

# **Breaking the Silence: Voice of Devi**

## **Working with Tamil Asylum seeker with Domestic Violence Experience**

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**STARTTS Clinical Master Class**

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NSW Service for the  
Treatment and  
Rehabilitation of  
Torture and Trauma  
Survivors

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# Presentation Overview

- Factors influencing DV among Sri Lankan communities
- Client background information
- Presenting problems
- Assessment and Case Formulation
- Therapeutic Goals
- Intervention
- Outcomes

# Factors influencing Domestic violence in Sri Lankan communities

- Gender inequalities and Subordinate status of women lead men to control women
- Women are expected to uphold cultural and family values and suffer in silence
- It is considered a great failure and humiliation if they do not uphold the “family honour”
- It is an issue that should be concealed within the household
- Victim blaming by the community
- Avoidance of reporting due to fear of possible imprisonment / detention or forced deportation.

# Devi's Background Information

- Age: 46yrs
- Language: Tamil
- Country of birth: Sri Lanka
- Religion: Hindu
- Date of arrival in Australia : 17-Nov-2012
- Visa: Bridging Visa E -050

Referral by: Australian Red Cross (Tracing service) in August 2021.

## Engagement with therapy:

- 2 STARTTS counsellors:
  - 2018: 39 sessions
  - 2019-2020: 24 sessions
- Re-referred in 2021:
  - August 2021–September 2023: 72 sessions

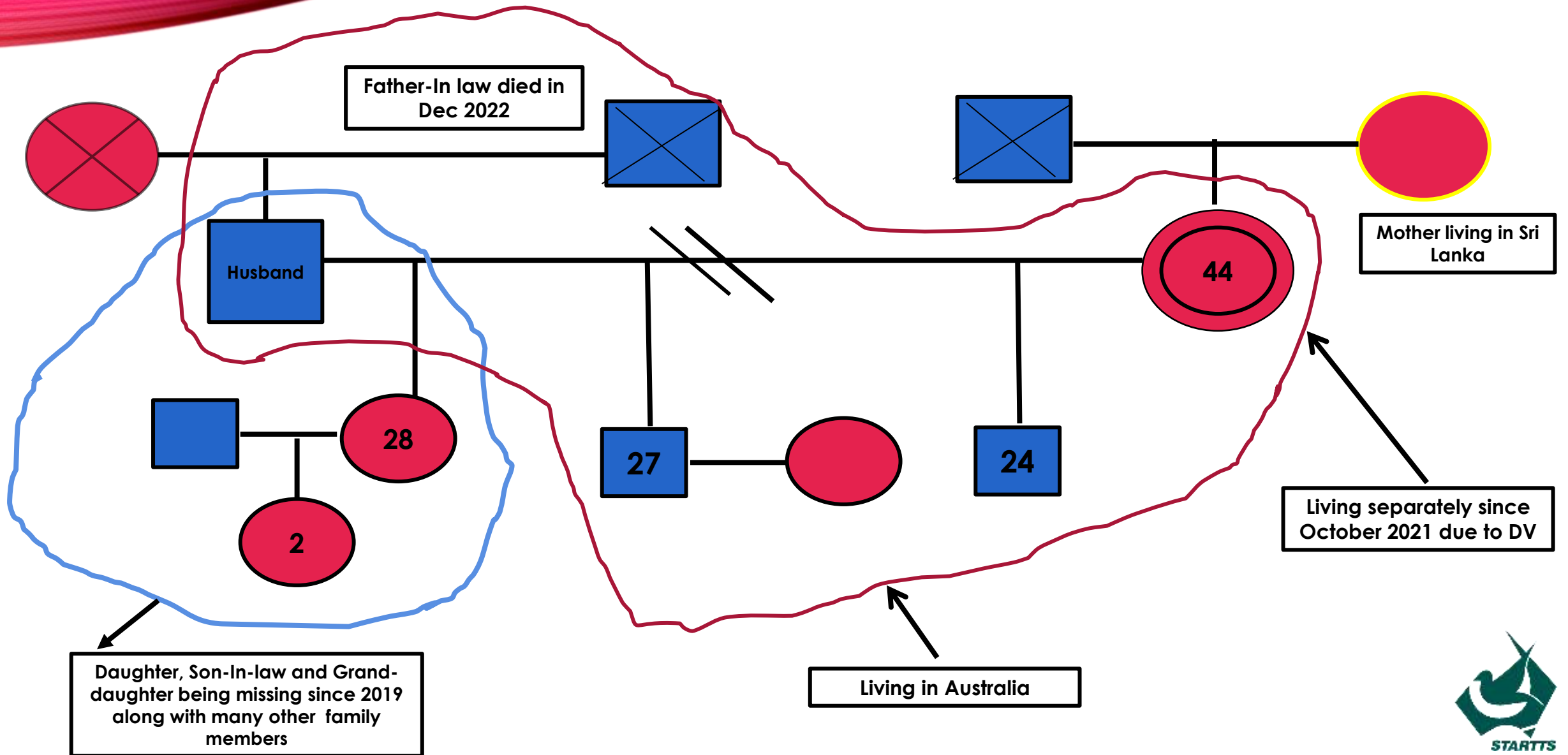
# Devi's Trauma History

- ❖ Significant Childhood trauma
- ❖ Husband's torture & trauma experiences
- ❖ Torture and Trauma
- ❖ Trauma from India Refugee Camps
- ❖ Traumatic boat journey
- ❖ Trauma from Australian offshore detention Centre – 18 months in Manus Island detention centre
- ❖ Grief around missing daughter family
- ❖ DV experience : Husband MH issue and D&A affected relationship leading to DV. Devi only reported verbal abuse



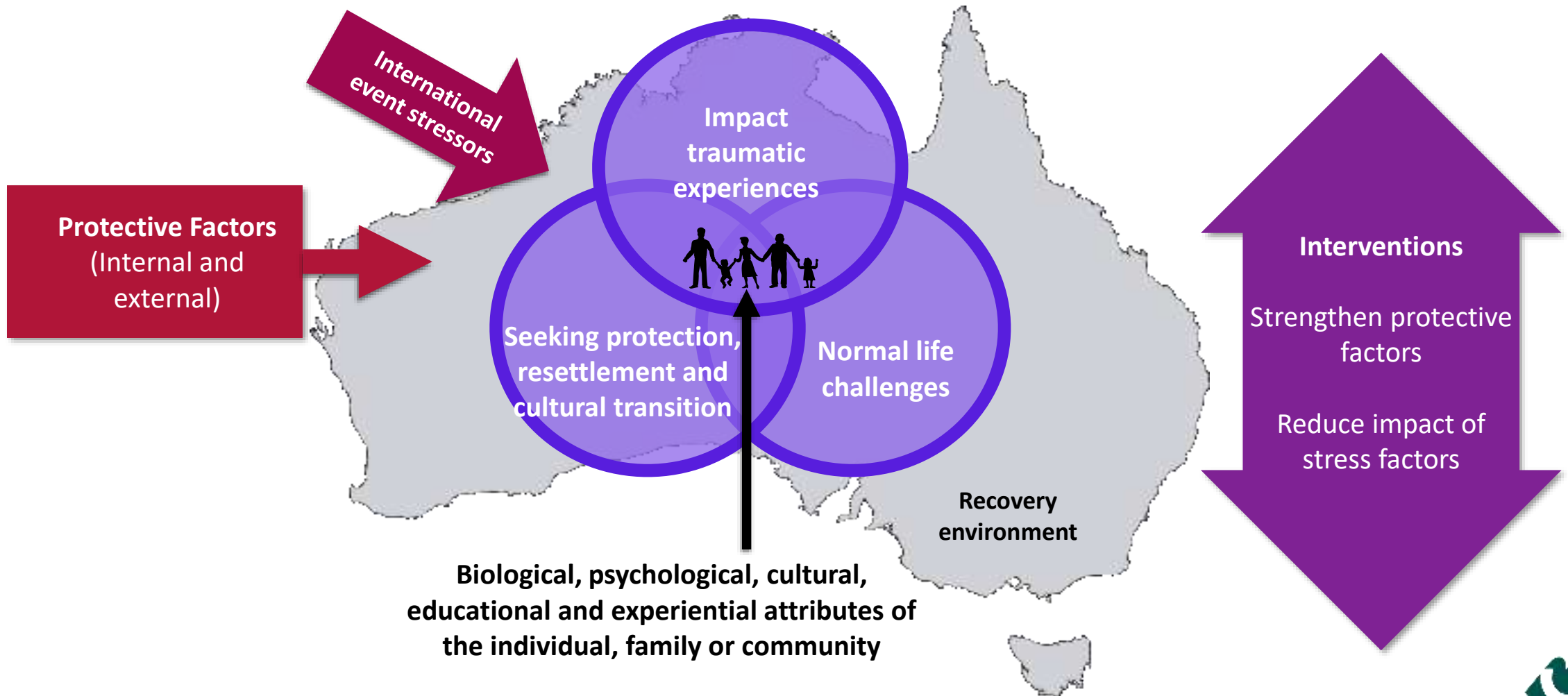
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-45474584>

# Devi's Genogram





# The Complex interaction of Challenges



# Devi's Presenting Symptoms

## Symptoms of PTSD & Anxiety

- ❖ **Insomnia & recurrent nightmares**
- ❖ Panic attacks
- ❖ Flashbacks & recurrent intrusive thoughts of past traumatic experiences
- ❖ Hyper-arousal and hyper-vigilant
- ❖ **Dissociation & avoidance of past traumatic memory**

## Symptoms of Depression

- ❖ **Chronic passive thoughts of suicidal ideation**
- ❖ **Survival guilt and shame.**
- ❖ **Grief & loss**
- ❖ Lack of appetite
- ❖ Lack of trust and Social isolation
- ❖ Worthlessness & hopelessness
- ❖ Insecure & low self-esteem

## Psychosomatic & Physiological Symptoms:

- ❖ Chronic migraine headaches
- ❖ Neck pain and general tiredness
- ❖ Heart palpitations
- ❖ Menstrual problem – possible early Menopause



# Therapeutic Goals

## Devi's Goals

- Financial support
- Assistance to return to Sri Lanka to find her missing daughter
- Reduce her psychosomatic, physical & psychological symptoms



## Counsellor's Goals

- Creating safety
- Reduce her symptoms
- Managing her survival guilt associated with her daughter missing
- Providing DV support
- Reduce her social isolation and improve her self-esteem
- Support reflection about future goals

# Therapeutic Intervention

## Symptom management

- Therapeutic relationship creating safety
- Supportive Counselling
- CBT based –
- Psychoeducation
- Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT) & Sleep hygiene
- Mindfulness and grounding exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation and breathing exercises
- Cognitive restructuring - positive re-thinking, realistic expectations, relative hardship, self-initiative

## DV Support

- Psychoeducation regarding DV cycle (exploring safety)
- Advocacy to Red Cross emergency financial support
- Advocacy to SRSS case management support
- Cognitive restructuring using Strength based approach to build self-esteem
- Social isolation– referral to STARTTS community development group facilitated by myself.

# Treatment Outcomes

- ❖ Devi reported her sleep has improved and nightmares have reduced
- ❖ Social and self-esteem improved by attending clinical group.
- ❖ Devi was able to explore positive aspects and gain clarity of being able to get support from her mother and family in India to find her missing daughter's family
- ❖ Generally Devi was able to function better

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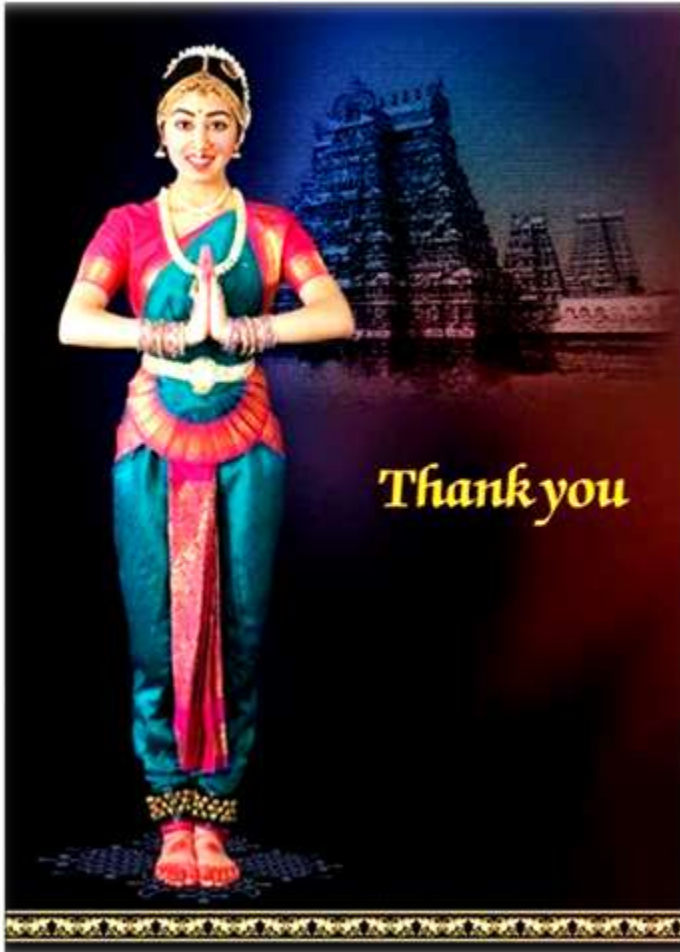
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