

## Foreword

To quote Gloria Steinem, “The story of women’s struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights.” Which means every person reading this newsletter has a role to play in terms of inspiring inclusivity.

Broadly, the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of women is heavily connected to the value society places on visible measures and policies in place to enable equal opportunities for women. Specifically, it is about removing systemic and cultural barriers to gender equality- are they based on individual potential or based on external appearances, labelling and stereotyping? Is there a level playing ground? Are resources distributed equitably, when compared to men?

“To truly include women means to openly embrace their diversity of race, age, ability, faith, body image, and how they identify. Worldwide, women must be included in all fields of endeavour.” UN International Women’s Day 2025

Women wellbeing is one of the key deliverables for ECCWA. ECCWA is actively advocating for and building capacity in ethnic CaLD women. We not only champion the notion that a seat at the table should be based on ability (not gender) but also actively promote inclusive practices within our workforce and board. Six of our nine current ECCWA board members and ECCWA Executive Officer are women.

Looking through the lens of gender-based outcomes and opportunities, men appear more “visible” than women across the WA spectrum. Be this at work or in social settings. And when we look at gender equality through coloured lens, CaLD women become even less “visible”. Women residents of Western Australia, especially women of colour, have untapped potential which could be of huge benefit to our state in innumerable ways- at home, in workforce, in government and, in community. In my view, we are a very long way from demonstrating ‘visibly’ equal outcomes and opportunities. The reason for this invisibility is a combination of societal and systemic factors. Now add to these factors, the pressures caused by migration to a new, unfamiliar country - Life truly becomes an everyday challenge for many ethnic CaLD women.

For instance, in my thirty years as a public health physician, the narrative of Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) continues to remain a vicious cycle of physical, verbal, emotional, financial and sexual abuse rooted in and perpetuating gender inequalities. The light at the end of the tunnel is that more women are now speaking out, seeking help and taking actions to fight for their rights. Yet, systemic and cultural barriers continue- E,g, Strategies not walking the talk of our policies or system and culture based implicit and explicit gender biased knowledge, attitude and behaviour. These barriers overwhelmingly impact women and children more than men and, directly on the woman’s physical and mental wellbeing; her ability to secure a job and rebuild her life; her struggle to find meaning in jobs that do not do justice to her capability and many more ways.

We know from state and national data that WA attracts skilled migrants with potential. This includes migrant women with either high educational attainment and professional experience or inherent capability and aptitude. The question is – How much level playing ground do we offer in Western Australia? To women of diverse ethnicity and of colour - At work, at home and in the community? To understand where we stand and what policy levers we can use to truly inspire inclusion and empower,

we have articles and an interview that put the spotlight on two issues of high importance to CaLD and ethnic women living in Western Australia – (1) Family and Domestic Violence and (2) Equal Opportunities at work.

According to the UN Global Health Workforce report (March 2019), gender inequity remains a challenge in the workforce, with too few women making critical decisions and leading the work. For example, a report launched by WHO, the Global Health Workforce Network, and Women in Global Health on the *Status of Women* describes the social and economic factors that determine why women make up 70% of the health workforce but only 25% hold senior roles. This report explores issues such as stereotypes, discrimination, and power imbalances driving gaps in gender leadership, with women further disadvantaged on the basis of their race or class. In turn, these have a domino effect and contribute significantly to the gender pay gap.

To conclude, instead of fixing women to fit into inequitable systems, when policies attempt to fix inequitable system and work environment, they will empower survivors of FDV; create skill/ ability-based work for women and; help address gender gaps in pay and leadership. Targeted measures will enable and empower ethnic CaLD women to create gender equality dividends such as female education, fair pay at work, autonomy, improved family education & nutrition, women's and children's health, and fuelling WA's economic growth. It gives me great pleasure to share that an ECCWA board member (Tinashe La) will be providing strategic leadership and facilitating engagement with the Centre for Women Safety and Welfare (CWSW) and other key agencies to take forward the objective of women wellbeing in 2025-2026.

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**President Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia**

**Chairperson, Australian Multicultural Health Collaborative**

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## Intersection between policy and advocacy

The United Nations Population Fund (2022) noted advocacy and policy dialogue as “the direct interaction of stakeholders with policy decision-makers and each other to develop, improve, reform and monitor policies. It includes providing evidence-based analyses and recommendations (including identifying the major drivers and bottlenecks of policy implementation), convening and facilitating dialogues, and offering options to address development challenges.”

This sounds so simple and easy when you have passionate advocates wanting change. However, in Western Australia, advocates, professionals and researchers from refugee and migrant communities have explored and recommended strategies to policy makers on how to best support women’s health and wellbeing when facing barriers in accessing support services.

There is little appetite to take up the recommendations.

In October 2024, the **Advisory Group for Refugee and Migrant Communities in WA**, supported by the Centre for Women’s Safety and Wellbeing (CWSW) published<sup>1</sup> a Spotlight Report on Family and Domestic Violence in Refugee & Migrant Communities in Western Australia [RMCWA Spotlight Report](#).

There has been little interest in its recommendations.

Though the ongoing prevalence of gender-based violence receives a lot of attention, the wellbeing of victim-survivors is as important such as education, employment opportunities and legal rights. Personally, I find it infuriating that the research that has been done with refugee and migrant victim-survivors of family and domestic violence is largely ignored by policy and decision makers. We could be using that evidence right now – taking it up in policy and practice – and making a difference to the lives of refugee and migrant women.

The Conversation<sup>2</sup> published the results of a survey done by Harmony Alliance in 2024 which is said to be the most comprehensive in Australia for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. It is the [first national study](#) to look at the residency and visa status of migrant and refugee women, and the first to ask specific questions about controlling behaviours related to migration abuse.

The study showed that temporary visa holders consistently reported proportionately higher levels of domestic and family violence, including controlling behaviours. Temporary visa holders also reported much higher patterns of migration-related abuse and threats (such as threats to be deported or separated from their children).” And yet again this data is not enough to promote substantial change.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://csws.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Spotlight-on-FDV-in-Refugee-and-Migrant-Communities.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://theconversation.com/one-third-of-migrant-and-refugee-women-experience-domestic-violence-major-survey-reveals-163651?utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=bylinecopy\\_url\\_button](https://theconversation.com/one-third-of-migrant-and-refugee-women-experience-domestic-violence-major-survey-reveals-163651?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=bylinecopy_url_button)

Most of the service providers in Western Australia will tell you this is a real and ongoing problem. Specialist responses are required but continue to be lacking.

As a starting point, the two peak bodies – ECCWA and CWSW – will continue to advocate for funded responses to the following recommendations from the Spotlight Report:

### **Recommendations**

1. WA State Government to commit to adequately fund ‘By and For’ family and domestic violence prevention and response services for refugee and migrant women and children.
2. WA State Government to enact reform enabling women on temporary visas escaping family and domestic violence to access public housing and financial support.
3. Funding agreements with service providers to ensure adequate provision for service providers to access accredited interpreting services.
4. Fund the Centre for Women’s Safety and Wellbeing in collaboration with the Advisory Group for Family and Domestic Violence in Refugee and Migrant Communities in WA to undertake research to improve knowledge of family and domestic violence victim-survivors from refugee and migrant backgrounds. The research will:
  - Identify the type and quality of data currently being collected by family and domestic violence services and agencies which indicates the cultural, linguistic, and migration characteristics of clients in Western Australia (government and non-government services and agencies).
  - Analyse what this data reveals, or fails to reveal, in relation to the situation of women and children in WA from refugee and migrant backgrounds impacted by family and domestic violence.
  - Provide an overview of the key learnings which can be taken from existing Australian research on women and children from refugee and migrant backgrounds impacted by family and domestic violence that can inform service provision.
  - Make recommendations on a standardised data set for WA relating to cultural, linguistic, migration status of clients to be implemented by all family and domestic violence services and agencies.
5. Fund the Centre for Women’s Safety and Wellbeing and the Ethnic Communities Council of WA to:
  - Support the specialist family and domestic violence sector to implement and deliver culturally safe and trauma-informed prevention and response services to refugee and migrant women and children experiencing family and domestic violence.
  - Support refugee and migrant communities and services to respond to and prevent violence against refugee and migrant women and children.

Refugee and migrant women and children experiencing family and domestic violence are identified as a priority population group in Western Australian family and domestic violence policies, strategies and plans. Yet this commitment in words is not put into action.

As called out by The Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia (FECCA) in May 2025, the newly appointed Office for Multicultural Affairs must “Establish an independent Commissioner or statutory body to oversee accountability, transparency, and long-term progress.”

**Ms Tinashe La, Board Lead for Women Wellbeing, Ethnic Communities Council WA**

**Ms Alison Evans, CEO, Centre for Women Safety and Welfare**

“The author Eduardo Galeano said that “in the end, women’s fear of men’s violence is a reflection of men’s fear of women without fear.”” Isabel Allende, *The Soul of a Woman*

***A conversation about the potential role that effective policies and resources could play in helping women become fearless***

Patterned as an interview, this article is the summary of a conversation between Professor Jaya A R Dantas and Dr Sadhana Bose. Centered upon the very important topic of gender equality and equity, the purpose of this interview is to leverage ECCWA’s role in influencing policies to enhance CaLD gender equality and enable FDV survivors in Western Australia to rebuild their lives.

**Sadhana Bose**

How does gender inequality play a role in domestic violence? From a Culturally and Llinguistically Diverse perspective in Western Australia.

**Jaya Dantas**

From a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) perspective, refugee and migrant women face several disadvantages because gender inequality and family and domestic violence (FDV) have different nuances. Often women think if it's not physical violence, then it's not violence. However, in the last decade, different types of violence and abuse have come to the fore - psychological violence, emotional violence, financial abuse, social isolation, coercive control. For example, in some communities living in Australia some of these amount to, forced marriage, modern slavery, domestic servitude. All of this impact women and highten inequalities because of lack of awareness combined with huge amount of control. Especially in recent times, during the pandemic (when families were socially isolated).

Then there is technology abuse, which includes mobile surveillance, tracking, monitoring, use of cameras and GPS devices. All of which impact women. Many of whom are unaware of their rights, especially because the victims are controlled to the extent where they have very little voice and social agency. Living in a foreign country with systemic issues like racism adds to this because it becomes difficult for them to navigate systems. There is also the cultural stigma that affects CaLD communities, from a position of cultural male privilege.

**Sadhana Bose**

A woman of colour often has to deal with preconceived stereotyping and barriers. And then, if one is actually struggling with violence in family settings, then there are these whole range of issues in addition that you've shared. It appears that women in such situations are fighting on multiple fronts, without support or resource and information about next steps. So, it's beyond a double whammy.

**Jaya Dantas**

Yes, it's very common, and often they're not aware they are in a situation. See, if there's control and isolation then they are isolated from family and friends. There is also control like spouse wants to know where they are going etc. Women in such situations often have to develop the social agency to be able to reach out. And they do - when they realise that the situation is untenable. In extreme cases, they can lose their lives or there is suicidal ideation or there's harm to them and their children or abuse of their children. These are all aspects of modern slavery. Even everyday issues like doing all the domestic chores all the time, cleaning the house to twice a day etc because domestic servitude is unknown within these cultural contexts.

### **Sadhana**

The woman finds it difficult to understand what to do and often ends up focussing on survival, especially when children are involved. It is not uncommon for women in the middle-ages to actually call or walk out - after putting up with years and decades of abuse in the relationship.

From a policy perspective, do you see any benefits or consequences of bringing policies for family domestic violence, sexual abuse and gender equality together?

### **Jaya**

It's not only having good policies, it's the translation of those policies into actions. We have good national FDV strategies. E.g. there is a national policy of 2022 – 2032 and an action plan for 2023 - 2027, in addition to a similar policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and a 2020-2030 WA Action plan for Safety. Whenever there is a policy, one also needs procedures to support that policy translation and sustained funding for implementation because one cannot have a policy and cannot actually not support the translation of the policy on the ground.

Secondly, when we say there are hubs and wrap around service, it's actually problematic because the reality is that many of the women go around in circles. It is obvious they need someone to talk to, psychological support, legal support, even basic understanding of how to make a police complaint or apply for a family violence restraining order (VRO). Problems with simple solutions - I have been with women to the Magistrate Court and there is no computer with a printer, so everyone has to write down by hand. If the woman has written a victim impact statement on her laptop, there is no print facility at the magistrate courts and she cannot leave it to next day because she fears that if the violence restraining order is not allowed, she has to come another day. So resourcing is a genuine problem in all of this and legal aid has a backlog. I've known women who have access to legal aid but they are often not able to actually talk to the lawyer like you and me are doing.

And the biggest elephant in the room is accommodation. What happens after the refuge? Where does she go? You know the accommodation situation for the best of us in Western Australia. Now imagine for people dealing with FDV, who have children and, they really need accommodation near a school. What the government pays is a small amount. Red Cross and some other organisations give \$5000 as a one-off payment. We know even a basic one bedroom accommodation costs around \$500 minimum. She needs basics like pots and pans, kettle, plates and spoons. \$ 5000 is very little in the current financial crisis as the money doesn't last long. I talk to migrant women who are highly

educated. We are talking about architects, engineers, accountants and those with a PhD but they need shelter 1st, and they need safe shelter.

I feel we have good policies when we look at the sustainable health review of WA - It talks about vulnerable populations, but we know what happens when women need psychological support, legal support and services like interpreters.

**Sadhana**

From what you are saying and what I know from my experience in the community, women don't just undergo family domestic violence-many would also be victims of other forms of violence. If they are working outside home, issues of gender pay differences add to this. Many go about their even as they are carrying all that trauma with them into their work.

Coming back to the question about the benefits of pulling together policies that cover family, domestic violence, sexual abuse, gender equality, we could look at actually bringing those resources together to fund capacity building within the Community.

**Jaya**

With sexual violence, in a family situation or sexual violence, women hesitate to talk about that, often they are within coercive control or sexual violence and that men don't really understand consent.

**Sadhana**

Absolutely agree. Moving on, in 2022 the Australian Federal Parliament passed the Fair Work Amendment Act and that provides employees, including casual employees with certain rights with regard to their leave. Given your own work in this area, where you do have women who are academics or pursuing academics, have you come across awareness about this act?

**Jaya**

They definitely don't know about the act. However, they know there are provisions and they know that if they are working for universities or schools, there are provisions within HR/People and Culture for different type of leave. So they do know that they will get family and domestic violence leave; that they'll get personal or bereavement leave. There is an awareness but with respect to the actual act itself, they might not know this is part of the Fair Work Act. In Curtin University, we have an employee assistant programme with access to confidential psychological support.

**Sadhana**

Have you come across women employees or students hesitating to apply for this kind of leave, worrying about whether it will impact on their CV or own reputation?

**Jaya**

No. We have a mechanism. Where people apply for promotions, they can mention that they are going through personal issues or reasons confidentially about reasons for leave or poor work performance etc. Consideration is given while actually looking at the whole application of the person.

**Sadhana**

That's good to know. So, the fear or concern that one may be discriminated would not be there because of the transparent support system in place really.

**Jaya**

Yes, and it's confidential with the line manager.

**Sadhana**

Thank you! Following on from a previous question, what policy levers would you find beneficial to advance the wider case of CaLD women in leadership roles?

**Jaya**

We know that there are lot of migrants working in WA's public sector, especially government, university and health sectors. You'll also find lots of women of colour in leadership roles on community boards and not for profits. Yet, when it comes to mid and senior management level, these numbers actually diminish significantly. There are not very many CALD people in very senior positions such as director, executive director etc. There is a glass ceiling - I do not know whether targets and quotas will help, or whether there has to be programs in place that enable women and men of colour. Very few CaLD people in the public sector hold very senior positions beyond Level 9, or level 10. The private sector also has similar problems. E.g. Corporate boards, where people are paid.

I think government needs to look at how to address those barriers and how to use agencies like WGEA, which offer tools and guides to help employers improve workplace gender equality & pay gaps. This information is published annually for organisations with more than 100 people.

**Sadhana**

You really want to see this happen! So, how can we work towards enabling this? I.e. Equal opportunities for women of colour aiming for top level leadership roles in paid positions, be this the corporate sector or public sector.

**Jaya**

One thing we have to continue is the advocacy. In Australia, we have the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. You can also do a diversity survey by the Diversity Council of Australia that organisations are allowed to do to get an environmental scan of diversity in the organisation. Many organisations are already doing it but one can also look at this information as an ordinary citizen.

For example, when you look at the hospital sector, within the sector there many CALD doctors and nurses of colour. But when it comes to leadership positions, how many are there? I have found that there are multiple barriers to senior leadership positions. Women on student visas, work visas, spousal visas etc really impact these women significantly.

### **Sadhana**

The hospital sector would include private and public. And this would be the case for other sectors too, like higher education settings. Looking at this from the employer perspective, it is indeed an opportunity to utilise people of talent, skill, calibre if we address barriers that are stopping them from progressing. Barriers related to stereotyping or a certain perception which is really a loss to the state system and to the country.

### **Jaya**

And globally too. There is a report that shows that, if you use women effectively at various levels in the workforce, they bring economic dividend that is lost currently. The report describes how this can be reversed.

### **Sadhana**

True. So much work to be done but it's good to know how we could use these levers when advocating with the government or advocating with the communities.

Moving on to my last question, when I was reading the discussion paper of the Australian national strategy to achieve gender equality, I came across a list of resources that are mentioned on the last page for further information and for people to access support if they need. The listed ones include - 1800 respect, beyond blue, Q Live, men's line, 13 yarn, Arafmi. I could not find any resources that were related to ethnic or culturally, linguistically diverse communities. And we constitute 1/3 of Australia's population. **Are you aware of CaLD resources on gender and ethnic equality within WA that can be shared with our readers?**

### **Jaya**

Basically in WA, it's the national resources. I also have a card that I always carry with me to show women - There is none for CALD, and that I feel a challenge when women, they might be educated, but their English is impacted by fluency sometimes. When they are in an abusive situation, it makes them more vulnerable in wanting to speak to someone who speaks their language, and they often need an interpreter like I have been to the Magistrate Court to help.

### **Sadhana**

I agree. I have come across highly articulate, confident and educated migrant women living with FDV and who struggle for information. Yet, when I have signposted a few to refuge centres, the ones that accessed refuge support gave feedback about feeling culturally isolated and that the refuge does not cater to their specific needs. And in such a vulnerable situation, even basic needs become paramount, giving solace.

Summarising today's conversation Jaya, could you capture in a few lines the issues plaguing gender equality from a CALD perspective? Broadly through the lens of family domestic violence and

specifically in terms of women employees- what would be your key takeaway message in terms of effectively implementing gender-based policies?

**Jaya**

My key take-away message is that we still have a long way to go to for gender equality in Australia among migrant communities and ethnic communities, where men and women are treated equally in the eyes of law. Backed by strong policy and advocacy, both women and men should be given the social agency to work towards change.

With family and domestic violence, we have a long way to go and need sustained resourcing at multiple levels - from policing, legal, justice departments to housing, family court and, psychological support. When it comes to equality in the workplace, I think the challenge is multi-fold with barriers for employment, of systemic racism and, issues that are culturally and contextually different.

For the first time in Australia, both in last Parliament and this Parliament, we have women of colour in office. I would like to actually see people of colour get ministerial positions. Dr Anne Aly has a ministerial position at the federal level. But in WA state, no women of colour has a ministerial position. I'd like to see more of that from that level, then flow down to senior positions in public and private sectors, in state departments, in foreign affairs as ambassadors and very senior positions at universities.

**Sadhana**

Thank you so much. It was a pleasure talking to you. I particularly look forward to ECCWA working with you to help translate policies into effective support on the ground for survivors of FDV. To help us tap into the true potential of FDV survivors for themselves, their families and wider WA society.

**Dr Sadhana Bose, President of ECCWA**

**Professor Jaya A R Dantas, Chair | University Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee,  
Curtin University**

## **Summary of the SHAKTI project– Family and Domestic Violence among Refugee and Migrant Women**

The COVID-19 pandemic had acute and lasting gendered impacts around the world, with UN Women declaring a shadow pandemic of violence against women. The SHAKTI (*a Sanskrit word that means power and strength*) project uses a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach to document the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated isolation measures on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) migrant and refugee women who were experiencing or had experienced family and domestic violence (FDV) to facilitate the co-design of policy and programmatic recommendations and a frontline intervention.

For **Phase 1** of the project, we have conducted 40 interviews with 28 women and service providers and administered 2 qualitative surveys to gather the FDV experiences of CaLD women. Interviews and survey data underwent reflexive thematic analysis informed by the **Power and Control Wheel**, generating three themes and ten subthemes: (1) the facets of violence women experienced (isolation; economic violence; emotional violence; visa vulnerabilities; fear and uncertainty), (2) the systemic enablers of FDV and barriers to seeking help (FDV service provision; the immigration system), and (3) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and government measures on women and family (enabling FDV; reducing the impact of FDV; COVID-19 paled into insignificance). An adapted power and control wheel was created in line with this phase.

For **Phase 2** of the project, we have designed a **Self-Help and Safety Intervention (SHSI)** based on the voices of CaLD women from Phase 1. The SHSI is a three-page document that provides information on FDV, Self-help information (i.e. what women should be mindful of in the FDV situation), and steps to create a **safety plan** to leave an abusive relationship. The SHSI is currently being piloted and evaluated by CaLD women from the community to ensure it is culturally relevant and appropriate. The project aims to collect feedback from over 50 women from the CaLD community, including those with lived experience, service providers, healthcare professionals, and general community members. The SHSI will be amended based on the feedback received from the community. The project aims to make available an evaluated SHAKTI SHSI for widespread implementation following successful project completion and evaluation.

**Professor Jaya Dantas** [PhD, MA, FPHAA]

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