

Culturally Appropriate Strategies in Preventing Violence Against Women

A joint workshop presented by

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Violence in culturally and linguistically diverse communities presents particular challenges for practitioners developing prevention initiatives. Successful work in this area requires approaches that are both flexible and respectful of the selected communities' values and needs. This work in turn offers important insights about ways of capturing the interest and support of diverse communities.

This paper elaborates the workshop presentation on the development and implementation of three culturally appropriate strategies to reduce violence against women. The workshop highlights three projects targeting different cultural groups in the two regions of Western Sydney and Wentworth. The targeted groups were the Aboriginal community and other culturally and linguistically diverse groups. The strategies employed were developed according to the cultural needs of the communities targeted and sensitivity towards the issue of violence against women.

The workshop presentation includes:

- a brief over-view of the New South Wales Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women
- presentation of the three identified projects:
 - Hey Sister Girl, It Only Takes One Step (Aboriginal community)
 - Harmony Brings Happiness in the Home (culturally and linguistically diverse groups, focussing on the Indian sub-continent communities)
 - "Living Without Violence" A Visual Arts Exhibition (culturally and linguistically diverse groups)

The presentation of each project includes:

- project rationale - perception that the complicated terminology of different forms of violence would be better comprehended if presented in a visual image/ art form.
- project methodologies - involving women effectively in the process of self exploration through art workshops and the unique strategies applied for successfully engaging those women, many of whom had never been involved in such projects before.

- project outcomes and evaluation
- lessons learned from the three projects
- a presentation of the various resources produced including photographs, video clippings and CDs.

The Overall aims of the projects:

To implement culturally appropriate strategies for raising awareness about the issue of violence against women, using a positive and empowering approach, by:

- providing a safe and non-threatening environment for women to express their feelings on violence against women;
- giving enough space for self exploration about the issue;
- encouraging the participants to express themselves non-verbally through the visual arts medium;
- facilitating the creative process in articulating ideas for the development of culturally appropriate resources such as information pamphlets, videos, CDs, catalogues, posters and banners.

The development and implementation processes used for the three projects sought to ensure that the women concerned - both the participants and the target group - were respected and empowered to do something about the issue of violence against women, either for themselves or for their sisters in the community.

A brief over-view of the NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women:

Equal access to safety and well-being is a basic human right for women and children. That is, the right to be safe from violence, violence in all its forms - physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, financial, social and spiritual. Moreover one could argue that a community which is safe for women and children is safe for all.

In this regard we would like to briefly discuss with you the NSW Government's Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women. You may ask why do we need a Strategy that focuses specifically on violence against women? The answer is that violence, or the threat of violence has been, and still is, used to exert power and control over women and children. Sometimes the community responds differently to men and women who experience violence. Often community attitudes imply that women are responsible for the violence they experience, by denying the pervasiveness and seriousness of the abuse, or by questioning where a woman was at a particular time, how she was dressed, or why she didn't leave a situation. Often the women themselves do not recognise or acknowledge that they are experiencing violence. Research indicates that violence against women remains seriously under reported. (ABS Women's Safety Survey, 1996) . For all of the above reasons, a strategy that focuses on reducing and/or preventing violence against women has been recognised by the NSW State Government as vital to the wider community.

The NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women promotes a comprehensive understanding of the many forms of violence experienced by women. The Strategy adopts a broad definition of violence. It includes stalking, intimidation, hate-related violence, sexual, verbal, emotional and other forms of harassment and physical assault as types of violence experienced by women in addition to domestic violence and sexual assault. The Strategy promotes a holistic approach in reducing violence for all women as well as responses that are tailored to the specific needs of particularly vulnerable women.

The NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women consists of four key structural elements:

- The Violence Against Women Specialist Unit, facilitating the implementation of the Strategy. It is located in the Crime Prevention Division of the NSW Attorney General's Department where prevention of crime against the wider community, including men, is being addressed by other initiatives.
- The NSW Council on Violence Against Women, with membership drawn from Government departments and the community sector, provides high level advice to the State Government on issues of violence against women and in the development of policies and strategies to address these issues.
- A State Management Group comprising representatives from the Government agencies working within the Strategy, ensures a whole-of-government approach to the issue of violence against women.
- 17 Regional Violence Prevention Specialists, who are located throughout the State and are in the business of identifying and addressing regional violence prevention concerns.

The operational framework of the NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women is consistent with three major approaches, namely, a partnership approach, a preventative focus and the promotion of a broad understanding of all forms of violence against all women. Since it is everyone's business to take responsibility for reducing violence against women, the Strategy maintains that an effective response would be promoting partnerships between organisations providing services to women and children who experience violence, and that would include both Government and non-Government agencies. Funding for the Strategy comes from four government agencies - the NSW Attorney General's Department, NSW Department of Community Services, NSW Health and the NSW Police Service, supported by the Department for Women. Integral to the work of the Strategy is the involvement of the community and community-based organisations. At a statewide level this occurs through community membership on the Council on Violence Against Women.

At local and regional levels, the Regional Specialists liaise with government and non-government agencies and the general community in order to enhance linkages amongst service providers and between service providers and the community, and to develop a range of prevention projects to reduce violence against women (and children). The Specialists facilitate the process for local people to identify local concerns and issues, to feed this information to a Regional Reference Group which acts in an advisory

capacity to the Specialist in each region, and to work together to provide strategies that best suit their community. The projects are decided by each region in consultation with the Regional Reference Group, which has representations from government departments, non-government organisations and community groups. Thus at all levels the Strategy aims to unite government departments, non government organisations and the community to work together in addressing this issue.

The issue of violence against women may appear simply as a social problem, but in reality it is also a matter of sociological complexity, swayed by intrinsic values and controlled by systemic attitudes. Preventing violence against women is not the core business of any single agency, government or non-government. It has to be addressed collaboratively on a partnership basis with the participating agencies sharing their expertise and resources and by coordinating service delivery to produce the best outcomes for victims of violence. Hence, the Regional Violence Prevention Specialists have had to liaise closely with the major stakeholders in their regions such as the Police, Area Health, Department of Community Services, Department of Housing, Department of Education and Training and local councils, as well as involve other non-government agencies such as women's health centres, family support services, youth services networks, migrant and multicultural services as strategic partners in the development and implementation of projects aiming to prevent or reduce violence against women.

Some of the projects target the grass roots community, others target the service providers themselves in terms of information dissemination, training and further education, developing good service practices, learning to work in partnership with other stakeholders, and developing interagency protocols for responding to the needs of women and children. Some of the activities which directly involve women from the community include community education, information provision, including women in the development and production of appropriate resources to assist them to break the cycle of violence, and also providing training for women to identify and articulate their needs and to voice them through appropriate channels. . Through focus groups and informal meetings sensitive issues are discussed and articulated. These are then translated into products; products by the women and for the women.

Project Presentation:

The following are examples of projects specifically developed to target violence prevention in a culturally appropriate manner.

The **'Hey Sister Girl'** pamphlet was developed for and produced by Aboriginal women. We undertook this project jointly as the demographic statistics revealed that the Aboriginal population was concentrated along the borders of both Western Sydney and Wentworth regions. Consultations with Koori interagencies and Koori women indicated that there was a need for culturally appropriate information on violence against women, particularly on family violence.

Four workshops were held with different groups of Aboriginal women in the two regions. In these workshops we discussed the issue of family violence, the complexities involved, the information needed by women, the wording to be used, the contents, design and colour of the pamphlet and the phone card and ways of distributing this resource to the women. Based on these consultations and input from the women at grass roots level, the pamphlet was designed with the assistance of a female Aboriginal artist.

The final product was launched at a women and children friendly venue and environment. The community responded well to the launch and positive feedback has been received about the usefulness of the pamphlet. Thus the whole project was designed and developed around the requirements of the target group with their involvement at every stage of the project. The product was something that they had developed themselves and they owned it with pride. Since September 1998, when it was first launched, there has been a continuous demand for this pamphlet and it has been reprinted and distributed.

These pamphlets are available with us now. For more details about this project please contact either Rugmini on (02) 9633 0717 or Anoop on (02) 4732 1322.

‘Living Without Violence’ was a visual art exhibition by women of Western Sydney. The aim of this exhibition was to raise the wider community’s awareness of issues of violence against women, to empower women with the knowledge and understanding that they have a right to live without violence and to highlight women’s strengths in challenging violence.

The Exhibition was held during the week of International Women’s Day, March 1999, in Parramatta and Auburn local government areas.

Women from the community were invited to create artworks on the above theme. To include women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds the exhibition was advertised in local ethnic media. Hence the exhibition was held in two parts, in two different LGAs, to capture the attention of the different ethnic groups living in those areas. It was publicised through posters which depicted the translated versions of the theme of the exhibition, “Living without Violence”, in four different languages, post cards, fliers and the local media. The response from the community initially began as a trickle, but the momentum soon caught on, and artworks from many different cultural backgrounds and sections of the community were received. Young women in schools learning visual arts subjects were some of the keen participants.

As it was well publicised in the ethnic media, women from a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds came forward with their artworks. The Exhibition provided a wonderful opportunity to women and women artists in the community to express their feelings and personal experiences through the visual arts medium. These were reflected in a range of practices such as craft, painting, sculpture and objects.

Here are a few quotes from the artists themselves:

“My passion for art is about emotions and memories. I put my whole being into it, and create from several images of experiences and the imagination, to know you have to see” (Stohlod, Living Without Violence Exhibition Catalogue, 1999, p 26).

“Sculpture is a way of relinquishing an emotion, it encapsulates my desire to escape reality.....My work allows me a peaceful delusion, a cathartic experience, which for a brief time externalises pain” (Shepherd, Living Without Violence Exhibition Catalogue, 1999, p 24).

Further feedback showed that these women gained a sense of achievement by playing a significant role in raising community awareness about violence against women issues.

“The strength of the Exhibition lay in its diversity including the recognition of cultural approaches” said Ms Melissa Chiu, a lecturer at University of Western Sydney in the School of Visual Arts and who was one of the curators of this Exhibition.

This was a joint project with Auburn and Parramatta City Councils, Immigrant Women’s Speakout Association, a state-wide peak body and Western Sydney Area Health Service. The project was a great success and as a result in the following year, the local councils joined hands with a couple of non-government organisations to organise a similar exhibition.

Posters, catalogues and videos of this exhibition are available. For more information please contact Rugmini on (02) 9633 0717.

Home + Harmony = Happiness (3H) Project:

The 3 H project is a part of the PACT(Police and Community Training) program which aims to foster positive relationships between the police and the communities they serve.

In St Marys and Penrith area a 3H project was conducted with a focus on domestic violence in non-English speaking communities and effective police response. The aim of this was to address key community concerns regarding domestic violence and how it impacts upon families of culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD). Police education was also a component of this project. This project is an excellent example of a partnership approach in reducing violence against women.

Four identified communities ie. Arabic, Filipino, Pacific Islander and Indian sub-continent produced culturally appropriate resources for their communities. These included posters, banners, CD, video, magnets, pens, brochures. All the resources prompted the message of harmony in the home.

Each community had a project co-ordinator. The Indian sub-continent group was co-ordinated by Anoop Johar, regional violence prevention specialist from the Wentworth region. This group produced the following resources;

- CDs in different Indian sub-continent languages for community radio announcements.
- Banner depicting the message Home + Harmony = Happiness.
- *A New Dawn*, a video (drama) on the issues of domestic violence and Indian sub-continent communities
- a poster

The process for producing the resources was similar to that of *Hey Sister Girl* project. Art workshops were organised for the Indian sub-continent women. An artist was engaged to collate these ideas and to develop art work for these resources. All the words and ideas came from women themselves. The artwork produced in these workshops has been used in all the resources i.e. poster, banner, CD and video jackets.

These workshops served a dual purpose firstly, involvement of Indian sub-continent women in producing the art work and secondly- an awareness raising exercise for these women on violence issues.

Another highlight of the project was the purchase of an enclosed trailer that is used to promote an anti-violence message incorporating the 3H concept. Culturally appropriate messages in different languages were painted by the four identified communities. This trailer is stocked with information on domestic violence and is now being utilised by police and community groups on a variety of occasions. This innovative idea proved to be an excellent resource for the community.

The second part of the project included providing cultural awareness and domestic violence training to 300 police officers in the Penrith and St Marys areas.

For more information please contact Anoop Johar on 02 47321 322

Evaluation:

The women who participated in the art workshops and the visual arts exhibition gave feedback on their perceptions of the outcomes for themselves:

- women expressed that they felt more confident in talking about domestic violence issues with other women
- the workshops enabled the women to verbally express feelings they had previously blocked-out
- they became empowered to know that domestic violence was not their fault and that they were not alone
- the women became aware that these workshops provided them an avenue for communication on this sensitive and difficult issue
- they became aware of available support services and ways of accessing them

- some women developed an interest in the visual arts and wanted to further explore their skills in this area
- they realised that they could contribute meaningfully to help other women experiencing / living with violence
- the above realisation enhanced their self-esteem
- the workshops facilitated the process of exploring positive life choices
- the workshops empowered the women by enabling them to take ownership of their own creativity
- the resources that they developed through their own creativity were positively received by the wider community. Some of these resources gained state-wide popularity.

The comments written in the visitors' book placed at the Exhibition showed that the general community welcomed such innovative strategies and that there needs to be more such awareness raising projects.

What we learned from the 3 projects presented:

'Hey Sister Girl'

Promotion:

When promoting the 'Hey Sister Girl' project we found that information passed by word of mouth was very effective in bringing the women together for the workshops. We had advertised the workshops through fliers, which were sent to Aboriginal organisations and groups. However, it was through the participants of the first workshop promoting the project by word of mouth that we achieved a much better response for the rest of the workshops.

Location:

As project co-ordinators we were only the facilitators of the process which was carried out in an environment which we ensured would be informal and friendly. We consulted with the women and chose venues for the workshops in places the women were familiar with and where they felt safe.

High level of participation in planning:

The agenda of the workshop, the direction of the discussion, the collation of input from participants, and other women's business talk were lead by the Aboriginal women themselves. We realised that it was important to let them proceed at their own pace. We learned from one of the workers that if "you push them ...you lose 'em". We respected the fact that they were willing to contribute to the development of resources by giving their time. At the same time they demonstrated their enthusiasm in sharing their perceptions, ideas, experiences and skills in order to help themselves and their sisters.

Tailoring strategies to community needs:

When working with communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it's important to employ different strategies for different communities to address the same issue. The issue of violence against women in particular is an issue that communities may not want to know or talk about. Even when approached individually, the response was that there are other priorities such as settlement issues, employment, housing, education and training.

Strategies to ensure that communities did not feel stigmatised:

Many of the communities felt particularly targeted asking "why target us" for raising awareness. The "Living without Violence" Exhibition project, however, demonstrated the fact that similar strategies could be employed across all ethnic communities for raising awareness about issues of violence against women. The Exhibition was advertised in such a manner that it was perceived as an issue prevailing across the whole society, that women could challenge the issue through their artworks, and that was what the Exhibition was all about.

Publicity and location:

The fact that part of the exhibition was held in the local area (where there is a high proportion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities) and publicised in the ethnic media attracted both artists and viewers from different NESB communities. The publicity poster featured translations of the title in four languages in order that it was inclusive of the NESB community in general.

3 H Project:

Promotional tactics:

The 3H project targeted women of different language backgrounds - Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati and Tamil - from the Indian sub-continent; the process was carried out in a number of layers. Women were invited to informal gatherings to talk about social issues, in particular family happiness and harmony. A positive approach to the issue encouraged women to participate freely without feeling constrained. When they were appealed to for their contribution to help their less advantaged sisters, they responded readily. This was because their socio-cultural value system required of them to devote a certain percentage of their time to welfare or charity work.

The facilitator:

It was definitely advantageous to have a worker of Indian background, who could speak and or understand some of the languages, as the co-ordinator of the project. Often, it has been rationalised that any one who had undergone cross-cultural awareness training and who was sensitive to cultural differences and familiar with domestic violence issues could work with any community on similar projects. But this project demonstrated that it was important for that worker to have some insight into

the cultural complexities and sensitivities within those communities, and this was only possible if the worker came from a similar background.

The women came up with culturally appropriate symbols, such as the henna decorated palm, the wedding palanquin and traditional jewellery to be featured in the information posters, banner, and CD and video-cassette covers - symbols that the community could relate to. These choices made sense, within a cultural context, to the worker facilitating the process and she was able to provide the participants with some much needed acknowledgment.

The strategies employed in the projects presented support the principals of the NSW Strategy to Reduce Violence Against Women of prevention, inclusiveness and community ownership.

Our experiences of actively engaging women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities in violence prevention have been rewarding for us as workers, in developing resources with energised, creative and positive women. These strategies have also appeared to be more effective, than more generic prevention strategies, in terms of achieving the goals of the projects and in raising the awareness of both participants and observers and recipients of the materials produced in the workshops.