



Reproductive coercion and abuse among women and pregnant people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

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“... women are most easily, I suppose, controlled via the children, and that’s true, whether it’s before they’re born, while they’re pregnant, after they’re born.” (FG3, 23).

Reproductive Coercion and abuse

Reproductive coercion and abuse is defined as any deliberate attempt to dictate a woman's reproductive choices or interfere with her reproductive autonomy. It can include physical, psychological or sexual tactics and occurs in a context of fear and/or control in an interpersonal relationship.



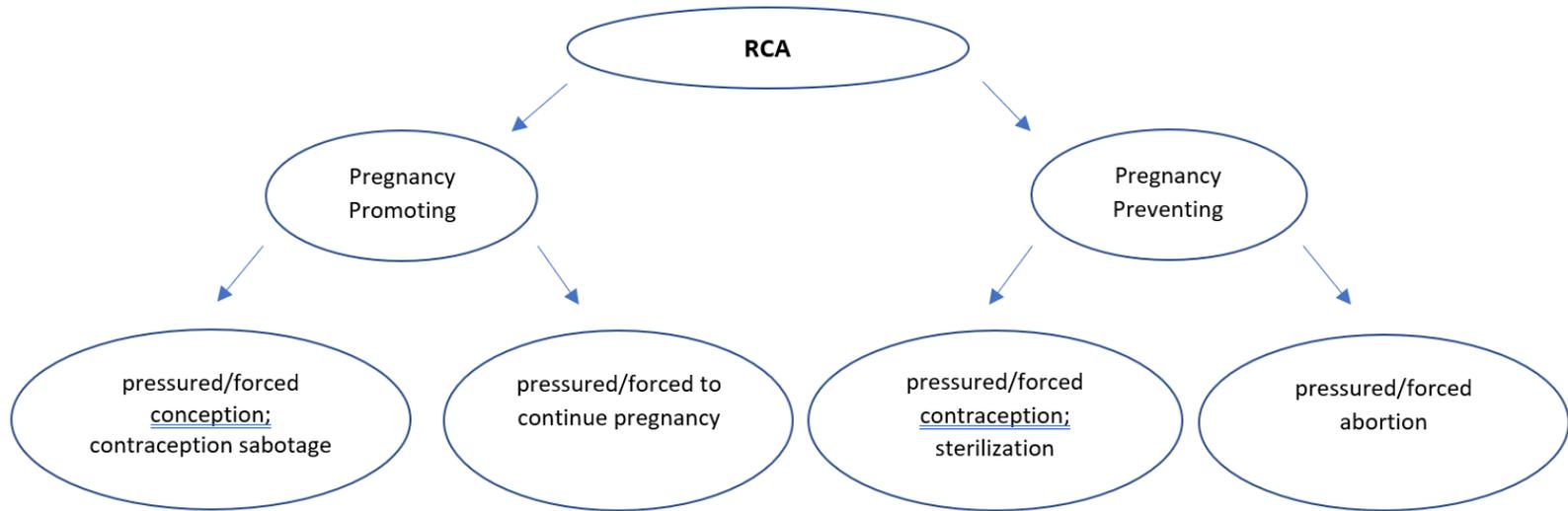


Figure 1: Forms of RCA as a function of whether it is aimed at promoting or preventing pregnancy.

What is reproductive coercion?

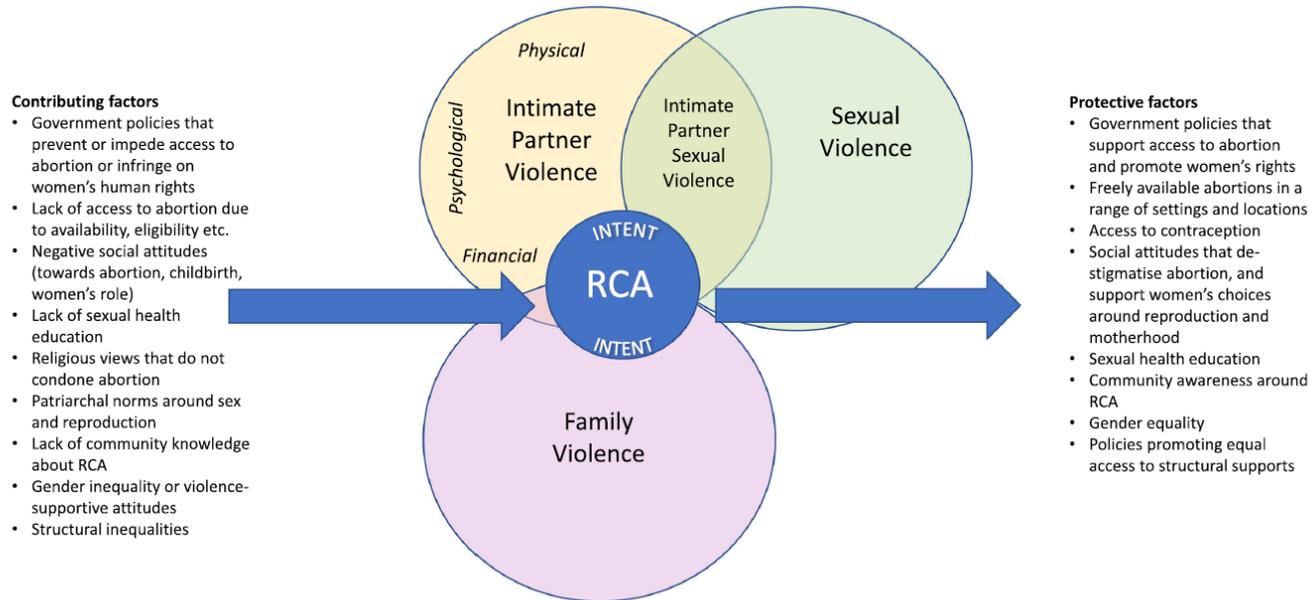


Figure 1. Intersections between reproductive coercion and abuse, intimate partner violence, family violence and sexual violence (Tarzia et al. 2019).

RCA

- prevalence data is lacking
ranges from 9 - 40%
- little is known about whether
particular forms of RCA are
more or less common
- Minimal research exploring
RCA experiences of those from
migrant and refugee
communities



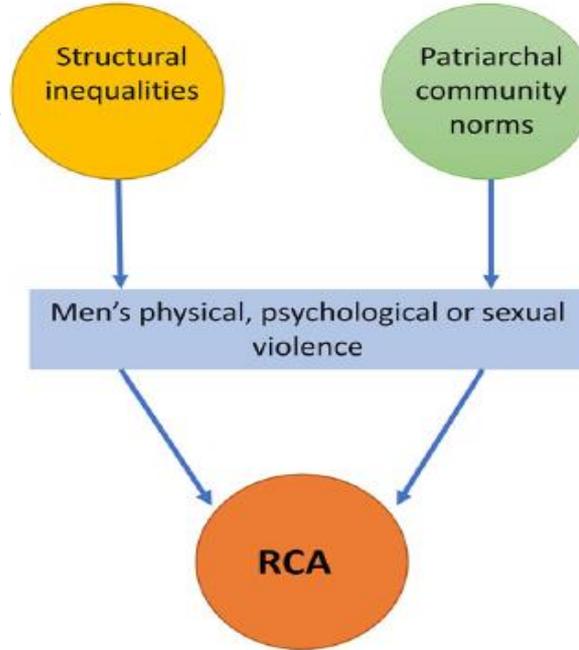
Study 1

- *What does RCA look like for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia?**
 - *What role does language play in help-seeking for migrant and refugee women experiencing domestic and family violence that may include reproductive coercion and abuse/sexual violence?**
 - 6 x domestic violence support services in Melbourne and Brisbane.
 - 2 x specialist community legal services; 2 x specialist support services for migrant women; 2 x generalist support services.
 - 6 focus groups; 38 participants: 11 lawyers/paralegal & 27 counsellors/social workers.
- * Findings are perceptions of service providers (key informants) – not the voices of migrant and refugee’s themselves



Unique context for those from migrant and refugee communities

- Visa threat
- Financial insecurity
- Ineligibility for supports
- Lack of awareness of legal rights



- Expectation of motherhood
- Others make decisions about number/timing of children
- Gender biased sex selection
- Beliefs about abortion
- Lack of sexual autonomy

Communication, language and interpreters

- Cultural barriers
 - taboo to discuss some topics with men
 - reluctance to trust authorities
- Health practitioners, police reluctant to use interpreters
- Basic communication is “good enough”
- Lack of interpreters in small communities
- Perpetrator as the “go-between”
 - Women subjected to non-consensual reproductive procedures
 - Unable to disclose or report abuse
- *“one of my clients, she speaks perfectly fine English, she doesn’t need an interpreter but [her] husband went into the sessions and told the GP directly, my wife doesn’t speak English at all, so you tell me [everything]” (FG4).*

Study 2

- *Do people seeking counselling for their pregnancy who report experiencing RCA more commonly experience coercion that is pregnancy promoting or pregnancy preventing (i.e., coercion towards abortion)?*
- *Do these trends differ by demographic factors such as age and whether the person identified as being from a migrant or refugee community or as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person?*
- N=5107 people who had contacted the counselling services at Marie Stopes Australia (n=3109) or C by C (n=1998)
- Identified as being from a migrant or refugee community (n=1162)
- Identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (n=283)



CHILDREN
BY CHOICE
ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED

Demographic details of the sample for those experiencing and not experiencing reproductive coercion

	Reproductive coercion present	No reproductive coercion present/Not asked
	N = 782	N = 4325
Mean age (SD) years	28.56 (6.80)	29.32 (7.12)
Identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	N = 52	N = 226
Identified as being from a Migrant or refugee community	N = 189	N = 973
Mean number of times contacting the service (SD)	2.78 (4.13)	1.86 (1.82)

Proportion of participants of participants accessing C by C and MSA counselling services during 2018-2020 identified as experiencing RCA by cultural background

	Reproductive coercion present			No/not asked	Total
	RCA that promoted pregnancy only N (%)	RCA that was pregnancy preventing/abortion only N (%)	Experiencing both forms of RCA N (%)	N (%)	N (% of total)
Total sample	304 (6.0)	382 (7.5)	97 (1.9)	4324 (84.7)	5107
Migrant/Refugee	83 (7.1)	87 (7.5)	19 (1.6)	973 (83.7)	1162 (22.8)
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	26 ^a (9.1)	18 ^b (6.3)	8 (2.8)	231 (81.6)	283 (5.5)
MSA	157 ^b (4.9)	276 ^a (8.5)	53 (1.6)	2780 (85.1)	3109 (60.9)
C by C	147 ^a (7.4)	106 ^b (5.3)	44 (2.2)	1701 (85.1)	1998 (39.1)

Conclusion and Implications

- Around 15% of clients from each service experienced RCA
- No significant differences in pregnancy promoting/preventing
- 2% of the sample reported experiencing both forms of coercion
- No significant differences in the experience of the different forms of RCA for people from migrant and refugee communities
- Further research is warranted to understand reproductive autonomy and what that means to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, including facilitators and barriers to reproductive autonomy

Conclusion and Implications

- Need to recognise that clients of any age and background could be experiencing RCA and to remember to sensitively enquire, as well as to provide culturally appropriate education materials, health system support, and interventions across the reproductive lifespan.
- We recommend sensitive enquiry and culturally safe approaches to experiences of RCA be embedded in all health care, health education, and health research.

Our papers:

- Nicola Sheeran, Kari Vallury, Leah Sharman, Bonney Corbin, Heather Douglas, Brenna Bernadino, Maria Hach, Leanne Coombe, Sophie Keramidopolous, Regina Torres-Quiazon, and Laura Tarzia, 'Reproductive Coercion and Abuse among pregnancy counselling clients in Australia: trends and directions', *Reproductive Health*, *in press*.
- Nicola Sheeran, Laura Tarzia and Heather Douglas, 'Communicating Reproductive Coercion in the Context of Domestic and Family Violence: Perspectives of Service Providers Supporting Migrant and Refugee Women', *Journal of Family Violence*, online first: doi:[10.1007/s10896-022-00357-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-022-00357-x)
- Laura Tarzia, Heather Douglas, Nicola Sheeran, 'Reproductive coercion and abuse against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds: Exploring the views of service providers in Australia', (2022) 24(4) *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 466-481. doi: [10.1080/13691058.2020.1859617](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2020.1859617)
- Heather Douglas, Nicola Sheeran and Laura Tarzia, 'Reproductive Coercion and Legal Recognition: Views of Domestic Violence Support Workers and Lawyers.' (2021) 10(4) *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 117-130. doi: [10.5204/ijcjsd.1704](https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.1704)

Future directions

- Looking to apply for funding to explore migrant and refugee experiences directly and to develop resources that might support help-seeking
- Any questions, suggestions or interest please contact me
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