MULTI-CULTURAL CENTRE AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE

intouch

Women on temporary visas experiencing family violence

Tip sheet

This resource is for family violence practitioners, and is part of a series on best practice when working with victim-survivors of family violence who are from migrant and refugee backgrounds. It outlines some of the common issues faced by women on temporary visas who are experiencing family violence. It also covers some practical tips for support and referrals.

Women on temporary visas

Temporary visa holders make up almost half of our clients at inTouch – sometimes more. This includes women who are on spousal/partner visas, working visas, student visas and tourist/visitor visa holders.

When temporary visa holders experience family violence in Australia, they face multiple and varying layers of disadvantage. There are a number of considerations to keep in mind below and as demonstrated in the case study:

- A woman's visa status may be used by someone to coerce and control her
- She may not be eligible for Centrelink payments
- She may not be able to access housing support services
- She may not be eligible for free public healthcare
- She may not know how to navigate the Australian legal or migration systems

- She may be isolated and far away from her family, friends, and other support networks.

Case study

John and Maria are in a relationship and have a 10-month old baby together. John is an Australian citizen, Maria is from a European country and the baby was born in Australia. John has offered to sponsor Maria and the two have submitted a partner visa application so that Maria can remain in Australia with him and their child.

John has been abusive towards Maria, using physical, emotional and other forms of family violence. He threatens to withdraw Maria's sponsorship application if she reports or discloses the family violence to anyone. He threatens to have her deported and keep their child in Australia.

Maria is terrified of being separated from her child and does not disclose the violence to anyone.

Pro-Tip: Questions to ask your client

There are some very important questions that you should ask your client prior to making any referrals or taking any action.

- Do you need an interpreter?
- What is your preferred language or dialect that you feel most comfortable speaking in?
- What is your migration status? What type of visa are you on, if any?
- Do you have any children or other dependents?

Language and interpreters

Language and literacy can be a barrier for many women who are on temporary visas. Appropriate and suitable interpreters should be arranged to ensure that your client is comfortable and understands all the details of the discussion. You might like to refer to the inTouch website for our tip sheet on 'Working with interpreters by phone in a family violence setting'.

Crisis support

Crisis support services are available to women who are on temporary visas. Organisations such as safe steps Family Violence Response Centre can do safety planning, and provide urgent care. safe steps can also provide assistance with emergency housing, basic material needs, and other short-term, urgent needs for women and children experiencing family violence.

Migration assistance

It's very important to understand the type of visa your client is on as this can determine what support services and referral pathways are available. For example, women who are on particular spousal visas and have experienced family violence, may be eligible to apply for the family violence provisions in the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth). The provisions, at

times, can grant permanent residency despite the relationship breakdown. This is a pathway to safety for some temporary visa holders experiencing family violence.

> **Pro-Tip: Seek migration advice**
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> In order to understand a client's eligibilities and options for safety, it's crucial to consult a migration agent or to obtain migration law advice. The laws around visa status and eligibilities also change regularly so advice from an expert is important to have the most up-to-date information. It's useful to collect as much information as possible before doing so, including any correspondence from the Department of Home Affairs.

Legal advice

Many women who are on temporary visas may also require legal support, such as assistance with an intervention order application, parenting matters or other family law matters. Community legal centres and Victoria Legal Aid should be contacted for free legal advice and assistance.

Financial assistance

One of the most significant concerns for women who are on temporary visas in Australia, is the lack of access to financial support because of their visa status. The following financial supports may be available to clients on temporary visas:

- Centrelink Special Benefits or Family Tax Benefits
- Flexible Support Packages (Victoria only)
- Philanthropic support and aid through not-for-profit and charity groups.

Housing support

We know that women on temporary visas often face numerous barriers to finding stable, safe and affordable long-term housing. After receiving crisis support, it can take some time to find suitable and long-term housing. Housing support services are a good starting point when trying to assist these clients. However, depending on the needs of the client and her circumstances, you may need to broaden your search to include philanthropic and other not-for-profit services for support.

> **Pro-Tip: Advocate for your client**
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> It is important to advocate for suitable housing for your client. Be considerate of her needs and the needs of her children.

Cultural connections and community belonging

We know that many women from migrant and refugee backgrounds have been isolated from their friends, family and their community by the individual that is using violence. Temporary visa and migration status can further exacerbate this isolation and disconnection for many women, making them feel very alone. In addition to inTouch, there are a number of organisations that can provide important cultural support in this situation including:

- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health – an organisation empowering migrant women living in Australia with information to support and promote their health and well-being
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights – an organisation working to advance the rights and status of Muslim women in Australia.

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