

**Submission
No 63**

**INQUIRY INTO CAPTURING DATA ON FAMILY VIOLENCE
PERPETRATORS IN VICTORIA**

Organisation: Centre for Multicultural Youth

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***INQUIRY INTO CAPTURING DATA ON FAMILY
VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS IN VICTORIA***

***Submission from the Centre for Multicultural Youth
June 2024***

Executive Summary

To achieve the stated priority of Victoria's *Free from Violence Second Action Plan (2022-2025)* to "strengthen intersectional approaches across all programs and the prevention system" we must better understand how diverse cohorts are using, at risk of using, and/or are impacted by family violence.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) work with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. We deliver services and programs across Victoria that support young people and families from migrant and refugee communities impacted by family violence and those using or at risk of using violence. In this work, we rely on data to support the delivery of tailored supports, for program development, and to inform our capacity building and advocacy work.

Current gaps in family violence data on refugee and migrant communities limits the capacity of services and governments to adequately meet the needs of these diverse communities and young people. Data gaps signal issues with how guidance and practice relating to data collection with diverse communities are being implemented. This has implications for the effectiveness of policy development and investment in this area, and our capacity to deliver on meaningful change in the long term.

To address current gaps and challenges with capturing data on people who use violence from diverse communities, including young people and those from refugee and migrant backgrounds, CMY recommend that the Victorian Government:

1. Review screening and early identification for young people who are using violence, and information sharing across services working with this cohort, to improve early intervention and prevention.
2. Implement and enforce national family violence framework definitions and models to support consistent data collection and sharing across jurisdictions.
3. Increase transparency around how data on people who use violence is being used by government.
4. Support service implementation of existing data collection guidance on cultural and language diversity.
5. Develop and share good practice guidance to support the collection and use of culturally responsive data collection across the family violence sector.
6. Work with communities, including young people, to deliver community education programs that address stigma, increase community awareness and normalise discussions of family violence within refugee and migrant communities.
7. Fund ongoing research to better understand the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who use or are at risk of using family violence.

Background

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Committee on the Inquiry into Capturing Data on Family Violence Perpetrators in Victoria.

CMY is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. Our purpose is to ensure that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have every opportunity to succeed in Australia. CMY believes diversity is a cornerstone of Australia's success; respect for everyone's human rights is essential for a fair and equal society; and that everyone should be able to feel like they belong and can participate fully. This is reflected in CMY's 30 years of working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, in order that they might become connected, empowered, and influential Australians.

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds deserve to have their unique experiences of family violence listened to, recognised, and responded to. This submission is informed by CMY's experience in working with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, their families and communities, and the services that work them, as well as our expertise in delivering CMY's Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH) program and Speak Up, a primary and early intervention project designed to promote gender equity among multicultural young people in Victoria. We also draw on our expertise from having researched and published the '[I Need to Know You're Safe' Framework](#), with Anglicare Victoria, presenting the latest practice for engaging multicultural young people experiencing family violence.

In preparing this submission CMY spoke with multicultural youth workers engaged in supporting our work with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, including staff engaged in direct support for adolescents identified as people using violence in the home.

Supporting evidence for this submission can be found in recent CMY publications on this topic, including:

- Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2023, Submission to the survey on 'The next stage of Victoria's work to end family violence'. 22 February 2024.
- Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2023, "[Better the devil you know than the system you don't understand": Creating better outcomes for newly arrived young people experiencing family violence](#)". Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Multicultural Youth.

1. What data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators is collected in Victoria?

Data on people who use family violence provided to us in our capacity as a service provider is commonly collected by courts, support services (e.g. Orange Door Network) and by referring agencies, including mental health providers, schools, counsellors and general practitioners. This data varies widely, depending on the nature and type of referral and the service from which it is collected, but typically includes quite detailed demographic data about the perpetrator and their history of program or service interaction, as well as relevant legal information and details.

Early identification and prevention for young people

A key challenge as a new service provider, with CMY's AVITH service model, has been our limited access to data about young people who have used or are at risk of using violence referred to us. We understand that under existing protocols, services must be recognised *specialist* family service providers working with adult perpetrators to access data (e.g. offending histories, trauma, histories with services) and to access data sharing systems. In order to meet the criteria for this 'specialist' status, services must work with adult perpetrators. However, the lack of access to information about young people who are using violence can create barriers to services understanding client needs and effective tailoring supports and interventions.

We are also concerned about how a lack of available data, especially on early indicators, may be limiting early intervention and prevention work with young people. We believe there is a gap in data about those at risk of using violence or who are using violence but are not visible through our court or other 'crisis intervention' systems such as the police. Most of the data on those who use violence comes from our courts and referral services. This means our data is specifically about those who have already reached crisis stage, where the violence is so pronounced that it reaches court. We would like to see more data around early indicators, especially for young people and other diverse cohorts. We believe this is incredibly important for understanding and developing more, and more effective, early intervention and prevention strategies.

Recommendation 1: Review screening and early identification for young people who are using violence, and information sharing across services working with this cohort, to improve early intervention and prevention.

We recommend that the Victorian Government work with specialist service providers to review screening and early identification for young people who are using violence. This review should investigate how information sharing across services can be strengthened where there are high risk levels to improve early intervention and prevention.

2. How is the current data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators used in Victoria?

CMY use referral data on family violence perpetrators to inform targeted care plans and support to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families. We typically do this in partnership with other organisations and services.

We also use deidentified perpetrator data available from public sources, including the Crime Statistics Agency, Respect Victoria, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and others, to inform our program development. This data is used to target services and outreach in specific locations or to specific population cohorts (e.g. older male siblings), and to support our capability building work and advocacy in this area.

Consistent language and reporting

One area for improvement in perpetrator data usage is through strengthening national consistency and standards around measures, data collection and sharing processes. For example, a practical challenge with information sharing is working with interstate entities. Challenges have arisen when attempting to gain interstate information about a person's history of offending and whether an intervention order already exists. This limits our understanding and ability to respond to the risks and needs to adequately provide support of clients.

A related challenge is the lack of agreed national family violence definitions that are consistently applied across services and agencies across this area. This results in different understandings of what is family violence, and subsequently what is criminalised and required to be shared. This can result in jurisdictional issues with data sharing. For example, in Victoria coercive control is recognised as a criminal offence whereas in New South Wales it is yet to be criminalised, as such this information may not be shared meaning an accurate picture of a perpetrator cannot be obtained.¹

Recommendation 2: Implement and enforce national family violence framework definitions and models to support consistent data collection and sharing across jurisdictions.

We recommend the Victorian Government adopt and implement terms and definitions of family violence from the National Plan (to end violence against women and children) to improve data collection, reporting and use across jurisdictions.

The Victorian Government should also advocate nationally for the inclusion of non-government organisations in national data-sharing schemes. This was proposed, for example, in the National Attorney Generals Framework for Family Violence 2021, which recommended "non-government organisations, such as specialist family violence services," be considered for inclusion as Authorised Information Sharing Entities (AISEs) under the National Framework.²

¹ Parliament of Victoria. "Coercive Control." Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/news/justice/coercive-control/>; New South Wales Government. "Coercive control and the law." Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/family-and-relationships/coercive-control/the-law>.

² Australian Government Attorney-General's Department. National Strategic Framework for Information Sharing Between the Family Law and Family Violence and Child Protection Systems. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government Attorney-General's Department. <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/national-strategic-framework-information-sharing-between-family-law-and-family-violence-and-child-protection-systems>.

Data transparency

Another way the use of this data could be improved is by addressing concerns regarding the lack of transparency between government and services about the end use of this data. A lack of clarity about where and how data is being used can have numerous adverse effects. For example, this can limit the capacity of services to confidently and transparently gather consent from service users, which undermines confidence in the service and impacts on the quality of data collected. Additionally, it can create doubt or questions about the necessity and benefits of capturing and sharing data, with potential to impact data quality. Finally, without input and feedback from those services collecting the data about how and when it is used to drive policy development and investment, we miss an opportunity to better understand and explore possible ways to improve and strengthen data use and impact.

Recommendation 3: Increase transparency around how data on people who use violence is being used by government.

We recommend that the Victorian Government increase transparency around how data is being used to drive policy development and investment for people who use or are at risk of using violence and people impacted by violence. As part of this, we recommend that the Victorian Government engage with services to learn what is needed to strengthen data collection and sharing practices.

3. What additional data on the profile and volume of family violence perpetrators should be collected in Victoria?

Gaps in cultural and language diversity data of people who use violence is a key concern for CMY. This data informs meaningful and targeted service delivery to meet identified need, the development of tailored programs for specific cohorts, and effective capability building and advocacy work. We also see the lack of qualitative and long term data captured about people who use family violence as areas for further consideration.

Cultural and language diversity data

To achieve the stated priority of Victoria's *Free from Violence Second Action Plan (2022-2025)* to "strengthen intersectional approaches across all programs and the prevention system" we must understand how diverse community groups, such as young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, are using, at risk of using, and/or are impacted by family violence. To gather the data necessary for this a number of things must be addressed:

1. Guidance on collecting and reporting data on cultural and language diversity must be consistently applied.
2. Culturally responsive practice, including in relation to the collection and use of data on cultural and language diversity, must be strengthened.
3. Education to address stigma and increase awareness of family violence within multicultural communities must be delivered with community.
4. Research is needed to better understand the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who use or are at risk of using family violence.

Data collection guidance

CMY continue to support the guidance contained within the Victorian Family Violence Data Collection Framework in relation to capturing data on CALD communities. However, we remain concerned that “the Guidelines are not consistently applied across the sector”.³ As we have previously noted:

“There is currently no comprehensive data on the rates of family violence experienced by newly arrived young people, or refugee and migrant young people more broadly, living in Victoria. Evidence tells us that one-third of women from refugee and migrant backgrounds have experienced family violence, with migration related controlling behaviours being the most prevalent form (91%). There are also indications that adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) is on the rise...However, we still do not know how this data relates specifically to newly arrived young people, or even those from migrant or refugee backgrounds more broadly.”⁴

While there is a significant volume of data collected and reported on people who use violence and are at risk of using violence⁵, we know there are gaps in relation to data for those with intersectional identities. The Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor has identified “disaggregated data on perpetrators is much more limited for refugee and migrant communities, LGBTIQ+ people and disability status”.⁶ A lack of data on these diverse cohorts limits the ability for services and government to understand and respond to their needs, and to effect meaningful change in this area.

Recommendation 4: Mandate services to collect data on cultural and language diversity and other intersectional backgrounds.

We recommend that the Victorian Government consider mandating the use of existing data collection frameworks to ensure more consistent data relating to cultural and language diversity, and other intersectional identities, is collected. Data collection should be regularly audited to identify areas for additional support and quality improvement.

Culturally responsive practice

Data gaps for some diverse community groups may be attributed to the limited number of specialist services that work with people of these intersectional identities and, relatedly, hesitancy among these service users to access mainstream services due to concerns they will not be responsive to their needs.⁷ Collecting data with refugee and migrant families and young people, both as victim-survivors and as those at risk of or using

³ Centre for Multicultural Youth. Submission to the survey on ‘The next stage of Victoria’s work to end family violence’, Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Multicultural Youth, March 2023.

⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth. “Better the devil you know than the system you don’t understand” - Creating better outcomes for newly arrived young people experiencing family violence. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Multicultural Youth, March 2023. https://cmy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CMY-Family-Violence_Report_FINAL.pdf.

⁵ This includes publicly available data such as that captured by Respect Victoria’s Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform and the Crime Statistic Agency’s Family Violence Data Portal.

⁶ Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. Monitoring Victoria’s family violence reforms. Available at <https://www.fvrim.vic.gov.au/monitoring-victorias-family-violence-reforms-service-response-perpetrators-and-people-using-violence-within-family/evidence-base-perpetrator-interventions>

⁷ Royal Commission into Family Violence. Report and Recommendations 99.

violence, requires that workers are equipped to have conversations that safely and effectively traverse potential social, cultural and language barriers.

CMY consultations about data collection with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds have shown that while young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a diverse cohort with different needs and preferences there are some shared barriers to data collection:⁸

- Language and literacy barriers.
- Confusion regarding end uses of data.
- Privacy concerns.
- Unfamiliarity with rights and distrust of services and processes.
- Digital and socioeconomic inequity.

In 2024, CMY and Anglicare published "'I need to know you're safe': A youth-informed framework for engaging multicultural young people experiencing family violence".⁹ The report shared the lived experience, needs and challenges of multicultural young people when accessing the family violence service system and identifies how the wider service system can better support their engagement.

As captured in this report, it is our experience that sometimes workers are not asking the right questions to be able to obtain open and accurate information from young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families about experience of family violence. For example, some young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds may be unlikely to disclose experiencing family violence when asked directly due to shame, stigma and fear, however if you were to ask, 'do you feel safe at home', they may be more likely to share.¹⁰

We also know from our work that many young people and multicultural families and communities may feel more comfortable sharing their information with services in more informal ways, with people who can relate to their experience, including peers and bicultural workers, and outside of more formal or 'clinical' settings or in interactions that feel like 'checkbox' processes.

Guidance and support to develop cross-cultural, youth-centred practice when working with young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds is necessary to capture better family violence data. This guidance needs to support workers to confidently ask sensitive questions in ways that recognise the diversity of young peoples' experiences and promote the safe and confident sharing of personal information and stories.

⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth. "Data? It is everything about you? Collecting Data with Migrant and Refugee Young People: Insights from Young People and Workers". Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Multicultural Youth, forthcoming 2024.

⁹ Centre for Multicultural Youth "'I Need to Know You're Safe' Framework". Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2024. <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/i-need-to-know-youre-safe-framework/>

¹⁰ Ibid.

Recommendation 5: Develop and share good practice guidance supporting the implementation and measurement of culturally responsive data collection across the family violence sector.

We recommend that the Victorian Government invest in the development of good practice guidance regarding data collection with refugee and migrant background young people. The guidance should include requisite support for services, including teachers, health care providers, settlement and community workers, to develop skills and competencies to implement, measure and use data collected with refugee and migrant communities.

Community education and awareness

*“Barriers to (data) collection are still based on fear and mistrust.”
– Family violence worker*

We know many young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds carry genuine fear of negative repercussions - such as visa cancellation or deportation - when sharing information with services, including around family violence. Lack of confidence in or understanding of Australian laws and systems can be a barrier to how people share information with services generally, but this can be especially pronounced for more newly arrived communities.¹¹

In addition to strengthening service cultural responsiveness in data collection - there is an urgent need to continue to invest in community education on family and domestic violence for young people and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Dispelling myths, building knowledge of what constitutes family violence, and increasing understanding of the laws, systems and services and how they operate, is critical to supporting both perpetrators and victims to confidently report and access support. This would also, likely, result in wider capture and sharing of data.¹²

Community education models that engage young people as information brokers for refugee and migrant communities have demonstrated success in Victoria. Examples include, Speak Up, a primary and early intervention project designed to promote gender equity among multicultural young people in Victoria,¹³ and Reverb, workshops co-designed and delivered by multicultural young people to address the stigma of mental health in culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Victoria¹⁴.

¹¹ The settlement journey is navigated by families and communities over generations. Young people and families from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the early staged of settlement are often undertaking this journey without the support and guidance of trusted people and networks with established language, cultural and social knowledge, as such concepts like 'informed consent' or 'mandatory reporting' and processes like 'service intake' can be especially challenging.

¹² Royal Commission into Family Violence. Report and Recommendations, Volume 5, 99. Victoria, Australia: Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016. <http://rcfv.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Vol-V.pdf>.

¹³ Centre for Multicultural Youth. "Speak Up." Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://www.cmy.net.au/young-people-community/youth-opportunities/speak-up/>.

¹⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth. "Reverb." Accessed June 3, 2024. <https://www.cmy.net.au/young-people-community/youth-opportunities/reverb-2/>; Department of Education and Training, Victoria. Reverb: Culturally Responsive Mental Health and Wellbeing for School Communities. Victoria, Australia: Department of Education and Training. <https://www.schools.vic.gov.au/reverb-culturally-responsive-mental-health-and-wellbeing-school-communities>.

Recommendation 6: Work with communities, including young people, to deliver community education programs that address stigma, increase community awareness and normalise discussions of family violence within refugee and migrant communities.

We recognise the Victorian Government’s commitment, as part of the second phase of the Free from Violence Second Action Plan (2022-2025), to investing in innovative prevention initiatives led by diverse communities, including multicultural and faith-based organisations and other community groups. As part of this investment, we recommend the Victorian Government work with young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds to develop and deliver relevant and accessible community education programs within their schools, families, communities and the services supporting them.

An evidence base

The combination of these factors, alongside the relative newness of many of the services supporting diverse community groups in the family violence sector, means there may not yet be sufficient data to identify patterns and trends in behaviour for some of these cohorts. Given this, we support the conclusion of the Office of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor that “There is a need for ongoing research to better understand perpetrators, the drivers of family violence and how this intersects with special needs for diverse cohorts.”¹⁵

Recognising that young people are already a focus within some family violence research funded by the Victorian Government, we would highlight the need to ensure current and future research explores the experiences of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, as a diverse cohort who make up almost half of Victoria’s youth population.¹⁶

Recommendation 7: Fund ongoing research to better understand the needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who use or are at risk of using family violence.

We recommend that the Victorian Government fund ongoing research to better understand young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds who use family violence, including their particular risk and protective factors, the drivers of family violence in refugee and migrant communities, and the service responses needed to support this cohort. This research should be undertaken in collaboration with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and the services and organisations that work with them.

¹⁵ Office of the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor. “Service response for perpetrators and people using violence within the family”. Victorian Government, 2023, <https://www.fvrim.vic.gov.au/monitoring-victorias-family-violence-reforms-service-response-perpetrators-and-people-using-violence-within-family/evidence-base-perpetrator-interventions>

¹⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth. “A Young and Multicultural Victoria – the 2021 Census Report”. Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2023, <https://www.cmy.net.au/resource/young-and-multicultural-victoria-the-2021-census/>

Additional considerations - output data versus impact data

Current family violence data collection systems preference output measures over more qualitative and long term data. This can limit our understanding of what is happening, especially within diverse communities who often have complex and intersecting needs. This can also prevent us from understanding the long term protective and risk factors for people who use family violence, and the impact of services and interventions over time.

“The nuance of the work isn't being captured because it's all reduced down to decimal points.” – Family violence worker

The current data we receive on the profile of family violence perpetrators is often very clearly related to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) measurement (i.e. is tied to obvious service deliverables such as referrals made, sessions attended, etc., and related client demographic information like age). While useful in many respects to support tailoring interventions and services, this data is very 'rigid' and 'point in time', and typically driven by funder- or system-defined needs, rather than client (service user) needs. This often means we focus on collecting data that justifies the quantity of what is delivered (number of programs, referrals, etc.) rather than the impact of service interventions on perpetrator attitudes, behaviours and outcomes.

Evaluation data

Evaluative data is an area of opportunity. Many current evaluation practices in the family violence space limit service user feedback via the widespread use of Likert scales and 'check box' responses. This fails to adequately capture the experiences of users and to gather important data on where and how service interventions are impacting those who use violence. This is an inadequate evidence base upon which to build a more comprehensive understanding of family violence and those who use violence in Victoria.

CMY have previously recommended that the Victorian Government support upskilling of the family violence workforce to strengthen the measurement of impact and program evaluation following implementation, and resource the creation of back-end technology and software to be utilised by service providers that can collect and record data and demonstrate impact.¹⁷

Qualitative data

Another area of opportunity is supporting the collection and use of more qualitative data. The collection and use of qualitative data by services in relation to people who use family violence can support more effective exploration of the evolution of cases over time and the development of greater understanding of root causes and effective interventions for different cohorts and individuals. This is not to say that individual workers or organisations do not collect and use qualitative data and information within their services and care models already, but rather to highlight that this type of data is not systematically collected and used as part of funded service delivery models.

As we noted above, many young people and families from refugee and migrant backgrounds may feel more comfortable sharing their information with services in more informal ways. Qualitative data collection approaches can support this preference, and in the process allow for greater sharing of personal information and stories to capture rich, contextual information important to understanding diverse communities' needs.

¹⁷ Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2023, Submission to the survey on 'The next stage of Victoria's work to end family violence'.

Support and guidance on culturally responsive practice in data collection should go beyond the collection of demographic data to include guidance on how to collect and use qualitative data in ethical, rigorous and meaningful ways with diverse communities. Critical to this guidance are considerations around cultural safety.

We reiterate here our earlier recommendation regarding the need to develop and share good practice guidance supporting data collection and use with diverse communities.

Longitudinal data

Another challenge that CMY workers raised was that there is a lack of long-term tracking of client data and outcomes. This is despite recognition that results of interventions are often not observed for many years. Without long-term tracking and longitudinal data of service interventions and outcomes, it is difficult to accurately measure how effective supports and interventions, and their benefits are, over time.

We recognise that capturing client data over extended time periods requires additional consideration, for example longer term funding to enable end-to-end case management, and case coordination programs. However, this would not only benefit recipients, by providing ongoing support and stable care, but would facilitate the collection of comprehensive data, beyond times of crisis, while also providing detailed data to identify trends and evidence to inform program development, policy and investment.

One way longitudinal client data could be collected is through the strengthening of shared care or care team responses within youth services and the family violence sector. Such responses:

- share the responsibility of managing risk and increasing safety, while centering the needs of young people;
- foster engagement with family violence services among young people by allowing for greater continuity of care; and,
- foster knowledge transfer and information sharing, strengthening our family violence response for young people who use, are at risk of using and/or are impacted by family violence.

CMY have previously recommended that the Victorian Government establish formalised structures and systems to support sustainable integration and collaboration between youth work and family violence organisations and services to ensure young people are at the center of our service responses.¹⁸

“It's not only about getting the information from other organisations; it is about working together after we get the referral.” – Family violence worker

¹⁸ Ibid.

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