

Myths & Facts

Myth Violence against women is an accepted 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 rights of that woman.

Myth Generally speaking violence against women is perpetrated by uneducated men from lower class.

Fact Violence against women occurs around the world, within all cultures, in all creeds and all socio-economic backgrounds. People from middle and upper classes may have the resources to enable them to conceal the violence.

Myth People from different cultures are more emotional; they get over-excited and aggressive, so it is natural that there is more violence in that community.

Fact Being excited and emotionally expressive does not equate with being violent.

Myth Women from some cultures are more passive and submissive that is why they are more likely to become victims of violence.

Fact 1 Not all women from any specific culture are passive and submissive. Women may be relegated to specific roles and they may be repressed by state or religious laws, but this does not mean they are themselves passive or submissive.

Fact 2 Violence against women is a social construction that reflects and reinforces the unequal distribution of power between men and women in society generally. Being passive and submissive does not invite violence or give anyone the right to perpetrate violence against them.

Myth Conciliation and marriage counselling are the most culturally appropriate forms of intervention.

Fact Conciliation and joint counselling operate from the premise of an equal relationship between the parties. This myth therefore, negates the power imbalances in the relationship for the woman. Often women are given or are expected to take greater responsibility at keeping the relationship together.

Myth Our culture allows physical force to be used as a means of disciplining women.

Fact Some practices, such as physical force, may be common in most or all cultures. Such practices reinforce the power disparity between men and women. Because they are common does not mean they are lawful, or that it is desirable that they are maintained.

Myth Cultural traditions must be respected and remain unchallenged.

Fact A woman's basic human rights must be upheld regardless of cultural values and traditions. Furthermore, violence must be challenged and discussed at every opportunity with the woman. Promoting discussion with the woman about her cultural traditions allows women to think and reconsider traditional cultural norms that foster violence towards women and children.

Myth All women from the same cultural background have the same values and beliefs.

Fact There is not one group from any country that is homogenous. There are influences through political, religious, social, educational and geographical location of an individual that influence values and beliefs of people.

Myth Their religion tells them it is okay for a husband to assert his sexual needs and that a woman is there to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband.

Fact All religions and religious texts speak of the importance of respect and honour between men and women or husbands and wives. No religious text (Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu) either advocates or provides for the abuse of women, irrespective of their marital status. For a man to treat a woman without honouring and respecting her needs is to reinterpret religious text out of context and from a self-interested viewpoint. Many women and men are not aware that rape in marriage is a crime in the same way that rape anywhere is a crime. The law applies to all people in Australia regardless of their ethnic background.

Myth Domestic and sexual violence against women does not happen in our community.

Fact Domestic and sexual violence are prevalent in all communities regardless of the culture, creed, educational or socio-economic background of the individual. From experience we know that often women's experience of violence is minimised, dismissed and disbelieved by the community. There may be a tendency to justify violence as part of the cultural norms within a community thus secrecy and silence are encouraged.

Myth The promotion of women's rights endangers the social stability of communities.

Fact Stopping violence in a community can only strengthen its fabric and social stability. However, perpetrators of violence are threatened by public discussion and acknowledgement of human rights of women and children and their rights to safety.

Myth Women from that community only talk to each other. They don't want any help or intervention from outsiders.

Fact People from non-English speaking background are entitled to information and services as much as any other Australian resident. However, many people from non-English speaking backgrounds are isolated because of language differences, lack of access to information and services, experiences of discrimination and racism. These factors create barriers to obtaining assistance from mainstream services. Coming into contact with a worker from her own background may be very comfortable and familiar for some women.

Myth It is too difficult to communicate with people who do not speak English.

Fact Using an interpreter makes it possible to communicate with a person who speaks a language different to your language – an interpreter is as close as the telephone. Everyone responds positively to someone who is friendly and open to communicating with them.

Myth We are not funded to work with people from non-English speaking background.

Fact Human services are funded to work with anyone who needs the service regardless of their language, religion, cultural background or race.

Myth Women's refuges are not culturally appropriate.

Fact All services are funded to provide services to women from all backgrounds regardless of their ethnicity. Although cultural inappropriateness may be the case, the priority is for the woman and her children to find safety. Information about refuges and options for safe accommodation must be available for the woman to make an informed choice.

This brochure has been produced by Immigrant Women's Support Service in collaboration with Court Assistance Service – Women's Legal Aid.

IWSS thankfully acknowledges the use of: Desperately Seeking Justice – A resource & Training Manual on Violence Against Women in a Culturally Diverse Community produced by CASA House in 1992.

Information Resources

- Working with interpreters brochure
- How to translate information for women in your community brochure
- Myths and facts: women of non-English speaking backgrounds and violence brochure
- Diversity Training Project Training Kit

Information resources that have been translated into different languages:

- Palm cards on sexual assault
- What is counselling and how can you access it? brochure
- Consenting sexual activity in a relationship or marriage brochure
- Sexual violence is difficult to speak about brochure
- Information for mothers whose children have been sexually abused brochure
- What is domestic violence? A reading book for parents and children



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SUPPORT SERVICE

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Women of non-English speaking backgrounds & violence

IWSS offers free culturally sensitive and confidential advocacy, counselling and support to immigrant and refugee women and their children from non-English speaking backgrounds who are affected by domestic and sexual violence.



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SUPPORT SERVICE