations and principles that must underpin such work.

Preventing family violence in Muslim communities must also go beyond individual- and community-level initiatives to also target the systemic, institutional, and societal factors that drive and reinforce abuse.

AMWCHR continues to work across these levels through our programs, casework, research, policy, and advocacy work, to achieve structural as well as individual change. Some challenges, especially those related to structural issues, may go beyond the scope of what can be addressed in a program setting. However, naming these experiences and barriers, and providing the space to reflect and make change beyond the program is always possible.

For the purpose of this Framework, we will predominantly focus on the creation of community-based primary prevention programs, to fill service gaps in this area and provide meaningful options for Muslim men and boys to engage.

1. Start by setting clear prevention goals

Objectives and goals for any prevention initiative engaging men can vary greatly, depending on the service's theory of change, resources, and capacity. For sensitive and complex issues, such as family violence, it is important to reflect on and develop clear goals, expected outcomes and limitations at the outset.

The following are examples of the types of goals a service may set in developing a prevention initiative.



Community awareness and education

Awareness-raising is a common goal for community programs. Many programs on family violence aim to provide information, increase participants' knowledge and improve their social, psychological, legal and in some faith-based groups, religious awareness.

In our Voices for Change research project, which explored ways to engage Muslim men in the prevention of family violence, participants suggested that men in their communities had strong knowledge of the physical aspects of family violence, though the non-physical aspects – e.g., coercive control, emotional abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse – were less understood. This is just one example of how knowledge gaps can present. Muslim communities are diverse, and the levels of understanding of how family violence manifests will differ widely between individuals as well as within communities. In any program,

consultation can be a useful way to identify the specific knowledge gaps and educational needs of the men you're engaging. Content can then be tailored accordingly.

While knowledge building is an important component of any work on family violence, on its own the value of awareness raising, and education is limited if not linked to a deeper, critical understanding and action.

Men's social support

Programs may also aim to provide social support to men through regular groups or community sessions. Through this process, men are encouraged to listen, develop a greater understanding of gendered issues, build trust, and in some cases work through difficult emotions. It is from this place men have greater capacity to contribute to family violence prevention in community.

Sometimes, the support that men require can be related to material as well as emotional and psychological needs. Our Voices for Change research showed that for some Muslim men, financial pressures and feelings of gendered responsibility (i.e., overworking, being a provider) may be detracting from their capacity or willingness to engage in family violence prevention initiatives. Providing support surrounding material needs, or unpacking beliefs that lead to men holding this gendered pressure may support men to realise how prevention work connects and interacts with their everyday lives.

The men you're seeking to engage may also be facing compounding challenges or changes in their own lives, including unemployment, physical or mental health issues, homelessness, or migration/displacement-related stressors. Supporting men to address concurrent or intersecting issues will be instrumental to building long-term engagement in any program.

Primary prevention projects are designed with the knowledge that, due to the wide prevalence of family violence in Australia, there will likely be people who use violence as well as people who have experienced violence in any given initiative. For this reason, prevention initiatives geared to engage men should always be delivered in coordination with support agencies that can be leveraged when and if needs arise. When working with Muslim communities, referral pathways with specialist multicultural or ethno-specific family violence services is recommended.

Skills development

Building skills and capacity for both program participants as well as facilitators is another common goal for services. These skills can be direct (e.g., behaviour change) and indirect (communication/team-building) in preventing family violence. Skills may be individual, relationship/family-related or at a community level.

For gender transformative work,¹¹ individual skills will only be effective if they are linked to work at a broader level, and used to encourage change in others as well as at a structural level. Such skills can be applied through advocacy, leadership, group facilitation, and within interpersonal relationships. In Australia, Muslim men – and especially young men –

have had little opportunity to demonstrate and represent their individual and community values, having been long targeted and vilified on public platforms. Locked in impossible narratives that barely mask the Islamophobic undertones, many Muslim men have disengaged. Building men's leadership skills, and encouraging them to use these skills as advocacy tools in private as well as public spheres will support experiences of empowerment and translate program learnings into real-world change. It will also support men to build on their own sense of self-worth and representation of healthy masculinity both inside and outside of their communities.

Self-awareness/consciousness-raising

To engage men at a deeper level, programs may choose to invest their time in self-awareness work. This takes men through a process of self-reflection and to develop a better self-understanding of emotions, gender socialisation experiences, vulnerabilities, attitudes and needs. A deeper, more critical examination of themselves both as individuals and as operators in a patriarchal system can motivate men to work towards change. Men should be encouraged to reflect on their own interpersonal relationships, and whether they are holding the women in their lives – as well as themselves – to gendered standards that may not serve either one's interests. The key to this initiative's success will be to find a relevant program, facilitators, and methodology to deliver such content in a way that attracts men and retains their engagement and interest. This could be via respected male community or faith leaders who understand and seek to counteract the implications of patriarchy on women's experiences and men's use of violence.

Behaviour change and therapeutic intervention

Ultimately, all family violence programs aim to bring about behavioural change in men and communities in the short or long-term. Awareness-raising, capacity building, support provision may all be linked to behavioural change at some level. Other programs may develop focussed mechanism that are action and change oriented, with built-in follow ups, refreshers, and action plans.

Expected outcomes may include improved family relationships, increased peer education, increased engagement and advocacy by men, and a reduction in rates of family violence in the community. Many experts recognise the role of trauma and shame in men's use of violence and their capacity to engage fully in a behaviour change program. For Muslim communities, this trauma may be significant, and tied to experiences of migration or displacement, loss of loved ones, war, and conflict, as well as racism and Islamophobia. This trauma can be direct as well as intergenerational. While recovery is always ongoing, some of the traumatic incidents or experiences may be in men's pasts, while others may be continual or concurrent to their engagement with a program. Models of behaviour change that interweave therapeutic intervention will result in a higher rate of engagement and outcomes for the men involved. Therapeutic interventions must be family violence informed for this to be effective.

[1] 'Gender transformative' approaches to violence prevention seek to highlight, challenge, and ultimately 'transform' gendered roles, expectations, and power imbalances between genders (Our Watch, 2022). Gender transformative work is intersectional, seeking to address structures and norms inhibiting self-determination, such as racism, colonialism, classism, ageism, ableism, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity. Developing young men's empathy for the feelings and experiences of others, and especially women, is a key focus of gender transformative work (see: Flood, 2019; Messner, Greenberg, & Peretz, 2015).

Parenting together: Strengthening Muslim Families

1. Setting prevention goals

This program aims to strengthen positive parenting practices and family relationships among migrant and refugee Muslim couples. Goals include:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of parenting and relationship norms in an Australian context, equity, and gendered expectations;
- Identifying practical ways to manage pressures of parenting, and retain important cultural values in an Australian context;
- Building teamwork skills to support one another as partners and parents; and
- Building communication and conflict resolution skills.

2. Identifying the audience

Migrant and refugee Muslim couples with children.

3. Engaging appropriate facilitators

A Muslim women's family violence service in partnership with a multicultural settlement service with experience working with families and men. Both men and women facilitators will support the delivery of the program. Facilitators are multi-lingual and representative of program participants.

4. Create tailored and responsive content

This program will be delivered through 8 weekly sessions. The program will commence with a mixed picnic social event, where participants will discuss the issues they see to be impacting family wellbeing in their respective communities. The program will then split into men's sessions and women's sessions, to provide space to discuss gendered concerns. Towards the end of the program, men and women will come back together to share learnings and discuss how they can implement new skills in their home lives. The sessions will take place over a shared meal.

5. Guiding principles for engagement

This program is intended to provide a space for participants to learn new concepts, but also speak openly about the gendered challenges and expectations that shape their roles as partners and parents, especially the intersections with migration and displacement. The ultimate aim is that following the program, participants will understand and act on the knowledge that supportive and equitable parental relationships are central to providing a safe and nurturing home life for all family members, especially children.

2. Identify your audience

Diversity

The Australian Muslim community is diverse. Almost 40% of Australian Muslims were born in Australia (ABS, 2021). The other 60% have migrated from over 185 countries, most commonly Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Lebanon (ABS, 2021). While many people attribute Islam and Muslims primarily to the Middle East, in reality only around 20% of Muslims are from a Middle Eastern background. Muslims also come from cultures originating in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Bosnia, Somalia, Cyprus, and even Australian Aboriginal language groups. It's also worth remembering that Islam is a religion, and so people of any cultural or linguistic background can be Muslim if they choose to be.

Experiences of family violence are also seen across every class, age, racial, ethnic, and linguistic group. It exists in all regions of Australia and can happen to anyone. Therefore, any framework aiming to engage Muslim and migrant men in work on family violence, must be structured as one that is sufficiently broad- and inclusive to connect with Muslim men and boys from diverse backgrounds and of all ages. When working with specific cultural, ethnic, and/or linguistic groups, additional components should be added from this basis to ensure that the program speaks to cultural nuances and experiences.

Diversity

Starting early

Working with fathers

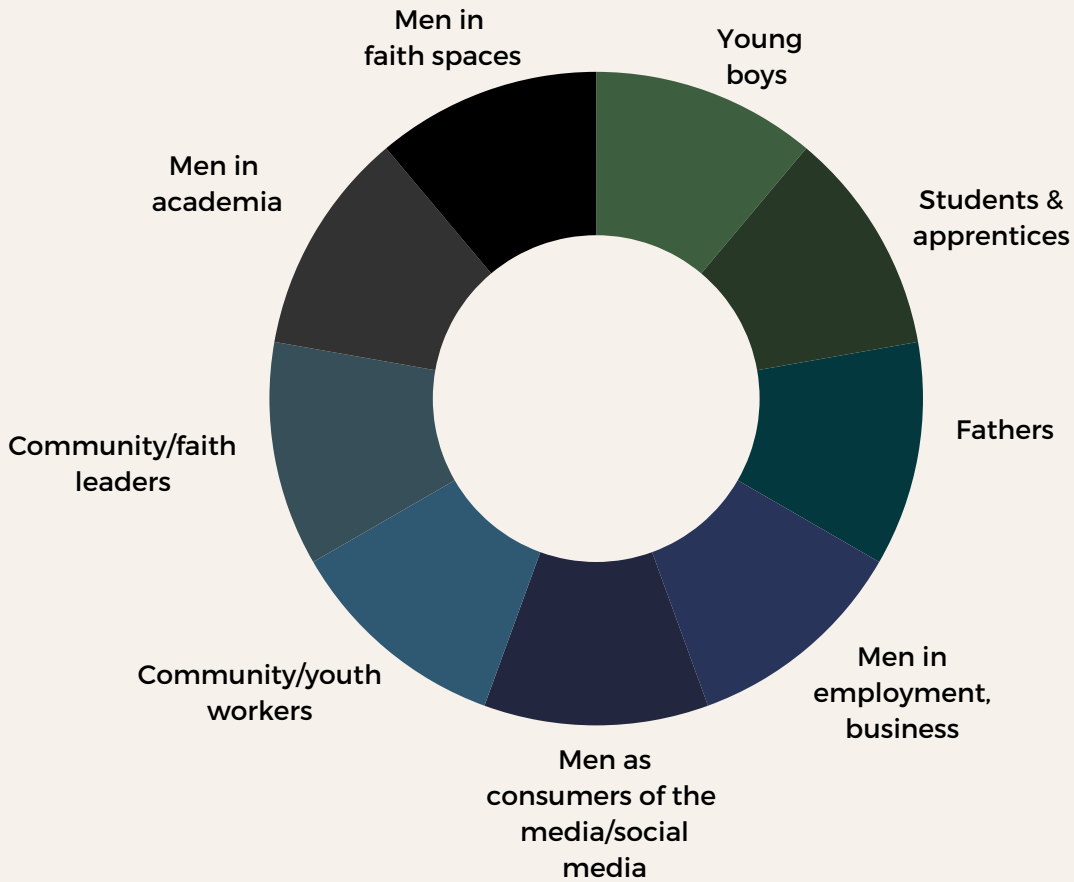
Starting Early

Working with boys and young men is paramount in the primary prevention of family violence, as it addresses developing gender attitudes, worldviews and identities. An investment at this level allows for valuable cognitive work on equality, respect, empathy, and healthy communication, thereby challenging and intervening in the development of unhealthy notions of gender and masculinity that lie at the centre of family violence. Intervening early can create a significant difference in breaking the cycle of violence before it begins. It also creates opportunities to empower young minds to recognise, call out and challenge popular boys' club culture and behaviour around them that contributes to violence against women and girls. Such attitudinal and behavioural initiatives need to be tailored to be age and context-appropriate and can be implemented in various ways to reach young boys and men.

Working with Fathers

For many Muslim men, their role as fathers is a central aspect of their identity, especially in respects to the passing down of cultural practices, beliefs, and fostering a strong sense of cultural identity and connectedness within their children. Family-oriented programs that focus on relationship building, parenting, family/cultural values and adjusting to new ways of being can be a valuable way of engaging men.

Suggested groups to engage



3. Engage appropriate facilitators

Who engages and facilitates work with Muslim men is a critically important, but commonly overlooked factor in most projects. Identities are both personal and political constructs and as such, shape how messages are delivered and received.

The following are key identity-related factors that can affect outcomes:



Facilitator values

The facilitator's own value system, gender attitudes, politics, theories of change, and self-awareness are some of the most important factors in engaging men to create sustainable change. Not all facilitators are aware of - nor equipped or willing - to challenge existing power dynamics and structures, including their own power and privilege related to class, gender, or ethnicity. Yet, work on family violence cannot be effective without an understanding and analysis of its drivers, root causes, and risk factors. A facilitator working with men on these issues must necessarily be aligned with critical frameworks and practices that underpin such work, namely feminist paradigms that have led the field.

An understanding and adoption of anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, and intersectional practices is also crucial to any work with Muslim men. Within this, facilitators must be sensitive to how systemic Islamophobia and power dynamics can play out in work with Muslim communities, and take steps to counteract these dynamics within the program space. Many community leaders, including religious leaders, are not familiar or comfortable with feminist and gender-transformative development frameworks, and therefore services wishing to engage Muslim/migrant men through such leaders must tread with caution. It is important to note that not all Muslims or Muslim/migrant communities necessarily refer to religious leaders as a source of information, support, or guidance for matters related or unrelated to family violence. However, when religious leaders are consulted on issues of family violence prevention or intervention, unless specifically trained and sensitised, can tend to take a welfare-oriented or paternalistic approach to family violence. Even when coming from a well-meaning place, this approach may undermine women's experiences and maintain or even reinforce unequal power structures and male dominance.

Without a somewhat comprehensive understanding of and commitment to gender inequality as a driver of family violence, initiatives led by leaders can, at best, offer short-term solutions aimed at immediate damage control, and at worst, perpetuate gender imbalances in communities.

Variety

To cater to the highly diverse groups of men that make up the Muslim community in Victoria, engagement is likely to be most effective when facilitated through a range of approaches, such as through teachers, youth/community workers, peers, and community leaders, who have access to and established relationships with the target audience. Engagement from a variety of sources also allows men to see the diversity of perspectives and approaches that exist in the community, which may be different from the exposure they have in their personal circles. Providing variety also allows men to have multiple entry points to engage with programs and may be more likely to take up the opportunities presented to them.

Gender

The gender of the facilitator can be a critical variable. Typically, men are better able to relate to other men as facilitators. Male facilitators who have identified and challenged both internal and external misogyny can help build a rapport quickly and be positive role models.

They are able to speak to men about their personal struggles with dominant and unhealthy masculinities, their fears, resistance and ultimately challenge problematic gender attitudes and behaviour. They can role model alternative ways of being 'men' by showing empathy and emotional vulnerability.

Similarly, women as facilitators bring their own value to men's learning and transforming purely by bringing a female voice and perspective into the space. It is widely believed that without empathy we cannot change our behaviour, and by having a trusted woman's perspective in the space, men might better understand the lived experiences of women in relation to family violence. Some men may also find it easier to engage with women, show vulnerability, and let their guard down in the absence of other men.

One way of harnessing the strengths of different genders is through interspersing programs led and facilitated by men with sessions co-facilitated with women. A team of men and women leading the program will model and make visible positive co-working and collaborative partnerships. In introducing all genders into the prevention space, men may feel more accountable and there may be fewer attempts to collude with facilitators. Different genders bring their own strengths as facilitators, and assessing from the outset what is more appropriate to your specific program can set the tone for the program and foster a safe learning environment for participants.

Cultural relatability

When working with men in general, notions of masculinity and patriarchal control can create a resistance to instruction, or initiatives coming from sources that are seen as attempting to undermine or threaten existing power structures, leadership, and community/family systems. For Muslim/migrant men, there is an added component in that the loss of, or changes in, identity that occur in the process of migration can create a fear of families losing touch with their culture, language, and religion. These fears may result in parents – and in this case, fathers specifically – imposing strict parenting styles, which can sometimes be gendered. Direct challenges to this may be viewed as criticisms of participants' culture and family structures and runs the risk of disengagement. Initiatives that involve or are led by men to whom participants can relate at a cultural level, who are seen as role models, especially those from diverse or participants' own racial/ethnic/religious backgrounds, are much more likely to be met with acceptance and trust from the outset. Facilitators from a shared cultural background can speak to the specific cultural factors which may intersect with gendered drivers and reinforcing factors for family violence, engage with the many aspects of culture which exist as protective factors for family violence, and hold men accountable to these shared values and expectations throughout.

Trust

Australia has a long, complex, and problematic history of race relations. It is impossible to overstate the damage that has been done, and continues to be done, specifically to First Nations communities. Over the past two decades in particular, the racism present in Australian society and built into our structures has also targeted Muslim, migrant and

refugee communities, resulting in varying degrees of racial discrimination, profiling, and labelling of Muslim men as violent, controlling, and misogynistic.

This has led to a deep trust deficit among many communities, the effects of which are likely to be felt when delivering programs and services to Muslim communities. It is also important to note that at times facilitators who are part of the dominant culture, however well-meaning, may well harbour unconscious prejudices towards certain communities or be ignorant of important cultural and/or religious considerations. As a result, initiatives led by mainstream services may be seen as being biased and irrelevant, thereby hindering Muslim men's participation. To effect real change, it is imperative that whoever the facilitator, they begin with an honest self-reflection from a place of humility, trust, acknowledgement, and understanding. This will allow individuals and organisations to see their own limitations in the space and reach out for support and collaboration to strengthen the effectiveness of programs.

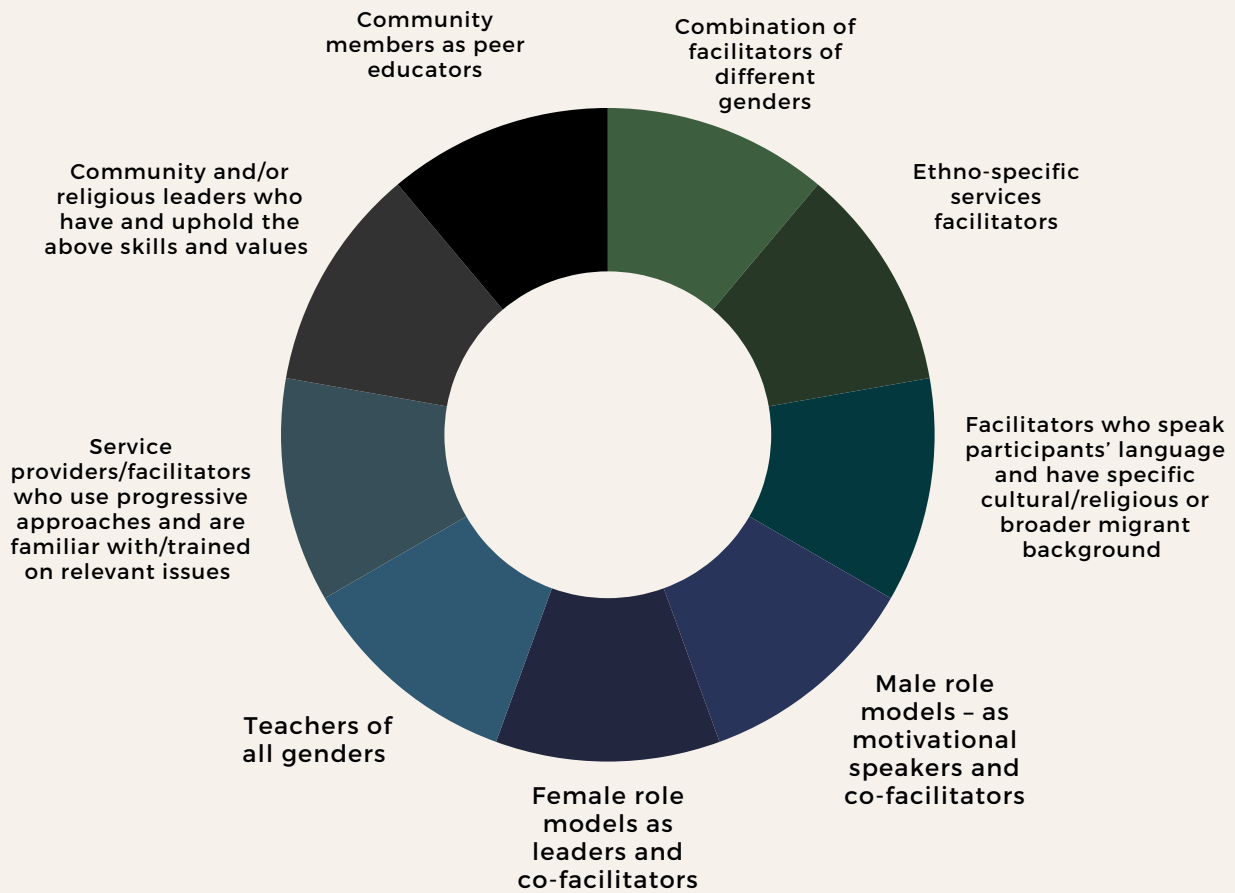
Balance of sound awareness, skills, and attitude

Facilitators who engage men on family violence must be adequately equipped to impart the right messages and work towards the desired change, have a strong set of skills, and carry positive values. The following is an ideal list of areas in which facilitators must be competent.

Facilitators who engage men on family violence must be adequately equipped to impart the right messages and work towards the desired change, have a strong set of skills, and carry positive values. The following is an ideal list of areas in which facilitators must be competent:

- Self-awareness
- Gender relations and family violence
- Strengths-based practice principles
- Laws and services in Australia
- Issues of power, dominant masculinities, privilege, equality, respect, human rights, and diversity
- Prejudice, bias, discrimination, and marginalisation
- Rapport building
- Communication skills - listening, handling conflict and resistance
- Group and individual facilitation skills
- Trauma-informed and trauma-responsive care
- An understanding of how shame manifests in this work and how to work with shame safely and effectively
- Creativity to challenge and encourage learning
- Handling disclosure of abuse

Suggested facilitators



4.

Create tailored and responsive content

Globally, family violence prevention and intervention programs can look significantly different from one another depending on their goals, approaches, strategy, and content. However, programs generally include content to develop participants' knowledge, raise awareness, change attitudes, and build capacity.



Knowledge

When working with men, programs should ultimately facilitate an understanding of the gendered drivers of abuse, and how they manifest in society on an individual, community, structural, and societal level. However, delving into this information up front may not always be appropriate. Programs should first seek to understand men in their environment and contexts – what challenges are they facing, and how do these challenges impact their ability to fulfil what they perceive as their role in their family and community? What impact is this having on their sense of identity, purpose, and achievement? Programs can then unpack how these underlying struggles may in fact be translating into behaviours or beliefs that impact their familial and community relationships. From a basis of connecting with Muslim men on the true challenges they're facing, examining pre-conceived notions of gender roles, biases, and rights can occur.

If programs wish to go beyond the gendered drivers of abuse, these learnings can then be linked to family violence as it occurs - defining family violence, identifying its forms, types and dynamics (e.g., Power and Control Wheel), its impact on survivors and their children, highlighting relevant laws, discussing behaviour change programs for perpetrators of family violence, useful resources, and referral information. Some faith-based groups may also include religious information against family violence for men.

Program example

Brothers' Halaqa Sessions on Family Wellbeing

1. Setting prevention goals

This program aims to facilitate family well-being through sharing information on positive masculinities, parenting, and respectful relationships.

2. Identifying the audience

Muslim men from a range of cultural backgrounds.

3. Engaging appropriate facilitators

This program will be delivered in partnership between a specialist multicultural family violence service and a local mosque.

4. Create tailored and responsive content

This program involves a monthly halaqa on issues that build Muslim men's capacity to embody positive masculinities, be present as partners and parents, and promote social change. Each session will begin with a speaker, followed by questions and opportunities to discuss the topic further.

Guiding principles for engagement

The content has been developed in partnership between a local mosque and a specialist family violence service to ensure that the content addresses drivers of family violence, but also that it draws in rather than alienates the intended audience. The halaqa sessions are designed around topics that men are more likely to engage with – i.e., 'family wellbeing', and provide a space to share what this looks like in practice – i.e., open communication, acceptance, cooperation, and empathy. This program will draw on many examples and aspects of Islam and participants' culture that promote such values.

Awareness and attitudes

The popular quote 'knowledge is power' rings true only if the information being transferred is empowering. Ideologies that serve to maintain or reinforce hierarchies are damaging to the prevention of family violence and indeed to all forms of abuse. At AMWCHR we believe that the transforming nature of awareness comes from learning, using, transferring, and internalising progressive approaches that focus not only on survivor centred support and direct service provision, but also on challenging the roots that uphold structures of power. This necessitates a more holistic and systemic view which seeks to change society, culture and policy, promote gender equality, challenge structures of power, and implement primary preventative measures.

Placing gender inequality at the centre allows for a more meaningful understanding of family violence and unhealthy masculinities that are directly linked to patterns of abusive behaviour. Challenging concepts of male power, privilege and entitlement, and learning to express and regulate emotions, is a complex but necessary component of engaging men. Through a process of self-reflection, men can begin to better understand their identity from the lens of privilege, power, unhealthy masculine culture and powerlessness, the complex trajectory of childhood abuse (and trauma), and societal pressure to adhere - sometimes rigidly - to gender roles and male violence. It allows them to better understand the impact of additional layers of their identity as migrants, minorities and Muslim men in the existing political climate. Through this process, men can learn to understand and ultimately re-shape their identities to develop a worldview that prioritises safe and respectful relationships.

Capacity building

An additional component when engaging men is to break yet another barrier and allow space for vulnerability and emotions, other than anger, that are not traditionally associated with men and boys. Promoting emotional intelligence, which includes emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills, can also be a valuable component of men's engagement.

The learnings that participants acquire can only lead to sustainable change if these are translated into action. Engagement with men must include a component that equips them with the skills and capacity to take the work forward in their personal circles, peer groups, workspaces and larger communities.

Suggested content for engagement

SELF-AWARENESS	SOCIO-POLITICAL AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS AND CAPACITY BUILDING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender identity as boys and men • Role identity - fathers, brothers, husbands, sons • Migrant identity • Religious identity • Political identity in context • Other identity markers (ethnicity, class, etc.) • Identity influences • Impact of gender, power and unhealthy masculinities • Impact of abuse/ bullying; conflict/violence; displacement • Emotional awareness, experiences of trauma, and healing • Personal attitudes, prejudices, privilege and misogyny • Impact of migration, racism, and Islamophobia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human rights • Gender - sexism, misogyny, healthy and unhealthy masculinities • Prejudice and discrimination • Power and its link with family violence • Family violence types and dynamics • The impact of family violence on individuals, family, children and society • Progressive religious/Islamic perspectives on equality and family violence • Healthy marital relationship/ marriage as a partnership • Healthy family relationships/ fatherhood/ • Respect and consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional regulation • Stress, anxiety and anger management • Empathy • Interpersonal and communication skills • Men as allies - leadership, facilitation and community activism • Mentoring and peer support • Mental health and wellbeing support • Critical thinking (as a protective measure against harmful messaging)

5. Guiding principles for engagement

Muslim and migrant communities are highly diverse, therefore there is no **one way** to engage all Muslim men in family violence prevention efforts. Global feminists and scholars, including from the countries of origin of many migrant Muslim men and their families, have contributed significantly to developing a theoretical base and guiding principles for such work. Here, we present a brief explanation of what these guidelines are and how they may be applied as part of a men's engagement project. Our hope is that these guidelines will help existing services evaluate and improve the quality and effectiveness of their work, and inform interested, new and emerging initiatives as they develop their programs.



Community-centred approach

Muslim communities, with their unique set of experiences and knowledge, must be at the centre of any program design. Facilitators need to be aware of, and sensitive to, communities’ socio-political contexts, experiences of oppression, needs, strengths and voices. Facilitators who work with a community centred approach show respect, take time to consult with diverse community voices, learn, build trust and interact without judgement and stereotyping. Complex issues require an investment in time spent learning, unlearning, understanding and planning.

Community-based approaches also allow for learning from existing community knowledge, values, strengths, and experience. This can be gained from interactions with the wider community, but there may also be male participants in men’s programs who have already been engaged in such work before, and who could share their learnings and contribute to the program. Programs should be participatory and flexible to allow for the incorporation of new ideas.

We know from our Voices for Change research that emphasis on community and family values will likely be effective in engaging and sustaining involvement from Muslim men, towards the development and health of families and community. In a broad sense, Muslim communities place a high value on family wellbeing, and for men, their role as a father is important both culturally and religiously. Centring programs around issues such as community wellbeing, and in particular emphasising cultural and religious values of respect and empathy will support men to identify with a program and see how their participation may benefit themselves, their family, and their wider community.

Intersectionality

Men's engagement initiatives and facilitators must recognise and centre the intersectional experiences of diverse communities and the men with whom they work. Gender is not the only variable that determines values, hierarchies or power relations. It is critical, especially when working with diverse groups, to be aware of and acknowledge the unique ways in which other variables – ethnicity, race, religion, identity (including political), socio-economic class, sexuality, ability, neurodiversity, age and other identities - interact to shape individuals' experiences. With the diverse identities that we all carry, power and powerlessness are relative experiences. Muslim men often experience privilege and oppression at the same time as part of their layered identities, depending on how they are positioned. Experiencing oppression and marginalisation is not an excuse for inaction or unaccountability in this space. Ignoring these power structures, however, is a tacit endorsement. Men's positionality must be recognised, validated and reflected in programs to encourage self-reflection and empathy for self and others.

Non-judgmental

Programs and facilitators must check their own biases, prejudices, and stereotypes about certain communities and families. Family violence occurs across all of Australia, and in all communities. Patriarchy is a global issue, though how it manifests within certain cultures and societies varies, depending on other interacting variables.

There is currently no evidence indicating that any one culture or community is more violent than any other. Despite this, the Australian media and dominant culture continues to portray Muslim, migrant, and refugee men as being more violent. They also commonly portray women from these communities as lacking in agency. This bias and judgement often show up in mainstream services/workers' interactions with Muslim and migrant men and creates distrust and lack of safety. In doing so, this bias not only renders a men's engagement project ineffective, but also further alienates communities and reinforces power hierarchies. Having an awareness of these histories and preconceptions about Muslim communities will allow facilitators to come to the community without judgement, and further, with empathy.

Acknowledgement of structural prejudice/Islamophobia

Any program working with Muslim men must consider, acknowledge, and mitigate the impact of intersecting disadvantage and prejudice that men from Muslim, migrant, and refugee communities experience in Australia.

Muslim men are positioned as a highly politicised group, where decades of surveillance, over-policing, and Islamophobia have alienated them from the services preventing and responding to family violence, including family violence organisations, police, and the legal system. Developing genuine empathy for men's experiences and navigating this situation with consideration is important.

Understanding these experiences will help organisations and practitioners establish authentic relationships and trust within the community. It will also allow a deeper understanding of how the resentment, fear and alienation that prejudice causes can be overcome to facilitate wider involvement and engagement of Muslim men.

Acknowledging structural prejudice including racism, sexism, and Islamophobia is also integral when designing programs for men because it contextualises women's and children's experiences in this space too. Any program aimed at preventing family violence must highlight how women and children face the added elements of gender and age-related vulnerabilities. When the power structures become visible to men within their own lives, and when they receive recognition and validation from programs and services that these power structures are real and impeding their equitable participation, they may better be able to reassess their own behaviour and perpetuation of such structures in relation to the people around them.

Collaborations and partnerships

Men's engagement programs that aim to work with Muslim men must collaborate with services, across various sectors, that work with Muslim communities. Given the complexity of engaging men in family violence work and the dearth of tried and tested models of practice, all the support and resources that are available must be applied. Collaborations allow for greater learning from each other as a range of skills and awareness come together to create more meaningful, reflective, and higher quality work. Collaborations are especially important when working with a cohort as diverse as the Muslim community.

We have many multicultural and ethno-specific services in Australia that work from, with, and alongside Muslim communities, though the cultural and ethnic composition of their client bases can vary widely. Collaboration can provide insight and responsiveness to the wide range of issues impacting different groups within the Australian Muslim community. It can also allow services to reach groups and individuals that may be more isolated, such as men who are recently arrived in Australia as migrants or refugees.

Accountability

Men's engagement programs help men understand and take responsibility for the impact of their own beliefs and actions on women, girls, children, and society as a whole. Concepts of male power, privilege, and entitlement and their impacts are examined and explored in depth, and the safety, healing, and wellbeing of survivors of family violence are prioritised. Even as men examine their own vulnerability, trauma, and pressures of upholding dominant masculine ideals, this must not be seen as an excuse, but as a way of connecting with their constructed identity and power. This responsibility and commitment to change are central to a gender transformative approach.

Team Players Program

1. Setting prevention goals

This program aims to promote healthy behaviours and relationships on and off the sports field. The goal is to increase young men's capacity and willingness to push back against common hyper-masculine expectations and ways of relating around sport.

2. Identifying the audience

Muslim young men (age 16-18) of various cultural backgrounds.

3. Engaging appropriate facilitators

This program is delivered in partnership between an Islamic school and a Muslim community organisation.

4. Create tailored and responsive content

This program will be delivered to the young men who play on the school's football teams. The program will be delivered to the young men after school once per week, for ten weeks. In the weekly sessions, the young men will discuss their experiences as young Muslim men in Australia, how to manage stress and pressure within their personal as well as sporting lives, and how this will translate to better teamwork on the field. The program will weave in information and discussions on positive masculine traits, leadership skills, cooperative conflict resolution skills, and gender equality.

5. Guiding principles for engagement

This program is designed to provide a judgement-free space for young Muslim men to discuss personal and community challenges they're facing both on and off the sports field. This may include experiences of racism and discrimination, balancing cultural and familial expectations with personal goals, and mental health. This program provides acknowledgement and validation to the young men who may be navigating a tumultuous time as they enter adulthood and establish their identities. It encourages men to show vulnerability and empathy, and in doing so will address hypermasculine norms that are often present surrounding sports.

Challenging patriarchal gender attitudes

Knowledge and awareness are useful tools for change, but on their own they are insufficient. Programs must employ a critical lens that explores and challenges concepts of patriarchy, power, male dominance and personal attitudes, and recognises them as drivers of family violence. This process includes a self-reflective examination of the impact of

unhealthy masculinities, with all its prejudices, privilege, pressure, and vulnerabilities. From gender discrimination to misogyny, violence and victim blaming - men who are being engaged must face the discomfort that comes with understanding their own roles as beneficiaries of a patriarchal system.

They must then be encouraged to gradually work through this to develop healthy models of masculinity that prioritise choice, freedom, empathy, respect, and accountability in relationships.

Women-centred

Initiatives to engage men on family violence prevention remain relevant to women and women's organisations that address these issues. The voices, experiences, and leadership of women as survivors, advocates, and experts must be valued. Some of the discourse on unhealthy forms of masculinity focuses on the harmful impact of patriarchy on men along with women and other genders, and the potential benefits of dismantling it for all. While this may be accurate and this understanding can be a valuable point of rapport building and self-reflection with men, the messaging must be clear that it is men who receive the majority of privileges in a patriarchal system, and women who are most harmed by it. The pervasive nature of family violence and its impact on generations of women and children must be highlighted and form the central premise for men's engagement.

Trauma-informed and strengths-based approach

A strengths-based practice approach is integral to achieving sustained and meaningful change in the family violence space. A strengths-based practice is a holistic and collaborative approach to working which focuses on a person's existing and potential capacity, skills, and knowledge to respond to circumstantial, personal, and systemic challenges. Strengths-based practices acknowledge individuals' and communities' inherent agency and the power they have to produce meaningful change in their own lives.

Importantly, strengths-based practice is never about avoiding difficult realities, limitations, or barriers, nor is it about only focussing on the positives. The practice starts with acknowledging and validating people's experiences of hardship with relation to personal circumstances as well as structural disadvantage, and then tuning in to identify resources, supports, and skills that can be built upon to create change.

Strengths-based work is a particularly powerful method for responding to experiences of marginalisation and discrimination. A personal and communal sense of inherent strength and agency is impacted by experiences of interpersonal and/or systemic exclusion and oppression. The role of a service provider or practitioner is to counter this while supporting people's connection to their own power, capability, and worth.

Programs must also create an understanding of the impact on and empathy towards survivors of family violence. They must also acknowledge and validate the trauma and structural disadvantage that male participants may have experienced, including social

disadvantage, conflict, displacement, child abuse/punitive practices, gender/sex-based humiliation, racism, Islamophobia, and violence.

Facilitating emotional awareness and expression in men can be a transformative process. One way in which this can occur is when men begin to develop an understanding for, and empathy with survivors' trauma, and consequently feel the push to challenge social attitudes and norms, and take actions towards creating more equitable relationships. Another way is when they draw linkages with their own experiences. Based on prevalence rates alone, it is likely that within any program there will be men who have experienced family violence in their home as children. This is something to be cognisant of as prevention strategies are implemented, noting that discussions of family violence with people who have themselves experienced it can elicit trauma-triggers. When this kind of expression and disclosure is handled sensitively and skilfully, it can be an immensely powerful experience.

Safety

Working on family violence with any group carries with it certain risks. Working with men on family violence prevention contains an additional risk of engaging with men who are already using violence. Services must be prepared for and have in place risk mitigation and management processes in case there is disclosure of violent behaviour, or a participant's behaviour during engagement becomes threatening. Safety mechanisms must ensure the safety of his family members, other participants and the facilitator. In this case, it is imperative that services consider existing knowledge and expertise around how to ensure threatening behaviours, particularly within familial relationships, are not exacerbated by the facilitators' intervention. Namely, avoiding a collusive or coercive/punitive approach. We also know that within any program that aims to prevent family violence by addressing its drivers and reinforcing factors, there is a risk of backlash from those involved and men in general (Our Watch, 2021). Programs must anticipate this backlash and take steps to mitigate and minimise any risks to facilitators, other program participants, and families.

Inclusive, whole-of-community approach

Initiatives must recognise and collaborate with social justice struggles and movements for and with diverse groups of women, and actively advocate for policies and practices that uphold their rights to equal opportunities, dignity, safety and well-being. Engaging men is not just about changing individual mindsets, but, centrally, is about unpacking and disrupting the mechanism, institutions, and structures at different levels of society through which unhealthy masculinities and gender inequality operate, are enabled, and reinforced.

A gender-transformative, holistic approach aims to actively challenge unhealthy forms and patterns of masculinity that operate at and across structural, systemic, organisational, community, interpersonal and individual levels of society.

While most programs developed from this Framework will likely be community-based to facilitate individual change, such programs can incorporate wider advocacy elements to affect wider social and structural change.

Sustainability

Family violence initiatives aim to facilitate transformative change, that which is reflected by changes in attitudes and awareness, as well as in capacity, behaviour, and post-program action. Gender attitudes are built over decades and can be stubborn and resistant to change. Even participants of intensive programs can revert to their 'old ways' unless they feel empowered and motivated to follow their hard work by long lasting action. We recognise that many men may be motivated and influenced by both extrinsic social expectations as well as intrinsic feelings of shame. While ideally, actions grow out of a sense of responsibility, ownership, and urgency, we know that in reality, our behaviour is often driven by seeing ourselves as good and being seen by others as good. This can mean that when new values and learnings surrounding gender equality clash with community expectations, pressures, and norms, tensions can arise. There is a risk that challenging or failing to meet community expectations will elicit feelings of shame that subsequently cause men to conform.

Services can facilitate and reinforce sustained change through capacity-building and leadership, and developing systems for long-term engagement, continued learning opportunities, and monitoring progress towards goals. Men must also learn to sit with their discomfort and internalise strong personal principles that can help guide them in retaining their progress in the face of critique from their immediate community as well as society at large. Ultimately, change will only be sustainable if it is owned by the community and is reflected in all domains – at home, in workplaces, and in community spaces.

Conclusion

Preventing family violence in Muslim communities requires the sustained engagement and participation of men and boys - as parents, partners, community and religious leaders, and individuals. Muslim men have significant knowledge and strengths to offer when it comes to the prevention of family violence in their communities. As professionals working in the family violence sector, our role is to leverage these strengths, and we require evidence-based and community-led tools to support this work. This Framework seeks to provide practical guidance to promote the development of engaging, meaningful, and inclusive primary prevention programs for Muslim men and boys.



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