2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS)
Attitudes to violence against women among people born in non-main English speaking countries

The National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey (NCAS) is a program of research funded by the Commonwealth Department of Social Service and led by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth). The Social Research Centre and The University of Melbourne are research partners. An advisory group comprising experts from across Australia provides technical advice and support to the program.

This research summary focuses on the findings for the NCAS sample of people born in a country in which the main language spoken is not English. It is one of a suite of documents based on the 2013 survey. Reports containing technical detail on the survey, and findings for all Australians as well as for other particular groups, can be found at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/ncas.

Introduction

Violence against women is widely recognised as a global issue. It is an often invisible but common form of violence, and a violation of human rights. It has serious impacts on the health and wellbeing of those affected and exacts significant economic costs on communities and nations (National Council to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009a,b). This violence occurs across all groups in Australian society, with one in three women over the age of 18 years reporting that they have experienced violence at the hands of a man since the age of 15 (ABS 2013a).

Together, Australian state and territory governments have developed the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (COAG 2010; referred to in this summary as the National Plan). The NCAS is being used to monitor whether there are positive changes in attitudes. The Personal Safety Survey monitors the experience of violence. It is conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2013a).

There is growing international consensus that violence against women can be prevented, and changing attitudes is one important step. Attitudes that condone or tolerate violence are recognised as playing a central role in shaping the way individuals, communities and organisations respond to violence (VicHealth 2014). Measuring community attitudes and learning more about what influences these attitudes tells us how we are progressing towards a violence-free society for all women. It also reveals the extent of the work that lies ahead, where to focus our efforts, and the messages and approaches likely to be effective.

About this summary

This is a summary of key findings of the 2013 NCAS as they pertain to people born in non-main English speaking countries (N-MESCs). The summary also draws on research conducted by others to better understand the findings.

The strengths and limitations of the research are outlined on p12 and should be taken into account when considering the findings. Detailed information about how the survey was done and why particular questions were asked can be found at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/ncas.

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About the NCAS

NCAS is a 20-minute telephone survey of more than 17,500 Australians aged 16 years and over about their:

- knowledge of violence against women
- attitudes towards violence against women
- attitudes towards gender roles and relationships
- intended responses upon witnessing violence and awareness of sources of assistance.

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as 'any act of gender-based violence that results or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life' (UN 1993). NCAS has a particular focus on four forms of violence against women: partner violence, sexual assault, stalking and sexual harassment.

Violence against women from N-MESCs

International research shows marked differences between countries in the prevalence of violence against women (Fulu et al. 2013a; Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005, 2006; Jewkes et al. 2012). In some countries the rates are much higher than they are in Australia. In others they are lower. For example, the lifetime rate of reported partner violence varies between countries from 13% to 61% of ever-partnered women, while rates of sexual assault vary between 6.2% and 59% (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005, pp. xii–xiii). It is probable that this variation is also reflected in Australia in differences between birthplace groups.

No data are available on the prevalence of violence for or within individual birthplace groups in Australia. The 2012 Personal Safety Survey (ABS 2013a) reports prevalence for persons from N-MESCs as an aggregate, rather than for individual birthplace or ethnic groups. Survey results showed that women from N-MESCs are a little less likely than those born in Australia to report having experienced physical or sexual assault either in the 12 months prior to the survey or in their lifetime (ABS 2013a). It is not known whether the results for women from N-MESCs reflect actual rates of violence or are due to methodological or situational factors (ABS 2013a; Mitchell 2011). Evidence from qualitative studies in Australia suggests that violence against women is a particular issue in some communities (Fisher 2009; Rees & Pease 2006; Pittaway 2004; Zannettino 2012).

The experiences of N-MESC groups before arriving in Australia are diverse, and these groups have diverse demographic and cultural characteristics. Some of these groups have a high level of exposure to known risk factors for violence prior to arrival (e.g. exposure to civil conflict, marked gender inequality, poor legislative protection) and in Australia (Fisher 2009; Kaplan & Webster 2003; Pease & Rees 2008; Pittaway 2004; Zannettino 2012). Some women in these groups may be vulnerable to more severe violence and experience greater barriers to securing safety (Kasturirangan et al. 2004). This may be due to a range of factors, such as poor proficiency in English or cultural barriers to accessing services (Kasturirangan et al. 2004).

For these reasons, reducing violence against women from diverse backgrounds has been identified as a priority in the National Plan (COAG 2010).

OVERALL FINDINGS

- Overall, respondents born in a N-MESC have a good knowledge of violence against women, although this is not as well developed as for Australian-born respondents. This is especially the case with regard to the law pertaining to forced sex within a relationship.

- Like Australian-born respondents, most N-MESC respondents reject attitudes supportive of violence against women.

- However, N-MESC respondents are substantially more likely to endorse attitudes justifying and excusing violence, privileging family privacy and unity over the safety of women and children and victim-blaming. This sample is also more likely to endorse attitudes that may compromise consent to sexual relations.

- Like the Australian-born respondents, N-MESC respondents are willing to assist a woman affected by violence. However, only 55% would know where to seek help, slightly fewer than the Australian-born (58%).

- Understanding of violence against women and support for gender equality are priorities for prevention because these are the strongest drivers of attitudes towards violence against women among people born in a N-MESC and those born in Australia.

- Country of birth is among the strongest demographic predictors of understanding and attitudes in the NCAS sample as a whole and within the N-MESC sample.

- Understanding of violence against women and attitudes towards gender equality are stronger, and attitudes supportive of violence against women are weaker, among those who have lived in Australia for a long time (compared with the recently arrived), those who have a higher level of proficiency in English (compared with those with poor proficiency), and among second- and third-generation Australians (compared with first-generation Australians).

- Demographic differences in the N-MESC sample are small but, similarly to differences within the sample as a whole, men and young (18–24 years) and older (75 years and older) people are more likely than women and people of other ages to hold violence-supportive attitudes.

- Attitudes supporting violence and gender inequality are a feature of the cultures of almost all groups across the globe. The challenge in prevention will be to work with minority ethnic groups in Australia to address risk factors and strengthen factors that protect against violence. This will involve looking at cultural norms and practices people bring with them as well as new risks and strengths associated with cultural norms and practices in Australia.

- Strong policies to support the settlement of new arrivals and cultural diversity are important foundations for preventing violence against women. This is because social exclusion of minority ethnic groups has been found in other research to increase the risk of such violence.

- There is a commitment to focus on culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the National Plan (COAG 2010) and its second action plan (Department of Social Services 2014). A carefully planned approach is needed to realise this commitment.

The N-MESC sample and approach to analysis

A number of indicators of diversity are commonly used in research and data collection in Australia. Among these are country of birth, year of arrival, language proficiency, language spoken at home, religion, ancestry and generation (ABS 2013b).

This summary reports findings for respondents who themselves were born overseas in a country in which English is not the main language spoken (n = 3453). These respondents were randomly selected from across Australia and so come from many different countries. Results are not analysed for individual country background groups owing to the relatively small number of respondents in individual birthplace groups and the likelihood of ethnic and cultural diversity within groups. Selected analyses are presented by other indicators of diversity including year of arrival and proficiency in English. The N-MESC sample does not include second-generation Australians (i.e. persons born in Australia whose parents were born overseas).[1] However, selected analyses in this paper are presented by generation in Australia.

There is no single satisfactory indicator of diversity; each has strengths and limitations. In particular there is not a clear relationship between an individual's birthplace and their ethnicity or culture – since people can have the same birthplace but different ethnic or cultural heritage. Similarly, people can be born in Australia, but not identify as ethnically Anglo-Australian.

The terms 'culture' and 'ethnicity' are conceptually different from the indicators of diversity just introduced (see box on page 4).

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[1]   The project technical report includes data for each question in the survey for four measures of diversity: birthplace; year of arrival; language proficiency; and first, second and third generations (i.e. for people born overseas, those born in Australia with one or more parents born overseas and those who were themselves born in Australia as well as having both parents born in Australia).

Where relevant, results for the N-MESC sample are compared with respondents born in Australia. It is important to note that the N-MESC sample has a diverse number of birthplace groups, each with different cultural and demographic characteristics, as well as different pre- and post-arrival experiences. There are also substantial differences within individual birthplace groups. For these reasons, the results for the sample as a whole cannot be generalised to any particular country background or minority ethnic group.

Data is analysed in two ways. In the first, percentages for responses to each of the questions in the survey are given for both the Australian-born and the N-MESC samples. Such data help to identify:

- whether the N-MESC sample differs from the sample of the Australian-born respondents in level of knowledge or attitudes towards violence and gender equality. This is important for determining if there is a need to prioritise people from minority ethnic groups in future prevention work
- the particular areas of knowledge or types of attitudes that require attention in prevention work with minority ethnic communities.

Selected analyses are also undertaken for particular subgroups within the N-MESC sample.

The second approach to analysis taken here involves gauging the influence of a range of factors (e.g. place of birth, age, gender) after taking into account the influence of other factors. This analysis is designed to strengthen understanding of the factors shaping or driving attitudes.

Unless otherwise stated, all differences reported in this summary are between the N-MESC sample and the Australian-born respondents.

Key findings

Knowledge

A good understanding of the causes, dynamics, patterns and prevalence of violence against women is important to ensure appropriate responses by and towards those affected by violence (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). Also, a well-informed community is better able to help prevent the problem (Carlson & Worden 2005; McMahon & Baker 2011; O'Neil & Morgan 2010).

Research has shown that knowledge influences the formation of attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein 2005; Chaiken & Trope 1999; Fazio 1990). Wide understanding that violence is against the law can help to set non-violent social norms, which in turn can help to prevent violent behaviour (Salazar et al. 2003).

Defining violence against women

Table 1: Knowledge of definitions of violence against women

Certain behaviours are a form of partner violence/violence against women	% agree	
	N-MESC	Australian-born
Slaps/pushes to cause harm and fear	93*	98
Forces partner to have sex	93*	97
Tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt others	95*	98
Throws/smashes objects to frighten/threaten	94*	97
Repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad/useless	81*	87
Controls social life by preventing partner from seeing family/friends	82*	86
Tries to control by denying partner money	68*	71
Stalks by repeatedly following/watching at home or work	79*	91
Harasses by repeated phone calls	82*	88
Harasses by repeated emails/text messages	82*	86

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born respondents is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

N-MESC respondents have a good understanding that violence involves more than physical assault and forced sex, and also includes psychological, social and financial means of control, abuse and intimidation. However, they are moderately less likely than the Australian-born respondents to recognise each of the behaviours along this continuum as partner violence/ violence against women.

Like the Australian-born respondents, the N-MESC sample are more likely to identify physical violence and forced sex as partner violence/violence against women than they are to recognise non-physical forms. When results from the questions in Table 1 are used to classify respondents as having 'high', 'medium' or 'low' levels of understanding that violence occurs along a continuum, N-MESC respondents are:

- less likely than those born in Australia to be classified as having a high understanding (12% v. 21% of the Australian born)

- more likely to be classified as having a 'low' level of understanding (41% v. 27%)

Table 2: Knowledge of the prevalence and nature of violence, the law and causes

Knowledge	% agree	
	N-MESC	Australian-born
Prevalence of violence against women		
Violence against women is common	57*	71
Women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence	38*	42
Understanding of the law		
Domestic violence is a criminal offence	92*	97
A woman cannot be raped by someone she is in a relationship with	21*	5
Patterns and consequences of violence		
Women are more likely to be raped by someone they know than by a stranger	58*	64
Men mainly or more often commit acts of domestic violence	66*	72
Women are more likely to suffer physical harm from domestic violence	82*	88
Level of fear from domestic violence is worse for women	55	51
Perceived main cause		
Some men being unable to manage their anger	55*	67
The belief that men should be in charge of the relationship	20*	17
Some men being under financial stress	19*	11

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

Prevalence

Just over half of the N-MESC sample agree that violence against women is common (57%), substantially fewer than among the Australian-born respondents (71%). Thirty-eight percent recognise that women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence, again marginally lower than the Australian-born sample (42%).

Understanding the law

N-MESC respondents have a high level of understanding that partner violence is against the law (92% v. 97% among the Australian-born).[2] Although still in the minority, 1 in 5 (21%) do not recognise forced sex in a relationship as a crime and this is four times higher than among the Australian-born respondents (5%).

Patterns and consequences of violence

Women are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted by a known person than a stranger (ABS 2013a). Only 58% in the N-MESC sample recognise this, fewer than among the Australian-born respondents (64%).

A majority in the N-MESC sample recognise that it is men or mainly men that perpetrate violence against their partners (66%) and that women are more likely to suffer physical harm from this violence (82%). However, N-MESC respondents are a little less likely to agree than the Australian-born, 72% of whom agree that it is men or mainly men that perpetrate violence and 88% that women are more likely to suffer physical harm.

While only just over half of N-MESC respondents recognise that women are more likely to experience fear as a result of partner violence (55%), this is not significantly different to the Australian-born respondents (51%).

Perceived main cause

Other research shows that most people in the communities studied believe that violence against women is due to problems with individual men who use violence, such as their misuse of alcohol or their inability to manage their anger (European Commission 2010; Harris/Decima 2009; O'Neil & Morgan 2010).

In contrast, many experts look to factors in people's environments. A particular focus has been on the way in which inequalities between men and women, both in families and in public life, contribute to violence (UN 2012; VicHealth 2007; WHO & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 2010).

People in the survey were given three options and asked to say what they believed was the main cause of violence against women (Table 2).

As was the case for the Australian-born sample, N-MESC respondents are most likely to identify 'some men being unable to manage their anger' as the 'main cause' of violence against women. Twenty percent of N-MESC respondents identify 'the belief that men should be in charge of the relationship' (v. 17% among the Australian-born) and 19% identify 'some men being under financial stress' (v. 11% among the Australian-born).

However, respondents from a N-MESC are less likely to choose the option of 'some men being unable to manage their anger' than the Australian-born (55% v. 67%), being more likely to select one of the other two options.

Attitudes

Attitudes contribute to violence against women because they influence expectations of what is acceptable behaviour. Our understanding of these expectations has a strong influence on our behaviour (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). Community attitudes influence how people respond to violence, from victims and their friends and family to law enforcement professionals, employers and policy-makers. This means that attitudes are an important barometer of how we fare generally as a society in relation to violence and gender relations.

Our attitudes are often shaped by the world around us – for instance, through how we see gender roles and relationships in families and organisations, and how women and men are portrayed in the media and popular culture (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). As a result, preventing violence against women is not simply a matter of changing attitudes, but will also involve challenging the social factors that shape those beliefs (Pease & Flood 2008).

Questions were analysed within five themes (see box).

WHAT ARE VIOLENCE-SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES?

Five key categories of violence-supportive attitudes have been identified by researchers. These are attitudes that:

- **justify** violence against women, based on the notion that it is legitimate for a man to use violence, particularly against a woman with whom he is in an intimate relationship, in certain circumstances (e.g. the idea that partner violence is justified if a woman has sex with another man)

- **excuse** violence by attributing it to external factors (e.g. stress) or proposing that men cannot be held fully responsible for violent behaviour (e.g. 'rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex')

- **trivialise** the impact of violence, based on the view that the impacts of violence are not serious or are not sufficiently serious to warrant action by women themselves, the community or public agencies (e.g. 'women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves rather than report it')

- **minimise** violence by denying its seriousness, denying that it occurs or denying that certain behaviours are indeed violence at all (e.g. the idea that it's only rape if the woman physically resisted)

- shift **blame** for the violence from the perpetrator to the victim or hold women at least partially responsible for their victimisation or for preventing victimisation (e.g. the idea that women ask for rape).

This does not mean that people who hold violence-supportive attitudes would necessarily use or condone violence themselves. However, such views expressed by influential individuals or held by a substantial number of people can create a culture where violence is not clearly condemned and may even be subtly condoned or encouraged.

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2 Not all of the behaviours canvassed in the NCAS are crimes and there is some variation in definitions of partner violence between Australian jurisdictions and between civil and criminal law.

Attitudes justifying violence

Only a minority of the N-MESC sample agree that violence can be justified (between 8% and 12%, depending on the scenario).

However, this is higher than the percentages among the Australian-born respondents (between 3% and 5%, depending on the scenario).

Table 3: Attitudes justifying and excusing violence

Attitude	% agree	
	N-MESC	**Australian-born**
Circumstances in which violence towards a current/former partner can be justified		
Partner admits to having sex with another man	12*	5
Partner makes him look stupid or insults him in front of his friends	10*	3
Partner ends or tries to end the relationship	9*	3
Against ex-partner to get access to children	8*	3
If ex-partner is unreasonable about property settlement and financial issues	9*	3
Attitudes excusing violence		
Rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex	45	42
A man is less responsible for rape if drunk/affected by drugs at the time	18*	6
Domestic violence can be excused if people get so angry they lose control	37*	17
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person genuinely regrets it	40*	16
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person was abused as a child	21*	9
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person is under a lot of stress	24*	9
Domestic violence can be excused if the violent person is affected by alcohol	19*	6

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

Attitudes excusing violence

Between 18% and 45% (depending on the scenario) are prepared to excuse partner violence and sexual assault. For all but one of the seven scenarios put to them, N-MESC respondents are more likely to excuse partner violence or sexual assault than the Australian-born respondents.

Specifically, N-MESC respondents are:

• nearly 2.5 times as likely to agree that partner violence can be excused if a person is under stress (24% v. 9% among the Australian born) or the person genuinely regrets it afterward (40% v. 16%)

• more than twice as likely to agree that violence can be excused if the person gets so angry they lose control (37% v. 17%) or if the violent person was abused as a child (21% v. 9%)

• three times as likely to excuse violence if the violent person is affected by alcohol (19% v. 6%) or if the perpetrator of sexual assault is affected by alcohol and drugs (18% v. 6%).

Forty-five percent of N-MESC respondents agree that rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex, not significantly different from the Australian-born (42%).

Attitudes trivialising violence

Table 4: Attitudes trivialising violence

Attitude	% agree	
	N-MESC	**Australian-born**
Where one partner is violent it is reasonable for them to be made to leave the family home	82*	91
It's hard to understand why women stay in a violent relationship	73*	80
Most women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to	63*	48
Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves	21*	9
Domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family	31*	13
It's a woman's duty to stay in a violent relationship to keep the family together	19*	6

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

Most N-MESC respondents support the principle underlying current laws pertaining to partner violence – that the perpetrator, and not their partner and children, should be made to leave the family home (82%), although the percentage doing so is lower than among the Australian-born respondents (91%).

Sizeable proportions of N-MESC respondents endorse other attitudes trivialising violence, and for all but one question the percentage is larger than for the Australian-born. Specifically, N-MESC respondents are:

• 2.5 times more likely than Australian-born respondents to agree that women who are sexually harassed should sort things out themselves (21% v. 9%)

• more than three times more likely to believe that women should stay in a violent relationship in order to keep the family together (19% v. 6%)

• almost 2.5 times more likely to believe that domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family (31% v. 13%).

N-MESC respondents, similar to all Australians, have a relatively poor understanding of the barriers to women securing safety from violence. A smaller proportion of N-MESC respondents (73%) agree that 'it's hard to understand why women stay in violent relationships' (v. 80% Australian-born). However, N-MESC respondents are more likely (63%) than the Australian-born respondents (48%) to agree that a woman could leave a violent relationship if she really wanted to.

Attitudes minimising violence

Table 5: Attitudes minimising violence

Attitude	% agree	
	N-MESC	Australian-born
Violence against women is a serious issue	89*	97
Certain behaviours are serious		
Slaps/pushes to cause harm and fear	87*	94
Forces partner to have sex	90*	97
Tries to scare/control by threatening to hurt others	94*	98
Throws/smashes objects to frighten/threaten	89	94
Repeatedly criticises to make partner feel bad/useless	77*	87
Controls social life by preventing partner from seeing family/friends	80*	89
Tries to control by denying partner money	68*	75
Stalks by repeatedly following/watching at home or work	87*	96
Harasses by repeated phone calls	84*	91
Harasses by repeated emails/text messages	80*	88
Seriousness/acceptability of tracking female partner by electronic means without consent		
Serious	78*	87
Never acceptable	56*	62
Attitudes towards false allegations of partner violence and rape		
Women going through custody battles make up or exaggerate domestic violence in order to improve their case	54	53
Women rarely make false claims of rape	55*	61
A lot of times women who say they were raped lead the man on and later had regrets	42*	37
If a woman does not physically resist, even if protesting verbally, then it isn't really rape	23*	7

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

Seriousness of violence against women

In the theme of minimising violence, the majority of the N-MESC sample agree that violence against women is a serious issue (89%); this is lower than among the Australian-born (97%). A majority of N-MESC respondents regard the range of behaviours involved in such violence as serious (between 68% and 94% depending on the behaviour considered). This sample are more likely to regard physical violence and forced sex as more serious than psychological, social and financial means of control. These patterns are similar to those of the Australian-born. N-MESC respondents are a little less likely to identify each of the behaviours along this continuum as serious.

Tracking a partner by electronic means

Fifty-six percent of N-MESC respondents agree that tracking a partner by electronic means is unacceptable (compared with 62% of the Australian-born) and the majority (78%) agree that this is serious behaviour (compared with 87% of the Australian-born).

False allegations of sexual assault and partner violence

Contrary to contemporary legal approaches to consent to sexual relations, nearly 1 in 4 N-MESC respondents (23%) agree that 'if a woman doesn't physically resist then it isn't really rape'. This compares with 7% of the Australian-born.

As is the case among the Australian-born, attitudinal support for the notion that women make false allegations of sexual assault and partner violence remains among a sizeable percentage of N-MESC respondents. Among N-MESC respondents:

- only 55% agree that false allegations of rape are rare (v. 61% of the Australian-born)
- 42% agree that women who say they were raped led the man on and later had regrets (v. 37% Australian-born)
- 54% agree that women often fabricate or exaggerate domestic violence in order to improve their prospects in cases to decide care arrangements for children following separation or divorce (this was comparable to the Australian-born).

Attitudes shifting blame from perpetrator to victim

Sizeable proportions of N-MESC respondents (between 22% and 34%, depending on the scenario), are prepared to attribute at least some of the responsibility for violence to the victim (Table 6) .The percentage prepared to do so is substantially higher than for Australian-born respondents. Specifically, N-MESC respondents are:

- more than twice as likely as the Australian-born respondents to agree that a woman is partly to blame for sexual assault if affected by alcohol or drugs at the time (34% v. 15%)
- nearly 2.5 times as likely to agree that women say 'no' when they mean 'yes' (29% v. 12%)
- more than three times as likely to agree that 'if a woman goes alone into a room with a man at a party it is her fault if she is raped' (25% v. 8%) or that domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol (22% v.7%).

Overall level of attitudinal support for violence against women

Responses to a range of questions from each of the themes above were brought together into a single measure. Respondents were given a score indicating whether they had a 'high', 'medium' or 'low' level of attitudinal support for violence against women based on their responses to these questions. Respondents from N-MESCs are less likely to have a low level of attitudinal support for violence (10% v. 25% among the Australian-born) and more likely to have a high level (50% v. 22% among the Australian-born).

Table 6: Attitudes shifting blame from perpetrator to victim

Attitude	% agree	
	N-MESC	Australian-born
If a woman is raped while drunk/affected by drugs, she is at least partly responsible	34*	15
Women often say 'no' when they mean 'yes'	29*	12
If a woman goes into a room alone with a man at a party, it is her fault if she is raped	25*	8
Domestic violence can be excused if the victim is heavily affected by alcohol	22*	7

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

Attitudes to gender roles and relationships

The NCAS also gauges attitudes to gender equality, gender roles and relationships. These attitudes are important because they influence the formation of attitudes that support violence against women (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). People with weak support for gender equality tend to be more likely to hold violence-supportive attitudes (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009; Grubb & Turner 2012; Suarez & Gadalla 2010). Respondents were classified as having 'high', 'medium' or 'low' support for equality in gender roles and relationships based on their responses to a series of eight questions. N-MESC respondents were more than twice as likely to have a low score for attitudinal support for gender equality than the Australian-born respondents (44% v. 21%) and half as likely to have a high score (17% v. 34%).

Responses to violence against women and knowledge of sources of assistance

Interest in how people intend to respond when they witness violence and its precursors is increasing (McDonald & Flood 2012; Powell 2012). This is because the rate of reporting violence to the police and other authorities is low and that much violence takes place beyond the view of those responsible for enforcing the law or organisational regulations. Studies show that social sanctions (i.e. the disapproval of one's peers or positive expectations of respected others) are among the strongest influences on whether people engage in violence or violence-supportive behaviour (Abbey et al. 2006, 2007; Bohner et al. 2006; Brown & Messman-Moore 2009; Fabiano et al. 2003).

The overwhelming majority of N-MESC respondents say that they would take some form of action if a woman they knew was being assaulted by her partner (97%). The proportion is less if the woman is unknown to them (90%). The presence of children makes no difference to intentions. While there are only marginal differences between the Australian-born and N-MESC respondents in overall intentions to intervene, N-MESC respondents are less likely to say that they would physically intervene (Table 7).

Studies show that capacity to intervene and confidence that intervention will make a difference influence whether people take action (Powell 2011). N-MESC respondents are less likely than Australian-born respondents to say they would know where to get help about a partner violence problem (55% v. 58%).

Forty-six percent agree that police response times have improved, not significantly different to the Australian-born respondents (44%).

A slightly smaller proportion of N-MESC respondents than the Australian-born respondents agree that women with disabilities are less likely than other women to be believed when reporting sexual assault (39% v. 43%) (Table 8).

Table 7: Preparedness to intervene

	% agree	
Preparedness to intervene	**N-MESC**	**Australian-born**
If a known woman is being assaulted by her partner	97	98
If an unknown woman is being assaulted	90*	93

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

Table 8: Knowledge of sources of assistance

	% agree	
Knowledge	**N-MESC**	**Australian-born**
Would know where to go to get help regarding a domestic violence problem	55*	58
Police response times have improved	46	44
Women with disabilities are less likely to be believed when reporting sexual assault	39*	43

* Difference between N-MESC and Australian-born is statistically significant, p≤0.01.

N-MESC patterns by gender and age

Similar to the NCAS sample as a whole, N-MESC women are more likely than N-MESC men (but less likely than Australian-born women) to have:

- a high level of understanding that violence against women constitutes a continuum of behaviours, not just physical violence and forced sex (15% v. 9% of men)
- a high level of support for gender equality (22% v. 11% of men).

N-MESC women are less likely to have a high level of attitudinal support for violence (46% v. 55% of N-MESC men).

The influence of age is broadly similar to that in the sample as a whole in that younger people (under 25 years) and older people (over 75 years) are more likely to have a high level of attitudinal support for violence.

Factors influencing attitudes in N-MESC communities

As is the case for the sample as a whole, the main factors influencing attitudes to violence against women in the N-MESC sample are:

- understanding of violence against women (i.e. the extent to which people understood that violence constitutes a continuum of behaviours)
- attitudes to equality in gender roles and relationships.

N-MESC Australians are less likely to have a high level of attitudinal support for violence if they have a high level of understanding and/or a high level of attitudinal support for gender equality.

Demographic factors have less influence on people's attitudes towards violence against women than understanding and attitudes to gender equality. That said, in the sample as whole, heritage (one's own birthplace and the birthplace of one's mother or father) is the second most influential factor on attitudes to gender equality (after gender), the third most important demographic influence on understanding (after age and gender) and the most influential demographic influence on attitudes to violence.

The relative influence of demographic factors included in the survey within the N-MESC sample is similar to the sample as whole, with the top three factors (in order of influence) being:

- the individual respondent's country of birth
- age
- gender.

However, the factors included in NCAS do not explain all of the influence on attitudes and understanding. This means that other factors, not measured in the survey, are also influential (see VicHealth 2014 and Webster et al. 2014 for further discussion).

Effects of time in Australia, generation and proficiency in English

The results suggest that understanding improves, attitudes to gender equality strengthen, and attitudes supportive of violence against women lessen:

- with length of time in Australia (based on comparing results for people arriving before 2005 with those arriving after 2005)
- among those with good self-assessed proficiency in English compared with those with poor proficiency
- among second-generation Australians (i.e. those born in Australia but with one or more parents born overseas) compared with first-generation respondents (those born overseas). Indeed when the results overall are considered (as opposed to the results for each individual question), there were no statistically significant differences between people with one or more parents born in an N-MESC and those with both parents born in Australia in understanding, attitudes to gender equality or attitudes towards violence against women.

Statistical tests were performed to confirm that these results were not due to the composition of Australia's overseas-born population at particular periods of time (e.g. the higher proportion of European migrants among longstanding migrants).

Strengths and limitations of the research

The survey involved a large sample (*n* = 17,500), including 3453 overseas-born respondents, both sufficiently large to be robust statistically. Both the sample as a whole and the N-MESC sample represented a broad cross-section of the Australian and overseas-born populations respectively. Including both landline and mobile interviews meant that a broader range of people were included than would have been the case if only landline interviewing had been used. In particular this approach increased the likelihood of participation of new arrivals to Australia, since this is a group less likely to have a landline (Pennay & Vickers 2013). Additional strategies were adopted to maximise the effective participation of people from N-MESC backgrounds, including bilingual interviewing in eight commonly spoken community languages, having translated versions of the survey instrument and conducting a larger number of 'call-backs' to people from an N-MESC, with the aim of converting contacts into interviews. In 2009 the survey was reviewed by a specialist research organisation to maximise its relevance to N-MESC communities.

It was not possible to analyse results for individual birthplace groups because of the small numbers in each group, hence the decision to aggregate results for all overseas-born respondents from N-MESCs. There is also likely to be ethnic and cultural diversity within birthplace groups. For these reasons, it is important to note that the N-MESC sample is heterogeneous and comprises a number of birthplace groups, with different cultural and demographic characteristics and pre- and post-arrival experiences. The results for the sample cannot be said to apply to any particular group. Caution should be exercised in generalising from the results to any individual N-MESC group at the local level or among the clientele of an individual agency. In this regard, the NCAS N-MESC findings need to be considered in conjunction with existing qualitative research conducted with specific communities, or be supplemented with local-level consultation with minority ethnic groups.

As with all surveys, response bias, the potential distortion of results due to a particular profile of people choosing to partake in the survey, may have affected the survey findings. Because information about the people refusing to participate is unavailable, the impact of response bias cannot be quantified. The response rates for this survey were low (26.9%); however, the rate is comparable to other similar surveys (Kohut et al. 2012).

A range of factors may influence findings when researchers and participants do not share a common cultural heritage. As a result, findings may be an artefact of cultural and language differences (Survey Research Centre 2011). Attitudes surveys may be subject to social desirability bias: respondents giving answers they believe to be socially acceptable, rather than what they actually believe. Such a bias requires a relatively nuanced understanding of the cultural and institutional context in which the research is being undertaken. Accordingly, it is less likely to be exercised by respondents who do not share the culture of the researcher. This would apply particularly to respondents who are recently arrived or who have limited proficiency in English. The steps already described (bilingual interviewing, translated questionnaires) were taken to mitigate these risks). Again, it is not possible to quantify the extent to which these steps influenced findings for the N-MESC or Australian-born samples and the differences between them.

Last, this research found that length of time in Australia and proficiency in English have a significant impact on understanding and attitudes (see section above). These influences are not apparent in the aggregate N-MESC data presented for individual questions.

Explaining the results

The NCAS asks people about their understanding and what views they hold, but not why they hold them. It does not, on its own, allow explanation of results. However, when considered alongside other research, some possible explanations can be considered.

Knowledge, understanding and awareness of violence

The lower level of knowledge, understanding and awareness of violence among people from N-MESC backgrounds is most likely to be due to two factors. First, in some of the countries that new arrivals come from, legislation and programs to respond to and prevent violence against women are not well developed (UN Women 2011). Worldwide, 127 countries still do not explicitly criminalise rape within marriage and many do not have laws prohibiting family violence (UN Women 2011).

Second, in Australia knowledge about violence against women improved since 1995, and this is likely to be partly due to the impact of violence-prevention initiatives, such as reform of the law, awareness raising and media advocacy (VicHealth 2014). However, these initiatives are designed for the population as a whole and may have limited reach into some minority ethnic communities. This may be due to language and cultural differences, or because such messages are promoted through systems that some minority ethnic groups have limited interaction with (e.g. mainstream media).

Attitudes towards violence

As already indicated, understanding of an issue influences attitudes, and this is confirmed in this study: understanding that violence comprises a continuum of behaviours was the strongest influence on attitudes measured in the survey.

Other research shows that attitudes towards violence against women are shaped by three interrelated clusters of factors (VicHealth 2014):

- gender, and the way we understand gender roles, relationships and identities (i.e. what it means to be a man or a woman)
- whether we support violence generally, and whether or not we have been exposed to other forms of violence, such as child abuse or violence in the community
- conditions that intersect or interact with factors related to gender and violence to shape or magnify their influence, for example entrenched social and economic inequality or particular cultural influences.

The N-MESC sample findings confirm the finding of many other studies of an association between gender and attitudes. Women are more likely than are men to have a:

- high level of understanding of violence against women
- high level of support for gender equality.

N-MESC women are less likely than N-MESC men to have a high level of attitudinal support for violence against women. Although the influences of demographic factors on attitudes and understanding is modest overall, gender is among the top three demographic influences.

Similarly, as has been found in many other studies (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009), the findings show that support for gender equality is a critical influence on attitudes to violence. It is second only to people's understanding of violence.

In this and many other respects, patterns in the N-MESC and Australian-born samples are very similar, suggesting that many of the factors influencing attitudes in minority ethnic communities are likely to be similar to those discussed in the main NCAS reports.

As already discussed, demographic factors are less predictive on attitudes and understanding than understanding of violence against women and attitudes to gender equality. Nevertheless, in the sample as a whole the birthplace of the respondent or their parents is:

- among the top three demographic influences on understanding and attitudes to gender equality
- the most influential demographic factor on attitudes to violence against women.

This was also the case for the individual country of birth of respondents in the N-MESC sample.

The findings also have a specific pattern: on some measures there are only small differences between the N-MESC sample and the Australian-born sample, whereas on others the differences are quite large. This is especially the case in the areas of:

- excusing and justifying violence (although it is critical to note that the latter are a very small minority in both samples)
- family privacy (the view that domestic violence is a private matter) and unity (the view that women should stay in violent relationships to keep the family together).
- consent to sexual relations
- attributing some of the blame for violence and sexual assault to the victim.

There are a number of possible explanations for these findings.

Influences prior to arrival in Australia

Prior research has shown that there is significant variation between nations in attitudes towards violence against women, with endorsement of attitudes justifying violence reaching 80% of the population in some countries (Gracia et al. 2008; Lee et al. 2005; Pierotti 2013; Pradubmook-Sherer & Sherer 2011; Vandello et al. 2009; Waltermaurer 2012; Yamawaki & Tschanz 2005). The NCAS findings may reflect this.

Although the N-MESC sample comprises a diversity of country-backgrounds, conditions found to have a negative influence on attitudes (see Flood & Pease 2006, 2009) are more likely to be found in some of the countries from which Australia accepts migrants and refugees. Among these conditions are:

- low levels of literacy, in particular female literacy (UNDP 2013)
- violence and normative support of violence, especially in countries affected by war and civil strife (Kaplan & Webster 2003)
- limited social cohesion and collective self-efficacy, especially in countries affected by economic deprivation and conflict (Kaplan & Webster 2003)
- social and economic marginalisation of groups based on their religious or political associations (Kaplan & Webster 2003)
- gender inequality (UNDP 2013; World Economic Forum 2013) and relatively high levels of attitudinal support for gender inequality (Aboim 2010; Brandt 2011; Steel & Kabashima 2008; Wike et al. 2009)
- limited formal sanctions against violence in the form of legislative and program responses. Violence-supportive attitudes are less prevalent in countries with well-developed legislative responses to violence against women (UN Women 2011).

As already indicated, levels of knowledge and awareness are also relatively low among N-MESC respondents and this has been found to influence attitudes about a range of issues, including violence against women (VicHealth 2014). The attitudinal themes on which there were large differences between the N-MESC and Australian-born samples have been the particular focus of awareness raising and legislative reform in Australia in recent decades (e.g. consent to sexual relations, that violence is against the law regardless of the circumstance).

Experiences in Australia

Although migrants and refugees ultimately do as well, if not better than, the Australian-born on key social and economic indicators (Community Relations Commission 2011), some minority ethnic communities experience a high degree of social exclusion, particularly in the early period of settlement (see, for example, Betts and Healy 2002; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1999; Jupp 2010; Poynting & Noble 2004). This has been found in other research to be associated with a greater inclination to justify and excuse violence (Nash 2005). There are three possible and related reasons for this.

First, members of communities experiencing social exclusion may seek to protect their community from stigma and prejudice by attributing violence to external causes or to causes that lie beyond the control of individual men (Langton 2008; Lucashenko 1996; Nash 2005).

Second, in the community as a whole, there has been an emphasis on holding men accountable when they use violence and increasing women's protection under the law. Such an approach may be hard for women and non-violent men when the perpetrator is from their community. This is because it requires them to engage with a criminal justice system in which some minority ethnic groups have been badly treated (Atkinson 2002). Taking action against a man within one's community may be seen by other community members as threatening the

solidarity of already fragile communities (Nancarrow 2006; Nixon & Cripps 2013). This tendency may be a particular risk for people from refugee backgrounds who may have a lack of trust in systems designed to protect women's safety and hold men accountable (Kaplan & Webster 2003; Pittaway 2004). Justifying or excusing violence may be a way of resolving conflicting beliefs. On one hand, respondents are clearly aware that violence is a serious problem. On the other, they may be concerned that acting on that understanding, by holding men who use violence accountable, could have serious negative impacts for relationships, families and communities.

A third possibility is the negative influence of entrenched racism and oppression on the ways in which men and women in some minority ethnic groups see themselves and each other. Research has found that this may result in people internalising negative views about themselves and other members of their group and can result in people turning upon one another (Lipsky 1987; Pyke 2010). Further, it can lead to individuals lowering expectations of themselves and of the ways they will be treated by others (Lipsky 1987; Pyke 2010), in turn increasing vulnerability to violence. This form of violence is sometimes referred to as 'lateral violence' (see, for example, Australian Human Rights Commission 2011).

There is also some evidence that social marginalisation may work against positive change in cultural norms by increasing the inclination to adhere to existing norms more strongly than may otherwise have been the case, as a means of preserving fragile communities (Yoshihama 2009). As discussed in the following section, some of these norms may increase the risk of violence.

Culture and violence against women

Cultural norms concerning violence and gender relations have been identified as factors contributing to violence against women. These norms, and the structures and practices that support them, are present in almost all groups across the globe in some shape or form (VicHealth 2014). Most countries, including Australia, have some way to go to achieve equitable gender relations (UNDP 2013; World Economic Forum 2013) and safe environments for women (UN Women 2011).

A possible explanation for the difference between the M-NESC and Australian-born samples is that some minority ethnic communities have a high level of support for certain norms measured in the survey. For example, in some groups the emphasis on the support of the family unit is greater than that in the Australian community (Yoshioka & Choi 2005). This is likely to explain the substantial differences between the samples in questions related to family privacy and unity.

These findings do not mean that violence against women can be attributed to the 'cultures' of particular minority ethnic groups. Cultural norms can have different meanings. For example, attitudes endorsing family privacy and unity have been identified as a particular risk for violence against women (Yoshioka & Choi 2005). Such beliefs are particularly strong in collectivist cultures – cultures in which the welfare of the group is seen to be more important than that of the individual (Browning 2002; Yoshioka & Choi 2005). However, so too are attitudes supportive of helping others facing adversity or taking action against those whose behaviour threatens the

wellbeing of the group (Harris et al. 2005). These are attitudes that can help to reduce the risk of violence (Harris et al. 2005). Experts working with minority ethnic communities have argued that particular cultural norms do not inevitably increase the risk of violence. Rather, they have the potential to do so when they are used as part of a 'script' for excusing or justifying its use (Mederos 2012). This is most likely to occur in a climate in which women's rights to equality, respect and safety are compromised.

Culture is not fixed; it changes in response to changing social circumstances. Cultural norms and practices in the countries Australian migrants come from are influenced by many factors (Aboim 2010; Steel & Kabashima 2008; Waltermaurer 2012). These may include those associated with colonisation by European powers; globalisation; and extended periods of war and civil conflict (Alliston 2004; Simister & Mehta 2010). The attitudes of people settling in Australia – as is the case for the Australian-born – are best understood as a product of historical and contemporary influences, rather than being an inherent part of a particular group's 'culture'. This helps not only to understand how particular attitudes are formed, but also suggests that there are strong possibilities for change.

A further problem with viewing attitudes supportive of violence against women as 'cultural' is that it may lead to certain attitudes being justified or excused in the bid to honour and protect 'cultural diversity' or the 'culture' of particular minority groups. Scripts justifying or excusing violence differ in content or emphasis from group to group and understanding these differences can help to address the problem (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009; Yoshihama 2009). However, the policy of the Australian government – and a belief shared by many leaders in minority ethnic communities – is that violence is a choice for which individuals must remain accountable. Likewise, while Australian multicultural policy clearly supports the right of minority ethnic groups to practice their distinctive cultural beliefs, this right sits within an overarching commitment to the rule of law, tolerance and equality, including equality of the sexes (Soutphommasane 2014).

Violence against women undermines cultures and communities (VicHealth 2014). Taking action on the issue is not contrary to a commitment to multiculturalism; rather, it helps to strengthen immigrant communities and cultural diversity in Australia.

Understanding change over time

The survey findings suggest that understanding and attitudes strengthen over time in Australia, among second and subsequent generations and with improving proficiency in English. Given the role played by widely held norms in the perpetration of violence, this is a positive finding. However, it may not necessarily mean that violence prevalence reduces over time, since violence against women is a problem to which multiple factors contribute (UN 2006; VicHealth 2007; WHO & London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 2010).

Research on the impacts of acculturation on health and wellbeing overall shows that the health and wellbeing of migrants worsens with increasing years of settlement (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006; Fuller-Thomson et al. 2011; Jatrana et al. 2013). Researchers believe

that this is due in part to the fact that settlement in a new country may involve the loss of factors that 'protected' health in some countries of origin (e.g. a less sedentary lifestyle), along with exposure to new health risks in Australia (e.g. a greater reliance on processed foods). Although there is no known definitive research on whether violence against women increases or decreases among immigrants as they settle, researchers have proposed that a similar pattern may apply. That is, settlement in a new country can be associated with:

- a loss of cultural norms and practices that may have protected women from violence in some countries of origin (e.g. a greater emphasis on collective responsibility for the welfare of others, collective activity among women and respect for elders) (Yoshihama 2009)
- exposure/heightened exposure to factors in Australia that may increase the risk of violence (Yoshihama 2009). Examples include the wider availability of violent pornography and the sexualisation of women in Australian media and peer and sports cultures (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009).

Other research suggests that among new arrivals from countries with less egalitarian cultures than that prevailing in Australia, violence may commence or increase as part of a 'backlash' from some men as women exercise greater freedoms in Australia (True 2012).

Implications of the findings

People from minority ethnic backgrounds are exposed to many of the same influences on their attitudes as the population as a whole, and many attitudes in the N-MESC and Australian-born samples are similar. This suggests that many of the implications discussed in reports for the survey also apply to N-MESC Australians (see VicHealth 2014; Webster et al. 2014)

Further, as already discussed, other research suggests that the responses of the wider community towards minority ethnic communities may contribute to shaping attitudes and behaviours within minority ethnic communities. For example, international research shows that women from minority ethnic and racial groups who are exposed to violence are viewed less sympathetically and are taken less seriously than are women from majority groups (Esqueda & Harrison 2005). This suggests there is a need to develop prevention activity to strengthen the wider community's knowledge about and attitudes towards violence affecting minority ethnic communities.

Additional issues applying specifically to minority ethnic communities are addressed in the following sections.

Targeting prevention efforts in a range of communities

The second action plan for the National Plan (Department of Social Services 2014) identifies the need for an increased emphasis on preventing violence against women in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The NCAS findings provide support for such a focus. There are substantial differences between the N-MESC sample and the Australian-born on the three overall measures of understanding, attitudes towards violence against women and attitudes towards gender equality.

There is a need for particular emphasis to be placed on those recently arrived, since attitudes, knowledge and understanding varied to a greater degree from the Australian-born among those arriving after 2005. This is also consistent with principles of contemporary settlement policy: that efforts are more likely to be successful if introduced early in the settlement period and that problems should be addressed as soon as possible after arrival so that they do not become enduring barriers to settlement. Four considerations are important in this:

- Both settlement in a new country and positive cultural change are ongoing processes.
- There are likely to be different opportunities to engage new arrivals at different points of the settlement process (e.g. via English language programs soon after arrival, via mainstream schools at a later stage).
- New arrivals themselves will have different capacities to engage with various approaches to prevention at different stages of their settlement process. This will be influenced by factors such as their proficiency in English or the demands of other settlement tasks such as securing employment and housing.
- There is the need to avoid stigmatising or problematising gender relations in new arrival communities, especially as these communities have considerable strengths in regard to maintaining positive gender and family relationships.

Consequently, prevention efforts should not be 'once and for all' activities. Rather, they would involve a range of processes reaching people by different means at different points of the settlement process. Ideally, prevention would be integrated naturalistically into existing processes and settings (e.g. English language classes, orientation programs). As indicated elsewhere in this summary, there is an equal need to identify and support strengths in particular communities, as well as addressing factors that increase the risk of violence against women.

The link between social exclusion and the propensity both to justify or excuse violence and to resist adaptive change found in other research (see above) suggests that there may also be benefits in targeting communities affected by exclusion. This is particularly the case for new and emerging communities (Jupp 2010), although some longstanding migrant groups may be similarly affected (see, for example, Poynting & Noble 2004). Indeed, as argued below, reducing social exclusion affecting some minority ethnic communities has the potential to have a positive impact on attitudes towards gender inequality and violence more generally, as well as to strengthen prevention efforts overall.

Although there are clear gender differences in the N-MESC sample, as is the case in the sample as a whole, these differences are generally modest. That is, when comparing N-MESC men with N-MESC women, a greater percentage of both groups share the same views. This indicates the importance of prevention strategies that reach minority ethnic communities as a whole.

Nevertheless, there has been increasing recognition among those working to prevent violence against women that efforts must focus upon and involve men (Fabiano et al. 2003; Flood 2010). This reflects the facts that most violence is perpetrated by men (ABS 2013a) and that male socialisation is a key factor contributing to violence (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009).

Importantly, it also recognises that the majority of men neither perpetrate nor support violence against women and hence are potential prevention partners. Other research shows that engaging men in this way is vital because peer censure is among the most powerful influences on violent and violence-supportive behaviour (Abbey et al. 2006, 2007; Bohner et al. 2006; Brown & Messman-Moore 2009, Fabiano et al. 2003). The gender differences found in the survey suggest that it will be important to reach men from minority ethnic backgrounds with preventative efforts.

Reaching young people from minority ethnic backgrounds and the contexts that shape their values will also be important. The reasons for this are discussed in greater detail in a forthcoming report on the NCAS youth sample (Harris et al.) In summary these include that:

• young people are more likely than their older counterparts to hold violence-supportive attitudes, a pattern found in both the N-MESC and Australian-born samples

• adolescence and early adulthood are a time when values and relationship practices are being formed. Hence prospects for prevention are particularly strong (Flood & Fergus 2008)

• early adulthood is a life stage involving particular vulnerability to violence for both young men and women (see also ABS 2013a). International research shows that nearly half of all men who disclose having perpetrated sexual assault did so for the first time before reaching the age of 20 years (Fulu et al. 2013b)

• violence has particularly serious consequences for young women given that exposure occurs at a critical life stage. Research shows that adverse experiences in adolescence have the potential to impact negatively on health, especially mental health, well into adulthood.

The relatively positive results for women indicate that there may be benefits in supporting leadership among women in minority ethnic communities to strengthen their role in preventing violence against women.

Appropriate targeting of communities as a whole – as well as the particular subgroups already described – will require a careful and planned approach. It is widely accepted internationally that preventing violence against women involves a multi-pronged approach implemented across sectors (VicHealth 2007). In the case of minority ethnic communities, there will be a need to involve policy settings and services across a number of additional sectors. In addition to various mainstream environments through which new arrivals can be reached, and/or influencing responses to violence against women (e.g. schools, workplaces), this will need to include settings concerned with:

• settlement of new arrivals

• promotion and support of cultural diversity

• prevention of and response to violence against women.

Improving knowledge

Information about the law pertaining to forced sex within a relationship and to consent to sexual relations will be especially important not only to strengthen the rights of

individual women, but because knowledge of the law helps to shift norms at the community level (with social norms in turn having a powerful influence on behaviour). Raising awareness of the prevalence of violence and the fact that it comprises a continuum of behaviours will also be important, especially given the finding of this survey that this understanding influences attitudes to violence against women. Similar to the Australian-born there is a need to increase understanding of the gendered patterns of violence against women.

Shifting attitudes

It is likely that minority communities have factors that both protect against and increase the risk of violence against women and that upon arrival in Australia they are exposed to factors that have both positive and negative impacts on their attitudes. The challenge will be to work with minority ethnic communities to identify and strengthen protective factors while also reducing risks associated with practices and norms in both Anglo-Australian and country-of-origin cultures. There is also a need to support the adjustment in gender roles that may be involved in migration and settlement for some groups.

Priorities for future work will be attitudes and norms excusing and justifying violence, as well as those concerned with family privacy and unity, consent to sexual relations and shifting blame to the victims of violence.

Respondents in the N-MESC sample are less likely to endorse attitudes supportive of gender equality. Addressing this will be important given the finding of the NCAS and other research of a strong relationship between attitudes to gender roles and relationships and attitudes to violence against women.

The change in attitudes over time, generation and with improving proficiency in English, along with research indicating a link between social marginalisation and violence against women, suggests that preventing marginalisation of minority ethnic communities through strong settlement and diversity management policies is likely to help prevent violence.

In the case of communities affected by histories of violence prior to arrival, taking steps to address the impacts of past exposure to violence, such as war-related trauma and torture, may also be important as these experiences can influence people's attitudes and behaviour in the present (Button 2008; Flood & Pease 2006, 2009; Speizer 2010). It is important that this is done while also ensuring that men who use violence against women remain accountable through both informal sanctions (i.e. expectations from the community) and formal sanctions (i.e. by reducing barriers to reporting and applying the law). A barrier to this may be a greater inclination (discussed above) to excuse or justify violence among men who have suffered past adversity or are affected by current stressors. However, many of these adversities are also experienced by women (Pittaway 2004), making it all the more important to protect their right to safety in the present. Moreover, freedom from violence is a basic human right. It is important that the human rights of one group (women and children) are not compromised in a bid to observe the human rights of another (men) (Goonesekere 1998). In planning prevention strategies, there is a need to be mindful of everyone's rights.

Strengthening community responses

N-MESC respondents demonstrate a high level of willingness to assist a woman affected by violence. A significant challenge will be to strengthen their capacity to do so by increasing knowledge of sources of assistance and appreciation of the increasing rigour in police responses. As is the case with the sample as whole, it will also be important to strengthen the role of minority ethnic communities in preventing violence (versus simply responding to it after it has occurred) by also building preparedness to address its known precursors (e.g. controlling behaviours, sexism and disrespect of women) (Powell 2011, 2012).

Conclusions

Attitudes among respondents from N-MESCs follow a similar pattern to those among the Australian-born respondents. Overall, N-MESC respondents have a relatively high level of awareness of violence, but a poor understanding of its gendered patterns and particular dynamics. While relatively small proportions are prepared to justify violence, the proportions endorsing attitudes excusing, trivialising or minimising the problem or blaming the victim are somewhat higher. Like the Australian-born, most N-MESC respondents intend to intervene if they witness violence against women.

Compared with the Australian-born, N-MESC Australians have a lower level of understanding of violence, a greater propensity to endorse violence-supportive attitudes and a lower level of attitudinal support for gender equality. This is especially the case for N-MESC men. Although understanding of violence against women and attitudes to gender equality are the strongest influences on attitudes, birthplace is among the top three demographic factors. This suggests the importance of targeting interventions to minority ethnic communities and the environments supporting the formation of their attitudes.

Evidence from the wider literature indicates that differences like those found in NCAS are not inherent features of the cultures of certain minority ethnic groups. Rather, they are due to a range of factors associated with experiences in countries of origin and asylum, as well as exposure to new risks in Australia.

Working collaboratively with minority ethnic communities to identify and strengthen factors that build positive attitudes and reduce those that increase the risk of violence will be important. Realising the commitment in the second action plan of the National Plan (Department of Social Services 2014) to increase focus on prevention in diverse communities will require a considered, planned approach supported by a range of sectors and organisations.

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