

WALKING ON A TIGHT ROPE UPON MIGRATION; CROSS CULTURAL MEDIATION AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper will discuss and explore the push and pull factors involved in migration patterns, the impact of migration on New Zealand society and the settlement support that is available. Migration has changed demographic trends in New Zealand cities in the last two decades. In main centres such as Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch new settler communities are growing in size, bringing rich cultural diversity and social complexities at the same time. The 2006 Census shows that the fastest growing population is Asian groups with the Auckland region hosting the highest proportion of new settlers.

Refugee and migrant groups face multiple stressors coping in a new society. Of concern in new communities is the rise of cases of Family Violence. Migration poses many challenges for families such as changes in traditional roles, language barriers and lack of knowledge about New Zealand health, education and social systems. These are all factors involved in rise in Family Violence. To address this concern in the Auckland region refugee communities are working on a “Reducing Family Violence in Refugee Communities” project in collaboration with central government and non governmental organisations.

The project is being implemented in partnership with refugee communities, using a train the trainers’ model through interpreters. Community engagement includes with women groups, youth groups, religious leaders, elders and community leaders. Workshops include discussions about migration journeys, dreams and aspirations for the safety and wellbeing of children, families, communities and future generations to come. The project offers a range of training in the areas of media management, working with victims of family violence, working and liaising with the NZ Police and Child Youth Family Services

I. Introduction

The founding mandate of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as “persons who are outside their country and cannot return because of a well-substantiated fear of persecution as a result of factors related to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group” (UNHCR 2001).

Over 50 years have passed since the international refugee convention came into being, and since then the composition of refugees and their countries of origin have significantly changed. However, conflicts caused by underdevelopment and other factors linked with the widening gap between the rich and the poor, still remain the leading causes for the displacement of people and their becoming refugees.

New Zealand is a signatory to the Refugee Convention and has been hosting refugees since World War II. It is currently one of only a few countries in the world which have refugee resettlement programmes (New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS): 2001). With globalisation, the ethnicity and cultural background of refugees has considerably changed during these fifty decades, and particularly in recent years

The current immigration trend suggests that the number of refugees arriving in New Zealand from Non English Speaking and less developed countries is likely to rise over the coming years.

Refugee resettlement is a complex process. Burnett (1998:3) suggests that "Formulating a definition of refugee settlement raises various theoretical issues which have direct policy implications". Due to the complexity of the resettlement process, resettling countries have to date failed to agree on common indicators for gauging integration of refugees into the receiving societies. However, what all resettling countries have in common is the universal acknowledgment of the importance of cohesive families in the resettlement process.

Refugee experiences can be classified into four different levels: the pre refugee experience; the flight process; the experience in the first country of refuge or camp life; and the settlement or integration into society in the second country of resettlement. Marginalisation, exclusion, poverty and disempowerment are the key features of the refugee experience. These processes are characterised by loss, grief and trauma which present several challenges including increased family violence in the resettlement process.

Family violence in its wider interpretation is a social problem, which negatively impacts on the stability of families and the social development of children, which is why violence eradication has been, become one of the prime goals for New Zealand social development agencies such as NZ Police, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Health.

It also is a key objective of the New Zealand Health Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2000) and is one of the 13 medium term health priorities identified in the New Zealand Health Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2001). The Ministry of Social development has as well identified it as one of its strategic priorities. The Development Family Violence Prevention Strategy *Te Rito* is one of the mechanisms in which the Ministry has devised to increase the publics' awareness of family violence (Ministry of Social Development, 2004).

While there is little research on family violence in refugee communities in New Zealand, there is considerable research in the international literature to suggest that refugee and migrant families require focused reducing family violence interventions (Alwishewa, 1996; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996; Central Sydney Area Health Service (CSAHS), 1995; Heise, Pitanguy et al. 1994; Kavanagh & Kaur, 1996; Korbin, 1995; Moore, 2001; New York City Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, 2004; Office of the Status of Women (OSW) 1995; Seitz, & Kaufman, 1994; 1995; 1997).

The World report on violence and health (WHO, 2002) suggests the application of an ecological model which takes into account the biological, social, cultural, economical and political contexts to understand the complexity of family violence. The model has four levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal (Table 1).

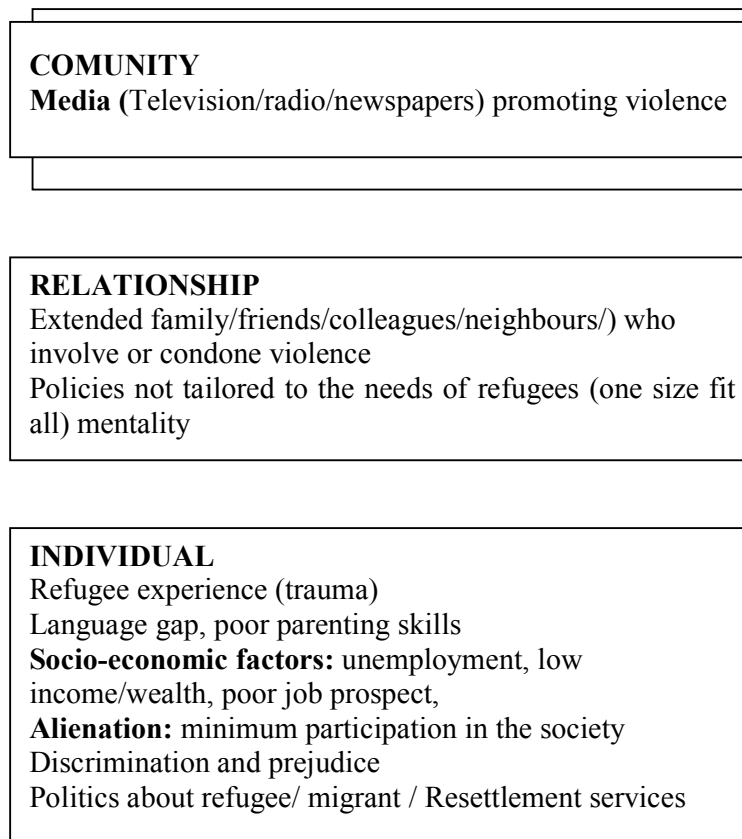


Figure 1: Table 1: Factors which increase the risk of perpetrating violence and becoming a victim of violence

Adapted from the World Health Organisation ecological model (WHO, 2002)

Based on the above ecological model, number of factors (table 1) has been identified to perpetuate the prevalence of family violence among refugee families. These factors were identified through community needs analysis and an explanation why the factors were believed to foster violence in the family will be discussed following section.

Changing roles in the families: changes in women's roles in the early resettlement period can have a significant impact on family dynamics as refugee men come to terms with the demands on women outside of the home and women's greater social and economic power.

Communication break breakdown: the language gap between parents and their children is widening faster, as children pick up oral English faster than their parents while losing their mother tongue faster. These widening cultural and language gaps are more common with families where the children were born in New Zealand or have come to the country at very young ages.

Refugee related factors: Anecdotal experience suggests that refugee families, who have been exposed to incidences of conflicts and violence in their countries of origin, have higher chances violence occurring in their homes than the families who have not gone through similar patterns of conflict. Based on it is also a common trend for families of domestic violence victims to suffer and become further victimized in the hand of authorities, for example, the police, immigration, children welfare groups; , schools, and other community based and Government institutions. In such cases, because we remain obscured from the realities in the families and the factors, which triggered the violence, we are often forced to deal with the consequence while ignoring other circumstances impinging on the family which trigger violence.

While building on the above model refugee women are a particularly vulnerable to violence due a variety of reasons:

- Lack family and community support;
- Lack of familiarity with laws (prohibiting domestic violence) in receiving societies;
- Their partner's violent behaviour as a consequence of the trauma in the course of his refugee experience;
- Low English proficiency and limited access to information to the resources available to them to leave a violent relationship (e.g. housing, income support). Low English also prevents from accessing legal and social support •
- Lack of confidence to seek support from the police and legal personnel in family matters. Their diminished confidence is the result of their negative experiences with law enforcement authorities in their countries-of-origin;
- Cultural constraints: many refugee women come from traditional societies where there are strong cultural prohibitions against separation and divorce. The pressure on women to 'keep the family together' may also be particularly strong given the degree of trauma and dislocation to which refugee women have been subject to.
- Women who are experiencing psychological difficulties associated with their traumatic experiences may also fear being alone.
- For some women, an unsatisfactory union may be better than having no adult relationship.

New Zealand Experience

The considerable research already undertaken on family violence prevention provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of particular prevention/ intervention efforts (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). While there is some agreement on the broader

elements of an effective multi-faceted approach, there is less certainty on the precise detail (i.e. which specific services, programmes and other initiatives are most effective in preventing violence in families and/or which particular elements of these initiatives work well, for whom and in what circumstances). Despite this, there appears to be a high level of consistency across information sources on the broad elements of an effective multi-faceted approach to family violence prevention. These include (Ministry of Social Development, 2002):

Interagency- approach to dealing with family violence

To addressing incidences of violence key agencies in New Zealand have collaborated on a joint initiative to address family violence.

Project profile

The Refugee Reducing Family Violence Project is an Auckland region-wide inter-sectoral primary prevention project aimed at preventing and reducing violence in interpersonal relationships in refugee families and communities. The project was initiated in 2006 by male community leaders of the Afghani, Ethiopian, Iranian and Somali communities in collaboration with other government departments including health, education, social services and the police, refugee communities and the NGO sector. The project started working initially with the Afghan, Ethiopian, Iranian and Somali communities in Auckland and has extended to other communities including Arab groups. The focus is on prevention, in particular on raising awareness of family violence and changing the social attitudes, beliefs and systems that sustain violence. Underpinning this project is the need for strengthening community action.

The partners involved in the Refugee Family Violence Prevention programme include: Settling In, Family & Community Services - Ministry of Social Development, Child, Youth, and Family Services, City Councils, New Zealand Police and Housing New Zealand, Auckland Regional Public Health Service, District Health Board Family Violence Intervention Projects, Ministry of Education, schools, Group Special Education, NGOs, Community leaders, Human Rights Commission, Refuge and crisis response services and New Zealand Relationship Services

Vision guiding the implementation of the project

“Creating communities where people can live free from violence in their homes, have healthy and respectful relationships and where the values, attitudes, beliefs and systems that support violence are no longer tolerated.”(Community Leaders, 2006)

Objectives

The Refugee Reducing Family Violence Project focuses on making positive changes in the social environment of refugee groups through raising awareness, changing community perceptions about the acceptability of violence, promoting community integration, health, well-being and self-esteem and addressing social and environmental factors which may promote violence (e.g. poverty, human rights issues and the promotion of violence in mainstream culture).

The Refugee Family Violence Prevention Programme uses the Family Violence Prevention Public Education Framework

The purpose of the vision is to provide individuals, communities and society as a whole with the tools to recognise and change attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards family violence.

Overarching goals

Goal One: Changing the underlying attitudes, beliefs and systems that support violent and abusive behaviour.

Goal Two: Creating a community that actively intervenes to stop perpetrators and protect victims from violence and abuse.

Implementation Strategies

The project was guided by the strategies built upon the *Te Rito Family Violence Prevention Education Framework*. *Figure 2 shows this framework*.

The programme employed public education awareness raising strategies to increase awareness of violence in identified communities by:

- Promoting a consistent message that violence in families is unacceptable
- Promoting healthy relationships and safe behaviour in families with a particular emphasis on the safety and wellbeing of children
- Promoting healthy gender roles and non-violent conceptualisations of masculinity
- Raising general awareness of the nature, causes and effects of various forms of violence in families
- Encouraging individuals to take safe and responsible action when they are aware of violence in families

Project components

The Refugee Reducing Family Violence programme has two components:

I. Region-Wide Co-ordination: Co-ordination of refugee family violence prevention initiatives by collaborating with key stakeholders through co-ordination and ongoing agreed activities, including capacity-building in family violence support agencies

II. Refugee Community Awareness Campaign: This involves a range of strategies and approaches to build awareness within the relevant refugee communities. The project offers useful insights into setting up and delivering family violence prevention programmes in ethnic communities.

III. Learning Outcomes

The key learning from the project are:

- Family Violence projects in refugee and migrant communities need to be managed with extreme sensitivity.
- There can be a perception that ethnic communities are being singled out for such programmes. Community engagement and ownership is essential to the acceptability of the project.
- The collaboration between mainstream providers and ethnic community representatives is essential in developing acceptable culturally appropriate and responsive programmes.
- Parenting programmes present a positive and non-threatening vehicle for initiating discussion and addressing family violence issues in ethnic communities. These programmes have been received very favourably in the Auckland region.
- Designing culturally, religiously and linguistically appropriate programmes for the 40 plus ethnic groups represented in Auckland refugee communities is complex.
- Apply strengths-based approach which includes linking the family violence awareness campaign to improving resettlement support for newcomers.
- There is a risk that family violence prevention activity in the refugee sector may expose individuals to increased danger if suitable support and safety mechanisms are not available in family violence protection agencies in conjunction with the prevention programmes that are being run.

IV. Community Perspectives

- The strong message from ethnic communities is that dialogue, trust development, and training needs to happen before effective family violence prevention and intervention services can be developed and implemented. This is vital to the success of family violence prevention programmes and will involve lengthy and sensitive processes of engagement with communities.
- Provide services for each member of the family – in our case, men, women, and youth (0-18) – but in established communities in which grandparents, and other extended family are present, they too should be invited to participate in order to enhance the potential gains of the intervention beyond the time that the families are participating in the program
- Set up non-hierarchical structures so that people with whom we work can see alternative approaches to those based on gender, education, class, etc. Insist that all people who work in this area (and very specially those who work with women survivors and male batterers) engage in ongoing self-reflection regarding their own power, privilege, values, history, beliefs, etc., so that we don't inadvertently recreate the abusive structures that brought the families to our programs in the first place

- Involve participants (including the youth!) in developing new topics, activities, research studies, advocacy, community education, etc. Use cultural traditions, values, ideas, etc. to enhance the intervention, always being careful not to “romanticize” and deify the culture, as a critical lens is necessary to figure out what elements of our cultures are worth keeping, and which need to be discarded.
- Make sure that the intervention reflects the ethnic, racial, cultural realities of the people who will participate – this of course requires that we not only be involved with and knowledgeable about the local community, but also that we take into consideration the subgroups present within it. figure out what elements of our cultures are worth keeping, and which needs to be discarded.
- Make sure that the intervention reflects the ethnic, racial, cultural realities of the people who will participate – this of course requires that we not only be involved with and knowledgeable about the local community, but also that we take into consideration the subgroups present within it.
- The increasing numbers of families’ individuals from many countries of these people may need linguistic and culturally specific interventions.
- Approach the work not from a service provider’s perspective (even if that is what we actually do), but from a social change perspective. Changing our lens will radically change our stances, ideas, expectations, and approach to the work at hand, not to “romanticize” and deify the culture, as a critical lens is necessary to figure out what elements of our cultures are worth keeping, and which need to be discarded.
- Make sure that the intervention reflects the ethnic, racial, cultural realities of the people who will participate – this of course requires that we not only be involved with and knowledgeable about the local community, but also that we take into consideration the subgroups present within it.
- The increasing numbers of families’ individuals from many countries of these people may need linguistic and culturally specific interventions.
- Approach the work not from a service provider’s perspective (even if that is what we actually do), but from a social change perspective. Changing our lens will radically change our stances, ideas, expectations, and approach to the work at hand.

V. Best Practices

A community worker should be guided by a framework that requires individuals and families be considered (i.e. studied, served, understood) always within the context, in which they find themselves. Thus, it must consider the ways in which their culture, ethnicity, social class, immigration status, gender, religion, history, sexual orientation, level of education, etc. affect their worldview and the ways they interact with and respond to systems, laws, agencies, organizations, etc. In other words, rather than attempting to judge people based only on the individual’s behaviours, one should first attempt to understand the environment in which they find themselves and the forces that are at work in their world. As a result of this stance, one cannot focus on individual pathology without also understanding the ecology in which it happens, the role of societal norms in its occurrence, and the systems that may need to be transformed. Other distinctive perspectives of community are that they tend to work with groups of people and systems rather than individuals; approach interventions and research from a strengths perspective (as opposed to a deficit model); consider the role of power in all formulations

and interventions that attempt; focus on prevention strategies; and generally try to use one's work and self as tools for social justice and change.

Community psychology is very useful to understand the phenomenon of domestic violence given the emphasis on understanding the role of culture, gender, power, and societal norms on individuals and groups within a particular society. Rather than looking at the individual pathology of women who have been battered as some of the social psychologist have tried to do it in the past, or even the dynamics within a couple (as others have focused on), community psychology provides the framework of a society in which gender-based oppression is the result of social norms that not only accepts violence in its many forms, but at the same time supports an imbalance of power based on gender. From there it is not difficult to understand how, in order to eradicate domestic violence, societal norms (at the same time as individuals) need to be changed.(Perilla J, 2006)

Appendix One:

Figure 2: outcomes and strategies on the *Te Rito Family Violence Prevention Education Framework*.

Outcome	Strategy
Communities that have a zero tolerance to family violence	<p>Utilising social marketing techniques through media and community-based seminars:</p> <p>Increase awareness and understanding of definition, nature, causes and effects of family violence and New Zealand’s legislation regarding family violence</p> <p>Promote the message that:</p> <p>Violence in families is unacceptable, all people have the fundamental right to be safe and to live free from violence, and perpetrators of violence should be held accountable for their violent behaviour and accepts responsibility for changing their behaviour.</p>
Communities that actively intervene to stop perpetrators and protect victims of family violence	<p>Promote values of family, respect and collective responsibility in preventing violence in families and the benefits of families living free from violence (eg, better health, employment and educational outcomes for families).</p> <p>Prioritise solutions that promote wellbeing, safety and support for children and young people.</p> <p>Encourage open and solution-focused discussion and debate within communities about violence in families.</p> <p>Encourage and support community leaders to develop and deliver innovative language and culture-appropriate models and solutions to family violence in their communities, to support existing community and religious leaders in the family violence prevention field and to encourage other leaders to address family violence issues in their communities.</p>

<p>Communities that are strong, well-engaged and well-linked to health and social services</p>	<p>Focus on building on existing family strengths when developing and delivering family violence prevention services and encourage and support mosques and other cultural and community groups to further develop and deliver family support services.</p> <p>Ensure that quality family violence prevention services are available and accessible to families; particularly those that focus on developing effective parenting and communication skills.</p> <p>Ensure that family violence prevention services are responsive to the diverse needs of various communities and inform families about available family violence prevention and family support services.</p> <p>Encourage family violence prevention services to work with communities to address the needs of families.</p> <p>Strengthen specific communities' connections to informal family and community support networks and encourage leaders to reach out to families who are not well connected to their communities or other sources of support.</p>
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