

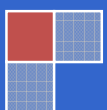


Serbian Welfare Association of Victoria Inc.

Changing Needs of the Serbian Community

Research Study Report
2009

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Executive Summary

In December of 2008, until January 2009, the Serbian Welfare Association of Victoria (SWAV) conducted a *Developmental Feasibility Study*, funded by the Victorian Multicultural Commission, as part of the Community Strengthening Grant. This study was undertaken for the purposes of ascertaining the needs and concerns of the Serbian community, residing in Victoria.

It was hypothesised that the needs and concerns of the Serbian community have changed dramatically since SWAV was initially incorporated in 1992. At the time of its inception, SWAV's primary role was to provide assistance to the influx of refugees fleeing the 90s civil war of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The key services offered by SWAV were centred on settlement and orientation needs as immediately required by newcomers to Australia. Such services included; Assistance with Immigration, Income Support, Housing, Legal, Material Aid, Settlement Information, Health, Education, Employment, Mental Health, Domestic Violence, Recognition of Overseas Qualifications, Torture and Trauma Counselling, Learning English etc.

According to the statistics, the last major influx of refugees of Serbian background arrived to Australia during 2001/06 period¹. Since that time, a large proportion of the community has overcome its initial settlement issues and challenges. Many of the Serbian residents still associate services and assistance offered by SWAV as primarily catering to the recently arrived migrants and individuals in need of settlement assistance. As such, many people feel that SWAV services have become irrelevant to their needs.

Despite overcoming initial settlement issues, it was brought to the attention of SWAV's project workers that there are serious challenges and issues confronting the community today. This was evident from constant phone calls and enquiries made by distressed residents in need of services, which we could not provide to them. As SWAV is the primary organisation to whom the Serbian community looks to for support and assistance, the onus was upon us to further investigate the current issues and challenges which are pertinent to the community. This was achieved by conducting the Feasibility Development Study.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008). The people of Australia: Statistics from the 2006 Census.

The aims of the study were to identify key issues facing the Serbian community in Victoria. The study focused on the following broad areas;

1. The community's satisfaction and knowledge of current services available to them.
2. The requirements of the contemporary Serbian community in terms of services and support.
3. The specific and detailed account of the issues and challenges facing different subgroups of the community.

The following report presents detailed findings of our survey. Following the results are our recommendations, incorporating the research findings, to allow for the development of updated services and interventions offered by SWAV, to cater more effectively and positively to the present day Serbian people of Victoria.

Acknowledgment

SWAV would like to thank the following departments, and funding bodies, for their continued support and assistance.

Our sincere gratitude to;

The Department of Health and Ageing (Community Partners Program)

Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (New Workforce Partnerships)

Department of Human Services (Count Us In)

Victorian Multicultural Commission

City of Greater Dandenong and City of Casey

Overview of the Study

The survey was conducted from October 2008, to January 2009, and included members of the Serbian community residing in Victoria. The participants varied in age, socioeconomic status, level of education and employment, and length of time in Australia, to provide a representative sample of the community.

Of the 200 respondents invited to participate, 50 expressed an interest to contribute to the present study. These interested participants had the option of completing the survey in either English or Serbian language. This ensured that all members of the community had an opportunity to take part, regardless of their proficiency in Serbian or English. Furthermore, participants also had the option of completing the survey in form of a semi structured interview, to cater for the more disadvantaged and illiterate members of the community.

The report is presented in two parts.

Part One assesses the general satisfaction with services currently available to the Serbian Community in Victoria. This section also examines, in greater detail, the present issues and challenges faced by the community.

Part Two explores possible figures and spokespersons, to whom the Serbian people look upon, as valued and potential candidates, that SWAV could incorporate and seek assistance from when implementing and promoting their services.

The support of our Community Partner, The Victorian Multicultural Commission, has provided the vital support necessary for The Serbian Welfare Association of Victoria to undertake this important study and we express our sincere gratitude for their support.

Key Findings from the study

The study has supported our initial assumption that the needs of the Serbian Community have changed, and we are not adequately catering and targeting the emerging issues and concerns.

- In the study, **66%** of the respondents reported that the community needs are not being met and **18%** did not know if the Serbian community needs are being met. Based on this statistic, significant work needs to be done to identify and address these issues.
- **82%** of the participants reported a limited knowledge of the services that SWAV provides, or were unaware of SWAV's role in our community, thus confirming our concerns that reduced resources (both human and financial) have resulted in a serious loss of community presence and, therefore, service and support.

The issues currently rated as being pertinent to the Serbian community differ substantially to the initial settlement needs SWAV initially based its services on.

- Three of the highest expressed concerns facing the community include; **Integration into the Australian Society due to Language Difficulties, Employment and Education** and **Mental Health Issues**.
- In regards to the Ageing Population, **50%** of the respondents expressed the need for a **Linguistically and Culturally Appropriate Aged Care Accommodation**, to cater for the Serbian elderly who lack Basic English skills, and subsequently have marginalised themselves from the wider Australian society.
- Issues rated as being of highest concern to the Young Serbian Adult include; **Drugs and Substance abuse, Family Conflicts** and **Cultural Uncertainty**.
- In regards to both Men's and Women's issues, **Inadequate Access** and **Lack of Information Regarding Physical and Mental Health** was prioritised as being of a major concern.

This report has identified **49** key recommendations to be implemented to ensure that the Serbian Community in Victoria can embrace quality of life both now and in future generations. To achieve this, the participation of the Serbian Community, its leaders, community partners and the Federal and State Government will be essential.

Part 1:

**SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT SERVICES AND
CONCERNS FACING THE SERBIAN COMMUNITY**

Q.1 How familiar are you with the services provided by SWAV?

The purpose of this question was to assess the awareness of the community in regards to the Services offered by SWAV. As indicated in Figure 1, of the 50 participants taking part in our survey;

- **62%** of the participants reported a limited knowledge of the services that SWAV provides
- **20%** were unaware of SWAV's role in our community
- **16%** reported a good knowledge of our services
- **2%** did not answer question

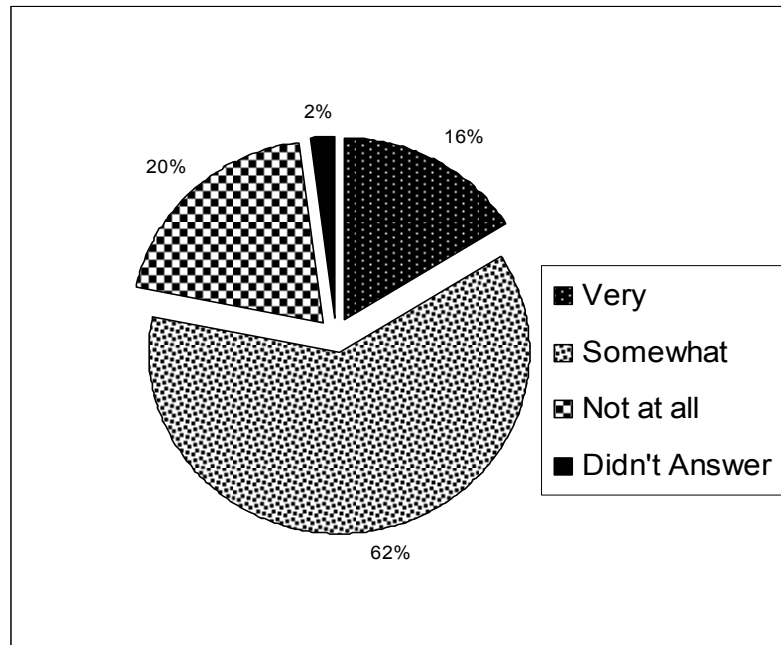


Figure.1 Familiarity with the services offered by SWAV

Commentary:

A few key inferences could be made from these statistics.

1. SWAV's services have become irrelevant to the changing needs of the Serbian community and people have stopped using such services.
2. SWAV has been unable to disseminate its services and programs, due to a reduction in funding and resources.

Recommendations:

1. We need to diversify service delivery and promote the services we provide to the community in order to meet the changing population demographics of our community.

Q.2 Have you or anyone known to you used the services of SWAV?

The following question attempted to assess the utilisation of SWAV's services within the community. As indicated in Figure 2, of the 50 participants surveyed;

- **53 %** answered Yes
- **47 %** answered No

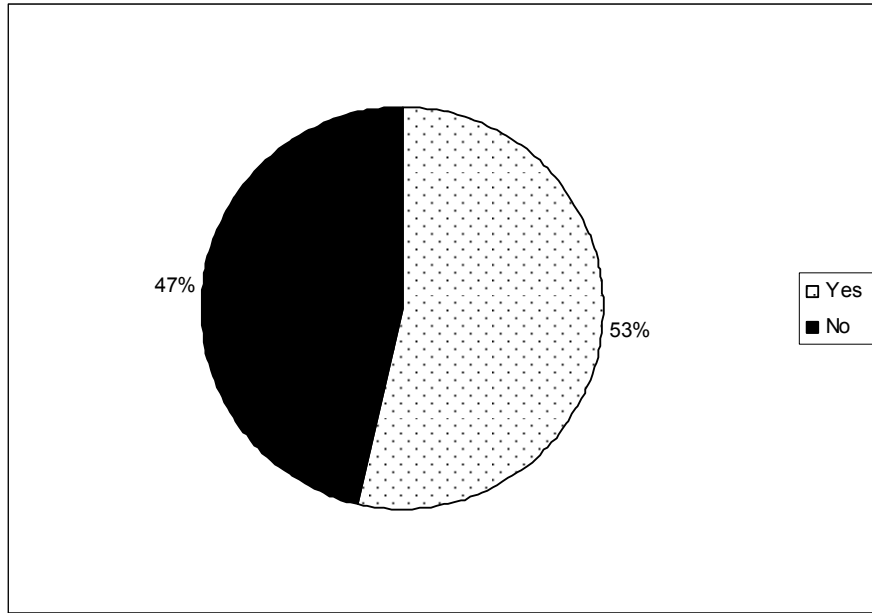


Figure 2: Utilisation of SWAV's services

Commentary:

In describing the services used, the group cited general settlement issues as being the primary reason for seeking assistance from SWAV. Some of the settlement services included; assistance with accessing the services provided by Centrelink, Medicare and Financial Institutions along with assistance with completing forms and other administrative tasks. Only a few of the respondents were aware of other smaller projects and initiatives put forward by SWAV including information sessions about: health and wellbeing, domestic violence, aged care, and information about accessing resources from mainstream services. Also, respondents were less aware of other programs which were employed to target families such as; children's playgroup, women's group etc.

Recommendations:

The current findings confirm our initial premise that our services are generally seen by the community as being only relevant to the issues of settlement. Fewer respondents were aware of social support groups which SWAV has continued to

support for the past five years such as Multicultural Arts Group and Women's Social Support Groups.

1. Based on these conclusions, we recommend that future programs require promotion, on a much wider scale, in order to engage a greater proportion of our community. The limited knowledge of smaller projects offered by SWAV could be due to people still associating SWAV as being primarily involved in issues centring on initial settlement needs.

Q.3 In your opinion are the welfare and community support needs of the Serbian Community in Victoria being adequately met?

The responses of this question aimed to assess whether people were satisfied with current services available, to assist with their concerns. Based on the findings;

- **66%** of the respondents reported that the community's needs are not being met
- **18%** did not know whether the Serbian community's needs were being met
- **16%** felt that the needs of the community are being adequately met

From the above responses, it became apparent that the community's needs have not been met. Therefore, participants were further asked to comment on these issues. Generally, respondents have provided a few suggestions on how SWAV could improve its services, to meet its members' needs.

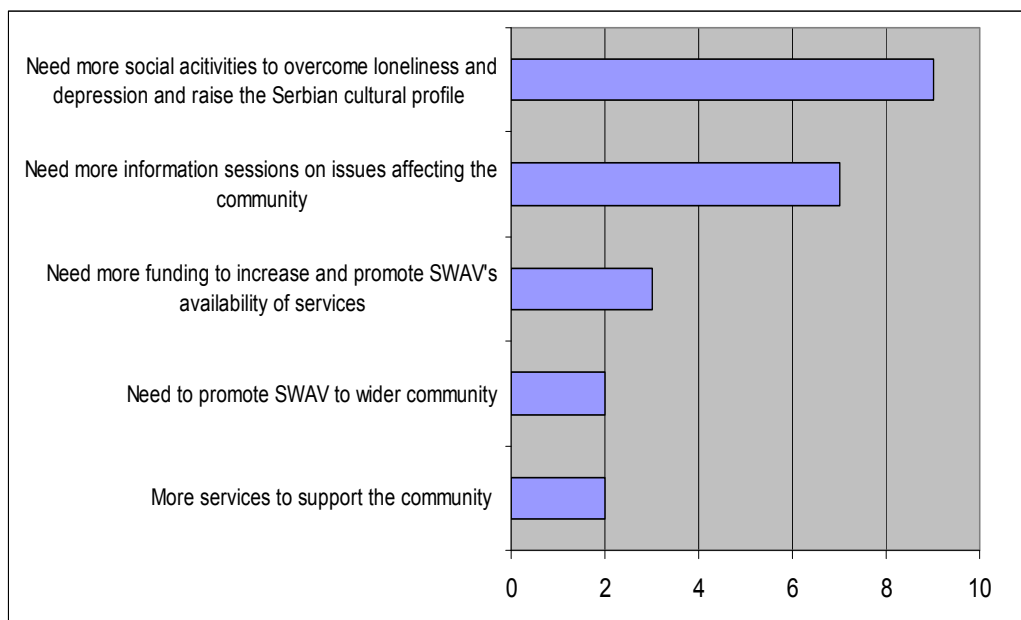


Figure.3 Suggestions for possible improvement strategies for SWAV to meet the community's needs

Commentary:

As shown in Figure 3, the greatest expressed needs by the respondents included providing wider variety of services and support to the community. Furthermore, interests in information sessions, relating to relevant issues, have also been highlighted. This reflects the reports underlying prepositions, and findings, that the needs of the Serbian community have changed.

Recommendations:

In order to support the community, in a wider and more diverse manner, we need to provide its members with services and information to address their primary need .

1. SWAV needs to seek additional funding to assist with the promotion of its services to the community.
2. SWAV needs to search within its community for marketing and promotion specialists to assist with the promotion and scope of its services.
3. SWAV needs to identify suitable radio sessions for communication purposes.
4. SWAV needs to follow-up on the development of a bilingual website through The State Library.
5. SWAV needs to develop social activities appropriate to both men and women to overcome social isolations issues.

Q.4 What do you believe are the issues currently faced by the Serbian Community in Victoria?

This question is of a general nature, trying to capture the perceptions and attitudes in regards to the current needs and challenges, faced by the community. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.

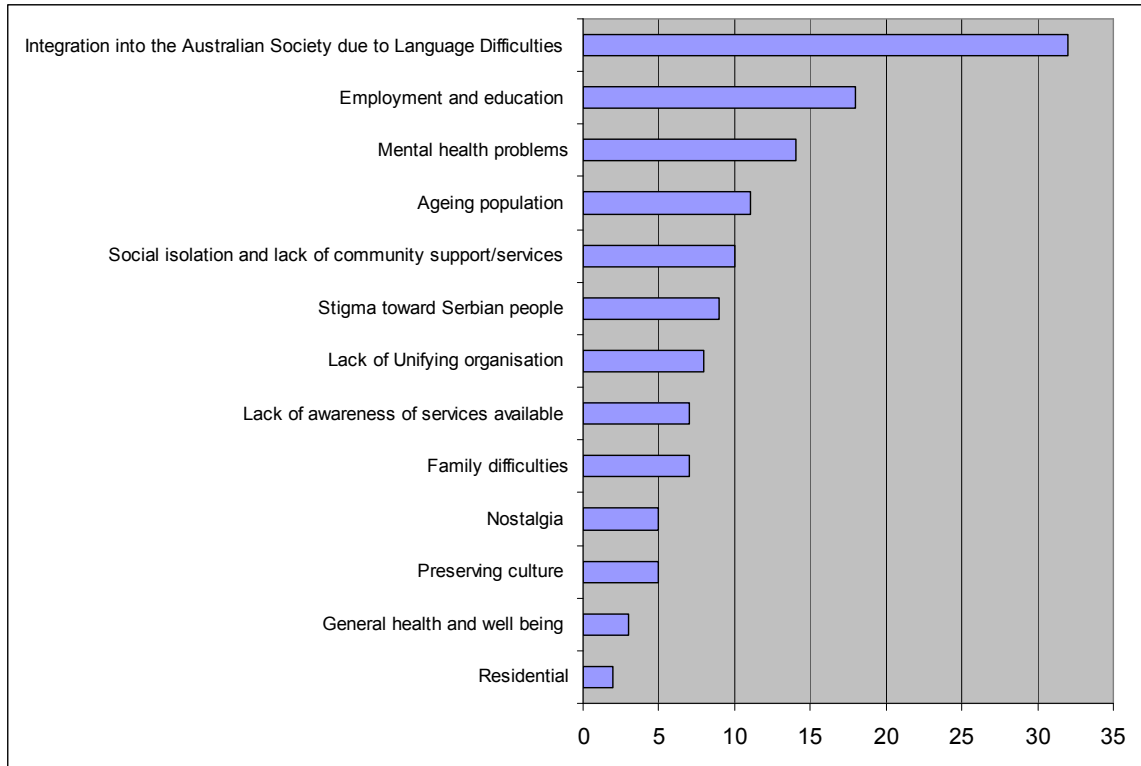


Figure.4 Perceived needs and issues in the Serbian Community

Comments:

The following is a detailed explanation of the three foremost concerns highlighted in the survey's responses.

Integration to the Australian society due to language difficulties:

This category encompassed a variety of subgroups including problems with;

- Translating documents
- Filling out forms
- Accessing mainstream services

Employment and education:

- Lack of information about educational courses available
- Lack of understanding of the Australian education system.

The latter concern was usually expressed by the unfamiliarity with the present education system, which differs greatly from education in their native homeland.

Furthermore, people were dissatisfied with not having their overseas degrees recognised in Australia.

Mental Health Issues:

Some of the most notable mental issues pertinent to the Serbian community include;

- Substance Abuse
- Addiction (drugs, alcohol, gambling)
- Post War Trauma
- Depression.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that SWAV incorporates the highlighted issues and concerns of its people, and implements new programs, and services, to assist with combating and managing these issues.

The issues identified in Question 4 were related to general areas of concern amongst the Serbian Community, living in Victoria. In order for the survey to gain deeper understanding of the issues which were presenting challenges, question 5 of the survey asked the participants to comment on the more acutely targeted subgroups of the Serbian community.

The sections of the community which we set apart for comments were:

- The Aging community,
- Young Serbian Adults,
- Men's Health Issues
- Women's Health Issues.

Thus, the survey was able to highlight each of the subgroups and how they experienced unique challenges and exhibited different areas of concern and needs. We will now explore the results as relating to those issues in greater depth.

Q. 5A Ageing Population:

The results from this section of the survey express general concerns and issues faced by the ageing population. Participants' responses have prioritised three highest concerns including;

- **50%** The need for linguistically and culturally appropriate Aged Care Accommodation and Nursing Homes
- **24%** Loneliness, isolation, socialisation, depression issues
- **13%** Accessing mainstream services

Other concerns as illustrated in Figure 5A include; problem of assimilating into Australian society and the experience of culture shock, family change and disconnectedness, transportation issues along with substance/drug abuse.

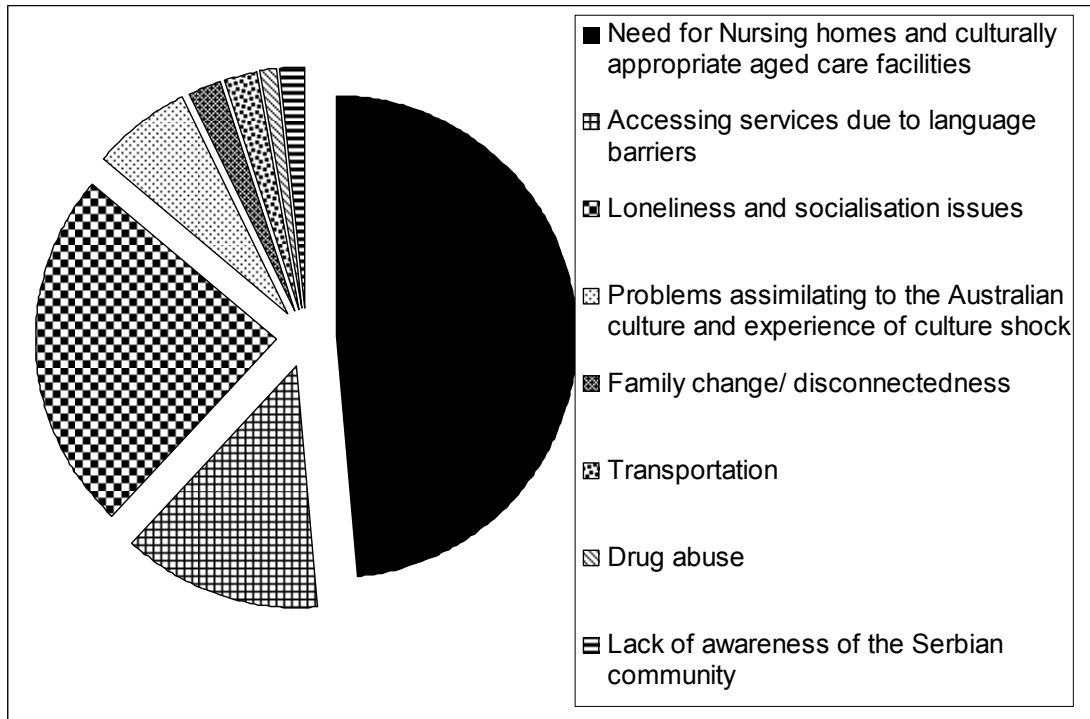


Figure 5A Current issues faced by the Aging Serbian Population

Commentary:

Currently, there are no ethno-specific Aged Care Accommodation facilities catering for the ageing Serbian community. This issue was raised and quoted by far as the greatest area of concern, by 50% of participants. This highlights the importance of establishing culturally appropriate nursing homes and aged care facilities. The reason for the needs of such facilities and services is that the majority of the elderly Serbian population lack Basic English language skills. Their limited proficiency in the English language is a major impediment towards accessing mainstream services. Being

linguistically isolated from the wider Australian community could be one of the causes which gives rise to many other challenges highlighted in this survey including; problems assimilating into the Australian society and the experience of culture shock, loneliness and social isolation, depression, mobility and transportation issues. It is apparent that SWAV is not meeting these current needs.

Recommendations:

We need to further assess current services and programs available for the elderly population. Furthermore:

1. SWAV needs to diligently assess the presenting needs of the ageing population
2. Re-evaluate and implement strategic intervention to make such services accessible to the Ageing Serbian Community including;
 - a.* The implementation of a comprehensive HACC program.
 - b.* Build specific institutions or facilities, to accommodate people living with dementia.

5B. Issues affecting Young Serbian Adults:

The results in Figure 5B express the general concerns and issues faced by the young adult population. Participants' responses have highlighted four of the highest concerns to include;

- **18%** Drug (substance) abuse
- **18%** Family conflicts/problems
- **14%** Cultural Uncertainty
- **13%** Education / Employment issues

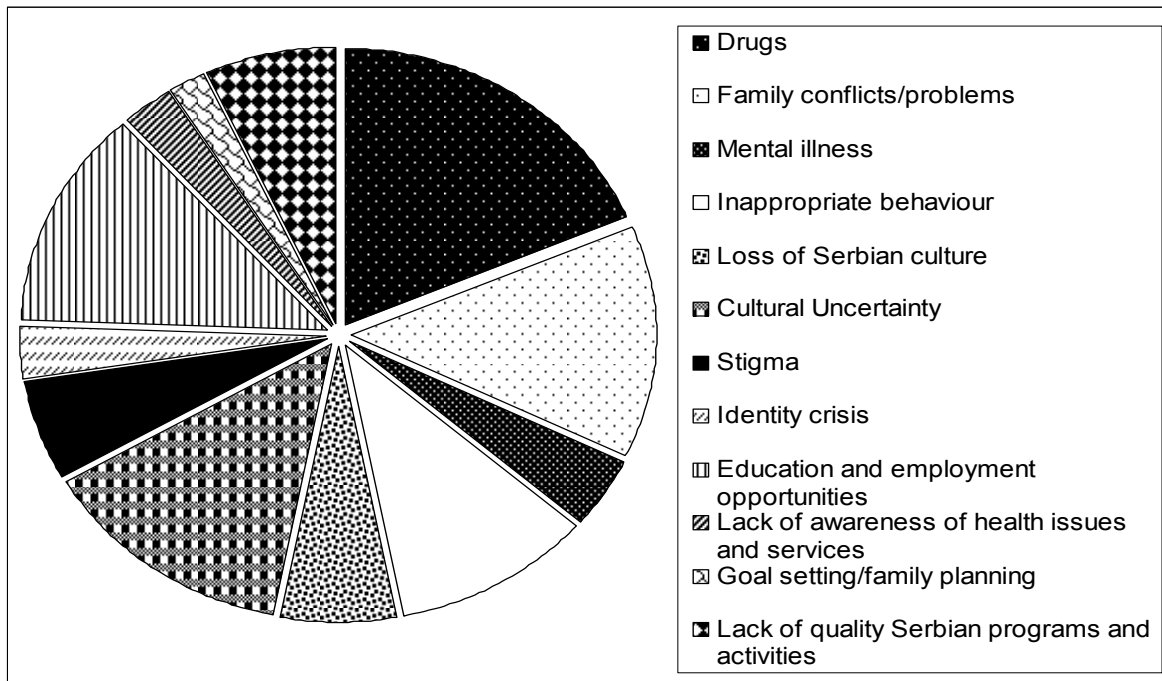


Figure 5B Current issues affecting the Young Serbian Adults

Commentary:

The following is a detailed explanation of some of the key issues affecting Young Serbian Adults:

Drug Abuse:

This area of concern encompasses many problems of drug addiction, including substance abuse, smoking and the abuse of illicit drugs.

Cultural Uncertainty:

The general concern of respondents, corresponding with cultural difficulty and uncertainty, includes problems of integrating with other ethnic groups, retaining Serbian values and beliefs, whilst at the same time aiming to adapt to the Australian way of life, and general concerns and problems experienced between the conflicting

values of the Serbian and the Australian cultures. Ultimately, cultural uncertainty could also be the basis of other issues affecting youth including; identity crisis, family conflicts, loss of Serbian culture and mental illness.

Education and Employment issues:

The problems of education relates to Serbian youth not receiving higher levels of education possibly due to living in a more disadvantaged and poverty stricken areas of the city. Another cause of concern was lack of awareness of vocational courses and other educational resources available to them. Such educational impediments usually result in problems with employment opportunities and satisfaction.

Recommendations:

1. The health and welfare of the young people must become a major priority.
2. Support, in terms of funding and human resources, must become available
3. Preventive health services and counselling services are vital.
4. Young leadership and mentoring initiatives need to be developed to ensure positive behaviours and appropriate role models are presented.

5C. Men's Health Issues:

The Participants generally felt that there were numerous issues that needed addressing in relation to men's health (see Figure 5C).

The three most cited issues were:

- **17%** Physical conditions including Heart disease, diabetes etc
- **15%** Mental Health
- **12%** Post War Trauma

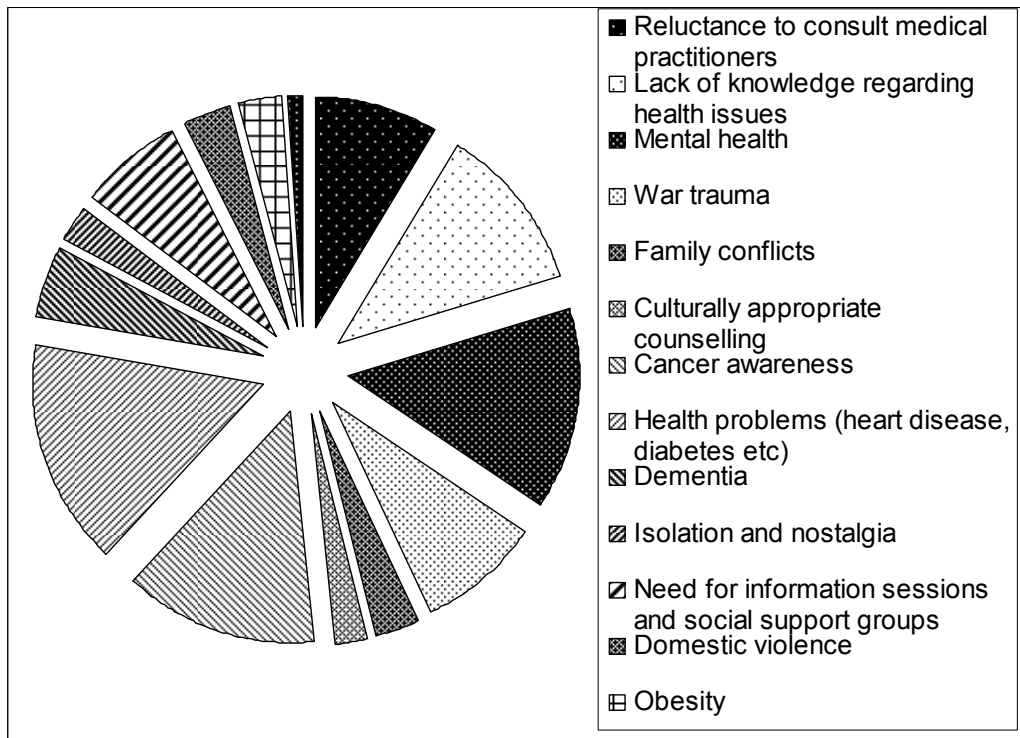


Figure 5C. Issues affecting Serbian Male Population

Commentary:

Other issues brought forward were;

1. Men's reluctance to see medical practitioners
2. Lack of knowledge regarding health issues
3. Family conflicts
4. Culturally appropriate counselling and general problems related to health information and resources

Such problems are of high severity, as they are ultimately related to an individuals' quality of health and wellbeing. Furthermore, male's reluctance to seek medical advice could be a basis for many of the other health related issues, which are highly pertinent to this cohort.

Recommendation:

1. SWAV needs to implement more health information sessions, inclusive of
 - a. Conflict Management
 - b. Stress Management
 - c. Depression
 - d. Preventive health initiatives such as Prostate Check, Blood Pressure Check, Diabetes prevention and management
 - e. Cancer awareness- Bowel Cancer check
 - f. Diet and Lifestyle – healthy living

2. SWAV needs to identify funding for and appoint a full time Male Health and Welfare Community Education Officer to work closely with community partners such as:
 - a. Diabetes Victoria
 - b. Cancer Council
 - c. Heart Foundation
 - d. Regional Health Organisations
 - e. Beyond Blue
 - f. Men's Health Specialists

5D. Women's Health Issues:

The major concerns of Serbian women, as indicated in Figure 5D, generally correspond with health issues and awareness. According to the respondents;

- **27%** lack knowledge regarding health issues
- **22%** need more assistance with cancer awareness
- **17%** require Ethno-specific counsellors and medical practitioners.

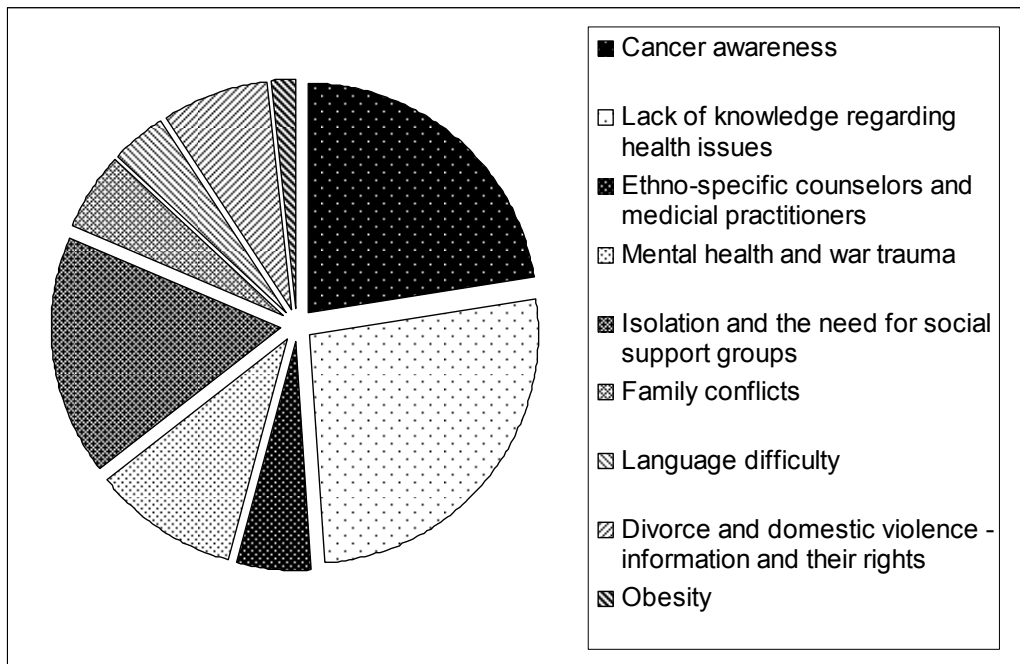


Figure 5D Issues affecting the Serbian Female Population

Commentary:

Other major concerns correspond with:

1. Mental health and war trauma issues
2. Social isolation and the need for social support groups
3. Family conflicts, divorce and domestic violence and the need for general health information

Despite the Australian government implementing powerful initiatives and programs to increase awareness of the issues mentioned in this survey, it is apparent that such information is not being readily accessed by the Serbian community.

Some impediments preventing the access to such information include; limited knowledge of the English language, unawareness of health services available and stigma associated with some of these issues such as mental health and domestic violence.

Recommendation:

1. SWAV needs to implement more health information sessions, inclusive of
 - a. Conflict Management
 - b. Stress Management
 - c. Depression
 - d. Preventive health initiatives such as Breast Care, Pap Smear, Diabetes prevention and management
 - e. Cancer awareness
 - f. Diet and Lifestyle – healthy living

2. SWAV needs to identify funding for and appoint a full time Health and Welfare Community Education Officer to work closely with community partners such as:
 - a. Diabetes Victoria
 - b. Cancer Council
 - c. Heart Foundation
 - d. Regional Health Organisations
 - e. Beyond Blue
 - f. Regional Health Organisations
 - g. Women’s Health Specialists such as Jean Hailes Foundation

5E. Serbian Culture Alive/Forgotten

The purpose of this question was to assess whether the Serbian culture is being retained, by the newer and younger generation, or if it is being allowed to slowly fade.

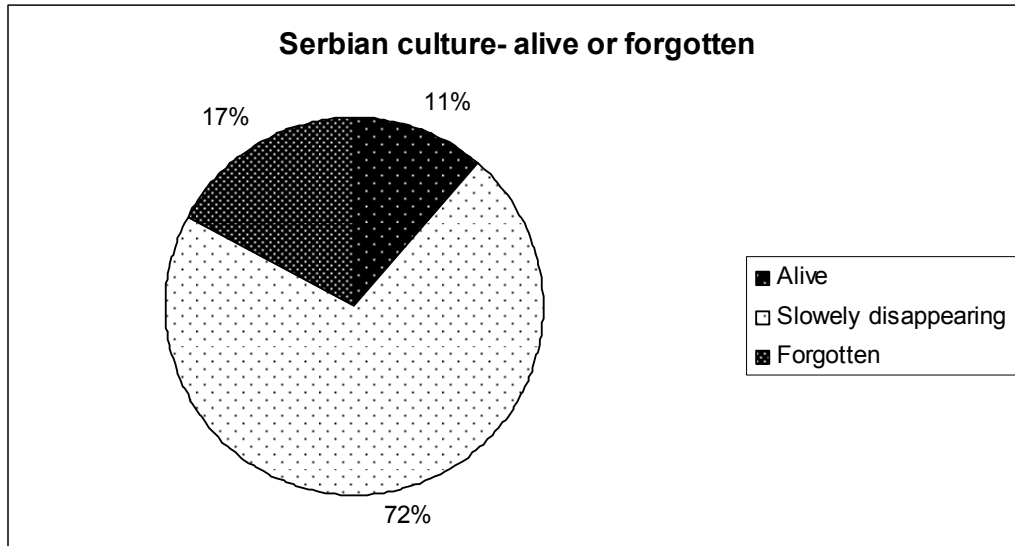


Figure 5E. Preservation of Serbian Culture

Recommendations:

Without losing focus on welfare tasks it will be important to:

1. Establish an annual cultural event to showcase skills and encourage the preservation and pride in the Serbian culture.
2. Introduce programs to engage the younger generations in activities of a cultural nature.

PART 2:
**CAPTURING THE SERBIAN COMMUNITY'S VISIONS
TO ASSIST SWAV WITH FUTURE DEVELOPMENT**

The aim of the remaining survey questions, 6 to 10, was to capture the overall profile of the Serbian community, as well as to provide SWAV with important information to assist with our future plans. We have asked the participants about their thoughts on who would make a good patron, and possible leaders who could assist SWAV with its future projects. Furthermore, participants were asked about their attitudes and level of support to other organisations. The general purpose of these questions was to determine the values, beliefs and attitude of the Serbian people.

Q6. Who do you think will make an excellent patron for the SWAV?

Majority of people in the survey have nominated prominent Serbian sportspersons, including the current active tennis players, as possible patrons for SWAV. In addition to these, other major nominees included people from the entertainment industries and other celebrities of Serbian origin.

Comment: Inferences could be drawn that the Serbian people feel a great sense of satisfaction and community empowerment by the recent accomplishment of many of the Serbian sportspersons.

Recommendations:

1. Connections should be established with various government, entertainment, education and sports bodies in Serbia.

Q.7 Who are the community leaders who could assist SWAV?

The respondents have placed a high value on local priests, presidents of the community clubs, along with general practitioners, and other health professionals as being primary candidates to assist SWAV with its future programs and interventions.

Comment: It is notable that the nominated candidates are of key relevance in addressing the important issues, as highlighted in Section 1 of the report, for which SWAV can seek their assistance when implementing future programs.

Recommendations:

1. SWAV to present the recommendation, as found in this section of the survey, to the mentioned professional bodies and enlist their assistance and participation in future plans and strategies.

Q.8-Q.9. What organisations are you involved in or support? What are the three main reasons you or your company has for supporting a community or a charitable cause?

Majority of the respondents have stated that they are involved or presently support a charitable organisation. The answers have varied from supporting the local Serbian Orthodox Church to other charitable organisations found within the wider community. When asked for the reasons for their support or participation in charitable events, their primary drive was based on humanitarian reasons such as; compassion to the cause, and the need to help and improve the general welfare of the community.

Comments: The participants appear to have a high level of empathy and a sense of belonging to the Serbian and the wider Australian community, and as such exhibit the need to give back to the community and the less fortunate.

Recommendations:

1. SWAV could implement charitable and fundraising events, to serve as an incentive, when promoting and initiating programs, which aim to attract the wider community.
2. SWAV needs to establish a volunteer committee to engage in community strengthening and fundraising activities.

Q.10. Who else should we be talking to about this survey?

The general responses have suggested that SWAV approaches health professionals, religious leaders and prominent successful Serbian people, with further insight into the issues addressed in the survey.

Comments: As stated in Question 7 of the report, the nominated professional bodies are generally the people to whom the Serbian community looks to for help, guidance or assistance, when dealing with issues cited in Section 1 of the report.

Recommendation:

1. SWAV needs to approach these professional bodies and seek active engagement in future planning and initiation of its projects.

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