



THE FEDERATION OF CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS (VIC) INC.

維省華人社團聯合會

SUITE 6, LEVEL 4, 20 COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE, VIC 3000, AUSTRALIA

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A.B.N. 45 236 763 583 Org. No. A0010549X

Submission paper

The Federation of Chinese Associations Vic (FCA) welcomes the submission call from the Royal Commission into family violence discussion paper and would like to give our input in the issues of family violence in our society and its impact on individuals and families.

As an umbrella organisation FCA represents 103 Chinese organisations in the state of Victoria with the aim of uniting the local Chinese community and undertaking welfare projects for the benefit of the local Chinese community. FCA also functions as a peak body bridging the connections between the local Chinese community and different levels of government bodies addressing needs that affect the local Chinese community. Over the past 36 years FCA has provided social services to local Chinese especially new migrants and assists them with their problems and difficulties include family violence.

FCA social welfare centre is the front line of the organisation's services assisting at least 800-1000 client each year. Of the many issues 20-30 family violence related cases were assisted by the organisation each year. We provide information and advocacy to victims of family violence with a significant number of referrals to external services such as women's domestic violence services enabling victims to access appropriate and specialised services.

We note that the issues paper indicated almost one third of homicide incidents in Victoria were domestic homicide during July 2010 to June 2012 with 43 family violence related deaths in 2013. Furthermore, over 45 per cent of assault offences and over 34 per cent of rape offences by reported by Victoria Police were related to family violence incidents during 2013-2014. It is clear that family violence has become a social issue that needs to be addressed by government and the community to ensure women and children are able to live in a violence free environment.

Through our close work with the women's domestic violence service provider Intouch we have found that the number of Chinese clients who seek help from Intouch due to family violence was on the agency's top list for more than 10 years. It is our understanding that in 2013 there were 61 Chinese women and children who obtained assistance from Intouch and this number has increased to 73 in 2014. These statistics concern us, and how we reduce and eliminating family violence within the Chinese community is critical to the organisation and the public at large.

As a service provider with experience in providing direct assistance to victims of family violence, we would like to make our submission by addressing the service gaps in the following areas:



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1. Improvement in response to victims' call for help

Both the Women's Crisis Centre and Intouch's telephone intake service are in English which has caused a high degree of difficulty for women from Non-English speaking backgrounds to communicate with the service providers or the intake worker in an emergency and crisis situation. Inability to communicate to crisis hotline staff or intake workers from other women's DV services has added more stress to victims.

It is important for women and their children in a life threatening situation for their calls for help dealt with immediately. Unfortunately, a number of our clients have expressed their disappointment with the system as they have had problems in find an online interpreter or person to help with the lifesaving call. During our day to day work we have found that TIS service for Chinese especially for Mandarin speaking services have a long wait times, imagine people who have been subjected to domestic violence desperately needing help having to struggle to find an interpreter to connect them with crisis services at the same time in fear of their safety.

Back to some years ago, we raised this question about telephone intake in a DV network meeting and suggested that Women's Crisis Centre and Intouch should adopt the multi-lingual phone system to allocate a specific number for different languages so women who facing family violence can use their own language to ask for help and be assisted at the first contact not wasting money and energy while struggle to find TIS services

We do know there are hidden issues related to family violence, the accessibility of domestic violence response systems are critical in saving lives. The call for help from victim of family violence should be treated as a priority above everything.

In addition, we have encountered issues where Chinese victims were disadvantaged while asking for protection because of a lack of English skills. In a number of cases female victims made the call for police assistance but before being interviewed, the other party approached the police and gave their version of the incident. Once the female Chinese victim was interviewed the police usually didn't give enough time and attention to what the female victim had said or tried to explain. There were no interpreter services being offered in some cases. Recent newspapers have also reported that ambulance officers were often unsure of how to handle the situation



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with both parties presenting different explanations of events. We urge the government to put a conduct code for both police and ambulance to encourage them to be able to handle the situation appropriately.

We need a system that people can use their language to ask for help, offering assistance at the first contact point not scaring them off because of language problems. If the system that responds to calls for help can't be effective then there will be more hidden victims in society who we have failed.

2. Assistance in refuge care

It is our understanding that once a Chinese female victim moves to a women's refuge they usually have to wait for a while to be assisted by Chinese speaking staff from relevant services.

We believe that there should be an intensive casework period put in place for women who enter women's refuge. The reason for this intensive care period is many victims from non-English speaking backgrounds have no concept about how refuge will assist them, who will help them with Centrelink claims, legal assistance, housing, children's school, food and daily item purchases, what will happen to them in a short or long term.

We have worked with many women who were assisted by women's refuge, their stories told us that the intensive care period is important for individuals to get a sense about how the system can or can't help and when and how. Not leaving them in an uncertain situation, waiting to be assisted when someone is available. The intensive care period should start immediately after the victim enter the women's refuge and only take a few days so women are prepared and understand what the refuge workers can do for them and what they need to do for themselves in terms of becoming more independent and more confident with life ahead.

3. Housing support

In recent years, we have found that women who are residents of women's refuge are pushed to look for housing themselves. We all know the impact on individuals who have been victims of family violence is far deeper than what we can image and it takes a long time to recover. Assistance by women's refuge should be the first step on the road to recovery. But instead the victims were asked to look for a place to stay after three months or certain period so they wouldn't remain in refuge for too long.



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Where is our transitional housing for victims of family violence? Where is the assistance that helps victims to apply for an affordable and long term accommodation? Why do we put victims in another vulnerable situation competing with others who are trying to find accommodation in the private market? What safety assurance has the system provided for women and their children while in refuge putting them under stress and worry if they can't find a place to move into?

We highly recommend that transitional housing for women and their children after refuge should be provided to ensure that everyone escaping family violence will have a roof over their head and not become homeless. As stated in the issues paper provided by the Royal Commission into Family Violence, a third of all clients who accessed homelessness agencies in 2013-14 sought assistance as a result of family or domestic violence. The housing support for family violence victims should be adequate, effective and prioritised.

4. Post refuge support

Post refuge support is a key to a successful recovery for victims of domestic violence. The current system has limited connection between refuge and community support. It is our understanding that some female victims are new migrants with no relatives or friends in Australia. To be able to link with community organisations and be supported by their own community is the best way to help women and children settle in an environment that provides them with cultural and social support.

In the past we have provided social and cultural support to many women and their children after they leave the women's refuge or enter public housing in which they feel that they have a new family to rely on and to be cared for. We refer them to local Chinese organisations for social support and link them with relevant groups for social connection. After being supported by local Chinese organisations, some women become more interested in life and take part in community life heading to a healthy way to full recovery. Furthermore, a number of victims have been elected as organisation leaders and take on volunteer work to help the community.

Post refuge support will give victims a sense of belonging, a feeling of being a member of a family, an atmosphere of caring and security. Better integration and coordination between government agencies and community organisations can make a huge difference in women and their children's lives.

5. Raise awareness among international students



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In 2014 we were shocked by the death of 22 years old Mrs Dan Lin who was murdered by her mother-in-law in a very cruel way. We have had the chance to work with Dan Lin's mother Ms Chen who was referred by the Victorian Police. Through our discussions Ms Chen said that Dan Lin had no knowledge about our women's crisis service or other family violence services before she was murdered. Dan Lin usually relied on international phone calls with her mother Ms Chen to seek support and go to other friend's homes to avoid more violence after being assaulted.

Two days before Dan Lin was murdered, her mother asked her to go back to China but she was so worried about her two year old son being taken by her mother-in-law or father-in-law who was often violent towards her. We were so distressed to hear this fact and believed the life of this young beautiful woman should be saved had we had knowledge about this.

Dan Lin was a young international student when she fell in love with her husband and married him. Unfortunately young student's awareness of support and services that are available in our society was limited. Dan Lin's only helper was her mother in China. This tragedy rang loud alarm bells for all services including FCA.

We had a discussion with police about Dan Lin's murder and brought this issue to the Monash city Multicultural Advisory Committee because Dan Lin was a student of Monash University. We would like to develop promotional material and work with local police, universities and international student organisations to start a campaign to raise awareness of family violence among international students preventing Dan Lin's tragedy happening again.

6. Regional/remote area's support service

During our work with victims of family violence, we have come across a number of women who from regional or remote areas have escaped from a violent environment. One Chinese lady with her [REDACTED] son had to travel to Melbourne from a small town near [REDACTED] to find support. She had endured two years of physical abuse, and in fear of her life couldn't talk to people about her problem and ask for help because she had no idea that there is any service able to assist her. After her neighbours noticed her swollen eyes and bruises they called police.

One Cantonese lady who from the outer western suburbs had been subjected to violence for more than a year, and her [REDACTED] year old son was kicked out by her violent husband which caused huge psychological impact to the boy, he became homeless in this country town with no relative or friends, ending up with a mental disorder.



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As with the Chinese lady from [REDACTED] this Cantonese woman also had no knowledge about the women's family violence service and felt that life had no meaning for her with deepening worry about her son's safety and health.

Only by chance the Cantonese woman met a lady who knew FCA's service introducing her to us. We have helped both ladies with support and referral services, both now moving on with their lives, one obtaining public housing and the other gaining employment.

The above two ladies experience has signalled the issue of lack of available support and services in regional and remote area. If this issue can't be addressed there will be more people affected.

7. Safety assurance

As indicated in the issues paper, there were 35135 family violence intervention order applications finalised by the Victorian Magistrates' Court in 2013-14. But we don't know how many intervention orders were breached by perpetrators as many homicide incidents were not publicised.

During our assistance, many female victims had expressed their concerns about their fear and worries on their safety even though there was an intervention order in place. The fact is the one who breached the order was rarely punished in a way to stop their actions.

What we need is a legal system that provides victims with adequate protection. For people who breach intervention orders should have ankle monitoring devices fitted so that authorities can keep track on them particularly when becoming to close to the victim.

8. Connection between the women's domestic violence service and community organisations

Although we have worked with certain women's family violence service providers, more integrated coordination between government agencies and community organisations is the best way to respond to domestic violence issues. In and post refuge support can contribute to a better outcome from our support system.

The women's refuge usually works alone with limited connection with community organisations. In the past there were little or no referrals made from women's refuge to our service. But we are continuously approached by Chinese women who are in refuge care or post refuge. If there is a connection between community



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organisation and women's refuge or other DV services, individual will be more aware of who can support them once they moved out from women's refuge, and what kind of service they can be offered in the future which will give them more certainty and confidence living independently post refuge.

In Melbourne, there are Women's Health services in different regions also taking responsibility for helping victim of domestic violence. But we understand that the sooner individuals can be connected to the community organisations the better the outcome will be. Therefore we believe that the coordination between women's domestic violence services and community organisations will bring new approach into the system and lead to a more effective and responsive support towards family violence.

9. Elderly abuse

Elderly abuse within the Chinese community is mainly related to financial control in which Chinese seniors have been taken advantage of. Unfortunately generational problems have affected the relationships between seniors and their adult children, seniors who are generally the ones to leave and in some cases become homeless.

Due to the fact over 90 per cent of Chinese seniors can't speak, read or write English, their ability to live independently is very low. As a result, some Chinese senior's finances are controlled by their family members. Verbal and emotional abuses are another elderly abuse that has been identified in addition to the financial abuse.

In 2013 we have worked with the Senior Right Victoria to conduct community education on senior abuse in different regions, raising awareness of the existence of elderly abuse in the community, aiming to prevent and reduce elderly abuse within the community.

10. Child abuse

During the past, we have been approached by some parents who were contacted by child protection or summoned to court due to child abuse. Parenting in Australia for Chinese migrant families is a big challenge as the old method of parenting in China only emphasises unconditional obedience and a high expectation of children's academic achievement. Turn your back on the unconditional obedience is treated as disrespectful and brings shame to their parents. As a consequence some parents tend to use physical punishment to teach their children and eventually are reported to authorities. For parents, it is a shock because they may not realise that physical



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punishment is not allowed in this country and their awareness of children protection needs more education.

Community education on parenting and child protection will make a difference as some parents do not know why and how they have been summoned to court.

11. Limited support to male victim

We do want to raise a problem that is encountered by some male victims of family violence. The lack of support for male victims should be addressed with accessible services provided. Male victims' needs cannot be ignored.

We propose:

A community based family violence response program to be established, including healthy relationship education, intake and referral to external services, co-case management in refuge care, post refuge support, family and parenting education. Our strength in language, cultural and experience in assisting victims of family violence will be an advantage of the proposed program. We will be happy to provide more detail about the proposed program when needed.

Junxi Su

The Federation of Chinese Associations Vic

28th May 2015