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Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland

Empowerment Through Insight

A Guide for Multicultural Women Leaders on Domestic Violence and Narrative Therapy Tools



“Never stop fighting for your freedom, you are worth it”

(Domestic abuse survivor – Anon)

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Introduction and rationale

The Ethnic Community Council of Queensland's (ECCQ) has had a group focused on the issues that affect multicultural women since 1978. Since 1999, this group has been known as the **Women's Ethnic Network (WEN).** The WEN's mantra is "*nothing about us, without us"* and strives to advocate for women's issues and develop policy papers to inform the government about the needs and concerns of multicultural women in Queensland. Through the years, the volunteers and members have participated in various groups and committees; organised and attended forums, conferences, workshops and speak out on issues relating to health, work, citizenship, ageing, child protection, refugees and human trafficking. From 2023 - 2025, the focus for the WEN is on the issue of violence against women and its preventive strategies: advocacy and education.



1 in 4 women (27%) experienced violence by an intimate partner or family member since the age of 15.



1 in 5 women (22%) experienced sexual violence (assault and/or threat) since the age of 15.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety, 2021-22)

No matter where you live on Earth, women have always been subjected to violence, and protection has been an important safety issue for all governments worldwide. Feminism movements have paved a safer path for women, making them empowered, protected, and respected. However, despite these efforts, the implementation of laws, and the creation of support systems, women are still being abused, raped, and murdered.

In addition to concerning data, according to the 2012 ABS Personal Safety survey, Australian-born women were more likely to report experiencing violence since the age of 15 than those born overseas (44% and 33%, respectively).

This is a cultural issue where CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) women will not come forward to report abuse or violence from their intimate partner.

The Office for Women advised SAMEAC that there is a need to focus on prevention and associated issues such as gender equality, the impact of sexual discrimination, and economic independence and choice through access to jobs and career pathways for culturally diverse women.

Considering these statistics, the WEN organized two workshops: one where participants were trained on how to have conversations with women who might be facing domestic violence, and the second brought together community leaders and service providers to connect, talk about recognizing domestic violence and facilitated discussion about the issue of domestic and sexual violence. These workshops addressed the concerns of women facing domestic violence and provided answers to questions from community leaders who interact with affected women.



Through the survey, conversations with WEN members, and the two workshops, we found that migrant women need a tailored, co-designed strategy for domestic violence prevention. The nature of violence varies with different cultural backgrounds of multicultural women. In some countries and cultures, the ideas surrounding women's and men's behaviours differ significantly from those in Australia. Therefore, policies on violence against women need a co-designed strategy that considers different cultures and cultural behaviours.

The current resource is a summation of the tools and information collected from the survey and the two workshops. This resource will help with understanding the concepts of domestic violence and coercive control, and how leaders can equip themselves with knowledge necessary to help women in domestic violence situations. It is a brief, yet comprehensive resource, that incorporates theories, activities, and panel discussions with service providers.

You can find out more about the ***Women's Ethnic Network at our page:***

https://eccq.com.au/policy-and-advocacy/womens-ethnic-network/

Domestic and Family Violence Needs of Multicultural Communities



A phrase in India says, *“Ghar ki baat ghar mein hi rehni chahiye,”* meaning *"Let the issues that happen in the home stay in the home."* Most Indian women are groomed from childhood not to argue or question their husbands and to succumb to the sexual and physical force thrust upon them because the man has the right to do so. The husband is likened to God and must be worshipped and respected.

These cultural issues must be considered when developing strategies for domestic violence prevention to make women safe and give them their rightful status in the country.

Migrant women, particularly the most vulnerable cohorts such as refugees and asylum seekers, face additional challenges that heighten their risk of experiencing family and domestic violence. Satyen et al (2018) found in their research that migrant women experienced abuse at high levels, particularly physical, psychological, and financial abuse. Their migration experiences, for example, involve a history of social isolation, lack of belonging, limited culturally appropriate resources and support available for the victims of family and domestic violence as well as being overwhelmed whilst they try to integrate into the new country and culture. They also face language barriers.

More alarmingly, migrant and refugee women living in Australia usually deal with multiple stressors at once, such as domestic violence, racism, and non-recognition of their overseas qualifications, leading to a chain of other vulnerabilities, including but not limited to, compromised employment opportunities (De Silva, Shepherd & McEwan 2024).



The WEN developed a policy paper: The Need for a Tailored Strategy for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence Against Women, Especially Those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Queensland.

The recommendations included in the paper were:

1. Migrant and refugee women are made aware of what family and domestic violence entail in the Australian context

Every country has different laws and requirements and migrants who come to Australia need to be made aware of their rights and responsibilities within the country.

2. Multicultural women are empowered to participate and influence their own fate.

They also need to be given a platform and a safe space where they can voice their own concerns, needs, and demand for their rights. This requires developing direct linkages between multicultural organisations and domestic and family violence support services.

3. Women are given information about safe places to go along with their children when faced with a domestic violence situation.

More resources need to be made which share information about support services. You can find the list of services which was shared at the WEN workshop by Challenge DV on pages 13 to 15 here.

4 Migrant and refugee women are given access to translated educative information on domestic and family violence.

This information should be shared with immigrant women at different stages of their migration process through formal channels. Additionally, fact sheets regarding violence against multicultural women should be developed and presented to all migrant women at the time of their visa application.

5 Information about violence against women is available in a simple and concise language.

We recognise that translating information to every language is not easy. therefore, simple, concise and clear English resources need to be readily available to migrant women.



Coercive Control Information

Juliana Mantilla, Challenge DV



1 Understanding Coercive Control

Coercive control is a pattern of abusive behaviours aimed at controlling, dominating, and instilling fear in a partner. It underpins most family and domestic violence.

Types of Abuse: Includes physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, social, spiritual, and post-separation abuse.

2 Red Flags for Coercive Control

These include and are not limited to:

- **Isolation:** Preventing you from seeing friends, family, or participating in social activities.



- **Monitoring:** Constantly checking your phone, emails, or social media, or demanding to know your whereabouts at all times.



- **Gaslighting:** Making you doubt your memory, perceptions, or sanity by denying events or twisting the truth.



- **Financial Control:** Restricting access to money, controlling household finances, or preventing you from working.



- **Jealousy:** Extreme jealousy and accusations of infidelity without cause.



- **Manipulating Children or Pets:** Using children or pets as a means to control, threaten, or punish you.



- **Threats and Intimidation:** Threatening to harm you, your loved ones, or themselves to manipulate your actions.
- **Degrading Comments**: Constantly belittling, criticising, or humiliating you, often in front of others.

3 How to Respond

Triple R Framework:

- **Recognise:** Understand and identify signs of coercive control and domestic violence.
- **Respond:** Engage in safe, empathetic conversations, and prioritise confidentiality.
- **Refer:** Connect the person to appropriate support services.





4 Barriers to Disclosure

There are common barriers that can prevent women from seeking help. These include:

- **Fear:** Of not being heard, believed, or loosing children, identity, house or many other things, or of breaking religious rules.
- **Financial dependency:** The man in the relationship controls bank accounts and access.
- **Shame:** Which can be perpetuated when the man constantly criticises or comments on the body image of the woman.
- **Social Context:** Controlling the connections or amount of time that can be spent with family and friends.
- **Visa status:** Especially for those on partner visas or other temporary visas, threatening to have the visa cancelled.
- **Self-blame:** The woman believes it is her fault that the abuse is occurring.



5 Empowering Women

Listen and Believe: Provide support by listening empathetically and believing their experiences.

Safe Conversations: Ensure privacy and safety during discussions, empowering them to make informed decisions.

Refer to the Narrative Practice tools and methods of listening and conversing.

Power and Control Wheel



By understanding and addressing coercive control, we can empower women from CALD backgrounds to live lives free of abuse and full of dignity and respect.

Service Providers Contacts

Recognise and respond

Organisation	Area of Expertise	Website Link
Brisbane Domestic Violence Service	24 Hour support, information and options	https://bdvs.org.au
QPS Vulnerable Persons Unit	Police Command	https://police.qld.gov.au
Women's Legal Service	Legal Support	https://wlsq.org.au
Challenge DV	Prevention Training	https://challengedv.org
DV Connect	Safety Planning (emergency transport and accommodation, crisis counselling, intervention, information and referrals).	https://dvconnect.org
Children's Hospital	Health care and safety	https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au
Hospital and Health Servcies	Health care and safety	https://www.health.qld.gov.au/system-governance/health-system/hhs
The Handy Guide	Information and service directory for Queensland women in need.	https://thehandyguide.com.au/

Refer

Organisation	Area of Expertise	Website Link
1800 RESPECT	National phone counselling service.	https://1800respect.org.au/
Victims Assist	Information about support services, victim's rights and financial assistance.	https://www.qld.gov.au/law/crime-and-police/victim-assist-queensland
Tenants Queensland	Tenant Advice and Referral Service	https://tenantsqld.org.au
Immigrants Women's Support Service	Support service for immigrant and refugee women and their children.	https://iwss.org.au
Department of Home Affairs DFV Support Section	Support victims of DFV by helping them with their visa status.	https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/domestic-family-violence-and-your-visa/how-we-can-help Email: dfvs.temp.visa@homeaffairs.gov.au
Bangle Foundation	Domestic abuse support services for women of South Asian heritage.	https://banglefoundation.com.au
Footprints Housing Older Women	Older women in QLD to receive housing services and support.	https://footprintscommunity.org.au
Braveheart	Prevention and treatment of child sexual abuse.	https://bravehearts.org.au/
Community - Skilling for Queenslanders Program	Skilling Queenslanders for Work for community organisations.	https://desbt.qld.gov.au/
Brisbane Youth Service	Housing or emergency assistance.	https://brisyouth.org
Uniting Care- Escaping Violence payment Program	Escape - financial support.	https://www.unitingcareqld.com.au
Head to Health Program	Mental Health, suicide prevention service	https://www.headtohealth.gov.au/

Recovery and Healing

Organisation	Area of Expertise	Website Link
WHEQ	Women's health, gender equity and the primary prevention of violence.	https://wheq.org.au
Centre Against Sexual Violence	Childhood sexual assault.	https://casv.org.au/
Beyond DV	Empower survivors of DV to reclaim their lives.	https://www.beyonddv.org.au/
Strong Women Talking	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children.	https://strongwomentalking.org.au/
Open Haven	Emotional and practical support.	https://www.openhaven.org.au/
LGTB Domestic Violence Awareness Foundation	LGTB community.	https://www.dvafoundation.org/
Working Women Queensland	Legal training on women's workplace rights.	www.brq.org.au
WWILD	Support for people with intellectual or learning disabilities.	www.wwild.org.au
BRISSC	Rape and incest survivors.	www.brissc.org.au
Centre for Women and Co	Family and Domestic Violence Support	https://www.centreforwomen.org.au/
99 Steps	Emotional and practical support for CALD women	https://www.ssi.org.au/our-services/domestic-family-violence/99-steps/
Friends With Dignity	Programs to assist victim-survivors of domestic violence	https://www.friendswithdignity.org.au/
HART 4000	Emergency housing.	https//communify.org.au

We thank Challenge DV for their contributions to the WEN workshops and events. Learn more about Challenge DV and the work they do.

https://www.challengedv.org/


Religious Place
Church
Rituals
Traditions
Values
Culture
Religion
Home
family
own space
Practices
Family Photos/Stories
Passed down from gens

In Brisbane, in April, the Women's Ethic Network (WEN) hosted a ***ReAuthoring our Stories with Narrative Practice*** workshop, facilitated by Narrative Practitioner, Leanne Levinge, from Big Hill & Oyster. This workshop outlined the principles and applications of Narrative Practice in addressing issues of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) and offering workshop participants empowering and strengths-based possibilities for talking about DFV in the community.

Narrative Practice offers a powerful approach to supporting women who have experienced domestic and family violence. This approach has an emphasis on the separation of the person from the problem, allowing women to reclaim their stories and identities beyond the violence they have endured.

Activities such as the "Tree of Life" conversation help women to reconnect with their strengths, hopes, and support networks, fostering a sense of empowerment and agency. This empowerment is a beacon of hope in the fight against domestic and family violence.



What is Narrative Practice?

Narrative Practice was developed by Michael White and David Epston in the late 1970s/early 1980s.
This theory focuses on exploring and understanding people's identities, problem stories, therapeutic relationships, and the ethics and politics of therapy.

The Narrative Practice Approach

This approach focuses on seeing the problem as separate from the person. The emphasis is on asking rather than interpreting, centering the person's knowledge and experiences, and bringing social, cultural, and historical contexts into conversations.



Narrative Practitioner's Toolbox

Techniques that a Narrative Practice Practitioner uses include: externalizing the problem, re-authoring conversations, remembering conversations, outsider witness practices, alternative storylines, documentation, and the Tree of Life approach.

> "The person is not the problem, the problem is the problem"

Externalising. (n.d.). The Dulwich Centre. https://dulwichcentre.com.au/courses/what-is-narrative-practice-a-free-course/lessons/externalising/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20person%20is%20not%20the

The workshop in which WEN members participated implied three people having a conversation, where one person was the victim/survivor and two others were listeners who had to listen to the victim/survivor's story and facilitate the conversation, but not judge. The victim/survivor needed to be empowered to share their story and identify their strengths, resources and skills.

Identification of healing activities was encouraged and examples of these included: cooking, painting, exercise, meditation, saving money in secret or keeping items secret from the person using violence.









Thank you to Leanne Levinge from Big Hill and Oyster for her facilitation of the workshop. You can find out more about Leanne at:

https://bighill-oyster.com.au/

Activity:

Tree of Life

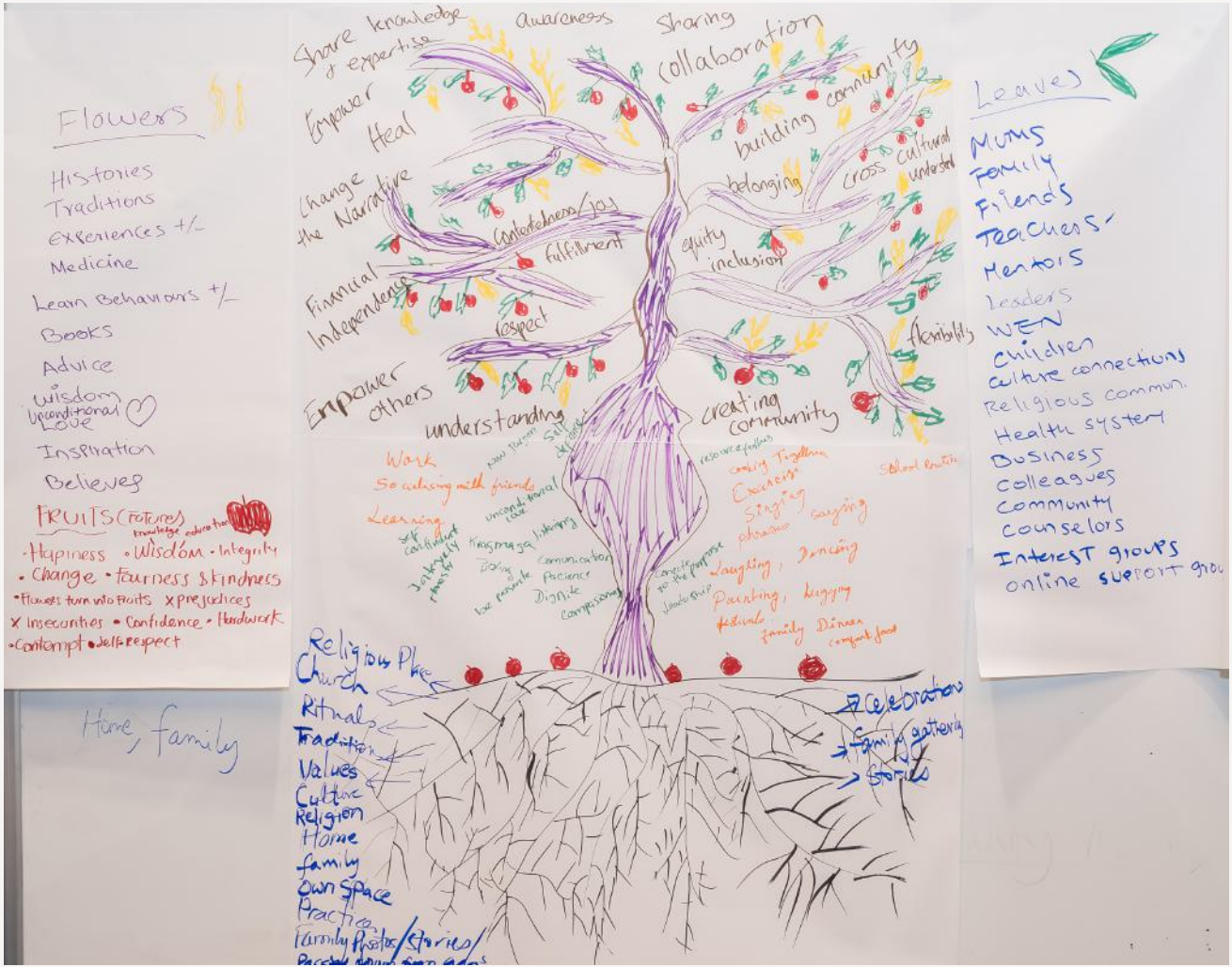


Participants co-create a "Tree of Life" to represent connections, daily activities, hopes, dreams, skills, relationships, and legacies (see the pictures below).








Flowers
Histories
Traditions
Experiences +/-
Medicine
Learn Behaviours +/-
Books
Advice
Wisdom
Unconditional Love
Inspiration
Believes
FRUITS (Futures)
Hapiness
Wisdom
Integrity
Change
Fairness & kindness
Flowers turn into Fruits
x prejudices
x Insecurities
Confidence
Hardwork
Contempt
Self-respect
Home, family
Share knowledge & expertise
awareness
Sharing
collaboration
Empower
Heal
building
community
Change the Narrative
belonging
cross cultural understand
Contentedness/joy
fulfillment
equity
inclusion
Financial Independence
respect
flexibility
Empower others
understanding
creating community
Work
So walking with friends
Learning
Krasnaya listening
Boring
Communication
Patience
Dignity
Compassion
Laughing, Dancing
Painting, Lugging
Festivals
family Dinner
Religious Place
Church
Rituals
Tradition
Values
Culture
Religion
Home
family
Own Space
Practice
Family Photos/Stories/
Celebration
family gathering
Stories
Leaves
Mums
Family
Friends
Teachers
Mentors
Leaders
WEN
Children
culture connections
Religious commun.
Health system
Business
Colleagues
Community
Counselors
Interest groups
online support grou

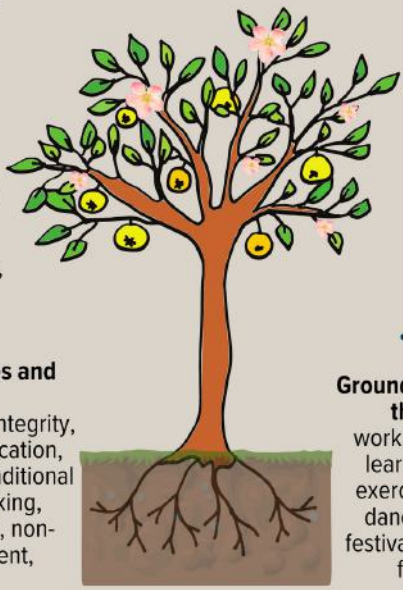
Women's Ethnic Network

TREE OF LIFE

Flowers (gifts, values and legacies that others have given us):
histories, traditions, experiences - both positive and negative, medicine, learnt behaviors - both positive and negative, books, advice, wisdom, unconditional love, inspiration, beliefs

Fruit (the gifts, values and legacies we want to leave for others):
happiness, wisdom, integrity, change, fairness and kindness, less prejudices, less insecurities, confidence, hard work, less contempt, self respect

Leaves (people or groups in our lives who are our networks):
Mums, family, friends, mentors, leaders, WEN, children, culture connections, religious community, health system, businesses, work colleagues, community, counselors, interest groups, online support groups



Branches (our hopes, dreams & goals):
building community, cross cultural understanding, equity, inclusion, belonging, empower others, financial independence, respect, change the narrative, heal, joy, contentedness, fulfillment, collaboration

Trunk (our skills, abilities and strengths):
dignity, boxing, charisma, integrity, self-confidence, communication, leadership, purpose, unconditional love, self- defense, cooking, honesty, resourcefulness, non-judgement, being present, compassion

Ground (activities and interests that keep us strong):
work, socialising with friends, learning, cooking together, exercising, singing, laughing, dancing, painting, hugging, festivals, family dinner, comfort food, school routine

Roots (things and places we feel strong connections):
family gatherings, celebrations, religious places, rituals, traditions, values, culture, home, family, own space, practices, family stories

Acts of Resistance

It is helpful to acknowledge and highlight the various ways women resist violence, with the emphasis on their continuous efforts to maintain their sense of self-worth and hope. Some examples of acts of resistance include:

- imagining another scenario, or a future that is different,
- going through old photographs,
- creating a community and maintaining healthy relationships outside of the abusive relationship.

Putting It All Together

Community leaders can create spaces for curious conversations, support women in resisting violence, honour their strengths, and help expand their possible futures. Conversations can empower women by amplifying their agency and connecting their stories of bravery and resistance with their hopes and dreams.

Engaging Men in the Conversation

Men are integral to stopping violence against women and children. Community leaders are encouraged to involve men in respectful masculinity conversations and support them in moving toward their preferred ways of being.

Resources: https://dulwichcentre.com.au/

Sexual Violence Against Women Information

Centre Against Sexual Violence



Understanding the spectrum of sexual violence against women is crucial. It encompasses a variety of unwanted behaviours that can make the victim feel uncomfortable, distressed, frightened, threatened, or harmed.

These include:

- sexual harassment,
- unwanted touching,
- forced sexual acts,
- rape, and
- other non-consensual sexual activities.



It's important to note that victims are never to blame; the responsibility lies solely with the perpetrators

Victims often face significant barriers when seeking help, including fear, social stigma, financial dependency, and concerns about confidentiality and visa status. This is where our community support becomes crucial.

Services such as:

- trauma-informed counselling,
- legal aid,
- and support from community organizations play a pivotal role in assisting victims.

These services provide emotional support, legal guidance, and practical assistance, helping victims to navigate their options and make informed decisions.

Community leaders and service providers play a pivotal role in addressing domestic and family violence. They are encouraged to create safe spaces for conversations about these issues, support women in their resistance against violence, and involve men in discussions about respectful masculinity. It's crucial to acknowledge and celebrate the acts of resistance women exhibit, as these demonstrate their ongoing fight for dignity and self-worth.





Effectively combating sexual violence against women requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. This approach should include legal, emotional, and community support, along with ongoing efforts to change societal attitudes and empower victims. It's a complex issue that demands a comprehensive response.

Centre Against Sexual Violence Inc.
A safe space for women to hea

Learn more about the Centre Against Sexual Violence and the work they do.

https://casv.org.au/

“There is always light at the end of the tunnel”

(Domestic abuse survivor – Anon)

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The Empowerment Through Insight Guide has been developed by the **Women's Ethnic Network (WEN)** of **Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ).**

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Diversicare Your lifestyle, Your choice

Berlasco inclusive residential care