

# HOME IS WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS:

Family, community, and belonging for sexuality and gender diverse CALD people

## Research

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

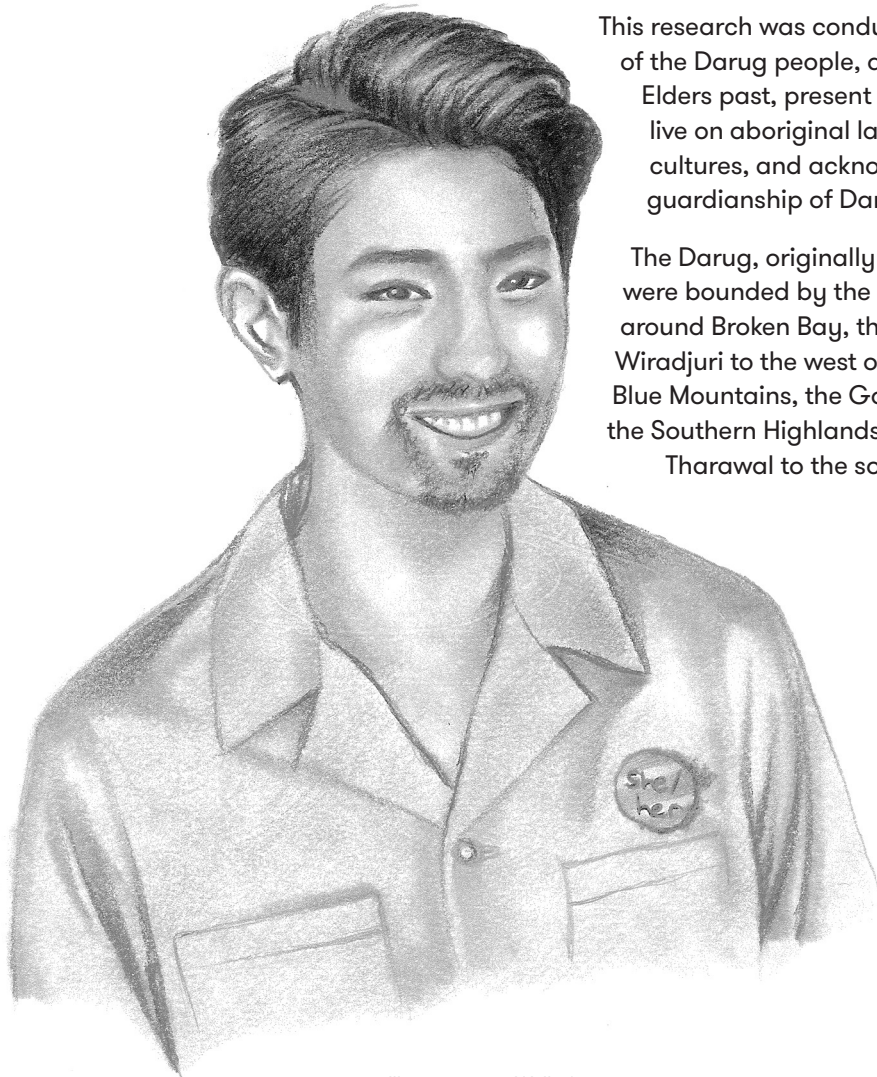
Home is where our story begins was a collaboration between the NSW LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency, ACON<sup>1</sup> and Western Sydney University researchers. We are indebted the City of Parramatta, Western Sydney University, The Interagency, and ACON for providing cash and in-kind support to complete this project.

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Finally, we are honoured to present the thoughts and feelings of 60 participants in our study, without whom this project would not be possible. We thank these participants for sharing their sometimes traumatic, sometimes joyful experiences of navigating their relationships to family and surviving the Marriage Equality debate and vote.

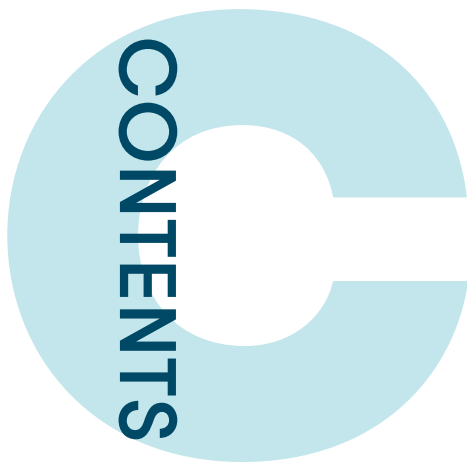
This research was conducted on the traditional lands of the Darug people, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We work and live on aboriginal lands never ceded to settler cultures, and acknowledge the sovereignty and guardianship of Darug peoples.

The Darug, originally a Western Sydney people, were bounded by the Kuringgai to the northeast around Broken Bay, the Darkinjung to the north, the Wiradjuri to the west on the eastern fringe of the Blue Mountains, the Gandangara to the southwest in the Southern Highlands, the Eora to the east and the Tharawal to the southeast in the Illawarra area



Illustrations: Wally Amin

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## TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this report we have used the term sexuality and gender diverse (SGD) in place of the more commonly used acronym LGBTIQ+ to better capture the wide variety of our participants' identities, noting that none of our participants reported a variation in sex characteristics.

In the original survey and interviews, the acronym, LGBTIQ+ was used as it was a term more familiar to our participants. Unless citing our participants or other research and projects, in this report we only use SGD.

**CALD** = culturally and linguistically diverse/ cultural and linguistic diversity

**Cisgender** = gender assigned at birth

**Cishet** = Cisgender Heterosexual

**GWS** = Greater Western Sydney

**LGBTIQ+** = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and others who identify within the community

**SGD** = sexuality and gender diverse/sexuality and gender diversity

**TGD** = transgender and gender diverse

**WSU** = Western Sydney University

We know so little about the lived experiences of sexuality and gender diverse (SGD) people in Great Western Sydney, who are also culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD). In this project, we filled some of the gaps in knowledge by way of a survey of 60 SGD CALD people in Greater Western Sydney about their experiences and relationships to family and community during the coming out process and during the Marriage Equality debate in 2017. We also conducted in-depth interviews with two participants, and held community development events in Greater Western Sydney.

This report discusses the experiences of participants through a number of themes in relation to both family and community relationships and the Marriage Equality debate.

Participants reported a range of experiences in relation to disclosing their sexuality and gender to family, or choosing not to disclose their identities. Some of the key themes from this research include:

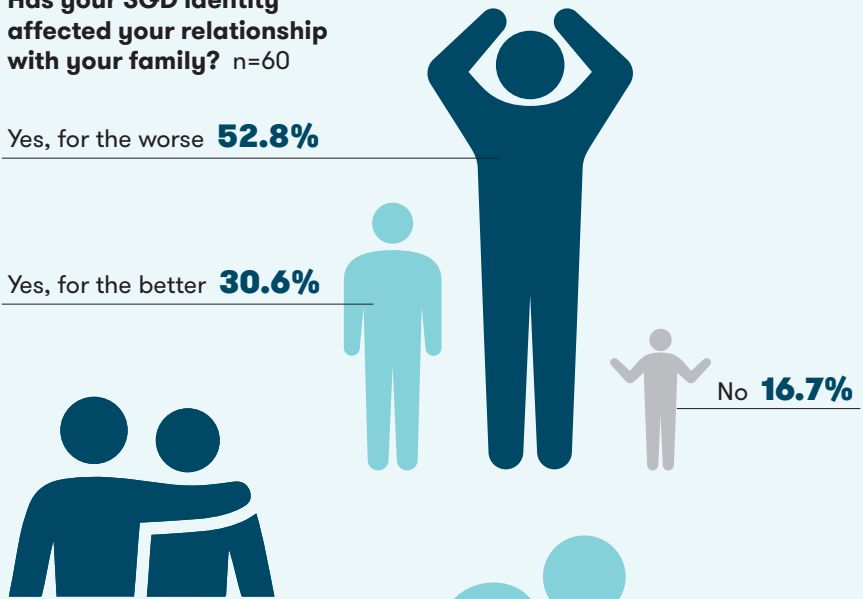
### Family and Community Relationships

**Has your SGD identity affected your relationship with your family?** n=60

Yes, for the worse **52.8%**

Yes, for the better **30.6%**

No **16.7%**



#### Intimacy through transparency

Participants who had disclosed their sexuality and gender identities with positive responses from family described a greater intimacy, closeness and trust with their relatives. Some participants reported that following disclosure, their families formed a more supportive position on the topic of SGD acceptance and marriage equality.

#### The grief and shame of challenging heteronormativity

Participants who had disclosed with negative reactions from family commonly reported the disappointment, shock and even guilt that their family members had expressed when the participant had 'come out'



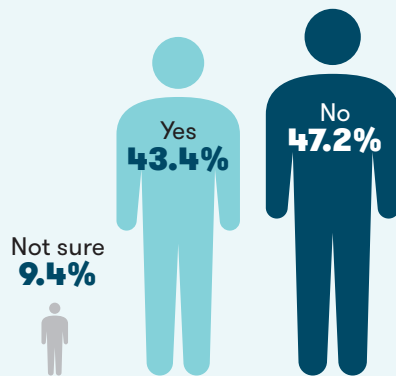
Following the initial disclosure of SGD identity, many participants faced silence and denial from family members. Some participants also chose not to come out or to be discreet regarding their sexuality for reasons such as self-preservation or out of respect for their religious community.

### Disconnection and isolation

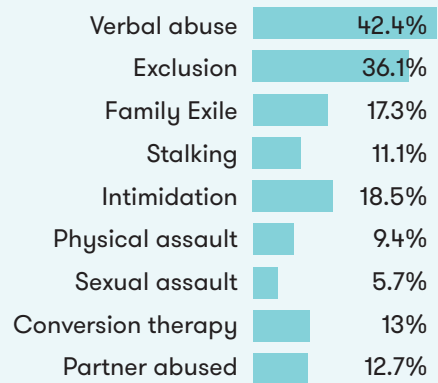
Some participants felt a disconnection between their cultural identity and their sexuality and gender. Participants felt they had to choose between living in the inner city and having access to SGD services and community, or to remain in Western Sydney and be connected to family and culture. Some participants felt left behind and invisible to mainstream SGD services.



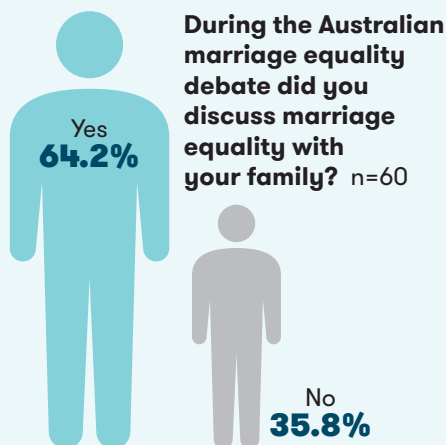
### Have you ever have experienced family violence? n=60



### Types of Family Violence n=60

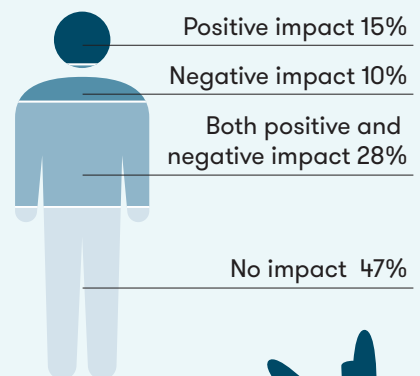


### Marriage Equality Debate



During the Australian marriage equality debate did you discuss marriage equality with your family? n=60

### Impact of Marriage Equality Vote Discussions n=60



### Minority Stress

Secrecy, exclusion and denial of sexuality and/or gender and fear of family violence created stress for a number of the study's participants. This additional psychological labour is known as minority stress.





The Marriage Equality postal vote broke the silence regarding sexuality and gender within some families and led to increases in discussion and social media posts about sexuality and gender. For some families this was a positive and transformative experience, while for other participants, this exposed prejudice and created a more hostile environment.



The Marriage Equality postal vote amplified the voices of some family members who had previously been quietly unsupportive. This forced conflict between some participants and their relatives. Some participants also experienced prejudice outside of family relationships, for example within their workplaces.

**Queer subjects as collateral**

The Marriage Equality vote had significant impact on the health and wellbeing of SGD people. A quarter of survey respondents reported that they experienced prejudice-related abuse from the broader community during the Marriage Equality campaign. Many participants felt they became the target of the ‘no’ campaigns hostility to the potential law change.



**Active resistance**

Many participants actively resisted the negative discourses surrounding their identity through actions such as breaking silence with family, attending marriage equality rallies and putting up ‘yes’ campaign material in their workplaces.



The report makes recommendations for strategies for addressing the concerns raised by participants in the following areas:



## CONTEXT OF HOME IS WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS

This project was initiated by the New South Wales LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency (The Interagency) following the Marriage Equality vote in 2017. The Interagency identified that sexuality and gender diverse (SGD) people living and working in Greater Western Sydney (GWS) may have encountered increased harms from the public vote, and were interested in investigating the unique features of life for SGD CALD people living in a region that rejected the proposition for marriage equality.

This project has captured the rich and diverse life experiences of SGD CALD people living and working in GWS, including stories about the critical importance of family and community during the coming out process and during the Marriage Equality vote. But we have also begun to shine a light on the traumatic experiences that stem from family exclusion, exile from family, and family violence. It is important to note from the outset, that these negative relationships with family are not unique to culturally and linguistically diverse people. Nor are our participants' religious and/or cultural backgrounds necessarily linked to their experiences of family violence.

It is also important to note from the outset that as we only received responses from nine trans and gender diverse (TGD) participants, statistics relating to this group of participants need to be considered with care. Responses from nine TGD CALD participants provides insufficient data to propose specific recommendations for this group. However, all but one of these participants also identified as sexuality diverse, including lesbian, queer, androphilic, bisexual, and asexual.

***Family violence, as with domestic violence, occurs everywhere, and in all types of families.***

This is the first study of its kind in Australia, and represents an initial scoping of the experiences of SGD CALD people living and working in GWS. This is a starting point in the essential work required to assist CALD people negotiate their sexuality and/or gender identity and to develop culturally capability in SGD community organisations and services, and mainstream family and domestic violence services.

The importance of this study cannot be underestimated. Many of our participants noted that they felt ignored during the Marriage Equality debate and that this was one of the first opportunities to share their unique experiences. As noted by our participants:



*[This study] feels like you're not forgetting what happened and the effects of that. Expecting people to just move on, and I feel this is sort of honouring that painful moment in a way that's going to then help other people potentially not to have to go through something without resources [Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian].*



“

I think it's extremely important that our community and our community services are aware of how central these issues are to the struggle for gay rights. I have met countless Queer people in Western Sydney who are in far worse situations than I am. There are still many people who are at risk of family violence. But more broadly, any degree of discomfort, feeling unsafe, feeling disconnected from family, is a site of our struggle. We cannot be expected to function healthily in society without fully formed familial networks and a sense of belonging to culture. Feeling alienated from family or culture; or feeling torn between culture, religion, and tradition and our identity as Queer people impacts substantially on our wellbeing; mental, emotional and even financial. We cannot rely on family in ways that straight people take for granted, and, for those of us from CALD backgrounds, we can never feel fully at home in either our heritage culture nor in Australian society, even the Australian Queer community, which is again something that straight/Anglo people take for granted. This has real and material impacts on our lives. For that reason, our services, services that target us, and our community, absolutely should not underestimate how deep homophobia still runs in Western Sydney. The results of the postal survey were just a very clear manifestation of how basic tolerance, the kind largely developed in broader Western society through the 80s-00s, is still not progress that Queers in Western Sydney can claim for ourselves. But people from low-income backgrounds, religious backgrounds, low-education backgrounds, CALD backgrounds are not stupid, and the community can do a whole lot more to seriously engage with people about their beliefs and about the Queer people who walk among them (Cis Man, Gay, Italian/Spanish).

“

The worst thing about the marriage equality campaign was that there were no services out west and no obvious places for us to turn. We live in the places where the 'no' votes were highest, but the support was focused on the places where the 'yes' vote was a sure (thing) or on-the-fence. I know this because I reached out to the campaign. I feel like so much of our community especially PoC [people of colour] are constantly left behind. The excuse that the services are there and we should find them isn't enough! Too many LGBTIQ+ organisations don't intentionally go into the communities looking for the people that need support. I carry so much angst because of the lack of support I saw during the Marriage Equality. I saw the token brown people in the advertising material but not much else. A friend of mine committed suicide a couple weeks before the win. At his funeral there was 'no' vote material in circulation, but you wouldn't hear these stories. You wouldn't know that, because it happened out west. I really hope more services are created for our communities out here. I really hope there is more engagement like this planned (Cis Man, Gay, Tongan).

We hope that we have honoured and respectfully conveyed the views of our participants, and look forward to continuing our work on advocating for culturally appropriate support and services to SGD CALD people living and working in Greater Western Sydney.

# INTRODUCTION

Between 12 September and 7 November 2017, a national postal survey was conducted in Australia, designed to gauge support for changing the law to legalise same-sex marriage. Although the outcome was that 61.6% of survey participants across Australia voted ‘yes’ to changing the law, Greater Western Sydney (GWS) returned the nation’s highest ‘no’ vote. The Marriage Equality postal survey in Australia in 2017 quantified to sexuality and gender diverse (SGD) people in Greater Western Sydney (GWS) what many had already known or felt: that the majority of the people in their communities did not believe they should hold equal rights to marry. In electorates held by Labour and the Liberal/National Party coalition, in an arc from Brighton-Le-Sands to Macquarie Fields to Marsden Park to Ryde, communities voted against the proposition; from 50.2% voting ‘No’ in the division of Bennelong to 73.9% in the division of Blaxland (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017; Evershed, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The 12 GWS electorates that voted against marriage equality house Australia’s most culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse populations (CALD; ABS 2016a) and are some of the most economically disadvantaged communities in New South Wales. The resulting wellbeing of SGD CALD people living ‘out west’ following the postal vote became a focus of The Interagency. This endeavour was made more urgent by the fact that previous research on SGD communities had focussed primarily on those in the inner city of Sydney. Through collaboration with the NSW LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency, ACON, and researchers from Western Sydney University, this study begins to sketch the contours of life “out west” for SGD CALD people and their families at the time of the Marriage Equality postal survey.

Family violence experienced by SGD people is rarely considered when forming community, legislative, and policy approaches to family violence (Our Watch 2017). The additional layer of cultural and linguistic diversity adds further complexity, partially because of the silencing of sex, sexuality and gender diversity in some CALD communities, and conversely, the silencing of cultural and linguistic diversity in SGD communities. Shame and denial also penetrate discussions of family violence. The need to name family as perpetrators of violence hinders victims from reporting their experiences, as they fear further demonisation of CALD communities by the media and government. The differences between cis-het and SGD experiences of family violence point to a critical gap in our understanding of the nature of family violence, including the best strategies for reducing family violence, and the support services required to support SGD CALD victims. This study aims to address this gap, allowing us to consider the effects of intersectionality in family violence by developing a more nuanced understanding of how sex, sexuality and gender diversity transforms the experiences of cultural and linguistic diversity, and vice versa.

<sup>2</sup> Importantly, only 17 electorates voted against marriage equality, with the 12 of these sited in Greater Western Sydney, and the remaining five electorates based in rural Queensland (3), and metropolitan Melbourne (2) (ABS 2017; Evershed 2017).

## Defining the problem; the problem of defining

Australian policy makers and researchers currently use the term 'cultural and linguistic diversity' to make reference to the hundreds of cultural, religious, ethnic and nationality differences within Australian society. Along with 'Non-English Speaking Background' (NESB), CALD is used "to refer to all of Australia's non-Indigenous ethnic groups other than the English-speaking Anglo-Saxon majority" (Sawrikar & Katz, 2009). CALD addresses some of the problems with the term NESB, but also raises problems; many of which were highlighted by our participants. For example, up to 12 questions are required to ascertain cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, but this is often reduced to simply country of birth, nationality, and language spoken at home (ABS, 2016b). Using such a term as shorthand communication does not capture the full picture of a person's identity, and how this identity has altered across generations. This term also centres whiteness by naming only those cultural identities that differ from the dominant cultural identity of Australia. Within the present study, participants were asked to identify in relation to their sex, sexuality, gender, culture, religion, and language. Despite including these elements, participants were limited in their ability to express their identity, especially those whose family had lived in Australia for two or three generations. Additionally, some participants did not use the term, CALD, to self-identify.

In this paper, we use the acronym SGD to represent the sexuality and gender diversity present within our study participants. Miller (2017) has identified that there are approximately 500 different terms for sex, sexuality and gender identity, many of which do not align with the normative Western frame of lesbian and gay, or even LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer). In addition to using this shorthand term, we provided participants with the opportunity to identify their own labels (which we report below, and assign to their comments).

While many studies demarcate transgender participants, we believe it is also important to name those who identify as cisgender, and have deliberately used both terms when reporting. 'Cis' means 'on this side', and refers to gender identities that align with the gender an individual was assigned at birth. As Asquith et al (2018, 17f9) argue, "[t]he terms cisgender, cishet, and cis men and cis women are used deliberately to foreground that the bodies (and identities) of the 'norm' (of heterosexual, and gender assigned at birth) are equally social and constructed". It is also important to note that in some cultures, trans and gender diverse people are not marginalised in the same way as they are in Western societies. What is perceived as problematic in Western cultures - gender diversity - is normalised elsewhere. Hundreds of distinct cultures recognise third, fourth and even fifth genders. For example, the *leiti* in Tonga, *whakawahine* in Maori culture, *fa'afafine* in Samoa, *mahu* in Hawaii, *muxe* (or *muxhe*) in the Zapotec peoples of the Oaxacan peninsula, *kathoey* in Thailand, *ninauposkitzipxpe* in the Blackfoot Confederacy (in northern America), *sekrata* in Madagascar, and *hijra* in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, to name a few (PBS, 2015).

In reporting our participants' experiences below, we have provided three demographic characteristics to contextualise their comments: participants' self-identified gender, sexuality, and cultural heritage. Cultural heritage was extracted from the participants' and their parents' countries of birth.

Understanding the wider contexts of SGD CALD people's relationships to family during the Marriage Equality vote, including their experiences of family violence, requires an investigation into multiple, intersecting factors. In this paper, we investigate the links between the Marriage Equality vote and its effects on SGD people, the intersectional experience of identifying as CALD and SGD, the critical role that family plays in SGD people's experiences, and finally, SGD CALD people's experiences of family violence.

## **The effects of the 2017 postal survey on SGD people**

### **MINORITY STRESS**

Minority stress (Meyer, 1995) refers to the concept that SGD individuals live within a community that assumes all members are heterosexual (heteronormativity) and cisgender (cisnormativity). Due to this, Meyer (2003) explains SGD individuals are seen as different to the norm, and in turn face distal stressors (e.g., prejudice and discrimination) and proximal stressors (internalised shame, non-disclosure). These additional stressors limit opportunities for SGD people, leading to poorer mental and physical health outcomes, homelessness, and social exclusion (Meyer, 1995).

In addition to minority stress, the SGD population also face structural stigma, whereby legislation, institutions, and cultural practices contribute to disadvantage on a macro, societal level (Hatzenbuehler, 2016). The previous definition of legal marriage as being a national acknowledgement of solely heterosexual relationships is an example of structural stigma within Australian law for the SGD population.

### **THE MARRIAGE EQUALITY POSTAL SURVEY**

In 2017, the Australian government conducted a national Marriage Law Postal Survey to identify the level of societal support for legalizing same-sex marriage. Conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission, the voluntary survey was mailed to voters at the address registered on the electoral roll. Nationally, nearly 80 per cent of eligible Australians responded, with 61.6 per cent voting 'Yes' and 38.4 per cent voting 'No' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). This vote led to an Australian law change to allow same-sex marriage, as was also the case in Ireland, the only other nation to utilise a public vote to make a decision on this issue.

In the lead up to the vote, advertising campaigns were legally allowed to include fictitious content, and unequal funds were spent advertising the “no” perspective. The pro-change advertising movement was led by The Equality Campaign, and was opposed by the Christian-affiliated Coalition for Marriage, who advocated against marriage equality (Quinn 2018). During the advertisement period, the Coalition for Marriage spent nearly one million dollars while The Equality Campaign spent half that amount (Hegarty et al. 2018). According to Quinn (2018), the ‘No’ campaign targeted the ignorance or misunderstanding of some viewers and aimed to evoke disgust in them. For example, the ‘No’ campaign advertisements equated gay marriage with gay sex, positioned ‘No’ voters as being persecuted within the debate, and elicited concern regarding the safety of children participating in the Safe Schools program (Quinn, 2018).

These pre-vote advertising campaigns had a significant impact on the wellbeing of SGD people. The Human Rights Law Centre (2018) found that there was an increase in prejudice-motivated speech and violence against SGD people during the marriage equality campaign period and voting period (August – December 2017). In late 2017, immediately following the postal vote, the Australia Institute and the LGBTI National Health Alliance published the most comprehensive study (N=7,500) of the impact of the debate on the SGD community. The authors, Ecker and Bennett (2017), found that verbal and physical assaults more than doubled in the three months following the announcement of the vote when compared to the six months prior to the announcement. As a coping mechanism, 70 per cent of SGD respondents avoided situations related to the debate most of the time of the campaign and “avoided being with people in general” during some of the campaign. In Dane’s (2017) study of SGD people’s attitudes to proposed religious exemptions to marriage equality, 79 per cent of participants said they had been adversely affected, and 74 per cent responded that someone close to them was adversely affected by the campaign and vote. In Ireland, the same process of a popular vote had a similarly distressing impact on SGD people, with SGD Irish citizens reporting they always felt negative (71%), sad (63%), and angry (75%) during the debate (Dane, Short and Healy, 2016).

### **THE EXPERIENCE IN GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY (GWS)**

At the meso-level of structural stigma, different areas of a country can have varied cultural climates, which influence the degree of prejudice and discrimination experienced by the local SGD population (Oswald et al., 2010). With data collected prior to the Australian Marriage Equality Postal Vote, Perales and Todd used multilevel regression models to investigate the minority stress experienced by the Australian LGB community populations in communities that would go on to vote ‘No’ for marriage equality (2018). The participants who identified as LGB living within these communities reported worse life satisfaction and poorer mental and physical health than those living in communities with a low percentage of ‘No’ votes. Comparing the communities of lower ‘No’ votes to higher ‘No’ votes, social stigma accounted for two-to-four times the estimated effect on the decreased wellbeing of participants, compared to other prominent social variables such as unemployment or not having a partner.

Twelve GWS electorates voted strongly against marriage equality. These electorates are particularly high in cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, but were mixed in terms of socio-economic status (ABS 2016a). The results of Perales et al (2018) study of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey showed a correlation between high levels of religiosity and voting 'No' on marriage equality. Specific religious affiliations hold a strong correlation with rejecting marriage equality, with over 90 per cent of Jehovah Witnesses, Pentecostals, and Muslims rejecting the proposition, and over 80 per cent of Buddhists, Jews, and people with multiple religious affiliations supporting it (Perales et al, 2018). Interestingly, as Australia becomes more secular and accepting of the rights of SGD people, those who hold conservative religious views are pushing back against these rights (Perales et al, 2018).

## **ACTIVE RESISTANCE**

During these periods where there is an increase in prejudice-motivated speech and violence against SGD communities, SGD individuals can actively resist structural stigma on multiple social levels. For example, disclosure of one's SGD identity can help to normalise sexuality and gender diversity, and therefore is an act of resistance against prejudice on a micro level. However, these expressions of resistance can cause additional complications and difficulties to the lives of minority populations. Several studies have shown those disclosing within the work place can experience increased discrimination and job loss.

Taylor and Raeburn (1995) found that political participation, as a form of macro level resistance, can negatively impact the lives and careers of LGB individuals. They concluded that all forms of active resistance that involve one's minority identity, such as CALD and SGD populations, position the individuals themselves as the site of political activity. Due to this, active resistance involving identity politics are forms of high-risk activism, threatening the wellbeing of the individual involved (McAdam, 1986). In the present study, we explore our participants' acts of resistance in relation to both the coming out process as well as the Marriage Equality vote.

## **CALD Family Relationships and the Role of Social Support**

Given the Marriage Equality debate likely caused an increase in minority stress for the SGD population, especially in GWS where the 'No' vote was high and there is greater religious and cultural diversity, it is likely this time period in 2017 was a particularly intense and difficult period for the SGD CALD population of GWS (Dane, 2017; Ecker and Bennett, 2017; Campbell, Perales and Bouma, 2018). The present study therefore sought to not only investigate their wellbeing, but also focus on their relationship to family and the emotional and social support these relationships provided.

## CALD FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

For SGD CALD people in Western Sydney, their relationships to family serve as a vital source of information regarding their cultural and religious background and identities, often shaping if, how, and when they disclose their sexuality and/or gender identity. As Yip identifies, negotiating these relationships is often a complex interplay of "...secrecy, silence and discretion in balancing individualism (i.e. expression of sexuality) and socio-religious obligations. In general, ... the intricate inter-relatedness of structure and agency, and the cultural embeddedness of the production and management of identity and social relations" inform these familial relationships (Yip, 2004, 336).

In recent years, some cultural communities within Australia are forming an emotional and cultural framework to enable CALD people to disclose their sexuality or gender identity to family. While SGD CALD people are commonly born into pre-existing familial cultural practices, it is rare for the same to occur in relation to sexuality and gender diversity. Coming out to family as SGD can therefore be especially difficult for CALD individuals, with some CALD families lacking the understanding of SGD experiences within their culture, and seeing it solely as a Western phenomenon. It is also commonly deemed pathological and/or immoral, and brings shame upon the family as a threat to family honour within their community (Yip, 2004; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011).

SGD CALD people therefore often balance and negotiate their two identities; respecting the religious and cultural values that have shaped their lives while managing their "outness" (del Aguila, 2012). They report avoiding engaging in general SGD events, and using discretion and caution in their same-sex relationships and friendships, which involves "playing the game" regarding their families' and communities' "knowing, not knowing and pretending not to know" (del Aguila, 2012). This balancing of individual and community expectations oftentimes results in a mixture of "coming out, staying in, and stepping in and out of the closet" (das Nair, 2006), and "inviting in" people who are important to SGD people (Hammoud-Beckett, 2007).

## FAMILY SUPPORT

In Perales and Todd's (2018) study, they found that social support mediated the negative effects of structural stigma on LGB health and wellbeing, such that having greater perceived social support increased wellbeing. The authors hypothesised this could be due to participants in high-stigma areas finding it harder to find social support, thereby increasing financial struggles and loneliness. This relationship could also be due to those with close and accepting extended family and friends having their emotional and social needs met, thereby not noticing as many experiences of prejudice they may encounter. Regardless of the mechanism, this finding illustrates that social support can act as a form of intervention, or prevention. during times of high expressed prejudice. This family support can increase and protect the wellbeing of those SGD individuals living in communities that are less culturally supportive of their sexuality and gender diversity (Perales & Todd, 2018).



Support from family is also shown to be a key indicator for wellbeing for SGD youth and is a vital component to their positive mental health state following self-identification and coming out. McConnell, Birkett, and Mustanski, (2015) report an increased prevalence of loneliness, hopelessness, depression, anxiety, and major depressive disorders for those SGD young people lacking family support (McConnell, Birkett, and Mustanski, 2015).

Family acceptance is also a protective mental health factor for SGD youth. Illegal drug use was less likely among young SGD individuals when their mother was supportive of their disclosure, compared to those who received unsupportive familial responses or did not disclose (Katz-Wise, Rosario, and Tsappis, 2016). Family support and acceptance is also associated with "...greater self-esteem, social support, general health status, less depression, less substance abuse, and less suicidal ideation and behaviors among LGBT youth" (Katz-Wise, Rosario, and Tsappis, 2016, 8). Similarly, for transgender and non-binary people, suicidality drops from 41 per cent to 4 per cent when family is supportive (Krishnan, 2019). It is clear from the literature that family support, especially when coming out, is a critical element of wellbeing for SGD individuals. Elizur and Ziv (2001, 136) suggest that:

“

*...supportive relationships with other persons of same-gender orientation, feelings of acceptance by heterosexual significant others, including the family, and the level of tolerance and safety within one's social-cultural context influence the strategy and goals of disclosure.*

Riggs, von Doussa, and Power reported a correlation between feeling emotionally close to family members and feeling supported by one's cultural community for gender-diverse people (Riggs, von Doussa, and Power, 2015). Emotional support by family was illustrated through correct pronoun and name use, and financial support. Likewise, participants reported feeling less supported when they experienced discrimination from their family, in the form of pathologisation of their gender identity, incorrect pronoun use, and exclusion from family events. Just over half of the participants experienced little to no support, with negative effects on their health and wellbeing. Family support has also been shown to be critical to the long term wellbeing of Indigenous sisters (Riggs and Toone, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> PFLAG = Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Merighi and Grimes (2010) identified four dominant CALD family responses to sexuality diversity: support through action; support that preserves a kinship bond; avoidance; and distancing and disengagement. Active family support included acceptance and continuing family love and support, as well as learning about and supporting the SGD community. Active family support also includes a “coming out” process for the parents of SGD children. Participation in organisations such as PFLAG<sup>4</sup> and advocacy in support of parents of SGD people are critical factors in building the capacity of cis-het parents to support their children (Goldfried and Goldfried, 2001). Discussing sexuality and gender expression (even when family is uncomfortable engaging in the topic), and inviting their friends into the family home are signs of support for SGD children, which increases the emotional closeness between CALD families and their SGD children (Ryan, 2010). These strategies also educate the family in SGD lived experiences, alleviating the parent’s fears regarding their child’s future, and consequently increasing their parental bond further (Ryan, 2010).

## SGD FAMILY VIOLENCE

For SGD CALD individuals, disclosing to an unsupportive family member can result in forms of violence. SGD CALD people experience harassment, physical violence, threats of (sexual) violence, stalking, family exile, pathologisation, forced marriage, homicide, and conversion therapy when they disclose their sexuality and gender identity (Ocampo, 2013; Kassisieh, 2012; Yip, 2004; Asquith, 2015; Khan, Howe & Lowe, 2017; Riggs, von Doussa, and Power, 2015). Individuals with insecure residency or citizenship may face an additional layer of abuse by being threatened with deportation to the family’s country of origin (Ocampo, 2013).

Investigation into family violence is lacking within the wider research landscape of domestic violence for the SGD population (LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency and the Centre for Social Research in Health, 2014; LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency, 2015; O’Halloran, 2015; AIFS, 2015; Messinger, 2017). In this report, we use the Family Law Act (s4.1) definition of family violence to include “violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person’s family (the family member), or causes the family member to be fearful”. For the most part, this definition relates to intimate partner (or domestic) violence, elder abuse, and child abuse. When considered in light of sexuality and gender diversity, the formation of family violence is different, with the majority of violence being targeted at SGD youth on the basis of familial expectations around gender performance, or due to the family member “coming out”.

Difficulties in defining and understanding the family violence experienced by SGD CALD people have hampered both research and advocacy for victims; let alone the development of strategies to eliminate family violence in these contexts. Our Watch, the premier organisation funded in Australia to lead change in the culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and their children state that:



*...understanding and acknowledgement of family violence against LGBTI people remains limited, whether perpetrated by a partner or a family member... much of this is a result of the heteronormative framing of family violence. Consequently, LGBTI people who are victim/survivors of family violence may not identify nor locate their experience as one of family violence victimisation (Our Watch, 2017, 23).*

For SGD youth of colour, coming out is a particularly critical moment in their relationships to family, which is often imbued with “religiously-informed abusive attitudes” (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, and Saltzburg, 2009, 198). These attitudes can then result in verbal abuse, physical abuse, and family exile following a coming out experience (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, and Saltzburg, 2009; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011). Young, bisexual asylum seekers to Australia report family exile, a lack of community support, and physical abuse following disclosure of their sexuality (Mejia-Canales and William, 2016). Reck (2009) identified that young SGD people of colour experience homelessness in part due to being exiled from their home and harassed and intimidated by their family. However, as with Dempsey et al (2019), Castellanos (2016) suggests that the act of “coming out” can be an extra layer to pre-existing familial conflict, resulting in further estrangement and ultimately, homelessness.

Ocampo’s (2013) study of second generation Filipino and Latino gay men identified the significant ‘moral management’ that is undertaken in order to maintain emotional closeness with family members before and following disclosure. Verbal abuse and homophobia expressed by family, and their families’ religious beliefs and gender assumptions about gender performativity, shaped if and when the Filipino and Latino gay men disclosed. Common responses from family members to SGD CALD individuals disclosing include:

- refusal to acknowledge their gender/sexuality
- fear of the contagion effect on siblings, suggestions for participants to ‘fight the urge’ or to engage in hetero-sex to solve the ‘problem’
- expressing religious disapproval, forced therapy, and the loss of emotional and financial support (Eaton and Rios, 2017; Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018).

Interestingly, Eaton and Rios (2017) found that the majority of negative family responses originated from mothers (41% compared with 18% of fathers), and physical aggression and family exile originated only from female family members. Pastrana's (2015; 2016) quantitative studies of levels of outness and family support among Black and Latino LGBT people in the US, identified that the strongest predictor for "coming out" was pre-disclosure family support. He also found that "...as the strength of religious faith increases, outness levels decrease" (2016, 782); however, religious affiliation in itself did not correlate to level of outness. The level to which the individual's sexuality and/or gender identity was central to their identity and social network also influenced the degree to which Black LGBT participants disclosed.

SGD CALD people often report pressure from family to enter into heterosexual marriages, as a form of reputation management and an attempt to force them to be heterosexual and/or cisgender. Pressure to leave their community to protect their family from shame is also common (Yip, 2004). As noted by Asquith (2015), intra-familial hate crime experienced by SGD CALD people is often framed by family and community notions of honour. At times, SGD CALD people choose not to disclose their gender identity or sexuality to protect family honour, and therefore avoid the potential exclusion, isolation, and violence that may come from bringing feelings of shame to the family. While honour-based violence is often associated with Muslim communities, this type of violence is experienced by SGD people from all cultures and religions. For example, in their small (N=14) study of "honour-based violence" experienced by South Asian LGBT people in England, Khan, Hall and Lowe (2017) found that half had experienced honour abuse and violence from strangers, family and community due to their sexuality/gender, 35 per cent had been forced to marry, and 57 per cent knew of other South Asian LGBT people who were forced by their families to marry because of their sexuality or gender identity.

Experiences of violence by family during the Marriage Equality debate and during the coming out process are distinct from the comparatively well-researched area of domestic and intimate partner violence experienced by cisgender people. The present study begins to disentangle the elements involved in family violence for SGD people from varied communities and cultures. We need to cease conflating all domestic violence experiences by critiquing the dominant heteronormative framing of the issue (Our Watch, 2017). Family violence perpetrated against SGD CALD people is mediated by additional, intersecting factors not present in cisgender family violence. In this study, we examine how culture, religion, and language intersect with sexuality and gender, and how this changes the nature of the violence experienced. Additionally, while outside the scope of this report, our research also highlights how the experiences of CALD and SGD people are often impacted by the economic insecurity and poverty that many in Greater Western Sydney experience.

The original research team were identified through community and research networks, and consisted of only white people. To ensure that our project met the needs and expectations of SGD CALD people, the original project team was expanded to include four, paid CALD interns, who assisted in designing the project, including the approach, methods, and analysis. Three of the four interns also identified as SGD. Even with this critical input, the team recognised that this project would require a robust ethics protocol to support SGD CALD people engaging with the survey or interviews.

As a community capacity building project, Home is Where our Story Begins involved several components, only two of which were research related; however, the other community development aspects of the project informed and were informed by the research. As a whole, the project involved:

1. **Survey;** online, anonymous, consisting of 46 open-ended and multiple choice questions
2. **Life history interviews;** audio-recorded, consisting of 71 prompts, which were used to guide participants through their life experiences
3. **Stakeholder forums;** coordinated by the NSW LGBTIQ Domestic and Family Violence Interagency in GWS (Penrith, Campbelltown, Kingswood) to expand the network's reach<sup>5</sup>
4. **Community forum;** coordinated in conjunction with the Western Sydney University (WSU) Queer Collective
5. **Community resources;** materials that aimed to raise awareness of CALD LGBTQ+ people's relationships to family, including a short animated video that integrated survey participants' and interviewees' responses to our questions.

## Research Ethics

As a hard-to-reach community (family violence survivors) in a hard-to-reach community (culturally and linguistically diverse) in a hard-to-reach community (SGD), this project was bound to have difficulties in reaching our research populations. This was made more difficult by the concerns raised by the WSU Human Research Ethics Committee in relation to the risks to participants' safety in contributing to the research. To address the committee's concerns, before participants were able to answer the survey or interview questions—but after they answered questions relating to the inclusion criteria—they were asked to assess their current risk of family violence and distress. Participants were asked:

<sup>5</sup> This outreach work continues beyond this project completion

1. Are you experiencing family or domestic violence now, or in the last 6 months?
2. Are you currently afraid or fear for your safety?
3. If family members were to become aware that you are participating in this research, would your safety and wellbeing be at risk?
4. Would participating in this research lead to further hostility from your family, or damage your feelings about your family?
5. Have you sought and received support and/or counselling for any family or domestic violence experienced?

If participants answered yes to the first four questions, and no to the last question, they were asked to take the time to consider their participation and seek advice from a trusted advisor. Participants were also provided with links to support and counselling services, and invited to contact the researchers to discuss their participation. Answers to these preliminary Participant Safety Checklist (PSC) questions were sobering. Of the 63 survey participants to complete the PSC:

- 5 participants (8.3%) had experienced family violence in the last six months;
- 6 participants (10%) were currently afraid of family members;
- 11 participants (18.3%) believed that their safety would be at risk if family members knew they were participating in the research;
- 10 participants (16.7%) believed their relationship to family would be damaged if their family knew they were participating in the research; and
- 17 participants (28.3%) had sought counselling in the last six months to address issues relating to family or domestic violence.

A similar preliminary safety check was undertaken with our two interviewees, and all effort was made to ensure that their participation did not increase the risks to their safety, and that they were conducted at a time and place that was ideal for the interviewee.

## Survey

The survey was hosted in Qualtrics, using 46 open and multiple choice questions, which took on average 30 minutes to complete. Of the 138 people who started the survey, 69 were excluded on the basis of the inclusion criteria (identify as CALD, identify as SGD, over the age of 18 years, and they or their family live and/or work in Greater Western Sydney). This left us with 69 eligible participants, of which three participants opted out of the survey after completing the Participant Safety Checklist, and a further six respondents did not complete anything more than the demographic questions. This resulted in the final sample of 60 respondents. Quantitative data were cleaned, coded, and analysed using Excel and SPSS. Descriptive analyses are provided in this report.

## Interviews

At the end of the survey, all participants were asked whether they wished to participate in a life history interview. Only two of the 60 survey participants ultimately agreed to be interviewed.<sup>6</sup> Originally, the project team had hoped to be able to video-record these interviews so that participants' responses could be edited for inclusion in the community awareness raising materials; however, neither of the interviewees agreed to be video-recorded. Prior to the interview, participants were contacted by one of the project team members from ACON to undertake the Participant Safety Checklist and to discuss their safety in participating in an interview.

While neither of the interviewees approved video-recording of their interviews, both agreed that their interview could be audio-recorded. The duration of interviews were 70 minutes and 120 minutes. The audio-recordings were transcribed and returned to participants for review. At this time, interviewees were invited to embargo any data provided in the interviews, or to clarify statements that they had made. Both interviewees made amendments to their interview transcript; in most instances to protect their anonymity and ensure that any quotes used did not contribute to a safety risk for the participants. Nvivo and Leximancer were used to analyse the qualitative survey and interview data to identify key patterns of experience.

<sup>6</sup> Importantly, a third interview was conducted with a participant who did not identify as CALD with the aim to provide comparative data on lived experience, however this participant's data was ultimately excluded from analysis and the final report. Additional survey respondents indicated they were interested in participating in interviews but ultimately decided not to participate in this aspect of the research.

## **Limitations**

As the first study of its kind in Australia, this research marks an initial step in understanding the lived experiences of SGD CALD people. While 60 responses to the survey is laudable, more work needs to be done to investigate the nuances of SGD CALD people's relationships to family. In particular, and as noted in the acknowledgments, there were too few trans and gender diverse (TGD) respondents to undertake a robust analysis of their relationships to family and/or experiences of family violence. Where appropriate, we have noted the unique gendered experiences of our nine TGD participants. Importantly, all but one of our TGD participants also identified as sexuality diverse.



# RESULTS

Strong and supportive family relationships are critical to wellbeing. This is the case for anyone, but most particularly for those who identify as SGD. When family relationships break down, important social and psychological capital disappears, which can result in family violence, including family exile. In this section, we document the lived experiences of sexuality and gender diverse (SGD) CALD people in Greater Western Sydney (GWS), and report on their relationships to family, and their experiences of coming out, and the Marriage Equality debate. We analyse these experiences through the results of both our online anonymous survey, which included both closed and open-ended responses, and the deeper life history interviews of two participants.

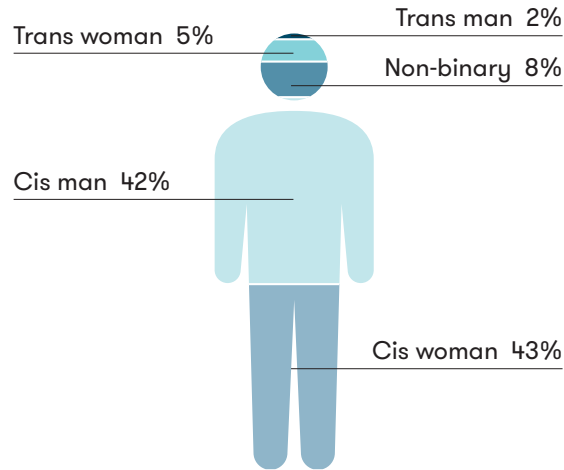
The results of this study will follow the most common sequence of lived experiences described by participants. We will discuss their initial experiences of 'coming out' through the themes of greater intimacy through transparency, and the grief and shame participants often felt regarding their sexuality/gender identity. We will then explore how disclosing their sexuality and gender identities to family resulted in feelings of disconnection and isolation, with some participants moving out of home or choosing to end communication with unsupportive relatives. Common experiences of living as a SGD CALD person in GWS were reported as involving a great deal of minority stress, often due to the denial and refusal to accept their identity by close family members and the fear of family violence.

Our discussion will then focus on the lived experiences through the Marriage Equality debate, where the silence around SGD identities of loved ones was challenged. The debate revealed and heightened the prejudice participants reported experiencing, with negative effects to their mental health and wellbeing. Lastly, the highlighting of SGD rights within the community and within the family unit provided participants with ample opportunities for active resistance against prejudice, with some participants voicing that the emotional labour of resistance became too heavy. Later in the report, we discuss the impact of negative family relationships in terms of family and domestic violence, including the preferred support by victims of this violence. Before discussing each resulting themes of this study in depth, we will provide an overview of the participants themselves.

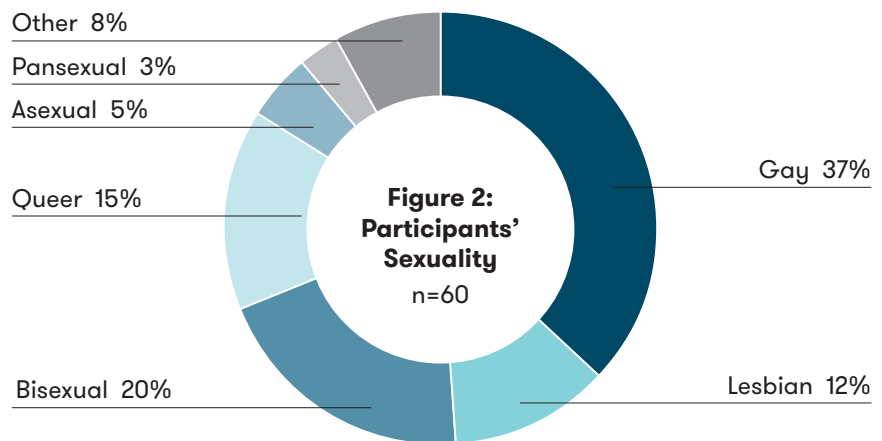
## The Participants

As noted in the Methodology section, while 138 people were interested in participating in our survey, only 60 participants were either eligible to participate and/or completed the survey. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 51 years, with a mean of 27 years. As can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below, respondents identified with a variety of genders and sexualities, with most participants identifying as cisgender and gay.

**Figure 1: Participants' Gender** n=60

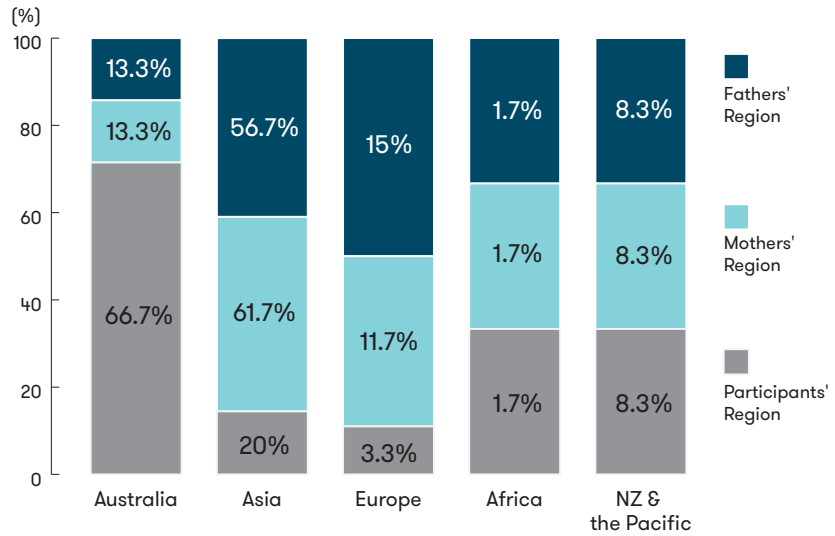


In some sections of the report, where we report on experiences of family violence with respect to gender, we have reported trans and non-binary participants as one group. This is due to the small number of TGD respondents. We acknowledge that the genders of these participants are varied.



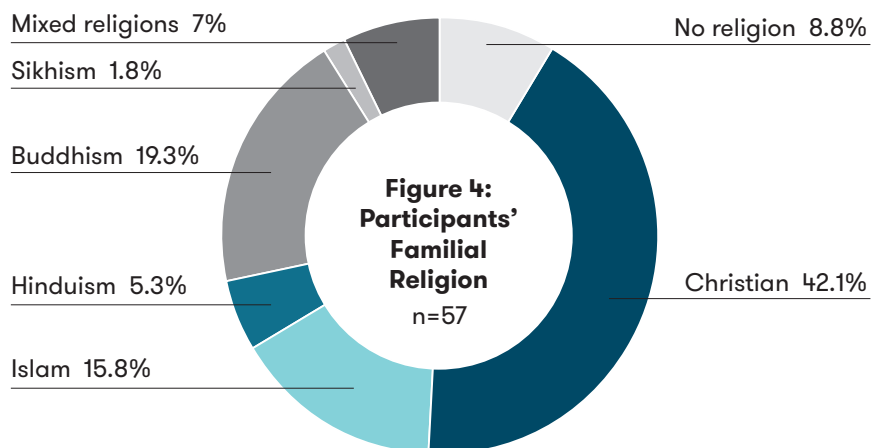
As noted earlier regarding terminology, difficulties arose in categorising participants' cultural or linguistic background due to the complexity of cultural identity, and the many intersections of their and their parents' country of birth, religion, and primary language spoken at home. Thirty-seven participants (67.3%), were born in Australia, and despite all survey participants identifying as CALD, six participants (11.3%) identified their cultural heritage or background as Australian (with both parents and themselves born in Australia).

**Figure 3: Participants' and Parents' Region of Birth** n=60



The most common cultural background was 'mixed heritage', with parents and participants born in different countries (8; 15.1%), followed by four Cambodian (7.5%), four Vietnamese (7.5%), and five Lebanese (9.4%) Australian participants. Other cultural backgrounds included: Fijian, Finnish, Indigenous Australian, Iraqi, Italian, Kenyan, Korean, Macedonian, Portuguese, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Malaysian, Tongan, Chinese, Filipino, and Turkish. In Figure 3 below we document these in regions to provide an overview of participants' and parents' regions of birth.

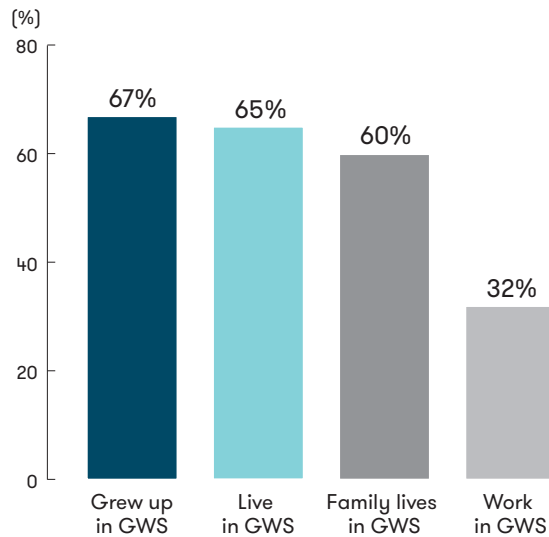
The primary family languages spoken at home other than English (23; 42.6%), were Cantonese (3; 5.6%); Turkish (3; 5.6%), Vietnamese (4; 7.4%), and Arabic (5; 9.3%). While the majority of participants identified as Christian, as noted in Figure 4 below, a variety of religions (and no religious affiliation) was reported by participants.



Participants also noted that their family’s religious and cultural practices were very (18, 30%) or somewhat (25, 42%) important to family life, with 17 per cent and seven per cent of participants indicating that these practices were not very, or not all important, respectively. Additionally, participants indicated they were very close (25, 42%) or somewhat close (19, 32%) to their family, with 15 per cent and seven per cent indicating that they were not very, or not at all close to their family, respectively.

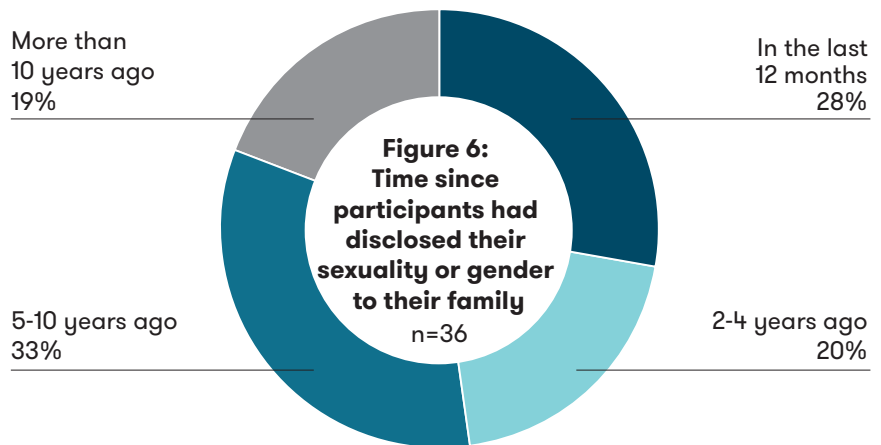
Participants were also asked about their connections to Greater Western Sydney, which are noted in Figure 5 above. The majority of participants reported that their primary connection was that they grew up in GWS, followed by currently living in GWS. Only one participant noted that their only connection to GWS was by way of their employment.

**Figure 5: Participants’ connections to Greater Western Sydney** n=60



## Coming Out

Before being asked about their family's reactions to the Marriage Equality vote and experiences of family violence, participants were asked about whether they had disclosed their sexuality and/or gender to their family, their family's reaction to this disclosure, and for those who were not currently out to their family, their plans for disclosing.



Two-thirds of all participants, and 100 per cent of TGD participants, had disclosed to their family prior to completion of the survey, and as noted in Figure 6, the majority had done so more than five years ago. Of those who had disclosed, 53 per cent had introduced their partner to their family. Seventeen per cent of participants reported that disclosing their sexuality/gender had not impacted their relationship to family, while 53 per cent indicated that it had impacted for the worse, and 31 per cent for the better. Eleven per cent of TGD participants noted that their disclosure had no impact. Forty-four per cent of TGD respondents noted a negative impact and a further 44 per cent, a positive impact. Of those who had not disclosed their sexuality/gender to family, 74 per cent had no plans to do so in the future.

## INTIMACY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

Participants who had disclosed with positive responses from family described a greater intimacy and closeness with their relatives. Being able to share all aspects of their life and identity made participants bond with parents and siblings. They could bring partners home to meet their family. They felt an increase in trust, support, and understanding, with many family members expressing unconditional love following the disclosure. This closeness often resulted in spending more time together, and was more common with sibling relationships.

“

*It strengthened my belief in them as they grew to better understand the plight of many LGBTIQ people, and help them realise the bureaucracy that hamstrung so many of us*  
**(Trans Woman, Bisexual, Chinese/New Zealander).**

“

*Although we have never discussed how he (Dad) found out, he has often showed support, suggesting gay-themed movies to me and asking me how to vote ‘Yes’ in the postal survey*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, Italian/Spanish).**

“

*Disclosing it to them and finally embracing who I am as a gay individual made them realise more about the LGBT community and the way in which gay people are either treated or showed in society. I really believe it broaden their understanding as me being a gay person, made them see the world differently, and how there are different people and different values in life*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, New Zealander).**

“

*I disclosed to my mother and sisters that I was gay when I was a teenager, and they asked me if I could change my mind or see a doctor to “fix it”. However, they became supportive over the next couple of years and accepted me fully. Four years ago, I came out again as trans (this time to my father as well), and all four of them were extremely supportive and understanding, despite some concerns about medical and surgical transition which they were unsure about. But since then, they have fully supported my transition and gender*  
**(Trans Woman, Androphilic, Vietnamese).**

Following the disclosure, conversation around SGD issues arose between family members, leading to a greater awareness of SGD experiences and identities for participants’ relatives. This ultimately led to family members forming a more supportive position on the topic of SGD acceptance and marriage equality.

## THE GRIEF AND SHAME OF CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY

For those who had disclosed with negative reactions from family, heteronormativity—the societal assumption that everyone is born and remains heterosexual—was a common cultural hurdle. Participants explained that many of their cultural norms and rites of passage were based around a heterosexual life, from the moment they were born. Marriage was the main rite of passage their parents looked forward to, with some marriages being organised by the families during the participant's childhood. Grandchildren were then an expected result of a heterosexual marriage. Upon participants coming out, families would grieve the loss of these celebrations and their prospective grandchildren. They were often disappointed and shocked that their child would not be following the heterosexual life path mapped out for them, and worried about what their alternative future may hold.

“

*As the oldest boy in our family it was seen as an embarrassment and a disappointment. Many high hopes had been pinned on me from an early age. Plans were made for my life and expectations were set for who and how I should marry from the moment I was born*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, Tongan).**

“

*Their idea of a traditional marriage is of paramount importance to my identity, and to them it's a rite of passage into adulthood and religious obligation. I cannot marry a woman and therefore I must explain this to them at some point... I would like to live my life as authentically as possible free of shame and guilt*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, Bangladeshi/Pakistani).**

“

*...my sister was horrified about it. She screamed at me, she said you are a disgrace. Like just [sighs], like mum's going to kill herself because of you, basically, just saying oh, look what you're doing, she's going to die now. It was really intense, and she was like you're not queer. You've been with men. Like, she tried to invalidate it really quickly. Also, she was disgusted by it. She's like I just want a normal family, is what she wanted. I understood where that came from, because growing up, that's all we wanted. But it was extremely hurtful because she's my sister, and I always thought I could be myself with her. So it shocked me. It changed our relationship*  
**(Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).**

Some parents expressed guilt, wondering if their bad parenting was the cause of their child's sexuality. Some families viewed being gay as a potentially treatable health issue, suggesting a visit to the general practitioner when their child disclosed their sexuality. This failure to follow the heterosexual norm also led to shame and embarrassment for some of the participants' families, as the taboo of their child's identity reflected poorly on the family unit within their broader cultural community.

“

According to Catechism if you're gay that's not a sin but you have to be celibate for the rest of your life and I was thinking I cannot live like this. I tried to live by the Good Book for 12 fricking years and I always spiral down to depression because of that. That colour my reconciliation between the two, reconciling between the two because now I can truly say that I tried. It didn't work for me and I think I believe God will be happier for me to live as a gay man than killing myself (Cis Man, Gay, Indonesian).

“

Anger and violence initially. Then worry and concern. My family and I attended a GP in Liverpool for the doctor to advise what was wrong with me (Cis Man, Gay, Lebanese).

Due to these social consequences, some participants also expressed guilt or shame for failing to follow the heterosexual norm. For some families, same-sex partners served as a reminder and symbol of the participants' non-heterosexuality, and the lack of marriage and grandchildren. These families were therefore unsupportive of these relationships and exhibited contempt for the participant's partners.

“

I know he (Dad) loves me because I'm his child but I also know that he finds it hard to reconcile who I am with who he wishes I was/would be. There will always be a part of me that's a bit sad at the fact that I know I will never live up to his expectations because they're so different to what I am and what I want for myself (Cis Woman, Queer, Cambodian).

## COMING OUT; A TABOO MET WITH SILENCE

Following the initial disclosure of a participant's SGD identity, a major theme was silence and denial from family members. This took many forms, from implicit communication around the topic to refusal to acknowledge the disclosure in the first place. Some family never made direct reference to the disclosure, but instead made their attitudes towards their relative's sexuality known implicitly through comments made to or around them. Many family members denied the news out of shock, disappointment, or anger, refusing to discuss or acknowledge the participant's coming out. They made reference to the family member's prospective future heterosexual marriage, or referred to their current same-sex partner as their 'friend'. They would encourage the SGD family member to not disclose to extended family due to the family's potential negative reactions, and to not attend religious or cultural events in case their sexuality disclosure caused issues.



“

*They just sort of live in denial. So, if anything comes on, because I live with them now, so if it comes onto our television, they will switch the channel... They just don't talk about it. They use quite heteronormative language too. They are very like, when you get married to a man, and just all that crap. So it's just like they are trying to reinforce like their beliefs onto me, as if that moment never happened, of me coming out (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

“

*They ignored it completely. My father pretended to forget my coming out because he refused to acknowledge it. My mother didn't speak about it (Non Binary, Lesbian, Vietnamese).*

“

*Shock when I came out as gay at first. Mum felt she did something wrong. Parents never talk about my coming out or sexuality (Non Binary, Queer, Malaysian/Hong Konger).*

Some participants also self-silenced regarding their sexuality, by either not coming out, or being discreet regarding their sexuality following initial disclosure. For some, this was a move of self-preservation, in order to live harmoniously with close family members that supported them in many other ways. For others, it was out of respect for their religious community that disallowed SGD experiences, or to save their family from shame within the cultural community, as described earlier.

“

*...there's some friends of mine, very nice people, highly religious, highly conservative, who campaigns against marriage equality so I remember when I showed my close friends at church my wedding photo album I had to make sure that those other people are not in the room. I sort of had to whisper to some people [very close friends at church to whom I am out], "Please don't go, please don't go, please don't go. Let's just stay. I want to share with you guys something but I want to wait until everybody else [other friends who are against marriage equality] leaves the room... (Cis Man, Gay, Indonesian).*

## DISCONNECTION AND ISOLATION

Being CALD and coming out as SGD in GWS resulted in participants feeling a disconnection between their cultural identity and their sexual identity. Participants often felt they had two options; they could live in the inner city and be near SGD services, and have their sexuality and gender accepted by the white SGD community there; or remain in Western Sydney and be culturally connected to family and community.

“

*People I did try and talk to, I think, that were LGBTQ plus, they're all white, and they were quite, they were just relieved about the result after the plebiscite, and we didn't really talk about the pain of your community that you live in... I don't know how to locate myself within it. I don't know if that's just because I live so far away from the queer hub, wherever that is. I feel like I'm just so far away from everything (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

Being openly SGD and engaging with the SGD community led to feeling a distinct disconnect to cultural heritage for some participants. The alternative choice was living in Western Sydney near family, where they had access to financial support, culture, and community. By living close to family, participants knew they would face a distinct lack of SGD services, often feeling isolated as an SGD person, and feeling pressure to keep their gender/sexuality discreet.

“

*In the early days I withdrew from family and became depressed. I resented my families views and felt culturally disconnected (Cis Man, Gay, Lebanese).*

“

*I'm constantly being asked to justify why I belong in the community. I need to read all the right books, I need to know all the right authors, and it becomes like this obstructed nuanced language that is so academic and it's not lived, and I just don't see the importance of it. I guess for me I have a lot of pain that I can't find in conversations with other people in the community, where it's similar to mine... I feel it's very cliquey. Like I say, I feel like they've all got their little circles of safe spaces that they've actually closed off without realising it. But I feel it when I walk into those spaces, that I don't belong there. Also, I'm fem presenting, and I think sometimes you have to prove yourself as being queer enough, on top of that. But also being a person of colour, I feel like they assume that you're out of the loop (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

Those currently living in GWS voiced a feeling of being left behind and invisible to the mainstream SGD services in the city, and noting the distinct lack of resources for the large Western Sydney population.

“

*But then again, you know, how many of us gays in the 'burbs would actually come across any of the survey or any of these research projects? So our stories - we are the unheard voices, you know... People say, people of colour and that sort of thing, these are the unheard voices. Well, there's actually another group, you know, of people who are just, like, normal, which is 'the gays in the burbs' (Cis Man, Gay, Indonesian).*

Participants also discussed their experiences of racism and discrimination that they faced from the broader community, including the SGD community. One participant commented that their family's support of marriage equality felt really important.



*Particularly when my community and faith is so demonised by the media and the broader community (Trans Man, Queer, Lebanese).*

Another participant specifically highlighted their concern that this project could contribute to the racism and discrimination that CALD communities face.



*While I think this is a useful piece of research, I'm a bit concerned about the framing of the questions. White people don't get asked to participate in surveys about how homophobic their families are, and have their culture/religion brought in as a factor. Many QPoC that I know have close and stable relationships with family members who are not supportive of LGBTIQ communities. Of course, there are families who are homophobic and violent, but I think it's important for the nuance of the situation to be respected. If a report comes out of this research showing that western Sydney communities of colour are homophobic and violent, this could end up increasing the racism and discrimination that we are already facing (Cis Woman, Queer, Arabic).*

## MINORITY STRESS

Secrecy, exclusion, and family denial of their sexuality and/or gender, along with fear of family violence, formed additional stressful aspects to participants' lives. Participants explained that their family's reactions to their identity made them feel that their family's love was conditional. Negotiations and pressure to hide their sexuality or gender can cause daily stress, known as 'minority stress'. To avoid these experiences, many participants chose to only partially disclose, in one of two ways. Some participants only disclosed to the relatives they thought would be most accepting of their identity. Others only disclosed their sexuality, rather than also disclosing their gender, which they believed, would more likely result in family conflict.

Participants expressed feeling 'psychologically unsafe' after coming out, and expressing 'stress and anxiety' when hiding their gender and sexuality from family due to their worry regarding potential negative reactions, such as financial stability and homelessness.

“

*...being forced to live in that (unsupportive family) situation, because it's not financially feasible for me to be out of it right now. So, it's like I have to figure out a way to navigate it. I don't want to, but like I still feel unsafe. Not in the sense of any physical danger, but the fact that I am constantly hiding who I am, and censoring myself is quite oppressive. It's really oppressive actually (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

“

*It would cause too much trouble to be worthwhile - I have a bad enough relationship with family without needing to disclose this. It's more convenient to just pretend being hetero and I have a partner of the opposite gender anyway (Cis Woman, Bisexual, Chinese).*

## **Marriage Equality Debate**

### **BREAKING THE SILENCE**

Following the silence around SGD family members' sexualities, public debate at the time of the postal vote brought the topic back onto the family room table. The Marriage Equality postal vote, and pre-vote media and advertising, broke the silence within the family on the topic of same-sex attraction for the vast majority of participants. This increase in discussion and social media posts led to both positive learning experiences and greater familial support for some, as well as exposing prejudice and creating a more hostile environment for other participants.

The postal vote forced previously avoidant and uncomfortable family to face their family member's sexuality. Participants recalled their families discussing the meaning and importance of marriage, the legality of same-sex couples adopting children, and societal respect for difference. Some participants felt these conversations transformed their relationships, encouraging greater understanding and trust between themselves and their immediate family members. Some family argued that marriage should be for everyone, given its religious importance within their community. Others began normalizing their family member's sexuality due to the increased visibility and representation within the streets and media of the SGD population. Through discussion and media representation, relatives developed a greater understanding of their family member's experiences. On social media, a few participants were surprised by the outpouring of support for their equal rights from their siblings. One participant recalled being surrounded by support when the negatives of public debate made them feel particularly emotionally vulnerable.

“

*It also gave the opportunity to explain why it was so important and gave way for some transformative conversations with my dad (Cis Woman, Lesbian, Italian/Australian).*

“

*It reinforced how much my siblings wanted not just me, but everyone in the lgbt community to have the same rights as they did (Cis Man, Gay, Filipino).*

For other participants, this refocus on their sexuality among family was not a positive experience. The Marriage Equality debate resurfaced underlying, unspoken tensions between family members. The reasons for original familial disapproval regarding the participant's sexuality were back in the limelight, being highlighted and repeated through the media and everyday community discussion.

“

*In the lead up to it, there was like just a lot of tension, because I had already come out to my family. So this created more tension, because they were sort of happy to live in denial, and this sort of made it, it was like public discourse, and so like everyone was talking about it, and so it was really hard to avoid that. So the denial became more suffocating I think, because it was active, it was really active. But yes, they didn't like it that they even had to think about this (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

## REVEALING AND LEGITIMISING PREJUDICE

The Marriage Equality postal vote amplified the voices of family members who had previously been quietly unsupportive, as avoiding the topic altogether became difficult. Some family members who had previously avoided much discussion of the topic in relation to their relative were suddenly more vocal on social media, sharing anti same-sex marriage posts. False information and fear mongering was shared during the social campaigning, such as the SGD community were 'tampering with ballots'. Moral panic was encouraged as social commentators argued that being SGD would become the new normal, and to be enforced in schooling and law. They argued same-sex marriage would 'devalue' heterosexual marriages. Some family members began believing and voicing these arguments to their SGD relatives and on their social media platforms, encouraging an 'us' versus 'them' mentality. This forced conflict between participants and the relatives engaging in the 'no' campaign material.

“

*It revealed some ingrained prejudices that they held against LGBT+ persons as they implied they were 'dangerous individuals tampering with ballots' (Cis Woman, Bisexual, Filipino/British).*

“

*Extended family seemed to think it gave them a green light to voice negative opinions or post negative things on social media and when challenged about it would respond with things such as “oh but I don’t mean you (Cis Woman, Lesbian, Italian/Australian).*

“

*Religious content, content that false, false statistics. It was really heartbreaking to see your family in the same sentence say they love you unconditionally but then say they will never accept your sexuality (Cis Man, Gay, Tongan).*

“

*I was very upset reading my sister’s comments (that she would vote No, that her future marriage would be devalued by gay weddings, etc.)... she basically said that gay people should get over it, and that the issue was not important, etc. My mother commented in support. I liked various friends’ comments which responded negatively to her ignorance and subsequently blocked her on all social media (Cis Man, Gay, Italian/Spanish).*

In the community, prejudice was also made more explicit through instances of structural stigma. One participant explained that catholic school workers were only allowed to encourage the ‘No’ vote, and any vocal ‘Yes’ campaigners would face disciplinary action. Others commented on the intensity and frequency of workplace homophobia and transphobia on the walls of their office, and conversations in the lunchroom.

“

*Working in a catholic high school, we were told by the school leadership that the top heavies of the diocese were forcing everyone to defend the views of the church and campaign at school for the ‘No’ camp. We were told that those who were caught openly campaigning for the ‘Yes’ camp could face disciplinary action (Cis Man, Bisexual, Aboriginal Australian).*

“

*My CEO and direct manager at work in the western suburbs think all gay people are pedophiles and are also super transphobic. They had loud discussions in the middle of the office about it and the LGBTIQ+ propaganda. They hate safe schools and anything set up to protect LGBTIQ+ people. The plebescite gave them permission to have these discussions and they have not stopped. I put up ACON and Twenty10 posters on our community notice boards and my colleagues regularly tear them down. this are just a handful of examples. This has been going on for 16 months now (Cis Woman, Gay/Queer/Lesbian, Solomon Islander).*

The government legitimising the campaigning of both sides of the postal vote meant that in turn, those holding prejudice towards the SGD community and wanting to have discriminatory laws felt socially legitimised in being vocal about it. This was made explicit in the 'It's OK to vote No' tagline of the 'No' campaign.

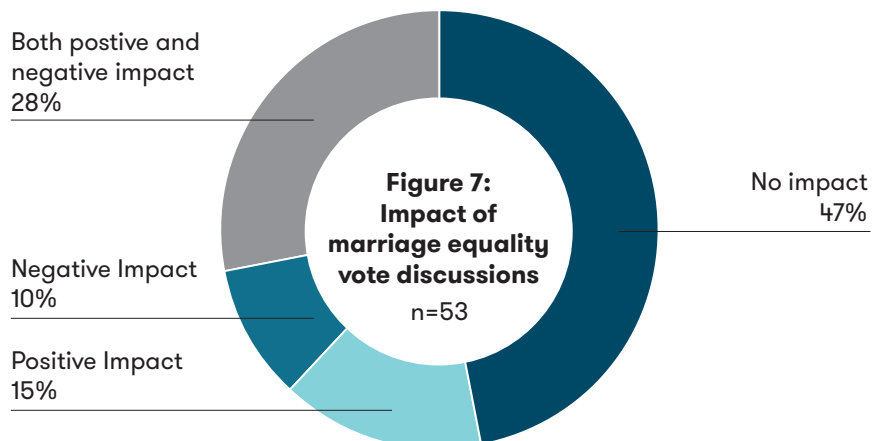
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*[regarding majority no vote in area] I never really trusted the government, but I just feel disillusioned even more so. Also, I look at, even in the suburb that I live in, and I'm like I don't trust any one of you. There's a resentment there, because I'm like I know what you did. I guess that's what I'm feeling. I'm like, I know what you tried to do to me and people like me. So yes, it does linger (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

### QUEER SUBJECTS AS COLLATERAL

As noted previously, the Marriage Equality vote in Australia, as with similar processes internationally, had a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of SGD people. SGD CALD people living in GWS were no different, and arguably, the impact is more significant given the structural stigma they face by living, working, and having family in electorates that overwhelmingly opposed marriage equality.

Of the 53 participants who responded to the questions relating to marriage equality, 34 (57%) discussed the vote with their family members. Of these 34 participants, only 32 per cent reported that it was a positive discussion, with 29 per cent and 38 per cent indicating that it was either a negative or neutral discussion, respectively. As noted in Figure 7, these discussions had various impacts on participants' relationships to family, with only 15 per cent indicating that the impact was wholly positive; though 27 per cent of participants reported that these discussions had no positive or negative impact on their relationships to their family. Additionally, eight per cent of participants reported that during the Marriage Equality campaign they experienced family violence, and 25 per cent reported that they experienced other prejudice-related abuse. These experiences of family violence are discussed in more detail in the next section of the report.



This prejudice-related abuse came from the broader community, so was largely unavoidable. Participants felt they became the target of the 'No' campaign's hostility towards the potential law change, serving as an individual reminder of the existence of SGD people. Participants recalled experiencing verbal abuse when putting up 'Yes' campaign posters and attending rallies. They had also received abuse from religious protestors on the street and were yelled at by strangers when holding hands with their same-sex partners. This increased everyday social tension and feelings of community isolation for many participants. Some participants recalled being also confronted online, with SGD university club being targeted by other university clubs who were taking an anti-marriage equality stance.

“

*I think I felt the judgement because there were a few strange looks if I was with my friends in the area, who were like masculine presenting. So there'd be like strange looks, and I'd feel kind of uncomfortable because I think they had some anger that the yes vote went through. So it was this weird like oh, F you, this is what it is now to them, and then kind of like making me feel like it will never really change how they value me. So it was, I don't know, I still didn't feel safe, essentially (Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).*

With family, due to the unavoidable discussions that arose regarding sexuality, the time of the postal vote was emotionally exhausting. Family would react to media comments, voice anti-SGD opinions, or post 'No' campaign material to social media. When their SGD relatives confronted them, the family member would respond, 'oh, not you', suggesting their unsupportive posts and comments were unrelated to their SGD relative's sexuality and identity, and therefore irrelevant to their relationship with them.

“

*The plebiscite sent my family into a moral panic... They believed that "gay" would become a way of life, enforced by schools, the law, and would become the new Norm and standard. This lead my parents to paranoia, taking extra precaution to police me from the outside world. I was not allowed on social media, had my internet privileges taken away and they monitored my whereabouts at almost every movement of the day (Cis Man, Gay, Bangladeshi/Pakistani).*

All of these confrontations and discussions with family and the broader community led to a heightened experience of minority stress for the participants, with many expressing their anguish and exhaustion during the campaign. For some, the theme of being collateral damage continued, as participants voiced feeling excluded and unsupported when their community had a high 'No' vote result.



“

*The plebiscite. It was really upsetting, and very othering and scary. I felt like we were just sort of having to fight for our lives. So I just retained a lot of anger when it happened, and I never really got to express it, because I'm not really in an environment where I can freely express those kinds of ideas and feelings*  
**(Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).**

“

*The marriage equality campaign made my every day life a hostile one. Because people knew I was gay, a lot of their anger was focused on me*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, Tongan).**

## ACTIVE RESISTANCE

Rather than becoming collateral damage following the Marriage Equality debate, many participants actively resisted the negative discourses surrounding their identity. As described earlier, the increased prejudice within general society, the workplace, and family networks led to ongoing minority stress during the Marriage Equality debate. In an effort to fight against these prejudices, participants described engaging in acts of resistance. These acts were in both private and public spheres. Some participants broke the silence with family, by choosing to re-introduce the topic of their sexuality into family discussion despite their family refusing to acknowledge their sexuality previously. This often involved the emotional labour of educating their families—both online and in face-to-face conversations—about their sexuality and why they believe they should have equal marriage rights to their heterosexual peers. Participants challenged family members on their anti-equality stance during the Marriage Equality debate, both in person and on social media. Some participants commented on ‘No’ campaign material posted by relatives on social media platforms, while others stopped speaking to relatives who had voiced their lack of support for marriage equality. They attended marriage equality rallies to fight for equal rights, and put up ‘Yes’ campaign material in their workplace to counteract the ‘No’ campaign material present.

“

*Dad has always been emotionally distant. During the debate he said that gay marriage should be legalised however, the question of whether LGBTQ+ in same sex relationships should be allowed to adopt children remains... It was good in that I could have discussions that weren't overly heated and challenge their preconceived notions towards things like adoption*  
**(Cis Woman, Bisexual, Indian).**

“

*Had to create new ways to relate to my family members that are different from cultural expectations. Had to educate them about my potential future family life*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, Turkish).**

When discussing these acts of resistance, most participants also commented that the frequency and size of their acts were limited by the energy and emotional strength they had available at any given time. Many participants found that resistance enhanced family members' expressions of prejudice and their engagement with the 'No' campaign material.

“

*Outside people, even just in a public setting, I'd overhear something and I'd have to say something... and I regretted it immediately, because I was like oh, like you don't feel safe now. But there are times I felt so compelled to, because it just felt sickening*  
**(Cis Woman, Queer, South Asian).**

Separate from the Marriage Equality debate, some participants shared their general acts of resistance within their familial relationships, insisting on respect within the family home. For example, one participant recalled setting boundaries regarding their family meeting their future partners: “I decided if my mum wasn't going to be completely accepting of my sexuality she couldn't meet any of my partners, male or female” (Cis Woman, Bisexual, Indian). Some participants chose to cut down or redefine who their family and community would include, making the decision to end 'toxic' relationships: “It has given me the strength to cut off unsupportive/toxic family members and made me feel more comfortable with my real family” (Cis Woman, Lesbian, Filipino/Australian). An interviewee noted that:

“

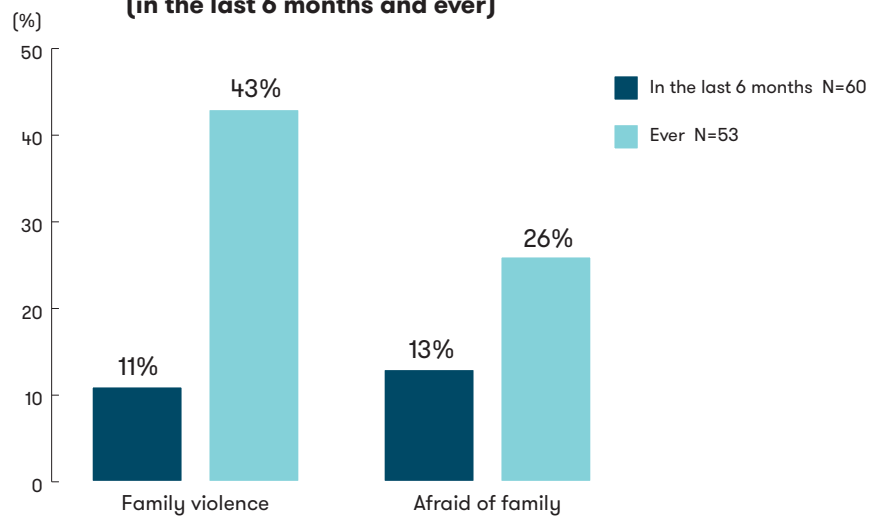
*I stopped going to my old parish because ...after marriage equality the priests were still harping on against marriage equality, and then I thought: you know what, I'm volunteering here. I don't want to have, you know, animosity against anybody in the church. What I don't hear won't hurt me so I decided to step away from that parish and just stick to my current parish, more like a self-preservation*  
**(Cis Man, Gay, Indonesian).**

In addition to resistance during the campaign and resistance in their daily life, some participants also used this study to resist the negative discourses around SGD CALD identities. Both interviewees explained their reason for participating was to provide an example of SGD CALD experience to those SGD CALD readers who may need to hear a life narrative akin to their own, in order to lessen their feelings of isolation. Being interviewed, in and of itself, was undergoing emotional labour in an effort to provide support to others struggling within this political climate. Participants, both within the interviews and the survey, advocated strongly for more SGD support services in Greater Western Sydney. They argued that public services had largely ignored SGD CALD populations in the west of Sydney, focusing resources and support services on those living in the inner city, who they believed were more likely to already have community support due to the higher density of SGD people within their cultural (white) community.

# FAMILY VIOLENCE

After coming out to family, and during and after the Marriage Equality vote, some participants experienced strained relationships with family members. For some, this resulted in fearing for their safety due to certain family member's reactions. As noted in the methodology section, as part of our safety and ethics protocol, we asked participants about whether they are currently experiencing family violence, or whether they were afraid if family members knew of their participation in this research. As noted in Figure 8 below, over their lifetime many participants had experienced family violence or been afraid of family members.

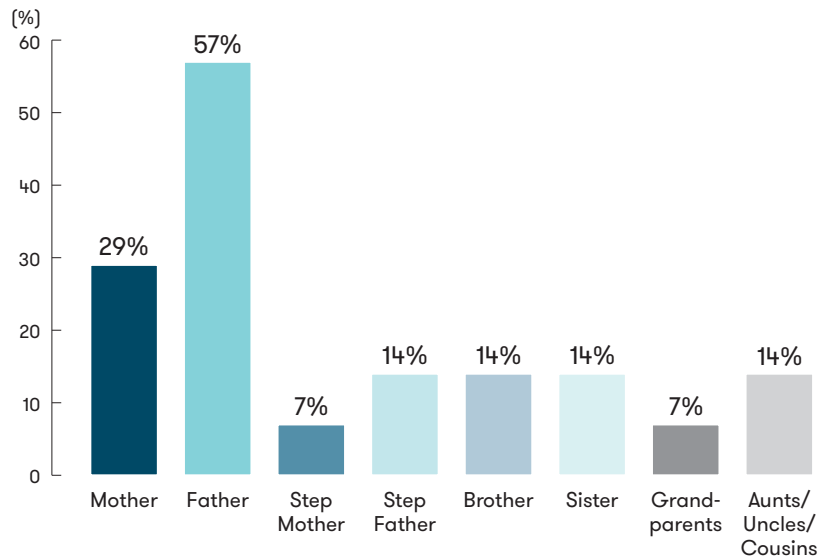
**Figure 8: Comparison of Family Violence and Fear of Family (in the last 6 months and ever)**



Additionally, a further 9 per cent and 17 per cent of participants indicated that they were unsure if they had experienced family violence or been afraid of family members at any time before participating in the research, respectively. While the number of respondents is small, when only TGD participants are considered, these results skew in both directions. Eleven per cent of TGD respondents noted that they had experienced family violence in the last six months, and 38 per cent over their lifetime, with 11 per cent indicating they were unsure. In terms of fear of family, 11 per cent of TGD respondents have been afraid of family members in the last six months, however, 50 per cent have been fearful over their lifetime, with another 25 per cent unsure.

Participants were then asked to document their experiences of a range of behaviours directed at them from their family. The majority of violence experienced by our participants came from parents, with siblings and extended family contributing to this violence.

**Figure 9: Source of fear from family** n=53



Participants reported on their fear of family, with 26 per cent indicating that they have been or are currently afraid of someone in their family. In total, 43 per cent reported fear or the possibility of fear for their safety from family members. As noted in Figure 9, participants' indicated that this fear came from multiple members of their close and extended family, with male family members generating the greatest fear. When combined, fathers, step-fathers and brothers were the source of fear for 54 per cent of participants, and constitutes 86 per cent of all multiple responses. This contrasts with Eaton and Rios' (2017) research with Latino/a SGD people, which found that mothers were the primary perpetrators of family violence.

## EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family exile — being forced out of the family home—and a retraction of emotional and financial support, were commonly discussed by the participants. Some whole family units cut off all communication with participants, leaving some participants homeless, 'couch-surfing', or struggling financially. For example, one survey respondent stated: "I was not wanted at home and wasn't spoken to for almost 8 months. I had been treated like scum" (Cis Woman, Queer, Hindu, South Asian). And another noted that:

**“**My household disowned me and asked me to move out and leave the family home. I then had a very strained relationship with them for about a year, however it worsened and became very toxic. It has now been 13 years since I last spoke or saw my mother or brother (Cis Woman, Lesbian, Italian/Australian).**”**

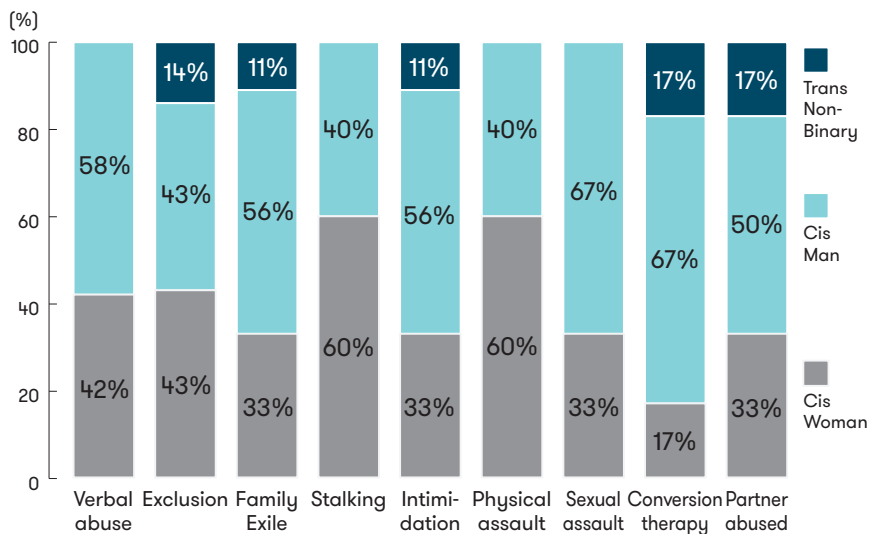
These experiences often led to feeling culturally disconnected as well, with their immediate relatives their only link to culture. Some participants described living situations where their relatives exhibited verbal abuse or violence following their coming out, but did not reject the participant from the family home or end their relationship. This left participants weighing up the difficulty of staying within a violent environment at home, or leave the unsafe home environment but become homeless if they were not financially independent



*It has greatly impacted my relationship with my sister. Due to a culmination of mostly unrelated emotional abuse and entirely unrelated physical abuse on her part, in conjunction with her expressly homophobic sentiments during the postal survey period, I decided to permanently cut her out of my life. None of my family members acknowledge the issue or accept that I feel unsafe around her. During two periods since, including the present time, she has moved back into the family home forcing me to decide every night between living in an unsafe environment or being effectively homeless, couchsurfing or sleeping in my car. My mother sees this as an attack on her parenting and does not acknowledge my position, suggesting that I am 'difficult' for not making attempts to rebuild the relationship. My father is more tacitly supportive (especially financially) but similarly thinks that the right course of action is to grin and bear it (Cis Man, Gay, Italian/Spanish).*

When these experiences are considered in light of our participants' sexuality and gender, the differences in experiences of family violence becomes clear. In relation to gender, it can be seen in Figure 10 that while only constituting 43 per cent of participants, cis women experience 60 per cent of all stalking and physical assaults reported by participants, but only 17 per cent of reported experiences of conversion therapy.

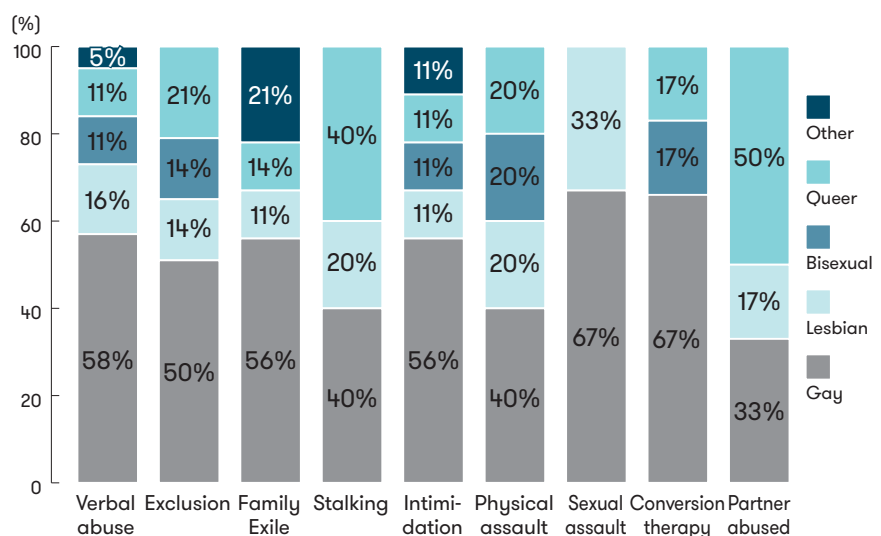
**Figure 10: Experiences of Family Violence by Gender** n=53



Cis men, who constitute 42 per cent of participants, experienced 58 per cent of the verbal abuse reported, and 67 per cent of sexual assaults and conversion therapy. This contrasts with trans men, trans women and non-binary participants, who constitute 15 per cent of the participants, but report no experiences of verbal abuse, stalking, or physical or sexual assaults. It is important to note that only eight TGD participants responded to these questions. All of these participants noted that they had disclosed their gender and/or sexuality to their family, and while some experienced an initial negative response, most did not experience any of these forms of family violence as a result of their gender. Additional research is required to get a better understanding of TGD people’s relationships to family, including their experiences of family violence.

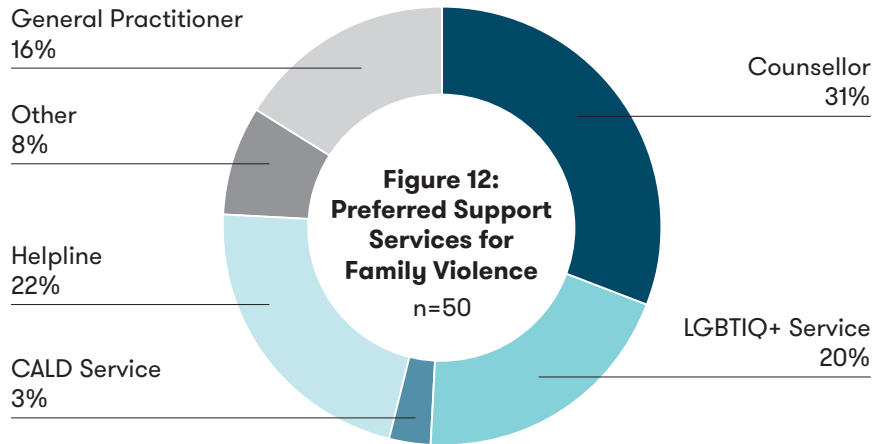
These experiences of family violence are further contextualised when we consider them from the perspective of sexuality. As noted in Figure 11, while gay participants constitute 37 per cent of participants, they are significantly over-represented in all forms of family violence apart from the abuse of their partners. Conversely, all other sexualities are under-represented in most forms of family violence. However, it is notable that while they only represent 15 per cent of participants, queer people are more likely to experience stalking and the abuse of their partner by family members. Lesbians, who represent 12 per cent of participants, reported increased likelihood of stalking, and physical assault, but no experiences of conversion therapy. Bisexual participants reported no experiences of family exile, stalking, sexual assault or the abuse of their partners, and were under-represented in all other forms of family violence apart from physical assault. Those participants consolidated into the “other” category (including heterosexual, asexual, pansexual, androphilic, and questioning) reported no experiences of exclusion, stalking, physical or sexual assault, conversion therapy or the abuse of their partners, but were over-represented in their experiences of family exile.

**Figure 11: Experiences of Family Violence by Sexuality** n=53



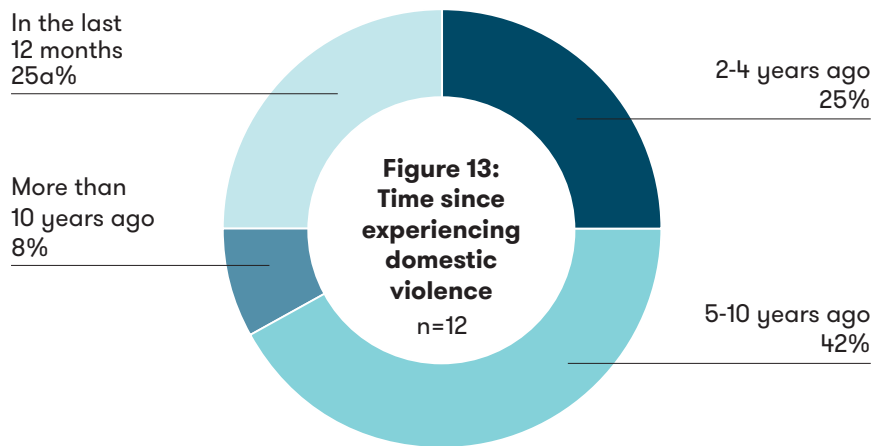
## Preferred Support Services

Participants were also asked about their preferred support for managing experiences of family violence. As noted in Figure 12 below, most participants indicated they would contact SGD services over CALD services, but that their primary preference is to speak with a counsellor or telephone helpline. Other responses included an Imam, partner's family, and a gay and lesbian liaison officer.



## Experiences of Domestic Violence

In addition to reporting their experiences of family violence, participants were asked about whether they had been in a romantic or sexual relationships where their partner had physically, sexually, or emotionally abused them, and if so, when this occurred. While not directly related to the core aims of this research, these questions were asked to ascertain the type and extent of intimate-partner violence experienced by SGD CALD people in GWS, and to provide a context to the wider work of the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Interagency. Of the 53 participants who answered these questions, 12 (23%) reported that they had experienced domestic violence, and of these, as noted below in Figure 13, the majority occurred within the last four years.



When asked who they contacted after this experience of domestic violence, 75 per cent indicated that they had drawn on the support of friends, and 25 per cent, family members. The only significant formal support service accessed by domestic violence victims was counsellors (58%), with participants also indicating they had spoken with a doctor/hospital (8%), police (8%), and telephone helpline (8%).



The wealth of data collected from our survey and interview participants provides ample evidence to begin addressing some of the concerns raised by our participants. Importantly, many of the participants noted their own suggestions for creating more supportive families and communities for SGD CALD people in Greater Western Sydney. Below we provide an outline of those strategies the participants and researchers believe will make the most difference to our participants' lives.

## LEGAL REFORM

- Lobby to make conversion therapy illegal in New South Wales
- A greater acknowledgement of intersectionality in policy and legislation as often SGD communities and CALD communities are regarded as separate population groups

## SUPPORT SERVICES

- Ongoing SGD inclusion training and support for services, including domestic and family violence services, in Western Sydney to enable SGD CALD to safely access services and supports
- Alternate, affordable, and accessible supported living arrangements for those exiled from family homes
- An increase in professional services in GWS to support families of SGD people
- Informal support groups for CALD families, such as that modelled by Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
- SGD specialist services to work in partnership with multicultural services and community leaders to develop culturally appropriate strategies to address family and domestic violence for SGD CALD people
- Services to be provided with information, training and resources about the unique forms of family violence experienced by SGD people such as conversion therapy, forced marriage, threats of deportation, corrective rape and interfamilial hate crimes. Services should also be educated about the impacts of minority stress and trauma on clients.
- Investment into an SGD specialist service in GWS or funding for existing services to have SGD workers, services and programs.

## GENERAL COMMUNITY

- Increased support and education to Western Sydney communities to destigmatise and myth-bust regarding SGD people and the issues they face
- Training/awareness raising with cultural and religious organisations and groups about SGD CALD people's experiences, especially in terms of loss of culture/religion when exiled from family/culture
- "Speak out" tours to showcase SGD CALD people to the community, including the use of panels of SGD CALD people discussing their experiences
- Propose to Mardi Gras and InterPride that preliminary work is done ahead of Sydney WorldPride in 2023 to work with GWS communities
- In conjunction with Western Sydney University (and other GWS universities) to hold an annual lecture on SGD CALD experiences
- Develop campaigns that highlight the stories of SGD CALD people and showcase the diverse expressions of sexuality and gender diversity that exist across cultures.
- Awareness raising initiatives educating people on the nuances of family violence experienced by SGD people

## SGD COMMUNITY

- Visibility of relatable positive stories to help SGD CALD people with feelings of isolation and to offer potential tools for helping them navigate challenging family life.
- Legitimation of SGD CALD identities within the SGD community more broadly; especially in terms of cultural and religious differences and expectations
- Events, programs and media materials should be genuinely accessible, relevant, representative and avoid tokenism. Community organisations should ensure SGD CALD people are represented in leadership roles and should take active steps to be inclusive, for example establishing an anti-racism policy
- SGD organisations should include SGD CALD people in decision making and agenda setting for all program, business and event planning
- Resourcing and support to existing SGD CALD community groups, such as SheQu, FOBGays, Sydney Queer Muslims and Trikone. This will support SGD CALD people in GWS to develop peer connections, build community and engage in community led activities and events

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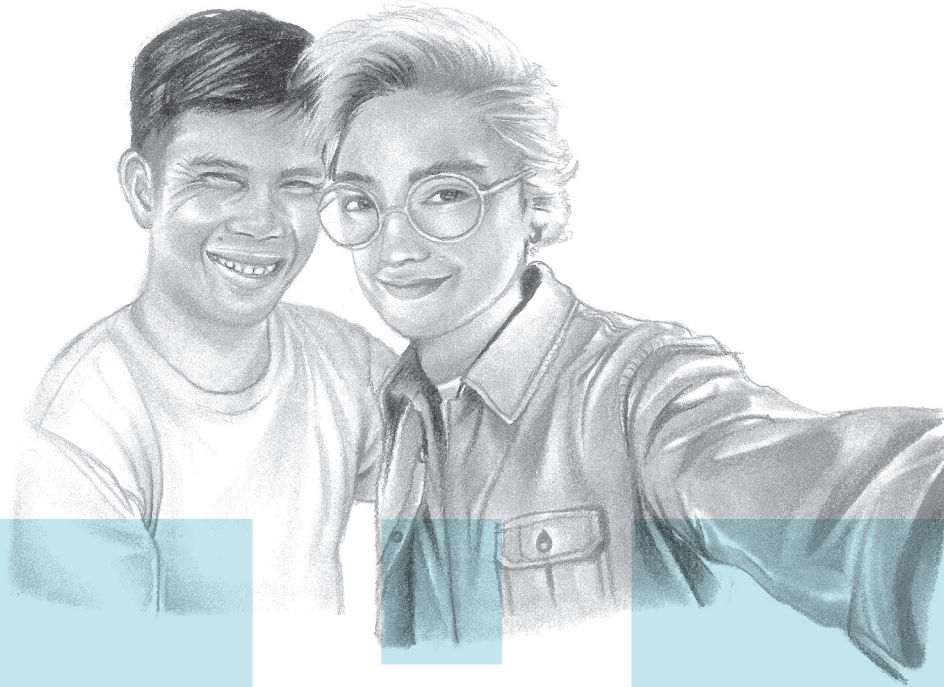
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## **HOME IS WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS:**

Family, community, and belonging for sexuality  
and gender diverse CALD people

