

AIFS Conference 2026

Sharing Wisdom:

Integrating Multicultural Expertise into the
Victorian Specialist Family Violence Sector



Project Team

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Project Partners

*Multicultural Centre for Women's Health |
Whittlesea Community Connections*

Funded by

Family Safety Victoria



The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

The University also acknowledges and is grateful to the Traditional Owners, Elders and Knowledge Holders of all Indigenous nations and clans who have been instrumental in our reconciliation journey.

We recognise the unique place held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways across the Australian continent, with histories of continuous connection dating back more than 60,000 years. We also acknowledge their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future, and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous knowledge in the Academy. As a community of researchers, teachers, professional staff and students we are privileged to work and learn every day with Indigenous colleagues and partners.

In making this Acknowledgment of Country we commit to respectful and responsible conduct towards all others according to the Traditional lores of this land, particularly at times of formal ceremony.



Overview of presentation

- Background & methodology
- Participant demographics
- Findings
 - What is safety
 - Key barriers
- Recommendations
- Questions & discussion

Background



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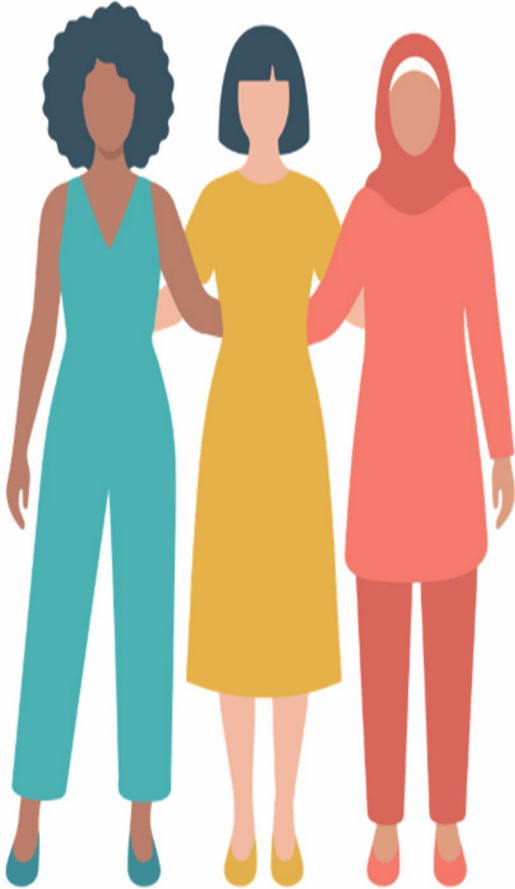
Partnership

University of Melbourne,
Multicultural Centre for Women's Health,
Whittlesea Community Connections

Research aims

To understand what “**success**” looks like for a **coordinated response** to family violence that is both **inclusive** of multicultural community services and **responds to the needs** and priorities of migrant and refugee communities.

Methodology Frameworks:



Intersectional feminism

**Family Violence Experts by
Experience**

**Family Violence Lived
Experience Strategy**

Methodology



Timeframe

- June – November 2024

Data collection

- **14** in-depth interviews with migrant & refugee women
- **13** Focus Group Discussions with service providers
- **14** key informant interviews with service leaders

Service provider perspectives

74 participants from **33 organisations**, including:

- **SFV** — specialist family violence services
- **TFV** — targeted family violence services
- **MCS** — multicultural community services

Participant Demographics



CHARACTERISTIC		NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
Region of birth	South Asia	5
	South-East Asia	2
	Europe	2
	Middle East	4
	Sub-Saharan Africa	1
Visa pathway to Australia	Partner	5
	Tourist	3
	Humanitarian	2
	Student	1
	Australian citizen	1
	Not stated	2
Number of children in participants care	0	6
	1-3	6
	4 or more	2

Findings – What does safety mean?



Safety means:

- Freedom from violence
- Stability and social connection
- Cultural safety in service systems.

“In my personal experiences, a very unsafe, violent home is much safer than a very white world outside the home. Because in a very unsafe, violent environment, you at least pick up the patterns. You know ... what to expect. You know what to predict. You know the person, it’s just one person that you have to deal with. So, you develop this resilience to manoeuvre around. How safe you can feel but out in the world, you know, in Australia”.

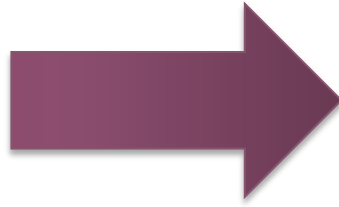
Ash, victim survivor

Findings – Barriers to safety

**Accessing and navigating
the system**

Culturally safe responses

Resourcing gaps



- Insufficient representation in SFV workforce
- Undervaluing of multicultural expertise
- Experiences of racism and discrimination

Insufficient representation in SFV workforce

- Constrains women's safety
- Visibility fosters trust
- Lack of diversity in leadership



Insufficient representation in SFV workforce



“So, we do have practice lead for LGBTIQ community, practice lead for disability, practice lead from the Aboriginal community, practice lead from family violence practitioner, and practice lead from the person using violence. So, there are five practice lead at the [specialist family violence service] ... but we don't have practice lead from CALD community.”

Deena, SFV practitioner

Insufficient representation in SFV workforce

Significant barriers to education and FV workforce participation:

- Migration challenges
- Trauma experiences
- Recommendation 209 - Royal Commission into Family Violence



Insufficient representation in SFV workforce



“I was speaking to somebody who was working in response ... and she really wanted to get into case management [and] she had to do a Master of Social Work or a graduate diploma or something and she was “I can't afford to do one, I can't take study leave, I don't have time to study part time, I have two kids and I'm trying to pay a mortgage, I just can't do it.”

Claire, multicultural community service

Insufficient representation in SFV workforce



Changes to Minimum Qualifications

- Broadened range of qualifications
- Simplified “Working Towards” policy
- Provided exemptions for those working in sector since July 2021

Undervaluing multicultural expertise



- Lack of recognition of expertise
- Contributions to FV response not recognised or acknowledged
- Shared space but not shared power



“Even though we are specialising, we do take the training, we go through accreditation ourselves...But sometimes they see us that we are, it’s more we providing emotional, cultural aspect of it. Yeah. They don’t expect that we’re gonna be doing the, managing risk, and providing similar service”

Jihan, targeted specialist violence service

Experiences of discrimination



This limits:

- Service access
- Career progression

“People from a migrant background repeatedly went for promotions and tried to progress ...faced some pretty significant organisational barriers to promotions... I [also] heard from a manager once that she didn't want to employ a woman whose English wasn't top notch because she thought that her emails would be unprofessional. So, the racism is just like, like “unprofessional”, ... it's a euphemism, isn't it?”

Jenny, SFV practitioner

SHARING WISDOM ROAD MAP FOR ACTIONS

**1. Invest in
communities**

**3. Strengthen
workforce capacity**

**2. Address
structural
inequalities**



Strengthening workforce capacity

Fund formal & sustainable partnerships

Review discriminatory practices & implement policy change

Develop leadership pathways for women with lived experience

Develop genuine employment pathways

Co-design feedback mechanisms to report discrimination



Thank you



Sharing WISDOM report

Search for: “Sharing WISDOM Final Report Nossal Institute”

or use web address below:

<https://mspgh.unimelb.edu.au/research-groups/nossal-institute-for-global-health/gender-and-womens-health/sharing-wisdom>

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