

**Submission
No 109**

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Immigrant Women's Speakout Association (IWSA)

Date received: 19/02/2016



**Submission on the NSW Parliament Inquiry on Elder Abuse in New South Wales
19 February 2016**

The Immigrant Women's Speakout Association of NSW Inc (IWSA) is a key and community-based organisation that has an advocacy role, and provides education, information and direct services to women of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background in NSW. IWSA represents the issues and ideas of immigrant and refugee women at all levels of government, in the community services and community as a whole and to the media. IWSA has been established in 1982 by a gathering of 300 immigrant and refugee women in Sydney. We are a listening post on CALD women's issues, concerns and proposals for policy and programs.

The NSW Family and Community Services (FACS) fund the two core services of IWSA:

- The FACS Community Builder/Targeted Early Intervention Program – funds the IWSA Immigrant Women's Resource Centre that has community hub and community skills development as its key components. The women's community hub provides group activities for isolated and distressed CALD women and 50% are older women. In 2014-2015, we have had 350 participants in the IWSA English conversation class and 175 are Older CALD Women.

- The FACS Specialist Homelessness Services - funds the Homeless Multicultural Women Integrated Support Service (HoMWISE) that includes three project officers doing casework and community engagement in homelessness prevention including domestic and family violence. We provide support to older women who are homeless and are escaping domestic and family violence.

IWSA works with the Older Women's Network (OWN), Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), Ethnic Community Services Cooperative, City Councils in different Local Government Areas in Western Sydney, Migrant Resource centres and community-based organizations in supporting and addressing the issues and concerns of Older CALD women.

The following is one of the stories shared at a Focus Group on Abuse Experienced by Older CALD Women that was held on 17 February 2016 in Parramatta. There were 10 participants from Afghan, Filipino, Indian, Bosnian and Sierra Leonean communities. It was emphasised by the participants that Abuse on Older CALD women and men is hidden.

1. Experience of abuse of an Older CALD woman

(as narrated by a CALD woman who knew the abused older woman)

In 2012 Ms A and Ms B two sisters from CALD background sponsored their mother to migrate to Australia. Their mum was granted the refugee visa and entered Australia. The mother lived with Ms A for a period and then to Ms B for another period.

When the mother started receiving Centrelink payments, the sisters started to fight over where their mum should stay as they benefit from the welfare payment their mum receives from Centrelink. These two sisters were using their mum's money from Centrelink and the same time and the mum was helping her daughters in housework and looking after their children.

After almost two years after arrival the mum got severely sick and needed someone to look after her. Her daughters tried to pass mum to each other and abused her verbally while she was in their care. As the mum's health situation deteriorated, she became incontinent and totally turned dependent.

The daughter who provided accommodation later moved their mother's space to the large bathroom and lock the mother until the family members are back home. The reason for locking up the mother in the bathroom is to avoid their lounge sofas and chairs to get dirty because the mother might sit there and get the sofa dirty.

When the two sisters could not cope in looking after their mother anymore they arranged to have her cared for in a nursing home. They did not visit her regularly and she was feeling very lonely. She did not know any English to communicate with the other residents and the staff. She refused to eat the food in the nursing home and most of the time avoided eating. Finally she passed away with her last wish to go back to her country of origin to live with her son. The daughters did not allow their mum to go back to their country of origin because the mother will lose the payment from Centrelink.

2. The issues of Older CALD women who are vulnerable to abuse as identified by the focus group are:

- a) Financial dependency due to migration status
- b) Low English language proficiency
- c) Changing family structures and values
- d) Lack of education especially those from poor families
- e) Not aware of their rights
- f) Stress in looking after sick Older person (husband) and grandchildren
- g) Older CALD women do not have power to speak up
- h) Pressure (required if sponsored as visitor) to care for children, grandchildren, and son/daughter in-law and do household chores. It is similar to the role of a domestic helper
- i) Lack of education of Older CALD people, especially women
- j) Older people do not want to live in nursing homes
- k) Older CALD women with dementia are locked up in the family home
- l) Abuse has become a stigma, it is a shame it is not confronted
- m) There are huge gaps in service provision for Older CALD Women as a whole and in particular those who are in transition from retirement from paid jobs to that of receiving pension

3. Needs identified

- a) Specific and specialist services for Older CALD women
- b) CALD women-specific respite care
- c) Centre-based activities to be provided by an NGO. Employ bilingual workers who will organise and motivate Older CALD Women to participate in group activities such as supported discussions and other social activities where they are able to share ideas and cultural actions and live actively with quality of life
- d) Free interpreting service for Older CALD women
- e) Multi-lingual and plain language resources and information about the rights of Older CALD people, women, children and LGBTQ

4. Recommendations:

1. Provide funding for:
 - Support programs that will employ specialist bilingual workers in the community sector, to address issues of abuse and violence on Older CALD women
 - The development and implementation of a statewide community education campaign targeting CALD communities regarding issues abuse on Older people across NSW.
 - The establishment and running of a refuge/shelter for Older women of CALD background in particular those who are escaping family and domestic violence
 - On-going training service providers in cultural competency, use of interpreter, gender and other major issues concerning the well being of Older CALD women and men. (Funding from state and federal level)
 - Fully resourced interpreting service for Older CALD people.
 - Free English conversation classes for Older CALD people.
2. Implement a collaborative and whole of government approach by both government and non-government service providers in their service delivery models to address the needs of Older CALD women
3. Use cross-sectional approach in bringing together government and non-government organisations to initiate the process of addressing the above recommendations.

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