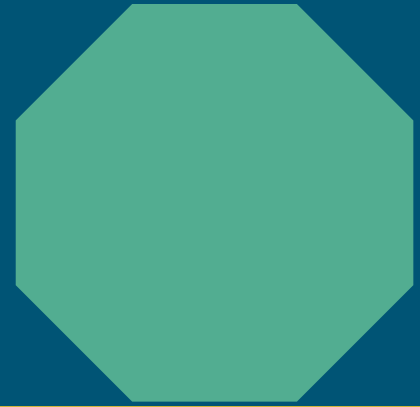


# Addressing resistance to domestic and family violence responses

## In CALD communities



### What is resistance?

This resource highlights the context and forms of resistance to gender equality and prevention of violence against women initiatives in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in Australia. Resistance, often used interchangeably with backlash, refers to “active pushing back against progressive programs, policies and perspective”, or simply against “progressive social change”.

Resistance is sometimes defined negatively. This resource, however, also considers how resistance might be a result of the combination of influences and pressures put on CALD communities to conform to a dominant white Australian way of life. As such, resistance may be mixed with more ambivalent messages around culture and identity.

Resistance can also be a good sign – it shows that people are listening. It is inevitable in any project wanting to create change. This means preparation is key to effective responses.

### What is this resource for?

This resource is designed for those working to prevent or respond to violence against women in migrant and refugee communities. The resource:

- highlights contextual factors that inform resistance in CALD communities
- locates specific forms of resistance that the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse projects with Action Research (CALD PAR) have encountered
- suggest a reflective practice exercise to understand the social context of resistance
- identifies strategies to address resistance
- notes practices for worker wellbeing when facing resistance.

This resource draws on evidence from ANROWS's Culturally and Linguistically Diverse projects with Action Research (CALD PAR) initiative. CALD PAR supported 26 projects to take an action research approach to preventing violence against women or creating safer pathways to crisis and support services. Projects identified resistance to gender equality messages from some CALD community members and service providers.

## Considering context

As elsewhere, resistance to gender equality messages or prevention programs in CALD communities takes many forms. However, there are particular contextual factors that inform resistance in CALD communities in Australia.

These include:

- Racism, violent processes of assimilation and inequalities in employment and education affect the reception of messages about domestic violence. Resistance might be a result of CALD communities feeling unfairly targeted.
- Families are often identified as the most important priority for CALD community members. The family itself is often seen as the locus of culture, identity and security. CALD families experience multiple changes and stressors during the settlement period. When gender equality messages threaten patriarchal family structures, resistance can be an attempt to safeguard values, support and culture within multiple processes of change.
- For refugee families or those from post-conflict settings, resistance is influenced by histories of trauma. Responses to resistance need to be trauma-informed and invest in long-term change.
- Despite mainstreaming ideas of intersectionality, many service providers face challenges to actively address racism and other forms of discrimination, which are linked to patriarchy and gender inequality. For example, mainstream prevention practice, which is centred on frameworks, such as *Change the story*, may see the understanding of colonisation, racism and cultural safety, which are addressed in sources, such as *Changing the picture*, as 'optional', rather than being central to good practice for all clients.

CALD communities have historically been misrepresented in the media and other sources as resistant to change, violent and more traditional. Yet, the CALD PAR projects have highlighted courageous and innovative ways that many communities are challenging violence against women. Communities are already having conversations about family violence, supporting each other in getting to services, fundraising for community-based responses and holding awareness events.

## Specific forms of resistance in CALD communities

We have collated a list of common ways in which some community members and service providers articulate resistance.

### Community resistance

#### Why are you picking on us?

As a result of racism in wider society, CALD communities often feel unfairly targeted by gender inequality or violence focused initiatives.

#### It doesn't happen in our community

Denial of violence is a common form of resistance in many communities. In CALD communities, this denial may be used as a defence against stigmatising media or political attention. It may also be a reaction to unhelpful service interventions.

#### Women should stay with their families

The default position in some communities can be that women should stay with their families rather than leave a violent relationship. Some women may need support from outside their immediate communities to make a decision to leave a violent relationship, but they may also need ways to stay connected to their communities for their sense of cultural safety.

Some projects found that supporting women even if they chose to stay with their families was crucial in maintaining their safety and engagement. Women who have left their families due to violence can face intense stigma, particularly from older women in the community.

In many communities, women take up the position of the symbolic bearer of familial virtue. Leaving their families may acquire greater significance in the context of resettlement, as women are often responsible for doing the work of maintaining kinship ties.

#### Services break up families

Communities sometimes have difficult histories with services in their local area. When a few individuals have bad experiences of families breaking up following service intervention, communities can think that is what services are aiming to do. Migrants and refugees, particularly those experiencing visa issues or precarious migration, can also feel that they are under intense scrutiny from the government in most areas of their lives.

### Women are more powerful here

Some men in CALD communities can experience a perceived decline in status when they arrive in Australia. This perception can be compounded by discrimination in education and employment. It can appear that, in comparison men, women receive advantages in Australia.

### Equality is not what we want

This form of resistance is rare but some groups of women may state that they do not want equality. They might say that they prefer the different roles that men and women play, regardless of gender stereotypes. Attention to the language people use is crucial. There may be better words to define equality in the communities' own languages and the word 'equality' might be seen as a white or Western imposition. There may also be practical ways of talking about gender inequality.

### The material is too sensitive

In working with schools and other institutions, staff can refuse to take part in prevention activities on the assumption that parents and communities will find the material too sensitive or taboo. Involving parents and community members in the design of the material can help address such concerns.

### Threats to workers or families

At times, resistance can take the form of threats to the physical, emotional or cultural safety of workers involved in gender equality and prevention programs. Bicultural workers face these threats most often as they may live in the communities that they work with and can be contacted outside of the workplace.

## Service provider resistance

### **There's not enough money or time**

Some service providers express the view that there is no time or money for the training and capacity development that would improve their service's accessibility to CALD communities. Cultural safety or competency training can be seen as optional. Catering for a minority of clients may also seem hard to justify when services are already under-resourced.

### **Communities don't engage**

Some service providers perceive communities as the problem for not engaging. Service providers may make assumptions about the community being hierarchical or conservative. However, communities may have many reasons for not responding or attending services, including poor experiences with staff. There is a diversity of views in all communities, which may diverge from the representations of community leaders.

### **Communities don't understand**

If service providers have not had effective training in cross-cultural communication, they may fixate on a lack of understanding as the reason why individuals and communities may not engage. They may also perceive gender inequality as an inherent part of some communities. It is likely that there is a lack of understanding and communication on the part of the service providers and community members in this case.

# Reflective practice

## Part 1: Identify the form(s) of resistance

Write down the stories of what happened or what people said. Describe the situations and locations and consider the following:

- What ideas or kinds of change are people resisting?
- How were you positioned in relation to this resistance?
- What effects did it have on other project participants, staff and the public?

## Part 2: Have informal conversations with community members or the bicultural project worker

Consider the following questions (with their permission, record the conversation through notes or audio):

- Is there a history for these phrases, do people say and do these things often or about other topics?
- What message/activity are people resisting?
- Is there stigma from mainstream Australian society/media on this issue – how do communities/groups react to this?
- Where is it coming from? Who is supportive of these views and why?
- Are there multiple forms of power at work e.g. the power of community leaders; state structures; local services; local employers?
- Who are our allies and role models we can draw on within the community to address this resistance? What are the areas in which change is possible?
- What are some of the questions and challenges that this resistance raised for your project?
- What can you do now and in the long-term to address this resistance?

## Part 3. Communicating what you have learned

Identify 3 things you have found out through this exercise:

1.

2.

3.

# Reflective practice

## Part 4: Create an action plan

Identify key actions that can be taken to share and follow up on your findings:

### *Example*

Action 1: Sharing findings from reflective practice

When: (Insert a deadline)

Where: Steering committee meeting/local network meeting

Who: Project leader/team leader

Why: To address identified resistance in the long-term

Follow up: Report to advisory group meeting and/or the community members you engaged

Action 1:

When:

Where:

Who:

Why:

Follow up:

## Strategies for responding to resistance

CALD PAR projects used creative, collaborative and strength-based strategies to respond to resistance. These are listed below:

### With communities

- take the time to build trust
- look for allies in different parts of the community e.g. work with young people; work with small groups
- adapt your language so that it is more positive and aspirational
- prioritise in-language and in-culture interventions
- focus on benefits for families
- be open to mutual benefits and learning with the community
- be flexible in program delivery
- create safety plans for bicultural workers
- use art, film and music to reach out to different sectors of the community
- hold community celebrations.

### With service providers

- create communities of practice or engage providers in regular meetings about community engagement
- create opportunities for service providers to connect with and hear more community perspectives
- persist over time in raising issues relevant to CALD clients at network meetings
- find strategic allies and alternative leadership for key actions
- emphasise the need for mutual trust and understanding between service providers and communities.



## Other resources

### VicHealth

[\(En\)countering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender inequality initiatives](#)

### Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

[Unpacking resistance video series](#)

### Women's Health West

[Speaking publicly about preventing men's violence against women: Curly questions and language considerations](#)

### Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

[Intersectionality matters](#)

## Remember self-care

Worker self-care is not the sole responsibility of individuals. Organisations should [provide for worker wellbeing](#) if they are experiencing resistance. Resistance can deplete the wellbeing of individuals and teams, especially if workers are already stretched due to under-resourcing. Some strategies to help are to:

- celebrate yourself and your teams – schedule time to recharge
- plan for safety early
- speak up about what you and other team members need for maintaining wellbeing
- build supportive management and supervision for all workers
- structure program delivery in a way that shares the risk of resistance. For example, through having multiple presenters for the delivery of workshops and securing strong community buy-in and representation before events and campaigns.

## Feedback

We would love to hear what you think about this resource. Please let us know by emailing [research@anrows.org.au](mailto:research@anrows.org.au).