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# **Iranian New Zealander men's perception of domestic violence**

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## **Abstract**

Domestic violence is a significant social issue in both Iran and New Zealand. Ethnic migrants have a high risk of experiencing domestic violence and have distinct needs compared to the local population. The purpose of this study was to explore domestic violence in the context of migration, through Iranian migrant men's perceptions. The participants were recruited through social media or by word of mouth through other participants. The research aimed to obtain a deep understanding of factors and experiences that shaped Iranian migrant men's views on domestic abuse. Seven semi-structured phone and face to face interviews were conducted in both Persian and English when appropriate. The key findings indicated that men were aware of the detrimental effects and the multifaceted nature of domestic violence. However, they showed more tolerance toward non-physical forms of domestic abuse than physical. It was found that Iranian family hierarchy, parenting, and the religious and cultural customs of migrants had a major influence on men's understanding of domestic violence. Cultural relativism was used to justify domestic violence to some extent. The men argued that migration had altered some of their beliefs and views on gender roles and violence against women in a significant way. Domestic violence was perceived to be a more severe problem in Iran than New Zealand. This study offers recommendations for policy, practice and prevention strategies regarding domestic violence in an Iranian migrant context.

“If you can't eliminate injustice, at least tell everyone about it.”

Shirin Ebadi (The first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to  
receive the Nobel Peace Prize)

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Domestic violence is a social malady and a significant worldwide health concern (García-Moreno et al., 2013; Madeley, 2015; Rasoulilian et al., 2014). It is one of the major forms of violence against women (Nilan, Demartoto, Broom, & Germov, 2014). Not all victims of domestic violence are necessarily women however they constitute the vast majority of the victims (Johnson, 2006). That is why it is crucial to discuss domestic violence as part of a bigger context which is violence against women or gender based violence.

The worldwide prevalence statistics show that approximately one in three women have faced either sexual and/or physical intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lives (García-Moreno et al., 2013; Kazantzis, Flett, Long, MacDonald, & Millar, 2000). Such violence violates the most basic human rights of women, the right to feel safe in their place of residence and community and, in extreme cases leads to serious injuries and even death. Although domestic violence influences everyone in the family, women and children are more likely to be affected. Approximately half of all female victims of homicide (globally) in 2012 were murdered by an intimate partner or members of their families, compared to less than six percent of men murdered in the same period (García-Moreno et al., 2013).

Domestic violence is also a serious social, health and economic issue in New Zealand (Kazantzis et al., 2000; Martin, Langley, & Millichamp, 2006). It is a prevalent and life threatening social malady that causes serious physical injuries, mental illnesses and economic inequality for thousands of New Zealanders. Frequent studies conducted in New Zealand indicate a pattern of domestic violence consistent with the figures in the other parts of the world. Fifty percent of all murders in New Zealand are perpetrated by a family member (Family Violence Death Review Committee, 2014). About 1 in 3 women are subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by their partners (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011). Seventy six percent of all

reported assaults against women are perpetrated by a family member (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011). Among different ethnic groups in New Zealand Māori are disproportionately represented in IPV. The lifetime prevalence rate of IPV victimisation for Māori women was 26.9% compared to 14.6% for Pākehā women (Marie, Fergusson, & Boden, 2008). This rate was 11.9% for Māori men and 6.8% for Pākehā men (Marie et al., 2008). A national crime survey showed that 49.3% of Māori women and 22.2% of Pākehā women have been victims of IPV (Marie et al., 2008). These statistics indicate an unequal distribution of victimisation between ethnicities, with Māori experiencing 50% higher than average rate of partner violence (Marie et al., 2008). This is broadly consistent with indigenous peoples around the world living in the context of colonisation. Canadian Indigenous people have a higher risk of experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) than non-indigenous Canadians (Brownridge et al., 2017). Zellerer (2003) argues that Aboriginal women in a Canadian context experience similar victimisation and brutality to other women, however it is not only aboriginal women who have become vulnerable and powerless but also their society and way of life. There has also been a growing concern for domestic violence in Australian indigenous communities. It was argued that freedom, rights and dignity of Aborigines have been undermined in a colonised land and the effects tend to be more severe for Aboriginal women (Larsen & Petersen, 2001). In summary, colonization has exacerbated domestic violence in indigenous communities. Māori and ethnic women in general face more barriers to reporting domestic violence or seeking support due to socioeconomic disparities, discrimination and a low number of culturally appropriate and protective services (Pillai, 2001; Robins, & Robertson, 2008; Zellerer, 2003). Indigenous domestic violence offenders also seem to face discrimination in their sentencing. Jeffries and Bond (2015) indicated that there was no discrepancy between the conviction rate of indigenous domestic violence offenders and their counterparts convicted of violent crimes, unrelated to domestic violence. Even though non-indigenous domestic violence offenders were more likely to avoid conviction than those violent offenders who had committed violence outside of familial contexts. Systematic violence which disproportionately affects indigenous and people with low socioeconomic status, has

been compared to domestic violence. For example in a study on urban poverty and structural violence, a government agency, Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) like environments of domestic violence was associated with fear, dislike, disrespect and anxiety. It was also described by affected families as quick to punish disobedience while ignoring their own wrongdoings (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Groot, & Tankel, 2014). All these figures highlight the seriousness and the devastating effects of domestic violence in the world and in New Zealand.

Like all women, female immigrants are at risk of experiencing domestic violence. However there are specific but recurrent attributes and burdens shared by female immigrants that may increase their vulnerability to experiencing various forms of abuse (i.e. domestic violence) in their host countries. For example some of these victims are refugees or undocumented immigrants and rely upon their partners for socio-economic security. Others face culture shock and social isolation due to their residential status, and some may experience poverty and therefore be economically dependent upon their husbands because they find it difficult gaining employment (Gonçalves & Matos, 2016). Adapting to a new social environment and lack of knowledge of its norms could be stressful. This cultural shock could isolate victims of domestic violence and prevent them from seeking help. Additionally, until an immigrant woman gains resident status, her ability to remain in the country may rely on the man who is abusing her. That is, he may be a citizen and sponsoring her application for residence and can withdraw or threaten to withdraw his sponsorship. Or he is the principal applicant on a joint application and can remove or threaten to remove her name from the application. Some studies highlight that immigrants are influenced by more than just one culture; the culture of their home country which is widely practiced and strengthened by immigrant families and the culture of their host nation (Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). This adds more complexity to the domestic violence in immigrant families, for example, migrant women may attempt to renegotiate or even challenge their supposed gender roles and be more financially independent (Erez, 2002; Pillai, 2001; Sharareh, Carina, & Sarah, 2007) which some migrant men may despise and act out violently to maintain a sense of control over their partners.

A number of factors could explain the world-wide commonality of domestic violence among different ethnic groups. One of the most vital factors is a belief system that incorporates detrimental myths, problematic assumptions and views that reinforce maladaptive attitudes (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). Justifying domestic violence against ‘disobedient’ women, dictating rigid gender roles and blaming victims for inciting the violence are examples of these myths and assumptions (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Zakar, Zakar, & Kraemer, 2013). Such belief systems may eventually strengthen an individual’s belief over a period of time that intimate partner violence is an acceptable act. Its influence can differ from culture to culture. This mentality tends to be dominant in Middle Eastern cultures, such as Iran, compared to Western cultures (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). Men’s superior position in the family hierarchy and a sociocultural environment that condones or ignores violence against women could explain this high prevalence (Nazir, 2005). Partner abuse is more prevalent and commonly accepted in Middle East and North Africa (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Considering the significant effect of this belief system (which minimises or condones domestic violence and blames divorce on women) in maintaining and committing domestic violence, there is a lack of existing literature regarding the perception of Iranian men (immigrant and those living in Iran) toward domestic violence (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011).

There is also a lack of research on Iranian New Zealanders with regards to domestic violence. My research aims to address that gap. It will explore Iranian New Zealander men’s perception of domestic violence. Researching Iranian men’s perceptions of domestic violence is helpful in preventing domestic violence and better understanding this complex problem in immigrant families (Nilan et al., 2014). This research becomes even more important because as it was highlighted, personal beliefs can shape an individual’s behaviour. For instance, those who hold accepting views toward domestic violence are at higher risk of engaging in abusive behaviour.

According to the 2013 census ethnic group profiles, there are 3,195 people of Iranian descent living in New Zealand. The population increased by 10.4% between 2006 and 2013 (New Zealand & Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Considering the gradual increase in the number of Iranian immigrants in New Zealand and the prevalence of violence against women in Iran (Kargar Jahromi, Jamali, Koshkaki, & Javadpour, 2015), more resources should be dedicated to understanding this group's unique needs and issues regarding domestic violence.

Culture shapes gender and gender roles and migration reshapes these concepts once again. Boys are born in a certain culture. They grow up in a particular environment which has specific cultural, behavioural and gender norms that shape their perceptions of marriage, family and roles and relationships. These boys may adopt these norms to some extent. After migration to a new country these individuals bring their cultural beliefs with them and are exposed to some different gender and behavioural norms (Erez, 2002). These likely include some differences in how violence is sanctioned or condemned. There are challenges in negotiating these new roles and responsibilities as men (and their partners) may simultaneously want to retain their culture, embrace some of the new ways of the host culture (and reject others) and adapt to the reality of a different social and legal context. It can be argued that immigration is full of challenges and opportunities for immigrants and makes their needs very unique compared to their non-migrant counterparts (Pillai, 2001; Simon-Kumar, Kurian, Young-Silcock, & Narasimhan, 2017).

In the subsequent pages, I provide a description of the present thesis, including appropriate terminology, the theoretical background, and the cultural background with regard to domestic violence in an Iranian/Middle Eastern context.

## **Terminology**

The terms intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence, and domestic abuse will be used interchangeably and describe physical, psychological and sexual harm caused by a current or former spouse or intimate partner, as well as controlling

behaviours and tactics in the context of domestic violence (Jiao, Sun, Farmer, & Lin, 2016).

The term ‘abuser’ will be used to describe a person who uses a range of coercive behaviours, such as physical violence, sexual assault and intimidation in a relationship. This pattern of controlling behaviours are not always limited to physical violence but can also be economic, psychological and sexual.

Regarding participants, the terms ‘witness’ and ‘exposure’ refer to participants observing and/or hearing incidents of domestic violence in their lifetimes. The term ‘experience’ is described as being directly involved as a perpetrator or a victim of domestic violence or being present in an environment affected by domestic violence.

## **Domestic violence in the Middle East**

A main group of Asian immigrants are Middle Easterners and a subgroup of them are Iranians however there is limited information available about intimate partner violence in the Middle East and North Africa and their immigrant communities living overseas (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). IPV is being gradually acknowledged as an issue in many Middle Eastern and North African countries. Even though there have been a number studies on specific types of gender linked violence such as honour killing (Chesler, 2009) and female genital mutilation in these regions, there is little research done on domestic violence in particular (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). A report from the World Health Organization on violence and health only referenced three studies conducted in the Eastern Mediterranean territory. These indicated that approximately 16% to 52% of married women had reported being assaulted by their spouses in the past 12 months, as compared to 1.3% to 12% of their counterparts in North America and Europe (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Other studies have investigated the prevalence of domestic violence and attitudes surrounding domestic abuse in the Middle East. One article had discussed several such studies and although it lacked a systematic review of the

literature, it argued that Koranic verses are taken out of context and used to justify gender linked violence (Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker, & Ghachem, 2003).

Twelve studies on IPV in eight countries which were conducted between 1992 and 2002 (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008) indicated that its prevalence ranges from 8% in northern Israel (telephone survey of women) (Fisher, Yassour-Borochowitz, & Neter, 2003) to 65% in Turkey (face to face interview of pregnant women) (Sahin & Sahin, 2003). Seven of these studies found prevalence rates of more than 20% with regards to domestic violence (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). A rare nationally representative health survey from Egypt showed that approximately one out of three (34%) married women between the ages of 15 to 49 had been physically abused by their husbands since their marriage (El-Zanaty, Hussein, Shawkey, Way, & Kishor, 1996).

Six of the 12 studies on the 12 month prevalence of abuse showed (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008) that the rate varies from 6% in general Israeli population of women (Eisikovits, Winstok, & Fishman, 2004) to 52% in the Palestinian women living in Gaza and the West Bank (Haj-Yahia, 1996). Nationally collected data from Egypt indicated that around one in eight women in the childbearing age had been physically abused in the past year. Battered women were also asked a question regarding the frequency of the beatings in the past 12 months, 45% were physically abused in the past 12 months, and 17% reported being abused at least three or more times in the year (El-Zanaty et al., 1996). There are shared characteristics among Middle Eastern women who have experienced IPV. According to studies in Syria and Egypt rural women were more likely to experience abuse (El-Zanaty et al., 1996; Maziak & Asfar, 2003). Economic dependency is also prevalent in the victims (Yamawaki et al., 2012). Unemployed Egyptian women were two times more likely to be physically abused compared to those who were employed (El-Zanaty et al., 1996). Data on the significance of victims' age was inconsistent. A study on low income women in Syria showed that younger women were more at risk of being beaten (Maziak & Asfar, 2003) but nationally representative research from Egypt indicated that there are no major differences in different age groups (El-Zanaty et al., 1996).



## **Effects of domestic violence on Middle Eastern Women**

Some of the detrimental psychological and physical effects of IPV have been captured in researching Palestinian, Saudi, Israeli, Egyptian and Iranian women (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). Higher rates of psychological distress, fear and anger were found in abused Palestinian women compared to those who were not abused (Haj-Yahia, 1996). 18% of Egyptian women who were physically abused at least once since their first marriage said that they were injured and 10% said that they required medical attention due to abuse (El-Zanaty et al., 1996). The negative effects of domestic violence on the reproductive health of women have been explored to some degree in the Middle East and North Africa. Egypt Demographic and Health Survey in 1995 indicated that battered women were more likely to undergo abortion, unwanted or ill-timed pregnancies and require antenatal care in future compared to women who did not experience abuse (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Nojumi and Akrami (2002) collected data from 406 Iranian women in labour and their results showed that constant exposure to physical violence from their spouses has led to lengthier hospitalisation as a result of kidney infection, an increase in unplanned pregnancies and premature births and experiencing nausea compared to their non-battered counterparts. An overview of the literature clearly highlights the harmful effects of domestic violence on pregnant women. These effects on victims vary from giving birth to underweight infants, to lacking empathy toward their newborns (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). One study showed that the intensity of verbal and physical abuse was higher if the husband disapproved of his wife's pregnancy (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). They all underline the importance of educating men on the dangers of domestic violence.

Domestic violence can also have other life threatening outcomes as well. A study by Amirmoradi, Meamari, Remim, Mehran, and Khosravi (2005) showed that having marital issues and domestic violence victimisation were the major reasons for women attempting to self-immolate. Another study found that psychological abuse was strongly associated with developing suicidal ideation and harming the spouse. Fathi (2003) found that the majority of runaway girls were brought up in families

affected by domestic violence, physical, sexual, and psychological in particular. Kamranifakor (2006) also showed that the main reason behind children running away from their homes was either being abused (psychological or physical) or feeling extremely distressed from marital conflict. Another well-established effects of domestic abuse is Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A review on the effects of family mistreatment and PTSD, using several data bases in Iran found that somewhere between 25 to 35% of women with histories of domestic violence also had PTSD (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011).

## **Domestic violence in Iran**

A literature review of domestic violence in Iran highlights the multidimensionality of it (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). One study examined different types of domestic violence; verbal-psychological, sexual and physical in particular. The results showed that verbal-psychological violence was the most frequent type followed by physical, economic and sexual violence. The authors concluded that the concept of domestic violence as being mainly physical is changing to more psychological which they attributed to the sociocultural changes (e.g. a young population and access to technology) in Iran (Mehdizadeh, Zamani, Farajzadegan, & Malekafzale, 2004). Even though these findings were fairly interesting, the types of violence in each category were not specified, and it was not clear what kind of physical (e.g. beating, pushing, and kicking) and psychological (e.g. swearing and ignoring) violence occurred (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). Another issue was that the verbal-psychological group was categorized as a type of violence, despite the fact that verbal abuse is considered a subtype of psychological abuse. Another study conducted on 386 victims of domestic violence indicated that the rates of physical, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse carried out against them were 95.3%, 100%, 81.6%, and 95.3% subsequently (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). It was also found that factors, such as violent victimisation, familial problems, having a patriarchal family, acceptance of violent acts, and different reaction types toward spouse's violence, were significantly associated with the act of wife beating. A different study by Kazemian, Razaghi, Toufani, and Nemati (2005) found that physical and psychological violence and

sexual abuse were perpetrated against 93%, 88% and 8% of the victims of domestic violence, respectively. It was also revealed that the most victims happened to be housewives with husbands suffering from alcoholism and drug addictions.

A cross sectional study on the prevalence on IPV among women visiting public health services in Marivan County in Iran showed that the majority of women had experienced psychological abuse (79.7%), followed by physical abuse (60%) and sexual abuse (32.9%) (Nouri et al., 2012). Another study conducted on married women between the ages of 16 to 80 years old in Jahrom, South of Iran showed that the prevalence of physical, sexual and emotional violence in intimate relationships were 16.4%, 18.6% and 44.4% respectively (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015). A number of studies conducted in Iran indicate that the prevalence of physical, psychological and sexual domestic violence is high and violence perpetrated against women by their intimate partners is a common occurrence in Iran (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015; Rasoulilian et al., 2014; Vameghi, Feizzadeh, Mirabzadeh, & Feizzadeh, 2010) Level of education and drug dependency were among the most important risk factors for violence (Nouri et al., 2012).

The Iranian legal system is discriminatory toward women (Ghaderi, 2014). Women require their fathers' consent for marriage and the law allows men to have more than one wife (Schneider, 2016). The custody laws heavily favour the fathers (Ebrahimi, 2005). There is also discrimination in divorce laws which were often made to convince women to remain in their marriage. It is significantly easier for men to apply for divorce than women (Shivolo, 2010). The current laws against domestic violence are inadequate (e.g. they dismiss psychological abuse due to lack of evidence and are not even fully implemented. Many women in Iran avoid reporting their abusers due to fear for their future and safety (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015; Vameghi et al., 2010; Ghaderi, 2014).

## **Attitudes and perceptions of Middle Easterners**

The attitudes and beliefs of Middle Eastern and North African men and women regarding domestic violence can be concerning. Research is showing that people in

this region justify domestic abuse and women are conditioned to believe that they are partly responsible for the abuse they encounter (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Hajjar, 2004). A range of scenarios were used in different studies to assess the justification for violence in response to the violation of norms by women. It is not exactly viable to compare all these justifications for wife beating across these studies due to using different methods and scenarios (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Some were deemed as less significant, such as issues with cooking, to suspecting a wife's moral qualities.

Women's infidelity produced the highest degree (69% to 73%) of justification for abuse in Israeli Arab women in two small-scale studies (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Concerns surrounding infidelity have been considered as a form of control and jealousy, and a risk for both a violent episode and causing injuries or even homicide (Bonomi, Trabert, Anderson, Kernic, & Holt, 2014; Nemeth, Bonomi, Lee, & Ludwin, 2012).

Two studies on married Turkish women and Southern Iraqi women showed that respectively, 12% and 54% of participants believed disobeying the husband justifies physical abuse (Amowitz, Kim, Reis, Asher, & Iacopino, 2004; Hortacsu, Kalaycioglu, & Rittersberger-Tilic, 2003).

One in three Palestinian women residing in Jordanian refugee camps, three out of five Palestinian women in Israeli territories and one in seven Turkish women believed that pestering or insulting the husband creates legitimate ground for physical abuse. (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Other common justifications were shaming the family, child neglect and kitchen related problems (e.g. burning the food) (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Results from nationally representative surveys from Jordan and Egypt which collected data regarding attitudes toward partner abuse showed that the real degree of tolerance for such behaviour may be even higher than those previously referenced studies (El-Zanaty et al., 1996; Government of Jordan & ORC Macro, 2003). 87% of Jordanian women participants in the age of childbearing agreed with at least one justification of physical violence. 83% of participants believed that betrayal granted the husband the right to be violent against his wife. 60% of responders also agreed that the husband is in the right to beat his wife if she burns a meal, and slightly

more than 50% agreed the same if the woman was noncompliant with her husband. Interestingly only a few saw woman's violation of religious codes, discourtesy toward the husband's family and arguing with him as valid justifications for wife beating. 86% of ever-married Egyptian women believed that sometimes physical abuse against them was warranted. Rejection of sexual intercourse happened to be the highest mentioned reason. There was little variation in age; although the youngest group (15-19 years old) and rural women were somewhat more likely to accept such behaviour. Level of education had the most variation than any other characteristic. Approximately illiterate women were twice as likely to condone abuse if the wife talks back as those who had a secondary or higher education. Parents' misconception on the position of Islam on women's education, and their place in the community can prevent them from seeking education (Csapo, 1981).

Turkish Demographic and Health Survey also assessed attitudes on IPV and despite the fact that the levels of condoning were still high, the results showed that a smaller number of married Turkish women agreed with such acts (Hacettepe University, 1999). Overall, 40% of Turkish women who had been married at least once in their lifetime agreed with at least one justification for wife abuse (highest 36%, being arguing with the husband and burning the meal the lowest, 8%). The first Israeli national domestic violence survey (Eisikovits et al., 2004) did not show the number of women in general public who agree with at least one justification for violence. Although, infidelity was seen as a valid reason for the use of violence in 18% of women. This is substantially lower than the numbers reported in the previous studies on Arab Israeli women. 49% of the responders believed that the perpetrator does not bear full responsibility for violence committed against his wife, and 30% of them considered such acts as a private matter in the family. Furthermore, 56% of these women had experienced at least one type of controlling behaviour by their spouse (e.g. restricting her interactions with other men) and 31% experienced medium or heavy types of control. These results show that although the responders had a low agreement with the direct use of violence but were more condoning of implicit forms of violence than previously thought.

### **Men's attitudes on domestic violence**

Not many studies have explored men's attitudes on IPV in this region of the world but almost all report that a high number of men believe that wife beating is acceptable in certain circumstances (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). 60% of Palestinian married refugee men in Jordan believed that wife battering was sometimes warranted and those under 30 years old were more likely to accept at least one justification for wife beating (Khawaja, 2004). Lower but nonetheless significant degree of agreement was shown in other hypothesised situations such as child neglect (29%), rejection of sexual intercourse (28%), and disgracing the family (23%). The percentage of Palestinian married men who endorsed wife beating ranged from 17% in the event of kitchen related problems (in Jordan) to 71% in the case of unfaithfulness (in Israel) (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Examining two small-scale studies in Southern Iraq and Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan that almost 50% of men perceived wife beating a valid response to disobeying the husband (Amowitz et al., 2004; Khawaja, 2004). The Israeli national domestic violence survey also gathered data from every fifth male spouse of the respondents (Eisikovits et al., 2004). Three out of 10 men believed that violence against a woman was justified if she was being violent toward him, 25% condoned wife beating if she was being violent with the children, and 23% would consider infidelity as a valid reason for wife beating. Overall men were more likely to legitimise domestic violence if the woman was violent herself or unfaithful toward them. One of the only nationally representative studies on men's attitudes on domestic violence is available for Turkish husbands (Hacettepe University, 1999). Similar to the Israeli survey, the number of Turkish married men who justified wife abuse was lower than those described in the past studies. This also may reflect the situation of Turkish wives compared to their other Middle Eastern counterparts. 41% of Turkish husbands condoned at least one reasoning for physical violence. 36% agreed that wife beating was warranted if the wife argued with him or interacted with other men. Less than one in four respondents mentioned other reasons for wife beating, lowest being if the wife burnt the meal (5%).

It is important to mention that there is a scarcity of research on male victims' views of domestic violence compared to women (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013; Gadd, Farrall, Dallimore, & Lombard, 2003). Men are less likely to report IPV against them than women, due to shame and inadequacy of current support services (Drijber et al., 2013; Gadd et al., 2003; Muller, Desmarais, & Hamel, 2009).

It has been suggested that self-defense is rarely the main reason for women's use of physical aggression, and women's aggression may have similar causes as men's, such as being frustrated, retaliation and to intimidate or control. They are also just as likely as men if not more often to start physical violence (Muller et al., 2009). Muelleman and Burgess (1998) have a different view on male victims of IPV. They indicated that male victims were more likely to have a history of committing domestic violence themselves. It was argued that the injuries caused by women were only in self-defense and injury by a female partner was a useful indicator for identifying possible abusers. Others have indicated that although men can certainly be victims of domestic violence however women and children have a higher chance of victimisation (García-Moreno et al., 2013).

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature review

#### **Gender inequality and violence against women**

In 2015, 194 member states of the United Nations general assembly agreed upon a set of 17 goals to abolish poverty, save the planet, and guarantee prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development program (Madeley, 2015). Each goal includes certain targets to be achieved by 2030. One of the goals relevant to my thesis is Goal five - achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. There is general consensus that all of the sustainable development goals will be hindered if gender equality is not prioritised (Madeley, 2015). Evidence from sources such as Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and UN women indicate that investments in women and girls have positive social and economic effects on national development (Madeley, 2015). Under this program, one of the targets of gender equality is eliminating all types of violence against women and girls in the public and private environments (Madeley, 2015) with domestic violence one of the most serious types of violence against women (Martin, Langley, & Millichamp, 2006).

It is only recently that conditions for women are improving in most nations but certainly not all. In Southern Asia, for every 100 boys only 74 girls were attending school in 1990. These numbers were equal for boys and girls in 2012 (Madeley, 2015). Approximately one third of seats in national parliaments in 46 countries are held by women (Madeley, 2015). Recently, governments have begun passing legislations to counter violence against women. The Middle East and North Africa had the poorest degree of legal protection for violence against women in 2012, also having the lowest improvement from 2009 (OECD Development Centre, 2013). Sub-Saharan Africa was in the same position but has shown more significant improvement (by introducing new laws addressing violence against women)



compared to the Middle East and North Africa. East Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean regions have shown the most substantial improvement from 2009 to 2012 (OECD Development Centre, 2013). These improvements were measured using Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) which scored countries based on introduction and successful implementation of violence against women laws. Reforming and introducing new laws on violence against women including domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment in countries such as Viet Nam, Fiji, China, Cambodia, Argentina and Jamaica has contributed to this improvement (OECD Development Centre, 2013).

Violence against women is acknowledged as an important social problem, requiring thorough investigations, such as cross cultural studies and research on its impacts (Pillai, 2001). IPV affects men and women from a variety of ages, cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status (Antunes-Alves & Stefano, 2014) however women and children are more likely to be victimised (García-Moreno et al., 2013). The negative effects of IPV can include many aspects of an individual's life such as physical, psychological and reproductive health (Antunes-Alves & Stefano, 2014; Fanslow, Robinson, Crengle, & Perese, 2010; Fanslow & Robinson, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Shah et al., 2012). It has also been shown to be an important risk factor for psychological distress and increase the risks of psychological distress, posttraumatic stress disorder, addiction, and suicidal behaviours (Antunes-Alves & Stefano, 2014; Johnson, 2006; Kazantzis, Flett, Long, MacDonald, & Millar, 2000). In addition to these there is evidence that children victimised by domestic violence develop vulnerabilities to a range of psychological disorders (some even consider non-physical abuse just as disturbing as physical abuse) and that domestic abuse hinders the victims' parental capacities (Antunes-Alves & Stefano, 2014; Martin et al., 2006; Zhu & Dalal, 2010). A number of studies show that physical, mental and sexual abuse over a long period could lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, suicidal behaviour, social isolation, financial problems, substance abuse, and fear which are more experienced by abused women than non-abused women (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004; Fanslow et al., 2010; Saidi & Siddegowda, 2013; García-Moreno et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2007). Women who have been subjected to sexual or physical abuse

by their partners are two times more likely to undergo an abortion, twice as likely to have depression (Antunes-Alves & Stefano, 2014; García-Moreno et al., 2013), and 1.5 times more likely to contract HIV, compared to women without the experience of domestic violence (García-Moreno et al., 2013).

A number of personal and situational factors have been found to be important contributors to domestic violence, for example psychological disorders, marriage quality and poverty or lack of resources (Bonomi, Trabert, Anderson, Kernic, & Holt, 2014; Murshid, 2017; Nilan et al., 2014). Although many individuals are affected by domestic violence some groups such as indigenous people and migrants are of higher-risk due to a variety of reasons including socioeconomic hardship, higher exposure to violence in childhood, colonialism, family structure, and culture (Marie et al., 2008; Simon-Kumar et al., 2017). From a public health point of view, identification of these groups within a population is highly beneficial, as it underlines those who may need more rigorous and continued resources for prevention and intervention. For instance many studies indicate that indigenous (e.g. Māori) and ethnic minorities experience domestic violence in disproportionately higher rates compared with non-indigenous and ethnic majority groups (Fanslow et al., 2010; Marie, Fergusson, & Boden, 2008; Pillai, 2001). Indigenous and ethnic minority groups require culturally competent and appropriate services that are able to meet their cultural needs (Crichton-Hill & others, 2010). Many mainstream services are unable to provide culturally competent support to ethnic and migrant women (Kulwicki, Aswad, Carmona, & Ballout, 2010; Pillai, 2001; Simon-Kumar et al., 2017).

## **Attitudes toward domestic violence**

While there is general consensus that eliminating IPV is in the public's best interest there is less agreement about how to best achieve this objective (Antunes-Alves & Stefano, 2014). A number of studies have shown that exploring men's and women's attitudes and perceptions of domestic violence can expand our knowledge of a variety of issues that are closely related to violence in a household (Fanslow et al., 2010; Halket, Gormley, Mello, Rosenthal, & Mirkin, 2014; Nilan et al., 2014; Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsipher, Harlos, & Swindler, 2012).

These attitudes can be used to highlight broader societal views about domestic violence. For example cross-national studies regarding attitudes to violence have indicated that in many countries, women hold condoning views toward violence, with women from developing countries more likely to be supportive of those views (Fanslow et al., 2010). Furthermore, Flood and Pease (2009) argue that beliefs that legitimise men's violence toward intimate partners stem from the concept that men should be dominant and assertive in intimate relationships and households (Towns & Scott, 2013) and can even assert their dominance through physical force and are deemed as having uncontrollable sexual desires. There is evidence that men use physical force or threats against women or the children in order to coerce the victim to comply with their demands (Johnson, 2006; Kuennen, 2007). Men learn to be the dominant personality within a relationship through sociocultural values and religious teachings (Flood & Pease, 2009; Ilkkaracan, 2002).

Women on the other hand are seen as spiteful and deceiving. Flood and Pease (2009) indicated that gender orientations and wider societal gender norms influence men's and women's conflicting perceptions on violence and gender stereotypes. For example men with traditional gender-role attitudes are more likely to condone violence against women than men with egalitarian gender attitudes. In some contexts, marriage is seen as conferring on men a virtually unlimited right to have sex with their wives, and for women, a duty to submit to their husband's sexual demands (Flood & Pease, 2009). This also suggests that women's protest of such demands, could result in physical violence or justifying violence against the wife (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Historically, gendered proprietary and male dominance in society have led to exploitation and abuse of women in marriage. For example in the past, women were seen as their husband's property under British law and currently Middle Eastern women's inferior legal status exacerbates their exploitation in marriage (Nazir, 2005; Towns & Scott, 2013). Towns and Adams (2016) indicate that language is used in order to suppress any discourse of violence. For instance the technique of neutralisation (e.g. rejecting any responsibility or mitigating the injury inflicted on the victim or victim-blaming) is used by batterers in order to shift the blame.

In addition to understanding the women's attitudes on gender and violence in a variety of countries, these same attitudes can also be examined within different ethnic groups in a country like New Zealand. Exploring women's perception on gender roles, body autonomy, and legitimacy of using violence and views on outside intervention in family disputes can provide valuable information on different cultural approaches toward the acceptability of violence and gender norms, which could improve prevention and intervention strategies (Fanslow et al., 2010). For instance research has shown that the efficacy of bystander (the belief that intervention will be successful) and egalitarian gender views are strong predictors of an individual's intervention in a domestic dispute (an active bystander) (McCauley et al., 2013; Pradipto, Prayoga, & Pea, 2016).

Investigating men and women's attitudes on domestic violence can improve our understanding of less 'obvious' forms of abuse such as psychological and verbal abuse. O'Leary (1999) indicated that psychological aggression was measurable but also acknowledged that the high prevalence of psychological aggression, even in secure marriages had made reaching an agreement on what counted as mental abuse in a legal or mental health context, very difficult. Follingstad (2007) was sceptical toward the current approaches to psychological abuse. She argued for a more holistic and contextual approach that considered the victim's and perpetrator's perceptions. She further emphasised that the subjectivity of psychological abuse has prevented it from being properly defined and validated.

Although women's perspectives on violence have little to no effect on their likelihood of violent victimisation, their views can affect the intensity of internalised self-blaming after an assault, their tendency to report incidents to authorities, and the probability of experiencing detrimental long term psychological problems (Fanslow et al., 2010). Therefore, even though women's perceptions on violence and gender norms are unlikely to be significant with regards to their initial experiences of violence, their views on the normalised essence of this behaviour can affect their support-seeking behaviour and the level to which they strive to remove themselves from violent circumstances (Fanslow et al., 2010).

One study in Iran found a positive relationship between domestic abuse and the degree of religious commitment in both women and their partners and educational level of women (Nouri et al., 2012). Most studies in this area that are conducted in Iran are correlational and quantitative studies. Although correlational studies are valuable regarding the relationship between different factors, they do not provide evidence on the causation of domestic violence. With regards to categorisation of violence types, there are some forms that are culture specific and might not overlap with other cultures. Pournaghash-Tehrani (2011) had noticed that some of the items (on experiences of domestic abuse) in these forms were completely unfamiliar to Iranian victims of domestic violence. They had not necessarily heard of these items (e.g. being threatened by a gun or being sat on) that were mainly derived from a Western perspective. This highlights the importance of comprehending domestic violence from the cultural lens of the people involved. There are types of violence that are very rare or may not even exist in certain cultural contexts.

Nearly all Iranian studies included predetermined types of violence (physical, psychological, verbal etc.) derived mainly from Western studies and presented to respondents without taking into account the compatibility of these categories with Iranian culture (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). What seems to be missing here is a “bottom-up” approach and qualitative studies to explore people’s experiences, perceptions and understandings of domestic violence, and allow them to express themselves, followed by an in depth content analysis. The majority of studies also did not investigate the attitudes of men or immigrant men. Dehghanfard and Azamzadeh (2007) studied 200 married women in Tehran who had experienced domestic violence. Their findings showed a significant relationship between the social acceptability of gender linked violence and the women’s access to resources for support. An unpublished study by Pournaghash-Tehrani (2010) showed that the more repulsive domestic violence was perceived by the husbands, the more understanding and empathetic they were in their marital relationships. They were also less likely to act in an emotionally negative way such as retaliation or ignoring their partner. Domestic violence was discussed in a qualitative study on Iranian immigrant women’s health in Sweden (Sharareh, Carina, & Sarah, 2007). Two of the

participants were victims of domestic violence and one of them mentioned that it had scarred her physically and psychologically. Four of the interviewees had divorced their husbands. Some believed that migration had an impact on their decision. It had changed their views on life and values. Swedish laws were also believed to be more protective of women's rights than Iran (Sharareh et al., 2007). Finally most articles do not propose a firm plan for the kind of direction that this line of research should follow in Iran (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). This is important because many governmental organisations whose area of expertise is in social planning can rely on this research to make policies.

It is clear that understanding attitudes, perceptions and values about domestic violence is extremely important. It is also established that different groups may hold different values and beliefs regarding this social issue. Immigrants in particular, although not necessarily homogenous but have unique beliefs and needs compared to their native counterparts.

## **Immigration and domestic violence**

Millions of people migrate worldwide. According to The United Nations Population Division at least two percent of the world's population are immigrants (Erez, 2002). Also, the growing globalisation and intertwining of the world's economies will increase the rate of migration in every major region of the world that will continue into this century. At least half of all migrants are women and in some cases they constitute the vast majority of migrants (Erez, 2002). Kuo (2014) indicates the coping mechanisms of migrants are influenced by their ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds, views and resources. Although immigrants are significantly shaped by their sociocultural backgrounds and their country of origin however it is also important to consider the possibility that immigrants may not be a full representative of their national group but a select group of people with distinct characteristics (Williams et al., 2014). For example migrants are more likely to be educated than their non-migrant fellows (Gorinas & Pytliková, 2017; Hofmann & Buckley, 2013; Williams et al., 2014). Education can give migrants social capital and facilitate a smoother process of migration (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013). Migration is not one directional.

Even though migrants are affected by the host population they too can influence their host country by introducing their own culture and interacting (e.g. doing business or marriage) with the host society (Portes, Guarnizo, & Haller, 2002).

A couple of studies have indicated that migrants who are more linguistically alike to the host population, are more likely to have similar cultural practices, favour interaction with their hosts and are less anxious about their adjustment (Gorinas & Pytliková, 2017; Tabor & Milfont, 2011). Religious participation has been known to help migrants by providing social support (Massey & Higgins, 2011) but differences between the host population's religion and the migrants' could cause tensions between the two groups (Foner & Alba, 2008). Also religious behaviours may decrease in the short term because migration is a time consuming process and migrants have to dedicate more time to adjustment and finding work (Massey & Higgins, 2011).

According to the 2013 census population, 12% of New Zealanders identify with at least one Asian ethnicity, 7% identify as Pacific and 1% identify as Middle Easterner, African or Latin American. The latter group has shown the highest growth in population (35%) since 2006 (New Zealand & Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Migration has been a gradual and constant process in New Zealand. Around 72,000 non-New Zealander migrants arrived in the year ending May 2016 (Statistics New Zealand, 2016). Ward and Masgoret (2008) investigated New Zealanders' perceptions on migration. Their results indicated that overall New Zealanders had positive view on multiculturalism, as well as migrants. This positive view could be attributed to New Zealand's diversity. Approximately 1 in 5 New Zealanders are born overseas, the government promotes diversity policies and the country itself is more linguistically and ethnically diverse than European societies (Ward & Masgoret, 2008).

Migration can intensify women's vulnerability to domestic violence (Erez, 2002; Gonçalves & Matos, 2016; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Pillai, 2001). Violence against women or gender linked violence has been acknowledged as a distinctive risk for migrant or refugee women (Erez, 2002; Gonçalves & Matos, 2016; Pillai, 2001).

Women may be more dependent on their spouses, intimate partners, sponsors, close or extended family, and their own ethnic/religious groups. This dependency and some migrants' cultural norms could increase their risk of victimisation (Erez, 2002; Pillai). Present day research in the US indicates that violence against women is one of the most frequently occurred incidents experienced by migrants and that migration is more correlated with victimisation rather than crime (Erez, 2002; Kapur, Zajicek, & Gaber, 2017).

Domestic violence is still considered a norm and an acceptable behaviour in many Asian (including Middle Eastern) countries and communities (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Flood & Pease, 2009). These norms can be passed via economic, individual and specifically social learning mechanisms. Intergenerational transmission of domestic violence is well documented. Children who have been exposed to interparental violence may perceive it as 'normal' and perpetrate IPV against their partners later in life (Deitch-Stackhouse, Kenneavy, Thayer, Berkowitz, & Mascari, 2015; Martin, Langley, & Millichamp, 2006; Stith, Rosen, Middleton, Busch, & al, 2000; Zhu & Dalal, 2010).

Only recently has the Jordanian Parliament repealed a law that allowed rapists to escape criminal prosecution by marrying their victims. Despite some progress over the years such as, public awareness and campaigns, anti-domestic violence rhetoric and law changes (Asia News Monitor, 2017) violence against women remains a justifiable form of dominance and power that is at times even ignored by the law. Under Islamic law, women are deprived from the right to protest abuse, meanwhile men are allowed to punish their wives using broad legal or religious interpretations (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). It highlights a popular perception that men can claim ownership of women due to their lower status in family and society, which in turn may lead to sexual and physical abuse without authorities' intervention. These actions are vindicated and sanctioned by cultural and religious beliefs that encourage modesty and obedience for women and justify violence against those breaking those 'values'. Immigrants and refugees could bring in these values and beliefs (mentioned above) from their country of origin to the host country. Some may attempt to cling to



their ethnic identity, refuse to assimilate and build their own communities (Pillai, 2001). John Berry's acculturation theory explains that ethnic minorities acculturate in different ways. They may integrate (interacting with the mainstream culture while preserving some aspects of their own culture) or assimilate (abandoning their own culture and adapting the host society's). Some groups especially those who are relocated against their will (e.g. refugees) are more likely to separate themselves from the host population (Ward, 2008).

This has significant consequences on the social dynamic of migrant women's cultural and gender identity and has effects on their experiences of domestic violence. The Asian (East, Southeast, and South Asian) and Middle Eastern communities value the unity of their nuclear families. They may conceal or understate the severity of domestic violence and the need for urgent protective actions as a result of concentration of power in the head of the household (the husband) and fear (Pillai, 2001). For example divorce is perceived as disobeying God in Muslim communities or many abused Muslim women do not seek divorce due to fear of losing their children's custody (Islamic law grants men the custody rights) (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Domestic violence is a phenomenon which is rarely discussed because these Asian and Middle Eastern communities either deny its existence or consider it a private matter. Labelling domestic violence a private matter is not limited to migrant communities. Some New Zealand men have also justified the use of violence as a private matter (Towns & Adams, 2016) and resolution is sought within the immediate or extended family (Erez, 2002). It also may not be recognised as abuse and is seen as a typical part of a married woman's life. It falls to women to effectively or sufficiently control their family roles. It is widely believed that women will avoid violence if they fulfil their responsibilities as supportive and obedient mothers (e.g. the good wife), wives and daughters in law. Women who experience difficulties with their relationships are not only held responsible but even blamed for creating them. These attitudes may in fact dissuade migrant and refugee women from reporting violence against them (Erez, 2002). Marriage is a cultural construct with culturally and socially constructed roles and obligations that are genderised. When women do not live according to these genderised and cultural constructed guidelines, the cultural

retort by men can be violence (not always). The dominant narrative of holding marriage and family unit as sacred entities and the seclusion of these women in their host country reinforces the silence surrounding domestic violence prevalent in Asian immigrant and refugee communities (Pillai, 2001).

Immigrants in general and abused migrant women in particular are less willing to report crimes and collaborate with authorities due to complex legal, cultural and social elements (Bui& Morash, 1999; Erez, 2002; Pillai, 2001). Battered migrant women are extremely reluctant to report their abusers to authorities, religious and community leaders and anyone outside of the family because it brings shame upon themselves and their family members. The image of a “good wife” is in sharp contrast with the concept of the “shameless wife”, one who ignores her expected normative duties, and discloses the violence or leaves the abuser (Erez, 2002). A woman who dares violating cultural and gender norms can be disowned by her family and retaliated against by their community. It has been suggested that gender nonconformity could lead to similar negative effects in different contexts. For example Iranian lesbian, bisexual and homosexuals were more likely to be socially excluded by their peers, parents and even by teachers (Nematy, Fattahi, Khosravi, & Khodabakhsh, 2014). Although there are many benefits to having an extended family, in these situations, it works in a paradoxical manner with regards to the needs of the victim. Fears of being rejected by her family or shunned by her community are some of the challengers for reporting perpetrators of violence to the authorities. Divorced women are judged more harshly than divorced men by the community and are often blamed for destroying their marriage (Erez, 2002). The divorced woman’s whole family, including her siblings could also be stigmatised by association which reduces their social desirability in the eyes of the community. For example Indian migrant women were worried that exposing the abuser or divorcing their abusive husbands could ‘taint’ their families and prevent their siblings from finding a suitable match for marriage (Pillai, 2001).

Efforts to bring light to gender linked violence in migrant communities are often met with resistance from community leaders who see these attempts as

imposing “Western agendas and standards”, and even insist that their communities and traditions do not suffer from such issues which are more inherent in “Western culture” (Erez, 2002; Pillai, 2001). Religious leaders of migrant communities may also be dismissive of this problem. They argue that women who reveal domestic violence only represent a defiant and deviant minority, and abuse is very rare among their members (Erez, 2002). Religious beliefs and institutions generally embrace traditional responses to domestic violence (e.g. intervention by community leaders or family elders who may encourage women to stay married) and act as barriers to contacting law enforcements (Erez & King, 2000). Not all religious beliefs condone violence against women. For example Baha’i texts embrace gender equality between men and women as a necessity for achieving unity (Maloney, 2006). They also reject the notion of women’s inferiority to men (Gervais, 2004; Zabihi-Moghaddam, 2017).

Women who have succeeded in overcoming these cultural and religious barriers are still hesitant to request support from the authorities. They might have been subjected to ill treatment from authorities in their home country or they may have had unpleasant experiences or anticipate such experiences from their host country’s legal sector (Erez, 2002; Sulak, Saxon, & Fearon, 2014). They may also have valid concerns about receiving discriminatory treatment based on their ethnicity, gender and immigrant status (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). A language barrier may be an additional hurdle to reporting violence against them (Erez, 2002). Some migrant abused women are concerned that informing the justice system could mean deportation of their batterers, which they believe equates losing their dependent immigration status (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Pillai, 2001). For example many immigrants are unaware of the new laws that offer abused women a path to obtaining an independent permanent status (Sullivan & Cosentino, 2007). Nevertheless deportation and legal immigration status are widely used by abusers to silence their dependent partners (regardless of their spouse’s status) and coerce them to stay in abusive relationships (Gonçalves & Matos, 2016). Perpetrators often frighten victims of domestic violence by threatening to have them deported by contacting immigration officials if the victim tries to report them to authorities. Even for migrant women with a legal immigration status, the threat of deportation is strong enough to persuade them

into staying with their abusers (Erez, 2002). Overall, mistrust of the justice system, incorrect knowledge of immigration laws and manipulation by abusers combined, force migrant women to remain in abusive relationships.

## **Cultural and gender norms**

It is clear that experiences of immigrants can be quite difficult. Migrant women bring with them their cultural and traditional beliefs and their experiences with the legal system in their home country but they also begin to assimilate and incorporate New Zealand culture and norms due to relocation and adaption to the new society (Pillai, 2001). Therefore, they and their families may feel distressed regarding resettlement and alteration in their social statuses and gender roles. These changes can lead to conflict (Pillai, 2001). These stress factors and unemployment can cause frustration in Asian immigrant families (Gonçalves & Matos, 2016). Men are usually seen as the ‘breadwinners’ (Mahler & Pessar, 2006) and an inability to adequately provide impacts their sense of authority so they react by releasing their anger on their wives and children. The cultural and religious norms condone abuse by either implicitly or explicitly minimising it. (Pillai, 2001).

It has been argued that one of the most fundamental aspects of many cultures, and at the core of most social identities, are perceptions of the “virtuous” women and repercussions regarding accepted behaviour of women (Okin, 1998). A significant part of these perceptions are expectations of women in the form of rigid gender roles as wives and mothers. Violence has been used to enforce these behavioural expectations, especially in the privacy of the household (Erez, 2002). Migrants often hold communal or familial beliefs that are deeply linked to idealised concepts of purity, honour and gender role responsibilities (Pillai, 2001). Cultural customs, colonialism and historical processes develop the perception of female moral virtue (Erez, 2002). Definitions and boundaries of appropriate behaviour for women are rationalised using society’s principle values: patriotism, religion, morality, hygiene etc. This makes it clear why these groups strive for controlling, legislating and overseeing women’s behaviour. Therefore, resisters to the process of acculturation who champion preserving their cultural identity concentrate on restricting their roles,

behaviour and sexuality (Tichy, Becker, & Sisco, 2009). These practices can become important components of the migrant community's collective identity that distinguishes them from the majority group.

Women are expected to submit to their cultural group's specific etiquette of virtue. This expectation is exacerbated during sudden changes such as immigration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). Ethnic migrant communities often perceive such events as attacks against their collective identity and distinctiveness. Their sense of security and identity is formed by a distinct disparity between two types of cultural contexts; their own and their host country. These two contexts can be perceived as inherently different and unalterable. A study on Iranian migrant couples in Malaysia indicated that Iranian women felt more empowered and found new opportunities in their new social environment. Women's abandonment of their more traditional roles made their husbands stressful and challenged their sense of authority (Salehy, Mahmud, & Amat, 2013). For men who undergo displacement and lose control of their daily lives, as it is common with immigration, controlling women's affairs and sexuality is seen as signs of diligence and continuity of the old ways (Erez, 2002). It reassures migrant communities that some of their cultural practices have survived. Confining women to their rigid gender roles is fundamental to conserving collective identity and honour and considered an endeavour to protect the remainder of immigrants' identity.

In a number of ethnic cultures women are seen as the glue of the community due to their responsibility as cultural carriers (Erez, 2002) who teach and transmit the traditional values, role expectations, beliefs and familial and communal histories to the future generations (Pillai, 2001). Therefore their proper behaviour is strictly monitored and used as ethnic marker in order to highlight the disparities between the members of their own group and the others (Erez, 2002). The orthodox control of women's lives in regards to marriage, sexuality and divorce guarantees that the children born to these women are biologically and culturally within the confines of the group (Erez, 2002). This idea can manifest itself in men by showing a preference for arranged or intra-ethnic marriages (Heger Boyle & Ali, 2010), preventing the risks anticipated in marrying Western women (women of European descent) or those

who have been accustomed to Western beliefs (a set of social norms such as individualism and equality before the law which are associated with Anglosphere societies) (Erez, 2002). Such propensity for control leads to violence against women in order to achieve compliance. This eagerness for a firm control of women's behaviour is one of the reasons that migrants are seen as primitive and in dire need of change by the host country's population (Erez, 2002). The control of women is highly associated with the immigrant group's culture and another sign of their primitiveness. Violence against women in migrant families is more attributed to the culture than an aspect of male supremacy (Erez, 2002). When perpetrators and their victims belong to the same ethnic group the nature of the assault is more attributed to gender than race. Although cross-cultural evidence indicates that stereotyping migrant cultures plays a major role in mediating the judgement of violence by the host country (Erez, 2002). Immigrants are often seen as backward and prone to violence, thus receive different treatments by the judiciary in violence against women incidents. These negative perceptions precipitate immigrants to avoid authorities, or to perceive it as belligerent, indifferent, and even incompetent in providing protection (Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). Battered migrant women in particular are often reluctant to request help from the authorities.

Coming from cultures with extremely rigid gender roles, being expected to be passive and compliant and, with men holding the power of decision making, migrant women become the weakest point of connection between the majority population and their own group (Erez, 2002). With little to no authority but heavy weights on their shoulders, they are very vulnerable and disadvantaged compared to immigrant men. (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). For example, due to displacement, migrant women lose access to their extended family and social support groups (Heger Boyle & Ali, 2010; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Pillai, 2001). Language barriers and lack of employment skills necessary to gaining vital information and economic autonomy also disadvantage them disproportionately (Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Pillai, 2001). They are often dependent or assume that they are, on the husband's immigration application and require his assistance to remain in the country (Erez, 2002). Maternal duties such as child care or fear of losing their custody if they attempt to leave their

spouses, further increase their dependency on their husbands and limit their freedom of movement.

Migrant women also experience the negative consequences of the hardship that their men undergo in their contact with the host society. Further, when abused women ask for help from the justice, social or health systems, they find themselves caught in a crossfire (Erez, 2002). If they reveal their abuser, they risk being viewed as traitors by their communities (Kapur, Zajicek, & Gaber, 2017). If they involve the majority society in the situation, they risk inflaming the xenophobia directed at their own group (both men and women migrant). Migrant women who report their abusers are also perceived by the majority population as women who have forsaken their communities due to their extreme patriarchy and primitiveness. This is seen as a strong evidence for the inferior status of migrants' cultures (Erez, 2002). These women are caught between racialised sexism in their own kin and gendered racism from the majority society. This issue obstructs migrant women from contacting appropriate agencies for help. Abused women who do come out and report their abusers to the authorities, are then pressured to retract their complaints. Contacted authorities are often anxious to intervene in situations that are described as an internal matter by the community leaders (usually male) (Erez, 2002). The victimisation of women may be collectively denied or understated. Observers have indicated that in migrant communities, sexism and jingoism often cooperate to build immense resistance to recognising the intensity of domestic violence. In multicultural societies with different groups of immigrants, immigration status has become weaponised by abusers who use it to threaten and silence their victims (Gonçalves & Matos, 2016; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). Perceptions of migrant women toward immigration legislation and policies influence their response to violence and the way they seek help from the justice system.

A high number of Asian immigrants including Middle Easterners and Iranians have come to New Zealand over the past few decades (New Zealand & Statistics New Zealand, 2014). This highlights the importance of researching the needs and issues of this growing population. The process of immigration is full of hardship for both men

and women but it is more difficult for women in particular (Pillai, 2001). Their experiences in New Zealand are similar to their counterparts in other countries, where moving to a new social context intensifies their gender associated vulnerabilities (Kapur, Zajicek, & Gaber, 2017).

Recently domestic violence in New Zealand's ethnic and migrant communities has been more highlighted but the available information on gender linked violence in New Zealand's migrant families is not completely reliable due to limited data (Simon-Kumar et al., 2017). Available sources indicate that assaults are less likely to occur in ethnic migrant communities (in proportion to their population size) than Maori, Pakeha, or Pacific communities (Simon-Kumar et al., 2017). That being said, migrants and refugees have a lower tendency to report domestic violence than other groups in New Zealand (Boutros, Waldvogel, Stone, & Levine, 2011) which is unsurprising considering the arguments I have made already around threats of deportation and cultural guidelines on family violence.

Changes in migrants' lives can be unexpected and sweeping. As immigrants arrive to their host country and the novelty of the new environment disappears they come to terms with difficult realities. They have to adjust from the familiar environment of their home country to the reality of life in a new country (Pillai, 2001). There is an insufficiency of infrastructure and support systems. At first it is quite difficult to figure out how it all works, where to go for help and different services. As a result of limited English proficiency it is harder to communicate, thus immigrants and refugees face isolation (Heger Boyle & Ali, 2010) English classes and housing are costly and can be difficult to find. Income and employment services may be user unfriendly at times and even humiliating (Pillai, 2001).

In a study by Pillai (2001) the manager of Shakti women's refuge argues that migrants gain residency in New Zealand via a point system but upon their arrival they realise that their qualifications may not be recognised. There is low employment in their area of expertise and they are deemed as overqualified for the available jobs or due to lack of appropriate work experience (although they have unrecognised experience in their own countries). The low basic income in New Zealand deters



migrants with children to start careers comfortably. Many Asian immigrants are from cultures with high value for education and employment. The most success driven individuals take such high risks and migrate to a new country and it can be humiliating to be unemployed or on a low wage job.

The combining effects of these predicaments demonstrates themselves in a decline in their psychological and physical health, leading to depression, gambling and alcoholism and rise in domestic violence (Pillai, 2001). In addition to these problems, poor nutrition and living conditions cause substandard physical health, worsened by a health system which lacks to comprehend their issues. Asian migrant children and women are significantly impacted in particular. Culture has a major effect on domestic violence in an Asian context. It includes traditions, customs and social and religious expectations (and the accepted behaviour) forced upon women.

There are many countries in Asia with a variety of economic, cultural and religious differences. Although they share common links with regards to familial and social structures and there is certainly an important value in discussing domestic violence from the broad Asian perspective, however immigrants are by no means homogenous (Pillai, 2001). There are specific risks and needs for a migrant community with particular sets of beliefs and visions (Kapur, Zajicek, & Gaber, 2017). There is also a high degree of variation in Asian cultures from being very conservative/traditionalist such as Muslim majority Middle Eastern countries) to being progressive/Westernised like Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore (Pillai, 2001). A comparative study of Iranians and Indians regarding domestic violence showed that although most of the violence was sexual, as well as physical among both groups but Iranian women experienced more physical and emotional abuse and their Indian counterparts were more subjected to verbal and economic abuse (Saidi & Siddegowda, 2013). These countries vary with regards to financial freedom and freedom of choice. Migration to New Zealand can cause these cultures to collide, and migrant women may embrace parts of New Zealand culture. That being said the fear of men losing authority over women and the idea of women becoming liberated causes the family and the community to restrict and isolate women from the majority

population (Erez, 2002). In this process religious texts and interpretations are used to maintain control over women. It can be a heavy culture shock for an Asian migrant man to come to terms with gender equality in the Western world. Muslim men use the dictated role of women in the Quran (it advises women to be modest and cover their bodies) and the Islamic law to restrict women (Hajjar, 2004; Pillai, 2001). However Ilkkaracan (2002) argues that Islamic teachings are often misused to suppress women and legitimise abuses of their rights. The author further indicates that customs which disregard women's body autonomy in the Middle East are not extracted from the Islamic teachings on sexuality, but from a mixture of socioeconomic and political contexts. Muslim reformers and feminists have used "exegetical relativism" (e.g. the idea that a Qu'ranic verse may have varied interpretations) to reform beliefs that violate women's rights (Hammer, 2016; Seedat, 2013). However this strategy may be problematic since it can stigmatise Muslims with more conservative values or interpretations of Islamic teachings (Hammer, 2016).

Regardless of the cultural background close and extended families have an important position in many Asian countries (including Middle Eastern) (Pillai, 2001). Women receive all kinds of support from their parents and relatives. Patriarchal familial systems have a strong presence in most Asian societies in which men are seen as dominant and superior and women as inferior (Zakar, Zakar, & Kraemer, 2013) however factors such as socioeconomic status, age and ethnicity may vary this position. Still it is expected of women to obey their families, look after children and conserve cultural and traditional customs (Kapur, Zajicek, & Gaber, 2017). There is more compliance with traditional values in joint families where individuals from different generations live together. These families can be excessively intrusive regarding the way a couple live their life and in addition to violence from the woman's husband, other members of the family may perpetrate it against the woman. (Pillai, 2001). Family has a crucial position in Islam which is originated from the Sharia law and pre-Islamic practices in the Arabian Peninsula (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Dhimi & Sheikh, 2000; Hajjar, 2004). Islam values patrilineal bonds and urges men to form families and support their wives and children. In a Muslim family, the wife's key responsibilities are sustaining a home, child care and compliance with her husband's

wishes. He is allowed to exercise his rights by limiting his spouse's movement in private and public life. These practices reflect old medieval societal systems of isolating and restricting women, in order to preserve their honour. Meanwhile male members of the family enjoy a privileged position compared to their female counterparts. Young women marry to large families and acquire respect through their children (sons in particular), and eventually as mothers-in law. Their dependency alternates between fathers, husbands and later sons during their 'patriarchal' life cycles (Pillai, 2001).

## **Rationale for this study**

In conclusion, research on the perceptions and beliefs of Middle Eastern men on domestic violence and justifications for it is even more limited. This is where the rationale for this study stems from. There is also limited literature addressing the perceptions of Iranian migrants and Iranian immigrant men in particular. Little attention has been given to this group. As it is evident in the literature, men are more likely to be perpetrators of domestic violence and at the same time can also be victimised by it and belief systems play an important role in committing and accepting such violence. Gender based violence is a major issue in the Middle East and women's social status is one of the poorest in the world (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Our beliefs and cultural norms impact the way it is expressed. Immigration adds more complexity to this issue as it may alter these norms in the host country and create new challenges and opportunities.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

This chapter illustrates information about the researcher and methods used for this research. A qualitative approach was used for data collection and analysis, in order to obtain a thorough understanding of participants' perceptions on domestic violence through semi-structured interviews.

#### **The researcher**

It is important to recognise that as researcher, my values, beliefs and assumptions are not separate entities from the research itself. Rather they need to be understood as part of the research. They are crucial with regards to reasons for conducting this research and any personal biases that may be present.

I am a 24 year old Iranian man, who has lived in three different countries (Iran, Malaysia and New Zealand) and as a result, I have been exposed to a variety of cultures and customs. Although I have not been a victim of domestic violence I have witnessed it second hand among relatives and family friends. The main reason behind my interest in this area is gender inequality. As I was growing up in Iran I began to notice a significant imbalance of power between men and women. Gender inequality is embedded in our laws and many cultural beliefs and it manifests itself through many forms, especially domestic violence. My initial assumption of gender equality in New Zealand was very positive and I perceived its social progress as a potential role model for Iran. However throughout my four years of study, I was informed by academic research, university courses and the media that domestic violence and gender inequality in general (despite much progress over the past few decades) still remain a significant issue, even in developed countries such as New Zealand.

I even used to believe that domestic violence was no longer an important issue in New Zealand and that developed nations had finally built egalitarian societies but to the contrary I realised that not only domestic violence is a major issue in New Zealand but certain groups such as Māori, Pacific Islanders and immigrants are more

severely affected by it than their Pākehā counterparts (Marie, Fergusson, & Boden, 2008; Pillai, 2001). I believed that living in countries with protective legislations for women would prevent immigrant women from experiencing the horrors of domestic violence but despite these laws migrants and women of colour are at high risk for domestic abuse.

I am also a psychology student and therefore a variety of psychological theories and branches such as clinical psychology regarding antisocial behaviour and rationalisation and community psychology with regards to social, cultural and environmental factors have affected my understanding of domestic violence. As a consequence of witnessing extreme gender inequality in my home country Iran, feminist theory has played a major role in shaping my perception of domestic violence. It is understood that domestic violence is a gender asymmetrical problem and the majority of domestic abuses in a relationship are carried out by men against women (Kimmel, 2002). The feminist analysis would argue that a patriarchal social structure just like structural violence, supports men's domination of women and is sustained through socialisation which promotes traditional gender roles where femininity is heavily linked with submissiveness and masculinity with supremacy and dominance (Crichton-Hill & others, 2010; Hodgetts et al., 2014). Domestic violence is one of many methods used by men to enforce control on women. I am aware of the weaknesses of the feminist theory. It is now acknowledged that no theoretical approach on its own is able to sufficiently explain a very complex social issue such as domestic violence (Crichton-Hill & others, 2010). In order to gain a better and more complete understanding of this issue, the cultural and social contexts in which the violence is conducted must be taken into account. Therefore New Zealand and Iran context and culture must be considered. For example since colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori are often excluded from the process of decision making by the government and early colonial practices attempted to destroy Māori family structures that promoted the communal living in favour of individualised and nuclear family structures of British society (Crichton-Hill & others, 2010).

I also consider it crucial to hold a holistic view of domestic violence, including cultural views of violence and understanding social, political and historical contexts forming these views.

## **Qualitative research methodology**

Qualitative research methodology, in the form of semi-structured interviews, was used for data collection, in order to demonstrate the idiosyncratic views of participants and their understanding of social realities. Qualitative research is a type of approach to scientific investigation that captures personal experiences in context, and explores the elements that have shaped these experiences (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative methods have certain advantages that quantitative methods lack. For example a quantitative approach could show that patients with a specific disorder and serious physical disability, unexpectedly do not have a low quality of life, but struggle to explain this phenomenon (Gelling, 2015).

A qualitative approach allowed me to explore and analyse participants' perceptions as well as the complex meaning behind their perspectives and life experiences. It makes rich data collection using a small number of participants possible. This was compatible with the goal of this research which explored the complex perceptions of Iranian New Zealander men on domestic violence.

Qualitative research is extremely helpful for gaining knowledge in areas with limited information (Patton, 2002). As it was discussed in my literature review, there is limited research on Iranian and Middle Eastern men's perceptions on domestic violence: the information becomes even scarcer in the context of migration. Moreover participants are chosen less randomly and more selectively in a qualitative method, as this yields rich information on the research topic. Even though it is acknowledged that participants are not representative of the whole population, qualitative methods aim to provide a variety of perceptions by incorporating a diverse range of participants within the population (Patton, 2002). The participants of this research were quite selective regarding national origin and gender due to essence of the topic however there was a variety in their upbringing, sociocultural and religious background, age, occupation, and the number of years residing in New Zealand.

## **Semi-structured interviews**

### **Planning**

Interviews are one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research, which can generate rich data on participants' experiences and perspectives on the research question (Gelling, 2015). Interviews investigating an area which there is limited research are less likely to be structured, and are often called semi-structured. They are often conducted in person however they can also be done via phone or other electronic software, such as Skype or WhatsApp. An important aspect of semi-structured interviewing is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to ask follow-up questions and further discover participants' perspectives (Gelling, 2015). This makes an in depth examination of data possible which is rare in other modes of research. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible way to collect data combining pre-planned open ended questions and follow-up questions. It allows participants' responses and the interview themes to be further explored without limiting the desire to discuss areas that are important to participants (Savin-Bagen & Major, 2013). Face-to-face interviews can be suitable for discussing sensitive or potentially distressing topics because they create a safe environment for the participant (Patton, 2002). The observation of participant allows the researcher to witness the effects of the interview on participants and modify the structure of the interview if deemed necessary (Savin-Bagen & Major, 2013). Planning is a vital factor in conducting interviews. If interviews are not planned properly, there is a risk that the process would generate biased data which undermines the quality of the research (Patton, 2002).

The interview questions were prepared and divided into themes (see Appendix B) prior to conducting an interview which allowed me to communicate with participants in a conversational and friendly manner. Although it contained preplanned themes, it also allowed participants to express their views freely. One disadvantage of tightly planned interviews is that issues important to participants may not be covered. It has also been indicated that the flexibility of semi-structured interviews could generate unique responses in each interview as a result of asking a variety of questions from

each participant (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Although I made sure that I followed the interview guide consistently throughout the interviews which formed the basis of our discussion, any important issue raised by participants was further discussed and participants had the opportunity to convey their perceptions. The following are the major areas that were covered in each interview:

1. Demographic information: This section aimed to find out some general information about participants such as age, occupation, religion, the highest degree or level of school, their duration of residency in New Zealand and reasons for migration.
2. Understanding of domestic violence: Their definition of domestic violence, its impacts and their personal experiences.
3. Migration: This section focused on the effects of migration on participants' perspectives. It also explored differences and similarities between Iran and New Zealand in the context of domestic violence, as well as cultural and societal norms within two countries.
4. Religion and personal beliefs: The role of religion and other personal beliefs on shaping participants' perceptions on domestic violence was discussed.

### **Recruitment**

Most participants were recruited by word of mouth through other participants. As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, Iranian migrants are not necessarily a large group in New Zealand which justifies a qualitative style of research.

A participant recruitment sheet (see Appendix F) was shared on social media (Facebook) which briefly explained the research topic and provided my contact information. Male participants who were born in Iran aged 18 years old and living in New Zealand were eligible for this research. Two participants expressed interest through social media. Thus, I sent them the information sheet (see Appendix D) which provided details about the research topic, the interview process, participants' rights, the researcher, the supervisor and their contact information. Potential participants were also informed that they may ask any questions about the research. A suitable time and place was set for each participant and they were reminded again



closer to the time of interview. It is important to mention that I had to show a high degree of flexibility with regards to interview times because some participants wished to do the interviews at a specific time or date. After conducting the first two interviews, the participants informed me that they may know other Iranian men who would be interested in participating in this research. The participant recruitment sheet (see Appendix F) and my phone number were passed on for further contact. When the interest and eligibility of new participants were confirmed, the information sheet (see Appendix D) was sent to them and they were informed that they may contact me for further questions at any time. That is, with the exception of the two, participants were recruited by other participants in a snowball effect. Three participants were contacted by social media and the rest via cell phone. The recruitment process halted after consultation with supervisors which determined that the data was saturated.

### **Description of participants**

I interviewed seven participants in total. The following table indicates some demographic descriptions including age, marital status and, the number of years residing in New Zealand. Each participant was given a pseudonym (common names in Iran) in order to protect their identity.

Table 1.

*Demographic information of participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Number of years spent in New Zealand	Reason for migration	Relationship status	Religion
Afshin	23	9	Migrated with family	Engaged	Atheist
Hamed	30	5	Education and safety of New Zealand	Married	Agnostic
Babak	24	9	Education and family	In a relationship	Theist but no particular religion
Ahmad	34	7	Seeking asylum	Divorced	Islam
Saman	19	10	Family	Unknown	Non-religious
Mehdi	33	12	Family	Single	Baha'i
Arya	32	3	Education	Married	Islam

Overall, the participants were between 19-33 years old. Persian was their first language. All except one had grown up in Muslim households. Some described themselves as non-religious and had migrated to New Zealand because of familial ties, high standard of living, discrimination and oppression in Iran, and education. They had spent between 3-12 years in their host country. The majority of participants were in a relationship.

## Interviews

Three out of seven interviews were conducted in person in various locations suitable for participants. Of these three interviews, two were conducted in designated rooms at higher education facilities and one was done outdoors but in a quiet place without any disturbance. The remaining four participants were interviewed via cell phone due to geographical distance. A suitable time and if necessary place was selected prior to the actual interview. With regards to phone interviews, I sent a text message to the participant a few minutes before our agreed time in order to ensure that they were ready to proceed. I introduced myself in the beginning of the interview and provided some background information about myself and the research. I explained the reasoning behind my thesis and thanked them for their time. The information sheet for participants (see Appendix D) and the informed consent form (see Appendix E) were presented and explained to participants. I had emailed these forms to participants whom I interviewed by phone. At the beginning of the call, I went through every line of these sheets, to make sure they were understood by participants. Furthermore I asked participants' permission to record the interview using an audio recorder on my cell phone. I assured them that any potentially identifiable information will be removed and all the provided information will be regarded as highly confidential. It was explained that audio recording was necessary to guarantee an accurate verbatim transcription of the interview for research purposes.

For face to face interviews, participants signed the consent form and verbal consent was obtained for phone interviews. I managed to build rapport with participants quite quickly. We shared a number of characteristics. We were all Iranian men living in New Zealand. A number of participants had migrated to New Zealand for education or they were or had studied in New Zealand themselves, this attribute further related us to each other. I asked each participant whether they preferred to do the interview in English or Persian. Three participants preferred English and the other four interviews were conducted in Persian. Interviews started with asking some general questions regarding age, occupation, and reason for migration from participants and then exploring their subjective definition of domestic violence. I

informed participants that migration (in the context of domestic violence) and possible changes in their perceptions and beliefs were important in this piece of research. An interview guide was used to direct the discussion however the process was flexible and sometimes back and forth. For example if a participant was interested in talking about his personal beliefs regarding domestic violence in the beginning of the interview, he was encouraged to proceed and I used follow up questions to elicit more responses and explore their perceptions on that particular area. Open-ended questions allowed participants to freely express their personal views and experiences. Closed questions were sometimes employed and the information for was summarised for clarity. The duration of interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 40 minutes. At the end, participants were given an opportunity to ask further questions or make extra points if they wished. The interview finished by mutual agreement between the researcher and participants when the main questions were covered.

### **Follow-up**

The interviews were transcribed verbatim as much as possible however repeated words, unfinished sentences (e.g. the participant decided to reword his sentence) and pauses were not included. Some interviews were conducted in Persian therefore they were translated to English and transcribed simultaneously. Participants were asked whether they would like to receive a summary of the findings at the end of the interview (Appendix C). This was also asked in the informed consent form (Appendix E). As it was indicated in the information sheet (Appendix D) participants were asked if they would like to check a copy of their transcript and had the opportunity to make corrections before approving use of their transcript. They were satisfied with the state of transcripts and understood that they may withdraw from the study at any time up until this point. One participant requested to record the interview too. Four participants asked to receive the summary of the study findings. They will receive the summary upon the completion of this research.

## Research ethics

The ethics application was prepared with the help of my chief supervisor. The University of Waikato School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee reviewed the application and approved it after recommending some minor changes.

## Data analysis

I used thematic analysis to systematically identify, classify and organise qualitative data into meaningful patterns or themes. I used a report and instructions by Braun and Clarke (2012) to familiarise myself with the process of thematic analysis. It is very difficult to be entirely deductive or inductive because the researcher tends to bring their own ideas and biases into the data and it is impossible to ignore the data while coding and forming the themes. However my approach was mainly inductive, wherein common and important (to the research topic) patterns were identified during data analysis rather than relying on theoretical perspectives for coding the data. I employed these six steps for my data analysis, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2012):

1. Irrespective of the language used in the interview, each interview was transcribed in English. I listened to each interview at least twice, read the transcript a number of times and familiarised and immersed myself with the contents of interviews. I made casual notes on each transcript and the overall datasets.
2. Once I felt confident with my familiarity with the data, each data item was thoroughly reread and examined and coded if deemed relevant to the research question. A portion of the data was highlighted using a colour-coding system in Microsoft Word 2013. The extracts of data and their corresponding codes were organised into tables.
3. The codes were reviewed in order to find areas of similarity between them. Those sharing a unifying characteristic were clustered into themes and subthemes using visual aids such as mind maps and tables. The relationship

between themes were also explored in order to determine how these themes together provide the whole ‘story’ of the research.

4. Potential themes were reviewed in this process and compared with the collated texts of data to determine whether they were compatible with one another. Some themes had low repeatability, and some themes were combined or broken into subthemes. At the end six domains were generated with related themes and subthemes.
5. I named each domain and the corresponding themes. They were clearly defined and determined what was unique about them. The relationship between each domain and its subsequent themes and the relationship between the domains themselves became clearer and the thematic map was essentially complete. I also employed analytic narrative to discuss my interpretations of the selected data, their significance, and potential meaning. Themes were contextualised and interpreted with relation to the broader research question and the relevant literature.
6. The last phase involved writing the discussion chapter and presenting the domains in a logical and meaningful manner. The analysis began broad by discussing definition of domestic violence and its effects, thus it led to participants’ personal and religious beliefs followed by cultural differences between Iran and New Zealand and ended with specific changes in perceptions as a result of migration. There were references to other themes and domains throughout the analysis and themes were interconnected to deliver a coherent story.

## **Limitations of research**

Unfortunately there is not much reliable data on violence against Iranian women. Statistical center of Iran, which is a government body responsible for data collection has never conducted a nationally representative study on domestic violence and neither has it permitted any international organisation to do so (Rasoulilian et al., 2014). Despite a variety in people’s interpretation, understanding, acceptance or rejection of domestic violence, there is enough evidence to indicate that domestic

violence is prevalent among Iranian families and remains a major social issue (Kargar Jahromi, et al., 2015). In 2004 a number of government agencies including The Centre for Women's Participation Affairs, the Interior Ministry, and The Ministry of Education directed a project on domestic violence which covered all Iran's provinces (Rasoulilian et al., 2014). The results showed that 66% of married Iranian women experience a type of domestic violence in the first 12 months of their marriage, either by their spouses or by their in-laws. They also indicated that there was a negative correlation between having a higher level of education and employment and being subject to domestic abuse. Having a high number of children increased the chance of experiencing domestic violence for women.

For a variety of reasons, it is quite difficult to compare the prevalence rates reported in these studies with one another. Women may provide different answers to whether they have been physically abused by their spouses, depending on how the survey questions are constructed. Physical or other forms of violence may be interpreted differently across a variety of sociocultural contexts (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). There is variation in the definition of abuse across these studies; some focus mainly on physical assault and others acknowledge other types of abuse. Methodological differences also make comparisons difficult. Not all studies had nationally representative samples and some use convenience sampling (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Furthermore, methods for data collection differ among studies. One study used phone surveys. The others have used face to face interviews, questionnaire or a mixture of the two. Not all authors used standardised questionnaires or neither had they fully explained the validation of their research instruments (Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011). There are valid reasons for assuming that many of these studies may actually underreport the accurate prevalence of IPV. The weight of family ties can prevent many women from disclosing any information about physical abuse by their relatives, never mind by their spouses. Researching this subject in the region is relatively new and these studies can be viewed as the initial estimates, and considering the sensitivity of the matter and the state of women's rights in the Middle East, some underestimation is anticipated (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008).

## **Limitations of the study**

As with any piece of research, this study has its own limitations. Firstly, the size of the participants sample is quite small. As it has been mentioned before, despite its growth over the years, Iranian migrants are not necessarily a large group in New Zealand and most live in Auckland city. The small sample size implies that results of this study cannot be generalised to Iranian migrant community in New Zealand. Participants were recruited with ease but since they were introduced to the study through each other, it can be argued that most had come from a specific community or social circle. They belonged to a small age group (most were below thirty years old) and the majority had university degrees. There were no middle aged or elderly men. Although I investigated a very specific demographic group but a more diverse group of participants could have generated more varied sets of responses.

Four participants were interviewed by phone. With regards to consistency, I would have preferred to conduct all interviews face to face however due to distance and participants' limited availability, phone interviews were the most efficient method. I suspect that rapport and trust were built in a more rapid manner in face to face interviews than phone interviews. Interviews were conducted bilingually. Even though English interviews were easier to transcribe however less nuance was lost in Persian interviews. Overall conducting the same interview in two different languages was challenging. The other issue was translation. I translated the transcripts to the best of my ability and knowledge but even the most accurate translations might not deliver the full meaning and essence of the discourse.

Most importantly, it must be acknowledged that Iranian women were absent in this study. Although men's perceptions and attitudes on domestic violence are understudied and add more value to this area of research, it is impossible to deliver a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence without including women's experiences and perspectives. There was limited literature on Iranian and Middle Eastern migrant men's perceptions on domestic violence. This made comparing my data with available research rather difficult.



Finally, all participants were extremely cooperative, open and friendly but I suspect my lack of experience may have had an impact on their responses. Some follow-up questions could have been done more professionally and with better timing. I accidentally interrupted a few my participants but apologised for my mistake and tried to avoid repeating it.

## **Reflection on research**

I believe it is important to reflect on the process of research after its completion. There were a number of points worth discussing which may be helpful to future researchers interested in the area of domestic violence and migration. One of my personal challenges was lack of experience. I had conducted interviews before but none were as detailed or sensitive as the current study. I had not written a thesis or dissertation before. This required consulting with supervisors and a high degree of research. I was also concerned about recruiting participants but I was surprised by the level of interest and cooperation expressed by participants. Except for two participants it was not necessary to actively recruit the remaining. Participants themselves assisted me with recruitment and often at the end of the interview informed me that they knew other potential participants who could be interested. I provided my contact details and other relevant information and soon I was contacted by a new participant.

As it was mentioned, three of the interviews were conducted in person. I found building rapport and trust easier in face to face interviews compared to phone interviews. It also needs to be acknowledged that I was familiar with two of my participants through academic work, prior to conducting the research. I assume this fact had helped them to be more open and comfortable during the interview. Participants felt relaxed and at ease and discussed a variety of valuable personal experiences and views regarding domestic violence. I spent more time on building trust and introducing the purpose of the research during phone interviews. Participants were asked which language (Persian or English) they preferred for interviews and most chose Persian. I am glad that I provided participants with this option because a number of them felt more comfortable conversing in our first

language and that in itself enhanced my relationship with them. They used idioms and adages or referred to specific cultural or religious customs that were only understandable to a Persian speaker who had lived in Iran for a number of years. Even those interviewed in English uttered those idioms or cultural norm in Persian. This made an in-depth discussion of their perceptions and experiences possible but it also made me realise how language barriers and lack of cultural knowledge could hinder our understanding and responses to domestic violence in migrant families.

It was impossible to preserve all of the nuances evident in Persian, in the English translations. As it was mentioned my shared cultural and lingual background with participants facilitated the interviews significantly. Almost all men used phrases such as “you know what I mean” or used specific Persian terms. They rightly assumed that I was able to comprehend the subtle cues and nuances in their described experiences and perceptions. Semantically similar English words or phrases were used for their Persian counterparts however some of the words had unique meanings in an Iranian cultural setting. Some words were better understood in an Iranian cultural context (in relations with other customs). Therefore, using their English equivalent did not do them justice. That being said, the English equivalents were able to transfer some to most meaning of the Persian terms.

Almost all participants showed a high level of openness and personal disclosure. A number of them informed me that these experiences had not been shared with many individuals before. Some were aware of lack of research on domestic violence in an Iranian migrant context and admired and supported this type of work. Although I was the ‘researcher’ but I also found stories and perceptions of these men not only central to my research but also relatable to my own life story. We had all been exposed to domestic violence at some point in our life or knew someone who was a victim or even a perpetrator. Unfortunately, it was a common experience in our home country. In the past we were also exposed or learnt some cultural practices that condoned domestic violence. Most importantly our perceptions and beliefs had changed over time due to a variety of factors such as migration. Our

shared experiences, especially as Iranian migrants strengthened our relationship and provided me with a rich source of insight.

The current study supports an existing but limited source of research which indicates that migrants' upbringing, cultural and religious beliefs are significant factors in forming their perceptions on domestic violence. It is also important to highlight that these perceptions are not necessarily fixed but alter due to migration. There was no or little support for physical violence. This is in contrast with many available studies on this issue in the Middle East however there was more acceptance toward verbal aggression and most participants argued that this type of abuse may be interpreted differently based on an individual's culture and is less tolerable in New Zealand compared to Iran. Religion was seen as a double edged sword which can exacerbate or reduce domestic violence. Overall, domestic violence was perceived as a major but common social issue in Iran and the laws and cultural norms were contributing factors. New Zealand was considered more egalitarian and less condoning of domestic violence. Exposure to a different cultural context and education were found to mediate or completely change migrant's perceptions on gender related concepts such as domestic abuse.

These perceptions will be discussed and analysed thoroughly in the next chapter, using a number of domains and themes.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results and discussion**

This chapter discusses the findings in six domains with regards to the reviewed literature in chapters one and two. These domains represent the perceptions and experiences of the participants in the context of immigration and domestic violence. I have identified a number of themes and subthemes within each domain which will be discussed and explored separately. However, it is vital to remember that these themes do overlap and are intertwined. They need to be read as a whole in order to provide a thorough understanding of this piece of research. Thus, throughout this chapter while discussing a particular theme or domain, I will be making references and comparing them to other themes and domains.

### **Definitions and effects of domestic violence**

There was a strong consensus that domestic violence takes various forms. None of my participants perceived domestic violence as merely physical. Instead, the men talked about domestic violence as encompassing threats, intimidation, verbal abuse, humiliation and other form of psychological abuse. For example, Baback said

Domestic violence for me literally coming from the word is, in families especially, it's a violence from two partners so at home it could be wife toward husband or husband towards wife. Anything that could come from verbal aggressiveness to physical aggressiveness or anything in between I would define as domestic violence.

And Arya commented:

My definition of domestic violence is first its physical aspect, physical violence basically and also the mental aspect of it. When you threaten someone. I see threats as violence too... I do not consider solely hitting someone or the word violence on its own as domestic violence. Threat and especially humiliation I feel is a form of violence.

Both participants highlighted the location in which violence occurs. A violent household and victimisation of family members were perceived as the core characteristics of domestic violence. Babak seemed to have a gender neutral perspective and argued that violence can arise from either the husband or the wife. Although men can certainly be abused by their female partners (Drijber et al., 2013), women are more likely to be victimised by men in a relationship (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011; García-Moreno et al., 2013; Johnson, 2006).

Physical abuse was seen as the most noticeable form of domestic violence. This may be explained by tangibility or commonality of this type of abuse for participants. Further through this chapter, it becomes clear that most participants have had personal (being abused or exposed to violence themselves) or second hand experiences (hearing about friends or family members' abuse) of domestic violence. A significant number of these experiences were physical abuse however participants perceived domestic violence as a multidimensional social issue. This broad view of domestic violence is in accord with the literature which indicates that physical violence is only one of the many types of domestic abuse which includes sexual, psychological, emotional and economic abuse (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011; García-Moreno et al., 2013; Shah et al., 2012).

Some men like Ahmad preferred to be hit over being abused psychologically.

Ahmad: I believe the physical is the best type because the perpetrator empties himself (releases his anger)... The perpetrator can destroy his victim mentally and psychologically by his behaviours.

His account suggested that he had personal experience of domestic violence. He viewed physical violence as spontaneous and short term (as soon as the violent act is committed, it is over) but psychological abuse can be done in a variety of ways and was more likely to be prolonged and detrimental over time in his perspective. This is interesting because Mehdizadeh et al. (2004) argued that the concept of domestic violence as being predominantly physical was beginning to shift among the Iranian population due to sociocultural changes and the psychological effects were becoming

more visible. The same study indicated that verbal-psychological violence was the most recurrent form for the surveyed Iranian women. It can be implied that Ahmad's preference for physical violence could be as a result of higher familiarity and acceptance of such punishment and perceiving them as a 'norm'. I argue that men's preference for physical violence and especially mitigating its potential harms (e.g. "spontaneous and short term") may be used as a justification for physical abuse of partners.

Given that the participants saw domestic violence as much broader than physical violence, it was unsurprising that when they discussed its impact, they went beyond the physical impact, including, potentially death, to talk about other effects. They highlighted its diverse and less visible impacts such as psychological and economic abuse. For example Afshin said that the impacts range...

from mental disorders to just being completely inconvenienced economically and every other way possible. Social isolation, God knows what, many many many things. At the worst just straight up death.

Specifically social isolation, low self-worth and self-blame were attributed to the long term consequences of abuse. The longer the abuse went on, the more severe these impacts were said to become. Again, this accords with the literature (Fanslow et al., 2010; Kazantzis et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2006). Domestic violence has been highlighted as the most substantial risk predictive factor for psychological distress and physical health complications (Kazantzis et al., 2000). The association between domestic violence and mental and physical health, also shows that the effects of domestic violence may persist for a long time even after the end of abuse. Therefore, subjective threat to life and the overall impacts of abuse generate a significant risk of developing psychological distress (e.g. traumatic stress) later in life (Kazantzis et al., 2000). Previous research indicates that long term psychological, physical and sexual abuse could cause effects such as low self-confidence, anxiety, depression, suicidality, social isolation, drug abuse, financial difficulty, fear and posttraumatic stress which are more prevalent in women victimised by domestic violence than non-

abused women (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004; Fanslow et al., 2010; Saidi & Siddegowda, 2013; García-Moreno et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2007).

The men had their own way of theorising the impacts. Babak, a qualified nurse commented:

If you try to keep it private and that is going to create a perception that something is wrong in your own head so looking at it from a nursing aspect, it could lead to a lot of mental illnesses I suppose. Self-confidence issues, mental illnesses, just physical harm to each other for both parties, male or female. Even looking at it from the person who is being violent.

While Saman specifically linked the impacts to the perpetrator's sense of dominance

Saman: If the perpetrator has a sense of dominance and control and sees it as his right to beat his partner then the victim will have a lower confidence, might self-blame and experience anxiety and depression. The longer it is the tougher it gets for them to talk people.

Thus, at least some participants were apparently able to sympathise with victims and articulate a power and control view of domestic violence. They were also aware of the psychological impacts of domestic violence. Babak said that violence is even detrimental to the perpetrator himself, which may be true however, I argue that the degree of victim's suffering is significantly more severe compared to her abuser's discomfort or distress.

### **The grey area**

This theme includes the more ambiguous areas with regards to domestic violence that were brought up by men. The difficulty of providing 'evidence' for psychological or verbal abuse compared to physical violence was the reasoning behind Afshin's uncertainty.

Afshin: Lack of evidence. You might have people that you know depending on the situation you might have someone that really doesn't think that is domestic violence.

He also mentioned that the perception of an individual on what is domestic violence may vary from one situation to another. The subjectivity of domestic abuse has important implications in the context of migration. For instance, abusers from a particular cultural setting may perceive verbal abuse in the forms of verbal aggression, insults and threats as justifiable or may not even consider them as abusive behaviours. This ideation seems to be more prominent in non-physical abuse. Essentially, determining any type of abuse other than physical aspect was assumed to be complicated. O'Leary (1999) argued that psychological aggression can be measured reliably however the author also admitted that reaching a consensus on a specific level of psychological aggression that is regarded as psychological abuse in a legal or mental health context, is quite difficult due to the commonality of psychological aggression, even in happy partners.

Abusers can misuse this notion of lack of 'evidence' in psychological and financial abuse to deny any wrongdoings. Women could be potentially blamed for slander and smearing their reputation because non-physical abuse is either more difficult to prove or not seen as 'real' abuse. As it was reflected by men, most perceived physical violence as indefensible however there was a degree of tolerance for non-physical abuse which was viewed as less severe. This is a hierarchy of domestic abuse with physical violence on top but as we move down the hierarchy, the perceived severity of abuse decreases and its subjectivity increases which in turn increases the justification of abuse.

Some researchers have criticised the current approaches to psychological abuse. Follingstad (2007) argues that the subjective nature of psychological abuse has been an obstacle for its adequate definition and validation. This reflects what I called 'the grey area'. It is important to recognise that psychological abuse does not occur in a vacuum and it may never be properly measured however a more holistic and savvy



approach to human nature may improve our understanding of this aspect of domestic violence.

As it was discussed earlier in this chapter, almost all the men perceived domestic abuse as multifaceted. However, when it came to what was considered domestic violence, they had an easier time distinguishing and condemning physical abuse than the other types. Towns and Adams (2016) argued that ambiguity occurs when there is more than one interpretation of a violent incident. Ambiguity about violence and responsibility is a controlling strategy against women who are subjected to violence from their intimate partners and ex-partners. For example the perpetrator would dispute the victim's version of a violent act (ambiguity about responsibility) and uses language as a tool to silence or manipulate the discussion of violence. Offenders often use techniques of neutralisation (e.g. denying any responsibility or injury to the victim) or victim-blaming (holding the victim responsible for the violence she endured) shift responsibility for the violence away from themselves (Halket et al., 2014; Towns & Adams, 2016).

There was more justification for verbal aggressiveness (saying 'hurtful things') in the heat of the moment. Hamed and Afshin did not necessarily perceive that as abuse but as something relatively normal in an argument with your spouse

Hamed: If you are angry you may say things that are hurtful, that's one thing but if you are angry and you raise your hand and hit someone that's next level. You have problems.

Afshin: Depending on how you would define domestic violence, I have friends who might define domestic violence as two couples shouting at each other or man being sort of you know aggressive in a vocal way towards a woman that he is in a relationship with. If you define it as that then I think there is more leeway for I guess "domestic violence" to sometimes maybe in certain circumstance be semi-justifiable. I could see that. As far as physical violence no.

However, if this anger transformed itself into physical aggression then that was completely unacceptable. Basically, Hamed viewed physical violence as far worse than verbal abuse. Afshin also explained that our definition (Iranians) of domestic violence might differ from other individuals (non-Iranians) and if it is defined as interpersonal shouting or verbal aggressiveness then there can be some justification for ‘domestic violence’ but not for physical violence. Normalisation of verbal aggression and seeing domestic violence by a subjective lens has important implications. According to Afshin and Hamed, verbal aggression was more justifiable and less likely to be seen as domestic violence compared to physical aggression. Although most participants demonstrated a multifaceted understanding of domestic violence, there was more subjectivity toward non-physical abuse than physical abuse. This implies that if an action (e.g. saying “hurtful things”) is not physical aggression then it may not be domestic violence and therefore, is more likely to be used against a partner. From the men’s perspective they are not abusing anyone, they are merely “arguing” with their partners, in which some ‘insults’ are uttered. The assumed subjectivity of non-physical abuse is used to dismiss them as not serious.

Literature has shown that language and behaviour of perpetrators have serious impacts on victims (Halket et al., 2014; Towns & Adams, 2016). An act (either physical violence or coercive behaviour) conveys messages regarding the value of the victim (e.g. the deserving victim) and violence transpires within the context of these acts. A simple put down by the perpetrator can seem unimportant but in a complexity of hostile language has detrimental impacts on victims’ self-confidence. Ultimately language shapes the social reality, and vice versa therefore, language moderates the relationship between violence and interpretations of the real world. Men’s dominance and their use of violent language can affect women’s understanding of reality and the way they interpret the world (Towns & Adams, 2016).

A number of participants such as Afshin defined domestic violence as a multifaceted issue but they also argued that it was sometimes difficult to determine what was seen as domestic violence.

Afshin: Then I think it would get into more of a grey area when we talk about things that have to do with say “verbal abuse” or the abuse of power or money. Certain things that can happen in a relationship which lie outside of physical violence but maybe yeah I could consider domestic violence.

He expressed a degree of uncertainty and referred to a ‘grey area’ while talking about the other types of abuse which were outside the realm of physical violence.

Psychological aggression is significantly more likely to occur in intimate relationships than physical violence (Follingstad, 2007) therefore investigating these two in a parallel way has been problematic due to significant differences in their frequency and the way they are projected. “Abuse” was originally referred to any employment of physical force against a partner in an intimate relationship. Adopting a parallel approach to psychological aggression has led to labelling any type of psychological aggression as “abuse” (Follingstad, 2007).

It is indicated that measuring and to some extent providing evidence for non-physical abuse might be more difficult than physical abuse. However, this theme showed that some men can exploit this characteristic with little to no consequences. For example financial abuse is actually a powerful tool in cultures wherein men are the main providers. Men’s control of their family’s financial means (their financial power) can easily be employed to force women into submission. Considering women’s financial dependence on their husbands and the heavy burden of showing proof for mental abuse, they have little defence against this type of abuse.

### **The long term effects**

In this theme I defined the long term effects of domestic violence as a range of mental health issues that continue impacting the victims, long after the initial exposure to violence. The long term impacts manifested themselves in different ways for these men. My participants talked about having traumatic memories, and being anxious or fearful due to witnessing domestic violence in their childhood.

Babak had been exposed to domestic violence as a child.

Babak: Me as a kid that I have been around it, I feel like it has changed me, you end up being a lot more fearful. For me I am always like “what if I once lose it? What if I do it?” that affects me. I’m scared. You cannot not get into an argument with your partner. You do and you sort of see triggers in yourself “oh f\*ck, if I keep on going like this, I might end up in that category” so that’s one effect for someone who has been around it and I suppose for the two partners that are in it, it would be a lot of self-confidence issues, a lot of self-doubts “Do I deserve it? Is this normal or not?” a lot of shyness about how they are perceiving me.

He believed that as a result of being a constant witness to violence as a child, he struggles to remain in an environment which reminds him of his unpleasant past experiences. He also mentioned that these early childhood experiences have changed him permanently. He expressed fear of becoming violent in an argument with his partner and repeat what he had witnessed years ago. Babak saw having arguments with a partner as something normal in a relationship and unavoidable but was worried that if these incidents carried on and built up, they could trigger a violent response in him. That was something that he wholeheartedly wanted to avoid. He was also concerned about how he was viewed by his partner during a verbal altercation and expressed self-doubts regarding whether the situation he found himself in (arguing with his partner) was normal or not. Essentially, he was questioning whether the level or argument/altercation was justified.

Babak was aware that his childhood experiences continue to affect his current mood and relationships. Although he had arguments with his partner, he did not seem to engage in any violent behaviour himself. It can be argued that he has become vigilant in trying to recognise and prevent any possibility for domestic violence (e.g. stopping a heated argument with a partner before its escalation into a physical altercation). Babak’s story highlights the connection between growing up around violence to replicating it, not just thinking about replicating it. He recognised his own capacity to be violent, and this ability has helped him to reject violence as a solution to a relationship conflict.

Hamed was concerned for children who witnessed aggression between their parents. He saw them as the ‘real’ victims who were constantly exposed to domestic disputes between their parents and were completely disregarded and mentally scarred. He spoke of his own experience. Although he never saw physical violence from either of his parents but he recalled the unpleasant memories of their disputes after thirty years.

Hamed: Yelling at each other as an argument, I think that becomes domestic violence when your child is right there and you keep doing it so you are starting to fight but you have no consideration for your child who is witnessing this violence and that is violence and the victim is not necessarily mum and dad, the victim becomes that little child sitting there hearing this which will mentally affect them for the rest of their lives. Like I said I’m 30 years old I can still remember when my parents argued and you will never forget that even though there was no violence involved, physically.

Hamed’s comments attributed the blame to both parents. Although he described the above situation as ‘violent’ and showed concerns for children in that environment, the situation only became ‘domestic violence’ when a child was present. Essentially, only the child was the ‘victim’. I argue that even though there was no physical violence, one of the parents (e.g. the mother) can also be a victim in a violent household. Violence is directed at an individual. Using Hamed’s example, women may be subjected to explicit or direct violence and children who witness this dispute may experience implicit or indirect violence. Not all parents who argue or ‘fight’ with each other are equally responsible for their child witnessing this violence. The perpetrator of violence bears the responsibility for inflicting pain on his victims who can be his spouse, as well as his children.

Hamed’s experience is reflected in research by Martin, Langley, & Millichamp (2006) who examined domestic violence as witnessed by New Zealander children. A high proportion of the interviewees reported feeling extremely upset at the time of the incidence regardless of the type violence. It has been established that victims of domestic violence often perceive non-physical violence just as tormenting

as physical violence (Martin et al., 2006), and similar effects were seen in my participants and other witnesses of domestic violence. The same study reported that witnesses of domestic abuse had a higher chance of developing anxiety and depression by the age of 21 than non-witnesses. Subjective distress and other psychological issues have long been acknowledged as separate but detrimental impacts of child abuse (Zhu & Dalal, 2010).

For Babak, the psychological effects have had a long term impact but it has also encouraged him to help when and where required.

Babak: Personally they affected me quite a bit especially when I was younger. I could not stand people screaming because it was so much of it back home, so I could feel that psychologically it has affected me negatively. It has left an impact on me whether I am a bit more scared and a little bit rattled when someone screams or doing something like that around me, positively it has made me really understand that it's really not ok. I would really try not to do it. I'll try not to be in an environment where there is domestic violence and I understand what people are going through so I'd like to think I would try to stop it if I could.

Babak believed that his experiences have given him the ability to relate to victims of domestic abuse and have made him a more empathetic individual. Someone who understands the feelings and worries of people involved. He also perceived domestic violence as a reprehensible act and expressed interest in stopping it if the opportunity presented itself.

Literature has shown that children who witness domestic violence may replicate this behaviour against their partners in adulthood. Babak in contrast has developed a negative view toward domestic violence. The long detrimental effects of domestic violence have built an urge in him to step in, during a domestic dispute. Witnessing domestic abuse in his own household and feeling powerless without anyone to intervene may explain his aversion toward violent situations and his desire to stop domestic abuse. This theme highlighted how childhood experiences and exposure to

domestic violence shape men's views and behaviour in different ways toward a particular but familiar phenomenon. It also indicates that these past memories create uncomfortable feelings and reactions in the present and the effects of domestic violence may never be completely eradicated.

## **External factors**

This domain refers to a number of environmental factors such as poverty, education, infidelity, and the stress of life that were important in either exacerbating or minimising domestic violence but were deemed for the most part, beyond the control of the individual.

Studies from a number of countries, the United States in particular, show a range of individual, situational and relational factors that are instrumental in perpetrating domestic violence, for instance psychological disorders, the quality of relationship and poverty (Bonomi et al., 2014; Murshid, 2017). Pillai (2001) also argued that unemployment in Asian immigrant men leads to a sense of loss of control and frustration which in turn may become aggression toward wives and children. Nilan et al., (2014) highlights that according to Indonesian men financial stress was a major contributor to domestic violence.

Some men perceived poverty as an exacerbating force with regards to domestic abuse. They believed that when families' basic needs such as financial security are threatened, that can manifest itself in the form of domestic violence which becomes to some extent inevitable.

Afshin: If you are talking about a third world country in the Middle East ... I think a lot of people are out of resources. When they do not have as much as food or money, I think it does bring out some qualities in them and I see that as just human.

Afshin's comment implies that domestic violence and violence in general is the 'natural' or expected outcome when people experience poverty. There is a degree of sympathy to potential perpetrators of domestic violence from poorer countries like Iran.

They are not held to the same standard as their counterparts in developed countries. Poverty is seen as the main cause of domestic violence and the blame is shifted from personal responsibility to these macro social factors.

This sympathy was also repeated by Hamed who believed women and children were easy targets (e.g. “physically weaker”) for perpetrators who took out their frustration on them.

Hamed: The poor people of Iran are right now are under so much pressure where there is unemployment, because of the sanctions and the dollar value, this and that...I think that automatically contributes to the violence in Iran and obviously the children the women are physically weaker so the dad comes home mad at you know the world, takes it out on his children and his wife you know. I’m not saying that’s an excuse. I’m saying that is a contributing factor.

The concept of viewing women and children as legitimate targets for venting frustration highlights the status of women and children in an Iranian sociocultural context. Men are the head of the household in this familial hierarchy and the wife and children hold an inferior position. The husband may exercise his dominance through various forms such as physical violence. When a man does not succeed to provide for his family members, he is perceived to have failed in fulfilling his duty and his sense of superiority and high status is undermined. He responds to this perceived challenge by targeting his wife and children in order to silence any voice of dissent. It is important to mention that not all wives and children undermine or challenge their husband’s/father’s authority. Some may be compliant with their husbands’ and fathers’ predicament but they could still experience domestic violence. The father can use his wife’s and children’s low status to abuse them with impunity and even justify his actions (e.g. blaming distress for being violent).

Hamed also used the word “automatic”. Seeing domestic violence as an automatic response decreases the chance of prevention because it erases responsibility and the process of conscious decision making from the perpetrator. Automaticity of



domestic violence deflects and dilutes abuser's blame by implying that a violent action is out of his control.

A couple of participants viewed daily life stressors as triggers for a violent response. These psychological stressors and daily life pressures are gradually built up and then unleashed in the household, usually against women and children.

Saman: Maybe it can be the stress of life. There is pressure on individuals. Someone comes home and starts fighting and screaming...I think most of it stems from the pressure of life...

Arya: When I am having a good day subsequently I will be a calmer person compared to a bad day in which I can't get my work done, I am faced with some problems, my boss is not treating me well, my salary is overdue and you have to spend hours in traffic. When you arrive home after all this, you might just lose it in a moment. This is certainly not your wife's/partner's or children's fault... External reasons play a major part. You can be angry at something else and your wife raises a relatively simple matter and you will react in a way that you should not.

They considered domestic violence spontaneous in these situations and out of the perpetrator's control. I, however argue that the perpetrator is fully responsible for spontaneous eruption into violent behaviour. Similar to the previous theme, a number of participants did not hold the perpetrator fully responsible for being violent. Afshin for instance perceived violence toward women and children as condemnable but quite likely under excessive distress. This ideation tends to minimise the harm done to the victim. Many men experience high levels of distress but not all respond violently and target their wife and children. Abusers may use the excuse of daily life stressors to justify their abuse. Violence is a chosen and learnt behaviour. Women are also faced with stressful circumstances but a violent response was only seen to be stemming from men. I argue that acute inequality in the husband and wife's statuses within the family tends to create this illusion that a man is allowed to express his frustration in a violent manner but his wife is prohibited to do the same.

I discussed the subject of infidelity as a justification for domestic violence in this domain because some participants like Ahmad viewed it as a powerful and uncontrollable trigger for violence.

Ahmad did not completely condone domestic violence as a proper response to infidelity but argued that it was very difficult to adhere to a societal norm (e.g. avoiding physical violence against the partner) in the face of a betrayal which has caused extreme emotional and psychological suffering.

Ahmad: Because in that moment (when one party is caught cheating), there is extreme anger and emotion. One party loves the other one and he has trusted her and when faced by this lack of attention and unkindness, he is emotionally and psychologically hurt badly and it becomes difficult to control yourself in that moment and adhere to some norms such as “don’t raise your hand on a woman”. Again it is not right but unfortunately still happens in the Iranian society and even in New Zealand but the way it’s reacted to is different.

There is a degree of sympathy from Ahmad toward the perpetrator. Ahmad had mentioned earlier that physical violence is not justified however these comments indicated that some societal norms (e.g. not hitting your partner) can be suspended or more difficult to follow under certain circumstances (when one party is caught cheating). A relativist approach toward physical violence is potentially dangerous and even life threatening. I describe a relativist approach as an inconsistent belief in unethicity of violence. For example violence is always condemned except in the face of infidelity. The perpetrator perceives himself as being right and vindicated to use violence against his partner. It is implied that infidelity warrants such violent response.

Findings from Nemeth, Bonomi et al., (2014) showed that infidelity concerns (a specific type of jealousy) were the immediate trigger for both severe violent episode and causing injuries to victims and were continuously highlighted as a stressor through the relationship by the perpetrators and victims. Jealousy is seen as a strategy used by abusers to control their partners and a risk factor for homicidal behaviour (Nemeth et al., 2012). The notion that women’s unfaithfulness justifies violence against her, is

relatively endorsed in the Middle East (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Ahmad believed that infidelity occurs in both Iranian and New Zealand societies but generates different reactions from the person who has been cheated on. For instance, New Zealand men are less likely to resort to violence in this situation than Iranian men. He may overstate the difference. There is relatively high acceptance of violence in these circumstances among NZ men and even small but significant acceptance in women (Fanslow et al., 2010; Towns & Adams, 2016).

Ahmad's awareness of the fact that Iranian and New Zealander men may react differently to being cheated on raises an important point in the context of migration. Directing violence toward a partner suspected of infidelity can be punished in a New Zealander context which happens to be less sympathetic toward this type of behaviour than Iranian culture. Failure of adaptation to New Zealand's cultural and legal norms may create complications with the legal system and even result in perpetrators' imprisonment. The other point is that Ahmad admits that New Zealanders may react differently to discovering their partner's infidelity than Iranians which can suggest his knowledge of differences between these two cultures. This is a form of cultural relativism which will be further explored in future themes. It implies that a violent response toward a 'cheater' in an Iranian context may be acceptable but the same cannot be said about a New Zealand context.

Hamed unlike Ahmad did not see any rationale for wife beating in the face of unfaithfulness.

Hamed: First of all if she has been unfaithful well then leave her don't beat her...Go take legal measures. I don't know, take a divorce. Nothing can justify violence especially physically.

He further explained that taking legal action such as divorcing your spouse is the right path to follow. Hamed's comment shows that some Iranian men do not perceive infidelity as a justification for wife beating despite some tolerance for such behaviour (beating the cheating wife) in an Iranian context. This also indicates that Iranian men can be capable of controlling their anger during such intense moments.

## **Education mitigates domestic violence**

Some participants considered education a protective factor against domestic violence. Hamed and Afshin discussed education in two different contexts. Hamed attributed the low degree of domestic violence among Iranian immigrant communities in New Zealand to their high level of education.

Hamed: ...there are certain things that they have to go through and if you notice almost everybody here either came for education like me and you or is on a higher level of education so they are pretty educated people. That affects I think the issue of domestic violence so you don't see that much in Iranian community here in fact I have never heard of anyone.

Erez (2002) argues that empowering immigrant women through language skills and educational opportunities reduces their dependency on men. Hamed also explained that going through filters such as police background checks brought a type of people who were less likely to commit domestic violence to a high degree. As it was mentioned earlier abundance of wealth and education were considered protective factors against domestic abuse. These factors reduced intimate partner violence dramatically in Afshin's opinion.

Afshin: Well, I sort of view New Zealand as a society that has a lot of you know education, money and you know the society is well fed. I would assume that one of the lowest domestic violence rates in the world.

The majority of participants had higher education which they saw not only as a protective factor but also as a differentiating factor between them and the rest of the Iranian population. They viewed themselves as having higher moral standards. It was suggested that domestic violence was more common and accepted in families with low socioeconomic status but they (the men themselves) were different. They did not belong to that 'lower' group and domestic violence was not necessarily a significant problem for educated Iranians. The implications for migration is that, domestic violence may be less common in migrant families with higher education and therefore more attention must be given to families with lower education. Another implication is

that Iranian migrants in New Zealand are probably not an accurate representation of Iranian population so their assumed low rate of domestic abuse cannot be generalised to other Iranian migrant communities around the world.

Previous research has shown that individual factors such as the level of education, socioeconomic status, exposure to interparental violence, being single and, to a lesser extent, religiosity were associated with justifying attitudes toward wife beating (Zhu & Dalal, 2010; Nouri et al., 2012). Men with higher economic status and educational attainment were less likely to justify domestic abuse (Zhu & Dalal, 2010). Further, although these characteristics also safeguard men from child abuse, men with a history of childhood abuse, and low socioeconomic status are susceptible to developing views that condone wife battering (Zhu & Dalal, 2010). Educational resources must be dedicated to this group, young men ready for marriage in particular, in order to alter their perceptions.

In summary, this domain indicated that some men believed in a relativist approach to domestic violence. Factors including, lack of education and poverty were used to justify domestic violence to some extent. Participants had a lower expectation of individuals affected by these factors, to not abuse their spouses. This ideation implies that poorly educated Iranian men with low socioeconomic status cannot be fully held accountable for violence against their partners, compared to their affluent counterparts. This attitude can further victimise women with low socioeconomic status as well as migrant women because their husbands or partners are not held to the same standard as the rest of society.

## **Gender norms and masculinity**

This domain explores ideas behind gender norms and masculinity that have shaped the perceptions and behaviours of men on domestic violence in this piece of research. Gender norms can be described as a set of behaviours and standards that individuals are expected to conform to, based on their sexuality and culture (Griffin, 2017). Masculinity can be viewed as a subset of gender norms which refers to social and cultural attributes associated with men (e.g. the acceptable social roles for men or the

way they project power in the family) (Harris & White, 2013). In this section, a strong man (physically and emotionally) who conceals his vulnerabilities was an example of masculine notions of gendered relationships. These gender norms and masculine views were expressed in various contexts and situations.

### **Men, the stronger gender?**

A couple of participants viewed men as physically stronger than women and that advantage (physical strength) has been utilised against women in the context of domestic violence.

One participant proposed alternatives to physical violence in the face of partner's infidelity. However the victims were implicitly blamed. He perceived the man's lack of attendance to his partner and the woman's sexual variety seeking behaviour as relatively valid reasons for infidelity but he repeatedly rejected violence as a legitimate reaction.

Ahmad: ...Maybe he is part of the problem, maybe he has not been attending to his partner's needs. It can also be the woman's variety seeking behaviour (regarding sexual partners). That being said overall this behaviour is condemned. Male in general is the stronger sex (physical strength) and shouldn't partake in such behaviours. There are other ways to deal with this.

Men's superior physical strength was viewed as an advantage over women that should not be exercised in a domestic dispute situation and therefore, men must restrain themselves from committing any physical aggression. Scholars have indicated that battered women are continuously subjected to forceful physical and psychological abuse by a male perpetrator who intimidates her to do something against her will (Kuennen, 2007). Men also tend to use physical force as a threat against their partners or the children in order to coerce them the woman to comply with their demands (Johnson, 2006).

Hamed also mentioned physical strength while explaining how daily life stressors and external pressures trigger violence against women. He also deemed children and women as physically weaker than the husband in the household. This

disadvantage made them an easy target for the man's physical aggression in his opinion.

Hamed: I think that automatically contributes to the violence in Iran and obviously the children the women are physically weaker so the dad comes home mad at you know the world, takes it out on his children and his wife you know. I'm not saying that's an excuse. I'm saying that is a contributing factor.

The men also talked about circumstances that violence might be justified. Afshin was very clear.

Afshin: No I do not think physical violence is ever justified unless it is in self-defence basically.

The participants considered physical violence as simply unjustifiable: the only exception for Afshin was 'self-defence' (in the face of danger to his physical wellbeing).

Men seemed to be aware of this perceived 'advantage'. Women and children's weaker physical strength (compared to men) makes them defenseless against physical violence. Abusers may use their physical strength to dictate their wish to their wife. Body strength is not the sole reason behind exploiting this greater strength by men. Gender roles and familial hierarchy allow men to utilise their physical advantage to overpower women. Men ought to be providers and leaders in the family while women tend to have a more subservient status. This gender and power disparity in addition to cultural beliefs that condone domestic violence provide men with the opportunity to dominate women and children in their household. Migration might change this power disparity and create new conflicts. The host country's family laws could be more supporting of domestic abuse victims and women may acquire more financial independence in the new environment. Adaptation to this new environment could force modifications in familial hierarchies, relationships and behaviours among migrant families.

### **“Double standard”**

A number of participants criticised the double standards in domestic violence. They complained that society was more likely to accept domestic violence against men than women.

Mehdi used a hidden camera social experiment (that he had watched in the past) as an example. He explained that when the male perpetrator merely raised his voice and only shook the woman (he emphasised that the man did not beat the woman) bystanders instantly intervened and threatened to contact the police but when the situation was reversed and the female perpetrator was beating her male victim, the bystanders just simply observed and even laughed.

Mehdi: I watched a movie a while back which was about domestic violence against men. There were two characters, one girl and one boy in a park. The guy started raising his voice and shaking the girl (he was not hitting her). It was a hidden camera involved. The bystanders intervened and threatened him that they will call the police and he apologised in the end. Time passed and in the same location but with different people, the couple started fighting again but this time the girl was the perpetrator and she even slapped the guy multiple times in the face but the crowd was just watching and laughing.

Arya used a similar but real life example that he had witnessed at the Dubai airport, in which the woman's physical aggression toward her husband did not generate any type of reaction from the bystanders, even the security staff (whose responsibility is to protect travellers at the airport). He argued that if the situation was reversed, people would definitely have intervened.

Arya: I was at the Dubai airport. There was a woman there. She hit her husband in front of the crowd. She slapped him in the face and their kid was there too and no one showed any reaction, even the airport's staff. I have a feeling that if the situation was reversed, the reactions would have been very different.

Mehdi further commented how this mentality was replicated in Iranian culture as well.



Mehdi: It's not different who hits whom. Violence is violence but it is like that in our culture. In the movies, the guy says something to the girl and she suddenly slaps him in the face. It is deemed very causal and normal when a girl hits a guy but the other way around is problematic. I do not want to say at all that just because she beats the guy then violence against women is ok. I am saying a man shouldn't hit a woman and vice versa.

He used Iranian media as an example and how it portrayed women's physical violence against men as a casual act in the movies. He emphasised that he was not using these examples to justify domestic violence against women but the fact that physical violence was perceived normal when it came from one gender was unacceptable to him. He argued that violence committed by either gender was unethical. Hamed also argued that domestic violence was gender symmetrical.

It's not a gender issue related issue for me. Female can be violent as much as a male...

Mehdi and Hamed's comments are in contrast with the research literature on the gendered nature of domestic violence. This shows overwhelmingly that while women and men may hit, shove, slap etc. their heterosexual partners with similar frequency (as indicated by Straus), men's violence is much more likely to result in significant injury or death, cause the victim to become fearful and result in him achieving power and control (Johnson, 2006; Kimmel, 2002). Additionally, compared to men, more of women's violence is resistance (e.g. pushing past a man who is standing in the doorway stopping her from leaving the house) or in self-defence (Kimmel, 2002; Muelleman & Burgess, 1998).

There is a lack of research on the perspectives of men as victims of domestic violence compared to women (Drijber et al., 2013; Gadd et al., 2003). Therefore, more awareness on the characteristics of domestic violence against men is needed. Some have argued that men are less likely to report domestic violence against them than women, due to fear of humiliation, being ridiculed and the scarcity of current support services (Drijber et al., 2013; Gadd et al., 2003). This may be true but it would be

unwise to assume that the violence directed against men is indistinguishable from the violence directed against women.

Many crime surveys that provide data on partner violence frame this issue in the context of criminality, and because many victims do not view such violence as a criminal behaviour, victimisation rates can remain unreported and the effects could be more significant for men (Muller, Desmarais, & Hamel, 2009). A study of adult male victims in the Netherlands illustrated that victims were often physically and psychologically abused by a female perpetrator (partner or ex-partner) (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013). Most of the victims felt that they could not discuss the incident with the police. Those who did, reported that authorities refused to cooperate or they were not taken seriously and, some were even accused of committing the violence themselves. Despite the fact that most victims did not report the abuse to the police, 62% talked to people they knew about their experiences.

Although different groups such as “men’s rights” activists try drawing more attention to the legitimate and often forgotten issue of men victims of domestic violence, they also show interest in undermining initiatives and policies designed for female victims. The gender symmetry argument (it implies that domestic violence is not a gender based issue and men are just as likely as women to be abused in a heterosexual relationship) is sometimes used to derail the conversation. To many supporters of gender symmetry, expressing compassion for women or raising awareness on the gendered nature of domestic violence is interpreted as ignoring male victims of domestic violence (Kimmel, 2002).

Hamed had similar views toward this perceived double standard.

Hamed: A lot of people think it’s ok. If I put my finger on a female, it’s a huge deal but the other way around to be fair if someone gets hit by his girlfriend, it looks very ok. “It’s not that bad. She hit you so what?” you know? People’s perception on violence when it comes from a male being the victim, many people actually think “oh you wuss. She just hit you. It’s ok.”

He contended that a slight form of male physical aggression toward a woman generates a significant public reaction but if a man is physically abused by his partner, the society tends to minimise its severity. It was argued that public's perception on men's masculinity forces men to tolerate such abuse and 'brush it off'. If they dare to complain about their victimisation then their manhood could be easily questioned and undermined, "oh you wuss". Although it is difficult to infer whether participants had any personal experiences of abuse by a female partner (they mainly talked in third person), however it can be argued that exposure to degrading comments (which questioned their masculinity) could have prevented them from breaking out of their gender norms.

Hamed mentioned that unless his life was in danger, he would never report any acts of violence committed against him by his partner. Revealing such information was deemed as extremely embarrassing and shameful. There seemed to be an attempt to retain the image of a 'strong' man and reporting domestic violence by women against men, shattered this image and degraded them. Drijber et al., (2013) have indicated that male victims of domestic violence are more likely to contact the police if they have been physically abused or assaulted with an object. It was argued that mental abuse was not as visible and more difficult to provide evidence for. Thus, men were more reluctant report it.

Hamed: I would say the first thing is they probably won't feel comfortable talking about it. I'm going to be honest with you if I were a man who is being a victim, I would never talk about it. If I felt like my life was in danger, I might but if my wife slaps me once in a while or punches me once in a while, I am not going to tell anyone. I think that's the major issue. Male victims don't like talking about it because they probably feel degraded and feel like someone is taking their manhood away.

Babak argued that men can easily be abused but they were more likely to experience non-physical forms of abuse (e.g. psychological and verbal abuse).

Babak: I feel like with male victims it won't be as physical. I mean there are some cases but just to clarify in my opinion domestic violence maybe historically was more toward women but as the world is going forward, it's becoming on both ways. The balance, I feel like male can easily be a victim but I feel like it would fall into more sociological and psychological aspect of it rather than physical but still males is the same and I feel like the whole not being able to talk about it would be hard for males as well because you sort of feel ashamed that you are not being a man in your relationship if you are a victim of it.

He further discussed that historically women constituted the majority of domestic violence victims but as time passed and the world became more egalitarian, the risk of men being victimised increased. Similar to the other men, Babak also mentioned that it was more difficult for the male victims to come out and seek help. Their sense of shame and challenged masculinity was perceived to persuade the victims to only cope with the abuse and manage the harm, rather than actively solving the problem.

Babak: You learn to cope with it rather than come out and get some help for it or stop it.

Babak had a relatively gender symmetrical view of domestic violence (e.g. "men can easily be abused") but he also believed women's victimisation was more physical and men's was more psychological. His comments imply that men are socialised to exercise physical force in a domestic dispute but women have to employ other methods to fight back. It can be argued that their status and threat of violence from men, prevent women from using physical violence in such a direct manner similar to men. Women's use of physical violence may escalate the situation and result in an even more violent response from men. Therefore, psychological or verbal aggression is not only socially or culturally expected of women (physical violence from a woman can be seen as a masculine behaviour and thus as a sign of violating gender norms) but may have lower risks for them than physical aggression. Babak's last comment also indicates that he believes 'coping' is the only realistic solution for male victims. Feeling

ashamed is perceived to prevent men from getting help and support. It implies that beliefs surrounding masculinity force men to internalise their victimisation. Being abused in a relationship as a man damages their sense of masculinity and manhood, therefore the only viable option in their opinion is to conceal their victimhood. Requesting help may be seen as a sign of weakness by the community or family.

Some have suggested that women's use of physical aggression is rarely in self-defence, and driven by similar reasons as men, such as showing frustration, retaliation and to coerce or control. They also tend to initiate physical violence as often, if not more often than men (Muller et al., 2009). I am sceptical about this approach toward domestic violence. As it was indicated before, although men and women can perpetuate violence at the same frequency but men's violence happens to be more severe. Women's use of physical aggression may be possible to a small degree in a Western context but in an Iranian or Middle Eastern context which the legal and cultural settings heavily favour men over women (e.g. in the Iran's legal system marital rape is not criminalised), it is very difficult to imagine that many women can even attempt to use violence against their husbands.

Muelleman and Burgess (1998) have a different position on male victims of domestic violence. They examined men who had suffered injuries from their female partners and were referred to the emergency department. It was concluded that male victims had a history of domestic violence perpetration themselves. The authors argued that the female perpetrators could have injured the male victims in self-defence and injury by a female partner was a convenient indicator for identifying potential batterers.

Saman and Arya discussed male victimisation from a cultural lens. Saman explained that the idea of a man being abused by his partner was completely humiliating in an Iranian cultural context. Saman's comments showed that ideas around masculinity and portraying an image of a 'strong' man can be cross-cultural and even in a more egalitarian society like New Zealand, there is a perceived degree of expectation for masculinity. This mentality has an important implication in the context of migration. Migrant men might believe that the host society reflects some of their perceptions on gender norms to some extent. This means that migrants can not

only preserve their views on gender norms but also use this similarity with the host culture to justify their behaviours (e.g. refuse to seek help as a male victim of domestic abuse or assert power over their wife).

Saman: It is a joke in our culture. People make fun of it but it is real. It doesn't matter who gets beaten, man or woman. They are humans but no one would take it seriously. Even in New Zealand which has tough laws, men victimisation is not taken seriously. People make jokes about it and laugh it off. Men can be easily and widely abused.

Arya referred to a Persian term called “zan zalil” (a henpecked husband/man) which is a common insult directed at men who do not conform to their expected gender roles (e.g. showing too much affection toward the wife or being ordered around).

Arya: I feel that the men who are victimised by domestic violence, their number could be lower than female victims, I am not sure about the statistical population but the amount of support that they would receive is way less. In Iran we call the guy “zan zalil” [it means a man who is submissive to his wife].

This term highlights the superior status of men compared to women, and the power relations between them in intimate relationships. When a man fails to behave in a masculine manner he is likened to a woman who holds less power than him. Attributing feminine characteristics to a man by his peers or the community can threaten his position in the family. Therefore, men would try to avoid being labelled ‘weak’ or ‘henpecked’. Iranian men’s expected gender roles can include portraying the image of a strong man who is a protector as well as a provider for his family. Any deviation from these norms is heavily punished by society. It can be argued that victimisation by a female perpetrator is a significant example of deviation from masculinity and the image of a ‘protector’ and a ‘strong man’. Inability of fulfilling these expected gender roles could question men’s leadership and trustworthiness (protect and provide) in the eyes of society. They may lose their social status and struggle to form a family. The Pakistani culture also dictates that strong and honourable

men must “act like a man”. Those who fail to follow these guidelines are labelled “wife’s subservient” which stigmatises not only themselves but even their families too (Zakar et al., 2013).

Another example of punishing Gender non-conformity in Iran is observed among non-heterosexual groups. Nematy et al., (2014) indicated that gender nonconformity was largely responsible for lesbian, bisexual and homosexual Iranians’ different treatment by their parents, peers, the education system and the overall society. It was reported that the homosexual group was more likely to experience mistrust/abuse, shame and social isolation than the heterosexual group. I argue that it is possible for heterosexual men to receive the same treatment for not complying with their cultural gender norms. Homophobia or attributing feminine characteristics (e.g. “zan zalil”) are used to control individuals and stop them from violating their ‘assigned’ gender roles. Men who are associated with homosexuality or femininity can lose their power, respect and privileges. Zakar et al., (2013) indicated that crossing the “culturally defined red line” (e.g. challenging the husband’s authority in the presence of others) by Pakistani women was punishable and justifiable by society (Zakar et al., 2013).

Two participants, Arya and Mehdi made interesting comparisons between men and women in this context. Arya believed that the public was more likely to take a female victim seriously than a male victim and women had an easier time discussing the matter than men.

Arya: A woman can discuss the matter but in many societies even societies here [Western societies], a man who is beaten by his wife is looked upon with shame. Many with this problem probably will not talk about it because it seems pretty shameful and degrading. “You are a man, if she hits you, you should hit her back even harder.”

His view on easiness for women discussing their victimisation in societies is in contrast with realities explained throughout this chapter. Many women in various cultures find it difficult to report their abusers. He also referred to a narrative that encouraged physical retaliation against women perpetrators. Although he further

mentioned that most men will not retaliate against their female abusers but this narrative highlighted an important point regarding men's position of power. It implies that when a woman dares to use physical violence against her husband, she violates her gender role by employing a mechanism predominantly used by men. Men supposedly must reclaim their lost privilege and 'manhood' by outdoing their wife by using excessive amount of force. This mentality also raises concerns for women's safety when they try to defend themselves in a domestic dispute. Men might interpret that as an 'attack' and retaliate more severely against their partner.

Mehdi explained that although domestic violence victimisation was more prevalent among women (the dominant narrative) but most cases of abuse against men remained unreported due to fear of humiliation.

Mehdi: It is the dominant narrative but it also occurs more and it is talked about more often as well. We do have violence against men but a man would never come out and say "I was beaten by my wife" because he is not only supported but he will be humiliated too...Some things are not even in the records because nobody would report/talk about them.

His gender asymmetrical understanding of domestic violence is in contrast with a number of other participants who believed men are just as likely as women to be victimised. His comments imply that male victims of domestic violence cannot expect any degree of support and sympathy from their peers and community. This belief about the community which holds men to their masculine standards can prevent them from talking about their victimisation.

Men are expected to portray a strong image. They are seen as leaders who dictate their wishes through a variety of means including violence, threats and intimidation. Being subjected to violence from the wife who has a supposed 'lower' status and is physically 'weaker' than him, undermines his masculinity and male superiority which can be significantly uncomfortable. Discussing these incidents and feelings means revealing weakness that may be punished by other men or society.



Another type of double standard that was highlighted was intervention in the context of domestic violence. Two participants who had criticised public's reaction to women's violence against men also admitted that they themselves would not intervene in a situation in which a man was beating beaten by his female partner.

Hamed explained that if he witnessed a woman being physical abused in public, he will contact the police and will certainly intervene to try to help the victim. However in a reversed situation, he would ignore the incident. When I asked him about his reasoning, he mentioned culture.

Hamed: Like I said if I'm walking down the street and I see a man hitting a woman, here is the other thing if I'm walking down the street and seeing anyone hitting a woman I will get involved but if it's the other way around, the girl is hitting him, I wouldn't probably bother. If a woman is hitting a man, I'll be like "don't really get involve yourself" but if I see a woman getting hit by another man, doesn't matter who they are, I will get involved. I will stop him somehow and I will call the police.

Hamed: I think it's also a cultural thing again... [to help a woman in domestic violence situation]

Arya: If the situation is reversed, I probably will not do the same. Logically they are the same but I will not do it. I do not know why.

Hamed's and Arya's hesitance for intervention can be viewed as an acknowledgement that the impact of women's violence on men is very insignificant compared to men's violence on women. It can also be interpreted as men's responsibility to defend themselves. In summary, women's violence on men was not considered a major threat due to high status of men in the family and their perceived physical strength compared to women. There are social factors that picture domestic violence as an exclusively female issue. For example when men and women were asked to rate the intensity of violent altercations between men and women, both groups were more likely to perceive male to female violence as more negative than vice versa (Drijber, Reijnders, & Ceelen, 2013).

Arya provided another real life example wherein he became concerned of a man's verbal aggression toward his partner thus, he continued observing the couple so he could step in if the situation was escalated to physical violence. This topic has been covered in other themes (e.g. the grey area) as well. Physical violence was perceived as a "red line" for Arya.

Arya: I am against any type of violence. One time I was just walking around and I felt that the guy was yelling too much at his wife/partner so I had to hang around for another ten minutes to make sure that if he was going to get physical, I could put him in his place. The physical aspect is an extremely red line for me but if the violence is from a woman toward a man, I may not do the same. I don't know why but if it [the victim] is a woman then yeah [I would intervene].

Although verbal aggression led him to keep an eye on the situation but did not require an intervention in the participant's view. In earlier themes, I discussed the hierarchy of abuse in which physical violence was more likely to be considered unacceptable than verbal abuse or aggression. The same perspective was shared by Hamed who described two couples yelling at each other as merely 'awkward' but physical aggression toward a woman in public was seen worthy of a proper intervention. A man's physical violence toward a woman justified intervention.

Moreover, Arya admits that if the gender of the victim and perpetrator was reversed, the situation was logically the same but he would still feel hesitant to step in. It may be implied that perceptions on gender norms and 'men as the stronger gender' could contribute to such reactions. A study which explored Pakistani men's beliefs and attitudes toward IPV indicated that the men perceived women as "fragile and unwise" who needed protection as well as, monitoring and guidance (Zakar et al., 2013). If men are perceived as physically stronger then they may not need much protection from the 'weaker' sex. The participants themselves subscribed to the double standard that they fiercely criticised.

Hamed: ... if they are yelling at each other it's awkward but if I see you touch a woman in public, I will stop you. I don't care I know you or not.

The double standard regarding the male victims of domestic violence was extended to views of men on the unique struggles of male victims of domestic violence.

Afshin: ...it would be quite taboo to talk about what they are going through.

Afshin: Yeah. Just "being a man". If you are getting physically abused by your woman, I think that might undermine your masculinity and you might not want to talk about that. I think you might just want to pretend that did not happen.

Almost all the participants emphasised the taboo around being a male victim. Being victimised by a female partner undermined their sense of masculinity. Masculinity is constructed and maintained via a number of beliefs and behaviours that distinguish masculine characteristics from feminine characteristics. Therefore men and women are distinguished by their gender roles which emphasise masculinity and femininity. Men's gender roles (e.g. being the breadwinner) in a patriarchal context sanctions the use of violence dictating their wishes to women and children. Victimisation is a tool to maintain masculinity and control. However the employment of this tool by women targets men's gender roles (e.g. showing force and strength). Experiencing partner abuse is perceived as a feminine role, the reversal of this role weakens men's position as the head of the family. I argue that migration may influence demonstration of femininity and masculinity in migrant families. These concepts can manifest themselves completely differently in the host country. For example the notion of working outside the house may not be viewed as a masculine characteristic. Migrant women may show interest in taking advantage of this opportunity which exacerbates gender related conflicts with their husbands who wish to maintain control of the family.

This theme raised important issues surrounding gender roles and use of violence in intimate relationships. I argue that the gender based double standard that men heavily protested may not actually be a double standard. It could be participants failing to understand important differences between men's and women's use of violence in

relation to its context, meaning and impact. The essence of violence used by men and women in intimate relationships can be inherently different. Women tend to employ violent tactics mainly for self-defence but men use violence to maintain control and assert dominance. Attitudes and beliefs present in an Iranian sociocultural context allow men to dictate their wish to their spouse. In conclusion, men's use of violence is more likely to be severe than women's, due to men's higher status in a familial hierarchy (power inequality) and a set of cultural, religious and legal factors that protect their privilege. Participants indicated that women's use of violence to challenge a man's dominance violates his sense of masculinity and gender role. This violation threatens his position in the family and community, therefore according to participants, he either has to internalise and conceal the abuse (he is unable to discuss it) or retaliate against his partner.

### **Violence a learnt behaviour**

This theme examines parenting and the role of parents and guardians in teaching and perpetuating gender norms and violence. Saman perceived child discipline in the form of corporal punishment as a positive force in his upbringing that kept him out of trouble and prevented him from turning to an ill-mannered or impolite person.

Saman: I was beaten a little bit and if it has affected me, I think it was positive. As a result, I did fewer naughty things in my childhood... I didn't become a rude boy in the end. My brother was beaten more and he was more sensitive as well and I think its impacts were heavier on him. He is different to me. I think its effects were negative on him but not me. Its effects were good on me to some extent.

School work was seen as extremely important to his parents and that was the main reason behind his beating. His mum happened to be more involved in his punishment than his dad which according to him, never raised a hand on his children. The severity of physical punishment was also minimised. There has been a propensity to dismiss the harm caused by mothers in the context of domestic abuse. Although Martin et al., (2006) found a higher number of assaultive fathers than female abusers

but this can be attributed to participants who viewed a portion of violence witnessed from mothers as being less forceful and thus not as detrimental. The authors concluded that the factor that contributed the most to feeling discomfort and anxious was not the gender of the perpetrator, but the frequency of the violence.

Saman emphasised that he was never beaten too severely and it was more the fear of punishment that kept him in line rather than the punishment itself.

Saman: My dad never hit us at all in our home. My mum was very concerned about our studies (we were hit for not studying enough), you know how it is in Iran but she never hit me too much. My mother hit (my brother) more than me because he didn't study much. She hit me very little. I was comfortable in my childhood. I didn't experience it that much and when I experienced it, I think it was good for me because it's not the punishment itself you know, it's the fear of being punished/hit. If a child does something bad and is scared of being hit then they won't repeat that (behaviour) again. It's not the beating itself and if hitting is involved, it has to be gentle but that fear teaches the child not to do wrong again.

He perceived that fear as instrumental in teaching a child about right and wrong. This idea can be applied to violence against women as well. Threat of using violence may be sufficient to restrict women's behaviours (Johnson, 2006). The similarity between Saman's account and violence against women is power inequality between two parties. In both cases (corporal punishment and wife battering), the parents and the husband hold a significant amount of power and control over the child and the wife. This makes threats of violence very effective in controlling women's and children's behaviour. The victim knows that they have little chance of resisting the perpetrator's unequal power.

Although Saman condoned corporal punishment he also held the view that a high level of punishment could be detrimental and also people may react differently to being punished. As it was the case with his older brother. Saman explained how his brother's more frequent experiences of domestic abuse and his sensitive personality

had left him scarred and overall these impacts were not so beneficial to him. The higher degree of punishment was attributed to his brother's lack of efforts at school. This ideation implies that there is a personal threshold for punishment and if crossed, would cause detrimental effects. The issue with such measures is its subjectivity. The perpetrator may never know that he has crossed the subjective 'red line' or the negative effects of his actions may appear years later. I argue that legitimising use of violence in the context of child discipline or domestic violence increases the risk of women's and children's victimisation.

Violence in the form of male superiority as a learnt behaviour was evident in the belief system and the cultural context of some of men's friends and families. Arya mentioned growing up with senior members of his family who normalised violence against women and propagated rigid gender norms.

Arya: This stems from my own mentality. When I was a child, I had more contact with older generations therefore, violence against woman wasn't necessarily a negative characteristic or a taboo... He is a man and he is violent. "That's how he is. He is such a man and full of charisma."

Violence was viewed as a core characteristic of a strong man which was not only appealing but also gave him charisma and a sense of authority. Arya's comments show that the senior members of his community applauded and reinforced violence against women in younger generations. This could imply that young men resort to violence to maintain their status, and respect and approval of their elders. These young men may later perpetuate this violence against their own spouse.

Men's perceived right to relationships and access to women's body is predictive of domestic violence justification (Zhu & Dalal, 2010). Intergenerational transmission of domestic violence can be passed down through economic, individual and social learning mechanisms (Stith et al., 2000; Zhu & Dalal, 2010). Young boys who are exposed to parental aggression may perceive it as normative, and therefore utilise it against women from an early age (e.g. half of all teenage respondents endorsed wife beating for disobeying the husband) (Zhu & Dalal, 2010). When they have their own

spouses, violence becomes a viable option for conflict resolution. Children's behaviour is shaped through this process by observing their parents' treatment toward them and each other. The social learning theory argues that children learn from direct conditioning and mimicking the observed reinforced behaviour. Thus, those who have been abused or exposed to parental violence, are more likely to reflect or condone such actions compared to those brought up in nonviolent families (Stith et al., 2000).

Some men believed that the belief system that is taught by the previous generation begins to shape their perceptions from an early age for years to come. Thus, continuing the cycle of violence.

Saman: ...It also could be because that's the way they were brought up. They have witnessed a lot of violence growing up in their household so they see it as the only solution.

Saman's comments imply that domestic violence becomes normalised for boys who have witnessed domestic violence in their household. Violence then becomes the only 'viable' solution for a conflict in the family. These young men may also develop an inferior perception of women as a result of witnessing their mother being treated poorly by their father.

Hamed felt that his friends who were abused as children have learnt to engage in such behaviour and perceived it as a legitimate tool to handle conflicts.

Hamed: They have picked it up a little bit and they still live in Iran so it's ok for them, I don't know yell at their wife or even, I have never heard of them hit their kids or their wives...

He continued that the sociocultural context of Iran allowed them to behave in that manner. This can be concerning because it implies that an environment which disregards women's rights can further ingrain sexist attitudes in the next generation. It also implies that a significant change in the environment (e.g. migration) may alter the perceptions of men who have condoning views of domestic violence. Arya discussed the effects of the education system on forming sexist perceptions toward women.

Arya: Another problem that I recall from school was when our teacher used to say that “women are only half as smart as men. You can consult your wife but don’t take her seriously and pretend that you have consulted/listened to her because she is only half intelligent.” And I completely believed in that and I thought that’s just how it is.

He talked about how his teacher openly questioned the intelligence of women and urged his students to avoid consulting their wives when they got married. He admitted that he used to completely believe in his teacher’s view of women and perceived it as a norm. This signifies the broad scope of this belief system propagated from close and extended family, all the way to the education system in Iran. This could be problematic for migrant children who grow up in a household that justifies or practice domestic abuse but live in a society that is less condoning of domestic abuse. It can cause a crisis in their beliefs and they may feel uncertain about which norms they must subscribe to. It may also make their adaptation to the host country more challenging.

In conclusion, violence can be passed down and learnt by children. It is also important to mention that relevant observation and learning are not limited to physical violence. There is also the internalisation of norms about male privilege and male power and control. Witnessing domestic violence or degrading women convey this message to children that men can use violence to dictate their wish or resolve conflicts in this manner and women hold an inferior position in the family compared to men. These beliefs can shape the behaviours of boys and girls as adults. Young women may grow up experiencing internalised misogyny and believe gender prejudices in favour of men and young men use their male privilege to continue exploiting women.

### **Do not be indifferent**

The men expressed various degrees of intervention in domestic violence situations but they all agreed that something needed to be done (especially if the victim was a woman) and being ‘indifferent’ was looked down upon.



Two participants contended that the degree of intervention depended on the severity of the incident. Mehdi discussed that various strategies can be used to mitigate the violent situation and it was not always necessarily to be physically involved in order to help.

Mehdi: Sometimes you can even use staring. The person [perpetrator] might be completely zoned out and is yelling at their child and you with your staring can inform them “hey what are you doing?” and hopefully that person gets a sense of themselves without even uttering a word or doing anything.

Sometimes you can walk in and ask “hey are you ok?” so that implies you are trying to help, not in a way that you are taking a side straight away. Anyhow it is our responsibility to get involve but that doesn’t mean making troubles for ourselves but not being indifferent and try balancing [mitigating] it out. If there is a fight and we cannot directly intervene then the least we can do is to contact the police or do something.

For example staring was seen as an implicit method of informing the perpetrator that they were put on notice and you were not approving their behaviour. Walking toward the victim and perpetrator and simply enquiring about their wellbeing was another intervention method, proposed by the participant. He argued that this way, you did not necessarily pick a side and it only implied that you were concerned about either party’s wellbeing which could deescalate the situation. Mehdi’s ‘measured’ response emphasises his concerns for the perpetrator’s possible escalation of the situation. He viewed directly calling out the perpetrator in a violent situation as potentially destructive and even dangerous. His neutral stance highlights the importance of bystander’s image (for Mehdi) in perpetrator’s view. It could also convey this message to the perpetrator that his actions are not necessary problematic. I argue that appearing neutral as a bystander in a domestic dispute can question or invalidate the victim’s experiences. Clearly the perpetrator bears the responsibility.

Mehdi repeatedly rejected being a bystander in these situations and encouraged any form of intervention, including contacting the police if direct intervention was too risky. There was a limit for his involvement. This implies that certain situations (e.g.

when violence is too serious) may decrease the likelihood of bystanders' direct intervention. It can be argued that lack of intervention allows the perpetrator to continue his abuse.

Saman argued that intervention depended on the victim's interpretation of the incident. Whenever the victim felt that they are being abused (even if it is a light altercation) or they feel that their safety was being threatened then these would legitimise intervention.

Saman: Depends on yourself. When someone feels that they are being abused then that is a right time to intervene. For example it can be a light altercation or a severe beating. Whenever someone feels unsafe then that is a good time to intervene. Depends on the people involved.

His account encourages a rather passive intervention. It implies that unless the victim communicates her victimisation to a bystander or a third party, no action can take place. Not all victims report or discuss their abuse or actively seek help (Erez, 2002) but that does not mean that they do not feel threatened or abused. A passive intervention allows the continuation of abuse. In some cases (e.g. some ethnic or migrant communities), the abuse is so normalised that even victims themselves do not perceive their ill treatment as abuse (Simon-Kumar et al., 2017).

Ahmad, who had mentioned that he felt more reluctant to intervene in a domestic dispute in Iran due to it being seen as a private matter, also explained that he would contact the authorities in New Zealand.

Ahmad: But in New Zealand I believe if I see such behaviour, this is not what we call selling someone out by the way, I would contact the police immediately because as I have said before, a man is physically stronger than a woman and this is not fair when you see a woman is being physically assaulted and you stay silent. You got to have no conscious if you can go to sleep comfortably at night after witnessing such an event and doing nothing about it. In my opinion you have to report it. Maybe even the woman is responsible but overall this action is condemned nonetheless.

This could be due to a number of reasons. Domestic violence is more likely to be viewed as a public issue in a New Zealander sociocultural context than an Iranian context. Therefore New Zealand's norms encouraged him to intervene. The second reason is domestic violence laws and law enforcement in New Zealand which tend to be more supportive of domestic abuse victims. Reliance on them can be more successful than a lone intervention in Iran which lacks the support of the law and societal norm. This has important implications for domestic violence and migration. It shows that migrants' cultural norms and the way they react to a particular social issue may change as a result of migration. New Zealand's firmer legal and social approach to domestic abuse can alter migrants' perceptions on domestic abuse and encourage intervention.

The perceptions on masculinity in the form of gender differences in strength was once more highlighted in this discourse. Utilising this physical advantage against women deserved intervention in this participant's opinion. Ahmad also rejected the idea of being a bystander and argued for intervention. Interestingly, it was mentioned that it may be possible that the woman bore the responsibility for the attack but nevertheless intervention was warranted. This comment assumes that the victim is responsible for the attack and fails to take into account the power imbalance between men and women in intimate relationships. In reality, abuse is a conscious decision made by the perpetrator.

Arya mentioned that familiarity toward the female victim (including familial relations) would make his intervention more likely, serious and fierce.

Arya: If she [the victim] is known to me then I will fight tooth and nail.

This ideation could stem from this notion that men must protect women whom they are related to from other men. It indicates that some men are aware of the threat posed by their peers against women but it also highlights the power dynamics between women and men. Women's supposed inferiority means they require protection. However, this safety net cannot come from women themselves but is guaranteed by men who are closely akin to them.

The research has shown that those with high exposure to IPV and having peers with the same experiences, are more likely to describe IPV as normal (Deitch-Stackhouse et al., 2015). It has also been suggested that intention to intervene and gender-equitable attitudes decrease the likelihood of abuse and are strong predictors of intervention (McCauley et al., 2013). A number of studies have found that the efficacy of bystander to be a strong predictor of a bystander's intervention in a domestic violence situation (an active bystander) (McCauley et al., 2013; Pradipto, Prayoga, & Pea, 2016). The theory argues that the more bystanders believed in their ability to intervene, or the higher their self-confidence in preventing domestic violence, the higher the likelihood for them to intervene (Pradipto et al., 2016).

The theory of pluralistic ignorance indicates that during an ambiguous event, the reaction of other bystanders have a major effect on an individual bystander. Thus, the calm reactions of other bystanders may cause the individual bystander to not perceive the event as an emergency (Deitch-Stackhouse et al., 2015; Pradipto et al., 2016). Perspectives of social norms and social cues (e.g. observed peer views and behaviours) have found to be determinant of whether a person would intervene in a violent situation, and different social phenomena may disrupt someone's desire for intervention (Deitch-Stackhouse et al., 2015). Another theory explains that the fear of embarrassment can reduce the likelihood of bystanders' intervention. The bystander becomes worried if the situation was found to be not an emergency (Deitch-Stackhouse et al., 2015; Pradipto, Prayoga, & Pea, 2016).

I argue that these theories may explain the participants' lack of willingness to intervene in a female to male domestic dispute. It was mentioned before that both men and women view male to female violence as more negative than vice versa. A number of participants described men as the stronger sex, therefore when a woman is perpetrating violence against a man, they may not perceive it as an emergency. However if a woman was being abused by a man, then due to his physical superiority the situation suddenly becomes an emergency. One participant, Ahmad emphasised that he was more likely to intervene in New Zealand than in Iran wherein domestic violence was perceived as a private issue and some cultural or religious beliefs allowed

or condoned such behaviour. This may imply that the efficacy of bystander (the belief that the intervention will be successful) and the social norms (viewing it as public rather than a private matter) in New Zealand altered his reaction in a different social setting. This implies that public's perspective on a social issue can change a migrant's view on that same issue. Also the migrant might feel that the host society deems intervention a legitimate act and expects him to intervene which can encourage him to do so. The risk of embarrassment could also explain the participants' reluctance for intervention. Their comments indicated that firstly, they did not perceive woman against man violence as too dangerous or life threatening and, secondly the event was viewed as complicated and ambiguous and their involvement could cause more complication in their opinion. This theory can also be applied to the public/private distinction. Perceiving domestic violence as a public matter could potentially lower the risk of embarrassment and increase the likelihood of intervention.

This theme indicated that although participants were eager to intervene in a domestic dispute but a number of factors determined their willingness to intervene in various situations. A reoccurring example was women on men violence. Most participants were hesitant to get involved in this situation. The sociocultural context was another determinant. Men were more willing to intervene in New Zealand than Iran. Some proposed a gradual, measured and passive intervention and some argued for a more active involvement. Overall, they all agreed that something had to be done if the victim was a woman.

## **Religion and culture as double edged swords**

This domain focuses on the role of religion and culture in an Iranian context. I will show how in the context of domestic violence religious and cultural beliefs can be empowering, as well as oppressing. These beliefs can be empowering for both men and women but it seems that they disproportionally benefit men compared to women. They create a sociocultural context that gives men a variety of privileges (e.g. being the head of the household) that women lack. Men tend to use their privileged position to exploit or abuse women.

### **Exceptions to the dominant culture/narrative**

Some men painted a picture of the dominant theme which domestic abuse was a common or acceptable practice among Iranian families but then highlighted how their experiences were different from the majority of Iranian households.

For Afshin growing up in an affluent and educated family which not only sheltered him from the harsh realities and customs of society but also gave him opportunities that many other Iranian children lacked, was seen as advantageous. Pournaghash-Tehrani (2011) in a literature review of domestic violence in Iran, indicated that level of education and income, specifically when combined together had a significant effect on experiencing physical violence.

Afshin: I kind of grew up in an advantaged household where we were affluent. We did not really see much of society as a whole...

Afshin's comments showed that education and wealth may shelter children from the societal norms to some extent. It also indicates that a family is able to adhere to their own familial norms which can be in contrast with the larger societal norms. The implication for migrant families is that they may be able to maintain their own cultural beliefs and some may condoned domestic abuse. Witnessing domestic violence is common among Iranian children and teenagers. A study on Iranian secondary school students showed that more than half of participants were witnesses of domestic violence in their households (Vameghi et al., 2010).

Hamed talked about how his grandfather was a conservative and a traditionalist who used corporal punishment to discipline his son (Hamed's father). However, these values were not adopted by his father who was a victim of domestic abuse.

Hamed: Well my grandfather was old school. I'm sure my father was punished physically. He was probably. If he didn't study well, he was a naughty boy but he always talked to us.

My dad was always, the first thing he told me was "you will respect your mum, your sister or any other woman" and I wasn't a witness of it...

Instead he rather conversed with his children about their wrongdoings. Hamed further explained that his father emphasised the importance of respect for the female members of the family. Something which is in contrast with the norm in some Muslim families which see male members as superior (Kapur et al., 2017; Pillai, 2001).

Mehdi's story is different to other participants. The majority of men were born in Shia Muslim families in Iran, although some no longer identified as Muslim.

Mehdi: In our relatives some are Baha'i, some are Muslim and some are not religious at all. You would see in some of our relatives, for example some of my uncles are Muslim, many wanted to give their daughters [for marriage] to their Baha'i relatives. They used to say "you Baha'is are great and don't have the habit of hitting your women". They would see this and tell us themselves. It was very interesting to me. Since I grew up in a Baha'i family, we never really experienced domestic violence of any kind [child abuse or spouse abuse].

The role of religion will be examined further through this domain however one participant belonged to the Baha'i religion which is a persecuted minority in Iran and their beliefs may be seen as inherently different to Iranian Shias. The Baha'i faith was born in Persia (currently known as Iran) in 1844. A man named Mirza Husayn Ali, also known as the Bab (means "gate" in Persian) claimed to be a messenger of

God, 'the promised one'. He proposed spiritual solutions to social and economic issues (Maloney, 2006). His teachings also emphasised gender equality between men and women as core elements to obtaining unity. The faith also encouraged its followers to reflect internally and develop their own interpretations of the teachings as there are no established clergy (Maloney, 2006).

Mehdi argued that domestic violence was less prevalent in Baha'i families than Muslim families and he had never experienced or have been exposed to any type of domestic violence in his house. This has encouraged his uncles (the heads of Muslim households) to prefer Baha'i men who are not known for spouse abuse as their daughters' husbands (It is important to mention that cousin marriage is still common in the Middle East). This is interesting for two reasons. First, it seems that some fathers in Muslim families are quite aware of the commonality of domestic violence and actively try to protect their daughters from it. Secondly, it highlights the superior position of men in a family hierarchy (Flood & Pease, 2009). Although 'choosing' Baha'i husbands for their daughters may be perceived as a positive act that guarantees their safety, it also underlines gender inequality and exclusion of women from the process of decision making about their marriage. Many cultures consider arranged marriages as a viable option for mate selection. For example it is not uncommon for immigrant men to return to their home countries in order to find a suitable wife who follows their belief system (Erez, 2002).

Other distinct differences between experiences in Baha'i community and Iranian society were discussed.

Mehdi: ... when I was a kid and we would go to school from Saturday to Thursday and our school was gender segregated but on Fridays we had these classes called ethics/moral lessons in which all the children from the same grade of a particular area would gather. Boys and girls were mixed together. Although this was a strange thing for my male classmates in high school to see and chat to a girl. I began to realise how different the Baha'i community is to the wider society in Iran. The Baha'i community was safe and good. They would tell us that try your best to avoid being negatively affected by the



outside society and put an effort to leave a positive effect on your friends. It seemed like we were always being watched and compared to the outside society. For example my uncles and aunts would highlight us as role models. “Look how great these kids are”. This automatically would force you to stay good.

All public and private schools in Iran have become gender segregated since the 1979 revolution. Although Mehdi studied in the Iranian education system, he also attended Friday classes (similar to Sunday schools) that were prepared for Baha’i boys and girls from the same school grade. Attending these mixed gender classes and growing up around women his age in the Baha’i community have normalised his interaction with women and helped him develop a more egalitarian view toward them. His high school classmates for example struggled to interact with women due to lack of exposure. Hijab (a veil worn by Muslim women to cover their hair in the presence of a man outside their close family) is compulsory for Iranian women in public but Mehdi explained how seeing women (who were not his immediate family) without hijab in the Baha’i community was normal for him but that was not the case for his classmates (in Iranian public schools). Mehdi’s comments indicate that growing up with girls from an early age tends to normalise men’s relationship with women later in life. It also implies that this long interaction can reduce gender biases between men and women.

Zabihi-Moghaddam (2017) indicates that the views of early Baha’is (who had recently converted to the new faith) toward gender was similar to the wider population of Iran, however a change occurred due to the influence of Bábism (which laid the foundation for the Baha’i faith). The perceptions and behaviours of Baha’i community changed as the Baha’is teachings and beliefs evolved over the years. This change became noticeable by the efforts of Baha’is in promoting women’s education in Iran in the early 1900s and further distinguished Baha’is from the wider society (e.g. some members of the Shia clergy were against women education).

Mehdi viewed the Baha’i community as safer, better and, radically different than the Iranian society. This belief was further promoted by the community leaders

who encouraged the younger members to avoid adopting the negative aspects of the outside society and attempt to leave a positive impact and change the outside world for the better. According to the Baha'i faith, humans are always considered to be in the process of learning and equally capable of being altruistic and aggressive and only formal and informal teachings are able to solidify one or the other (Gervais, 2004). Mehdi explained that he felt being in the spotlight and the community leaders and the family elders viewed him as a role model for other children. He felt constantly compared to the outside society and that forced him to be better and behave in a particular manner that was expected of him (to be "good"). His account also shows the importance of elders and senior members of the community in shaping children's behaviours. It was highlighted in one of the previous themes, "Violence as a learnt behaviour" how violence and prejudice against women can be learnt during childhood, but Mehdi's description showed that the opposite is possible as well. Respect for women can also be taught from a young age which can have a long lasting effect on men.

This theme showed that even a specific cultural context such as Iranian culture is by no means homogenous. Subcultural groups with a different set of beliefs and norms exist within a larger culture. They may certainly share a number of beliefs and norms with the parent culture as well. These subcultures influence society and are also influenced by the parent culture. The main implication for migration and domestic violence is that a migrant family can strongly associate with a particular Iranian subculture or a religious group and as a result have different perceptions than those thought to be common in many Iranians. Uniqueness of cultures and acknowledgement of subcultures and religious minorities are important for policy making and providing appropriate support services. A 'common' norm within Iranian society cannot be generalised to Iranian migrants.

### **Religion: Empowering and Oppressive**

This section looks at the role of religion in domestic violence. Although one participant considered religion a positive force against violence. Most participants with Muslim upbringings expressed an overall negative view toward religion. They

perceived it as a major contributor to gender inequality and domestic violence. Islam was specifically singled out by a couple of men. Hamed argued that the Iranian/Persian culture had been negatively affected over centuries by the process of Islamisation in Iran. He believed that women in pre-Islamic Iran had a dignified social status which was destroyed by Islamic teachings.

Women's familial rights in Western countries improved significantly in the nineteenth century and become even more egalitarian by the end of twentieth century however the progress was slower in the Muslim world. Marriage laws in many Muslim majority countries are heavily influenced by Sharia law. Iranian women lost a number of legal rights that they had gained in the Pahlavi dynasty after the 1979 Islamic revolution (Zabihi-Moghaddam, 2017).

Hamed viewed Islam as regressive and although it may have helped the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula at the time but it was incompatible with the 'more advanced' Persian culture.

Hamed: It is a religion problem for me. Because if you go back and look at Persian history and Persian culture, if your wife died you would die alone in Persian culture. You wouldn't go remarry. We respected women that much. There were absolute equals to men but then 1400, 1500 years ago Islam comes to the country, burns down everything and ruins everything and I think lack of respect for women from Islam carried out...

Hamed may be biased in his description of women's status in ancient Persia. It can be argued that women's rights in Iran were heavily suppressed after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran however, historically Iran has always been a patriarchal nation.

Saman saw a positive relationship between a man's religiosity and his belief in the importance of women's obedience.

Saman: The more religious you are and believe in women's obedience and if a woman doesn't obey then you'd believe that she needs to be beaten. That's how they think. That's also how it is in many Arab countries as well as Iran.

“A woman must listen to her man and if she doesn’t then she has made a mistake and must be beaten.” But I don’t believe in that. If I was a woman, I wouldn’t have wanted someone else to dictate how I should live my life.

Moreover he argued that men with such beliefs were likely to resort to violence in the face of perceived ‘disobedience’ from their spouse. This was viewed as a common practice in many Arab countries and Iran. In the end he rejected this concept that a woman’s way of life should be dictated by other men. His comments imply that religious beliefs have a tendency to empower men which leads to strict control of women.

Ilkkaracan (2002) indicates that practices that result in the violations of women’s bodily autonomy in the Middle East and Maghreb are not derived from the Islamic view of sexuality, but from a combination of socioeconomic and political factors. Islamic teachings are often used as a tool to subjugate women and legitimise violations of their rights. The author argues that there are discrepancies between Qur’anic ideation of gender equality and its adaptation in fiqh (the legal system, extracted from Islamic sources) by religious authorities in the middle ages. A number of customary penalties used for controlling women’s sexual behaviours such as honour killings, female genital mutilation and stoning have no basis in Quran. Although the Quran has banned adultery and dictates a heavy punishment for this act (100 lashes for both men and women), it also requires a minimum of four witnesses to testify before the penalty can be carried out. Even though Quran does not mention stoning as a punishment for adultery, this punishment was introduced to the Iranian and Pakistani penal code systems (Ilkkaracan, 2002).

Hajjar (2004) argues the ideation that Islam entitles men to beat their wives is in contrast with the Qur’anic image of the ideal marital relationship which according to Quran must be amiable and supportive from both sides. It also contradicts the right of both Muslim men and women to seek divorce due to a failed marriage which is in contrast with women’s perceived obligation to accept violence (Ilkkaracan, 2002).

Hamed saw the Quran’s teachings on marriage as discriminatory toward women and that they dictated women’s absolute obedience to their husbands. It can

be argued that there are justifications for domestic violence derived from women's inferior status in Islamic teachings and the Quran.

Hamed: It says in the Quran, the holy book of Muslims that you as a wife have to obey your husband. Obedience is a part of marriage, you have to do as you were told and things like that and I think it has everything to do with religion. I don't think it's a little thing. I think it's a huge thing.

Hajjar (2004) indicates that there are justifications (for domestic violence) that can be derived from the Sharia and the Quran itself. For example rape is a criminal offence in all Muslim societies. However, since the Quran creates a basis for a man's complete sexual access to his wife, marital rape is extremely difficult to criminalise based on the main interpretations of the Sharia. Another example is forced marriage. The Quran does not specifically authorise such practice however, the idea of male dominance and female compliance enable men to force their desires on women. (Hajjar, 2004). Furthermore, the Quran acknowledges the right of mature women to enter voluntarily into marriage, however their unequal legal status hinders their ability to enforce this right against an opposing male (Hajjar, 2004).

Two of the participants highlighted the role of religious beliefs in their upbringings. Ahmad explained that depending on the dominant culture and religion of your environment, you may subscribe to conservative beliefs which can become deeply embedded and part of your identity.

Ahmad: Hundred percent they [Islamic beliefs] have had an effect. It depends where you have grown up and with what culture and religion. Hard line beliefs/bigoted beliefs have a major effect (on shaping your perspective). Unfortunately in today's Iran, some beliefs become part of us (our identity), things like fanaticism (*taasob*: referring to defending someone's honour, usually a woman's).

The example he used "*taasob*" is a strong belief in many Iranian families that the honour of a man's female family member must be defended or protected. Labelling cultural or religious beliefs as part of one's identity has important

implications. For example, it might be more difficult to change an individual's view if that belief is part of his core identity. He may perceive criticism of men's dominance over women as an attack against his own identity and the way of life.

This may include (not always) honour killings as a form of retaliation against tainting the family's dignity (e.g. having a boyfriend) (Chesler, 2009). Mehdi emphasised the problems with honour killing and how even an untrue rumour can result in a woman's murder.

Mehdi: ... We even have honour killings in Iran. Even when people just gossip about someone's sister, it doesn't even have to be true, that will be enough to sanction the murder just because they gossiped about her which implies she wasn't a good girl [wasn't modest or faithful]. It is well established in some tribes unfortunately in Iran and that is very horrible.

Although honour killings can be a form of domestic violence but they have distinct features; a rumour (that the victim has broken the group's cultural/religious moral code) is usually the cause, it may involve multiple close and extended family members and disproportionately victimises women (Chesler, 2009). I discussed in previous themes how violating gender norms or bringing shame upon the family can result in punishment by the head of the family and the community. Honour killing is the ultimate punishment and is perpetrated when the victim has violated the most sacred moral codes such as engaging in premarital sex. As it was mentioned earlier in this theme, Muslim women have little say on their sexual relations which is strictly monitored by their parents and later in life by their husband. A woman's virginity and virtue are considered valuable by the community. Losing this virtue by having premarital relations or rumours reduces the woman's 'worth' (decrease her chance for marriage) and damages her family's reputation. A family whose daughter has dishonoured them can be ostracised by the community so they respond by removing this 'shame' and restoring their family's lost honour. Although honour killings do take place in developed countries (Chesler, 2009; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2013) migrant families with such strict beliefs may struggle to dictate and execute these practices in a country in which premarital sex is legal and the majority of host

population are opposed to these harsh measures against women. It is important to mention however that the host population may perceive the idea of honour killing as a sign for migrants' "backwardness and barbaric practices" as well as failure to integrate which further marginalises and stigmatises their communities (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2013). This exclusion and not paying attention to the context of migration and migrants' culture can discourage victims from seeking help and hinder reform in Muslim migrant communities.

Arya referred to his previous comment on his school teacher who promulgated the notion that women are only half intelligent as men.

Arya: This concept is undeniable and if you remember how I said earlier that women are half as smart as men stems from religious beliefs. I completely reject this premise now but definitely. This notion that "man has the right to do that [beat his wife], he is her husband after all" a lot of comes from our religious and cultural beliefs. The role of religion cannot be denied although it is a double edged sword.

He attributed the origin of this idea to orthodox religious beliefs. It was argued that the man's perceived entitlement to his wife's body autonomy (in the form of domestic abuse) is mainly derived from religious and cultural practices. His comments highlight the notion of ownership of women by their husband. It implies that a man's matrimonial ties enable him to violate his wife's body autonomy. He further labelled the role of religion as "a double edged sword" which implied religious beliefs could play an empowering role as well.

Muslim feminists have used "exegetical relativism" (e.g. a Qu'ranic verse can be interpreted in many different ways) as a strategy to push for reforms that are often viewed as feminist due to their concentration on women's rights (Hammer, 2016; Seedat, 2013). Sura 4, Verse 34 of the Quran mentions patriarchal hierarchy and the husband's role during a marital discord (when the woman is disobedient). The verse encourages Muslim men to guide their wives (those who are arrogant) and if they

continued (their behaviour), avoid them in bed, and finally beat them. Reformists have tried interpret the word “daraba” as to hit, to go away (Hammer, 2016).

However Hammer (2016) also points out that there are certain risks involved with exegetical relativism. First, it places the responsibility of finding the ‘right’ ethical interpretation on Muslims themselves, which may end up labelling those who subscribe to different interpretations as morally inferior and supportive of domestic abuse against women. Secondly, and more critical in Muslim anti-domestic violence movements, it weakens the power of Quran as the foundation for marital rules and therefore, undermines the legitimacy of Muslim activists and reformers in the eyes of Muslim families. Another complicating side effect of this approach is that by referring to Quran and highlighting certain marriages as acceptable models, the reformist are actually restoring the relation between religion and domestic violence, rather than disconnecting the two (Hammer, 2016).

Mehdi’s perception on religion was vastly different to other men’s.

Mehdi: The Baha’i teachings are full of love, kindness and solutions for problems. The Baha’i is the first religion that recognises the equality of rights between men and women. This was gradual... This is the need of the society. We won’t reach peace and prosperity if women are deprived from having equal rights to men. This is the basis of the Baha’i faith. This respect has always existed among families for women. It is even taught that if you are a family with two children, one boy and one girl, and you are in a low socioeconomic status and cannot afford to send both to school, it is recommended to prioritise the girl. This is because the girl will become a mother who nurtures her children and becomes their first life coach. It is important to have well educated and knowledgeable mothers who can train good children in future and these children will become members of society who will eventually run it. We will end up with a healthier and better society.

As it was mentioned Mehdi grew up in a different religious environment (Baha’i) compared to the other men who grew up in Muslim families or communities.



Religion in this case was perceived as a force for good. He emphasised the egalitarian aspect of his faith that recognised equality between men and women (Gervais, 2004; Zabihi-Moghaddam, 2017). Furthermore, he explained that the Baha'i faith encouraged families to prioritise their daughters' education if they had to choose between a son and a daughter due to financial difficulties. This approach is different to traditional Islamic approach that does not necessarily emphasise education for women but considers motherhood as their primary role (Hajjar, 2004; Pillai, 2001).

As the reasoning behind this prioritisation in Baha'i faith was explained, it became clear that even though this ideation was more egalitarian than some other religious attitudes that prevent girls from seeking an education (Csapo, 1981) but gender roles were once more visible even in the Baha'i religion. Girls are prioritised over boys because it is assumed that they are responsible for teaching children so a more educated mother can carry her duties more efficiently, nurturing children who can be beneficial to society. Motherhood was perceived as if not the major role but one of the main roles of women.

Mehdi argued that Baha'i values taught respect and kindness and he had grown up with these values and was never exposed to domestic violence in his household.

Mehdi: There are a lot of teachings about respect and things like that. And when you grow up in a family which follows these teachings, these things become normal to you so when someone tells you that their father has beaten them or their parents fight, these all sound very strange to you. Although domestic violence can certainly exist within the Baha'i community but it is rather a personal thing. The religion doesn't teach you to do that. It doesn't give you the right to hit your wife or child. That [domestic violence] could have other reasons. It does not have a religious reason.

Hearing stories about his friends being domestically abused by their fathers was deemed unusual to him. Baha'u'llah (the leader of the Baha'i faith) wrote a letter in 1883 in which he announced the full equality of marriage and between the sexes.

Although his letter did not address ‘domestic violence’ separately but it condemned any ill-treatment of women and rejected the notion of a wife’s inferiority to her husband (Zabihi-Moghaddam, 2017).

Mehdi did not deny the existence of domestic violence in Baha’i communities but he insisted that religion had nothing to do with this issue. He believed that his faith did not sanction such actions nor legitimised domestic violence against women in anyway.

Mehdi’s perception on his faith was dissimilar to other men who attributed gender inequality and violence against women to religious teachings. This could be because Baha’i peaceful and egalitarian teachings and the fact that the religion is not forced on a state level on its members. Other men’s negative view of the role of Islam in domestic violence may stem from Iran’s theocratic government. Shia Islam is the state’s official religion. The country’s legal system is based on Sharia or Islamic law which imposes strict moral codes (e.g. women are required to wear a hijab and premarital relationships are prosecutable) on citizens and monitors their daily lives. People who have experienced living in Iran may find Sharia law invasive and associate this intrusiveness with the whole religion of Islam. A number of participants complained that Islam was ‘imposed’ on them. For example Babak said many are born into Islam without a choice. This highlights that not all migrants who come from a Muslim majority country strongly identify as ‘devout’ Muslims. Secular governments can facilitate migrants to reveal their real perceptions and identity without fear of punishment by the state. Another important point is that citizens of a country with a bad record on women’s rights may actually be opposed to the way their country of origin is governed. I argue that because people in a theocracy have little to no say in their government’s affairs, it is unfair to use Iran’s legal code to label Iranian migrants as “backward” or susceptible to perpetrating domestic abuse. Basically the current moral codes imposed on Iranian public may not be a valid representation of Iranian’s beliefs and desires on gender related issues such as domestic violence.

In summary, this theme showed that most participants (especially those with a Muslim background) held a negative view toward the role of religion in domestic

violence. They argued that Islamic texts and teachings support men and oppress women. The only exception was the Bahai'i participant who believed his religious teachings protected and respected women. In conclusion, I argue that women have a higher status in Bahai'i religion than Islam which may explain this significant difference between these two faiths. There is no doubt that Islamic teachings are often misused to abuse women, however men's privileges and superior status in Islam gives some legitimacy to interpretations that tend to subjugate women.

### **Our culture may silence the victims**

A couple of men criticised aspects of Iranian culture (the notion of shame, privacy, safety, and women's economic dependency) that either silenced the victims of domestic violence or forced them to stay in abusive relationships.

Babak who had been exposed to domestic violence explained that victims may hold themselves responsible for the abuse they have experienced.

Babak: I haven't been a victim but I have seen it but I can assume it'll be very hard to be put in their position because you made felt that you have done something wrong to deserve it I suppose. By our culture supressing it, "you shouldn't talk. A good wife or a good husband wouldn't break the family's honour" by speaking it out. It just allows the domestic violence to happen...

Furthermore he explained that Iranian culture exacerbated the situation by supressing victims who found it difficult to come out and ask for help. Victims could find it difficult to disclose their abuser because revealing the abuse is viewed as shaming the family and breaking its honour. As it was covered in the previous themes, the notion of domestic violence as a private matter is strong in many Muslim families (Eisikovits et al., 2004; Pillai, 2001). Therefore, exposing the abuse or the abuser is perceived as revealing family's secrets. Babak also believed that this culture of silence enabled abusers to do as they please. This culture of silence empowers and supports the abusers and may continue in a migrant context. Migrant women could deem reporting their abuser shameful which further victimises them.

Arya argued that women's dependency on men can force them to stay in abusive relationship. He explained that 'safety' was a key factor for tolerating violence.

Arya: One of the major ones is lack of safety. They may feel insecure. "He may beat me but at least there is a house for me to live in. His name is on me [I can be protected from other men because I am married to him] or he is the breadwinner. I am a woman. If I ever decide to leave, where would I go? I will be alone. Society will see me different [negatively]. I am a divorced woman. People will look down upon me and not everyone would know that he was beating me [so there could be other reasons for my divorce]". The lack of psychological and financial security can cause women to stay in those relationships. Sometimes it can also be for the children but the sense of security is the most important reason in my opinion.

Although a woman was physically abused but her husband provided accommodation for her and his relation to her (having his last name) protected her from other men. Women's inferior status and risk of mistreatment or exploitation by other men, leaves them with no option but to stay with their abusive husband. Financial security also prevented women from leaving their abusive husbands. From the woman's perspective, if she decides to leave then she might have to face homelessness and poverty. Some families might even see daughters as burden (one more mouth to feed) so women could find it difficult to return to their parents' after marriage. Arya's comments indicated a variety of ways that a man has power over his wife. This familial power imbalance in the forms of women's financial dependency and children are then weaponised by men to force women into compliance. This power discrepancy can continue into migration. For example women can still be dependent on their husband for obtaining a residential status. Migrant men can use this 'advantage' to silence and control women. Women's dependency does not necessarily end with migration. It might continue or even exacerbate. A number of studies indicate that women's financial dependency on their husbands is a major factor in confining immigrant and non-immigrant women to abusive relationships

(Erez, 2002; Saidi & Siddegowda, 2013; Yamawaki et al., 2012). It also increases women's likelihood of experiencing domestic violence (El-Zanaty et al., 1996)

There was also the risk of stigmatisation. A divorced woman may be viewed as 'tainted' (Pillai, 2001) and society (which may not know the truth about domestic abuse) could attribute negative characteristics to her (e.g. unfaithfulness) for being divorced. Divorce consequences seems to be more serious for Iranian women than men. A divorced woman is blamed for being a failure in keeping her family together and fulfil her duties as a wife or mother. Society is quick to judge the woman but is more lenient toward a divorced man. The power dynamics between the two genders exacerbates a divorced woman's situation who might find it more difficult to remarry. Being divorced stigmatises not only the woman but her family too, which can explain why abused women are willing to pay such a high price by staying in abusive marriages. This stigmatisation can also be present in migrant communities which may discourage women from seeking divorce. However I believe that marginalisation of divorced migrant women is mitigated in some case, due to smaller size of some migrant communities (e.g. Iranians in New Zealand) and lack of social support in the host country's society for such harsh measures against women. Children were perceived as another reason for silencing and persuading women to tolerate abuse. Fear of losing children's custody tends to act as a deterrent for women seeking divorce (Hajjar, 2004). According to Iran's Civil Code, after a divorce, children's custodies are passed to the mother however when they reach the age of seven, their custody rights are transferred to the father unless insanity or other factors disqualify him (Ebrahimi, 2005).

I will discuss the cultural differences between Iran and New Zealand in the 'cultural relativism' domain however, one participant, Ahmad, explained that it was more difficult to intervene in a domestic dispute in Iran in which is seen as a private matter than New Zealand.

Ahmad: ...in Iran if you say something, you'll be told that "this is none of your business" [if you intervene]. A man's home is his castle (I have used the equal idiom in English which means the same thing), traditional examples and

things like that. If the person is rational and can control his nerves, he might listen to what you have to say and accept your criticism.

He further commented that “A man's home is his castle” was an expected response from the perpetrator in these situations and there was not much else that could be done but conversing. Discourses of privacy like the example given by the interviewer above are cross cultural. For example they have also been used by New Zealander men in order to justify domestic violence (Towns & Adams, 2016).

Towns and Scott (2013) suggested that transforming into a “normal” man meant asserting power over women, and young men exploit social arrangements that consistently advantage men over women. Labelling a domestic dispute as a private issue can be an example of these social arrangements that benefit men. Ahmad emphasised that there was a chance that the perpetrator could listen to someone’s criticism but it all depended on whether he was logical and not extremely aggressive in the moment.

Babak who was introduced earlier and was exposed to domestic violence in his childhood, had a different perspective.

Babak: If I see it I’ll try to stop it and personally I don’t think it’s ok in any way you know. I don’t think it’s a private matter because it’s a social issue. If you have domestic violence in any families around you, it’s going to affect the children there, therefore down the track it’s going affect the society because that kid is going to grow up thinking that’s ok.

He expressed a strong interest in intervention in a domestic dispute and did not perceive it as a private but a public issue. His comments regarding the effects of domestic violence on children such as the tendency for repeating these behaviours as adults reflected much of the literature on social learning theory (Stith et al., 2000). Lack of initiative and being a bystander in a domestic incident were seen not only as insufficient but irresponsible. He viewed intervention in a domestic dispute as a responsibility and expressed feeling of guilt if he failed to do so. Compassion for victims of domestic violence may be attributed to Babak’s own victimisation.

Mehdi, a kindergarten teacher used child abuse as an example. He first explained that it was crucial to intervene if a child was being beaten by their parents, regardless of the feelings of the parents. It was not a private matter for them to decide. However his second comment was regarding his concern that his actions (intervention) could actually exacerbate the situation and leads to a build-up of anger and frustration in the parent and later released against the child at the privacy of their home.

Mehdi: I was thinking about this a while back because we talked about child abuse at the university. We were discussing what needs to be done if someone was beating their child. I argued that it doesn't matter if the parents get upset or not, we need to get involved anyway but the counterpoint to my argument was that the father or mother who is angry and is physically disciplining their child, may stop that in front of me but when they get home, they will beat their child two times more.

This showed that Mehdi was aware of perpetrators' power behind closed doors. It can be derived from his comments that abusers behave differently only as a result of the presence of a bystander and they continue their abuse in the privacy of their household. Although bystanders are able to halt the abuse but this can be temporary. As I had mentioned before, viewing domestic violence as a private family matter is prevalent among Middle Eastern men and women (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). Hajjar (2004) argues that criminalisation (detention, prosecution, conviction and, punishment) compromises the ability of perpetrators to rationalise their actions as private. It sends a clear message that directs the responsibility to the perpetrator and carries the condemnation of society. Although, it is vital that those in positions of power, consider the sociocultural, economic and political contexts of their nations, in order to make effective policies (Hajjar, 2004).

This theme indicated that certain cultural beliefs and practices such as seeing domestic violence as a private issue, silence women. Women's lower status in an Iranian context enables their abusers and forces them to remain in abusive relationships. Victims who reveal their abuser lack the social support of their

community and legal support of the government. This equation might change as a result of migration. For example migrant men could lose the support of their community and their legal privileges in their host country. This can encourage migrant women to speak out against abuse.

### **The government, part of the problem**

Some men believed that the Iranian government and the Islamic penal code of Iran enabled domestic violence against women. Ahmad argued that theocracy (when a country is governed by a particular religion) and lack of secularism have created a system that is disproportionately advantageous to men.

Ahmad: Unfortunately the Iranian government contributes to the problem. These are the countries which are not secular and the religion and politics are often mixed and as a result they predominantly support men more. Even when a woman applies for a divorce (in Iran), they (the government) requests some reasons/justifications (from the woman) that are illogical. “They are not happy together. That’s all” for any reason (she should not be forced to justify it). It can be anything. You shouldn’t use religious rules and articles to dictate how the process is done. For example (divorce can only take place) if only the husband is a gambler, drug addict or alcoholic.

He further explained that the Iranian justice system discriminates against women in the case of divorce. A man could quite easily divorce his wife but the woman had to justify her decision and the divorce was only granted for extreme cases (e.g. when the husband had substance abuse). He perceived the role of religion in the justice system as detrimental. He believed the fact that both parties were not satisfied with the current relationship was a sufficient reason for divorce and women must not be forced to provide additional reasons or justifications for their decision. There is inequality in Iranian divorce laws which were often designed to persuade women to return to their marriage. Women experience more difficulties applying for divorce than men do (Shivolo, 2010).



Hajjar (2004) points out that many governments especially in the Middle East, suppress public discourses, scholars and advocates who attempt to provide a more egalitarian interpretation of Sharia law on gender related issues. There are some penalties (e.g. fines) in the Iranian penal code against domestic violence, however they may not be fully implemented and also women may be reluctant to report any offence due to fear for their future and safety (Vameghi et al., 2010). The current family violence laws in Iran are stricter regarding physical violence but more difficult to implement in the face of psychological or emotional abuse (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015). It can be argued that the Iranian legal system exacerbates the exploitation of women and gives unprecedented privileges to men. The legal system considers little consequences for the abuser and at best can be described as ‘a slap on the wrist’.

In addition Saman also mentioned the poor status of women’s rights in Iran.

Saman: Women don’t actually have many rights in Iran as a result abuse and domestic violence are rampant and easier to occur.

The systematic discriminatory laws against women and their legal status in Iran were seen as main reasons for the high prevalence rates and continuity of domestic violence in the country. The legal age of marriage for women is thirteen and they also require their father’s consent in order to legally marry (Shivolo, 2010). The current legislations in Iran recognises a man’s rights to marry multiple women. The older law required men to seek their first wife’s approval before their second marriage but despite numerous protests from women’s rights advocates, the obligation to gain the first wife’s permission was not placed in the new introduced bill (Schneider, 2016). I explained in previous themes how some Iranian cultural and religious beliefs sanctioned or ignored domestic abuse. The Iranian government is a major contributor to the continuation of domestic violence. It creates an unequal legal basis for women’s exploitation. The familial hierarchy which heavily favours men is supported by the law which is an obstacle for abused women seeking support and help. I imagine that Iranian migrant who are aware of family violence laws of their host country are less likely to be dominated by their husbands who have lost the legal

support of the Iranian legal system. As it was the case with Iranian migrant women in Sweden (Sharareh, Carina, & Sarah, 2007).

In conclusion, women in Iran are still denied their fundamental rights. Their current legal status is not only an obstacle to reporting domestic violence for many Iranian women but also condones their victimisation and protects the abuser.

## **Cultural relativism**

This domain will discuss migrants' adaptation to a new sociocultural setting. I will argue that an individual's beliefs, perceptions and, customs are better understood within their own cultural context and how the same phenomenon produces varied reactions in different cultural settings. I will also indicate that similar behaviours are perceived differently as a result of people's diverse upbringings and life experiences.

### **Adapting to a new society**

This theme discusses factors that participants believed either facilitated or hindered their assimilation to their new home such as, education or religious and cultural affiliation with the host population.

Hamed believed that Iranian migrants had an easy time adapting to New Zealand's way of life.

Hamed: You see a lot of people and other groups coming here, come to another country and they try to force their culture on that place instead of getting used to it while we are the exact opposite. We come here and try to get used to it. We do bring our culture and our communities and our loudness and our parties but I think we do adapt quite well.

Similar to most participants, he viewed education as a protective factor for domestic violence and a facilitating factor for integration. He had an exceptional view of Iranian migrants in New Zealand. It was indicated that Iranian immigrants had achieved a balance between keeping their Iranian identity and adapting to New Zealand. It was emphasised that although Iranians preserved some distinct parts of

their culture (e.g. food) but they did not force their cultural beliefs on their host country. Hamed's comments show an interest in migrant communities to preserve their cultural identity and customs. It can also be implied that since Iranian migrants did not force their cultural practices on the host society, they might expect the same treatment. This might be a source of conflict if migrants' religious or cultural beliefs collide with those from the host population. For instance, a migrant community might view domestic violence a norm and an important part of its identity which can cause its members to resist any change enforced by the host society.

Migrants are more likely to have a higher level of education than their non-migrant counterparts (Gorinas & Pytliková, 2017; Hofmann & Buckley, 2013; Williams et al., 2014). For example Georgian women with a level of education above secondary had a higher propensity for migration to European Union and Turkey than their non-migrant countrywomen (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013). Hofmann and Buckley (2013) have also argued that education can provide migrants with social capital and enable their migration. Education has been found to improve migrants' access to information and employment and to reduce women's dependency on men (Erez, 2002). Although Pillai (2001) indicates that despite having a good education and placing a high value on employment, some migrants struggle to find jobs and provide for their family.

Two participants had a different perspective toward Iranian migrants' assimilation into New Zealand.

Ahmad: One migrant comes from Columbia and Ecuador and the other happens to be from the Middle East, I beg your pardon but from an area of backwardness.

Ahmad described Middle East as a backward and primitive place. His comments imply that immigrants from countries with more social freedom and relaxed moral codes (e.g. with regards to sexual relations outside marriage) are more successful at adapting to their host country than their Middle Eastern counterparts. It is interesting that Ahmad holds a negative view of the region that he was born in. In

contrast with Hamed it seems that some migrants like Ahmad, are more critical of their own cultural background. They are also aware of the vast cultural differences between the Middle East and New Zealand. This critical perspective could have been formed due to migration. It shows that some migrants are fully capable of critiquing some of their own social issues such as domestic violence.

Research has shown that migrants who share more linguistic similarities with the host country are more likely to be culturally similar to the host population and appreciate interaction with them (Gorinas & Pytliková, 2017). A study which investigated the process of migration on a psychological level using thematic analysis of discussion forums indicated that British migrants to New Zealand were not too concerned about sociocultural adaption to their host country (Tabor & Milfont, 2011). Some even claimed that the adjustment was less difficult than when moving from Scotland to England. The authors also highlighted despite being significant ethnic minorities in New Zealand, Māori or Pacific cultures were not mentioned in the forums. British migrants may not have felt the need to learn about the indigenous culture because their own sociocultural background was similar to the majority of New Zealanders. This exclusion could continue the cycle of marginalisation and discrimination against Māori and Pacific people (Tabor & Milfont, 2011). In my own interviews with the participants, the Pākehā culture was perceived as the dominant New Zealand culture and Māori or Pacific cultures were completely absent from the discourse.

Saman had migrated to New Zealand with his family at a young age and his age made his assimilation much easier.

Saman: I was a child and managed so easily to assimilate into society...  
Depends how much they stick to Iranian culture you know. Some migrate here and their culture change and they become New Zealanders and adapt the Kiwi culture but some stay Iranian and it makes no difference for them.  
Depends on the people. The ones who modify Iranian culture and blend in, their perception and expectation of family violence becomes more serious.

He argued that not all Iranians assimilated and embraced the ‘Kiwi culture’ that easily and some preserved their distinct cultural practices. It was believed that those who reshaped their Iranian cultural beliefs and adapted to New Zealand culture were more likely to view domestic violence as a serious issue than those who conserved their old beliefs and refused to integrate. It has been shown that some community leaders reject and view attempts to highlight violence against women in migrant families as enforcing “Western ideologies and standards”, and even argue that their families and groups are not impacted by such issues that are more recurrent in Western cultures (Erez, 2002; Pillai, 2001). Simon-Kumar et al., (2017) explored domestic violence among ethnic migrant communities in New Zealand. The authors indicated that abusive behaviours are usually so normalised in these communities that criminalising violence is often seen as surprising. I argue that young migrant children may have an easier time adapting to and learning the host country’s norms (as a result of the education system and exposure to the dominant culture) than those who have migrated in adulthood. It is worth mentioning however that family has an important role in children’s upbringing and if their norms and values differ significantly with the host population, then this may cause confusion for children who feel caught between their family and the host society.

For Mehdi, the social support provided by Baha’i New Zealander community was seen as a major facilitating factor for his integration into society and prevented experiencing culture shock.

Mehdi: It was very casual to me. We managed to build a strong social network with the Baha’i kiwis who welcomed us and this facilitated our entry to society. The Baha’i kiwis would never humiliate Iranians “you are terrorists or you are this and that”. They were never racist to us in contrast, they were very kind and welcoming because we were from Iran. As an Iranian Baha’i I have had a variety of experiences regarding racism. Some of my friends were saying that New Zealanders are quit racist and their stories were very interesting to me. I noticed that the rest of Kiwis are not necessarily that friendly toward Iranians, your religion and the Middle East in general.

Because our first contact with the Baha'i community in New Zealand, my transition to the host country was very safe especially in the beginning. We didn't experience culture shock nor some other negative experiences that others might have had, thank god.

He described them as kind and welcoming. It was emphasised that Baha'i New Zealanders did not perpetuate the negative or racist stereotypes (e.g. Middle Eastern terrorist stereotypes) toward him. His nationality was seen as a positive characteristic (Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of Baha'i faith was born in Iran). Mehdi explained that his initial experiences were vastly different to his friends who described New Zealanders as "racist". He further argued that Baha'i New Zealanders were only an exception and most New Zealanders did not necessarily hold a positive view toward Iranians, their religions and Middle Easterners in general. An implication of Mehdi's experience is that religious unity is a tool for helping and supporting new migrants with their transition. This process can inform migrants about their new country's cultural norms and even raise awareness of New Zealand's stance on domestic violence. At the same time discriminating against migrants reduces communication between them and the host population which further hinders their transition. It will take longer for them to learn the norms, abuse could continue behind closed doors and victims may struggle to seek help without proper knowledge.

Massey and Higgins (2011) indicated that religious participation can be an important step toward acculturation (in an American context), which churches deliver social support for ethnic families and enabling intermarriage in main religious communities. It has also been suggested that migrants turn to religion for assistance and mutual support in the face of struggles of migration and challenges of relocation (Massey & Higgins, 2011).

The role of religion on migrants' integration into society is perceived differently around the world. For example the majority of migrants in the US are Christian compared to Western Europe, wherein they are mostly Muslim (Foner & Alba, 2008). Western Europeans tend to be more secular and less religious than Americans. Moreover, historically deep relations between the state and religious

communities in Europe have made the incorporation of new religions quite difficult, as compared to the United States which is a multicultural state with a variety of migrant groups and belief systems. Overall, Europeans were more likely to perceive the religion of migrants as a “barrier” compared to Americans who perceived it as a “bridge” (Foner & Alba, 2008). Ward and Masgoret’s (2008) findings on New Zealanders’ attitudes toward migration has shown that overall New Zealanders endorsed multiculturalism and had a positive attitude toward migrants. Their positive attitude toward multiculturalism was demonstrated by their approval of cultural diversity and preference for integration in contrast to assimilation (which was more favourable in Germany and Netherlands). Their attitudes were more positive than EU citizens but less positive than Canadian nationals.

This theme showed that a variety of factors facilitate or obstruct migrants’ adaptation to their host country. Religious and cultural similarity and migration at a young age were perceived to help with migrants’ transition. A number of participants believed that some migrants are resistant to changing their views and cultural beliefs and they will struggle to integrate into the New Zealand society. I argue that a successful adaptation in New Zealand could be potentially empowering for Iranian migrant women who will have access to more opportunities and a higher status. However, transition could also be a source of conflict since migrant men could lose their previous privileges and dominance.

### **Varied expectations from Iran and New Zealand**

Participants referred to a number of issues such as gender inequality and domestic violence that were reacted to and perceived differently in Iran and New Zealand. Therefore, they had developed different expectations from Iran and New Zealand due to their varied experiences from these two cultural contexts.

One participant, Ahmad compared gender roles in Iran and New Zealand.

Ahmad: Our country is not exactly similar to New Zealand in a way that both men and women work together. Men work more and have more financial responsibilities in Iran. A man who works between ten to fifteen hours a day

plus two shifts, when he returns home, for being the provider, he does have some expectations and when he sees that his wife/partner is inattentive, these cause negative psychological effects on this man. Time passes and they tolerate each other for the sake of holding the family together but when he sees this (his efforts) has no effect and is faced with a lot of inattention and unkindness from his spouse, automatically he would be driven to that behaviour (violence).

He argued that women in Iran do not work outside the home as often and tend to have more traditional roles (e.g. motherhood, cooking and other household duties) while men are the 'breadwinners' with important financial responsibilities. Being the sole provider created some expectations from the spouse including, expressing affection and fulfilling her household duties, according to Ahmad, not meeting these expectations built frustration over a period of time and caused conflict within the family. Interestingly, violent behaviour was perceived as if not the normal outcome but very anticipated. Ahmad's perception of women's household responsibilities is an example of rigid gender roles in an Iranian cultural context. The implications of this for gender relationships are that violence is justifiable where the man is the breadwinner and the woman fails to meet his expectations regarding housekeeping and sex. The man's role as the sole provider entitled him to his wife's body and affection. The woman's negligence of her housekeeping and sexual 'duties' sanctioned violence against her. I also noticed a double standard for New Zealander and Iranian women. Because New Zealander women were employed outside of the house (like the men), they were not 'required' to satisfy their husband's expectations to the same degree as Iranian women. Iranian women were not entitled to the same treatment due to their lack of financial contribution. This shows that power imbalance (e.g. complete financial control) creates a male sense of entitlement that is misused to punish women who do not adhere to their defined gender roles. The implication for migrant women is that they too could experience abuse if they are only housewives. Overall, being a housewife was seen as a low status which removed the woman's rights in her own house.



Similar to one of the previous theme ‘the taboo of being a male victim’, an individual who deviates from his or her defined and traditional gender roles could risk punishment in various ways. Okin (1998) discusses the concept of a “virtuous woman” who fulfils her expected duties as a wife and/or a mother. Violence may be used to impose these expectations and failure to complete them could result in victimisation of women (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Erez, 2002).

A qualitative study on Pakistani men’s attitude toward IPV revealed that most men were not opposed to the concept of modernity which they described as “social contribution” and “capacity development” of women (Zakar et al., 2013). The capacities were categorised into two groups: desirable and undesirable capacity. Desirable capacity referred to the capacity of woman to fulfil her familial responsibilities and assist her husband on his daily life. Undesirable capacity was when a woman built courage to challenge her husband’s authority and neglected her household duties. This capacity was perceived as negative and damaging to the family’s honour. The Pakistani men highlighted the importance of women’s household duties and believed that women’s social development must not undermine their husbands’ control. Some even viewed earning income through women as an embarrassment.

A number of men explained that domestic violence was a universal problem which existed across the world, however its intensity and the way it was dealt were noticeably different in Iran and New Zealand.

For example Saman and Mehdi talked about New Zealand’s problems with domestic violence and the fact that certain groups such as migrants and people with low socioeconomic status in particular were more vulnerable. However, they both believed that the situation was grimmer in Iran wherein there was little public discourse on domestic violence compared to New Zealand.

Saman: I believe it [domestic violence] is way worse there than here. That being said there are a lot of problems in New Zealand as well. I believe it (the issue) exists in Iran but nobody talks about it and nobody sees it as a problem

therefore, it is not a major thing on people's minds but here because people do talk about it and are tougher on it, it occupies people's minds more often and it is seen as a bigger problem.

Mehdi: It exists in Iran, the Middle East, the Muslim countries in south East Asia and Africa. There are some problems [in those countries] that although still exist in New Zealand as well but not to the same extent. If you tell them [New Zealanders] about it, they'll be shocked...It's not like this here.

Domestic violence exists here but not with the same intensity. There is still some hope but it's horrible in Iran. Fortunately it's not like this everywhere but it exists. The norm of our society and culture contribute.

Lack of discourse was attributed to ignoring the extent of the problem. It can be implied that if the same amount of attention was given to domestic violence in Iran (like it was given in New Zealand), the Iranian public would perceive it as a more serious issue. Mehdi assumed that the seriousness and frequency of domestic violence in Iran (he had used honour killings as an example earlier) would be appalling to New Zealanders. His description indicates that there is a significant difference between the acceptability or commonality of certain violent behaviours against women, in Iran and New Zealand. It implies that some common or to some degree acceptable behaviours (e.g. physical violence on women and children) in Iran could create an outrage in a New Zealand context. This difference can cause disputes between migrants and the host population who may consider some of migrants' actions repugnant. Migrants on the other hand could interpret the host population's negative view toward their practices as discrimination or bigotry.

Mehdi concluded that there was room for optimism in New Zealand but the same could not have been said about Iran. Men's different views on domestic violence in Iran and New Zealand could have been influenced by a variety of factors. However based on their descriptions of two societies, I argue that open and public discourse in New Zealand surrounding domestic violence and its supportive family violence laws seemed to be the most influential factors in building their higher expectations from New Zealand. These factors are absent or less noticeable in Iran.

IPV remains a major social and health problem in New Zealand. Some demographics are disproportionately represented. For example Marie et al., (2008) indicated that the life time prevalence of IPV for Māori women was 26.9% compared to 14.6% for European New Zealanders. Recently more attention has been paid to domestic violence in New Zealand's ethnic and migrant communities however it has been argued that the available data on gender related violence among New Zealand's migrant ethnic families is not entirely reliable (Simon-Kumar, Kurian et al., 2017; Pillai, 2001). Available data shows that there are fewer assaults on migrant women compared to Pākehā, Pacific or Maori women however it is important to consider two points: 1- the current research indicates that ethnic migrants or refugees are less likely to report family violence than other New Zealanders (Boutros, Waldvogel, Stone, & Levine, 2011) and the Ministry of Social Development has reported that Asian and Pacific women had a higher risk of being murdered by their intimate partners than any other demographics except Maori (Simon-Kumar et al., 2017).

Despite these shortcomings there is a significant discrepancy on multiple levels between Iran's and New Zealand's approach to domestic violence. New Zealand has adopted progressive legislations against domestic violence (e.g. labelling marital rape a criminal offence in 1985) (Crichton-Hill & others, 2010), has installed a variety of interventionist services (e.g. women's refuge) (Pillai, 2001) and more importantly actively conducts research in this area (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004; Kazantzis et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2006).

Iran's current legislations are derived from Islamic jurisprudence (Ghaderi, 2014; Hajjar, 2004). Religious interpretations of civil and criminal laws has caused significant disparities between the rights of men and women. Article 1053 of the Iran's civil code declares men as the head of the household. The legal use of the word 'master' allocates most of the power to men and considers women as 'subordinate' (Ghaderi, 2014). Article 1108 of the civil code states that a woman's failure to fulfil her responsibilities as a wife revokes her right to alimony. Some men have used this legal ground to physically or even sexually abuse their wives when they refuse to perform their 'duties' (Ghaderi, 2014). Many Iranian women are reluctant to take

available legal measures out of concern for their own safety (e.g. retaliation from the husband) and their future (economic hardship and losing their children's custody) (Ebrahimi, 2005; Vameghi et al., 2010).

As it was mentioned in Chapter two Statistical centre of Iran has never conducted a nationally representative study on domestic violence in Iran and has not authorised any major international organisation to conduct a large scale study (Rasoulzadeh et al., 2014). A number of Iranian researchers have argued that there is scarcity in this area accompanied by a lack of accurate figures of violence against Iranian women (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015; Nouri et al., 2012; Vameghi et al., 2010).

### **The norm**

A subtheme that emerged from this section was the varied norms regarding domestic violence in Iranian and New Zealander contexts. Mehdi, above had mentioned that the society's norm contributed to domestic abuse.

Mehdi: Normal people are the ones who make mistakes but because it is accepted in society, nobody sees them as sick/abnormal. For example parents may easily beat their children. This is the norm. He is not even seen as a bad father. Because it is the norm, it is not considered violence. Although based on the definition of violence, it is violence.

He categorised people (in a society) into three different groups; sick/antisocial people who abused others, sound/genuine people who treated everyone with respect and finally the biggest group, normal people. The latter group were not necessarily immoral but followed the norms of their society. Justification for wife abuse has been reinforced by cultural and societal norms (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Erez, 2002). For example if the norm condones corporal punishment of children or wife abuse then these behaviours may not be considered violent or abhorrent.

Babak highlighted that domestic violence was more clearly defined in New Zealand than Iran and that helped with creating prevention strategies and public awareness and ultimately altered the societal norms.

Babak: People are a lot more aware of it [in New Zealand]. In Iran there is no proper “what we define as domestic violence” so this is just what undergoes in families but in New Zealand they have drawn a clear boundary of what falls into that category of domestic violence. A lot of prevention strategies, things like the ads, you can see that it’s not ok as it’s teaching, educating people that it’s not so people who are even doing it, you could see that from the general public’s perspective is not really ok but I feel like in Iran, especially in lower class, like in villages or people in the outskirts, smaller cities or towns it’s really just the norm. People don’t deem it as hugely wrong.

Lack of these initiatives in Iran (particularly in people with low socioeconomic status and rural populations) were attributed to perceiving domestic violence as a legitimate act. Scholars have reported a variety of definitions for domestic violence in studies conducted in the Middle East and Iran (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Pournaghash-Tehrani, 2011; Vameghi et al., 2010). Some have only considered physical violence as spousal abuse (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008). The current laws in Iran are stricter with regards to physical violence than psychological abuse due to ‘lack of evidence’ (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015). Subjective definition of domestic violence was also evident in my participants’ comments. I also argue that a poor or vague definition of domestic violence can certainly hinder many prevention strategies. Many abusers and even victims themselves may see the abuse as just the ‘norm’.

A number of participants underlined the commonality and acceptability of domestic violence in Iran compared to New Zealand. Afshin viewed verbal violence as the norm in an Iranian family. He had mentioned earlier that there was some justification for verbal aggression however he labelled his experience ‘verbal abuse’. It implies that he is aware that verbal aggression could lead to verbal abuse. This awareness might have been formed as a result of exposure to a different cultural context.

Afshin: As far as verbal violence/abuse yeah. I think that is normal or semi normal in an Iranian family to go through or in my family at least.

Arya could think of many domestic abuse cases among his circle of friends in Iran but not in New Zealand, indicating its possible higher prevalence in Iran.

Arya: When I was a kid, one of our neighbours, the guy would beat his wife or I used to hear from my family that some guy [one of our relatives] beats his wife or threatens her or is a violent man at home... I did not see any of my friends here [in New Zealand] being subjected to domestic violence. I heard about a lot of cases among the younger generation which mainly includes a relationship between a boyfriend and a girlfriend, in my recent trip to Iran about a month ago.

Arya's comments indicate that domestic violence incidents similar to his childhood, still happen in Iran, implying an intergenerational transmission of violence. However it also highlights a change in the nature of relationships. A change from traditional relationships (marriage) to premarital relationships but domestic violence seems to be present in both types. It could be argued that sociocultural changes in Iran have not necessarily led to less domestic violence for women.

Saman's comment indicates a degree of habituation and passivity to domestic abuse. It implies that a portion of society have accepted domestic violence as part of marriage.

Saman: It is way more accepted in Iran. For example when a man beats his wife, they say "oh well, that's just the way it is" you know.

The commonality of domestic violence in migrants' culture can pose some challenges for adaptation in the host country. Subscribing to norms condoning of domestic abuse may increase the likelihood of facing the host country's legal system which is less tolerant of domestic violence. There is also the risk of marginalisation when the host population perceive migrants' cultural norms as a sign of their 'primitiveness' which further hinders their adaptation.

Babak just like Ahmad in earlier themes, implied that Iranian culture condoned and to some extent normalised physical violence against unfaithful women. The notion of victim blaming is reflected once more. It seems that infidelity is a

popular excuse for justifying domestic violence. The community could be less sympathetic toward the victim if she has been labelled as sexually unfaithful.

Babak: ... I don't think that's right but it is the norm in our culture, in Iranian culture it is that she deserves it because she was unfaithful.

Hamed and Afshin held a different view toward the problem than the rest of participants. Hamed said that although there was an argument for the seriousness of domestic abuse in Iran but it tends to be exaggerated.

Hamed: I think it's been blown out of proportion. It is a huge problem but unfortunately they make it look a lot worse than it is... I know it sounds wrong but if you compare the Iranians with let's say Arab communities or countries...

He emphasised that Iran must be understood within its own context and be compared to other Middle Eastern countries, rather than New Zealand.

Afshin also argued that Iran cannot be compared to New Zealand with regards to domestic violence.

Afshin: I think when you generally think about Iran and apply the same standards as you would in New Zealand to Iran which might not be fair or might be, I don't know, that's whole other discussion, then yeah. You would see that certain things that would be considered domestic violence are more likely to happen there.

A number of men had explained in the previous themes that there were environmental factors (e.g. poverty and lack of education) that exacerbated domestic abuse in Iran but New Zealand was less affected by them. Therefore the comparison between the two contexts was deemed illegitimate or unfair. They had a relativist perspective on women's rights and applied different standards to Iran and New Zealand as opposed to a universal approach to women's rights. This implies that Iranian women are unable to have access to same rights and opportunities as their New Zealander counterparts and Iranian men cannot be expected to behave in a same

manner as New Zealander men due to poverty and other macro issues unique to Iran. Although it has been established in this research that factors such as poverty can certainly contribute to domestic violence but a number of men seem to use Iran's 'poor' status as a developing country to minimise or justify domestic violence. This lower expectation and applying different moral standards based on people's ethnic or national background sends a signal that ethnic or migrant women are entitled to fewer rights as their European counterparts and ethnic men are less capable of following moral codes that support women's rights than for example European men.

It was implied that Iran's status on domestic violence was superior to its Arab neighbours. It can be difficult to accurately compare between the prevalence rates of domestic violence in studies conducted in the Middle East. The formulation of survey questions, definitions of abuse and interpretations of physical or other types of abuse in different social contexts affected participants' responses. Despite that, the current literature indicates that the prevalence of domestic violence is not necessarily lower in Iran than the rest of the Middle East. For example Egypt's national health survey indicated 34% of married women between the ages of 15 to 49 had experienced physical abuse by their spouses since their marriage (El-Zanaty et al., 1996). A study in Iran on women between the ages of 15 to 75 visiting family planning health services showed that 60% of them had experienced physical IPV (Nouri et al., 2012). Another piece of research on the prevalence of domestic Violence against women by their spouses in Iran, suggested that the rate of physical violence was only 16.4% but also argued that due to societal and cultural changes in Iran, the rate of emotional abuse was increasing, 44.4% (Kargar Jahromi et al., 2015).

In summary, men believed that domestic violence was taken more seriously in New Zealand than Iran. New Zealand was perceived to have a tougher stance on violence against women on a legal and societal level. There was also a significant discrepancy between the acceptability of domestic violence between an Iranian and New Zealander context. Domestic abuse was described as a 'norm' in Iran by a number of participants. Some men argued that the New Zealand's standards on domestic violence cannot be applied to an Iranian context.



## **Culture shock and cultural misunderstandings**

This theme discusses the cultural differences experienced by Iranian immigrant men in a New Zealand context, including varied interpretations of the same behaviour in each culture.

Some men viewed New Zealanders as less conservative and more relaxed in their daily routines and familial relations. These comments highlighted some differences between the Iranian collectivist perspective and New Zealand's individualistic worldview.

Mehdi did not describe his experiences as 'culture shocks' but found them interesting nonetheless. The formality and hierarchy at a working place was less visible in New Zealand.

Mehdi: Despite all that because the Iranian and the New Zealander culture are completely different, Eastern and Western cultures. There were some things that I would not call them 'shocks' but were fairly interesting... Whenever we had a [work] meeting in Iran, we would dress quite formal and act very polite but here everyone was relaxed and show up with shorts and sandals. It wasn't a big deal but we were always tidy and formal. That was very interesting to me. I saw cultural differences like this but I was not culture shocked per se.

A couple of men talked about the differences in familial relationships between Iran and New Zealand. Hamed mentioned how he could never imagine calling his parents with their first names (it was considered to be disrespectful), unlike his New Zealander wife.

Hamed: I only call my parents mum and dad but she might call her parents by their first names and we have cousins and cousins and we're all one big happy family. Others may not exactly be like that so that's the only difference.

Respect for parents' authority was repeated by Saman.

Saman: Here the Europeans are more relaxed with regards to their children. For example when kids want food then they have to ask their parents, when

they go out, they are not wearing any jacket/warm clothes. They go in the rain with shorts and a shirt and without any shoes. Parents are more protective of their children in Iran. When a meal is presented, the kid will eat it without any question. It's not too common but you see it happening here that children from the age of sixteen start paying rents to their parents and even have to pay for their own food. Here parents want you to move out when you are an adult but in Iran, children don't leave their parents' house till they are married. The main difference is this, we are Eastern and the eastern cultures are more family oriented.

He mentioned that Iranian children were less likely to question their parents' decisions and were more likely to be dependent on them (only leaving the house when they got married) than their New Zealander counterparts. Iranian parents were seen as more authoritative and protective of their children. There was also more interaction with the extended family members such as uncles, aunts and cousins in an Iranian context. There is a notion here that Iranian family and work relationships tend to be stricter and more hierarchical than is the case in NZ families and workplace. The power structure is more clearly defined in an Iranian context. A dominance hierarchy creates different positions of power with husband or boss at the top and women and children at the bottom, respectively. Although these power dynamics can create unity, order and social support within the family but they also distribute power unequally. The husband or father has substantial power and can run the family according to his wish. Parents can also exert power over children whom are taught to respect their authority and not question them. The concentration of power in the head of the household and a sense of respect for authority has important implications for domestic violence. Obedience can prevent victims from questioning the behaviour of the abuser who holds more power than they do. I argue that power imbalance between family members increases the risk of abuse and allows those with more authority to assert their dominance with insignificant consequences. Migration and exposure to a more individualistic culture such as New Zealand might alter these power dynamics. Therefore this new legal and social setting allows those who held less authority before (women and children) to share it with the head of the household. However it is

important to mention that migrants' familial hierarchy is able to withstand influences from the host's dominant culture. For example Hamed indicated that even after spending years outside of Iran, he still found it difficult to call his parents by their first name.

Saman believed that opposite gender relations in New Zealand were more acceptable than Iran in which they may have been looked down upon. This implies that opposite gender relations are more normalised in New Zealand than Iran. This normalisation could potentially reduce subscription to rigid gender norms and gender based biases (as it was the case with Mehdi and his Bahai'i community).

Saman: The differences for example, friendships were different. It was normal here for a boy and a girl to kiss and give each other a hug but in Iran wasn't like that (was heavier/conservative). We didn't have that much freedom in Iran. We couldn't freely ride our bikes wherever we wanted around our neighbourhood.

There was more safety and social freedom in New Zealand. This implies that relationships in New Zealand were perceived to be less strict which require less responsibilities and roles. Less structured intimate relationships could mean more power imbalance and less endorsement of gender roles. In summary, the role of close and extended family was perceived to be more dominant in an Iranian family than a New Zealander one. Family is seen as the core building block of a Muslim society and parents are deeply respected based on their hierarchical position in the family (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000).

Afshin's story was a perfect example of cultural misunderstanding; how a norm in a migrant's social setting was interpreted completely differently by a member of the host country.

Afshin: So I think I was either fifteen or sixteen and my mum really wanted us to do the dishes and my mum and I got into an argument. Quite a heated argument whereas was usual we started shouting at each other and at some point one of our neighbours had called the police. It was loud enough for that

to happen. And so the police came. They took me to the car. Sat me down inside and said “having a bit of an incident there. This is a warning. Do not let it happen again.” And we did. So that was the end of the story. I think for me that is what demonstrated the difference. It was quite surprising to me that I was sat in the car.

He explained how a verbal altercation about house chores between him and his mother led to involvement of the police. One of their neighbours had contacted the authorities due to hearing their loud argument. Afshin emphasised that this type of behaviour was very usual in his household. His mum shouted at him once a while and it was only normal for him to shout back. The police officers took him to their car and issued him a warning, asking him to not repeat this behaviour. He said that they adjusted their behaviour as a result of this incident. Despite that, he found it odd how the officers took him (a teenager) into the car instead of his mother (the guardian). Further into the interview, he mentioned that his physical appearance (he described himself as a large guy for his age) might have contributed to the officers’ decision. It seems that Afshin (at least at the time) viewed the ‘loud’ argument with his mother as normal but the person who contacted the authority had a different interpretation.

There are a number of implications here. First, this incident shows that an acceptable or tolerable behaviour in an Iranian family is perceived problematic by New Zealanders. For example ‘spanking’ or verbal aggression in an Iranian migrant household may not be considered abuse which can lead to law enforcements’ involvement. Migrants’ low awareness of the host country’s norms exacerbates the situation. This is also a learning experience. Afshin highlighted that his family adjusted their behaviour as a result of this incident. It indicates that migrants learn by interacting and experiencing the host’s societal norms and adjust their behaviour accordingly. I also argue that the reason behind taking Afshin to the police car could have been his physical appearance. He did describe himself as a large teenager. It is possible that the police officers perceived him more of a ‘threat’ due to his size than his mother. It was shown throughout this research that some participants believed that

men's physical strength was a risk and contributing factor to domestic violence. This belief might have been shared by the law enforcements in Afshin's story.

Afshin talked about another similar incident that he had come across while working in the city council.

Afshin: We had this Iranian couple who had turned up and what had happened was they had got into an argument. She threatened to call the police as sort of an empty threat sort of situation. Just in the heat of the moment and so called the police the police came by and sat her down. Now she has very broken English, right. So the police sat her down. They had a discussion with her and after this discussion they arrested the guy and he is serving jail time at the moment and since then she has been contacting everyone she can. She has been trying to get him out of jail.

He spoke of an Iranian couple whose heated argument had involved the authorities. According to Afshin, the wife had threatened to call the police in the middle of the argument. Eventually, the police were contacted and arrived at the scene and discussed the situation with her. Seemingly the wife lacked a good command of English and her husband was arrested in the end. The participant stated that she has been trying to release him and that was why she was seeking assistance from the city council. This is a second hand account, therefore it is quite difficult to know the woman's real intentions for calling the police. There may be multiple reasons why a women in this situation does not want her husband imprisoned and they are not necessarily indicative of a feeling that the violence was minor. It is possible that Afshin has a very particular version of the incident he retells however this account reveals his beliefs and attitudes toward domestic violence in a migrant context.

Afshin: Maybe not perhaps for fresh immigrants who do not know the social etiquette. They do not know the law and how very very deeply troubled them and their families can become if they do not know how to act. Especially surrounding domestic violence. I mean I did something that for me was very

normal. As a kid my mum has always been shouting at me so to shout back as a teenager...

Afshin's comments showed his scepticism toward new migrant's interaction with the legal system of the host country. It implies that language barrier and lack of knowledge of social norms impede migrants' ability to communicate their intentions appropriately. I argue that scarcity of culturally appropriate services and negative or complicating experiences with authorities can slow immigrants' adaptation to their new country and discourage them from seeking support in a domestic abuse situation.

As it has been discussed in other themes, the authorities in Iran tend to play a mitigating role in a domestic dispute situation and practice significantly less pronounced methods against alleged perpetrators. Afshin did not expect the police to intervene to the extent that they did. These examples indicated how low awareness of the host country's laws, customs and language barriers could lead to such complications. It has been suggested that language barriers, ignorance of the laws, different experiences/expectations from the authorities (based on experiences from the home country) and discrimination could prevent immigrants from reporting the abuse or hinder proper communication between them and the justice system (Erez, 2002; Sulak et al., 2014).

Ahmad believed that an asylum seeker's cultural background was an important factor in experiencing culture shocks and assimilation to society.

Ahmad: An individual who comes from Columbia and claims asylum here through the UN, a concept such as sex is ok and natural to him but for someone who has come from the Middle East and has always been faced with limitations and strict rules and been told to "do this but don't do that", suddenly enters a new world such as New Zealand in which everything is free.

He compared a South American country, Columbia as an example wherein more personal freedom existed (e.g. sexual behaviour is not looked down upon) to Middle East where sexual behaviours outside marriage were suppressed. It may be implied that Middle Easterners would experience more conflicts, culture shocks and,

overall more difficulties as a result of this radical change in their social environment. Stress and Coping Grounded Theory argues that specific contexts (e.g. ethnic and sociocultural contexts), beliefs and resources could affect the coping mechanisms of migrants with varied acculturation and migration backgrounds (Kuo, 2014).

Immigrants with various sociocultural experiences in the host culture may react differently to a similar distressing factor due to being affected by varied cultural factors, beliefs and expectations. The greater the overlap between their cultural context and the host population, the easier their transition. A successful transition depends on a variety of factors however it is understandable to assume that an Iranian migrant might need a longer period to adjust to New Zealand's cultural norms than a European migrant. Dedicating more teaching resources to migrants with dissimilar cultures is warranted in order to ease their transition to New Zealand.

### **Taking advantage of the law**

Some participants argued that there were some issues with the laws on domestic violence, specifically in New Zealand. Afshin believed that if the law was too broad scoped and strict then that opened the door to possible legal abuse.

Afshin: I don't know how tight I might make the law. The sort of the more sensitive you make the law I think it can be abused as well on the other end.

Ahmad perceived women's misuse of these protective laws as an indicator for their disloyalty and lack of respect for familial hierarchy and spousal responsibilities.

Ahmad: ...some women misuse this situation and do not want to be loyal and respectful to the frame and the structure of their own family. They take advantage of it....

The idea of women taking advantage of the NZ law is in contrast with the concept that immigrants often do not fully understand the law of the host society. A number of studies have argued that migrants are not fully aware of their host country's domestic violence laws (Erez, 2002; Pillai, 2001; Simon-Kumar et al., 2017). However Ahmad's comments indicate that at least some women migrants not only understand these laws but also use them to protect themselves or challenge their

husband's dominance in the family. In a similar example female Iranian immigrants in Sweden showed a degree of awareness of Swedish domestic violence laws and four had initiated and sought divorce and were satisfied with their decision (Sharareh et al., 2007). One of the women explained that her husband was against her working outside the house but he also knew that the laws in Sweden did not allow him to restrict his wife like Iran. She further commented on the denial of Iranian women's rights in her home country.

There is a significant discrepancy between family violence laws in the Western countries and the Middle East where perpetrators of intrafamily violence either enjoy a degree of legal impunity (when the act is not criminalised) or social impunity (when the act is legally prohibited but not enforced) (Hajjar, 2004). Although the estimate rates vary from country to country but domestic violence is pervasive enough to be reported as 'common' in many Muslim majority countries (Boy & Kulczycki, 2008; Hajjar, 2004; Rasoulilian et al., 2014). These impunities indicate a reluctance or defiance to acknowledge intrafamily violence as actual violence. Often violent behaviours such as, beatings, threats, captivity, and insults are considered "discipline" or "punishment" instead of "abuse" therefore, obscuring the nature of abuse (Hajjar, 2004). Further, male superiority which includes the entitlement to disciplining the family members (women in particular) is a core belief in many (Muslim) familial relations, then society could perceive these means used to maintain this order as vital (Hajjar, 2004; Pillai, 2001).

Erez (2002) and Pillai (2001) suggest that a high proportion of immigrant and refugee women are ignorant of the family violence laws of their host country. Moreover, a variety of sociocultural factors (e.g. language barriers, lack of social support, dependency on the spouse, and rigid cultural beliefs about gender roles) prevents them from seeking legal protection. In a study of Iranian migrant women's health in Sweden, a number of interviewees explained that immigration has had a significant effect on their worldview and belief system (Sharareh et al., 2007). I argue that due to years of incorporation of discriminatory cultural and religious traditions into the legal system, abuse against women has been to some extent normalised in the



Middle East. Therefore when female immigrants exercise their rights of protection (in a more egalitarian context), their male counterparts tend to perceive it as “taking advantage” or “abusing” the law.

This theme showed that some behaviours and cultural customs could be interpreted differently in another cultural setting. Family and work relationships were said to be more structured and hierarchical in an Iranian context compared to New Zealand. Some participants believed that language barrier and poor understanding of the host country’s culture creates cultural misunderstanding and complications with the legal system. A couple of participants argued that New Zealand’s domestic violence laws allowed some women to take advantage of the law. This idea is in contrast with the notion that many migrants are ignorant of their host country’s family violence laws.

## **The process of change**

The last domain leads to the final domain of this analysis. In this domain, the participants reflected on their process of adjustment to their host country and the cultural and behavioural changes that they had experienced throughout their lives as migrants and how these changes ultimately impacted their perceptions on domestic violence and other gender relate issues.

### **Immigration changes your perceptions**

The title of this theme is self-explanatory but men provided some examples of changes in their beliefs and perceptions on gender norms and treatment of women which they attributed to migration and being exposed to new cultural perspectives.

Some participants had experienced major perceptual changes.

Ahmad: For example when I was 17-18 years old, I used to scold my sister for exposing her hair but now I give her this right that this is none of my business. Although she is my sister (namoos: the man’s wife or sisters who need to be protected/defended) but I shouldn’t force her to follow my guidelines. This is

wrong. Maybe if I was still in Iran, I wouldn't have thought this way. I think this way because I live in New Zealand.

Ahmad used to hold religious and conservative views toward women's dress codes in Iran. He forced his sister to cover her hair completely (as it is the law in Iran) whenever she left the house. Ahmad's perceptions began to shift after his migration to New Zealand. He put forward the possibility that his beliefs may have remained unchanged if he had not been exposed to New Zealand's way of life. His sister's rights to choose her own dress without coercion was respected. This directly addresses the impact of migration on views about domestic violence. Ahmad's comment on "giving" his sister the right to do what she pleases with her hair highlights his superior position in relation to her. It indicates that an Iranian cultural context has allowed him to assert his authority on his sister and control her body autonomy. Exposure to New Zealand's culture has changed his understanding of the power structure and gender roles (e.g. his role as the protector) that formed the basis for his previous relationship with his sister. His new relationship seems to be more equal with regards to power.

Arya's perceptions were heavily affected by noticing the differences in the academic contexts of Iran and his host countries, Australia and New Zealand.

Arya: I studied in the University of [...] in Iran and there was only one woman lecturer [in that institution] and she was despised by the male students but when I came here, I noticed that most lecturers are actually woman and this made me realise that I as a man, am not superior to a woman. There is no reason for me to use violence, to threat or degrade a woman in a household. When I saw the strong presence of women in the society I recognised automatically that women are also rational/logical beings and are just as intelligent as us [men]... This is the thing I felt the most and stood out the most when I came here from Iran.

He highlighted the more dominant role of women in New Zealand compared to Iran. For example the sole female lecturer in a university in Iran (that he attended)

was despised and ridiculed by male students but Arya noticed that the majority of lecturers in New Zealand academia were woman. This pronounced difference had made him reevaluate his views on male superiority and domestic violence. He referred to his school teacher who propagated the idea of women's low intelligence. That was one of many views that altered as a result of seeing the strong presence of women in a freer society. These changes manifested themselves more clearly when the participant rejected the legitimacy of violence (sexual or physical) against women. It can be implied that with education and under more equal circumstances, gender stereotypes could and firm beliefs in rigid gender roles are reduced. This can also reduce domestic violence.

Arya: I attended these introductory sessions at the Melbourne University but one of the other things that they taught us was sexual harassment. "You shouldn't try to befriend someone from the opposite gender by force" which implied this [action] is not a positive thing but when I was in Iran, a guy who had multiple girlfriends was known as a 'cool/alpha' person. My behaviour and perception radically changed. I came to conclusion wholeheartedly that domestic violence, either from men or women is something negative and should not be done under any circumstances.

His comments also highlighted the vast differences in tackling gender related issues in two varied cultural contexts. For instance, the Melbourne University's sexual harassment prevention session affected his perception on the concept of 'dominant/alpha' male which he used to describe as someone who had multiple girlfriends and was not afraid to use force to achieve his goals when necessary. This implies that women tend to be more objectified in Iranian context. Having access to multiple women was believed to empower them in their peers' eyes. The lower status of women meant that men could use intimidation or violence to force them into a relationship. Women could also find it difficult to leave these relationships and disobeying their spouse or partner may also be faced with violence.

When Hamed was asked about the acceptability of using violence against a woman who 'talks back' (replies defiantly) to her husband, he rejected this idea. His long

lack of exposure to the Iranian society was attributed to this change. It can be implied that the longer someone is secluded from a particular cultural context, the less they identify with some of its customs and practices.

Hamed: First of all, it's probably because I have been living outside the country for so long that this [when a woman talks back] sounds ridiculous to me...

In earlier themes Saman had described how both he and his brother were physically disciplined by their mother.

Saman: Neither of my parents are religious. They are quite open minded and educated. I don't think religious beliefs have contributed to it as much. They were quite relax. I think the Iranian culture has affected it more than anything else. Since we have come here, I have heard my mum telling my brother that I was wrong to hit you and being hard on you in your childhood but that's the Iranian culture. You will really see the difference when you leave home (Iran) and come here. It wasn't religious but cultural.

Although he perceived corporal punishment as beneficial to him but he admitted that the effects were more severe for his brother. He mentioned that after some years his mother expressed remorse and apologised to his brother for beating him. Saman perceived this (corporal punishment) as something normal in an Iranian family. It is implied that an individual's views and behaviours are more likely to alter when they leave their home country and are exposed to a new cultural setting. Therefore, it was very difficult to consider child beating as an immoral act without any other cultural reference for comparison. The host country's societal norms may alter the migrant familial norms.

In order to gain a thorough comprehension of the process of change in migrants' beliefs and values, it is vital to consider the possibility that they may not fully represent their population of origin (Williams et al., 2014). Instead immigrants are a select group of individuals whose values may be systematically different to their non-migrant countrymen and women. Past migrant scholars often perceived

migration as a one-way stream where migrants accepted socioeconomic and cultural contexts of their host country, while gradually disremembering their own (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013). A newer approach “transnationalism” argues that migrants may build a lifestyle that includes social settings of both the country of origin and the host country (Portes, Guarnizo, & Haller, 2002).

A study on Nepali migrants living in the Persian gulf region, indicated that migrants were more likely to be family oriented, materialist, and less likely to be religious compared to non-migrant countrymen and women (Williams et al., 2014). Over time the Nepali migrants tended to strict their own behaviours, including becoming more religious and spending more time with their families due to immigration and the stress associated with it, migrant lifestyle and low social support. It has also been suggested that migrants become less devoted to some cultural values and more open and accepting toward the new societal norms, such as the importance of individual needs, getting divorced and leaving the parents. Experiencing the host population’s culture, exposure to a variety of people and ideologies and the transitional way of life may loosen migrants’ attachment to some of their historical values and customs (Williams et al., 2014). Massey and Higgins (2011) who looked at the effect of immigration on religiosity in the US, indicated that their results could be explained by the “alienating hypothesis”. It argues that although migration do not necessarily change the migrants’ religious beliefs but affects their religious behaviours. Immigration is extremely time consuming which requires learning a new language, searching for a job and adapting to a new culture and environment. These actions may outcompete the immigrants’ religious practices with regards to limited time. Also a high number of new arrivals do not belong to the main practicing faiths in the country (Catholicism, Protestantism, or Judaism) and find themselves in a context in which not many share their belief system. Therefore, immigration can reduce religiosity in the short term (Massey & Higgins, 2011).

Participants talked about the changes in their perceptions on gender based violence as migrants. It was indicated that migration has had a significant effect in altering their views on relationships with women and domestic violence. Most

participants believed that they have developed a more egalitarian and respectful view on women as a result of migration.

### **Immigrants under scrutiny**

This section is about how some men felt scrutinised by the host population due to having different cultural norms. They tried following the host society's norms to integrate and reduce this perceived scrutiny, instead of being seen as the 'other' (someone who is not part of New Zealand society).

Two other participants had also noticed this change in Iranian migrants' norms and behaviours. Mehdi argued that migrants' norms shifted based on the host population's norms and customs.

Mehdi: Because the society's norm is different here, naturally you would try to not to portray yourself as too different from others. You would even try to portray a better version of yourself and that may help with mitigating that violence but because some bad practices are norms in Iran, you may not feel too obligated to behave properly [in Iran]. There is no one to scrutinise/criticise you because it is something that everybody does anyway... The example that I can think of top of my head regarding why we behave different is about driving. I was talking to one of my friends about this. He had come from Iran recently and was saying how everyone here follows the [road] rules/code.

There was a desire for belonging to the majority. He explained that migrants were more likely to be noticed or scrutinised by the host society so they avoided behaving radically different to the norms of their host country. There was no social pressure in Iran to reshape "bad practices" of individuals because those practices were accepted by the majority of people. Driving was the example that was used. He referred to a conversation about this subject with his Iranian friend who highlighted the fact that the vast majority of New Zealanders followed the road codes.

This scrutiny is not always positive. For example a high portion of the host population may view the migrant women who have reported domestic violence

against them (challenging their families' norms) as those who have abandoned their families as a result of patriarchy and primitiveness. This rhetoric is then used to highlight 'the inferior status of migrants' in the host society (Erez, 2002). The power of majority was evident through this analysis. The participants believed the majority dictated the acceptability of a particular behaviour. Interestingly some of these changes seemed to be more temporal.

Mehid's friend admitted that he would possibly return to his old habits (driving carelessly) again if he returned to Iran due to absence of social pressure to enforce it. Mehid further used the analogy of being self-conscious of your behaviour when you are someone's guest versus behaving comfortably at your own home. It was implied that immigrants were more aware of their own behaviours (that may differ to natural born citizens) in their host country rather than their home country. There is an obligation to follow the rules because violating the rules/norms, can label the individual an outlier who is possibly scrutinised or scolded by society. This ideation implies that although some migrants may not completely change their beliefs and norms on a particular issue (e.g. domestic violence) but fear of scrutiny by the majority population and a desire for belonging enforce them to follow their host country's norms. For example they may still find physical discipline toward a wife legitimate but refuse to act upon this beliefs.

I: They are law abiding.

Mehdi: Yes. He said that he used to drive carelessly in Iran but when he comes here, he follows the rules automatically. He also said that if he returned to Iran, he will probably drive badly again. It's not like I am a fully changed man because I have migrated here. When you come back home and are placed in that situation, you would return to those old habits again because nobody is following the rules and you will not either...

Norms and beliefs of migrant communities may change as a result of migration (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013; Pillai, 2001; Williams et al., 2014). For example the feminisation of migration can challenge gender norms. For years labour

migrants had been conceptualised as male providers but with an increase in women's migration and participation in labour market, husbands may lose their prominent role as provider, and their sense of authority challenged (Hofmann & Buckley, 2013).

New Zealand's stricter approach to violence against women and its support for victims were believed to be mitigating factors for domestic violence. Arya illustrated that awareness of protective family violence laws prevented immigrant men from using violence against their partners.

Arya: I feel women feel safer due to the amount of support they can receive from the society so if there is a problem, the woman can go to police and complain that "my husband is abusing or beating me" and society will not see her in a negative way... She is able to control/contain the situation legally. This in itself can make us men to behave more cautiously. "This is overseas. You need to be careful. The police/laws are tough here." I have also heard more vulgar comments such as "if you hit your wife, the police will show up and f\*ck you up." This also makes us hesitate to do something if we are about to do it.

It implies that fear of negative consequences force men to avoid such practices. The victim is perceived to be supported by the law and society which do not stigmatise her. This new environment empowers the victim and removes some of abuser's privileges such as, society's dislike of victims who report abuse and authority's direct intervention in domestic abuse incidents. Migrant women have used their host country's family laws to seek divorce and challenge the patriarchal hierarchy within their family (Sharareh et al., 2007). However there are also many migrant women who are not able to seek support due to variety of reasons including language barrier, ignorance of the law or fear of deportation (Erez, 2002; Pillai, 2001). For non-resident women, their ability to remain in the country may well depend on the man who is abusing them as he is likely to be the principal applicant in a joint application for resident status or is a NZ citizen.



In summary, some participants believed that migrants tend to be watched and scrutinised by the host population. This feeling was said to encourage them to follow New Zealand's societal norms. It was also shown that some of men's beliefs were not really altered but they chose to follow the host country's norms anyway. For example it can be argued that some migrant men may still view women as inferior but New Zealand's cultural and legal reality would discourage them from abusing their wife.

## **Chapter summary**

A number of themes were discussed within six domains. Although the domains were presented separately there was a great degree of overlap between them. As it had been mentioned at the start of the chapter, these themes and domains are intertwined and must be read as a whole. There were also various implicit and explicit references to other themes and domains while analysing a particular theme.

Participants showed a great insight into domestic violence. They described domestic violence as a complex social issue with various forms (e.g. psychological and physical) and different negative effects on victims. Education, poverty and the pressure of life were seen as important risk factors for domestic violence. They were also used to justify domestic abuse to some extent. There was a degree of ambiguity regarding what constituted as abuse in every other forms of domestic violence (e.g. verbal) except the physical aspect. Gender norms and masculinity were perceived as contributing factors to domestic violence. They also prevented male victims of domestic abuse from acquiring support. The men believed that there was a societal double standard regarding domestic violence against men. They may have failed to consider the differences in context, essence and effects of domestic violence against women versus men.

The participants considered family and cultural and religious beliefs to have had major effects on shaping their perceptions on domestic violence and other gender related issues. Most participants with a Muslim background were more critical of the effects of religion on domestic violence compared to the Baha'i participant who viewed his religion as a protective factor against domestic abuse and gender

discrimination. Some men were also critical of certain aspects of Iranian culture which they believed normalised domestic violence in society but they themselves did not necessarily follow those cultural practices. The men also argued that their cultural customs and beliefs must be understood within an Iranian cultural context. Some even believed that New Zealand's standards on domestic violence are not compatible with social realities of Iran. Social norms with regards to domestic violence were perceived to be different between Iran and New Zealand. Members of each society may react differently to gender related violence based on their upbringings, cultural and religious backgrounds and the societal norms of their community.

Domestic violence in Iran was seen as a more serious problem and legal, religious and cultural discrimination against women exacerbated the issue, compared to New Zealand which was viewed as a more egalitarian country that paid more attention to this social issue and had more protective laws against domestic abuse. The process of change was the last domain of this chapter. The Iranian men were fully aware of the changes in their beliefs, perceptions and behaviours as the result of migration and exposure to a new cultural context. However, some of these changes were more significant than others. Some argued that feeling scrutinised by the host population could pressure migrants to follow their host country's social and cultural norms.

This chapter was centred on migration. The men have spent at least some of their formative years in Iran, living in a particular cultural context. To varying degrees (probably relating to the age at which they migrated) that cultural context has helped shaping particular views of domestic violence. After migration they found themselves in a different cultural context. Some of the ideas they grew up with were being challenged, while others are being reinforced. Some felt caught between adapting to new realities and retaining core beliefs and values.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore Iranian New Zealander men's perceptions on domestic violence and its implications in the context of migration. The perspectives and experiences of men who have been exposed to two different cultures at various stages of their life (a bicultural experience), provide a vital source of knowledge in areas which require more attention. Contemporary research is limited with regards to domestic violence in ethnic migrant families and this is particularly so for Middle Eastern and Iranian migrant men. The vast majority of studies tend to be quantitative with methodological differences and a lack of in-depth and 'bottom-up' approach to domestic violence is evident. This has important consequences for the way domestic violence is understood and assessed by policy makers and mental health workers.

Migrants bring their culture with them but then face the challenge of living within the wider host culture within which there may be some different values, beliefs and norms. My research showed that as it relates to gender and domestic violence, Iranian migrant men embraced and rejected different aspects of the host culture. For example most participants were aware of their male privilege in an Iranian context but showed varying degrees of resistance to losing some of their privileges whilst living in New Zealand. New Zealand's law has a firmer stance on domestic violence compared to Iran which was applauded by my participants although, some of my participants also viewed New Zealand's laws as too broad, invasive and easy to be manipulated (by women).

The idea of gender symmetry (it assumes men and women perpetuate domestic violence in a same rate) in domestic violence was also prominent. Some men believed that there was a double standard on gender based violence against men. I argued that they may have failed to understand the difference in essence and context of women's violence on men compared to men's violence on women. There was some ambiguity on ethicality of non-physical abuse (e.g. verbal and psychological

abuse). The notion of ambiguity was then used to justify or normalise non-physical abuse in a domestic dispute. It was also admitted that normal verbal aggression in an Iranian family can be considered abuse in a New Zealander social setting. Some men had a culturally relative perception (applying different standards to interpersonal relationships in an Iranian and a New Zealand context) on domestic violence. For example participants tolerated verbal aggressiveness more in an Iranian context compared to a New Zealand one. Poverty and poor education were used to justify domestic violence in an Iranian context. These factors were said to increase the rate of domestic violence among Iranian men more than men from New Zealand. It became evident that religious upbringings and social learning had major and long last effects on participants' perceptions on domestic violence but some of these perceptions changed due to migration. For example a number of men had become more accepting of women's freedom and body autonomy after migrating to New Zealand.

A more thorough conceptualisation of migrant men's perceptions on domestic violence can be essential in identifying potential risks and forming prevention and recovery strategies for victims as well as perpetrators. Although more research has been conducted on the relationship between migration and domestic violence, however migrant communities and their host country are by no means homogenous. Therefore, in order to appropriately examine and understand domestic violence in immigrant communities, we must take into account migrants' perceptions and cultural customs (Iran) as well as the cultural norms of their host country (New Zealand). As it was the case with this study, migrants are influenced and interact with at least two or even more cultural contexts.

## **Future research and policy implications**

As indicated by limited studies in the area of domestic violence and migration, further research is vital to expand the findings of this research and other studies in different sociocultural contexts.

As previously mentioned, conducting a qualitative study exploring Iranian or Middle Eastern women's perceptions, and a comparative study on Iranian migrant men and women's views on domestic violence is highly recommended. A separate study on Middle Eastern migrant victims of domestic violence could be helpful with identifying gaps in support services and policies and could also highlight the sociocultural needs of this group of victims. It may further reveal migrants' coping strategies and reasons behind their low rate of domestic abuse report. In addition to illuminating victims' coping strategies and decisions about reporting of violence, victim studies might also provide valuable insights which could lead to a more critical reading of what men say. For example possible power imbalance (between men and women) and gender based biases within an Iranian migrant context will be better understood.

My research showed that parenting and the household play an important role in shaping men's perceptions on domestic abuse. I would suggest that migrants' perceptions on parenting must be studied. Researching this area can highlight the role of parenting in migrant families regarding domestic violence. It also reflected that migrants bring their own cultural and religious beliefs to their host country but these beliefs are sometimes changed and mediated. This process of change can further be examined. For example is there a relationship between the migration age or the level of education and perceptions on gender linked violence? Do younger migrants change their beliefs more radically than older migrants? How do the host country's norms affect migrant's views and norms? What are the extent of these effects and does successful adaptation reduce the rate of domestic violence?

It is clear that participants had particular views about the roles of men and women and about the nature of domestic violence. Some of these views condone violence and reflect a fairly rigid view of gender roles. Of course Iranian culture is not unique in this but there are particular aspects of Iranian culture relating to gender and violence which have important implications for responding to domestic violence in NZ. For example, it was indicated that familial relationships in an Iranian context are more hierarchical with men and parents holding most of the power, compared to

New Zealand. Close and extended family tend to be significant in an Iranian's social life. It was also argued that Iranian gender based violence must be understood within its own context. The feeling of shame was suggested to prevent victims from reporting their abuser. There are important implications for those running stopping violence programmes, for police, for health professionals, for social services: anyone dealing with Iranian men and/or Iranian women for whom domestic violence may be an issue.

These organisations must consider the role of family and its hierarchy while dealing with Iranian migrants. This could mean including the close family or parents in the process of stopping domestic violence. Health professionals and social services must understand that Iranian victims may not actively seek support or report their abuser due to a variety of reasons such as deportation and shame. Immigration New Zealand has taken some steps toward providing safety for migrant victims by granting special visas for victims of domestic violence but it is important that migrants become aware of these initiatives. Victims could also be financially dependent on their husbands. The government or family violence organisations could offer shelter and financial support to those who are worried about the consequences of their report. The implication for law enforcements is that Iranian migrants could expect a more compromised approach from the police in a domestic dispute. Some may know little about their legal rights or lack language proficiency so they could struggle communicating some of their needs. My research showed that there was a degree of tolerance for non-physical abuse among male Iranian migrant and the Iranian legal system tends to be lenient on such abuse. This means that there could be a difference between Iranian migrants' understanding of what counts as abuse compared to what New Zealanders consider abuse. Social services need to explain these differences to their recipients.

Finally, culturally appropriate studies on underrepresented groups can improve the current support services for victims and rehabilitative services for perpetrators. More research is required on culture and religious specific aspects of domestic violence in the context of migration. Migrants continue to have relatively

low knowledge of their host country's norms and laws and that may prevent victims from seeking help and create complications and misunderstandings with the law enforcements and the judicial system. Educating and informing migrants about cultural and gender norms, as well as the laws of New Zealand can make the adjustment to their new home easier and reduce the likelihood of culture shock.

Culturally appropriate studies have important implications for perpetrator programme. At the moment, it can be argued that perpetrator programmes still fail to meet the diversity of participants adequately. In some parts of the country, there may reasonably good programmes for Maori men. Other programmes may be reasonably good at engaging Pasifika men. But few programmes are well-equipped to provide for men from most of the more recent migrant groups: they often end up in Pakeha groups which may not be very appropriate or effective. Cultural competence and knowledge of domestic violence in migrant communities can help tailoring services toward the unique needs of recent migrants.

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## **Appendix B: Interview questions**

The interview is divided into themes.

In the beginning of the interview, the interviewer will briefly explain the reasoning behind this research and the importance of perceptions in domestic violence to the participant (refer to appendix A).

### General information

- 1- General information: age, occupation, religion, the highest degree or level of school and marital status. Have you ever been in a relationship? How long have you been living in New Zealand? Why did you migrate to New Zealand?

“I am quite interested in a narrative approach. I would like you to speak your mind freely. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.”

- 2- How do you define domestic violence?
- 3- What do you think are the causal factors of domestic violence?
- 4- What do you think are the main effects of domestic violence on the victims and their families?
- 5- What is the role of gender in domestic violence in your opinion?

“Some behaviours are seen as inappropriate based on an individual’s gender. How do these gender dynamics influence domestic violence?”

**Key terms:** Definition, cause, gender role

### Migration

- 6- How significant do you believe domestic violence is as a social problem in Iran? In what ways?
- 7- What have you noticed about this issue in New Zealand throughout the years that you have lived here? How did you hear about it or came into contact with it?

- 8- How different domestic violence laws are in Iran and New Zealand? What are the most significant differences that you have noticed?
- 9- Immigrants are exposed to a new culture when they arrive to the host country. Are there any cultural or gender norms regarding relationships and marriage that you find vastly different in New Zealand compared to Iran? What are they? Have you had any difficulty with accepting some of these new norms? Why?
- 10- How would you compare the situation of Iranian women living in Iran and Iranian immigrant women in New Zealand with regards to domestic disputes? What challenges and opportunities each group has? (E.g. A woman living in Iran may have access to support from her family but an Iranian New Zealander is under more protective laws).
- 11- What are some of the differences and similarities between domestic violence in Iran and New Zealand? (E.g. commonality of domestic violence between the two social contexts or the support provided by the government and families).

**Key terms:** Migration, Iran, New Zealand

#### Religion and personal beliefs

- 12- How do you think some of your cultural/religious beliefs have contributed to your understanding of domestic violence?

“You mentioned growing up in a Muslim family.”

- 13- Some people believe that use of violence against a spouse is justified under certain circumstances. For example if the spouse has been unfaithful. What do you think?
- 14- Some individuals have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime. Does it apply to you? How have these experiences shaped your perceptions of domestic violence? "This question may be sensitive.”



- 15- What specific challenges are faced by male victims of domestic violence in your opinion?
- 16- Some people tend to stay in abusive relationships. Why do you think they stay in such relationships?
- 17- When do you think it is appropriate to interfere in a domestic dispute? Do you consider domestic violence a private matter of households?

**Key terms:** Cultural and religious beliefs, personal experiences, abused men

## **Appendix C: Post-interview questionnaire**

Would you like to receive a summary of the findings from this study? Y/N \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to be informed of similar studies in the future? Y/N \_\_\_\_\_

If you have answered “yes” to either of the above questions please indicate your name and contact details (this information will be kept separate from your results for this study)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Information sheet for participants



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### Iranian New Zealander men's perception of domestic violence

#### Information Sheet

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and the belief system of Iranian men living in New Zealand on domestic violence.

We are asking participants in the study to:

Participate in an interview and answer the researcher's questions that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

The interviews shall be recorded using a voice recorder software and transcribed and the information used to prepare a Masters thesis. Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in password protected files for three to five years. The digital files will be deleted permanently using specific software. The data will also be used for preparing a manuscript for publication in an academic journal. All the provided information will be regarded as highly confidential. Only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to them. No identifying information will be included in either the thesis or manuscript. Participants will be given a copy of their transcript and the opportunity to make corrections before approving use of their transcript. They; and participants may withdraw from the study at any time up until this point. Participants will have the option of receiving a summary of the research findings. They have the right to refuse answering any question, and ask any further questions regarding the research that occur to them during the interview.

Please contact the primary researcher (Amin Ghaleiha, [ag92@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ag92@students.waikato.ac.nz)) if you need more information. If you have any concerns you can contact the researcher or the research supervisor (Dr Neville R Robertson, [scorpio@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:scorpio@waikato.ac.nz))

## Appendix E: Informed consent form



School of Psychology



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

**Research Project: Iranian men's perceptions of domestic violence**

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty		
5. I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
6. I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
7. I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.		
8. I wish to receive a copy of the findings		
9. I consent to be audio recorded and I understand that interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in password protected files for three to five years. All the provided information will be regarded as highly confidential.		

### Declaration by participant:

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology

Research and Ethics Committee (Dr Rebecca Sargisson, phone 07 557 8673, email: [rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:rebeccas@waikato.ac.nz))

Participant's name (Please print):

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Signature:

Date:

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**Declaration by member of research team:**

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print):

---

Signature:

Date:

---

## Appendix F: Participant advertisement



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*



We need you! Participants wanted

### *Men's perception of domestic violence*

We are looking for male participants of Iranian descent who are willing to take part in a study exploring men's perception of domestic violence.

### **What does the study include?**

- You will participate in a face to face interview that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and answer the researcher's questions about your views and knowledge regarding domestic violence.
- You will be briefed before the start of the interview

Email [ag92@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ag92@students.waikato.ac.nz) for more information.