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Rees, Susan and Pease, Bob 2007, Domestic violence in refugee families in Australia : rethinking settlement policy and practice, *Journal of immigrant & refugee studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 1-19.

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ARTICLES

Domestic Violence in Refugee Families in Australia: Rethinking Settlement Policy and Practice

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ABSTRACT. It has been identified that immigrant and refugee women are particularly at risk in cases of domestic violence. This article reveals the qualitative research findings from a study into the significance of traumatic history, social and economic context, cultural differences and changed gender identities on the perceptions and experiences of domestic violence in refugee families. The study was undertaken with a sample of refugee men and women from Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. Compounding contextual factors concerning structurally based inequalities, culturally emerged challenges, social dissonance, psychological stress and patriarchal foundations are revealed. Informed by an intersectional framework that recognizes gender oppression as modified by intersections with other forms of inequality, the article argues the case for

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Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, Vol. 5(2) 2007

Available online at <http://jirst.haworthpress.com>

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doi:10.1300/J500v05n02_01

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community-managed projects involving multi-level empowerment-based interventions to prevent domestic violence. doi:10.1300/J500v05n02_01 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Domestic violence, gender relations, trauma, intersectionality, culture, refugee families, settlement

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence against women perpetrated by male partners, or ex-partners, has been articulated as one of the most concerning and prevalent public health issues in the world today (Krug et al., 2002) and is a major cause of injury and mental illness among women and children (Vichealth, 2004). In the Australian context, “domestic violence” is usually taken to mean partner abuse, specifically physical, verbal, emotional, economic or social violence between a male and female partner, most commonly perpetrated by the male partner (Hegarty et al., 2000). Domestic violence occurs in most societies irrespective of culture, socioeconomic status or religion. Nevertheless, it has been identified that immigrant and refugee women are particularly at risk in cases of domestic violence (Kang, Kahler, and Tesar, 1998; Perilla, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2000; Narayan, 1997; Easteal, 1996). Empirical research concerning domestic violence and the experiences of refugees settling in developed countries is sparse despite concerns from service providers and policy makers that these communities are experiencing violence and that it is negatively affecting wellbeing and the chances of successful settlement (Pittaway, 2005).

Domestic violence does not occur in isolation of social or cultural factors (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005a) and the significance of the settlement experience was prioritised in this study. Involving a sample of women and men who arrived as refugees from Iraq, North and South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian communities, this mixed method qualitative study examined refugee settlement and domestic violence in Australia with the intention of revealing the significance and interrelatedness of cultural, psychological, social and economic factors, and generating knowledge to influence settlement and

family violence related policies and practices in the Australian context. We applied an intersectional framework of analysis because of evidence of the multifactorial nature of such an investigation. Gender oppression is modified by intersections with other forms of inequality and oppression (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Furthermore, if we are to advance interventions to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence we need to understand the beliefs, attitudes and experiences of men (WHO, 2005), and this was a focus of our study.

Our study has underscored the importance of thinking about refugee communities, settlement and domestic violence in more complex ways than has previously been evidenced in Australian policy or practice. We demonstrate that while many feminist theorists have included an analysis of ethnicity and class in considering domestic violence, these theories have not filtered through to influence policy or practice in Australia. Crenshaw (1991) says that domestic violence is only one form of oppression and control and our study supports this view. Social injustices impacting on refugee communities, occurring at multiple sites, requires urgent attention if refugee women are to feel safer in their own homes. This is not to advocate an argument of causality, but rather to emphasise the compounding factors that can make refugee families vulnerable to violence, its effects and outcomes. Domestic violence manifests with patriarchal characteristics, as well as with culturally and socially-mediated antecedents and on these grounds the responsibility for violence needs to remain with the perpetrator as well as with governments and societies that perpetuate inequalities and disadvantages extending beyond gender.

Culture is a system of shared beliefs, customs, behaviours and values that are used by members of a society to make sense of their world and each other. However, we operationalized “culture” to be constantly emerging, influenced by contemporary imposed or welcomed changes, rather than a static entity that could, in isolation, be blamed for domestic violence. Domestic violence does not occur in isolation of social or cultural factors, and with an emphasis on the wellbeing of those who arrived as refugee or humanitarian entrants in the first five years of arrival, we have necessarily focused on the settlement experience.

Australia’s “Offshore Resettlement Program” assists refugees and others in humanitarian need and for whom settlement in another country is the only available solution. Australia accepted 13,000 Humanitarian entrants in 2004-2005. Settlement in the Australian context refers to a range of federally funded services to assist newly arrived refugees to participate as soon and as fully as possible in Australia’s economy

and society. The Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Scheme (IHSS) is the Federal government program provided to entrants to provide short-term orientation and information, accommodation support, household material support, health care support, and community support through a volunteer support program to the recently arrived. The findings from this research are relevant to future IHSS policy directions and other related settlement policies and programs.

Whilst focusing on a social problem that affects all communities, we are mindful that refugee arrivals are particularly at risk of being typecast in a negative light. Australia is a culturally diverse country built on migration, with four in ten Australians being migrants or the children of migrants. Migration creates employment, increases consumption of food and household goods and increases spending (HREOC, 2003). Cosmopolitan Australia would not be what it is without the richness and ethnic diversity that has emerged from migration. Our study highlights the wealth of knowledge, insight and expertise that refugees in particular contribute to Australia, and underscores the importance of ensuring that the skills and talents of refugees are recognised, valued and nurtured.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Undertaken in 2005-2006 the study was designed to examine the significance and inter-relatedness of cultural, psychosocial and economic factors in the safety and wellbeing of refugee families experiencing domestic violence and to produce knowledge that could inform the development of effective settlement supports for refugee families.

The objectives of the study were to

1. Investigate the relationships between domestic violence and gender, traumatic history, social and economic context, cultural differences, and changed identities.
2. Identify contextual factors in domestic violence affecting refugee families.
3. Articulate the settlement support needs of refugee families and to inform the training needs of health and welfare professionals working with refugee families.

An action research genre was chosen for this study because it allowed the researchers to emphasise community inclusiveness and participation. The authors undertook the study in collaboration with the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (IWDVS), the only Victorian

agency funded specifically for supporting immigrant and refugee women victim/survivors of domestic violence. Victoria is a state located in the south-eastern corner of Australia. It is the smallest Australian state in area but the most densely populated and urbanised. More than 70% of Victorians live in Melbourne, the capital city. About 72% of Victorians are Australian-born although this figure falls to around 66% in Melbourne where the study was conducted.

Four men and four women (seven of whom arrived as refugees) were recruited to research with participants from Ethiopia, North and South Sudan, Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian communities and communities from Iraq. The methodological concept of “storyboards” (developed by Dr Eileen Pittaway) is used as a medium for gathering pictorial and written data on large sheets of paper for exploring identified themes in a focus group context (see <http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au/> for more information). The research assistants were trained in research process, ethics and data collection, including focus groups and interviews.

Representing four broad groups including communities from (1) Ethiopia, (2) South and North Sudan, (3) Serbia, Bosnia, Croatia and (4) Iraq, eight focus groups (a men’s group and a women’s group from each broad group) involved a total of 78 participants. Additionally, face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews from across the participating ethnic groups involved another 17 men and 25 women. Approximately 35% of the combined focus group and interview participants were Muslim and the remaining 65% identified as Christian. The focus groups sessions were held with separate groups of men and of women from each community (using the story board methodology), and in-depth interviews with men and women from each of the participating communities were conducted with the appropriate male or female interviewers from that community. Data were collected in the primary language of each group and then translated into English by a research assistant. Each group session had a chief investigator or IWDVS representative present to support the research assistant and to monitor the process.

Participants were recruited by purposive sampling that allows for participants considered to have specific expertise in a certain area to be targeted for participation. In this case “expertise” represented knowledge associated with the refugee and settlement experience. Each research assistant had close contact with their respective community and engaged in discussing the project at various community forums and inviting participation from self-selecting individuals meeting the criteria for the study. The study involved refugees who had been in Australia for a period between three to five years and who were over 18 years of

age. Direct experience of domestic violence was not a prerequisite; however, participants were aware that the study would ask them about settlement, wellbeing and domestic violence in their communities. The trained research assistants from each community promoted the studies within their communities and were responsible for recruiting participants. It was also the case that some of the women participants were recruited through contacts with the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service and would therefore have a higher likelihood of direct exposure to domestic violence.

Domestic violence was intentionally not defined for participants; however, we found that the forms violence articulated by the participants did not differ from those identified by women in the broader community (articulated in a following section of the paper). Emotional abuse and controlling behaviour was mentioned directly as a form of domestic violence and indirectly, when describing the ramifications if the expectations of a husband were breached, or when describing the implications of behaviour that was not dutiful. In general, women and men often used the terms "family conflict" and "domestic violence" interchangeably. There was not an opportunity to continually clarify terms and meanings during fieldwork and this was made more difficult with the effects of translation from the spoken language back to English. Every effort was made to discern the intention of participants and to reflect this honestly in the analysis and findings.

Data segments were identified and coded, theme categories were developed, and data segments were allocated to categories following interpretation and discussion between researchers and informants. Researchers did not act autonomously with respect to any attempt at inter-coder reliability; rather we relied on each researcher's tacit knowledge of the areas of inquiry in the analysis of data. Furthermore, the engagement of IWDVS staff and of participants and research assistants in crosschecking and qualifying interpretations served as a sound method of achieving reliability in the qualitative research context. Categorized data from both the interviews and the focus groups were analysed together using cross-tabulation of themes and issues including an analysis of consistencies, dissonance and ambiguities emerging from within the thematic areas. Cross-checking occurred with self-selecting participants in a language specific forum designed for sharing research insights and findings. Data from refugee women and men were analysed separately and then compared and contrasted.

In this study, involving different ethnic groups, we emphasized the structural underpinnings of domestic violence and problems during

settlement rather than differentiating between the groups represented in the study. Our analysis was undertaken through the lens of intersectional feminism although we were also committed to privileging the voices of refugee men and women despite their own varying degrees of critique of structurally-based oppression. The resulting tension between these two conceptual frameworks is evident in the findings and discussion of this research.

EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ISOLATION

Women primarily described domestic violence that they had heard about, witnessed or experienced as being physical, including kicking and hitting. Additionally, emotional abuse and controlling behaviour was mentioned directly as a form of domestic violence and indirectly, when describing the ramifications if the expectations of a husband were breached, or when describing the implications of behaviour that was not dutiful. Reflecting on her husband's treatment of her since arrival in Australia a woman participant said "He treated me without any affection. The time I arrived in Australia he said I have nothing to do with you. Constantly he used to put me down never encouraging me to do anything. We separated."

Financial abuse was also mentioned explicitly as a form of domestic violence, where men control women through dominating financial resources. Social isolation was also identified as a form of domestic violence affecting refugee communities, where women were intentionally kept from social and community contact. Significantly, the study found that the experience of being a refugee is frequently isolating because of unemployment, limited finances and because of inadequate English language skills. In this respect, the strategies of violent men can be assisted by the process of settlement. Women identified the experience of isolation as more of a serious problem than male participants did.

None of the male participants volunteered information about the type or nature of domestic violence in their communities. They identified family conflict as an issue associated with women's increased independence. However, most of the men did not regard "family conflict" as violence. Furthermore, in most cases they regarded government intervention to address this issue as undermining their authority and family cohesiveness.

In this study isolation emerged at multiple sites, including in cases of domestic violence and the strategic isolation of women; and isolation associated with the implications of living with refugee status. Isolation was associated with social withdrawal associated with posttraumatic stress related disorders, fear of racist violence and intimidation, inadequate English language skills preventing social integration, poor social networks exacerbated by inadequate public transport, and poverty preventing social outings. The point was made that the widespread isolation experienced by refugee women means that they are not widely aware of services or the laws about domestic violence.

Refugee women have been found in subsequent investigations to experience isolation (Easteal, 1996a; Kang, 1992) including at a higher rate than the general population (Narayan, 1997). Furthermore, isolation is a known risk factor, and strategic form of abuse, in cases of domestic violence (Hegarty, 2000). A female participant in our study said the male partner would isolate her; he'd go out and keep her at home and would tell her that she has no right to ask anything.

Isolation from family support prevented women from speaking out about violence. It was viewed that without the traditional support of family members women have fewer options to talk about violence. A woman participant said, "Yes women are at risk (in Australia), they don't have family to protect them." Another participant said "Unfortunately women are at more risk (in Australia), they don't have family." Another participant said "In [our home country] women have family to defend them, here they know they have no one to defend them, they beat them, they are at risk here" and "Here there is no one to protect them, so they (men) beat them."

Almost the entire cohort of male and female participants considered separation from family (one manifestation of isolation) as a serious problem. The responses demonstrate the changed conditions for men and women in Australia and the difficulties facing refugee women and men in a society that offers comparatively reduced opportunities for reunion with family living in the country of origin, as well as social contact and engagement with communities in Australia.

When interaction with the wider Australian community did occur, refugees generally felt that it was a positive experience for them. Nevertheless, racist violence and intimidation was described in the study. Women, and in a few cases men, described being verbally assaulted; however, women described being physically assaulted including spat on and having head scarfs (Hijabs) torn off them. September 11 was viewed as the event that had fuelled an increase in racism. The western media has contributed

to the creation of negative images of Muslim people (Hassan, 2006) and this has undoubtedly had a profound impact on refugees and their capacity to experience social inclusion, as a result compounds the likelihood of isolation, and associated risks including that of violence from within the household.

Factors contributing to domestic violence were almost all interrelated with the refugee and settlement experience, although patriarchy and male dominance associated with cultures, traditional and contemporary, were pervasive features. Traditional cultural manifestations of patriarchy were consistent with the domestic violence and migrant literature (Bhuyan et al., 2005; Yoshioka et al., 2001). Our study highlighted the importance of a dual analysis of patriarchy as it presents in both traditional and contemporary contexts. The study supports the view of Sokoloff (2005) that although domestic violence affects individual women and often occurs in private homes it is culturally produced and emerges from the intersections of culture, class and gender. The interrelationship between the secondary status of women (often viewed differently from the perspectives of men and women participants in this study) and factors related to refugee status and experience were highlighted in our study and are evidenced throughout the following sections of this article.

ENGAGING WITH THE STATE

In contrast to the view that women are more at risk of domestic violence in Australia, an almost equal number of participants felt strongly that women were less at risk because it (domestic violence) is not legally permissible. Participants felt that women could use civil orders and the criminal justice system to prevent their partner's violent behaviour. Often it was men's awareness of the legal ramifications of domestic violence in Australia that was enough to deter them, and to give women confidence to challenge violence against them. A woman said, "I feel as though I can defend myself now." Another woman said, "Here (in Australia), men can't exercise the violence as much." Reflecting the view of others, a participant said women are less at risk in Australia "because the law protects those who are at risk." Many women thought that they have more protection from domestic violence in Australia. "I feel supported by the Government, my husband can not hit me as he used to," a woman explained. A woman said, "He used to severely abuse me physically now it is minimised to almost none."

Whilst there was evidence of women who had left violent relationships and were as a result safer and more satisfied, it was widely held by men and women that women who seek assistance for domestic violence usually have a negative experience as a result. A male participant said that women or men who seek assistance for domestic violence are betraying their culture. "Men and women who try to call for help for domestic violence are considered to be the betrayers of their own culture." A woman said something similar "those who ask for assistance are seen as the people who have changed their true culture." To be perceived by your own community to deny your culture can have socially alienating and potentially more serious consequences. This was viewed for many women as a risk not worth taking. For mainstream health and welfare service providers this is important knowledge. As Stewart (2005) explained in relation to refugee women, how a woman assesses her risks and relative safety might be very different to the sorts of risks that those of us who are not refugees usually think of. Women participants agreed that many women generally do not talk about their experiences of domestic violence and if they did, it would be to a friend or a family member. The opportunity for sharing problems is necessarily reduced when women are isolated from social networks, unfortunately a common occurrence for refugee women and a situation that was clearly reported in this study.

Women believed that if they sought assistance for domestic violence externally from within the mainstream community they would not be believed. The data support the view that most women try to cope alone for cultural reasons, predominantly shame and for fear of the isolation and poverty that they believed would affect them and their children if they did speak out (Yoshioka, 2003; Bui, 2003; Sharma, 2001). Women also said that there is a risk of increased violence from partners if women contact the police or talk with friends. A lack of trust in mainstream domestic violence services emerged, where seeking assistance would result in family breakdown or having to move the children from school. Women said that mainstream service providers should be able to speak languages other than English, and require an enhanced knowledge of cultural differences.

MARGINALIZED MEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Unemployment affecting men was correlated with family conflict and domestic violence. Referring to violence, a participant said, "My husband

is not working, sometimes we have family problem.” Another participant explained how her husband was not content in Australia because he could not get a job. Now they are divorced because he had become aggressive and abusive as a result of his dissatisfaction. Employment was articulated as fundamental to men’s identity and self-worth whilst simultaneously unemployment or under skilled employment affecting men was considered a widespread problem.

Women were generally of the view that men who are not occupied outside the home during the day are more likely to be dissatisfied with their lives and to be violent toward their partners. It is a truism that if men are at home during the day there is a greater opportunity for them to be violent toward their spouse if they choose to be. In this respect employment is a protective factor against domestic violence because it reduces opportunities for men’s violence.

Culture appeared to play a strong part in men’s attitudes and identities towards employment. In all of the countries represented, the men were traditional “bread winners.” The men talked about being “in control” as they supported their families financially, while the women were concerned with supporting their families emotionally. Failure to find a job commensurate with their knowledge and skills led many of the men to talk about being “depressed” and feeling “worthless.”

All of the men emphasized how important paid work was to them. As one man said, it is a source of power which can sustain his dignity, while another man added, “Work means life to me.” Work was seen by the men as symbolically representing them as “the head of the family.” Yet another man said, “As a head of the family, it’s important. A man should have a job all the time.” The importance of the breadwinner role was culturally determined. A number of men across the participating groups spoke about this role in relation to “our culture.” Thus, these gendered beliefs and practices were seen by the men as pertaining to their culture rather than to patriarchal beliefs and practices mediated through culture.

The research convincingly established that education and awareness of the mainstream Australian society, cultures and worldview were important factors in preventing violence in families. Women said that more educational opportunities designed for refugee women were specifically required. A woman said that “education leads to confidence for women.” In relation to knowledge and education during settlement, another woman participant said, “Those who understand the Australian way of life can cope with changes and support their families.”

With respect to refugee men and successful settlement, a male participant said that the men who cope with the challenges and difficulties are more educated, less strict with their religious beliefs and less rigid with adherence to traditional cultural norms. A male participant said that the “men who cope are clever, educated and enjoy life wherever they are.” Another participant said: “Those who understand the Australian way of life can cope with changes and support their families.” Echoing a view that men need positive role models the participant went on to say, “We learn from the ones who cope. Changes are important for a better life.”

TRAUMA AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Prior torture and trauma were commonly described in the context of current domestic violence. Considering the relationship between mental health and violence, a woman said that “men are becoming depressed and aggressive.” A participant said, “From my experience as a support worker, I find that many men who commit violence are affected by war trauma. Most of them have been imprisoned and have been at the frontline.” Refugees have necessarily experienced persecution in the country of origin. The number of participants involved in the study that had experienced trauma and torture in the country of origin was accordingly high. People who arrived as refugees continue to be affected by past torture or trauma in their lives. “Psychological effects are hard to forget” a woman participant emphasised. Trauma “causes alcoholism, psychosis, and violent behaviour,” said another. Reflecting the general view among women, a participant said that men who have been traumatised “turn to violence rather than leniency with partners to solve family problems.” Another woman said, “The hardship and trauma remain in their memory and affects their mental well being.”

Women who have experienced life in refugee camps—rape and hardship—often carry their abuse in silence and accordingly statistics often under-represent the extent of gender-based violence they have encountered (Jansen et al., 2004, p. 843). Nevertheless, our study showed that many refugee women had experienced trauma, hardship and rape prior to arrival; one woman disclosed having a child as a result of a rape. It is important to remember that the effects of gender-based violence, poverty and deprivation including lack of access to health services prior to arrival can continue to negatively affect women’s health and wellbeing during settlement (Kaplan and Webster, 2004).

Although the connection between torture and trauma and the male victim becoming the perpetrator of domestic violence was made in our study, it is pertinent to recognise that the women's cohort also experienced high levels of torture and trauma in the country of origin, without correlating evidence of them becoming aggressors. This supports an argument for a more complex analysis of the causes of domestic violence, involving an awareness of the effects of patriarchy and sanctioned violence against women by men with legitimised power and privilege.

ACCULTURATIVE PROCESSES

Social norms were viewed as dissimilar in Australia; which is socially more liberal than the countries represented in the study. It was found that some refugee men attend nightclubs and gamble more than prior to their arrival, and that women have opportunities outside the home, such as education and employment, that they did not have before. These changes were viewed as negative, causing or with the potential to cause violence and conflict in families. The general view from both genders was that cultural change associated with identity loss and loss of status as head of the house for men, and change associated with opportunities for women in employment and a more liberal lifestyle, was causing personal and relationship problems. A woman participant said, "Cultural clashes affect spousal relationships in a negative way—(it) ends up in separation and divorce."

Nevertheless, whilst many of the men felt disempowered by the changes to their status, there was a perception that many women become more aware of their rights and more empowered. Many women felt protected from domestic violence in Australia, both from the laws that can support them and from the increased opportunities provided to them to become more independent. In Australia, many refugee women found greater independence and opportunities than in the country of origin, and they reflected on those changes in a positive light. The positive changes related to the sense of independence that women experienced followed the breakdown of, in some cases violent, relationships, and through this lens the benefits associated with women's new found independence would be magnified. In contrast to this, the evidence that many women remained isolated, without social supports and felt more at risk of abuse in Australia underscores the importance of not approaching refugee and settlement issues in a general or universal

way, and for service providers to be aware of the multiple experiences for refugee women during settlement.

Many of the men did not accept changes in women's roles—either associated with what they witnessed of women in the broader Australian society, or reflected in the behaviour and opportunities encountered by their spouses. Some of the men perceived government intervention (such as social security, social support services and employment assistance for women) as destroying family life: In the words of one man, government was “making men less dominant and decisive in the family.” Another man said, “I am with the freedom of the individual as long as it helps the unity of the family.” One man commented, “My wife is more independent. I am no more the dominant one. The government and the society are always beside my wife's rights.”

Notwithstanding the men's resentment, most of the men said that they now shared domestic responsibilities and financial decisions equally. Role reversal that was divergent from traditional cultural expectations was again prominent. “Now it is more likely that men are obliged to do a lot of things. Women become decision makers contrary to our culture back home.”

Some men felt that this meant that they were no longer respected as men. As one man said, “In [country of origin] the man is the head of the house and women look after the children. However, in Australia, due to the system, there is lack of respect for the husband. Children do not respect the father either. In particular, if the couple divorce, the system does support and is mainly on the women's side.”

A few men regarded the changes to gender roles in a positive way. One man commented that in response to the effects of cultural change on gender roles he now dealt with his wife and children “in a fairer way.” Another man said they he now had a “better understanding of women's rights” and that he now “dealt with his children as friends and not as a dominant father.” These views were predominantly from educated men who were very positive about their lives and opportunities in Australia.

Education in refugee communities appeared strongly as a factor associated with adaptation and capacity to better manage social change. Cultural change favouring decreased rights for women is not something we envisage should, or will, occur in Australian society. In fact, patriarchy is the most strongly correlated factor in the incidence of domestic violence and therefore to advocate for less power for women is an absurd proposition. Nevertheless, the issue of refugee men's disempowerment and disaffection, linked to violence against women, is something that requires an urgent response from policy makers and settlement service

providers. Coping and managing with cultural change and how much it impacts on the refugee's sense of identity or changing identity in Australia is an area for further study. These issues can not be separated from a broader critique of structural factors such as unemployment and relative poverty, and the effects of torture and trauma, that continue to affect the wellbeing of refugees in Australia. In response to the importance of adaptation, a woman participant said, "Life changes, so you must change." Successful coping and adjusting was directly related to accessible education and contemporary social and cultural knowledge. Isolation and lack of support networks and social opportunities were subsequently an additional risk factor in adapting to cultural change.

THE CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

The research highlighted the importance of an in-depth appraisal of psychological, social and cultural factors in policies related to refugee wellbeing during settlement, reducing risks associated with domestic violence, and ensuring interventions reflect specific knowledge of the refugee experience. These contextual factors emerged at different sites, including the individual psychosocial level, group level community issues, and the need for interventions at a social and structural level. These levels are necessarily interrelated; however, it was advantageous to operationalize our findings within a multi-level framework.

Individual contextual factors included experiences of trauma, loss, anger, sadness, depression and anxiety. These were associated with negative experiences of settlement and could in effect reduce the likelihood of women seeking assistance for violence and impact on how men might act to prevent their violent behaviour. For both men and women, these psychological issues were seen as inhibiting opportunities for successful settlement. At an individual and group level, cultural dissonance and insufficient support to manage cultural change were related to vastly different belief conceptual dimensions (world view), causing significant problems for many people who arrived as refugees. Australia's individualism and materialism is at odds with worldviews emphasising collective wellbeing. Patriarchal gender roles and expectations and perceived liberty for women was raised a significant stressor in communities where men are traditionally responsible for decision making, and earning and managing money. The effect of unemployment on men and their identity was profound. These issues were viewed as related to disharmony in relationships and in some cases violence

against women. The intrinsic value of depleted social networks and leisure time combined to isolate those who arrived as refugees from positive social experiences as well as from seeking support and assistance from health and social welfare services.

At a group level, the capacity to share experiences with each other was reduced by isolation related primarily to low socioeconomic status, and unemployment; and lack of confidence in and capacity to connect with the broader community was related to lack of opportunities for education and inadequate English language skills. Inadequate knowledge of the broader culture and society was viewed as inadequately addressed by current orientation programs as part of the Integrated Humanitarian Support Scheme. The isolation of women from community supports and interventions was viewed as a risk factor for domestic violence.

At a structural level, the importance of acknowledging and valuing the skills and knowledge of refugee and humanitarian entrants was identified. Racism and racist intimidation emerged as a prominent issue inhibiting successful settlement, related to limiting employment opportunities and eroding the confidence and capacity, particularly of women, to adapt and live productively and well within the broader community. Racism promotes isolation, and for women this compounds the existing risk factor of isolation in domestic violence. People who arrived as refugees are aware of the negative portrayal and perceptions of them in the broader community. Structural change is therefore required to change community views and opinions. Our research team has identified additional evidence of a putative link between a perceived injustice and expressions of disaffection and anger. In effect, the research has shown that cultural dissonance, and marginalisation as a result of social and culture blind policies impacts negatively on the health of refugee communities and leaves them vulnerable to domestic violence and at risk of family breakdown. The social consequences of marginalisation, violence and family breakdown on the successful settlement of refugee communities extends beyond the wellbeing of those who arrived as refugees, to the wellbeing of all Australians.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

There is a need to widen services to make them more culturally appropriate and there is a requirement to develop models and practices of social change (Pratt and Sokoloff, 2005) that reflect the complexity of

issues that impact on the lives of refugees during settlement. Analysis of domestic violence in the refugee context requires a specific appreciation of patriarchy as it manifests through cultures, as a way of ensuring that the critique remains focused on the factors that place women at risk, rather than on pathologizing broader cultural frameworks. Human rights discourse reveals the collusion of male privilege, racism, colonialism and class privilege, and helps to facilitate a critique of our own intersected identities (Pratt and Sokoloff, 2005).

Whilst we acknowledge the impact and effect of the civil and criminal justice system in making women who arrived as refugees feel safer, we also recognise the effects of state-inflicted violence and the importance of promoting opportunities for genuine inclusion of refugees into society, access to its dominant epistemology, and its economy. There is a need for a more in-depth and concerted effort to welcome refugees into communities by ensuring absolute access to knowledge, the dominant language, education, and access to employment for men and women.

Social contexts that facilitate acculturation need to reflect genuine opportunities for inclusion, including the expulsion of racism and the promotion of respect and equality. The critique of western cultural lifestyles, particularly related to work, leisure and time, as well as the experiences of racism and exclusion from employment that those who arrived as refugees experienced should form part of a critique of expectations associated with “acculturation” or “integration” in refugee settlement policies and practices. Refugees should be able to discern the social norms they require from the dominant society and have their traditional cultural lifestyles, beliefs and norms promoted and protected in a system that does not continue to privileged dominant cultures or genders.

Importantly women need to access the laws and services to provide them with support and protection in cases of domestic violence, whilst refugee men and women should be able to re-establish cultural norms that they believe promote wellbeing. Ultimately, the issue of women’s rights and men’s power, and the schism between traditional cultural norms and contemporary rights for women will need to be addressed. The emphasis on moving toward a shared appreciation of gender equality among refugee men and women can be facilitated through a process that promotes access to education and social inclusion, and where refugee policies incorporates an understanding of the intersections of culture, traditions, class, gender and contemporary social contexts.

Increased resources for ethnic groups—particularly those welcoming new refugees—are required. The research emphasised the importance of Elders and Church leaders in assisting new families, and in supporting

couples that are experiencing conflict and violence. Religious and traditional structures, however, need to confront the cultural manifestations of patriarchy that put women at risk of domestic violence. They also need to be mindful of broader Australian social and legal expectations in relation to the rights of women, opportunities for the inclusion of women in the workforce and the law in relation to domestic violence.

People who arrived as refugees should be centrally involved in the development of policies and programs related to migration, settlement and to specifically addressing domestic violence. Strategic engagement of communities should be undertaken and reviewed to ensure effective engagement and impact from this target group is occurring. This study points to the need for a community-based and managed project concerning multi-level empowerment-based interventions to support refugee communities and to prevent domestic violence.

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Received: June 29, 2006

Revised: October 18, 2006

Accepted: December 8, 2006

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