

INCLUSION, POVERTY AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN FROM CALD BACKGROUNDS IN WESTERN SYDNEY

Globalisation is a process that has seen increasing polarisation within industrialised nations between the privileged minority and the growing majority of people excluded to the economic and social margins (Martin&Schumann,1996). This polarisation is profoundly gendered with many women from CALD backgrounds in NSW being forced to the bottom end of the labour market (Brewer,2009) at the same time as declining expenditure on health and community services increase demands on women to carry out unpaid caring and domestic work in the home (Krause,1996).

The forces of globalisation profoundly impact the international migration of labour into Australia. Over the past 50 years, patterns of trade have altered perceptibly – with particularly significant changes to the technologies of production, transport and telecommunications. This has been accompanied with great changes to frameworks that previously provided stability to national markets for labour and capital. (Kabeer, 2008). A global rise in the international mobility of social capital has impacted deeply in many economies. As Kabeer (2008) states, we now live in an interdependent world.

It is in this global context where both developing and developed nations see their economies struggling to pay international debts, and where social and environmental costs highly impact on the poorest countries, a growing number of immigrants are seeking a better life through international migration. (Arya & Roy, 2006; George, 2005 as cited by Browne. & Braun, 2008). The makeup of migrants has also changed, with a growing proportion of women contributing to international migration. According to a United Nations (UN) report from 2005, about 49% of international migrants were women and girls, with the proportion of female international migrants higher in more developed regions. Caritas, in its report “The Female Face of Migration’ (2012), also states that *“amongst migrants to Australia, women have outnumbered men in the last three decades. Here migration flows have seen an increase in the number of women – married and unmarried – who migrate alone or in the company of other women”*. (p. 3). As of 2013, the percentage of international female migrants to Australia aged 20 to 34 was estimated at between 50% and 52% (UN, Population Division, 2013). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2012), female migrants made up 50% of the net overseas migration. In NSW, this percentage was 50.1%.

A primary challenge faced by migrants to Australia is finding employment, particularly in a climate where migrants are expected to be independent and self-supporting. This is a particular challenge for many migrant women, who often have the additional responsibility of unpaid child rearing and housework. Although current research specific to the experience of migrant women in relation to employment or socioeconomic outcomes is difficult to find, some existing data may contribute to further understand the full implications of migration for women. In regard to recent overseas migrants (defined as people who migrated to Australia in the last 10 years, not including those who were already Australian or New Zealand citizens before arrival), the ABS found that:

“Overall, men were more likely to be employed full time than women: 92% of employed male migrants with Australian citizenship were employed full time compared with 57% of females; 86% of employed males on a permanent visa were employed full time compared with 58% of females; and 72% of employed male temporary residents were employed full time compared with 54% of females”. (Characteristics of Recent Migrants, ABS, 2013)

Furthermore, the ABS also reports that the unemployment rate is higher (11%) for recent overseas migrant women in the Permanent Resident category than for men (7.3 per cent) in the same category and also higher than women who are born in Australia (5.2 per cent). These statistics illustrate that the migrant women in Australia often face lack of income, financial dependence and unemployment.

According to the Report on the Profile of Women in Employment in NSW (2011), women from culturally and diverse background find it difficult to find work and that *“those in employment are more likely to be found in lower skilled and lower paid jobs than women in the broader population”* (p. 86). The same reports presents statistics that show high female unemployment rates in areas known for having high migrant NESB concentration, such as Bankstown, Parramatta and Blacktown.

Lack of income and unemployment are usually key points in the discussions about poverty. However, poverty can have a multiplicity of meanings and could carry different connotations – many current perspectives have challenged the idea that poverty can be considered solely based on income. Insightful analysis of people and communities have led to an understanding of poverty as a complex set of deprivation that could

impact on many dimensions of human life. (Fakuda Parr, 2006). Social cohesion strategies at government and community development level need to acknowledge the multidimensional range of limitations that impact on female migrants due to unemployment and financial struggles.

“Income deprivations and capability deprivations often have considerable correlational linkages ... If our attention is shifted from an exclusive concentration on income poverty to the more inclusive idea of capability deprivation, we can better understand the poverty of human lives and freedoms.” (Sen, 1999, as cited by Saunders, 2003, p.4).

Ideas such as capability deprivation allow community development practitioners to reflect on the inter-related factors that are shaping the story of each client, and the global encompassing contexts where relationships are taking place. This notion, which also forms the basis of many social exclusion/inclusion strategies could provide organisations with further operational tools to understand causes, outcomes and processes so programs can respond to these multidimensional challenges. If Australian society is to advance towards social cohesion then it is important that the conditions that are creating the multidimensional poverty currently faced by a concerning portion of recent migrant women are fully understood.

The National Community Hubs Program (NCHP) recognises the impact of wider global factors on local issues in a given space and time, and that efforts to help migrant women break away from the margins of poverty need also to be multi-dimensional. As such, activities are aimed at supporting women access education, health, community and settlement services. The NCHP is an evidence-based, place-based, citizen-centric program designed to enhance social inclusion and social cohesion, targeting migrant families. The program has Hubs located in Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales (NSW). Since the beginning of 2014, fifteen Community Hubs have been established in NSW in identified areas of disadvantage located in Parramatta, Blacktown and Bankstown according to Socio Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) rankings. The program's aim is to provide a safe and friendly environment for children and families from migrant and refugee background who might not otherwise engage with early childhood education services, training and other services that promote child and family outcomes. The Hubs are located within primary schools and at local

community centre sites. Each Hub is run by a Hub Leader who works to promote and enhance social inclusion, build the capacity within each Hub, create a better environment for child well-being and improve connections to services.

Even though outcomes that benefit the children, families, schools and communities that participate in the programs are sought in all Hubs at a national level, each Hub Leader proposes a place-based action plan to reach these outcomes. The case studies presented in this paper, and subsequent discussion, relate to the work carried out by NSW Community Hubs in relation to the outcomes sought for Families and within that, to challenges and successes related to support employment and capacity building with migrant women.

Context-specific empirical studies could provide individuals, institutions and structures in positions of responsibility with clear examples of how migrant women circulate differently from migrant men, and how this impacts upon their place within the labour market and access to social services (UNRISD, 2005, as cited by Piper, 2005). Furthermore, it could contribute to the ongoing dialogue and knowledge about the current situation of migrant women in Australia.

CASE STUDY 1

My name is Methea. I arrived to Australia in 2006 as an international student. I completed my first Australian degree in Information Technology (IT). Later I got married, and my husband and I were able to obtain permanent residency. Now we have two children.

I obtained an Honours degree in Sri Lanka in Political Science. I never thought about getting my degree from Sri Lanka recognised as I knew it wouldn't lead to a job in Sydney. Once I had my children, I knew that finding a suitable job in the IT industry would be difficult because we don't have a family network in Australia to help us with the children. My husband works full time at the moment. We are currently living on a tight budget and trying to minimise expenses.

I am currently unemployed. I am seeking employment in the childcare industry. I am aware that there is more women in this field, so maybe a prospective employer would be more flexible and understanding if I need to take some time off if my children need

me. With that goal in mind, I completed a course in Childcare studies at TAFE. I have tried to get a job as an Early Childhood Teacher but then I was informed during the application process that I need to have a university degree to be an Early Childhood Teacher. I am now studying for this degree by distance at a local university. I have tried to get a job as a childcare worker but they always ask for at least two years of experience. That can be very discouraging as I don't have any experience and, because I am currently looking after my children, I don't have time to get work experience.

Participation in the Hub has helped me a lot in getting my confidence back. The Hub Leader has a great understanding for our struggles. I am grateful that I decided to participate in the Hub activities as I have found many encouraging voices. We all feel that these activities have given us a great push to continue as we can all relate through our similar experiences and we can find the strength to continue so one day we can get a good job.

This case study illustrates some of the complex challenges faced by a large number of the female clients at Community Hubs. The barriers that Methea faces have been consistently documented in studies for many years. Castle (1998, as cited by Ressia, 2010) states that barriers for employment for migrant groups *“include an absence of jobs available for those who hold certain types of qualifications, (...), a lack of familiarity with the Australian economy and labour market, local employers not understanding, or being aware of, the migrant talent available within the workforce”* (p.1) .

It is concerning that similar narratives continue to emerge in relation to migrant women and employment, which highlights that these problems still persist. Methea's struggle to get local experience is compounded by how her responsibilities at home have been negotiated. In many migrant couple households, there is an agreement that the woman will look after the young children or aging relatives. A Hub Leader interviewed for this paper said that female migrant clients are *“very motivated, passionate about fulfilling their professional goals and hard-working when applying for opportunities in the job market (but) also know that they are the ones looking after the children, and this can conflict with their goal to find work”*. A skilled migrant woman's ability to return to the

workforce is often dependent upon *'familial responsibilities and re-negotiations within the household unit'* (Ireland, 2005, as cited by Ressler, 2010). This responsibility also impacts on capacity building efforts. For example Hubs have often found it challenging to provide training or programs without also providing childcare support to potential participants. Where funding has been obtained to offer childcare support, Hub programs have been significantly more successful in attracting female migrant clients. However Hubs often struggle to obtain funding for these purposes. This might be due to the lack of awareness among funding/grant organisations regarding the intersection of gender issues and migration.

In addition to these family responsibilities, many migrant women desire employment to relieve economic pressure on their families. As one Hub Leader stated, in addition to their roles as carers many of her clients *"feel under pressure in relation to employment (and) often have financial constraints at home"*. Changes in government benefits for newly arrived migrant individuals and families have increased the urgency to enter the workforce to avoid economic disadvantage and improve financial stability. However although there have been many changes to the economy in the last decades, with increased female participation and more flexible hours, many migrant women find it difficult to enter into employment, despite good qualifications. This has seen many turn towards industries with a high demand for labour.

In 1989, Alcorso, in her research on newly arrived migrant women in the workforce in Australia, stated that *"because of the urgency of their financial needs, NESB women have historically been a cheap, flexible and dispensable source of labour for manufacturing industries in Australia"* (p.10). Since manufacturing has increasingly been moving to developing countries, current global labour trends show that women from NESB who migrate to developed nations often seek employment in the childcare and aged care industries in place of manufacturing work (Browne and Brown, 2008). These industries are often seen as more accessible, despite a woman having pre-existing skills or qualifications in another field. After observing many of her skilled female migrant clients being rejected at interviews, a Hub Leader commented that many of her clients had started looking into jobs in the childcare industry. Although some may argue that language barriers hinder the participation of migrant women in other types of jobs, current narratives from the Hub Leaders experience, such as the case study presented, suggest that this may not be the case for many women. Rather,

evidence suggests that many skilled migrant women choose care occupations because these job opportunities are driven by globalisation, international economies, training opportunities, and immigration policy (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2004; Tung, 2000, as cited by Browne and Brown, 2008).

This has particular implications for current community development practices with migrant groups in NSW. If community development workers are supporting clients towards industries where there is high demand for labour, this should also be accompanied by empowerment practices. At NSW Community Hubs efforts to link migrant women to employment have been accompanied by strategies to raise understanding of working rights and responsibilities, superannuation schemes, identification of discriminatory practices, and towards improving awareness regarding fair working conditions. There have been also opportunities to link participants with organisations that provide enterprise and small business mentoring. The potential also exists for community development practitioners to liaise with organisations that provide apprenticeships, training providers in the care industry and workers' rights groups to strengthen and develop programs to empower female migrant workers entering the workforce, thus advocating for the inclusion of gender and migration issues when developing employment pathways for their clients.

CASE STUDY 2

My name is Moneesha, I arrived to Australia in 2012. I have a child and, together with my husband, we arrived to Australia as permanent residents. I am not working at the moment, however occasionally I get called to do casual pick packing jobs. I have a Bachelor of Psychology and a Master in Sociology, both degrees completed in Nepal. Once my child starts school I would like to get a job in the disability industry, working with children who have intellectual impairments.

I have discussed this idea with the Hub Leader and she has been very supportive of my aspirations. I told her that I didn't want to study any degree at the moment because all the courses are really expensive and our family budget wouldn't allow for this expenditure. I told her that first I would like to learn more about the disability industry, so the Hub Leader suggested that maybe I could do some voluntary work. With the support from the Hub Leader I made contact with an organisation for children with

physical disabilities. I applied for a volunteer position and then I was called for an interview. Soon after they called me back to tell me that I was successful. It was a great feeling. In the next few weeks I will start my training as a volunteer. I am really happy with this outcome.

Participation in the Hubs has been of great benefit as I have learnt to write cover letters, write concise resumes and learn more about the job market. Now, when I look at jobs that I like, I try to book a time with the Hub Leader to discuss what are the qualifications needed for that job. So, when the time comes for me to apply for a paid job, I will know that I am prepared. While I am now a housewife, the Hub has made feel that I belong to a community and it has given other migrant women in a similar situation to me the encouragement to follow up our plans and aspirations in relation to employment.

Many lessons have been taken from stories such as the one illustrated in Case Study 2. Based on reports and Hub Leaders' reflection about their own practice, there seems to be a strong awareness among Hub Leaders of the importance of creating warm, friendly environments where female clients can meet and develop trusting relationships and support networks. Poverty, seen as a multidimensional disadvantage, hinders individual's opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and can lead to social exclusion. In order to promote the participation of migrant women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the workforce, it is also important to create contexts and develop social cohesion strategies so they feel safe to voice their experience and goals and where they can learn from other similar experiences. (Triggs, 2013).

Efforts across all NSW Hubs to connect participants to the workforce, for both male and female migrant clients, are made based on each Hub Leader's assessment of their clients' needs and goals. A Hub Leader states that "*as a community worker, I think that it is important to listen to people's goals and aspirations. The information that clients provide me helps to feed the decision-making process in relation to programs we put in place to support employment and capacity building*". Working in partnership with public primary schools has allowed the Hubs to create an organic link with the school community, and provided familiar physical spaces where clients from

the target group can meet through a range of activities and connect to services, not only in relation to employment, but to promote social, health and educational outcomes, thus working towards achieving general well-being.

However, challenges have been observed in relation to accessing women whose children are not attending the schools where Hubs are located (individuals who may have children in preschool age, or no children, who live in the community but are not participating in any community activities). In relation to this, given the positive reception of the programs, Hubs are trying to enhance access by working together with other community development agencies and local government councils. In addition, Hub Leaders have also established collaborations with teachers and school counsellors with the aim of strengthening cohesion within the school and the community. Community development and capacity building in schools has the great potential to share with the teachers the socio-economic problems that migrant families may be facing, and in the long term this could contribute to lessen inequities and disadvantage.

Both case studies are representative of the positive feedback received by participants in relation to the job seeking skills and preparation for the workforce programs and initiatives carried out at some Hubs. A Hub Leader states that, along with significant barriers to employment such as English language skills, childcare support, lack of networks, and financial struggles, for many women barriers also arise *“because of the lack of awareness of what to include in a CV - sometimes they might write too much information. Sometimes clients do not know how to write a good cover letter, or the importance of using positive wording when addressing selection criteria”*. Efforts to increase female clients understanding of job seeking skills have included programs facilitated by the Hub Leaders and programs run in partnership with training providers such as TAFE. However, one of the main challenges at the moment is the increasing cost of this type of programs for clients who are already facing many financial difficulties.

Clients who have been linked to volunteering roles have reported feeling an increased sense of value as individuals, in their families and their community. For some women, this could be a good opportunity to strengthen their English language skills, to gain a good understanding of working in multicultural settings and to feel empowered

because their skills are being recognised. In addition, in the past year, some Hub Leaders have browsed, together with clients, different government and employment sites to obtain mentorships and apprenticeships. Many other potential partnerships still remain unexplored however, such as links with corporate organisations in industries such as IT and finance, so clients can obtain broader employment choices and perhaps be able to use their pre-existing qualifications.

Community Hubs established in Western Sydney will continue to contribute to advocate for an inclusion of gender issues in relation to migration and employment. The evidence shows that community development efforts targeting employment with migrant female groups can lead to greater connectedness and stronger social cohesion in Australian society. The case studies and related analysis in this paper have shown the importance of understanding gender issues when seeking to address the disadvantage experienced by female migrants.

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