Insights into adapting to change: women from new and emerging communities

Intern Research Paper

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the *Voice of Multicultural Victoria*. As the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For 40 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

We aim for a culturally diverse and harmonious society that is just, fair and inclusive where all people have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to, community life. We advocate for freedom, respect, equality and dignity for multicultural communities and strive with others, to build a strong, vibrant Victorian community.

Contents

Foreword

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is pleased to be able to present the following insights, which are largely the work of Zandra Carino an ECCV intern. This paper was submitted in partial fulfilment of her undergraduate degree at RMIT. ECCV supports interns as they grapple with the issues that arise for people of a culturally and linguistically diverse background and in this particular case, issues that may arise for women from new and emerging communities in Victoria.

The purpose of the paper is to highlight the important issues raised by women who have experience providing services to women from new and emerging communities in Victoria and have an in-depth knowledge of the issues they face. Consultations took place with health and multicultural service organisations that provide support to women from new and emerging communities in Victoria. Semi-structured community interviews were conducted with five participants working in the multicultural services sector.

Whilst this paper provides valuable insights about women from culturally diverse backgrounds adapting to life in Victoria, an intern's time is limited therefore this paper is not intended to be a comprehensive literature review, or the result of an extensive consultation process.

The views presented are views of individuals and not representative of the organisations to which they belong.

Eddie Micallef
Chairperson

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Considerable Australian research exists regarding the settlement experiences for people of a refugee background, mostly identifying issues in areas of employment, education and health. Limited research exists however, regarding women from new and emerging communities and the issues they face when settling in Australia.

Stratton and Ang[1] have observed that a person's self-identity is constructed, to a significant degree, by the perceptions, expectations and responses of those around them, including those within and outside of their cultural community.

Upon arrival in Australia, and during the initial settlement phase, women can find themselves confronted with a variety of stressful demands. These might include finding a home for her family; being a single parent in a new community; coping with changes in family dynamics; and dealing with language barriers. Women may therefore experience strong feelings of isolation, low morale and depression.

This intern research paper aims to provide a general insight into issues facing women from new and emerging communities. It also paints a general picture of how such women may see themselves in the Australian community; whether they chose to maintain their traditional culture, adopt a bicultural identity, or reject both cultures altogether. The following sections highlight the areas in which women from new and emerging communities could be better supported including cultural adaptation, health, justice and legal system, housing, employment and settlement.

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[1]Stratton, J. and Ang. I (1994) 'Multicultural Imagined Communities: Cultural Difference and National Identity in the USA and Australia

1. Use of Terminology

ECCV defines new and emerging communities as those groups that:

- have recently settled in Australia
- are small in number but with a significant increase in the previous five years
- lack sufficient infrastructure resources relative to established ethnic communities.[2]

ECCV notes that people from new and emerging communities may experience some or all of the following:

- lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources, relative to more established communities
- are more vulnerable than established communities as they are often from a refugee background and have experienced displacement due to civil unrest
- have low levels of education and workforce skills due to displacement
- have limited English language proficiency
- are unfamiliar with mainstream government services that are available in Australia and are less likely to be able to locate services that can help them meet their basic needs
- experience employment and job advancement barriers
- face difficulties gaining recognition for overseas qualifications.[3]

The term "New and Emerging" can be applied to these communities for a time period of up to one generation; however, the needs of these communities can exceed this period.

2. Cultural Adaptation

Women from new and emerging community backgrounds often feel underrepresented and undervalued in their new community. This may stem from many issues including, a language barrier with the local community and the absence of a strong support network. While husbands and sons are expected to find employment to support the family, the woman is often left with 'traditional' maternal duties of caring for the children and looking after the home. Without active social interaction and community participation, these factors may exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness.

2.1   'Otherness'

As Pinson, Arnot and Candapa (2010) described, 'refugees and asylum seekers today are often seen as aliens, strangers and the ultimate *others* in society'. Generally, a feeling of not being a part of a society from the beginning of the migration process can traumatise and pave a way for continuing feelings of 'otherness' by women especially from refugee backgrounds. Stakeholder consultations suggests that for men, when a host country and its ideals do not live up to their own expectations, physical activity such as sport may be seen as an outlet of escape for letting out frustration and angst for these situations. For women however, some may live in self-imposed silence because it is difficult for them to find support with a friend or relative who is experiencing the same issues, or feel they are embarrassed to speak to anyone because of their low English language proficiency.

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[2] James Jupp AM, *Defining New and Emerging Communities* in Australian Mosaic Issue 24, March 2010 p10-12 and Policy Document FECCA New and Emerging Communities Policy *Supporting New and Emerging Communities to Participate in and Contribute to Australian Society* 2010
[3] Adapted from FECCA New and Emerging Communities Policy Statement 2010

Western Australian research (Casimoro 2007) about resettlement examined issues around the isolation and insecurities of Muslim women. It noted that women from new and emerging communities may be more susceptible to feelings of being 'the other' due to visible differences such as their cultural dress not being interpreted/imagined as being typically 'Australian'. These feelings of exclusion may stem from the idea that women do not feel welcome and despite moving to Australia, even up to a decade ago, do not feel they could call themselves Australian. This can be exacerbated for women of Muslim faith, who may find themselves subject to significant scrutiny, prejudice and suspicion. As pointed out by Casimiro, Muslim refugee women encounter additional challenges as members of a religious minority in Australia whose perceived religious dogmatism is under attack in a avowedly secular society".[4]

The community interview participants suggested that, although many women may appear to be adapting to life in Australia, they do not feel accepted in the Australian community and therefore cannot easily identify themselves as Australian.

2.2 'Sameness'

Despite the diversity that exists, both between and within new and emerging communities, they are often perceived or represented as one homogenous group. Women from diverse new and emerging communities feel strongly about their particular culture and heritage, especially when migrating to a new country; and yet they are often perceived as one homogenous group, especially for those of a refugee background.[5] A recurrent theme in the community interviews was that women from new and emerging communities disliked the idea of being grouped as 'African' for example. A majority of the women said that there needed to be understanding and awareness that there is a vast range of cultural, community and religious identities that women from the African continent identify with. One woman expressed:

> *People see Africa as a country when it's not. It's filled with different countries, religions, races, communities and tribes just like Asia or Europe. You can't understand each culture if you don't differentiate these things.*

In order for the Australian community to avoid this 'collective grouping', more public education and understanding is needed about these different countries.

2.3 Tradition versus new culture

A common fear that is expressed by people from new and emerging communities is losing one's culture and heritage. This can result in women holding more firmly to their cultural identities, to feel a sense of continuity and become more at peace with their new environment. Conflict sometimes arises when children who grow up in Australia, want to culturally accept Australian customs as part of their identity and move away from, or reject elements of their parent's culture and expectations. What may result is pressure for the child to adopt the culture of the mother which may conflict with a desire to be accepted by peers and adopt an Australian cultural identity. This can result in a loss of cultural identity altogether.

Research shows that young women from new and emerging communities may face challenges that come with challenges associated with changing gender roles and expectations. A young woman, for

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[4] Casimiro, S. et al. 2007, Isolation and insecurity: resettlement issues among Muslim refugee women in Perth, Western Australia. Australian Journal of Social Sciences, Vol 42, N1.

[5] Allimant, A. et al. 2013. Refugee women in housing stress and at risk of homelessness, Parity, Vol 26, N2.

example, may have ambitions of studying and obtaining a tertiary qualification. Though she has the right to education, 'many young people, especially girls, felt they were discouraged from pursuing higher education'[6]. On the other hand, cultural values that women should not need to study but should remain home and maintain a maternal role in the family may affect a young woman's attitude to studying. What might result is that she feels resentment towards both cultures, and later rejects the desire to belong to any culture altogether.

2.4 Bi-cultural identity

The topic of bi-cultural Identity was passionately expressed by the interviewees especially by those who had experienced first-hand their identity struggle between their country of origin and Australia. One participant said:

> 'marry the two cultures together, they need to let women be independent and earn that living and see what she can do. For most of the time, the doors get closed really quickly. Some girls are married very young and it's a way to be independent sometimes, to marry a man means to be independent from their family, to own their own home'.

Importantly, when speaking about identity many of the participants referred to the youth and its importance of moulding a bi-cultural identity when they are young.

2.5 Intergenerational dynamics

Changing family dynamics and challenges can occur across all Australian families. Adapting to change in family dynamics is one of the few challenges that equally impact the children and parents from new and emerging communities. In a way, a parent's interaction and closeness with their home community represents their cultural ties and communal identity. It is usually the parent that introduces the child to the wider community and becomes the primary link between the two. As a parent who is seen as the provider, the carer, the primary link between community and family, it can be a difficult challenge adapting to a society without being able to communicate with others where English language proficiency is an issue.

As such, the responsibility, or 'burden' of being the primary link, falls to the child, as they usually adapt and attain English language skills easier and much quicker than the parents. A change in family dynamics when moving to another country means that it is now the child that is the primary link between community and parent and can often lead to the parents feeling disempowered and children taking on more responsibility.

2.6 Gender roles

Dependency sometimes based on cultural traditions poses challenges in families.[7] In some cultures for a woman to be independent from her parents, she will find a husband and raise a family but for a woman who chooses to be independent and autonomous, she risks being excluded from her community, bringing shame to her family and being shunned from society completely. Divorce from a partner may also be highly stigmatised in some new and emerging communities.

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[6]African Australians: Human Rights and Social Inclusion Project
[7]Kambarami, M. 2006

When these practices are placed within a different cultural context and women oppose these traditions, problems sometimes arise between husband and wife. A male who identifies himself primarily as the 'breadwinner' of the family and who is used to the construct of a woman relying on him for financial support, may find it difficult to accept these changes. 'Many of the women complained that their husbands were threatened by the woman's increasing autonomy and independence.'[8]

Daughters may be supervised more closely and their activities outside the home may be more restricted. At the same time, they are frequently assigned more responsibilities within the home. Younger women often faced with her changing body and puberty are also challenged with conflict between her culture's role as a 'dutiful daughter' but also wanting to fit into the westernised culture by dating and interacting with the opposite gender. One participant described that there is no Australian role model that young women can look up to and therefore they look to online for guidance.

> *'They go on YouTube and social media where they use African-Americans in the rap videos to look up to. Young people are quite lost; they find it hard to take on the Australian identity you know. Their identity is rejected by Australia even if they have Australian citizenship'.*

3. Justice and Legal System

The justice and legal system of Australia is especially significant for women from new and emerging communities. In order to know what is acceptable in a particular context, they must be able to understand their rights and feel confident asserting them in the workplace, in public spaces and in their homes. Reticence remains a challenge for all women, across communities, many of whom do not know, or are reluctant to assert their rights. Women from culturally diverse backgrounds are more vulnerable when they are not aware of their rights and are not knowledgeably equipped to access legal services.

3.1 Awareness of rights

A lack of awareness of legal rights for women from new and emerging community backgrounds may mean that women will disregard issues such as gender discrimination as a cultural custom in Australia. This is a significant problem as it may cause women from new and emerging communities to become more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination if they are not aware of their rights; specifically in the workplace or when attending job interviews and participating in religious events.

Another important issue is their lack of awareness regarding formal complaint mechanisms that leaves women from new and emerging communities vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace.

There is also the issue of women who may have a desire to learn about their legal rights but are unable to find services that can assist. For example, accessible and high-quality in-language legal and rights-based information resources can be hard to find and in some cases may not exist.

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[8]Baird, Martha and Joyceen S. Boyle 2011

3.2 Reporting of family violence

A participant noted that family violence can be an issue, as in all communities; not only referring to physical violence but also passive forms of family violence, that often go unnoticed. Specifically, she referred to scenarios of mothers who were unwell and they were still expected to perform all the maternal duties such as cooking and cleaning the house as the 'female of the household'. These expectations from husbands and sons are placed heavily on the female. More commonly community understandings of family violence generally include notions of physical assault[9], to the exclusion of other forms of abuse such as verbal, emotional, financial, sexual and controlling behaviours, as these have been found not to be understood as family violence.[10]

Changes in intergenerational dynamics noted earlier can lead to forms of family violence in recently arrived families. Further, the impact of unemployment and/or responses to trauma on men are strongly correlated as being related to family conflict and family violence. Alcohol and gambling are also strongly associated with family violence.[11]

Women from new and emerging communities are less likely to report family violence for many reasons including:[12]

- being afraid to report it in case of retribution
- immigration status or visa dependency
- unaware of available services
- lack of information about legal rights
- loss of financial security
- language barriers
- a lack of self-confidence that comes from being a victim of family violence
- fear of authority
- shame and
- fear of isolation from their cultural community.

Fear of authority can be a result of negative experiences with law enforcement officers, from their past or present country. For example, a woman who recently moved to Australia may have had experiences in the past where they had approached a law enforcement official and the case was not treated with sensitivity or consideration. Negative experiences in the past may prevent women from reporting any other misconduct in the long term therefore it is important for law enforcement officials to show integrity and understanding for women.

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[9] Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, (2006), Rural Research Report, p 8.

[10] InTouch: Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, (2010), "I lived in fear because
I knew nothing" Barriers to the Justice System Faced by CALD Women Experiencing Family Violence, p 15.

[11] IWDVS, (2006), Refugee Settlement, Safety and Wellbeing: Exploring Domestic and Family Violence in Refugee Communities, p4.

[12] Research on migrant domestic violence can be found 'Strengthening CALD communities to educate: Family violence justice and protection services, Hauser K. 2011

These issues are compounded if the women live in a rural community.[13] Further, maintaining the integrity of the family unit can become an imperative for women from new and emerging communities. The Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service noted "migrant women are often under extreme pressure to keep the family together in a situation where other supports are absent, in a context where English is a second language and the culture and legal system of the new country are not well understood".[14]

3.3 Family and child protection

Understanding family and child protection laws are a key concern for women from new and emerging communities. They feel that the laws are not culturally sensitive to individuals of the community and often think that they are not sensitive to the issues facing women today. Many are not aware of the rights for children who are 16 and under, and their responsibilities as 18 year olds. One participant noted that women were not necessarily aware of what their responsibilities were considering their children's schooling in Australia:

> *'A lot of the parents when asked to attend parent interviews don't attend. Mum's don't understand sometimes what the expectations are for kids participating in school programs, expectations of the kids and their homework, they don't know that there are zones for applying at a school, these basic things that we take for granted.'*

4. Housing

Looking for housing and accessing services to help with finding a house is often a daunting task, yet women from new and emerging communities have no choice but to exhaust measures to find a house. This is often dispiriting for women and families, especially those without references, supportive documentation or those who have low English proficiency, and face religious or racial discrimination. As access to social housing is limited, or subject to lengthy waiting lists, women from new and emerging communities are often competing in the private rental market.

As has been observed by Allimant et al (2013) competing in the private rental market raises challenging issues for women from refugee background:

> "There is a fundamental and significant gap in terms of the lack of practical support offered to refugee women with or without children with regard to attaining private rental accommodation that is affordable and appropriate. There is no formal assistance offered to women to actually access transportation to property inspections. This means there is an expectation that they will find addresses, often via several buses and often with multiple children and then face dealing with agents face to face where there is no language connection. In addition to these challenges, inspections are often very brief and timed to suit workers in transit".[15]

Families often find themselves sharing small units and apartments with extended family, in an effort to maintain familial connectedness. Being isolated from relatives or community can exacerbate feelings of loneliness which means staying connected even if it is by means overcrowding in a shared house. In

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[13] Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, (2006), Rural Research Report, p 3.

[14] Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, (2006), *Rural Research Report*, p 3.

[15] Allimant, A. et al. 2013. Refugee women in housing stress and at risk of homelessness, Parity, Vol 26, N2.

some instances people may make sacrifices in an effort to live in more expensive areas, if this means they can be close to other people from their cultural community. This is sometimes preferable to moving somewhere more affordable, if this means being isolated from one's community.

Families who do not have a culturally or family based area may look for a home in a more secluded area to suit their budget. This may mean moving to regional or rural locations where there may be a lack of access to medical care, public transport and a range of services needed in order to maintain good psychological, physical and emotional health.[16] This can lead to feelings of isolation.

5. Employment

Employment for women is often extremely difficult to attain especially if she has had a disrupted education, no formal qualification or low proficiency in English. Childcare and access to public transport can be a significant challenge for women with a desire to learn and be employed.

The ABS (2011) statistics indicate that of the migrants who experienced difficulty finding jobs:
- 64 per cent reported a lack of Australian work experience references
- 33 per cent experienced language difficulties
- 23 per cent reported a lack of local contacts or networks
- 15 per cent said there were no jobs in their locality, line of work or at all
- 15 per cent had difficulty with their skills or qualifications not being recognised
- 8 per cent said they did not know how or where to apply for jobs
- 7 per cent had restrictions due to their visa type
- 7 per cent had difficulties with transport or has no drivers licence

Indirect discrimination in the workplace against women from new and emerging communities may also be a barrier to employment, for example a woman's accent, increased visibility and even her name.

Australian research by Booth, Leigh and Varganova (2009) submitted 5,000 fictional applications for entry level jobs (wait staff, data entry, customer service and sales) in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane; varying only the candidates name as an indicator of ethnicity. The names represented five ethnic groups. The call-back ratios indicated that, to obtain as many interviews as an applicant with an Anglos-Saxon name, an Indigenous person must submit 35 per cent more applications, a Chinese person must submit 68 per cent more applications, an Italian person must submit 12 per cent more applications, and a Middle-Eastern person must submit 64 per cent more applications.[17]

Australian research by Kamalkhani (in Casimro 2007) also found that "owing to discrimination and a lack of recognised qualifications in Australia, highly qualified Muslim women continue to find it difficult to secure suitable employment" [18]

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[16]Berta, L. 2012 'Making it Home: Refugee Housing in Melbourne's West. A comprehensive case study and publication written by Laura Berta from the Footscray Community Legal Centre focuses her study around refugee housing in Melbourne's West.

[17] Booth, A., Leigh, A., & Varganova, E., (2009), *Does racial and ethnic discrimination vary across minority groups,* Australian National University, P 9.

6. Health

"The 'healthy migrant theory' proposes that migrants have better health than the host community, because of pre-migration health screening that excludes unhealthy migrants, and the occurrence of self-selection, where only healthy migrants can afford to relocate. However, the healthy migrant effect is, indeed, unlikely to be true for those who are forced migrants and were often exposed to trauma prior to their forced departure from their home country".[19]

> "During life in their country of displacement and in refugee camps where they have spent protracted periods, women refugees have been routinely exposed to violence and extreme poverty. Furthermore, access to basic needs such as adequate food and water, education and income generating and resettlement opportunities would have been limited. These factors together with the relative lack of gender specific healthcare have had a major impact of their physical and psychological health".[20]

According to the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Melbourne the health status of migrants is known to deteriorate after their arrival in Australia which is mainly due to the health disadvantages experienced in different areas.[21]

Also, women may place family health, especially those of young children, above themselves and in the process often neglect their own medical needs to accommodate and financially provide healthcare for their children.[22]

6.1 Cultural perceptions of health care

Differing perceptions of illness are quite common within and across people from all communities, for example some people from new and emerging communities associate being sick with physical ailments. This poses a problem for preventive health services like nutrition and for early detection of illnesses such as breast cancer, cervical cancer, diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

Cultural perceptions may also hinder adequate care and caution when tackling issues of diabetes and other chronic illnesses. In certain communities, for example, being overweight is considered to be a sign of stress or worry[23] rather than from dietary causes. It might also mean that an illness is thought of as a supernatural cause for wrong doing and people may feel duty-bound to receive the 'punishment' without treatment, or believe that only a native healer can cure the illness.

Women from new and emerging communities may also not understand the medical referral system in Australia, where referrals are made to specialists, especially if they come from a background where the family physician treats most ailments.

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[18] Cited in Casimiro, S. et al. 2007, Isolation and insecurity: resettlement issues among Muslim refugee women in Perth, Western Australia. Australian Journal of Social Sciences, Vol 42, N1.

[19] Health Promotion Journal Australia, Vol 23, No 2, August 2012, Editorial: Left out, left off, left over: Why migrants from non-English speakingbackgrounds are not adequately recognised in health promotion policy and programs

[20] Costa, D. (2007), health care of refugee women, Australian Family Physician, Vol 36(3), p 151.

[21] Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, 2011

[22] African Australians: Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues Project, 2010

[23] (Thow and Waters, 2005)

It may also be conflicting for new and emerging communities to accept Australian 'westernised' medicine and health care services in comparison to their own cultural health system[24]. A hesitancy to accept western medicine may come from the cultural understanding that it would be intrusive. Women who need a caesarean during labour may refuse the operation due to cultural beliefs of needing a 'natural birth', despite advice from doctors that it is a life threatening situation.

6.2 Lack of knowledge of services and access to service providers

Women from new and emerging communities regularly face challenges in understanding and adapting to the Australian healthcare system. The main concern of most of the participants was that sometimes it was not the services that necessarily needed improvement but that the women lack awareness of the services, meaning they miss the opportunity to access them. One participant replied:

> 'It's not normal for women to access these services, they're not used to doing it because back home you would ask your mother, your auntie or your elders.'

An ECCV health literacy report (2012) indicated that they are often not provided with adequate information regarding Australia's healthcare system.

Knowledge of services is fundamental to health care. When women are accessing health services two issues generally arise. Firstly, a Foundation House report identified the barriers that women have when accessing suitably qualified interpreters as a matter of course when accessing health services (Foundation House, 2013)[25]. If communication is not mediated by an interpreter, the quality of the interaction and patient safety deteriorate. Secondly, there may be limited access to health care services for women from new and emerging communities who reside in developing areas or non-urbanised communities where living expenses are more affordable but consequently, access to health services are significantly reduced.

Communication challenges, together with poor access to health care providers and an apprehension to discuss personal details, may make women feel reluctant to approach service providers freely and as such they may delay seeking medical advice until their condition is quite advanced, or severe.

6.3 In-direct discrimination in the health sector

Women from new and emerging communities often feel that service providers do not take into consideration their cultural past and therefore do not adequately diagnose conditions that may be culturally and environmentally specific. Receiving inadequate help from medical professionals leads to a hesitancy by women to attend future health checks[26] .

Further, women have also described experiences of subtle, or implicit discrimination during medical consultations for example, culturally diverse patients often felt they experienced poorer treatment, longer waiting times and were made to feel contagious[27]. Women may feel they are wasting a medical doctor's time or feel they have been mistreated in terms of not taking into consideration their cultural and socio-economic factors while considering medical treatment.

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[24] ECCV Health Literacy Paper

[25] Foundation House, 2013 *Promoting the Engagement of Interpreters in Victorian Health Services*

[26] Australian Independent Health policy Research and Action Centre, 2004

[27] Polonsky M. J and Renzaho, 2011

7. Settlement services

"To actively engage in civil life people require adequate support and understanding of service providers, community support networks and practical assistance to help them adjust to life in Australia".[28] There was majority agreement that not enough was being done in terms of services being provided to assist in the settlement of these women:

> 'They need to make services like counselling compulsory, these women are deer caught in the headlights and they don't know what they're experiencing sometimes. Also the case workers, most of them are overworked and understaffed, they can't provide the attention that's needed for these women, there is no assistance for them; the whole model needs to change.'

One participant particularly highlighted that there should be more support for service providers and counsellors through more federal funding to cope with caseloads and more training programs for caseworkers, particularly cultural responsiveness training. One woman expressed concern about caseworkers:

> 'Often I do things that case workers are meant to do for these women, like I show them where to get help and what to do, and I understand that they can't do all the work they're supposed to, like they might be looking after this person as much as they can but then they also have to help maybe another 40 people or more.'

One participant responded that the services had been doing a lot of positive things though there are gaps in services that are not yet addressed. She felt that there was a big break-through with parenting programs. Another argued some gaps in the system included a need to educate men to encourage their spouses and female family members to obtain formal qualifications and also an encouragement program for men to access services, as one participant described it being 'very challenging' to encourage men to come to programs that would be beneficial to their lives.

An interviewee had also highlighted an important gap in the services provided for women from culturally diverse backgrounds. She described that women had plenty of classes and programs that assisted in their daily lives, however, most of these programs were gender role based e.g. cooking classes, sewing, 'mum and bub' program.

> 'I was describing a program for men where they could learn about cars and how to change a tyre and how to conduct maintenance services on their own and the women said what about us? Why only the men?'

Interestingly, a participant disagreed with the general consensus and argued that often there are too many programs describing it as an integration challenge. She said that sometimes a client would come into the centre and when they didn't get what they wanted, they would go to another organisation around the neighbourhood and then onto another. The participant believed that there were many services in place but she felt many men and women from new and emerging communities did not want to partake in the programs even though they truly needed it.

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[28] Beshe, E. 2008 'Rahma's new life: strengthening connections, building communities' Migration Action, N 1.

When asked if the services that are being provided were adequate, there was a mixed response from participants. While one woman said that the housing issues of new migrants are particularly looked after, some of the other participants disagreed.

One participant commented:

> *Public housing within the inner city is good I think, the rent is affordable, single mums are able to apply for single mother's pension and child support rebate*

However, another participant argued:

> *'A lot of these services aren't enough especially because people group them together as if to say everyone who is from this background is 'ethnic' and therefore experiences the same problems.'*

All interviewed community participants felt that more financial assistance was needed from the Government. Suggestions included more allocated funding for existing settlement programs and more support for case workers. Responsibility for associations to create more traineeship and mentorship programs was also suggested and to create policies and practices that are culturally sensitive.

7.1 English language classes

"The importance of English language acquisition for resettlement of refugees is well established, particularly as a pathway to education, employment, health and social connections … limited English proficiency leave mothers at risk of isolation and marginalisation".[29] The Adult English Migrant Program provides new arrivals with access to up to 510 hours of English language courses, in their first five years of settlement in Australia.[30]

Melbourne research utilising focus groups with 87 refugee background women and 18 service providers found that the women wanted to learn English, but experienced difficulties attending classes due to:

- Child-rearing responsibilities and culturally inappropriate child care options;
- Complex part-time options;
- Concern that part-time study might affect welfare payments;
- Families prioritised English language classes for the male head of the household to increase employment opportunities; and
- Mixed gender classes inappropriate.

For the women that were able to attend the classes it was found that the 510 hours was insufficient for them to acquire adequate English language skills as they had often not been in a classroom environment before.[31]

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[29] Riggs, E. et al. (2012), Flexible models for learning English are needed for refugee mothers, *Australian Journal of Adult learning,* 52(2).
[30] http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/94amep.htm
[31] Riggs, E. et al. (2012), Flexible models for learning English are needed for refugee mothers, *Australian Journal of Adult learning,* 52(2).

7.2 Making women feel welcome

Making newly arrived women feel welcome is an important step in their migration process. There was general agreement that this process should include a collective effort from the Federal and State governments by providing funds and support for the counsellors, case workers and organisations that first make contact with newly arrived persons. The interviewees also said that the wider Australian community could make people feel more welcome by reaching out to and interacting with them, in the spirit of friendship. The majority of participants said that inviting people to community events, to small gatherings and to Christmas parties are small but extremely positive steps to providing a more welcoming environment. It is especially beneficial for women, who may feel lonely or isolated in a new society, to feel included. Others suggested outreach programs, a discussion group for women to share their settlement experiences, weekly mother activities such as walking the children as a group and traditional arts and crafts.

8. Conclusion

The interviews conducted revealed that women from new and emerging backgrounds may face challenges that are not always well recognised, or understood by the wider Victorian community. Service providers should improve their cultural responsiveness in order for women to feel a sense of belonging in Australia. Although there are programs that are making a positive impact on women from new and emerging communities, the general consensus from services providers was that many services are lacking financial resources and necessary support to actively continue supporting these women. This may exacerbate feelings of not being welcomed from the beginning, experiences of discrimination, challenges accessing services and isolation.

The general feedback provided by interviewees indicated that, while there are programs that can and do support women from new and emerging communities, there remain significant gaps in service delivery and these need to be addressed. More cultural responsiveness training was highlighted as an important issue that needed attention, especially for workers who come into regular contact with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

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