

FV & Ethnic Communities in Waitakere

Another WAVES project for 2010/11 has been looking into the needs of our local ethnic communities in relation to FV services. Recent cases in the news media have underscored that the FV sector needs to develop an understanding of migrant/refugee experiences of FV and to improve knowledge within these communities of where to get help.

The ethnic communities in Waitakere City are diverse, made up mostly of peoples from the Asian subcontinent, extending from Afghanistan in the north-east to Japan in the north-west and including India, China, and south-east Asia to Indonesia. As at the 2006 census, Asians made up 16% of Waitakere City population whilst Middle Eastern, African and Latin American peoples made up just 2%. Statistics NZ project that Waitakere City's Asian population will increase from 28,323 to around 61,000 by 2021.

International research conducted on the experience of FV by migrants to western receiving countries suggests that the incidence of family violence is not higher in migrant communities than among locally-born residents (Menjivar; Kasturirangan). But researchers also acknowledge that migrants from non-western, patriarchal cultures may accept and even promote the use of violence in the home as a discipline or conflict resolution strategy. The pattern of family violence in ethnic communities is highly gendered with women most often the victims. However, perpetrators may be male or female as violence may be intergenerational, for example perpetrated by mothers-in-law on daughters-in-law or by adults upon children and young people as discipline (Kasturirangan; Pillai; Tse).

The acceptance of violence as discipline and the socialisation of women as submissive is believed to contribute to the underreporting of family violence among NZ's ethnic communities (Tse). Overseas research suggests that migrant women may experience higher levels of extreme violence, with migrant women more likely to suffer severe injury as a result (Vatnar). In NZ, Asians born overseas were over-represented in couples-related homicides (all femicides) between 2002 and 2006: 17% of victims and 13% of perpetrators compared to 9% of the national population (Martin).

Settlement issues are frequently identified as triggers for family violence, especially male unemployment or underemployment (Jin; Kasturirangan; Martin). Some men are believed to be triggered by wives' and daughters' desire to participate in the

opportunities available to women in western receiving countries, leading to men becoming 'more traditional' than they had been in their home countries (Tse; Simbandumwe). Family members may also react negatively to their children's desire to adopt local behaviours that would be considered offensive in their home country.

Care must be taken, however, to avoid minimising family violence as simply a consequence of settlement issues. Many of these issues, like unemployment and financial stress, are known triggers for FV among the locally-born population. Likewise, many migrants and refugees experience settlement issues but do not harm their families.

NZ immigration policies and rules contribute to the problem by creating an underclass of 'sponsored' dependents including women, children, and elders. These policies reinforce male privilege and are known to be abused allowing a range of illegal behaviours including theft of dowries and fraud, prolonging victims' experience of abuse because leaving the relationship may mean losing the legal right to remain in the country, especially if they have children born here (Pillai; Tse, see also Menjivar). Whilst some changes have been made to immigration policies to mitigate these risks, there remain concerns that the changes are not far-reaching enough.

WAVES is currently working with a group of service providers towards expanding the FV sector's capacity to respond to FV in ethnic communities.

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