

# **Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) Prevention in Australian Muslim Communities: The Role of Community Faith Leaders**

## **Evaluation Report**

**Presented by Board of Imams Victoria (BOIV)**

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**Prepared by Dr Fida Sanjakdar and Dr Melanie Brooks,  
Monash University**





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# Executive Summary

## Background

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (2015) acknowledged Victoria's leadership in the development of successful policies and structural reforms to prevent and reduce incidents of family violence. The Family Violence Prevention Act, the adoption of a Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence, the Victorian Family Violence Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework, amongst other initiatives, services, programs, and research has significantly strengthened the state's overall comprehensive response to family violence. Yet, for the gains made over the last decade, the commission identified systemic issues, obstacles, and challenges which have reduced the effectiveness of Victorian laws, policies, services, and programs. In particular, the Commission's Summary and Recommendations (2016) identified the importance of "harnessing community effort" to address, reduce, and prevent family violence (Neave, Faulkner, & Nicholson, 2016, p.13).

Identifying the centrality of community led responses to family violence, the Commission stressed the importance of empowering community leaders to create and lead initiatives and programs that are culturally appropriate and aligned with a community's specific needs. While appreciation for community-designed responses is gaining momentum as a significant driver to address and prevent family and domestic violence (FDV), little is known about FDV incidences and prevention strategies among many marginalised communities in Australia, including Victoria's Muslim community. Family violence is a sensitive topic for many Muslims and typically not discussed openly. While this presents some challenges, community led responses are better able to shape interventions and programs in culturally and religiously appropriate ways, improving uptake and raising community capacity to prevent family violence.

It is common for Muslims to seek religious counselling and/or guidance from Imams, faith leaders, and Muslim organisations. Established in 1984, the Board of Imams Victoria (BOIV) provides a range of community services that support the religious lives of Muslims in Victoria. As there are no set policies or procedures for responding to family violence for the BOIV or Victoria's Imams and community leaders, the BOIV developed a bespoke training program to address this gap. BOIV's FDV Training Program was designed to increase Muslim leader capacity to ensure they use best practices when responding and referring victims and perpetrators of FDV.

## Aim of the evaluation

The aim of this evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the BOIV's FDV Prevention Training Program and the extent to which Imams and faith community leaders obtained the knowledge, skills and resources to address, respond, refer, and resolve FDV issues with efficacy. Specifically, this evaluation sought to:

1. examine processes of planning and implementation of the training program and identify opportunities for capacity building for both BOIV, Imams, and faith community leaders;
2. monitor the processes and strategies used and the extent to which they meet the objectives of the program to increase participant awareness of definitions, drivers, impacts and prevalence of FDV in all its forms; and,
3. report and communicate results to BOIV members, partners, stakeholders, and the wider community to challenge attitudes, behaviours and actions that enable FDV with Victorian Muslim communities.

Key questions guided this evaluation:

1. What did participants learn by taking part in the program?
2. Did participating community faith leaders receive the information and assistance they needed and/or sought?
3. Were the instructors effective in delivering the program?
4. Was the content appropriate for the aims of the program?
5. Did participants learn about government and non-governmental resources for preventing and referring incidents of FDV?
6. Do participants feel empowered to prevent and respond to incidents of FDV?
7. Do participants see additional training necessary?
8. What structures and systems can BOIV implement to support Muslim community leaders in responding to incidents of FDV?

## Methods

Observations of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program occurred from October 2020 to March 2021. Data collection included 10 one-on-one interviews, 16 hours of observation, and evaluator field notes taken during the training program. The participants were purposefully recruited due to their participation in the training. All participants reside in the state of Victoria and network with faith leaders nationwide. The interviews were conducted by the two evaluators. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Prior to beginning each interview, participants received an explanatory statement stating the purpose of the interview, in keeping with Monash University's Research Ethics guidelines. All participants agreed to participate and signed the consent form provided.

## Brief Findings

All participants interviewed reported the training a success. It expanded their understanding of FDV and provided them the opportunity to learn best practices in recognising and responding to FDV. Participants gained a wider appreciation of the governmental and non-governmental agencies available to victims and perpetrators. Participants also learned the value of engaging proactively with Muslim community members in the education and prevention of FDV. Participants acknowledged the need to continue FDV trainings and extend the training to include more female community leaders. They also valued learning from real-life experiences and recommended follow-up trainings include speakers who have survived FDV, health professionals working with survivors and perpetrators, sexual assault responders, and child-counsellors.

Participants also pinpointed gaps impeding service entry points and pathways for Muslim men, women, and children. For example, participants cited the urgent need for Muslim-only safe houses for victims.

Participants agreed that FDV remains poorly understood in the community. They acknowledged the sensitivity of the topic and the role of cultural norms impeding victims (mostly women) from seeking assistance. Faith leaders reflected on the ‘normalisation’ of FDV in the Muslim community. Accordingly, they emphasised the need for additional trainings to discuss how cultural and religious knowledge (and its interpretations) influence the furtherance or mitigation of FDV. Findings recommend further trainings and the establishment of community leader information networks.





# Part 1: Introduction and Background

## Purpose of the evaluation

This evaluation presents findings from the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program and demonstrates the central role faith leaders play in the prevention of FDV. The evaluation also identifies the successful components of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program and concludes with recommendations to consider for future trainings.

Questions guiding the evaluation process include:

1. What did participants learn by taking part in the program?
2. Did participating community faith leaders receive the information and assistance they needed and/or sought?
3. Were the instructors effective in delivering the program?
4. Was the content appropriate for the aims of the program?
5. Did participants learn about government and non-governmental resources for preventing and referring incidents of FDV?
6. Do participants feel empowered to prevent and respond to incidents of FDV?
7. Do participants see additional training necessary?
8. What structures and systems can BOIV implement to support Muslim community leaders in responding to incidents of FDV?

## Description of the training program

As presented in **Table 1** below, the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program included two key components:

- an awareness campaign of FDV community led services targeting the general public which are also accessible to Muslim faith leaders;
- a training program to equip faith leaders with knowledge on how to use government and non-government services when responding to FDV; and,
- making informed decisions regarding the prevention of FDV.

The awareness campaign component within the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program aimed to educate participating faith leaders about FDV, raise their awareness about FDV prev-

**Table 1: Details of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program**

| Stages of Training Program                                       | Training Program Outcome   |
|--|--|
| <b>STAGE 1: Capacity building for BOIV and Community Leaders</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in participants' awareness of definitions, drivers, impacts and prevalence of FDV in all its forms.</li> <li>• Increased willingness of BOIV, imams and CLs to discuss FDV and recognise traditions and values that promote positive and healthy relationships among families.</li> <li>• Increase in knowledge and skills of participants to refer victims safely to specialist support services.</li> <li>• Increased referral of perpetrators by BOIV, imams and CLs to Men's Referral Service and other appropriate interventions.</li> <li>• Increase awareness of participants in the FDV sector and culturally appropriate services.</li> <li>• Increase in women's participation, leadership and involvement in decision-making in BOIV FDV projects.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Stage 2: Organisational capacity building for BOIV</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in BOIV's best practice policies and guidelines regarding safe referrals</li> <li>• Increase in knowledge and skills of participants to refer victims safely to specialist support services</li> <li>• Increase in number of effective partnerships between BOIV and FDV services and culturally appropriate services</li> <li>• Increase in knowledge and skills of participants to refer <i>victims</i> safely to specialist support services</li> <li>• Increase in knowledge and skills of participants to refer perpetrators to specialist support services</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Stage 3: Public Engagement</b>                                | Increase in public and private statements made by imams and CLs that challenge attitudes and behaviours that enable violence   |



alence in their community, and develop skills set to decrease Muslim community acceptance of FDV. Various organisations participated in the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program including: 'InTouch,' 'Our Watch,' key research scholars in the field including Dr Nada Ibrahim from University of South Australia; Government Agencies that focus on FDV prevention; and community-led services within the Moreland Municipality. The sessions included resource sharing and provided participating faith leaders with key understandings on how to utilise the services.

The second core feature of the training program involved equipping faith leaders with key knowledge indicators that could help them identify and thus plan for appropriate action. They also learned how to sensitively and appropriately respond to incidents of FDV. FDV can encompass various forms of actions and behaviours and does not discriminate. FDV can affect people from different cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Whilst some forms of FDV are visible, such as physical assaults and injuries to victims including children, other forms are less apparent, but have equally damaging effects on both the physical and psychological wellbeing of victims. Understanding the various ways in which FDV can manifest is an important first step to understanding FDV comprehensively.

| Training Program Activity   | Training Program Delivery Date   | Expected Participants  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>3 x 2 days conferences.</p> <p>Focused on upskilling leaders to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand drivers and forms of FDV</li> <li>• Understand FDV laws in Australia</li> <li>• Understand the impact of FDV on Muslim families and communities, and specific issues related to this community in dealing with FDV</li> <li>• Respond safely to victims and perpetrators</li> <li>• Understand and build capacity of leaders to engage with service providers in the FDV sector</li> <li>• Create and develop network to provide support to women and men in the community</li> </ul> | <p>First group - April 2019</p> <p>Second group - September 2019</p> <p>Third group - March 2020</p> | <p>At least 30 people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 Imams (including from BOIV)</li> <li>• 10 community leaders</li> <li>• 10 women</li> </ul> <p>Focus: All Imams and community leaders</p>                                    |
| <p>Consult with BOIV staff, volunteers and members on issues and gaps, and areas for improvement and topics for professional development sessions.</p> <p>Design and deliver tailored Professional Development for BOIV Imams and staff on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be determined after consultation.</li> </ul> <p>Promote safe referral protocol and resources to be used in family matters and prior to mediation processes</p>  | <p>May 2019</p> <p>PD session in August 2019</p>   | <p>Sheik Nawas 'InTouch'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 BOIV Imams</li> </ul> <p>2 x trainer (man and woman)</p> <p>'Our Watch'</p> <p>'InTouch'</p> <p>Dr Nada Ibrahim</p> <p>Muslim women's organisation</p> <p>Sheikh Nawas</p> |
| <p>At least 5 Community Education sessions and public events including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Week without Violence in October 2019</li> <li>• White Ribbon - December 2019</li> </ul>   | <p>Oct 2019-2020</p>   | <p>Sheikh Nawas</p> <p>BOIV Imams</p> <p>Other Imams</p> <p>Community leaders</p>  |

# Part 2: Review of Related Research

## Understanding Family and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence (DV) appeared in government policy agendas in Australia in the 1980s. This, in part, was a response to the feminist movement that linked DV to the broader issue of women's inequality. The rise of DV visibility was also a reaction by those who looked for "the promotion of family harmony and the enhancement of law and order as a response to an ungended 'culture' of violence" (Murray & Powell, 2009, p. 533). By 2006, "a well-established public policy agenda concerned with domestic violence existed and was capable of being used in Australia" (Murray & Powell, 2009, p. 547). In subsequent years local, community and government initiatives paved the way to address and combat DV. However, with greater incidences of domestic violence also impacting more broadly on wider family dimensions, the term Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) was coined. FDV in the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (2021) is defined as behaviour that is physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abuses, threatens, or controls a family member, and includes intimate partner violence (IPV), child abuse, sibling abuse and elder abuse. MARAM - 'Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management' - is a framework that aims to support workers across the service system to better understand their responsibilities to undertake risk assessment and management, including information sharing and working collaboratively. Developed by The Victorian Government (no date) the MARAM framework defines family violence as behaviour that controls or dominates a family member and causes them to fear for their own or another person's safety or wellbeing. Definitions of FDV as a policy problem is significant because it affects how the policies work "in terms of provision (who receives funded services and in what forms), protection (who is protected and from what), and prevention (what we are preventing and what we are working toward)" (Murray & Powell, 2009, p. 548).

FDV often occurs when there is a "backlash when men's power is challenged" (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 18); however other factors have been identified as contributing to FDV including, but not limited to: excessive alcohol and drug use; attitudes of acceptance towards violence; harassment; and unequal relations. While gender-based discrimination frequently remains the motivating reason behind domestic violence, research into FDV in Victoria suggest that many other forms of discrimination are also experienced by victims, such as: racism; sexism and ageism "in ways that intersect with gender inequality to shape violence against women in different contexts" (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 18). According to the MARMA framework (no date), people from Aboriginal communities, people with disabilities, older people, LGBTIQ people and those in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, are among the most vulnerable to FDV.

FDV occurs across all ages, genders, sexualities, social classes, races, and cultures however; certain socio-demographic groups have a higher risk of victimisation. According to Zark, Hammond, Williams, and Pilgrim (2019), “women, particularly younger women, are disproportionately affected by FDV, while men disproportionately perpetrate FDV” (p. 1538). Apart from socio-demographic characteristics, there are various psychosocial factors and life events that increase one’s risk for family violence victimisation. Most prominent of these factors are “mental health disorders (particularly depressive and anxiety disorders), alcohol and drug abuse, social isolation, separation or attempted separation, and pregnancy and new birth” (Zark, Hammond, Williams, & Pilgrim, 2019, p. 1538). Research also suggests that when one is exposed to violence in their family or have had previous experiences of violence, there is a higher probability of experiencing family violence in their later lives (Zark, Hammond, Williams, & Pilgrim, 2019). In Australia, FDV is a serious issue as it is one of the leading contributors to death and disability particularly in women (Murray & Powell, 2009) and statistics show that the occurrence of FDV in Australia has significantly increased over time (Zark, Hammond, Williams, & Pilgrim, 2019).

Information regarding FDV can be sourced from government websites and community run organisations. While government bodies engage in nation-wide surveys to produce information about FDV, community run organisations generally provide more localised responses about FDV drawing on the through lived experiences of their community members. While the statistics of FDV incidences, including death, remain disturbing, people are coming forward and reporting FDV. Additionally, there are more counselling services available for those who seek help (mostly women and children) and high-risk teams are being established across the country to support victims. However response rates of FDV prevention within the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities remains problematic, particularly with members of the Australian Muslim communities (Ghafournia & Easteal, 2019) making community-based training sessions like that of BOIV, even more important.

## Australian Government responses to FDV

Since 2005, the Victorian Government has invested millions of dollars to reduce and prevent FDV by identifying strategies to address underlying causes of violence as well as initiatives to promote gender equality and respectful relationships (Department of Social Services, 2010). Amongst these strategies, The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022), Fourth Action Plan (2019-2022), identified five national priorities to reduce FDV in a continued effort to reduce violence against women and their children, especially through prevention. Through this policy response, Australia aims to prevent and stop “violence from occurring, support women who have experienced violence, stop men from committing acts of violence, and build a body of evidence to better understand ‘what works’ in terms of reducing FDV and sexual assault in Australia” (p. 4).

Programs specifically aimed to address gender inequality remains a focus for the Australian Government. ‘Safe and Strong’ is one of such programs that aims to define and help various communities responding to FDV by developing effective community-based strategies to combat gender inequality. These include “the establishment of governance structures, implementation of policy and legislative changes, funding and procurement measures, and supportive employment practices” (Trezona, 2018, p. 23). There are six key settings in its strategy for prevention which include: education and training, work and economic security, health and wellbeing, leadership and representation, sport and recreation, and arts and culture (Trezona, 2018).

Another program at a state level is the ‘Free from Violence Strategy’ that “was developed by the



Victorian Government in response to recommendation 187 of the Family Violence Royal Commission” and was “a key component of the plan to end family violence” (Trezona, 2018, p. 23). Developed in 2018 by the Victorian government, this step-by-step approach concentrates on three key phases: “building the infrastructure and systems for prevention, strengthening whole community actions, and maintaining efforts and getting results” (Trezona, 2018, p. 23). The 10-Year Industry Plan seeks to address gender inequality and aims “to create a system in which the specialist family violence and primary prevention sectors work together with community, health, justice, education and training sectors to prevent and respond to family violence” (Trezona, 2018, p. 24).

Despite the national and state level government policy shifts and service developments around FDV, the number of FDV incidences remain unacceptably high. According to MARAM framework (no date), “on average, one woman a week is murdered in Australia by her current or former intimate partner” (p. 12). Thus, the practical effect of the legislation is questioned. Particularly, the excessive use of increased criminalisation for perpetrators has come into focus and has raised questions of its effectiveness (Zark, Hammond, Williams, & Pilgrim, 2019). Keen to improve justice response for victims, many initiatives started to turn to communities and key members within.

## Faith-based community approaches to FDV

Because faith is an essential and inherent part of many people’s lives (Ghafournia, 2017; Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019), faith organisations and institutions (i.e. Mosques, churches, synagogues) can have impact FDV prevention responses. As explained by Truong et al. (2020a), “under the Third Action Plan (2016–2019) of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022, action 3.9(b) has a commitment to ‘build the capacity of community and faith leaders to reject, prevent and respond to violence’” (p. 1). The state of Victoria recognises the important role faith communities and/or organisations play in prevention and reduction of FDV and are described as “‘vital settings’ for dealing with family violence and recognising the trust and authority faith leaders have within their communities to influence attitudes” (Truong et al., 2020a, p. 1). Faith organisations and institutions are well-situated to tailoring responses that both help prevent FDV as well as observe and respect culturally sensitive and inclusive issues (Vaughan et al., 2020).

Faith-based communities all over Australia have provided significant help to victims of family violence. They have assisted families with “temporary housing, social and spiritual support, health services, economic and material, counselling and case management” (Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 12). Many faith-based communities in Victoria provide crisis services such as “the Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights, Good Samaritan Inn, Good Shepherd, Jewish Care Victoria, McAuley Community Services, Salvation Army, Uniting Victoria Tasmania, and Vincent Care, amongst others” (Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 12). In addition, there are organisations that are not linked to a particular faith and have secular orientations. It is important to note that the type of organisation may impede victims seeking support, especially for “non-Christian women and migrant and refugee women” (Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 12).

Women with strong religious backgrounds often turn to faith for protection against FDV. It is also common that strong faith fosters relationships based on equality and respect. In their study of women affected by FDV, Vaughan et al. (2020a) found that women draw upon religious texts for support during and after experiences of violence, using scripture to assist with their healing. Reliance on faith is not limited to particular belief systems; rather, women across different faith communities “draw resilience from their faith and faith teachings” (Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 7; see also El-Khoury et al., 2004; Ghafournia, 2017; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). In a study with

Muslim community members, faith and religious beliefs and practices were “important sources of peace and support during difficult times” (Truong et al., 2020a, p. 20). Faith and religion were also “viewed as a protective factor against FDV through promotion of traditional family values and limiting of alcohol and other substance use which are risk factors for FDV” (Truong et al., 2020b, p. 6).

Faith-based community responses to FDV play a significant role into feelings of safety due to local networks and supportive relationships. Truong et al. (2020a) commented that faith-based communities can appear as “an avenue through which information and action in relation to FDV can be advanced,” and “a source of support for those experiencing FDV” (p. 5). Indeed, faith-based communities actively working to prevent FDV help victims through their promotion of “messages about gender equality, including women’s rights, by drawing on religious texts and allegorical stories, as part of initiatives to address FDV” (Truong et al., 2020a, p. 5).

Research generally demonstrates support for the positive role of faith-based communities in addressing and preventing FDV. However, in some cases, faith-based organisations have failed to successfully address these issues, due to cultural norms that contribute to gender inequality and misunderstandings are perpetuated generationally and not disputed. Male dominated hierarchies within faith-based leadership structures also contribute and reinforce gendered drivers of violence. In male dominated faiths “the ability of religious institutions to play a role in transforming unequal gender relations” becomes challenging, especially “while leadership structures continue to exclude women” (Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 7). Patriarchal faiths often reproduce “conceptions of gender and appropriate behaviour for men and women in intimate relationships together with institutional norms that legitimise male dominance” (Truong et al., 2020b, p. 7; see also Eidhamar, 2018). In these cases, gender norms and doctrinal beliefs that “encourage women to be subservient and men to be dominant” are identified as “important factors impacting the extent to which women in faith communities recognise experiences of FDV, seek help for FDV, and to which they are supported appropriately” (Truong et al., 2020b, p. 25; see also Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016; Wendt, 2009). Faith cultures that support male superiority through

“God-ordained gender hierarchical roles” may encourage family violence “at interpersonal and institutional levels” (Truong et al., 2020b, p. 25). Religiosity may lead to the acceptance of family violence because gendered norms promote male authority and female submission. Male perpetrators can more easily “justify their behaviour based on patriarchal religious ideologies and interpretations of sacred texts” (Truong et al., 2020b, p. 7; see also Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017).

To effectively plan for FDV prevention strategies within communities, it is important to acknowledge that while many Muslims share the same faith, Australian communities are not a single, united group. According to Truong et al. (2020a), “there is much religious and cultural heterogeneity across families and communities in Australia, and ... this heterogeneity is increasing” (p. 5). In addition, “culture and religion are distinct, yet overlapping, concepts” (Truong et al., 2020a, p. 5) in Islam. Therefore, those who identify as Muslims and are from different backgrounds are likely to have varied cultural practices. Truong et al. (2020b) identified six themes that describe attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about FDV within culturally diverse Australian faith communities:

1. Faith and religion do not condone violence;
2. Awareness of FDV is increasing, yet remains often poorly understood;
3. FDV is still a taboo topic;
4. Denial and defensiveness about FDV persist;
5. Patience, endurance and forgiveness is often prioritised over safety;
6. Gender roles and norms founded on religious beliefs and interpretations underpin many FDV understandings and responses (p.14).

While various members of faith-based communities play an integral role in the prevention of FDV, faith leaders have come into sharp attention as an important change figure.

## Towards prevention of FDV: the important role of faith leaders

As faith leaders are integral to creating strong communities, networks and partnerships, faith leaders have become a government and community-based priority. Therefore, it is critical that faith leaders know about and understand different forms of FDV and are able to properly respond to victims within their community. Faith leaders also provide “spiritual support to victims of FDV” and for some, do so “without pressure to maintain a marriage or preserve the family unit [while] holding perpetrators to account for their behaviour” (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 24). In Victoria, several community initiatives with various faith-based organisations have accepted recommendations from and cooperate with the Victorian Multicultural Commission, including Multifaith Advisory Group. According to Truong et al. (2020a), this suggests opportunities for family violence practitioners to extend their work to a range of faith-based communities. This includes developing “training materials for faith leaders on issues of sexual assault and family violence” (p. 4). Faith-based community participation in the prevention of FDV is rising in Victoria, including with various culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities (Truong et al., 2020a).

Despite a positive outlook towards faith leaders’ involvement in the prevention of FDV, there is the concern that faith and/or religious teachings, as disseminated by faith leaders, may support perpetrators actions and undermine victims. For example, religious laws that forbid divorce among married couples can lead to intense pressure on women to stay in relationships, despite FDV. Some research accounts for faith leaders using religion to justify violence against women (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019; Wendt, 2009). According to Vaughan & Sullivan (2019), interpretations of religious texts by faith leaders also contribute to the use of violence. Interpretations and particular constructions of sacred texts, accepted by both men and women in a religious community, may increase women’s risk of harm. In addition, religious women who experience violence may decide not to ask for help because their faith teachings encourage them to prioritise forgiveness; thus, they are unwilling to explain their experiences to others or ask for help. They may decide to “remain in, or return, to an unsafe relationship with a violent partner” (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 13; Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 6). Faith leaders can also actively discourage women from reporting FDV to authorities; rather, advising victims of FDV “to be ‘good wives’ and to pray more” instead (Truong et al., 2020a, p. 5).

Many women in faith communities do initially go to faith leaders for help (Beaulaurier et al. 2007; Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019; Vaughan et al., 2020). Across various settings, and in different faiths, women who report their experiences of FDV to religious leaders can receive vastly different responses from faith leaders. While some women report positive experiences, others did not and felt faith leaders’ responses to be inappropriate and unhelpful. These varied and untrained responses could put women and families at risk of further violence. For some women, seeking help left them “feeling blamed and/or ostracised by both their communities and faith leaders” (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 23; Vaughan et al., 2020, p. 12; see also Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016).

In studies where faith-leaders have failed to provide the necessary support for victims of FDV, faith leaders have blamed women. They often advise women to change their behaviour to not provoke their partner or raise them to anger, suggesting that “it was the woman’s words or actions that were the cause of the violence” (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 23; see also Levitt & Ware, 2006). Indeed, faith leaders are by and large not equipped to properly respond to family violence “due to a lack of education, training and resources” (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019, p. 24; see also Levitt & Ware, 2006; Vaughan et al., 2020). Faith leaders recognise this gap, acknowledging their need for training in order to respond appropriately (Vaughan & Sullivan, 2019).



To date there has been very limited attention across research, policy or practice on FDV prevention strategies among Muslim faith leaders and Muslim communities in Australia. Faith leaders play a central role in the lives of many Muslims. As trusted and respected members of their faith communities, faith leaders have influence in supporting changes in behaviours and attitudes, which can mobilise communities to adopt prevention strategies for FDV. As a Muslim ummah, mobilising Muslims, as a community, provides a rich opportunity for faith leaders to promote norms that reinforce healthy, safe, and affirming relationships.

## **FDV in Australian Muslim Communities: Understanding Islam and Muslims**

The Australian Census 2016 data show that although Australian-Muslims constitute only 2.6% (604,200) of the Australian population, this is a 15% increase over the previous 5 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The Muslim population in Australia is largely of immigrant origin from more than 120 countries and varies not only ethnically, but also linguistically and culturally (Ryan & McKinney, 2007). In Australia, the Muslim population mirrors the cultures and practices of many countries around the world, “including Indonesia, Syria, Bosnia and Somalia” (Truong et al., 2020a, p. 6). Although Islam is a unified religion, Australian Muslims are not a homogenous group. The Australian Muslim community is varied ethnically, culturally, socio-economically, and linguistically. Yet despite this diversity, Muslims are generally guided by two things: the teachings of the Qur’an, the sacred text of Muslims, and the Sira, the life history and example set by the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of God. Yet, despite these two solid sources of knowledge, meanings differ due to interpretational variations.

While the practices of Muslims vary, Islam disallows family violence and all forms of oppression and abuse, including all forms of emotional, physical, and psychological abuse. The improper treatment of women is prohibited and not accepted in Islam. Replete in the Qur’an are verses aimed to guide a successful relationship between husband and wife. For example:

“And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He put love and mercy between your hearts. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect” [Qu’ran 30:21].

God also commands men in another verse to “live with your wives in kindness and equity” [4:19]. The complementary nature of marriage describes husband and wife as ‘garments for one another’ [2:187]. Other verses remind Muslim believers that ‘men and women are protectors of one another’ [9:71]. It is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad stated, “an honourable man treats women with honour and respect, and only a despicable person treats women poorly.” In another hadith, the Prophet shares his wisdom: “Share with them [your wives] the same food you have for yourself, and clothe them by which you clothe yourself, and do not beat them, and do not revile them.”

## Conclusion: Towards effective FDV prevention in Muslim communities

Whilst many Muslims will return to these two key sources for guidance and inspiration, “permission or justification for violence against women is learned and reinforced through social, institutional, community and/or family environments” (Darebin City Council, 2016, p. 13). Thus, minimising FDV requires a systemic approach. As mentioned by Darebin City Council (2016), this “will require a strong and lengthy commitment from all sections of the community – but it can be done” (p. 13). In their attempt to end FDV, Darebin City Council (2016), with its high Muslim population, identified “unequal power between men and women” as the “strongest predictor of high levels of violence against women” and gender equity as the key element to end FDV (p. 13). By addressing and promoting gender inequity, women are given opportunities to have their voice, have equal participation in the community, and be able to assist the whole Muslim community. Yet, FVD harms Muslim women in several ways largely as a response to culturally infused misinterpretations of sacred texts. Some examples include:

- Women forced into becoming a second or third wife;
- Forced and early marriage;
- Marriage without knowledge that the husband has other wives;
- Denial of a marriage contract or marriage contract not being recognised;
- Denial of inheritance;
- Denial of access to mahr (dowry);
- Forcing a woman to abort unwanted children, especially female fetuses; and,
- Female genital cutting (Darebin City Council, 2016, p. 14):

Further research investigating Muslim experiences of FDV is essential. However, it is equally important that Imams and faith leaders receive the requisite training to respond, refer, and prevent with efficacy. Future research exploring the influence of Muslim leader training will shed light on best practices and areas where more work is needed. Indeed, the entire ummah benefits from a community that foregrounds the Islamic principles of love, care and compassion for one another.

# Part 3: Methodology

This qualitative evaluation sought to determine whether the intended outcomes of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program were achieved. This approach generated findings and recommendations grounded in interview and observation data. The analysis of this data served to inform the further development of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program and identified the strengths of the project, responses from participants, needs for future training, and suggestions raised by participants for community engagement and improved Islamic resources and services.

## Purpose

The BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program supports the Muslim community to be able to help people experiencing, are at risk, or perpetuating family violence. It also provides the BOIV, Victorian Imams, and Muslim community leaders with the knowledge and understanding of all types of family violence and its impact on families. In addition, the project builds on the ability of BOIV, Victorian Imams, and Muslim community leaders to recognise and safely respond to FDV both the victim(s) and perpetrator(s). BOIV, Imams, and the Muslim community leaders expanded their understanding of family violence, increased their ability to recognise family violence, learned about the processes and procedures for referring victims, the range of support organisations available and how best to access their services. Lastly, the project encouraged Imams, Faith leaders and Muslim community leaders to reject family violence and ensure families at risk are safe and connected to their communities.

## Ethical and Quality Evaluation Standards

The evaluation was conducted independently, with neither BOIV, the trainers, or participants imposing restrictions on the scope, participant comments, or recommendations generated by the evaluation. The evaluators report no conflict of interest. All participants names are removed

for anonymity and the highest ethical standards were upheld in the collection, analysis, and reporting of the data. The research was granted approval by Monash University's Human Ethics Review Board.

## Evaluation Methods

This evaluation centred on the overall quality of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program. Data collection included 10 one-on-one interviews, 16 hours of observation, and evaluator field notes taken during the training program. The participants were purposefully recruited due to their participation in the training. The semi-structured interview questions were conducted by the two evaluators. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Prior to beginning each interview, participants received an explanatory form to the purpose of the evaluation and interview as per Monash University Research Ethics guidelines. All participants agreed to participate and signed the consent form provided.

Interview questions were semi-structured and sought to gain the participant's understanding of family violence, their perspective of its import to the Muslim community, the reason for participating in the training, strengths of the training, what they felt could be included or improved, and their likelihood of incorporating key learnings into their leadership practice. See **Table 2** (below) for the interview questions. Each interview was recorded over Zoom and transcribed. Observations focused on the content, pedagogy, and participant interactions during the training. Running field notes were generated and used for triangulation.

**Table 2: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe your role in the Muslim community?
2. What is your understanding of FV?
3. What is your understanding of FVP?
4. How would you describe the issue of FV in the Muslim community?
5. In your role, what are the key issues around FV that need to be addressed and why?
6. Why did you choose to undertake the FVP Training Program delivered by BOIV?
7. What do you hope to gain from the training?
8. How would you describe the content/information delivered (including the ppt slides) in the FVP Training Program delivered by BOIV?
9. What information was presented which you thought was unnecessary? Why?
10. What information about FV do you think was missing and should have been included? Why?
11. How would you describe the way in which this information was delivered (the trainer and breakout session leaders) in the FVP Training Program delivered by BOIV?
12. How effective were the breakout room sessions?
13. How would you describe the trainers' abilities to deliver this information? What were their strengths? weaknesses?
14. What do you think can be improved in this training?
15. Now that you have completed this training, what immediate things would you put in action?



## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis guided the analysis of interview transcripts and field notes to identify explicit and implicit themes. Each assessor read, coded, and identified explicit and implicit themes independently. After this was completed, the assessors examined and discussed each theme in depth, arriving at consensus through deliberation and debate (see **Table 3** below).

## Limitations

There were several limitations that need to be taken into account. The evaluation began in the middle of the series of training sessions. Only one training session was observed in person due to COVID-19 restrictions. The limited number of participant interviews and observations served to narrow the scope of this evaluation.

**Table 3: Example of Thematic Analysis Process**

| Codes                        | Theme/Sub-Theme  | Narrative Examples  |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Understandings               | Gained Expanded Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normalisation</li><li>• Beyond the physical</li><li>• Women as perpetrators</li></ul>  | <p>“Often in the Muslim community, people understand physical violence, but they don’t understand the other types of domestic violence, such as mental or financial.”</p> <p>“Women experience physical abuse, emotional abuse, and financial abuse. There is a high threshold for this behaviour, and we need to bring that threshold down.”</p> <p>“It is important to acknowledge women can be perpetrators of family violence. Women also hit their children. We can’t just label men as bad and women as victims. It is much more complicated than that. Whole families need support.”</p> |
| Leader seeing and responding | Learned how to recognise and respond family violence <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identified the need to teach acceptable behaviour of Muslims</li><li>• Linked faith to responding</li><li>• Beginning of a network</li><li>• Opportunities to reflect</li></ul> | <p>“Girls and women need to know what is acceptable behaviour from a man....”</p> <p>“I have to refer victims to the right agency because I recognise that I do not have the skills, nor do I know everything.”</p> <p>“If an Imam does not know how to respond to a family violence issue, then he should not give advice. Rather, this training taught us the importance of having a network one can reach out to for help.”</p>  |

## Part 4: Findings

The training successfully upskilled participants' abilities to: accurately define family violence; recognise and respond to family violence; refer victims to appropriate family violence government and non-governmental services; and engage proactively with Muslim community members to educate about family violence and the importance of family violence prevention. In addition, findings also identified a critical need to not only continue family violence prevention training for Muslim leaders and integrate Islamic responses, but also expand training to include more female Muslim community leaders throughout the state of Victoria, Australia. Below are the seven findings of the evaluation. Key findings are bolded and blue.

### Obtained an expanded understanding of Family Violence

Most participants held a basic understanding of family violence and family violence prevention. **All participants agreed on the need for more detailed information and access points for victims.** A female Muslim leader said, "often in the Muslim community, people understand physical violence, but they don't understand the other types of domestic violence, such as mental or financial." Another female Muslim leader commented that women see fear as normalised in Muslim households. She explained, "women experience physical abuse, emotional abuse, and financial abuse. There is a high threshold for this behaviour, and we need to bring that threshold down." She continued, "it is important to acknowledge women can be perpetrators of family violence. Women also hit their children. We can't just label men as bad and women as victims. It is much more complicated than that. Whole families need support."

Addressing the misconception that women are always the victim in Muslim households, a female community leader said, "mother-in laws are often perpetrators of family violence. In addition, Muslim women who use drugs, alcohol, or have mental health issues do perpetuate violence. Often, women do not know how to regulate their emotions. It is not other religions, nor is it just men. It's complex." **Acknowledging that family violence is not a gendered issue, another female participant reflected on the importance of Imams having deep knowledge of family violence and educating their community.** She explained, "Imams need to be mindful that family violence is more than a woman issue. Family violence impacts the partner, the kids, extended families, and the community. Imams need to know the pervasive myths and actively engage in myth-busting." One particular issue was the diversity of the Muslim community and cultural misunderstandings of the Qur'anic verse 4:34. A female Muslim leader with twenty years working in her community explained, "What is unique to the Muslim community is the misrepresentation of text. Unfortunately, Qur'an 4:34 is misread. Some of the Imams might not completely understand because it may not be their area of expertise." The training addressed this verse directly and clarified the centrality of comprehending this verse through the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.).

Upon the conclusion of the training, the Imams and community leaders articulated a comprehensive understanding of family violence, largely attributing it to culture. Several comments reflected this increase in knowledge:

- My understanding of family violence is any type of rights that are taken away in terms of a conflict or a dispute between two parties. It could be anything from physical, emotional, or psychological abuse. **I learned that family violence is not exclusive to the Muslim community, but I do see family violence tied to culture.** Some people throw a line of ‘This is the way I was raised,’ or ‘This is what I was subjected to. I turned out okay. What’s the big deal?’ When they say this, they clearly do not have the education or understanding that what they’re doing and saying is contributing to violence. It is often the case that perpetrators are not well informed and not receptive to any information.
- “I do understand that family violence is more than one type of violence. I think physical violence is the least worrisome. There are so many other types of violence that are more psychologically damaging than just physical violence.”

Another Imam explained his new understanding of family violence and the value of this training. He mentioned several critical points concerning the need for and benefit of the training. He reflected:

Family violence is emotional, psychological, and/or physical abuse that is directed at individuals in the family construct. It is terrible because it happens where a person is most vulnerable, in their home. **This family violence prevention program is so important because it creates awareness and fosters communication.** In the Muslim community, family violence is often put under the rug, under the carpet. It is not something that people talk about openly because of cultural contexts and because of keeping face. Sometimes they don’t even know what family violence is nor do they know it is wrong. There is a portion of the community that does not have access to English speaking services. They don’t even know what is going on in society or what rules have changed. That is why **it is important to train community leaders to increase awareness and communication.**

A female leader expanded her understanding of family violence to include its presence among the elderly. She stated, “A lot more needs to happen with the older community. This is not something that just affects the young. Older women have suffered for years.” A regional female Muslim leader added, **“Education is the key component to preventing family violence.”**

## Learned how to recognise and respond to Family Violence

The training emphasised the centrality of educating the community to (1) recognise family violence and (2) know how to respond appropriately and effectively. **The training emphasised that preventing family violence was the responsibility of the community; yet, led by a knowledgeable Imam or community leader.** Participants acknowledged the importance of community education:

- “Girls and women need to know what is acceptable behaviour from a man. They need to know that if someone loves you, they don’t put you in fear. If they are fearful, then they need to know what to do, and have a plan.”
- “We have in our faith that if you don’t know something, go to those who know. **This training taught me how to recognise, respond, and refer.** I have to refer victims to the right agency because I recognise that I do not have the skills, nor do I know everything.”

A female community leader acknowledged that **the training created a new and much-needed network.** She explained, “If an Imam does not know how to respond to a family violence issue, then he should not give advice. Rather, **this training taught us the importance of hav-**

**ing a network one can reach out to for help.** Imams know the strengths in their community, and should draw on experts when addressing family violence.”

**The training provided Imams and community leaders with the opportunity to reflect on previous responses to family violence.** For some Imams, this was eye-opening. A community leader shared, “I spoke to several Imams who said regretfully during the training, ‘A mother came to me for help and my advice was to call the police. I did not know what else to do. Now I feel so guilty that she might really be in trouble.’” Another Imam recognised his role in responding to family violence. He stated, “We have a massive responsibility as leaders, one that we don’t fully understand at the moment.” This recognition was impactful. An Imam reflected:

“I have had young girls come to me whose families are forcing them to get married to individuals because of a fear that they will get too old to be married. I have issues of girls being hit by their older brother. I also have fathers beating up their boys. Sometimes, the abuse is not physical but psychological. For example, it can be emotional. I have had women being ignored and ostracised in their own home. Why do people have to put up with that type of stuff? I now consider all of this family violence.”

Muslim community leaders and Imams stated:

- **“The training answered questions I didn’t even know I had about family violence.”**
- **“The training’s interactive activities were beneficial.** The different activities allowed us to pick up the information, deal with it, live it, breathe it. This made the learning experience much more powerful.”

An Imam shared an unsettling experience where the knowledge acquired from the training informed his response. He stated,

“A sister contacted me and explained that for five years she has experienced physical and mental abuse from her husband. Now, she was beaten up and pregnant. She was trying to stay with her husband, which was difficult for me to understand. Yet, I learnt in the program that this is sometimes common. **I would have been completely unprepared if it were not for the training. I went through the protocols and the processes that I learned;** but in the end, the sister did not leave her husband. It is sad, but there’s only so much I could do.”

The confidence to not only recognise, but also respond appropriately was a positive outcome of the training.

## Identified appropriate governmental and non-governmental services

A female community member spoke of the urgent need for increased education for Muslims living in Victoria, Australia. She said, “family violence is very secretive and dysfunctional. There is a lot of fear, shame, and stigma regarding family violence. Women do not know what resources are available to them.” Several Imams made the point that family violence is an issue for all faiths, and not exclusive to Islam. An Imam explained, “Women, regardless of faith, find it difficult to talk about abuse. I learned through this training that there are many services and government initiatives that are organised to work with women.” One main issue was how Imams could encourage women to use secular services. An Imam reflected, Before the training, my question was, ‘How do I get it solved?’ Learning the answer to that question through the training was the number one take home for me. Yet, the unique needs of Muslim women and children needed to be addressed. For a female community leader, being Muslim was viewed as a barrier to obtaining



government services. She stated, “Muslim women and children find it prohibitive to live in a safe house alongside women with substance abuse problems or not responsive to Muslim dietary requirements. The Victorian Muslim community is in urgent need for an Islamic-friendly safe house only for Muslim women.” Yet, despite this gap in service, the training included government representatives that explained the referral process and government agencies charged with helping victims and their families. Imams found this learning invaluable. For example, one Imam reported,

“I learned about all the different organisations that are involved in preventing and supporting families afflicted with family violence. For example, the community groups that are involved and the number of governmental organisations. In addition, I did not know how much money was being invested by the government to solve this problem. Every bit of the training was necessary.”

The Muslim community leaders and Imams by and large agreed that the number one thing that stood out in the training was their learning about the step-by-step procedure they needed to follow when presented with family violence. Learning about the diversity of organisations was just as critical to their understanding of the secular process. All of the Muslim leaders stressed that this was what they hoped to gain from the training, and were grateful that this was a core component.

## **Grasped the importance of engaging proactively with Muslim communities**

The Muslim community leaders agreed that they needed to proactively engage with their communities to educate their families about family violence prevention. Several female community leaders felt that children should learn about family violence from a young age. A few comments stated:

- We should have conversations with young Muslims. We can teach them early that family violence is unacceptable. They need to learn that it is unacceptable whether or not it is perpetrated by a man or a woman, boy or a girl.
- Imams should talk to kids about family violence. They need to learn what is unacceptable behaviour in Islam. If we teach them, they will be better able to speak up and not be afraid.
- Imams need to speak about family violence in Islamic schools. I do know that some Islamic schools bring in speakers to address bullying and zero tolerance to bullying; but Imams need to talk to the kids as well.

The training allowed the community leaders time to reflect on the socio-cultural dynamics of their communities. One Imam who works closely with an Islamic school reflected,

“There are minor issues in the way males speak to females that we’re addressing in Islamic schools. I’ve seen it and heard it with my own eyes. It is the talking down sort of thing, which often mirrors cultural perspectives of gender. It’s very important for us that programs are put into place to educate our kids on how to communicate with each other respectfully. I think this should be a top priority because we are teaching the next generation.”

For other leaders, proactive engagement with their communities was essential. Below are a few comments:

- If somebody says something about family violence, it is common for people to think, ‘Well, that’s between husband and wife, let them deal with it. I’m not going to stick up for one or

the other for the sake of being involved or implicated.’ We need to educate our community members to have the courage to stamp out something they seek and know is wrong.

- We really need to work together. We can’t work in silos when it comes to family violence. It is the community’s responsibility to keep everyone safe.
- The Imams should take responsibility for teaching the community about family violence. Every Friday they do the khutbah at the masjid. They address a wide variety of topics. Family violence should be one of these topics. Unfortunately, for many people, speaking about family violence is taboo. People just push it under the carpet.
- Highly practising Muslims will take the word of the Imam and apply it. Imams have a role in preventing family violence. What tends to happen is some Imams might give one-sided advice that is culturally aligned. However, the Imam must be educated to give the proper advice aligned with current knowledge about Australian government and not-for-profit organisations’ services. Definitely, 100% the Imams should be involved in proactively educating their communities about family violence and family violence prevention.

The training highlighted gaps in services to Muslims living in Victoria. One Imam recognised the urgent need to reach Muslim families in non-traditional ways, such as through videos, podcasts, lectures, and interactive programming. He stated,

“We need to have real-life stories out there. There needs to be a record of what’s going on, because it is going on, especially in the ultra-traditional communities. That’s where most of the family violence occurs, in the communities that are religious. Ideologically speaking, it is the Wahabis Salafists and the Tablighi Jamaat. In both communities, family violence is rife. Members of those communities are absent from this training. I can honestly say that it wasn’t a smorgasbord of the Muslim community attending this training.”

This last comment suggests an urgent need to extend the training’s reach to closed communities, such as the Wahabis.

## **Asserted the need to continue Muslim leader family violence prevention training**

When asked who should deliver the education and where the education would take place, many participants responded in “mosques and where Muslims congregate.” These locations were quickly identified because Muslims are “more comfortable in their own community groups.” An Imam asserted the need to expand the training to other Muslim leaders in the community. For example,

“All Muslim leaders should be upskilled. Heads of schools and principals should be upskilled. Coordinators need to be educated because they’re usually working with children experiencing family violence. They too need to be upskilled. The Muslim community also has a lot of females who are very well educated in Islam. Upskill them, as well as the Imam. The Imams, as we know, are males. When women speak to an Imam, sometimes they are concerned that they will not be well represented. We need highly educated females in Islam who have the requisite skills to help families. Skilled female leaders can work with the two parties and then the Imam can make a ruling.”

Another Imam praised the training and the programs offered by the Board of Imams Victoria. He stated,

“It is great to do professional development. I participated in this program because I knew that I needed a better understanding of family violence. I value learning from experts in the field. I also wanted to better understand how to handle family violence issues, espe-

cially the legal implications. This training opened my perspective. I'm always interested in upskilling and educating myself because I am a work in progress."

The Muslim leaders were in agreement that the training was beneficial. One participant commented, "There is no such thing as too little training on this subject. If we could have family violence training on a monthly basis, that would be great. We need to have the most current information."

## **Indicated the need for additional training in Islamic and real-life responses to family violence**

Upon conclusion of the training, the Muslim community leaders found additional training to be needed and necessary, especially from an Islamic perspective. Trained with an Islamically integrated perspective will allow leaders to form stronger connections with family violence victims. An Imam supported this reasoning,

"Islam must be integrated into our responses to family violence. Some families in the Muslim community are very conservative and ultra-religious. If we try to resolve family violence from a secular viewpoint or a western viewpoint, they will not be receptive. That simply results in a big divide. It won't matter what we do or how we set up a response or program. If it isn't grounded in Islam, some families will not participate."

The Imams agreed that Islam was fundamental to helping families in crisis. An Imam explained, "For family violence prevention and response to be successful, we must stay within the bounds of Islam and Islamic law." However, a female community leader asserted concerns regarding the interpretation and applications of Islam and Islamic law when engaging with issues of family violence. She said,

"It's not the Islamic knowledge that I doubt. I worry about the interpretation of Islamic knowledge. I find that there needs to be consistency from one Imam to another. When we look at our Imams and our population of Imams, many of them are from different cultures and different countries. What is most important, though, is how well their knowledge aligns with Australian society."

To upskill Imams with cultural backgrounds other than Australia, a community leader suggested the training include real life stories. The rationale is the need to meet someone who has experienced family violence first hand. He reflected, "I do believe that delivering the training with individuals who have personally gone through family violence might make it more real. The person needs to be someone of a progressive nature who isn't afraid to talk about these issues. That would be the best approach." Others found the training to exceed expectations. Suggestions included:

- Invited speaker who has experienced family violence;
- Increased interactivity; and,
- Continued training to maintain currency.

## **Pinpointed gaps impeding service entry points and service pathways**

There were concerns expressed by the female community leaders regarding the appropriateness of females seeking help from Imams, arguing that men and women are often not represented

equally. Complicating the issue was the problem of women not knowing where to begin. A female leader explained,

“Women do not leave because they do not know where to go, particularly if their mothers and sisters are telling them, ‘What are you going to do? You have no money or job.’ If they had a Muslim friendly safe house, they could go there for support and help. Muslim women need to know there is a safe place for them and their children. They need the knowledge on how to protect themselves and their children.”

Identified barriers to securing resources include, but are not limited to a lack of Arabic-speaking interpreters; government support that is offered solely through a Western viewpoint; and a reluctance of Imams to grant women divorces. These findings indicate that the training met a critical need and was well-received. Its objectives were met and participants reported gaining improved knowledge and confidence to respond to issues of family violence in their communities. Importantly, the training revealed a need for monthly/bimonthly short trainings to maintain currency and a Muslim leader support network maintained via social media sites, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, or Line.



# Part 5: Summary and Recommendations

The BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program provided participants with current information about the dynamics of FDV, Australian laws regarding FDV, and the processes in place to support the work of Muslim community leaders and their role in responding and referring victims of FDV. We begin with answering the questions that guided the evaluation. This is followed by recommendations aligned with the MARAM framework.

## 1. What did participants learn by taking part in the program?

The participants learned: an understanding of what is (and is not) considered FDV; the range of government and community-based organisations working to prevent FDV and the variety of accessible resources available to them as faith leaders; effective ways to collaborate with different service providers that respond to FDV; successful intervention and case planning strategies that are effective and in the best interests of victims; and the importance of networking with other faith leaders and community and health-based services to assist with their work.

## 2. Did participating community faith leaders receive the information and assistance they needed and/or sought?

The participations completed the training program with a renewed sense of confidence about addressing FDV prevention in their day-to-day work. They acknowledged that the information learned, particularly from experts in the field, provided them with the most up-to-date information. Participants also appreciated the varied and easy to access to resources and services available to assist their work in FDV prevention and referral. To further build on this knowledge, participating faith leaders suggested a need to include additional information from Allied Health experts to assist with information that is sensitive to the Muslim community, such as sexual assault related domestic violence.

## 3. Were the instructors effective in delivering the program?

Instructors invited to the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program were all experts in their respective fields and successful in delivering a high quality program. Dr Nada Ibrahim, academic

from the University of South Australia, led the training program through a research informed orientation. She focused on legal, social, and cultural issues relevant to FDV. Different members of Government and Community run FDV organisations also delivered sessions within the training program. These included ‘In Touch,’ a multicultural centre working to stop Family Violence and ‘Our Watch,’ a campaign supporting bystanders in the prevention of FDV. The participants found the choice of instructors and the content they delivered to be both informative and useful.

#### **4. Was the content appropriate for the aims of the program?**

The content was relevant and appropriate. In considering future trainings, participants suggested an interest in acquiring additional strategies to assist them when working collaboratively with female Muslim leaders. The Imams indicated a need for future trainings focused on culturally sensitive issues related to FDV.

#### **5. Did participants learn about government and non-governmental resources for preventing and referring incidents of FDV?**

Yes, participants learned about the wealth of resources available for support in preventing and referring incidents of FDV. These included: a wide range of experts in the field, such as Dr Nada Ibrahim from University of South Australia; obtaining support and resources through organisations such as ‘In Touch,’ a multicultural centre against Family Violence and ‘Our Watch’ a campaign supporting bystanders in the prevention of FDV.

#### **6. Do participants feel empowered to prevent and respond to incidents of FDV?**

Yes. All participants felt empowered to respond and refer victims appropriately upon conclusion of the training. They gained a broad understanding of services available in Victoria. Participants recommended additional trainings to remain current in best practices and informed of service and/or resource changes in the field.

#### **7. Do participants see additional training necessary?**

Yes. Participants indicated a need for ongoing training programs. They acknowledged the significant role BOIV plays in the Muslim community and suggested the need for BOIV to continue to offer trainings to faith leaders on FDV. Participants also suggested the BOIV serve as an FDV ‘hub’ where faith leaders can access current resources, support services, and continued trainings. Participants suggested an urgent need for collaborative meetings with Allied health and public health professionals to stay current with changes in FDV governmental and non-governmental support structures.

# Recommendations

The evaluation found a need for continued FDV trainings for Muslim faith leaders. The recommendations presented emerged from the analysis of the data and are aligned with the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM). The framework ensures organisations and services are effectively preventing FDV.

The MARAM framework seeks to:

- Make certain organisations and services are effectively preventing FDV;
- Increase the safety of individuals experiencing family violence;
- Ensure the broad range of FDV experiences across the spectrum of seriousness including for Aboriginal and diverse communities, children, young people and older people, across identities, and family and relationship types;
- Keep perpetrators in view and hold them accountable;
- Be used across a broad range of organisations and sectors; and,
- Ascertain consistent use of the Framework across these organisations and sectors.

Using the MARAM framework as a guide to structure the recommendations shows the BOIV training to be effective. However, additional trainings tailored for the Muslim community are recommended.

## **MARAM Recommendations Pillars for the BOIV Training Program**

### **Pillar 1: Shared understanding of family violence**

#### **1. Expand training to include victim voices**

Including the voices of victims of FDV with the aim to learn more about particular situations, is growing in acceptance and an important feature in FDV prevention programs.

Although a sensitive area, participants recommended the inclusion of real life stories of FDV, especially from victims. Real life stories were perceived to give faith leaders more nuanced understandings of how victims of FDV navigated their own experiences including using support services, determining what access points and networks are available (or not available). As described by faith leaders, detailed information about how victims of FDV ‘survived’ would provide them with examples of how best to support the ‘victim-survivor’ transition process.

## **2. Include perpetrator interventions and behaviour change programs**

Muslim faith leaders considered the need to include a wider range of human service agencies in the BOIV FDV Prevention Training program. In particular, participants suggested a need to learn more about perpetrators and specific resources and organisations available that focus on FDV perpetrators. Participants acknowledged that perpetrators of FDV can be of any gender, but made special mention of the prevalence and impact of male perpetrators. Suggestions for additional trainings included: developing better understandings about the causes/influences of behaviour change in men; current intervention strategies/support services and their success rates; and the need for both the BOIV and participants to network with organisations to collaboratively manage FDV.

### **Pillar 2: Consistent and collaborative practice**

## **3. Include Child Protection Practitioners and Sexual Assault Services**

An integral feature of the BOIV FDV Prevention Training Program was to create awareness of supportive network/agencies in FDV prevention. Faith leaders requested the inclusion of child service professionals skilled to address child protection and issues related to child experiences of FDV, sexual assault, and other forms of FDV violence that impacts children. Participants recognised the need to establish stronger networks to assist with their responding and referring, as this remains to be a sensitive issue. In addition, given the emotional challenges of working with FDV, participants suggested a need for male faith leaders have specific trainings on cultural sensitivities regarding gender.

### **Pillar 3: Responsibilities for risk assessment and management**

## **4. Establish a comprehensive checklist or flowchart to guide faith leaders in identifying and addressing FDV through an Islamic perspective**

Muslim faith leaders are highly regarded religious authorities in their communities. Their work includes translating and working with Fatwas (Islamic rulings) particularly when reconciling between Sharia and Australian family law. Although confident in their Islamic knowledge guiding their decision-making processes relevant to FDV prevention, participants acknowledged cultural knowledge overriding religious teachings on some occasions. To mitigate cultural interference, participants recommended a comprehensive checklist or flow-chart to guide faith leaders in navigate sensitive spaces in keeping with best practices of prevention and response to FDV.



## **5. Train women as faith leaders**

Male faith leaders were hesitant to address issues relevant to female sexual assault or other gender related violence issues. Participants acknowledged that the Islamic faith does not prohibit or discourage men from working closely with women, if modesty (haya) is observed. However, male participants felt less comfortable discussing sexual assault with women. A solution was suggested for trained female faith leaders as a point of entry for female sexual assault victims. Further, female support might encourage reluctant women to seek help. Participants viewed the BOIV as the appropriate organisation to increase female participation in FDV trainings and include them as part of their community support program.

## **Pillar 4: Systems, outcomes, and continuous improvement**

### **6. Include the provision of ongoing training programs for resources, support, and learning**

To better equip and support Muslim faith leaders in the prevention of FDV, participants indicated an urgent need for ongoing training programs to remain current in their knowledge of responding and referring victims of FDV. Participants stressed the importance of being notified if changes occur in resources and/or support systems. Regular collaborative meetings with Allied health and public health community organisations were recommended in addition to formal training programs. The BOIV is uniquely positioned to serve as a resource ‘hub’ for all members of the Muslim community to obtain needed information and support services regarding FDV.

### **7. Include the provision of mental health care for Faith Leaders**

Participants acknowledged the emotional strain of working with individuals and families affected by FCV. Although charged to help others, participants spoke of their need for professional psychological services to help them confidently process their thoughts and emotions to remain an effective resource for FDV victims. As a ‘hub’ for the Muslim community, the BOIV’s role in providing mental health services aligned with Islamic healing practices would be beneficial for faith leaders working on the front lines of FDV.

**For further information we recommend  
the following Community Resources.**

**1800RESPECT**

[www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

**Our Watch**

[www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)

**In Touch**

[intouch.org.au](http://intouch.org.au)

**National Plan to Reduce Violence  
Against Women and their Children (2010-2022)**

[www.plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au](http://www.plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au)

**Safe Steps**

[Safesteps.org.au](http://Safesteps.org.au)

**Men's Referral Service / No To Violence**

Call 1300 766 491

**Seniors Rights Victoria (Elder abuse)**

Call 1300368821

**Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria**

[dvrcv.org.au](http://dvrcv.org.au)

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