Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant Women in New Brunswick: Provincial Reference Guide
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Introduction

The project “Overcoming Barriers: A coordinated response to violence against immigrant women in New Brunswick”, began in 2015 under the leadership of the New Brunswick Multicultural Council in partnership with the Violence Against Immigrant and Visible Minority Women research team of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, Liberty Lane Second Stage Housing, the multicultural associations, members of the immigrant community, and the Government of New Brunswick’s Women’s Equality Branch, and the Departments of Justice and Public Safety and Social Development.

Funded by Status of Women Canada, the project aimed to: (1) assess and understand the current systemic and structural barriers as well as the state of services relating to immigrant women experiencing domestic and intimate partner violence (D/IPV) in New Brunswick; and (2), to work with key stakeholders across the province to develop and implement a coordinated response to D/IPV experienced by immigrants.

Throughout this document, the phrase “immigrant women” refers to women who immigrated to New Brunswick by a variety of pathways. The pathway to Canadian citizenship for immigrant women is not straightforward and the shape of the pathway depends on their category of entry. Immigrant women enter Canada as skilled workers (federal or provincial), temporary workers, refugees (some apply for asylum upon or after entering the country), and international students. Permanent residents (spouses and family members) and principal applicants sponsor other women’s applications, so they arrive in Canada under a “dependent” status. In the case of refugees, sponsored applications can be made by permanent residents as well as by organizations (government or non-government). Following the granting of a permanent resident visa, full citizenship is only granted to immigrants who have lived and paid taxes in Canada for at least four years and who have passed a citizenship test. Responsibilities for carrying out immigration
procedures are shared by the federal and provincial governments. For many women, their rights are limited and conditional, and depend and change based on the various stages of immigration.

During the first year of the project, the project team conducted a needs assessment to determine the barriers, challenges and supports accessed by immigrant women in New Brunswick. Consulting with dozens of immigrant women, service providers and sector experts, the project team identified different barriers described in detail throughout this document. Among these, a gap of coordination was found between immigrant serving agencies and settlement organizations and the sector agencies that provide services to people experiencing D/IPV. In the same way, staff from both sectors may not have a full understanding of the particular challenges of immigrant women experiencing violence through a lack of understanding of immigration policies and cross-cultural awareness, or limited training on violence prevention and interventions, or intercultural communication. Therefore, neither sector is fully equipped with the tools, training and resources to best support these women.

As a result, and following the recommendations from project stakeholders, the project team created this reference guide along with locally-driven and community-based resource and action-oriented guides that are practical, useful and adaptable for all relevant actors. The reference guide includes important information and definitions regarding the immigration sector, cross-cultural awareness, and the barriers faced by immigrant women to consider when working with affected individuals and clients. This guide is intended to be an orientation tool for the immigrant serving agencies and related organizations, the violence prevention and support services sector, and other community based agencies who may work with immigrant families and/or D/IPV victims.

The accompanying resource guide is a living document of available regional resources, adapted for different communities across New Brunswick, including contact information and services provided available for immigrant women experiencing D/IPV. Furthermore, the resource guide contains recommendations on best practices for approaching D/IPV with immigrant women and particular considerations and questions to ask to best support immigrant women experiencing D/IPV.

The ultimate goal of the reference and resource guides is for every door to be the right door, and to ensure that no woman should be left alone to navigate an unfamiliar system when seeking support. Through these documents and the ongoing work to strengthen collaboration across sectors, this project envisions a New Brunswick where all women who experience D/IPV, and all immigrants are supported in their efforts to reach out, access services and get the support they deserve in times of need.

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1 This includes government funded settlement services, multicultural associations, community organizations that provide services to immigrants such as churches and libraries and cultural associations and societies (e.g., New Brunswick African Association, Asian Heritage Society of New Brunswick) and international student services.

2 This includes shelters, transition housing, second stage housing, police, counselors, government agencies such as social development and health care providers.
Characteristics of Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant Women

There are many factors to consider when working with an immigrant survivor of abuse. The following section will outline the specificities of D/IPV as a whole, while focusing on the unique forms of abuse immigrant women may experience.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE?

A common definition of domestic and intimate partner violence (D/IPV) has been developed and is used by all police forces (both RCMP and municipal/regional) in New Brunswick. The definition is consistent with the description used by the Domestic Violence Court in Moncton, by prosecution services of the Office of the Attorney General, and New Brunswick’s Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy:

Domestic and intimate partner violence occurs when a person, regardless of their gender, uses abusive, threatening, harassing or violent behaviour as a means to psychologically, physically, sexually or financially coerce, dominate and control the other member of their intimate personal relationship. (Province of New Brunswick, 2012).

This definition includes individuals who were previously or who are currently involved in an intimate/romantic relationship with each other (married, common-law, or dating), irrespective of whether this relationship was between same-gender or different-gendered couples, and whether the couple cohabitated. D/IPV is also considered to have occurred when an individual or family member on the individual’s behalf, directly or indirectly, resorts to abusive, threatening, harassing...
or violent behaviour towards the partner’s or ex-partner’s children, relatives, friends, pets/farm animals, employers and work colleagues, or new partners, as a means to psychologically intimidate, dominate and control the current or ex-partner (Province of New Brunswick, 2009).

The Criminal Code of Canada does not specifically outline offences related to D/IPV; however, there are relevant criminal offences that apply (Department of Justice, Canada, 2017) including: murder, manslaughter, assault, assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm, sexual assault, uttering threats, sexual harassment, stalking, intimidation, mischief, destruction of property, theft, and fraud. While we do not know the full extent of D/IPV in New Brunswick, statistics show that a Canadian woman is killed every six days by her intimate partner; and in New Brunswick, more people are killed by their intimate partners than in any other Atlantic province (Government of New Brunswick, 2018). Despite the high level of D/IPV crimes that occur, it remains one of the most under-reported types of crime in Canada. Notably, statistics on immigrant women experiencing domestic violence are not consistently collected in New Brunswick and reporting rates are unreliable given the additional barriers faced by immigrant women discussed further throughout the document.

LIST OF MYTHS AND FACTS

Many myths are associated with D/IPV. Many of them are rooted in societal and media perceptions and do not paint an accurate picture of what the research on D/IPV tells us. The following is a list of some common myths and facts, as reported by the Purple Ribbon Campaign Violence Prevention Initiative (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015) and the Department of Justice and Public Safety (Government of New Brunswick, 2018).

- **Abuse only happens to certain people:** Abuse can impact anyone, not only certain families, ethnic or religious minorities, uneducated or lower-class individuals. It pervades all socioeconomic classes and all types of families.

- **Children are not affected by intimate partner violence:** There can be serious negative outcomes when children are exposed to D/IPV and New Brunswick child protection recognizes this as a form of child abuse. Children may experience physical health problems, mental health problems or act more aggressively.

- **Domestic violence is usually an isolated incident:** Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour that exists in some relationships and gets worse and more frequent over time.

- **If women really wanted to leave a violent relationship, they could:** Abused women are faced with the reality of severe physical assault or even death when attempting to leave. Immigrant women face further barriers to leaving, including lack of support network, language barriers, economic dependency, and fear of jeopardizing her immigration status.

- **If men are violent with their partners, they are likely violent in all their relationships:** Men who abuse their partners may appear to be charming and pleasant in other situations, like with co-workers or friends. At home, they may justify their use of violence to control and subordinate their partner.

- **Immigrant and refugee women do not seek help because their background or culture allows abuse:** Violence against women takes place in every country and culture in the world. Assuming that one specific culture accepts violence is a generalization, and a dangerous one.
CYCLE OF ABUSE

No two women are abused in the same way, and the violence a woman experiences can be unpredictable, but there are observed patterns and similarities in abusive relationships. The Cycle of Abuse was first described by Lenore Walker (1979) in her book The Battered Woman. This cycle is used by many service providers to explain that D/IPV is rarely an isolated incident and may follow a pattern similar to the one shown in Figure 1.

The cycle of abuse can cover a long or short period of time and the pattern may be specific to the relationship. Eventually, the tension builds up again, resulting in another period of abuse followed by the honeymoon phase. With repeated cycles, the violence will often get worse, and the honeymoon phase will shorten or even disappear (Government of New Brunswick, 2014).

Figure 1. The Cycle of Abuse, adapted from Walker (1979).

- **Tension building:** The abuser may verbally harass their partner, and may be afraid their partner will leave them resulting in more possessiveness, jealousy and aggression. The partner often tries to do anything to keep the peace. Partners will often make excuses for the abuser’s behaviour. There may be anger, blaming and arguing.

- **D/IPV incident:** The abuser may be unpredictable and appear to be out of control. The abuse is not necessarily physical and may include intimidation or humiliation.

- **Honeymoon phase:** The abuser may ask for forgiveness or state that it will never happen again, and may appear to be calm and loving. The partners will often feel guilty about leaving their abuser and often hope that the abuser will change.

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All abusers seek to maintain power and control over their victims. Even if the abuse occurs infrequently, they will instill fear of future assaults. The wheel of power and control, also known as the Duluth Model, demonstrates that physical violence is only one form of D/IPV an immigrant woman may experience. The ways an abuser attempts to control an immigrant victim is represented in the eight spokes, or tactics: intimidation, isolation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse, using children, threats, and/or using citizenship or residency privilege. While tactics may be similar for immigrant and non-immigrant victims, the examples provided in each spoke are specific to immigrant women.

While physical violence, the outer ring, tends to be more visible, forceful and overt, the inner wheel represents subtler, continual and sometimes unrecognizable acts of violence until one looks at these forms of violence more carefully. Many of these forms of violence can happen simultaneously as a way to enforce power and control within a relationship.

- **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**
  Lying about her immigration status. Writing her family lies about her. Calling her racist names.

- **ECONOMIC ABUSE**
  Threatening to report her if she works “under the table.” Not letting her get job training or schooling.

- **SEXUAL ABUSE**
  Calling her a prostitute or “mail order bride.” Alleging she has a history of prostitution on legal papers.

- **USING CHILDREN**
  Threatening to take her children away from Canada. Threatening to report her children to Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada.

- **THREATS**
  Threatening to report her to Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada to get her deported. Threatening to withdrawal the petition to legalize her immigration status.

- **USING CITIZENSHIP OR RESIDENCY PRIVILEGE**
  Falling to file papers to legalize her immigration status, withdrawing or threatening to withdraw papers filed for her residency.

- **INTIMIDATION**
  Hiding or destroying important papers (i.e passport, ID cards, health care card, etc.) Destroying her only property from her country of origin.

- **ISOLATION**
  Isolating her from friends, family or anyone who speaks her language. Not allowing her to learn English and French.

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*Figure 2. Wheel of power and control, adapted by Futures without Violence [www.futureswithoutviolence.org](http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org), with permission from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota.*
WHAT D/IPV LOOKS LIKE FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Although the immigrant wheel of power and control provides a good basis to the types of abuse an immigrant woman may experience, it is important to include more specific examples of how these abuses may be impacted by the immigration process. Abuse can encompass a wide variety of behaviours. There are many different forms of abuse for women, but the following are some examples of D/IPV, many of which could be experienced by non-immigrant women as well, while others are more specific to immigrant women due to the immigration process and additional barriers they may face. These examples are not definitive and violence may be carried out in many different ways:

- Hitting, slapping, pushing, punching or throwing objects
- Grabbing her firmly or cornering her, choking
- Burning, acid throwing
- Bodily mutilation, including female genital mutilation, forced cosmetic surgery

**PHYSICAL ABUSE**

- Rape, women may believe that it is a husband’s right to demand sexual intercourse with his wife.
- Accusing her of promiscuity or overt sexuality (this may occur due to clothing choices, or socializing with unrelated men)
- Coercion to have unprotected sex
- Sexual neglect and coldness
- Strictly controlling reproductive choices

**SEXUAL ABUSE**

- Threatening to take away her children (including back to the home country), threatening to hurt the children
- Isolation (not being able to leave the home without permission, preventing the victim to reach out to others)
- Destroying or hiding important documents like passports; destroying objects from home cultures
- Controlling all the decisions, preventing her from obtaining an education or working outside of the house
- Threatening to withdraw his file to legalize her immigration status or promising to sponsor her and not following through
- Telling her family lies about her
- Blaming her for the abuse
- Treating her like a servant
- Forcing her to do illegal things
- Threatening to report her to authorities

**PSYCHOLOGICAL / EMOTIONAL / VERBAL ABUSE**
FINANCIAL ABUSE

- Prohibiting the victim from having knowledge of finances or access to funds
- Preventing the victim from earning money
- Preventing the victim from sending money overseas to family
- Enforcing all financial decisions in the household

SPIRITUAL ABUSE

- Aspects of religion may be used against victims (i.e., interpreting sacred texts in ways that justify abuse; increased pressure to perform or act a certain way during religious holidays)
- Denial of a religious divorce by their husband (immigrant women may seek a civil divorce in Canada, but many also want or need a religious divorce for it to be recognized by her family and community)
HONOUR-BASED VIOLENCE

Honour-based violence is a concept rife with controversy – it is understood as a crime or incident of violence committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community based on the perpetrator’s interpretation of what is morally right and acceptable values and practices. This form of violence is perpetrated against a family member, usually female, who is perceived to have brought shame or dishonour to the family, and is carried out in order to “cleanse the family name and restore the family honour” (Papp, 2010). Service providers should be aware that honour-based violence can be perpetrated by any member within the family, not only the spouse - by fathers, fathers-in-law, brothers, brothers-in-law, husbands and occasionally sons—often with the complicity of older females. Honour-based violence can result in honour killings, where a female relative is killed “in the name of honour”; the reasons can vary, often for forced or suspected sexual activity outside the marriage, but may also include things like undesirable behaviour, clothing choices or socializing with unacceptable people. While all forms of violence against women is deplored, there are distinctions between historically observed Western patterns of abuse of women, and such “culturally driven” abuse of girls and women by both men and women within the family. For instance, the cycles of abuse may not resemble the typical Western model – often the plan for an act of honour-based violence, including honour killings, can be made over a long period without significant preceding events.

Aruna Papp, an expert researcher on honour-based violence in South-Asian communities in Canada, writes:

A growing body of research confirms that in patriarchal societies […] where honour/shame codes are rife, men exercise rigid control over women. The result is a higher incidence of violence against women as compared with mainstream Western host communities. [In such patriarchal societies], women are held to a tightly scripted role of submission to a hierarchy of family authority. In addition, they face the most insurmountable obstacle of all: a community-wide conspiracy of silence regarding the abuse of girls and women. Community leaders point to cultural traditions, religious values and norms in defending their way of life. Thus, they consciously exploit multiculturalism-inspired fears amongst mainstream Canadians of appearing racist or of perpetuating cultural stereotypes. (Papp, 2010, p. 8)

Service providers should be sensitive to the distinct culturally-driven factors of honour-based violence and allow space for open dialogue and acknowledgement of these cultural factors with the victim. Conversely, service providers must also be wary of prejudice and racialization of entire ethnic communities, and avoid over-projection and/or extrapolation of cultural ties to violence. Honour-based violence is unique in its nature, but varying cycles of abuse exist regardless of culture and country of origin of the perpetrator or the victim.

Regardless of the alleged rationale, violence toward and the killing of a woman or girl does not distinguish women and girls based on race, culture, or religion. Nor can we allege that Western society is not patriarchal.
There are multiple theories about the determinants of domestic and intimate partner violence (D/IPV) including an imbalance of power and control, the social learning of perpetrators and victims, in particular the intergenerational transmission of D/IPV in families, the widespread prevalence of violence in society, the exposure to violence through all forms of media, and the lack of significant consequences for perpetrators.

Multiple factors contribute to the increased risk of D/IPV amongst members of particular social groups. Immigrant women are an example of one such group that is particularly vulnerable in situations of D/IPV due to a range of additional barriers explained throughout this section.
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

One of the factors associated with D/IPV for immigrant women is the social context in which D/IPV occurs. D/IPV does not take place in a vacuum; it is shaped by the social context and culture in which it takes place. For immigrants, their experiences of D/IPV are influenced by both their countries of origin and their experiences in their new community, by the course of their immigration journey, as well as by global factors such as systemic patriarchy.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Defining culture in a simple way can be a challenge because it includes many different facets of life. A complete and representative definition has been written in the Empowering Non-Status, Refugee and Immigrant Women who Experience Violence Manual (Battered Women’s Support Services, n.d):

Culture is understood to be a set of shared beliefs, values and behaviours held by a group that shares, for example, a common race, language, country of origin or religious affiliation and are based in gender and sexual differences that are deeply interconnected to social and political categories. (p. 189)

Culture is not static; it is dynamic and changing. It can encompass positive, negative and neutral associations, and it can be expressed through individual and collective actions. Culture includes beliefs, values, and practices held by an individual or a group and passed along from one generation to the next. Cultural norms include ways of thinking, talking and behaving that are considered to be normal or typical of that group; they are often influenced and justified by society, laws, rules and procedures. Culture is also gendered and often times a dominant group (usually males) has a greater power to enforce the cultural norms.

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND CULTURAL AWARENESS

Cultural awareness can be described via a continuum as shown below, with the left most portion describing unhelpful or harmful approaches to culture, with a shift to more helpful and beneficial approaches to the right.

![Cultural Continuum](image-url)

*Figure 3.* Cultural continuum from Rossiter et al. (2018). Domestic violence in immigrant and refugee populations: culturally informed risk and safety strategies.
The harmful or unhelpful approaches include cultural destructiveness, such as discriminatory or prejudicial attitudes, and cultural indifference, such as adopting a one-size fits all method to providing services. Ideally, service providers who work with immigrant women should possess the qualities of i) cultural awareness (being aware of the various cultures); ii) sensitivity (being sensitive to difference when providing services); iii) competence (being able to work cross-culturally); and iv) proficiency (efforts to improve services based on cultural needs). Having these qualities should lead to increased cultural safety, which is achieved when the service providers are aware of how the current procedures and systems may harm the client. Ultimately, cultural humility is the apex of the cultural continuum and occurs when service providers recognize that their own cultural beliefs and values can impact the services they provide to immigrant women.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO VIOLENCE AGAINST IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Domestic and intimate partner violence against immigrant women can be provoked or aggravated due to a variety of factors unique to the immigration journey. Understanding D/IPV against immigrant women requires a multifaceted approach with the consideration of many variables. According to the Canadian and Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative (Rossiter et al., 2018), it is important to consider the following variables when attempting to understand and help an immigrant woman suffering from D/IPV. Each point enumerates examples of how or why such variables could lead to increased risk factors for D/IPV.

ACCULTURATION LEVEL / CULTURE SHOCK

Navigating a new culture, regardless of how the individual’s pathway brought them to Canada and of their background can be challenging and disorienting. There is a lot of information and newness to process, and what may seem like simple details to some, may seem shocking to others. The sense of disorientation can provoke frustration, a sense of isolation, insecurity and imbalance among members of the family – some adapting faster than others – and aggravate risk factors for D/IPV.

SHIFTS IN CULTURAL NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS, LOSS OF CULTURE

Many immigrants may be taken aback by the reality of their immigration experience, expectations may not be met, and they may have more difficulty adapting and settling in their new community than they anticipated. Unmet expectations, changes in cultural norms or loss of cultural pillars such as place of prayer, familiar foods or shared language can lead to disappointment, shame, sense of loss, sense of regret, sense of doubt, etc., all of which can intensify risks for violence.

GEOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL ISOLATION, AND LOSS OF FAMILY STRUCTURES AND COMMUNITY

Many newcomers do not have strong community connections prior to arriving and suddenly find themselves far away from family and friends. Travel back to the home country can sometimes be prohibitively expensive, impossible due to security situations, or otherwise difficult. Therefore, such newcomers may feel lonely. Integration and inclusion can seem insurmountable for many newcomers, and some may never find a strong sense of community. Isolation can lead to a sense of sadness or depression, and to heightened risk factors due to the victim’s inability to find a local source of support.
LENGTH OF RESIDENCY IN HOST COUNTRY

Different residency statuses – ranging from undocumented migrants to citizenship – mean that newcomers have access to different levels of services in a given community. A dependency on the principal applicants, sponsors and/or other authorities who hold power over one’s status of residency in the country can lead to precarious situations, including risks of exploitation or other forms of enduring abuse in order to access protection, permanent residency or legal status. On the other end of the spectrum, for some citizens born outside Canada, it may be assumed that they have fully integrated and are fully aware of services that are provided, while in actuality they may still need additional support and still feel a sense of isolation and continue to feel discriminated against when seeking services.

LOSS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-economic status (or class) is often regarded as highly important in many cultures around the world. A loss of status, due to difficulty entering the labour force, through forced migration, or lack of affordability in the new community, for instance, can lead to a weakened sense of pride, frustration, shame, and in many cases in more patriarchal cultures, a weakened sense of masculinity or dominance. It may translate into increased risks of D/IPV as a means to regaining a sense of power and control.

POWER IMBALANCES BETWEEN PARTNERS, TRADITIONAL PATRIARCHAL BELIEFS, AND STRICT OR CHANGING GENDER ROLES

Shifting family dynamics is often observed among newcomer families, whereby children learn the language and adapt to the new cultural norms faster than parents, or women become more empowered and liberated among more patriarchal families, or men feel disempowered by a loss of socio-economic status, etc. Such shifts within a family or couple can be difficult for individuals to manage, adapt to, or accept. Among families with stricter norms, it could provoke counter-efforts to regain power and translate into violence and controlling behaviours.

[In patriarchal family structures], a woman’s financial and professional success often destabilizes the traditional dynamic of authoritative male and submissive female. The natural tendency of such women to assert their rights as equal partners is deeply threatening to men from the patriarchal community; they perceive equality between the sexes as a threat to their masculinity. (Papp, 2010, p. 7).

STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH MIGRATION, INCLUDING PRE-MIGRATION TRAUMA, AS WELL AS POST MIGRATION STRAIN AND STIGMA

The immigration process itself can be very stressful and demanding, often taking a very long time, costing a lot of money, with uncertain results; in other cases, migration may be forced due to security reasons. Regardless of immigration pathways, the prospect of starting completely new can be burdensome in the best of cases, and traumatic in the worst case. It may include learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, starting over one’s career, rebuilding a social circle and sense of community, depleting or stressing one’s funds, confronting one’s expectations with the reality on the ground, etc. The mental stress and potential exhaustion, trauma and frustrations related to migration can heighten risks of D/IPV.
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE AUTONOMY

It is important to consider the distinction between individual and collective autonomy when working with immigrant women. For instance, in patriarchal societies, the hierarchical ordering of gender is a central feature and many immigrant women come from cultures in which collectivist values are supported by state, religious, and ethnic ideologies that privilege men’s power. Immigrant women often internalize this ideology, and they display a deep understanding and commitment to their gender duties and roles. It is in contrast to Canadian society, in which secular individualism tempers patriarchy. In Canada, the value of the individual is promoted by state ideology, public policy is used to bolster women’s agency, and a legal system can hold men accountable for the abuse of power in families (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018; Battered Women’s Support Services, 2010).

UNIQUE FAMILY DYNAMICS

Domestic and intimate partner violence can often remain hidden in a collectivist culture, where there is an emphasis on the importance of family (Rossiter et al., 2018). According to the Needs Assessment Report (Holtmann et al., 2016), immigrant women indicated that disclosing the abuse would have consequences not only for her and her husband, but also for the family as a whole, including for family members who may still be in the country of origin or else where in the world. In Canada, D/IPV is viewed as a public problem, as opposed to a private family problem, and this can often cause a disconnect in understanding D/IPV in the lives of immigrant women. Maintaining family unity is highly valued; and as a result, mothers may endure violence in order to try to ensure the safety of the children, which is seen as best protected in the family unit. As a result, the cultural norms of enduring abuse risks being passed down from mother to daughter, and from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law over several generations. Extended family members may also participate in violence against wives/mothers.

Many immigrant women strongly believe in protecting the privacy of the family at all costs. It is an important factor to consider as it contributes to the vulnerability of abused immigrant women. Some may be afraid that opening up about D/IPV would violate the family and community codes of privacy, and may fear retaliation from their own community, in addition to contributing to stereotypes about their community and fearing further marginalization. For others, disclosing D/IPV to a public service provider in Canada can have implications for the safety and reputation of an immigrant woman’s family in the country to origin. They are important factors to consider as they contribute to the heightened vulnerability of abused immigrant women.

WHY WON’T SHE LEAVE: STRUCTURAL BARRIERS FACED BY IMMIGRANT WOMEN

The following are some of the key structural barriers that immigrant women may face in accessing public services, as well as the intersecting challenges that may await them in New Brunswick due to their gender, race, ethnicity, religion and language abilities.
ACCESS TO INFORMATION

• Newcomers are often overwhelmed with new information to process upon arrival. As such, immigrant women may only begin to learn about Canadian law and public services as they pertain to D/IPV when they become personally affected by violence or begin to identify the abuse that is taking place in their relationship.
• Information concerning D/IPV is available through the government’s Love Shouldn’t Hurt website as well as other resources, but immigrant women may not be aware of this website, may not know where to find local information, or may not have safe or sufficient access to the internet to search for resources.
• Immigrant women come to this province from a variety of countries, many of which do not have extensive public services, particularly for victims of D/IPV; as such, these services may be completely new and unknown, and the process may be intimidating and confusing for newcomers.
• Abusive partners, or other members of the community, may provide false information or restrict women’s access to information and/or financial resources that could be used to plan for security and safety.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

• Many immigrant women struggle to communicate using either of the official languages in New Brunswick and find it challenging to access and understand important information concerning the resources available to them.
• Even women with high levels of language proficiency may be criticized by members of the locally-born population for speaking with a strong accent.
• Access to translation and professional, accurate and sensitive interpretation is very difficult to find and limited in New Brunswick; professional interpretation services are often costly and can lead to longer wait times, while turning to other community members may jeopardize the client’s confidentiality, comfort and the accuracy of the communication.
• Inter-cultural communication is a complex process requiring new skills, patience, and understanding on both sides of the conversation; the English terms associated with D/IPV may have no direct translation in an immigrant women’s primary language and vice-versa.
IMPACT OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION POLICIES

- Family sponsorship and principal applicant regulations often force immigrant women into positions of economic and social dependency on their spouse and have significant impacts on family dynamics.
- For some immigrant women, it is their spouse’s decision to immigrate and they are reluctant migrants. For others, they immigrate for the sake of their children’s education. Women may believe that disclosing D/IPV may jeopardize the successful integration of other family members.
- Wives of international students, sponsored spouses and wives of temporary foreign workers may experience restrictions to opportunities to create social and professional networks, language classes, employment counseling and other services offered by government or government funded agencies.
- Some immigrant women fear that police involvement or accessing domestic violence services will lead to deportation.
- Immigrant women whose sponsor (usually partner) withdraws their sponsorship application will need a lawyer to evaluate the possibility of a “humanitarian and compassionate” assessment for their application for permanent residency or refugee status depending on the case. This process includes gathering evidence from police, shelter workers, and health care providers. These assessments are not guaranteed to be successful and they can be lengthy and costly.

TROUBLE FINDING EMPLOYMENT

- Many immigrant women struggle to find employment commensurate with their credentials and work experience. There is evidence of a gendered and racialized labour market in New Brunswick (Holtmann & Thériault, 2017).
- There is often a great deal of stress and pressure for immigrant women to find employment quickly because of the financial challenges they experience, including housing, transportation, food, and childcare.
ISOLATION

- Immigrant women, uprooted from their native countries, usually have few people who share their ethnic or religious background to turn to for support other than the aggressor.
- Tight-knit communities and families, especially those with strong patriarchal values, may provide support for women, but may put pressure on victims not to disclose D/IPV because it threatens family honour. Those who speak out may be shamed.
- In many cases, newcomer immigrant women have young children. Some women are forced into gender specific roles as the primary caregivers for their families. The role as caregiver often inhibits a woman from leaving her home. Furthermore, immigrant women, like other victims of abuse, are afraid that disclosing the situation may jeopardize their children’s future or lead to the loss of contact with them.
- In small ethno-cultural communities, there are additional challenges in ensuring confidentiality because everybody knows everybody. Immigrant women may be reluctant to disclose abuse amongst their informal social support networks. The barriers to accessing public services for immigrant women contribute to immigrant women’s feelings of isolation and hinder their full inclusion into their receiving community.
- The lack of public transportation systems in the province and the high cost associated with owning a vehicle contribute to the isolation of immigrant women.

NEED OF INTERCULTURAL SERVICES

- Lack of cultural sensitivity, biases, discrimination and/or racism amongst professionals, government and community service providers present barriers for immigrant women seeking understanding and safety from D/IPV.
- Differences in cultural values also create barriers for immigrant women who access D/IPV services.
- Immigrant women’s identities are strongly linked to their cultural community and the extended family. D/IPV services, particularly shelters, are based on an individualistic model of identity, which many women may not find comfortable.
- Many immigrant women are not accustomed to accessing public services in their countries of origin and some have experiences that have led them to distrust public officials and police.
- Public service providers in the region are unfamiliar with the impact of the multiple intersecting structural barriers on the lives of immigrant women. For example, Muslim immigrant women who are members of a visible minority and refugees may be dealing with religious discrimination, racism, sexism, and poverty concurrently.
Conclusion

No single immigration story is the same. Neither is a single experience of violence. All women who experience violence face difficult hurdles and barriers in accessing support, safety, and justice. What this Reference Guide intends to do is offer a glimpse on the particular barriers that immigrant women may face as victims of violence.

In some cases, the acts of violence may not appear different for immigrant and non-immigrant women, but barriers to accessing support may be impacted by the immigration experience, including the immigration status, as well as language abilities, access to information, culture, social pressures, changing family dynamics, trauma, and other individual factors. In other cases, immigrant women may face specific forms of violence due to their immigration status and experiences, which in addition to their particular barriers, renders these victims particularly vulnerable to abuse. Regardless of the form of violence or the barrier in question, it is our responsibility as a province to work together to support the woman. Cross-sector collaboration in the form of exchanging expertise, training and resources, and working together to develop new approaches to D/IPV is a first step. Listening actively to the woman and seeking to understand her reality in spite of, and because of her immigration experience is key. It is wise to avoid presumption and over-attribute the violence to cultural causes, while also seeking to understand how cultural factors shape the form of violence or the form of support the woman may find in her community. Violence is not limited to any one race, ethnicity, culture, country of origin, immigrant status or background, but it may not be entirely free of it either.
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