
DIVERSITY TRAINING MANUAL

SECTION TWO EXPLORING THE ISSUES

- 2.1 THE EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN
- 2.2 THE INTERFACE BETWEEN CHILD ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**
- 2.3 ACCESSIBLE AND EQUITABLE SERVICE DELIVERY

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2.2

INTRODUCTION

This section aims to explore the complex issues surrounding the multiple forms of abuse that can often be present in domestic violence situations. In particular, the obstacles women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds may face when disclosing abuse, interacting with child protection services and accessing support services will be discussed.

2.2.1

THE LINKS BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & CHILD ABUSE: RESEARCH FINDINGS

- In a study of 206 cases of child abuse, domestic violence was found to exist in 40% of the sexual abuse cases and 55% of the physical abuse cases (Goddard & Hiller, 1993).
- Studies estimate that between 30–50 per cent of men who abuse women also abuse their children and 70 per cent of children living in domestic violence situations are victims themselves (Smith, O'Connor, & Berthelsen, 1996).
- Where there is violence between the parents, more serious child abuse has been found, and the greater the likelihood of violence between siblings (Stanley & Goddard, 1993).
- In Victoria, family or domestic violence was found to have occurred in at least 55% of families investigated for child abuse and neglect (Department of Human Services, child protection data collection)
- Violence towards children can occur pre-natally with women being abused during pregnancy. Pregnancy has been identified as a time that abuse often starts because the perpetrator sees the child as a threat to his claim on the woman (Professional Education Taskforce, 1991).
- A Queensland-wide phone survey found that 68% of callers said children had been directly abused by the perpetrator of domestic violence (Queensland Domestic Violence Task Force Report 1988).

- A British study, which involved a questionnaire survey of 108 mothers who had experienced domestic violence, found that at least 27% of children were physically abused by the domestic violence perpetrator (who was usually the father) (Abrahams, 1994 cited in Hester, Pearson & Harwin, 1999).

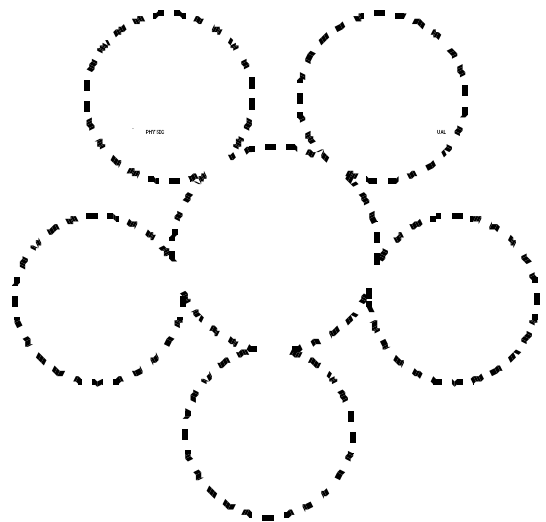
Ø (Refer to Appendix for OHP 1)

2.2.2

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR CHILD ABUSE?

There is often an overlap between child abuse and domestic violence. Many children who reside in households where spousal violence occurs are also the victims of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. The abuse may be a result of the child trying to protect their mother and being injured inadvertently, it may be that abuse (verbal or physical) is targeted specifically at the child, or emotional harm to the child may result from the child witnessing violence. Sometimes it is the intention of the perpetrator to abuse the child in order to further distress and perpetuate the abuse of the woman.

Children can experience a mixture of physical, sexual, verbal abuse that can occur in isolation or in conjunction with other types of abuse. However, emotional abuse is a significant factor in all types of abuse.



Ø (Refer to Appendix for OHP 1).

2.2.3

CULTURAL PRACTICE & CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES

In some cases when women from immigrant/refugee backgrounds have reported child abuse, professionals have been hesitant to intervene in matters where they consider that they may be intruding in culturally sanctioned beliefs or practices. However, it is widely recognised that it is not acceptable to justify a lack of intervention on the grounds of unwarranted interference into accepted cultural practice, as harmful cultural practices are no excuse for abusing children.

It is important for practitioners to challenge the myths and beliefs surrounding family violence and to uphold the rights of non-English speaking background children in the same way they would children from Anglo-Australian backgrounds (NSW Child Protection Council, 1992, p.21). The key is to develop an intervention that provides protection to the child and is culturally sensitive.

Concerns and misunderstandings about cultural practices have been identified in relation to alternative medical practices.

A person's culture can influence the types of food they provide for their children, the way in which they discipline and parent their children, their expectations of the child, the way they may or may not seek help, and the type of health care they access. Some cultures follow alternative medical practices, which may leave marks on the body, for example, coin rubbing and hot cup marks.

Coin rubbing is a practice that involved rubbing the skin with a coin to alleviate various common symptoms and illnesses. This often leaves marks on the skin not unlike abrasions caused by injuries. Hot cup marks leave similar markings on the body to those of coin rubbing. Literature suggests that these practices are not generally harmful and that practitioners should take care not to view these practices negatively. This is primarily to ensure that the family or person in question will continue to seek assistance and services without being accused of, or criticised for abusing their children (Department for Education and Children's Services, 1996, p.47).

However there are some medical practices, such as female genital mutilation, that have serious negative consequences that are harmful for children.

The key is to have an understanding of the types of cultural practices that may or not be taking place, the likely harm that may be caused to the child, and to discuss any concerns in a sensitive non-judgmental manner with the family.

By treating people from cultures other than our own differently we are creating an "us" and "them" situation where a persons culture becomes a barrier to them receiving information and education.

(Refer to section 2.1 "The effects of domestic violence on children" and section 4.1 "Working with children: A practical perspective")

Myths & Facts

Myth

'In some cultures domestic violence is acceptable'

'Some cultures condone severe physical punishment of children'

Fact

Violence against women and children occurs in all cultures, races, and societies. The fact that it may be a common occurrence does not lessen the suffering and damage it causes to the woman or child. While there are some people in all cultures who condone family violence, this is not a universally held belief in any cultural group, and in all cultures there are people who regard family violence as unacceptable. Culture is not an excuse for violence. The notion that women or children provoke or deserve violence does not acknowledge that this practice breaches their legal rights as well as basic human rights.

- A lack of access to services which could identify and respond to abuse
- Lack of information about her legal rights, little or no knowledge of the Australian system of law and how the law can protect her and her children
- Isolation as a result of her marginalised position in society – language, cultural and physical isolation
- Previous contact with agencies where they may have experienced racism or an inappropriate response
- An unwillingness of professionals to intervene in situations where they perceive the abuse as being a cultural practice

(NSW Child Protection Council, 1992, p.18).

Practitioners should recognise these potential difficulties and encourage women to seek appropriate services, in order to ensure the child's safety and well-being.

2.2.5

POTENTIAL BARRIERS FOR FAMILIES OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS WHEN ACCESSING SUPPORT FROM CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Bilingual workers in domestic violence services report that many immigrant and refugee women are skeptical about receiving services from child protection agencies. This can be attributed to factors such as:

- A lack of understanding of the role of child protection agencies
- A previous negative experience where the statutory agencies have been insensitive to cultural issues
- Some communities correlate government intervention with police, military, or paramilitary action
- In many non-English speaking communities there may be a misconception that the government's role is to remove children from their homes. This creates a sense of fear. It is

important for practitioners to be very clear about the purpose of the child protection intervention and to provide information about their role to the client. This can alleviate some of the fear the client may be experiencing and may facilitate an environment of mutual cooperation. However, on some occasions placing a child away from home is necessary to ensure his/her protection.

- Some families believe that when a government department intervenes it brings shame to the family. The honour of the family name could be in disrepute because of negative perceptions about departmental intervention. Many families believe that what happens within the family is no business of anyone outside the family and that the family has the ability to solve their own problems internally or through religious or community structures.

These factors may be present and should be taken into account when developing an appropriate intervention plan. It is important to provide an opportunity for the woman to talk about these issues. An intervention that responds to cultural sensitivities has a better chance of being not only effective but also has the potential to be a positive experience for both the child and the family (NSW Child Protection Council, 1992, p.24).

2.2.6

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Sexual assault should not be viewed in isolation from other types of abuse against children in their homes because forms of abuse are often interconnected. An underlying issue in all forms of abuse is the misuse of power.

Sexual abuse of children often has the following characteristics:

- It may occur over long periods of time
- Males are overwhelmingly the perpetrators – men who are brothers, fathers, uncles, babysitters, friends, step-fathers, or (less commonly) strangers to the child
- The majority of victims are female

a lot invested in the secret being kept. Many perpetrators go to extremes to maintain the silence and often resort to threatening the child with violence, or threatening to kill the child's pet or mother if they speak of the abuse. The perpetrator may also blame the mother for his actions and tell the child all kinds of stories about why it is necessary for him to go to them for sexual gratification.

Women may experience a wide range of feelings when they find out that their child has been abused:

- Women often blame themselves for not knowing about the abuse
- Some women feel ashamed. Many women from non-English speaking backgrounds have expressed that their families may shun them for bringing the family name into disrepute. They have therefore felt pressured into maintaining the silence and secrecy which so often surrounds sexual abuse
- They may have mixed feelings about the perpetrator, and not want to believe that the abuse has occurred
- Women may feel responsible for the abuse
- They may be concerned about what their family will think
- Many women express that they feel very angry at their partner for what they did to the child and for betraying their trust
- Many women feel confused about what they should or should not do

In addition to this emotional turmoil the woman has to support and care for a child who may be emotionally distressed or who may be exhibiting challenging behaviours as a result of the assault (Immigrant Women's Support Service, 2002a).

Children may exhibit some or all of the following behaviours as a result of sexual abuse:

- Disturbed sleep – including nightmares, difficulty going to sleep, fear of the dark
- Depressed mood – lack of enthusiasm, detaching themselves from everyday events

- Suicidal feelings – self harming behaviours – often associated with depression
- Hypervigilance – anxiety, inability to relax, hyperactive behaviour, may startle easily
- Acting out sophisticated adult sexual scenarios and engaging in sexualised play
- Behaviour swings, from being outgoing to being withdrawn and vice versa.

Note: These behaviours need not be solely associated with sexual abuse, many children experiencing trauma in their lives may exhibit some or all of the behaviours as may children experiencing many kinds of disruption to their lives.

This resource manual includes work sheets designed to assist parents in talking to their children about domestic violence and child sexual assault. The work sheets are designed to be informative not confronting (Refer to part 3 of the manual).

2.2.7

ABUSE ON CONTACT VISITS: DILEMMAS FOR WOMEN & CHILDREN

When parents separate as a result of domestic violence, children may experience a range of contradictory feelings, and may want to have ongoing contact with their abusive parent. This contact can be important for children and it is important to try to make contact a positive and non-violent experience for the child.

Unfortunately, ongoing abuse may occur at the time of access visits or contact. For example, children may be frightened or angry if they observe their father's efforts to continue to control and manipulate their mother at contact visits.

Women who leave their partners may experience a false sense of security at this time primarily because they believe that once they have left their partner the abuse will stop. However an abusive partner may have access/residency/contact with their child in spite of their history of violence. The report "An Unacceptable Risk" undertaken by the Abuse Free Contact Group in Brisbane in 2000, found

Practitioners can assist women and children from non-English speaking backgrounds in domestic violence situations by:

- Taking the time to explain what the women's rights and obligations are, and how child protection agencies work
- Providing accurate information about what legal recourse is available to the client
- Informing women of the possible consequences of her actions
- Helping women to recognise how their children may have been or still are being affected by the violence
- Informing them of the links between domestic violence and child abuse
- Helping the women to place the responsibility for the violence with the abuser, or to acknowledge her own part in not protecting the children
- Utilising the services of professional translators and legal practitioners
- Enlisting the support of immigrant women's services with the view to sharing case management and/or making appropriate referrals to appropriate support services

(Breckenridge & Laing, 1999)

Child protection interventions should not be thought of in a negative way, because primarily they are about ensuring children's safety and well-being, and creating an opportunity for parents to develop appropriate and effective parenting skills. Families who have immigrant or refugee backgrounds may be unaware of their rights and obligations under Australian law and may welcome the chance to become informed. However, the reality for some families and the stigma attached to child protection services often make the negative perceptions difficult to overcome.

The imbalance of power between men and women and ensuring the perpetrator takes responsibility for the violence must play a key part in the child protection intervention process. Throughout the referral, intake, assessment,

intervention and monitoring processes where child protection concerns are present, interventions should be child-focused, emphasizing:

- Child's safety and wellbeing
- Empowerment and safety of the woman
- Perpetrators of violence held responsible for the violence

(Breckenridge & Laing, 1999).

An activity has been designed to assist practitioners in developing their understanding of the complex layers of issues for immigrant / refugee families where there are child protection issues present in domestic violence situations. (Refer to Appendix for Activity 2).

DIVERSITY TRAINING MANUAL

SECTION 2.2.10

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE EVALUATION SHEET

In order to gauge the effectiveness of this module we are asking participants to provide us with their valuable opinions. This will enable us to determine the relevance and usefulness of the material in the manual and, pending available funding, to update the manual where appropriate.

Please hand in your evaluation sheet at the time of training or complete and return your evaluation sheet to -

Immigrant Women's Support Service
Diversity Training Project – Evaluations
PO Box 5490, West End, Qld 4101

1. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate the content of this section "The interface between domestic violence and child abuse"?

1. Excellent 2. Very good 3. Good 4. Average 5. Poor

2. On a scale of 1-5 how would you rate the usefulness of the activities?

1. Excellent 2. Very good 3. Good 4. Average 5. Poor

3. If you believe that the section could be made more effective what changes could you suggest?

4. Do you work directly with children in domestic violence situations?

Yes

No

5. Do you think this section has the capacity to assist you to work more effectively with children from non-English speaking backgrounds?

Yes

No

RESOURCE LIST

CONTACT CENTRES IN QUEENSLAND

Caboolture

Caboolture Contact Centre
22 Edward Street
PO Box 118
Caboolture Qld 4510
Ph 07 5495 3347

Dalby

Dalby Crisis Support Association
Stuart Street Centre
Marble Street
PO box 406
Dalby Qld 4405
Ph 07 4669 8499

Ipswich

Uniting Church Neighbourhood Centre
25 Eileen Street
Booval Qld 4304
Ph 07 3424 5514

Mackay

Mackay Children's Contact Service
George Street
Ph 07 4957 2638

Logan

Logan West Contact Centre
Logan West Playgroup Centre
Orr Court
Hillcrest Qld 4118
Ph 07 3800 3929
07 3806 8977

Maroochydore

Sunshine Coast Family Contact Centre
Association
Harmony House, 5th Ave
Maroochydore Qld 4558
Ph 07 5479 6971

Toowoomba

Toowoomba Community Access Centre
East Creek Community Centre
43 Kitchener Street
PO Box 186
Toowoomba Qld 4350
Ph 07 4638 0035

IMMIGRANT WOMENS SUPPORT SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA

Queensland

Immigrant Women's Support Service (IWSS)
Domestic Violence Service
Ph 07 3846 3490

Sexual Assault Service

Ph 07 3846 5400

South Australia

Migrant Women's Support and Accommodation
Service
Ph 08 8346 9417

NSW

Immigrant Women's Speakout
Ph 02 9635 8022

Western Australia

Women's Refuge Multicultural Service
Ph 08 9325 7716

Victoria

Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service
Ph 03 9898 3145

ACTIVITY 1 BRAINSTORMING SESSION

Aim:

To assist practitioners in identifying child protection issues and differentiating them from cultural / family practices.

Strategies:

- Practitioners to divide into four groups – one for each scenario.
- Practitioners discuss the nominated scenario and answer a series of questions. The group discussion should take approximately 15 minutes.
- Each group should nominate a spokesperson to report back to the larger group – this should take approximately 5 minutes per group = 20 minutes.
- Trainer to facilitate general discussion about issues raised by each group – approximately 10 minutes.

Scenarios:

- 1 A child has told a refuge worker that her father has beaten her with a stick when she has gone out on a date with a boy from a culture other than her own.
 - 2 An 11 year- old female child from a non-English speaking background tells a refuge worker that she has to sleep in her uncle's bed in her family home.
 - 3 A male teenager who has recently arrived in refuge has been constantly verbally and physically aggressive towards the workers, his siblings and mother. He tells the child support worker that he is the head of the family now and that he beats his sisters and mother when they disobey him.
 - 4 A recently arrived refugee family has moved into refuge and on several occasions the mother has hit her children over the head with her open hand.
- ∅ (Refer to Appendix for OHP 3).

ACTIVITY 2 **GROUP DISCUSSION**

Aim:

To develop an understanding of the complex layers of issues for non-English speaking background families where there are child protection issues in a domestic violence context.

Strategy:

- Practitioners should be divided into groups of 4-5 people.
- A child protection scenario is presented to each group.
- Each group is asked to answer a series of questions related to the scenario. Approximately 15 minutes allowed for discussion.
- Practitioners to take into consideration Models of Service: Principle 4 – Communication when responding to the questions.
- The individual groups then join together to discuss their answers with the main group. General discussion to take approximately 20 minutes.

Scenario:

Ling has come into a refuge with her two male children Lo (age 3) and Cheong (age 7), Ling is from Vietnam and the boys were born in Australia. The family fled from a violent episode where the woman's ex-husband (an Anglo Australian) broke into her home and beat her in front of the children and threatened to kill her and the children if she reported him to the police. There is a current protection order in place that has been breached many times. However, the police have been unable to locate her ex-husband to prosecute him. Ling has been in four refuges in the last year and has moved twice since gaining community housing because her ex-partner has found where she lived and physically abused her. The children have not only witnessed this abuse but on two occasions have been injured by their father.

Ling's ex-husband has made calls to the child protection agency and claims she moves all the time and is involved in prostitution. He has also told them that Ling neglects the boys because she leaves them for long periods of time while she works. He has told Ling that the department will take the boys off her and give them to him because she is a bad mother. However, Ling says she moves because he harasses her and only leaves the boys at home for short periods of time while she works at a local convenience store. Her ex-husband also threatens Ling with having her deported back to Vietnam.

The child protection worker contacted Ling on her mobile phone but Ling did not understand what the call was about due to her limited English language skills. Ling has requested that the refuge not tell the department where she is because she fears losing custody/residency of the boys and she fears deportation.

Ø (Refer to Appendix for HANDOUT 2).

The links between domestic violence and child abuse: Research findings

- In a study of 206 cases of child abuse, domestic violence was found to exist in 40% of the sexual abuse cases and 55% of the physical abuse cases (Goddard & Hiller, 1993).
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Scenarios:

- 1** A child has told a refuge worker that her father has beaten her with a stick when she has gone out on a date with a boy from a culture other than her own.

- 2** An 11 year- old female child from a non-English speaking background tells a refuge worker that she has to sleep in her uncles bed in her family home.

- 3** A male teenager has been constantly verbally and physically aggressive towards the workers, his siblings and mother. He tells the child support worker that he is head of the family now, and that he beats his sisters and mother when they disobey him.

- 4** A refugee family has moved into refuge and on several occasions the mother has hit her children over the head with her open hand.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1** What are the issues that child protection and refuge staff should be aware of in this scenario?

- 2** How could refuge staff respond to Ling's fears?

- 3** Are there potential child protection concerns?

- 4** What could be the potential negative and positive consequences for Ling should the refuge inform the department of her whereabouts?

- 5** Is there a way the refuge and the department could work together? If yes, discuss strategies that could be used to work effectively together. If no, why?

- 6** What other services might be able to assist Ling and her children given her immigration status and cultural background?

Scenario:

Ling has come into a refuge with her two male children Lo (age 3) and Cheong (age 7), Ling is from Vietnam and the boys were born in Australia. The family fled from a violent episode where the woman's ex-husband (an Anglo Australian) broke into her home and beaten her in front of the children and threatened to kill her and the children if she reported him to the police. There is a current protection order in place that has been breached many times. However, the police have been unable to locate her ex-husband to prosecute him. Ling has been in four refuges in the last year and has moved twice since gaining community housing because her ex-partner has found where she lived and physically abused her. The children have not only witnessed this abuse but on two occasions have been injured by their father.

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