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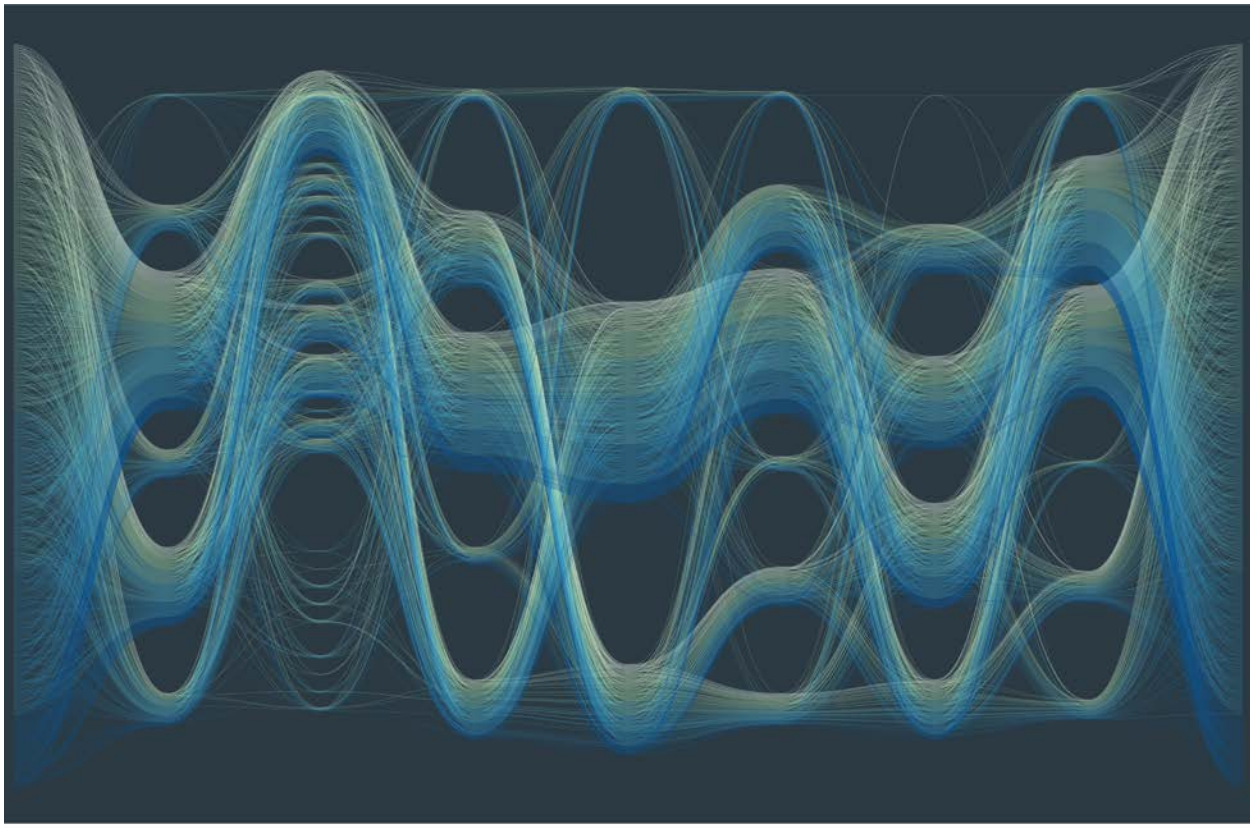

Faith-based communities' responses to family and domestic violence

M Truong, M Sharif, D Pasalich, A Olsen, B Calabria and N Priest

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ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods
Research School of Social Sciences
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M Truong, M Sharif, D Pasalich, A Olsen, B Calabria and N Priest

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The findings and views in this report are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to any Australian Government department.

Acknowledgment of country

We acknowledge and celebrate the First Australians on whose traditional lands we work and meet, and pay our respect to the Elders past, present and emerging.

Acronyms

ANU	Australian National University
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CSRM	ANU Centre for Social Research & ` Methods
FDV	family and domestic violence

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Executive summary

Background

Reduction in family and domestic violence (FDV) is a national and international priority. Under the Third Action Plan (2016–2019) of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022, National Priority Area 3 focuses on primary prevention practices, and assisting communities to better support women and their children who are experiencing violence at home. Specifically, action 3.9(b) has a commitment to 'build the capacity of community and faith leaders to reject, prevent and respond to violence'. At a state level the 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence drew attention to the role of faith communities in FDV, describing faith communities as 'vital settings' for dealing with family violence and recognising the trust and authority faith leaders have within their communities to influence attitudes. Similarly in 2015 a Queensland Government Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence undertaken by former Governer General Quentin Bryce also drew attention to the need for capacity building among faith leaders and communities regarding family and domestic violence.

Settings based approaches are recognised as essential to preventing and addressing FDV (Flood 2007). Attention to how these issues may uniquely play out across contexts and populations such as in different workplaces and professions, sports clubs, schools, rural and regional areas, and ethnic and migrant groups is now best practice.

However to date there has been very limited attention across research, policy or practice on FDV within faith based settings and on attitudes, beliefs and responses to FDV among faith leaders and communities in Australia or globally. Given that faith and religion plays a central role in the lives of many individuals and communities it is imperative that this under-addressed issue be given attention. An increased understanding of the attitudes of individuals, families and leaders within faith-based communities is critically needed to inform future best-practice approaches to prevention, early intervention and responses to FDV within these communities.

This report outlines the findings from a consultation project commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. The project is led by researchers from the Australian National University.

There is considerable religious and cultural heterogeneity across families, communities and within faiths in Australia with over 40 religions and over 300 cultural backgrounds identified with many forms of religious and faith expressions and beliefs. As such this project focuses on some communities and is not intended to be representative of all faith and religious groups, or to be representative of all those who practice faiths included in this study.

Aim of the consultation project

The aim of the project was to to:

- explore the role of religion and cultural values in attitudes and responses to FDV in some CALD communities
- gain a better understanding of the capacity of faith-based communities for prevention, early intervention and response to FDV.

Specifically, the aims were to identify:

- attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding FDV in faith-based communities
- barriers and enablers to addressing FDV in faith-based communities

- the capacity of faith leaders and communities to reduce FDV
- effective interventions to reduce FDV in faith-based communities.

Methods

Formal consultations (interviews and focus groups) were conducted from August to November 2018. Participants were from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 11 faith leaders and 47 community members self identifying as from different faith backgrounds in Australia: Christianity (Catholic, Evangelical and Anglican), Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. Seven key informants working in the FDV sector who had experience working with faith leaders and faith-based groups also provided insights on the myriad issues and complexities of engaging with faith-based communities in this work.

Findings

The findings from the consultations with key informants, faith leaders and community members are outlined according to the four aims of the consultations.

Attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding FDV in faith-based communities

Overall, FDV was generally recognised as a common issue faced by faith leaders and their communities (but to a lesser extent among those of a Buddhist faith), yet still considered to be poorly understood. This was seen as due, in part, to FDV being a taboo topic and a private, family issue not discussed in public. Some participants perceived a denial of the existence of FDV among some leaders and members in their community. Although some faith leaders and community members emphasised that their religion does not condone violence, some religious beliefs and practices were considered to influence understandings of, and responses to, FDV – for example, victim-blaming attitudes, and overemphasis of doctrines of forgiveness, acceptance and endurance. Religious beliefs regarding gender roles that consider men and women to be 'equal but different' and support hierarchical gender roles were considered highly influential in FDV-related attitudes because they contribute to normalisation of FDV behaviours and attitudes.

Barriers and enablers to addressing FDV in faith-based communities

The barriers and enablers to addressing FDV identified by participants were multifactorial and operated on multiple levels: individual, family and community. Most participants focused their discussions on the various barriers rather than the enablers. The main barriers identified were:

- a reluctance to engage in FDV work because 'it's too hard' or because of feeling stigmatised and under attack from outsiders
- family obligations and reputations preventing victims from seeking help with divorce and relationship separation, which are associated with considerable stigma and shame within faith-based communities
- pushback or backlash effects from men (including faith leaders) as a result of perceived insufficient attention to men's experiences of violence, resistance to acknowledging gender inequality, and perceived loss of traditional gender roles
- a lack of awareness and understanding of FDV, and skills to address it
- perceived conflict between mainstream FDV frameworks (e.g. government and nongovernment agencies) and religious teachings regarding gender roles
- difficulties accessing mainstream service systems and fears of deportation (for migrants on temporary visas)
- insufficient funding and resources.

Capacity of faith leaders and communities to decrease FDV

Overall, the key informant, faith leader and community member participants perceived the capacity of faith leaders and communities to address and prevent FDV to be limited and highly heterogeneous: some are helpful, some fail to act,

and some engage in harmful and re-traumatising behaviours. However, some key informants and faith leaders felt that progress was being made, in that leaders and communities were increasingly aware of FDV.

Effective interventions to reduce FDV in faith-based communities

Key informant, faith leader and community member participants suggested a number of strategies that would be most effective in reducing FDV in their communities. Many strategies centred around the role of government and community organisations in working in meaningful partnership with faith leaders and communities to achieve lasting and substantial change regarding FDV.

Recommendations from participants

Findings from this project indicate that more work is needed to strengthen the capacity of religious and CALD communities to address FDV. The main recommendations from participants in the consultation are as follows:

- Work in meaningful partnerships with faith leaders and communities, employing religious respect and cultural competence.
- Use flexible approaches that suit each particular context, including assessing communities' readiness for change and the most appropriate language (e.g. family safety, healthy relationships).
- Raise awareness of FDV across different settings (e.g. health, education) and empower women within their faith communities.
- Provide evidence of the prevalence of FDV in faith-based communities to engage reluctant leaders and communities, and address pushback and backlash effects.
- Train and build the capacity of faith leaders, community leaders, advocates and organisations.
- Encourage engagement with religious texts and teachings to promote gender equality.
- Engage men in faith-based communities to do FDV work.
- Provide more culturally and religiously appropriate support services.
- Address gaps in funding and resources for faith leaders and communities (including better sharing of existing resources).
- Increase the availability of information sessions for newly arrived migrants to Australia that include information relating to FDV.
- Provide soon-to-be-married couples with information about healthy relationships and FDV.
- Teach children and young people about respectful relationships and gender equality.

Limitations

This consultation had several limitations. First, the use of qualitative methods in this consultation means that the results are not generalisable to any particular group or community based on their cultural or religious background. Although a broad range of experiences and perspectives was captured across different religious and cultural backgrounds, it is possible that some points of view were not included and that some were overstated.

Second, the majority of community member consultations were with women. Therefore, the range of views held by men in the community was not fully captured. This highlights an area for future research efforts.

Finally, this work was limited to urban areas across four Australian states. Different communities, service systems, policies and immigration histories in other regions and states may provide slightly different or additional experiences that were not captured in this project.

1 Introduction

This report outlines findings from the consultation project 'Faith-based communities' responses to family and domestic violence'. The project aimed to explore the role of religion and cultural values in attitudes and responses to family and domestic violence (FDV) in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. The project was conducted to inform the development of community-driven initiatives to build the capacity of community and faith leaders to address FDV. It was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services.

1.1 Background

Reduction in FDV is a national and international priority. There is increasing recognition of the high prevalence of FDV across communities, and of the substantial harm such violence does to women and their children, families, communities and wider society (Our Watch et al. 2015, DSS 2016, State of Victoria 2016).

Addressing violence against women is a major policy focus at the national, state and local levels. The Australian, state and territory governments have collaborated with organisations, communities and individuals across the country to develop a 12-year National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022. The National Plan has two major areas of focus: FDV and sexual assault. The National Plan aims to prevent the violence from occurring, support women who have experienced violence, stop men from committing acts of violence, and build a body of evidence to better understand 'what works' in terms of reducing FDV and sexual assault in Australia. There are four Action Plans, each building on previous iterations. The next (4th) Action Plan is due to be released in 2019.

Under the Third Action Plan (2016–2019) of the National Plan, National Priority Area 3 focuses on primary prevention practices, and assisting communities to better support women and their children who are experiencing violence at home. Specifically, action 3.9(b) has a commitment to 'build the capacity of community and faith leaders to reject, prevent and respond to violence'. This builds on calls from experts and stakeholders for more research exploring the role of religion and cultural mores in FDV in CALD communities (Bartels 2010, ABS 2013). Faith-based contexts such as places of worship, networks and associations are recognised as environments that have a powerful influence on social norms and beliefs relating to FDV (Our Watch et al. 2015). Faith-based organisations and their leaders can affect individuals, families and communities through the delivery of programs and services (AMWCHR 2011, JTAFV 2011, City of Greater Dandenong 2015, Our Watch et al. 2015).

At a state level, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) drew attention to the role of faith-based communities in FDV, describing faith communities as 'vital settings' for dealing with family violence, and recognising the trust placed in faith leaders and their authority to influence attitudes within their communities. It identified that women experiencing FDV may face barriers seeking help as a result of attitudes and practices within their faith-based communities, inadequate or ill-informed responses by faith leaders, and a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity by mainstream FDV services (State of Victoria 2016). Several community initiatives with various faith-based communities in Victoria have resulted in recommendations from the Victorian Multicultural Commission, including the Multifaith Advisory Group, that family violence practitioners work with women from a wide range of faith-based communities to develop training materials for faith leaders on issues of sexual assault and family violence. A participatory action research project in Victoria is currently under way to build faith leaders' capacity to respond to and prevent FDV (led by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, and the University of Melbourne).

Recent reporting by the Australian Broadcasting Commission has further focused community attention on FDV in faith-based communities. This included a series of in-depth investigations into these issues among people of Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu and Sikh faiths (Baird & Gleeson 2017, Gleeson & Baird 2017, Jopson 2017). More in-depth knowledge is needed regarding beliefs, attitudes and responses to FDV within faith-based communities both in Australia and internationally, and how faith-based communities can be more effective in preventing and addressing FDV (Priest et al. 2017).

An international literature review of faith communities' and organisations' responses to family violence (Le Roux 2015) found limited empirical research examining these groups' involvement in addressing FDV. The existing literature focused on certain regions (mostly the United States) and religions (mostly Christian faith groups). The literature review suggested that much faith-based work in relation to FDV is undocumented, largely because this is a relatively new area with little funding for research and evaluation (Le Roux 2015).

Although a detailed literature review on the role of faith communities and organisations in addressing FDV was beyond the scope of this current project, our scoping search found that the existing body of literature presented a multifaceted depiction of how faith leaders and faith communities influence experiences of, and responses to, FDV.

On the one hand, being part of a faith-based community is described positively as an avenue through which information and action in relation to FDV can be advanced, and as a source of support for those experiencing FDV (Holmes 2012, Vaughan et al. 2016). For example, the credibility of faith leaders within their congregations means that they have the opportunity to provide information and to mobilise members around the issue (Equality Institute 2017, Holmes 2012, Kaybryn & Nidadavolu 2012). Some faith-based organisations have promoted messages about gender equality, including women's rights, by drawing on religious texts and allegorical stories, as part of initiatives to address FDV (Kaybryn & Nidadavolu 2012).

On the other hand, there is also evidence that faith and religion can further add to women's susceptibility to FDV and present challenges when addressing FDV. For example, religious laws and customs may forbid divorce among married couples, leading to intense pressure on women to stay in relationships despite FDV (SAMEAC 2016, Vaughan et al. 2016, Access Community Services 2017). Additionally, some faith-based communities are highly patriarchal; as a result, the experiences of women and their voices can be diminished or minimised, thus hindering a woman's ability and willingness to recognise FDV and seek help or support (Versha & Venkatraman 2010, DSS 2015, SAMEAC 2016, Access Community Services 2017). There are accounts of FDV perpetrators (mis)using religion to justify violence against women, in addition to faith leaders actively discouraging victims of FDV from reporting FDV to authorities but rather counselling women to be 'good wives' and to pray more (Wendt 2009, Kaybryn & Nidadavolu 2012, Access Community Services 2017).

Much of the work on the role of faith-based communities in relation to FDV in Australia has occurred as part of work among CALD, migrant and refugee communities. Various studies involving CALD communities with a faith background have emphasised the importance of engaging religious leaders as educators and spokespeople in efforts to address FDV (Versha & Venkatraman 2010, DSS 2015, Murdolo & Quiazon 2016).

Although addressing FDV among CALD communities is a critical priority, it must be recognised that culture and religion are distinct, yet overlapping, concepts. For example, two people – one born in Somalia and one born in Indonesia – identifying with the same religion (Islam) may have entirely distinct cultural and linguistic practices. Although 'culture' and 'religion' are often used interchangeably, these two related concepts need to be disentangled within the context of FDV. It is important to recognise that there is much religious and cultural heterogeneity across families and communities in Australia, and that this heterogeneity is increasing.

Recent data from the 2016 Census show that Christianity (including Catholic, Anglican and other denominations) remained the largest religious group reported (52% of the total

population), and the next largest groups were Islam and Buddhism (ABS 2017). Although only 2.6% of the total Australian population identified as Muslim in 2016, this is a 15% increase over the previous 5 years. Hinduism had the largest growth between 2006 and 2016, largely influenced by immigration from south Asia and reinforcing the increasingly diverse religious composition of the Australian population (ABS 2017). Again, it is imperative to note that religious groups are not homogenous groups. For example, the Muslim population reflects the cultures and practices of countries and regions around the world, including Indonesia, Syria, Bosnia and Somalia. Many migrants and refugees to Australia – including from Southeast Asia, Syria and much of southern Africa – are Christians. Religious 'groups' often reflect very ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, both born in Australia and born overseas. There is thus an ongoing need to better understand how faith and religious background intersect with ethnicity, culture and migration experiences.

1.2 Key terms and definitions used in this report

1.2.1 Domestic violence and family violence

For the purposes of this consultation and report, a broad understanding of FDV has been adopted. As acknowledged by the National Plan, there are various legal and academic definitions of violence against women. The National Plan states that 'domestic violence refers to acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship'. It includes behaviour aimed at exerting control and power over women and their children (e.g. physical, sexual and psychological abuse). Family violence encompasses violence between family members, in addition to violence between intimate partners (e.g. between parents and their children, between siblings and between other family members).

1.2.2 Religion and faith

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), providing a specific definition for religion is difficult because of the intangible and wide-ranging nature of the topic. However, the definition the ABS uses is 'a set of beliefs and practices usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense' (ABS 2016). Faith refers to a strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on a spiritual conviction.

1.2.3 Faith-based organisation

The United Nations defines faith-based organisations as '*religious, faith-based*, and/or *faith*-inspired groups, which operate as registered or unregistered non-profit institutions'.

1.2.4 Place of worship

Generally, we use 'place of worship' to refer to local places that provide a space for religious activities to be conducted – for example, mosques, churches, temples, synagogues and other similar buildings or meeting places.

1.2.5 Culturally and linguistically diverse

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) is a broad and inclusive descriptor for communities with diverse language, ethnic background, nationality, dress, traditions, food, societal structures, art and religious characteristics. CALD people are generally defined as people born in countries other than those classified by the ABS as 'main English speaking countries' (i.e. Canada, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) (ECCV 2012).

1.2.6 Migrant

According to the ABS, a migrant is a person who resides in Australia but was born overseas. Migrants in Australia may have permanent resident status or temporary resident status (ABS 2012).

1.3 Aim of the consultation project

The aim of this project was to consult with different faith-based communities in Australia to:

- explore the role of religion and cultural values in attitudes and responses to FDV in CALD communities
- gain a better understanding of the capacity of faith-based communities for prevention, early intervention and response to FDV.

Specifically, the aims were to identify:

- attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding FDV in faith-based communities
- barriers and enablers to addressing FDV in faith-based communities
- the capacity of faith leaders and communities to reduce FDV
- effective interventions to reduce FDV in faith-based communities.

The project was conducted in accordance with relevant Australian Government strategies, including the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 and the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020.

1.4 Ethics

Ethics approval for this project was obtained from the Australian National University's Human Research Ethics Committee. A detailed ethics application was developed, with consultation methods, participant information sheets, consent forms, risk management guide, and interview and focus group guides.

Interview guides were developed for key informants, faith leaders and focus groups with community members. The interview guide for key informants included topics such as:

- key informants' work with faith communities and the nature of this work
- key informants' perspectives of faith-based attitudes about, beliefs about, and experiences of, FDV
- faith communities' responses to FDV
- priority faith leaders and communities that should be consulted in the project.

The interview guide for faith leader consultations included topics such as:

- faith leaders' understanding of FDV
- the extent to which FDV is an issue in their community
- faith leaders' capacity to respond to FDV.

The interview guide for focus group discussions with community members included topics such as:

- faith-based perspectives of FDV
- the extent to which FDV is an issue in their community
- their faith leaders' capacity to respond to FDV.

In consideration of religious and cultural sensitivities, the project team consulted with key informants and other contacts to determine the most appropriate terminology to use during consultations with faith leaders and community members. For example, terminology such as 'respectful relationships' and 'family safety' may be used to facilitate discussion relating to FDV.

1.4.1 Safety protocol

A risk management guide was developed, which identified potential risks for both participants and researchers, and outlined strategies to handle such risks should they occur during the course of the project. For example, to minimise the risk that participants would become distressed while being interviewed, the researchers adopted several strategies:

- There will be no direct questions about participants' own experiences of family violence.
- Participants will be advised that their participation is entirely voluntary and their information will be kept confidential.
- Interviews and focus groups will be conducted in a supportive and nonjudgmental manner, and care will be taken to avoid using blaming or stigmatising language. The researcher team will consult with key informants and faith leaders to ensure that the interviews questions are respectful and take cultural sensitivities into consideration.

- At the end of focus groups, all participants will be given the opportunity for further one-on-one follow-up conversations to allow an opportunity for private discussions (not in front of other community members).
- A list of support services and resources will be provided to all participants should they require assistance.

2 Methods

Before the consultations, a preliminary scope of stakeholders and organisations in the area was conducted. Once ethics approval was obtained, formal consultations were conducted with key informants, faith leaders and community members from different faith-based communities in Australia. The preliminary scope and formal consultations are detailed below.

2.1 Preliminary scope of stakeholders and organisations

While waiting for final ethics approval for formal consultations, preliminary scoping conversations were held with a wide range of stakeholders and organisations to:

- identify current community, policy and practice priorities
- build knowledge and understanding of the key issues and gaps to be addressed in this area
- identify other work in this area by the Australian and state/territory governments
- refine consultation methods and interview guides
- identify potential key informants, faith leaders and community groups for the formal consultations.

The project team held preliminary discussions with representatives from the following organisations and individuals:

- Our Watch
- White Ribbon
- HealthWest Partnership (primary care partnership consisting of healthcare providers, community organisations and local councils in the western suburbs of Melbourne)
- Common Grace (national Christian social justice advocacy organisation)
- Jewish Alliance Against Family Violence (New South Wales)
- Anglican Diocese of Sydney
- Merri Health (community health centre, inner northern suburbs of Melbourne)
- Healthy Communities and Population Health Sections (Merri Health, community health centre, inner northern suburbs of Melbourne)
- Community development section (IPC Health, community health centre, inner western suburbs of Melbourne)
- Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence (Victoria)
- Community Participation Unit, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet
- World Vision
- Salvation Army
- inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (Victoria)
- various interfaith networks in different states
- Catholic Social Services (Victoria)
- a sister from the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy (Victoria)
- a Churchill Fellow investigating family violence interventions overseas and a community worker/advocate from Queensland
- Arabic Welfare Inc.
- SydWest Multicultural Services
- Foundation House: the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Victoria).

These discussions enabled the project team to identify key stakeholders and work being conducted in various communities across Australia. It also highlighted groups that had been consulted by government agencies and that might provide a new perspective on the important issues regarding FDV facing faith-based communities.

This preliminary scope of stakeholders and organisations also provided information to ensure that the consultations were respectful and culturally appropriate.

2.2 Consultation processes

Formal consultations were conducted from mid-August to the end of November 2018. Participants were from New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

Overall, staff from social service agencies and advocacy groups showed a willingness to engage in the consultation project. A strong view was articulated that more work was needed to understand the issues relating to FDV faced by faith-based communities in Australia.

In contrast, recruitment of participants for the consultations with faith leaders and community members was more challenging. Some faith leaders and community groups were highly wary of participating in the project, providing feedback to the project team that they felt they were already overconsulted without any resulting practical outcomes for their communities. This was particularly evident among several groups from Islamic-faith backgrounds, as well as members of the Hindu and Sikh communities. Several Islamic-faith groups reported feeling that their communities were being targeted using a deficit frame, and were concerned that this would contribute to further negative stereotyping of their faith and cultural group. Some people from an Islamic-faith backgrounds were also concerned about surrounding political and media narratives that contribute to negative stereotypes about their religion and cultural background. In addition, a number of potential participants expressed that they were reluctant to participate in the consultations because explicit discussion of FDV is very much discouraged, or even stigmatised, in many faith-based and CALD communities. As a result, several of the community member consultations were conducted via individual interviews rather than focus groups, because some people felt more comfortable discussing these issues without others present.

It was initially conceptualised that the consultations would be conducted in three phases: key informants, then faith leaders and finally community members. In practice, it was an iterative process, which involved going back and forth between the different participant groups.

2.3 Consultations with service providers and agencies working in the area

Formal interviews were conducted with seven key informants from a range of organisations in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria. These organisations included FDV advocacy organisations, tertiary religious studies units and community social services. The key informants worked with leaders and communities from the following faith-based communities: Catholic, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh. Some of the key informants had a faith background themselves and were working in FDV either within their faith community or with other faith communities. One key informant had been a faith leader previously.

On average, interviews were 30–60 minutes long, and all were audio-recorded (with consent). All participants were provided with a plain-language statement describing the project, and had an opportunity to ask questions about the project and their involvement.

The interviews explored key informants' experiences in working with faith-based communities in relation to FDV, in terms of the types of communities they had worked with, and the kinds of attitudes, beliefs and experiences they had encountered. Interviewees were also asked about their perceptions of how faith leaders and communities responded to FDV and what issues they thought were important for faith-based communities.

During key informant interviews, advice was sought on which faith leaders and organisations might be approached to be a part of this project, and on considerations for engaging with leaders and community members. Advice was also sought on the appropriate terminology to use when interacting with faith leaders and communities. This ensured that the methods for the later phases (involving consultations with faith leaders and community members) were culturally appropriate, and respectful of faith leaders, faith communities and their specific needs.

Following consultations with key informants, contact was made with faith leaders and community members to invite them to be part of the project.

2.4 Consultations with faith leaders

Interviews were conducted with 11 faith leaders from different faiths in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. The faiths were Catholicism, Christianity (Catholic, Evangelical, Anglican), Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. The self-identified cultural backgrounds of the faith leaders included Asian, Sudanese, Sri Lankan, Chinese, Singaporean, Afghan and Jewish. All but one were individually interviewed (face to face or via phone). The faith leader who was not interviewed was part of a planned focus group with community members at a mosque. Three of the 11 faith leaders were women. Some of the faith leaders consulted had done FDV-related work within their faith communities (e.g. conducting workshops to raise awareness, advocacy work). On average, interviews were 30–60 minutes long, and all were audio-recorded (with consent). All participants were provided with a plain-language statement describing the project, and had an opportunity to ask questions about the project and their involvement.

Information was sought regarding the faith leaders' awareness and perception of the prevalence of FDV in their communities, and what key issues were faced by their community in relation to FDV. Leaders were also asked about any programs or training they were involved in that addressed FDV and what gaps needed to be addressed.

2.5 Consultations with community members

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with 47 community members from different faiths. The faiths were Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hindu and Judaism. The self-identified cultural backgrounds of the community members included Southeast Asian, Indian, Pakistani, Jewish, Lebanese, Afghan and Vietnamese. They were located in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria. Some community members had experience working in FDV (e.g. as activists, community workers.) Some were personally interested in the topic but had not participated in any FDV-related work.

On average, interviews were 30–60 minutes long, and focus groups were 60–90 minutes long. All focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded (with consent). All participants were provided with a plain-language statement describing the project, and had opportunities to ask questions about the project and their involvement. Most of the individual interviews were with women (six out of seven), and most of the focus groups comprised women only (five out of seven).

Community members were recruited via key informants from social service or advocacy agencies, community health networks, community associations, faith-based organisations, and personal and professional contacts. The interviews and discussions focused on people's awareness and perception of the prevalence of FDV in their communities, and how much of an issue family safety was among the community. Participants were also asked about the role of faith leaders within their communities and their perceptions of faith leaders' capacity to address family safety issues. Participants were not asked to disclose personal experiences of family violence, but were provided with information about available support services if they indicated that they needed assistance.

Community members were either individually interviewed (in person or via phone) or consulted in a focus group discussion. Focus groups consisted of up to nine participants, and were conducted in a comfortable and supportive environment. Focus groups were usually arranged with the assistance of a community worker or advocate who was known to the community members; this person was often present during the group discussion.

2.6 Consultations with government services

To further understand the context for FDV information and programs provided to the community from Australian Government agencies, discussions were held with the following Australian Government representatives:

- Craig Flintoft, Director of Family Programs Operations, Department of Social Services

- Brendan Tunks, Director of the Humanitarian Settlement Program Section, Department of Social Services
- Bridget Quayle, Registrar of Marriage Celebrants, Attorney-General's Department.

2.7 Analysis of consultations

All interviews and focus group discussions were digitally audio-recorded, with the consent of participants. Audio-recordings were transcribed in full. NVIVO© software was used to manage the process of coding and analysing the transcribed data.

3 Findings

This section presents the findings from the consultations with key informants, faith leaders and community members according to the four aims of the consultation – that is, to identify:

- attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding FDV in faith-based communities
- barriers and enablers to addressing FDV in faith-based communities
- the capacity of faith leaders and communities to reduce FDV
- effective interventions to reduce FDV in faith-based communities.

Under each main aim, themes and subthemes are described. As a result of the overlapping nature of some participants' roles and experiences, the viewpoints of key informants, faith leaders and community members are integrated and presented according to themes. For example, some key informants are also members of a faith-based community, and some community members have previously worked in, or currently work in, FDV.

Quotes from the consultations are used to illustrate the findings throughout this section. To protect the identity of participants, codes are used to identify the participant group: key informant (KI), faith leader (FL) or community member (CM, or CM_FG for focus group). Faith leaders and community members also have their faith background noted.

3.1 Attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding FDV in faith-based communities

The most commonly discussed attitudes, beliefs and knowledge regarding FDV across all participant groups and across all faiths were as follows:

- FDV and other forms of violence are not at all condoned by faith and religion, and are counter to the fundamental beliefs of the faith.
- FDV is generally recognised as a common issue faced by faith-based communities. However, although awareness is increasing, FDV is still poorly understood among many.
- FDV is rarely spoken about openly because it is perceived as a taboo topic.
- Denial and defensiveness about FDV within faith-based communities persist among faith leaders and community members, often leading to victim blaming and failure to believe disclosures.
- Religious beliefs and practices are highly influential in understanding and responding to FDV. Values of patience, endurance and forgiveness often given primacy over directly addressing FDV disclosures.
- Gender roles, norms and practices are also influential in understanding and responding to FDV.

3.1.1 Faith and religion do not condone FDV or any violence, and FDV is counter to fundamental beliefs

Faith leader participants, particularly those who were Buddhist, Jewish or Muslim, strongly emphasised that their faith and religion did not condone FDV, and that violence was abhorrent to their fundamental beliefs. They all saw FDV as associated with a misinterpretation of their religious beliefs, rather than as inherent to their faith:

> *In Buddhist aspect, we – in daily life we already teach them everyday when you come you have to focus on the precept of Buddhism, it's – if everyone have practice or precept, five precept[1] of Buddhism, it's no family violence. FL10 (Buddhist)*

> *In Judaism, its value system would be one that would completely abhor abusive relationships but nevertheless not everyone is in sync with those values. FL9 (Jewish)*

If you practise Islam the way it's said, it will prevent you from violence, and if you really practise Islam no violence will happen, not husband against wife, wife against woman, the family against community, so you will live the perfect life. But if you don't practise Islam and you misinterpret the religion, then there will be cases and cases and … Islam has potentials and if we can work with such platforms we can raise awareness and prevent domestic violence. FL11 (Muslim)

A misinterpretation of faith was also explained by a Christian faith leader in this way:

I think theologically not many people have put their time and energy into thinking about how some of the real basics of the Christian faith, the idea that Jesus died for us so that we would be forgiven by God and that because we've been forgiven by God we have the resources to forgive others. Some of those things I don't think have kind of been passed through the domestic violence lens to say how do we teach that in a way that's sensitive to how that is heard and kind of misused by abusers? FL2 (Christian)

Some Muslim community members concurred with this belief.

No, I think most of them [faith leaders] are you know in line with that it's [violence] not allowed … that's what Islam says, that this not condoned at all in our community. CM_FG5 (Muslim)

There are real cases in everywhere in the world, everywhere in the world, it's not only the Muslim or Islamic world so it's everywhere. It doesn't have to [do] anything with the religions. CM_FG1 (Muslim)

Even though people around me who claimed to and who demonstrate Islam but treat me wrongly, I blame their actions and not Islam because they're not acting in true faith. CM5 (Muslim)

Several faith leaders and community members suggested that FDV was culturally acceptable, rather than being directly related to faith and religion. This was particularly so for several migrant communities moving to Australia with different cultural norms relating to FDV:

Culture's a massive factor. It's not the religion because in our religion, does not say that the parents have to force their children [to be married]. CM_FG7 (Muslim and Christian)

No, we don't accept that [family violence], we don't accept that. Yeah, we say – if you know in the culture, when we were in [country] it's fine, you can fight with your wife … police never intervenes in any family affairs 'cause they know this is the culture but here we are in new country, we have to respect the culture of this country and the laws and rules. FL5 (Catholic)

Because that's their culture and it's not their religion. Religion does not sanction this [violence] but certain culture, they bring from the village. KI7 (and Sikh community member)

Whereas the participants above implicitly made the distinction between culture and religion, others more explicitly noted interconnections between religion and culture, and blurred distinctions between them:

So when you're looking at something, you don't detach it from the culture because culture is part of who they are, faith is part of who they are so you need to be able to … work with the cultural currency. No faith-based group will actually condone domestic and family violence, right? It's the cultural nuances that have been added to the faith. KI6

In terms of physical abuse, I know of a couple … she was a pastor's wife and you know they come from a very strong Greek culture and so there was cultural stuff as well as spiritual stuff and the husband who was a pastor … would even physically hurt her as well as emotionally manipulate things and spiritually twist things from scripture so she never found that there was a right answer. 'Cause I think there was cultural stuff and not just the spiritual stuff and the cultural stuff that was oppressing her, that was telling her to be a good Greek wife, you need to do these things and it went to a tipping point where the light was being shed on his darkness and she realised – saw it for what it was now. CM4 (Christian)

3.1.2 FDV is common, with awareness increasing, but is still poorly understood

Although clearly stating that FDV was counter to their religious beliefs and values, faith leaders and community members from all faiths consulted (but to a lesser extent among those of a Buddhist faith) recognised that FDV was an important issue needing to be addressed within both their faith contexts and the broader community.

The faith leaders from Christian, Jewish and Muslim backgrounds who were consulted were active in addressing FDV in their communities. They considered FDV as common within their communities, and expressed the view that there was no difference in prevalence among their faith communities and wider society:

> *I'd say it's in [sic] – very prevalent for a good number of the women that I meet with just for pastoral or for training purposes end up disclosing abuse to me at some point in our relationship so it would be more common than not. FL1 (Christian)*

> *I think family violence is as prevalent within the Jewish community as it is in all other communities. One thing we know from extensive research is that it really doesn't discriminate, it's not something that is limited to a specific religious affiliation or lack thereof or socioeconomic standing or level of education or, you know, race or ethnicity, it's very much a craving of power. FL8 (Jewish)*

> *That is the most concerning … about 60% [of women coming to request an Islamic divorce] – just to give you enough idea – is domestic violence. FL4 (Muslim)*

Some community member participants from Muslim and Hindu faiths, and some Jewish and Christian faith leaders felt that awareness of FDV was increasing among leaders and community members, particularly recently:

> *Now people have started talking, now that there is lot of awareness going on and especially the education with – among women when we talk about our community, now women have started knowing that this is not okay. If someone is abusing you, it's not okay. CM_FG4 (Muslim and Hindu)*

> *There's been a very big push in the last number of years to raise awareness in the Jewish community on domestic violence and abusive relationships on all levels and so on, and that's been very, very helpful. FL9 (Jewish)*

> *[I] think in the last 10 years I can witness that there's a growing trend of openness, but still compared to the mainstream it's still, we are quite far away. FL3 (Christian)*

As noted in the quote above, it was also expressed that considerable gaps remained within faith contexts in openness about, and understanding of, FDV. Across all faiths, leader and community member participants stated that some in their community still had a very low awareness of FDV. As a result, there are highly likely to be people within their communities experiencing FDV but who are unaware that this is the case. A knowledge gap identified by participants was that knowledge and understanding of FDV were often limited to extreme physical violence and did not include other forms of abuse, such as emotional, social, financial and spiritual abuse:

> *It's also important to – for us to understand sometimes victims don't even know that they're being abused and that's the thing. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Christian)*

> *I don't think the very wider perception about domestic violence were understood, but it's more like the physical one, if my spouse is very violent, he's always very angry, he throws stuff around, they understand. But in terms of issues like verbal violence or mental violence I don't think so. FL3 (Christian)*

The Buddhist faith leaders consulted appeared less aware and informed about FDV in general than those from other faith and religious backgrounds consulted:

> *I really have not heard many of such cases within the Buddhist community. I don't know whether it's because Chinese, because we're predominantly Chinese, whether the Chinese prefer to keep any family matters private and not bring it to the larger community or whether because the Buddhists tend to be less violent. FL7 (Buddhist)*

Another Buddhist faith leader believed that FDV was 'very rare' in his ethnic community and about the same now compared with 15 or 20 years ago because:

> *I'm not sure in the other religion, other culture like in Malaysia, Indo or whatever Malaysian Buddhism … is maybe open mind but [his ethnic community], way of life seem to be to try to [be] patient, keep it until we cannot bear anymore. FL10 (Buddhist)*

3.1.3 FDV is a taboo topic

Some key informants, faith leaders and community members mentioned that FDV was often viewed as a taboo topic by leaders and community members within faith-based communities. One key informant described this as a challenging aspect of his work because:

> *I think there's so many layers that we have to talk about. It depends on the readiness of different community. For some community, talking about the word, even, violence against women is taboo. For example, then you have to break that silence first. KI2*

When asked about whether it was common for people to talk to him about family problems when they were worried or unhappy in a relationship, a Buddhist monk replied 'Not many' (FL10 [Buddhist]). Christian and Jewish faith leaders also acknowledged that people were reluctant to talk about FDV; however, they felt that this was improving over time:

> *I would put it this way, when I first came 26, 27 years ago, I don't think it's very apparent or it's disclosed so openly. But I think in the last 5 to 10 years it's getting – I don't know whether it has to do with media or people getting more transparent with their issues nowadays – I guess it's getting more easily disclosed or unveiled to the community or to the leadership in the church. FL3 (Christian)*

> *I think that in the past 20 years it's certainly come a long way. I think you know some 20 years ago it simply wasn't discussed, it wasn't something that was a topic of conversation around the table in the family or in the community and increasingly in recent years because of the wider – the greater – awareness of the issue, we see it a lot more in the media, we see politicians talking about it more, community leaders, faith leaders and so on, it does sort of catapult it into the forefront of people's consciousness. FL8 (Jewish)*

Community member participants from all faiths consulted perceived FDV to be a taboo topic within their faith contexts. They stated that it is rarely spoken about, resulting in community members often being reluctant to acknowledge FDV, or speak out about FDV prevention or responses:

> *I think it's quite prevalent but it's hidden … People just don't talk about it, they try to keep it within the confines of their own four walls and only in extreme cases do they ask for help from outside. That's my belief. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Hindu FG, Muslim participant)*

> *As Asian, we too scared to talk. We keep it [to] ourselves. If we do have family problems, then we just ask the monks – not many Buddhist people go to the monks for sort of issues but they keep it themselves. Instead they ask the monk to do prayer for the family's at peace [sic]. CM1 (Buddhist)*

> *I think there will definitely be still people in our church that still come from that place and probably not readily freely want to talk about these issues at all. I mean no-one likes to air their dirty laundry. CM4 (Christian)*

The reluctance to discuss FDV is potentially greater in more conservative communities, according to one Jewish community member participant:

> *I think in a more secular Jewish context it'd be more likely to be spoken about than in an ultra-religious one because you know it's really the pressure to conform, the pressure to not rock the boat would be a lot higher, I would hazard a guess. CM7 (Jewish)*

Faith leader and community member participants from Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim faiths attributed the lack of openness to beliefs and practices around family issues being private and not shared with outsiders. Sharing such issues was seen by some as being shameful and counter to faith-based values of patience and endurance. In addition, there appears to be a more distant

relationship between Buddhist monks and their followers compared with other faiths:

> *Again I'll bring it back to the culture thing, I think because it's obviously a very Asian thing. You wouldn't just go and blab about your personal stuff randomly to anybody until you are familiar with them. CM3 (Buddhist)*

> *I believe most families would like to keep it under the rug, the issue of family violence, they would rather the person not talk about it outside the family unit. CM6 (Hindu)*

> *I do realise it is an issue but then the culture prevents you from opening up and disclosing or revealing too much … it's considered shameful to speak about it. Even though you're the one being tormented, it's shameful to speak about it because we're told as good Muslims and good people we're supposed to be patient and put up with that and so we'll be like martyrs. CM5 (Muslim)*

3.1.4 Denial and defensiveness persist about the existence of FDV

Faith leader and community member participants from Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths perceived that a number of people within their faith contexts still had defensive attitudes about FDV and denied that it was a problem in their faith-based communities:

> *I think there are people who – that – whose church just deny that it was an issue at all and so didn't have any training or staff available for people who'd experienced it. FL2 (Christian)*

> *Sometimes we underestimate the level of denial in these types of communities. It's so strong. CM_FG3 (Jewish)*

Several participants related this denial and defensiveness to a perception that FDV would not be an issue if one is a true follower of faith:

> *The way that churches they … deal with it is you just need to get your theology right, and you need to be a loving Christian and abuse won't be a problem in your life. KI3*

> *It's other people who are in abusive relationships, not Christians. KI1*

> *Re other people's attitudes: No, DV's not an issue, good Muslim people don't do that. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Hindu FG, Muslim participant)*

Denial, defensiveness and lack of acknowledgment of FDV as an issue among those with strong faith and religious practices were also identified by participants as resulting in victim-blaming attitudes and failing to believe women who disclose FDV experiences within faith contexts:

> *So then she drums up the courage and goes to her imam and the imam looks at her and 'oh but he's a very good Muslim and he comes to my congregation and he's a good man and he's this and he wouldn't do that to you'. KI4*

> *One of my neighbours, she had been adopted by her aunty and uncle after her parents died so her adoptive parents' son, he made a move on her and she told about this to the parents but they actually blamed her and not the son. Said 'no, you're just lying' and stuff so … she didn't feel supported at that point of time and she sees that she's been put on a lower rung than other male family members. I don't think she would be too willing to ask for help. CM5 (Hindu)*

Both Muslim and Christian participants identified that victim blaming, minimising and failing to believe FDV disclosures from women are even more an issue when the perpetrator has a high status within the community. The nature of leadership structures and gender role norms within many faith contexts means that it is far more common for men to be in such high-status positions within faith and religious organisational contexts, as well as within the wider community:

> *So this is when they realised that this [perpetrator] is a distinguished person in the community, this is someone who can help them in the hospital, this is someone who is qualified and you know qualified surgeon and all that so he's someone they can benefit from so the family and everyone will actually have a soft corner for that because he will be of some advantage at some time in their life. CM5 (Muslim)*

[There were] instances where the abuser was a significant member of the church so even a minister or an elder in the church and … when the wife or partner chose to leave, spinning stories that made her seem like the person who'd given up on the relationship and was sort of unreasonably unwilling to consider reconciliation. FL2 (Christian)

3.1.5 Religious beliefs and practices influence understanding of, and responses to, FDV

Although faith leaders strongly stressed that their faith and religion fundamentally did not condone violence, community member participants from Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim faiths gave examples of instances in which religious beliefs and practices affected understanding of, and responses to, FDV. Across many faiths, an overemphasis on acceptance, endurance, forgiveness and maintenance of relationships as of primary importance was discussed as being associated with denial and minimisation of FDV, as well as shaming of those speaking out against FDV either personally or as community advocates. Participants also identified a persistence of victim-blaming attitudes and placing of responsibility for FDV on victims rather than perpetrators:

So a woman particularly has been taught from fairly young age if something bad happens to you, you have to accept it, you've got to forgive – say for example if you're married in the context of family violence, the abuser was your husband or other members of the family. And if you don't it means that you're not strong enough so instead of – they link that strength in terms of forgiveness. CM8 (Muslim)

Even though if sometimes people would approach religious leader some of them might hold the view again that the husband is superior to the wife and the wife should just compromise and stuff. CM6 (Hindu)

So when one rabbi was confronted he said – he was recorded without his knowledge because they'll say one thing to the media and another thing in private, right? So this rabbi was busted saying you know a kid shits his pants, the kid doesn't go talk about it to everybody. You get abused, you don't go talk about that to everybody and that's how they see it, it's the same as shitting your pants. It's your own fault, you got yourself into this mess. CM_FG3 (Jewish)

Or blaming her or kind of saying 'you know it takes two to tango' and so 'yes, he's done wrong things but so have you and you need to repent of those and you need to apologise to him or you need to maintain contact with him or be open to reconciliation with him. You should be willing to forgive him'. FL2 (Christian)

What we have is the Dharma, or what we call Buddhist teaching, and what we could do is to advise them to step back and look upon this from a karmic situation that certainly there could be something in this, in their previous life … we offer a space that they can come to, be away from abusive relationships and that the other party knows they're in a safe space and give them time to reconcile. FL7 (Buddhist)

Actually, at the moment in daily life we already give them how to live already, how to manage your life mentally and physically or verbally or whatever, you have to focus what you are doing. I understand the government try to encourage the people to bring it up with family violence but we have to start from the – yourself, from the family, not from the paper. FL10 (Buddhist)

3.1.6 Gender roles, norms and practices influence understanding of, and responses to, FDV

Interlaced with discussions about the overemphasis on acceptance, endurance and forgiveness in the context of FDV was both implicit and explicit recognition that religious and faith-based beliefs and practices strongly influence gender roles and norms. A fundamental belief in distinct gender roles was clearly articulated by faith leaders from Jewish and Muslim communities. They strongly endorsed an 'equal but different' belief, expressing that they saw women and men as having equal rights and value, but that men and women had different

roles to play and different expectations for their behaviour both within faith contexts and in wider society. Men were seen as active and women as more passive. How these different gender roles and expectations translated to equal rights and access to opportunities in practice was not, however, articulated. One Jewish leader cautiously acknowledged that such views could be seen as sexist:

> *According to Islamic perspective or the law, there is no differences between men and woman's right, only the difference is the physics of being a male and woman and there is – you can't even think of anything else except that. We've given the rights, as much as for man it's for woman, but there's certain ways that their – expectation according to the physics that you have that this is for you and this is. FL11 (Muslim)*

> *So you know in Judaism … ritualistic – in terms of ritual men have a more active role in that area, women's role is more passive in that area and some would interpret that as being sort of sexist or chauvinist or what have you, but when you actually speak to practitioners of the faith and religious people they'll say that you know the women in their families and the women in their communities are valued equally but simply have a different kind of role. FL8 (Jewish)*

A key informant described how the gender role distinction and emphasis on male authority over women were also strongly endorsed by many Christian leaders and community members:

> *The language around kinship and around headship and around the pronouns that they use. And then it's even sort of notions of them. As I said before about the unconscious assumptions about adulthood and males. I mean when you think of the way that language … and other norms normalise inequality. KI1 (also Christian background)*

However, these views regarding gender roles and hierarchies were not held by all faith leaders consulted; one Jewish leader stated:

> *I actually believe that what lies at the core of this issue is the cultural mindset and mentality that … women should know their place kind of thing in the community. And I find that very disturbing. FL8 (Jewish)*

Community members and key informants from Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths also noted that girls and women, in comparison with boys and men, were often particularly expected to be accepting, forgiving and enduring. They were expected to conform to traditional gender roles in the home, and leadership roles were not open to them either within the wider community or within their religious contexts:

> *[Gender norms and roles] are buried in the language that the Bible was written in. It's buried in the language of the hymns and get sang on a Sunday. It's buried in the language of the validity and the prayers and the words they use … the unconscious assumptions about adulthood and males … normalise inequality. KI1 (also Christian background)*

> *The gender nature [sic] is something that I've found very much linked into the scriptures, to the religious scriptures so meaning that if you're a woman you're a bit more nurturing and caring and therefore you should say gender traditional roles in the kitchen [sic], being housewife so that's fairly much linked into the gender nature. CM8 (Muslim)*

Muslim and Hindu community members further noted that, as cultural and religious gender roles and expectations are socialised throughout childhood and family life, this can contribute to the normalisation of FDV behaviours and attitudes, and to those experiencing FDV not identifying it as such and thus not seeking help:

> *Well that's it, because maybe they've seen their mother go through that or their mother-in-law go through that or whatever so it's a learned behaviour and its acceptance that when my father comes home he's going to be really rough and tough and so my husband's got to be the same. So they don't even see – that's their condition to believe that they don't have a say and that that's what their life – what their role in life – is. CM_ FG2 (Muslim and Hindu, Muslim participant)*

> *So ever since childhood those are – they just listen at every other action they do, especially when you reach teenage years, that oh if*

you're doing it right now like this, in this particular manner what could happen when you go to your in-law's house, how would you do it then? You've got to learn to think … what will your mother-in-law say? You've got to do household chores, advice, they'll say that your mum didn't teach you well. Everything – none of this is said to the boys … So this again ingrains into them that okay, I have to go to the other house and I have to do these chores … this is expected of me and I cannot get out of it. CM6 (Hindu)

It's not that the support and the services are not present, just that not everyone is proactive enough and especially because in India girls are taught to be submissive, supportive, the husband is everything, you've just got to listen to him. Yeah, because of that they are not proactive in seeking out other services. CM6 (Hindu)

One Muslim community member further discussed the interplay between religion and culture, identifying historical gender inequality across many religious and cultural contexts. These are negative influences on Islam's views of women, rather than gender inequality being core to Islam itself:

And we were a little bit biased (how we treat boys vs girls). You're still fighting that culture, I think, see because having grown up in India the majority of the Indians are Hindus and their views of women also wasn't the very best. And we Muslims living together with them for I don't know how many years – hundreds of years – obviously we've adapted some of theirs. Like in Islam you know 1400 years ago we were given the right to divorce if you've tried everything else you know you can do – you have a right to inheritance, whereas even in Christianity and the west all those rights were not given to women. CM_FG5 (Muslim)

3.2 Barriers and enablers to preventing and addressing FDV in faith-based communities

The importance of faith and religion as a source of support in difficult times was raised by participants, although this did not emerge as a major focus in the consultations. Participants almost exclusively focused their discussions on barriers to preventing and addressing FDV within their faith-based communities, rather than the enablers that facilitated change in this area.

A range of barriers to preventing and addressing FDV in faith-based communities were discussed, including:

- reluctance to address FDV because
  - the issue is too difficult and threatening
  - skills and knowledge are lacking
  - people feel stigmatised and 'under attack'
- family obligations and reputation, the sanctity of marriage and the shame of divorce
- backlash from men, involving
  - perceived insufficient attention to men's experiences of violence
  - resistance to acknowledging gender inequality
  - loss of traditional gender roles
- conflict between mainstream FDV frameworks and religious teachings regarding gender roles
- difficulty in accessing mainstream service systems and fears of deportation
- insufficient funding and resources.

3.2.1 Faith and religion as a source of support

Faith and religious beliefs and practices, as well as community networks, were described by Buddhist and Muslim community members as important sources of peace and support during difficult times:

When they go home [after visiting temple], they can solve their own problems in a peaceful way. And then start to understand the Buddha, why these problems occurred. It's really helpful with a lot of families, if you go more

often then you start to understand more and you start to realise oh okay, that makes sense. CM1 (Buddhist)

Yeah, when you are in distress, religion is the only peace, which can put some sort of comfort, it can bring you some sort of peace. CM_FG1 (Muslim)

That's [faith] the foundation of the essence of my survival. CM5 (Muslim)

... of community assistance, togetherness plus the religious faith that carry people through difficult time. So I do believe that faith can have such powerful effect on people. CM8 (Muslim)

In contrast, some Jewish participants described how being part of the Jewish community did not necessarily translate to either personal faith and belief or participation in spiritual and religious practices:

Participant 1: When it comes to Judaism, it's distinctly different, it's not based on faith, it's based on practice and identity. Identity really is the key, it's – it could just be that you have a Jewish mother and you have zero faith, right?

Participant 2: But you're still a Jew.

Participant 1: You're still a Jew and you could be even considered part of the faith-based community and you wouldn't even practise a thing, even all these things that we're discussing, all these very intense rituals and you would do nothing and you can still be considered within that fold of faith-based community within the Jewish community so it is – it gets a bit complicated as a result. CM_FG3 (Jewish)

3.2.2 Reluctance to address FDV

Key informant, faith leader and community member participants all reported reluctance among some in their communities to engage in FDV work. They attributed this to perceptions that FDV is too difficult, challenging and potentially threatening for leaders and communities to acknowledge and address:

[I] think some just resisted because it was just too hard work. KI1

And that's just human nature because why would people dwell on something that's you know hurtful and negative to think about and painful to think about if they don't really need to or want to. FL8 (Jewish)

They [imams] might feel like threatened that if they do allow that [talk about domestic dispute] and speak up then they'll find a lot of things going on because to start with women don't speak up about it. CM5 (Muslim)

And the other issue would be around that they just didn't want to confront it, they just didn't want to because imams had had women come to them over years and they just said well that's your lot in life. KI4

An overall lack of confidence and knowledge about how to address FDV within faith contexts was also identified as a factor influencing reluctance to engage in FDV action:

Everybody knows that this stuff is in our community, it's just that not everybody feels empowered to know how to tackle it and from a faith-based framework. FL5 (Christian)

None of them have got social work skills, none of them have got any sort of you know psychology, psychiatrist you know any sort of community work even, even basic stuff. KI4

In addition, some participants described a fear among some within the community, including leaders, that admitting that FDV was an issue would bring shame and ostracisation for faith and religious communities, many of which already feel under threat and excluded by mainstream society. These views were expressed by Muslim and Jewish participants, and associated with wider Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. As a result, there were strong sensitivities about any discussions that could be perceived as portraying their faith and religion negatively:

It's been you know very evident that family violence is certainly deeply embedded within – systemically embedded within – our community, people don't want to talk about it, they fear talking about it and that just leads to complete silence and ostracisation of anyone who actually does speak out. CM_FG3 (Jewish)

I think – well it can of course give a bad name to the community, that's one thing because it's taboo. We are peaceful community so once someone speak up then it will give a bad name to the community, you can be labelled as a violent community, for instance. CM8 (Muslim)

With abuse, let's say within my experience, if you have someone who in times that say Europe, the – where a lot of Jews came from – the justice system was very much biased against the Jewish population, so there was a huge distrust that if someone would go to tell something against another Jew to a court they would be considered a traitor to the Jewish community, so this became very strongly held attitude which then came across to countries, western countries where the justice system is not supposed to be slanted against anybody, it's supposed to be fair, unbiased and we all know it's not perfect but in general so when – the whole idea of reporting abuse still has – still carries this terrible attitude against it that you're being a traitor to the community. CM_FG (Jewish)

Christian participants similarly discussed that many Christian leaders and community members felt that their beliefs were now 'under threat' and marginalised within society, and that this contributed to a reluctance to discuss FDV in faith and religious contexts. Attention to FDV within these settings was thus seen as though 'we were attacking the Church' (KI5).

Participants across Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths all described what they saw as a growing conservatism among some parts of their communities that further reinforced reluctance to engage in issues such as FDV and a wider resistance to change, particularly on social issues:

I think the churches feel under threat from contemporary society in all sorts of ways, and its response to that has [been] retreating to what is familiar and what is known rather than actually daring to be more progressive. KI1

Yes, so they're becoming more zealous if you like. As they become more popular and more successful, that creates also if you like an anti-establishment or an anti-western establishment reaction as in there's a sense of significance that comes from that for people. CM_FG3 (Jewish)

People who lives here, they still have the old mentality, keeping us from when they came so they still holding it (i.e. traditional gender roles). CM_FG7 (Muslim & Christian)

3.2.3 Family obligations and reputation, the sanctity of marriage and the shame of divorce

Community member participants, particularly those from Muslim, Jewish and Hindu faiths, emphasised the importance of family obligations and reputation as potential barriers to speaking out about, and addressing, FDV. Drawing attention to marital conflict and issues such as FDV is seen as threating family reputation within the community, affecting other women's marriageability and giving one's family 'a bad name'. This is further reinforced by views of family and relationships that emphasise relationships with in-laws and extended family members.

As one participant declared, 'you're not marrying an individual, you're marrying the whole family you know past, present and future' (CM_FG7 [Muslim]):

The issue of it's shaming the family and the family – bad family name and then you're affecting marriageability 'cos a lot of ultraorthodox families still practise arranged marriage … Which is very much based on the reputation. CM_FG3(Jewish)

When I came to talk with his parents [about domestic problems], they go oh no, don't tell anyone and that's not accept[able] to tell anyone, you should wait, you should stay and you should give him a chance or something and that's after six years giving chance. CM_FG7 (Muslim and Christian)

The first point of contact would be – say if the husband is perpetrating violence against the wife and children, the first point of contact would be parents on both sides and then extended family members and more often than not they would actually ask the couple to keep it under the rug. CM6 (Hindu)

This strong focus on family reputation and obligations was identified as a barrier to women seeking help or leaving an abusive relationship, and a driver of ostracisation and stigma for those who are able to do so:

> *And unless you are ready to take a step [to leave their partner] as in – to be extreme, to be ostracised and not just for you but also for your kids to leave and you're ready for the consequences then it will be extremely difficult. CM8 (Muslim)*

> *There's still stigma at some level, so for example women who will not want to leave these relationships because of community stigma, which really is getting a lot better but it's not perfect, I mean that still happens. FL9 (Jewish)*

> *This happens every day, I've a woman here, she said 'please go down to the local Gurdwara, the Sikh temple' and she said 'put the money together to fly my body home in a coffin' 'cos she said 'that's the only way I'm going to go home'. 'That's the only way I'm going to go home' and she said 'I'm not going to' – she said 'if Immigration comes knocking on my door' she said 'I'm going to kill myself first. Because I'm only going home in a wooden box. Because I will not be accepted'. Because she was divorced. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Hindu FG, Muslim participant)*

> *If you want to be accepted and [then] you have to subscribe to certain values and beliefs, that's my thinking so if lots of people in Australia are quite religious, if you want to be accepted within the community then you have to subscribe to the values and beliefs. CM8 (Muslim)*

Related to family obligations and reputations, strong beliefs about the importance of the sanctity of marriage for life, and divorce as shameful in any situation, were also identified by leader and community member participants from Christian, Hindu and Muslim faiths as key barriers to addressing FDV appropriately:

> *And victims, and they want … [to] give their marriage their best shot, but, you know, the church is, kind of pressuring them to stay. KI3 (also Christian background)*

> *And you've just got to deal with it (domestic issues) because once you get married it's hard to just separate and take a divorce. It's still seen as taboo. CM6 (Hindu)*

> *What we believe is [that] God hates divorce, you need sufficient evidence and not only just evidence like it needs to be a valid reason why you cannot be – like no-one can interfere anymore like that's it, no-one can help you guys anymore like it's the end. CM_FG7 (Muslim and Christian FG, Christian participant)*

Christian teachings from priests that wives should obey their husbands were also seen as a barrier to seeking help:

> *The other religious thing in the Catholic Church is the sanctity of marriage so the church teaches that when you're properly married that's for life, okay? So people can divorce or that but they can't remarry and so marriage is seen as a very important part of society so that importance of marriage and the reflections about wives obeying husbands probably have some impact on people not going to priests about the issue. KI5*

Another example was provided by a key informant working on FDV issues with a Buddhist participant who strongly believed in yin and yang, and in using this philosophy to stop couples divorcing. The key informant found this discomforting, saying:

> *… that just [goes] against some of the principles when you try to save the victims of … domestic violence. Because we learned that home is not always the safe place for women and keeping them in the relationship sometimes we just … create harm rather than safety. KI2*

In addition, obtaining a religious divorce can be very difficult, particularly for those from Jewish and Muslim communities:

> *One thing that does happen, and I'm sure you're aware of it … but it's another form of abuse, is the unjustifiable withholding of a Ghet (Jewish divorce) [by men]. FL9 (Jewish)*

> *They've already got their Family Court divorce, [but] they still want an Islamic divorce and*

that's where we run into the problems with the imams … And that's where the imams are discriminatory, misogynistic, lazy and don't understand domestic violence, abuse. Because they can take years before they grant a divorce and it's tragic for the woman because she's got to relive that every time. And then they want to hear her story and what did he actually do? And how bad really was bad? KI4

3.2.4 Backlash from men

Several key informants discussed backlash against work on FDV from men within faith-based communities. It was noted that a common perception among many men was that there was too much focus on violence against women and insufficient attention to men's experiences of violence. Resistance among men to acknowledging gender inequality within wider society, and its role in FDV, was identified by participants as an important contributing factor to this backlash and quest for greater attention on men's experiences.

As one key informant who works with groups of men noted:

Interestingly, last week we had a kind of, role-playing, handling difficult questions … and then, uh, people just kind of backlash and attack the person there, 'Hey, we miss violence against men. What about that project?' KI2

Another key informant who works in the Catholic sector noted:

We haven't had any opposition from any bishops but we haven't – but they've taken it on with varying degrees of enthusiasm. We've had pushback – I think in every time that you go into groups with this you get pushback from males about – when you look at the gender imbalance of family violence and gender inequality being a causal factor. You get pushback on that, I think. KI5

A key informant working with Buddhist, ethnic-minority, Southeast Asian men discussed reluctance among these men to engage in FDV work as related to entrenched beliefs about gender inequality and roles that were resistant to change. He thought that attitudes and beliefs were 'rooted and passed on from generation to generation' and therefore 'the belief system, it takes many generation to change' (KI2).

Yet another key informant who had worked with men from the Sikh community in FDV workshops described how he challenges this backlash by highlighting how few women are incarcerated for FDV compared with men:

So I tell them you are very right, you are very right. I say I also felt the same way. How come we are empowered and we are disempowered, how come the law is one-sided? ... then I found out that 5% of women who are sitting in jail for beating up their husband. Then they laugh. So instead of telling them that 5% of men abuse, I say 5% women are sitting in jail. So in that sense they feel the balance. KI7

Some participants also highlighted that many men, particularly from ethnic minorities, grappled with feelings of disempowerment and loss of gender role status as a result of migrating from a more patriarchal country with strong gender hierarchies and roles. This change in gender roles was seen as a large reduction in status for men, with Australia perceived as where 'women are on the top followed by the children, and the pets, and the front yard, and then the men' (KI2).

3.2.5 Conflict between mainstream FDV frameworks and religious teachings regarding gender roles

A number of key informants drew attention to conflicts between mainstream FDV frameworks (focused on gender equality) and religious beliefs and teachings about gender. This was identified as a key barrier to addressing FDV within faith communities. Some faith leaders question and challenge the underlying frameworks used by secular and mainstream agencies to address FDV. Discussions regarding the role of gender inequality in FDV were described by informants as resulting in resistance and disengagement from many faith communities, and at times seen as challenging their religious beliefs or existing investments and organisational structures:

I think others (faith leaders) were resistant because they at some level knew that to open up the issue of gender inequality in a faith

context was to open up a really difficult can of worms in terms of theology. KI1

When I'm approaching them (faith leaders) to kind of, having a conversation around men's role in gender inequality … it wasn't seen to be welcome. KI2

I know that in the training that I did we were told by the experts who were teaching us that in communities that are hierarchical, in other words where there's sort of a hierarchy of power whereby males sit at the top of the power structure, that that could lend itself to greater – higher – prevalence of family violence. To be honest, I don't know, I struggle with that and am somewhat conflicted, not necessarily because of my faith but just because of the values that are taught in Judaism are about – the different roles for men and women have never been referred to in the context of more or less important, it's always been in the context of equally valued but simply different. FL8 (Jewish)

One key informant expressed that it was challenging for some Christian leaders to have their beliefs about gender roles questioned because 'the faith community by and large have had a fairly big investment in the ideas of men and women being different' (KI1).

This perceived conflict between mainstream feminist FDV frameworks and traditional religious beliefs about gender roles was identified as an important contributor to wariness and resistance among many faith leaders and communities about engaging with those outside their faith context:

Yeah and there's a bit of distrust against, you know, if someone doesn't share your faith, understanding, I think there could be a sense of wariness that they might be coming from different … assumptions, I guess about what reality is. And that can make a difference, I think, to the way that you receive their advice. FL1 (Christian)

When outsiders tell any faith group, any community, what you're doing, that you hate your women, you do this, you do that, people close ranks, right? CM_FG3 (Jewish)

If you're working with the religious leader, it will be even harder because the scripture. And we believe that come from Allah, it come from God so anyone trying to change that or interpret it in a different way, it will be something that against God's so that's – you can't question, it's extremely hard. CM8 (Muslim)

One Muslim community member and worker explained how the group that she worked with was seen by some other Muslims as mainstream and hence to be treated with distance because it took a feminist perspective:

From the perspective of, say, Indonesian community, we are still the mainstream because we are suggesting – we are not going to say someone who's been you know beaten up that you have to forgive your husband and you've got to go back home, we're not going to give that sort of advice. Our take on would be on the feminist stance. CM8 (Muslim)

These strongly held beliefs relating to 'equal but different' gender norms and roles within faith and religious contexts, particularly Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, were identified by participants as key barriers to changing and challenging views about FDV within faith-based communities, and to addressing gender equity in these organisational and relational contexts, and in society more broadly.

As stated by one Christian key informant, gender inequality is reflected in both the 'normative and structural way[s] that women are discriminated against' (KI1).

Another key informant identified the need for structural changes within patriarchal religious hierarchies to ensure that women were able to vote and obtain leadership positions. This was essential to achieve cultural change in wider religious teachings on gender roles and relationships:

Women have no voice in voting, in that system [Christian religious hierarchy], and elected. So they have to change at that top level before you can talk about changing [it] … in the details of the teaching. KI2

Wider societal issues of gender inequality were identified by one Jewish faith leader as contributing to difficulties promoting gender equality norms, by reinforcing rather than challenging stereotypes within their faith community:

> *And the status quo unfortunately just reinforce the cultural perception. So by that I mean that we could tell our little boys and girls from knee high to a grasshopper that you're the same and you're equal etc, etc but then they grow up and say well that might be the case but the board in this company is 80% male and all the CEOs – most of them are male and most of the politicians are male and most of the power is held by male[s] etc, etc. FL8 (Jewish)*

3.2.6 Difficulty in accessing mainstream service systems and fears of deportation

Participants identified challenges in accessing and navigating complexities of mainstream service systems, particularly for new migrants and those with limited English literacy, as key barriers to support for those experiencing FDV. These challenges were described as contributing to, and at times magnifying, stress and fear among those seeking assistance:

> *I use the system that's available to help clients, to help them steer through this tedious process of – from the point of reporting 'til the point of intervention order to the point of you know financial – everything. It is messy, believe me, I walk through with many – of some of them, it's so tough and I am just – imagine a victim is just so stressed, you know? And disempowered and has got no literacy, low literacy, no knowledge. KI7 (also from Sikh background)*

> *The language I think is a big barrier because sometimes we come across young girls you know come from overseas, they don't speak English so well, so if they don't speak English well how will they know what services [are] there? How will they know how to read this or understand it or you know even talk about their problems? CM_FG5 (Muslim)*

> *A lot of young women that are feeling this and they're too scared to – 'cause they're worried about what's going to happen, all the consequences … there's a bit of like lack of I guess you know knowledge or information about where to go and what to do. CM_FG7 (Muslim and Christian)*

Participants from Muslim and Hindu faith backgrounds discussed issues relating to migration, including temporary visas and reliance on partners for residency, as barriers to people experiencing FDV seeking help; fear of deportation is a strong deterrent to accessing services. Those without a wider social support network, and reliant on a perpetrator for financial and emotional support were described as especially vulnerable and fearful:

> *I was speaking to a woman the other day and she said 'I can't even walk straight' because she said 'my husband's sexually abused me that much'. I said 'have you spoken to the police? 'No, I'm worried that if I speak to the police somebody'll deport me.' KI4*

> *People who were brought here so people who came as – because the migration issues, language kind of you know issues and then many other social issues that affect the women. And so because of that reason the people affected by domestic violence are … find it more vulnerable. Sometimes they are the only member in the country, they don't have extended family. FL4 (Muslim)*

In discussing these challenges and fears about accessing mainstream support services, participants from Muslim and Sikh backgrounds also indicated that there is an ongoing need for culturally and religiously appropriate FDV services and resources for their communities:

> *I think there are … not enough culturally friendly services. And especially for those who do not have PR (permanent residency). You know? Like inTouch and all the others, there's a limit to what they can do. And they say sorry, you're not a PR, you are student visa and these are the people who suffer the most because they [perpetrators] use the visa as blackmail for them to beat their wives and not to report. KI7*

> *Even if you do find something for them, then they're not culturally appropriate, you know? People want meditative spaces, they want prayer spaces, they want access to their*

special food, Halal food, vegetarian food, all those sorts of things, so they're not culturally appropriate even if you can find – and I've had some girls in refuges but then they give up. Or if they come from an extended family and they think okay, I'm sitting in this room by myself, I can't speak the language, I can't contact my parents, I don't know anyone apart from my husband's family so really how bad was it back home? I'll just pack up and go back. So they go back. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Hindu FG, Muslim participant)

Maybe having availability to safe haven for them like you know sometimes culturally appropriate safe haven like you know crisis accommodation and things like that. FL4 (Muslim)

3.2.7 Insufficient funding and resources

For some participants, a lack of funding and resources to implement change was identified as a key barrier to change within their faith-based communities:

Funding is always an issue for us, that's the thing that we're always kind of struggling to work out. It's probably the biggest barrier for us in terms of making progress. It's not for the lack of willing leaders or volunteers. FL2 (Christian)

I think something like small organisation like us, we don't have funding. Everything out of my pocket. I mean my dream is to go full-time helping my community but I can't afford it ... So I take away time from my family, my own personal time. So it's quite tough so – and that's how it is. I think more resources would be helpful. KI7 (Sikh)

Faith-based organisations are limited in capacity. They may not have access to things that other organisations, mainstream organisations, already have as automatic. They don't have that. Sometimes that prevents them from helping domestic violence victims and their families. KI6 (working with Muslim communities)

3.3 Capacity of faith leaders and faith-based communities to address and prevent FDV

Overall, participants consulted perceived the capacity of faith leaders and communities to address and prevent FDV to be limited and highly heterogenous: some are helpful, some fail to act, and some engage in harmful and re-traumatising behaviours. As a group, faith leader participants appeared more positive about their own capacity to respond to FDV than were key informant participants and community member participants. (It should be noted that faith leaders and community members in this consultation were not connected with each other and not directly commenting on each other.) However, some communities did report feeling that progress was being made – albeit slowly – as leaders and communities were increasingly aware of FDV.

3.3.1 Faith leaders – variation in roles and capacity

In their comments, several faith leaders across religious backgrounds portrayed feeling assured of their skills in addressing FDV – practically, emotionally and spiritually – from within their religious and faith frameworks, although also acknowledging their limitations:

Yeah, okay, simple like the people who have a family violence, they might argue and break down or whatever and nowhere to live, okay? Okay, they will come to the temple and I can give them for a week or two, they can stay with us but the less [sic] I wouldn't help because it's not my professional way to do it or I might have a [X ethnic community] social welfare, okay? You go and talk with them. FL10 (Buddhist)

The approach is, we base on what God says and then we apply it to our daily life and help people to understand what their issues are and for people who abuse others, they may need to reflect on their lives, what's wrong with me, why am I so critical. And with people who are always being criticised, they need to know sometimes you have to ignore criticism and sometimes you have to be strong, but sometimes you'll have to understand what's

wrong with you, in an abusive situation, domestic violence, for example … It's a sensitive question, yeah, but I think this is part of our duty of care to let people know that no-one has the right to abuse us. FL3 (Christian)

That problem [family violence] can be solved from religious point of view because that has a strong tool, religion, to de-escalate the violence. FL11 (Muslim)

That's why pastors are important because we're not counsellors but we are caring people, we are the provider, we're supposed to be the leader and if we know the problem and if we can approach the family and help, that's the best. But we are not heroes, we are not superman, we are not superwoman, there are times we just can't do anything. FL3 (Christian)

That not all faith leaders shared the same level of skills and awareness in responding to FDV was articulated by several leaders. Some discussed this as a failure to respond to FDV disclosures appropriately, including referral to specialist services. Another described how some faith leaders not only failed to access expert support but used religious texts in harmful ways, perpetuating trauma and harm. Another said that some faith leaders were falsely confident and lacked insight into their own limitations, and that this was reinforced by their positions of power within their community:

I suspect that there would have been clergy like myself who would have referred on and there would have been others who tried to sort of, who were just seeing themselves as being able to deal with it. K1

They [Sikh leader] will give solution and advice based on the scriptures but they will not be trained to get the kind of social advice in terms of relationship and all that. And also I'm aware because some of them, they themselves, they come from that background culture so would the advice be one-sided? KI7

Not all the imams [are] dealing with this matter because it's a very – breaking the family and bringing together one of the vulnerable person into a relationship so it has to be done with degree of due diligence. FL4 (Muslim)

Ministers who put guilt and pressure on the victim from a spiritual sense so either in regards to forgiveness or even in regards to Bible passages that have been used against the woman who – which then become kind of triggering things for them … [Ministers] not being kind of alert to some passages that have been taken out of context and so kind of wielding those pretty insensitively in the context of women who've been really, really affected by their misuse. FL2 (Christian)

I think that's particularly dangerous with ministers not just because of the power that they hold and the influence they hold but also because ministers tend to think that they – tend to be the knowledgeable people in the room in a ministry context, not that they don't imagine that they know everything and that other people know nothing but there's that sense of like if you've got a Bible college degree then you have a sense that you know a bit more about a topic that deals with the Bible than maybe other people might, and I think that kind of can give ministers a false sense of confidence and competence about their capacity to deal with it well. FL2 (Christian)

Key informants' perspectives on faith leaders' capacity to prevent and address FDV were mixed. One key informant had experienced a widespread lack of engagement from Muslim faith leaders in her community because FDV was not viewed as a priority:

And that's the difficulty that we have with our leadership, is that there's no engagement, there's no proactivity unless it's about terrorism, oh we got to get on the front foot about that. KI4

In contrast, a key informant working in the Catholic community found a positive reaction among clergy within a particular diocese to being more engaged in FDV issues. However, he also acknowledged that it was necessary to be proactive about FDV because:

… without that extra effort, without the project it's going to happen only much more slowly. So not necessarily relearning but a little bit of that, more reprioritising, seeing it – putting it on the radar. Given there's only 24 hours in every day. KI5

Some key informants identified that more capacity building of faith leaders in FDV work was needed:

> *I think capacity building for leaders is really vital. KI1*

> *It's often because these leaders may not have the skills or they may have limited skills if they do and so we're upskilling them to be able to look at the other perspective (the victim's). KI6*

Community members were less positive than faith leaders about the capacity of their faith leaders to respond to FDV, and keen for their leaders to develop greater skills:

> *Unfortunately not. And I have reached out to them and I had faith in them. Unfortunately not and I don't want to name names. CM5 (Muslim)*

> *He (the rabbi) actually literally spoke to my husband and said that he could not understand what the problem was, was it really such a bad thing that this had occurred? And I was so shocked when I heard. CM_FG3 (Jewish)*

> *We wish that our local imams were equipped with these sorts of knowledge where if somebody goes up to them and says look, this is a genuine problem they won't just tell the woman to just be patient for a little longer, they would actually be able to give you some advice. CM_FG1 (Muslim)*

Some Muslim community participants did feel, however, that, with more imans and scholars being trained in Australia, their capacity to address FDV appropriately was improving:

> *Some things are changing now because we've got people growing up in this community who've had – gone through the Australian lifestyle and they're becoming scholars and imams … I think most of them are you know in line with you know that it's not allowed. Certainly family matters and things like that so they're learning Islam from the right perspective and that's what Islam says, that this is not condoned at all in our community. CM_FG5 (Muslim)*

When discussing the capacity of faith leaders to respond to FDV, some faith leader, key informant and community member participants described wide variation in the role and influence of faith leaders, both across and within the different faith communities. Some were described as exerting high levels of control and power, and others as having minimal influence or contact with members of faith-based communities. This was particularly so for women, who are often restricted – culturally and structurally – by religious systems from close contact or relationships with faith leaders. Faith leaders are predominantly male and largely practise their faith at home rather than at a place of public worship:

> *In some communities, the leaders have different levels of influence on authority, you know, particularly including over that sort of interpretation of sacred texts and things like that. So, and in different communities different things will affect change in different ways. KI1*

> *I think it depends on the relationship, I think it depends, you know, there's rabbi to rabbi. So many people do, I think some people don't because it depends – also I mean the dynamics of the Jewish community is changing so – it used to be that more people were affiliated to a synagogue even if they weren't observant. That's not always the case so – and it's getting less and less in a way so it's not – the rabbi's not always the first port of call but it is many times. FL9 (Jewish)*

> *Participant 1: Yes, they control everything in the –.*

> *Participant 2: They control whether you have babies, they control –.*

> *Participant 3: It's like a cult, it's like a cult. CM_FG3 (Jewish)*

> *Only the ultra-ones sort of revere their rabbis. In other communities, they [rabbis] get stabbed in the back like a politician so it just depends. CM7 (Jewish)*

Muslim women, particularly, described how they rarely interacted with imams as part of their religious practices or even in situations of FDV, unless they wanted an Islamic divorce:

> *Only those women that actually want an Islamic divorce will go to an imam, otherwise they wouldn't go near him. They've got no*

reason to go anywhere near him so if they're suffering at home they may tell their girlfriends or they talk about it or sister or whatever … the women speak between themselves. They wouldn't think yeah, let's all go together and talk to our local imam … they don't go there for their religious affirmation, they don't go there for their religious needs, they don't – because they can do that at home. KI4

Both Hindu and Muslim women further explained that their religion and religious practices were largely family- and home-based, whereas for men there was more of an expectation to attend the mosque (for Muslims):

Participant 1 (Hindu): … you just learn it by seeing in the family, even like it's quite strange that here you people have scripture classes and all but growing up we never had any scripture classes.

Participant 2 (Muslim): No, neither did we, it was just self-taught at home.

Participant 3 (Muslim): Yes, seeing your family, seeing different festivals coming, rituals coming, fasting or this and that so you just learn by following your family members. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Hindu)

If the mosque is close by, they [men] have to [attend] but women don't have to, they can pray at home. FL5(Muslim)

Some Muslim community members further noted that these gender roles and expectations limited women's access to faith leaders, making them even less likely to go to an imam for support regarding FDV:

When they do, they miss out on listening to the sermon or maybe interact directly with the imam and asking different – consult about any things they need to. There's that barrier there too. Where when you talked about being accessible and approachable, there's a barrier there. CM5 (Muslim)

'Cause the men and women's sections are always separated but really there is no opportunity for women to ask questions. I know in the US most mosques have a question time with the imam for just women but here in Australia I haven't seen one. CM_FG1 (Muslim)

3.3.2 Faith communities – variation in organisational structures and leadership

Recognising and addressing the wide variation in organisational and leadership structures in religious and faith-based communities, and working within these contexts to achieve structural change was highlighted by a number of participants as key to addressing FDV. Key factors raised included the extent to which religious and faith-based organisations had formalised processes for internal monitoring and critique, representation and participation of women within leadership and decision making, lack of connection between religious leaders and those working on the ground in communities, and lack of formal structures and training of leaders in emerging faith communities.

According to a key informant, opportunity and space for people to critique and debate issues within a faith context varied across faiths. Without these, broader or structural change in relation to FDV was unlikely:

[Some] have more structured processes for internal critique than others. KI1

Another key informant identified that change was likely to be difficult without ensuring that women had an equal voice within religious institutions and communities:

At the moment, women have no voice in voting in that system [Christian church] … they have to change at that top level before you can talk about changing in the details of the teaching. KI2

A Christian faith leader extended this beyond women to all community members, identifying that ministers often held great power over congregation members:

Often it is congregation members who are kind of hearing the stories on the ground who are a little bit more engaged. But because in most churches the structure – the organisational structure – means that ministers do still kind of hold a lot of the power for lack of a better word then I think you can have a really informed church body and still have significant issues that won't be addressed until the minister changes. FL2 (Christian)

The need to bridge gaps and build relationships between those working on the ground to address FDV and religious leaders and systems was further highlighted in relation to the Catholic Church, where social welfare services often function quite separately from ordained priests and leaders:

> *These agencies, got the expertise and parishes where there's lots of people who are aware of family violence issues and a lot of our work is to try to marshal this understanding and expertise from the agencies to bring to bear to assist the people in the parishes. KI5*

Several participants also raised challenges in relation to a perceived increase in emerging faith communities – particularly among new migrant communities – that are independent of, and separate from, formal organisational religious structures and systems. This can mean that they are hidden from mainstream society, and that their faith leaders are not required to participate in formal training or belong to a registration body, and are not subject to external monitoring or support. Examples given included new independent Pentecostal churches from mainland China, Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, well as in the Hindu community:

> *I shouldn't criticise, but there are people who just get the name as a pastor, they have no content as a pastor. FL3 (Christian)*

> *No. Nothing, no. I can just decide to [be a] religious leader. All I've got to do is garner support from people, I give a few talks and just people like my talks … and they have such huge followings [in India]. CM6 (Hindu)*

> *The independent churches as well as the small churches, how do you educate the people through this faith communities about the need of services or the availability of service or their rights or what kind of care and help they can get. I don't think many pastors would know. FL3 (Christian)*

3.4 Effective approaches and actions for reducing FDV in faith-based communities

Key informant, faith leader and community member participants in this consultation provided the following advice about strategies they believed would be most effective in reducing FDV in their communities:

- Work in meaningful partnerships with faith leaders and communities, employing religious respect and cultural competence.
- Meet people where they are at – 'you can't aim high when they are not ready'.
- Raise awareness of FDV, and empower women within faith communities and in society more broadly.
- Provide evidence of the prevalence of FDV in faith-based communities.
- Train and build the capacity of faith leaders.
- Engage with nontraditional and informal faith-based community leaders, advocates and organisations.
- Encourage engagement with religious texts and teachings to promote gender equality.
- Engage men in faith-based communities to do FDV work.
- Provide more culturally and religiously appropriate support services.
- Address gaps in funding and resources for faith leaders and faith-based communities.
- Provide soon-to-be-married couples with information about healthy relationships and FDV.
- Teach children and young people about respectful relationships and gender equality.

3.4.1 Work in meaningful partnerships with faith leaders and communities

Muslim and Catholic faith leader participants were keen to reinforce the importance of government and community organisations in developing and working in meaningful partnerships with

leaders and communities to achieve lasting and substantial change on FDV:

> *Government need to work with the community because the community are the people who understand, they are the people who can say now, this particular person, the information that he give you or she give you is wrong. FL5 (Catholic)*

> *The law cannot eliminate any violence in the society, domestic violence or any kind of violence. We also have work with the community to change the perceptions first of all and then you have to empower the community organisations to be champions of denouncing the violence of any kind. FL4 (Muslim)*

Key informants and community member participants similarly felt that working collaboratively and empowering faith leaders and communities to address FDV are essential to effective change, and to holding leaders and communities accountable for their actions:

> *It helps the community to feel empowered, it makes its leaders feel like we can do something, we're not looked at as like you're an obstacle in the past and changing that and looking at the strength-based approach does wonders in terms of like collaboration. KI6*

> *The only way to get faith communities to fix their problems inside is in a sense not to abandon them because you know they have to be held to account, they can't abuse their children but to support – to find those people inside the communities who are effectively driving change and to support those people inside those communities. CM_FG3 (Jewish)*

> *If it's all just Anglo people in there – say the Hindu community is present in the workshop and the facilitators and everyone is all Australian, white people, there would be a pushback, they just think oh they do not know anything about our culture and here they're preaching us how to stop domestic violence. CM6 (Hindu)*

Participants discussed that this may mean identifying and engaging with gatekeepers in some communities; at times, these people might present major barriers to change:

> *[The] women he observed had no English, no connection to the services. And the gatekeepers are men. So I asked him to run a conversation around respectful relationships and gender equality. He came and he spoke to the men. And then he got the refusal, they said, 'No, we're not keen to have that conversation'. And if those men will not allow their women to participate, then there's no forum to go ahead. So you have to think about the gatekeepers. KI2*

Key informant participants working with faith leaders and communities emphasised the need for government, and non-faith-based organisations and workers to develop such partnerships in ways that are respectful and understanding of religious and cultural contexts:

> *There needs to be that – if you really want to help someone it will take – the initial period will take a bit of time but I promise you that later on it'll get easy 'cause you've put into place what you needed to put into place. 'Cause if you haven't done that part where you've rapport built with this person I can promise you it will be difficult and you'll fail. Unless there is that duality of cultural competence and cultural humility when you're working with faith-based communities. People really need to have cultural humility and the idea of social competence. KI6*

> *These are just basic things like treating them like human beings, not treating them like somebody that oh this is from a traditional whatever and I can't deal with you. Come with the attitude of how can I help? … People need to look at faith-based as being a strength rather than a negative. KI6*

Several key informants described negative experiences of faith leaders and communities, who felt disrespected and as a result were cautious about engaging with those from outside their networks and contexts:

> *So, if you're looking at how they deal with leaders, quite often people are, you know, a lot of the mainstream organisations tends to become very dismissive of leaders. Why? Because they've got gatekeepers and if you've*

got gatekeepers you need to understand that those gatekeepers are there for a reason, you know? And they're there and you need to work with them and sometimes it's the personal prejudices and biases that cloud the judgment of a lot of workers who might have had a challenge with one or two leaders and so they do a blanket statement on all of them. KI6

I only got that secondhand but I gathered some quite strong feedback from some community leaders saying that they felt they'd been treated disrespectfully. KI1

3.4.2 Meet people where they are at

Assessing readiness for change among faith leaders and communities was identified as critical, given the vast variability in knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding FDV, as well as variability in formal and informal structures and relationships across faith leaders and communities. It was suggested that quite different approaches to starting conversations around FDV may be needed for communities and leaders across different faiths and even within faiths. As one key informant said, 'you can't aim high when they are not ready' (KI2).

Having said that, this informant also suggested that mainstream agencies should be more proactive when working with faith communities, rather than waiting for them to come to the agencies for help. He recommended going to their current activities to develop relationships and 'buy-in', and integrating new approaches into their existing programs to avoid:

… creat[ing] further burden for them … because sometimes they are migrants [and] they have a lot of work to do or having extra things is a big task. KI2

Another key informant discussed the importance of using appropriate language to engage with leaders and communities:

Sometimes some of the service providers fail in providing – in using the language – that the community knows. So when you're using a language that is foreign to them they can't relate to you, you need to be able to have the currency of language … Is it appropriate for the community? Is it appropriate for that faith-based community? They do have the language, you just need to find it, find it and use it. KI6

For example, talking about 'parenting' or 'healthy family relationships' at the beginning was suggested as an effective way of engaging communities and leaders when naming FDV was too taboo or sensitive. A key informant related some feedback he received from a young person from an ethnic-minority community:

The community also suggesting that maybe instead of talking about violence against women, we need to do the pitch, you know carefully. For example, we can talk about, um, parenting, to kind of lure people. KI2

A Muslim leader concurred that breaking the ice about difficult topics was important to avoid backlash:

If we want together in the future to tackle the issues within the community and especially in Islamic, Muslim communities, we got to fix the minds first, we got to talk to them and kind of break the ices before we kind of inject in a way – force them because once you force them it will kind of backlash. FL11 (Muslim)

3.4.3 Raise awareness of FDV, and empower women within faith communities and in society more broadly

Community members, especially those from Muslim backgrounds, suggested that education, and raising awareness about FDV and available support services remained an important priority within their communities:

So awareness, so to create awareness, to tell the community that such platforms and helps are available to tackle the domestic and family violence. CM_FG6 (Muslim)

They should know what is the proper help and the other thing I would say on this platform is that there should be proper information which could be easily accessed by all the women around that – where we can get the help, what sort of help we are going to get if we are going to share our problem. CM_FG1 (Muslim)

Muslim community members also discussed empowering women by educating them about their rights, both within their religion and under Australian law:

> *Plus empowering these women because what it is – like when I talked about education I didn't mean education in the general sense but their rights as a Muslim woman, you know, what are their rights with their husbands and things like that. CM_FG5 (Muslim)*

> *Yes, women need to be more empowered in terms of their education, in terms of their education, in terms of their skills or job. It was – when a woman's empowered, she has knowledge, awareness about their rights, she can stand up, she has the support, the backup, she has the confidence that she can stand up in case there is something wrong in the relationship. CM_FG4 (Muslim and Hindu FG, Muslim participant)*

Faith leader participants also suggested that greater education about FDV among both leaders and communities was needed:

> *Education like … you have to highlight the incidences … you know public events, awareness campaigns … this is happening in society … Is it every year the Royal Commission reports stats on domestic violence? I'm not very sure ... And then involve the faith communities to go out and educate their communities. FL4 (Muslim)*

> *I think it's also a lot about education, meaning educating both the leaders and the people because I think the more awareness there is the more awareness people know that it's not a stigma, it's okay and you know if people – and also I think fostering the trust of being able to reach out for help. Maybe that's one thing we haven't sort of highlighted but that education that it's okay to be, you know, to be on the receiving end and it's okay to reach out for help. And then when help is sought actually, accommodate it and to welcome it and to provide it in a healthy way. FL9 (Jewish)*

It was recommended that information about FDV needed to be available in a variety of settings – faith based and non-faith based (such as medical centres and pharmacies, maternal and child health clinics, libraries) – because often women were not allowed or able to access the internet or the phone to seek information and support:

> *And believe me the women who are going through this stuff, they often don't have access to mobile phones, they're not allowed on the internet, so if you need to help them you need to give them a concrete place to contact. Or – because they might be allowed that one phone call, you know? And then they need to use that to actually get out but we don't know where to send them. CM_FG1 (Muslim)*

Other community members discussed the importance of community forums and projects (such as this current consultation) that bring women together to discuss FDV and empower each other for change:

> *Participant 1: Maybe like more like this like ladies getting together especially from the community like make an event for all ladies to come together and you know empower one another to, you know, be stronger.*
> *Participant 2: Feel free to talk about everything. CM_FG7(Muslim and Christian)*

Some key informants suggested greater availability of information sessions for newly arrived migrants to Australia, including information relating to FDV. This is despite inclusion of information relating to FDV provided to new migrants in visa grant letters, and information programs for humanitarian and refugee entrants (pre- and post-arrival):

> *There needs to be something around that and whether that's 6 hours of domestic abuse stuff, whether that's a 2-day course that they've got to attend around, you know, introduction to Australian living or Australian culture or whatever and domestic abuse is part of that. KI4*

> *So I feel the Immigration and Border should have a program for all new migrants to have – like they have settlement programs, you know? Settlement program, you know, bring you to Centrelink … but they don't have anything to do with family violence. KI7*

3.4.4 Provide evidence of the prevalence of FDV in faith-based communities

Some key informant participants identified the need for greater empirical evidence of the prevalence of FDV within faith-based and religious communities, suggesting this to be important to motivate leaders to engage in FDV work:

> *The more evidence that's around the more – we would feed that into what we're doing, you know, if there was – I'm not aware of any demographics or that family violence by faith community. KI5*

> *I inserted direct research from the Muslim community, it meant something to them. Like obviously I presented stats so the national stats but then I funnelled it down to stats relating to our community and that was the one that they focused on … Absolutely, you have to have evidence, everything has to be evidence based. 'Cos when you're providing evidence – and that's what religious legitimacy is all about. KI6*

3.4.5 Train and build the capacity of faith leaders

Faith leaders' and communities' capacity to address and respond to FDV was discussed as highly influenced by their access to information, resources and training. Key informant participants identified training and capacity building for faith leaders as being important; this includes training of trainee faith leaders and those who have come from overseas:

> *I think capacity building for leaders is really vital. And there are some faith communities within Australia which draw quite heavily from overseas for leadership, it's difficult to ... So you can't sort of embed pre-service training for those people because they come already trained. KI1*

> *I think it's about directly speaking to … The Bible colleges again, are really pouring a lot of energy into training Christian counsellors, and to make sure that, at that early level … when they're training counsellors, that they have an awareness that family violence is a very distinct area, and that they should be wading into it. KI3*

> *They need to have proper training. Some people have very good intention but they don't know how to do it so if there's not enough support they might say I'm tired to do this work on my own and I might just go back to where I was because that's my comfort zone. KI5*

A Christian faith leader also suggested that training would be helpful:

> *I would think if there are people who can train the pastors and leaders or there are talk [sic] about what's the definition of abuse, of family violence is, that we can educate the people. Even booklets or even a video clip that we can play and through fellowship or things like that, I think that would be good. FL3 (Christian)*

Some key informants described some effective ways to engage and train faith leaders, based on their experiences:

> *It [peer mentoring program] was an attempt to match up people who [had] done a bit more thinking in the space with those who were sort of came to do more thinking. And we developed this program which was a series of six conversations for those pairs to have, with some reading material and so forth … it [the program] seemed to indicate that [it] was a good approach, as a way of providing a safe space for those who had more questions, to engage with people who were willing to obviously answer them. KI1*

> *The way we've done the training … is also need to be tailored carefully on the first touches … so we do not overwhelm the audience in the first place. KI2*

> *What we realised was like all the learning has to happen in the classroom. You can't expect them to go away and read material, it's not going to happen. It's not going to happen. You have to do it within the thing so the activity has to be such that it's driving a point ... It's you're upskilling them to make them feel empowered and that's the point of it, the point is for them to realise that I didn't know, I need to know more about this. KI6*

Some caution was advised about approaching some faith leaders and communities to be involved in FDV work: some participants described frustrating experiences in their work.

A key informant who worked with Muslim communities expressed frustration with some faith leaders and organisations that she perceived as not engaging with FDV work appropriately, while still receiving funding for the activities:

> *I personally would be very disappointed that an agency or the government came in and said to a mosque, here's $5000 to put on a domestic violence function or an awareness afternoon or whatever, I'd be pissed mightily because I know the mosques do nothing. KI4*

3.4.6 Engage with nontraditional and informal faith-based community leaders, advocates and organisations

In addition to faith leaders and established faith organisations, some community member participants suggested that nontraditional or informal leaders within faith communities should also be supported to do FDV work:

> *It hasn't been the religious leaders that tend to resolve the issues, it's usually – they tend to only do the marriage and the divorce, when things are going good or when they're ready to be divorced … It's usually the families, the respectful community leaders, maybe people around in the community that are respected or in the community that tend to help out and they're the ones that offer that support. CM_FG7 (Muslim and Christian)*

> *Certain people would go to imams and certain people would [go to] these elders that probably – they thought that they would be more open-minded. CM_FG5 (Muslim)*

In addition, a Muslim faith leader suggested that having more women formally engaged in this work would be helpful:

> *I think that there should be a female kind of assistants in the mosques to talk to them [women] because you know sometime there are issues that they wanted to talk [to] a mother but you don't have a mother here, maybe overseas and she can't go over the phone all the time … So I think the mosques should make available some female assistants so that they can play a role in giving some sort of service on that. Giving them space for them to come and talk or even they can have a regular programs to victims of domestic violence to come and talk in a safe environment. FL4 (Muslim)*

A Jewish faith leader saw value in supporting grassroots groups that do FDV work:

> *But that on its own [religious leadership] if not accompanied by the grassroots response can look – can be dismissed – as tokenism because it can be dismissed as rabbis sermonising from the pulpit and lay leadership bodies issuing statements and it's all very nice but how is that affecting this woman in her current circumstances and situation? FL8 (Jewish)*

He further explained that it was important to have issues relating to FDV becoming part of 'your day-to-day conversation' because:

> *… it's the day-to-day comments that people say, the image that's portrayed that wives are just nagging and annoying and all that sort of stuff. This filters down and it just creates the nonspoken, the unspoken text that it's a man's world and women are secondary. FL8 (Jewish)*

A key informant who is a member of the Sikh community provided some insight from his experiences working voluntarily to help victims of FDV in his community:

> *I think we need more resources and, you know, to train individual community, identify those leaders – not just leaders, don't go for leaders, gatekeepers who've got influence in the community who people will listen to. They need to be converted … I work with all the groups … I get along with everyone … I say I go to every temple. I'm not linked to anyone, I'm aligned to the community. KI7*

This kind of work can take a toll on both community workers and faith leaders:

> *Victims don't call you just [during] office hours, when they're scared and whenever they go and deal with the system it's all during office hours. You know? Child Protection and all, nobody works after hours or weekends when the real trouble happens, everybody's at home asleep and partying and barbequing. So I've given them my number, it became like a hotline but it's not a hotline … Imagine if they can*

fund me and imagine I'm doing 5 days a week, I can do wonders. I'm struggling in between just to achieve what I've done … So I take away time from my family, my own personal time. KI7

The rabbi's role is 24/7 so you know we're with our congregants but the very same person who just yesterday was spilling his or her heart out over this problem is next day at a – in a synagogue or next day at a bar mitzvah at a reception and you see them and you're talking to them and you're engaging them so there's this constant labyrinth of layer upon layer of complexity within our relationships with others, which means that we don't actually get time off. And you'd be surprised at the number of now disclosures or these types of things that happen in very ad hoc informal settings. FL11 (Jewish)

3.4.7 Encourage engagement with religious texts and teachings to promote gender equality

Some key informant and faith leader participants observed that engaging directly with religious texts and scriptures can be an effective way to change beliefs, behaviours and attitudes that may be used to justify abuse and encourage victims to stay in an abusive situation; and encourage a reinterpretation that promotes greater gender equality and condemns abuse:

While we were looking at our faith through different eyes … and most of the stuff that we were working with was … a form of feminist theology, that helped look at the text in different ways. FL2 (Christian)

When we saw the (Bible) stories differently, when we read the stories in the light of, in light of gender-based violence, there was a new driver, there was a new call to … living better. FL1 (Christian)

I've found that it's very powerful when you're dealing with people, particularly people who are more observant, to actually highlight the Jewish text for them because like this is the faith then you consider yourself Jewish and observant, well then you can't be behaving like this. FL9 (Jewish)

Whenever I run a workshop, I link them to the Sikh scriptures and I say where does the scriptures? – I say [if] we bow down to the scriptures, we have to stop being hypocrites. If we cannot follow and we are going against by hitting women, you know, not giving them equality ... So that's of course very confronting and they're like, yeah, I see you're right because they can't argue with me because scriptures backs me up. KI7

However, there needs to be an awareness that:

… in some communities, the interpretation of sacred text is much more integral to change processes than in other types of faith communities. KI1

3.4.8 Engage men in faith-based communities to do FDV work

Some key informant and faith leader participants discussed issues relating to involving more men in FDV work. As a key informant described:

There's a lot of discussions, and forums and they're all run by women, and women speaking and women are the attendees. There's no men in there. KI2

One Christian faith leader suggested that more 'male-driven processes and programs that help men look at this stuff and why they do what they do' was needed to engage men because:

… there's not a lot of men in this areas. I think men who are comfortable interrogating themselves and their culture is kind of, it's a lonely business, a lonely place. FL1 (Christian)

A key informant suggested trying to find factors that would motivate men to engage in FDV work, especially if it is perceived as threatening their position within a community:

I think a lot of men are motivated by the thought of women that they know. But I think there's another whole group of men who are motivated by issues around justice and fairness and there's a small percentage of men, I'll put myself in this place, who are also motivated around awareness of how gender stereotypes and gender norms have affected us as men as well. KI1

According to this key informant, women can also be resistant to change that challenges gender roles and norms because:

> *… there are women who also feel like life makes sense because of the way it's always been for them. KI1*

3.4.9 Provide more culturally and religiously appropriate support services

Faith leader and community member participants from Muslim and Hindu faith backgrounds, in particular, felt that more culturally and religiously appropriate support services were needed because some women may not feel comfortable accessing secular or mainstream services that do not take into account their cultural or religious customs:

> *Maybe having availability to safe haven for them … culturally appropriate safe haven like, you know, crisis accommodation and things like that because these type of things are available for common people where they may not be deemed comfortable with this, they have to go and live with drug addicts or whatever accommodation or religiously different people. FL4 (Muslim)*

> *A mainstream woman can walk into five different service providers and she'll get something. A Muslim woman, Indian woman, somebody from that cultural background might not. Might not walk into any of them but she might walk into one and get really, really badly treated or misunderstood or whatever and then will disengage completely. CM_FG2 (Muslim and Hindu FG, Muslim participant)*

Some community member and key informant participants also suggested improving the cultural competence of people working in the FDV sector more broadly:

> *I think like culturally responsive training would be good if you can provide it to all the frontline workers, faith leaders, community leaders. CM8 (Muslim)*

> *Like we were saying, you know, okay, there may be a program there that is suitable for Australians for one part of the community but that may not be suitable for us or some, you know, the cases we see so more tailor-made programs. CM_FG5 (Muslim)*

> *We need more Sikh or rather in general culturally friendly approaches, services, even legally [sic] sent for training, you know? Court staff sent for training. Even judges should attend training to know cultural sensitivities. KI7*

3.4.10 Address gaps in funding and resources for faith leaders and faith-based communities

Some faith leaders and key informants working with faith-based communities cited a lack of resources and funding for engaging in, and addressing, issues of FDV among their communities:

> *I think there's some smaller faith communities that just haven't got the resourcing. So, I think, for the government to be able to support them to develop, resources that help them to examine their sacred texts in different ways, that they're training for leadership. I think that's really important. KI1*

> *One of the other things that came up was that faith-based organisations are limited in capacity. They may not have access to things that other organisations, mainstream organisations already have as automatic. They don't have that. Sometimes that prevents them from helping domestic violence victims and their families. KI6*

During this project, some participants provided names and details of faith-based FDV-related resources of which they were aware or that they had used in their work. A list of these resources is in Appendix A.

3.4.11 Provide soon-to-be-married couples with information about healthy relationships and FDV

Some participants suggested that marriage preparation for couples should include information about FDV to increase awareness about the issue. A key informant discussed the lack of content

relating to FDV in marriage preparation for couples from a Christian background:

> *Just a total, total gap when it comes to all the training and support the churches give for families and marriage. There's a lot of preparation that happens when Christian couples, male–female couples become engaged, every church provides a marriage course, but there is virtually zero in there on abuse, on violence, on sexual consent, there's just nothing. KI3*

FDV alert training is available to providers of pre-marriage courses, but it is not mandated or compulsory. This suggests that increased awareness of the availability of such training or greater encouragement of uptake is needed.

One Muslim faith leader suggested that marriage celebrants also have a role to play:

> *It could be a partnership between government and then the community organisations. The reason you know marriages are registered by marriage celebrants so the marriage celebrants have to be educated how to protect the most, you know, the women when they conduct the marriages. FL4 (Muslim)*

One community member who was also a marriage celebrant discussed her experiences training to be a celebrant:

> *No, just relationships. No, the domestic violence wasn't something in – like in – that wasn't part of our sort of training as such but as they're talking about forced marriages, underage marriages, the government was sort of really starting to come down on that. CM7 (Jewish)*

At present, under s. 42 (5A) of the *Marriage Act 1961*, celebrants are required to provide all marrying couples with the document *Happily ever … before and after*.[2] There is no explicit mention of FDV in this document and no compulsory requirement for celebrants to attend training that includes information relating to FDV.

3.4.12 Teach children and young people about respectful relationships and gender equality

Jewish faith leaders mentioned that teaching children and young people about respectful and healthy relationships from a young age would help to prevent FDV:

> *For me, I think prevention needs to start actually with young children, on their level, of course, age-appropriate, and needs to continue on through school and through the young adulthoods before people are very entrenched then in negative behaviour. FL9 (Jewish)*

Another Jewish faith leader emphasised that ideas about gender roles start from a young age:

> *I think that government is to be fair doing its part and where that matters a lot is when it comes to education because it all starts with the kids, it all starts with the kids, it's about engendering a strong sense of equal respect from a very young age and ingraining that it's from that – those ages of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, that's where little girls and boys are made to feel that one is the dominant and the other might be the more passive and submissive one. FL8 (Jewish)*

A Muslim community member from a focus group also recognised that differential treatment of girls and boys was a factor related to gender inequality:

> *Yeah, I do that very consciously, I put the values in my son and I all – I give my daughters very confidence in everything that you are special and because it's very – it was lacking in the past because girls didn't have that confidence from their childhood, that they are special, they are you know they're – or maybe equal so they need to – yeah so we need to give confidence to our girls from their childhood and we need to teach our sons that you're not superior, you're just equal so everything – if there needs to be judged on the standards of goodness or like that standard, not on the standard of being a girl or a boy. CM_FG4 (Muslim and Hindu FG)*

As shown, key informant, faith leader and community member participants in this consultation provided various recommendations for how best to engage with faith leaders and communities to address FDV.

4 Limitations

This consultation had several limitations. First, the use of qualitative methods in this consultation means that the results are not generalisable to any particular group or community based on their cultural or religious background. Although a broad range of experiences and perspectives was captured across different religious and cultural backgrounds, it is possible that some points of view were not included and that some were overstated.

Second, the majority of community member consultations were with women. Therefore, the range of views held by men in the community was not fully captured. This highlights an area for future research efforts.

Finally, this work was limited to urban areas across four Australian states. Different communities, service systems, policies and immigration histories in other regions and states may provide slightly different or additional experiences that were not captured in this project.

5 Conclusion

This project aimed to explore the role of religion and cultural values in attitudes and responses to FDV in CALD communities in Australia, and increase understanding of faith communities' capacity for prevention of, early intervention in, and response to, FDV.

The project consulted with faith leaders and community members from different faith-based backgrounds – Catholicism, Christianity (Catholic, Baptist, Evangelical, Anglican), Islam, Buddhism and Judaism – in Australia to gain a better understanding of their capacity for prevention, early intervention and response in relation to FDV. Key informants working in the FDV sector with experience working with faith leaders and faith-based groups also provided insight on the myriad issues and complexities of engaging with faith communities in this work.

A summary of findings is outlined below, followed by recommendations.

5.1 Summary of findings

Overall, FDV was generally recognised as a common issue faced by faith leaders and their communities (but to a lesser extent among those of a Buddhist faith), yet is still poorly understood. This is due, in part, to FDV being a taboo topic – a private, family issue. Some participants perceived a denial of the existence of FDV among some leaders and members in their community. Although some faith leader and community members emphasised that their faith and religion does not condone violence, some participants described how religious beliefs and practices may influence understanding of, and responses to, FDV – for example, victim-blaming attitudes, and overemphasis on doctrines of forgiveness, acceptance and endurance. Religious beliefs regarding gender roles that consider men and women to be 'equal but different' were considered highly influential in FDV attitudes, knowledge and responses.

The barriers and enablers to addressing FDV identified by participants were multifactorial and operated on multiple levels (individual, family and community). Most participants focused their discussions on barriers to preventing and addressing FDV within their faith-based communities, rather than enablers that facilitate change in this area. However, some participants did discuss how their faith gave them support in difficult times. Barriers to preventing and addressing FDV included a reluctance to engage in FDV work, which sometimes led to pushback or backlash effects, as experienced by key informants. Participants also believed that some victims of FDV lacked information about how to seek help and may be apprehensive about calling the police or other forms of assistance, particularly if there is a fear of deportation (for migrants on a temporary visa). Faith leader and community member participants also discussed how family obligation and reputation can prevent victims from seeking help, because divorce and relationship separation carry a stigma and shame in some families and communities. Some key informants described how secular and mainstream FDV frameworks can challenge religious teachings and beliefs, leading to resistance or pushback to FDV work among some leaders and faith groups. This was commonly related to views about gender roles and norms. Some participants also cited a lack of funding or resources for FDV work, in addition to the lack of culturally and religiously appropriate FDV services.

Overall, the key informant, faith leader and community member participants perceived the capacity of faith leaders and communities to address and prevent FDV to be limited and highly heterogeneous: some are helpful, some fail to act, and some engage in harmful and re-traumatising behaviours. However, some key informants and faith leaders felt that progress was being made, as leaders and communities were increasingly aware of FDV. When discussing the capacity

of faith leaders to respond to FDV, some faith leader, key informant and community member participants described wide variation in the role and influence of faith leaders, both across and within faith communities. Some participants highlighted the need to recognise and address the variation in religious and faith-based organisational and leadership structures, and to work within these contexts to achieve structural change.

Key informant, faith leader and community member participants provided a number of suggestions about strategies they believed would be most effective in reducing FDV in their communities. Many of these centred around the role of government and community organisations in developing and working in meaningful partnerships with leaders and communities to achieve lasting and substantial change regarding FDV. The strategies are outlined in detail in the next section.

5.2 Recommendations

Findings from this project indicate that more work is needed to strengthen the capacity of religious and CALD communities to address FDV. The main recommendations are as follows:

- Work in meaningful partnerships with faith leaders and communities, employing religious respect and cultural competence.
- Use flexible approaches that suit each particular context, including assessing communities' readiness for change and the most appropriate language to use (e.g. family safety, healthy relationships).
- Raise awareness of FDV across different settings (e.g. health, education) and empower women within their faith communities – for example, by educating them about their rights both within their religion and under Australian law.
- Provide evidence of the prevalence of FDV in faith-based communities to engage reluctant leaders and communities, and address pushback and backlash effects.
- Train and build the capacity of faith leaders, community leaders, advocates and organisations. Provide them with support, as many work voluntarily.
- Encourage engagement with religious texts and teachings to promote gender equality.
- Engage men in faith-based communities to do FDV work.
- Provide more culturally and religiously appropriate support services.
- Address gaps in funding and resources for faith leaders and communities (including better sharing of existing resources).
- Increase the availability of information sessions for newly arrived migrants to Australia that include information relating to FDV.
- Provide soon-to-be-married couples with information about healthy relationships and FDV.
- Train and build the capacity of marriage celebrants in relation to FDV.
- Teach children and young people about respectful relationships and gender equality.

This project contributes to our understanding of the attitudes and beliefs about FDV within faith-based communities in Australia, and the capacity of these communities to address, respond to and prevent FDV. However, more work is needed. Future research in this area should involve other faith groups and CALD communities in other locations in Australia (including rural and regional areas). The views of men from a range of different faith and CALD backgrounds in the community should also be obtained. More work is needed to measure the prevalence of FDV in particular populations, including religious and CALD groups. In addition, evaluation of programs addressing FDV within faith and religious contexts is required.

Appendix A Resources

Below is a list of resources mentioned by participants consulted in the project.

- Safer by Common Grace
  - Online resource produced to help churches support and prioritise victims of domestic and family violence, and know how to deal with perpetrators. https://www.saferresource.org.au/
- *Will my Rabbi believe me? Will he understand? Responding to disclosures of family violence in a rabbinic context* by the Jewish Taskforce Against Family Violence ; The Rabbinical Council of Victoria
  - Written for rabbis in Victoria, an introductory guide to the causes and effects of family violence, and how rabbis can respond to victims who ask for help.
- Parish resource kit from Catholic Social Services
  - A resource kit for parishes to help them better respond to domestic and family violence. www.css.org.au/Domestic-Violence/Article/21343/Parish-Resource-Kit-to-support-our-response-to-domestic-violence#.XMaSmo2P6UI
- Together We Are Strong by the Lebanese Muslim Association.
  - Resource as part of the Islamic Psychosocial Skills Training program.
- BINA Library and Educational Resource Centre (based in Sydney)
  - Resources for Jewish communities, including materials on healthy relationships. https://bina.com.au/home/

Notes

1. The five precepts of Buddhism are: 1. to abstain from taking life, 2. to abstain from taking what is not given, 3. to abstain from sensuous misconduct, 4. to abstain from false speech, and 5. to abstain from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind.

2. https://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Marriage/Documents/happily-ever-before-and-after.pdf

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