

Family Violence and Temporary Visa Holders During COVID-19



Acknowledgements

We dedicate this work to the women who have and are experiencing domestic and family violence: research that takes apart contexts and experiences can seem far removed from the daily challenge of survival. We hope that this work can contribute in some way to meaningful change to enable security, independence and stability to be more easily accessible.

We extend our gratitude to the women at inTouch, Michal and Ela for the quick decision to support this project and to enable it to move so efficiently, the case managers and staff at inTouch who have supported this research but who do this important work daily. We thank Luba and Naime for their expert guidance at various stages of the project, and the case management team who shared their views and experiences to support the analysis of the data.

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We acknowledge our colleagues and advocates beyond Monash, particularly the National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence who have not allowed the specificity of the impact of temporary migration status in the context of family violence to stray from the national agenda.

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Acronyms

DFV	Domestic and family violence
FVP	Family violence provisions
FVSN	Family Violence Safety Notice
MARAM	Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework
FVIO	Family Violence Intervention Order
inTouch	inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer
NESB	Non-English-speaking background
VAW	Violence against women

Key Terms

Domestic and family violence (DFV)

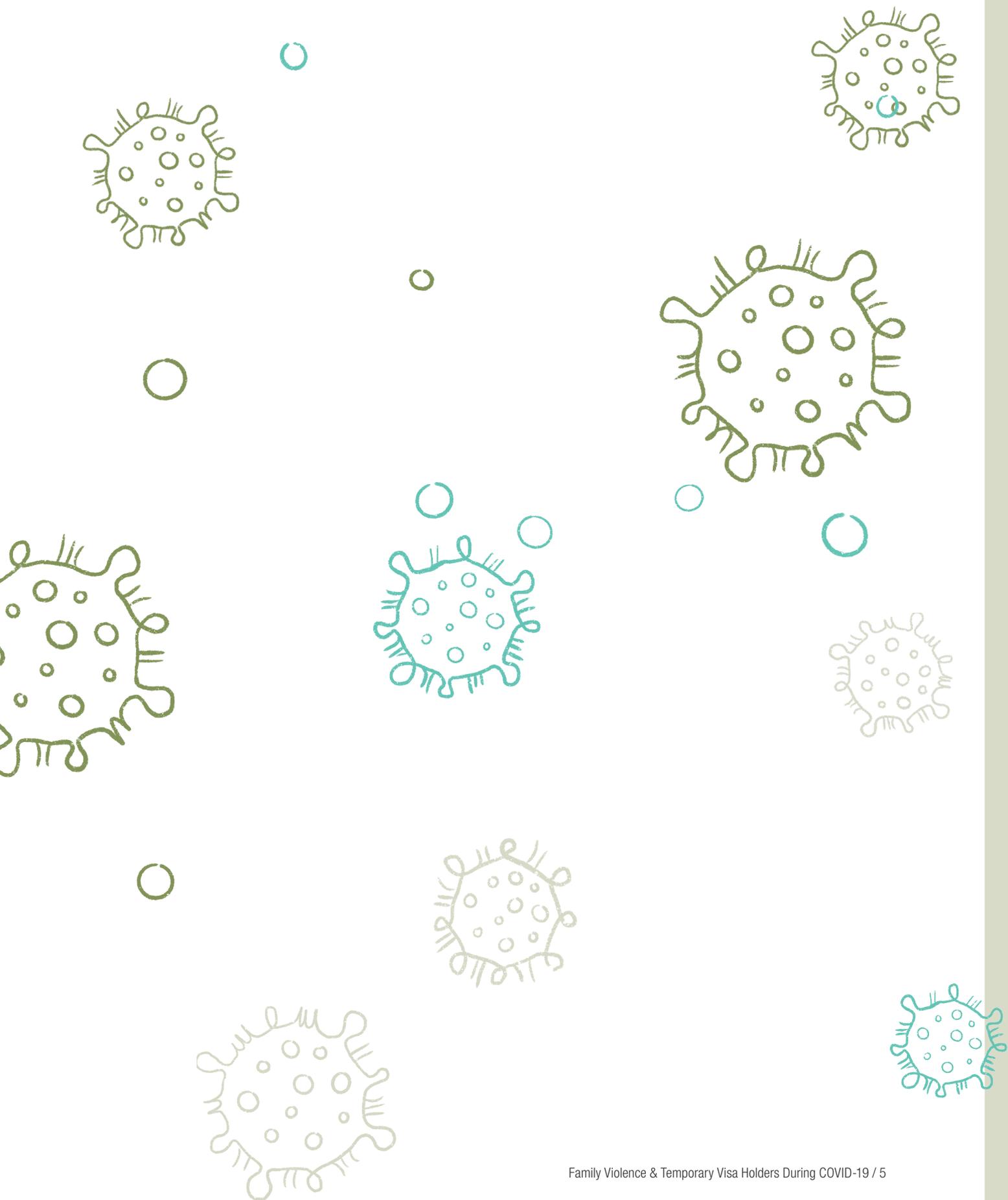
For consistency we use the term DFV throughout this report to acknowledge that varied terminology used in Australia jurisdictions to refer to violence that occurs in the context of family relationships and between intimate partners.

Victim-Survivor

In the case files the reference is to the 'client': reflecting the nature of the service provision. In this report, this term is replaced by the use of the term victim-survivor, or woman/women as appropriate (reflecting that in this study all of the victim-survivors were women). It is important within the context of this research to clearly demarcate the data from the files: that is, we come to these files and reproduce this data as research evidence, rather than as client reports that reflect service provision, and thus this shift away from terminology of client is critical.

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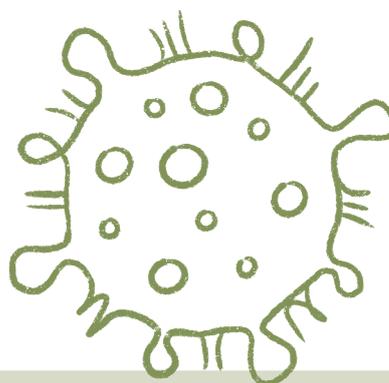
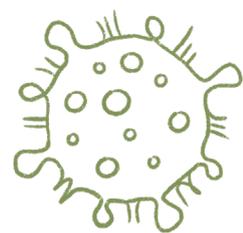
Executive Summary

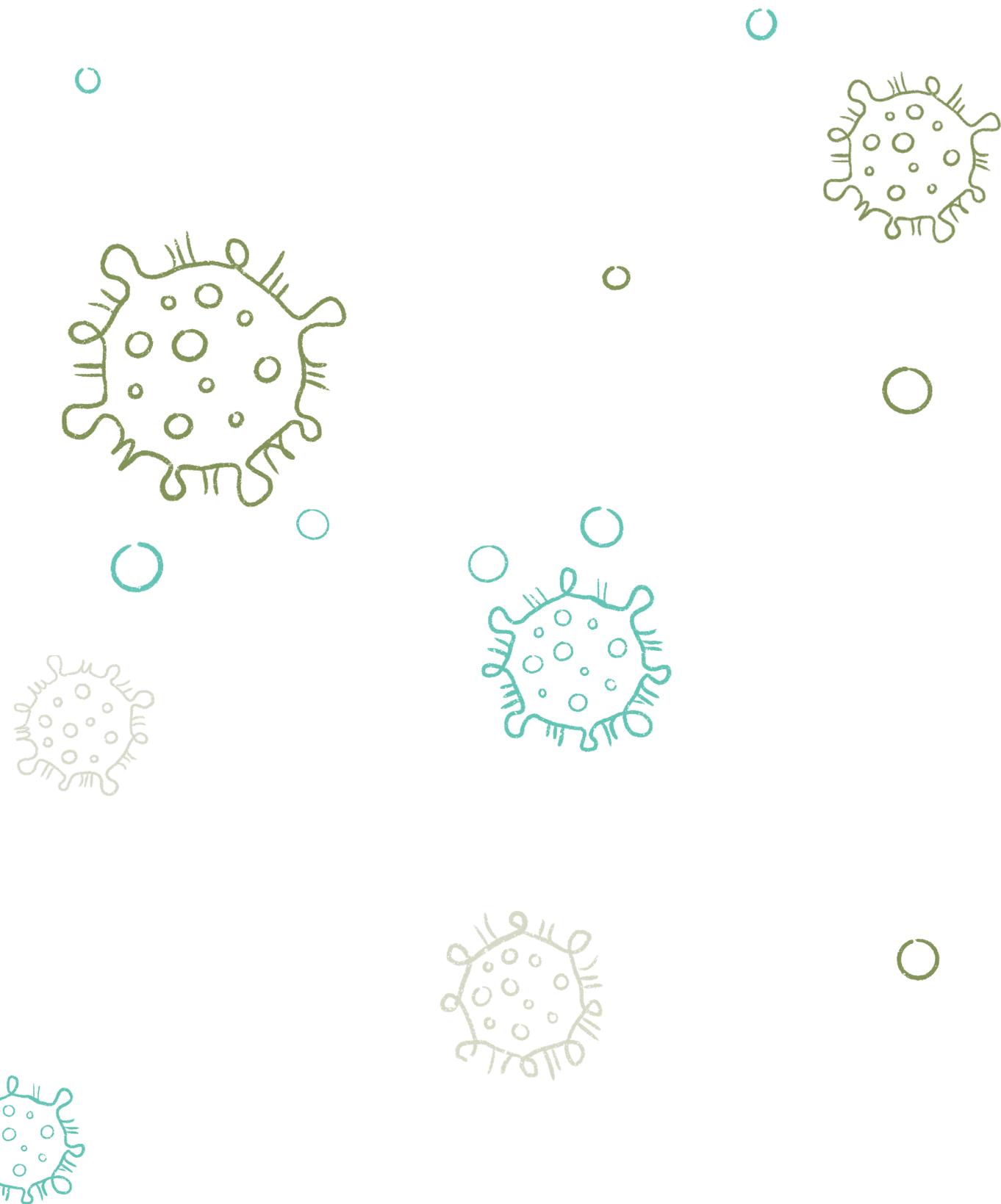
Every day across Australia, domestic and family violence services and their case managers and key staff, are supporting women and children experiencing domestic and family violence. Their work is focused on short term needs in the first instance, and then looks to medium-to-long term supports that can be accessed and established to assist women to live securely and safely. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, this work has changed in terms of where it is undertaken and how, but it remains the case that case managers work with clients to assess and identify risk, to develop risk management strategies and to navigate access to the supports and systems available. This study captures the immediate needs, contexts and circumstances of 100 women who held temporary visas and sought the support of inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch) due to their experience of family or domestic violence during the first lockdown phase [from the declaration of a State of Emergency across Victoria on 16 March to 31 May 2020].

From early March 2020 service providers, stakeholders, advocates and researchers raised concern that the lockdown would exacerbate the severity and frequency of domestic and family violence. Domestic and family violence was already declared a national emergency in Australia. It is already well documented that temporary visa holders who experience domestic and family violence in Australia have limited access to support because of their migration status, and that the visa system can contribute to and compound women's insecurity. The announcement that the Commonwealth Government would exclude temporary visa holders from the financial support packages (JobSeeker and JobKeeper), fuelled further concerns that women on temporary visas experiencing domestic and family violence would be impacted significantly.

This study documents 100 cases during the first period of lockdown in Victoria. Through an analysis of the case management files, we document these women's needs; their diverse locations and situations, their circumstances and as much as possible, the specific impacts of COVID19 including the subsequent restrictions and period of lockdown. It is not possible to capture the impact of the lockdown in its entirety: case management is a specific skill and service, where risk assessment and management for the safety and security of women is prioritised. Where women commented on specific impacts and situations brought about by the lockdown period and associated policies and processes, we are able to glean insights into the impact of the pandemic and its associated restrictions.

We observe that the impact of COVID 19 has been to intensify the impact of the exclusion of temporary visa holders experiencing family violence from safety and support mechanisms, at a time when they need it more than ever.





Recommendations

The recommendations from this study align with and build upon recommendations from previous leading Australian research and advocacy¹ which have consistently outlined a pathway for reform. The recommendations are specific to the focus of this study.

Recommendations are identified as either Commonwealth reform or reform of service and support. Service and support recommendations may have relevance and application beyond temporary migrants. Service and support initiatives should be guided by the realisation of the Commonwealth reform recommendations and the expansion of family violence provisions and bridging visa subclasses for all persons experiencing domestic and family violence in Australia.

Commonwealth reform: Migration Law and Regulation²

Recommendation 1: Review and expand the family violence provisions.

This should include a view to expanding access by expanding the definition of perpetrators to include extended family/in-law family members.³

Recommendation 2: Review and broaden the definition of family violence in the Migration Regulations 1994 (Cth)

to ensure consistency with the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)*, this should include the recognition of all forms financial abuse.

Recommendation 3: Establish a single subclass bridging visa for all temporary visa holders to access if they experience domestic and family violence.

This visa would enable immediate access to health, housing, medical, financial and other supports without limitation as well as work rights, to ensure women have certainty for 3 years (with an option of extension if necessary) while issues pertaining to Family Court and other matters be reduced, and to enable necessary arrangements made regarding women's safety.

Service and support

Recommendation 4: Targeted, strategic and monitored information provision about migration status and family violence law and support provisions.⁴ Temporary visa holders need confidence and knowledge regarding their rights pertaining to their migration status and family violence law and support provisions. Information and communication strategies must include the following:

- Pre-departure and arrival information for new arrivals regarding Australia's definition of, and stance on, domestic and family violence.
- Ongoing information must be provided that targets immigrant and refugee women, and temporary migrants, and shared on diverse media and communication channels and platforms. Beyond printed materials, this should include digital social media, television and radio, and community awareness raising (i.e. a comprehensive text/verbal/visual communication strategy).
- All messaging must clearly articulate that the definition of domestic and family violence is broad and inclusive.
- All efforts to engage, target and reach temporary migrant holders must be subject to ongoing analysis on reach and impact, reporting on processes and strategies cannot inform how best to reach women who do not engage with mainstream services.⁵

Recommendation 5: Increased support for adequate emergency, medium-term and long-term safe housing for women and children escaping domestic and family violence: this is an issue more broadly across Australian communities but requires specific attention for temporary visas holders. Temporary migrants face significant challenges in accessing the private rental market and are excluded from some support provisions. This creates further barriers to leaving abusive relationships. Temporary visa holders should not have to choose between personal safety and housing stability.

Recommendation 6: Increased financial supports: Recognising that in many cases women are dependent on their partners financially, there is an opportunity for women and their children to be better supported by the government. Both emergency and ongoing adequate funding is necessary to enable access to independent safety and security without financial dependence on their sponsor / perpetrator. This must be focused on the long term, given the demonstrated financial (and related) impacts on all temporary visas holders of COVID-19 and the related policy response.⁶

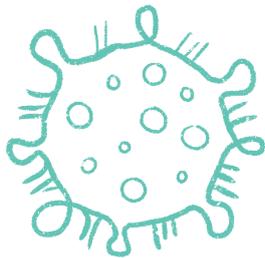
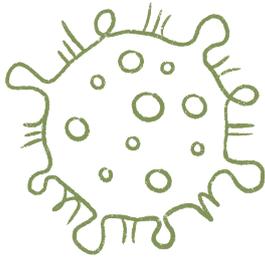
Background

Prior to the global pandemic, it has been well established that migrant and refugee women in Australia require specific support in the context of domestic and family violence (DFV): this group is a key priority under COAGs Fourth Action Plan (of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 [2019, p. 29]. The commitment of COAG has focused on the specific needs of women who hold temporary visas: a group who require focused service provision, and targeted immigration support⁷. There is growing national and international evidence that migration status, particularly temporary migration status, can exacerbate the risk of domestic and family violence (Vaughan et al., 2016; Ortiz-Rodrigues & Mooney, 2018; Martinez-Roman et al., 2017). Recent research on domestic and family violence among migrant and refugee women identified the absence of robust data as a major hurdle to better understanding and to the development of more nuanced responses (Vaughan et al., 2016; Guruge et al., 2012). The need to attend to class, race and visa status; and to develop effective service responses to the diverse and complex needs of migrant and refugee women has been the focus of some scholars in the field (Anitha, 2008; Burman & Chantler, 2005; Vaughan et al., 2016; Varona, 2018). Segrave's (2017) research on the intersection of temporary migration and migrant and refugee women's experiences in the context of domestic and family violence, undertaken in partnership with inTouch, was the first large-scale analysis of how the migration system contributes to and sustains power inequality for non-citizen women experiencing domestic and family violence (Segrave & Burnett-Wake, 2017; Segrave, 2018). Building on previous research (McCulloch et al., 2016), Maher and Segrave (2018) have also shown that investigation needs to move beyond identifying when and how women are 'vulnerable' towards a systematic identification of the differential impact of migration status in the context of domestic and family violence, particularly in relation to service and system responses. Given this knowledge, the impost and impacts of lockdown and stay-at-home rules for women holding temporary visas require specific and focused attention.

The COVID-19 policy context: Temporary migrants

Alongside the knowledge that temporary visas holders experience specific risk and barriers to support because of their migration status, this group was also excluded from the national wage protection mechanisms put in place temporarily to alleviate the loss of work and the reduction of work hours for employees across Australia.

Temporary migrants were excluded from the Commonwealth Government economic response to COVID-19 including the JobKeeper and JobSeeker assistances schemes introduced for those who had lost work as a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions. In contrast to other countries that extended wage subsidies and support to temporary migrants, on 3 April 2020 Prime Minister Scott Morison told visa holders and international students to make their way home (Gibson & Moran, 2020). The recent report on temporary migrants in Australia during COVID details the piecemeal state and territory responses to assist temporary migrants following the exclusion from the federal response (Berg & Farbenblum, 2020, p. 18). In Victoria, a \$500 million 'Working for Victoria' Initiative fund was announced on the 8th April designed to provide financial and job seeking support for those who were unemployed as a result



of the lockdown. While the Australian Red Cross was provided \$7 million from the Commonwealth Government to deliver emergency relief and counselling support to the most vulnerable temporary migrants, the payments were one off, not intended as income support and were only for those experiencing extreme financial hardship (DSS, 2020; Australian Red Cross, 2020).

Recent research by Berg and Farbenblum (2020) captured the experiences of over 6,100 temporary visa holders in Australia affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. Their online survey clearly demonstrates how critical income loss and the lack of financial support has resulted in many temporary migrants being unable to meet basic living needs (Berg and Farbenblum, 2020). They reported findings that even with the additional supports offered by state and territory governments, and other service providers, that 30 per cent of their sample of temporary visa holders were reluctant to access the financial support because of fears that it might impact their visa status (Berg & Farbenblum, 2020, p. 8). They highlight the vulnerability of temporary migrants to poverty and homelessness during the coronavirus recession. It has also been argued that this financial impact compounds structural barriers to help seeking and support for temporary migrants experiencing family violence (Gleeson, 2020; Rushton, 2020; Segrave, 2020).

Pre-COVID it was known that the family violence provisions, as per the *Migration Regulations 1994 (Cth)* under the *Migration Act 1958 (Cth)*, were a limited safety net for women experiencing family violence to remain on the pathway to permanent residency despite the relationship breaking down due to family violence. For women on temporary partner visas (specifically subclass 300, 309 and 820) the provision enables an application to be made but they may still have limited access to financial support, housing support and income while their application is being processed. For women who do not hold those visas (such as student visa holders, visitor visa holders) there is no safety net to enable women to remain in Australia for any length of time, and access to support is very limited due to their migration status, as mapped in Figure 1 below (see Segrave, 2017; MGFVPC, 2018).



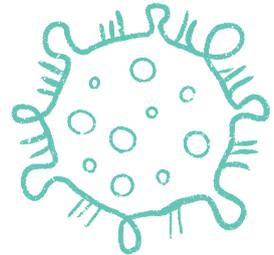
Figure 1: Simplified difference related to migration pathways for temporary visa holders who experience family violence

For temporary visa holders who experience family violence the total absence of any form of guaranteed support and assistance created specific concerns in the context of COVID. A major concern was that for both partner visa holders and other visas, the reliance on perpetrators to survive in the absence of access to financial support would impact decisions regarding safety and survival, resulting in decisions to remain with perpetrators of violence and abuse. This was brought out in the analysis.

COVID-19: gender and family violence implications and impacts

COVID-19 is exacerbating existing inequalities and evidence about the differential impacts of the pandemic on women and men is beginning to emerge (John, Casey, Carino & McGovern, 2020; Milford & Anderson, 2020). Previous research on women's workforce participation during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis showed that women's economic vulnerability increased due to their concentration in low paid/casualised roles with limited leave entitlements and in sectors shaped by discretionary spending (Barns, Jefferson & Preston, 2009). The COVID-19 pandemic is no different with payroll data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealing that unemployment levels for Victorian women are at a record high and women segregated in industries hardest hit by the coronavirus restrictions, such as accommodation and food services (Batchelor, 2020). While stay-at-home directives have meant that men and women are both more likely to be working from home during lockdowns, the systemic inequities in paid work, care and household work performed by men and women remains (Craig, 2020; Landivar, Ruppner, Scarborough & Collins, 2020). The economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, or the 'shecession', together with increased caring and housing school responsibilities has led many commentators and researchers to describe women as the 'shock absorbers' of the COVID-19 pandemic and to call for gender-responsive recovery plans (John, Casey, Carino & McGovern, 2020; Hurst, 2020; Gupta, 2020; Tuohy, 2020a, 2020c).

In fact, changes in women's caring responsibilities may heighten their risk of gender-based violence during the pandemic. Previous research shows that women's motherhood status can increase their risk of domestic and family violence with violence often commencing during pregnancy and high prevalence throughout pregnancy and early parenthood (Campo, 2015; Taft, 2002; WHO, 2011). The increased care burden carried by many women since the onset of the pandemic together with increased economic insecurity, social isolation and disruptions to support networks and services has heightened the risk of violence against women and children in the home. Times of crisis and natural disasters are associated with increased violence against women and children (Parkinson & Zara, 2011, 2013; Peterman, Potts, O'Donnell et al., 2020; True, 2013; UNICRI, 2015). The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is no exception with reports of increased domestic and family violence since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Australia in January 2020 (Clayton, 2020; Tuohy, 2020b). A Victorian study by Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon and True (2020) based on the experiences of 166 practitioners' who supported women experiencing violence during the initial stage 3 restriction in April and May 2020 revealed that the severity and frequency of violence against women had increased. Fifty-nine percent of practitioners reported that COVID-19 had increased the frequency of violence and 50 per cent said that it increased the severity of violence. Increases in first-time family violence reporting by women and in the complexity of women's support needs were also observed by practitioners (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & True, 2020). This study showed that perpetrators were using COVID-19 and the threat of infection to restrict women's movement, to force them to share homes with their abusers and to further isolate victim-survivors (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & True, 2020). It highlighted that the pandemic control measures have reduced women's ability to seek help as home confinement and increased surveillance of communication technology by perpetrators reduce privacy in homes (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & True, 2020).





Other Australian research based on an online survey of 1,500 women between 6 May to 1 June 2020 found that 8.2 percent of women in cohabiting relationships had experienced physical violence and 4.2 percent had experienced sexual violence in the three months prior to the survey (Boxall, Morgan & Brown, 2020). Rates of coercive control were higher for these women with 11.1 percent of cohabiting women reporting that they had experienced emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours (Boxall, Morgan & Brown, 2020). However, while one in five respondents (18.7%, n=2,799) came from non-English speaking backgrounds, incident rates by population groups were not reported.

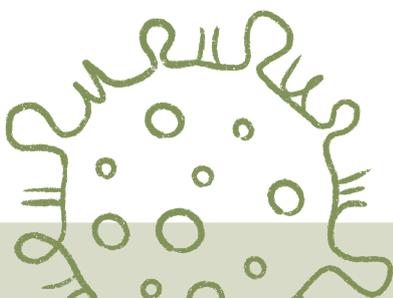
Although it has been clearly recognised that domestic and family violence has increased, there is a lack of data on the experiences of diverse groups, such as temporary migrants, people with disability and LGBTIQI.

Aligning with Australian findings, increases in violence against women and children during lockdowns have been reported in several countries leading the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuke, to declare violence against women the ‘shadow pandemic’ (UN Women, 2020; UN News, 2020). There is important work to do to capture and share learnings on the specificity of the impact of pandemic, particularly the lockdown, for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, as well identify if and how existing areas of insecurity escalated.

Migrant and refugee women and family violence and COVID-19

Inequities in access to financial and social protection during COVID-19 are likely to disproportionately affect women experiencing domestic and family violence who hold temporary visas. COVID-19 has created multiple financial and social stressors, particularly during the lock down and stay at home orders in March-May 2020, and the exclusion of temporary visa holders from ongoing financial support over this time. In this context our research sought to illuminate the situations of temporary migrants who were experiencing domestic and family violence and sought the assistance and support of inTouch during the lockdown.

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence provides person-centred integrated, culturally responsive services to migrant and refugee communities experiencing family violence across Victoria. They are committed to changing lives and transforming communities, and strive to create a world where culturally diverse women and children live free of violence. Throughout its 35-year history inTouch has made a significant impact, having helped over 20,000 women experiencing family violence. inTouch offers services and programs across the family violence continuum, from prevention and early intervention, to supporting women in crisis, post-crisis support and recovery. They also undertake research and advocacy, and help build the capacity of specialist family violence providers and mainstream services to better deliver support to refugee and migrant women experiencing family violence through training and community-based projects. inTouch is a critical piece in Victoria’s family violence response system with specialised understanding of the issues related to the intersection of family violence, culture, temporary migration, family law and the legal system.



Method

The aim of this project was to undertake a snapshot study of domestic and family violence cases managed by inTouch that involve women (victim-survivors) who have experienced or are experiencing domestic and family violence and whose migration status was temporary when they first came into contact with the organisation.

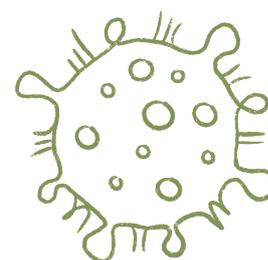
This project sought to:

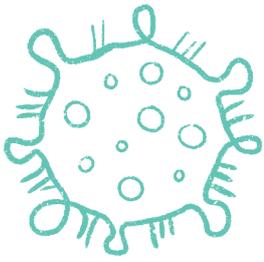
1. Build a database that details the breadth and range of the specific migration related components of domestic and family violence risk during times of crisis to provide a rigorous evidence-base for state and national policy makers and stakeholders.
2. Provide a platform from which to examine the impact of COVID-19 on women's experiences of accessing safety and support.
3. Provide inTouch with an evidence base to optimally target support for their clients.

This project builds on the previous work of Segrave in partnership with inTouch (2017), undertaking the first large-scale national study of women experiencing domestic and family violence who hold temporary visas based on a case file analysis. It also contributes to the broader work being conducted by the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Centre, led by Naomi Pfitzner, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Jacqui True, documenting gender-based violence and help seeking behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report draws on the analysis of 100 client case files from inTouch that were open from the declaration of a State of Emergency across Victoria on 16 March through to 31 May 2020 and involve clients whose migration status was temporary when they first came into contact with inTouch. These clients included those on partner-related visas, but also those on working, student, visitor and other temporary visas. During this period, there were 116 clients holding temporary visas: the study design stopped at 100, for the purpose of timeliness of data entry and analysis. Cases were chosen simply based on the criteria of the date the case was opened and the visa status of the client. The additional 16 cases were across the time period, as some were excluded from the study because, for example, the client moved interstate or left the service/case was closed with very little information because limited contact had been made. The women in this study, in some cases, had previously been clients of inTouch and their case had closed- for this study, we only focused on the case and details relevant to this period.

The research was conducted with the approval of the Monash University Ethics in Human Research Committee (Project ID: 25338) which took into account the highly sensitive nature of the case files. The case files are stored electronically on an inTouch case management system. An external database was created by the Monash researchers that de-identified the information as it was entered. The analysis is based on the Monash database, which enabled quantification of the individual situations and circumstances (demographic information, details of the immediate needs and services, and information related to migration status); the identification of risk (drawing on the existing Victorian MARAM including the items specifically relevant to migrant and refugee clientele). The research was undertaken in August 2020: with 44 cases remaining open at the time the data was entered. The analysis reflects the 'snapshot' approach to capturing the circumstances of women who made contact with inTouch and the provision





of support during this time, however it is not a complete picture of support provision, including applications to access permanent residency via the family violence provisions, given that many women remained clients at the time the data was entered and applications were underway or under review.

This research adopted the same method as the previous 2017 study by Segrave: the data is drawn from case files, which inevitably means that the detail and breadth of each file varied considerably, as did the nature of information recorded. Files include case worker contact notes regarding risk, provision and prioritisation of support; updates regarding the individual and familial circumstances of the client; and information and documentation related to migration processes (including applications to access the family violence provisions and the accompanying documentation). The variation in file length was similar to the previous 2017 study, though the high workloads of case managers during this time and the specific challenges of undertaking this work whilst transitioning to work from home due to the COVID 'stay home, stay safe' directions should also be noted. This means that for some areas of data collection there are, at times, significant 'unknowns' simply because there is variance across client needs and situation. In our analysis, we indicate the number/percentage of unknowns where relevant, but more often present analysis based on the total number of known identifiers/factors. Importantly, in many of the case files, there were rich narratives and first-person accounts of women's experiences, the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim-survivor, and the details of what occurred within the context of the relationship. Throughout this report, the quantitative data is further enhanced and illustrated via examples drawn from this qualitative data. As part of the research process we also spoke with case managers, to offer some context and reflection on the findings: where it is useful we provide some context from those discussion in the analysis.

It is important to note: the specificity of COVID impact is not necessarily immediately apparent. This it is not a specific question asked by case managers (eg do you think this is happening/began because of the current circumstances) as their work is focused on the Victorian MARAM and the broader service provision of immediate, medium- and long-term support for women experiencing family violence and seeking security and safety. Capturing the impact of COVID, as detailed in the analysis is complex: but it is clear that it should not be suggested or implied that COVID is a cause of men's abuse and violence.

Notes on the presentation of findings

Throughout this report we use names to offer case studies, and to share excerpts from case notes. These are pseudonyms. We use names to ensure that we humanise these stories: women are not just 'victims' or 'survivors' or 'clients', they are many things as daughters, mothers, employees, students, and we wish to honour that rather than using labels.

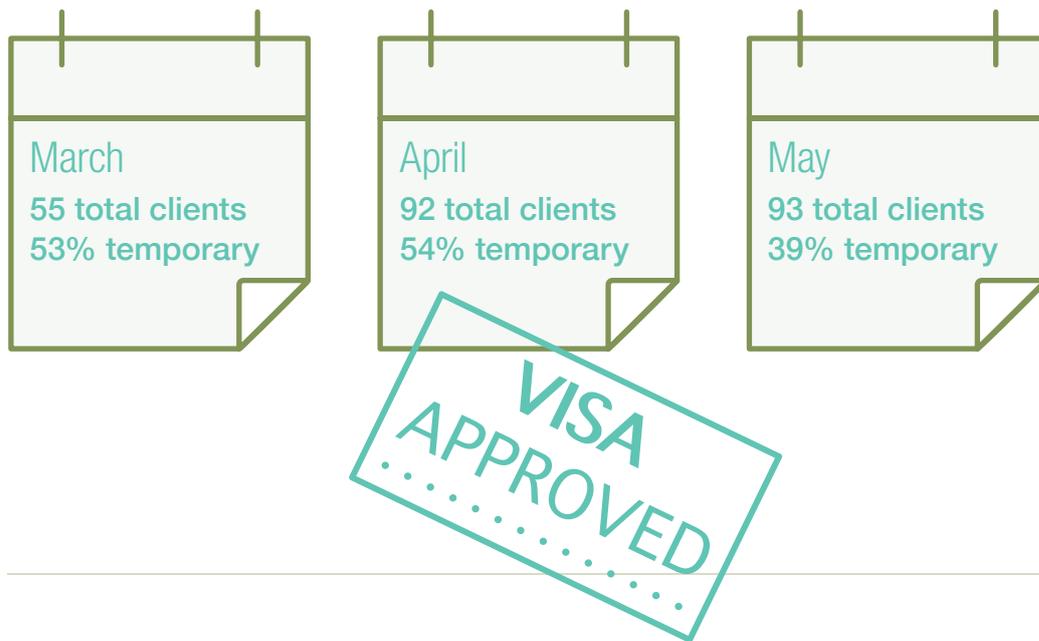
We refer throughout this study to perpetrators, and we do not give names to perpetrators. This reflects the basis of the study: women's experiences as captured via their multiple conversations with case managers in the course of providing targeted support.

We draw on case file notes throughout the analysis. We have only amended these in relation to using full words where truncations are generally used (such as 'perp', 'nil' etc) and/or there were grammatical/typological errors: they have been amended for readability.

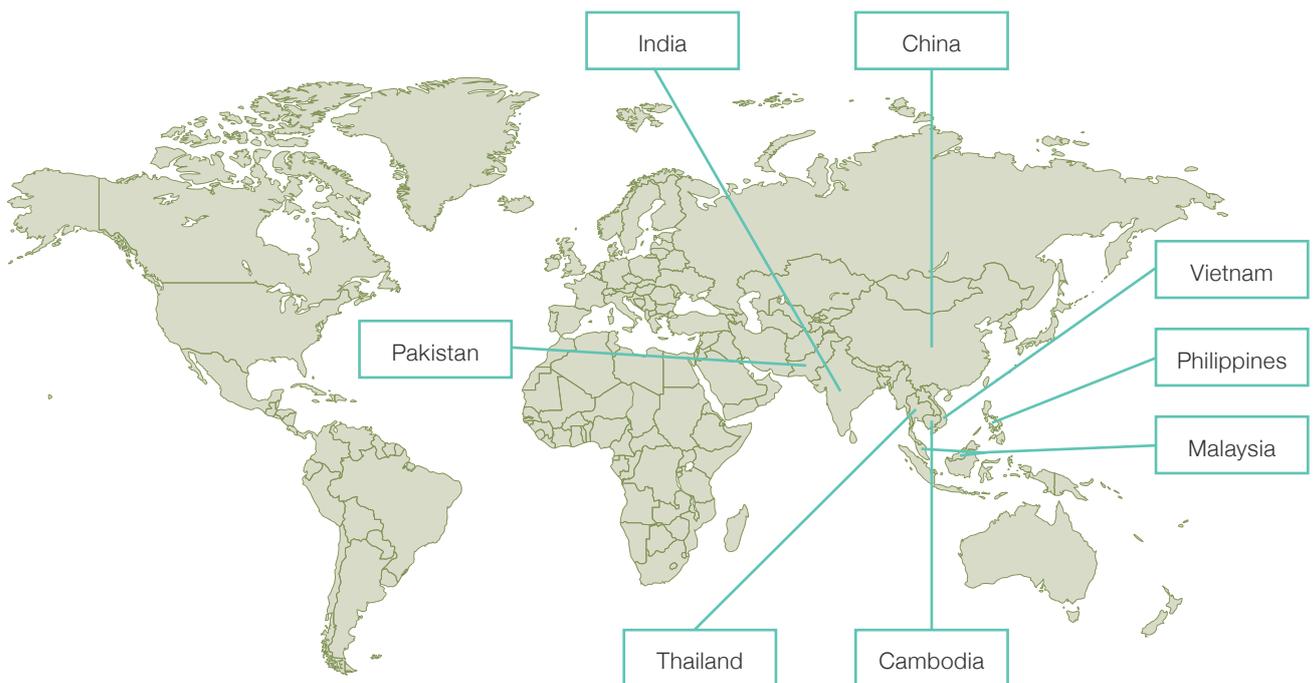


Snapshot: An overview of the cases

Number of temporary visa holders by month



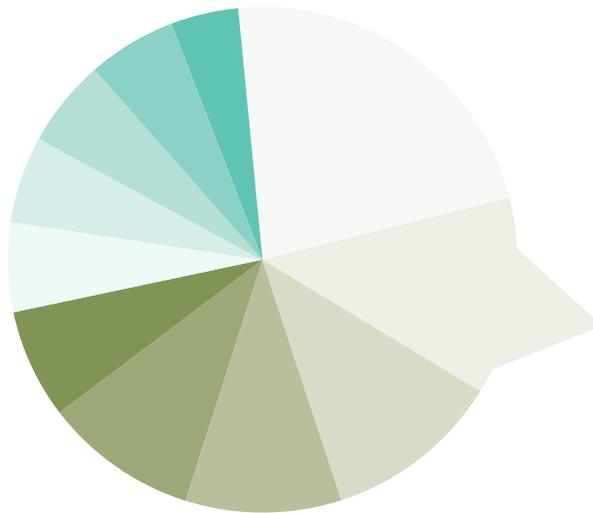
Country of birth





Languages spoken at home

- Vietnamese
- Punjabi
- Hindi
- English
- Persian
- Thai
- Mandarin
- Spanish
- Khmer
- Urdu
- Swahili



29 different languages spoken



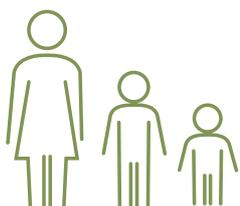
Proficiency in English

Very well	 	20.65%
Well	 	34.78%
Not well	 	34.78%
Not at all	 	9.78%



45% required an interpreter

Women with children



54% had dependent children



38 children were aged 4 and under

Demographics

GENDER, SEXUALITY

All the clients in this study were women. None identified as LGBTQI. We need to acknowledge this is a major issue: that is, women not coming forward to this service, but not indicative of not impacted by DFV over this period.

LANGUAGE AND COUNTRY OF BIRTH

inTouch data consistently documents services to a diverse group of clients from an array of countries from across the globe. In the 2018-2019 financial year inTouch supported clients from 101 countries who spoke 90 different languages (inTouch, 2020). This diversity in service users remained in 2019-2020 financial year where inTouch supported women from 98 countries who spoke 75 different languages. In 2017, from 300 cases, the most represented countries of birth were slightly different but equally diverse: India & Vietnam (16%), China (excluding SARS & Taiwan, 9%), and the Philippines (7%) (Segrave, 2017, p.19). During the COVID-19 lockdown, the diversity was similarly spread: there were 34 different countries of origin noted (in three cases this was not recorded), with the most frequent identified in the snapshot above. This diversity points to myriad processes and reasons for coming to Australia, the cultural context within which temporary migration may occur and diverse conditions, cultures and traditions that are relevant to each client who seeks support.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

The number of women that required an interpreter during the period of time reviewed in this snapshot study was reflective of the broader demand for interpreter services by women accessing inTouch. In 2018-2019, 42 percent of all inTouch clients required an interpreter at intake. In this study, 45% of women required an interpreter for support and a similar number reported they were not comfortable or confident in English.

Temporary visa type

The most critical factor determining support options for women experiencing domestic and family violence in Australia who hold temporary visa is the specific visa they held at the time of contact with inTouch. This is a Commonwealth law and regulation issue: the family violence provisions are detailed in the *Migration Act 1958*, and provide a pathway to permanent residency for women who experience family violence and who can demonstrate both that the relationship was genuine and broke down as a consequence of family violence as detailed in the Background (see also Segrave, 2017; MGFVPC, 2018). Women who do not hold a temporary partner visa and/or relevant working visas are ineligible to access the domestic and family violence provisions in order to apply for permanent residency, despite the breakdown of their relationship due to domestic and family violence. They are also generally ineligible for housing and welfare support, particularly beyond short-term emergency support. **While this study is based on women accessing support in Victoria, this is a Commonwealth issue: it is Federal law and regulation that limits women's access to Centrelink, for example, though some issues such as housing and other forms of financial support are state-based. This is important because this study presents a nationally consistent situation for women experiencing family violence in Australia who hold temporary visas.**

Of the women in this study where visa type was recorded, 40 percent held a bridging visa and just over 30 percent held a partner visa.

Visa Type	%
Bridging visa	40
No visa	0
Partner visa	33
special category visa (sc 444) for NZ citizens	4
Student visa	11
unauthorised maritime arrival	0
Visitor/tourist	2
working/skilled	0
Other	10

Mothering and COVID: Women with dependent children

The negative impacts of domestic and family violence on children and the risks of intergenerational violence, whether or not they are direct targets of perpetrator abuse, is widely acknowledged (Campo, 2015; Lourenco et al., 2013; Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008). At the time of contact with inTouch, over half of the women in this study had dependents. While 46 percent of the women in this study had no dependents, the remaining women had between one to five children. The majority of the women had one dependent (33 %) following by two (17 %), three (3 %) and five (1%). While some women had dependents living outside of Australia, the majority of the dependents were living with the women in Australia at the time of the women's interaction with inTouch. Of the 54 women who had dependents living with them in Australia, the majority of the dependents were Australian citizens.

Where age was known, dependents ranged in age from less than 12 months to 19 years of age. Just over half of the women's dependents in this study were less than five years old with 23 percent of dependents under the age of one at the time of contact with inTouch. Previous work shows that pregnancy and early parenthood is an increased period of risk for women experiencing intimate partner violence and that women with infants and very young children are especially vulnerable to isolation (Campo, 2015; Taft, 2002). This isolation is likely to have intensified during the lockdowns while people were confined to their homes and many services suspended face to face service delivery.

Domestic & Family Violence: Experiences during COVID-19

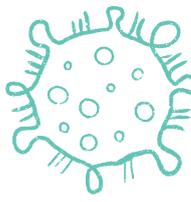
We provide here a summary of the circumstances of the experiences of domestic and family violence, the perpetrators, and the specific risk factors identified via the MARAM multi-agency risk assessment and management tool. We then turn specifically in the following section to highlight the issue of temporariness in the context of family violence.

Forms of violence and abuse

- **92% of perpetrators had recently harmed or threatened to harm victim-survivor and / or children**
- **46% of perpetrators had recently followed, repeatedly harassed, messaged / emailed victim-survivor**
- **83% of perpetrators had recently controlled victim-survivor day-to-day activities / put her down**
- **63% of perpetrators had recently physically hurt victim-survivor in any way**
- **92% of perpetrators had used controlling behaviours**
- **87% of perpetrators had used emotional abuse**
- **38% of perpetrator/s had denied food, secure place, medication to the women in this study**

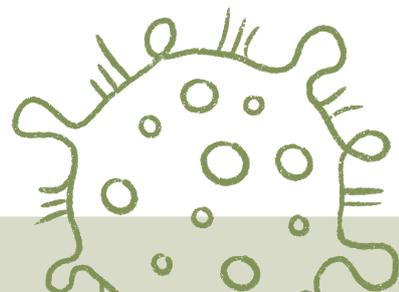
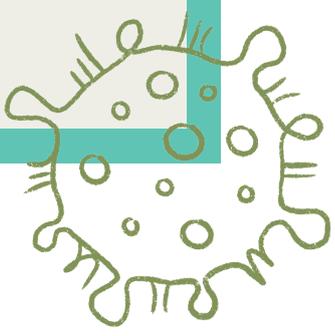
FORMS OF CONTROL

-  8 removed from house
-  5 denied money
-  4 denied food
-  1 deny choice of food
-  4 refuse to pay for essentials (medical etc)
-  5 no independent access to house (no key)
-  6 denied access to medical care



Zareen's Story

Zareen cannot work due to her pregnancy and the perpetrator uses this power against her: she is totally dependent on him for money. Zareen said that she had GP appointments which she had to pay for and the perpetrator would not give her the money. Zareen had missed a few GP appointments because of this. She had been told her that the unborn baby has lost a lot of weight and so had she, which can cause implications for the baby's health and well-being. Zareen said that the perpetrator often doesn't buy food or give her money to buy food. There are days where she starves and has very low energy due to food deprivation. Zareen said that when she confronts him about not giving her money and starving her, he yells at her calls her names and says very hurtful things to her.



Aruna's Story

Aruna is 8 months pregnant, and both her and her baby have lost significant weight due to the perpetrator starving her. Aruna said that she is experiencing high levels of stress due to his abusive behaviour towards her. She is scared to call 000 in case he gets angry and harms her daughter who is in Kenya. Aruna has no one here in Australia and her family overseas don't support her to leave him due to traditional beliefs that "good women stay with their husbands no matter what". Aruna had no money and no income.

Assessment of Risk

- **67% had a current FVIO against the perpetrator**
- **14% were subject to child protection intervention**

CURRENT RELATIONSHIP FACTORS

In the context of COVID-19 a major concern has been that women who hold temporary visa would potentially be less likely to seek help. This was for reasons such as financial dependence, the absence of significant reliable support for this group of women, as well as heightened safety concerns during the period of lockdown. We found that a third of the women in this study were separated at the time of contact as detailed below, in some but not all cases, before the lockdown.

Separation	31%	83
Escalation of violence	28%	74
Financial difficulties	27%	72
Other	15%	40

Within this data set the longer-term consequences are yet to be seen. Speaking with case managers two things are clear. First, that some women did return to perpetrators they had separated from for reasons that included:

- The absence of any alternative housing
- Lack of money
- Having no friends or family who could support them
- Pressure to return from friends or family

An important ongoing trend to follow is the shift in support seeking when the restrictions across Victoria and in Greater Melbourne begin to lift, as it is suspected more women will be better placed to access support and assistance without compromising their safety.

ASSESSED LEVEL OF RISK (ASSESSED BY CASE MANAGER)

Requires immediate protection	8%
Elevated risk	47%
At risk	43%
Not at risk	2%

VULNERABILITY FACTORS

23%
Pregnancy /
new birth



31%
Depression / mental
health issues



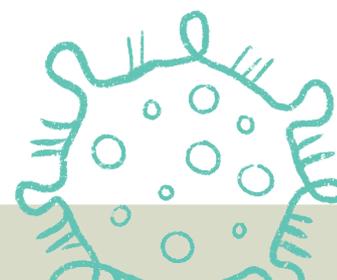
2%
Drug and / or alcohol
misuse / abuse

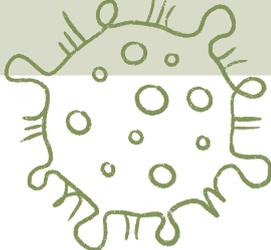


14%
Verbalised / had
suicidal thoughts
or attempts



65%
Isolation





Perpetrators

In this section, we examine available information about the perpetrators. The level of detail about perpetrators gathered via the risk assessment and management process can be limited and incomplete for many reasons related to the delicacy of the intake questions and the focus on women's immediate needs and immediate risk.

In this study, the majority of perpetrators were the current or former intimate partner(s) of the woman presenting to inTouch (noting that in 7% this was unrecorded so was unknown).

Boyfriend	8%
Defacto	6%
Husband	58%
Divorced/former partner	21%

These findings are reflective of recorded patterns of domestic and family violence nationally (see Vaughan et al., 2016; Boxall & Brown, 2020).

Of the 100 women included in this study, the following details were present in the case files about perpetrators, but this is information based on women's knowledge and/or view not necessarily a reflection of diagnosis:

- 
- 
- 30% of perpetrators had known mental health illness/issues (64% unknown)
 - 18% of perpetrators had threatened or tried to commit suicide (71% unknown)
 - 39% of perpetrators had recent history of abuse/misuse of alcohol or other drugs (54% unknown)

MULTIPLE PERPETRATORS

Echoing the 2017 study by Segrave, 84 percent of the cases in this study involved one perpetrator (80% in Segrave, 2017, p. 39), with 15 percent involving two or more people (1% unrecorded). As detailed below where there were multiple perpetrators cited this was spread across the perpetrator's family members, and in some instances, was not specific to any one person, rather the 'family' was named as a source of fear and perpetrator of abuse, harassment, violence and threats.



Current/former intimate partner	12
Mother-in-law	7
Brother-in-law	2
Sister-in-law/ex partner's sister	2
Adult step-son	1
Father-in-law	5
Ex-partner family	2

While there are multiple perpetrators in 15 cases, the data held within the case file primarily refers to the current/former partner, with the exception of two cases.



Support during COVID-19: family violence, wellbeing and services

Within the context of the lockdown and restrictions, significant attention has been paid to mental health and wellbeing. Within the risk assessment and management process there is an assessment. It was possible to extract from the case files a range of specific impacts that connected to stress and mental health, and second in relation to practical implications in relation to services and supports being inaccessible. These issues are important to consider when making sense of the overall experience of domestic and family violence and managing safety and security: it cannot be disentangled from the various ways that the context of lockdown and the reality of living through a pandemic was impacting the lives of women in this study. Predominantly this was evident in terms of impacting their overall health and wellbeing, as well as the tangible stress of service access being delayed or limited.

STRESS, ANXIETY & MENTAL HEALTH

For at least seven women there were quite specific stress impacts captured in the case notes, in particular concerns generally related to the COVID-19 virus:

Kristina had issues with refuge staff because they told her to go out and do things for herself but Kristina was scared to go out and take child since she thought that they might contract COVID;

Marja was afraid for her health and her work after one worker tested positive COVID 19;

Jolina distressed because she cannot find a job due to COVID

Attempts to get Sauda son into school were impeded by the fact that support service cannot do outreach because of the pandemic;

COVID significantly increased Sidra agitation and fears/mental health conditions associated with history of abuse;

Pandemic concerns increased stress for Doreen

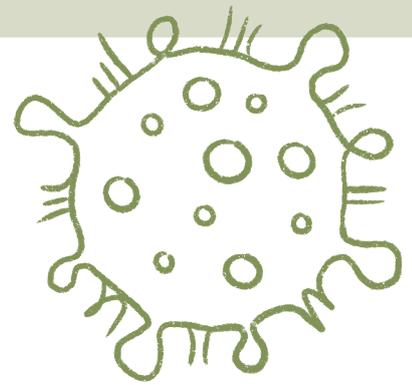
Elli family overseas tested positive and hospitalised which added extra stress;

SERVICE AND SUPPORT IMPACTS

Additionally, the impact of the pandemic and the associated lockdown on accessing support or services was quite varied but evident. This include services being delayed or postponed during this period, often in relation to legal support or court matters, for example:

[The] legal centre was helping Ikram with child visitation request from perpetrator but recently they closed her case due to COVID19

IVO Court hearing also postponed to September



Consistent reference to the delays that COVID was causing to processing times and access to support i.e. immigration dept delays, Child First delays, inTouch could not provide in person support e.g. court attendance.

Abuk's court hearing was postponed due to COVID

Court date for IVO was postponed because Karimi advised she could not attend on the date originally given since she had to self-isolate due to potential COVID contact incident

Other issues included challenges in moving applications forward for various reasons, such as:

Siranthi experienced increased difficulty in applying for special benefit from Centrelink and getting Health exam for visa application due to COVID related issues e.g. Siranthi could not see sister-in-law for help with communication/interpreter assistance, Health service cancelled Health exam due to COVID restrictions

Phung was told that DHA is not progressing any applications yet at the moment due to COVID 19

Wendy had difficulty getting appropriate copies of important docs for visa application to support officers due to public library closures as a result of COVID restrictions

Delays also impacted accessing secure, safe housing:

Hava had to wait for COVID interstate travel restrictions to ease before she could move to be with family

COVID lockdown meant there was difficulty moving Simmi from the immediate crisis accommodation to more long term housing,

COVID restrictions mean Maria has extended time to stay in refuge accommodation since they cannot be moved until after September

These myriad issues are not 'family violence impacts' per se, but domestic and family violence does not occur in a vacuum. Seeking support, accessing services, and other efforts to provide service intervention and supports were compromised by the restrictions and the pressures on the systems, despite efforts by many to do as much as possible to meet the needs of women and children experiencing family violence at this time.

Temporary Visas: Control & threats during COVID-19

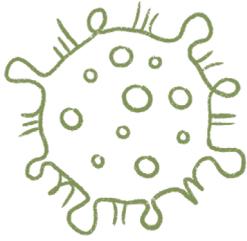
The key concern for this study is temporary visa holders and the specificity of their experience of domestic and family violence and the exclusions or limitations placed around support. Evident in this study and other large studies (Segrave, 2017), temporariness is a significant form of leverage for perpetrators. This was evident in the case files in some places and the risk assessment and management MARAM tool, where this is specifically raised as an issue to pay attention to. This fear and uncertainty regarding the threat of being deported impacts across a whole range of areas- financial, familial, and beyond. We focus here on women's self-identified risk, the reported utilisation of threats to deport women and/or withdraw sponsorship, threats specific to children, and the ways in which financial abuse can be interwoven with migration issues.

While it is not accurate that visa sponsors or any other person can have someone deported, the threat of this is clearly significant and experienced as a direct threat. As identified above, the majority of perpetrators (nearly 70 percent) are Australian citizens or permanent residents. That is, they are seen as and often assert themselves as having, more power and impact on migration decisions than non-citizen women who hold temporary visas.

These findings highlight the necessity of structural and service reform to enhance safety supports and minimise risk for women experiencing domestic and family violence who hold a temporary visa, as detailed in the recommendations that follow.

Self-assessed risk

In the context of risk assessment women, who best know their risk, are asked to self-assess their risk and this is recorded alongside the case managers assessment of the woman's risk. The analysis of 70 qualitative responses (not all case files had responses to this question) found that **over three quarters of the women in this study feared harm/death at the hands of their perpetrator, and 20 percent specifically feared deportation. Putting together deportation and the threat of a child forcibly separated (tied to the mother's visa status, the child's status as an Australian citizen and the father's assertion that he can deport her and keep the child), over a third of the women who articulated their fears saw risk related to migration status as significant.**



Source of fear/self-assessed risk	%
Fear he will harm/kill her	77
Fear of deportation *	20
Fear of child forcibly separated*	11
Fear of survival (no funds, no supports)	6
Fear of FV impact on child	4

*these two issues pertain to visa status

Some of the case managers notes regarding women's self-assessment of their own risk included:

Hava is very scared as perpetrator making false allegation. She is physically, verbally, and psychologically abused but has no chance or choice of leaving the house she has nowhere to go. Woman disclosed perpetrator is very aggressive and violent especially when he is drunk.

PERPETRATOR'S MIGRATION STATUS

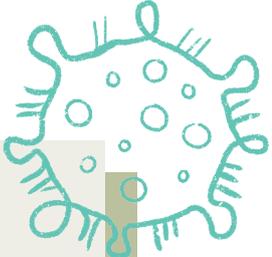
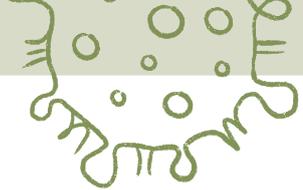
Reflecting on the impact of risk and fear for women who temporary visas, it is essential to highlight that the **majority of perpetrators were Australian citizens or permanent residents**, an issue that is critical in the context of using migration status as leverage for control. It is clear that citizenship is wielded in the context of control, to reinforce women's precarious status.

Migration status	%
Citizen/PR	67
Temporary	17
Unknown	16

FEAR OF RETURNING HOME

To understand the significant impact of the threat of deportation, it must be highlighted that this is not simply about fear of leaving Australia. Over a quarter of the women (n=26) in this study feared returning to their country of origin. Their concerns included exclusion and shame in the community, others feared violent outcomes, for some the issue is destitution. These two case studies highlight women sharing these concerns:





Tasneem's Story

Tasneem arrived in Australia in 2019. She requires an interpreter as she has a poor understanding of English. She first contacted inTouch at the end of March. Tasneem's husband and visa sponsor has been perpetrating verbal, emotional and financial abuse. He controls all the finances, Tasneem contacted inTouch because she was worried that the abuse will escalate to physical violence. She is also extremely concerned that her abusive partner will force her to return to [country of origin] where he will hurt and/or kill her. Tasneem has separated from him, but they remain legally married and she is dependent on him for her visa. She is not entitled to Centrelink payments and has no source of income. She has no friends or family in Australia and the perpetrator refuses to provide her credit to allow her to contact her family back home.

Roanna's Story



Roanna is on a tourist visa. She has a child living with her mother in her country of origin whom she wants to sponsor to come to Australia to be with her. Roanna married in 2018 and she visited her husband, the perpetrator, several times in Australia on a visitor visa. The perp applied to sponsor her on a partner visa (onshore application) two years ago, but the application was rejected. The perpetrator has been physically and emotionally abusing the woman. There is an IVO against him and he has been excluded from the house. Roanna is very worried about her future. She fears him in Australia, but said to her case manager that "I'm thinking how can I go back to my society again, rather I should suicide here [in Australia]". This is her second marriage and the failure of this marriage was a significant source of shame if she returns to her country of origin. Critically because the relationship broke down before accessing the sponsored partner visa, Roanna has no pathway to permanency via the family violence provisions, despite being married to the perpetrator.

Threats to migration status and outcome: deportation as leverage

As noted above, while the language of deportation is used often in the articulation of threats, perpetrators as sponsors or as citizens reporting a visa breach, do not have the power to deport anybody and the process of removal is not straightforward. However, what is clearly evident is that threats to deport or withdraw sponsorship are predominant and extremely powerful. Women are specifically asked if this threat is made. **Where it was noted in the files, threats to report / have the woman deported by Immigration were noted in 55 percent of cases. In 60 percent of cases there was a record of threats to / withdrawing sponsorship.**

When capturing migration-related threats, the data points to both the threat to withdraw sponsorship, threats to comply or risk deportation, or general threats regarding visa status and deportation. These are, in fact, all part of the same broad threat: that women are powerless because of their migration status and the perpetrator wields control.

The case notes illuminate the threats that perpetrators made regarding withdrawing sponsorship of the woman's visa:

Threats that Jamillah was dependent on his visa so she had to stay with him or she would be deported

Perp constantly threaten to withdraw the sponsorship, to send her back to Vietnam, to warn her to enjoy the rest of her days in Australia

Threats to comply are where it is most evident that women's status as non-citizens is enabling perpetrators to exercise power and control via the specific articulation of deportation as within his power. This was evident just in these case notes:

Used threats of sponsorship withdrawal when Narin refused to do what perp said.

The perpetrator threatened that if Jaspreet didn't follow his demands he would contact immigration

The perpetrator often made threats to withdraw his sponsorship and get Ana deported if she didn't do as she was told by him.

Thi's Story

Thi holds a bridging visa, she lost her job due to COVID, and now has no income or work and no savings. The perpetrator's behaviour had escalated from verbal to physical during the COVID period, and her situation was challenging because he had financially abused her demanding a financial payment for the promise of a visa, even though they were married. In the most recent incident the perpetrator told her "if you call 000, you will finish here, that is it, I am calling immigration and sending you back to your country". He has told her she must keep paying him \$1500 a month if she wants him to sponsor her. His mother also involved and when she left she called woman and told her that she (mother-in-law) will have Thi (victim-survivor) deported if she doesn't return to him.

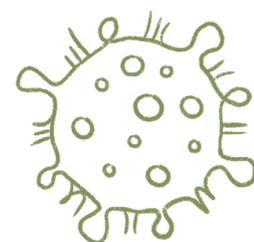
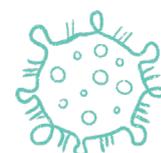
As was evident in the 2017 study, this power is exercised to sexually assault and rape women, and to generally control and ensure compliance. These case notes indicated the presence of this form of violence among the women in this study, capturing the threat of migration status to perpetrate sexual violence against women:

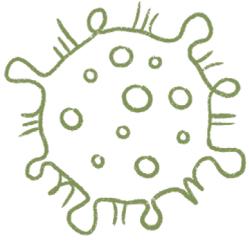
Perp threatened to deport Ellene numerous times as a method of forcing Ellene to engage in oral sex; mother-in-law told Ellene to return to India since she was not wanted anymore; DHS received a complaint about Ellene and perp relationship which was unfavourable to the application - Ellene believes this was from perp brother rather than the perpetrator though

The perpetrator threatens that he will send her back to Ethiopia and bangs the wall and screams at woman [that he will] send her back to her country if she refuses sex.

Finally, visa status and control over migration outcomes was also used to exercise financial extortion and abuse. In nine cases it was recorded that the perpetrator had asked for the woman to pay him (or repay him) for the visa application or other migration processes or demanded dowry/bride payments (noting that in 58% this was unknown as there were no details/response provided). These situations included most often effort to extort money, for example:

The perpetrator is asking for \$ 1.5 million to buy a house in Melbourne before woman and perp gets married.





The perpetrator forced Maha to pay for his visa fees.

The perpetrator told Meena 'if you want divorce from me, you have to give me \$25 millions'.

The perpetrator tried to force Rebeka to call parents and ask for more money after their arranged marriage.

The perpetrator tried to get Jasmeen to sign contract which stated that she would pay him \$250000 if they separated after she received residency.

It is key to identify that efforts to capture and codify specific practices can distort the entanglement of such demands with women's precarious or conditional visa status, where financial demands are connected to broader threats related to visa status, as this example demonstrates:

The perpetrator was asking Anna to pay him \$1500 every month the perpetrator has told her that she needs to keep paying him if she still wants him to sponsor her. The perpetrator kept threatening to deport her if she didn't pay him

Threatened to send her back to Cambodia when she didn't give him money

RISK AND THREATS TO CHILDREN

A critical concern for women is the fear of separation from their children. In addition to harming and controlling women directly, children are also used to exert power and control. In the 2017 study, Segrave found that "children... can become pawns in practices of abuse that include attempting to wield total control over the child and to utilise migration pathways to separate the mother from the child" (Segrave, 2017, p. 25). It is well known that children can be used to control and coerce women in the context of domestic and family violence broadly (Bagshaw et al., 2011; Campo, 2015; Holt, 2017). Research with domestic and family violence practitioners in Queensland during the initial period of lockdowns in April 2020 revealed that perpetrators were using children and the COVID-19 pandemic to exert control over women's access to, and time spent with, their children (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer & True, 2020).

Concern about forcible separation from children were raised by the women in this study. When women self-identified their own risks and concerns, the fear of children being forcibly separate from them was noted by almost 10 percent. This was captured in the case notes in the following ways:

Narin said that she is scared the perpetrator will take the baby and give it to his mother

Leila said that she is very fearful of the perpetrator's abusive behaviour towards her, woman said that she is scared of taking any action against him in case things get worst and she loses her children as the perpetrator has told her that he is a citizen and has more rights than her here.

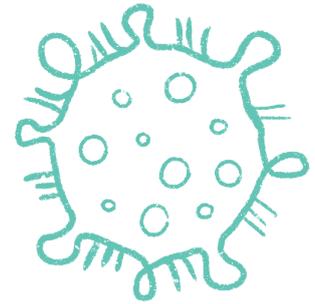
Jolina said that she is scared of being deported and the perpetrator keeping the child.





COVID-19 & family violence circumstances

While some studies are attempting to capture the 'impact' of COVID, this study is a snapshot of clients seeking help during the first lockdown in Victoria, Australia. The risk assessment and management process is not designed to capture the 'why' of what women are experiencing, in terms of external events or pressures in general terms. For this reason, there are very few notes that indicate or capture the spikes, or increased intensity in a clearly measurable way and it is not possible to discern what is directly attributable to the pandemic and consequential restrictions. However, on intake when the full risk management and assessment is undertaken, the question of whether violence has increased in severity or frequency is asked as part of the intake process. **During this period of lockdown the experiences of 72 percent women who sought assistance from inTouch indicated that violence had increased in severity or frequency just prior to making contact.** We note this, whilst also noting that it is generally true in the context of help seeking that escalations in violence and abuse are often the points at which help is sought.



We cannot say with certainty that there are many clear or direct situations that are COVID specific, in large part because of the complexity of domestic and family violence. The impacts of COVID-19 and the restrictions and lockdown are complex, so too the impacts on domestic and family violence ricochet in ways that are not easily captured when examining case notes.

Critically, though, the broader impacts of what was happening were evident. For example, the impact of job loss created tensions and situations where women and children were at home all the time with the perpetrator, creating various stressors. This is captured in the case notes:

Zahra stated that working from home due to COVID lockdown made it harder

Perp lost his job due to COVID and the presence of both parties at home all the time increased tension... leading to escalation of FV i.e. incorporation of physical assault;

Escalation after COVID impacted income; Deborah work hours were reduced due to COVID; financial impact meant daughter could not do after school care so had to be at the house with perp alone which she did not want to do

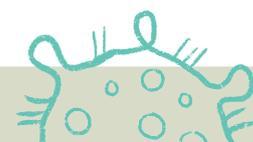
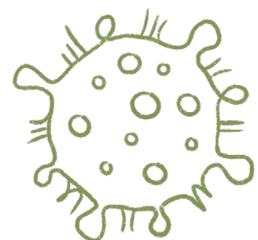
Escalation during lockdown: Ghada job was terminated but she found another one



In recent studies (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & True 2020; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer & True, 2020), it has been reported that COVID has been weaponised to perpetrate new form of and/or heighten abuse. There were a few explicit examples of this in this case notes such as:

Perp and family lack of adherence to COVID restrictions made Lieu very fearful which prompted physical assault

Perp presented with COVID 19 symptoms in March after they returned from Russia. Perp was tested negative for COVID19. Since then, perp has been blaming woman and Russia for the virus



SUPPORT IMPACTS: FROM LIBRARIES TO COURTS TO IMMIGRATION PROCESSES

A major concern, not captured easily in the data, but in discussions with case managers is the compounding impact of delays in accessing and finalising paperwork and the impact of system delays. Many women in this study did not have internet or computer access at home and could not sign forms. Public libraries that they rely on for internet and computer access are closed, and the challenge of having forms certified is delayed.

We also heard that **the adjournment of IVO hearings is having many flow on effects: it is delaying the finalising of applications for the family violence provisions, most often increasing the financial burden of independent expert reports which can cost up to \$1500 and which also take some time to prepare.** As a case manager outlined:

We are... expecting an increase in applications for social work reports to support immigration. If a woman has a final IVO, this is taken by the department as proof of FV. Without this they need a report from two social workers/ psychologists, with at least 3 visits each, stating the impact of family violence. These reports cost between \$600 and \$1500. With so many court cases being adjourned women are needing to use reports as they cannot get IVO's, and they often do not have the money to pay, so are using FSP. Always, even when we are reaching the end of our budget, we prioritise paying for immigration support.

This is the ricochet effect in action, where delays and decisions in one part of the system are creating significant challenges elsewhere in the process and the result is that women remain in significantly uncertain and poorly supported situations for some time.



Migration / Visa Support

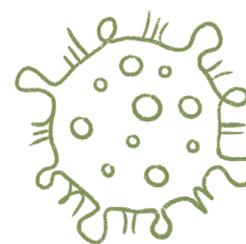
inTouch is a unique service because it has a legal team and a migration agent within the service, so women are able to access case managers as well as legal and migration support via an integrated team. inTouch migration support extends only to providing a service to support women to access the family violence provisions to enable them to be granted permanent residency, temporary partner visas, as well as being able to support women to identify the visa they hold, to refer them to alternative migration-related legal services that can assist with those who hold non-partner visas.

Of the 100 women in this study;

- 27 were on partner visas and the remainder on other temporary visas.
- In 31 cases women's migration status changed following their contact with inTouch, 20 were supported by inTouch in the following way:
 - 10 were granted PR (one was supported by a private immigration lawyer)
 - 10 moved to a bridging visa, following a FVP application

In addition, five women were supported elsewhere to apply or access protection visas, and other visas changed varied such as one woman accessing a work visa, another accessing a partner visa.

Financial and Housing: Welfare issues during COVID-19



Capturing the impact of the pandemic, specifically the restrictions and lockdowns, is difficult in the context of case management. As described earlier, initial contacts are focused on risk assessment and management, not on capturing a definitive view of the current situation in order to understand the impact on clients. In those initial intake assessments, **72 women were identified as experiencing financial difficulties**. However, this figure requires closer analysis to understand whether and how directly these issues were connected to the lockdown and restrictions, or compounded by this context.



This study captured data primarily on women as clients of inTouch, so there is more detail about the impact on women, directly and in some circumstances indirectly in relation to the perpetrator's employment. The risk assessment data did not capture in detail or consistently whether the perpetrator's employment had been impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown. However in a number of cases this was evident, for example in one case it was noted that the perpetrator was:

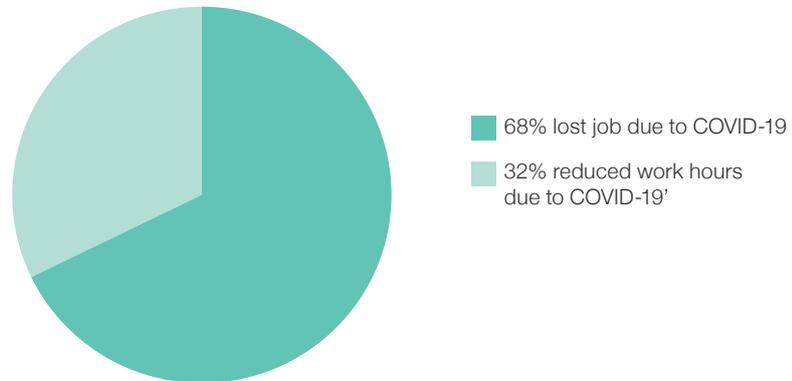
made redundant due to COVID-19, two weeks before the recent incident... both of them being home had increased the tension in the household.

The impact of COVID-19 on perpetrators is a much larger question beyond the scope of this study. For the women in this study, however, there was a clear impact in terms of employment and financial stress from COVID-19 and the related restrictions, and exclusionary Commonwealth financial support. In this study 30 women had paid employment outside the home before the pandemic had a widespread impact, as per the table below.

Employment status and COVID-19 impact

Employment Status	%
Employed FT	14%
Employed PT	9%
Employed Casual	7%
Unemployed	37%
Unpaid / home keeper / parent	31%
Unknown	2%

For 25 women, their employment status changed as a direct consequence of the impacts and restrictions related to COVID-19. As the chart below indicates, 70 per cent lost their jobs:



As temporary visa holders, this group of women was ineligible for Job Seeker and Job Keeper. In some case notes the impact of this was captured, including the consequent dependence on the perpetrator:

Jamsai depends on the perpetrator for her visa status. [She] lost her job due to the coronavirus and has NIL income and NIL savings due to financial exploitation from the perpetrator... [She] is experiencing high levels of stress due to sitting in uncertainty with her visa, finances and also the virus.

Job seeking was something seven women specifically mentioned to their case managers as also impacted by restrictions: such as impediments to seeking alternative work, due to not being able to access the library to get online and prepare an application. Other impacts were a result of restrictions, for example one woman had a job offer in a cafe just before the restrictions and this was subsequently cancelled. Another woman had a job offer in Adelaide but was unable to move at the time due to the internal border closures. Many relied on alternative funding including money provided by inTouch as well as other provisions, including food donations.

Beyond losing employment, economic hardship and stress was present but more difficult to capture in relation to women who had not been in paid employment pre-COVID-19 lockdown (n=30) and at the time of contact with inTouch: their financial stress can be hidden. **In 19 of the 100 cases, financial dependency and financial stress was a key issue identified in case manager assessments of the vulnerabilities their clients were experiencing at the time of intake.**

In relation to the impact of COVID-19, it is clear that many of the women in this study were not financially 'secure' and were already living with domestic and family violence, and several were entangled via their visa or via the absence of financial independence, with their abusive partner. In most cases, the notes included statements such as "Loan is totally dependent on the perpetrator for financial and accommodation support", or "Bharti depends on perpetrator for her visa, Bharti has NIL income". Women may not be in paid employment for many reasons, including visa conditions, which can be a point of vulnerability



because of the reliance (most often) on the perpetrator. This appeared to be compounded during the periods of restrictions and even more fraught with the additional responsibility of a new or young child/ren. For example, the case notes would read as follows:

No family. 10 months old baby. No income.

For some women it was evident that the risk was that their dependency on the perpetrator would likely result in remaining in an unsafe household because of the absence of external support. For example, in one case file it was noted:

Fatema has a 1 year old baby. [She] has NIL income, NIL savings, she has NIL money to buy food for her and her baby. [She] depends on the perpetrator for her visa. [She] doesn't have any supports here. [There is a] high chance of [Fatema] letting the perpetrator back in her life.

For another client, on a student visa, she had no income and one friend in Australia. In the Victorian context, such visa holders who have had piecemeal support payments would be surviving via a range of services providing food and other supports, and potentially accessing payments either via their institute in some cases and via the Victorian Government payments for international students (as noted in the Background). One woman in this study had been supported by friends before COVID but her friends could no longer extend their generosity:

Grace was getting financial assistance from friends but then they lost their jobs due to COVID and could no longer help support her and the baby.

For at least two cases the financial impact of COVID-19 restrictions was compounded by financial abuse. In these two cases the perpetrator was taking child benefit payments for Australian citizen children:

Ivana has a 3 week old baby, baby was born premature with health issues. Ivana has asthma and is scared of coronavirus. Ivana is on Bridging visa C and doesn't have access to any Centrelink benefits, the perpetrator receives child payments and refuses to give to [her], and gambles it all.

Nga was financially exploited by the perpetrator, she was pressured to pay for everything, the perpetrator receives child benefits and doesn't give [to] Nga. She has NIL income and NIL savings.

These issues are not 'COVID-19' specific impacts: they are reflective of everyday forms of domestic and family violence that are occurring and that create specific challenges for women on temporary visas because of the absence of any form of financial safety net to enable independent financial security to be accessed. In the context of the COVID-19 restrictions, the conditions are heightened in relation to limited job opportunities, under pressure organisations that are stretched to provide welfare in the form of food and other supports and the absence of any formal, ongoing financial support to enable women the security of ongoing independent financial stability.

Financial needs and support

In the context of COVID-19 and the Commonwealth response, there has been significant commentary around the exclusion of temporary visa holders. During the period of this study, 57 women were financially supported by inTouch during the period captured in this study.

The provision of support captured a range of immediate needs, as detailed below.



The needs of these women were diverse: some received a single payment, others multi supports that may have included vouchers to set up a new home and a bond payment, one client received support to pay tuition fees, another for divorce application support fees, and a handful for phone/connection/internet fees.

The amount of financial support ranged from \$250-\$5720. A total of \$101,772 support was provided to this group of women, on average \$1957 per person.

Alone, however, this data only tells us one story. For inTouch, the case managers alongside the Client Services Manager were well placed to put this data in context and offer some key observations during COVID19:

1. In mid-March several FSP applications from clients who had been granted previous FSP packages and whose cases were either closed or progressing towards closure requesting further FSP support **because they had either lost their employment income or had it seriously cut due to COVID-19. They had returned to inTouch because they had no other option for financial support.**
2. As COVID-19 rolled **out it quickly became evident that clients were significantly impacted.** This required inTouch to revisit spending. In early March, they were monitoring their budget carefully, based on concerns to make the budget stretch to the end of the financial year, which meant prioritising what money was given to clients. After the reporting period of this study, the Board agreed to spend additional money, and later targeted clients holding temporary visas to provide additional rent and food/support vouchers.
3. inTouch launched, the inSpire initiative supported by project partner Sibling by Kinfolk, commenced to provide emergency food delivery to those who were extremely vulnerable, including temporary visa holders.

These observations and reflections from inTouch are important: they highlight the need to track the impact of COVID over the medium-to-long term. The impact was not just the immediate impact of the first lockdown, and the consequences of the additional Stage 3 and Stage 4 lockdowns across Victoria for an extended period also warrant close and further attention given the specific implications for temporary migrants with no access to income.

Housing

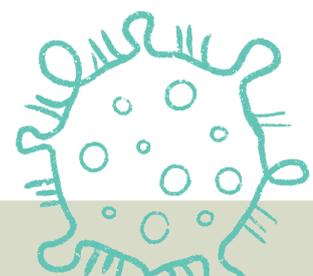
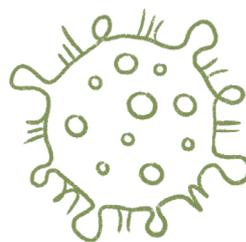
The shortage of safe housing options for women and children escaping domestic and family violence in Australia is well documented with domestic and family violence recognised as a leading contributor to homelessness for women and children (Flanagan, Blunden, Valentine & Henriette, 2019; State of Victoria, 2016b; Special Taskforce, 2015; Tually et al., 2018). Recent Australian research on women experiencing domestic and family violence during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the shortage in safe housing options has been acutely felt by practitioners at this time (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon & True, 2020; Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer & True, 2020). During the initial COVID-19 restrictions in April this year, DFV practitioners in Queensland identified access to ongoing and temporary accommodation as the most pressing service gap for their clients (Pfitzner, Fitz-Gibbon, Meyer & True 2020).

Aligning with these findings, housing / accommodation was a key issue for two thirds of the women in this study at their point of contact with inTouch.

69%



Housing and financial support are significant points of disadvantage for temporary migrant women as the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV) noted 'those without permanent residency have limited access to crisis accommodation, Centrelink benefits, and some health and education services' (State of Victoria, 2016a, p. 110). Previous research by Segrave (2017), Vaughan (2016) and others highlights that the lack of sustainable housing for women experiencing family violence who hold temporary visas significantly impacts their ability to safely escape situations of domestic and family violence. Barriers to accessing affordable safe housing options are compounded for temporary migrant women who experience particular vulnerabilities such as uncertainty regarding their long term status in Australia, lack of rental history and/or referees (often because the women have only ever lived with the perpetrator/lease holder while in Australia) and employment and income insecurity (Segrave, 2017).





Natawan's Story



Natawan doesn't live with the perpetrator but he knows where she lives and she is very fearful he will take child and return to his country of origin, with the child. She is fears her child's return to school as he will be more at risk of his father taking him.

Natawan holds a bridging visa, has a job but has reduced hours and income due to COVID. While she has family in Australia and in her country of origin, none of them support her decision to leave the perpetrator. She had moved to Sydney to escape him, he followed here there and was tracking her phone. When she left his family and many other members of the community contacted her to demand she return to him. She has been threatened with the impact of ruined reputation if she returns to her country of origin.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AT FIRST CONTACT

At the time the case was opened, a quarter of the women in this study were living with their alleged abusers. **37 percent of women were living independently either with dependents (25%) or alone (12%). Importantly: for some who were living alone, many lived in fear because the perpetrator knew where they lived and/or had a key as he had previously lived there.** Understanding housing issues requires understanding whether the living arrangement is safe (see Natawan's story).



Living arrangements at first contact	%
Alone	12
With alleged abuser/s	25
Single parent with dependents	25
With friends	15
With family (husband/partners' side)	2
With flatmates	4
With family (victim-survivors' side)	8
Other	9
Total	100%



HOUSING TYPE

Around a third of the women in this study were living in precarious housing situations at the time of contact with inTouch. These women were either staying with friends (26%) or in emergency accommodation (8%).

Notably, 54 percent of the women in this study were living in rental accommodation. The Victorian Government and other jurisdictions across Australia have introduced rental assistance support packages for tenants experiencing rental hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Victoria, this included a suspension of rental increases, rent relief for eligible tenants and from 29 March 2020 a moratorium on evictions (Consumer Affairs Victoria, 2020).

Housing type	%
Rental	54
Owner / Occupier	8
Guest (e.g. staying with friends or family)	26
Emergency accommodation / Shelter / Motel	8

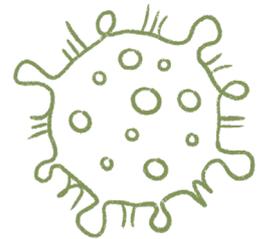
What is not clear from the above data, but was made clear via conversations with case managers, was that:

- During the COVID-19 first lockdown period, clients at inTouch were postponing leaving abusive relationships regardless of visa status,
- Clients on temporary visas living in share house and tenancies remained the same, but the significant difficulty they faced was financial stress in general including rental payment,
- Finding long-term accommodation is very difficult for women with no income and no financial support. Some women left their relationship and have no money. Without a stable income and rental history, it is very unlikely to get private rental. Most women have no option but to look for shared accommodation online: this is not an ideal housing solution for women with children, and
- For those on Bridging Visas, with no Centrelink income support, there is no access to support from housing services. Some clients were asked to return to their countries (and other services had offered to fund this) and were at risk of homelessness. It is very difficult to assist temporary visa holders to get access to women's refuges due to financial hardship because they are not eligible for special benefit or other centre link payment which the refuge relies upon.



It is also worth noting that inTouch advised that the pre-COVID and during-COVID internal guidelines for FSP have changed to specifically accommodated temporary visa holders. They have doubled the rental support, and added nearly 50 per cent to the budget for vouchers (for food, necessities).

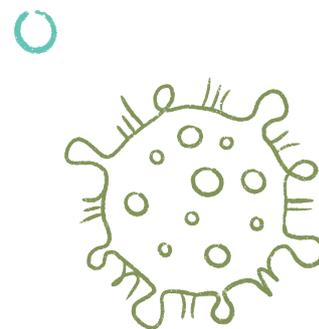
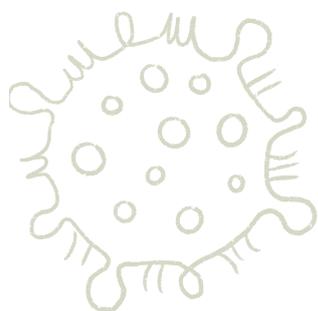
inTouch has been provided with additional Victoria Government support to fund these increases, including the Family Violence Crisis Brokerage funds announced at the end of May. As the lockdown has continued financial pressures are significant, including student visa holders being require to pay fees to maintain their visa status, without any income or means to do so. This highlights the long tail impact of COVID-19 and the specific exclusion of temporary visa holders from financial support.

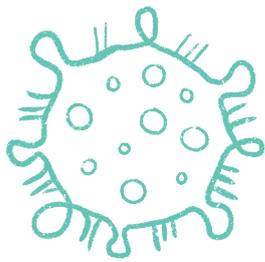
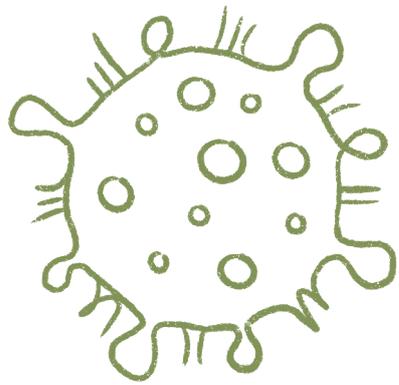


Conclusion

This study has captured the context of women's experiences of family violence during the first phase of lockdown in the midst of COVID-19. It tells a complex story of the intersection of financial stress, lockdown, mothering, and surviving violence and abuse. This means the impact is not linear or neatly summarised: it is complex. What is clear is that it is essential that women's safety remains at the forefront of rebuilding beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, as we move towards a new future. Women's safety is clearly connected to certainty of protection and support: this is something that for many decades, prior to COVID-19, that was denied to temporary visa holders. During the pandemic, we have seen the compounding impact of violence, abuse and exclusion from support. Organisations across Australia, such as inTouch, have prioritised their efforts and have done everything within their means to support temporary visa holders. There are systems and structures that can be changed to remove unnecessary barriers to support and safety. It is anticipated that as restrictions ease in Victoria towards the end of 2020 more women will come forward to seek help, safety and security. The issues for temporary visa holders are not only financial or service focused: the leverage and control that temporariness offers to perpetrators is now well documented. This requires a Commonwealth response, supported by states and territories, to ensure we protect all women regardless of what visa they hold.

We must remain attentive to what happens in the coming years, to document with rigorous evidence the impact of what is done and what is not done to support women. Victoria has led the world in developing a comprehensive reform response to domestic and family violence, one committed to ensuring independent evidence informs and monitors implementation. This is critical: we need to know that what we do as a nation is increasing women's access to safety, alongside the longer-term work of undoing the devastating impacts of gendered violence.





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ENDNOTES

- 1 Specifically [Segrave \(2017\)](#) , National Advocacy Group for Women on Temporary Visas Experiencing Violence [NAG] (2019) inTouch (2020).
- 2 NAG (2019) 1.1 & 1.2, Segrave (2017) Recommendation 4.
- 3 [Vaughan et al \(2016\)](#), as this is a broader migrant and refugee issue not just temporary migration.
- 4 Segrave (2017) Recommendations 1, NAG (2019) Recommendation 3, inTouch (2020), Recommendation 2.
- 5 Segrave (2017)., also Ratnam, C., Wickes, R., Powell, R., & Keel, C. (2020) 6 Berg and Farbenblum (2020).
- 7 For a detailed overview of temporary visas, support options and the family violence provisions under the Migration Act, please see Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention (2019): Support options for migrant women on temporary visas experiencing family violence in Australia. Monash University. Online resource. <https://doi.org/10.26180/5d198aad4bcfa>

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