

23rd October 2017 Watershed Moment: Domestic Violence in Faith/Spiritual Multicultural Communities Symposium highlights

By Dr Nada Ibrahim

What a success! Over 100 participants enjoyed the *Domestic Violence in Faith/Spiritual Multicultural Communities Symposium* hosted by the Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, UniSA.

Domestic violence is a human problem that affects many families and communities in Australia and across the world. The Australian Bureau of Statistics in its 2016 Personal Safety Survey reveals that one in four women in Australia have suffered violence from an intimate partner. Though the challenges and consequences of domestic violence are significant and varied, for faith/spiritual based communities there are additional considerations for effective responses. Addressing domestic violence requires an incorporation of the holistic needs and concerns of the individual, which includes religion/spirituality and its role in their lives.

The event aimed to provide an exploratory platform for speakers across Australia, with skills and expertise in faith and domestic violence to inform, educate and provide a networking symposium for our participants in a safe space.

Much positive feedback was received from participants, including the diversity in speakers and discussions, networking, exploration of the challenges and strengths in DV and faith/cultural perspectives and paradigms. Participants have also commented about the prominent level of quality of the day and the safe space created for discussions.

Among the most significant achievements of the symposium was establishing a national network of faith leaders and advocates, service providers, settlement and migrant services, policy makers and correctional and justice services.

The symposium began with a welcome session opened by the Honourable Zoe Bettison, Minister of Status of Women, South Australia; Honourable Minister Jing Lee, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, Trade and Investment and Small Business; Honourable Stephen Wade, Shadow Minister for Health and Wellbeing; and Professor Stephen Dobson, Dean and Head, School of Education, University of South Australia (UniSA).

The keynote address was delivered by Dr Nada Ibrahim, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Islamic Thought and Education, UniSA who spoke about *Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities: From Research to Response*.

Four plenary sessions totaling 17 speakers (representing Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh and others) covered the following themes:

1. *Role of Faith/Spiritual based communities in domestic violence responses*
2. *Faith/Spiritual based perspectives on domestic violence*

3. *Current trends in responses to domestic violence for faith/spiritual based communities*
4. *Challenges faced by service providers/practitioners when responding to domestic violence in faith/spiritual based communities.*

For the list of speakers please visit the CITE website on: www.unisa.edu.au/cite

This was followed by an interactive workshop on *Trauma & healing for faith-based communities* and facilitated roundtable discussions on *seven current trends and themes* to allow participants to share their skills, knowledge and expertise.

The symposium was reported and covered by the ABC: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-23/faith-based-approach-to-tackling-domestic-violence/9072242>

The symposium illustrated a number of pertinent issues when addressing domestic violence in faith/spiritual based communities, predominantly:

- There is a lack of awareness of what evidence exists within faith-based communities, or the extent of domestic violence prevalence, and what strategies work or have worked best in preventing and responding to DV.
- State based policies and responses are particularly absent for faith-based communities.

Some of the challenges facing an effective response for faith/spiritual communities were also identified, including:

1. lack of resources,
2. lack of experts that understand the cultural faith/spiritual nuances,
3. lack of appreciation of the need to modify services to faith/spiritual communities;
4. little or no cultural and religious/spiritual training for domestic violence personnel in the frontline, and
5. lack of funding of significant faith/spiritual based programs.

A detailed documentation of the outcomes from the domestic violence symposium, video of Welcome session, photo gallery and some of the symposium presentations can be found on the CITE website.