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# DIVERSITY TRAINING MANUAL

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## SECTION THREE

### DEVELOPING RESPONSES

#### 3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND PRACTICE APPLICATIONS

#### 3.2 WORKING IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

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#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND PRACTICE APPLICATIONS

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### 3.1

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The resource manual is informed and shaped by a feminist philosophy, which encompasses –

- An ecological or systems approach
- An ethno-sensitive perspective

Ø (Refer to Appendix for OHP 1)

This philosophy forms the basis of a theoretical framework which practitioners can draw on to inform their practice.

Practitioners will already utilise a coherent practice framework that is congruent with their own knowledge, values and skills and informed by their agency's policies. It is not suggested that the practice framework referred to in this training manual is the only one that can be used when working with children from non-English speaking backgrounds in domestic violence situations. Rather, it is suggested that practitioners can also incorporate the information contained in this manual into their existing practice framework.

This module outlines techniques or tools that can assist to make accurate, valid and useful assessments and interventions when working with children of non-English speaking backgrounds and /or their mothers.

Women and children of non-English speaking backgrounds often face additional layers of disadvantage due to the structural inequities existing in society, which see differences marginalised rather than embraced. Therefore the framework underpinning this response to violence against immigrant and refugee women and children addresses issues arising from the environment in which they live and/or have been exposed to, and assists practitioners to further develop their understanding of the context in which the violence occurs. It takes into account the political reality that women and children of non-English speaking background are members of a minority group within a dominant culture.

When working with children in domestic violence situations it is important to understand that children are enmeshed in, and supported by, a complex web of family and social systems. Viewing them in isolation artificially removes them from the context in which they live. The

child's socio-economic status, physical environment, cultural background, social systems and socio-political world plays an important part in how they fit within the broader social context. This in turn shapes how the child views him/herself and how others view him/her.

A feminist philosophy that encompasses an ecological/systems and ethno-sensitive approach provides a broad, inclusive, effective practice base which has the capacity to address the socio-political reality for immigrant and refugee women and children affected by domestic violence. Furthermore, it has the capacity to respond to women and children experiencing domestic violence at individual, service and systemic levels.

#### 3.1.1

##### **A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK**

Historically, traditional gender stereotyping has encouraged men to feel that they are entitled to a position of power and authority in their relationships with women and within society generally. Male superiority is not the only power structure in capitalist, neo-colonial societies that adversely affects women. Women are generally affected by an inferior social status in relation to men as well as systemic inequality in relation to race, class and sexuality (Hanmer, Radford & Stenko, 1989). In addition, the role of women in society is culturally sanctioned and is embodied in legal, financial, religious and economic discrimination against women. This is evidenced through social institutions and processes such as the police, the court system, education, the church and the military. In essence, male dominance in these areas has meant that women are not being afforded equal opportunities to participate meaningfully in society or be involved in decisions that directly impact on their lives.

##### **Key principles of feminist practice**

- The role of gender is recognised as a key factor in the oppression of human potential
- Patriarchal assumptions and practices that oppress and disempower women and girls are identified and challenged

- Women's broader experiences are validated and they are seen as individuals not just as wives and mothers or potential wives and mothers
- Difference is celebrated and the uniqueness of the human condition is embraced
- Egalitarian and reciprocal relationships are fostered
- The empowerment of women and children is assisted by:
  - Working with and not for them
  - Encouraging a collaborative relationship with women and children
  - Focusing on strengths and not deficits
  - Actively supporting and encouraging women and children

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### **A feminist framework**

A feminist framework provides for interventions at an individual, service and systemic level. A feminist framework can:

- Assist women and children to identify their strengths and resilience
- Foster egalitarian and reciprocal relationships
- Offer a broad critique of social arrangements for the care of those who are vulnerable in society
- Assist women to find a balance between their rights and the rights and needs of their children
- Provide a sound rationale for political and community activism

(Adapted from Burton (2001).

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Ø (Refer to Appendix for OHP 2).

### **Application to interpersonal practice**

One of the principles of the feminist framework is to assist in the empowerment of women and children by encouraging a collaborative relationship with them, rather than a relationship of client and authority figure (Sheafor, 2000).

Practitioners can assist in the empowerment of women and their children in the following ways:

- Encourage women and children to make decisions about their lives, and provide support to them during the decision making process. This can often be extremely difficult for women who may have been dictated to, controlled, manipulated and constantly put down or ridiculed. The same can be said for children who have been told they are useless and have no rights or say in what happens to them.

It is also important to recognise that many cultures are not focused on the rights of the individual in the same way as the western Anglo culture. For many cultures greater emphasis is placed on the family unit and the community group than on the rights of the individual. It is then difficult for an individual woman to make a decision about her life in isolation, without taking into consideration the best interests of the family unit and the community group.

It is important for practitioners to discuss these matters openly and without judgment; to recognise the tensions that may be operating for women and children from different cultural backgrounds, and to support women and their children in the decisions they make.

- Focus on a woman or child's strengths, skills and capabilities rather than focusing on their weaknesses. Women and children in domestic violence situations often have low self-esteem or may lack confidence in their abilities.

### **Key principles**

The key principles of the ecological or systems framework are:

- Individuals should be viewed in the context of their environmental systems
- The concepts relating to the development, function, and structure of systems are equally applicable to all the clients, including individuals, groups and communities
- Client self-determination should be supported and encouraged
- Isolated or closed systems should be explored and encouraged to develop and interact with external systems and resources

### **Practice implications**

To develop effective intervention strategies for families in domestic violence situations practitioners need to be aware of the external systems of which the family is a part. An ecological systems approach allows the practitioner to focus on the concept of the person within the context of their environment and the connections between the family and its ecological system (Holman, 1983). This can be a valuable tool for practitioners during the initial assessment phase. It can assist with the effective identification of cultural links and kinship networks, and shows organisational patterns and relationships.

Garbarino (1992, p.16) asserts that in using an ecological perspective one "views individuals and their environments as mutually shaping systems, each changing over time, each adapting in response to changes in the other".

### **Assessment tools - systems approach (Ecomap)**

Using this tool as a guide, practitioners gather information from the client to construct a visual diagram that is used to map the family's potential support system. The diagram maps the connections between the family and their external world and identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the various connections.

When working with non-English speaking background families this enables the practitioner to visualise relevant networks and the family to identify community resources of which they may previously have been unaware.

In order to gain a clear picture of the child's environment there are a series of questions that can guide discussion:

- Who are the child's close family members and what are their ages?
- Which family members, if any, do they feel close to and supported by?
- Which family members if any have they ever felt fearful of?
- Which family members, if any, do they feel they can talk to about how they are feeling?
- Who are the significant people and organisations that the child is involved with? For example:
  - Social welfare agencies
  - Recreational activities
  - Schools/Education
  - Community organisations
  - Extended family
  - Religious institutions
  - Cultural/social groups
  - Health care
  - Play groups
  - Friends
  - Work
  - Child-care
  - Statutory authorities - Police, Immigration Dept

Note: An ecomap is quite different to a genogram, in that it records information about the child's environment as it is now, whereas a genogram draws out family histories and chronological events over time. Care needs to be taken when practitioners draw out historical information from a child who may be a refugee or come from a war-torn country as the events may be painful for them to recollect. This is not to say that practitioners should not use genograms when working with these children, rather that they should be aware that issues might arise for the child as a result. For example -

- Children may have witnessed a loved one being killed or injured
- They may have escaped to safety themselves leaving behind relatives, friends, pets and their social networks. This may leave them with feelings of guilt and/or shame
- Many immigrant children suffer from grief and loss over relatives and friends left behind in their country of origin

So when the child is asked about their extended family and life events over time they may become distressed, anxious or withdrawn especially if they have not previously discussed this information. In some instances it may be more appropriate for the child to be referred to a specialist torture and trauma counsellor. (For more information refer to section 4 "Working with children: A practical perspective")

Through the process of gathering information practitioners are able to gain valuable information about the context in which the domestic violence has occurred within the family.

The ecomap:-

- Highlights areas of unmet need
- Identifies potential resources that can be accessed

A significant number of women who have been sponsored for migration or residence in Australia by their fiancé or spouse, experience domestic violence. Often a feature of the abuse is that their partners lead them to believe they will lose custody of their children should they leave the abusive relationship, or they will be deported back to their country of origin. In such cases the woman's needs might be identified as - "being able to live in safety and have legal custody of her children". The resources she could access for assistance in meeting her needs could be identified in the ecomap, e.g. legal advice services, immigrant women's support services, immigration law specialists.

## Practice implications

Each cross-cultural encounter has the potential to be a learning experience and to be ultimately enriching. Moreover, each practitioner could derive great benefit from adopting a student role and could potentially gather new information or a better understanding of something that was not fully appreciated before (Green, 1999).

When working with women and children from culturally/linguistically diverse backgrounds, practitioners should be guided by them. It is their interpretation of their culture and life experiences, which is the key to understanding and providing appropriate support and assistance.

Some points to consider include:

- The concept of "family". This can vary enormously and it should not be assumed that the practitioner's perception of what constitutes a family would be the same for all people, particularly those from the diverse range of non-English speaking backgrounds present in Australian society.
- The role of the child in the family. Consideration needs to be given to the way in which the child sees their role or place in the family compared to how the parents may view the child. The impact of moving to a new country can alter the family dynamic and children may go from being dependent to taking a leadership role within the family, with many being relied on as interpreters and providers of information to their families. This often comes about because children pick up new languages more quickly than their parents. This can potentially disrupt family dynamics, undermine parental authority and create a tension between the child and their family (Cox, 1989).
- The ways in which culture can play a role in the child's life. For instance, the child may be accustomed to eating particular foods; parents may care for their child's medical needs in traditional ways such as "coining"; people may use traditional medicines or herbs that are not readily available in Australia; children may have different sleeping habits such as sleeping on the floor or sleeping with an adult; the child may require a particular toy or comforter; children may need assistance

with their toileting needs and may be accustomed to having an adult tend to them; and children may have family or social responsibilities at an early age.

- Refugee children may have experienced disruption to the child/parent bond. Parents may have been imprisoned, killed, or "disappeared". Parents or carers may be over-protective of their child or they could be emotionally distant from their child if they are recovering from torture or trauma themselves.

### 3.1.4

## MYTHS & FACTS

### Myth

'Incest is an acceptable part of some cultures'

### Fact

Violence against women is common 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, the family and the society, nor does it lessen its significance as a crime. Violence against a woman, including sexual violence, is a breach of the human and legal rights of that woman.

Even at the highest levels of cultural tradition there is no universal acceptance that advocates for the indiscriminate use of violence (Blanchard 1999). Therefore it is the role of a culturally competent practitioner to challenge these assumptions and explore the myths and any accepted norms. It is not acceptable to ignore practices that harm women and children, nor is it acceptable to justify the lack of intervention because of what are perceived to be culturally condoned practices. Here in Australia there are laws to protect women and children, and parents from all cultural backgrounds need to have an understanding that the law protects children against abuse and neglect.

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**APPENDIX**

**RESOURCE LIST**

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**OHPs**

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## OHP 1 **THERORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The training resource manual is informed and shaped by a **feminist philosophy**, which encompasses –

- An ecological or systems approach
- An ethno-sensitive perspective

**Through incorporating an ecological or systems approach practitioners can:**

- Enhance their understanding of the context of the abuse that is occurring in the family
- Provide a visual representation to the child. This may be useful to all children, and may be particularly useful if the child does not have fluent English language skills
- Identify strengths and weaknesses in the child's external resources
- Identify existing resources that are not being utilised by the child or their family
- Identify unmet needs
- Facilitate the expression of grief and loss for children who have been separated from or lost loved ones