Intersectionality in practice

This resource forms part of a series on best practice when working with victim-survivors of family violence who are from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This resource covers intersectionality as a framework. Key principles of an intersectional approach are outlined as well as practical tips for using the steps of Recognise, Respond and Refer.

Intersectionality as a framework

Intersectionality is used to understand how systemic barriers are produced by a combination of different types of oppression such as:

- racism
- able-ism
- sexism
- heterosexism
- ageism
- socio-economic inequity.

When a number of these oppressions come together, a complex form of injustice is produced that impacts the type of services a person will receive and how they receive them.

An intersectional approach

Victim-survivors from refugee and migrant backgrounds face intersecting systemic barriers to accessing support. This can be demonstrated in the example below where a woman, Maryam, calls a service to ask for help.

An intersectional approach to this situation would mean we:

- have a critical awareness of power. We all experience more or less power depending on our multifaceted identities and context
- acknowledge the power we hold as service providers while recognising victim-survivors as experts in their own lives and as unique individuals rather than members of a generalised cultural group
- recognise the diverse strengths of victim-survivors, for example a woman may be fluent in a number of languages, be highly qualified and be a respected community leader/professional
- think beyond a one size fits all approach.

Maryam has limited power and agency, no knowledge of services or her legal rights, and no emotional or practical support.

- English is Maryam’s third language
- Maryam has no family or social networks in Australia
- Maryam’s partner threatens to deport her if she doesn’t do what he wants
Intersectionality in practice: Using Recognise, Respond, Refer

**Recognise**

> Use culturally responsive practice which means listening without judgement and being critically aware of the potential impact of our own cultural and personal values and power.

> Think beyond and around eligibility criteria as the situation a woman describes may not fit into the criteria for intake.

> Consider the different aspects of a victim-survivor’s identity and potential barriers to accessing support. For example, Maryam is a woman, a migrant, a wife and a mother. She speaks English as an additional language, does not have permanent residency and may have cultural and religious beliefs about marriage being forever.

> A victim-survivor may have no knowledge of what the term ‘family violence’ means. Clearly explain what it means and its different forms.

> Always consult the victim-survivor on the selection of an interpreter.

**Respond**

> Ask gentle, exploratory questions to gain a clear picture of a victim-survivor’s situation and beliefs, whilst building her confidence and understanding of her rights and the support available.

> Check the victim-survivor’s understanding in a number of ways – ‘yes’ does not always mean that someone really understands.

> Co-create a case management plan with the victim-survivor that recognises her expertise in her own lived experience.

> Make sure the victim-survivor is comfortable with the plan and knows it is okay to disagree with you.

> If she chooses to stay with her partner, develop a safety plan with her that meets her needs and fits her situation.

> Check the victim-survivor’s attitudes to seeking help. Who might she be able to trust in or beyond her community? Clearly explain police and court processes and intervention orders.

**Refer**

> Combine a warm referral process with advocacy. This means educating services about a victim-survivor’s world view, the complexity of their situation and intersecting barriers.

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**More information**

For additional information about the origins of the term intersectionality see: