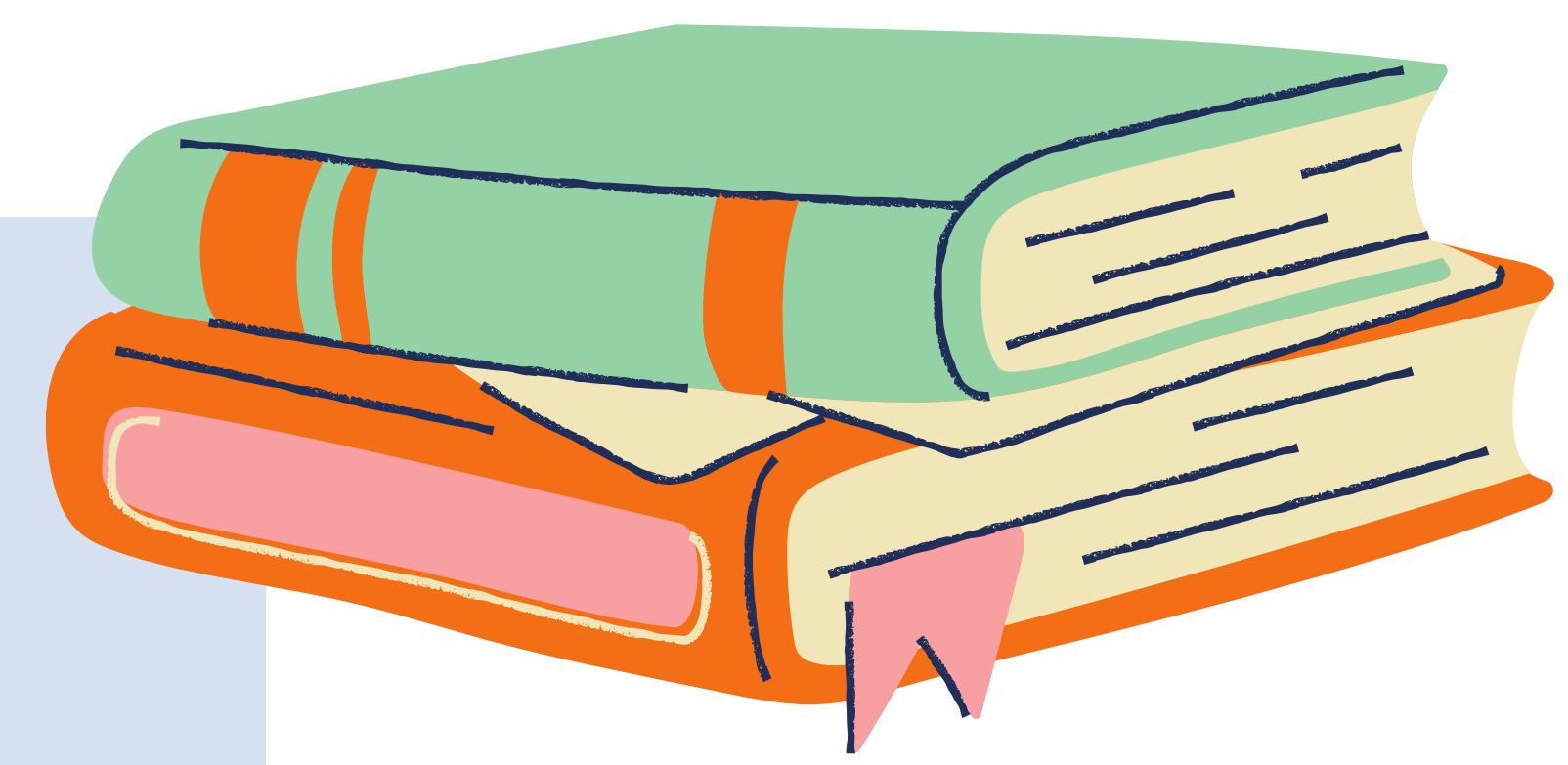


RESEARCH FINDINGS SUMMARY

“Hidden Victims” - Family Violence Affecting Children from Culturally and Racially Marginalised Migrant Backgrounds: Perceptions and Experiences of Mothers.



AUTHORED BY JESS KIRWAN

INTRODUCTION

It was previously thought that children simply “witnessed” violence.

It is now understood that children are also victim-survivors of family violence.

Research is important for improving responses to family violence.

To improve services, we need to know more about the experiences and support needs of children from migrant backgrounds affected by family violence.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We explored the following research questions with mothers from migrant backgrounds:

- How does abusive behaviour by men/fathers affect their children and families?
- How do children respond to family violence?
- What are families’ experiences of the family violence service system?

OBJECTIVE

This project is part of a larger study 'The FAIR Project'. It aims to improve services for children and young people from migrant backgrounds in Victoria who experience family violence.

METHODS & RESULTS

We conducted 11 individual interviews with mothers from migrant backgrounds, aged over 18, and living in Victoria.

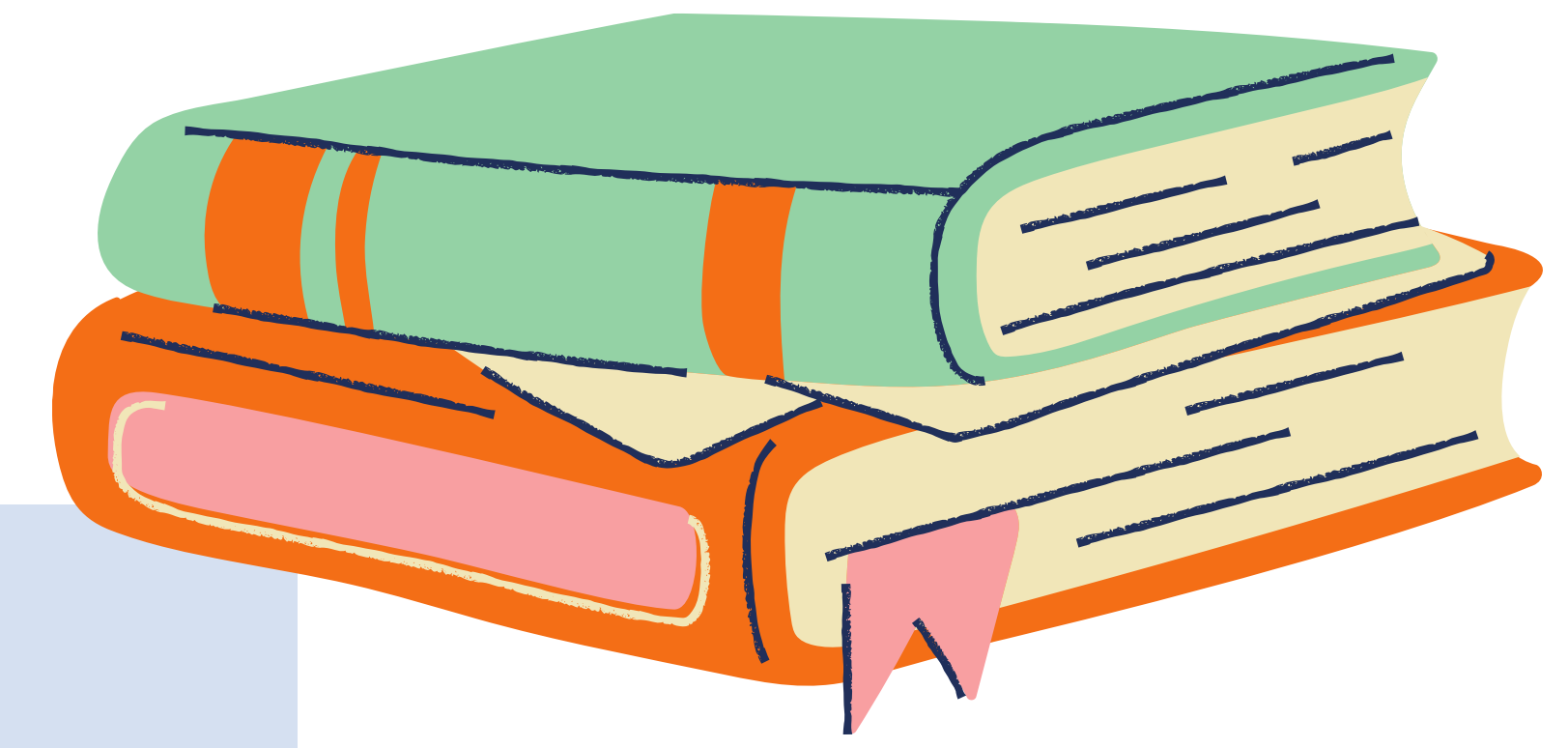
We identified **five key themes** from the interviews:

1. Descriptions of family violence & responses to abuse
2. Families’ experiences of coercive control
3. Barriers to children’s safety & wellbeing
4. Enablers of children’s safety & wellbeing
5. Key gaps in service response
 - a. Access to information and crisis support
 - b. Recovery focussed support



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RESULTS

1. Descriptions of family violence & responses to abuse

- The main perpetrator of family violence was the women’s male partner and children’s father.
- The pattern of abuse by men included a range of behaviours
- Many tactics of abuse were subtle rather than overtly violent – this fits the definition of coercive control
- Children often attempted to stop the abuse and support families’ safety, wellbeing, and healing.

2. Families’ experiences of coercive control

- Abuse causes physical, psychological & developmental harm
- When men isolate and control women, this limits children’s social connections to family & community
- Financial abuse causes poverty, limits social connection and leads to isolation
- Abuse stops women from focusing on their children and harms the mother/child relationship
- Children experience fear and stress, which limits their play and self-expression

3. Barriers to safety & wellbeing

- Services may have little understanding about coercive control
- Think of family violence as physical abuse only
- Believe that separation will lead to safety
- Lack understanding about fathers’ abuse & impact on children
- Community attitudes, beliefs and bias concerning a particular group of people can lead to victim blaming, gender double standards & discrimination
- This leads to loss of community for victim/survivors & harmful responses by community and services

4. Enablers of safety & wellbeing

- Practitioners who understand coercive control and its effects on the whole family
- Understanding the challenges to separating from husbands for migrant women
- Offering culturally appropriate support considering these challenges
- Mothers and children being away from perpetrators
- Strong mother-child relationships
- Opportunities for children to talk about experiences of abuse
- Children having a strong connection to community, family, work and/or school

5. Gaps in service responses

- Lack of access to culturally appropriate information about coercive control & support options
- Mothers would like to be able to speak with other mothers from similar cultural backgrounds who have experienced family violence
- Lack of support that helps children and women to heal from abuse and build connections with community

WHAT IS NEEDED?

- Better information for women and children from migrant backgrounds about coercive control, & options for support. This must include work & school-based initiatives.
- Training for services about men’s/fathers’ coercive control,
- Strategies to prevent victim blaming and discrimination.
- More employment in family violence services for mothers from migrant backgrounds who have experienced family violence.
- More support for healing from family violence
- More research about families’ experiences with children’s contact services
- More research to better understand how to support fathers to stop using violence against children from migrant backgrounds.

