

Analysis: Ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities

Date: March 2022

Purpose

During May and June 2021, the Joint Venture engaged with people across Aotearoa New Zealand to inform [*Te Aorerekura – the National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence*](#). A key part of this engagement was the conversation with ethnic communities. This paper reflects the community's experience with the family violence and sexual violence systems and the opportunities for improving how Aotearoa New Zealand work to prevent, respond, heal and recover from these forms of violence. Communities, organisations and individuals were generous in sharing their experiences, and through their insight government agencies have worked to develop a 25-year Strategy designed to achieve the moemoeā, or vision: All people in Aotearoa New Zealand are thriving: their wellbeing is enhanced and sustained because they are safe and supported to live their lives free from family violence and sexual violence.

This paper sets out themes that came out of hui, written submissions and conversations with ethnic communities and uses, as much as possible, the words and voices of the people who shared their pūrākau (stories) and whakaaro (thoughts). The writing of this paper has been strongly informed by this community.

The engagement process

Initial meetings and phone conversations were held with hui organisers to discuss the potential engagement options for each group, including specific requirements and risks. In some cases, government officials met with entire groups online to agree and brief each-other on the engagement process and what to expect at the hui. When required, counsellors were present so that any participant who wanted to share a personal journey had access to appropriate services and support. Most hui were two to three hours long, giving sufficient time to hear from, and record, all voices participating.

To ensure there was critical analysis of the National Strategy from a range of perspectives, the Joint Venture engaged with:

- Ethnic, migrant and former refugee women
- Family violence and sexual violence specialist service providers
- Specialists in family violence visas
- Victims and survivors
- Service providers who work with people who use violence



- Justice system providers, such as Crown Law and Public Defence Services
- Diverse university staff and students.

JV staff worked alongside the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry for Women, community organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and independent academics who helped organise the engagements. Most hui were in-person but some engagements were online.

Who are the ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities?

The ethnic, migrant and refugee community is also collectively known as the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community, and includes migrants, former refugees, long-term settlers, and those born in New Zealand who identify their ethnicity as African, Asian, continental European, Latin American and Middle Eastern.

Based on the 2018 national census, ethnic communities make up around a fifth of Aotearoa New Zealand's population, at almost a million people. This includes new and temporary migrants, former refugees, asylum-seekers, long term settlers, and those born in New Zealand. They are an incredibly diverse group, representing over 200 ethnicities and speaking over 170 languages.¹

The rise of ethno-linguistically diverse populations across Western colonial settler societies has drawn attention to the distinctive profile of family violence and sexual violence in these communities including the incidence, underlying drivers, patterns of disclosure and non-disclosure, and the development of effective interventions. There is a growing body of international evidence and some New Zealand research highlighting the systemic and structural nature of family violence, underpinned by cultural beliefs around gender norms, and the impact of socio-economic disparities.² Despite the growing focus, there is still an absence of reliable data on violence in ethnic communities across multi-cultural societies.³

What we know about ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities

What is wrong?

Violence for ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities in Aotearoa New Zealand occurs in a social context of pervasive racism which affects the way family violence and sexual violence services respond to the specific needs of these communities. It is widely recognised that there is significant under-reporting of all types of violence. This issue is particularly acute in ethnic, migrant and refugee communities, therefore an accurate profile of the nature and

¹ <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/community-directory/>

² Simon-Kumar, R. (2019). Ethnic perspectives on family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand. Issues Paper 14. Auckland, New Zealand: New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of Auckland.

³ Ibid.

prevalence rates of family violence and sexual violence in ethnic minority communities in Aotearoa New Zealand is difficult to establish.⁴

Under-reporting, combined with a lack of specificity around ethnicity and immigration status in data has led to a lack of evidence and knowledge about the profile of family violence and sexual violence in different ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities, particularly those in for smaller population groups. The information currently available paints an incomplete picture of the experience of people, families and communities.

In ethnic, migrant and refugee communities, violence can take distinctive cultural forms, including dowry-related violence⁵, coercion through visa status dependency and the threat of losing legal immigration status, intergenerational harm caused by harsh punishments and a cycle of violence, among other issues. Sexual violence in many communities, especially smaller communities, is rarely spoken about due to sexual and reproductive health issues being considered taboo, with victims are often shamed, blamed and alienated by the community.⁶

Language barriers and distrust of authorities can discourage ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities from seeking help. Within these populations, there are those who exist at the intersections, for example, disability, trans and non-binary people, for whom systemic barriers make accessing appropriate services more complex. Prevention, early intervention, crisis response and justice systems must be designed with communities to enable ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities to access appropriate resources.

Submitters also raised concerns about a lack of understanding of how sexual violence effects and impacts their communities and how the judicial system retraumatizes those who go through it, as well as a lack of:

- Adequate support systems in prevention and intervention
- Inclusive wellbeing and mental health frameworks
- Understanding that violence is far more nuanced than simply being physical violence.

What is needed?

Specific, culturally-safe and appropriate approaches to working in partnership with people of different cultural backgrounds and understandings, to understand, prevent and respond to the unique profiles of violence in ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities.

“We need a workforce that is able to support ethnic communities.”

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dowry-related violence is, violence that arises solely or in part from concerns about whether, how, or how much any gifts, goods, money, other property, or other benefits are:

- given to or for a party to a marriage or proposed marriage; and

- received by or for the other party to the marriage or proposed marriage.

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2018/0046/latest/LMS112966.html>

⁶ Simon-Kumar, R. (2019). Ethnic perspectives on family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand. Issues Paper 14. Auckland, New Zealand: New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, University of Auckland.

“We need a focus area that enables communities to create our own change – including cultural solutions.”

The stigma associated with family violence, sexual violence and help seeking needs to be dispelled. Make helping services accessible.

“Tackle damaging cultural norms that validate toxic societal behaviour.”

“Educate the younger generation to normalise help-seeking behaviour.”

“Advocate for our women and children for prevention education at different levels.”

A strong gender lens and an intersectional lens are required to understand the challenges faced by these communities and to provide an appropriate cultural understanding of prevention, intervention and elimination of violence.

“Get rid of harmful societal norms, for example, toxic masculinity.”

Resourcing needs to be made available for the further development and provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate models of intervention, not merely as a conduit for ‘mainstream’ services.

“Service providers and government need deeper culture understanding.”

Collaborative relationships between ethnic, migrant and refugee providers and ‘mainstream’ services are needed.

“More consultations and more collaborations between service providers and government.”

‘Mainstream’ agencies need to improve their responsiveness.

“Government need to work with different levels of service providers for a deeper level of cultural understanding.”

Violence prevention efforts need to be led by and for specific ethnic communities.

“Enabling communities is key. We need to be able to lead cultural shifts that can tackle the root cause of family violence.”

An integrated, comprehensive, cohesive and long-term wraparound service is needed to support men, women and families currently manoeuvring through the system, as well as support once they have been through the system.

“A need for services that are culturally inclusive but last more than just a few weeks.”

Information about ethnicity, nationality, religion and visa status could be collected when addressing family violence and sexual violence without perpetuating further harm to the victim.

“The National Strategy needs to address the need to work on systemic barriers that hinder communities with specific needs.”

What are the gaps?

Some ethnic communities rely heavily on faith-based leaders for guidance and intervention. Having the opportunity to engage with faith-based leaders could help highlight their point of view and identify ways to work together to improve the actions needed when disclosures are made and improvements to the system they would introduce.

There were some population groups, sub-cohorts, with intersectional identities that the JV couldn't reach within the timeframes and resources available for our initial engagement on the National Strategy in 2021. Not all voices of the diverse represented by communities were heard and recorded.

There is a lack of data for some of these cohorts. Support is required to translate the information held by services into a more nuanced understanding of ethnic, migrant and former refugee individuals' experience of violence in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Emerging themes from engagement with ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities

Participants identified the following issues:

- Lack of culturally appropriate family violence and sexual violence services and trained workforces

- Lack of resources and funding for culturally appropriate family violence and sexual violence services, communication and trained workforces
- The importance of the inclusion of education around financial abuse and financial violence to tackle issues such as the lack of autonomy in relationships and the independent decision-making that comes from that autonomy
- Community-led solutions cannot be ‘one size fits all’ for all the diverse communities living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The challenge is to identify true community leaders and gatekeepers -
- The emphasis on gender-based violence and understanding the culture of silence and how to break it
- Access to resources and services depending on where people live in Aotearoa New Zealand
- System/State barriers and discrimination that retraumatise individuals. Again, there cannot be a ‘one size fits all’ approach with different groups.

Bottom lines for ethnic, migrant and former refugee communities

- Embody te ao Māori and recognise other cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Ensure a strong gender and intersectional lens
- Recognise and address systemic discrimination practices experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Address economic harm as a priority issue relating to power and control over finances and resources
- Restructure visa processes and tackle visa-related coercion and control experienced by people in these communities. Change immigration policies and processes to address family violence issues⁷
- Dismantle system/State barriers and discrimination that retraumatise individuals
- Acknowledge that the use of community-led solutions may not be the best path for every community/population cohort or sub-cohort, as intrinsic cultural violence is socially sanctioned by some community leaders. This can effectively prevent victim-survivors from reaching out, or services from reaching in. Where service providers are located within the community, they are best placed to be the bridge between the victim-survivor and intervention.

⁷ INZ has two special visa categories for migrants in New Zealand who have experienced family violence: a temporary work visa and a special residence category visa (FV visas). While men can be victims of family violence, the visa data and literature reviewed as part of this Project, confirmed that most victims are female. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/12138-recent-migrant-victims-of-family-violence-project-2019-final-report>