



Criminology
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Grants

Young Women from African Backgrounds and Sexual Violence

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Overview

This research aimed to investigate the understandings and experiences of young adult women (18-25 years) from African refugee and migrant backgrounds in relation to sexual coercion and violence. The research was motivated by service providers reporting increasing numbers of young African women accessing unplanned pregnancy and relationship services with related concerns about domestic violence. For some of the young women, the pregnancy had led to family and community conflict, leading to them becoming culturally and individually isolated. Consequently, the research was an exploration of how young women perceived the issues and how service providers currently respond in order to identify the need for improved or specialist sexual violence prevention programs and service responses for young women from African refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The research documented young women's understandings of sexual violence, sexual coercion and cultural considerations for the development of preventive approaches. This research examined how agencies currently respond to sexual violence experienced by young adult women and what practitioners view as important to improving responsiveness. The research also identified barriers and enablers for young women in disclosing and accessing support for sexual violence. These findings shaped the recommendations for policy and practice and professional development and training focused on improving responses to sexual violence experienced by young women from an African refugee or migrant background.

The study included three methods:

- An online survey of service providers;
- Individual interviews and group interviews with young women from African backgrounds; and
- Focus groups with service providers.

Online surveys were received from 81 service providers working in health, social, multicultural, housing, domestic violence, youth, law enforcement and legal sectors in Western Australia and South Australia where the research was conducted. Interviews and focus groups were completed with young women aged 18-25 years to explore their understandings and experiences. A total of 12 interviews were held in Western Australia with young women and one face-to-face interview and two focus groups comprising of nine young women were conducted in South Australia. Focus groups were also held with 23 service providers, two in Western Australia and one in South Australia to explore current practice and identify potentially good practice responses to addressing sexual violence.

Gaining an insight into the experiences of young adult women from an African immigrant or refugee background posed a range of challenges due to the sensitive nature of the topic of sexual violence and the silence that surrounds it. The silence about sexual violence reflects prevailing community and societal attitudes towards sexuality of young women and men, male violence against women and cultural mores often linked to religious and cultural beliefs. Young women are often reluctant to disclose personal experiences of sexual coercion and violence and therefore much of the information obtained through interviews conducted with young adult women have been second hand accounts of the experiences of others such as friends and people known to them within their respective communities.

The findings indicate there was no agreement amongst the young women about what is sexual violence. In this research we found that there was variation in knowledge about the many different forms of sexual violence. Sexual violence was mostly defined as being stranger rape. There was some knowledge about the laws concerning sexual violence and support services available to young women victims-survivors of sexual violence. Whereas, when describing experiences with men, the young women's data suggests that sexual violence and coercion is occurring within their relationships. At the present time women are reluctant to disclose or raise concern about men's sexualised behaviour because there can be much to lose for young women including community judgment, shunning and excluding. The stigma associated with sexual violence and the myths, beliefs and attitudes that surround it pose a challenge to young women in speaking up. Other barriers such as language, transport, caring responsibilities, work/study commitments and other settlement issues also act as a hindrance to the full participation of young women from an African background in Australian society and make help seeking more difficult.

Findings from the agency survey and focus groups highlight young women may disclose experiences of sexual violence in a range of agency settings but that there is not one service that is specifically targeted to their needs. The impression is that it is typically older women who are married who seek out services with domestic violence as the presenting issue, rather than younger women who are not married or living with a partner reporting experiences of violence.

The service providers' findings support the young women's perspectives that sexual violence and coercion is a highly taboo topic to discuss with professionals. Consequently, there is a dominant theme in the service providers' data about future efforts being directed towards education and awareness raising about sexual violence, coercion and exploitation. Interview and focus group data from the young women also supports the importance of having such education and awareness raising. Young women suggested that people would be more likely to disclose after periods of education and awareness raising. Some service providers advocated promoting gender equality and independence for young women from African backgrounds as they felt young women were often expected to be unequal to their male partners. Others suggested that it was not appropriate to impose western views about gender equality, rather the focus should be on how young women and men negotiate living in and between two cultures. There was consensus amongst participants that any forms of education, awareness raising and community development utilise culturally appropriate methods and sites.

In relation to service responses and developments these were primarily focused on health and human services. This was largely because sexual violence and exploitation was seen as so unmentionable that it would not be reported to police, but it might be disclosed in a health or community based setting. Consequently, there was very little response to questions about improvements or reforms to law enforcement or judicial systems.

Areas for service development were in two main categories: firstly, a focus on increasing the cultural sensitivity/responsiveness of organisational and worker practices to be more capable of working with young people from African backgrounds; and secondly the continuing need

for specialist sexual violence responses for younger women, especially those in their early teens where an adult service is not appropriate nor is a child protection service response.

The data show that young women from African backgrounds were well aware that many women, particularly refugees exposed to war and other civil conflicts, had experienced rape prior to Australian settlement. This seems to underlie why sexual violence was largely defined as being raped by a stranger amongst some participants. In contrast, sexual violence in the Australian community is committed mostly by someone known or intimate with the victim. This has often deterred women from all parts of the Australian community from reporting sexual violence to authorities. The emphasis of the recommendations on education in the final section of this report highlight the relative obscurity of this problem due to its social unacceptability to be spoken about or addressed and for some participants its association with a traumatic event(s) of the past.

The traditional gendered roles that some young women are ascribed can serve to further obscure from view the problem of violence against women. Efforts towards ending sexual violence and exploitation against young women from an African background need to co-occur with responses that tread a fine line between promoting gender equality and human rights whilst respecting cultural traditions and cohesiveness amongst recently settled communities.

This exploratory study has in some ways ended with more questions than answers about the problem of sexual violence and sexual exploitation for young women from African backgrounds. What it has shown is that in the states where the research was undertaken there is knowledge amongst young women and service providers that sexual violence and exploitation is occurring but that disclosure and reporting to services of any kind is very limited and that in order to reduce and end such violence against young women from African backgrounds there is the need for culturally thoughtful community change, the promotion of gender equality and human rights to secure young women's futures and specialist service delivery responses that can effectively engage and support the needs of young women seeking help. At the preventive end of the continuum there is a strong suggestion that more inclusive strategies are required to work with African communities settled in Australia to shift taboos about discussing men's violence against women and ending it in ways that are culturally responsive. In emphasising the importance of cultural responsiveness it is also critical to note the diversity amongst the African communities settled in Australia in relation to cultural values, experiences in their homelands, religious and cultural beliefs and mores.

The recommendations are therefore largely oriented towards crime prevention goals associated with awareness raising and education and enhancing the cultural responsiveness of police and other human services as working with newly arrived African communities appears of variable quality at present.

It is recommended that:

1. Crime Prevention and Education Programs are specifically developed in consultation with young people from African backgrounds that address the issues of healthy intimate relationships, sexuality and sexualised violence and coercion

- 1.1. Taking into account diverse African cultural backgrounds and practices whilst recognising their experiences of living in Australia
- 1.2. Trialling programs that are targeted at single gender groups so that gender specific issues can be addressed.
- 1.3. Trialling of peer education models as they have been used effectively in other areas of work with young people in relation to sexuality and violence.
2. Development of campaigns that raise awareness about laws, rights and responsibilities in relation to families and relationships including areas such as family law, domestic violence laws, and housing and residential tenancies.
3. Community policing initiatives working directly with African communities are supported so that are identifying what aspects of the practices are leading to positive and supportive outcomes for all community members and any strategies which need revision.
4. Training for police officers that increases understanding of the diversity and dynamics of African communities and families so that when responding to police call outs concerning violence they are better able to understand what responses may be more effective.
5. Development of workforce and organisational development training which increases the cultural knowledge, sensitivity and responsiveness of police and other human service agencies to help seeking by young women from African backgrounds.

Introduction

Addressing sexual violence experienced by young adult women from an African migrant or refugee background living in Australia is challenging. Research with African women has tended to focus on their refugee experiences of sexual violence and its effects prior to settlement in Australia. There is limited research on African women's¹ experiences of male violence following settlement in Australia. Research in this area has predominantly focused on domestic violence, with some reference to sexual abuse (Fisher 2013, Rees and Pease 2007, Zannettino 2012). This gap warrants a focus on sexual violence to gain an understanding of the knowledge and experience of young women from African backgrounds. This is critical as contemporary research suggests that young women are the age group most likely to be victims of sexual violence and the least likely to report (ABS 2013; Kogan 2004). The ABS (2013) findings have been drawn from research with population-based samples that are intended to be a cross section of the population. Gaining an understanding of how sexual violence is viewed and understood by young women is key to informing future good practice responses. Understanding more widely what the community attitudes and perceptions of sexual violence is also important in determining how young victims-survivors, their families and respective communities, may treat and respond to young women effected.. The voices of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds, including African women, are often not heard and their experiences then remain invisible due to a range of barriers that hinder their full and effective participation. This project attempts to begin including their voices and experiences.

¹ This includes African women refugees and migrants settled in Australia

Current research and theorising about men's violence against women in relation to race, culture and ethnicity

While it is widely agreed that all women can be victims of men's violence, the role of class, ethnicity, sexuality, culture and race in men's violence against women (MVAW) has been increasingly problematised in recent years (see, for example, Crenshaw 1991, Wang 1996, Dasgupta 1998, Almeida and Durkin 1999, Bograd 1999, Bent-Goodley 2005, Burman and Chantler 2005, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, Sokoloff and Pratt 2005, Pease and Rees 2008, Erez, Adelman et al. 2009, Fuchsel, Murphy et al. 2012). Early feminist theorists argued that MVAW was an issue of gender inequality and men's entitlement, 'a consequence of socially constructed and culturally approved gender inequality' (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005), and, therefore, all women were potentially at risk of sexual violence (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). There has since been an increased focus on exploring the ways in which gendered violence is influenced and shaped by other forms of oppression (Andrews 1999, Bograd 1999, Jiwani 2005, Pease and Rees 2008). In her influential work, Razack (1994, p.897) argues that 'when the terrain is sexual violence, racism and sexism intersect in particularly nasty ways to produce profound marginalization.' Subsequently authors have added to the intersects including ethnicity, class privilege, sexuality, immigration and visa status, able-bodiedness, age and employment status as also influencing the ways in which women are subjected to male violence (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, Rees and Pease 2006, Bent-Goodley 2007, Dimopoulos 2010). These various forms of marginalisation contribute to heightening the risks and vulnerabilities of specific groups of women (Jiwani 2005).

The result of this increased acknowledgement of the multiple forms of marginalisation that influence MVAW, has led to increasing use of intersectionality in explaining MVAW. Intersectionality' was introduced by African-American and non-Western feminists to explore the interlocking and multiple forms of oppression that shape women's lives (Crenshaw 1991, Rees and Pease 2006). Tomlinson (2013, 255) has argued that 'as a conceptual framework that focuses attention on the degree to which all identities are multidimensional, intersectionality is a nexus of complex arguments about gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, nation, hierarchy, power, control, and value'. An intersectional approach suggests there is no singular explanatory cause or construct of MVAW, rather the intersections of all systems and forms of power and oppression must be explored (Dasgupta 1998, Bograd 1999, Bent-Goodley 2009, Burnette 2013, Parker and Hefner 2013). Bograd (1999, 276) further suggests that 'intersectionalities colour the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained.'

With the increased attention to the ways in which class, race, culture and ethnicity, among other factors, influence MVAW, contrasting research has emerged on just what role these factors play in MVAW (Dimopoulos 2010, Fuchsel, Murphy et al. 2012, Gill, Begikhani et al. 2012, Martínez and Khalil 2012, Burnette 2013, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria 2013, Fisher 2013, Parker and Hefner 2013). For example, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005, p.44)

cite a number of studies arguing that 'there is considerable empirical evidence suggesting that the most severe and lethal domestic violence occurs disproportionately among low-income women of colour'. They further suggest that other studies have 'found that when socioeconomic factors are controlled, racial and ethnic differences in the rate of intimate partner violence largely disappear' (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). In contrast Menjivar and Salcido's (2002) review of the literature suggests that the incidence of domestic violence is no higher among refugee communities than it is in the mainstream population (see also Rees and Pease 2006). Whereas Perilla, Bakeman and Norris (1994) have argued that women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds are particularly at risk of experiencing domestic violence. What is increasingly clear, however, is that 'domestic and family violence manifests through universal patriarchal foundations, as well as with culturally and socially mediated causes' (Rees and Pease 2006, p.49). For people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, for example, changing gender roles have been found to play a significant causal factor in the incidence of MVAW (Zannettino 2012, Fisher 2013). In addition, in some communities, men's honour is defined in relation to women's activities and sexual behaviour (Akpinar 2003, Gill, Begikhani et al. 2012) resulting in asymmetrical/hierarchical power relation between genders (Akpinar 2003).

What constitutes violence varies from culture to culture (Zannettino 2012). Understanding of MVAW is not complete if it does not explore 'specific forms of abuse that are particular to women's cultural backgrounds' (Bograd 1999, Yoshihama 1999, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, p.42). This is particularly important with relation to women from refugee and migrant backgrounds (Razack 1994, Yoshihama 2000, Rees and Pease 2006, Rees and Pease 2007, Zannettino 2012). Zannettino (2012) suggests that:

[a] theory of domestic violence that recognizes the ways that other forms of structural power operate in conjunction with gender oppression can lead to a more nuanced understanding of how, for example, discrimination, the cultural values of the dominant culture, and the ethnocentrism of institutional and cultural practices of countries receiving refugees, put up particular barriers for women and their children, which result in them living in unsafe situations. (p 824).

Bent-Godley (2007, p.93) has further argued, that 'understanding the cultural orientation provides an attuned sense of direction, an expanded awareness of potential factors, and a keen lucidity of latent barriers and strengths that can be used to address the challenges of IPV.'

Problems with a Cultural Analysis

Razack (1994, p.896) suggests that exploring 'culture talk' 'is a double-edged sword'. In considering cultural variations in MVAW, there is a risk of contributing 'to the false belief that violence against women is only something that happens to 'others'' (Pease and Rees 2008, p.41), perpetuating cultural stereotypes (Razack 1994, Volpp 2001), 'reifying cultures as

static entities' (Jiwani 2005, p.852), dehumanising the victims of MVAW (Bograd 1999) and legitimising MVAW in minority groups (Bent-Goodley 2007, Gill, Begikhani et al. 2012). These will be discussed in-turn below.

Men's Violence against Women, Neo-racism and the 'Culturalisation of race'

Attributing MVAW principally to culture is highly problematic (Pease and Rees 2008). As Said (2003, p.1979) has argued in his seminal text, *Orientalism*, 'cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to be'. Volpp (2001, p.517-8) suggests that in relation to MVAW, 'cultural pathology arguments are problematic. First, these arguments rely upon cultural racism, which positions the culture of certain communities as either inferior or incompatible with the values of the dominant community'. Cultural reductionist (Clifford and Marcus 1986) arguments of MVAW result in the location of cultural considerations of MVAW 'within a primordial interpretation of culture and cultural identity' (Jiwani 2005, p.851).

Attributing MVAW principally to culture and ethnicity results in what Jackson Jnr (2005) has referred to as 'culturalization of race' and 'ethnicization of race thinking'. Through this culture and ethnicity have become dominant features in what Balibar (2007) terms neo-racism. The theme of which, he argues:

...is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but "only" the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions. (p. 84)

This is replicable to the ways in which violence is understood as culturalised. As Jiwani (2005, p.850) has argued:

Violence is similarly culturalized because it is understood as stemming from a cultural conflict, rather than a structural inequality (Razack, 1998). In other words, violence is perceived to be an inherent feature of the racialized culture and a sign of its failure to adapt and/or assimilate to the dominant, Western context.

For women of colour and Indigenous women, then, patriarchal violence occurs 'within the context of racism and the histories of colonialism and imperialism' (Razack 1994, p.971).

Reifying culture

Culture is frequently understood as 'a system of shared beliefs, customs, behaviours and values that are used by members of a society to make sense of their world and each other'

(Rees and Pease 2007, p.3). However, understanding culture in this way means that it is frequently understood to 'exist in a timeless and unchangeable vacuum outside of patriarchy, racisms, imperialism, and colonialism' (Razack 1994, p.896; Volpp 2001, see also Rees and Pease 2006). To challenge the essentialist views of culture and violence it is necessary to understand culture as 'constantly emerging, influenced by contemporary imposed or welcomed changes, rather than a static entity that could, in isolation, be blamed for domestic violence' (Rees and Pease 2007, p.3) (see also Chambers 1994, Ang 2001, Volpp 2001, Ampofo, Beoku-Betts et al. 2004, Yuval-Davis 2012 among others, who argue for the need to understand the porousness of cultures and a view of culture as mobile and in a process of transition). It is also important to recognise that 'no racial or ethnic group is monolithic', rather culture is experienced and enacted in different ways by individuals within community groups (Bent-Goodley 2007, p.893).

It is necessary then to reject simplistic reductionist explanations of the role of culture in MVAW (Akpinar 2003, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005). The focus instead needs to be on understanding 'how male domination manifests itself within each culture to explore the connections with men's violence in those cultures' (Rees and Pease 2006, p.3). Through this it will be possible to 'address how different communities' cultural experiences of violence are mediated through structural forms of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, economic exploitation, heterosexism, and the like' (Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, p.45). This will ensure that intervention strategies for minority groups do not 'reinforce cultural values that tolerate violence against women' (Rees and Pease 2006, p.3) but also that 'cultural differences that can promote wellbeing' are not undermined (ibid, p.3).

[The perpetuation of cultural stereotypes](#)

Razack (1994) argues that violence in immigrant communities is often seen as a cultural attribute and a 'sign of backwardness'. Attributing MVAW to culture can result in the perpetuation of cultural stereotypes (Burman and Chantler 2005, Jiwani 2005). Models of cultural explanation result in the behaviour of a few individuals being 'thought to characterize the cultures of entire nations' (Volpp 2001, p.511). Through the portrayal of particular communities as intrinsically violent the behaviour of individuals within those communities is viewed as beyond Western critique or comparison (Pease and Rees 2008, Gill, Begikhani et al. 2012).

Cultural stereotypes and the sorts of neo-racism described above are propagated by how media report incidences of MVAW within particular cultural groups. As Gill (2006, p.3) has argued 'media reporting of honour crimes has influenced mainstream public perception of ethnic minority groups and even engendered racism. Because women are often seen as representatives of their culture, the danger is that ethnic minorities are seen as regressive and backward, and somehow morally inferior'.

[Dehumanisation and Denial of Victimisation](#)

Victimisation of cultural minorities who have experienced MVAW is denied through the use of these stereotypes which are used to naturalise or obscure suffering as well as by defining violence as 'culturally normal' for groups that are not from the dominant white culture

(Dasgupta 1998, Bograd 1999, Volpp 2001, Burnette 2013). This has a number of outcomes, including women from minority groups being less likely to seek support. For example, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005, p.53) argue that 'stereotypical perceptions of Black women as aggressive, resilient, and immune to the effects of violence have prevented Black women from receiving equal and sympathetic treatment in the criminal justice system, particularly by police officers'.

Legitimising MVAW through culture

Cultural explanations have been used to justify and legitimise MVAW (Razack 1994, Dasgupta 1998, Burman and Chantler 2005, Sokoloff and Dupont 2005, Bent-Goodley 2007, Pease and Rees 2008). For example, culture has been used as a defence argument by perpetrators in courtrooms, and as Gill (2006, p.7) has argued 'the deployment of 'culture' in the legal context generally allows for only one perspective, usually that belonging to the claimant'. By using culture as a defence, cultural rights are privileged over the human rights of the victim (Gill, Begikhani et al. 2012). Through cultural defence 'male aggressors come to be seen as victims while women who have been subjected to violence are represented as having brought abuse or death on themselves' (Bent-Goodley 2007, Gill, Begikhani et al. 2012, p.76). Dasgupta (1998) gives the example of a female Chinese immigrant in the USA being murdered by her husband after she admitted to having an affair. The husband was given a reduced manslaughter charge by the judge, who after hearing the testimony of an anthropologist concluded that the man was 'driven to violence by traditional Chinese values about adultery and loss of manhood' (p.209).

In addition, Gill et al (2012, p.83) have noted that police officers routinely dismiss Honour Based Violence (HBV) 'as part of the culture of black and minority ethnic communities', and as a result they do not take HBV seriously, regularly failing to protect women from violence.

Access to support services by minority groups

There are culturally-mediated factors that influence the assistance seeking and disclosure of abuse by women from minority groups (Rees and Pease 2006, Bent-Goodley 2009). These include shame for the individual, family and community (Dasgupta 1998, Gill 2006, Zannettino 2012), community and family taking precedence over the individual, normalisation of violence (Rees and Pease 2006), language and cultural barriers, fears of investigations perpetuating negative cultural stereotypes (Razack 1994, Bent-Goodley 2005, Burman and Chantler 2005, Jiwani 2005, Dimopoulos 2010, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria 2013), uncertain legal status of immigrant women, unemployment, lack of access to financial resources (Dasgupta 1998, Menjivar and Salcido 2002) and social isolation (Menjivar and Salcido 2002, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria 2013).

Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) give examples of some of these barriers, such as 'a Vietnamese woman who has been taught that saving face and family unity pre-empt individual safety will be reluctant to seek outside help for domestic violence' (p.43). In addition, they give the example of African American women who 'may fear that calling the police will subject their partners to racist treatment by the criminal justice system as well as confirm racist stereotypes of Blacks as violent' (p.43). Zannettino (2012, p.820) found in her recent

research with Liberian women from refugee backgrounds living in South Australia that 'women were very concerned that interventions from outsiders would publicize their problems, thereby bringing shame onto their family and community'. In addition, these women were also fearful of seeking support from within their own community as this would mean that members of the community would learn of the violence within the family that would result in stigmatisation by the community (Zannettino 2012).

Sexual violence, gender, culture, race and conflict

Sexual violence and assault is a serious crime affecting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of women worldwide. There has been much debate about sexual violence in relation to its definition. Liz Kelly's (1988) formative work on sexual violence has been influential to current understandings where she argued that sexual violence occurred along a continuum including sexist and sexualised remarks, sexual harassment, sexual coercion and pressure, sexual exploitation and rape. Underpinning the continuum is the assumption that sexual violence occurs in a patriarchal society in which gender inequality is pervasive and condoned in some instances. Legal definitions of sexual assault are traditionally narrower than those identified by authors such as Kelly which in practice means that only certain acts of sexual violence are likely to be subjected to legal intervention. Heath (2005) states that there are three components to most legal definitions of sexual assault that include behaviour which defines sexual assault (such as genital contact); non-consent and inability to consent to a sexual act; and the mental state of the accused.

Australian national studies of violence against women indicate that sexual violence is experienced by a large number of Australian women at some time in their lives. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) most recent Personal Safety Survey (PSS) showed that 17% of women reported an experience of sexual violence and/or threat since the age of 15, 1.1% of women reported sexual violence incidents or threats in the past 12 months. A continuing trend in these surveys is that young women aged 18-24 report higher rates of sexual violence in the past 12 months than any other age group (2.2% compared with 1.1%). In the Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health the lifetime prevalence of reported forced sex was 8.7% (Astbury et al 2011). When asked about their experiences since the age of 15, inappropriate comments about their body or sex life were reported by 32.5% of women and 25.1% of women reported unwanted sexual touching in the PSS. Morrison (2006) has noted rates of sexual violence were higher amongst young women in the PSS compared with other age groups, with 30.7% of all the women who experienced sexual violence in the 12 months in the 18-24 year age group. Determining the sexual violence prevalence, incidence and experiences of women from diverse cultural, language and ethnic backgrounds is difficult to determine in Australia. The PSS categories are: Australian born, overseas born in English speaking country and overseas born from where English is not the first language. One of the difficulties with this division is we know little about the diversity of the third category of respondents and like other surveys it cannot take account of women born in Australia from CaLD parents where there is still a strong cultural affiliation to values and norms. The 2012 PSS showed: reported prevalence of sexual violence amongst respondents from non-English speaking countries to be 9.3% and the yearly incidence to be 0.7%. This contrasts with the Australian born population reporting rates of 19.2% and 1.1% respectively.

In Australia as elsewhere there is under-reporting in research and to police and other authorities in relation to sexual assault (Daly 2011, Lievore 2003). Under-reporting has been attributed to a range of issues which include shame and embarrassment of victims, an internalised belief by victims that they may not be believed or they are somehow responsible, fear of the perpetrator, perception that it will not lead to a conviction and not always identifying the experience as an illegal sexual assault. From available public data sets we were not able to establish the extent to which CaLD women were reporting sexual assault and if there were related convictions.

Sexual assault of women as a tactic of war and conflict, sexual violence against women in refugee camps from fellow refugees, police and security officers has been recognised. However, sexual violence against women refugees and migrants in their country of settlement has received very little attention. The limited available literature on sexual violence and women from diverse racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds can be categorised into four main areas. First, demonstrating how women from minority ethnic and racial groups are constructed as 'more violent' and more accepting of sexual violence which leads to the false conclusion that the effects of such violence are therefore lessened when compared to other women (see for example Razack 1994). Second, legal scholarship criticising the 'cultural defence' of violence against women within CaLD communities and research focused on how the law, legal processes and cultures respond differentially to victims of violence based on their race, sex and gender (for example Cossins 2003). The third category of research is largely focused on comparing cultural and racial groups of women within a nation. Most commonly this takes place within western nation states whereby women of various cultural and racial identification are compared in relation to the prevalence and effects of sexual violence (for example, Bryant-Davis et al 2010, Clark et al 2012). A subset of this category includes research that has a specialist focus on women of specific racial or cultural groups, for example African American women's experiences of sexual assault. A fourth category of research examines sexual violence across different countries and national contexts. Some of this research includes women refugees' experiences of sexual violence as a tactic of war (see Bartels et al 2010, True 2009) and sexual violence experienced within refugee camps (see Feseha et al 2012; Hyder et al 2007). There is also a growing body of research, mostly from the field of transcultural mental health examining the ongoing consequences of trauma which refugees face when in their new country of settlement as a result of violence, torture and grief experienced during their time in war, conflict and transit. There is not however any substantive research we could identify concerning migrant and refugee women's experiences of sexual violence in their nations of settlement.

In summary there is no recent and substantive Australian research about sexual violence and women from culturally and racially diverse groups. This research addresses this specific area by examining how young women from African communities understand and deal with experiences of sexual violence. Young women are the focus as national data indicate it is this age group who have the highest self-reported incidence of sexual violence (ABS 2012). African communities are also the focus as the numbers of residents from African nations or who have parents born in African nations has increased in the past 10 years in Australia (ABS 2008).

Methods

Research Design

As this is an exploratory, mixed-methods study, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). Data collection methods were as follows.

Quantitative Component

(i) Scoping Exercise and Agency Questionnaire

A comprehensive scoping exercise was conducted across Western Australia and South Australia to enable the identification of agencies across both states that provide support and/or information on sexual violence. From this scoping exercise, a sampling frame of available services was developed. Agencies were invited to complete an online questionnaire developed and distributed through Survey Monkey.

The questionnaire provides data on the number of young adult women of African background accessing the service, the support offered/received and any perceived gaps in service provision. The scoping exercise identified approximately 50 agencies in each state and an agency representative was invited to complete the questionnaire. Services that provide such support include legal support agencies, police, sexual health agencies, sexual assault resource centres, women's health services, community development services, emergency accommodation services, youth services and specialist multicultural services. Agencies ranged across the government and the not for profit sector.

It was also intended to include secondary data from sources about young African women's use of services for violence against women and any relevant justice statistics, however, we were not able to source any such data that was publicly available. In the course of the research some service providers did report that they had observed an increased number of African young women seeking help but they did not often classify service users to this level of ethnicity or race.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative component of the research comprised data collected from open-ended questions from the agency survey, responses to in-depth interviews and focus groups with young adult women from an African background and focus groups with agency staff that provided a response to sexual violence.

(i) Data from agencies about work with young women from African backgrounds concerning sexualised violence and abuse

The rationale for the open-ended questions was that there is currently no existing information from agencies about their experiences of working with this group of young women.

(ii) In depth Interviews and focus groups with young women

In-depth interviews and focus groups were undertaken with young women from African backgrounds to explore in detail how they understand sexual violence. This included: behaviours that constitute it; what they consider the impact of sexual violence is for victims; who/which agencies they believe would be useful sources of help ; what they would describe as helpful formal responses and what they perceive are the barriers to young women accessing support.

In WA, interview participants had the option to be interviewed by one of the Chief Investigators or by a research assistant who is of African background. In SA, the research associate conducting the interviews and focus groups had very strong networks with the African community.

Sample and Recruitment of Young Women

To be included in the study potential participants had to be aged between 18 and 25 years, from an African migrant or refugee background and able to converse fluently in English. As we adopted a crime prevention perspective, the participants did not need to have experienced sexual violence. We sought maximum variation in our sample and included women across the age ranges 18-25 and from a range of countries that represent emerging communities within Western Australia and South Australia, for example: South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Rwanda. This variation was to ensure that we captured a range of religious affiliations and diverse cultural perspectives. The age of participants from both states ranged from 19 to 25 years.

Participants were recruited through services and refugee and migrant community networks. Information about the study was disseminated using a range of strategies including the use of flyers at appropriate sites, presentations to groups/meetings and through snowballing.

Potential participants contacted the services and the Research Assistant, confirmed individuals' eligibility to participate and arranged a mutually convenient time and place for the interview to occur and confirmed the participant's choice of interviewer (research assistant or researcher). Focus groups with young women in SA were conducted at services that currently offered support to young women from African backgrounds.

Sampling and Recruitment of Practitioners for Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted in South Australia and Western Australia with practitioners who had expertise in the areas of sexual violence and/or from the multicultural, health, social, homelessness, child protection, community and criminal justice/legal/policing sectors. Potential participants were provided with information about the research and contacted the Research Assistants about their willingness to participate. The Research Assistants confirmed their eligibility for inclusion and provided details of the time and venue of the focus group. The focus groups comprised 6-10 participants in each group and were recruited through mainstream and multicultural professional networks from the social, health and legal sectors. The focus groups identified key issues for young adult women from African

backgrounds; the strengths and gaps in the responses provided for these women as well as perceived barriers for the young women to access the services. Data were compared with information from the in-depth interviews and focus groups with young women regarding what they considered helpful responses to sexual violence.

Data Analysis

In-depth interviews and focus groups were audio recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim to enable a thematic analysis of data, using constant comparison as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). As such, data analysis and interpretation proceeded through multiple levels of coding. Initial coding - a close line-by-line reading of each individual transcript was undertaken to examine the data in minute detail. From this initial coding, important concepts were identified in the data and through a continuous iterative and cyclical process codes identified were grouped into categories as explanatory and conceptual patterns were identified. Properties and labels of individual categories were continually refined and linked together through a process of constant comparison as the analysis proceeded. As the process continued categories were grouped and abstracted to identify themes that pattern the data. Memos of researcher interpretations, thoughts, feelings and insights were meticulously documented throughout (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Findings

Sample

Seventeen young women from African backgrounds participated in the project and were interviewed individually in Western Australia and participants from South Australia attended focus groups. The South Australian participants were part of an existing group of young women and were agreeable to be interviewed as a group but reluctant to be interviewed individually. The average age of the young women was 22 years. As can be seen from the table below, 10 of the 17 young women were combining work and study, 6 were students and 1 was employed full time. Five of the 11 Western Australian participants had caring responsibilities for family members such as mothers, siblings and grandmothers. Not all participants provided information on how long they had been resident in Australia, however, all had attended school in Australia and most had been resident for about 10 years. Finally it can be seen that participants' country of birth ranged across a range of African nations including: Zimbabwe (5), Kenya (8), Sierra Leone (2) and South Sudan (2). Young women's brief descriptions of their cultural backgrounds highlight the variation amongst the participants and how the impact of forced migration has influenced these descriptions. For example, 5 of the eight participants who identified as Kenyan were of Southern Sudanese heritage.

TABLE 1: PROFILE OF SAMPLE OF YOUNG WOMEN

	Age	Country of birth	Cultural background	Student / Working
1.	21	Zimbabwe	Traditional	FT Student PT Worker
2.	19	Sierra Leone	Traditional	FT Student

3.	21	Kenya	(Aweil tribe) South Sudanese	PT Student
4.	23	Zimbabwe	African Christian	FT Student PT Worker
5.	25	Zimbabwe	African Christianity	FT Student PT Worker
6.	19	Zimbabwe	African Traditional	FT Student PT Worker
7.	20	Zimbabwe	Traditional	FT Student
8.	25	Kenya	African Catholic	FT Worker
9.	21	Kenya	South Sudanese	PT Student PT Worker
10.	25	Kenya	Value based	FT Student PT Worker
11.	25	Kenya	African	FT Student PT Worker
12.	20	Sierra Leone	Ghanaian-Australian (parents are Ghanaian and Liberian-Sierra Leonean)	PT Student PT Worker
13.	21	South Sudan	Sudanese-Australian	FT Student
14.	23	South Sudan	Mixed South Sudanese, Kenyan and Australian cultural background (due to migration)	FT Student PT Worker
15.	21	Kenya	South Sudanese Cultural background. Moved to Kenya in 1985, migrated to Australia in 2004. Hasn't experienced much of the culture from 'back home'. influenced by Sudanese culture and Australian	FT Student
16.	21	Kenya	Family from South Sudan	FT Student
17.	20	Kenya	Raised in Kenya, family from South Sudan Came to Australia as a little girl	FT Student PT Worker

The research team were very aware that the topic of sexual coercion and violence was highly sensitive and that we could not directly ask about this topic at the beginning of the interview. Based on existing research about young women there was an assumption by the researchers that young women's friends would play an important role in their lives related to acceptable social and sexual norms, information sharing about relationships and friends would be likely sources of disclosure and support. Therefore interviews commenced by asking young women about their friendships and pressures they felt generally as young women before asking about relationships and then sexualized coercion and violence. Early questions were about family and community expectations and gender roles and how this impacts on young women, changes in family dynamics pre and post settlement, intergenerational conflict, and education and employment opportunities for young women in Australia. Young women were then asked about intimate relationships, knowledge of sexual violence and their thoughts about why it occurs and help seeking. This organisation of the interviews provided a context for the discussion of sexual violence and provided an indication of attitudes, perceptions and experiences.

Role of friendships in young women's lives

Participants considered that friendships played an important role in the lives of young women, describing friends as a source of support for young women. Friends also have the power to influence and direct young women therefore it is important that young women maintain healthy relationship based on trust and honesty. For many living in Australia without family members, such as international students, friends became family. Friendships are also a powerful source of knowledge for young women as friends provide advice and ideas for dealing with issues such as relationship breakdown. Young women stated that, provided the relationship was healthy and trusting, friendships serve as a source of external support, especially for young women who may be new to the country or still settling. Young women also felt that as many lack solid relationships with parents in their teenage years, friendships played a crucial role in their wellbeing. Particularly where parents were overseas or young women were alienated from parents they were highly reliant on friends so should friendships end these young women could become particularly vulnerable to exploitation and/or abuse from men. Young women described having friends or friendships as a way of feeling that you are a part of something and not an outsider.

I think fitting in – trying to fit in and especially, just friendship groups and stuff like that like. 'Who are your friends?' And really just trying to fit into society and just trying to really find out where you really belong within friends, school, whether it's in uni or in work. I think with a lot of young women, that's always a struggle of like self-identity and stuff like that like trying to figure out where you really belong and then – in that, then you really identify yourself with which group you belong into 'cause most of the time everybody's sort of searching trying to see who are their real friends, who are not.

In the following the young woman talks about cultural connection and friendship.

Well when I started high school, I was sort of like the only African in my year level so I shifted more, you know, towards Anglo-Saxon kids and you know as the African population increased because we had – I just felt like we did not – what I was

interested in were all things they faced and my challenges were different and my opinions were different and so I really did not – it wasn't solid enough and for some reason, I just perceived them not to be children, childish, but then when I started hanging with African people, even today we sit down and we talk and laugh about it, we have like a mothers' bitching session, excuse my language.

Young women's accounts are woven between generalising why friendships play an important role for all young women regardless of background such as having someone to share problems with, seek advice, complain about parents and then the importance of having friendships with those who you have a similar experience and connection to you have a basis for sharing and developing the friendship. It seem from the data that young women do rely on each other to seek advice about relationships/'boys' and to feel part of the community in which they live.

Young women's concerns

"...when they [young African background women] get out of the house, they remove the African cloak and just put on a western culture. So it's just like – you will see the colour difference, but they're probably exactly the same. It's just – you go home, you get back to your African culture. You get out of your western culture. So, it's just the colour difference now these days".

For many young African women, effective settlement in Australia is important. Young women have a desire to settle, gain an education and meaningful employment. Settlement issues such as cultural differences, language differences and navigating through new and unfamiliar systems is a concern for some young women. Young women described a desire to belong and fit in to the society. Barriers to employment such as racism and discrimination and lack of English language proficiency are also a concern for some young women. Young women also spoke of how they are perceived by the Australian mainstream which included racialized assumptions and stereotypes, for example assuming that there is such a thing as 'African Culture' which ignores the diversity across the African continent and within countries and cultures. Young women described the stereotypes ascribed to them as falling into two main categories: African American pop culture figures or traditional rural women.

... and I think for women especially, it's – not racism, but it's like a racism plus sexism kind of like sexist thing kind of like you're an African woman. Maybe you are supposed to look a certain way from what women like they're showing on music videos and how African women are supposed to look like, what their body features are supposed to be and so, with that whole thing, we're –especially women from African background, they're stereotyped so much to be the housewives, the cooks and all these things and so, when they actually aren't – they have a voice. They have all these. They are totally different. People are like, "Whoa! This is not who you're supposed to be".

...when they see an African, most people see an African American, so it's kind of hard to show that I'm not African American and I am – even though I am African, I'm not a housewife. I'm not beaten.

The young women noted that physical appearance is a concern for many young women due to the desire to conform to societal notions of beauty and femininity, which are often based on Western ideals of straight hair and light skin. This can be a major issue as many young African women attempt to conform to such notions by adopting practices such as skin lightening and wearing wigs and weaves. Young women felt that these pressures came largely from media representations of beauty and what it means to be a beautiful black woman. Young women felt that the image presented by African American women musicians projected a certain image as the ideal black woman. This presents challenges to young women who may not fit into such expectations or where such images are sexualized and not consistent with their values.

Financial hardship is a major concern for young women and participants explained that as a result of poverty, some young women seek relationships with older men in exchange for financial security. This can be a problem as some young women may maintain unhealthy relationships for fear of loss of financial stability. Most young women talked about gaining an education and working (full time after education or part time during education) so as to ensure they could remain in charge of their lives and not be dependent or vulnerable due to not having economic security.

Gendered expectations and practices of family and community

Much of the young women's concerns centred on parental expectations and regulation. They felt that parents were stricter compared to their male siblings due mainly to the fear of pregnancy outside of marriage and the shame associated with such an event. Women also feared blame from fathers should they behave in ways deemed inappropriate for their gender. Young women linked their fathers' control of their behaviour strongly to the historical experiences of dowry and the desire for daughters to bring a high bride price. Maintaining purity and virginity is therefore considered necessary for young women as this strengthens a father's influence and bargaining power over the dowry negotiation process. Whilst processes may differ when they are settled in Australia the values concerning young women's virginity were still held.

Speaker: But I feel like with boys, they're so easy on boys. I feel like they are more strict on girls. My mum is still strict on me.

Speaker: Because, they don't bring their pregnancies at home.

Speaker: The boys can't get pregnant!

Speaker: That's what my mum says.

However, the young women's resistance to these expectations was notable and showed their shifts in gender relations occurring.

Back in the old days where people – men are supposed to be dominative and are the head and all this, and so, I think for young women, especially now growing up, it's like now coming to have that voice and seeing that I can do what people think that only men can do and I know it's a bit modernised, but I still see that around where people are like, "Don't do this. Don't do that." And especially from an African background, you see where the males are like – you do something – do some things – you're just – no, no, no – and so, I think it's also with the fitting in, I think it's also with the whole trying to actually get a voice and actually speak up for yourself and say that I do have a voice. I am strong. I am independent. I don't really need someone telling me that you can't do this or you can't do that. I can stand up for myself and stuff like that, so – yeah.

Some young women also spoke of how there were pressures on men to perform particular roles and ways of being a man. Young women then described how these community attitudes encouraged men to be controlling and domineering.

Speaker: I think it's what's expected of men.now, if we're just looking at the African community, if – you're seen as a weak man if you can't control your wife in that sense of – she's the one running the household. You're seen to be a sissy. "You're a man. Why is it that you can't look after your children? Why is it –?" You're seen to be very weak. Today, I saw one of my cousin's husband and my mum just said, "He's just a weak man. He can't look after her" and I'm just like "Mum, the guy is in uni". And mum's like, "No. He's weak."

Speaker: So what was she making her judgment on about being weak?

Speaker: Because he doesn't have a job and he's not looking after his wife and child – so her perspective is that he's weak. He can't look after the house.

Expectation when entering into intimate relationships

Intimate relationships pose a major concern for young women. They have a desire and an expectation to enter into relationships therefore finding the right partner in life is viewed as important. Young women are concerned about what the future may hold in terms of married life and whether they will find the right partner in life. This is also an expectation that is held by parents and as young women get older, there is an expectation that they will be married. Marriage is still highly valued amongst young women's families and a signifier of successful femininity. Living together unmarried was not considered acceptable by the young women's parents and dating was also not considered acceptable amongst some of the young women's families.

Young women explained that expectations about intimate relationships differ between young men and women. While for some it is casual, for many young women there is an expectation that you date with the intent of maintaining a serious relationship that may lead to marriage. Respondents in South Australia described dating as generally frowned upon in many African communities. Young women may date in secret and without the knowledge of parents. There is also a lack of dialogue between young women and mothers about relationships and dating

which makes it increasingly difficult for young women to speak with their mothers. The general dating violence literature found that young women were reluctant to disclose violence from a boyfriend where they felt it might lead to their parents placing stricter controls on their freedoms or social life. Therefore in cases where young women are dating in secret it is more than likely they will not disclose so any experiences of sexual violence, coercion or other abuse are likely to be unreported and they are unlikely to seek help.

The young women could be described as holding traditional views of gender roles and the family and expectation were that they would marry, the husband would be a breadwinner and provide for the family. His role would also include protecting the family while her role would primarily be concerned with looking after the husband and attending to the needs of the household. Young women responded that young men's expectations are often different when entering into a relationship. Young men may enter into dating relationships without the intention of a long-term commitment or marriage. Participants explained that young men often expected sex when they begin dating and put pressure on young women.

Discussions around emotional abuse centred on young men using blackmail and such tactics to pressure young women into sex. These experiences are consistent with literature on dating violence and sexual coercion whereby women feel pressured to engage in sexual practices in order to prevent being 'blackmailed' or that it is presented as a condition of the relationship continuing by the young man.

Respondents believed mainstream white Australian men hold different expectations when entering relationships with young women from African backgrounds. Some respondents talked about the idea that white Australian men may not hold such traditional attitudes about women and gender roles and perhaps are more open and willing to having a relationship based on principles of equality compared to African men. There was a view that perhaps white Australian men have a greater expectation for sexual intercourse. Different expectations of white men for specific types of sexual practices also raised concern amongst the participants, these included anal and oral sex. Participants explained these were foreign practices for many people from African backgrounds. This poses a challenge to young women who may enter into relationships with non-African men.

Intimate relationships, ending relationships and male violence

Participants were asked how they would describe a healthy relationship. The responses were very brief and largely similar. Participants noted that a relationship that is "God led" is ideal, where both parties share a similar religious, largely Christian, belief system. Valuing of the self and the other partner is also important. Open and honest communication was commonly noted as an important element of a healthy relationship. Respondents also felt that it was important to share similar world views, common interests, shared goals, working together, a sense of shared responsibility in the relationship such as caring for one another's' welfare and that of their respective families, being able to get along, have respect towards one another and having happiness in the relationship was also noted as important and characteristic of a healthy relationship. What is apparent from these descriptions or aspirations of a healthy relationship is that they do not assume or include descriptions of traditional gender roles in intimate heterosexual relationships which they described young African men as expecting.

Participants agreed that relationships between young men and women often did not end well. Participants described arguments leading to violence and aggression as not uncommon. Participants spoke of young men behaving violently when a relationship breaks down and post separation abuse that included stalking, harassment in the workplace and causing damage to property. A number of young women spoke about the experience of male partner violence as common for many young African women they knew.

Abusive relationships are common among adolescent girls ... all of my friends were in those abusive relationships...

Some young women "... are in relationships that are quite toxic and destructive and can be violent, or emotionally abusive... young women get caught in this whole like 'but that's passionate love', by that idea of love".

One young woman spoke about her mother, who had not experienced partner violence, wanting her daughter to find a partner who was no violent and abusive. The daughter agrees it is important but does not agree with her mother's reasoning about identifying who is not a violent partner.

She will say, "let him be a godly man let him be educated" because she thinks education kind of lessens it but I have grown to find out "no". No, it makes them even more than they already were when you know nothing. Just excuse my language - my friends say, "you know, an asshole with a degree is just an educated asshole" that's it. Their values and the cultural perceptions don't change; it's still the same

When asked about why they thought young men used violence towards women young women interviewed were clear about it being an expression of having power over them as females and used sexism to psychologically oppress them.

That's all they [the young men] know. They have the power so they have to assert it.

I think it's the power thing again because if it's 18 or someone who is your age group, you just turn around, look at them – you know you just speak up. But if it's someone older, I mean, even if you told that person off, you'd get in trouble. 'You are a disrespectful child! Who asked you to dress like that and walk in front of him?'

Yeah they know...it's like you're preying, you know, you're preying on the vulnerable. I think they're doing it on purpose because it's their whole ego thing. Like 'I'm a man, why should I let another woman have a say?'

Especially if you have kids together – men may use this to pressure women to stay "Who is going to want you?"

Most men... undermine the girls. They're like 'yeah you're a girl. Your only job is to give birth...'

Young women noted that the most common reasons leading to relationship breakdown was young men not being monogamous. Young women felt that due to polygamy still being a

common practice in some cultures, such as South Sudanese, young men hold the view that having multiple partners is acceptable, despite the feelings of their female partner towards it.

Young women interviewed discussed a range of barriers hindering women from leaving violent and abusive partners. A range of challenges stand in the way of women leaving unhealthy relationships, particularly long term relationships where the couple have a shared life, children, property, finances and responsibilities. Respondents felt that leaving an abusive man meant that the woman would be faced with greater challenges and the burden of responsibility. Many women that participants know were also largely depend on financial support from the husband/partner and therefore to leave the relationship would mean losing financial security.

Another barrier noted by respondents is that young women often believe that they can change the attitudes and behaviours of young men and therefore maintain the relationship in the hope that he will eventually change and end his violence and abuse. Respondents also discussed that other barriers that stand in the way of women disclosing violence include fear. Women feared the repercussions of disclosing which can include increased violence from the perpetrator. Other barriers noted by respondents included:

- Desire to please family and friends and to maintain perception of a healthy relationship
- Financial dependence and immigration issues, women depending on spouse visas for remaining in Australia
- Married women fearing being shunned and ostracised by the community and their families
- Women may feel an obligation to stay with perpetrator due to what the perpetrator may have done to support them in the past
- Homelessness and fear of having to return back to their parents' home for young women
- Fear of judgement by family, friends and community
- Dependence on partner as source of transport to and from work
- Women fear losing children and the possibility of deportation
- Many women become trapped in violent relationships and believe the perpetrators will change
- The concept of help seeking from a stranger (such as counselling) is foreign to many women therefore disclosing can be difficult
- Women fear the possibility of having to remarry and/or have children with another man and therefore have a blended family
- Women feel it is important for children to grow up with both parents in one environment therefore believing that self-sacrifice is best to ensure children do not grow up without a father

In relation to young women's specific concerns these included.

- Abuse may be experienced from a family member and therefore disclosing may be more difficult due to fear of possible repercussions such as being viewed with shame, community backlash often coupled with victim blaming (participants gave example of

girl raped by uncle and community attempts to cover it up in order to protect the 'honour' of the perpetrator who is known as a family man).

- Young women who are raised solely by mothers were concerned that they have not had the opportunity to know and understand men and witness positive interactions between men and women in a relationship.
- Some participants described being 'socialised' into being responsible for family members from a young age and developed beliefs and attitudes that may make it challenging to leave a man who is abusive.
- Where it is unacceptable for women to be sexually active before marriage, young women living with partners may be afraid to seek help due to their relationship not being regarded as genuine and proper according to traditional beliefs about marriage.
- Young women described how some of their peers hold the view that 'love hurts' and this led to romanticising of abuse and violence perpetrated by boyfriends.
- Participants reported knowing of peers that are in abusive relationships and that they continue with the relationship due to fears of 'never finding love' and possible reprisal from perpetrator if she chooses to leave. Other research with young women experiencing partner violence has similarly found that notions of romantic love and women as stoic supporters of their partners can prevent women and men from getting support about his use of violence.

Information and support for women in abusive relationships

Young women describe the police as the most commonly known and used source of help called for violence and abuse of a woman by her male partner. However, it was strongly emphasised that for many women this was when the violence was extreme and it had not stopped.

They're (women) tending just to access police and that's only in cases of – severe violence, when they run out of other options.

Interestingly, a couple of young women spoke about an emerging perception in their community that police remove the man if they are called out for violence towards women.

And it was a lady that has kids – let's say three kids – it's the husband that leaves. They will leave. They will kick – you call the police, the police come. Take the husband. You stay with the kids. You stay in the house. If you just – one kid maybe – I don't know how it works – but what – all the communities are most thinking – is men that are leaving. The man goes and the woman stays.

Young women went on to say that given the pressure to stay married the men returned in some cases but that there are women who are also wishing to remain separated and have their own place. For other women there is pressure to reconcile that is not associated only with cultural expectations but also linked to their relative inequality compared to her husband. In the following excerpt a young woman describes how a situation was not handled well.

I have one or two people from a community that don't have a bad experience and particularly around things like domestic violence. We've had cases before where women come to seek help and their idea of seeking

help is “make him stop, that’s what I want, I just want him to stop, change him”. They don’t understand the fact that once you go through the process, there can be convictions made on the part of the police. The man can have to forcibly leave the home. So we’ve had cases where this is happening and the woman’s been left with no transport, she couldn’t drive. She couldn’t speak English well. No one to drive their kids and her around or get the shopping for her, do things and she’s like “I want to take it back I didn’t want this to happen.” And got really upset by the situation so and then if other people find out about that or hear that story which I’m sure they will, they won’t get help (when there is violence)

Counselling as a strategy for support was not thought to be a highly known or valued option as it was not considered appropriate to be discussing the privacy of your marital relationship with a professional third party.

Respondents discussed information and support for victims of sexual violence, and access to culturally appropriate services and information. There was some discussion of service developments for those who have been victims of sexualized violence this was largely about health and social services. There was a notable absence of discussion about the role of law enforcement and the judicial system, as it seemed to be assumed that whilst sexual violence affected young African women they were not at this time coming forward to report to police the assaults. Consequently, participants did not discuss how law enforcement, judicial processes or correctional responses could assist in improved responses to those perpetrating sexual violence.

The most common response by participants was that there needed to be more education about sexual violence and coercion and domestic violence that is specifically targeted to the needs of African communities resident in Australia. Respondents felt that there was a lack of information available to people of African backgrounds about these concerns. While information existed, it is largely targeted at white mainstream Australians and therefore not culturally relevant or applicable to the circumstances of any other cultural or ethnic groups. Mediums used to raise awareness such as flyers and pamphlets were not viewed as suited to people that come from oral traditions and value relationships with individuals. Education involving done face-to-face engagement was preferred over paper resources.

Young women discussed the role of educational institutions in helping prevent sexual violence as vital. Respondents also felt that current sexual health education in schools was limited and there is scope to widen the learning. Respondents felt that sexual health education that addresses some of the barriers to negotiating safe and consensual sex in and outside of relationships would be beneficial.

Education about sexual violence needed to engage communities and not only young people given the influential role of families and elders. A strengths based approach was advocated whereby learning develops in a way that is empowering to the individual to reach out to others. A collaborative approach with the community was suggested so that all parties involved are equal partners in mobilising positive social change.

Some of the suggestions for education and information were largely focused on holding workshops and forums as avenues for raising awareness and educating the community. Participants' other suggestions for education and awareness include;

SITES AND APPROACH TO EDUCATION

- Embedding sexual violence and relationship education into other programs such as TAFE courses.
- Take account of the sensitivity to addressing sexual violence and engaging participants through use of scenarios and case studies
- Education from African elders/women to young people
- Focus on young men's education about relationship behaviours which are inappropriate and illegal, learning about boundaries from male role models
- Education through churches would reach many young African women such as through Christian girls group

CONTENT OF EDUCATION

- Include content about self-esteem, confidence and the importance of education and being financially secure as an individual rather than depending on male partners
- Raising awareness with young women about the impact of living in an abusive relationship
- Address the impact of substance abuse on relationships when delivering other awareness raising activities in the community on sexual violence

In relation to providers of sexual violence education or services the following was suggested:

- Facilitators of education and other responses need to be experienced women that may include women who have experiences of violence and have moved forward
- There is a need for increased specialist services that are able to respond using culturally appropriate approaches

Respondents report that while information about sexual violence existed, there is a lack of services for victims-survivors. This is consistent with the findings of the survey of agencies where there was little evidence of specialist services available for young women from an African background.

Due to African women often presenting to services with a complexity of needs that are beyond the capacity of one service referrals are necessary. Respondents noted that clients often do not want to be referred to other services for support once a relationship has been built with a service provider. Therefore they were unlikely to continue if it involved support from a number of sources.

Respondents also discussed issues concerning women accessing services and some of the challenges. Stigmatisation towards women who access services for help about a violent partner or anything concerning their relationship is a major barrier. A significant stumbling block to seeking help is the perception that services or white service providers do not understand African women's issues and therefore will not respond in an appropriate manner.

There is also an expectation that services should 'fix' a problem such as a relationship breakdown rather than removing the perpetrator.

Police responses were also described as sometimes being unhelpful to victims. This is largely attributed to the police approach of consulting community leaders and elders, often male, who in many circumstances are in support of the perpetrator. Respondents also felt that some Police officers hold racist and stereotypical views about particular groups or cultures as violent which compromises their approach in responding to issues of violence and promoting women's safety.

Awareness of sexual violence harassment and pressure

Young women explained they were often aware of the existence of rape from knowledge acquired in their home countries, however, most defined only rape as sexual violence. Young women said that they were aware of many young women in relationships who are forced into sexual acts without consent. The belief that a husband has a right over his wife's body is still held and therefore marital rape or sexual violence within marriage may not be acknowledged. Young women also said that they believed that women from African backgrounds are experiencing many forms of sexual violence.

Young women were becoming more aware of issues concerning sexual violence as they grow up in Australia. Respondents discussed other relevant issues such as forced child marriage and rape. Young women were aware that child marriage is still practised and other practices such as kidnapping young women and raping them in an attempt to 'keep' them, by forced marriage, are issues which are still of concern.

Men behaving in ways that are sexually harassing, coercive and violent

Young women outlined their understandings of why they thought men behaved in violent ways, such as young men growing up with domestic violence then believing it is acceptable behaviour in relationships with women. Respondents also felt perpetrators are often not held accountable for their actions and therefore men continue to behave in this manner as there are no consequences for their violent and abusive actions.

Men's continued violence towards female partners was attributed to a lack of protection for victims within the Australian legal system. Respondents felt that family dynamics and experiences also impacted on young men's violence against women. Young women felt that victims are often blamed for sexual violence and therefore it can be challenging to speak up, especially if experienced from older men. Young men also purposely prey on women they know to be vulnerable and therefore unable to assert their position. Women minimizing violence was also noted as being common amongst young women who are victims of violence.

[Findings from the Agency Survey](#)

A total of 81 agencies responded to the survey including government (41%) and not for profit agencies (56%) with a small number of community based unfunded agencies (see Chart 1).

The four main categories were: women’s services, homelessness services, multi-cultural services and counselling and support (see Chart 2). Participants could choose up to two categories for their agencies. Just over one third (36%) of agencies had people from specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds as a target population of their service. The main population group served amongst the agencies was women representing almost 60% of services, followed by families and the general community and specialist CALD services for adults and/or young people (42%) (see Chart 3).

Chart 1: Organisational Type

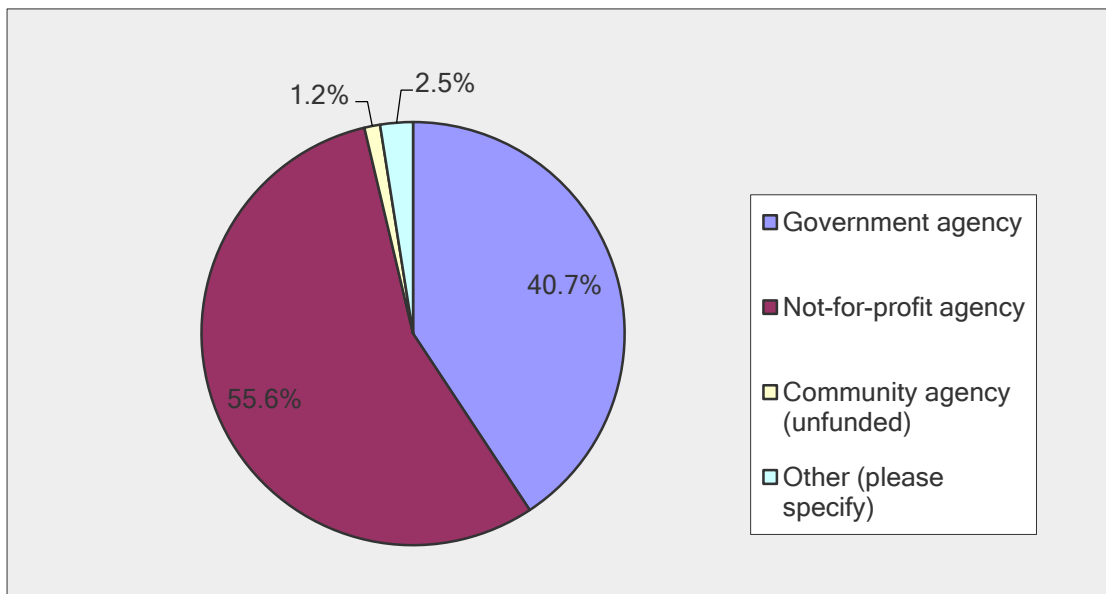


Chart 2: Main Area of Agency Work

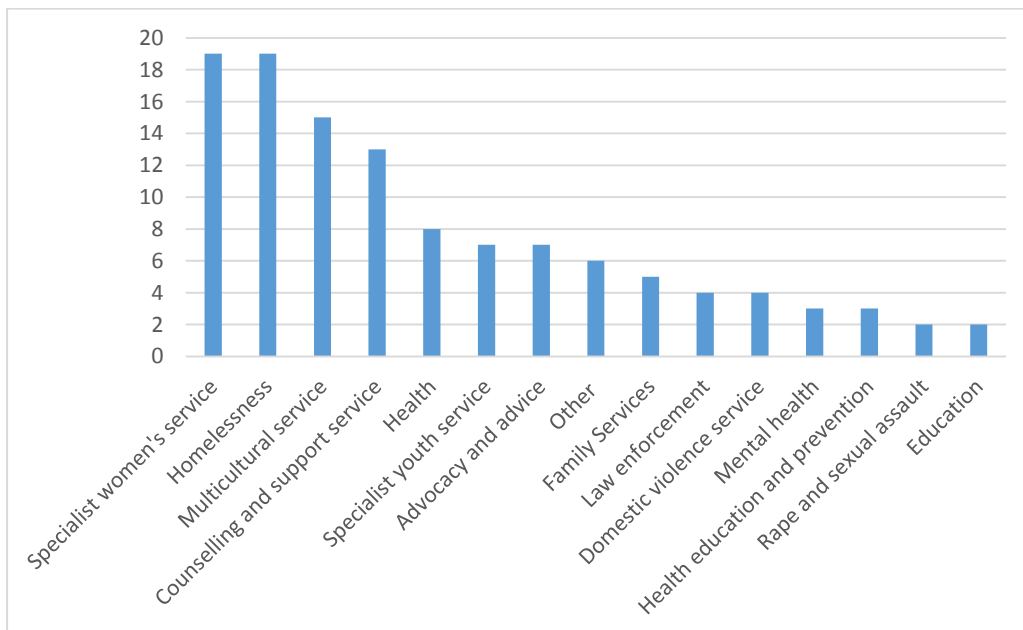
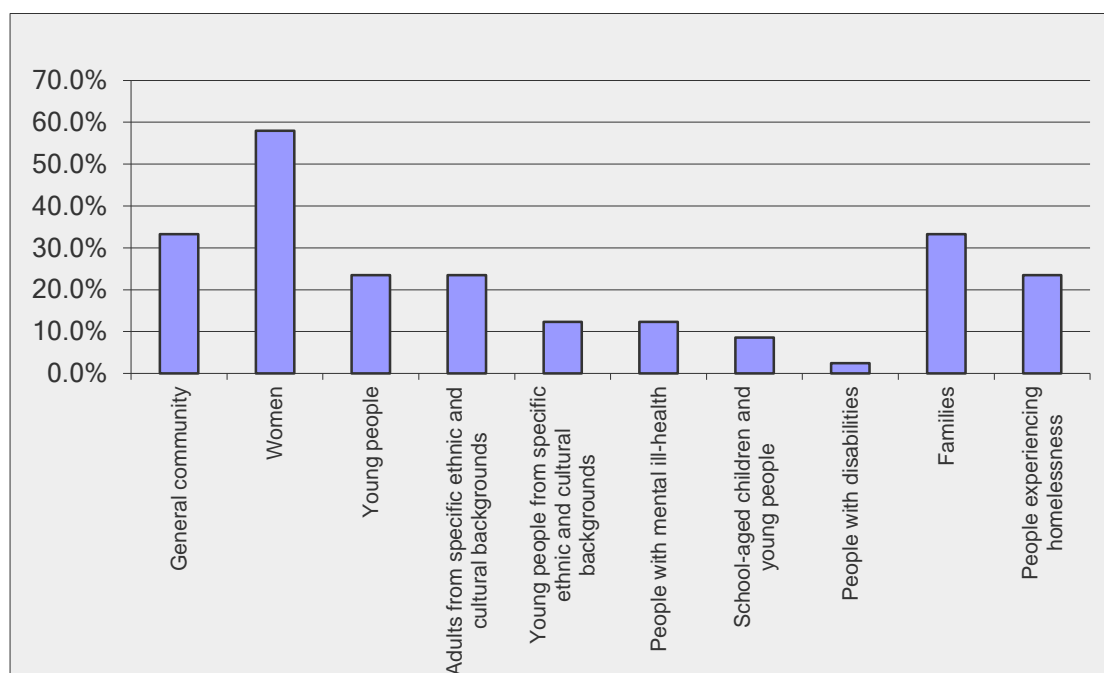


Chart 3: Main target groups of agencies surveyed (includes up to 3 groups per agency)



Twenty one of the 81 agencies reported they had contact with young women in the research target group and were able to estimate the number of young women from African backgrounds who sought assistance in relation to sexual violence and coercion, this ranged from estimates of two up to 60 per year. Agency respondents noted that sexual violence was rarely ever the presenting issue for service use. The primary reasons for seeking services were homelessness (often due to unplanned pregnancy, family conflict and domestic violence), counselling about life experiences, and assistance with parenting/children or health or medical service appointments. Respondents explained that sexual violence was often disclosed within the context of these other pressing needs.

Fifty participants provided responses to the question asking what they considered the main issues being confronted young women from African backgrounds. The range of responses cover five main categories:

- Resettlement and being part of a cultural minority;
- Culture and gender
- Negotiating living across two cultures;
- Poverty and financial disadvantage; and
- Service suitability,

TABLE ONE: MAIN ISSUES FOR YOUNG WOMEN FROM AFRICAN BACKGROUNDS	
	n
Resettlement and being a member of a cultural and racial minority	31
Language barriers	9

Social isolation from loss of family and displacement	7
Racial discrimination	5
Grief from traumatic experiences and loss	4
Being part of a smaller community that can ostracize, isolate and reject individuals and families. This can establish a negative reputation for the women concerned.	2
Settlement an ongoing process of change and learning	2
Dominant western culture's lack of acceptance of African cultures	2
Culture and gender	17
Traditional gender expectations and biases and patriarchal privilege	6
Family conflict	4
Violence against women within the African community	2
Traditional parenting roles with women taking on the burden of all parenting	2
Community pressure to marry and have children so that career is not established and become financially dependent and/or have limited earnings.	1
Specific harmful cultural practices of some groups (e.g. FGM, forced marriages)	1
Specific to Sexualised Violence – may not consider there can be rape in marriage	1
Issues for young African women living in Australia across two cultures	27
Difficulty of living between two cultures "Clash in culture, wanting to be more western but expected to remain loyal to own culture"	6
Lack of knowledge about their rights and the law	5
Violence in relationships, sexuality and sexual health are not socially acceptable topics to openly discuss.	4
Coerced into sex for "favours" and later sex work	3
Shame and risk with disclosure of male violence from family, community and/or offender	3
To escape perpetrator young women have to completely separate from their community and become homeless or couch surf	3
Young women and body image	1
Unplanned pregnancy	1
Support with homework and schooling to be able to improve performance	1
Poverty and financial disadvantage	12
Lack of income and unemployment	4

Financially struggling as sending money to relatives/family members	3
Lack of transport	2
Cost of services (e.g. medical)	1
Child care lacking	1
Non-payment of child support by fathers who may have children with a number of women	1
Services	7
Limited knowledge of supportive services or lack of trust of services.	4
Barriers to service use: fear of using interpreters where they may be elders or community leaders	1
Limited diversity of service providers/practitioners	1
Girls' fear of mandatory reporting prevents disclosure to services	1
Lack of acceptance CaLD services as an important place to resolve family conflict	1

In general what is notable about the identified areas is that a number of aspects commonly pertain to people who have recently arrived and who have limited familiarity with the main culture of the settlement country, such as language barriers and limited knowledge of laws and rights. Similarly some of the issues described are experiences that most young women find difficult to live with such as being coerced into 'sex for favours', shame that they have been subjected to male violence and unplanned pregnancies. However, it is the combined effect of a number of these aspects and particular issues such as the experiences of racial discrimination that compounds young African women's silence about their experiences of sexual violence and coercion. For example many of the women described living under the shadow of highly traditional gendered expectations within family and community structures where men are most often the leaders and patriarchal processes are valued and privileged. This can be underpinned by particular social institutions such as churches that perpetuate traditional roles of men and women in relationships. For young women who are considered to be breaching or living outside these traditional parameters the consequences include being ostracized, rejected by family and ultimately homeless and isolated.

This makes young women vulnerable to living in poverty on the margins and remaining poor. The taboo surrounding open discussion of sexuality, sexual and domestic violence was noted in the survey and in the focus groups some participants spoke of the challenges of attempting this education and awareness raising work with those who hold highly traditional notions of marriage and frown on divorce. This is occurring within communities and at the same time the young women are subjected to various forms of racism in Australian society. Some of which was evident in the agency survey responses.

"The way some of them dress and act makes them a target to people who may take advantage of them"

This written response clearly 'others' the young women and invokes the idea from the victim blaming rape myth that women are making themselves targets for violence due to their

choice of clothing. This overlooks the evidence that the majority of women are sexually assaulted and raped by men known to them (ABS 2013).

Overall the findings indicate there was great variation amongst agency representatives' knowledge and experience with young women from African backgrounds. This reflects the wide range of agencies participating in the survey from mainstream to specialist cultural services. One aspect that stands out is that agency representatives made relatively few comments about how services are or are not responding supportively to young women from African backgrounds. Survey findings show that much of the emphasis was on issues for the young women rather than on the ways in which policy or services need changing to better support young women to live free of male violence.

Agency participants were asked about gaps in services, interestingly 28% of respondents reported that services already meet the needs of young African women related to sexualized violence. Feedback from the remaining respondents falls into 2 broad categories; firstly the need for specialist responses which ranged from early intervention and education through to mainstream and CaLD specialist workers requiring better knowledge and training about sexual violence. The second category included items about mainstream services that many population groups encountered such as the limited supply of affordable and appropriate housing in Australia and lack of services addressing sexual violence when young women were in their early teen years.

TABLE 2: SERVICE GAPS LIMITING SEXUAL VIOLENCE DISCLOSURE AND SUPPORT	
Specialist services, programs or increased knowledge for workers	25
No CaLD specialist sexual violence program within services	8
No CaLD specialist services for women in rural and remote areas	4
CaLD services that focus on young women's empowerment would be valuable	3
Education about sexual health and sexual violence specifically targeting newly arrived communities	2
Mental health workers dealing with CaLD trauma needs require better knowledge about gendered violence generally	2
Limited funding of specialist services that understand the needs and dynamics of the community and similarly lack of specialist workers in mainstream services.	2
Limited written information available in relevant languages	1
Increase access of those who have limited English with greater use of alternative, non-talking therapies	1
Not enough specifically trained workers with high levels of cultural understanding and culturally safe approaches	4
Limitations of mainstream services	19
Length of waiting lists for appointments	5
Lack of supply of affordable and appropriate housing	4

Specific response needed for 12-16 year olds as tend to fall between child protection and adult sexual violence services	2
Lack of comprehensive response to sexual violence perpetrators	2
General practitioners need to work more closely with specialist services and address disclosures	2
Lack of quick and affordable access to counselling	1
Women professionals not always being available at all services	1
Services all work to calendar appointments which are not always aligned to individuals	1
Racism - Workers do not wish to work with African community members	1

The barriers and dilemmas faced by young women not being able to escape male violence is summarized by one of the participants.

Because the victims desperately need to remain connected within their community, to separate [from boyfriends or partners] means they feel isolated and alone. This is obviously very difficult for a young person. My experience is that in most cases the young woman will gravitate back to the community even though there is danger in doing this.

One respondent noted that whilst her service only saw a relatively small number of young women, increasing numbers of older women from African backgrounds with accompanying children were using the service following separation from their husbands after long periods of his violence. It was argued therefore that it was critical to work directly with young people through community programming in the hope of intergenerational shifts in gender roles and the use of violence and coercive control.

The responses indicate that there are very few agencies where their remit can include both responding to sexualized violence experienced by young women from this age group and cultural backgrounds. Responses to date have been largely across the health and community not for profit sectors. Statutory services, law enforcement and the legal sector have had less involvement in sexual violence responses for this group due to the barriers associated with disclosure and help seeking. This reflects young women's reluctance to disclose sexualised violence to the authorities. In relation to gaps in current responses it was suggested African communities take a more active role in addressing male violence against women.

I think the African communities need to take more responsibility and assist these victims. The police in our state, the sexual assault services and other agencies respond very quickly, BUT their own communities are very slow in responding. They do not seem to cope with sexual assaults or domestic violence.

It is often suggested that communities who are minorities and/or marginalized should have greater involvement in identifying issues and developing culturally appropriate responses. However, in this instance there seems to be an assumption that all people identifying as part of the 'African community' need to take responsibility for men's use of violence against

women. What may be more suitable here is a partnership approach that is cooperative and assumes that mainstream services and service providers have new learning to gain from working alongside the community in partnership.

Main areas for development to address gaps in responses include: Training and development of workers in both mainstream and specialist services as the problem of sexualized violence towards young African young women is evident in both areas. CaLD specialist services were not always viewed as having the time and capacities to address the issues and mainstream services were seen to lack cultural knowledge and sensitivity and the means for working in partnership with specialist not for profit agencies. The need for further development of partnership and interagency working were mentioned as important areas for development as well as early intervention and prevention of male violence against women that involves undertaking culturally responsive strategies. In relation to multiagency and partnership working this has to be balanced against young women's preference to only use a single service and not be disclosing and seeking help from multiple people for a sensitive problem.

Service Provider Focus Groups Findings

A total of three focus groups, two in WA and one in South Australia, brought together a range of service providers from community, health and legal sectors, including police. In WA, a total of 13 individuals participated in focus groups to explore the topic of sexual violence from the perspectives of a variety of services. Ten service providers from SA participated in one focus group.

Current Responses

The survey results have indicated that there are a number of shortcomings with current responses. It was therefore important to use these findings as a starting point for focus group questions to identify if there were practices that respondents viewed as helpful or appropriate to the needs of young women from African backgrounds.

Focus group questions explored current responses to sexual violence, potential good practice responses and also challenges hindering better practice. Respondents discussed the range of approaches currently undertaken, both formal and informal, to address sexual violence. While respondents largely agreed that there is a lack of services to address sexual violence and support victims specifically for young women from African backgrounds, some approaches exist that participants considered valuable. These included a range of programs that educate and raise awareness with the community about issues concerning sexual health and relationships. In relation to intervention the increase in agencies adopting a trauma informed approach to practice was also viewed as a positive step in ensuring victims of sexual violence are provided with appropriate support.

This was considered particularly important when working with women who may already have experienced considerable trauma prior to arrival in Australia such as during their forced migratory journey. The Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC) in WA and Yarrow Place in

SA work directly with victims of sexual violence. The safe environment for victims/survivors they provide was described as vital. The approach is client led to ensure women are provided with autonomy to make their own decisions. Attention should also be paid to the cultural context where there is a perception that sexual violence is equated with stranger rape and where young women's virginity is still highly regarded as a reflection of the woman and her family.

Other current responses considered valuable included community police officers, they were seen as a valuable source of knowledge for communities while also bridging the divide between Police and community. Community Police officers providing education to communities on a range of issues, including domestic violence was positively regarded. As the young women's findings indicate the police are the most recognised and likely source of help when there is violence against women. Therefore the police can also have a key role in community education about explaining rights and responsibilities whilst considering the cultural lens through which violence against women is understood.

More informal responses to sexual violence include those adopted by individuals within communities such as consulting friends for support. This is particularly common when parents feel unable to engage their young people concerning issues of relationships, sex and intimacy.

Current responses to sexual violence were similar in both states. Approaches that work holistically with clients and in a culturally sensitive manner were identified as vital to working effectively with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds. It is also crucial that a deep understanding of the importance of family relationships and traditional and slowly changing attitudes about women's sexuality inform approaches working with victims/survivors of African background. Participants also noted the importance of considering an individual's cultural background to inform any approaches for addressing such issues as African young women often present with a diversity of experiences and cultural backgrounds.

Current approaches to supporting victims-survivors are led by the interests and needs of the client. Services ensure that a client's autonomy is respected. Clients who have been sexually assaulted are presented with a range of possible steps to take and the implication of each such as counselling, forensic examination and reporting. It was widely understood and agreed that sexual violence impacts on young women's health. The implications for women's health after sexual violence was discussed and that it was critical to ensure victims/survivors of sexual violence are adequately supported to prevent other potential issues such as the neglect of health and emotional needs. The importance of recognising that disclosures of sexual violence are often not made until months or years later highlighted the place of longer term post-crisis responses as part of the service system alongside more immediate responses such as health checks, food, clothing and shelter.

Challenges to consider in working towards good practice

The findings show that a large percentage of agencies appear to have relatively little contact with young women from African backgrounds for any reason not only in relation to sexual violence. This is consistent with young women's reporting that there is a reluctance to seek help and that mostly help is sought from police and doctors. Therefore it seems that one

challenge may be about raising awareness of available services, however, this can only occur if there are services that can offer culturally responsive practice that can gain the trust of service users.

Other challenges to good practice responses in service provision included that some women used health services but the general practitioners were often ill equipped to work in a culturally sensitive manner and to deal with issues of sexual violence. An example was given of a young 14 year old who saw a General Practitioner after a sexual assault and she was given a pregnancy test and information about contraception rather than the support she was seeking as a sexual assault victim who was afraid and unaware of what to do. Such cases are a testament that there are practitioners who are unaware of how to deal with disclosures of sexual violence and how to support women in a sensitive manner and comprehensively.

A gap in service provision for all adolescents aged 13-17 years that hinder good practice is the lack of specialist sexual violence services particularly for. The lack of support catering to children in this age group was seen as leaving them without adequate protection from sexual exploitation.

The government's current refugee policies and community discourses about refugees were identified as increasing racism and discrimination and therefore making it increasingly challenging for victims/survivors of sexual violence to speak out and seek support. In relation to other barriers, it was reported that community members are often reluctant to report abuse due to fear of possible reprisal from perpetrators and his supporters, fear of consequences for the perpetrator and a desire to cover up the shame associated with sexual violence. Victims/survivors can also be reluctant to disclose and seek support due to a range of barriers such as language, transport, childcare commitments, and lack of knowledge and/or trust of Western models of counselling that protect confidentiality.

Challenges identified as barriers to good practice focused on the nature of the community sector being heavily dependent on government funding that is for limited periods of time. Tendering processes for non-government agencies can pose a real barrier to working in partnership with other agencies that was seen as one of the best ways to work in a holistic manner. Competition between agencies for limited government funding hinders effective interagency collaboration resulting in clients 'falling through the cracks' as some agencies may be reluctant to refer clients to certain services needed by clients due to politics and competition. This lack of interagency collaboration disadvantages clients from receiving the support needed to address their issues.

An often-used community development strategy when trying to bring about change or raise awareness in communities is to engage elders and other community leaders. This approach has had much success in various areas (Hunt 2013). However, respondents across all categories did note that it should be used cautiously in developing social change about sexual violence and coercion with African communities resident in Australia. Respondents variously commented that with such a taboo area it is likely that leaders and elders would be highly confronted and potentially unwilling to support what might be considered a westernised stance which could unintentionally stigmatise African men as sexually violent. The small size of some community groups makes it likely that some offenders will be known to elders which will not necessarily be conducive to supporting a climate for community

change. At the most extreme end some respondents gave examples of how leaders had defended perpetrators and shamed other community members who spoke out against the men using violence.

Another barrier related to small community size was about the fear of interpreters at services being known to victims and/or perpetrators. Whilst agencies may have in place strategies to deal with this concern it still may produce a lack of trust in the agency amongst potential service users. Furthermore, young women described how they worry about two aspects: firstly, what was said by the interpreter to the English speaking worker; and secondly, would the interpreter leak information to community members which could shame them and their family and in situations of violence ultimately make the situation more dangerous for them. These worries have previously been voiced in CaLD studies about the use of interpreters in many areas, however, the risk to women who disclose and seek help for violence is they can be put at further risk if the perpetrator and his supporters are told of her help seeking. Whilst this may be more of a perception than an actual risk in the use of interpreters, it can be enough to keep women who need interpreters from disclosing and using agencies.

Good Practice Responses: Current initiatives and future developments

In outlining good and helpful practice responses it is useful to take into account the various layers that shape why particular approaches are helpful and others are not. Therefore in this section the following considerations are included to build the argument for the types of approaches being suggested: the positioning of young women from African backgrounds living in Australia, the organisation and orientation of service responses, the likely continuum of responses and enhancing the workforce to better respond.

The positioning of young women from African backgrounds living in Australia

The young women participants from a diverse range of African backgrounds all described aspects of navigating their lives and everyday practices between the culture of their families and westernised Australian contemporary culture. They perceived themselves as different from their mothers due to their experiences of western schooling, employment and interaction with western peers. These differences were positive in that they mostly saw themselves as having greater choices and opportunities than their mothers, whilst holding a high level of respect and adherence to their mothers' (and some fathers') knowledge and wisdom. The young women studied and worked to achieve future economic security and personal freedoms. However, this occurred within a cultural context where they largely still felt treated differently and often discriminately compared to their male counterparts and where traditional values about marriage and having only one sexual partner are dominant. They also described living with cultural stereotypes about African women and racism both overtly and covertly. Their descriptions of their future aspirations that living across both cultures offered them demonstrated how strongly young women sought independence and economic security whilst living within their cultural communities, respecting traditions and also challenging inequalities.

Service continuum and knowledge of services

Good practice responses include and rely on a continuum of services from tertiary responses to crime prevention (National Plan 2009; UNCHR 2008). One of the most common themes that emerged in this study was the role for community education in relation to raising awareness about sexual violence and coercion, intimate relationships and gendered roles in relationships. Without investment in crime prevention programs centred on such education and awareness raising the silence and taboo around sexual violence and the silence of victims will continue regardless of any improved tertiary law reform processes in relation to sexual violence.

Different approaches may be effective for raising awareness about the types and extent of sexual violence and the importance of responsibility and consent regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. Peer led approaches were considered appropriate and targeting sites such as sporting clubs to reach and influence young people. Youth leaders and young role models were also identified as great agents for challenging beliefs and attitudes that minimise, tolerate or excuse sexual violence. The inclusion of sexual violence education into settlement services was also identified as a possible approach. Currently sexual education was seen by participants as widely variable in terms of content and limited in its coverage of sexual violence and related issues of consent and equality. The young women advocated strongly for the inclusion of sexual violence within a context of sex and relationship education that was delivered through schools. They saw schools as a valuable site for the delivery of this information as it would be unlikely to be addressed as openly within their family and community settings.

Other programs identified as valuable for reaching young people include camps and leadership programs. Allowing young people, particularly young men, to understand the concept of masculinity and manhood was agreed as a necessary means for challenging attitudes that encourage, condone or ignore male violence against women. As many relationship education programs often target young women, participants felt that it was necessary to begin the dialogue with young men and to look at how young men may behave in relationships in ways that are respectful towards women. This dialogue is also essential to empower young men to speak out against forms of violence against women. Participants suggest the dialogue must be developed amongst young people and with parents to support them to be able to discuss contemporary aspects of relationships and sexual violence with their children. High levels of awareness about sexual and relationship violence amongst influential members of the community such as elders and religious leaders could lead to changing attitudes and more sensitive informal response to victims by members of their social networks and communities. Other potential good practice responses include those that take account of young women's poor financial circumstances that can increase their vulnerability to sexual exploitation by men. Women's programs that adopt creative self-expression such as sewing classes have also been effective avenues for dealing with 'difficult to talk about problems' experienced by women. They can be an effective medium to reach women whilst providing a safe and non-threatening environment to address issues impacting on women.

In developing all types of services from prevention to tertiary responses the importance of having local community knowledge or guidance from community members was considered critical to assist with the co-production of the service design and approach. As noted earlier in the area of sexual violence the best way forward may not start with current community

leaders but the role of young people who are emerging as leaders and working with a cross section of community members not only those in leadership is helpful.

As mentioned earlier, community police officers are playing a positive role so maintaining this approach is critical particularly as the police are a well-known source of help. The potential to expand their role and/or utilise their knowledge to develop prevention and culturally responsive services would be helpful. The role of police more generally is important as they are the most recognised source of help and the most likely to be contacted to deal with men's violence against women. The findings indicate that once the violence has been stopped it is unlikely that police involvement is still required, however, this is not necessarily a 'good fit' with currently promoted models of policing for violence against women where the risk of post reporting retribution and post separation violence has been found to increase risk of escalating violence. This dilemma requires further examination between the police, specialist violence against women services, CaLD services and stakeholders in the communities.

Workers from diverse cultural backgrounds were described as indispensable in services due to their wealth of knowledge and understanding of community issues from a variety of perspectives, including cultural perspectives. CaLD workers also provide specialist knowledge that can inform practice approaches within mainstream agencies. Maintaining specialist cultural women's services is an important aspect of good practice as practitioners are well placed to understand the specific needs and barriers faced by young women from African backgrounds. As already mentioned, one concern is that the perceived or potential lack of anonymity can be a barrier to some young people accessing a small specialist service. This highlights how essential it is for mainstream services to be culturally responsive as it is less likely that young women will be concerned about lack of anonymity. Specialist services and programs are well positioned to work in partnership with mainstream agencies to develop greater awareness and advocate for the specific needs of young women..

Workforce development

One anticipated response in this study was the call for mainstream workers to be increasingly culturally sensitive and responsive and for specialist workers to have increased understanding of sexual violence and coercion. The need for both areas of workforce development is critical to ensure young women receive a thoughtful and caring response to sexual violence and coercion not matter which type of agency they attend to seek support.

The importance of mainstream service providers such as general practice, police, sexual violence, sexual health, youth services, homelessness services and women's health services to have cultural sensitivity and culturally competent responses to people from African backgrounds is critical in order to make women safer in their daily lives and more able to deal with the effects of previous violence. As mainstream services are increasingly required to have wider remits it is critical that they have increased cultural insight, alongside values and practice which can address the needs of young women living in Australia from African backgrounds.

There was also some suggestions for specialist cultural workers to have greater access to training and development about sexual violence and coercion. Given that there are national standards for prevention of sexual violence (Carmody et al, 2009) this would appear a valuable starting point for considering training that could be developed for workers.

Equipping practitioners in all services to work cross culturally was identified as vital. It is noted that cultural competency must be adopted as a whole of agency approach that informs every aspect of service delivery and is reflected in agency policies and procedures. While cultural competency training is made available to workers in the human services sector, it is vital that it is not treated as an ad hoc measure but rather one that requires a complete restructuring of services. This was thought to be lacking in many services where there may be a desire to work in a culturally appropriate manner but are unable to do so with consistency as it is not reflected in organisational policies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research attempted to address a hidden issue that is spoken about by some workers and some young women but is still relatively unmentionable in African communities resident in Australia. It is important to state that it is also a topic of discomfort and not one of open conversation in the remainder of the Australian community. The exception being incidents and events that are widely publicised in the media often involving people in positions of status such as sports stars, teachers or employees of church based organisations. The majority of the community do not personally know the individuals and do not feel the alleged behaviours reflect on them in any way. However, this is different when rape and sexual assault occurs in smaller communities as it can be used to stereotype, oppress, malign and stigmatise community members. In presenting the experiences of young women from African backgrounds we have tried not to convey ideas which could inadvertently present or be used to reinforce representations of African communities as 'typically' having higher level of violence against women or less responsive to social change about ending violence against women. Rather our intention was an attempt to highlight what barriers young women confront living in Australia, how they see the need to end violence against women and what contribution can services make to help bring about this change.

The young women participants emphasised their heterogeneity as women of African backgrounds on a range of axis such as religious backgrounds (e.g. Sudanese Muslims and Zimbabwean Christians), whether they were migrants or refugees settled in Australia, differing expectations about marriage and marriage age, for example one young woman said that if she lived in Sudan she would be married with 3 children whilst another young woman from Kenya spoke of how her mother thought she was growing up too fast in this western culture which included having an interest in boys. Some young women came from middle and upper class backgrounds in their country of origin whereas others had been poor and their parents had limited access to education. However, they commonly experienced racism and sexism specifically related to their African heritage. The young women all positively regarded the freedoms they had living in Australia and could describe how they moved between the two cultures, whilst not seeing their parents' cultures as static but as changing the longer they lived in Australia.

Agency representatives had varying amounts of experiences in working with African communities generally and young women in particular. Unfortunately, a small number of respondents did give impressions about not being particularly open to being responsive but rather the saw the responsibility for young women's experiences of violence as lying primarily with African communities' attitudes and beliefs. This was not particularly helpful in thinking about how to move forward. Other agencies representatives were keen to look at new ways of working and emphasised the importance of mainstream agencies being more culturally responsive and respectful and the need to support smaller specialist agencies to work effectively with African women around issues of violence, abuse and trauma. The dilemmas of being part of a small community and seeking help either informally or formally were described making it evident that there is no single way to best respond to the young women's needs.

Sexual violence and coercion largely remains an issue that is not spoken about, is defined narrowly as stranger rape or in other cases the female's fault such as when young women were told not to dress 'like that' around older uncles. Young women respondents were able to describe a range of sexually inappropriate or violent behaviours but spoke of how these were difficult to report formally or to parents for fear of the consequences making the situation worse or at least not any better. This is not a unique fear amongst young African women, but it is experienced differently when living in small community without much anonymity.

Therefore in making recommendations about future policy and practice, these are largely oriented towards crime prevention goals associated with awareness raising and education and enhancing the cultural responsiveness of police as they are the most well known and most likely utilised source of formal help particularly in situations of extreme violence.

It is recommended that:

1. Crime Prevention and Education Programs are specifically developed in consultation with young people from African backgrounds that address the issues of healthy intimate relationships, sexuality and sexualised violence and coercion
 - 1.1 Taking into account diverse African cultural backgrounds and practices whilst recognising their experiences of living in Australia
 - 1.2 Trialling programs that are targeted at single gender groups so that gender specific issues can be addressed.
 - 1.3 Trialling of peer education models as they have been used effectively in other areas of work with young people in relation to sexuality and violence.
2. Development of campaigns that raise awareness about laws, rights and responsibilities in relation to families and relationships including areas such as family law, domestic violence laws, and housing and residential tenancies.
3. Community policing initiatives working directly with African communities are supported so that are identifying what aspects of the practices are leading to positive and supportive outcomes for all community members and any strategies which need revision.
4. Training for police officers that increases understanding of the diversity and dynamics of African communities and families so that when responding to police call outs

concerning violence they are better able to understand what responses may be more effective.

5. Development of workforce and organisational development training which increases the cultural knowledge, sensitivity and responsiveness of police and other human service agencies to help seeking by young women from African backgrounds.

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