



ethnic  
communities'  
council of  
victoria



# Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities

*CALD Communities Taking Action  
Against Family Violence*



**Family Violence Forum**

Wednesday, 5 August 2009

Multicultural Hub, Melbourne

[www.eccv.org.au](http://www.eccv.org.au)

Forum Report





Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (eccv) Inc. was established in 1974 as a voluntary community based organisation.

35 years later, eccv is a broadly based, statewide, peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities in Victoria.

The particular needs and objectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women are represented by the eccv's Women's Committee.

The committee aims to support the wellbeing of CALD women by promoting the contributions made by and addressing issues of concern to women from CALD backgrounds.



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## Forum Partners and Stakeholders



eccv wishes to thank the following for their assistance and support in staging the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Family Violence Forum*:

- Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service
- Victoria Police
- Office of the Attorney-General
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre
- MyriaD Consultants
- Office for Women, the Victorian State Government
- Victorian Multicultural Commission
- Domestic Violence service providers
- Multicultural communities



## Acknowledgements

The eccv wishes to acknowledge all the people who contributed to the forum on the day and those who provided advice, support and guidance in the development of the ideas that led to the decision to conduct a forum on the issue of family violence in CALD communities.

In particular, we would like to thank Maria Dimopoulos, principal of MyriaD Consultants who acted as facilitator on the day and provided ongoing guidance and support during the planning stage on a pro bono basis. She made a very significant contribution and for this we extend our sincere thanks.

We would also like to acknowledge the contribution made by our speakers including the Attorney-General the Hon Rob Hulls MP who gave a very powerful speech and the Chief Commissioner of Police, Mr Simon Overland who kept to his commitment to address the forum on a day when he could have been forgiven for cancelling out such was the pressure of other issues on his time.

Thank you to James Demetriou, Executive Director, Sports without Borders, Ms Lara Fergus, senior policy officer with the Office of Women in Victoria and Ms Carmel Guerra, Director for the Centre for Multicultural Youth all of whom addressed the forum. There were many other people to thank too, including Sarah Hunt who wrote the first draft of this report and those who chaired the various discussion 'streams' in the afternoon and of course our sincere thanks to all the eccv staff without whose help the forum could not have taken place.

Ross Barnett  
Director

Eugenia Grammatikakis  
Women's Policy Committee Convenor



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## Executive Summary

On Wednesday, 5 August 2009, eccv's Women's Policy Committee hosted a public forum at Melbourne's Multicultural Hub to address the growing concern about issues of family violence in CALD communities.

Opened by the Victorian Attorney-General, the Hon Robert Hulls, the *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Family Violence Forum* attracted over 150 attendees and an array of speakers from government, the private and the non-government organisation (NGO) sectors. The Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Simon Overland gave the keynote address.

Key aims of the family violence forum included:

- drawing out of current issues impacting communities relating to causes and impacts of family violence
- furthering awareness of existing domestic violence research and responses being undertaken at a state and national level
- identifying and developing recommendations around culturally appropriate *preventative strategies* to help address domestic violence issues impacting CALD communities.

A series of interactive breakout sessions were held to give participants an opportunity to discuss specific areas such as: education; local government; sports and youth; and the workplace.

As a result of the collective work conducted in the family violence forum, the eccv's Women's Policy Committee makes the following recommendations.

### Recommendations

1. Improved awareness programs directed at CALD communities about their rights and responsibilities and the law in relation to family violence.
2. Programs to encourage greater reporting of spousal and family abuse within CALD communities.
3. An expansion of prevention programs in sport aimed at CALD men and the creation of multilingual behavioural change learning aids.
4. The resourcing of programs aiming to promote greater equitable, non-violent non-discriminatory relations between men and women in CALD communities.
6. That multilingual information strategies be adopted to reach CALD women in the workforce advising them about their rights to a safe workplace free of bullying and intimidation.



7. That the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) work with local government authorities to ensure their front line staff can appropriately direct people to family violence services.

## I. Background

### I.1 Family Violence in the General Population

Family violence is the single largest cause of death, disability and disease in women aged 15-45 in Victoria.<sup>1</sup> As noted in the Victorian Government's *State Plan to Prevent Violence against Women (2009)*, women appear overwhelmingly as victims in recorded cases of relationship and acquaintance violence. Moreover, most violence against women occurs in the home or private setting, and is perpetrated by a man known to them, usually a partner or ex-partner.

#### What constitutes Family Violence?

Family violence includes physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse and controlling behaviour that occurs between family members. It is not a result of family tensions but rather an issue of power and control. That is, one person (usually a male) exerting power and control over another (usually female). It can include physical harm, sexual assault, emotional and economic abuse and may include:

- Unreasonably controlling a person by withholding money for reasonable living expenses where a person is dependent on them for financial support
- Threatening to harm another family member or pet in order to intimidate
- Racist taunts that inflict emotional harm
- Preventing contact with other family members or friends in order to torment the person.

The aforementioned definition does not discount the fact that women can be perpetrators, and men victims, or that violence occurs in same-sex relationships. However, compared with male victims, women are:



- Three times more likely to be injured as a result of violence

<sup>1</sup> VicHealth, Health Costs of Violence.



- Five times more likely to require medical attention or hospitalisation
- Five times more likely to report fearing for their lives.

With this in mind, the Victorian government has reiterated its commitment to reduce incidents of violence against women and families *before* they occur.

Unfortunately, isolating statistical data for the CALD community in Victoria has been shown to be problematic. For example, the 2004 report, *Women's Experience of Male Violence* notes lower levels of physical and sexual violence reported by Australian CALD community women, but adds that this may not necessarily reflect fewer occurrences, but a lower rate of reporting of occurrences by CALD women to social researchers as well as authorities.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 Family Violence in the CALD Community

Researchers generally acknowledge that a reluctance to disclose incidents of violence and abuse within domestic settings complicates the gathering of accurate data with this tendency a particular concern among CALD communities<sup>3</sup>. A 2006 Victorian government report identified that women from CALD backgrounds are more likely than 'mainstream' Australian women to be victims of violence and sexual assault, or to experience trauma or torture including rape and sexual violence. The report also concluded that experiences of domestic violence are far less likely to be reported by these women than other English speaking women.<sup>4</sup>

In relation to sexual violence specifically, factors that contribute to the non-reporting of incidents amongst CALD women include:

- Personal issues
- cultural and religious factors
- informational / language barriers
- institutional / structural barriers.

These factors can vary amongst different CALD communities. Another report<sup>5</sup> shows that in the Sudanese community for instance this reluctance could be seen as 'cultural'. The report found that amongst the Sudanese community in Victoria "... the constructions of violence are markedly different when compared to Australian culture and Victorian law". The conflict resolution within the community which may take place using in-laws or elders as would typically be the case in Southern Sudan, "does not actually focus on the violence itself but rather the problem that led to the violence".

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<sup>2</sup> Jenny Mouzos and Toni Makkai, *Women's Experiences of Male Violence: Findings from the Australian Component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)*, Canberra: The Australian Institute of Criminology, (2004), p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Lee R M & Stanko E A, (2003). *Researching violence: essays on methodology and measurement*. London: Routledge p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Human Services (2006) *Building Partnerships between Mental Health, Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services*, DHS (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Kasidis, V, (2009), *It Shouldn't Hurt to be Family: Sudanese Women in Victoria and Family Violence* Commissioned by Telmo Languiller MP, Member for Derrimut.



### 1.3 Service Awareness and Access

Research into violence against women also tends to indicate that people from CALD communities, especially those from newer communities, are generally less well informed than the general population about the support services available and less prepared to access them. For example, research undertaken by VicHealth in 2006 identified extremely low levels of awareness of family violence services amongst immigrant and refugee communities. This was particularly evident amongst more newly arrived communities.<sup>6</sup>

The Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service also identified a range of barriers to access for immigrant and refugee women, including those in rural and regional areas of Victoria.<sup>7</sup>

Focus groups held with women and service providers revealed that:

- The majority of the women had knowledge of what services were available to them if they were in a violence situation
- Most problems were kept within the home, however, if women were intending to disclose situations of violence then confidentiality was a necessity
- When women did take action, they were far more likely to approach mainstream services such as the police than crisis or domestic violence agencies
- CALD women in rural areas faced additional obstacles including language difficulties, xenophobic community attitudes, fears about immigration or residency status, and physical and cultural isolation
- Services themselves can present an even further obstacle because of their approach
- Few family violence service workers come from immigrant backgrounds and there needs to be cultural sensitivity training
- Local women are afraid to approach services or are unprepared to trust the staff.

As a consequence, eccv believes that core priorities for those working in the migrant and multicultural sector must include:

- improving awareness and understanding among CALD communities of fundamental human rights and responsibilities as well as prevailing community standards regarding the appropriate treatment of others
- improving awareness and understanding of what constitutes a breach of these human rights and community standards
- encouraging greater reporting of spousal and family abuse within the home.

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<sup>6</sup> VicHealth (2006) Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women.

<sup>7</sup> IWDVS (2005) The right to be Safe from DV: Immigrant and Refugee Women in Rural Victoria.



## 1.4 CALD Children

Along with the unique issues associated with CALD women and domestic violence, CALD children who directly or indirectly experience family violence face a raft of extra issues not experienced by children in the wider community. A 2008<sup>8</sup> study conducted by the Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service identified that CALD children – in addition to the lowered self esteem, behavioural problems, anxiety, fear and attachment experienced by many children in family violence situations – also may:

- Experience personalised trauma associated with having to interpret for family members
- Have witnessed or experienced violence in their homelands
- Spent time in refugee camps or places of detention
- May have lost their family network, extended family and friends
- Experience the personal challenge of being in a new country with limited friends and having to learn new cultural norms
- Experience the community challenge of discrimination and racism at school and in the community
- Do not have access to culturally appropriate services.

These challenges are unique to the CALD community, and add to the traumas already experienced by children in family violence situations.

Professionals supporting CALD children have a duty to provide them with an opportunity to express themselves freely in a language of their choice. Those children need their stories to be heard in the context of family violence and like all children who experience trauma they deserve their stories to be heard and understood so they can start the process of healing.



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<sup>8</sup> IWDVS (2008) What about the Children? The Voices of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children affected by Family Violence, Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service.



## 2. Legal Framework

According to formal research and anecdotal evidence, awareness is extremely low among CALD communities about laws relating to family violence. In Victoria, the most pertinent law is the Family Violence Protection Act, which came into effect in 2008.

### **The Family Violence Protection Act has:**

- Broadened the definition of family violence so that it includes economic and emotional abuse, as well as other types of threatening and controlling behaviour
- Given police more powers so they can respond more quickly and effectively to family violence
- Made it easier for victims of family violence to adjust tenancy arrangements to enable them to remain in their homes if they wish
- Improved the court system to encourage greater reporting by victims, including restricting perpetrators from cross-examining their victims
- Provided better protection for vulnerable Victorians.

Along with other initiatives to address this issue, the Victorian government launched its *Enough* public awareness campaign in partnership with the NGO sector to increase awareness of the Act and educate diverse communities on what support and protections are available.

Nevertheless, there continues to be a range of barriers that hinder access to legal redress. These barriers include:

- The legal system lacks sensitivity to the particular needs of CALD women, either in provision of culturally appropriate services or in the dissemination of information about the legal system and how to access available services
- Insufficient attention to gender issues in legal interpreting
- Inadequacy of legal training for migrant / ethnic workers
- CALD women's lack of access to interpreters, in particular female interpreters, legal service providers and translated information about the law and their legal rights
- CALD women's limited financial ability to fund their own legal actions.<sup>9</sup>

The forum noted that since 2002, work has been underway in Victoria to design an effective, integrated police service and criminal justice response to family violence. A Strategic Framework, due in 2010, will act to imbed changes and continue the reform

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<sup>9</sup> QWE report, (1994), p.127.



process towards an integrated family violence system. These changes focus on a preventative approach and seek to prevent violence against women before it starts. Priority areas for change include:

- Education
- Local Government, Health and Community Services
- Sports
- Workplaces and
- Media, Arts and Popular Culture.

The specific needs of particular groups including CALD communities are recognised within the Strategy. For example the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) has commissioned research on how primary prevention strategies can be effectively tailored to meet the needs of CALD communities.

eccv recognises that in order for Victorian laws to be effective for the CALD community these new strategic plans need to be put into place across government departments, police and the NGO sector to give better access to protection for CALD community members as soon as practicable.

### 3. Keynote Speakers

#### **The Hon Robert Hulls MP Victorian Attorney-General**

The forum was opened by the Hon Robert Hulls MP, who said family violence in any form was unacceptable in the community and the government was responding to the problem.

He highlighted the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 as a key initiative of the Brumby Labor Government. The Act broadens the definition of family violence to include physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse.

The other initiative Hulls highlighted was the \$1.5 million *Enough* campaign, which is an awareness campaign to promote the 'no family violence' message. The *Enough* campaign also features a website, which will feature information in more than 30 languages.

Hulls urged CALD communities to support the government's responses to family violence, and suggested that the safety of domestic violence victims lay in a whole of community response to the issue.





**Mr Simon Overland**  
**Chief Commissioner – Victoria Police**



Mr Overland gave the keynote address at the forum. He highlighted the Family Violence Act has given police new powers to respond to incidents of family violence. This includes the family violence safety notice, which gives police new powers to remove perpetrators from the family home with greater ease.

Mr Overland said police have a lot of work to do to bring incidents of family violence in the CALD community down as far as possible, given they are much higher than in the rest of the population.

He also highlighted how police need to be trained to respond with cultural sensitivity in CALD communities, as many CALD community members come from countries where the relationship with the police force is very different. Often in CALD communities, police are seen as the greatest threat to safety and welfare, as opposed to being the protectors of it.

**Mr James Demetriou**  
**Executive Director – Sports Without Borders**

James Demetriou, Executive Director of Sports Without Borders, spoke about his passion for sport as a tool to empower young people from diverse backgrounds.

Sports Without Borders is a not for profit organisation dedicated to assisting young people from newly arrived refugee and first and second generation migrant backgrounds to integrate into their local communities by facilitating their participation in structured sporting activities. Initiatives of Sports Without Borders include:



- Arranging transport and travel for the Sunshine Heights Cricket Club
- Providing international scholarships to the Arsenal International Soccer Festival
- Supporting the AFL Unity Cup
- Helping the Victorian Iraqi Soccer Club with registration fees and gear

Mr Demetriou said Sports Without Borders aims to expand its programs to help ethnically diverse communities engage with sport. Next year the organisation will expand its ambassador program, organise a sports microbank and develop training for migrant and refugee community leaders.



**Ms Lara Fergus**  
**Senior Policy Officer – Office of Women**

Ms Fergus' presentation focused on the Victorian government's State Plan for the Prevention of Violence Against Women. The state plan will be launched in late November 2009 after consultation with non-government working groups and government policy advisory groups. The key underlying causes of violence against women in the plan were identified as: unequal power between men and women; gender stereotyping; and cultures of violence.



The plan highlights that addressing this violence has the long term goal of promoting gender-equitable, non-violent communities, relationships and organisations. This can be achieved through multi-level, reinforcing strategies.

The frameworks for action that were identified by Ms Fergus were:

- Women and violence, and its causes as 'multi-level'; individual, community and social
- Need for reinforcing strategies across these levels and in multiple settings
- Short, mid and long-term goals
- Expected outcomes to inform ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Ms Fergus also highlighted that a long term change to cultural attitudes to violence was needed. These included:

- Gender-equitable, non-violent communities and organisations
- Respectful and non-discriminatory relationships.

The government intends to target the key areas of; education and training; local government; health and community services; sports and recreation; workplaces; and media, arts and popular culture when addressing prevention of violence against women.

**Ms Carmel Guerra**  
**Director – Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)**

CMY is a statewide organisation that advocates for the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Ms Guerra spoke about the importance of prevention and early intervention strategies in addressing family violence, in particular, including young men as part of a prevention strategy and the role sport can play as a setting for addressing issues of family violence.





CMY sees that sport can contribute significantly to the quality of life and sense of community for young people, particularly those from a migrant and refugee background. It can assist in addressing young people's need for a sense of belonging, enhance community connections and reduce feelings of isolation.

The sports sector is an important setting for any prevention work but a key consideration is the cultural divide between cultures, the purpose of formalised sport and the culture and purpose of the NGO and community organisations involved in sport. The very nature of formalised sport and its tendency to be competitive and elitist can work against sport also being a tool for social connectedness.

The work of CMY has demonstrated that if partnerships are formed, mutual outcomes agreed and a community development approach programs can utilise the sport and recreation setting as an excellent place for building social networks and modeling respectful behaviours.

#### **4. Breakout Groups**

The participants discussed strategies for preventing family violence in CALD communities through interactive breakout sessions in the specific areas of; education; local government; sports and youth; and the workplace.

Each breakout group aimed to discuss:

- Key areas where family violence prevention strategies could be applied in CALD communities
- Violence prevention best practice models that have been shown to succeed.

The questions provided to each group to stimulate discussion were:

- What is the role of community leaders in preventing violence?
- How can the 'system' best support CALD women in reporting family violence?
- How do we overcome the claim sometimes made by men, and passed on to boys that violence is "Okay, it's a part of our culture"?
- What are some examples of approaches that have worked in CALD communities to change boys' attitudes in schools?
- What specific strategies are we using in the education area that work particularly well for CALD communities?

The discussion in each breakout group was free form and guided by two facilitators. Each breakout group produced a written summary of the ideas that emerged from the workshop. From the written summaries, each produced one to three recommendations, which are presented here in each group's results.



## 4.1 Sports and Youth Stream



The theme of the sports stream was how sport can play a role in more equal male / female relations.

The facilitator of the session was Brett Tomlinson. The speakers of the session were Hala Abdelnour, project officer of the Ethnic Youth Council from Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre and Brett Tomlinson, coordinator of the Men's Behaviour Change program at Kildonan Uniting Care Reservoir.

The sports and youth stream did not provide a recommendations poster.

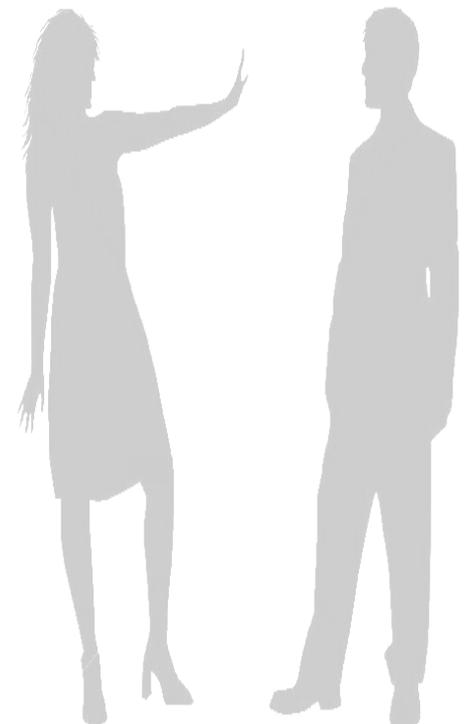
## 4.2 Education Stream

The key theme for the education breakout session was working with men and boys to educate and model positive family relationships.

The session was facilitated by Danny Blay. The session speakers were Ikani Taliai, former public officer from Tongan Association of Victoria and Akoc Manheim, director of Sudanese Lost Boys Association.

The key recommendations made by the education stream were:

- Programs need to be more localised
- Greater transport assistance to existing programs
- Stricter law enforcement against offenders including punitive measures
- Consistency in law enforcement methods
- Behaviour change management (suitably promoted) for CALD communities
- More Victoria Police multicultural liaison officers are needed
- Programs must target the underlying causes of domestic violence against CALD women





The stream also suggested effective methods of addressing domestic violence include:

- Sharing of information across localities
- Empowering CALD women
- Using the resources of peak bodies such as Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Local Governance Association to ensure a consistent approach across all local councils
- Providing information to residents
- Reporting by all service providers who work with women and children.



Victorian Police Chief Commissioner Simon Overland addresses the eccv *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities Family Violence Forum*.

### 4.3 Workplace Stream

The workplace stream focused on modelling positive and respectful relations between men and women in the workplace. In particular, the group discussed what specific strategies could be used in the workplace for CALD communities.

The facilitator for the session was Nazeem Hussein. The speaker for the session was Ellen Kleimaker, research and policy officer from Victorian Trades Hall Council.

The workplace stream made the following observations about workplace violence:





#### **4.3.1 Workplace violence on the agenda**

- Workplace violence is not on the agenda for research or change, nationally and internationally
- Women find it more difficult to refer to violence in the workplace as violence, and still called it bullying or harassment
- Women can be considered 'problem employees' and this can further isolate them; employer training and awareness is a key to helping female employees
- Employers have to role model desirable behaviours.

#### **4.3.2 Safety at work**

- 'Safe at Work?' (2005), produced by the Office of Women's Policy, is an important reference for women's experience of violence in the workplace
- Male authority figures use violence to subordinate their female staff members
- The OH&S Act focused on physical risks and impact to physical health and under the Act women's traditional work areas are perceived as 'safe'; the risks women face to their emotional health are not covered by the Act
- Casualisation of the workforce has perpetuated violence against women.

#### **4.3.3 Financial aspects of workplace violence**

- Parallels can be made between financial violence at work and the violence in intimate partner relationships
- Profit is a barrier to violence prevention because it prevents education in the workplace
- When men have workplace injuries there is less impact on the household than if a woman is injured. This is because a woman's injury has a higher impact on overall family household functioning.

The workplace session made the following recommendations:

#### **4.3.4 Outreach and service advocacy and involvement in the workplace**

- Information and material advertised in the workplace
- Multilingual publications.

#### **4.3.5 Workplace culture that promotes non-violent relationships**

- Targeting men and women with disabilities in the workplace



- Targeting management in particular
- Targeting male perpetrators of violence in the workplace

#### **4.3.6 Industrial relations laws**

- Casualisation of contracts increases the incidents of violence
- Frame it as a human rights issue
- Human rights charter to be used with public authorities – transfer charter to public authorities
- Accident compensation needs to be increased and include stress, which is currently very hard to claim against.

#### **4.4 Local Government Stream**

This breakout theme was strengthening local government responses to research showing a prevalence of family violence in some areas.

The session was facilitated by Maria Piu from Victoria Police. The session speakers were Amira Rahmanovic, education and training manager from the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health and Georgie Hill, coordinator of Safer Communities and Health Promotion at the City of Maribyrnong.

The key recommendations made by the local government stream were:

- Keep information on support services general
- Repeat events to establish rapport and trust
- Outreach programs targeting women at location
- Include follow up

The group identified some problems in addressing family violence, such as:

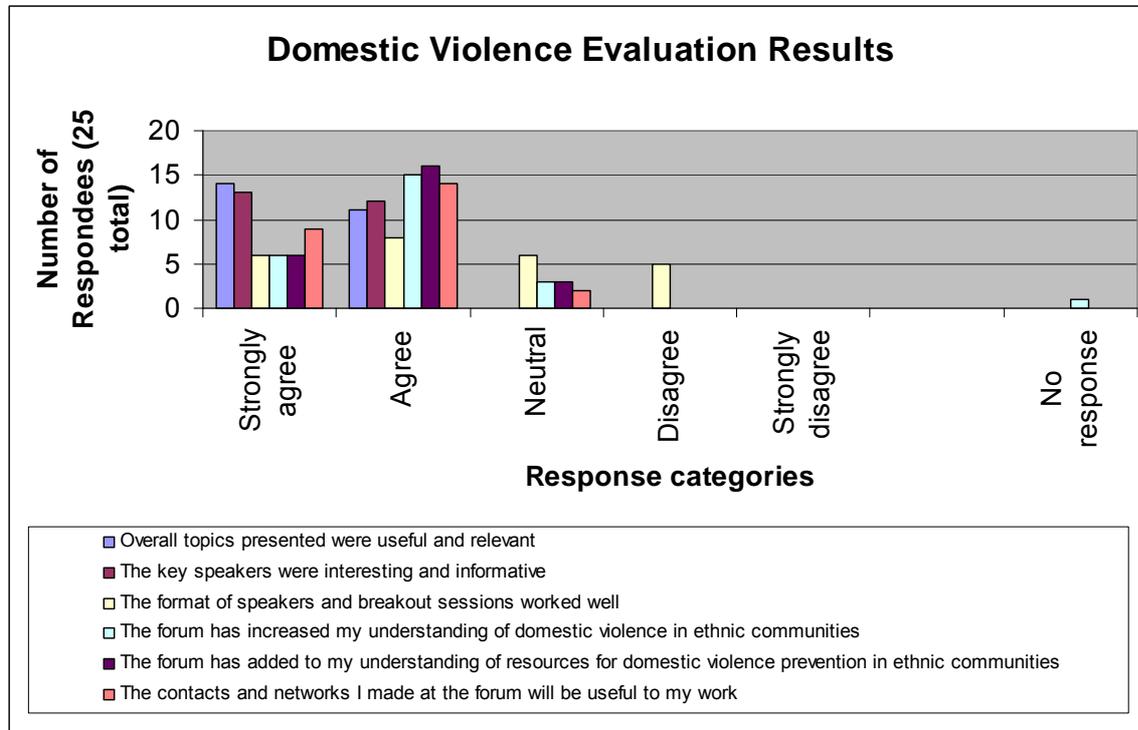
- Level of disclosure is generally low
- Geographic transport constraints
- Accessibility and affordability of services (especially in rural areas)
- Local councils are unaware of services in their own areas.

## **5. Forum Evaluation**

The forum was well attended with over 150 attendees, with many more requests for attendance than space available at the venue. Each participant was invited to provide feedback on the forum in the form of a feedback sheet.



The graph below demonstrates the results of the feedback sheet, highlighting that overall the forum has helped its participants to better understand and respond to family violence.



Furthermore, participants indicated they would like more information on:

- Improved capacity for Victoria Police and others to visit community organisations
- Violence in Indian communities, funding, networking
- A female speaker about Issues of access to law/justice
- Information for victims and respondents to be translated into different languages
- Men's behavioural change learning aids in multiple languages
- Information that CALD families can take away with them.

The forum participants also made a number of specific comments about the forum, which will help to shape the direction of future forum initiatives.

- More time needed to be allowed for group discussions and feedback in order to better develop the breakout topics.
- Some speakers needed a slightly different focus to their presentation to enhance their capacity to engage the audience in debate.
- Need community members to be supported to speak at length with organisations such as Victoria Police.



- Sporting codes need to work with domestic violence groups to help provide solutions to the problem.
- Overall the forum was a success and we need to develop more forums in the near future.
- Great to see the whole of government response with local and creative responses. Also excellent to have gender, power and control as the basis for common understanding.
- Well organised, interesting and informative. It is good to see progress is being made in domestic violence prevention.
- More time for individual speakers.

The eccv welcomes the feedback which indicates that overall the forum was successful in raising awareness and discussion on the issue. eccv has noted the need for more concise objectives in the breakout sessions as well as more time for groups to give recommendations.

Participants indicated an interest in holding future forums on the following topics:

- Children, disability, mental health and sexuality in CALD communities
- Men's behaviour change training
- Young people engaging in education and how to prevent them dropping out of the system
- The challenges of addressing domestic violence in rural communities
- How to close the gap on cultural beliefs and the prevention of family violence.

The eccv Women's Policy Committee has closely noted these suggestions, and they will inform further events and research pursuits of the committee. The eccv invites further feedback on the forum in order to enhance its capacity to create new events.







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