

Language barriers to accessing domestic violence support services

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In Australia, women experience domestic violence (DV) at alarming rates, with those from language other than English (LOTE) backgrounds facing specific vulnerabilities in relation to their social circumstances and language needs. Yet, information about DV support options may not take into consideration their low English proficiency and specific contextual constraints.

Against this background, this paper investigates institutionally provided multilingual DV information using the 4-A standard (availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability) of language support for communities who are culturally and linguistically diverse. The 4-A standard is used to triangulate data from three sources: 1) institutional websites that provide DV information; 2) survey responses from 102 participants who undertook online searches for multilingual DV information; 3) 20 in-depth interviews with DV case workers.

Findings indicate that many organizations make information available online in a large number of LOTEs using automated translation tools. However, accessibility is restricted due to factors that relate to the specific social and language needs of LOTE women. Amongst these are complex website features that do not take into consideration both linguistic and non-linguistic constraints of LOTE women in DV situations. Acceptability of translated information may be limited in relation to accuracy and lack of socio-cultural context. In addition, LOTE women are often dependent upon case workers to broker DV information found online and thus, adaptability is dependent on case worker knowledge of diverse contexts and specific situations of LOTE women.

This investigation contributes to understanding multilingual service provision in a linguistically diverse society and can aid in the design of more inclusive communication of vital support information.