

# DFV Community Conversation From Mar 2018 – Aug 2018 Thematic Analysis Report

## Background

The Community Leaders Gathering (CLG) is a forum where Community Leaders from new and emerging communities from African, Asian, and Middle Eastern backgrounds, come together on monthly basis to support each other, exchange experiences, and progress common issues of concern.

The CLG serves as consultative body for service providers and government agencies. The gathering is also used to advocate on systemic issues and to provide feedback to influence decision making processes and future policy direction.

As such, Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) issues were brought up to the attention of CLG early 2016. As a result, a Steering Committee was formed to work on domestic violence and to advise the CLG on the course of actions it needs take in raising awareness of new and emerging communities to prevent domestic violence. South's community hub Free of violence-community to all (funded by DSS) project established to assist steering committee work by focusing to African community gropes.

Last year the CLG and SCH agreed to organize DFV Forum for new and emerging communities in partnership with government agencies and service providers. As a result, the committee undertook an information gathering process last March through Community Conversation guide consisting 13 open and closed questions appended in this report. As the name of the instrument suggests, the CLG and SCH intentionally called it conversation guide to encourage community leaders to start discussing the issue through facilitated discussion.

The objective of this information gathering exercise was designed to capture the understanding of communities about DFV, main causes, prevalence; impact or consequences; how they address and/or prevent it etc. The findings of information gathered will be discussed by communities and stakeholders at the forum in order to develop a series of action plans that will support CALD communities to be active participants in preventing and addressing DFV in their respective communities.

The CLG and SCH collected feedback over 4 months from 27 community s organization via, focus groups and individuals representing 12 ethno-specific communities.

### *Communities, Focus Groups and Individuals representing:*

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|--|--|
| 1. African men from East African Countries           | 16. Rwandan Association of Queensland                          |
| 2. Anyuak Community Association in Qld               | 17. Somalia and Oromo -Ethiopian men's group                   |
| 3. Australian Karen Organization                     | 18. Somalia Women Matter Mothers group                         |
| 4. Burundi community                                 | 19. South Sudanese - Focus group 1 (men).                      |
| 5. Congolese Community Association of Qld            | 20. South Sudanese - Focus group 2 (men).                      |
| 6. Congolese Pastors                                 | 21. South Sudanese - Focus group 3 (women).                    |
| 7. Eritrean community - Focus group 1 (men & women). | 22. South Sudanese - Focus group 4 (women).                    |
| 8. Ethio-Najash Community Association Inc.           | 23. Syriac Assembly Association in Australia                   |
| 9. Ethiopian and Eritrean Youth (19 -25 yo)          | 24. Syrian and Iraqi Women                                     |
| 10. Ethiopian – (#27)                                | 25. Tertiary Students from Afghanistan- Women's perspective #1 |
| 11. Female DV Survivor - Afghan                      | 26. Tertiary Students from Afghanistan- Women's perspective #2 |
| 12. Female DV Survivor – Burundi                     | 27. Trinity Evangelical Ethiopian church                       |
| 13. Hazara Association of Qld – (Men)                |  |
| 14. Nigerian community                               |  |
| 15. Repr. of South Sudanese Community                |  |

#### **Participant demographics**

The total number of participants in the DFV Community Conversation was 167 people, out of whom 84 were male and 83 were female. The participants represented communities from Ethiopia and Ethiopian Oromo, Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, , Rwanda, South Sudan, Nigeria, Afghan, Iraq, Karen, and Syria backgrounds. Over half of them arrived between 1996 to 2010, and the rest arrived after 2011. The overwhelming majority of them are from refugee backgrounds.

The Community Leaders Gathering would like to thank all community groups and individuals as well as South's Community Hub for their valuable contribution to the community conversations and the feedbacks received around DFV issues.

The thematic analysis report is a snapshot which of course does not represent all communities or all people, but we think it illustrates some important points that are going to be outlined below.

## Defining domestic violence

Participants gave a diverse response on how they define DFV from their cultural perspective. These included:

Quotes from participants:

- “It occurs when one person in an intimate personal, family or informal carer relationship uses violence or abuse to maintain power and control over the family properties without sharing it with relatives of husband or families” (1.1.1)
- “A pattern of abusive behavior by someone in a relationship with another, which causes physical, emotional, psychological harm to the victim as well as intense fear and helplessness. It is usually an attempt to maintain control by the perpetrator in relationships and can be caused by set personal or cultural beliefs” (2.1.15)
- “DFV is deliberate behaviour where a perpetrator uses violence to control, dominate and intimidate and cause fear to a victim.” (3.1.2)
- From two survivors of DV perspective it is defined as:

Participants also outlined the different form of DFV. These include physical abuse, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, property damage, spiritual abuse, economical/financial abuse, as well as offending or hurting one another, disrespect towards family members and/or depriving them from their rights.

However, some participants indicated that they don't have definition or a specific name for domestic and family violence, or it is not legislated in their country of origin. Nevertheless, a female respondent gave analogy of two types of men from her cultural perspective: a man who beats a woman and another who do not. The former is viewed as a “disciplinary and manly” while the latter is considered either “controlled by his wife or educated who does not like violence, but has other means equally hurtful ways of treating his wife”

## Community understanding about DFV in Australian context

- Only one participant affirmed that members of new and emerging communities understand what constitutes domestic violence.
- 56 per cent of participants confirmed that new and emerging communities don't understand what constitutes domestic violence.
- 21 per cent indicated that majority of them do not understand
- 13 per cent stated that some do understand and others do not, or they may or they may not be aware, or not always they understand.
- 8 per cent mentioned that some of them are not fully aware or clear with what constitutes DFV

The response of the participants highlighted that members from new and emerging communities, particularly from refugee and migrant backgrounds lack the understanding of domestic violence and family law that relates to perpetrators in Australia. This indicates that there is a serious gap in information provision to cohorts coming from countries that rely often on traditional mediation processes through extended family members and community and religious leaders. These cohorts indicate they know little about the different forms of abuses that are classified under domestic and family violence law.

Female participants reported that their community members do not talk about DV. As a result, they lack understanding of the different forms of abuses, including the disciplinary actions accepted in their culture might bring them into conflict with Australia law.

Similarly, male participants confirmed that their members struggle to understand about the DFV law. Consequently, it makes it hard for their members, who grew up in a society with strong culture, to accept when they suddenly find themselves in collusion with the course of law.

Another female respondent pointed out that women from her culture understand D&FV because of the media and the Australian society, and that men do understand, but are reluctant to accept the system they perceive it as taking their “manhood away by telling (them) how to treat their(wives). This has caused resentment in the family home and also to the Australian system.”

#### Quotes from participants:

*A female respondent stated: “... New communities don’t realize that domestic violence is not limited to extreme physical violence. DFV can be physical, as well as emotional, psychological, financial, sexual or other types of abuse. Unfortunately, due to lack of conversation about the topic, both men and women are unaware of their rights and disregard abusive behaviour as they don’t even realise they are being abused in an Australian context. Also, what families might consider discipline can be regarded as abuse in an Australian context, making things difficult for carers and guardians, as they need to re-approach their care methods.” (6.2.3)*

*A male participant indicated that “....It is a reality that native culture shapes people and influences their behaviors. For a new comer, it may be difficult to immediately define the Australian culture and law due to inertia. It is a process which may require a time and support to break out barriers for a quick local integration in the new society. (7.2.14)*

*A female participant reported that: “I don’t think that they quite understand the meaning or what behaviours amount to domestic violence. Again, cultural orientation has a lot to do with it. I have heard female clients who were beaten, slapped, or shoved by their partner try to minimize these behaviours as “normal relationship problems and not such a big deal. I observe that they are somewhat afraid to acknowledge the adverse meaning of dv so as to avoid blame, isolation by friends or family, or financial difficulties. In fact, some victims from this background may only seek help when the police or Child Safety officers intervene during an incident or when they are severely injured.” (8.2.15)*

### **DFV in new and emerging communities**

- the overwhelming majority of respondent groups/individuals reported that DFV is a serious issue in the community, which requires involvement of community leaders, elders and religious leaders to deal with it
- Seven per cent of respondent groups/individual neither agree nor disagree that it is an issue, however they pointed out that lack of community understanding the law governing DV complicates the matter further

#### Quotes from female participants:

“Yes. Domestic and family violence is a problem as it has caused a lot of family breakdown within our community. Kids on the streets and homeless, a man leaving their families because they feel their role is devalued and have been turn into criminal for something they grew up watching and was never a problem let alone being against the law from where they came from. As a result, they leave the family. Women are torn between standing up for themselves by saying no to DFV against them and keeping their families together by putting up with the abuse so the children don’t have to lose their father.” (9.3.17)

“Yes, especially because there is a code of silence and denial that keeps it going. There is also the buck-passing and victim blaming that prevents any accountability for such behaviours.” (10.3.15)

### **How DFV is addressed in the communities**

Communities identify and address the issue of DFV, when a family or individuals come seeking help from friends, extended family members, neighbors, or trusted people. They also reach out to community leaders, community elders, and religious leaders for support, guidance and counselling.

Some communities have leaders that assist involved parties in settling their differences, while others form advisory bodies to engage affected members in the conflict resolution process. They also use religious events, community meetings and social gatherings to raise awareness about the issue. Community leaders were also identified as providing safe environments for victims to come and discuss their experience. Those who are not willing to participate will be referred or encouraged to seek support from relevant services in their area.

#### Quote from male participant:

“Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of early intervention and mediation to families experiencing DFV, educating the community to understand the laws and systems ... in Australia. .... A real workable solution can only come from within the community itself. Traditionally, when a couple is having trouble resolving issues they approach family elders to mediate and resolve the issue. Otherwise, have a cooling off period where the wife can go back to her family house.” (11.4.23)

DFV survivor highlighted that her community tries to keep the couple together through mediation and providing advice. Every time the couple experience difficulties in their relationship they keep mediating for three times or more before they can separate, depending on the seriousness of the situation. Another survivor indicated that none of her husband's relatives or community members offered support. However, another community supported her with clothes, cooking and cleaning, as well as some encouraging words that empowered her.

Participants also emphasized on the importance of community education, creating awareness to addressing DV within communities, and empowering victims. Additionally, a few respondent individuals and groups indicated that the issue is often unreported, because of fear of repercussions that could bring shame to the family or being deported.

### **The main causes\* of DFV included:**

Participants stated the following as the causes\* of DFV:

- Lack of understanding the Australia law governing DFV
- Traditional and religious beliefs, cultural norms or cultural mindset around gender
- Controlling and/or abusive partners or parents
- Alcohol and/or drug abuse, social problems, settlement issues
- Unemployment, use of power,
- Arguments around finance, financial pressures, financial control or loss of financial control,
- Couples disagree over financial support for family members back home
- A couple not knowing each other well before marriage, arranged marriage, lack of understanding of one another, lack of responsibility, lack of trust, depression, stress, mental health issue
- Age difference, interference of external parties in family affairs
- Arguments over home duties, poor communication, lack of conflict resolution skills between wives and their partners
- Ignoring the complaints of partner or lack of respect
- Change of family dynamics, changing gender role, power dynamics change, intergenerational conflict, etc.
- "A perception that women and children have more rights than men and men feel powerless"
- "Cultural/traditional personality disorder or psychological disorder\*"

*\*Consider weight of other literature and evidence that suggest some of the above ideas are about co-contributing rather than causes*

### Strength of communities in dealing with DFV included

- Having stronger families that resolve conflict within the family or seek external help from extended family members and/or community and religious leaders.
- Promoting harmony, helping one another and discouraging violence
- Having strong and influential community leaders, elders, and religious leaders in spreading awareness, they also educate communities to abide by the law and adopt better ways of communication without resorting to violence.
- **Community spirit and working collectively in resolving conflicts, and treat each other with respect and dignity**
- Respecting community leaders, elders and religious leaders who play critical role in defusing tensions and resolving conflicts,
- “The value that communities place in having a successful family home life”
- Helping community members to understand the law and cooperate with relevant institutions and services working to stop DV

### Perpetrator awareness of the law and the consequences of their actions

- 22 per cent of respondent groups reported that perpetrators were aware of the law and the consequences of their actions. While another:
- 26 per cent said that perpetrators were not aware of the law.
- 26 per cent stated that some of them may be aware and others aren't.
- Another 17 percent reported that the:
  - majority knew very little of the Australian laws governing DV; or
  - their understanding of law was low; or
  - in most cases they didn't understand; or
  - not always they understand the different types of abuses classified under domestic violence in Australia;
- 9 per cent indicated that they were unsure or do not know

Quote from female participant:

“Not always. Due to the lack of understanding about the different types of abuse that classifies under DVF in Australia, individuals can often be mistaken to think they won't face any consequences as long as they are not extremely physically abusive. Furthermore...abusive behaviours can come from a place of care where individuals think they are helping the other person in the long term, making them unaware of the negative impacts of their actions.” (12.7.3)

### **The impacts and consequences of DFV to the victims and perpetrators include:**

Respondent individuals and groups reported the impacts and consequences of domestic violence to include:

- It causes significant long-term impacts on the health and well-being of victims, homelessness and housing instability, social isolation, low self-esteem, fear, depression, anxiety, trauma, increased aggression, economic and financial impacts.
- Victims will be affected emotionally and physically, this includes being unhappy and gradually develop stress and anxiety, trauma, psychological problems
- It will result in loss of trust and loss of confidence, divorce, loss of dignity and respect family breakdown, children running away from home, physical injury or disability as a result of violence or possibly death/homicide.
- DFV can lead also to drugs and alcohol abuse as a negative reaction to domestic violence
- Victims won't be happy in their life, always under pressure, self-blame and feeling of guilt,
- Stigma associated with the issue,
- Mental health problems, court orders, criminal charges that may be preventable if they had advice and support

Quotes from female participants:

*“The impact and consequences are far more reaching longer lasting than we would like to admit. The victims are often re-victimized by the community for calling the police instead of keeping the abuse secret or tell her in-laws so it can be handled by the family. Most of the time what the victims want is the violent to stop but stay in that relationship. The family separation part is not something that most victims in my community anticipate the element of self-blame and the feeling of guilt becomes overwhelming for the victims. The community also isolates the victims because they have stepped outside the community to seek help. Mental health issues are also part of the equation for the victim as well as the children involved. The impact on the perpetrator include criminal record for DFV, lost of his family including the children and realization that he is no longer the head of the family but the destroyer of his own beloved family. The perpetrators also have a sense of lost, because their identity has been changes from the protector and provider to a villain. Mental health issues begin to kick in, so does the self-medication which most of the time is alcohol.” (13.8.17)*

*“Participants’ biggest concern seemed to be their fear that when a husband and wife fight and the Police are called the children are at risk of being taken by child safety. Some participants reported cases in the community that when the children were taken they may not come back. Someone else who may not teach him or her right from wrong raises the child. The child loses any relationship with their parents and family. All participants expressed that this grieved the ...community .... Participants reported family breakdown is causing ... children to disengage; they spend time on the street and in prison....” (14.8.21)*



## **Strategies/ideas to tackle or prevent DFV in your community**

The participants outlined the following strategies and ideas to tackle or prevent DFV:

- Empowering community and religious leaders to maintain their culture and assist in resolving DFV issue in the communities before it becomes a problem to the community and the authority and service providers.
- Communities need to discuss the difference between their culture and Australian law to understand better the role of parents at home
- Providing safe space for individuals to seek help from culturally competent services
- Provide education and awareness raising programs for community members to understand domestic violence and the laws in Australia, including the extended family violence that can exist within the communities, and how people can prevent it from happening.
- Organize family friendly information and wellbeing sessions around DV.
- Educate new comers and their leaders on how to recognise and prevent domestic violence in their communities. TAFE institutions should be encouraged to provide awareness raising session for AMEP participants as part of their English classes
- Provide awareness raising information to perpetrators to help them understand the consequence of their action and change their behaviours
- Organise information sessions on parenting to families experiencing challenges in the upbringing of their children or intergeneration conflict
- Forming reference/support groups that can help and respond to domestic violence and to consult with the police and services providers.
- provide employment and training opportunities for people from new and emerging communities to work as cultural liaison officer with funded organization in awareness raising programs about DFV,
- Provide financial literacy to help families overcome the main source of conflict.
- Encourage struggling family to resolve their conflict through mediation facilitated by respect community and religious elders.
- Community and religious leaders to play the role of mediation in family arguments

Quotes from male and female participants respectively:

*“Maybe enough time isn't spent helping people to understand the law here in Australia. Education, awareness raising, motivate unity, for a reference group - to consult with the police and services providers to provide advice and feedback. Groups of leaders to try to address issues before they reach violent levels. When there is a problem that we can assist with we will do this, but when it is beyond our power, then we need to collaborate with the police. This can empower us to support the community. This gives strength to the government when we work collaboratively” (15.9.12)*

*“Education - cannot recommend this enough- delivered in various forms- workshops, media, social media, theatres, in various languages including brochures that can be translated into their languages (at least the major languages) – at community events, churches, mosques, schools and universities, and workplaces. Focus on: promoting respectful relationships, available support services, access to justice, short and long-term effects of dv, consequences of dv especially to children and vulnerable persons.” (16.9.15)*

#### **Police enforcement of the law in DFV situations**

- 45 per cent of respondent groups/individuals felt that police involvement helps families. However, some of them felt that it is better to solve issues internally rather than engaging the police who lack cultural understanding/cultural competency.
- 36 per cent of respondent groups/individuals were of the view that police interventions were not helpful to families, because, they might exacerbate the situation, and dash the hope of reconciliation or may lead to early divorce. For this reason, communities prefer addressing the issues within the community with the help of close relatives, friends and community and religious leaders. The last resort will be police when community has failed to make progress in the mediation process.
- The remaining 18 per cent of respondent groups/individuals gave various responses. These include: **police intervention can worsen the situation; police do not consider community culture or cultural issues; after the police enforcement cultural input won't be negotiable; don't have much information about the police enforcement; The rest of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with police intervention.**

### Quotes from male participants

“Not really, because some of the cases are settled down in mediation and reconciliation process. More than that, family does not want police to get involved as they consider very completed process and have lack of knowledge and language skill to deal with police etc.” (17.10.2)

“Several participants expressed a belief that when Police arrive at a domestic dispute they encourage women to press charges and the ... women do because they feel supported in their side of the argument with their husband. But the women don't actually want to be separated from their husband and so they often want to withdraw the charges later when they find out what pressing charges means. Suggestion Police should understand and follow the ... (community)... process before going to court. Can contact community elders for help, support and to verify. Most of the participants expressed they were offended by the perceived assumption of Australia's DFV system that men are strong and unreasonable and that women must be protected from them, even without evidence. ....”. (18.10.20)

### **The role community and/or religious leaders**

Community leaders (CLs) and community members identified the following to be part of the CL role:

- Referring families and community members to relevant government agencies and service providers to access support and information to stay strong and resilient
- Some are very involved in conflict resolution within their groups, they provide advice and guidance to the cultural communities.
- Religious leaders have large number of audiences and they play significant role in helping people to address and prevent domestic violence within their respective communities,
- They raise awareness within their communities and offer support to families and individuals experiencing issues such as domestic violence,
- They also advocate and provide advice to government agencies and service providers on community issues and needs

## Types of support required by new and emerging communities

It was identified that new and emerging communities need from funded organisations the following support to deal with domestic and family violence and child protection issues:

Types of support required from funded organisation	
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More funding and resources are required for venue hire to carry out and conduct community meetings, information sessions, workshops, including for stationary, catering, refreshment and for preparing reports and evaluating activities</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided education to communities to understand the Australian domestic and family law, the role of child safety, parenting etc.</li> <li>• Organising culturally appropriate education sessions and workshops for families on parenting and family relationships</li> <li>• Education sessions to men and young people around domestic violence and relationships within families</li> <li>• Educating perpetrators to understand the consequences of their actions, the court processes, what DVO order means, how it impacts them, child custody, and conciliation conference etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging bilingual support worker available for the community members to support victims</li> <li>• Funded services to recruit educated bilingual/cultural support workers to assist in addressing DFV</li> <li>• Provide cross cultural training session for Police and other DV services on how to work with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds around the issue</li> </ul>
<b>Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building programs and training for elders, and community and religious leaders to address the issue in their community through seminars, information sessions, and conflict resolution processes</li> <li>• Provide training to elders and community and religious leaders on dispute resolution mechanisms</li> </ul>
<b>Victim or respondent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More programs to support community members affected, especially for women and children</li> <li>• Referring men for support and information, including understanding what the DV order means and how it impacts on them</li> <li>• Crisis support programs for victims of DFV, including safe and affordable houses, where either respondent or complainant can go to.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaboration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police services to consider working in collaboration with community leaders to address DFV</li> <li>• Support and recognition for reference groups to deal with the issue in community</li> </ul>

