

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants  
(OCASI)

***PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
AGAINST IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN:***

***PREVENTION THROUGH  
INTERVENTION TRAINING***

## **Resource Book**

This project is made possible through funding provided by the  
Government of Ontario, Ontario Women's Directorate



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OCASI**

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PREVENTION THROUGH INTERVENTION  
TRAINING**

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This document is meant to be a basic reading resource, aimed at filling the gap in knowledge for workers who provide services to immigrant women but who do not have familiarity with woman abuse issues. It is not meant for workers who have advanced knowledge of issues pertaining to domestic violence against women. This resource book is being used by facilitators as a complementary source to OCASI's *Prevention of Domestic Violence against Immigrant and Refugee Women Training Manual* in the workshops that form part of the OCASI *Domestic Violence: Prevention through Intervention* project. Contents of this book are arranged in a sequence corresponding to that of the Training Manual. This material has been developed with the valued assistance of the OCASI Prevention of Domestic Violence against Immigrant Women project Advisory Committee. The project is made possible through funding provided by the Government of Ontario, Ontario Women's Directorate.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Background on the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

OCASI, supported by the Government of Ontario, Ontario Women's Directorate, is involved in the *Domestic Violence: Prevention through Intervention* project. The project will develop and deliver training for settlement service providers and any workers who frequently provide services to immigrant, refugee and undocumented victims, but who do not have familiarity with woman abuse issues. Under this project, the training will not be targeted to workers who have advanced knowledge of issues pertaining to domestic violence against women. It is aimed at those who work at settlement agencies, ethno-specific associations and other immigrant service organizations.

### Training Goal

The goal of the training is to enhance service to immigrant women at risk of domestic violence. The training, which will build on the current settlement service interventions, involves:

- Identifying indicators of violence against women
- Ensuring early response
- Streamlining inter-agency coordination and case management
- Providing effective support and referral

### Project Objectives

- To enhance the professional competency and skills level of service providers by:
  - Equipping workers to recognize signs of abuse and high risk
  - Enhancing the confidence of the frontline workers through knowledge building and discussion with peers
  - Helping workers to discern when and how to refer
- To improve service delivery to victims of domestic violence through enhanced coordination and linkages among immigrant service workers and other service and community workers
- To facilitate the networking and sharing of resources, information, innovative approaches and expertise among service providers, their organizations and newcomer communities
- To ensure sensitive and timely response through increased coordination among service providers

### Learning Outcomes

It is expected that, at the end of the training, participants will possess:

- Better understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and an appreciation of how women and children are entangled in a cycle of violence
- Greater awareness of the important role that education and advocacy play in preventing and responding to domestic violence
- Deeper understanding of how cultural and societal circumstances, including the immigration status of a woman, pose unique barriers to immigrant women, with respect to domestic violence, and how related barriers impact their decisions, creating the necessity for service providers to be culturally competent

- More knowledge of the legal framework that relates to immigrants, refugees and undocumented women in Ontario, and better understanding of how the legal context can be utilized to prevent and address domestic violence
- Improved ability to make effective referrals and to identify local services and resources
- Greater appreciation of the need for interagency coordination and case management
- Enhanced ability to take care of the self, and less guilt about not helping more

Although considerable domestic violence training currently exists, this training is unique because it aims to fill the gap in basic knowledge for immigrant service workers.

The training has been developed because of an identified need for frontline workers to learn about domestic abuse and to learn to recognize signs of abuse. It is, however, very important that women victims do not become the learning tools in this educational process. With these two concerns in mind, the training focuses on:

- The knowledge needed by frontline workers in contact with immigrant and refugee women
- The need for a frontline worker to locate oneself in relation to other staff in one's own organization as well as other organizations to whom victims might be referred
- Knowing how to assess the level of risk
- Recognizing how one's own personal predispositions (including preconceptions and biases and beliefs about class and culture) can have an influence on service provision
- Emphasizing the need for ongoing education to ensure effective service to abuse victims
- Determining when and how to refer, recognizing boundaries

This book is designed as a basic reading resource for service providers who do not have familiarity with woman abuse issues. As such, the material is intended to provide basic information to help frontline workers to recognize signs of abuse and to make effective referral to appropriate workers who have the qualifications and experience needed to assist abused women. It is not meant for workers who have advanced knowledge of domestic violence issues. The material on public education and inter-agency collaboration is included to stimulate discussion on how inter-agency collaboration can enhance prevention of domestic violence against immigrant women.

Brief exercises are included to assist workers' self-assessment of their knowledge of various aspects of domestic violence issues.

## **SECTION 1: THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

To effectively prevent and respond to violence against immigrant women, it is important that staff who come in direct contact with immigrant women, as well as management in organizations that serve immigrant women, understand the dynamics of domestic violence.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of this section are:

- To create awareness and understanding of the scope of domestic violence, including core characteristics and types of violence
- To give service providers an opportunity to increase knowledge about the context of domestic violence

### **1.1 WHAT DO STAFF WHO COME IN CONTACT WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VIOLENCE?**

#### **Understanding Domestic Violence**

It is helpful for workers who come into contact with immigrant women to have a clear understanding of what is meant by the term domestic violence, and to understand the nature and types of violence. This is especially important because abused victims are themselves sometimes not sure what constitutes domestic violence in Canada.

There are several terms used to denote domestic violence (e.g., violence against women, domestic abuse, spousal abuse, family violence), and these have been defined in a variety of ways by many individuals and institutions. However, internationally these terms are used to reflect:

- Acts of violence, intimidation, and other behaviours likely to cause harm
- Coercive behaviour
- Abusive, sometimes criminal, behaviour that can occur at any time during a spousal relationship
- Abusive behaviour that has a pattern or cycle
- One-sided endeavours to maintain power or control over the other

#### **Acts Causing or Likely to Cause Harm**

All of us who work with women and who wish to focus on prevention and on addressing abuse must be sensitive to the fact that “violence against women” includes any act

that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

(United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Platform for Action on Violence against Women)

### **Coercive Behaviour**

In the report *Nowhere to Turn?*, a report funded by Justice Canada, Silliman's definition of domestic violence is "a pattern of coercive control that one person exercises over another in order to get their own way" (Silliman, 1995, quoted in *Nowhere to Turn?*).

### **Abusive Behaviour Occurring at Any Time during a Spousal Relationship**

Domestic violence can occur any time during the relationship, often taking place after the relationship ends, for example during or after divorce.

### **Power and Control**

On their home page, the Texas A&M Research Foundation (TAMRF) define domestic abuse as

a pattern of behavior used to establish and maintain power or control over a domestic partner or family member. The behavior may include acts of violence, intimidation, threats, psychological abuse, isolation, etc. to coerce and control the other person. Although the violence may not happen often, the potential for violence is constantly present as a terrorizing factor.

Source: Texas A&M Research Foundation Homepage. Domestic Abuse.  
<http://rf-web.tamu.edu/security/secguide/Eap/Abuse.htm>

They further state, although "abuse may not always leave the victim with bruises or broken bones, it does always leave emotional scars whether the victim is an infant, child, spouse, or elderly parent."

### **Seriousness of Domestic Violence**

Staff working with immigrant women must therefore be aware that, however domestic violence is defined, it can be, not only criminal and coercive, but may also constitute a pattern which can deteriorate at any time and result in serious harm to the woman.

To be able to detect if a woman is abused, staff must understand that abuse against women does not occur in one form.

## **1.2 FORMS OF ABUSE**

Violence involves acts of abuse that range from threatening, intimidating and terrorizing the victim, and various forms of psychological abuse (e.g., isolation and control), which do not always leave the victim with visible physical marks, to outright physical abuse.

Examples of forms of violence include:

- Physical abuse, including sexual abuse and exploitation

- Emotional/psychological abuse/violence
- Economic or financial abuse
- Spiritual abuse

### **Physical Abuse and Sexual Violence**

Physical abuse includes use of physical force that may involve physical assault, such as pushing, pulling, slapping, beating, stabbing, punching, shaking, choking, flogging, kicking or rough handling.

Physical violence includes sexual abuse, which may involve sexual assault, in which the woman is forced to take part in unwanted sexual activity, ranging from unwanted touching, unsafe sexual activity to rape. Sexual abuse also includes a variety of behaviours that range from withholding sexual affection and criticizing the woman's sexual performance to unfairly accusing the woman of being promiscuous and strictly controlling her reproductive choices.

Physical abuse can escalate from pushing and hitting, which may start gradually and become more frequent, to weapon use and murder.

Workers who come in contact with a victim must never trivialize any form of physical abuse, however non-life threatening it may seem. Neither must they overlook the serious impact of emotional or psychological abuse and violence. Indeed a woman who is abused does not always have physical signs such as scratches on the face.

### **Emotional or Psychological Abuse and Violence**

Emotional or psychological abuse, also referred to as mental violence, includes behaviour that causes distress, grief, anguish, stress, worry and pain to the victim, even when there is no physical touching involved.

### **Exercise**

Drawing from your work, or from other experience, can you list behaviours or signals indicative of emotional or psychological abuse? Would you be able to detect abuse if a woman stated or implied that she was experiencing some of the behaviours you listed?

Examples of emotional or psychological abuse:

- Threatening behaviour
- Being verbally aggressive and offensive
- Shouting and screaming
- Behaviour causing mental anguish, including deliberately making unreasonable demands
- Publicly criticizing and humiliating
- Intimidating in private
- Undermining a woman's self-worth publicly and privately
- Isolating a woman from friends
- Engaging in violent behaviour in front of the woman (e.g., burning the victim's clothes, breaking plates, etc.)
- Blaming the woman for everything that goes wrong, even when she is not at fault

## Types of Emotional Abuse

According to Public Health Agency of Canada, emotional abuse, like other forms of domestic violence, is based on power and control. Public Health Agency of Canada outlines the following forms of emotional abuse:

**Rejecting** – refusing to acknowledge a person’s presence, value or worth; communicating to a person that she or he is useless or inferior; devaluing her or his thoughts and feelings.

**Degrading** – insulting, ridiculing, name calling, imitating and infantilizing, and behaviour which diminishes the identity, dignity and self-worth of the person. Examples include yelling, swearing, publicly humiliating or labelling a person as stupid; mimicking a person’s disability; treating a senior as if she or he cannot make decisions.

**Terrorizing** – inducing terror or extreme fear in a person; coercing by intimidation; placing or threatening to place a person in an unfit or dangerous environment; physically hurting or killing a person or pets the victim cares about; threatening to destroy the victim’s possessions; threatening to have a person deported or put in an institution; stalking.

**Isolating** – physically confining; restricting normal contact with others; limiting freedom within the victim’s environment. Examples include keeping a senior from participating in decisions about her or his own life; locking a child in a closet or room alone; refusing a female partner or a senior access to her or his own money and financial affairs; withholding contact with grandchildren; depriving a person of mobility aids or transportation.

**Corrupting and Exploiting** – socializing a person into accepting ideas or behaviour that are inconsistent with legal standards; using a person for advantage or profit; training a child to serve the interests of the abuser and not of the child. Examples include child sexual abuse; permitting a child to use alcohol or drugs; enticing a person into the sex trade.

**Denying Emotional Responsiveness** – failing to provide care in a sensitive and responsive manner; being detached and uninvolved; interacting only when necessary; ignoring a person’s mental health needs. Examples include ignoring a child’s attempt to interact; failing to show affection, caring or love for a child; treating a senior who lives in an institution as though she or he is an object or burden.

Source: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. Public Health Agency of Canada. What is Emotional Abuse.  
[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/fvemotion\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/fvemotion_e.html)

Emotional abuse can also be a result of neglect, when the abuser purposely denies or refuses to procure food and other necessities, including medication, even when he has sufficient financial resources to do so.

It should be noted that emotional abuse may occur independently or as part of other forms of abuse.

### **Criminal Harassment or Stalking**

As indicated in the legal notes developed by the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) as part of this domestic violence project, stalking and harassment are criminal acts that are also categorized as a type of emotional abuse.

### **Economic or Financial Abuse**

Economic or financial abuse occurs when the abuser takes control of all the family finances. In this circumstance, the woman is not allowed to make any finance-related choices, and may not even be allowed to use any part of her own paycheque without the abuser's permission.

### **Spiritual Abuse**

Spiritual abuse involves the abuser controlling the victim's decisions relating to religion, dictating to which religion she must belong, and expressing hostility or ridiculing the beliefs and religious values of the victim.

## **1.3 DYNAMICS OF AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP**

There are different reasons for the occurrence of woman abuse. Some may link abuse to medical reasons, such as the mental health of the abuser. A principal reason is the power imbalance between men and women in society, which can be influenced by the relative economic circumstances of the abuser and the abused. Power imbalances can also revolve around many other circumstances, for example, the immigration status of the abuser and the abused.

Characteristics of the abuser, together with the social and economic context, determine the dynamics of an abusive relationship and the cycle of violence. The victim may be experiencing poverty and be dependent on the abuser. Whether or not she understands the law, she may not be able (e.g., economically) to act upon knowledge of her rights to end the abuse or to leave the abuser.

While there are some cases where women contribute to the conflict, they are usually victims. Oftentimes the woman is so completely traumatized by the abuser that she fears to antagonize, or in any way anger the abuser, and tends to placate him instead.

## **1.4 THE CYCLE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Usually, in private, abusers are overbearing and vicious to their partners and the abuse often escalates to physical brutality and intense continuous emotional abuse. The abuser may be irritable, bad tempered, and prone to rage. He may call the woman names, shout and scream at her, break household items, or speak disapprovingly of how the woman behaved in public. He may physically strike her.

After this abusive episode, he may switch character and suddenly behave lovingly to the woman, and demand that they engage in sexual activity. The victim, in fear, may consent to this, even when she

does not wish to. If she is unwilling to engage in the sexual activity, he may take offence at the rejection and physically hurt her.

The next morning he may become loving toward her again, do helpful things (e.g., preparing breakfast for the family), and apologize to her profusely for his behaviour, promising not to do it again, while at the same time maintaining that she caused him to behave poorly. After a calmer period for a few days or weeks, the violence and emotional abuse may begin again. This pattern of behaviour may dominate the life of an abused woman and may go unnoticed and unreported.

In public, abusers can often masterfully conceal their abusive nature. Because they can be charming, abusers can fool friends and relatives. Even the untrained service provider can be deceived by the practiced abuser who can make the victim's story seem doubtful. When in public without his partner, the abuser can be pleasant and likable. When with his partner in public, abusers can be intentionally attentive and make displays of affection to mask the abusiveness.

On the other hand, the abuser may subject his partner to constant public humiliation, making jokes about and ridiculing her (e.g., appearance, cooking) or he may criticize her publicly for small things he deems flaws. The enormous stress such treatment can cause the victim in the private sphere becomes even greater in the public sphere. The victim may fear to do or say anything in case it leads to more humiliation or reprimand.

It may become obvious to those around that the relationship is problematic, and a trained service provider coming in contact with the two will identify the presence of abuse in the relationship.

The concept of the cycle of violence originated with Lenore Walker in her 1979 book, *The Battered Woman*. While not all domestic violence cases correspond to this exact cycle, it serves as a useful model. Walker observed that many domestic violence situations usually begin with **tension building**, during which the abuser gets angry and the victim makes desperate attempts to calm the abuser. Following this is the **making up** period, in which the abuser may apologize for the abuse and makes promises that the tension situation will not occur again, often blaming the victim for having caused the abuse or denying that the abuse took place. The victim may then experience a **calm period**, accepting gifts and hoping that the abuse is over.

Others, for example the National Women's Health Resource Centre, have characterized the cycle sequence as involving three different phases:

**Phase 1:** Tension Builds – the abuser may threaten or physically abuse the victim, and the victim may do whatever is possible to calm him, believing she can prevent a violent incident, even though she usually fails;

**Phase 2:** Violence Occurs – the abuser often hits or sexually abuses the victim; and

**Phase 3:** Honeymoon Phase – the abuser apologizes and promises to stop the abuse, usually blaming the victim. Often, the victim believes in the apologies and forgives the abuser for the violence. However, the cycle resumes and the violence occurs again.

Source: Walker, Lenore. Dynamics of Domestic Violence – The Cycle of Violence. Retrieved <http://www.enddomesticviolence.com/include/content/filehyperlink/holder/The%20Cycle%20of%20Violence.doc>

## Exercise

Why do the above complex dynamics of domestic violence require the worker to be alert when dealing with women who might be abused?

- The encounter with the woman may be at a time when the woman is experiencing the honeymoon phase and she may not be ready or willing to disclose the abuse, either in the hope that the abuse will end, or due to the belief that she has some respite before the next affront
- If a woman is experiencing emotional abuse, it may be difficult to read the signs
- The worker has to be skilled and attentive because undetected abuse may lead to serious harm

It is crucial that workers fully comprehend the dynamics as well as the consequences of domestic violence, to help them understand the importance of detecting, preventing and addressing violence.

## 1.5 POWER AND CONTROL ISSUES

### Violence against Women: A Crime of Power and Control

Many who work with victims of domestic abuse as well as those who have experienced spousal abuse realize how “violence against women, also known as interpersonal violence, is a crime of power and control. It occurs in the context of many different types of relationships and takes many forms.”

Indeed, the Assaulted Women’s Helpline webpage outlines how

Violence against women is also a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and the prevention of women’s full advancement.

Source: Assaulted Women’s Help Line Web Page. Some Facts About Abuse.  
<http://www.awhl.org/abuse.htm>

### Power and Control Wheel

This diagram illustrates examples of dominating behaviour which is often minimized or unrecognized by partners and society.



Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Program. Domestic Violence: Power and Control Wheels. Duluth, Minnesota. <http://www.turningpointservices.org/tpmain.htm>

### Power and Control Wheel Specific to Immigrant Women



This version of the Power & Control Wheel was adapted by the Foundation for the Prevention of Family Violence, San Francisco, with permission from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota. It examines some of the different forms in which women who are immigrants can be abused because they are immigrants. This English wheel was translated from the [Spanish](#) by [CaNetiq](#).

Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. Hotpeachpages.  
<http://www.hotpeachpages.net/images/immigrantpower.html>

## **SECTION 2: IDENTIFYING INDICATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

### **2.1 RECOGNIZING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE: HOW WOULD YOU KNOW IF A WOMAN IS IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?**

Domestic violence leaves the victims traumatized, often with long-term consequences. Sometimes violence results in fatality. It is important that frontline staff working with women not only recognize the magnitude of the consequences of violence, but also educate themselves on how to recognize signs of abuse, with a view to helping to prevent and address abuse.

In the case of immigrant women, the need for reading signs of abuse is even more critical, due to the reluctance among many immigrant communities to report abuse, and due to the belief some women have that disclosing abuse jeopardizes their chance of becoming landed immigrants or Canadian citizens. Reluctance to report may also be caused by lack of familiarity with the Canadian legal system and unawareness of their human rights or of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of this section are:

- To increase service providers' understanding of the need to look for physical, behavioural and emotional signs, given the scope and nature of abuse
- To increase service providers' ability to make important observations and to ask questions that can enable them to assess whether the woman is abused or at risk of abuse
- To enhance participants' knowledge of the consequences of domestic violence and to create awareness of the importance of preventing and addressing domestic violence against immigrant women

#### **Important Elements of Abuse Identification**

It is important to recognize that:

- The abused woman could be any woman, irrespective of race, class or wealth
- Violence against women occurs in different forms and is often psychological (e.g., threats, intimidation and fear)
- The victim may have emotional and psychological affliction rather than physical bruises and visible scars
- The woman may be experiencing the stage in the cycle of violence when the partner's abuse is latent
- The woman may be in denial and not admit that she is abused

Even though the woman may not mention the abuse, for a variety of practical reasons, the abused woman may be secretly hoping that the frontline workers and service providers may recognize the abuse.

## **Learning to Read the Physical and Emotional Signs**

Because the victim of violence may not have physical signs of abuse, it is necessary to learn how to discern from a woman's conversation and from observations of the physical and behavioural signs, if she is in an abusive relationship. Learning about the woman's partner and about the woman herself helps when determining if abuse exists.

## **Learning about the Woman's Partner through Conversation**

When engaged in a conversation with the woman, it is possible to learn about the abusive situation, based on what she may say about her partner. She might reveal, for example, that her partner:

- Pushed, shook, slapped or physically assaulted her, or engaged in some form of aggressive behaviour
- Has the tendency to destroy property when angry
- Yells and uses abusive language when they are alone or in public
- Forces her to have unwanted sexual activity (e.g., rape) or sexually harasses her
- Confines her or forces her to stay at home if she wishes to go to visit her friends or relatives
- Humiliates and criticizes her repeatedly in private or in public
- Undermines her self-confidence
- Deprives her emotionally
- Stalks and harasses her at her place of work in person or by phone
- Killed a pet in anger
- Hits children or locks them in a room or closet on their own
- Denies her access to money, whether it is hers or his
- Prevents her from working, attending school, or going to place of worship she has chosen
- Prevents her from attending social functions on her own
- Allows children to use drugs and alcohol
- Tracks the woman's time
- Has affairs with other women but repeatedly and unfairly accuses her of flirting with other men
- Gets upset when she dresses up

While dealing with settlement-related or other issues, the woman might say she is frightened of deportation as a result of the husband's actions.

## **Learning about the Victim through Conversation**

In discussion with her, does she mention that she:

- Feels useless and unworthy?
- Would leave the husband but has nowhere to go?
- Would kill herself, if it were not for her children?
- Lost time at work due to problems with the partner?

## Observable Behaviour

There are certain observable indicators that help when trying to determine the presence of abuse. It is important to ask oneself:

- Does she show a lack of self-worth and self-esteem?
- How does she treat her child in my presence? Does she frighten the child?
- Does she appear extremely nervous and anxious? What might be the cause of the nervousness?
- Does she appear fearful?
- Is she excessively silent?
- Does she find it difficult to focus, listen, or remember?
- Is she prone to extreme emotions (e.g., weeping or anger)?

Physical and emotion signs when observed in conjunction with the consideration of pertinent questions can help to determine whether the woman is, or has been, experiencing abuse.

## Emotional or Psychological Abuse

- Is there deliberate deprivation at material and emotional level?
- Are there other forms of emotional abuse?
- Is there harassment and stalking?
- Does she appear frightened and uneasy?
- Does she appear to be abusing drugs?
- Does she appear to be irrational?

## Physical Abuse

- How does the woman appear?
- Are there physical signs of abuse, such as physical injuries or observable scars, scratches on the body or face, arms, neck, etc,
- Does she look physically exhausted?

## Observing the Partner

One can learn a lot by observing the partner. For example, does he

- Degrade the woman in your presence?
- Make unreasonable demands of the woman?
- Reject all the woman's opinions?
- Frequently accuse her or put her down?
- Hit or threaten the children?
- Ignore the woman or children, even when they try to communicate with him?
- Switch character from respectful when speaking to you to harsh when speaking with her?

### **Other Points to Observe and Questions to Ask**

- Does the woman reveal that she has no support network outside her home?
- Does she put herself down and blame herself for everything (e.g., things for which she is clearly not at fault, such as her and her husband's unemployment)?
- Does family responsibility not seem well balanced?
- Does she complain that her chronic illness or disability is getting worse due to the partner's treatment?

### **Assessment System to Avoid Prejudging**

It is important to ensure women's safety. However, this does not mean that a service provider should look for and treat every immigrant woman as a victim and every immigrant man as an abuser. The key is to:

- Identify whether the woman is from a vulnerable group (e.g., without immigration status or financially dependent)
- Recognize signs of anxiety and abuse through an established assessment system that treats every one in a similar manner
- Develop or adapt an assessment system in the organization to facilitate identification of abuse

## **2.2 CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Staff in organizations working with immigrant and refugee women must be aware of the serious consequences of domestic violence because:

- This will increase their understanding of the important role they can play in preventing and addressing domestic violence
- In extreme circumstances, loss of life is the ultimate consequence of domestic violence

Serious consequences of domestic violence against women include:

- Health consequences for the abused woman
- Consequences to children
- Consequences for the abuser
- Financial and other consequences to society

### **Consequences of Domestic Violence for the Victim**

Domestic violence against women has serious short- and long-term consequences to the victim. These range from health to socio-economic issues.

The health impact may be physical, psychological or behavioural. The extent of the impact depends on the nature of the violence and on the duration of abuse.

### *Physical Impact*

Some examples of the physical impact on the victim include:

- Long-term as well as immediate physical injury that may include broken bones, broken teeth, burns, cuts, etc.
- Development of physical illness such as headaches and hypertension as a result of stress, and other problems such as lack of sleep
- Development of gynecological problems

### *Psychological and Behavioural Consequences the Victim*

These include:

- Varying degrees of depression and trauma
- Irritability toward children
- Nervousness, phobias and panic attacks
- Memory loss
- Sleep and eating disorders
- Sexual disorders
- Suicidal tendencies
- Difficulty concentrating
- Behavioural problems (e.g., inability to trust people or form friendships, insecurity, loss of self-esteem, tendency to cry, misplaced anger, etc.)
- Inability to deal with people in the presence or absence of the abuser, for fear of annoying the abuser
- Inability to distinguish right from wrong due to constant condemnation and reprimand
- Difficulty taking risks
- High-risk behaviour such as promiscuity, drug or alcohol abuse

### **Other Impacts on the Victim**

Together with the physical and psychological impact there are also a number of existential challenges associated with having an abusive partner:

- Difficulty or inability for the victim to hold down a job due to:
  - Disruption of family life, as she may have to go to a shelter with or without children
  - Failure to concentrate
- Isolation, having been prohibited from associating with any friends, relatives, or with anyone outside the family

It is not uncommon, given the undue stress victims of domestic violence endure, that they develop symptoms similar to those of individuals affected by war or disaster.

## Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Children who experience domestic violence and abuse may not only suffer from physical abuse at the hands of either partner, but also suffer emotional abuse that has immediate and lasting effects. Children who witness or hear serious assaults on their mothers may:

- Be insecure and overly fearful
- Lack confidence
- Tend to misunderstand boundaries
- Tend to distrust adults and authority figures
- Have the belief that they are worthless, and experience feelings of shame
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Have dysfunctional relationships with adults and with other children

## Consequences of Domestic Violence for the Abuser

The consequences may include:

- Destroyed relationships
- Involvement in the criminal justice or child welfare systems
- In extreme circumstances, loss of life, sometimes at their own hands or those of their victims

## Financial Costs to Society

Consequences to society include:

- Disruption of social and societal fabric due to family breakdown, and alienation of some victims from the community
- Disruption of lives, including those of children

Financial consequences to society caused by domestic violence vary from costs for treating the physical, psychological and emotional conditions of the victim, including treating children who have been involved in the violence, to legal costs, advocacy costs, shelter costs, etc.

According to the Department of Justice Canada,

violence against women, including woman abuse in intimate relationships...costs Canadian society an estimated \$4.2 billion per year in social services, education, criminal justice, labour, employment, health and medical costs. Criminal justice costs alone total an estimated \$871,908,582.00 per year. The total costs related to all forms of family violence have yet to be calculated but would clearly be much higher.

Source: Department of Justice Canada. Family Violence: A Fact Sheet.

[http://prevention-dividend.com/en/research/family\\_violence.pdf](http://prevention-dividend.com/en/research/family_violence.pdf)

In a Statistics Canada's National Survey on Violence against Women, funded by Health Canada, Tanis Day estimates, "The total of the measurable costs related to health and well-being alone amounts to \$1,539,650,387 per year." According to Day, "This is just the tip of the iceberg." For

example, she has not included the costs of hospital admissions in this figure since it is not known what proportion of women injured through abuse were admitted for stays in hospitals.”

According to Health Canada Violence against Women Fact Sheets,

The measurable health-related costs of violence against women in Canada exceed \$1.5 billion a year,” in the form of “short-term medical and dental treatment for injuries”; “long-term physical and psychological care” due to physical injuries; hospital and other medical bills; “lost time at work”; and “use of transition homes and crisis centres.

Source: Health Canada. Healthy Living. Fact Sheets on Women's Health: Violence Against Women.  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/women-femmes/fi-if/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/women-femmes/fi-if/index_e.html)

### **2.3 RISK FACTORS AND CONDITIONS THAT LEAVE WOMEN VULNERABLE TO ABUSE**

Many risk factors not only make women vulnerable to abuse but also make it difficult for them to end the violence by leaving the relationship. These factors may also contribute to the cycle of violence that characterizes domestic abuse.

Numerous agencies, including the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the National Women’s Health Resource Centre, and many researchers have identified the following factors that make a woman vulnerable to abuse:

- Being young (18-24) or being elderly (65 or older)
- Being disabled
- Being Aboriginal
- Having experienced or witnessed abuse
- Having a verbally abusive or jealous and possessive partner
- Dependence, including economic dependence and poverty
- Difficulty accessing available services
- Ideological beliefs and values
- Isolation and lack of social support
- Fear of being judged or criticized
- Difficulty of getting detached from the abuser
- Feelings of powerlessness
- Language challenges
- Feeling of shame and dishonour
- Feeling of being marginalized and devalued

#### **Young or Elderly**

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada

Women younger than 25 years of age are at higher risk than other women of experiencing violence in their relationships. These women are also at higher risk than others of being killed by their current or ex-husbands or common-law partners.

Source: Health Canada. A handbook for Health and Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Woman Abuse/Family Violence.  
[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/femexpose\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/femexpose_e.html)

Abundant literature exists reporting the particular susceptibility of women in their senior years to a variety of abuses, including domestic abuse.

### **Being Disabled**

Women with disabilities are estimated to be 1.5 to 10 times more likely to be abused than are non-disabled women, depending on whether or not they live in a community or institutional setting. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada,

Abuse against women with disabilities includes a wide range of behaviours that women who are not disabled may not experience. For example, women with disabilities often have to rely on others to help them with mobility, toileting, eating, bathing or other daily tasks. This dependence requires quite intimate relationships with a wide range of others, including partners, caregivers, health professionals, transportation providers and other family members. Dependence on a large network of relationships increases the chances that a woman who is disabled will experience abuse.

Source: Health Canada. A handbook for Health and Social Service Providers and Educators on Children Exposed to Woman Abuse/Family Violence.  
[http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/femexpose\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/femexpose_e.html)

### **Being Aboriginal**

There is considerable research indicating First Nations and Inuit women experience violence at exceedingly high rates. “In one Ontario study, 8 out of 10 Aboriginal women had experienced violence in their relationships. Of these, 87 percent were physically injured, and 57 percent were sexually abused. An estimated 75 to 90 percent of women in some northern Aboriginal communities have been physically abused” (Public Health Agency of Canada).

### **Effects of Previous Abuse**

Previous experience of violence can leave victims with feelings of helplessness and an inability to believe that they can stand up against abuse. Women raised in a violent environment might, because of familiarity, view abuse as normal.

### **Relationship Factors**

Public Health Agency of Canada stresses how certain factors can increase a woman’s vulnerability to abuse. For example, a woman is more likely to experience abuse if her partner is young (18-24), unemployed for a long period, has little formal education, drinks alcohol immoderately, or has at an early age witnessed violence toward his mother. Women in common law relationships tend to be at higher risk of abuse than women who are married. Moreover, it has been established that when a woman either threatens to leave or leaves the abusive partner, the risk of violence, including being killed, is greatly increased. This is because the abusive partner sees this as a challenge to his desire for power and control.

## **Verbally Abusive Jealous and Possessive Partner**

A jealous and possessive partner is more likely to be abusive. The abuse is even more likely where the partner or both individuals use alcohol or illicit drugs.

### **Dependence**

This includes psychological, financial or physical dependence that results in the abuser having power. In some cases, the abuser may be a caregiver or other provider.

Poverty is a major challenge and one of the greatest risk factors that keeps the victim in an abusive and dangerous relationship. Without financial resources of her own, poverty or fear of poverty make it very difficult for a woman to leave. The risk of economic dependence is increased with lack of employment, which is exacerbated by lack of skills or experience. The situation is even more precarious when women have children, as they often fear leaving will render them unable to provide adequate support. Dependence and lack of economic power therefore makes women more vulnerable.

### **Lack of Easily Accessible Services**

Abused women sometimes have difficulty accessing affordable housing and other necessary services. Subsequently, they may not be able to take the necessary risk of leaving their abusive situation because they lack uncomplicated alternatives. The idea of staying with her children in a shelter is often dispiriting.

### **Institutional Constraints**

Many times, institutions, including places of worship, reinforce the bond of marriage and may discourage the victim from leaving an abusive relationship. Sometimes police personnel and prosecutors fail to treat domestic abuse as a serious crime, and may even dissuade the victim from filing a complaint or prosecuting the abuser. Knowing that restraining orders are not terribly effective and because certain institutional obstacles seem insurmountable, victims sometimes decide to stay in the relationship, convinced they will get little or no support if they leave.

### **Ideological Beliefs and Values**

A woman's ideological beliefs may pose a challenge to the woman's ability to leave an abusive relationship. For example, if a woman believes that children must grow up with both parents, at whatever cost, she may not be inclined to leave an abusive situation if children are involved.

### **Isolation and Lack of Social Support**

The abuser may actively isolate the victim from relatives and friends. Without social networks, the victim may have no one to turn to and may find herself isolated. In a study of rural women and violence, it was found that many of the women who had experienced abuse in their relationships had been moved by their partners to rural isolated areas (Jiwani et al., 1998). As well, the abuser may ensure isolation from institutional support by intimidating the victim, discouraging her from having contact with any individual, group or institution that might intervene.

## **Fear of Judgment or Criticism**

Many women may see the fact that they are abused as shameful, and may not tell, due to fear of being despised or misjudged and held culpable. They may fear being judged for jeopardizing their marriage, especially in cases where the woman feels pressured by family, friends or members of the community to keep the family together.

## **Challenges of Leaving the Abuser**

For a variety of reasons, including material dependency, or due to still having feelings for the abuser, some women find it emotionally difficult to break the attachment with the abuser. Some women believe the abuser loves them, some find reasons and excuses for their partner's abuse, others believe the abuse will change.

## **Powerlessness**

Victims of abuse are usually unable to stop the violence against them and find it difficult to change their personal situation. Victims may feel powerless not only physically, because the abuser is usually stronger than them, but also legally, socially and in other respects. Despair and hopelessness and lack of confidence and self-esteem typically accompany feelings of powerlessness, which does not facilitate leaving an abusive relationship. Victims often feel depressed and may be unable to make rational decisions.

## **Language Challenges**

Language limitations can be an important barrier to a victim of violence. Women who do not speak either of the Canadian official languages may not be in position to communicate with anyone, as translation services may not be readily available to them. Even when translation is available, it may be from members of the community or from family members, which may make it difficult for the abused woman to disclose because of privacy and confidentiality concerns.

## **Shame and Dishonour**

Some women who are in a situation of abuse do not inform anyone and do not leave the dangerous situation for fear of being stigmatized and judged, and consequently facing further isolation. In some communities, stigmatization may occur when members of another race, sexual orientation and class are involved.

## **Being Marginalized and Devalued**

In a society in which the socially powerful tend to marginalize and exclude those without means and power, many abused women experience alienation and isolation. They feel they must cope by themselves, even when their survival strategies are limited by what they can do without support from society. In fact, cultural and societal issues not only make immigrant women vulnerable to abuse but also form further barriers for the immigrant women who are already experiencing domestic abuse.

## **2.4 RELUCTANCE OF SOME VICTIMS TO REVEAL THE ABUSE**

Sometimes, despite the trauma, depression or the physical ailments that the victim might be suffering, she may be in a state of denial and may not admit she needs help. It is, however, important for the worker to prevent or address abuse because, in extreme circumstances, the consequence of domestic violence is loss of life.

## **SECTION 3: CULTURAL ISSUES AND COMPETENCIES RELATED TO ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN**

### **CULTURAL ISSUES AND COMPETENCIES IN PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN ETHNOCULTURAL AND NEW CANADIAN COMMUNITIES**

It is important for service providers who are in direct contact with immigrant women, not only to understand the dynamics of violence against women, but also to understand the cultural issues that can hinder or help to enhance the prevention of and response to domestic violence against immigrant women.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of this section are:

- To highlight the societal dimension of domestic violence, with a view to aiding service providers in understanding the nature of challenges that immigrant women face when dealing with domestic violence
- To enhance understanding of why immigrant women experiencing domestic violence might not seek help
- To review options available to victims of abuse (e.g., safety planning if a woman remains in the abusive relationship)
- To help service providers determine the kind of assistance they need to provide in order to prevent or address domestic violence against immigrant women in a sensitive and appropriate manner

#### **3.1 CHALLENGES FACED BY IMMIGRANT WOMEN**

Domestic violence occurs in different cultures and affects women of all backgrounds. All women who are victims of domestic violence live in fear and suffer physical and emotional abuse. Immigrant women can be especially vulnerable to partner abuse because of being newcomers: their precarious immigration status (e.g., sponsored or non-status) can cause them to fear reporting the abuse, as many have come as dependants or spouses. Some immigrant women become vulnerable because their partner develops abusive behaviours as a result of being frustrated by daunting challenges in the host country.

#### **Exercise**

What do you see as challenges facing men and women in new Canadian societies? How do these impact spousal relationships?

### **3.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY SOME IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN IN THE DIVERSE CANADIAN SOCIETY**

Challenges include the following:

- Need to adapt to a new way of life in the host country
- Exposure to abuse for the first time and lack of knowledge about how to end the violence
- Dependence on spouse for status in Canada
- Financial dependency on spouse
- Isolation and absence of social support
- Reluctance to report abuse due to potential hostility from ethnic community or family members
- Misinformation and threats by the abuser
- Unfamiliarity with Canadian system
- Lack of language competence
- Absence of professional interpretation and translation facilities in some areas
- Lack of knowledge of the existence of free translation and interpretation services
- Reluctance to report abuse due to fear of children being taken away
- Insufficient economic power necessary required to motivate or enable independence
- Dire economic situation even for highly qualified women
- Health challenges that include inadequate response to issues related to abused immigrant women

#### **Multicultural Nature of Canadian Society that Necessitates Service Providers' Cultural Awareness**

Because Canada is a multicultural country, immigrant women in Canada belong to many different races and cultures.

When service providers are not knowledgeable about an immigrant woman's cultural background and the immigration-related issues that she might face, they fail to understand the victim's reasoning and choices. As a result, service providers sometimes suggest solutions that are not appropriate or culturally sensitive.

#### **Adaptation from Patriarchal Societies**

Some of Canada's recent immigrants come from societies in which the man traditionally holds the position of superior, and is not frowned upon if he physically dominates the partner. Having to follow Canadian rules requiring that a woman be treated equal is maddening to some men. This loss of power and control can turn to frustration and violence toward the woman, making some immigrant women more vulnerable to abuse.

#### **First Exposure to Abuse**

Many women who come to Canada have never experienced abuse before, having lived in closely-knit communities with strict traditional taboos establishing and regulating limits to male authority. Some women are completely traumatized to find themselves in a situation where, due to economic and

social pressures, they are for the first time experiencing partner abuse and have no skills or knowledge to deal with the violence.

### **Dependence on Men for Status in Canada**

Many immigrant women arrive in Canada as dependants whose husband may have made the choice to immigrate. For a variety of reasons, including systemic reasons in the case of racialized minorities, many men are unable to find a job upon arrival in Canada. A man's frustration resulting from loss of economic status, combined with the sudden loss of social status, may develop into misguided anger toward his wife, which may eventually lead to domestic violence.

### **Isolation and Absence of Social Support**

A characteristic of many immigrant women is that they belong to small ethnic communities. Some immigrant women are completely isolated from any community, particularly since many are not employed and therefore have no job-related network. Many immigrant women lack the kind of social supports that they may have had in their country of origin. Isolation makes women more susceptible to domestic violence as the abuser knows the woman does not have a support system that will challenge him or bring him to account.

### **Reluctance to Report Abuse: Fear of Community or Family Reprisal**

Due to the beliefs and family values held in some communities, an immigrant woman may be shunned if abuse is reported to the authorities. This is particularly true where the religious and social beliefs do not sanction family breakups.

### **Misinformation and Threats**

Often, the abusive partner deliberately misinforms the immigrant woman about her rights and status. This is an even more serious problem in the case where the woman may not speak or read any of the official languages and is not able to obtain the information directly. In many cases, the abused woman is kept isolated from family and friends, and from anyone who speaks her language or poses a potential threat to the abuser. Consequently, without a network, or having a limited one at best, and experiencing intimidation and threats from the abuser, the woman may fear being deported if she reveals the abuse to any one.

### **Unfamiliarity with Canadian System**

Many women are unfamiliar with their rights and have insufficient knowledge of the way the Canadian legal system works. They may have a general distrust of the police and court system and may not believe it can work for their protection.

### **Lack of Language Competence**

Many immigrant women who speak neither of Canada's official languages are vulnerable. Abusive husbands often do not allow the victim to learn the official languages, English in particular. Immigrant women who cannot speak the official languages find themselves isolated, which makes them vulnerable, as their abusers know they are powerless to act to prevent the abuse. Worse,

language limitations reduce an immigrant woman's access to employment, further depriving her of any opportunity she might have had to meet more people and be less financially dependent.

### **Absence of Professional Interpretation and Translation Facilities**

Lack of interpretation services is a serious barrier with respect to domestic violence against immigrant women. An abused woman may go to a domestic violence agency, but may fail to get the required assistance because there may be no one available to translate. When an immigrant woman does not speak English, she may decide to resort to contacts (e.g., a family doctor) who speak her language. Unfortunately, in such situations, a woman may not disclose the abuse for fear that the husband may learn of it. This is true for meetings with service providers, where the abusive man is often the interpreter for the woman.

### **Lack of Knowledge of the Existence of Free Interpretation and Translation Facilities**

Even when free interpretation and translation facilities exist, the woman or the service provider may not be aware of where they are located and either may not seek services or may go to inappropriate organizations to seek help.

### **Reluctance to Report Abuse Due To Fear of Children Being Taken Away**

Many women fear that reporting abuse will put them at risk of losing their children to child protection authorities.

### **Insufficient Economic Power**

Victims of domestic violence also tend to experience economic abuse. This involves the abuser denying the victim access to family finances, restricting her from handling cheques, often including her own paycheque, not taking an interest in and not providing support for the woman with respect to her job, constantly harassing her about why she does or does not work. Sometimes the abuser may threaten to report, or he may in fact report, the woman to authorities, if she works without the appropriate work permit. Usually this is done to prevent the woman from becoming financially independent and to keep the woman in fear so that she does not dare talk to anyone about the abuse. The abuser may prevent the woman from attending any type of training, for the purpose of denying her the knowledge and skills that would enable her to find employment and become more independent.

### **Threats and Intimidation**

An abused immigrant woman may be intimidated in various ways. The abuser may destroy important official documents and items that she holds dear, such as souvenirs, certificates or family pictures. If she shows any ability to expose the abuse, the abuser may threaten to report, and may even report the victim to immigration authorities. He may threaten to take away the children or to abandon efforts to legalize her immigration status. Being so intimidated, the victim may have difficulty believing it is possible to find an individual she can trust to give her advice, information, or other assistance.

## **Dependent Relationship**

Given the dependency relationship and reliance on the abuser, and the environment of threat and intimidation in which she lives, the woman may feel powerless and unable to take action. Lacking information, she may have no hope of changing her situation. Coping with unemployment, insufficient financial resources, fear of immigration authorities, and having no skills to bring hope of future employment, the abused woman may decide to stay with the abuser, especially where there are children involved.

## **Dire Economic Situation**

Economic problems that make women more vulnerable to abuse due to the domination of the male partner (who may be the main provider or who may also be unemployed and frustrated) are not restricted to immigrant women. Immigrant women, however, face enormous challenges finding employment in Canada because their foreign-earned degrees and certificates are often not recognized by Canadian regulating bodies and by many employers. Many do not even have the possibility of licensure, which makes it even more difficult for them to imagine having a future in a well-paid job. As various studies have indicated, visible minority women in particular encounter immense job-related challenges because of systemic barriers. Even many highly educated immigrant women find themselves unemployed and lacking economic independence, which makes leaving an abusive situation difficult.

## **Health Challenges and Inadequate Response**

From the health point of view, it has been noted (e.g., Jiwani et al., 2001) that physicians sometimes “trivialize” women’s health issues. In health facilities where there is no screening for domestic violence, the response in relation to immigrant women who have been abused is inadequate. Sometimes a woman’s mental health is not considered in the context of violence, even when this may be a significant cause. When time constraints do not enable proper assessment of a patient, consequences can be serious.

## **Additional Abuse Due to Racism**

When immigrant women are married to non-ethnic group members, they sometimes experience racism from their partners and that may add other dimensions to the causes of abuse.

### **3.3 SERVICE PROVIDERS’ LIMITED CULTURAL AWARENESS**

Sometimes, a woman may face barriers related to service providers’ limited cultural awareness. Barriers related to service providers’ lack of cultural awareness include the following:

A service provider

- Having an ethnocentric view when dealing with abused women
- Contributing additional abuse due to racism, ageism, sexism and ableism
- Lacking awareness of culturally sensitive issues that impact the abused immigrant woman (e.g., female genital mutilation (FGM), war crimes, arranged marriages)

- Using his/her own moral and ethical judgment in evaluating an abused woman's situation
- Contrasting their professional status to that of the abused woman (e.g., acting like an authority and making decisions for the woman because it is assumed she lacks education)
- Generalizing in relation to an ethnocultural group (e.g., believing that all Africans have the same needs)
- Not adapting safety planning to the abused woman of a different culture (e.g., providing shelters when that is something with which the woman is not familiar)

### **Limited Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity**

- Although immigrant women share common experiences with other victims of domestic violence, many service providers are not sensitive to the unique challenges faced by immigrant victims of domestic violence
- Service providers are sometimes frustrated by the immigrant woman's reluctance to report abuse or to leave the abusive environment
- Service providers may mistakenly think it is best to refer the victim to an agency within their community where staff speak the language and understand the culture, but the victim may not wish to have her situation known by anybody in her community, and language may not even be an issue

Making referral decisions based on wrong assumptions about the victim's needs may result in an inappropriate response.

### **Role of Immigration Status**

Many service providers do not have accurate knowledge relating to both domestic violence and immigration law. This means that they are not able to provide accurate information or appropriate referrals and other services to the immigrant women who experience domestic violence. Many service providers need more training about sponsored or non-status women and their rights. This will enable them to know how to provide appropriate assistance. They also need to familiarize themselves with the protocols in their organization.

## **3.4 WORKING WITH IMMIGRANT AND RACIALIZED WOMEN**

Given the overwhelmingly vulnerable situation faced by immigrant women, there is need for more sensitive and more appropriate responses to violence against immigrant women. Below are some suggestions relating to how to ensure effective response. The suggestions reflect the multicultural environment in and policies of Canada:

### **Ensure Official Multiculturalism Policy of Canada Is Followed When Providing Services**

It is very important to:

- Ensure that the service provision (prevention and response) acknowledges awareness of the diversity of the immigrant women
- Ensure sensitivity to the beliefs and values of the woman concerned
- Ensure that service staff accumulate diverse cultural knowledge and cultural awareness

- Ensure that all workers in agencies that serve immigrants are culturally and religiously sensitive

The Multiculturalism Policy of the Government of Canada:

- “recognize[s] the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance[s] their development
- [strives to] ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity
- [strives to] preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada”

Source: Canadian Heritage. Canadian Multiculturalism Act. 1985.  
[http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/policy/act\\_e.cfm](http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/policy/act_e.cfm)

### **Ensure Service Staff Accumulate Diverse Cultural Knowledge and Cultural Awareness**

One of the ways of ensuring the implementation of Canada’s multiculturalism policy is for all individual service providers who work with immigrant women to augment their knowledge of the wide variety of cultures served by their organization.

To achieve this end, Adam’s definition of “cultural knowledge” is useful: “Familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group” (Adams, 1995).

Knowledge acquisition assists service providers to become more culturally sensitive and better able to understand the beliefs, values, and choices of immigrant women from different ethnic groups.

It is essential for workers to:

- Check their own personal values, their biases, and their attitudes
- Aim to be objective, understanding cultural and community factors that impact individuals’ choices
- Respond to the issue of domestic violence in accordance with the facts and circumstances specific to the victim, not through one’s own lens
- Listen to and interact with the victim without being judgmental about her cultural beliefs

Through self-monitoring and remaining open and sensitive to other cultural groups, service providers are able to approach their work with abused women in a more flexible manner.

Some useful definitions relating to cross cultural attitudes made by the National Resource Center can assist with the process of monitoring one’s perceptions, and those of one’s organization with respect to other cultural groups:

- “Superiority. The provider considers the client’s culture inferior or worthless and actively tries to impose his/her values and world-view

- Incapacity. The provider acknowledges differences, but has no skills or tools to address them effectively
- Universality. The provider considers that all humans share basic values and therefore treats all people alike, regardless of their differences”

Source: Warriar, Sujata. Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Outreach to Underserved Communities. 2000.  
[http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/BCSDV/OtherPubs/BCS\\_UnSer.pdf](http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/BCSDV/OtherPubs/BCS_UnSer.pdf)

It is important to consider the position of one’s organization in relation to the above definitions.

Settlement as well as mainstream organizations that serve immigrants and, in particular, abused immigrant women, should have mandatory multicultural training for all staff. Government funding should be available for such training, and each staff person should be required to obtain multicultural training to enhance competence.

### **Ensure Cultural Competence of Workers in Agencies Serving Immigrants**

As staff working with abused immigrant women, the following definitions should be employed to determine personal cultural competence.

Cultural competence is

a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Source: Cross, TL et al. Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care. Volume I. National Technical Assistance Centre for Children’s Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Centre. 1989

Cultural or ethnic competence refers to the development of skills that help people behave in a culturally appropriate way with a given group, demonstrating both sensitivity to cultural differences and the use of appropriate cultural symbols when interacting and communicating with members of diverse populations. It involves the acceptance of ethnic differences in an open, genuine manner, without condescension and without patronizing gestures.

Source: Warriar, Sujata. Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Outreach to Underserved Communities. 2000.  
[http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/BCSDV/OtherPubs/BCS\\_UnSer.pdf](http://www.vawnet.org/NRCDVPublications/BCSDV/OtherPubs/BCS_UnSer.pdf)

In light of the need for cultural awareness and competence, the following are some examples of questions frontline workers should ask themselves:

- What are correct behaviours and attitudes?
- How might my beliefs impact the service I provide?
- Do I have the correct behaviors?
- Do I have appropriate attitudes when dealing with an abused woman?
- What policies exist in our organization that encourage effective collaboration with immigrant communities and with immigrant abused women in particular?

- Am I comfortable with those policies?
- Has the organization provided training to the workers to develop the necessary skills to enable them to behave in a culturally appropriate way?
- How sensitive are we to other groups' cultures?
- Is there any picture, artifact or other symbol that puts immigrant communities and/or abused women at ease when they enter the offices? (E.g., welcome sign in different languages, flags, pictures of different ethnicity)
- How genuine are we when we say we accept other groups' cultures?
- Does race or colour of the woman affect the way I talk to them or the way I make a referral?
- Do I consider women as experts of their lives or do I see myself as the expert?

A preliminary report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women at the United Nations, 22 November 1994 gives the following recommendations that are also relevant to us in Canada:

- Provide Violence Against Women training for settlement workers and for other programs serving immigrants, such as the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs
- Provide funding to Immigrant Settlement agencies to allow them to utilize the services of trained cultural interpreters from agencies in the community
- Provide funding for culturally accessible and multi-lingual information about Violence Against Women services, agencies, programs, and legal aid clinics specifically developed to address woman abuse
- Provide information to immigrant and refugee women, particularly those in abusive relationships
- Obtain and allot funds for the dissemination of information through multi-lingual hotlines, the settlement.org website and through immigrant services and ethno-specific organizations.
- Provide culturally sensitive programs for immigrant, refugee women, and women of colour
- Agencies that receive Violence against Women funding should ensure access to services in both the official languages. (This requires appropriate staffing and salary funding sufficient to facilitate outreach, supervision, training and promotion.)

### **Serving Immigrant Women and Preventing Abuse**

- Recognize the cultural beliefs and practices of the woman
- Inform of services and provide appropriate referrals
- Adapt the safety planning according to the unique situation of the abused woman
- Educate the woman on the illegality of abuse
- Educate on the seriousness of the abuse

### **Additional Questions that Service Providers Working With Women From Other Cultures, Ethnicities, Languages, and Religions Should Ask**

The worker who comes into contact with an immigrant woman who is identified as a victim of domestic violence should ask the following questions:

- Do I realize what the woman is going through?

- Does the woman have somewhere else to go for help?
- What is her emotional situation?
- How frightened is she of her husband?
- Do I have a way of assisting her? Do I have the skills?
- Do I have the skills to deal with a woman from a different culture than my own?
- Who in my organization is better equipped to assess the victim? Have I discussed with my supervisors how to assess if the woman who came to me for some other service is a victim of abuse? Do I know what next steps to take?
- Am I aware that, as an immigrant woman, she might be facing challenges that relate to her immigration status, and that her status might be worsening the domestic abuse? What exact challenges is the immigrant woman who is before me in this case facing? In light of those challenges, how will I approach the intervention?
- Am I aware of what barriers the woman will be facing?
- Where am I going to refer the woman? Does my own organization have a woman abuse program? If not, do I know what procedure to follow to refer the woman?
- Is my organization going to report to authorities, if this is the chosen course, or will the report be done by the organization to which the referral is being made? What procedure has been established?

### **What kind of assistance is needed by immigrant women who have been abused?**

#### **Exercise**

Can you:

- Determine whether short- or long-term assistance is required?
- Make a comprehensive list of what kind of assistance the woman needs by adding to the list below?

The kind of assistance that immigrant abused women need is dictated by the complex situation of each woman. The complexity of the situation requires a multifaceted approach that should be underlined by both cultural sensitivity and by sensitivity to immigrant-related issues. The assistance required includes the following:

#### 1. Information, including:

- Legal information (e.g., individual rights, Canadian abuse law, immigration law and policy)
- Information on location and mandates of help centres and resources
- Support group information, including groups that might be using specific languages if language is an issue
- Children's Aid Society-related information and the rights of children
- Education around the scope and prevalence of violence
- Information on Peer groups (i.e., the option of having women in their communities provide information)

#### 2. Legal assistance, including:

- help understanding the legal information

- assistance related to the legal process (e.g., dealing with documentation, the police, lawyers and the courts).
3. Affordable housing to enable women to get into a safe environment as soon as possible.
  4. Shelter facility for the woman and her children.
  5. Financial assistance and eventual income. This may mean arranging for social assistance. Long term it will include assisting the woman to get access to job training.
  6. Counselling.
  7. Community services and programs that will provide social opportunities to counter isolation.

### **Checklist for Service Providers Working with Abused Immigrant Women**

#### **Exercise**

Can you suggest a checklist that could be used when working with abused immigrant women? Do you know of any existing tools that are helpful in responding to immigrant women?

For example:

1. Know the immigration status of the woman and establish if the woman might be in jeopardy due to her status. If you come into contact with immigrant women, you must have some knowledge of Canadian immigration policy and practices and how this affects the women you serve.
2. Without judgment, establish how the woman's social, cultural and religious background might have an impact on her circumstance.
3. Establish whether the woman needs translation or interpretation services.
4. Have an organizational plan on how a woman who is identified as a victim of abuse should be handled (e.g., use the best practice manual of your organization).
5. Listen to what the woman needs first, and ask if the subsequent referrals are adequate for her.

### **Working with Victims from Other Cultures – Highlights**

Working with victims from other cultures, ethnicities, language groups and religions requires the following:

- Using appropriate language
- Ensuring interpretation and translation services are available
- Understanding the role of stress related to settlement
- Maintaining ongoing dialogue and learning

- Being aware of and minimizing our own biases with respect to different communities and cultures
- Understanding agency beliefs and organizational culture
- Learning about and acknowledging the experiences of people from different countries
- Building trust between ourselves and the immigrant women
- Informing the woman of existing options
- Being patient and courteous
- Avoiding the use of our own ethical and moral biases
- Being sensitive to a woman's decision not to leave her community
- Being sensitive to a woman's desire not to deal with her own community (In small communities, everyone knows each other.)

### **Language**

When referring to individuals who lack important immigration documents (e.g., students or visitors whose visas have expired) use the term “undocumented” instead of “illegal.” This minimizes discomfort, fear, and the possibility of further victimization that could result from being seen as illegal.

Tapestri's advice never to assume that a woman does not know English or French just because she speaks with an accent. In fact, many immigrant and refugee women come from countries where French or English are the official language. So it should not be assumed that a woman does not follow what is being said simply because she has an accent. Moreover, many women understand and speak English or French but are shy to speak for fear of not being understood. In these cases, we should train ourselves to be good listeners.

### **Interpreter and Translation Services**

For women who do not speak the official languages, translation services should be available. Currently, some organizations use the abuser as the main translator each time a woman uses offered services, and this makes it impossible for her to disclose the abuse. Ensure, where possible, that an interpreter is scheduled at every stage of the process in dealing with the woman, instead of looking for interpreters at the last minute. This is very important particularly when dealing with protective order hearings, criminal hearings, etc.

It is our responsibility to ensure that the woman fully understands what is happening. It is not enough to simply ensure translation of her statements. She must also receive proper translation of all statements of others with whom she interacts (e.g., social workers, law enforcement officials, lawyers, judges, etc.)

### **Role of Settlement-related Stress**

The stress of settling in a new environment, possibly having to deal with a new language, and unfamiliarity with the new culture should not be viewed as the cause of abuse, but rather as a “unique aggravator” of violence. Subsequently, focusing attention on factors that minimize the stress experienced by new families is very important in violence prevention.

## **Maintaining Ongoing Dialogue and Learning**

It is possible to learn about a woman's culture through ongoing dialogue with her, her family and community, and other sources and experts. Being well informed enhances one's capacity to help as a frontline worker.

### **Awareness of Biases**

It is important to review and appreciate our own beliefs in relation to other cultures and to understand how our own culture is similar to or different from other cultures and how those differences might bias the way we treat certain issues. This self-understanding would also assist us in the way we tolerate and appreciate culture-related behaviour and practices of others.

### **Understanding Agency Beliefs and Organizational Culture**

This involves acknowledging the culturally predominant beliefs of our own organization and being aware of any ethnocentricity that may exist in the organization. Ethnocentricity is defined as "the belief that your own ethnic group is superior, or normal and that other groups are abnormal." As Tapestri states:

It is helpful to identify our beliefs to a point where we can understand how other groups differ, and respect those differences. Ethnocentricity leads to individuals making judgmental statements that may alienate the woman. Are there posters and materials that represent people from different cultures in your agency? Domestic violence occurs in all cultures. They just manifest themselves in different ways.

Source: Tapestri. Immigration and Refugee Coalition Challenging Gender Based Oppression. What to Keep in Mind When Working with Victims/Survivors from Other Cultures.

[http://www.tapestri.org/article\\_working\\_w\\_women\\_other\\_cultures1.html](http://www.tapestri.org/article_working_w_women_other_cultures1.html)

### **Learn about Experiences in Different Countries**

Learning about the political and social realities of various nations may enhance our understanding of the trauma women from those regions may have experienced. It may also help us to understand the need to develop specific violence prevention measures to meet unique needs stemming from women's experiences in their countries of origin.

### **Building Trust**

Building trust is very important to effective prevention of violence toward immigrant women, because some cultures have a norm where talking about private matters is done only within the family. Although an immigrant woman may lack the family structure she had in her country of origin and may desire to speak with someone about the abuse, overcoming the ingrained cultural norm could be a challenge. It is imperative that, as frontline staff working with immigrant women from different cultures and backgrounds, we endeavour to gain the confidence of the woman. How do we do this? In many cultures when a woman tells a problem to a family member or to a member of the community, it does not mean that the person listening is expected to take action. How do we draw the line between listening with empathy and not taking action, and listening with the knowledge that what is being stated involves illegal actions that have been committed?

### **Informing the Woman of Existing Options**

Given the differences in cultures and practices, it is important to provide explanations rather than just a list of relevant options. For example, explain in some detail, her legal or housing options, or the services that exist and the differences among them. It must be understood that in most cultures, communication is done in an oral, rather than a written form. If a pamphlet or important instructions are given to a woman, it is prudent, irrespective of the woman's education level, to first explain what is important in the document, for example if there are closing dates for applying for a desired service. Do not just hand the woman the document with the expectation that she will read it on time. There have been cases where important appointments have been missed because the woman read the information after the given date. This is even more important if the woman is not a fluent speaker of the language in which the documentation is written.

### **Patience**

Remember that working with a victim requires time and careful planning, with respect to resources. This is particularly true when working with immigrant women who might require interpretation services and, since many are not familiar with the cultural and societal expectations, more explanations are necessary. Because many immigrant and refugee women are reluctant to discuss or report the abuse, it is important to allow more time to avoid missed opportunities to make effective response.

### **Sensitivity to Woman's Choices Regarding Her Community**

As already stated, many immigrant women prefer not to take legal action against the abuser for a variety of reasons. Weigh the balance between safety and sensitivity, and educate the woman on the risks. Use your many skills (e.g., cultural sensitivity, trust building, patience, etc.) and knowledge to encourage the woman to agree to a referral to the appropriate service.

## **SECTION 4: CONDUCTING AN ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION, AND MAKING REFERRALS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **PROACTIVE ASSESSMENT, INTERVENTION AND REFERRAL**

Assessment entails a review, an appraisal, and evaluation. It involves estimation but, ultimately, involves a conclusion or result. Proactive assessment of an individual means assessing and evaluating an individual, not after, but before the occurrence of an event, with a view to preventing it.

Domestic violence has drastic consequences, which could in some cases mean loss of life. For this reason, proactive assessment is very important, not only in addressing, but also in preventing domestic violence against immigrant women.

#### **Objectives**

- To enhance service providers' knowledge to prevent violence against women
- To increase service providers' knowledge of proactive assessment in preventing and addressing abuse
- To enhance service providers' knowledge of how to support the survivor, including skills and resources for subsequent action
- To impart knowledge relating to guidelines for reporting violence

#### **4.1 ASSESSING PROACTIVELY: LEVELS OF ASSESSMENT**

Effective assessment is one that is accurate. The starting point is:

- Asking questions that help us learn about ourselves as workers
- Knowing how to manage our own tendencies and biases to ensure they do not interfere with the assessment or intervention
- Asking questions necessary to learning about the woman, in order to understand her current situation and identify the potential risks

#### **Learning About Ourselves as Workers**

Before assessing and intervening in a domestic violence case, it is essential for workers to first reflect upon their own role in preventing or addressing abuse with respect to the case at hand.

Self reflection and consideration of one's role as a worker entails the following:

- Recognize how your cultural beliefs might impact service delivery (e.g., with respect to family, male roles, gender biases, same sex issues, parenting, etc.)
- Be aware of your values and beliefs
- Be aware of your tone, wording, body language
- Understand and locate your position within society's power hierarchy (e.g., class, race, gender) and with respect to the newcomer

- Consider your responsibilities, boundaries (e.g., self disclosure), abilities, knowledge, skills, authority
- Recognize your own comfort level
- Reflect on transference of your experiences and assumptions
- Examine your ability to empower and enable others to take action (e.g., the degree to which you can help women to make their own choices)
- Reflect upon client dependency
- Recognize your strengths
- Be aware of the need for ongoing training and knowledge building
- Consider what is required to facilitate improvement in each particular case

### **Exercise:**

There are many useful tools that can assist with self-reflection. Do you know of any? List them.

### **Managing the Self**

It is important to be self-aware and to manage ourselves (e.g., biases, tendencies, limitations) to ensure we do not interfere with assessment or intervention.

- Understand that a worker's role is defined by agency mandate and organizational culture
- Do not think it is possible to save someone – you can help but it is not possible to rescue
- Deal with personal biases (e.g., thoughts about abuse, religious beliefs, education bias, skin privilege, professional power imbalance), and learn how to step out of the role if you are feeling uncomfortable
- Provide choices for your clients – do not withhold information
- Avoid assumptions (e.g., do not assume you understand the woman's experience of immigration and domestic violence)
- Do not make assumptions about who is a “real immigrant” and who is an “invisible immigrant” (i.e., mainstream assumptions about immigrants)
- Undertake ongoing education and training opportunities to improve knowledge base and skills
- Avoid assumptions about the abuse and the woman's related choices
- Ensure sympathy, empathy, and active listening

### **Levels of Assessment**

There are different models of intervention.

Given that the OCASI Prevention of Domestic Violence against Immigrant Women project focuses on training those frontline workers who do not have the qualifications and extensive experience with woman abuse programs, what is outlined below is a simple model, based on frontline workers being in the position of first line response. Subsequent to an initial assessment, such a worker must refer the victim to an individual in the organization, or if the organization has no woman abuse program, to an organization where there is qualified staff who will carry out Level 2 assessment and begin the intervention. Each agency needs to have a well-defined and stipulated protocol indicating how frontline workers are to work with women identified as victims. The levels of assessment proposed here are only suggestions and should be discussed within each agency.

**Level 1 Assessment**

This is the initial assessment by a frontline worker who may or may not be experienced in responding to woman abuse.

**Level 2 Assessment**

This is a more in-depth assessment by a worker who is specialized in woman abuse issues, including immigration issues (e.g., the challenges related to immigration status).

**Level 3 Assessment**

Assessment is also done at various levels as the woman seeks and makes use of a variety of services. For example, assessment will occur when legal or financial aid is sought, or when housing is requested by her or on her behalf.

The Prevention of Domestic Violence against Immigrant Women project is concerned with level 1 assessment because the training is targeted for workers who come into contact with immigrant women seeking services, but who do not have the qualifications and experience with woman abuse.

**Exercise**

- How do the above levels of assessment correspond to what currently takes place and what should take place in your own organization?
- What are the roles of service providers and of settlement workers individually?
- What boundaries should be respected and why?

**Requirements for Assessment**

Before starting the assessment:

- Establish if the woman needs an interpreter
- Ensure she has access to an interpreter and only use family or friends if she requests it (Children should not be used under any circumstances)
- Ensure the environment is safe for disclosures
- Validate and normalize the woman's experiences
- Ask the woman's permission to write some facts to aid memory. Explain to her why you are writing notes and what you will use them for (Refer to the legal material prepared for this project by METRAC)

**Issues Relating to the Woman's Disclosure of the Abuse**

- Women need to be given an opportunity to present a domestic violence problem
- The issue of abuse may not be raised at an early meeting before trust has been built
- Sometimes the woman will not present the concern of abuse. She may present a different problem (e.g., housing)
- A woman may speak about a friend who is being abused, when in fact it is she who is the victim
- A child may have presented concerns about abuse
- The occurrence of abuse could be denied at one stage and disclosed later
- A worker has to recognize that this is a way for the person to keep the abuse confidential

- A worker may need to educate a client about abuse – some cultures do not recognize physical or emotional abuse as abuse
- Women may be afraid of disclosing because they think it could result in their children being taken away

Quoting the Family Violence Prevention Fund, the National Association of Social Workers recommends the following steps:

- **Assess the immediate safety needs of the victim [by asking:]** "Are you in immediate danger? Where is your partner now? Where will he or she be when you are done with your medical care? Do you want or need security, or the police to be notified immediately?"
- **Assess the pattern and history of the abuse.** Assess the partner's physical, sexual, or psychological tactics, as well as the economic coercion of the patient. "How long has the violence been going on? Has your partner forced or harmed you sexually? Has your partner harmed your family, friends, or pets? Does your partner control your activities, money, or children?"
- **Assess the connection between domestic violence and the patient's health issues.** Assess the impact of the abuse on the victim's physical, psychological, and spiritual well being. What is the degree of the partner's control over the victim? "How is your partner's abusive behavior affecting your physical health? (For example, arthritis, migraine and other frequent headaches)."
- **Assess the victim's current access to advocacy and support groups.** Are there culturally appropriate community resources available to the woman? What resources (if any), are available now? "What resources have you used, or tried in the past? What happened? Did you find them helpful or appropriate?"
- **Assess [woman's] safety: Is there future risk or death or significant injury or harm due to the domestic violence?** Ask about the partner's tactics: escalation in frequency or severity of the violence, homicide or suicide threats, use of alcohol or drugs, as well as about the health consequences of past abuse

Source: National Association of Social Workers. Domestic Violence Assessment and Intervention provided by the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

[http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/events/domestic\\_violence/assessment.asp](http://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/events/domestic_violence/assessment.asp)

### Tips to Remember During the Assessment

- Communicate and emphasize confidentiality
- Read signs
- Observe hesitation
- Listen and validate
- Conduct a high-risk assessment if the woman is in danger
- Consider when it is appropriate to ask about impact on children. There are implications for action.

- Recognize woman's strengths (e.g., Use narrative questioning to learn about her, "What did you do today? What did you do before you came to Canada? Tell me about your friends," and develop an inventory of strengths and a history of behavior.)
- Consider safety of space (e.g., open office)
- Consider woman's fear that disclosing could result in children being taken from her
- Consider the 'message' given when a person is led through the reception area in tears to a private room, or to the counsellor known to work with woman abuse
- Consider the impact of companions (e.g., friends and family members, children, in-laws, husband, parents, who are present)
- Use questions from existing assessment tools
- Understand substance abuse
- Use written forms when questioning about abuse to provide another channel for disclosure, as the woman might feel safer responding to written questions
- Help the woman to feel comfortable
- Demonstrate concern about her welfare
- Determine if there are children involved
- Remember the importance of body language and consider in which situations touch is appropriate (e.g., in Tamil culture a light touch on the shoulder was identified as appropriate)
- Listen effectively
- Allow the person to determine how much she wants to talk about the problem
- Avoid questions that are presumptive
- Be compassionate
- Validate what the woman is saying (e.g., active listening)
- Use interpreters (a free service exists)
- Communicate clearly what the next steps are now that the information has been shared
- Provide support and inquire about the person's informal supports (e.g., a trusted family member or friend)
- Remember faith communities may or may not be supportive
- Discuss what support looks like, whether it is really support
- Inquire whether support is close or distant
- Help the person to make decisions so she is central in the decision making
- Ask the woman what she needs
- Inform her of her options. Do not assume that a woman would prefer to be referred to someone in her own ethnocultural community
- Recognize that some women have never been encouraged or allowed to make decisions
- Do not assume that the woman knows what the options are (e.g., she might not know what a shelter is)

### **Language Use during Assessment**

Language is very important. During verbal communication, workers need to pay attention to how they express themselves. When communicating verbally, workers need to be mindful of:

- The line of questioning
- Heightened sensitivity on the part of the victim
- Tone of voice
- Upsetting quality of "Why?" questions, which can sound inculpatory
- Using open ended questions

- Being non-judgmental
- Not raising one's voice
- Using simplified language. Crises can affect how people hear and process information, so do not use professional jargon or acronyms
- Inappropriateness of using really direct language

### **Example scenarios**

#### *Scenario One*

A woman comes to the agency seeking employment. She does not speak English; however, the worker speaks her language. Then the worker tries to inform her about LINC classes in order to prepare her for the labour market. The woman identifies that her partner will not allow her to attend any kind of educational setting and begins to cry.

[This is a critical point for identifying the safety of the environment at your office. If the environment is not safe (i.e., not an appropriate location of this kind of disclosure), calmly and sensitively relocate to a location that is safe within the office.]

The worker responds, "It seems like this is something that really bothers you. Is it that you want to go to school but your partner doesn't let you?"

[This type of question will help validate the woman's emotions and elicit information about power and control issues without being invasive.]

The woman may begin to talk about the reasons why her partner has not allowed her to go to school, including the environment of power and control in which she lives. This leads to the opportunity for the worker to talk with the woman about the nature of abuse, the options available, and services. The worker can then ask the woman whether she would like information about the options and services available.

[If the woman says no, the worker should not pass judgment for declining support. The worker should validate her decision and indicate that the door remains open if and when she feels ready.]

If the woman desires to know about services and options, the worker can present and discuss them with her. If appropriate, referrals are made.

[Workers should not assume how much or how little the woman knows about options and services available. The worker will need to gear this information to the woman's needs.]

### **Asking Questions to Help Learn about the Abused Woman**

To understand a woman's current situation and identify potential risks, it is important to ask critical questions. This involves not only understanding client challenges but also identifying client strengths.

Points for discussion in your own organization:

- Address case management (e.g., referring a client concludes your work with her). This ensures there is no intra-agency conflict.

- Consider gender concerns. Sometimes counsellors are men and it is hard for women to disclose. Inquire whether they prefer a woman.
- Consider your alliance if you are working with a woman and her family
- Remember your role (e.g., build trust, create safe environment for disclosure, educate about abuse, validate, and listen empathically, etc.)
- Make decisions when there is no one to whom you can refer
- Be careful of vicarious trauma. Practice self-care and seek assistance if you need it.
- Make appropriate referrals (e.g., appearing sad or down could be situational and not an instance of clinical depression requiring psychiatric care).

#### Related activities:

- Do an empathy activity where you put yourself in someone else's place to understand that person's challenges and discomfort. Use a scenario of a woman to discuss in small groups.
- Present stereotypes about women seeking help and discuss them together
- Do self-disclosure activities to show how people have common misconceptions
- Use humor to help people be able to look at themselves
- Do a classism activity where examples and checklists are used to identify things that cause people to feel uncomfortable (e.g., dress, speech, mannerisms, and perceptions that newcomers are from a "lower class" and are inferior)
- Develop a self-awareness checklist

#### Assessing the Presence and Level of Abuse

- Determine whether abuse is present. (Look for signs of physical and emotional trauma, fear, denial, etc.)
- Assess for indicators of high risk for serious injury if abuse is present. (Refer to Women Abuse Council of Toronto's High Risk Assessment Tool.)
- Consider and begin to address the survivor's needs, keeping in mind immediate and long-term needs
- Establish her existing support networks

#### Potential resources

Women Abuse Council of Toronto's High Risk Assessment tool is a very useful resource. Do you know of any others?

## 4.2 LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

Once the assessment is complete, the next step is to make an intervention.

Intervention entails an act that results in an effect. It is intended to alter the course of a process or an event. In domestic violence cases, it is hoped that the overall outcome of intervention will be, among others, a reduction or removal of the risk to the victim.

There are several levels of intervention:

### **Level 1 Intervention**

The initial Level 1 Assessment, carried out by a frontline worker who may or may not be experienced in woman abuse responses, can also be regarded as a **Level 1 Intervention**, the next step in the intervention process is, thus, the Level 2 Assessment (above) by a worker who is qualified to work with an abused woman.

### **Level 2 Intervention**

This level of intervention is accomplished after in-depth assessment by workers who are specialized in woman abuse issues. As previously suggested, any mismanagement of the process may result in greater risk for the woman.

As in the case of assessment, intervention is also done at various levels as the woman seeks assistance from a variety of services. For example, intervention, just like assessment, occurs when legal or financial aid is sought, or when housing is requested by herself or on her behalf.

### **Types of Intervention**

In woman abuse cases, intervention can take a variety of forms. The following is a list of matters with which a skilled worker can help through information provision or referral:

- Information to make survivors aware of various existing intervention options
- Emergency shelter
- Permanent housing
- Emotional support
- Medical interventions
- Counselling
- Support networks
- Legal and financial assistance
- Family support
- Support around immigration-related issues

### **Process of Intervention**

- Without frightening the survivor, explain to her the kind of danger she might be in and remind her that, in extreme circumstances, it could cost her life (Using the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto's High Risk Assessment Tool is a way to assess for this risk. The process of completing the tool is useful in that women are able to self-assess their level of danger).
- Acknowledge the difficulty relating to the fact that there are children involved and discuss with the woman what resources might be available (What resources are available in your area?)
- Discuss existing options that would enhance her safety

### **Exercise**

Can you list what you perceive to be an effective response? Can you compare your list with the one below and add to it any features that are missing?

There are effective and ineffective responses. An effective response:

- Acknowledges diversity (e.g., groups are not homogeneous and often need specific responses because they have different value systems and practices, different religious and social backgrounds, etc.)
- Constitutes an early response that is also preventative
- Recognizes cultural and societal issues and acknowledges that race and ethnicity have an impact on one's existential reality (e.g., how groups are impacted by colour; how systemic beliefs and barriers can work to minimize the abuse)
- Recognizes that women must be treated as individuals, even when they are perceived as belonging to the community. For example, they
  - May or may not have support from members of the community
  - May or may not have a language challenge
  - May not want to be assisted by a member of their own community
- Takes into account the woman's input

### **Extent of Response**

The response should be limited because it is very risky to try to effect a comprehensive intervention without experience and, more importantly, without being qualified to do so. For agencies that do not have a woman abuse program, policies should exist detailing the extent of intervention to be provided.

Response in agencies that do not have a program should be limited to:

- Recognizing whether or not the woman is abused (e.g., observe for physical and emotional signs of abuse)
- Informing the woman about abuse if she does not recognize that she is abused (e.g., reviewing with her what constitutes abuse)
- Communicating to the woman that help exists and with her consent connections to services can be made
- Calling ahead to a relevant organization to ensure services to which she is being referred are still available
- Making a specific referral to a specified organization and individual once the woman has indicated her desire for help
- Recording necessary information (See legal section about recording)
- Performing follow-up

### **Exercise**

Are you and your colleagues in your agency able to do some exercises to demonstrate examples of good versus bad response, and good versus bad referral?

### **Frontline Worker Intervention Skills**

To be able to respond effectively, the following skills are required:

- Assessment skills to recognize the signs of abuse

- Communication skills, including empathic listening
- Decision-making skills – knowing when to refer, how to refer, where to refer, as well as how to support the decision-making skills of the victim
- Non-judgmental and understanding service provision
- Patience and motivation to help the woman and put her at ease
- Willingness to learn from the woman's experiences and her own expertise
- Sensitivity to the woman's culture and beliefs

### **Role of Organization**

- Ensure all the staff are aware, committed and have the skills to intervene
- Ensure ongoing anti-oppression and anti-racism training takes place
- Develop relevant policy, based on the needs of abused women
- Ensure an environment in which women feel safe and comfortable to talk openly
- Develop protocols to deal with other settlement or mainstream organizations that have women abuse projects, support groups, etc.
- Develop protocols to deal with institutions such as the police and the courts, and with social workers
- Ensure all protocols are transparent and accountable
- Create an evaluation process and satisfaction survey to get feedback from women who use the service
- Have only one worker, if possible, do the initial intervention and reference
- Ensure that translation and interpretation services are available

### **Frontline Intervention Tips**

- Have a list of the names and telephone numbers of services available. Ensure that this is kept updated. It is also helpful to have a contact person attached to each service.
- Connect with local woman abuse initiatives (e.g., Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, North York Family Violence Network, workshops, training, etc.) to keep up with pertinent issues
- Explain how abuse is defined by the Canadian legal system, and discuss legal help available
- Remember the various forms abuse takes (e.g., physical, emotional, sexual)
- Follow your agency's intervention guidelines
- Remember your role is Level 1, that is, to support and refer the client
- Observe language (e.g., possible language challenges, need to avoid jargon, etc.)
- Focus on client empowerment and avoid building dependency
- Don't make assumptions about how much or little a woman knows about services
- Always ask if she would like a referral
- Provide relevant support, service or emergency phone numbers
- Help women make their own choices and decisions
- Facilitate women making decisions (some women have not made many decisions)
- Ensure safety
- Remember the woman is the expert on her own life
- Know how and where to refer
- Explain free services (e.g., legal aid)
- Adhere to reporting requirements (i.e., duty to report)
- Make inquiries on behalf of client without using identity
- Describe available services and the different mandates of their agencies

- Inform the woman of what will happen at other agencies, and provide relevant service information and contacts
- Consider a woman's safety and accompany her if necessary
- Consider interpretation needs
- Ensure all actions taken have the woman's prior permission
- Provide safety tips and plans
- Mobilize external supports and options (e.g., family and community based intervention, support for the couple, support for relatives, etc.)
- Discuss positive relations and the importance of moving from woman abuse to healthy relationships

It is vital that policies and procedures for intervention in domestic assault cases be founded on a sound theoretical basis which protects battered women, helps judicial system practitioners discharge their public duties, and renounces the practice of victim blaming. The following principles that guide the policies and procedures of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in the USA can also be very helpful:

- The first priority of intervention should be to carry out policies and protocols which protect the victim from further harm and whenever possible, the burden of holding abusers accountable should rest with the community, not the victim.
- To make fundamental changes in a community's response to violence against women, individual practitioners must work cooperatively, guided by training, job descriptions, and standardized practices that are all oriented toward the desired changes.
- Intervention must be responsive to the totality of harm done by the violence rather than be incident or punishment focused.
- Intervention practices must be accountable to the victim, whose life is most impacted by our individual and collective actions.
- Victims must have access to safe emergency housing, information and advocacy necessary to act in the courts, and should not be denied protection because of the cost of professional assistance.
- Except in the case of self-defense, violence is a criminal offense and the police and court are used to prevent further assaults. The intensity of intervention is based on the need for protection from further harm and on creating a deterrence to the abuser.
- The primary focus of intervention is on stopping the assailant's use of violence, not on fixing or ending the relationship.
- In general, the court avoids prescribing a course of action for the victim, e.g., does not force a victim to testify by threatening jail, nor mandate treatment for the victim.
- The courts and law enforcement agencies work cooperatively with victim advocacy programs and provide the advocacy/shelter program and victim with the broadest possible access to legal information.
- When appropriate, the courts mandate educational classes for assailants and impose increasingly harsh penalties for any continued acts of harassment and violence.

- All policies and procedural guidelines benefit from review by members of the communities not represented by majority culture (e.g., communities of color, the gay/lesbian/bisexual community, people who are low income). Their review should include a close look at monitoring procedures to safeguard against the use of race, class, or lifestyle biases in implementing policies.
- Policies and procedures should act as a general deterrent to battering in the community.
- All practices and policies should be continually evaluated for effectiveness in protecting victims and to plan ongoing training for agencies.
- All interventions must account for the power imbalance between the assailant and the victim. Adherence to these principles helps to produce consistent results regardless of the beliefs or values of an individual practitioner.

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Source: Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. Domestic Violence Information Manual. History  
[http://www.euowrc.org/05.education/education\\_en/12.edu\\_en.htm](http://www.euowrc.org/05.education/education_en/12.edu_en.htm)

### **4.3 GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

If the intervention involves reporting the violence, what are the guidelines? There is a duty to report to the Children's Aid Society. Also, a report must be made to police in situations of high risk. What are these high-risk situations? (Answers to these questions are provided in the legal material that form part of this resource book).

At what point and by whom should the reporting be done?

What are the implications to the woman?

### **4.4 UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING THE SURVIVOR**

#### **Exercise**

Are you or your agency colleagues able to answer the following questions?

- How can you support a woman who has been abused?
- What should be the process for supporting a victim?
- Where in the process should the woman be supported, by whom should she be supported, and what kinds of support are necessary?
- What is the cost of support?
- What skills Enhance Understanding of the Victim?
  - Active listening skills
  - Patience
  - Empathy

- Anti-oppressive framework to understand structural barriers experienced by the woman
- Nonjudgmental attitude and demeanor

## 4.5 PREVENTION

Prevention entails:

- Avoiding and deterring
- Prevention of escalation
- Prevention of reoccurrence
- Motivating change to stop violence
- Empowering change

### Abuse Prevention: Client Focus

1. Prepare and provide information on the rights of women and children in Canada.
2. Provide information on where they can find support services in case of abuse.
3. Provide information on family counselling services.
4. Provide safety planning in all situations, no matter the level of risk.
5. Emphasize the seriousness of abuse and educate about the signs of abuse.
6. Discuss the power and control model with respect to her relationship.
7. Use sensitive and appropriate language when referring to issues of abuse. (The woman may not be familiar with the term “abuse,” so, instead, provide examples of what constitutes abuse.)

### Abuse Prevention: Community and Agency Focus

1. Provide information and knowledge on abuse (e.g., flyers at places of worship, at seminars, ESL classes, grocery stores, laundry facilities, and other appropriate sites; provide other educational materials (audio or print) in different languages, etc.)
2. Provide community activities in order to get prevention materials into women’s hands.
3. Mobilize various community organizations to offer prevention workshops.
4. Mobilize community leaders to share information.
5. Encourage the involvement of youth and women.
6. Establish a best practices manual for organizations to promote effective response.
7. Train service providers on a regular basis on domestic violence.
8. Work closely with the domestic violence unit of the police department to promote understanding of what takes place prior to first contact.

It is always important to consider what kinds and levels of prevention are necessary to reduce immigrant women’s experiences of domestic violence incidents.

The following are some safety procedures that can be discussed with the woman to reduce risk:

- Having the woman ask a neighbour in advance if she/he could call police should a violent act occur
- Removing all weapons from the house
- Developing an escape and safety plan (A number of safety plans currently exist and should be used by the worker instead of reinventing the wheel)

- Informing close supports about the conditions of the restraining order (if one exists) and what to do if the order is violated

**Useful Resources**

Can you research information on existing Safety Plans that the woman should have?

## **SECTION 5: STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SERVICES – CASE MANAGEMENT, BEST PRACTICES, INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION AND LOCAL SERVICES**

### **BASIC COUNSELLING FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CASE MANAGEMENT**

The violence prevention workshops are meant for frontline staff from organizations that come in first contact with survivors or potential victims of abuse. Therefore, this section is not about providing professional counselling for abused women. Professional counselling should only be done by qualified professionals. One of the reasons for this is that attempting to provide a service for which one is not qualified can, in fact, put the woman at even further risk. However, basic counselling is central to frontline work, especially when learning the victim's narrative and connecting her to desired services.

It is also essential that the case is managed in a professional manner and that it is clear who is doing the follow-up and why.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of this section are:

- To discuss boundaries relating to what a frontline worker can and cannot do and to emphasize referrals
- To provide an opportunity for service providers to discuss who should be responsible for case management and why
- To assist service providers with identifying key sources of information for educational and referral purposes
- To identify some gaps and barriers affecting services for immigrant women
- To enhance understanding of how working collaboratively with other agencies adds value to services provided to abused women
- To provide input regarding how inter-agency collaboration can be enhanced, and establish protocols with other service providers to ensure expeditious response
- To discuss networking strategies and service approaches, based on existing expertise among service providers, within their organization and among immigrant communities
- To provide an opportunity for service providers to gain knowledge of best practices in prevention of domestic violence and discuss how to obtain and share resources and information among service providers
- To provide an opportunity for service providers to discuss institutional changes required to improve services for immigrant women.
- To raise service providers' awareness of the need to educate the community around issues relating to domestic violence against immigrant women, with a view to prevent and address these issues
- To provide information on topics to be included in education and advocacy, on modes of outreach, and targets for education and advocacy

## 5.1 BASIC COUNSELLING

Because settlement workers should only be practicing basic counselling, this section focuses on clearly understanding the boundaries of frontline work. Frontline workers who are the first contact with victims or potential victims of domestic abuse must know where to refer the woman for appropriate assessment, intervention and follow-up as soon as possible.

### Settlement Counsellors

Usually settlement counselors provide direct, frontline services specifically to immigrants and refugees. A wide variety of services are often provided by settlement counselors because of the diverse needs of clients. The same is true of frontline workers in many other organizations where immigrant women go for services, such as places of worship, social centres, shelters, etc.

### Services Provided by Settlement Counsellors

These range from information and referral, advocacy, basic counselling, community development and education. The type of service provided by an organization, and thus, the type of work carried out by a frontline worker, is determined by the type of organization (e.g. settlement agency) and the funding source (e.g., some funding sources are very specific about how monies are to be allocated).

### Goals of Basic Counselling

As a first responder, the goal is to link the woman to the most appropriate staff person or professional as soon as possible. When dealing with a victim of abuse, it is important to remember that every facet of an interaction with her is important and potentially weighty. For this reason, one must never attempt any type of counselling that one is not qualified to give. Subsequently, this Resource Book does not extensively cover material related to counselling as practiced by professionals. Remember the boundaries of what you can and cannot do.

If the woman has been abused, take the following steps:

- Be a good listener and listen with empathy. Listening empathically means listening with understanding, sympathy, compassion, and attention
- Encourage her to share by listening supportively and letting her know that you believe her. Be patient, as it might take some time to gain her trust. It is important for the woman to be comfortable about disclosing and to know what happened was not her fault
- Assess to what extent she is in danger and ask further questions
- Make suggestions about available services. Provide information about the immigration process, about legal and financial aid, and about important contacts and services
- Remain calm and do not show alarm. But, if she is in danger, let her know the extent to which you feel she might be in danger
- Remember that domestic violence is a crime and every woman has the right to be safe. Each woman experiences abuse in her own way and needs individualized support to meet her needs
- Inform her that you wish to arrange for assistance from a professional so that she can receive advice on legal action or the next steps. The woman might need to have a protective order. Discuss suggested options and let her decide which options she would like to pursue. Be

aware of cultural variations and communication barriers and be culturally sensitive. Different cultural groups may need different interviewing skills

- Communicate clearly that information is confidential. However, explain the limits of confidentiality, the circumstances for which you are bound to report. Also let her know what information you will have to use for referral
- Ensure that the woman is safe, if possible by finding a safe place for her away from the abuser. This could be in a shelter or with relatives or friends
- Arrange immediately for the woman to get to the appropriate staff person to handle her case

## **5.2 BOUNDARIES AND CASE MANAGEMENT**

As frontline workers it is good to clearly understand the scope of frontline work to have a strong sense of the boundaries.

### **Exercise**

- What is case management?
- How can the process be streamlined to ensure follow-up?
- Who should be in charge of follow-up and why?

## **BEST PRACTICES IN PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Best practices offer great learning opportunities and have the potential to enhance our work.

### **Exercise**

List examples of good practice where preventing and addressing domestic violence has been very effective because of:

- Assessment
- Intervention
- Effective case management
- Effective collaboration and sharing of inter-agency resources

## **5.3 IDENTIFYING LOCAL SERVICES, MAKING EFFECTIVE REFERRAL AND PROVIDING RESOURCES**

To effectively address and prevent domestic violence against immigrant women, it is essential to have access to a wide variety of resources.

### **Exercise**

Outline key resources required in an effective referral in your region. For example,

- Can you identify and access key sources of information?
- What service provision exists in your geographical area and how can you get the information?

- How can you ensure you receive updated information from agencies to which you refer? (Websites do not necessarily have current information about informal services provided.)
- Can you identify skills and knowledge necessary for effective information and referral?

An information and referral system needs to be developed with workers in a variety of organizations. If a woman receives services at one agency and then is referred to another, the second agency should have knowledge of this.

### **Information and Advice**

Information and advice should be customized to client needs. For example, does the client need information about housing, employment, legal matters, finances, etc. Using the Internet to find resources online can be helpful in this process.

Workers should be able to assess and respond to the degree to which the client is at risk. In cases of risk this would include discussing safety and protection.

## **5.4 STREAMLINING INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION**

Understanding current gaps in services and how enhanced strategies can help improve services to abused immigrant women is central to effective prevention and response in domestic violence against women cases.

### **Identifying Gaps in Services**

Some of the gaps in services include the following:

- Lack of services and supports, linkages and coordination (e.g., agencies often do not have the time and resources to offer court accompanying services to the victim/survivor)
- Currently some agencies have tended to be territorial and compete for dollars. Establishing the appropriate collaboration mechanisms would reduce this disconnect
- Even though many organizations indicate that they have woman abuse programs, there is a need to establish:
  - Which agencies have women abuse counsellors
  - What services they offer
  - Whether they accompany a woman to court
  - What supports they offer
  - What their eligibility requirements are
  - What kind of counselling they provide
  - Whether they conduct friendly visits
- There is no single resource bank within their communities
- There is still a need for more comprehensive community outreach and information dissemination for victims and survivors (e.g., it would be beneficial to place information brochures and pamphlets in locations women use – grocery stores, laundry facilities)
- There is need to build relationships with referral agencies
- There is need to seek out existing protocols and adapt them to create generic best practices

## Need for Inter-Agency Collaboration

Although many organizations providing services to immigrants have woman abuse programs, some do not. Indeed some organizations that have contact with immigrant women on a regular basis, for example faith communities, are not linked in any way with settlement organizations having woman abuse programs. The opportunities for immigrant women who frequent such organizations to learn about existing woman abuse programs and the range of services available are therefore limited. This lack of contact between organizations that do and do not offer woman abuse programs creates an information and coordination gap among service providers around strategies for violence prevention and intervention, despite the existence of relevant coalitions.

Hence, there is need for collaboration and further coalition building to facilitate:

- Harmonization of services and practices
- Provision of coordinated information.
- Provision of coordinated referral
- Advocacy to reduce service barriers abused immigrant women face

This collaboration should include:

- Advocating for resources to support abused women, including increased housing for battered women
- Advocating for resources for shelters
- Advocating for resources to enhance and maintain coordination among service providers to ensure timely and appropriate response and prevention
- Seeking resources for education with regard to immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence
- Advocating to ensure funders commit to short- and long-term programs

## Necessary Collaborations

Collaboration could be in the form of:

- Coalitions
- Networks
- Simple agreements and referral arrangements

An alliance is a formal agreement in which an association is established between groups to achieve a specified aim. A coalition is group of organizations that decide to work together on the basis of an agreement to achieve common goals. Usually a coalition takes on interests of a general nature that individual organizations are not able to effectively accomplish on their own. A coalition is an alliance between groups as a form of cooperation in joint action, each with its self-interest. It is really for convenience and can be short- or long-term. It can be an ad hoc arrangement between two or more parties and is less formal than a covenant.

**Coalition**

- An alliance
- An association
- A partnership in which the partners agree to undertake and endeavour to achieve a common purpose

**Network**

This is an interconnected system of individuals, groups and organizations.

- A system
- Set of connections
- Set of contacts
- An association
- A group

The above are loose statements of what a coalition, a network and alliance can be. They are only examples of what kind of collaboration can occur among organizations. Quite often organizations cooperate very well with no formal agreement apart from, for example, instruction to staff in the agencies concerned.

Service providers must determine what kind of collaboration and thus, what kind of formal arrangement to have when it comes to preventing and addressing domestic violence. Whatever the arrangement, the aim should be to prevent and address abuse in an appropriate and timely manner, using all available resources.

**Agency Coordination**

Make a systemic analysis of the current practice to determine the gaps and to establish ways in which enhanced coordination could be effected.

For coordination to occur effectively, all frontline workers and managers in these organizations must:

- Appreciate the fact that domestic violence against women is a serious problem with serious consequences
- Know their own strengths and purview relative to other organizations serving victims of abuse
- Devise a collective agreement of a system of referral that will facilitate effective response, and an agreement on who is to provide what service

At this juncture the different agencies should establish cooperative mechanisms.

**Expected Outcomes of a Coordinated System**

- Development of policies to train frontline and other workers in the organizations involved, ensuring training in multicultural sensitivity, and an agreed general curriculum on domestic violence with tailored training where necessary
- Awareness of abuse on a larger societal scale
- Creation of mechanisms to implement agreed policies

- Development of policies pertaining to support groups (e.g., who is to host them, who is to provide spaces, etc.)
- Agreement on mechanisms of intervention for facilitation of prompt response and for integrated service provision for immigrant women
- Agreement on role and use of the media for education purposes (To what extent can the media be relied upon to educate without creating bias in the community?)
- Development of measures to ensure accountability to communities and to funders
- Provision of comprehensive information, improved resources, and ensured accessibility to resources
- Development of better systems to actively monitor and address service delivery and related issues
- Creation of a long-term social safety net
- Standard policies on information disclosure

### Agencies to Be Included in Collaborative Network

But what kind of service coordination is required to improve services to abused immigrant women? Who are the key players in the lives of immigrant women? To which institutions do immigrant women go?

Some institutions with which immigrant women have contact include:

- **English as a Second Language (ESL) classes** which they take at local schools or in immigrant-serving agencies
- **Schools** where their children are being educated
- **Places of worship**, including mosques, churches and synagogues
- **Service providers**, including immigrant-serving agencies, where they seek a wide variety of settlement and other services
- **Hospitals and medical centres** where they go for medical care for themselves and for their children. It is also ultimately at the hospitals that women who are victims of domestic violence will have to go for treatment for violence-related conditions
- **Homeless shelters**, where they might go if they have no alternative housing options
- **Police**, who often have got to be involved because domestic violence is against the law
- **Legal services**, which may be required by the woman who is a victim of violence
- **Counselling services**
- **Support groups**, where the woman may be referred to find support

### Exercise

Do you know additional groups that need to be involved in the network of activities related to preventing and addressing domestic violence against women?

To provide effective prevention and effective responses to domestic violence against immigrant women, there is need for coordination of services among the parties listed above. All these institutions have to be players in prevention awareness and in addressing domestic violence against women.

## **Coordinating Services**

Service coordination should ensure that organizations and individuals with resources, including skills and expertise, material resources (e.g., rooms) and services (e.g., child care) that are useful to the abused woman are pooled for her benefit. The purpose is to make the service delivery to the woman:

- Preventive
- Accessible and speedy with respect to response time
- Integrated and seamless due to use of established mechanisms and more streamlined procedures

When forming alliances, coalitions or networks, it is important to ask questions that will answer Who? What? Why? When? Where? How? How much? and How many?

Example 1: (Who, Why, How and How much questions)

## **Education and Outreach**

Who has expertise in prevention education? How much does it cost and who is to cover the costs? Do we need to collaborate on education and outreach or should each organization practice education and outreach to women? Can some organizations that have resources prepare publicity material and those with outreach capacity in the local geographical region assume the outreach role? How are the roles to be shared? How does collaboration on this issue affect the target community? Who in the community can assist? Is there need to seek further financial resources to be able to accomplish the education task. Who should approach the funder?

Example 2: (When and Who questions)

## **Victim Treatment**

When is the referral to treatment made? At what stage? Who makes the referral? Is it by the organization to which the woman first came for assistance or by the organization to which the woman is going to be referred? This needs to be discussed, and a protocol must be established in each agency.

Example 3: (Where and Why questions)

## **Victim Counselling and Support:**

To where should the victims be referred for a support group? At a centre based in the community where she will be able to understand the language? If not, which organization is best for her and why? Is there such an organization in the network or is it necessary to go outside the network for some services? It is good to be aware how practical a network or a coalition can be, but also to remember the limitations.

## **Forming a Network**

When forming a network it is important to consider:

1. Goals and objectives. Do the organizations have the same goal on the issue in question? Always keep the focus on the woman, and on prevention and addressing domestic violence.
2. Practicability and compatibility. Are the organizations in the coalition or network able to provide the desired solutions?
3. Who will bear the costs? How will the benefits balance out?
4. What kind of support will the women and children need? Does the woman need education and prevention? Is she in an abusive relationship? How best can the needed services be coordinated and delivered?
5. What is the relationship between the woman's needs and what can be provided through social services?
6. Does she need preventive counselling and education about rights and freedoms? Who in the network can provide this centrally?
7. Is there need for medical resources, particularly for non-status women? Is there expertise in the network?
8. Which organizations have crisis management and long-term resources?
9. Which organizations have mental health or ethnocultural counselling resources?
10. Is there a need to have an organization that has alcohol or substance abuse expertise as part of the network?
11. Is housing resource expertise needed in the network?
12. Is non-status and immigration-related expertise needed in the network?
13. Are there resources for handling family disruption, including expertise in dealing with parental and child-related issues?
14. Is there need for legal expertise in the network?
15. Where can linguistic services be sought?
16. Is there sufficient knowledge and experience of cultural appropriateness and sensitivity within the network?
17. Is training expertise needed in the network?
18. Are there sufficient resources for public education, and for lobbying for more funding?
19. What special groups do we need to have in the network?

Sound information is essential to decision making in the collaboration process. This helps to identify and select who should be in the network or coalition. It is important to know:

- Where diagnostic services (assessment) are located
- Where local resources and services are located, and the types of services available
- What are the best way to choose who will provide specialized service to the woman
- How language services can be obtained
- Where appropriate shelters are located
- Where language services can be quickly accessed
- Where expertise is required to service the individual woman
- What relevant coalitions or networks should be formed to ensure efficient referral and response?

### *Effective Collaborations*

For coalitions or networks to work effectively, it is necessary to:

- Agree on protocols for assessing the nature and degree of risk faced by the woman
- Agree on how the assessment will be handled within the initial organization and the boundaries relating to the assessment
- Agree on where the woman will be referred for more detailed assessment and where her case will be managed and why
- Agree on the degree of subsequent exchange of information relating to the case

Due to the complex funding requirements of settlement agencies, there is need for each agency to agree internally and for the network to discuss protocols in light of funding requirements and limitations.

It is important to ensure that, apart from frontline staff who first comes into contact with the woman, staff who provide subsequent services must be qualified and or authorized to handle specialist service. This will reduce mismanagement of cases and will also reduce the risk to the victim. Receiving wrong or ill-timed advice, for example, around leaving the abuser, could lead to further risk for the woman. It has been established, that most women who are murdered by the abuser are usually killed when attempting to leave him. Directing the woman as quickly as possible to staff who have the relevant skills will enhance her chances of receiving the appropriate help and support. It will also assist the victim with decision making.

### **Exercise**

Below is a list of services identified by some of the past participants in OCASI Domestic Violence Workshops. Do you know of local services available in your area that can be useful to service providers for referral purposes? Are you aware of websites that can be used by service providers as resources? List them.

## 5.5 IMPROVING SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Given that immigrant women are vulnerable to abuse and the challenges they face are immigrant- and ethno-culture related, it is important to ensure that services for immigrant women are appropriate.

### General Improvements to Services for Immigrant Women

The following are some of the ways in which services for immigrant women can be improved with respect to domestic violence:

- Educate Executive Directors, managers of frontline workers and other stakeholders about the need to coordinate
- Increase collaboration among existing domestic violence coordinating committees throughout the province
- Bring settlement agencies and specialized agencies together
- Involve places of worship
- Conduct outreach visits (e.g., at a shelter staff-to-staff, and staff-with-resident outreach)
- Conduct an audit of existing services:
  - Establish mandate of each agency with respect to woman abuse program, and identify services offered
  - Ensure that all relevant agencies know what services are available and that this information is updated
  - Create an annotated list of services within the province
- Build relationships with referral agencies
- All staff, Executive Directors and other management staff, as well as frontline staff must keep up to date on changes at other services
- Establish links to Children's Aid Societies and to shelters
- Assist communities to build a resource bank within their communities
- Share information and resources:
- Make use of resource manuals on family violence (e.g., *Understanding Wife Assault*) and ensure that different organizations know about them
- Find out more about agencies that state they have woman abuse counselors (e.g., what services they offer, whether they accompany a woman to court, what supports they offer, what eligibility requirements they have, what kind of counselling they provide, and if they conduct friendly visits). Women may go to different agencies for different services
- Recognize that organizations and individuals in organizations develop informal reputations (e.g., "that person separates families")
- Improve public education
  - Use existing resources (many organizations have good brochures and handouts). Do not reinvent the wheel
  - Ensure information is provided in the appropriate languages
  - Place information in locations that women frequent
  - Find ways to get information to women (e.g., tampon holders, lipstick holders)
  - Ensure information includes contact numbers
- Seek out existing protocols and adapt them to create generic best practices
- Recognize the key role played by a wide variety of organizations that serve immigrant women and promote the important services played by the various organizations

- Provide orientation, education and information, including information on human rights, women's rights etc.

### **Ethnically Diverse Staff**

In many cases women feel more at ease when they observe the presence of an ethnically diverse staff team. This can signal that her immigration challenges or those relating to her cultural beliefs are likely to be appreciated by an organization having staff from different countries. Even when the woman may not wish to be served by an individual from her own ethnic group, a diverse staff team can still be welcoming. Where a qualified staff member from her ethnic group is available, a woman should be informed of the options and asked whether she wishes to see a staff person from her own ethnic group. It should not be assumed that a woman desires to be served by a Canadian staff just because she is an immigrant, but some women may prefer to be served by an immigrant to enable them to be more open.

### **Acknowledging Diversity**

There are many cultural groups in Ontario, even among immigrants who speak the same language. One way of treating women from different ethnicities, cultures and religions is to treat each woman as an individual and to acknowledge that, even when they might have some common experiences, immigrant women are not a homogenous group.

### **Reduce Automated Telephone Services**

Replace automated telephone systems with live staff. Automated systems are too challenging for many abused immigrant women. In many countries, including developed countries outside North America, the answering machine had delayed popularity as a method of communication and many women who are not particularly recent arrivals do not have familiarity with, or appreciation for, the system. Even when women are familiar with the system, they may change their minds and give up trying to access information or services when they do not reach an actual person.

### **Privacy**

When making assessment and when addressing abuse, ensure that the woman's right to privacy is respected. Ensure that the woman is aware of the need to exchange information professionally for referral, but reassure her that only the necessary information will be shared. Follow the recommendations that are given in the legal section. The organization must be careful in the way it selects staff who act as first contacts or who manage the case.

### **Assist Women with Legal Aid Matters**

One way of assisting the woman is being proactive and explaining the woman's situation to the Legal Aid office, instead of having her go to the office on her own. Many women feel helpless and powerless when they are in the presence of an uninformed, unsympathetic individual with whom they have to interact to obtain needed services. While immigrant women may find obtaining any number of services daunting, a visit to the Legal Aid office is especially so.

## **Role of Funders**

In a focus group that was held as part of the prevention of domestic violence against immigrant women project, it was expressed that the funding community should recognize the resources required to effectively prevent and address domestic violence toward immigrant women. It was stated that organizations that do not receive funding, however, should still promote the safety of immigrants through ensuring staff recognize signs of abuse and refer the victims to organizations that have appropriate programs. Focus group participants articulated their views that organizations should continue to seek funding to assist abused immigrant women, as women's safety should be acknowledged as being integral to their successful settlement. Indeed participants asserted advocacy should not stop until funding for abused women's programs is part of the mandate of all settlement agencies.

## **Improving Case Management**

A most significant aspect of improving services is appropriate follow-up programs. It is important that organizations streamline procedures for case management and establish networks with appropriate referral services, ensuring clarity regarding who is to follow up on a short- and long-term basis. Even where initial assistance has been given to a woman, or an appropriate support group has been identified, there has to be ongoing follow-up to monitor the woman's changing condition and to identify any developing challenges.

## **Ensuring Follow-Up Services**

The woman's isolation can be reduced by linking her with appropriate support groups, chat groups and other relevant services. Find support services that are related to legal issues or services that are of a cultural nature, if the woman requires or prefers this.

## **Improving Shelter System**

Provide resources to increase and to improve the shelter spaces. Many women who go to shelters have difficulty coping with the lack of privacy. Some also have problems related to meals served and the cramped space. Improvements to shelters (e.g., layout, dimensions, cultural sensitivity, etc.) could help abused women have as normal a life as possible. Housing should be found quickly, to prevent the discouragement that sometimes occurs in shelters, and to foster hope.

## **Multicultural Training for social Workers**

Provide multicultural and ethnic training for social workers and social service providers. This will prepare workers for dealing with issues relating to culture and help to improve services for the abused woman.

## **Provide Interpretation Services**

This will reduce dependence on the abuser as a translator.

## **5.6 COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY**

Community education involves information that assists the entire community to learn and become aware of an issue. Advocacy involves promoting a cause and actively supporting it. Both advocacy and community education are important because both involve awareness and information provision that are central to preventing and addressing domestic violence.

### **Educational Content To Be Developed and Disseminated**

Community education entails planning, developing and distributing educational information. There is a lot of material currently available in different agencies so it is preferable to use, or modify, existing material rather than develop entirely new material.

The information should outline basic facts about domestic violence, including the prevalence of abuse and the consequences to women, including health consequences. The information should also detail how to prevent and address abuse and the role of different organizations and individuals in this process. Topics to be covered in the educational materials include:

- Connection between domestic violence and substance abuse and the impact on mental health
- Dangers of domestic violence, warning signs of abuse, risk for violence and the need for prevention
- Magnitude of immigrant woman abuse and statistics
- Domestic violence in the workplace
- List of organizations, services, support groups, and other resources offered
- Information on how individuals and organizations can help
- Telephone numbers to call
- Legal and other options available
- Where to find available community resources
- How to prevent violence
- Information about available legal assistance, including information on victim's rights and on assistance available through courts
- Where to get financial support for victims
- Available medical services including counselling programs for abused victims and medical care for children
- Information of Women's Rights as Human Rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Training resources for service providers and volunteers who come in contact with abused women
- Information relating to the elderly and other special groups
- Family resources, including information relating to children
- Self-care and empowerment for immigrant women

**Exercise**

On what should advocacy efforts focus?

**Channels of Distribution and Outreach**

- World Wide Web
- Newsletter
- Public education brochures
- Ethnic media, including community newspapers, radio, television
- House to house
- Town hall and other meetings
- Working with local school districts
- Collaborating with existing education and outreach services addressing domestic violence issues
- Distribution at local events
- Videos
- Manuals
- Online support networks
- Places of worship

**Target Audience for Advocacy Material**

- Various levels of government
- All levels of the community including parents, children, elderly people
- Advocacy with law makers
- Advocacy with the public
- Business community
- Criminal justice personnel, including attorneys
- Victims of domestic violence

## Appendix 1

### A Sample of Services Identified By Past Participants in OCASI Domestic Violence Workshops

#### SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM WINDSOR ESSEX CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

- The Shelter for Abused Women Hiatus House

#### SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM VICTIM SERVICES, WELLINGTON, GUELPH

- Guelph Wellington Women in Crisis Mariann's Place, Transition Program, Sexual Assault Centre, 24 Hour crisis line. P.O. Box 1451 Guelph, ON, N1H 6N9
- Guelph Wellington Sexual Assault Care and Traditional Treatment Centre, General Hospital. Delhi St., Guelph, ON, N1E 4J4
- Family and Children Services of Guelph & Wellington. 55 Delhi St., P.O. Box 1088, Guelph, ON, N1H 6N3
- Victim Witness Assistance Program, 36 Lyndham Street South, Guelph, ON
- Homewood Health Centre, 150 Delhi St., Guelph, ON
- Family Counselling and Support Services, 409 Coolwich St., Guelph, ON, N1H 3X2
- Community Mental Health Clinic, 147 Delhi St., Guelph, ON, N1E 4J3
- University of Guelph, University of Guelph Centre, 3rd Floor Guelph, ON, N1G 2U1

#### SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM NORTH YORK COMMUNITY HOUSE, TORONTO

- Barbara Schlifer Clinic
- COSTI
- Elspeth Heyworth

#### SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM REXDALE WOMEN'S CENTRE, ETOBICOKE

- Micro skills
- YWCA
- Ernestine Women's Shelter;
- George Hull Centre
- Rexdale Community Health
- Rexdale Legal Clinic
- Family Services Association
- Albion Neighborhood Services

#### SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM FAMILY COUNSELLING CENTRE OF NIAGARA, ST. CATHARINES

- Nova House, Women's Shelter, Niagara Falls, 905-356-5800
- Women's Place North Niagara, Women's Shelter, St. Catharines, 905-684-8331
- Women's Place South Niagara, Women's Shelter, Welland, 905-788-0113
- Design for a New Tomorrow, Counselling for Women, Niagara Region, 905-684-1223

- Niagara Region Sexual Assault Centre, Counselling for Sexual Assault Victims
- Niagara Region-Welland, 905-734-1141
- Women's Resource Centre, Beamsville, 905-563-5910
- Women's Resource Centre, Smithville, 905-957-1838
- Women Against Violence (W.A.V.E), Fort Erie, 905-871-1122
- Niagara Victim Support Services, Niagara Region, 905-682-2626
- Bethlehem Place, Supported Housing, St. Catharines, 905-641-1660
- Centre de Sante Communautaire, Violence Against Women Program in French.

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM CATHOLIC FAMILY SERVICES OF PEEL, STRATFORD**

The following types of organizations are offering services to abused women and their children: shelters, counselling agencies, ethno-specific agencies. Contact Victim Services of Peel to get more information.

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM CATHOLIC FAMILY SERVICES OF HAMILTON WENTWORTH, HAMILTON, ONTARIO**

- The Sexual Assault Centre
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- All five shelters in Hamilton

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM MY FRIENDS' HOUSE, THE COLLINGWOOD CRISIS CENTRE, COLLINGWOOD**

- My Friends House
- The Collingwood Crisis Centre shelter, residency, 24 hour crisis line, womens group 444-2511
- Catulpa Tamarac, Partner Abuse Program, 446-1120

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM GUELPH-WELLINGTON WOMEN IN CRISIS, GUELPH**

- Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis
- Family Counselling and Support Services
- Guelph-Wellington Care and Treatment Centre for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
- Couple and Family Therapy Centre, University of Guelph

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM EDUCATION WIFE ASSAULT, SCARBOROUGH**

- Scarborough Women Centre
- South Asian Community Centre

Both are offering community services to women including training and workshop to immigrant and refugee women, relaying information about abuse and violence. They are also providing support counselling.

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF TORONTO**

- Transitional Support Workers, Shelters, Police, Victim Witness Assistance Program, Here To Help Programs, Counselling Agencies

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM SAVIS, OAKVILLE**

- S.A.V.I.S, open multicultural meetings on fridays, school presentations. (educator program)

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM ST. CHRISTOPHER HOUSE, TORONTO**

- St. Christopher House
- Abrigo Centre
- Redwood Shelter
- Parkdale Community Health Centre
- St. Joseph Hospital F24 center

**SERVICES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS FROM WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE SKILLS TRAINING OF WINDSOR INC.,**

- Children's Aid Society (Child Protection)
- Domestic Assault Treatment Centre
- Domestic Violence Shelter, Hiatus House
- Domestic Violence Unit, Windsor Police
- Sexual Assault Treatment (Medical)
- Sexual Assault Crisis Centre (Counselling)
- Sexual Assault (Safe Kids)
- Sexual Assault Unit, Windsor Police
- Victim Services of Windsor & Essex County
- Victim Witness Assistance Program (Court)

## Appendix 2

### Safety Planning in Situations of Woman Abuse

#### Prepared by Woman Abuse Council of Toronto

Source: Project Blue Sky: A Website on Domestic Violence. Retrieved September 22, 2006 from <http://www.projectbluesky.ca/english/generalinfo/safetyplan.html>

#### Safety during an Explosive Incident

- If an argument seems unavoidable, try to have it in a room or area that has access to an exit. Avoid the bathroom, kitchen or anywhere near weapons
- Practice how to get out of your home safely. Identify which doors, windows, elevator, or stairs would be safe and easily accessible
- Have a packed bag ready. Keep it in a secret but accessible place in order to leave quickly
- Identify a neighbor you can tell about the violence and ask that they call the police if they hear a disturbance coming from your home
- Make up a code word to use with your children, family, friends, and neighbors when you need the police
- Decide and plan for where you will go if you have to leave home (even if you don't think you will need to)

If the situation is very dangerous, use your own instinct and judgment to keep yourself safe. Call the police as soon as it is safe to do so. You can obtain a restraining order.

#### Safety When Preparing to Leave

- Identify who would let you stay with them or lend you some money
- Always try to take your children with you or make arrangements to leave them with someone safe
- Leave money, an extra set of keys, copies of important documents, and extra clothes with someone you trust
- Open a savings account in your own name to start, establish, or increase your independence. Think of other ways to increase your independence
- Keep the shelter numbers close at hand and keep change or a calling card with you at all times
- Review your safety plan with a friend or counselor in order to plan the safest way to leave your batterer
- To avoid being reported as missing, leave a brief note indicating your departure. If you are taking your children with you, indicate this in the note.

## **Safety in Your Home**

- Inform neighbors and landlord that your partner no longer lives with you and that they should call the police if they see your abuser near your home
- Rehearse a safety plan with your children for when you are not with them
- Inform your children's school or day care about who has permission to pick up your children. (Give them a copy of your restraining order)
- Change/Add locks on your doors and windows as soon as possible. Add a peephole and increase outdoor lighting if possible. Try to borrow a portable or cellular phone
- Change your telephone number, and make sure it is unlisted. Don't give it to anyone you don't trust

## **Safety with a Restraining Order**

- Keep your restraining order with you at all times. Leave extra copies at work, with a friend, in your car, etc.
- Call the police if your partner breaks the court order
- Think of alternative ways to keep safe if the police do not respond right away
- Inform family, friends and neighbors that you have a restraining order in effect
- Try to avoid places in the community your batterer may frequent

## **Your Safety & Emotional Health**

- If you are thinking of returning to a potentially abusive situation, discuss an alternative plan with someone you trust
- If you have to communicate with your partner, determine the safest way to do so
- Have positive thoughts about yourself and be assertive with others about your needs
- Plan to attend a support group to gain support from others and learn about the law and your rights
- Decide who you can call freely and openly to give you the support you need
- Read books, articles and poetry to help you feel stronger
- Collect resources and pamphlets concerning Woman Abuse

## **Safety on the Job and in Public**

- Decide who at work you will inform of your situation. This should include office or building security (provide a picture of your batterer if possible)
- Arrange to have someone screen your telephone calls if possible
- Identify a safety plan for when you leave work. Have someone escort you to your car, bus or train. Use a variety of routes to go home if possible. Think about what you would do if something happened while going home

## **If you are a teen in a violent dating relationship**

- If things in your relationship don't feel right to you, talk about it with someone you trust
- Decide which friend, teacher, or relative, you can go to in an emergency
- Contact the police to learn how to obtain a restraining order and make a safety plan

**[Checklist-What You Want to Take When You Leave](#)**

For more information about services available to you call:

**Assaulted Women's Help line:** Telephone: **416-863-0511**

**FemAide – Ligne d'aide et de soutien pour femmes violentées**

Sans Frais

Téléphone : 1-877-femaide (336-2433)

ATS :

1-866-860-7082

Prepared by **Woman Abuse Council of Toronto**: "Safety Planning in Situations of Woman Abuse"

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