



No Place to Go

**Report on the Needs Analysis of Crisis Accommodation
for Culturally and Linguistically (CaLD) background
people (Islamic)**

2007

**Funded by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous
Affairs**

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Dar al Shifah wishes to acknowledge the contribution and assistance of the following:

Somali Women's Association

Australian Muslim Association for Ladies (AMAL)

Muslim Students Association at the University of Western Australia

The Muslim women and youth who participated in this study

Foundation Housing (Formerly Eastern Metropolitan Housing Association)

Executive Summary

Domestic violence and homelessness are issues that affect all sections of the Australian community. While the government and service providers acknowledge the need to deliver services within a framework which is sensitive and responsive to the needs of diverse clients, there has been little research into the needs of specific ethnic or religious groups in Western Australia to inform the delivery of crisis accommodation services.

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, Australian Muslims have experienced unprecedented levels of aggression, vilification and discrimination. Women, the most visible but also most vulnerable members of Australia's Muslim communities have, unfortunately, suffered the most victimisation. This has effectively forced Muslim women back into their homes; compounding their isolation and preventing them from accessing available support services including crisis accommodation services.¹ There is no available research on the needs and experiences of Muslims in relation to crisis accommodation. Anecdotal evidence, however, suggests a high level of unmet need resulting in Muslims staying in violent or abusive relationships because they are unable to access appropriate crisis accommodation.

This report seeks to address the lack of documented evidence of the needs and experiences of Muslims in relation to crisis accommodation. It details the findings of the Needs Analysis of Crisis Accommodation for CaLD people (Islamic). The objectives of this Needs Analysis are:

- to identify barriers to accessing crisis accommodation services for CaLD Muslims;
- to investigate the specific needs of Muslims in relation to crisis accommodation services and whether these needs are being met by current service provisions; and

¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2003) Ismaa: Report on National Consultations with Arabs and Muslims. Available from www.hreoc.gov.au

- to raise awareness of issues and barriers for Muslims in accessing crisis accommodation services.

Future Directions

Considerations for Government

Community Education and Information

The Needs Analysis found that there is a need to raise awareness of crisis accommodation and related services to people from CaLD backgrounds. To address this, it is suggested that the government consider developing and implementing a community education campaign to provide information about crisis accommodation, its purpose and how to access it to address the lack of knowledge and manage the expectations of CaLD people about crisis accommodation. Information about crisis accommodation and related services should be provided in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats.

Muslim Specific Crisis Accommodation

Community support for crisis accommodation services is needed to address the need for these services among Muslim communities. A service that provides culturally and religiously appropriate crisis accommodation would assist in addressing barriers to access for Muslims in need of crisis services. The service could operate within the SAAP mainstream framework, but would garner community support as an appropriate Respite Centre for Muslims. Family support services provided within a religiously appropriate framework could be provided in tandem with the respite service. This would enable community workers to remove women and youth from potentially violent relationships while continuing to work with the family to address domestic issues.

Service Delivery

Service providers need to be supported to better deliver services that are responsive to the needs of Muslims and CaLD clients. This can be addressed through the provision of awareness training that focuses on the needs of Muslim clients.

Data Collection

Consultations with service providers indicate that a more comprehensive process of data collection would assist in the planning and implementation of appropriate service models for people from CaLD backgrounds. It is therefore suggested that the SAAP data collection model be reviewed to include the collection of data on religion and ethnic background for both clients and target groups. Data collected should be made accessible to service providers and used to inform service delivery models and in the development of policies and practices for crisis accommodation services.

Data on target groups should include demographic data on catchment areas that can be used to identify groups who are not accessing crisis accommodation and as a basis for investigating barriers to access.

Further Research

There is a need for further research into the needs of people from CaLD backgrounds in relation to information about, understanding of and access to crisis accommodation services.

Considerations for Service Providers

Service Delivery Models

The findings of the Needs Analysis suggest that current service delivery models that promote self-empowerment may not be appropriate to Muslims and people from new and emerging communities who require a more intensive case management service delivery approach. It is suggested that service providers examine alternative service delivery models that are responsive to the needs of Muslims and to improve access to crisis accommodation for Muslims.

Information and awareness raising

The Needs Assessment found that service providers do not have a coordinated approach to providing targeted information to people from CaLD backgrounds. Good

practice models include the provision of information on crisis accommodation within a broader context such as information sessions on women's health and well being. Service providers need to develop strategies to address the lack of knowledge and information about crisis accommodation services among people from CaLD backgrounds.

Considerations for the community

Community and religious organisations have a role in assisting service providers and Government to raise awareness of crisis accommodation. Partnerships between service providers and community organisations would assist in building relationships of trust and increasing community support for crisis accommodation services.

Through the process of this research undertaking, Dar al Shifah has developed and maintained relationships with both service providers and the community. As an outcome of the consultations with Muslim groups, community awareness of crisis accommodation and related services has increased. Throughout the consultation process, it became evident that the profound lack of information and understanding about crisis accommodation among the Muslim groups who participated required the moderators to act as an information source. Since embarking on this project, Dar al Shifah has received a number of queries and requests for information about crisis accommodation.

The relationships developed through this undertaking will assist in the dissemination of the Needs Analysis Report and its findings. A comprehensive dissemination strategy includes a community launch of the Report. Dar al Shifah has also sought the assistance of the WA Office of Multicultural Interests, the WA Department for Community Development and Foundation Housing to promote this Report and its findings among service providers and the broader community.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence against women and young girls is an issue for all communities in Western Australia. However, there is evidence to suggest that women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities experience barriers to accessing domestic violence support services including crisis accommodation services. The CaLD Literature Review undertaken by the Family and Domestic Violence Unit of the WA Department for Community Development asserts that the hidden nature of domestic and family violence makes it difficult to ascertain the exact extent of this issue in CaLD communities. The Review also provides evidence that CaLD women are less likely to seek assistance or report cases of domestic violence to Police than the mainstream community.

To date, there has been no national statistical or qualitative research into Muslims and crisis accommodation services. However, service providers and community workers have, for some time, been aware of the difficulties facing Muslims when accessing crisis accommodation services. These difficulties are related to cultural and religious considerations which impact on the ability or willingness of women and youth to access assistance in a violent relationship as well as a lack of understanding about family and domestic violence and available services. Further, since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, the Muslim communities in Australia have experienced heightened levels of vilification and abuse directed at women as the most vulnerable and visible members of the communities. This has resulted in a “siege mentality”² among Australian Muslims who are now even more reluctant to draw negative attention to issues such as domestic violence. Research also confirms that, when women from CaLD communities do access services, they are less likely to receive appropriate assistance³.

² Aly, A and Balnaves, B. (2006) The Atmosfear of Terror: Affective modulation in the war on terror. Media- culture Journal

³ CaLD Literature Review. Family and Domestic Violence Unit. P10

In an attempt to address the lack of documented evidence regarding the needs of Muslims and crisis accommodation, the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs funded Dar Al Shifah Islamic Inc. to undertake a Needs Analysis of Crisis Accommodation for people from CaLD backgrounds (Islamic). The rationale for the needs analysis is that anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a growing need for crisis accommodation services that specifically target Muslims but there has been no research to support this need.

This report details the outcomes of extensive consultations with Muslims and service providers regarding the needs of Muslims in crisis accommodation and the extent to which crisis accommodation services are responding to these needs. The report makes recommendations to address the issues highlighted in the needs analysis.

The objectives of this Needs Analysis are:

- to identify barriers to accessing crisis accommodation services for CaLD Muslims;
- to investigate the specific needs of Muslims in relation to crisis accommodation services and whether these needs are being met by current service provisions; and
- to raise awareness of issues and barriers for Muslims in accessing crisis accommodation services.

Dar al Shifah (Islamic) Inc

Dar al Shifah (Islamic) Inc is a not for profit community organisation managed by an elected committee that is drawn from the community. Since its inception in 1999, Dar Al Shifah has provided six years of service to the community, focusing on the delivery of services to members of Western Australia's diverse Muslim communities to address issues such as domestic violence, parenting issues, crisis accommodation, community relations, advocacy and mental health.

Vision: Building strength through unity

Purpose Statement: Working on the premise of Islamic principles we will strive to enhance the creative abilities of the community towards united empowerment by nurturing their spiritual, emotional and physical well being.

Dar al Shifah's Strategic Plan 2003- 2008 was developed in consultation with members of Muslim communities, the broader ethnic community and government service providers. It sets out the vision, purpose and strategic objectives for the organisation. The strategic objectives are: family issues; community leadership; community relations; crisis accommodation; history and culture and special projects.

While the range of services provided by Dar al Shifah target members of Western Australia's diverse Muslim communities which represents over 80 different ethnic and linguistic groups, our services are available to all Western Australians and the organisation strives to deliver inclusive services that are responsive to the needs of individuals and groups in the community regardless of ethnicity, language and religion.

Dar al Shifah's focus has been on building family unity and strength. Our members are family groups from diverse ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds who have diverse service needs in relation to services that aim to build family relations, prevent conflict and encourage meaningful relationships with all members of the family unit.

Dar al Shifah's focus as a family service has been to provide services that aim to:

- Enhance the creative abilities of the community so that they can address family issues in a non-confrontational manner;
- Enhance family relationships through appropriate information, education and training;
- Provide support to families in crisis mode and in transitional periods of family life that can result in family breakdown.

2. Crisis Accommodation

The Crisis Accommodation Framework

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is Australia's primary service delivery response to homelessness. The aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services in order to help people who are homeless, or are experiencing domestic violence and are at imminent risk of becoming homeless, to achieve a maximum degree of self reliance and independence.

SAAP is a jointly funded Australian Government and state/territory program which assists people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (including women and children escaping domestic violence). The Australian Government has a policy leadership role and state/territory governments are responsible for the day-to-day management of the program.

In Western Australia 128 services provide support and temporary (transitional) accommodation including:

- crisis and temporary accommodation for young people
- support and counseling for young people at risk
- refuges and outreach support services—for women who are single or have children who are victims of domestic violence
- crisis and temporary accommodation and support for homeless single adults and families.⁴

National data collected during 2004–2005, established that 14% of women accessing assistance through the SAAP were from CaLD backgrounds.⁵ The most

⁴[http://www.community.wa.gov.au/Resources/Accommodation/Homeless+\(SAAP\)/About_SAAP.htm](http://www.community.wa.gov.au/Resources/Accommodation/Homeless+(SAAP)/About_SAAP.htm)

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006). Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2004–2005 Australia, AIHW cat.no. HOU 132, (SAAP NDCA report,

common reasons for seeking assistance were domestic violence, eviction, relationship or family breakdown, unavailability of usual accommodation and financial difficulty. SAAP does not collect data on religion.

The SAAP Coordination and Development Committee (CAD) manage SAAP nationally. CAD is a senior officers' group comprised of a representative from each participating state and territory government, and two from the Australian Government, one of whom is the Chair. The CAD's role is to oversee the development and implementation of the program's strategic directions at the national level.⁶

Services to People from CaLD Backgrounds

The importance of providing a culturally appropriate service is embodied in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 which states that services 'should be provided in a way that respects clients' cultural backgrounds and beliefs'. The Act also acknowledges the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, to which Australia is a signatory. (Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994, No.162 of 1994:2.)

In Western Australia, the WA Charter of Multiculturalism, adopted as government policy in 2004, articulates the government's commitment to equality and fairness in the provision of services to Western Australia's diverse population. The Charter underpins the Policy Framework for Substantive Equality (2004). The Policy Framework is designed to ensure that services of the WA government are responsive to the needs of people from CaLD backgrounds and that policies do not inadvertently discriminate against Indigenous people and people from CaLD backgrounds.⁷

Series 10). Canberra: AIHW. Available at: www.aihw.gov.au/publications/welfare/saapndc04-05.pdf.

⁶ http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/house-nhs_saap.htm

⁷ The Charter and Policy Framework are available from the website of the Office of Multicultural Interests: www.omi.wa.gov.au

Within this context, there have been a number of national competency standards developed for service providers when dealing with people from CaLD backgrounds affected by family and domestic violence. However, research findings consistently indicate that strategies to ensure that services are more responsive to the needs of women from CaLD communities are not implemented. Generally these standards are designed to ensure that people from CaLD backgrounds have equitable access to appropriate services. Strategies to ensure this include:

- The provision of information in linguistically appropriate formats through the use of interpreters and translators
- Service providers are aware of which cultural and language groups are represented within the local community, and have some understanding of the cultural issues that arise when working with those groups.
- The service is promoted to all cultural groups in the community.
- The service has an organisational structure that is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the community.
- Staff reflect the cultural diversity of the community.⁸

The Department for Community Services Victoria (1999) developed Practice Principles for Working with a Multicultural Community as a supplement to their Case Management Resource Kit for SAAP Services in order to ensure equitable access to accommodation services for people from CaLD backgrounds who are homeless and/or experiencing family and domestic violence. The Principles were developed in response to service providers' requests for more assistance in dealing with people from CaLD backgrounds. The document acknowledges that clients from CaLD backgrounds may face a range of disadvantages, which makes it particularly difficult for them to access support services including

- few skills in using the English language;
- loss of family support;
- unfamiliarity with support systems available in Australia;
- lack of information in their own languages about support services; and

⁸ Department for Community Development. Family and Domestic Violence Unit (2006). A Review of the Literature Relating to Family and Domestic Violence in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in Australia. Available from www.familyanddomesticviolence.wa.gov.au

- isolation, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Importantly, the document also acknowledges that “another difficulty in accessing support services could be attributed to the low level of awareness and understanding of cross-cultural issues by some service providers.”

The Principles for providing services to clients from CaLD backgrounds are:

1. It is the responsibility of every SAAP agency to support clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
2. SAAP agencies recognise distinct cultural diversities within communities sharing similar languages and nationalities
3. SAAP agencies recognise and respect the beliefs, traditions, values and life experiences of clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
4. SAAP agencies will offer flexible service models based on assessment of client need
5. Any information supplied to clients must be in a manner and at a literacy level that they can understand
6. SAAP agencies will monitor and review their service provision regularly to ensure their responsiveness to a multicultural community.⁹

Best-practice models for the provision of services to both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence have been developed in Western Australia. One of the underlying principles is that services need to be accessible and relevant to the diversity of the client population. Materials need to be presented in a range of languages and formats, and services need to be easy to contact and culturally sensitive. These best-practice models are currently being reviewed and up-dated by the Family and Domestic Violence Unit at the WA Department for Community Development.¹⁰

⁹ Department for Community Services (1999). Practice Principles for Working with a Multicultural Community: A Supplement to the Case Management Resource Kit for SAAP Services, Melbourne, Victoria.

¹⁰ Department for Community Development. Family and Domestic Violence Unit (2006). A Review of the Literature Relating to Family and Domestic Violence in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities in Australia. Available from www.familyanddomesticviolence.wa.gov.au

Muslims and Crisis Accommodation

A brief review of the literature pertaining to Muslims and crisis accommodation reveals that there was no available research or statistical data on this specific issue. There is however some literature on CaLD people in crisis accommodation, albeit limited in both quantity and scope. It is therefore necessary to take a broader approach to the literature review that takes into account the dearth of resources available on Muslims in crisis accommodation. While Muslims face issues similar to those for people from CaLD backgrounds, they may also face other issues that are related to their particular cultural and/or religious needs and expectations.

The Literature Review undertaken by the Family and Domestic Violence Unit of the WA Department for Community Development (2006) highlights several issues for the provision of services, including crisis accommodation, to people from CaLD communities. In summary these are:

- Women from CaLD communities are much less likely to report cases of domestic violence or to access support services including crisis accommodation.
- The lack of a national data collection system makes it difficult to ascertain the exact extent of domestic violence in CaLD communities.
- Current service models do not support culturally appropriate practice and adversely impact on the ability of people from CaLD communities to benefit from domestic violence support services.
- Women from CaLD backgrounds are less likely to use mainstream services due to a perception that these services would not be responsive to, or understanding of their particular situation. Other factors include fears about involving the Police, anticipating a racist or unhelpful response, or a response that could place them in jeopardy within their own communities.
- The lack of access to relevant and linguistically appropriate information about domestic violence support services highlights a need for community education strategies.

The Review makes the following observation:

“Mainstream domestic violence services appear to experience great difficulty in dealing with the complex needs of marginalised groups within the community, including those from CaLD backgrounds. There are a number of reasons for this difficulty, many of which are outside the control of those services. Although services are expected to be accessible and relevant, it is acknowledged that CaLD people may choose not to access a service for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that specific, specialised services for these groups of people may be required. There are numerous national and State initiatives that attempt to provide services for people from CaLD backgrounds who are experiencing domestic violence. Most of these projects demonstrated that although it was possible to adapt a mainstream ‘Western’ model to meet the needs of a CaLD community, it would be more appropriate to develop initiatives that are specific to each community. Many of the difficulties experienced were also common to the mainstream programs, including a significant lack of resources.”

For the most part, strategies and programs for Muslims have focused on intervention and the prevention of family and domestic violence. These programs are mainly educative and are designed to address the issue of domestic violence from an Islamic perspective and to reinforce the message that domestic violence is not inherent to Islamic culture. There is no evidence of the development or implementation of strategies to assist Muslims who are experiencing situations in which they would need crisis accommodation services.

The Muslim Women’s Association of NSW is the only provider of crisis accommodation specifically for Muslim women. The Muslim Women’s Refuge located in the Sydney suburb of Lakemba provides crisis accommodation for Muslim women from all ethnic backgrounds who are escaping domestic violence or are at

risk of homelessness. The refuge was established by a group of women who identified that there was a need for a Muslim specific crisis accommodation service. It is located at a property that was procured by the Muslim Women's Association at its inception almost 20 years ago. This property was then refurbished to accommodate women seeking crisis accommodation. The Muslim Women's Refuge provides counseling services, referrals and support as well as access to a support network within the Muslim Women's Association through which women can become involved in the activities of the Association as a form of capacity building. Services are provided within an Islamic framework that includes the provision of halal food and food preparation areas and prayer facilities.

According to a refuge worker, the refuge is "very different from mainstream crisis accommodation services" in both the environment and in the way services are provided. The worker also asserted that the provision of a Muslim women's refuge was a major factor in preventing extreme domestic violence by assisting women to get out of domestic violence situations. Children are welcome but the Association assists in making provisions for teenage boys who may be accompanying the women as it would not be appropriate for teenage boys to stay in the refuge.

Of particular note is that most women self present to the Muslim women's refuge. This is in stark contrast to the available evidence in relation to self presentation at mainstream crisis accommodation services. The refuge worker reported that many women who use the refuge originally sought assistance through the Muslim Women's Association and were then informed about the refuge and its services. As such, the Association provides an important access point to the Muslim Women's Refuge.¹¹

¹¹ Conversation with Amani: refuge worker at the Muslim Women's Refuge, NSW

3. The Islamic Perspective

In order to fully understand the religious and cultural context within which Muslims would access services, it is important to briefly state the Islamic perspective on family and domestic violence and how this relates to crisis accommodation.¹²

An information sheet on the Islamic perspective is included in the attachment as an information resource for service providers.

KARAMAH: MUSLIM WOMEN LAWYERS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS operates out of the United States and is a charitable, educational organisation which focuses upon the domestic and global issues of human rights for Muslims.

KARAMAH asserts that Muslim women are most often concerned about the Islamic ruling on domestic violence, on whether or not it is acceptable practice within the religion. Some are told by their religious leaders and by their husbands that under certain circumstances it is acceptable.¹³ This confirms the inherent knowledge of Muslim community organisations such as Dar al Shifah and provides a strong rationale for providing services within an Islamic framework that is relevant to the beliefs of the Muslim communities. It also reinforces the importance of educating and informing Muslims about the Islamic stance on domestic violence in order to ensure that they are comfortable with the knowledge that, in seeking support services, they are not contravening Islamic principles.

Islam does not advocate nor condone violence against women. In fact, the Qur'anic definition of marriage is articulated in terms of mercy, tranquility and affection. Where there is violence, these qualities cease to exist.

¹² Parts of this section have been adapted from material provided by the United Muslim Women Association Inc. and is available at www.mwa.org.au

¹³ www.karamah.org

The Quran also provides guidance to Muslims about how to deal with marital discord. The Quran places great importance on the role of the extended family in resolving domestic disputes:

“If you fear discord between the two (spouses), then send an arbiter from his family, and another from hers; if they wish to repair (the situation), God will reconcile them. For God has full knowledge and is expert in all things.” (4:35)

Muslims are therefore required to seek peaceful means to deal with marital discord and to exhibit patience and tolerance during difficult times. For some Muslims in Australia however, members of the extended family may not reside in Australia and they therefore may not be able to turn to family networks for support or assistance.

Muslim women, like all other women are absolutely encouraged to speak out against violence and seek justice.

Islam considers the family unit the foundation of the society. Islam not only encourages, but exhorts humanity to maintain family stability, and to protect families from being split, either via political conflicts, or social degradation. Divorce, whilst a right within Islamic Tradition, is a remedy for irreconcilable differences as a last resort. Arbitration under family law is strongly advocated. Family involvement with the victim as well as the offender is highly encouraged. These methods have often proven to be successful alternatives to punitive conflict resolution measures.

Women in Islam are entitled to rights that are comparable to those of women in Western liberal democracies. Muslim women however, have had these rights for over 1400 years:

- Freedom of choice
- Equality
- Right to divorce and choose her own husband
- Right to maintenance of her and the children
- Right to earn an independent means

Through this articulation of women's rights in Islam, Muslim women can be encouraged to leave domestic violence situations and seek support services such as crisis accommodation.

There are a number of factors to consider in the provision of services to Muslim clients that are brought to bear on the provision of appropriate crisis accommodation services. Understanding these factors can lead to an understanding as to why Muslims do not access crisis accommodation services.

Dietary considerations

Muslims are prohibited from consuming

- Pork or pork related products are prohibited including in the use of animal fat, gelatine and animal shortening
- Meat of animals who died without being slaughtered
- Carnivorous animals
- Alcohol and illicit drugs
- Meat that is not slaughtered in accordance with Islamic requirements

Etiquettes and practices

For Muslims, Islam is not just a religion that can be neatly compartmentalized into the private domain. Islam is a way of life and provides a set of governing principles by which Muslims live. Islam also sets out certain practices and etiquettes that Muslims apply to their everyday lives. Given the diversity of Muslim communities in Australia, cultural practices are likely to vary between and among people from different ethnicities and according to how individuals practice Islam. There are, however a number of considerations that effect Muslims in their everyday lives.

- In observing cleanliness some Muslim homes will require all visitors, Muslim and non-Muslim, to remove their shoes before entering the home.
- Hospitality is an Islamic requirement and all guests are treated warmly. It is common for visitors to be served with refreshments and food when visiting a Muslim home whether on a personal or business basis.

- Physical contact is not recommended when greeting a Muslim of the opposite gender. Generally, it is not recommended to extend one's hand to shake the hand of a person of the opposite gender. It is a common practice to be greeted by a Muslim of the opposite gender by using a gesture of placing the hand on the chest as a mark of respect.
- Do not enter the home of a Muslim without first seeking permission. Identify who you are first and then enter when invited in.
- Make prior arrangements by making appointments when wishing to interview families so as to ensure both the husband and wife are present.
- It not recommended that a man visit a Muslim home when a Muslim woman is alone in the house. Similarly it is not recommended that a woman visit a Muslim home when a Muslim man is alone.

Having stated the above, it is also important to acknowledge that it is impossible for crisis accommodation services to cater to the range of needs that clients present. While some women may be able or willing to negotiate their religious needs while in temporary accommodation, it is more likely the case that Muslims will be so unfamiliar with a non-Islamic environment and will find it more difficult to adjust to this environment than non-Muslims. Furthermore, issues such as the lack of halal food and food preparation facilities, the lack of prayer facilities and the high level of unfamiliarity with the environment are likely to compound feelings of isolation, stress, low self esteem and trauma for women escaping domestic violence. Women who face domestic violence and homelessness may in fact turn to their religion for comfort and guidance during this difficult period and would seek to maintain their Islamic practices while in crisis accommodation. Women with children will also have a strong desire to maintain an Islamic environment for their children while in crisis accommodation as a way of retaining a level of normality for their children during a time of intense disruption and upheaval.

4. Methodology

The methodology used for this study consisted of

- Community led Focus Groups
- A workshop with Service Providers

Focus Groups

The objectives of the Focus Groups were

- to investigate the level of knowledge and understanding about crisis accommodation services among Muslims;
- to investigate the experiences of Muslims who have either accessed crisis accommodation or who have experienced need for crisis accommodation but were unable to access services;
- to investigate barriers to access to crisis accommodation services for Muslims; and
- to consult with Muslims regarding their needs in relation to crisis accommodation services.

In total 15 Focus Groups were conducted with groups of between 10-15 women and youth ranging in age from 14 to 70. The total number who participated in the focus groups was 179. The Focus Groups were organised and facilitated by women and youth in the community and were held at venues selected by the community and the participants. Focus groups were held in women's homes or at community centres where groups were already meeting for other purposes such as English language classes. Two moderators, Ms Gadija Gaba and Ms Anne Aly from Dar al Shifah moderated the sessions with the assistance of the community organisers. Each community organiser was given \$300 to cover the costs of organising the focus groups, including child-care. While it was originally intended that the women and youth themselves would facilitate the focus group discussions, it became evident that the profound lack of information and understanding about crisis accommodation

required moderators who could also act as an information source. Further, the community organisers indicated that they were also keen to participate in the focus groups and that they felt more comfortable in this role than as moderators. Participation in the study as organisers proved to be an effective model for community empowerment affording the organisers an opportunity to develop and use administration and management skills in organising aspects of the focus groups such as venue, child-care, community interpreters and transport. Early in the research process, the participants indicated that they preferred not to be audio-taped. Given the sensitive nature of the focus group subject and to honour the participants' wishes, it was decided that the focus groups would not be audio-taped. The moderator, with the assistance of the focus group organisers, acted as scribe. In some cases more than one focus group was conducted with a particular ethnic group due to the larger numbers of community members from those groups.

The Focus Groups were organised with Muslims in the following ethnic groups:

- Somali (x3)
- Afghan
- Lebanese
- Iraqi (x2)
- Indonesian (x3)
- Sudanese
- Egyptian and Middle Eastern (x2)
- Mixed ethnicity
- Muslim youth (conducted by the Muslim Student's Association)

The rationale for ethno- specific focus groups was firstly to enable community women to participate in the study as organisers and participants. Secondly, the focus groups were generally mono-linguistic to accommodate the use of interpreters. Where women and youth from different linguistic groups participated in the focus groups, the Moderator or organiser was able to act as interpreter. Thirdly, as the focus groups examined issues of sensitivity such as domestic violence, it was considered that participants would be more comfortable discussing these issues with

others from their own communities in a culturally and linguistically appropriate environment.

The Moderators used a semi- structured questionnaire (see Appendix A) to ensure that uniformity in the focus group process. The questionnaire first asked participants to indicate their knowledge and awareness of crisis accommodation services. At this point, the Moderators were often called upon to clarify the purpose of crisis accommodation before proceeding with the questionnaire to ensure that all participants had a similar basis of understanding of crisis accommodation.

A flexible approach was taken to the collection of data in the focus groups. Where appropriate and where the participants felt comfortable they were asked to note their answers on the questionnaire. This questionnaire was also translated into Farsi and Arabic for some of the focus groups and the answers translated back into English. In other cases literacy levels were not sufficient to enable participants to complete a written form in any language.

Early in the research process, some participants indicated that they were not comfortable divulging personal information such as age and household income. It was decided that the collection of demographic data could be abandoned without compromising the findings of the research as this information would only serve to give a more detailed illustration of the Muslims who participated in the consultations.

Service Providers' Workshop

A workshop with Service Providers was held on Thursday 9 November 2006 in association with Foundation Housing (formerly the Eastern Metropolitan Housing Association). The objectives of the Service Providers' Workshop were:

- to investigate how Service Providers collect and use data about clients;
- to investigate issues for Service Providers in delivering services to Muslims;
- to gain an understanding of how service delivery models respond to the needs of Muslims; and

- to consult with service providers on their experiences in providing services to Muslims.

The workshop was widely publicised through appropriate networks of service providers and attracted 9 representatives including the Department of Health and various crisis accommodation service providers.

The workshop was facilitated by Ms Anne Aly using a structured questionnaire (see Attachment B). The questionnaire was also circulated to service providers who were unable to attend the workshop but who had indicated an interest in contributing to the study. Those who attended the workshop also indicated their interest in sending a submission to the Report. As a result, service providers were invited to send submissions to the Report using the questionnaire as a guide. However, no submissions were received at the time of writing from Foundation Housing.

Analysis

The data collected from the focus groups was analysed to highlight issues for Muslims with regards to crisis accommodation in the following areas:

- Understanding and knowledge of crisis accommodation services
- Access to crisis accommodation services
- Experiences of using crisis accommodation services
- Experiences for which crisis accommodation services were required but were not accessed
- Perceptions of crisis accommodation service models and suggestions for how service provision could be more responsive to need.

The first level analysis of the Focus Group data revealed themes that were then used to construct the questionnaire for service providers. These themes were:

- information and knowledge about crisis accommodation;
- client expectations
- cultural and religious barriers to accessing crisis accommodation services; and

- experiences of crisis accommodation services.

The second level of in- depth analysis used the information from the Focus Groups and from service providers to identify issues and make recommendations to address the issues. The findings and suggestions for future directions are presented in the following sections of this report.

5. Findings

Knowledge and understanding of crisis accommodation services

The consultations revealed a very low level of knowledge and understanding about crisis accommodation services among Muslims. In response to the question “Do you know what crisis accommodation is and who it is for?” only 74 of the 179 people who attended the consultations demonstrated an understanding of crisis accommodation services. Most stated that crisis accommodation was for women in domestic violence situations or for youth experiencing parental conflict.

67 respondents stated that they do not know what crisis accommodation is with some participants stating “I have never heard of it.”

The remaining 38 respondents stated that they knew what crisis accommodation was but demonstrated a lack of understanding and knowledge in their answers.

Examples include misconceptions that crisis accommodation is for:

- divorced women
- people who are unable to find accommodation because of rental issues
- new migrants
- families facing eviction
- people in financial crisis
- aged people
- people who need shelter after an environmental disaster
- people with disabilities
- people with mental health issues.

The consultation held with Muslim youth found that while most of the 10 youths who participated in the consultation knew what crisis accommodation was for, some were

unsure and that crisis accommodation was better known as “safe houses” or “shelter”.

These findings are consistent with reports from service providers who stated that the lack of information about crisis accommodation resulted in false expectations by people from CaLD communities who understood crisis accommodation in terms of housing needs, rent and discrimination in the rental market. Appropriate housing is one of the most salient issues facing new and emerging communities particularly for larger families and refugees from Africa who face discrimination in private rental services.

Service providers also acknowledged that the concept of crisis accommodation is unfamiliar to many Muslims particularly those who come from countries where there is limited or no structured welfare system or who come from countries affected by war. In many traditional societies, the community will provide accommodation, care and support for people facing homelessness. The extended family is also a source of support and assistance. Structured welfare services in these societies are considered to be unnecessary where family and community networks provide such services.

In this context, it is easy to understand why Muslims, many from new and emerging communities, are unfamiliar with the concept of crisis accommodation and why crisis accommodation is often understood in terms of housing needs.

Few respondents indicated that they knew how to access crisis accommodation services if needed. 104 participants indicated that they would not know how to access crisis services. Of those who indicated that they did know, the most common answer was to call the Police or “Domestic helpline” or “crisis hotline”. Other answers were:

- Contact the school, university or doctor
- Social worker
- Department of Community Services

- Hospital
- Service providers (no details given)
- Government institution (no details given)
- Centrelink
- Muslim organisations

Some participants answered that they would go to Homeswest or to the Multicultural Services Centre which provides assistance to people in private rental accommodation through its Multicultural Housing Program. This is symptomatic of the misunderstanding of crisis accommodation as housing services.

The fact that Muslims know about contacting Police to access crisis accommodation does not necessarily mean that they would follow this procedure if faced with a violent or threatening situation. Research suggests that people from CaLD backgrounds are much less likely to report incidences of abuse or violence to police. This may be related to suspicious attitudes towards authority particularly for people who have come from corrupt or violent regimes. With recent legal amendments giving police more powers to arrest and detain people of interest, there is also a high level of distrust among Muslim communities regarding police that is fuelled by community fear that police are specifically targeting members of Muslim communities in Australia.

Few participants demonstrated detailed or explicit knowledge of service providers and how to access them. The indication is that most Muslims would not be able to access crisis accommodation services if needed but do have some knowledge of avenues to assist them to access services such as Police, Centrelink and Muslim community organisations.

Rabiha, a single mother of three, recently arrived as a refugee from Afghanistan. The house she was renting was sold and Rabiha was forced out with little notice. Unable to find a place to rent, Rabiha and her children were facing homelessness. She approached a friend and made arrangements to temporarily stay with her until she could find long term accommodation. However, her friend's house was too small to accommodate the entire family. Rabiha found another family who could look after two of her children. She then had to find another family who were willing to store all her belongings until she could find a place of her own. This was the first time that Rabiha had been separated from her children. "If I had known about crisis accommodation" she stated "maybe I wouldn't have had to leave my children."

The consultation with Muslim youth also indicated that there is a lack of knowledge regarding how to access crisis accommodation among this cohort. Even those who had some sort of experience with crisis accommodation did not know how to directly access services. Some stated they would call a hotline to find information or look in the Yellow Pages. Others stated that they would approach community organisations such as the Muslim Women's Support Centre and Dar al Shifah.

Service providers stated that, due to the nature of the services, the dissemination of information about crisis accommodation was difficult. There is no information available in multi-lingual formats and there are few community outreach strategies which aim to educate and inform specific ethnic or religious communities about crisis accommodation services. One service provider provides community education and information about services to students at Adult Migrant Education Service classes but this is not a widespread or uniform practice. The only communication education strategy targeting Muslims was through a Somali community worker who conducted community information sessions on domestic violence and crisis accommodation services for Somali women.

Word of mouth was the most common method of finding information about crisis accommodation for the Muslims who participated in the consultations. Information was passed on from friends or through community organisations such as Dar al Shifah. One woman stated that she found information about crisis accommodation in Amana Magazine, a monthly publication aimed at members of the Muslim communities. As is to be expected given the lack of written information on crisis accommodation, none of the participants stated that they found information through publications such as pamphlets.

It is appropriate here to refer to the example of the NSW Muslim Women's Refuge where Muslim women access crisis accommodation because the refuge is linked to the Muslim Women's Association of NSW. This arrangement has operated to ensure that Muslim women who approach the Association after experiencing domestic violence or facing homelessness are easily placed in accommodation as needed.

In the process of compiling this report, Dar al Shifah was approached by a Somali woman who had attended one of the focus groups requesting assistance to leave a violent relationship. Prior to attending the focus group, this woman had no knowledge of crisis accommodation. Dar al Shifah is currently providing assistance and support to this woman.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that there is an urgent need for community education and information services about crisis accommodation.

For most Muslims, the concept of crisis accommodation is unfamiliar as they tend to come from traditions with strong family and community networks. In the absence of these networks, Muslims in need of crisis accommodation are left with nowhere to go. Community education strategies should focus on educating Muslims about what crisis accommodation is as well as how to access crisis accommodation services. The implementation of an effective community education strategy would also

address the misconceptions about crisis accommodation evident in Muslim communities.

Information should be provided in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats. This does not necessarily mean that multi-lingual written information is appropriate as there may be high numbers of women with limited literacy skills in certain language groups.

Given the perception of domestic violence as a “private” subject and the taboos associated with talking about domestic violence in many Muslim communities, it is recommended that information about crisis accommodation be embedded in information sessions on broader subject areas such as parenting or women’s health and well being. This recommendation is supported by a Somali community worker who stated that it is very difficult to get Somali women to attend information sessions about domestic violence or crisis accommodation. These sessions are therefore often advertised as health and well being sessions in order to attract higher participation.

Experiences of crisis accommodation

Muslims who had either used crisis accommodation or knew of someone who had used crisis accommodation did so to escape domestic violence situations or family conflict. In a few cases, crisis accommodation was used as a result of conflict with a parent.

All Muslim youth who participated in the consultation organised by the Muslim Students Association reported that they knew of someone, or had had personal experiences where they needed crisis accommodation. One person discussed a situation from their childhood where their family was refused temporary accommodation from a family friend and thus sought out crisis accommodation at a women’s refuge.

The experiences of Muslims in crisis accommodation services were consistently described as negative. Women who had either accessed crisis accommodation or knew of someone who did tended to describe their experience in negative terms and to attribute this to the “un-Islamic” environment in crisis accommodation and the difficulties of maintaining Islamic practices in crisis accommodation such as the preparation of halal food. Women stated that the communal kitchen in crisis accommodation meant that food utensils were often used to prepare food that is prohibited in Islam such as pork. Muslims found it difficult to use the kitchen facilities where prohibited food had been prepared and where the dishes were often left dirty. The lack of privacy was also mentioned as an issue for Muslims. The lack of appropriate services was considered to be “traumatic” for the Muslims who had negative experiences of crisis accommodation.

Sabra, a Somali refugee was referred to a crisis accommodation service. She did not want the other Somali women in her community to know that she was in a violent marriage. Sabra found it difficult to adapt to life in the refuge but had nowhere else to go. After a while, the other women in the refuge complained that she was using water from the toilet bowl and leaving the bathroom in a mess (Muslims use water to clean themselves after using the toilet). Sabra was asked to leave the refuge. She ended up staying with another Somali woman from the community.

The findings also indicate that crisis accommodation is often considered a last resort after all other avenues have been exhausted. Young people in particular will tend to first attempt to find a friend who will accommodate them rather than approach a crisis accommodation service. A number of young people are leaving home as they find it difficult to deal with their father’s expectations. During the consultation phase, the researchers came into contact with 6 young Muslim people who were leaving home. Dar al Shifah has also dealt with another 6 cases in the past year.

Anna, a young Russian student was being physically abused by her husband to whom she had only been married a few months. One night, the violence forced her to run from home. Anna called a taxi and was picked up by a driver who happened to be Muslim. She confided in the taxi driver who invited her to stay with his family. Anna stayed with the taxi driver and his family for two weeks but had no support and ended up returning to her husband. Within a week the abuse started again. Anna moved several times, each time staying with a friend temporarily and then returning to her husband only to experience further abuse. She eventually managed to get her own place.

Service providers acknowledged that it is difficult to get Muslims to access crisis accommodation services and reported a lack of success in assisting Muslims to move into crisis accommodation. Often, community involvement in domestic violence situations prevented women from leaving their homes and made it difficult for service providers to place them in crisis accommodation. Community networks stressed the inappropriateness of crisis accommodation for Muslims and the need to prevent family disintegration, in effect forcing women and youth to stay in abusive or violent situations.

Further, in the current political and social environment where the Muslim community faces considerable media scrutiny, there is a tendency for Muslims to avoid situations in which they may be seen in a negative light.¹⁴ The impact of the negative image of Muslims in the media and political arena is that Muslim communities have retreated into themselves contributing to their isolation and marginalization. In the aftermath to the 11 September terrorist attacks, Muslim women who wear the hijab were verbally and physically abused. Muslim women are more reluctant to access public services and to place themselves in situations where they may experience abuse or discrimination.

¹⁴ Aly, A and Balnaves, M (2006). The Atmosfear of Terror: Affective modulation in the war on terror. Media-culture Journal.

Conclusion

A common perception of crisis accommodation is that it is both unsuitable and unsafe for Muslims. Muslims who have accessed crisis accommodation describe it as a negative experience. There is considerable reluctance to use crisis accommodation with most Muslims preferring to stay with friends or community members. Muslim communities also exert pressure on women and youth to prevent them from using crisis accommodation. Service providers are generally held in suspicion and seen to be working to break families apart.

The issue of a religiously appropriate environment is a difficult one to address as it is impossible for crisis accommodation to cater to the specific needs of all clients. Another issue that is difficult to address is the common perception of crisis accommodation as a place that is unsuitable and unsafe for Muslims. One way of addressing this is to provide a service that caters specifically for Muslims and provides an atmosphere in which Muslims can preserve their religious and cultural practices while in temporary accommodation. Such a service would be seen as more favourable by Muslim communities and may ease the resistance experienced by service providers who have attempted to assist Muslims to leave violent situations.

Barriers to accessing crisis accommodation services

In response to the question “In your opinion, what kinds of things would stop you from using crisis accommodation if you needed it?” Muslims listed the following barriers:

- Inappropriate environment and support
- Information is not confidential
- Inability to practice my religion
- No halal food
- Cultural differences with service providers and other residents
- Fear
- Crime and bad influences

- Language differences and not understanding the language
- Guilt or shame and not wanting people to know
- Few women indicated that there would be no reason for them not to access crisis accommodation if they needed it.

Young people gave diverse answers to this question. Some were concerned about not knowing what to do if a crisis came up, or who to ask for help first. Being scared and worried about how they would be received was also an issue. Some people again were worried about being judged. A non-Islamic place was seen as undesirable as people were uncomfortable with staying with others who may not understand Islamic culture. Mixed accommodation or communal housing was also seen as a problem. Another concern was the cultural community opinion about 'authorities not having the best interests of the Muslim community' in mind, or having no sensitivity to cultural factors. Some people would rather stay at friends or supportive homes where they would feel more comfortable.

While some of the barriers mentioned by Muslims are internal factors in that they arise from their own cultural or religious needs, some are also structural barriers to access. In particular the provision of services in appropriate languages is fundamental to ensuring access and equality for people from CaLD backgrounds who are not able to effectively communicate in English. Both the Federal and State governments have policies on the provision of interpreting services to assist people from CaLD backgrounds to access services. However, there are a number of new and emerging languages where interpreters are either unavailable or may be known to the client such as Somali and some African languages. Although all interpreters are bound by a strict code of ethics that includes confidentiality, clients may be reluctant to use services for fear of encountering an interpreter who is known to them or to their family.¹⁵

¹⁵ The author, Anne Aly, has developed and managed the WA State Language Services Policy at the Office of Multicultural Interests. These issues have been raised in consultations with interpreters, service providers and communities.

The inability to preserve cultural or religious practices features strongly as a perceived barrier to accessing crisis accommodation services for Muslims. Service providers stated that while they collected data on their clients, this data is limited to Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other. Service providers were also unsure of how data was used to inform service delivery. Religious information is not collected and hence is not a consideration in the provision of crisis accommodation services. This limits the capacity of crisis accommodation services to respond appropriately to the need of Muslims.

Service providers also raised concerns that the current model of service delivery in crisis accommodation did not suit the needs of many CaLD clients. The empowerment model used in crisis accommodation which encourages people to be independent does not take into account that many women from CaLD backgrounds, particularly refugees and humanitarian entrants, are not equipped with the necessary skills to take full advantage of an empowerment approach and would be better serviced by a case management approach that provided tailored support and assistance.

Conclusion

Muslims perceive a number of barriers that would prevent them from accessing crisis accommodation. The inability to maintain cultural and religious practices in the crisis accommodation environment is the most salient issue for Muslims. Muslims are also doubtful that service providers are able to understand their needs and to provide services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. In light of the finding that Muslims have generally had negative experiences of crisis accommodation, it is highly likely that these perceived barriers contribute to the negative perception of crisis accommodation among Muslim communities.

Strategies to address the barriers to accessing crisis accommodation should focus on ensuring that crisis accommodation services are responsive to the religious needs of Muslims and that service delivery is culturally sensitive. However, it is also necessary to recognise the difficulty for mainstream services to ensure an

environment that is appropriate for Muslims and that instills confidence in crisis accommodation for both the women and the communities as a whole. It is also necessary to recognise that strategies such as cultural sensitivity training for crisis accommodation staff are limited in their ability to address the issues described above. As such, it is recommended that crisis accommodation specifically for Muslims is established to service the needs of Muslims who are in need of crisis accommodation. This service could utilise the model of the NSW Muslim Women's Refuge which is attached to the Muslim Women's Association.

Needs of Muslims in crisis accommodation

Muslims stated a number of factors that they would need to be able to access crisis accommodation services. They are, in order of prominence:

- Safety and security for both victim and children
- Islamic environment
- With other Muslims or run by Muslims
- Halal food and food preparation facilities
- Language
- Privacy and protection
- Culturally sensitive and understanding service provision
- Service providers are respectful of Islamic needs

The needs expressed by Muslims are consistent with the perceived barriers to accessing crisis accommodation. A number of women also expressed a view that their communities have no need for crisis accommodation through statements such as "we have no need for this"; "this is a private situation" and "it is not in our culture". Somali women explained how domestic violence situations are considered a community concern and that community leaders will often be called to intervene in a violent or abusive situation. Community leaders saw their role as mediating between family members in a domestic dispute in order to prevent family disintegration.

It is however naïve and potentially dangerous to assume that communities have both the skills and the capacity to deal with domestic violence effectively. It is evident that few people in the community have sufficient knowledge of crisis accommodation services and how to access them. In addition most participants indicated that they would not know how to assist someone who needed crisis accommodation.

Two recent cases in Western Australia demonstrate the incapacity of communities to deal with known cases of abuse and violence. In the past two years there have been two deaths in CaLD communities due to domestic violence. In both cases the Malayali community and the Liberian community knew that the victims were experiencing violence and abuse. In the case of the Liberian victim, the perpetrator had approached community leaders for assistance. Community leaders referred him to the community church for guidance. In both cases, the community as a whole was traumatically affected by the death of the victims. The first case resulted in a series of information sessions about domestic violence and available services targeted specifically at the Malayali community at the request of community members. In response to the second case, the Family and Domestic Violence Unit established the African Working Party to develop a strategy aimed at addressing domestic violence among African communities. This initiative was also developed at the request of the community. Dar al Shifah is also aware of a case in which two young girls were experiencing violence and abuse from their father. Members of the Muslim community as well as a Muslim community organisation had direct knowledge of the abuse but were reluctant to approach the authorities or seek assistance through service providers. The case was eventually reported to police by an anonymous person resulting in the young girls being removed from the family home.

Karima, a recent arrival from Iraq was facing homelessness. She discussed her situation with a service provider. Karima was not able to recall who or where this service provider was. The service provider told her about crisis accommodation. “She said that I could go to this crisis accommodation but that I would find it difficult there. She said that this place would not be good for me because I am Muslim. What could I do? I could not go to this place if she said it was not suitable. I had no place to go” Karima ended up seeking the assistance of a friend in her community who allowed her to stay with her until she was able to find a home. She did not go back to the service provider.

There was overwhelming support from all the participants for a Muslim crisis accommodation service. Women and youth indicated that if such a service were available, they would be more likely to use a Muslim service than a generic service. The reasons for this preference varied but were generally related to feelings of being respected, understood and being able to practice Islam. Some examples are:

- So that I can be with people like me who know what I need
- They will know my religion
- They will have knowledge, cultural sensitivity and understanding about my religion and background
- My family would not be so concerned about me knowing that I am in a safe place
- They can relate to you a lot better and understand where I am coming from
- I would not want more stress from an un-Islamic environment and advice
- From my experience our community needs have not been met. We need this
- I would feel more comfortable
- It would be more convenient
- I would get a balanced service which incorporates the spiritual aspect
- I would feel safer
- There is a desperate need for Muslim crisis accommodation
- They would be more aware of what the religious needs are
- This is very important to Muslims in general

- I would trust it more

Service providers also expressed support for a Muslim crisis accommodation service and suggested that this service be presented as a Muslim Respite Service in order to garner community support.

A significant issue that would be addressed through the provision of a Muslim crisis accommodation service is the support of the broader Muslim community for such a service. As stated earlier, both service providers and Muslims report reluctance to access crisis accommodation services that are seen to be inappropriate for Muslims. The level of resistance from communities effectively serves to keep women and youth in potentially dangerous situations. Past experience shows that this can have devastating consequences for both the victims and the community as a whole. Crisis accommodation that provides services to Muslims in an Islamic appropriate environment and that caters to both the secular and religious needs of clients would be viewed more favourably by the broader Muslim communities. Gaining the support and confidence of the community for crisis accommodation is key to improving access for Muslims to this vital service.

Conclusion

Muslims expressed their needs in crisis accommodation as generally related to their need to maintain their Islamic traditions and to have access to services that are appropriate to both their secular and religious needs. There is overwhelming support from both Muslim communities and service providers for a Muslim specific crisis accommodation service. The provision of a Muslim Respite Centre was seen to be a key factor for addressing the various barriers to accessing crisis accommodation for Muslims as well as for garnering community support.

Data collection and use

The issue of data collection was raised by service providers. Service providers stated that data collection was both inadequate and ineffective. There is no specific

item for collecting data on ethnicity other than under the categories of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and 'other'. There is also no requirement to keep the data. Most importantly, data collected is not used to inform or assist service delivery or to inform the development of policies and plans for SAAP providers who come into contact with people from CaLD backgrounds.

Data collection on ethnicity and religious beliefs is an important tool to assess client trends and can highlight target groups with low representation in service areas. This information can then be used to inform the development of communication strategies and service delivery models that are responsive to the needs of different ethnic groups.

Conclusion

Service providers are concerned that data collection is a limited and ineffective activity. Data collected is not used to inform the delivery of services. Service providers are aware of the benefits of collecting comprehensive data on ethnicity and religion as a means of informing the development of strategies, programs and service delivery approaches that are responsive to the needs of diverse clients.

6. Future Directions

Considerations for Government

Community Education and Information

The Needs Analysis found that there is a need to raise awareness of crisis accommodation and related services to people from CaLD backgrounds. To address this, it is suggested that the government consider developing and implementing a community education campaign to provide information about crisis accommodation, its purpose and how to access it to address the lack of knowledge and manage the expectations of CaLD people about crisis accommodation. Information about crisis accommodation and related services should be provided in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats.

Muslim Specific Crisis Accommodation

Community support for crisis accommodation services is needed to address the need for these services among Muslim communities. A service that provides culturally and religiously appropriate crisis accommodation would assist in addressing barriers to access for Muslims in need of crisis services. The service could operate within the SAAP mainstream framework, but would garner community support as an appropriate Respite Centre for Muslims. Family support services provided within a religiously appropriate framework could be provided in tandem with the respite service. This would enable community workers to remove women and youth from potentially violent relationships while continuing to work with the family to address domestic issues.

Service Delivery

Service providers need to be supported to better deliver services that are responsive to the needs of Muslims and CaLD clients. This can be addressed through the provision of awareness training that focuses on the needs of Muslim clients.

Data Collection

Consultations with service providers indicate that a more comprehensive process of data collection would assist in the planning and implementation of appropriate service models for people from CaLD backgrounds. It is therefore suggested that the SAAP data collection model be reviewed to include the collection of data on religion and ethnic background for both clients and target groups. Data collected should be made accessible to service providers and used to inform service delivery models and in the development of policies and practices for crisis accommodation services.

Data on target groups should include demographic data on catchment areas that can be used to identify groups who are not accessing crisis accommodation and as a basis for investigating barriers to access.

Further Research

There is a need for further research into the needs of people from CaLD backgrounds in relation to information about, understanding of and access to crisis accommodation services.

Considerations for Service Providers

Service Delivery Models

The findings of the Needs Analysis suggest that current service delivery models that promote self-empowerment may not be appropriate to Muslims and people from new and emerging communities who require a more intensive case management service delivery approach. It is suggested that service providers examine alternative service delivery models that are responsive to the needs of Muslims and to improve access to crisis accommodation for Muslims.

Information and awareness raising

The Needs Assessment found that service providers do not have a coordinated approach to providing targeted information to people from CaLD backgrounds. Good practice models include the provision of information on crisis accommodation within

a broader context such as information sessions on women's health and well being. Service providers need to develop strategies to address the lack of knowledge and information about crisis accommodation services among people from CaLD backgrounds.

Considerations for the community

Community and religious organisations have a role in assisting service providers and Government to raise awareness of crisis accommodation. Partnerships between service providers and community organisations would assist in building relationships of trust and increasing community support for crisis accommodation services.

7. Dissemination Strategy

An agreed outcome of this study is the dissemination and promotion of the findings of the Needs Analysis. Through the process of this research undertaking, Dar al Shifah has developed and maintained relationships with both service providers and the community. These relationships will assist in the dissemination of the Needs Analysis Report and its findings.

A comprehensive promotion and dissemination strategy will incorporate:

- A community launch of the Needs Analysis Report;
- Provision of the Report to service providers and Western Australian State Government agencies involved in domestic violence, homelessness and crisis accommodation including Foundation Housing, the Department for Community Development, the Family and Domestic Violence Unit and the Multicultural Women's Advocacy Service;
- A meeting with crisis accommodation service provider networking groups to introduce the report and communicate the findings;
- Communication of the findings and provision of the Report to Muslim community organisations and to migrant resource centres, settlement service providers and SAAP providers;
- Access to the Report and findings on the website of Department of Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs;
- Communication of the findings of the report through CaLD networks at the community and State Government level;
- Dar al Shifah has approached the Office of Multicultural Interests to assist in disseminating the report to CaLD communities and across State Government.

It is anticipated that support for the recommendations included in this report will be gained through the promotion of the report and its findings.

Appendix A: Crisis Accommodation Questions

Dar Al Shifah Consultations on Crisis Accommodation Moderator's Guide

Moderator:

Introduce self to the group

Explain purpose of focus group and project

Explain to participants that the focus group will be audio taped only to assist with the recollection of information. Names will not be used.

Ask participants to speak clearly and one at a time.

Introduction

(2 minutes)

Ask participants to introduce themselves (first names only) to the group.

Part One (10 minutes)

Knowledge of Crisis Accommodation

1. Do you know what Crisis Accommodation is and who it is for? (moderator can explain crisis accommodation if the group does not know)
2. In your opinion, what are some situations in which you think people would need to access crisis accommodation?
3. Would you know how to access crisis accommodation services if you needed them?
4. If you do know about Crisis Accommodation, where did you find your information?

Part Two (10 minutes)

Need for Crisis Accommodation

1. Have you or anyone that you know ever experienced a situation where you may have needed crisis accommodation? What happened?
2. Have you or anyone that you know ever accessed crisis accommodation? Where and why?
3. Have you ever recommended or suggested crisis accommodation to anyone you know? Why? What happened?
4. Has crisis accommodation ever been suggested to you or anyone you know by a service provider? Who?
5. Have you or anyone you know ever refused a crisis accommodation service? Why?

Part three (15 minutes)

Attitudes

1. In your opinion, what kinds of things would stop you from using crisis accommodation services if you needed them?
2. In your opinion, what kinds of things would make a crisis accommodation service more accessible to you?
3. If there was a Muslim Crisis Accommodation service, would you use it if you had to?
4. Would you be more likely to use a Muslim Crisis Accommodation service than a generic service? Why or why not?
5. In your opinion is there a need for a Muslim Crisis Accommodation service?

Moderator thanks participants for their input.

Appendix B: Service Providers' Questionnaire

Needs Analysis of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) Crisis Accommodation (Muslim).

Please describe details of the service area you work in and the services you provide.

How are clients referred to your service?

Does your organisation or agency collect data on the cultural or religious backgrounds of clients?

If yes, how is this data used in the provision of services?

What are some of the considerations you take into account when servicing or referring clients to Crisis Accommodation services?

What actions/ strategies does your organisation / agency have in place to inform people about your services?

Have you provided this information to Muslim communities?

Have you provided crisis services or referred any members of Muslim communities to crisis services?

If so, were there any issues that arose in the provision of the service?

How did you deal with these issues?

Are you aware of any issues for Muslims in regard to Crisis Accommodation services? What are they?

What strategies can you suggest to make Crisis Accommodation more accessible and responsive to the needs of Muslim clients?

Thank you for your assistance.

This project is funded by the Department of Family and Children's Services. For more information please contact Dar al Shifah on 9248 4435.

Appendix C: Report on consultation with Muslim youth

Muslim Crisis Accommodation report Youth perspective

**UWA Muslim Students Assoc.
10 people**

Knowledge of Crisis Accommodation

1. Do you know what Crisis Accommodation is and who it is for?

Most people knew what Crisis Accommodation and whom it is used for is but some were unsure. Others knew of crisis accommodation in terms of a 'safe house' or 'shelter'. They said; Crisis Accommodation is for people that have personal or family problems and need somewhere safe to go. It is for people who are in need of accommodation due to difficult situations they are facing at home as well as for those who are in an urgent crisis, usually women and children. It is also for those who don't have normal accommodation, and have been forced to leave their normal place of residence. Crisis accommodation is known to be for all people of all ages although those who are more likely to use the service are women and children, teenagers, and young single women with children.

2. In your opinion, what would be the reasons for people to go into crisis accommodation?

Various reasons for the use of Crisis Accommodation came up. Domestic violence and safety issues, lack of support and family networks and lack of money were among the main reasons for people going into Crisis Accommodation. Teenagers facing family problems and conflicts are also likely to seek crisis accommodation, as well as people feeling unsafe in their homes due to physical and psychological abuse. Another reason why people go into crisis accommodation is monetary and housing problems, such as being evicted from a rental property due to non-payment

of rent. Another cause considered was people coming from interstate or overseas who are looking for a temporary place to reside, or people who have left home because of a crisis and need temporary accommodation before moving house. A professional Crisis Accommodation service was considered a good option because of the burden some felt occurred when seeking accommodation at a friend's or acquaintance's house, especially for prolonged periods of time.

3. Do you know how to get into Crisis Accommodation if you need to?

For those who were familiar with the concept of Crisis Accommodation, they had some idea of where to obtain information about this type of service. Even those who had some sort of experience with crisis accommodation did not know the first place to go. Some said they would call a hotline to find information or look in the yellow pages. Others said the *Muslim women's support centre* would be the first place to find information. Other agencies and organisations such *Crisis care* and *Dar al Shifa* also came up.

4. If you do know about crisis accommodation, where did you find the information?

Some people found information about Crisis Accommodation through friend's experiences while others found the information through agencies such as Muslim Women's Support Centre and Dar al Shifa.

Need for Crisis Accommodation

1. Have you or anyone that you know needed crisis accommodation? What happened?

All of the people interviewed knew of someone, or had personal experiences where they or their friends needed crisis accommodation. For those who

discussed their friend's experiences, the outcome of their situation was varied. Some who went through a crisis at home had a relatively easy and successful time staying in crisis accommodation. One person discussed a situation from their childhood where their family was refused temporary accommodation from a family friend and thus sought out crisis accommodation at a women's refuge. Another experience states how one family were taken care of by the Muslim community who organised a few houses (with families) to live at. Due to lack of family support the teenagers in the family had no where else to go, so they stayed at these family's houses for longer than expected. This caused a burden on the care takers. In this situation, professional Islamic crisis accommodation would have eased some of these burdens that occur with informal crisis accommodation.

2. Have you or anyone that you know used crisis accommodation? Where and why?

Some people stayed at refuges, in Perth and other states. Some crisis accommodation was used in the Northern suburbs in Perth and some people know of people who have used services provided by *DCD*.

3. Have you ever told someone about crisis accommodation? Why? What happened?

Yes, some places were recommended to people who used it. No, because some people felt uncomfortable with non-Muslim places. Another reason why some said No is because they believed there isn't a place to go such as women's shelter or a safe haven in Perth.

4. Have a service provider ever told you or someone you know about crisis accommodation? Which service provider?

For those who were in contact with support agencies said that *the Muslim Women's Support Centre* provided information about Crisis Accommodation.

5. Have you or anyone you know ever been refused a crisis accommodation service? Why?

Most people interviewed said no, they or friends of theirs had never been refused from crisis accommodation, but have been refused from staying at friends houses- once again confirming the need of a Muslim Crisis accommodation. Others answered yes to this, because some people are not seen as being in a 'crisis' and sometimes there is nothing available.

Attitudes

1. In your opinion, what kinds of things would stop you from using crisis accommodation if you needed it?

The answers to this question were diverse. Some were concerned about not knowing what to do if a crisis came up, or who to ask for help first. Being scared and worried about how people will receive you was also an issue. Some people again were worried about judgmental people. A non-Islamic place was seen as undesirable as people were uncomfortable with staying with others who may not understand Islamic culture. Mixed accommodation or communal housing was also seen as a problem. Another concern was the Cultural community opinion about 'authorities not having best interests of cultural community', or having no sensitivity to cultural factors. Some people would rather stay at friends or supportive family's homes where they may feel at ease as well as feel that they are supported.

2. In your opinion, what kinds of things would make a crisis accommodation friendlier to you?

Having a Muslim, non-judgmental environment. Having a comfortable place to stay as well as privacy. The carers/people involved having better understanding of cultural sensitivities and make decisions accordingly. Feeling at ease with Islamic issues such as Halal food, segregation, knowledge of Qiblah direction etc. Lastly, staying with carers/ people who can help with the problems or at least having access to a Muslim mentor or social worker.

3. If there was a Muslim Crisis Accommodation service, would you use it if you had to?

All people interviewed answered yes for several reasons. Firstly because agency will be more understanding. A Muslim crisis accommodation would also be better than a non-Muslim crisis accommodation because it seems that there would be more options to work with. Finally, the people involved would definitely have a better understanding of how Muslims and their families and cultures work and can thus cater for their needs more appropriately. Some interviewees discussed some of the cases they worked with concerning Muslim youth in Crisis Accommodation. There is concerns about the non-Muslim carers who allow young Muslim girls to do things such as go out to the city with friends at night time, dress un-Islamically and not pray regularly. In some instances, the carer must be aware of the mental state of the youth who is in there care. For example, if a Muslim is suicidal wants to use any material such as a hijab to hurt themselves. Thus, a Muslim carer should not only be Islamic but professional, balanced and objective. They should try to resolve the conflict in an Islamic way, but also be objective at the same time.

4. Would you be more likely to use a Muslim Crisis Accommodation service than a generic service? Why or why not?

Again, all interviewees answered yes to this question mainly on the issue of cultural understanding. Yes, because of the same attitude. Definitely a Muslim service as it is seen as being more familiar and reassuring where people would

feel more understood and thus the burden of the problems they are facing may be relived a little. A Muslim place will accommodate more needs even just to avoid food problems such as having halal food and dealing with alcohol issues.

5. **In your opinion is there a need for a Muslim Crisis Accommodation service?**

All people responded with Yes, definitely. A few people were hesitant about a Muslim crisis accommodation because of the fear of gossip circulating in certain parts of the Muslim community. Nevertheless, all interviewees overwhelmingly agreed with the need for a Muslim crisis accommodation in Perth.

The Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence and Crisis Accommodation

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and subsequent attacks in Bali, London and Madrid, Muslim communities in Australia have come under considerable scrutiny and pressure. The cumulative effect of fear, frustration, experiences of discrimination, and job insecurity have bled into the Muslim family. Where latent problems of domestic violence already existed, the new pressures have resulted in Muslim communities retreating into isolation making it increasingly difficult for service providers to reach out to women and youth in potentially violent and dangerous domestic situations.

Muslim women are most often concerned about the Islamic ruling on domestic violence, on whether or not it is acceptable practice within the religion. Some are told by their religious leaders and by their husbands that under certain circumstances it is acceptable.¹⁶ In some cases, the women receive little or no support from their female support networks or their local religious leaders. Women in the community and some in community organisations may counsel patience, greater obedience, and stoic silence. Some religious leaders may even blame the wife. Underlying all these attitudes is the silent belief that a man has the right to “chastise” his wife.

This provides a strong rationale for providing services within an Islamic framework that is relevant to the beliefs of Muslims. It also reinforces the importance of raising awareness of the Islamic stance on domestic violence so that service providers may ensure their Muslim clients are comfortable with the knowledge that, in seeking support services, they are not contravening Islamic principles.

¹⁶ www.karamah.org

Islam does not advocate nor condone violence against women. In fact, the Qur'anic definition of marriage is articulated in terms of mercy, tranquility and affection. Where there is violence, these qualities cease to exist.

The Qur'an states in that:

“And among His signs is this, that he created for you mates from among yourselves, so that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): Verily in that are signs for those who ponder.”

(Qur'an, Ayah 21, Surat al-Rum)

The Qur'an (2:187) refers to the relationship between spouses in the following:

“They (your wives) are your garment and you are their garment.”

This is a reference to the fact that the husband and wife are each other's sanctuary insofar as each covers the other's shortcomings and preserves his or her privacy.

In another verse (4:1), the Qur'an states:

“O Humans revere your Guardian Lord, Who created you from a single person created of like nature, its mate, and from this scattered (like seeds) countless men and women.”

In light of these and other similar verses, it is clear that the Qur'an articulates a basic general principle about spousal relations that is not based on gendered hierarchy. In other words, there is nothing in Islam that condones subordination or oppression of women in marital relations.

The Qur'an also provides guidance to Muslims about how to deal with marital discord and places great importance on the role of the extended family in resolving domestic disputes:

“If you fear discord between the two (spouses), then send an arbiter from his family, and another from hers; if they wish to repair (the situation), God will reconcile them. For God has full knowledge and is expert in all things.” (4:35)

Muslims are therefore required to seek peaceful means to deal with marital discord and to exhibit patience and tolerance during difficult times. For some Muslims in Australia however, members of the extended family may not reside in Australia and they therefore may not be able to turn to family networks for support or assistance.

Muslim women, like all other women are absolutely encouraged to speak out against violence and seek justice.

Islam considers the family unit the foundation of the society. Islam not only encourages, but exhorts humanity to maintain family stability, and to protect families from being split, either via political conflicts, or social degradation. Divorce, whilst a right within Islamic Tradition, is a remedy for irreconcilable differences as a last resort. Arbitration under family law is strongly advocated. Family involvement in the victim as well as the one offending is highly encouraged. These methods have often proven to be successful alternatives to punitive means of conflict resolution.

Women in Islam are entitled to rights that are comparable to those of women in Western liberal democracies. Muslim women however, have had these rights for over 1400 years:

- Freedom of choice
- Equality
- Right to divorce and choose her own husband

- Right to maintenance of her and the children
- Right to earn an independent means

Through this articulation of women's rights in Islam, Muslim women can be encouraged to leave domestic violence situations and seek support services such as crisis accommodation.

Considerations when dealing with Muslim clients

There are a number of factors to consider in the provision of services to Muslim clients that are brought to bear on the provision of appropriate crisis accommodation services. Understanding these factors can lead to an understanding as to why Muslims do not access crisis accommodation services.

Dietary considerations

Muslims are prohibited from consuming

- Pork or pork related products are prohibited including in the use of animal fat, gelatine and animal shortening
- Meat of animals who died without being slaughtered
- Carnivorous animals
- Alcohol and illicit drugs
- Meat that is not slaughtered in accordance with Islamic requirements

Etiquettes and practices

For Muslims, Islam is not just a religion that can be neatly compartmentalized into the private domain. Islam is a way of life and provides a set of governing principles by which Muslims live. Islam also sets out certain practices and etiquettes that Muslims apply to their everyday lives. Given the diversity of Muslim communities in Australia, cultural practices are likely to vary between and among people from different ethnicities and according to how individuals practice Islam. There are however a number of considerations that affect Muslims in their everyday lives.

- In observing cleanliness some Muslim homes will require all visitors, Muslim and non-Muslim, to remove their shoes before entering the home.
- Hospitality is an Islamic requirement and all guests are treated warmly. It is common for visitors to be served with refreshments and food when visiting a Muslim home whether on a personal or business basis.
- Physical contact is not recommended when greeting a Muslim of the opposite gender. Generally, it is not recommended to extend one's hand to shake the hand of a person of the opposite gender. It is a common practice to be greeted by a Muslim of the opposite gender by using a gesture of placing the hand on the chest as a mark of respect.
- Do not enter the home of a Muslim without first seeking permission. Identify who you are first and then enter when invited in.
- Make prior arrangements by making appointments when wishing to interview families so as to ensure both the husband and wife are present.
- It not recommended that a man visit a Muslim home when a Muslim woman is alone in the house. Similarly it is not recommended that a woman visit a Muslim home when a Muslim man is alone.

Dar al Shifah has a number of resources and training packages for service providers. For more information contact Dar al Shifah on (08) 9248 4435