



**The information in this fact sheet is for immigrant and refugee women. It aims to raise awareness about family violence and your health. It also talks about seeking help, where to go, who to contact and what happens when you talk to a health professional about your situation.**

## Talking about family violence

As women, we might want to stay silent about what is happening to us:

- because we don't want to believe it is happening to us
- because talking about it might lead to life changes that are also very frightening
- because we are scared of how our partner/family member (the perpetrator) will respond
- because we want to keep quiet to protect our family and community.

## Describing violence

**'My husband would hit me so that it wouldn't show.**

**He wouldn't let me use the phone, or let me have money.'**

Violence is any behaviour that makes you feel scared, sad, isolated or disconnected from your family or community. It is also behaviour that makes you feel worthless. Violence is also behaviour that threatens the safety, security and wellbeing of your children.

### Violence is

**Physical** – hitting, punching, slapping, pushing and aggression (screaming and yelling).

**Sexual** – rape or forcing you to have sex, forcing you to do sexual acts you don't want to do, unwanted sexual comments or touching (this includes women who are married).

**Emotional or psychological** – putting you down, making you feel stupid, telling others you are useless or stupid, commenting on your physical appearance, swearing at you and calling you names.

**Controlling** – stopping you from being with your family or friends, not allowing you to participate in your community or religious events, threatening you with deportation or taking your children.

**Economic** – keeping money from you, not allowing you to have money of your own.

**Coercive** – using their power over you to make you to do things you don't want to do.

Family violence is the most common form of violence that women experience and almost always, it is men who are violent towards women.

## Family violence is bad for your health

Family violence is the biggest cause of preventable disease and death in women<sup>1</sup>. In Victoria it is the biggest reason for early death, disability and illness in women between the ages of 15 and 44. It is also the biggest contributor to depression and anxiety in women.

Family violence can have serious and long-lasting effects on your physical and mental health. It can affect your social situation, your friendships, your ability to work and be involved in your community and your financial circumstances. This of course can affect your family and your community.

## The health effects of violence

**'If I hide and don't talk, I am only killing myself.**

**If I become mad or if I die, how will this help my kids?'**

If you have experienced or continue to experience family violence you are more likely to have health problems, including;

- unplanned pregnancy
- sexually transmitted infections, including HIV
- heavy periods and period pain
- tummy pain
- problems with eating
- problems with getting pregnant and pregnancy complications
- anxiety and depression
- flashbacks, sleeping problems and nightmares
- phobias and panic attacks
- traumatic and post-traumatic stress disorders
- cancers
- eating disorders
- smoking, drinking and taking drugs (illegal drugs and prescription drugs)
- self-harm and suicide
- physical and emotional harm to children
- illnesses and pain that are ongoing such as asthma, heart disease, obesity, stroke, blood pressure and pain.

## Family violence is illegal in Australia

**Abuse is not a cultural issue – it is a human rights issue**

## Immigrant or refugee women and risk of family violence

Young women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and women living with disabilities are at greater risk of male violence compared to women in the general population<sup>2</sup>.

As an immigrant or refugee woman you also face a number of other barriers that can put your safety more at risk. For example:

- language may be a barrier to getting help. You may also be unfamiliar with services that can help you, such as health and welfare services, legal services and social support services
- you may be feeling socially isolated and dependent on the person who is causing the violence
- you may have had experiences with authorities in the past that make it difficult to trust them or to feel comfortable talking with them
- you may have had other experiences with services that were insensitive to your culture, which made you feel uncomfortable
- you may feel that it is your role or your duty as a wife and a mother to manage your husband's behaviour and to tolerate it
- you may not be certain whether what you are experiencing is violence (this can be particularly difficult with non-physical violence)
- you may be concerned about your residency status and being sent back to your country of origin
- you may be concerned about the welfare of your children
- you may fear being judged by other people in your community.

Seeking support requires courage and determination but it may also be a first step to getting well.

## At the Women's

**'I went to a women's service in the end.**

**I felt more brave to speak with them (than to family and friends), but it took a long time.'**

If you tell the health worker that you are experiencing violence they will ask you a number of questions to find out what support you might need.

The doctor or midwife will ask you about whether the violence is ongoing. They will want to know if you or your children are in immediate danger.

### **If the violence has stopped and you are in no danger of violence continuing**

If you have experienced violence in the past the doctor or health worker will be concerned about how it is affecting your health now. The impacts of violence can last a very long time. Many women will still be having health problems because of violence they experienced many years ago. The doctor will work with you around your current health issues and make sure that any current treatment you need is done with sensitivity.

**Health workers are bound by the rules of privacy and confidentiality. Anything you tell the doctor or midwife about your past experiences of violence will be confidential. However, if you or your children are in immediate danger health professionals have to, by law, discuss your safety with other professionals; this will be done with your involvement where possible.**

### **If the violence is still happening**

The doctor or health worker will want to help you be as safe as possible. If you do not feel safe, the doctor or health worker with your consent will refer you to a social worker or family violence worker, who will support you with information and decision-making.

## Support services and contact numbers

**'I didn't know that everybody has a right to support – even if you are not a permanent resident.'**

### **Dial 000 in an emergency**

**Translating and Interpreting Service**  
(TIS) 131 450

## If you are a patient at the Women's

### **The Women's Interpreter Service**



**T: (03) 8345 3054**

Interpreter

### **Social Work**

The Women's social workers are experts in supporting women who are experiencing family violence.

Questions to ask the social workers.

- How can social work assist and support me and my family?
- What support is available?
- How can I protect my children and myself?
- Where will I live if I decide to leave?
- What will I do about money?
- What are my legal rights?

You can also make an appointment with an outreach lawyer from the North Melbourne Legal Service who can tell you about your legal rights.

**T: (03) 8345 3050**

### **Consumer Advocate**

The consumer advocate wants to hear about any feedback including complaints that you have with staff or services at the hospital. When we receive complaints we act on them immediately to make improvements. We always take complaints seriously. Making a complaint will not impact negatively on your care or the care of your baby. You can even make the complaint after you leave the hospital if you like.

**T: (03) 8345 2291 or 8345 2290**

## Crisis support for all women

Questions to ask crisis support workers.

- What happens if I leave now, what are my options?
- Where can I go?
- How long can I get accommodation for?
- Can my children come?
- What will I do about money?
- Will he find me?
- Will we be safe?
- What support is there to help me to leave?

### Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Freecall 1800 015 188 (24hrs) or **T:** (03) 9322 3555

### Sexual Assault Crisis Line

Freecall 1800 806 292 (24 hrs)

### inTouch (Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence) Freecall 1800 806 292

### Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA House)

**T:** (03) 9635 3610 **Fax:** (03) 9663 9742

**E:** casa@thewomens.org.au

## Legal advice

### North Melbourne Legal Service (NMLS)

You can call NMLS on (03) 9328 1885

### Legal information (from Legal Aid Victoria)



In different languages. You can speak to someone in English or ask for an interpreter.

You can also get this service in these languages:

- العربية / Arabic (03) 9269 0127
- Hrvatski / Croatian (03) 9269 0164
- Ελληνικά / Greek (03) 9269 0167
- Italiano / Italian (03) 9269 0202
- سرف / Persian (03) 9269 0123
- Polski / Polish (03) 9269 0228
- Српски / Serbian (03) 9269 0332
- Українська Мова / Ukrainian (03) 9269 0390

If your language is not listed here, phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450 and ask to be put through to Victoria Legal Aid.

Ask legal services about your legal rights, how can you keep your family safe, how can you get access to money or documents and your residency issues.

### Federation of Community Legal Centres

Visit [www.fclc.org.au](http://www.fclc.org.au) to find a community legal centre near you.

## Information and service advice for immigrant and refugee women

### Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

**T:** 1800 656 421 [www.mcwh.com.au](http://www.mcwh.com.au)

## Support for children

**Kids Helpline** Freecall 1800 551 800

### Online information for young people

[www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com)

## Pack a 'Go Bag' so that you can leave quickly, include:

- important documents such as passports, birth certificates and other identification documents
- medications
- change of clothes for you and your children
- money
- keys
- favourite toys/books.

## Teach your children to dial 000 in an emergency.

### References

- 1 VicHealth (2007, reprinted in 2010), The health costs of violence, Measuring the burden of disease caused by intimate partner violence.
- 2 VicHealth (2007)