

FACT SHEET 1

PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE: GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

WHY IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN A HEALTH ISSUE?

Violence against women is a significant public health issue worldwide.

Defined as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, 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'ⁱ, violence against women impacts negatively on women's and children's physical and mental wellbeing, and limits their access to human rights.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN IN PARTICULAR?

In the Australian context, violence against women occurs across all cultural, religious and socio-economic groups. However, as gender relations are intersected by factors such as age, culture, ethnicity, sexual identity and visa status, women who are marginalised by these factors are more vulnerable to violence and are less likely to have the resources to act and report it.

Language and cultural barriers also limit access to support services for many immigrant and refugee women. Within some ethnic communities, issues such as forced early marriage and child-bearing are a concern for young women.

Women who have experienced war, civil unrest and/or dislocation in their countries of origin have also been more vulnerable to rape and sexual assault at the hands of the State.

HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

Violence against immigrant and refugee women in Australia can be prevented.

However, the complexity of women's experiences of violence highlights the need for culturally-appropriate strategies that address the core issue of gender equality by working to improve the status of women.

It is equally important that violence prevention efforts address the specific and diverse situations of immigrant and refugee women, within the cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts of their lives.

HOW IS PRIMARY PREVENTION DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PREVENTION STRATEGIES?

Primary prevention targets whole populations and/or high-risk groups with the aim of preventing violence *before* it occurs.ⁱⁱ

Traditionally, efforts to prevent violence against women have been secondary (early intervention) and tertiary (an intervention implemented after violence has occurred) in nature.

Whilst it is essential that women experiencing violence are supported, addressing violence in its early stages, or after it has been perpetrated, maintains women's overall risk of violence and its negative health outcomes.

Primary prevention attempts to change the culture that allows violence against women to occur in the first instance.

GOOD PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR CULTURALLY-APPROPRIATE VIOLENCE PREVENTION EFFORTS INCLUDE:ⁱⁱⁱ

1. **Immigrant and refugee women** should be at the **forefront** of violence prevention efforts.
2. **Community consultation** needs to be a regular component of prevention efforts. Identify leaders to engage and provide feedback during evaluation.
3. **Effective leadership** will facilitate community participation in initiatives. Leadership also needs to be balanced and representative of men and women from immigrant and refugee communities.
4. Prevention messages and strategies should be **specifically tailored** for each individual community, guided by cultural norms and within an appropriate and meaningful cultural context.
5. Messages must be **positive** and focus on the importance of respectful gender relations and healthy family relationships.
6. Prevention messages need reinforcement using **different mediums**.
7. **Bilingual** female and male community workers need to be extensively involved in prevention strategies.
8. Strategies should recognise **all facets of social diversity**: age, gender, culture, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual identity and religion.
9. To remain culturally relevant, strategies need to undergo **continuous improvement**.
10. Violence prevention efforts require **long-term funding** to generate **lasting outcomes**.

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ⁱ United Nations. 1993. *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*. UN Resolution 48/104. Proceedings of the 85th Plenary Meeting, United Nations General Assembly, Geneva. Accessed on 8 March 2011 from <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

ⁱⁱ VicHealth. 2007. *Preventing violence before it occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria*. VicHealth: Carlton South. Available from <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~//media/ProgramsandProjects/MentalHealthandWellBeing/DiscriminationandViolence/PreventingViolence/framework%20web.ashx>

ⁱⁱⁱ Poljski C. 2011. *On Her Way: Primary prevention of violence against immigrant and refugee women in Australia*. MCWH: Melbourne.