MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent action needed to provide safety and support for migrant and refugee victims of domestic violence

Friday, 31 July 2020

Migrant and refugee victims of domestic violence are falling through the gaps during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new report, Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant and Refugee Women and Children Experiencing DFV, from Women’s Safety NSW. The report, which surveys frontline domestic violence service providers, describes the increasing complexity of domestic violence cases since the outbreak of the pandemic and flags culturally specific issues affecting migrant and refugee women.

“It is noticeable that women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are experiencing domestic violence and barriers to access services due to language and no knowledge of services who can help them.” - Inner Metropolitan WDVCAS worker.

The Impact of COVID-19 on Migrant and Refugee Women and Children Experiencing DFV report highlights some of the key barriers to accessing services for migrant and refugee women, including fear of deportation due to visa insecurity, fear and distrust of authority, inability to attend cultural support groups and barriers in adapting to a new cultural environment. Other issues impacting these women during COVID include a complete lack of services surrounding healthcare support for clients without Medicare; added administrative barriers in trying to access victims’ services, housing, Centrelink, women’s refuges and emergency relief; and further difficulty for those observing Ramadan during this time.

The survey respondents identified key service gaps that are keeping migrant and refugee victims of domestic violence from accessing the support they need. These include lack of access to temporary and ongoing accommodation, income and basic needs, specialist support/case management to support them in their complex needs and free legal services. Inconsistent police responses, language barriers and limited methods of accessing support were also identified as obstacles preventing women from seeking and gaining support. Women’s Safety NSW has identified three key measures to mitigate these problems and is calling on government to:

- Enable to access critical income and accommodation supports for domestic violence victims on temporary visas.
• Provide specialist domestic and family violence interpreter services.
• Fund specialist multicultural domestic and family violence caseworkers for migrant and refugee women experiencing violence.

“We are asking for three fairly simple measures that will offer a literal lifeline to migrant and refugee women and children who are suffering domestic violence. Without access to income and accommodation support, these women and their children are being forced straight back into the arms of their abusers,” explains Women’s Safety NSW CEO, Hayley Foster. “Government has an opportunity to step up and say we will not let this continue. They can make a decision now to ensure these women will get the help and support they need to be safe and to keep their children safe.”

Today’s report follows an earlier Women’s Safety NSW report, released in July, which recommended legislation to require police, courts and other government agencies to offer telephone interpreter services to people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

“Many clients with little or no English have great difficulty accessing phone interpreter services on their own. Without the assistance of an English-speaking support person, who can facilitate the initial process and get the call underway with success, it can be a very stressful and detrimental scenario for the client”. – Beth Roman, Multicultural Domestic and Family Violence Specialist, Illawarra Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service.

“Having access to quality interpreter services can make all the difference for vulnerable people when it comes to achieving safety, justice and wellbeing.” Ms Foster said. “We hope to work closely with government to ensure that these women have access to the services, case workers and interpreters they need to ensure their own safety and that of their children.”

To view the full report and recommendations, refer to report attached.

Hayley Foster. Beth Roman and survivors with lived experience are available for interview.
Contact 0474 779 847 | ceo@womenssafetynsw.org.au

About:
Women’s Safety NSW is a peak representative body for women’s specialist domestic and family violence services. Our purpose is to advocate on behalf of our members for women’s safety, justice and wellbeing in the context of domestic and family violence through policy, practice, law reform and cultural change.
Our full members – Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Service workers – supported 51,383 women across NSW last year through:

- NSW’s integrated response to domestic and family violence, Safer Pathway, in 43 metropolitan, regional and rural locations;
- The Women’s Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Program in 117 local courts across the state; and

Our associate members are women’s specialist domestic violence workers working in a variety of services including staying home leaving violence, women’s health, women’s supported accommodation, women’s counselling, and women’s legal services.