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# Executive Summary

The persecution and displacement of Mandaeans from Iraq and Iran is one of the great hidden tragedies of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. The recent political, religious and ethnic upheaval in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq, has resulted in a campaign of near cultural genocide and ethnic cleansing against Mandaeans.

Western countries have provided only limited assistance to the international population of Mandaeans fleeing persecution. In Australia many Mandaeans were held in immigration detention for prolonged periods and only given temporary protection when released.

## **Who are the Mandaeans?**

The Mandaeans are a small religious group originating from Iraq and Iran. Many have fled their homes in response to persecution which has intensified since the start of the 2003 war in Iraq. A group of approximately 4,500 to 5,000 has resettled in Sydney, Australia.

## **Why and how were the surveys conducted?**

This report outlines the findings from two surveys undertaken in 2002 and 2007 with Mandaean adults residing in Sydney. These surveys were conducted to investigate the experience of the Mandaeans before and after arriving in Australia. 241 Mandaeans took part in the first survey and 315 participated in the second survey. Of these, 101 took part in both surveys.

# Executive Summary

## What are the main difficulties faced by the Mandaean community in Sydney?

- ◇ Mandaean community members were exposed to many **traumatic events** before arriving in Australia.
- ◇ Mandaean community members reported high rates of **psychological disorders** including **posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** and **depression** in both surveys.
- ◇ At the time of the first survey, the mental health of the Mandaean community was impacted by the Australian government's **immigration policies**.
- ◇ Long-term **detention** had a very **negative effect** on Mandaean community members' mental health.
- ◇ **Temporary protection** visa status contributed to **poor mental health** in the Mandaean community.
- ◇ The **change in visa status** from temporary to permanent protection brought relief to many Mandaean community members.
- ◇ However, **rates of disorders** including PTSD and depression were still **high** at the time of the second survey as the community faced new difficulties.

# Executive Summary

- ◇ Compared to the first survey, participants were **less fearful** about their future at the time of the second survey.
- ◇ However, Mandaean were **extremely worried** about **family** members who remained in Iraq in the second survey.
- ◇ Participants were also concerned that the **Mandaean religion and culture** would **cease to exist** in the future as a result of ongoing **genocide** and **persecution**.
- ◇ High levels of **grief** and **anger** were present in the community as a result of injustice, suffering and loss experienced in Iraq and Australia.
- ◇ The main factors contributing to poor mental health for the Mandaean were past **trauma** experience, **detention**, **temporary protection** and **fear for family** living in Iraq.
- ◇ Approximately half the participants had **difficulty performing daily activities** due to mental health problems.
- ◇ One-third of participants believed they **needed help** for psychological problems.

# The Mandaeans: A Unique People

The Mandaeans are a small pre-Christian religious and cultural group of Aramaic/Semitic ethnicity who number approximately 60,000 to 70,000 worldwide. The Mandaean religion is an ancient faith, with followers believing that the religion was initiated by Adam. Mandaean texts are recorded in Aramaic, a language spoken during the first century AD by Mandaeans, Jews and Christians. Some scholars believe that the religion originated in the Jordan Valley, with Mandaeans immigrating to Iraq during the first century AD.

The Mandaean religion is thought to be the last surviving Gnostic religion in the world. In Aramaic, the term '*manda*' literally means "knowledge", thus Mandaeans are the "people who know". Mandaeans believe that a strong relationship exists between the earthly world and the heavenly world, a world of light. The numerous rituals practised by the Mandaeans maintain this relationship.

The Mandaeans particularly follow the teachings and rituals practised by John the Baptist, the most important Mandaean prophet. Religious practices revolve around regular ritual cleansing and baptism which is viewed as a constant affirmation of the connection between the earthly and heavenly worlds.

Free-flowing water, in which baptisms are held, is believed by the Mandaeans to be a symbol of the heavenly on earth. *Masbuta* (baptism) is held on Sundays and on special occasions (such as marriage, after childbirth, and before death), and involves several immersions in the flowing water, followed by a series of rituals symbolising the spirit world and its relationship with followers.

# The Mandaean: A Unique People

Mandaeanism is deeply spiritual and possesses a rich symbolism present in all aspects of the religion. At all major rituals the *drafsha* is present. This wooden cross, crowned by a wreath of myrtle (symbolising spirit and light) consists of seven myrtle branches, bound with golden thread. The holy banner of the Mandaeans, a three metre-long banner of white silk, is wound around the cross.

The religion holds a large body of texts, the most prominent being the *Ginza Rba*, known as “the great treasure” or the “book of Adam”. This book outlines practices, rituals and prayers. The *Ginza Rba* is one of only four texts written in book format, with other texts being written on scrolls, lead tablets and bowls. Texts are written in Mandaic-Aramaic, copied carefully by priests over 2000 years.

## Persecution through the ages

Despite the pacifist nature of their tradition, Mandaeans have historically been victim to discrimination, intimidation and oppression. In recent years, due to political turmoil in the Middle East, the Mandaean people have suffered a great deal of hardship, religious repression, discrimination, and violation of human rights.

Mandaeans (under the title of Sabaeans) are one of the three religious faiths named in the Koran as being *ahal el-kitab* or “people of the book”. In theory, this status affords individuals from monotheistic religions certain rights, including the right not to be forced to convert to Islam. However, this status has been debated widely in the history of Islamic scholarship with Mandaeans often not being recognized as “people of the book”. In many countries in

# The Mandaeans: A Unique People

the Islamic world, Mandaeans are said to be “star-worshippers” and are victim to harassment and discrimination. This discrimination has periodically intensified throughout history, with Mandaeans frequently facing persecution on the basis of their religion.

## **Current situation**

The violence against the Mandaeans in Iraq has intensified since the onset of the 2003 war in this country. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist regime, Mandaeans have been targeted for murder, kidnapping, rape, forced conversion, forced circumcision and destruction of religious property. Campaigns of ethnic cleansing conducted by Islamic insurgents and militia have been reported and documented. Mandaeans are particularly vulnerable to the effects of this persecution as they have no geographical safe area, and the pacifist nature of their religion forbids them from carrying weapons.

As a consequence, many Mandaeans have been forced to flee the country, with approximately 4,500 still remaining in Iraq. Many Mandaean families have fled to Syria or Jordan, or resettled in Western countries.

The dispersal of the community around the world and the very real risk that those left in Iraq will be killed or forced to flee raises a serious concern that this small and distinctive religious and ethnic group may become extinct as a result of cultural genocide.

# The Mandaeans: A Unique People

## Mandaeans in Sydney, Australia

Over the past two decades, a sizeable group of Mandaeans have sought asylum in Australia primarily from Iraq and Iran, with approximately 4,500 to 5,000 men, women and children resettling in Sydney. The expatriate community in Sydney receives frequent reports of human rights violations being perpetrated against Mandaeans who live in Iraq, resulting in a high level of concern for family and friends who remain in these dangerous circumstances.

Against nearly insurmountable odds the Mandaeans have retained their distinctive religion and culture over many centuries. More recently, after surviving persecution and trauma in Iraq and the challenges involved in both the journey to asylum and the resettlement process, the Mandaeans have successfully established a close-knit community network in Sydney, Australia. The Mandaeans, a highly educated community, have made a significant contribution to Australian society. Many Mandaeans work in professional fields or continue the historic tradition of craftsmanship in gold and silver-smithing. Mandaean individuals and organizations in Australia have been highly active in educating others about the Mandaean culture and religion and participating in multicultural events.

While this report focuses on psychological difficulties and needs of the community at this time, the resilience and achievements of this remarkable cultural group must also be recognised.

# Overview of the Surveys

This report presents the findings of two surveys conducted with Arabic-speaking Mandaeans in Sydney, Australia, in 2002 and 2007.

The surveys were conducted to examine the experience and identify the needs of the Mandaean community in Sydney over a five-year period.

The surveys aimed to look at the effect of traumatic events, past experiences, current difficulties and fear for the future on the mental health of the Mandaeans.

At the time of the first survey, many people who took part held temporary protection visas.

By the second survey almost all participants had obtained permanent residency or Australian citizenship.

However, the situation in Iraq had worsened dramatically following the 2003 war with a new wave of mass displacement and great ongoing risk for those remaining in Iraq.

The first survey included 241 members of the Iraqi Mandaean community in Sydney. The second survey encompassed 315 participants, half of whom had arrived after the outbreak of war. Participants from both surveys had an average age of 38 years. 101 people took part in both surveys.

# Overview of the Surveys

## Research measures used in the report

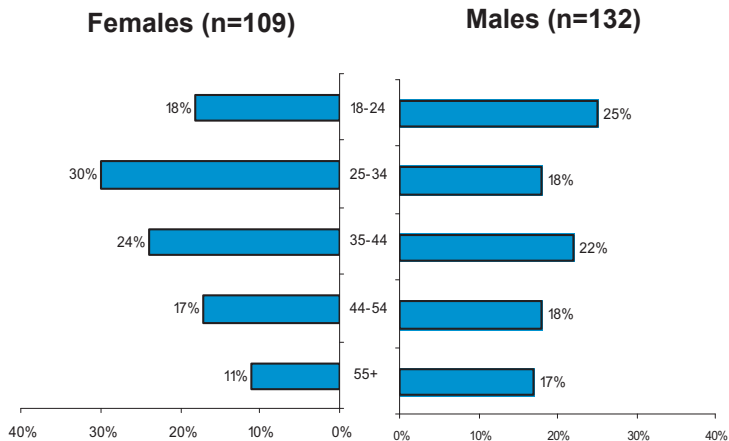
Trauma, living difficulties and mental health were measured using the following instruments:

- ◇ *The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire*
- ◇ *Depression Scale of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist 25*
- ◇ *The Postmigration Living Difficulty Checklist*
- ◇ *The Mental Component Score from the Medical Outcomes Study – Short Form 12*
- ◇ *The Inventory of Complicated Grief*
- ◇ *A self report assessment of anticipatory anxiety*
- ◇ *A self report assessment of fear for family*
- ◇ *A self report assessment of anger*

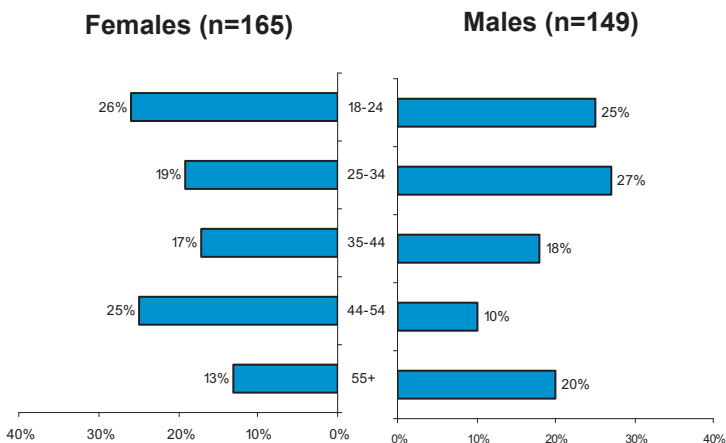
# Gender & Age

The following graphs show the gender and age of Mandaeans who took part in the first and second surveys.

## Survey One 2003



## Survey Two 2007



# Snapshot of Mandaean Health Pre-Migration Trauma

Survey One (2002) 241 people	Survey Two (2007) 315 people
<i>Approximately 1 in 2 had:</i>	<i>Approximately 1 in 2 had:</i>
Been close to death	Been close to death
Experienced the murder/ unnatural death of family or a friend	Experienced the murder/ unnatural death of family or a friend
	Gone without food or water
<i>Approximately 1 in 3 had:</i>	<i>Approximately 1 in 3 had:</i>
Gone without food or water	Experienced lack of shelter
Been ill without access to medical care	Been ill without access to medical care
Been imprisoned	
<i>Approximately 1 in 6 had:</i>	<i>Approximately 1 in 6 had:</i>
Been tortured	Been imprisoned
Experienced lack of shelter	Been lost or kidnapped
Been forcibly separated from family	Been forcibly separated from family
	Experienced combat situation
<i>Approximately 1 in 10 had:</i>	<i>Approximately 1 in 10 had</i>
Experienced combat situation	Been tortured

**Trauma exposure** was **high** in both surveys, with participants reporting exposure to an average of 3.8 trauma categories in the first survey and 3.5 in the second survey. Overall, **men** were more likely than women to experience **violent traumatic events** such as combat situation, serious injury, torture or imprisonment.

# Snapshot of Mandaean Health Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychological reaction that sometimes occurs after exposure to traumatic events. It can come on suddenly and sometimes lasts for many years. The symptoms of PTSD often interfere with a person's life and make it difficult for them to perform daily activities.

We assessed symptoms of PTSD in both surveys.

Some of the key symptoms of PTSD are displayed on the table below as well as how many people in both surveys reported each symptom.

Common symptoms of PTSD	Survey One (2002)	Survey Two (2007)
Frequent memories of trauma	54%	42%
Nightmares	31%	24%
Feeling like the trauma is happening again	31%	28%
Difficulty remembering part of the trauma	13%	16%
Avoiding people/places/situations that remind the person of the trauma	42%	40%
Withdrawal	12%	40%
Feeling jumpy	30%	34%
Irritability	38%	40%
Difficulty concentrating	40%	30%

In the first survey, **29%** of participants reported enough of these symptoms to warrant a diagnosis of PTSD, and in the second survey **23%** of participants met criteria for PTSD.

These rates are much higher than in the general Australian community in which 2-3% of the population are estimated to suffer from PTSD.

# Snapshot of Mandaean Health Depression

Depression is more than just feeling sad. People identified with depression must experience many of the symptoms described below for most of the day every day for a period of two weeks or longer. These symptoms have a large impact on a person's ability to do things in everyday life.

We measured symptoms of depression in both surveys. The following table displays how many people in both surveys reported various symptoms of depression.

Common symptoms of depression	Survey One (2002)	Survey Two (2007)
Feeling sad	45%	36%
Crying easily	41%	42%
Feeling hopeless about the future	51%	25%
Loneliness	34%	32%
Loss of appetite	24%	20%
Poor sleep	44%	34%
Feeling worthless	13%	8%
Feeling guilty	38%	44%
Loss of interest in activities	16%	16%

In the first survey, **37%** of participants met criteria for depression, and in the second survey, **34%** of participants had depression.

These rates are much higher than in the Australian population, of which 5% are estimated to meet criteria for depression in a 12 month period.

# Findings from Survey One

## Detention

At the time of the first survey, the Australian government had put in place two immigration policies that affected the Mandaean community greatly. These policies were mandatory detention and the use of temporary protection visas.

### **Mandatory detention**

Australia's policy of mandatory detention meant that all asylum-seekers who arrived in the country and did not already have refugee status or a visa were detained as "unauthorised arrivals".

People were held in detention centres around Australia for varying periods of time while their applications for refugee status were processed.

Following are the rates of detention reported by the 241 Mandaeans who took part in the first survey:

**38%** of participants were not detained

**38%** were detained for less than 6 months (short stay detention)

**24%** were detained for longer than 6 months (long stay detention)

# Detention Experiences

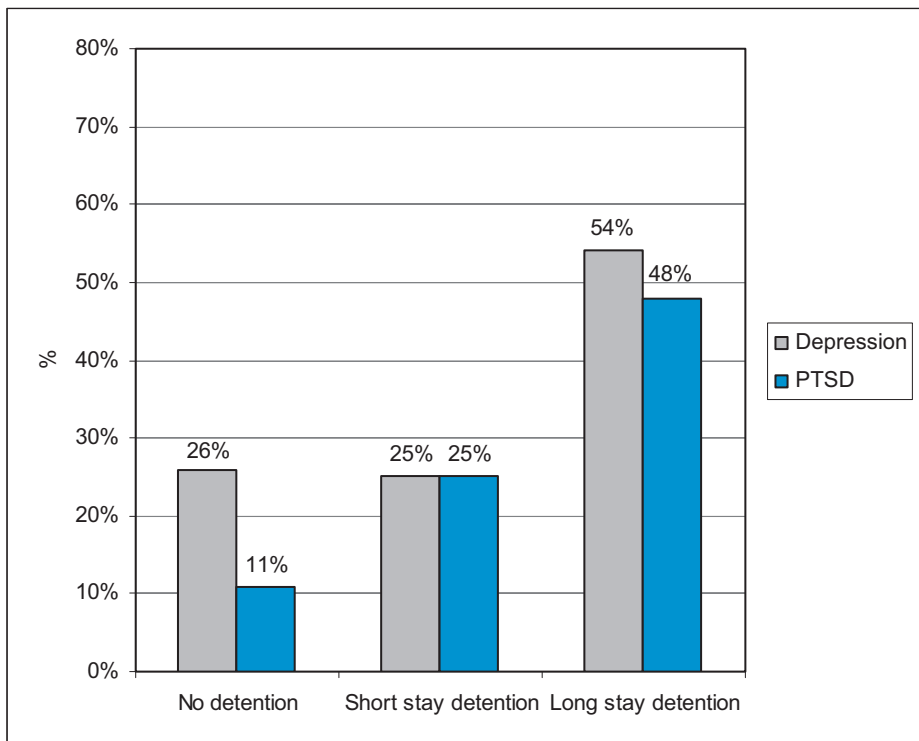
Many Mandaeans who were detained reported experiencing stressful and/or traumatic events during their time in detention.

<b>Short-stay detainees (0-5 months)</b>	<b>Long-stay detainees (≥6 months)</b>
<i>3 in 4 experienced severe stress related to:</i>	<i>3 in 4 experienced severe stress related to:</i>
	Being fearful of being sent home Worries about family back home Delays in processing of application Boredom Abuse from other detainees
<i>1 in 2 experienced severe stress related to:</i>	<i>1 in 2 experienced severe stress related to:</i>
Being fearful of being sent home Separation from family Worries about family back home	Isolation Seeing people make suicide attempts Separation from family
<i>1 in 3 experienced severe stress related to:</i>	<i>1 in 3 experienced severe stress related to:</i>
Being unable to access treatment for health problems Bad work conditions Delays in processing of application Boredom Abuse from other detainees	Over-crowding in rooms Poor quality food Poor access to healthcare Being woken during the night due to head counts or other disturbances

# The Effects of Detention

Being held in detention for an extended period of time also had a negative impact on the mental health of participants.

The figure below shows the rates of PTSD and depression for those who had been in long-stay detention (longer than 6 months) compared to those who had been in short-stay detention (less than 6 months) and those who had not been detained.



**Long-stay detention** was related to **higher rates of depression** and **PTSD** compared to short-stay detention or no detention.

# Findings from Survey One

## Temporary Protection

From 1999, asylum seekers who arrived in Australia without travel documents were eligible only for Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), generally valid for three or five years. After this time TPV holders had to undergo a full merit review of their refugee claim. This involved making a fresh application to the Immigration Department for protection as a refugee. Changes in country conditions, such as the removal of Saddam Hussain in Iraq, could greatly affect the likelihood of being recognised as a refugee a second time.

Many Mandaean TPV holders faced the realistic possibility that they would have to return to Iraq. If successful, TPV holders would only be granted another three years of protection in Australia.

TPVs were also associated with limited access to services and benefits. TPV holders were excluded from government-sponsored English language classes, access to higher education and employment assistance. They were unable to leave the country even in family emergencies and were denied the opportunity to apply for family reunion in order to sponsor family members to Australia.

Following are the rates of visa status reported by the 241 Mandaeans who took part in the first survey:

**58%** of participants held Temporary Protection Visas

**42%** of participants were permanent residents

# Temporary Protection & Living Difficulties

Participants who held Temporary Protection visas at the time of the first survey reported experiencing more living difficulties in the previous 12 months than permanent residents.

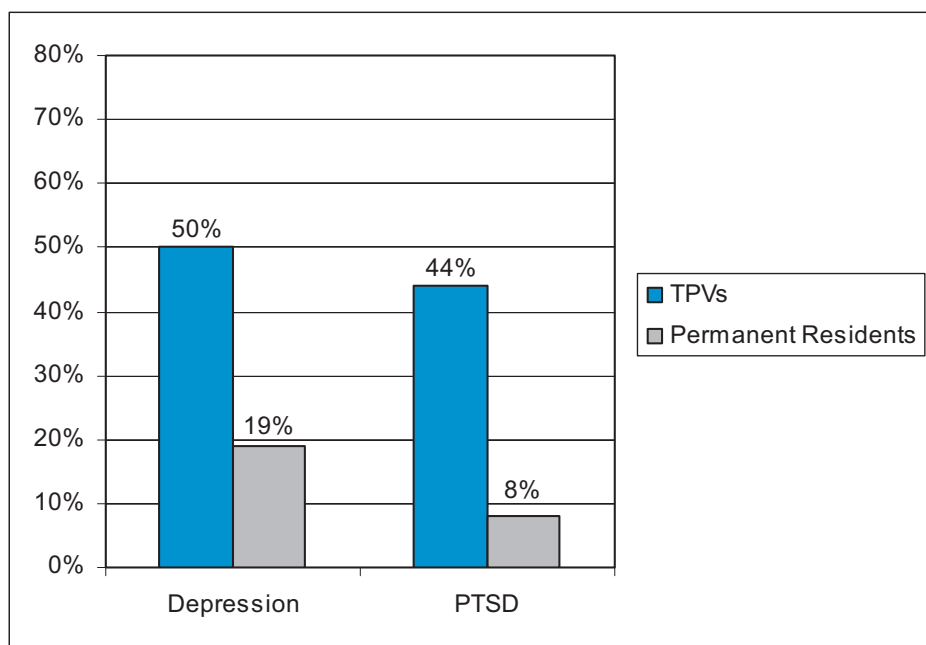
Listed below are the most common living difficulties reported by Mandaeans holding Temporary Protection visas.

<b>Temporary Protection visa holders (58 people)</b>
<i>4 in 5 experienced severe stress related to:</i>
Being unable to return home in an emergency
Being fearful of repatriation
Concern for family in country of origin
<i>1 in 2 experienced severe stress related to:</i>
Unemployment
Insufficient money
Loneliness and boredom
Communication difficulties
<i>1 in 3 experienced severe stress related to:</i>
Separation from family
Poor access to medical care
Social isolation

# The Effects of Temporary Protection

Participants who held temporary protection visas reported poorer mental health than permanent residents.

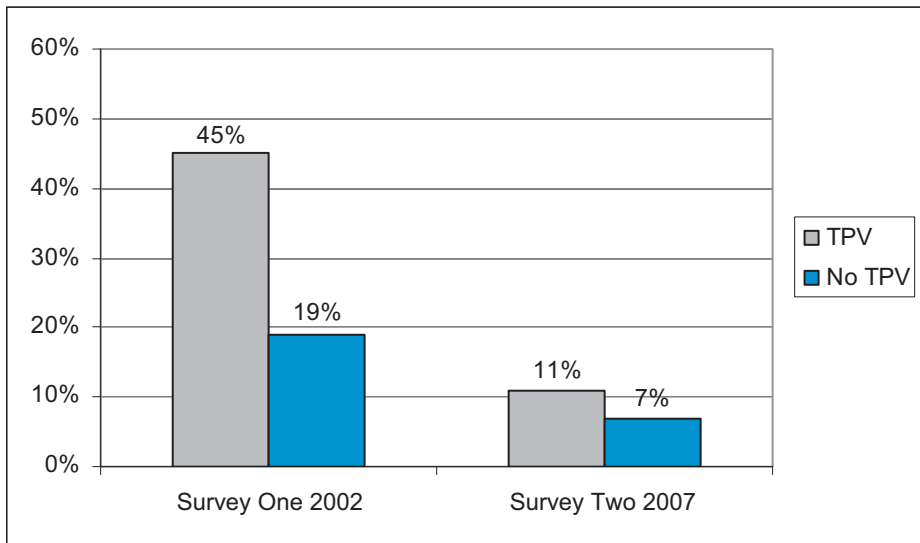
The figure below shows rates of PTSD and depression for Temporary Protection visa holders compared to permanent residents.



Participants with **temporary protection** visas had **higher rates** of **depression** and **PTSD** than permanent residents.

# Temporary Protection and Mental Health Over Time

We measured changes in mental health across time in the 101 participants who took part in both surveys. The following graph illustrates the relationship between changes in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and visa status across time. By the second survey, all 101 participants had permanent residency.



Rates of **PTSD decreased** as participants' **visa status changed** from temporary to permanent. This suggests that providing Mandaean refugees with **security** and **access to services** was related to **improved mental health**.

# Looking to the Future Fear for Self & Family

As well as having been exposed to trauma in the past, refugees often experience fear about terrifying events that may occur in the future.

These fears can be about traumatic events happening to themselves or to other family members.

In the first survey **48%** of Mandaeans experienced symptoms related to fear of future traumatic events happening to themselves. In the second survey, **28%** of participants experienced this fear about future events.

This represents a **decrease** of **20%** between the two surveys.

It is likely that this reduction is related to the **change in visa status** for many Mandaeans. People with temporary protection visas face the real threat that they will be sent back to their home country. This is much less likely for permanent residents. It is likely that, in general, participants in the second survey felt safer due to the change in visa status.

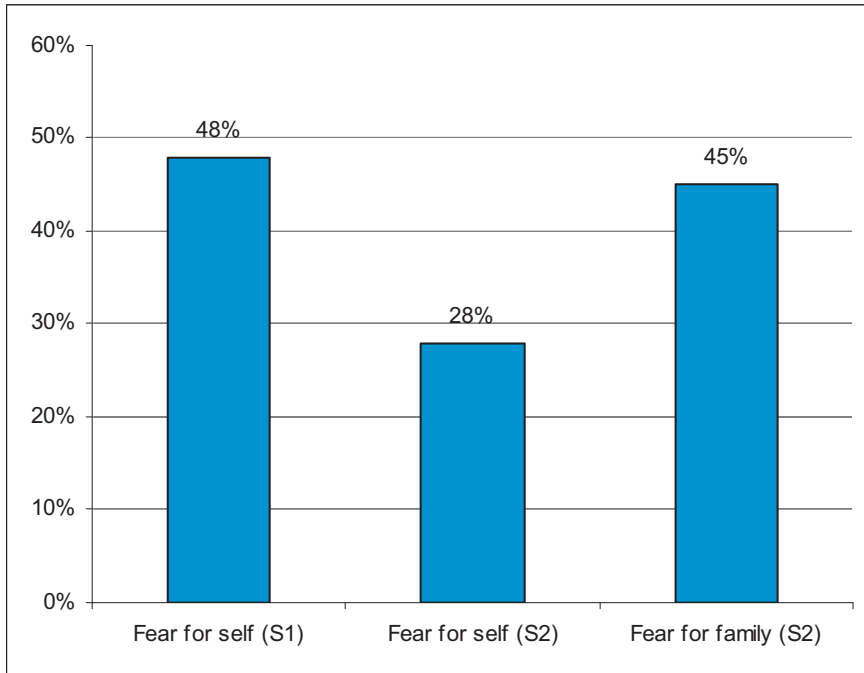
However, many Mandaeans who took part in the surveys had family and friends who remained in Iraq. Nearly half of the participants had at least one member of their immediate family living in Iraq at the time of the second survey.

In the second survey, we measured how bothered participants were by fearful thoughts, images, feelings and nightmares regarding what might happen to family members who remained in Iraq.

Overall, **45%** of Mandaeans in the second survey were very fearful about the safety of their family in Iraq.

# Looking to the Future Fear for Self & Family

These percentages are illustrated in the following graph:



While fear for self reduced substantially from Survey One to Survey Two, fear for family in Survey Two was very high.

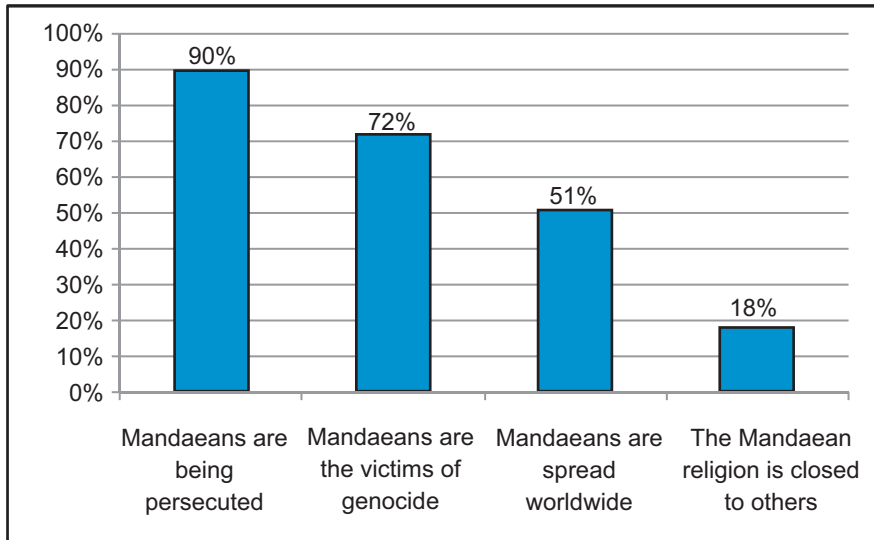
Therefore, while, by the time of the **second survey**, Mandaean felt **less concerned** about **terrifying events** that may happen to them in the future, they were **very worried** about the dangers their **families** were facing.

# Looking to the Future

## Loss of Religion & Culture

In the second survey we assessed participants' fear that the Mandaean religion and culture would cease to exist in the future.

Overall, **68%** of participants reported being “**quite**” or “**extremely**” fearful that the Mandaean religion and culture would **not exist in the future** . The following graph displays why participants thought this would happen.



**Most** participants thought that this was because Mandaeans were being **persecuted** or were **victims of genocide**. About **half** the participants thought this was because Mandaeans are **spread worldwide**. Nearly **one-fifth** believed this was because the Mandaean **religion is closed** to others .

# Complicated Grief

Traumatic events experienced by refugees may involve the death of a loved one. This is often followed by a grief reaction which usually improves as the individual gets used to life without this person. Sometimes the grief is too much for a person to be able to recover from easily. If the grief continues for a long period of time, the person may be suffering from a complicated grief reaction.

Complicated grief was assessed in the second survey.

The following table displays how many people in the second survey reported each symptom of complicated grief.

<b>Common symptoms of complicated grief</b>	<b>Survey Two (2006-2007)</b>
Yearning or longing for the person who has died	57%
Difficulty moving on	16%
Feeling numb	12%
Disbelief about the death	39%
Feeling empty	21%
Feeling that the future is meaningless	14%

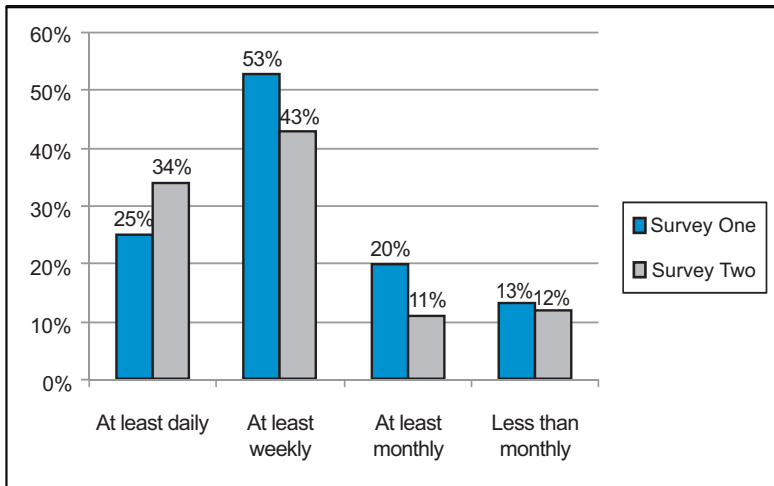
# Anger

When people experience great injustice and suffering, as well as fear, worry and stress, anger can be a common reaction. Anger attacks are anger responses that are out of proportion to the events that trigger them. People who experience anger attacks often feel out of control, and may feel guilty or ashamed after an attack.

Anger responses are particularly painful for the Mandaean community as anger is at odds with their pacifist tradition.

We measured anger attacks in both surveys. In the first survey, **69%** of participants reported experiencing anger attacks. In the second survey, **58%** of the sample experienced anger attacks.

The following figure illustrates the frequency of anger attacks reported by participants in the first and second surveys.



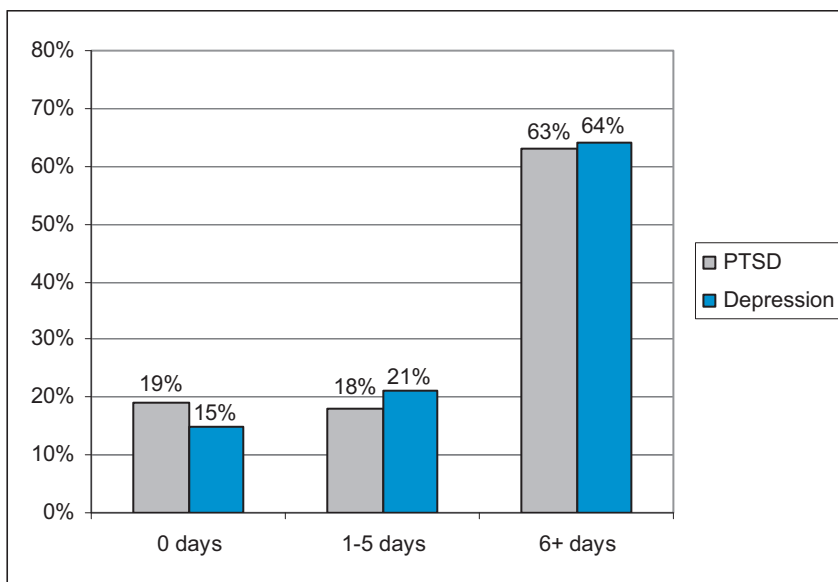
The number of people reporting anger attacks **decreased by 11%** between the surveys.

# Mental Health Effects on Daily Activities

Psychological difficulties can have a large impact on a person's ability to perform daily activities. In both surveys we measured how much participants' mental health problems influenced their ability to fulfil important roles and responsibilities.

In the first survey, **54%** of Mandaeans reported that their mental health difficulties impacted on their daily life to a moderate to severe level. In the second survey, **42%** of participants indicated that their mental health difficulties affected their daily life moderately or severely.

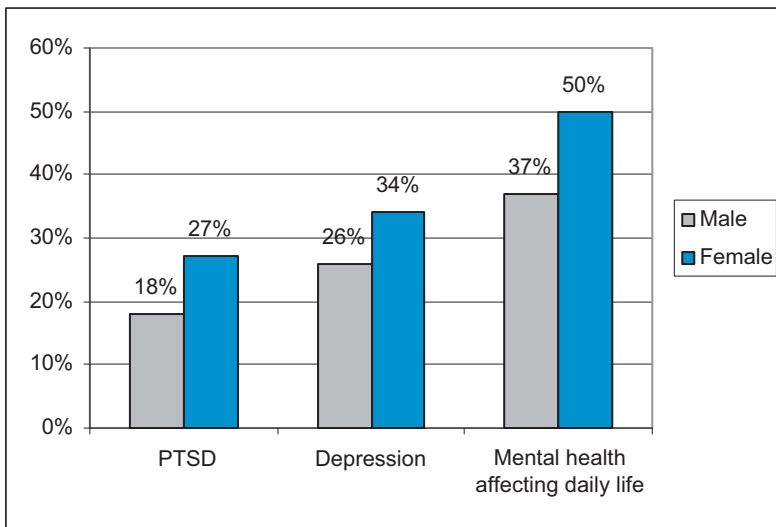
The following graph presents the percentage of Mandaeans with PTSD or depression in the second survey who had to cut down their activities on 6 or more days, 1 to 5 days or not at all (0 days) in the past month.



# Gender and Mental Health

In refugee groups, women can be especially vulnerable to the effect of traumatic events. Many face extreme challenges such as fleeing their home country and resettling in a new country while looking after children, often without the assistance and protection of other family members. As a result, refugee women often exhibit high rates of mental health difficulties.

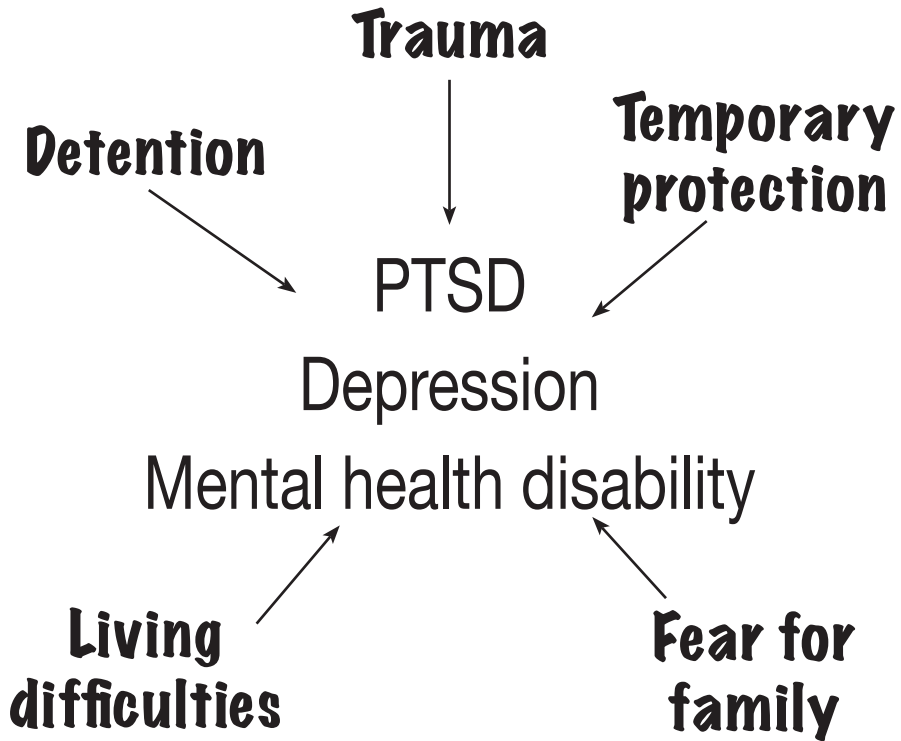
In Survey Two we compared the rates of psychological difficulties reported by male and female participants.



As with other refugee groups, **female** Mandaean refugees reported **higher levels** of **PTSD** and **depression** than male participants. Women also reported that mental health difficulties had a greater impact on their ability to carry out **activities** in their daily lives.

# Factors Contributing to Psychological Difficulties

The following diagram shows the main factors that contributed to the mental health of the Mandaeans:



# Health Service Use

**Overall, 34% of the Mandaean taking part in this study believed they needed help for psychological problems**

56% reported that they would seek help from their GP

20% indicated that they would seek help from STARTTS

17% reported that they would seek help from a community leader

11% indicated that they would seek help from the Migrant Resource Centre

**How many times did Mandaeans see a health professional in the past year?**

In the past year, participants had seen a doctor on average 16 times due to poor health

In the past year, participants had seen a doctor on average 3 times due to psychological difficulties

In the past year, participants had seen another health professional on average 2 times due to psychological difficulties

# Conclusions

## **Trauma exposure & mental health**

Members of the Mandaean community have been exposed to high levels of trauma. Experiencing traumatic events is related to mental health problems such as depression and PTSD. In both surveys, Mandaeans exhibited high levels of psychological difficulties such as PTSD and depression.

## **Australian government policies**

The policies of mandatory detention and temporary protection worsened the mental health of the Mandaeans. Those who had been held in detention for longer than six months, and those who held Temporary Protection Visas exhibited much higher rates of PTSD and depression than Mandaeans who did not have these experiences.

## **Changes in mental health over time**

The overall mental health of the Mandaean community improved, between the two surveys. It is likely that this is due to the conversion of Temporary Protection Visas to permanent residency for most participants, which provided a sense of security for resettled Mandaeans.

However, although the mental health of some participants improved rates of psychological disorders remained high as the community faced new difficulties. Worry about the danger faced by family members remaining in Iraq and the Middle East had a large impact on the mental health of many Mandaeans in the second survey.

## **Fear for the future**

At the time of the first survey, many Mandaeans experienced symptoms related to fear of future traumatic events that may happen to themselves. By the second survey, this fear had decreased, however many Mandaeans were extremely fearful for family who remained in Iraq or other dangerous circumstances, contributing to poor mental health.

# Conclusions

## **Persecution & genocide**

At the time of the second survey, many Mandaean were concerned that their religion and culture would cease to exist as a result of persecution and genocide.

## **Grief & anger**

Many Mandaean reported symptoms of grief and anger as a result of injustice and loss experienced in the past and the present.

## **Contributing factors**

The main factors contributing to psychological difficulties were trauma history, long-term immigration detention, temporary protection and fear for family members' safety.

## **Mental health & functioning**

Many Mandaean reported that their psychological difficulties were interfering moderately or severely with their ability to function in everyday life.

## **Help-seeking**

One-third of Mandaean interviewed during the second survey reported that they needed help for psychological difficulties.

# Future Directions

## Recent changes for the Mandaeans

In the time since the surveys detailed in this report, there have been a number of changes for the Mandaean community world-wide. The persecution of Mandaeans in Iraq has intensified which has resulted in the majority of Mandaeans fleeing this country. Reports indicate that individuals and families leaving Iraq have generally either sought safety in nearby Middle Eastern nations (such as Syria and Jordan) or applied for asylum in countries such as those in Europe, the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand or Australia.

## Displacement in the Middle East

Those who have fled to countries neighbouring Iraq face many challenges due to the inaccessibility of social services and the impossibility of finding employment. Many individuals and families in Syria and Jordan live in poverty, relying on savings or financial support from family members living in Western countries. Furthermore, Mandaeans living in these circumstances are often subject to harassment and discrimination, and live with the constant fear that they will be deported from the country in which they are living and sent back to Iraq.

## Concern for family living in poverty

Worry about family and friends living in such circumstances has been identified as a major concern for the Mandaean community in Sydney. The financial burden of helping people who are living without social support or the possibility of employment is also difficult for individuals living in Australia who are trying to establish themselves in a new country.

It is therefore very important that the plight of Mandaeans living in such difficult circumstances be recognised and measures taken to help those living overseas and in Australia.

# Recommendations

## Family reunion

Fear for family and friends living in Iraq and the Middle East plays a large role in the mental health and distress of the Mandaean community.

It is recommended that reuniting Mandaean family members in Australia be prioritised. This is necessary to remove members of this small and unique minority group from the threat of persecution, discrimination and poverty. This may also help Mandaeans living in Australia to adapt to their new life, as findings from this study suggest that fear for family members living in Iraq significantly contributes to poor mental health outcomes.

## Specialised treatment for mental health problems

Mandaeans taking part in these surveys reported high rates of psychological disorders including PTSD and depression. One-third of people surveyed in the second study indicated that they needed help for psychological difficulties. On the platform of these findings, a new program is currently being developed to evaluate treatment for psychological distress in the Mandaen community.

## Future research

This study and the findings outlined in this report set a template for investigating the mental health and functioning of refugee groups. More scientific research should be conducted to better understand the experiences of the Mandaeans and other refugee groups and to inform the provision of better mental health care for refugees in Australia.