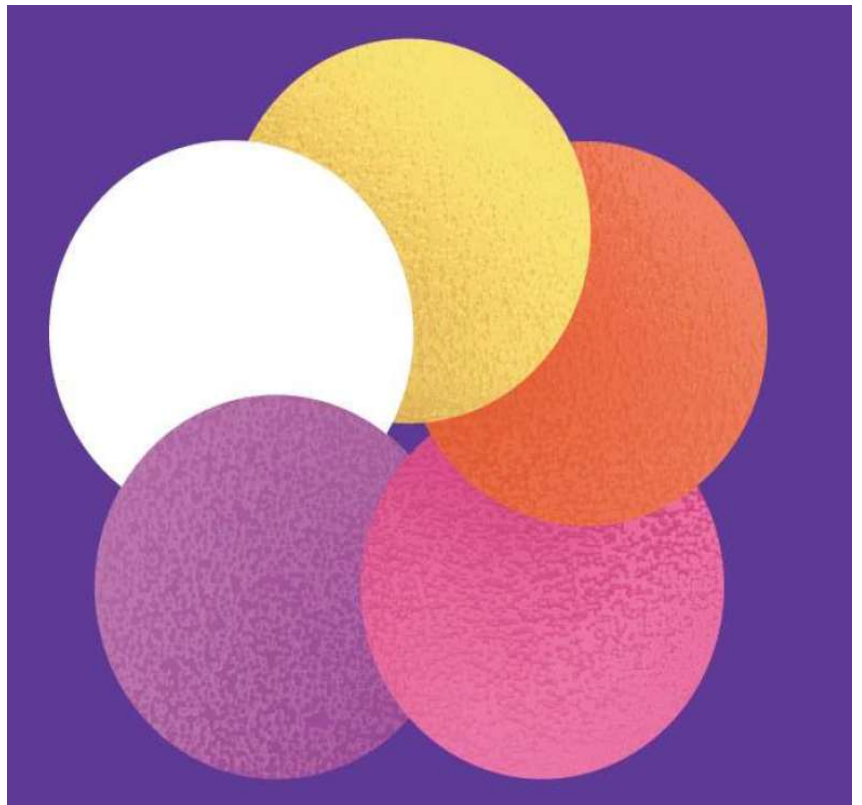


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# Submission into the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Abuse



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## Acknowledgement

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this research was conducted, The Kurna Land, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging. I recognize their deep connection to the land, waters, and culture, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. I honor their enduring strength and resilience in the face of ongoing challenges. This acknowledgment is a reminder of the importance of respecting and valuing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in all areas of research and practice.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, whose unwavering support, insightful feedback, and guidance have been invaluable throughout this research journey. Their expertise and encouragement have significantly shaped the development of this project, and I am sincerely grateful for their time and dedication.

I also wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the participants of my honour's thesis research. Their willingness to share their personal experiences has provided critical insights that are central to this work. Without their courage and openness, this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge the Social Work Innovation Research Living Space (SWIRLS) at Flinders University for providing an academic environment that has fostered my growth as a researcher. Though I did not engage directly with community organizations, academic, or administrative staff at SWIRLS, the resources and support available have indirectly contributed to the completion of this project.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for their continuous support and understanding throughout this journey. Your belief in me has been a constant source of motivation.

This research reflects the collective efforts of many, and I am profoundly grateful to each one of you.

## About the Author

Majdoleen Yasin is an Honours student in Social Work at Flinders University with a strong commitment to understanding and addressing the complex issues faced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Australia. Originally from Palestine, Majdoleen lived as a refugee in Jordan before migrating to Australia. Her personal experiences as a refugee and migrant have shaped her understanding of the challenges faced by displaced individuals, particularly those relating to access to social services and support. With a focus on domestic violence within Middle Eastern communities, Majdoleen's research has explored the intricate cultural, social, and systemic barriers that hinder Middle Eastern women from seeking help.

Throughout her academic journey, Majdoleen has developed a deep passion for supporting vulnerable populations and advocating for social justice. Her research is driven by a desire to contribute meaningful knowledge that can inform policy and practice, particularly in the areas of family violence and culturally sensitive support services.

Under the guidance of her supervisor, Majdoleen has honed her skills in qualitative research, particularly narrative methodology, and thematic analysis. Her work is characterized by a commitment to empathy, active listening, and a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of marginalized groups.

Majdoleen is dedicated to continuing her work in social research, with aspirations to influence positive change in the lives of CALD women and their families.

## Executive Summary

This report explores the complex challenges faced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women in Australia, when seeking help for domestic violence. Through the narrative of ██████ a CALD woman who migrated to Australia with her family, the report highlights the multifaceted barriers that CALD women encounter, including cultural stigmas, language difficulties, mistrust of authorities, and the inadequacy of culturally sensitive support services.








██████ story illustrates how these barriers are compounded by systemic issues, such as the tendency of support services to focus solely on the victim, often neglecting the perpetrator's accountability. The report also examines how limited access to community support and legal assistance further exacerbates the isolation and vulnerability experienced by CALD women in abusive relationships.

Despite these significant challenges, ██████ journey toward finding support demonstrates the critical role of community groups and holistic support services in empowering CALD women. The report underscores the importance of culturally sensitive approaches and the need for interventions that address both the needs of the victim and the perpetrator.

Key recommendations include the development of culturally competent support services, greater involvement of the criminal justice system in holding perpetrators accountable, and the implementation of holistic approaches that include both victims and perpetrators in the intervention process.

This report aims to inform policymakers, social workers, and community organizations about the unique challenges faced by CALD women in Australia, advocating for a more inclusive and effective support system that meets their specific needs.

## Table of Recommendations

<p><b>Recommendation 1</b> Key Area: Prevention</p> 	<p>Strengthening Domestic Violence Awareness and Support for CALD Women from the Onset of Settlement.</p> <p>Key strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporation of Domestic Violence Information in Settlement Services</li> <li>• Mandatory Domestic Violence Awareness Workshops</li> <li>• Collaboration with Cultural and Religious Organizations</li> <li>• Multilingual and Accessible Resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b> Key Area: Early Intervention</p> 	<p>Reducing Social Isolation through Community Integration and Support Networks</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b> Key Area: Response</p> 	<p>Addressing Visa Status and its Impact on Women's Independence</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> Key Area: Prevention</p> 	<p>Improving Relationship Dynamics Education</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 5</b> Key Area's: Response &amp; Recovery and Healing</p> 	<p>Combating Financial Abuse with Economic Empowerment Initiatives</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> Key Area's: Response &amp; Recovery and Healing</p> 	<p>Adopting a holistic approach to domestic violence services that focuses on the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combatting Emotional Manipulation</li> <li>• Reducing Isolation</li> <li>• Building Trust in Authorities</li> <li>• Addressing Language Barriers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> Key Area's: Prevention, Response &amp; Recovery and Healing</p> 	<p>Supporting CALD Women in Finding Help by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally Tailored Support Programs</li> <li>• Engagement with Community Leaders and Schools</li> <li>• Enhancing Legal and Financial Assistance</li> <li>• Holistic, Perpetrator-Focused Interventions</li> <li>• Community-Based Support Networks</li> </ul>

## Introduction

This submission tells the story of █████, a CALD woman who migrated to Australia with her four children and abusive husband, seeking safety and a better future. Her journey highlights the unique challenges faced by CALD women in South Australia regarding domestic, family, and sexual violence. Through her story, we explore the barriers she encountered, the impact on her and her children, and her eventual path to finding support and healing.

## Methodology

In this submission, I employ a narrative approach inspired by Loseke's work, "Narrative as Topic and Method in Social Research." This methodology is particularly effective in understanding and presenting the complexities of domestic violence within CALD communities. The narrative approach allows for a deep, hermeneutic exploration of individual experiences, emphasizing the meaning-making processes that victims of domestic violence undergo. By documenting █████ story, this submission aims to present a comprehensive, nuanced picture of her experiences, challenges, and the socio-cultural context that shapes her reality (Loseke, 2022).

The narrative approach is inherently interpretive, focusing on how individuals construct and communicate their realities (Andrews et al., 2013). In the case of █████ story, which is a composite of many stories I have listened to during my thesis research, reflecting the common struggles and experiences faced by CALD women in similar situations. █████ story is not just an account of her experiences but a rich source of data that reveals the intersectionality of culture, gender, and violence (Crenshaw, 1989). This approach aligns with my previous research on the cultural complexities of domestic violence within Middle Eastern communities in Australia, where understanding women's perceptions of reporting domestic violence was central. By integrating insights from this prior research, the narrative method helps to highlight how cultural norms, beliefs, and values influence victims' decision-making processes, their interactions with support services, and their overall journey towards safety and independence (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

In the analysis of █████s story, I have inserted red flag emojis ( 🚩 ) as visual cues to highlight critical moments where particular attention is required. These red flags serve to signal potential warning signs, challenges, or barriers faced by women like █████ in navigating their relationships, seeking help, or dealing with systemic issues. They are intended to prompt the Royal Commission to take note of these crucial junctures, which may otherwise be overlooked in the complexity of the narrative.

The red flags may indicate different types of obstacles, sometimes signalling relational difficulties, such as emotional manipulation or controlling behaviours, and at other times marking systemic barriers, such as language challenges or visa-related constraints that restrict women's capacity for independence. By incorporating these visual markers, I aim to draw the Commission's focus to the multi-layered challenges that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may experience, ensuring that these pivotal moments are fully considered when developing recommendations and strategies for support.

It is important to remain mindful of these red flags throughout the narrative, as they underscore not only the immediate issues but also the broader, often hidden, dynamics at play that contribute to the complex landscape of domestic violence among immigrant communities. This narrative aims to provide the Royal Commission with a personal perspective on the systemic issues affecting CALD women and to offer evidence-based recommendations for improving support services.

## 1. Background

██████████ and her family migrated to Australia on a skilled migrant visa, which allowed her husband to enter the country as the primary visa holder due to his qualifications and employment prospects ▶. Upon arrival, her husband quickly found work as a skilled tradesman, providing the family with financial stability but also further solidifying his control over ██████████ and their children.

As the primary visa holder, her husband held significant power, dictating their lives and leaving ██████████ financially dependent on him ▶. His job required him to be away from home during the day, which provided brief windows of opportunity for ██████████ to explore avenues for help. However, the isolation ▶, language barriers ▶, and fear of authorities ▶ made her attempts to seek support incredibly challenging.

The visa's conditions and the dependence on her husband's employment status also added to ██████████ feelings of entrapment ▶, as any disruption to his job could potentially jeopardize their right to stay in the country. This, combined with her husband's threats and manipulation ▶, made it even more difficult for her to leave the abusive relationship.

Despite being in a new country, the abuse did not cease. The isolation of being in a foreign land, combined with the cultural expectations from her home country ▶, left ██████████ feeling trapped. Her husband's job provided brief moments of freedom when she could attempt to seek help, but the constant monitoring of her movements ▶ made even these small opportunities fraught with risk.

██████████ daily life was a delicate balancing act of managing her children, who were also suffering under the strain of their father's abuse and trying to find a way out of her desperate situation. The few moments when her husband was at work were crucial for her to explore options for support, but her limited English proficiency and deep-seated fear of authorities, stemming from her experiences in her home country, made it difficult for her to trust anyone or navigate the complex legal and support systems in Australia.

**Migration Journey:** ██████████ journey to Australia was one of hope and desperation. She left her home country with her four children and her abusive husband, believing that moving to Australia would offer a fresh start and the safety and support she needed to rebuild her life. However, her deep-seated mistrust of authorities, stemming from her experiences in her home country, where corruption and abuse of power were rampant, made it difficult for her to fully trust the systems in Australia (Merry, ██████████). This mistrust was compounded by her fear that seeking help could lead to negative consequences, such as losing her children or being deported.

██████████ had lived under the oppressive control of her husband for many years. The physical and emotional abuse she endured was compounded by the cultural expectations and norms that discouraged women from speaking out or seeking help (Alaggia, et al., ██████████). Despite her fear, she managed to gather the courage to apply for a visa and plan her escape. The journey itself was fraught with anxiety and uncertainty, but ██████████ held on to the hope that Australia would provide a safe haven for her and her children.

Upon arriving in Australia, ██████████ mistrust of authorities persisted. Her previous experiences with corrupt and untrustworthy officials made her wary of seeking help from the police or social services. She feared that if she reached out, they might not believe her or, worse, take her children away. This

fear was exacerbated by her husband's threats, who warned her that she would be deported and separated from her children if she tried to leave him ▶. Despite these fears, █████ held on to the hope that Australia would provide a safe haven for her and her children, even as she grappled with the overwhelming challenges of navigating life in a new country.

█████ decision to migrate can be understood within the broader context of how migration can be both a survival strategy and a hopeful escape for women experiencing domestic violence. Studies have shown that women often view migration as a way to escape the control and violence of abusive partners, seeking a new beginning in countries that offer more robust legal protections and support systems for victims of domestic violence (Erez et al., █████). This is particularly true for women from patriarchal societies where cultural norms and expectations discourage them from seeking help or leaving abusive relationships (Raj & Silverman, █████). Migration, therefore, becomes not only a physical journey but also a psychological one, where the hope for safety and autonomy drives women like █████ to take significant risks in search of a better life for themselves and their children (█████).

**Initial Settlement:** Upon arriving in Australia, █████ faced numerous challenges ▶. Navigating a new country with limited English proficiency ▶ was daunting. The settlement process ▶ was fraught with difficulties, from finding housing and enrolling her children in school to understanding the local systems and services available to her (Afrouz et al., █████). Despite these challenges, █████ remained hopeful that she could create a better future for her children.

The first few months were particularly tough. █████ struggled with language barriers and had difficulty finding a job. The family lived in a cramped apartment in a neighbourhood where they knew no one. Her husband continued to control the family's finances, giving her little money for essentials and making it impossible for her to seek help. █████ felt isolated and alone, but she was determined to make a life for her children.

█████ struggles are reflective of the broader challenges faced by many migrant women who arrive in new countries with limited language skills and an incomplete understanding of local systems and services. Research indicates that migrant women often face significant obstacles in accessing support services due to language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of knowledge about available resources (Afrouz et al., █████). These challenges are compounded by economic dependency, where abusive partners control finances, making it difficult for women to seek help or gain independence (Vaughan et al., █████). The settlement process itself can be overwhelming, with difficulties in finding suitable housing, securing employment, and integrating into the community, all contributing to a sense of isolation and vulnerability (InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, █████). Despite these barriers, many women, like █████ demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination to create a better future for their children (Khawaja et al., █████).

## 2. Encountering Domestic Violence

**Relationship Dynamics:** Unfortunately, the move to Australia did not stop the abuse. █████ husband continued to control and abuse her, both physically and emotionally. The isolation of being in a new country, far from her family and support network, only made her situation more precarious (Guruge et al., █████).

The abuse took many forms ▶. Her husband would frequently insult her, belittling her attempts to learn English or make friends. He monitored her every move, restricting her interactions with others

and forbidding her from attending community events. The physical violence escalated, and [REDACTED] often had to hide bruises from her children and neighbours. She felt trapped and powerless, fearing for her safety and the well-being of her children.

Research indicates that immigrant women like [REDACTED] face compounded challenges in abusive relationships due to factors such as isolation, cultural dislocation, and lack of social support [REDACTED]. (Guruge et al., [REDACTED] highlight how intimate partner violence (IPV) often escalates during the migration process, where women may experience intensified control and abuse due to their dependence on their partners and the absence of familiar support networks. The cultural expectations and fear of social stigma further entrap these women in abusive situations, making it extremely difficult to seek help.

**Types of Abuse:** The abuse [REDACTED] endured was multifaceted. It included physical violence, verbal threats, and emotional manipulation. Her husband controlled the family's finances and restricted her movements, making it difficult for her to seek help or build any semblance of independence (ABS, [REDACTED]).

The financial abuse was particularly devastating. [REDACTED] had no access to the family's bank accounts and was given only a small allowance for groceries and household expenses. Her husband would often take her earnings from the part-time catering jobs she managed to find, leaving her with nothing. The constant fear of physical violence, combined with the psychological torment of being controlled and belittled, took a severe toll on her mental health [REDACTED].

Financial abuse, a common yet often overlooked aspect of intimate partner violence, severely limits the autonomy and agency of victims like [REDACTED]. Research indicates that financial abuse involves controlling access to financial resources, which can prevent victims from gaining independence or leaving the abusive relationship (Kutin et al., [REDACTED] The Australian Bureau of Statistics ([REDACTED]) highlights that financial abuse is prevalent among immigrant women, who may face additional barriers due to cultural and language differences, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

**Impact on Children:** The violence had a profound impact on [REDACTED] children. They lived in constant fear, their school performance suffered, and their emotional well-being was severely compromised [REDACTED]. The trauma of witnessing and experiencing abuse affected their development and sense of security.

[REDACTED] eldest daughter, who was a teenager, started to show signs of depression and anxiety. She struggled to concentrate in school and had difficulty making friends. The younger children, too, exhibited behavioural problems and often had nightmares. [REDACTED] was heartbroken to see her children suffer, but she felt helpless to change their situation.

Children exposed to domestic violence, such as [REDACTED], face profound and multifaceted impacts on their psychological and emotional well-being. Holt et al. ([REDACTED] assert that the trauma of witnessing abuse can lead to a range of adverse outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues. These children often experience disrupted development and a compromised sense of security, which is further exacerbated by the chronic nature of the violence (Schubert, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] eldest daughter's depression and the younger children's behavioural problems reflect these typical outcomes, highlighting the pervasive impact of domestic violence on child development. Edleson ([REDACTED] further emphasizes that children's exposure to domestic violence is linked to academic difficulties, social withdrawal, and an increased risk of developing mental health issues later in life. These challenges are not just limited to the immediate aftermath but can have long-term consequences, affecting children's ability to form healthy relationships and achieve educational success.

### 3. Barriers to Seeking Help

**Cultural Barriers:** █████ cultural background posed significant barriers to seeking help. In her community, domestic violence was often seen as a private matter, and there was a strong stigma associated with speaking out. She feared being judged or ostracized by her community ▶ (Rees & Pease, █████)

█████ was raised in a culture where male dominance and traditional gender roles were deeply ingrained. In her community, it is considered normal for husbands to exert control over their wives, and physical abuse is often seen as an acceptable way for men to assert their authority. The cultural norms and values that she grew up with reinforced the idea that women should be obedient and submissive to their husbands and speaking out against abuse is seen as bringing shame to the family ▶ █████

In this male-dominant culture, women were often blamed for the abuse they experienced. They were told that it was their duty to keep the family together, and leaving an abusive husband was seen as a failure on their part. █████ internalized these beliefs, which made it even more difficult for her to seek help. She felt immense pressure to maintain the appearance of a happy family and feared the social repercussions of leaving her husband (Al-Modallal, █████)

The cultural expectations placed on women in █████ community emphasized obedience and subservience to their husbands. The shame associated with leaving an abusive relationship was immense, and █████ feared that her family back home would disown her if they found out. The lack of understanding and support from her own community made her feel even more isolated and trapped (Ghafournia & Easteal, █████)

Cultural barriers present significant challenges for women like █████, who come from communities where domestic violence is often viewed as a private matter. In these environments, there's a pervasive stigma around seeking help, which discourages victims from reaching out (Rees & Pease, █████). The patriarchal structure in many CALD communities, particularly within Middle Eastern cultures, reinforces traditional gender roles where male dominance is expected, and women are conditioned to be obedient and submissive (Ahmad et al., █████; Al-Modallal, █████). This cultural backdrop makes it difficult for women to break free from abusive relationships, as they often internalize blame and fear the societal repercussions of leaving their husbands (Ghafournia & Easteal, █████). Moreover, the perception of shame and dishonour that may result from speaking out or leaving an abusive partner exacerbates their isolation, as they worry about the impact on their family's reputation, both in their community in Australia and back home (Yoshioka & Choi, █████)

This cultural context also means that the abuse █████ faces is not only normalized but also trivialized within her community, making it difficult for her to see her situation as one that warrants intervention (Afrouz et al., █████). The traditional values she was raised with, where the responsibility is on women to maintain family harmony at all costs, further complicate her ability to seek help (Childress, █████). As a result, even when women like █████ recognize the need to leave the marriage and establish a safer life for themselves and their children, they face overwhelming barriers in doing so, often feeling trapped by their cultural obligations and the fear of social ostracization (Guruge et al., █████). The lack of culturally sensitive support services only compounds these difficulties, as many mainstream services may not fully understand or address the specific cultural and social pressures that CALD women face, leading to inadequate support and further marginalization (de-Anstiss, █████)

**Language Barriers:** Limited English proficiency made it difficult for [REDACTED] to access information and communicate her needs. Understanding the legal and support systems in Australia was a significant challenge, and she often felt overwhelmed and helpless (Ghafournia & Easteal, [REDACTED])

[REDACTED] struggled to navigate the Australian legal and social service systems. She found it difficult to understand complex documents and was often unable to express her needs clearly when seeking help. This language barrier not only hindered her ability to access support but also made her feel invisible and voiceless in her new country (Kaur & Atkin, [REDACTED])

Language barriers significantly impede the ability of immigrant women to navigate and access critical support services, often exacerbating feelings of isolation and helplessness. Limited English proficiency can prevent effective communication with service providers, complicate the understanding of legal rights, and make it difficult to seek help, thus reinforcing the victim's sense of invisibility in a new country. Research by Asante & Asante ([REDACTED]) highlights that refugee women often struggle with similar challenges, which hinder their access to necessary support services.

**Mistrust of Authorities:** [REDACTED] had a deep-seated mistrust of authorities, stemming from her experiences in her home country. She feared that seeking help could lead to negative consequences, such as losing her children or being deported (Heron et al., [REDACTED])

In her home country, authorities were often corrupt and untrustworthy. [REDACTED] feared that if she went to the police or sought help from social services, they might not believe her or might take her children away. This fear was compounded by her husband's threats, who warned her that she would be deported and separated from her children if she tried to leave him.

The fear and mistrust of authorities among immigrant women can be deeply rooted in their experiences in their home countries, where corruption, abuse of power, and lack of protection from the state are common. This fear is often exacerbated by threats from abusive partners, who use it to further control and isolate their victims. Research by Vasil ([REDACTED]) indicates that immigrant women often fear that reporting abuse could lead to deportation, losing custody of their children, or other negative repercussions.

**Isolation:** The isolation [REDACTED] felt in a new country, combined with her husband's controlling behaviour, meant she had very few support networks. She felt alone and trapped, with no one to turn to for help (Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service, [REDACTED])

The physical and emotional isolation was overwhelming. [REDACTED] had no friends or family to confide in and no safe place to go. Her husband's control over her movements meant that she rarely left the house, and when she did, it was always under his watchful eye. The lack of social support left her feeling utterly alone and hopeless.

Immigrant women often experience profound isolation, both physically and emotionally, due to their limited social networks and the controlling behaviours of their partners. This isolation is exacerbated by cultural and language barriers, which make it difficult for them to seek help or build connections in their new environment. The lack of social support leaves these women feeling trapped and hopeless, further entrenching them in abusive relationships (Murray et al., [REDACTED])

**Emotional Manipulation:** [REDACTED] husband often used emotional manipulation to convince her to stay. He would apologize after violent episodes, claiming that he was not a bad person but was simply having a bad day or that she had made him mad and caused his behaviour. This manipulation created confusion and self-blame in [REDACTED], making it even harder for her to leave (Walker, [REDACTED])

After each abusive incident, her husband would express remorse and promise to change. He would blame his actions on stress, alcohol, or [REDACTED] behaviour, making her feel responsible for the abuse. He would also remind her of the good times they had shared, making her doubt her decision to leave. This cycle of abuse and apology left [REDACTED] emotionally exhausted and trapped in the relationship (Walker, [REDACTED])

Emotional manipulation is a common tactic used by abusers to maintain control over their victims. They often alternate between episodes of violence and expressions of remorse, creating a cycle of abuse and reconciliation that leaves the victim confused and emotionally drained. This cycle, known as the "cycle of abuse," makes it difficult for victims to leave, as they may begin to internalize blame for the abuse and hold onto the hope that their partner will change (Walker, [REDACTED] Aizpurua et al., [REDACTED])

#### 4. Journey to Finding Support

[REDACTED] journey out of an abusive relationship was complex and fraught with challenges. As a woman from a CALD background, she faced unique obstacles that compounded the difficulties of leaving her abusive husband. [REDACTED] journey toward finding support was not only marked by the challenges she faced but also by the strengths of her community that played a vital role in her eventual empowerment. Despite her initial isolation and fear, she gradually began to build connections within her local community, which became a source of strength and resilience.

**Initial Attempts:** [REDACTED] initial attempts to seek help were fraught with challenges. She didn't know where to go or who to trust. Her husband's control over her movements and finances made it nearly impossible to reach out for support (Postmus et al., [REDACTED])

The turning point came when [REDACTED] eldest daughter confided in a teacher about the abuse at home. The teacher, noticing the girl's signs of depression and anxiety, referred her to the school counsellor. The counsellor, upon understanding the gravity of the situation, recognized the potential danger to the children and the mother. As per mandatory reporting requirements, the counsellor contacted the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) to ensure the safety of [REDACTED] children. This intervention marked the beginning of [REDACTED] journey to seeking help. With the guidance of the school counsellor, [REDACTED] was connected to local support services that provided her with the necessary information and resources to start considering her options for leaving the abusive situation. This was the first glimmer of hope [REDACTED] had seen in a long time.

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often encounter significant barriers when trying to escape abusive relationships. These barriers include language difficulties, lack of knowledge about available services, and fear of authorities. Financial control by the abuser further limits their ability to seek help, as they may lack the resources or autonomy to access support services (Postmus et al., [REDACTED])

**Cultural Sensitivity and Support Services:** One of the significant barriers [REDACTED] faced was the lack of culturally sensitive support services. Many services in Australia are not equipped to understand the specific needs and cultural contexts of CALD women. This lack of cultural competence can make it difficult for women like [REDACTED] to trust and engage with these services (Vaughan et al., [REDACTED])

[REDACTED] found that many support services did not offer culturally appropriate counselling. The advice she received was often based on Western notions of independence and individualism, which did not resonate with her experiences or cultural background. This mismatch made her feel misunderstood and alienated, further complicating her efforts to seek help.

Culturally and linguistically diverse women often face significant challenges when engaging with mainstream support services in Australia, as these services may not fully understand or address their specific cultural needs. The lack of cultural competence in service provision can lead to feelings of alienation and mistrust, making it harder for CALD women to access the help they need (Vaughan et al., █████ Yoshioka & Choi, █████)

**Focus on the Victim:** Another challenge was the tendency of support services to focus solely on the victim while neglecting the perpetrator. This approach often left █████ feeling responsible for her safety and well-being without addressing the root cause of the abuse; her husband's behaviour (Douglas, █████) Despite the serious nature of the violence, there was minimal engagement with the criminal justice system. This lack of legal accountability allowed her husband to evade responsibility, further perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

Support services often provided █████ with information on how to protect herself and her children, but there was little to no focus on holding her husband accountable or providing him with the necessary interventions to change his behaviour, the absence of a coordinated response involving law enforcement meant that her husband continued to avoid any significant consequences for his actions. This approach reinforced the cycle of abuse, as her husband continued to evade responsibility for his actions, this failure to hold the perpetrator accountable not only undermined █████ efforts to escape the abuse but also reinforced her husband's power and control, making it even more difficult for her to seek lasting safety.

Support services often emphasize the protection and empowerment of the victim while insufficiently addressing the perpetrator's responsibility and need for intervention. This approach can leave victims feeling burdened with their safety and perpetuates the cycle of abuse, as the root cause; which is the perpetrator's behaviour; remains unaddressed (Douglas, █████ Stark, █████)

This approach not only places the burden on victims to ensure their own safety but also perpetuates the cycle of abuse by neglecting the need for interventions that address the perpetrator's behaviour. By not holding perpetrators accountable through the criminal justice system or offering them rehabilitation services, the systemic issues that contribute to domestic violence remain unchallenged. Research highlights that effective intervention requires a dual focus: protecting and empowering victims while simultaneously addressing and altering the behaviour of perpetrators (Douglas, █████ Stark, █████) Moreover, studies have shown that when support services focus exclusively on the victim, it can reinforce a sense of isolation and self-blame in survivors, as they are left to navigate complex safety and legal processes without adequate support aimed at changing the abusive dynamics (Kaburi & Kaburi, █████ Ablaza et al., █████)

**Community Support and Empowerment:** Community support groups played a pivotal role in █████ ability to navigate her situation. These groups, often formed by women with similar backgrounds, provided her with a culturally sensitive environment where she could share her experiences without judgment. (Masih et al., █████) highlight the importance of such support networks in the context of South Asian women, emphasizing that these groups can mitigate the psychological and physical effects of domestic abuse by fostering a sense of belonging and shared understanding.

Through these groups, █████ found not only emotional support but also practical advice on how to seek help. The women in these groups often shared information about local resources, legal rights, and strategies to protect oneself, which were crucial in helping her to take the first steps toward independence.

■■■■ found strength in community support, her pathway to connecting with a local women's group began through a chance encounter at a community event that her husband had reluctantly allowed her to attend. The event, organized by a local mosque, was a space where ■■■■ felt somewhat safe, as it was within the confines of her cultural and religious community. During this event, she overheard a conversation about a support group for women facing difficulties in their marriages, specifically designed for CALD women. This group was presented as a cultural and religious extension of the community, which made it easier for her husband to approve of her participation, as he perceived it as a religious gathering.

■■■■ initially approached the group cautiously, fearing that her husband might find out. However, the group's outreach worker, who was familiar with the cultural dynamics and sensitivities, discreetly provided her with information and offered a lifeline. The group offered culturally sensitive support and empowerment programs tailored to the specific needs of CALD women, including language support, culturally relevant counselling, and advocacy (InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, ■■■■). Through the guidance of the outreach worker, ■■■■ was able to attend meetings under the guise of participating in religious study sessions, which her husband approved of. This subtle and strategic navigation of her husband's control allowed ■■■■ to gradually build trust within the group and access the support she desperately needed without raising suspicion.

The women's group helped ■■■■ understand her rights and navigate the legal and social systems in Australia. They provided her with a safe space to share her experiences and receive emotional support from other women who had faced similar challenges. This sense of community and belonging was crucial in helping her regain her confidence and take steps toward independence.

The community group also connected ■■■■ with resources that improved her mental health and social support networks. According to Ogbe et al. (■■■■) interventions that focus on improving social support and mental health outcomes are crucial for survivors of intimate partner violence. These interventions can reduce feelings of isolation and hopelessness, providing survivors with the psychological tools needed to overcome their challenges. For ■■■■ the group's emphasis on mental well-being helped her manage the trauma she had experienced and gave her the resilience to pursue a life free from violence.

Research indicates that CALD women often face significant barriers when seeking help for domestic violence, including language barriers, discrimination, and a lack of understanding of their legal rights and available services (Vaughan et al., ■■■■; Rees & Pease, ■■■■). Culturally sensitive support programs are essential as they help women navigate complex systems and provide tailored assistance that considers their unique cultural contexts (InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, ■■■■; Vaughan et al., ■■■■). Community support groups play a vital role in empowering CALD women by offering a safe space for emotional support and confidence building, which is crucial for their mental health and overall well-being (Rees & Pease, ■■■■). In addition to emotional support, these groups also serve as essential sources of vital information and referrals, connecting women to legal aid, financial assistance, and other crucial services that they may not otherwise have access to or be aware of (InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, ■■■■).

The support ■■■■ received was not limited to emotional comfort; it was also about empowerment. The strength-based approach practiced within her community group was instrumental in helping her rebuild her self-esteem and regain control over her life. Chandhok and Anand (■■■■) emphasize that focusing on the strengths and resilience of survivors, rather than their vulnerabilities, can significantly enhance their recovery process. This approach helped ■■■■ see herself not as a victim, but as a survivor with the strength and resources to change her circumstances.

**Legal and Financial Assistance:** The advocacy and empowerment programs offered by the community group also played a crucial role in helping █████ understand her rights and navigate the complexities of the legal and social service systems in Australia. These programs were tailored to the specific needs of CALD women, ensuring that they were both culturally relevant and accessible. By participating in these programs, █████ gained the knowledge and confidence she needed to take legal action against her husband and secure her independence.

█████ received legal and financial assistance through the women's group. They connected her with legal aid services that helped her understand her rights and obtain a protection order against her husband. Additionally, she received financial counselling and support to help her become financially independent, which was a critical step in her journey to leaving the abusive relationship (Women Legal Services SA, █████). Access to legal support is vital for women in abusive relationships, as it empowers them to take legal action to ensure their safety. Additionally, financial independence is essential for survivors of domestic violence, as it enables them to support themselves and their children without relying on their abusers, which is often a significant barrier to leaving an abusive relationship (Douglas, █████).

**Holistic Approaches to Support:** Holistic approaches to support, which consider the needs of both the victim and the perpetrator, are essential in addressing domestic violence. Programs that involve perpetrators in rehabilitation and behavioural change can help reduce the risk of reoffending and support the overall safety and well-being of the victim (Pitts et al., █████). A report by the Australian Institute of Criminology highlights the importance of specialized approaches in dealing with domestic violence offenders. The proposal for a Domestic Violence Threat Assessment Centre emphasizes the need for an evidence-based approach to assess and manage high-risk domestic violence offenders, aiming to prevent intimate partner homicides. This approach could be crucial in providing holistic support that addresses both the victim's and the perpetrator's needs, ultimately leading to more effective intervention strategies (Cubitt et al., █████).

█████ husband was eventually referred to a behavioural change program, which helped him understand the impact of his actions and develop strategies to change his behaviour. While this did not absolve him of responsibility, it provided an avenue for addressing the root cause of the abuse and reducing the risk of future violence.

█████ story illustrates the complex and multifaceted challenges faced by CALD women in abusive relationships. It underscores the need for culturally sensitive and holistic support services that address both the needs of the victim and the perpetrator. By understanding and addressing these unique barriers, support services can better assist CALD women like █████ in their journey to safety and independence.

# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

**Strengthening Domestic Violence Awareness and Support for CALD Women from the Onset of Settlement.** It is essential to integrate domestic violence awareness and support into the settlement process for women from CALD backgrounds to ensure early intervention and access to services. This can be achieved by embedding domestic violence education into the mandatory settlement services provided to new migrants. Key strategies include:



- 1. Incorporation of Domestic Violence Information in Settlement Services**  
Ensure that all settlement services include detailed information about domestic violence, women's rights, legal protections, and available support services. This information must be accessible in multiple languages and provided through culturally sensitive approaches that resonate with CALD women's experiences, as many face language barriers and are unfamiliar with the Australian legal system.
- 2. Mandatory Domestic Violence Awareness Workshops**  
Offer mandatory workshops for new arrivals, particularly CALD women, to educate them about recognizing signs of domestic violence, their legal rights, and how to access relevant services. This can build trust in authorities and increase the likelihood of seeking help at an early stage.
- 3. Collaboration with Cultural and Religious Organizations**  
Work closely with cultural and religious institutions, which many CALD women trust, to disseminate domestic violence information and referrals to support services. This ensures that even in cases where a woman may feel hesitant to approach formal authorities, she can still receive vital information from trusted community channels.
- 4. Multilingual and Accessible Resources**  
Develop and distribute multilingual materials, including brochures, online platforms, and apps, that inform women of their rights and the services available to them. These resources should be available in the most commonly spoken languages of new migrants and cater to women with varying literacy levels.

By implementing these strategies, the settlement process for CALD women can become a key touchpoint for raising awareness of domestic violence and ensuring that women are empowered to seek help early on. This holistic approach can not only prevent abuse from escalating but also contribute to long-term safety, mental health, and independence for CALD women in Australia.

## Recommendation 2

**Reducing Social Isolation through Community Integration and Support Networks.** Establishing community-based programs aimed at reducing isolation, such as peer support groups and community mentoring, is vital. Women's groups that provide both social and emotional support have been shown to improve mental health outcomes and facilitate access to resources (Ogbe et al., 2020). Such programs should be tailored to reflect cultural nuances and help women build relationships within their communities.



### Recommendation 3

#### Consideration of Visa Status in Supporting Women's Independence

As part of its inquiry, I encourage the Royal Commission to consider the impact of visa status, particularly for women on dependent visas, when exploring barriers to independence in situations of domestic violence. While immigration is a federal matter, visa conditions can significantly affect a woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship and build a stable, independent life.



Women whose visas are tied to their partners may face additional hurdles, including fears of deportation or loss of access to essential services, making it even more challenging to seek support. It might be valuable for the Commission to explore how state and federal governments can work together to ensure that visa-related barriers are addressed effectively. Recognizing these challenges could help inform recommendations aimed at improving support services for women facing these specific vulnerabilities.

In this context, considering reforms or adjustments in migration policy, particularly regarding the status of primary and dependent visa holders, could be key to providing women with the autonomy and security they need in these difficult circumstances.

### Recommendation 4

#### Improving Relationship Dynamics Education

Programs aimed at addressing relationship dynamics within CALD communities should be a part of broader domestic violence interventions. Educating women and men about healthy relationship models, including mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution, can help shift harmful cultural norms.



Community workshops or counselling sessions that focus on respectful relationships should be offered in trusted community or religious settings, making them accessible and non-stigmatizing (Chandhok & Anand, [REDACTED]).

### Recommendation 5

#### Combating Financial Abuse with Economic Empowerment Initiatives

Financial abuse is a critical barrier that keeps many women trapped in abusive relationships. To address this, financial literacy programs and economic empowerment initiatives must be prioritized.



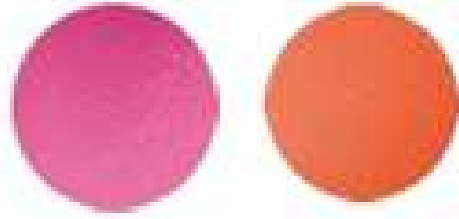
These programs should offer CALD women resources on how to manage finances independently, understand their legal rights regarding shared property or income, and access financial support

services, including social security and emergency funds. Providing access to microfinance and employment opportunities also helps women gain financial independence and agency (Masih et al., [REDACTED])

## Recommendation 6

### Adopting a holistic approach to domestic violence services that focuses on the following key areas:

1. **Combatting Emotional Manipulation:**  
Services must incorporate trauma-informed counselling that recognizes the emotional manipulation tactics used by abusers, such as the cycle of abuse and reconciliation (Walker, [REDACTED]).  
Providing women with counselling that helps them identify emotional manipulation and regain their sense of self-worth can break the cycle of abuse. Additionally, offering workshops on healthy relationship dynamics could empower CALD women to recognize abusive patterns and take steps toward recovery (Aizpurua et al., [REDACTED]).
2. **Building Trust in Authorities:** CALD women often have deep-rooted mistrust of authorities based on experiences in their home countries, where corruption and abuse of power may have been prevalent. To counter this, domestic violence services should work with law enforcement and social services to improve cultural competence and build relationships of trust with CALD communities (Heron et al., [REDACTED]). Initiatives that involve community leaders, religious figures, and peer advocates can bridge the gap between CALD women and authorities, reducing fear and mistrust.
3. **Addressing Language Barriers:** To ensure that CALD women can access support effectively, the RCDFSV should mandate the provision of language services in all domestic violence support programs. This includes employing multilingual staff, offering translation services, and ensuring all written and digital resources are available in the most common languages spoken by CALD women. Additionally, simplifying legal documents and service procedures can improve accessibility for women with limited English proficiency (Asante & Asante, [REDACTED]; Ghafournia & Easteal, [REDACTED]).  
By addressing emotional manipulation, reducing isolation, fostering trust in authorities, and overcoming language barriers, the RCDFSV can create a comprehensive support system that better meets the needs of CALD women and empowers them to seek help when facing domestic violence.



## Recommendation 7

### Supporting CALD Women in Finding Help

The RCDFSV should prioritize the creation and expansion of culturally sensitive, holistic, and accessible services tailored to the unique journeys of CALD women, such as [REDACTED]. The



following recommendations can help to support their transition out of abusive relationships:

1. Culturally Tailored Support Programs: [REDACTED] journey highlights the critical need for services that align with the cultural values and sensitivities of CALD women. The RCDFSV should fund and promote community-based programs, especially those with a strong cultural or religious grounding, that offer discreet pathways for women to seek help without raising suspicion from their abusers (Vaughan et al., [REDACTED]). These programs should provide culturally sensitive counselling and advocacy services that respect the communal values, family dynamics, and religious beliefs of the women they serve.
2. Engagement with Community Leaders and Schools: [REDACTED] experience shows how trusted community figures such as teachers, counsellors, and religious leaders can serve as critical allies in connecting women to support services. School staff, religious leaders, and community organizers should receive training to identify and appropriately respond to signs of domestic violence in a culturally sensitive manner. The RCDFSV should promote partnerships between schools and domestic violence support services to create clear referral pathways, like the one that helped [REDACTED] connect with a school counsellor and eventually escape the cycle of abuse (Postmus et al., [REDACTED]).
3. Enhancing Legal and Financial Assistance: A key factor that empowered [REDACTED] was gaining access to legal advice and financial support. For many CALD women, financial control is a significant barrier to leaving an abusive relationship. The RCDFSV should ensure that CALD women have access to free legal aid and financial counselling that helps them understand their rights and secure their independence, such as obtaining protection orders or support with financial planning (Douglas, [REDACTED]; Women Legal Services SA, [REDACTED]).
4. Holistic, Perpetrator-Focused Interventions: Addressing only the victim's needs without targeting the root cause of the abuse perpetuates the cycle of violence. The RCDFSV should advocate for programs that focus not only on empowering victims but also on holding perpetrators accountable and engaging them in behavioural change programs. Evidence-based interventions, such as perpetrator rehabilitation and behavioural change programs, reduce the likelihood of reoffending and address the abuser's behaviour, which is essential for breaking the cycle of violence (Cubitt et al., [REDACTED]; Douglas, [REDACTED]; Pitts et al., [REDACTED]).
5. Community-Based Support Networks: [REDACTED] case emphasizes the importance of community support in overcoming isolation and fear. The RCDFSV should invest in grassroots, peer-support programs that foster trust and offer emotional and practical help within the cultural framework familiar to CALD women. Women's groups, like the one [REDACTED] connected with, serve as vital lifelines, offering not only emotional support but also practical guidance on navigating legal, social, and financial systems (Masih et al., [REDACTED]).

### **Trauma-Informed Framework for Healing and Recovery**

In supporting women like [REDACTED] a trauma-informed framework is essential for both short-term and long-term healing and recovery. A trauma-informed approach ensures that services and interventions do not re-traumatize victims and instead foster an environment of safety, empowerment, and trust. This framework is guided by key principles such as understanding trauma's pervasive impact, recognizing signs of trauma, and integrating knowledge about trauma

into all levels of service provision (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, [REDACTED])

1. Safety and Trust: Creating a physically and emotionally safe environment is critical for women recovering from domestic violence. Ensuring confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and respect for boundaries helps build trust, which is often broken in abusive situations. This is particularly important for CALD women, as many come from cultural contexts where seeking help may lead to social exclusion or further victimization. Trauma-informed services provide a foundation of trust by addressing the specific vulnerabilities of each survivor and making them feel secure as they navigate their recovery.

2. Empowerment and Strength-Based Support: A key aspect of trauma-informed care is empowering survivors to regain control over their lives. This involves fostering a strength-based approach, focusing on the resilience and capabilities of the survivor rather than their vulnerabilities (Chandhok & Anand, [REDACTED]). For women like [REDACTED] who may have been economically dependent on their abusers, financial counselling and support services are vital components of empowerment. By giving women, the tools and resources they need to make decisions independently, trauma-informed care helps restore autonomy and rebuild self-esteem.

3. Collaboration and Choice: A trauma-informed approach emphasizes collaboration between survivors and service providers. Women are treated as active participants in their recovery journey, allowing them to make informed choices and decisions. This collaborative process builds confidence and ensures that survivors have a sense of control over their healing, something often taken from them in abusive relationships.

4. Culturally Informed Care: Trauma-informed care must also be culturally sensitive, particularly for CALD women. Service providers need to be aware of cultural dynamics, language barriers, and social stigmas that may prevent women from fully engaging with available resources. Culturally informed trauma care not only respects these nuances but actively integrates them into the recovery process, ensuring that women like [REDACTED] feel understood and supported in ways that align with their cultural and personal values (Vaughan et al., [REDACTED]).

5. Long-Term Recovery and Holistic Healing: Trauma does not end when the abuse stops; long-term recovery requires holistic healing that addresses emotional, psychological, and practical needs. Mental health support, legal assistance, and community integration programs are all crucial in ensuring that survivors have the necessary resources to rebuild their lives. A trauma-informed approach ensures that recovery services are ongoing, adaptable, and responsive to the evolving needs of survivors as they move forward.

By implementing these recommendations, the RCDFSV can help ensure that CALD women like [REDACTED] are empowered with the culturally sensitive, holistic support they need to rebuild their lives free from violence.

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