

## Jagriti Forum Submission

### **An introduction to Jagriti Forum**

The Jagriti Forum was established by leaders in Melbourne's Indian community who were concerned about the levels of family violence experienced by Indian families living in Melbourne.

Jagriti membership includes Chair: Marsha Thomson MP, Secretary: Javinder Sidha, Victoria Police, the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee, researchers from the University of Melbourne, La Trobe and Deakin, agencies such as InTouch and CoHealth, Indian religious and community leaders, medical practitioners, legal experts, social workers and a number of former victims of family violence who now support current victims as volunteers.

The objectives of Jagriti are to work with existing organisations and agencies to provide support and assistance to victims of family violence in the Indian community; To collate evidence and research to develop prevention and intervention strategies to reduce family violence in the Indian community; To act as a coordination body with agencies and the community to increase awareness of the issue of family violence in the Indian community and act as a resource in understanding the cultural complexities within the Indian community.

### **Family Violence in our community**

The incidence of family violence in Melbourne's Indian community is higher than average and of greater severity according to anecdotal reports. There has been a larger than average number of withdrawals of Intervention Order Applications in the western suburbs courts in recent years, suggesting a greater need support for family violence interventions, especially in the large Indian community in Melbourne's west, most of whom are recent arrivals. Evidence shows that the isolation experienced by recent migrants, coupled with the stress factors of settlement, can lead to strain on relationships and individual resilience. This may result in family members choosing to use violence.

The isolation of many Indian women in Australia, coupled with pressure from family, has resulted in some remaining silent about family violence. Seeking help is rare and many women are not willing to accept police and court assistance out of fear of the consequences. As such there is reluctance in the Indian community for women to leave or report domestic violence. This is more pronounced in this community than the general community because of fear of creating disharmony in the family and being shunned by their community. There is also a lack of awareness of what constitutes family violence other than physical abuse with many not understanding that controlling and isolating the victim is against the law. Additionally, women who do not have permanent residency (PR), including those on spousal visas, are a particularly vulnerable group due to cultural expectations, isolation from family and a lack of understanding of the laws that exist for their protection. Within this group there is a major fear they will be sent home if they disclose family violence. They may also experience pressure from the family to stay within the marriage and potential for serious repercussions if they are sent home, including the possibility of death.

### **Responses for Non-Permanent Residents:**

Many organisations provide some support to families experiencing family violence with or without PR. However what we know from the community is that they are not necessarily aware of where or who to go to in order to access support. It is well understood that if the victim takes a step to break the cycle of violence a single negative response may stop them from trying to access services again.

Research shows that working with community leaders in CALD communities is critical to addressing family violence. Indian community leaders do not currently have a comprehensive resource to assist women who want to seek help. They rely on information from the internet or pamphlets, which is widely dispersed but are sometimes inaccurate. Jagriti has partnered with the Western Integrated Family Violence Committee to produce a community education resource *Happy Families Happy Communities* that will help Indian community leaders in the western suburbs to direct families towards specialist help for family violence. This guide will fill a knowledge gap for the Indian community and hopefully increase domestic violence victims' access to services. The manual will provide Indian community leaders and organisations with up-to-date information on where to go for assistance, what kind of assistance is provided and whether it is provided to residents with non residents (non-PR) or residents and Australian citizens only. It will be available in a loose leaf format and an online format, to allow for revision of information, the manual will be published later this year.

### **General**

There is a general need for all service providers to be culturally sensitive to the community and their needs. Where children are involved or the victims work commitments are an issue, emergency housing and ongoing housing need to be available close to either the children's school and/or the victim's work so as not to further isolate them and impede recovery.

There needs to be culturally sensitive support for victims prior to seeking an intervention order, and once the intervention order is given, the woman needs to be supported to feel safe. There is insufficient housing and help available to women in emergency situations, particularly in the Western Suburbs. Presently most refuge accommodation is in the eastern suburbs, where the majority of Melbourne's population historically was, with the increase in growth areas in the western suburbs there is an immediate need for accessible crisis accommodation and affordable housing options to assist women. More refuges are needed along with a reassessment of how refuges are used and help to provide support. CALD communities in particular are not comfortable sharing houses with multiple families as is the model in the west. Lack of refuge housing often means that women will return to the abusive situation rather than seek help. Domestic violence in this community is severely under reported because of the public knowledge of violence and death that women have suffered for separating or reporting violence in the community.

### **More shared and coordination of support for these women.**

Apart from initial contact, the victim should not need to worry about who to go to for the support they need, but rather the services should be coordinated and brought to the victim to meet their individual needs.

Family violence requires a community response and everyone needs to take responsibility for prevention, recognition and action. We need to be able to identify champions within the community and provide them with appropriate and intensive training. It is not just about throwing money at it. There needs to be culturally appropriate education for both men and women within the Indian community as to what constitutes family violence; what is the law pertaining to family violence and the impact on children exposed to family violence.

We need to be able to use the community networks including media and online services, nationally and within the subcontinent, to both raise awareness and bring the issue out in the open. We need to also reach out to religious leaders. All this requires government support.

### **Perpetrators**

There are two types of diversion programs required. One for those who know they have a problem and wish to change and another for those who don't believe they have done anything wrong. The latter one in particular needs to be supported by corrections case management, intensive counselling orders, drug and alcohol support services and rehabilitation where required. There needs to be an assessment undertaken into the impact of drugs, alcohol, isolation and long-term unemployment that may be contributing factors in family violence within the community. Family violence is gendered, however for the Indian community it can be more complicated where young couples are living with parents/ in-laws.

### **Conclusion**

These are just some of the issues that impact on Indian victims of domestic violence across all areas from primary prevention through to culturally sensitive services to respond not just during the crisis but as early intervention, crisis support, and post crisis recovery.

Representatives from Jagriti are prepared to attend the Royal Commission if more information on these issues or any other issues is required.