



## Research Projects

# Breaking through the language barrier: Empowering refugee and immigrant women to combat domestic and family violence through cultural and language training

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### Background

Domestic and family violence affects women of CALD backgrounds in alarming rates. In 2007, 23% of women who sought Apprehended Domestic Violence Orders in NSW were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Community Relations Commission, 2008). According to the Immigrant Women's Health Service's 2008-09 annual report, 75% of the CALD women who accessed its services in that year had or were experiencing family violence and hardship. Most of these women do not understand or speak English at all or well enough to fend for themselves, are unaware of their rights as Australian residents and of how to seek help from community or welfare organisations, the police or the health system.

In order to empower these women to protect themselves from violence and voice their concerns, they need to 1: learn about the culture of the country and their human rights and 2: learn how to access the services of competent, trained professional interpreters to faithfully and ethically interpret for them in sensitive and confidential situations. While there are highly trained professional interpreters in the more established community languages (eg. Arabic, Chinese and Spanish), the same is not the case in rarer or new emerging community languages (eg. Dari, Dinka or Swahili).

Research of the practice of untrained interpreters has shown that such bilingual helpers do not interpret accurately and are not impartial, often disempowering women in these vulnerable situations, rather than empowering them (see, for example, Tallechea Sanchez, 2005). Other research has also found that non English speakers who have never used the services of professional interpreters, misunderstand their role and treat them like compatriots who are there to help or advise them rather than impartial professionals (Hale & Luzardo, 1997).

The A long way to equal report (2007:23) found that interpreting services continue to be a significant problem in refugee and migrant women's ability to access legal services. Some of the difficulties identified by the report include: no interpreter available for the particular language, inaccurate interpreting rendered by the hired interpreters and unawareness of both service providers and service recipients on how to access interpreting services and how to communicate through interpreters. The report goes on to make a number of important recommendations, among which are: that information about interpreter services be disseminated (#8); that efforts be made to recruit and train women interpreters in the new and emerging languages (#9) and that training be provided in the effective use of interpreter services (#10) (Women's Legal Services NSW, 2007:23-26)

## **Breaking through the language barrier project**

This project is to be administered by the Immigrant Women's Health Service (Fairfield), implemented by UWS' Interpreting & Translation Research Group and funded by the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, Office for Women's Policy. Its overarching aim is to empower CALD women from emerging communities through the provision of linguistic, contextual and cultural training to equip them with the tools to interact with the police, the courts, community and religious leaders and the health system when confronted with domestic and family violence (DFV). The specific research aims of the study are to:

1. Identify the main emerging language groups in the South Western Sydney local government areas.
2. Within these languages, identify existing interpreting and bilingual services which allow women from the emerging communities to access support to deal with domestic and family violence issues.
3. Identify the gaps between the current language services available and actual services required.
4. Evaluate the efficacy of a non-language specific interpreter course in the development of new interpreters for the identified emerging language groups.

In addition to the research component of this project, there is an important consultation and training phase which aims to build capacity to deal with domestic and family violence issues within the language communities identified through the study. Women from emerging language groups in the South Western Sydney area will be invited to participate in a focus group to discuss barriers they have faced in accessing support services in cases of domestic and family violence. The Immigrant Women's Health Service and Education Centre Against Violence will conduct a course for 40 women from the identified languages to equip them with the knowledge and confidence to liaise between victims of domestic and family violence in their communities and support organisations. UWS will further conduct a 40 hour interpreter training course aimed at developing the skills to work as interpreters in the relevant language groups, including applying for language recognition or paraprofessional interpreter testing through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

The project commenced in 2010 and is scheduled to finalise in late 2011.

For further information on this project, or to take part, please contact Silvia Martinez, ITRG Research Officer, at [s.martinez@uws.edu.au](mailto:s.martinez@uws.edu.au)

## **References**

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