

CASE STUDY 2:

COMBATTING RESISTANCE

Strength2Strength project
Save the Children (WA)

Some of the men engaged in facilitated group discussions during the Strength2Strength project perceived men as being victims of domestic violence (DV) and did not seem to accept male accountability for the presence of dominance, control and abuse in intimate relationships.

These views emerged during facilitated group discussions with 11 men of African backgrounds at the mid-term review and the individual interviews conducted at the end of the of the Strength2Strength project.

Some men believed that more women than men are perpetrators of DV in marital relationships, but since men are less likely to share experiences of DV or display their emotions compared to women, their experiences as victims of DV are often not captured. Additionally, they argued that research and DV statistics are biased against men due to an inherent assumption that men are the perpetrators of DV, and women are the victims, adding that they “know the truth behind the statistic” and that they “know things that are going on in the families”, while stating that often “a [male DV perpetrator] is put in the corner and the only thing he can do is react”. These expressions of resistance highlighted the men’s inability to accept accountability for DV in marital relationships as tied to a lack of understanding of condoning of violence against women as a gendered driver of DV.

“Since we enter Australia, we have been singing this one song: DV. Only men alone doing the violence on women? There is no cause, it just comes out of the air?”

(PARTICIPANT, FACILITATED GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH MEN,
SAVE THE CHILDREN WA)

Other men in the groups shifted the conversation from the impact of DV on women to a discussion of their feelings of alienation in Australia, expressed in statements such as “a typical African man in Australia is by himself” or “African men feel that nobody looks after them” and that there is no place available for them to speak and be listened to. They linked their feelings of alienation to the belief that men are victims in multiple ways—from their female partners and from the pressure to shoulder the family’s financial burden

in a country where they often face difficulties accessing job opportunities due to factors such as limited or unsuitable work experience. Limitations to their capacity to fulfil the role of breadwinner is a salient issue in their experience as migrant men, which influenced their readiness to engage with the program content.

Among men from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, expressions of resistance and contestations over the role of gender inequalities in DV can intersect with realities of economic marginalisation and disempowerment. Unemployment and underemployment are realities that immigrant and refugee men grapple with. At the same time, immigrant and refugee men disproportionately occupy jobs with lower pay such as taxi driving (Thomson, 2014). If providing for their family is central to a man’s understanding of masculinity, then their unemployment and or employment in unskilled jobs can result in feelings of disempowerment and loss of their value as men (see Murdolo & Quiazon, 2016).

In CALD communities, resistance could be more clearly addressed with a focus on the role of the gendered drivers of violence against women (see Our Watch et al., 2015) and their context in immigrant and refugee communities. A discussion of the gendered drivers can be supplemented by an exploration of the gender norms and power structures that inform experiences of DV for both men and women, shape the contexts in which immigrant and refugee men experience inequality and marginalisation, and shape men's perceptions of their stake in gender equality. It is also important while addressing resistance in CALD communities to draw on the intersectional approach (Murdolo & Quiazon, 2016) to consider the subordinate position that immigrant and refugee men share with women arising from the structural disadvantages they both experience as migrants.