

Dear Committee,

Thank-you once again for giving AWAVA the opportunity on Friday 30 November to give evidence to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry on dowry abuse.

I was hoping that there would be an opportunity for closing remarks, at which time I intended to give the following comments but there was no chance for this (understandably, given the need to manage the hearing in a timely way). At the end of our session, however, Senator Pratt I believe kindly invited witnesses to forward any additional comments for the committee's consideration. I would like to take up that offer to respond briefly to a discussion on specialisation.

As neither the draft Hansard nor video of the hearing are available yet, and since I was joining the hearing by teleconference, I cannot be certain about who was speaking or the exact comments made. However, my understanding was that there was some criticism of services working in the area of domestic violence (including dowry abuse) in relation to migrant and refugee women.

From AWAVA's perspective, there is a responsibility for services focused on domestic and family violence (D&FV) to be able to respond competently to women from migrant and refugee backgrounds who are experiencing domestic violence, including dowry abuse. Sector initiatives such as Domestic Violence Victoria's Code of Practice for Specialist Family Violence Services and Domestic Violence NSW's Good Practice Guidelines incorporate cultural competence as steps towards fulfilling this responsibility.

However, while acknowledging the need for D&FV services to improve their cultural competence, these services are often struggling to meet escalating demand and the increasing complexity of cases. Responsibility therefore sits as well with governments, in terms of establishing systems that support migrant and refugee women appropriately (please see AWAVA's submission for recommendations on this) and crucially in terms of funding. If services are having to turn people away due to lack of resources, it is difficult to devote time and resources to training and capacity-building.

Services focused on assisting people from migrant and refugee backgrounds (such as settlement services and migrant resource centres) are also very constrained in terms of resourcing, and should not be expected to take responsibility for responding to issues of D&FV in the absence of other sectors providing competent support and governments establishing sound systems and adequate funding.

Please feel free to get in touch if you would like to discuss these comments, or AWAVA's evidence or submission.

Thank-you once again for the opportunity to provide input to the inquiry.

Best wishes,

**Dr Merrindahl Andrew**

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