Language, Culture and Context: Perspectives of Canadian Service Providers on Immigrant Women's Understandings and Experiences of Violence within Intimacy

by

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ABSTRACT

Immigrant women from ethnocultural communities often have differing definitions and experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Domestic Violence (DV), and these processes are heavily influenced by language, culture and political contexts. However, the dominant conceptions of partner or family violence and the responses deemed appropriate to it within mainstream Canadian discourses do not account for this diversity. In turn, this creates a gap between the nature of services that many of these immigrant survivors have access to and those that they actually desire, thereby frequently discouraging them from seeking formal support. This thesis uses the framework of feminist standpoint epistemology to explore the various linguistic, cultural and contextual factors (such as immigration itself) that play overlapping roles in determining how immigrant women understand and respond to violence in diverse ways. Through interviews of six service providers from Edmonton who engage with immigrant survivors, it also shines a light on what many immigrant women look for when they approach support workers, why the existing system is not set up to cater to their specific needs, and how this creates a situation where immigrant survivors do not have equitable access to quality care and support within Canada. Finally, it suggests several areas for future research that could contribute towards more culturally-informed understandings of violence and offers some recommendations for improvements that can be made within the existing support system.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Domestic Violence, immigration, language, culture, help-seeking behaviour, challenges in service provision

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Nirupama Rajan. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, under the Project Name "The Role of Language and Meaning in Seeking and Receiving Aid among Immigrant Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada", with ID: Pro00131416, on August 3rd, 2023.

when I needed it, and for all the wonderful dinners! I love you so much. Rachel, the honesty with which you respond to everything I put down on paper has made me a better writer and will always continue to do so. Anne, thank you for letting me be myself in all my rage and bitterness – I honestly don't know what I'd do without you (or you without me). Andy and Renee, thank you for making room for me in your home and your lives, and for letting me lean on you through the unending moments of anxiety. haley, you are one of the best things to have happened to me in the last two years. You are my friend, and my family, and I am so grateful for all the moments of joy, wisdom and bittersweet comfort that I have encountered because of you.

And then there are those who live far away, but who touch my life every single day. First, my amazing parents, thank you for trusting my choices and decisions as far back as I can remember – I would have never found myself and my values without the freedom you gave me to do just that. Geetha Aunty, your presence in my life is a privilege. The way you take life head on and your sheer joy have inspired and comforted me since the day I met you. To my therapy group (So, Ri, He and Me) and my therapist (Sh), graduate school is hard enough without mental health getting in the way, and you gave me an anchor with which to ground myself every single week.

Finally, I want to thank Anup, my partner, for all the joy and beauty you have brought to my life. Obviously, this thesis owes everything to you. But more importantly, what an honour to know you, to love you and to be loved by you! Especially as I engage with the difficult subjects detailed in this thesis, and encounter my own trauma repeatedly in the process, your presence and your support surround me like a warm blanket and keep me going. Thank you, for everything. I will always have your back and I know you will always have mine.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Seated in one of the many Edmonton cabs driven by Punjabi men one evening, and having exhausted all the texts and emails on my phone, I eventually started listening to the radio. It was a Punjabi station, intended for the largely Punjabi population of Indians living in the city. I was fascinated, despite being able to understand only the occasional word or two that sounded like similar ones in Hindi. I realized soon enough that the narrator was reading out news headlines, informing listeners of the general happenings in the city. One particular report caught my attention – it was about a case of sexual assault, and the only reason I know that is because those two words were repeated over and over in English – "sexual assault". I couldn't tell you who was assaulted, what came of it or any other details, because every other word was uttered in Punjabi. "Sexual assault", however, didn't seem capable of being translated, despite the fact that the violence was clearly deemed as something problematic to be reported on.

I noticed a similar pattern playing out when coding a focus group discussion for a research assignment last year; this particular discussion involved Black African immigrant women, and the topic at hand was Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), how it manifested in their community, and what they thought the reasons for it were. A point that many women kept coming back to, in different ways and with different words, was that there was no direct translation for 'Intimate Partner Violence' in their native tongue, and so they weren't fully able to wrap their head around the concept or what the researchers wanted from them. This struck me as fascinating, because they seemed to unanimously agree with and understand violence, particularly that inflicted upon

women by their domestic partners (all men, in this case), and yet, the usage of the term IPV itself became a roadblock that they kept hitting, that seemed to impede introspection.

Having always gravitated towards the linguistic aspects of any subject, I noticed that this was not so much a problem of understanding or communicating a lived experience, but one of grasping a particular concept and its construction through the sociopolitical language and culture of the time and place. Likewise, in the case of the Punjabi news report, it wasn't as simple as there not being a way to talk about sexual abuse or assault in Punjabi. It seemed more as if there was a need to communicate the idea of sexual assault as a neat, categorized concept in the precise way in which it is defined and constructed (or perceived) in Canada, and there was no real way to communicate that specific conception except for in the language that is its container – English.

In other words, there certainly exist words to describe one human being violating another in all languages, but specific terms such as "sexual assault", "domestic violence" (DV) and "Intimate Partner Violence" (IPV) are sociopolitical and legal constructs that signify something more or other than just the set of behaviours that comprise them. Thus, it isn't so much the inability to translate behaviour or events, but the inability to translate constructs created from the lens and perspective of a particular Western worldview. And that begs the question, if the English "sexual assault" cannot be translated into Punjabi, what are the Punjabi constructs and concepts surrounding this kind of violence – products of a different worldview – that are incapable of being translated effectively into English, into a Canadian sociopolitical and legal system that purports the intention to end the problems that immigrants here are encountering? That is, what

is being missed simply because the language and legal framework for it doesn't exist? In this research project, I ask these questions in order to understand how women of some immigrant cultures perceive, experience and respond to violence in ways that might be different from what is expected within the mainstream Canadian context.

I hypothesize that terms such as "Intimate Partner Violence" and "domestic violence" are products of a particular worldview and sociopolitical context, and immigrant women may not necessarily identify with these terms – and may even have stigmas attached to them – which would in turn disempower them from seeking formal supports for IPV while living in a Western nation like Canada. The language used within the process of providing support might also heavily rely on terms relating to individualization of survivors, rescuing and prosecution. This could discourage help-seeking among immigrant survivors whose cultures, like my own South Indian one, heavily emphasize collectivism and family unity. On that note, I should clarify that while this may have begun as an exploration of language, it turned very quickly into one of language, meaning, culture and conception, simply because of how inevitably interconnected these concepts are. As Alaggia et al. (2017) noted about their research, "It is difficult to disentangle gender and culture and combine impact on language. Thus, examples of these interacting influences were not presented in tidy linear ways, but rather in layered complexities." (478) I find that the same holds true for my work here. Along with language and conception, I consider the process of immigration itself within my investigation, in order to observe how it interacts with the cultural aspects already at play. So as much as I keep coming back to language throughout this project, it is only within the context of a much larger puzzle that has to do with

culture and circumstance, that all together, and in complex interconnected ways, impact how immigrant women perceive, experience and cope with domestic violence or IPV.

Diversity in definitions

Mason et al. (2008) rightly state that "Research on intimate partner violence (IPV) across populations has been challenging, partly because of the multiplicity of definitions of IPV currently in use and the lack of clarity concerning the specific behaviors that constitute IPV, particularly across cultural settings." (1397) According to the Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention, "Intimate partner violence includes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive tactics) by a current or former intimate partner (i.e., spouse, boyfriend/girlfriend, dating partner, or ongoing sexual partner)." (Breiding et al., 2015, 11) According to the World Health Organisation (2021), "Intimate partner violence refers to behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours." The Royal Canadian Mountain Police, in its definition of IPV (2021), includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychosocial abuse, financial abuse and neglect.

Thus, we see that the patterns most recognized as IPV by mainstream bodies include some combination of mainly physical, sexual and psychological violence, with only limited attention paid to the possible diversity of the behaviours these forms of abuse may entail, and certainly almost no nod to the role of cultural diversity here. Useful to note here is the idea of *cultural*

contingency, whereby "The meaning of violence varies from culture to culture and sometimes within the same culture" (Krauss, 2006, 10). Indeed, the meaning of violence and the conception of appropriate responses to it also varies circumstantially, with immigration as an event being a major factor. For instance, in the context of immigrant Haitian women, Latta and Goodman (2005) note a "range of contextual variables that influence Haitian immigrant women's understanding of and responses to IPV. These had to do with their experiences of violence, the police, and social services in Haiti; cultural values; experiences as immigrants; and struggles with basic survival needs." (1447) Along the same lines, "causal and exacerbating explanations for immigrant women's experiences of IPV, including intimate partner homicide, typically reveal interrelated factors such as acculturation, gender role reversal, language barriers, immigration status, and isolation" (Kalunta-Crumpton, 2015, 2). This notion, that experiences of violence change form depending upon where the coordinates of its factors meet, echoes Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality, and her assertion that "Where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of color, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles." (1246)

A note on usage of terms:

While it is complicated for me to employ the terms domestic violence and Intimate Partner Violence within this thesis given that it is the usage of those very generalizations and constructs that I am interrogating, I find that at this juncture, I must rely on them for effective

communication of my ideas within the context of Western academia. (Indeed, in many ways, this thesis itself could be considered somewhat limited in that it is attempting to convey in English, several ideas that are only weakly translated into English.) On that note, I offer a rationale for using both those terms, often interchangeably. According to some scholars,

> "For decades during the last century, abuse in a personal relationship was characterized as *domestic violence*, a term that implied the standard model of a heteronormative male-female marriage. Over time we have come to realize that violence can in fact occur in any type of intimate relationship: whether the partners are married or unmarried; between partners of any gender, gender identity or sexual orientation, with siblings or other relatives; or in any intimate relationship, such as with a teacher or coach. Consequently, to be more accurate and inclusive, the term *intimate partner violence*, or *IPV*, was coined and that term prevails in the literature today." (Van Niel, 2021, 2)

And so, on the one hand, the term 'domestic violence' speaks to violence within the confines of heterosexual domesticity or marriage. Intimate Partner Violence, meanwhile, becomes a more inclusive term intended to represent violence within any bond of intimacy (romantic, sexual or otherwise), no matter the identities of the individuals involved.

On the other hand, a quick Google search will also reveal that some parties are of the understanding that IPV actually refers to violence within the bounds of a romantic and/or sexual relationship (heterosexual or otherwise), while domestic violence points to abuse perpetrated by members of the family, not just intimate partners: for instance, "Domestic violence refers to violence among people in a domestic situation, and can thus include not only a spouse or partner (same sex or opposite sex), but also siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. Intimate partner violence is more specific in describing violence perpetrated by a partner in a romantic or dating relationship." (Women Against Abuse, 2023). As well, "Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence may be regarded as the same thing: abuse in a romantic relationship. However, [some]

may reserve the term "Intimate Partner Violence" for this definition and use "Domestic Violence" as a broader term for abuse that occurs in the home. Under this second definition, Domestic Violence can include Child Abuse and Elder Abuse, as well as abuse from roommates or other people in the home." (Jacques, 2021)

Given that this lack of consensus seems to exist, I find that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to contemplate the difference between the two terms. My intention here is to describe abuse perpetrated within an intimate partner relationship (for which I see the benefit of using the terms IPV and DV both), as well as abuse perpetrated upon a member of an intimate relationship by a family member outside that immediate relationship (such as in-laws), but related – causally or contextually – to that intimate relationship (for this, I prefer to use the term DV).

Further, while there is a glaring need for more primary research into IPV and DV within non-heterosexual and queer intimate relationships in immigrant communities, I find that the details of these too are beyond the scope of my thesis, largely because most of the data I have collected through my review of literature and interviews speak primarily to violence within heterosexual relationships. Accordingly, the terms IPV, DV and abuse in this document are generally used to describe violence within that context.

Migration and domestic violence

I bring the notion of migration into this equation because I believe that immigrant women's experiences of violences are shaped not just by their cultures, but by their political and economic circumstances. Migration is (and has always been) the reality of the world we live in. Human beings are anything but stationary, and whether it is a move towards something or a move away from something, the daily migrations of people across the globe have intricately shaped the spaces that we occupy each moment of our lives. What forms migration takes, and how the immigrant experience itself unfolds, is determined by multiple forces and patterns produced by prevailing sociopolitical norms. As an Indian woman living in Canada, I am interested in understanding how these forces work in concert to produce the gendered lived immigrant experience in Canada. In the context of this thesis, as well as my research journey over the last year, the specific component of this experience that I find myself drawn to, is domestic violence (DV) and/or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) encountered by immigrant women.

In 2020, the total number of international immigrants in the world was estimated at around 281 million (International Organization for Migration, 2022). The USA has been the main destination for migrants since 1970 – with their numbers in the country growing from under 12 million in 1970 to close to 51 million in 2019 (International Organization for Migration, 2022). That said, according to some parameters, the implications of migration may well be larger for a country like Canada, given that according to the 2021 Census of Population, immigrants made up 23% of the country's population (Statistics Canada, 2023). "Among the G7 countries, Canada stands out as a

nation that welcomes immigrants and refugees … from various regions of the world" (Labonté et al., 2015 as cited in Okeke-Ijehirika et al., 2020, 788).

While these numbers provide a sufficient rationale for deeper research into non-Western immigrant experiences of IPV or DV, it must be stated at the outset that these problems are not unique to or common only within immigrant communities. As Payne and Gainey (2009) put it, "domestic violence is not limited to certain groups or classes. It affects everyone—the rich, the poor—the famous, the ordinary—blacks, whites—our heroes, our villains. All too often, individuals assume that violence involves only specific types of individuals." (1) Thus, nowhere do I mean to imply that domestic violence is a uniquely non-Western problem. Doing so would only perpetuate the pathologizing approach that immigrant cultures already encounter so often within Western nations. Rather, my intention is to shine a light on the ways in which gaps and mismatches abound between mainstream understandings of such violence that are instantly recognizable to the Canadian eye, those that are unique to immigrant populations, as well as surrounding cultural and contextual factors that affect these perceptions or acknowledgements of violence.

Alongside, I also wish to highlight the gaps that exist between *responses* to violence frequently deemed most appropriate within the Canadian context, and alternative responses that immigrant survivors may prefer, that are culturally determined, and that are often inaccessible to them if they choose to seek formal support. For instance, one study found that for West African women, "The use of criminal justice resources was viewed as a last resort and the least acceptable means

of resolving intimate partner conflict" (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2013, 120). For all these reasons, and not least because "[by] creating emotionally and physically unsafe family units, especially for women and children, IPV [and DV] erodes immigrant men and women's ability to mobilize and sustain their pursuit of viable economic opportunities" (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020, 789), understanding these aforementioned gaps is essential to recognizing and resolving abuse within immigrant communities in countries like Canada. This would allow immigrants here to be a step closer to enjoying the same opportunities, avenues and privileges as everybody else.

While several scholarly articles mention cultural variations in the experience of violence and the importance of integrating cultural awareness into interventions targeting immigrant populations, a limited number focus on language, conception and meaning exclusively, or at least highlight them extensively. For instance, a study conducted by Fuchsel and Catherine (2014) revealed that when Latina women were enrolled in a culturally-specific educational program on IPV in Spanish, their general awareness of the subject as well as the occurrence of healthier relationships increased. Another study (Ahn, 2006) indicated that programs conducted in the Korean language may aid early identification and resolution of IPV-related problems within Korean-American communities. Ashbourne and Baobaid (2019) propose a "culturally integrative practice model" (315) that recognizes the cultural need for "bridging local, more collectivist communities and the more individualist aspects of traditional North American mainstream services". (316) A study by Galano et al. (2017) showed a greater reduction in PTSD symptoms when a group treatment program was executed in Spanish within the community setting. A scoping review of 21st century literature documenting interventions in G7 countries (Okeke-

Ihejirika et al., 2022) states, "Across all reviewed articles, many incorporated cultural considerations into the intervention such as familism, machismo, immigration issues, religiosity, and group discussions on the impact that these and other cultural concepts had on intimate relationships. Providing interventions in the participants' native language, in-person, and accommodating participant schedules made interventions particularly effective." (72)

Thus, there is widespread recognition that cultural context matters and shapes experience when it comes to domestic violence. Why and how this plays out, however, seems fairly under-researched. This rings especially true when we try and arrive at a universally recognizable definition of domestic violence and/or Intimate Partner Violence. "Intimate partner violence is viewed differently around the globe, as evidenced by the varying laws against the practice across nations" (Heise et al., 1999 as cited in Raj & Silverman, 2002, 370), and so, there is a need for research to explore "how both men and women of diverse immigrant cultures understand, define, and view violence and abuse in families" (Raj & Silverman, 2002, 393).

Overview of this study

In this thesis, I wish to explore how immigrant experiences and understandings of IPV or DV, as well as their responses to it, differ from the most conspicuous approaches to these topics within the mainstream, and thus, what this mainstream view is at risk of missing or ineffectively addressing. I do this through a detailed literature review of articles published within Canada over the last fifteen years that make any mention at all, of the role of language and linguistic patterns

within this subject, as I find that language is a useful magnifying glass with which to assess cultural variations in meaning – thus, these articles highlight such ontological diversities and aid my own understanding of them. Based on the key themes emerging from this literature review, I then conduct interviews of service providers and community organizers working within the city of Edmonton, who have interacted with female immigrant survivors of IPV or DV in some capacity through their work.

As Giesbrecht et al. (2023b) note, "most of the existing literature regarding newcomer women's experiences of IPV, and the experiences of service providers who work with them, is based on research conducted in large immigrant-receiving cities such as Toronto." (139) This was an observation I also noted in my own search for Canadian literature in this area, and so, my attempts to gather the perspectives of service providers in Edmonton contribute to creating a more rounded picture of immigrant experiences of IPV/DV within Canada. I interview individuals from mainstream organizations as well as from those that cater to immigrant populations (specific or otherwise), in an attempt to analyze responses from people with diverse backgrounds. The countries from whom these service providers receive clients are many, but my focus here is on the experiences of those hailing from the cultures of the "Global South", including South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, African and Latin American countries. I provide more details of my methods in the following chapters of this thesis.

I intentionally choose to interview service providers instead of immigrant survivors for the following reasons: one, the perspectives of service providers could prove to be highly beneficial,

because their insights are bound to be shaped by multiple interactions with survivors from diverse cultures. In this, I borrow the rationale of Giesbrecht et al. (2023b), who said about their study of service providers, "While much of the previous literature focuses on experiences of particular groups of newcomer women (such as a specific cultural community or country of origin), a strength of this study is that service providers detailed their experiences working with many diverse newcomer women survivors of IPV. Our findings highlight some commonalities in experiences, impacts, barriers, and supports observed by service providers." (139) Two, the onus is on service providers to alter the ways in which support is provided, and therefore, they have a large stake in understanding the effectiveness of prevailing modes of support. Three, while immigrant survivors of violence are in general an understudied population, the fact remains that of the studies that do describe their experiences, most utilize the inputs of survivors themselves while very few turn their gaze on service providers – this is a gap that I seek to bridge (in this regard, the perspectives of service providers are especially relevant in light of the fact that survivors of several immigrant cultures are known to delay help-seeking). Finally, as an immigrant and survivor myself, I constantly encounter the sensitivity of this subject every day in my own life. As such, I believe that I have a long way to go, much to learn and many skills to develop as a researcher before I can interact with survivors themselves in a research capacity – interacting with service providers who possibly have vast experience in this area may prove to be a good step in that direction.

The interviews were semi-structured, and began with questions about language that could then lead into more complex questions about conceptions, meaning and culture. Interviewees were

asked about the languages they used to communicate with clients, and if and why they felt the need for exercising other languages. They described their experiences with interpreting services (human and computerized), and other strategies used when clients cannot communicate in the main language of service provision (usually English). They also touched upon how survivors from different cultures perceived and described acts of violence, how diverse gender roles, stigmas and taboos complicate service provision, the contrasts between collectivist and individualist cultures and how they interact during service provision, the untranslatability of cultural concepts related to abuse, as well as the nature of cultural awareness training that staff receive to facilitate such interactions with immigrant survivors.

Both my literature review and the interviews revealed to me that there is something here that truly deserves extensive research and consideration. While my thesis is merely scratching the surface, I hope that the questions I ask and the insights I offer inspire others to explore the deeper nuances of this issue.

Research questions

To that effect, the main questions I ask are:

1. How do the experiences of domestic violence and/or Intimate Partner Violence vary from one culture and context (for example, immigrant versus non-immigrant) to another, and how do the roles played by conceptions, meaning and language influence these experiences and the attempts of immigrant women to cope with or resolve it?

2. Further, how do the meanings ascribed to different forms of violence and responses to violence in the Canadian context contrast or coincide with those encountered in diverse cultures, and does this impede efficient and effective provision of aid and support to immigrant survivors?

For much of my time as a graduate student at the University of Alberta, I have been preoccupied with a concept in one of my earliest readings, wherein Sara Ahmed's (2018) paper describes, "dynamic non-performativity: when something is named without coming into effect or when something is named in order not to bring something into effect" (333). By exploring the nature of care and support currently available to immigrant survivors of DV or IPV, I ask whether Canada's reputation as a pluralist haven is truly reflective of reality and of the lived experiences of immigrant peoples here, or if all that it evinces is an interest in the immigrant aesthetic, and not the action that it requires. We must recognise that "newcomers are increasingly the major source of trained and menial labor that sustains Canada's economic growth and addresses the long-term care of its aging population" (Choudry & Henaway, 2012; Salami & Nelson, 2014 as cited in Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020, 788). I believe that many support services geared towards immigrant survivors of IPV are founded upon and directed by sociolinguistic conceptions that these women do not see themselves and their cultures reflected in. This creates a system where it appears as if there is sufficient access to effective support for such survivors, but where the actual reality is far from this imagination. The first step, however, is to ask questions about the nature of these differences in language, meaning and conception, and how we might move towards bridging the gaps that currently exist.

Organization of the thesis

My introduction to this thesis begins with a description of the events that ultimately led me to this point on my research journey and to these questions, in order to adequately set the stage and provide a rationale for why I believe this topic should be of importance and interest to anybody researching the experiences of immigrant survivors of domestic violence in Canada.

In the next chapter, I provide a detailed, in-depth review of ten scholarly articles published within Canada between the years 2008-2023, which focus on or at least mention the implications of language, meaning and culture for immigrant survivors. I categorize my findings into eight broad themes and describe how each of them relate to the concepts of language and cultural meaning, why they are relevant, and why they deserve more in-depth research considerations.

Following this, in Chapter 3, I explain the theoretical framework I have chosen – feminist standpoint epistemology (Brooks, 2007)– and its suitability for this research project. I then dwell upon the process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and describe how it has guided my methods throughout this journey. This chapter also provides an overview of the methods and procedures utilized in the recruitment and interviewing of participants, and the ethical considerations therein: I describe how participants were selected and approached, and offer my criteria for designing the interview script. By situating myself within the context of the research, I also examine how my own positionality may impact the nature and outcome of this research undertaking.

In Chapter 4, I analyze and discuss the data collected through the interviews, offer highlights and categorize the information into key themes. I use examples shared by participants (without revealing identities of their clients) to emphasize how diversity in cultural meanings impact immigrant survivors seeking support. I also note the various forms of abuse recounted by service providers, their perspectives of the support system as it exists, as well as their opinions on the role of language and meaning within it. Throughout this chapter, I juxtapose the findings from my interviews with the data gathered through my literature review, in order to identify potential points of agreement and contradiction, thereby proposing new directions for future research. In this chapter and throughout my thesis, I situate my observations and insights within and alongside those provided by a number of scholarly sources, including journal articles, books and information released by prominent governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I first offer a summary of my findings, before outlining some recommendations to make the current mainstream system of service provision more culturally situated, and more effective and efficient in catering to the specific needs of immigrant survivors of IPV and DV. I also list key areas for more in-depth research in the future, so that we may move towards bridging the gap between the current state of knowledge about immigrant experiences, and where that knowledge needs to be in order to create more just and equitable living circumstances for all peoples residing within Canada.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In doing a review of existing literature, my objective was to familiarize myself with Canadian research addressing the role of language and cultural meaning within IPV and DV. In total, I was able to gather ten articles that made some relevant contributions toward this topic. While most of them described general linguistic barriers in comprehending and speaking English that hinder help-seeking, some mention cultural conceptions of "violence", reflected in language, that factor into this process. In analyzing these articles, several common – or at least similar – themes emerged. Although there were significant overlaps among them, it is necessary to analyze each theme separately and in conjunction with each other in order to understand their individual and interrelated implications for immigrant survivors of domestic violence.

Once again, it is vital here to note that although this began as a simple exploration into the role of language, it quickly evolved into an exploration of conception and meaning alongside culture and circumstance. These ideas are all closely related, because language functions as a container for them and is the medium for their communication. Thus, unique conceptions of domestic violence and related subjects, and unique meanings attached to these will be reflected (or absent) in the language that is used to talk about them. For instance, Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) describe how a "form of IPV that is specific to newcomer women, and was experienced by women in [their] study, was threats involving immigration status." (22) While this may not seem overtly related to language, the fact remains that as a form of abuse experienced by several newcomer survivors, it inevitably broadens and alters the conception, and thereby the *definition* of abuse for immigrant communities. If this broader definition is not reflected or accounted for in the

mainstream language that is used to interact with survivors, or in the language used in the training of service providers, the risk that immigrant survivors will not receive access to effective support becomes greater. Accordingly, this thesis becomes an investigation of culture, context and conception, and their implications for experience, rather than an exploration of language in exclusion.

Of the ten articles reviewed here, five (Ahmad et al., 2009; Ahmad et al., 2015; Aujla, 2021; Giesbrecht et al., 2023a; Mason et al., 2008) were results of interviews with immigrant women who had experiences with domestic violence (DV) or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The women interviewed hailed mostly from South Asia (SA), but the research also included perspectives and experiences of women from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iraq, Morocco, Nigeria, Philippines, South Sudan, and Sudan (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a). These women included newcomers to Canada, as well as women who had been in the country for several years or decades. One study also included the perspectives of South Asian men (Ahmad et al., 2015). In terms of geographic representation, the majority of the interviews with survivors were conducted in Ontario and in the Prairie Provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba).

Two other articles (Alaggia et al. 2017; Giesbrecht et al. 2023b) were products of interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted with service providers engaging with newcomer and/or immigrant survivors of abuse. Of the remaining articles, two were literature reviews – one, a scoping review of 30 articles detailing immigrant perceptions of IPV (Okeke-Ihejirika et

al., 2018), and the other a critical review of existing legal and policy discourse on the subject (Abraham and Tatsoglou, 2016). The final article analyzed 15 closed Domestic Violence Family Law case files detailing the experiences of racialized immigrant women survivors of DV seeking support (George et al., 2022).

The major theoretical frameworks used across the board were intersectional theoretical framework, an integration of critical emancipatory and feminist perspectives with an ethno-gender lens (Ahmad et al., 2009), acculturative stress theory (Alaggia et al., 2017), conservation of resources theory of stress (Alaggia et al., 2017), and grounded theory (Aujla, 2021). Finally, all articles studied the experiences of individuals and groups in Canada (although the 2016 paper by Abraham & Tatsoglou also included details on legal and policy discourse in the United States), and were published between 2008 and 2023.

There are multiple tangible and abstract ways in which language and culture determine the ways in which immigrant lives unfold. Accordingly, I have outlined eight themes from within the literature that each serve as a cultural or circumstantial factor influencing the ways in which immigrant women experience and respond to violence.

English language ability

Although there is limited in-depth research available on the subject, most of the selected literature commented on the role played by the ability of survivors to understand English and

express themselves in that language. This seems to be the most direct, tangible role played by language in the process of securing aid and support for immigrant survivors of IPV.

As Alaggia et al. (2015) note, "Newcomer and immigrant clients with limited language abilities face serious communication barriers that can leave them compromised in informed decision-making about their lives, and the lives of their children and families." (472) Even if immigrant survivors are able to communicate in English, that might not necessarily prove to be effective when it comes to matters of abuse, as "significant events and their related emotional content may in fact be encoded in the language in which these experiences occur and (...) talking about and resolving such difficult experiences may be best achieved within that language" (Marian & Neisser 2000; Schrauf 2000 as cited in Alaggia et al., 2015, 473). Thus, immigrant survivors may find it easier to discuss emotionally fraught or unfamiliar ideas in languages other than English (Giesbrecht et al., 2023b, 141). Notably, Aujla (2021) quotes one survivor as saying, "sometimes we cannot express ourselves. In our language we express everything and then that helps. So I think from everywhere and every country and every language at least one or two people [should] work in one organization, [because] it helps." (194) These statements echo the idea that language is not merely a means for communication, but a container for something emotional and affective, cultural and conceptual, that may not be easily translated. Naturally, an inability to communicate in English in the way that native speakers are able to would rob several immigrant survivors of the opportunities to communicate these intangible components of their experiences.

While it is not uncommon to encounter service providers from ethnic communities or to have

interpreters present to cope with the challenges presented by the limited English-language abilities of clients, this is also rather fraught, particularly when interpreters often belong to the same community as the client. A series of interviews conducted with South Asian immigrant survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the city of Edmonton revealed that some of these women chose not to interact with formal service providers from within their own ethnic and/or religious groups "out of fear of revictimization." (Aujla, 2021, 196) It is thus evident that having access to service providers who are fully capable of understanding survivors with limited English ability does not necessarily guarantee that these survivors will indeed access the supports that they require.

While there are creative solutions to the problem of communication barriers, such as over-the-phone services that connect women to interpreters located in a different geographical area, thereby guaranteeing privacy (Giesbrecht et al., 2023b, 136), even these do not necessarily do away with the risk of revictimizing experiences for the survivors. Further, the overall quality of service provision may be impeded by compounding logistical factors that arise in a situation where English-language ability is compromised. Alaggia et al. (2017) noted in their interviews that time was often a "systemic issue" (477), with meetings often taking twice as long when translators or interpreters were present. Overall, where interpreters and translators are concerned, Alaggia et al. (2017) summarize effectively by noting that

> "Cultural connection, ease of language communication and support were cited as positive influences of interpreters and translation tools. However, quality of translation, confidentiality, privacy concerns and role confusion are factors cited as impediments to that relationship. As well, context and meaning are incredibly important when dealing

with cultural interpretation issues. Interpreters in some cases may be interpreting subjectively." (479)

Limited English-language ability also has implications for immigrant survivors outside the survivor-service provider relationship. Often, it can be a facilitating factor in increasing the vulnerability of newcomers to abuse, or in the perpetration of abuse itself. Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) explain that individuals may be "isolated due to their status as newcomers with limited English-language ability and social connections." (8) For immigrants, a limited ability to communicate in English may only offer "restricted opportunities for social interaction and help-seeking and [increase] dependency on their partner." (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a, 13)

Preventing individuals from improving their English language proficiency (and thereby restricting access to further supports) may itself be a unique form of abuse for immigrants. Giesbrecht et al., (2023a) list the various ways in which survivors of IPV described their experiences in this regard:

> "In situations of IPV, perpetrators use women's limited English-language ability to foster isolation and ensure that women are not effectively connected to the surrounding community. Some partners prevented women from attending classes and learning English. Women who did not speak English experienced their partners intentionally mistranslating their words. Abusive partners attempted to manipulate women's lack of English language skills to their advantage, in some cases having women sign papers they could not read (e.g., life insurance policies or loans in her name)" (18).

These statements evidence how language-related abuse intersects with other forms such as economic and familial abuse to create unique, compounded instances of violence for immigrant women, that often go unnoticed or are not actively watched for by formal providers of support.

Untranslatability of cultural concepts and complexities

While most of the available literature largely focused on language within the contexts of ability and proficiency, some articles observed that several words and phrases in ethnic languages contain cultural content and meanings that cannot be adequately carried over by translation into English, no matter what the level of proficiency is. In a study of Tamil immigrant women from Sri Lanka carried out by Mason et al., (2008), the younger among them opined that when perpetrators used animal names as a form of abuse, these names seemed highly demeaning in Tamil, but not in English (1406). Likewise, "the words in Tamil for bitch, prostitute, whore, or slut were more hurtful and powerful than these same words in English." (Mason et al., 2008, 1406) In both these statements, it is evident that the same words have differing connotations and carry differing emotional weightages for some cultures. Thus, even if the words are easily translated, these intangible aspects are not, leaving immigrant survivors incapable of effectively communicating the nature and extent of abuse.

Inherent differences in the structure and operating logics of languages also shape the experiences of those who speak it. Often, the rules of the language mould the rules of the community and vice versa. For instance, in modern English, the word "you" is used as a universal second-person pronoun, no matter the age or gender of the person being addressed. However, "Tamil includes both familiar and formal forms of address. Respect dictates the form of language that women are permitted to use when addressing men." (Mason et al., 2008, 1406) According to this T-V

distinction[1], the word *"nee"* in Tamil translates to "you" as a familiar form of address intended for peers, younger individuals etc., while *"neenga"* is used as a plural or respectful form of the same word, and is often the expected usage from women when addressing their husbands. Diverse sociolinguistic cultures, thus, can create unique, untranslatable forms of subservience for immigrant women, particularly for those from traditional, patriarchal families.

Interestingly, this peculiar untranslatability of certain words and ideas spilled over into the literature itself. For instance, while quoting a South Asian survivor of IPV in her interactions with her own community, Aujla (2021), a researcher, writes, "Some ladies, they said 'haram' [unlawful or forbidden] whatever your husband says, why are you sharing with...other women or involving others?" (193) In this instance, the author has translated the word *"haram"* as "unlawful or forbidden" for the English reader. While not inaccurate, that is a rather impoverished translation of the Arabic word, and one that can diminish the gravity of the challenge being encountered by this survivor. *"Haram"* is not merely "unlawful"; it is a sort of existential concept that forbids certain behaviours, violating which may have spiritual, identity-threatening consequences for the survivor. When translated simply as "unlawful or forbidden", the full implications do not carry over, and may even do the survivor a disservice by masking the actual nature of the situation she faces. In fact, the same author even notes that while transcribing interviews, several words/sentences were kept in the original language because their meaning could not be adequately carried over into English (Aujla, 2021, 188), highlighting how the

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[1] The T-V distinction is a sociolinguistic concept that refers to the use of different pronouns to contextually convey formality or familiarity. 'T-V' here comes from the Latin pronouns *tu* and *vos.*

untranslatability of terms can hinder effective expression in cross-cultural settings.

When dealing with domestic violence in immigrant communities, Abraham and Tatsoglou (2016) recommend a system where "the strengths of informal support networks are used based on first understanding the contradictions and complexities within communities." (577) The role of language is very relevant here, as cultural contradictions and complexities are often perfectly comprehensible in the immigrant's own language. Precisely because they are part of the culture, they are already framed in a way that needs no unpacking within that language. For instance, Ahmad et al. (2009) explain, in the context of confidentiality issues, that "Loss of face could be crippling if precautions are not taken because protection of one's face is highly valued in collectivist SA [South Asian] culture and immigrant minorities." (619) "Loss of face", while perfectly understandable as a metaphor, is much more than a metaphor in many South Asian cultures. "Face" here is not merely the anatomical placeholder for the idea of status or dignity, but their actual manifestation. "Loss of face" is a South Asian cultural *phenomenon* or *event* as opposed to merely a way to explain somebody's shame, and its translation into English could never fully carry over the cultural content it holds. Efforts to translate these complexities in a manner that may be understood by Western discourse, I believe, may to some extent be inefficient or futile, and may even take away from the service provider's understanding of their client's needs. Being able to communicate their problems and receive support in their native language may be ideal for immigrant survivors, given that "language overlaps with culture, giving immediate understanding of some cultural practices" (Aujla, 2021, 195). However, when this is not possible or feasible (due to multiple logistical *and* cultural factors), the research

recommends shifting gears towards providing more adequate training on diverse cultures and specific cultural practices to service providers. (Aujla, 2021, 194)

Mainstream responses to abuse

Several articles noted the implications of the language encountered by immigrant survivors when interacting with mainstream frontline workers and service providers. The prevalence of such language in mainstream responses is closely tied to the legal and political discourse that informs them. For instance, "the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) constructs many women who are entering Canada as being the legal dependants of male sponsors. This has civic, social, and economic consequences" (Mosher, 2009 as cited in Abraham & Tatsoglou, 2016, 573). The consequences of this construction are then reflected in the language used by service providers, which can highlight the precariousness of women immigrant survivors, and discourage them from seeking support. Survivors may therefore choose to live with abuse or remain in denial of it, rather than seek formal support and be consistently reminded of the insecurity of their situations and the potentially drastic consequences of attempting to address them. Similar observations of the legal and political constructions that inform the mainstream narratives of service provision are also made by Okeke-Ihejirika et al., (2018).

Aujla (2021) also writes along related lines when quoting the experiences of one South Asian survivor:

"'[my husband] literally beat the crap out of me and always used to scare me that he is going to dial 9-1-1 and that he is going to call the police. So I used to be so damn scared. . . . Honestly speaking when I had the cop come over too . . . I was crying. . . . I was totally losing myself. This [police officer] he wasn't really bad, but he just said this to me, "Why don't you go back home in case if you miss your family and if things are not working out for you? You should get back home."' (Asha) Asha was hurt by the police officer's lack of compassion and knew if she returned home she would be shunned by her community." (197)

Here, the language of the police officer when interacting with this survivor is not informed by the particular stigmas and socioeconomic consequences attached to the idea of "returning home" for many immigrant communities. Encountering such language at first formal contact may then discourage survivors from seeking out other mainstream supports.

Other forms of cultural stigmas can also have implications for the effectiveness of language deployed by mainstream service providers. In a study of service providers in Ontario, one participant recounted their experience with interpreters from ethnic communities: "Some interpreters refused to translate sexually explicit terms. For example, I'm very open and we were talking about masturbation and the interpreter said I cannot interpret that. And I said I'm sorry but you're here to interpret and you don't have to interfere with the counselling. And she said no, I can't." (Alaggia et al., 2017, 478) The weight of stigma is most often borne by language, and concepts that are culturally hidden from view are also hidden from hearing. Here, the "sexually accurate language" (Alaggia et al., 2017, 478) favoured by the "open" Canadian service provider does not align with the value system of a culturally diverse individual (the interpreter) and becomes a roadblock in effective communication and understanding between the client and service provider. Assuming shared cultural values (though it is imperative to note that this may not necessarily be the case, given value systems are shaped by intersections of culture with other

factors such as age, educational background etc.), one might also speculate if the client themselves may have felt uncomfortable or unsettled on encountering such sexually uninhibited language from the service provider.

Fluidity and particularities of domestic violence

The articles reviewed offered varying positions on how abuse and IPV are conceptualized and defined by different cultures and different social groups. In the study of Tamil women conducted by Mason et al. (2008), "participants, irrespective of their age or status, agreed with the definitions of IPV suggested by the CDC and WHO" (1403-1404) which broadly describe IPV as including physical, sexual, emotional/psychological and financial abuse. (Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention, 2021; World Health Organization, 2022) In reference to that paper, however, Ahmad et al. (2015) note that while this may be, "it remains unclear what kinds of acts and behaviors are perceived as abusive within each type of IPV." (58) Meanwhile, Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) uncovered differences in how abuse was described by first-generation and second-generation Portuguese immigrant women, wherein the younger women were more likely to perceive of certain behaviours as abusive and be less tolerant of them. (801)

While the existing literature indicates that the broad concept of domestic abuse is universally understood, it suggests that there are nuances and particularities in the ways in which it is perceived and experienced, and consequently, in the ways in which it is conceived of and defined; "limited understanding exists about conceptual variations in defining IPV by ethnicity for both men and women." (Ahmad et al., 2015, 27) Likewise, "in all cultures, violence against

women is sustained by patriarchal values and practices. Although such values are universal, their expressions are culturally specific." (Cottrell et al., 2009 as cited in Giesbrecht et al., 2023a, 3) Abraham and Tatsoglou (2016) also note that "while domestic violence cuts across communities, its damage is compounded by structural and cultural factors." (569)

Women in the United States ranked several DV indicators more severely than women in Mexico (Peek-Asa et al., 2002 as cited in Mason et al., 2008, 1400). George et al. (2022) note "unique experiences of spiritual abuse" (534) among the racialized immigrant women in their study. Ahmad et al., (2015) mention several specificities and nuances in how DV is perceived by South Asian populations in comparison with a general ethnic population: The concept of control for this group was expanded to include "financial control, forced work, imposed religious beliefs, and blocked access to health care providers" (62). Additionally, South Asian women "had a distinct concept of physical aggression compared to SA [South Asian] men and compared to the multi-ethnic group" (62-63), and perceived "physical abuse as a form of sexual abuse" (63). Still further, "the concept of public or social abuse seems unique to the SA group compared with the multi-ethnic group" (63) and they also uniquely grouped psychological and emotional abuse together, perhaps stemming "from a more inter-related conceptualization of mind, body and soul in Asian healing systems" (64). Mason et al., (2008) also note that for the Tamil community, "psychologically abusive behaviors were identified that held particular meanings" (1397), and that participants "referred to experiences of verbal abuse as particularly painful and psychologically destructive." (1406)

Further, these particular meanings arise not only from cultural variances, but also the intersection of culture with other factors such as gender, age, significant events such as migration (Sorenson, 1996 as cited in Mason et al., 2008, 1399) etc. Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) note that "economic abuse [is] a common experience among … newcomer survivors" (16). For Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018), "Women of different ages and stages in life … used their own parameters to define IPV and decided by themselves which abusive behaviors they were willing to tolerate." (801)

Altogether, these facts contribute to a reframing of the concept of domestic violence, as one that is more fluid and more intersectional than is commonly understood currently. What domestic violence entails can vary widely from individual to individual than the existing approaches of categorization account for, and despite the repeated attempts at universal definition, "missing from these discussions [are] how abused women, and in particular immigrant abused women, themselves define IPV." (Latta & Goodman, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002 as cited in Mason et al., 2008, 1398)

Gender and cultural Identities

While patriarchy is easily accepted by scholars across the board as a foundational cause and sustaining factor for IPV or DV across cultures, the articles reviewed suggest that the degrees to which the various rules of patriarchy are enforced and the roles for women are prescribed – particularly with regard to what it means to hold the identity of a woman – , are determined culturally, and these have significant implications for how these women perceive, define, interact

with and cope with abuse. In the context of the Tamil population in Ontario, Mason et al. (2008) note that while several of the behaviours described by participants "might be considered examples of a dysfunctional rather than abusive relationship … the strictures against divorce and expectations of female obedience and compliance render their impact equivalent to other forms of IPV." (1405-1406) Aujla (2021) cites Ahmad et al. (2004) as finding that many South Asian immigrant women hold "strong patriarchal beliefs … [which] [interfere] with women's ability to recognize abuse and seek formal supports from health care professionals." (184) Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) write, "Patriarchal values held by cultural and faith communities [are] another barrier to support and safety. A woman described her reluctance to engage with people from her cultural community, stating that she would not go to them for support: "I wouldn't go to them, because those people think [IPV] is normal …" " (13), and Alaggia et al. (2017) echo this finding, noting that "Interpreters from cultures with more deeply embedded patriarchal values sometimes displayed less sensitive responses to women in shelter services." (480) Participants in Ahmad et al.'s (2015) study "demonstrated their desire to highlight gender based power imbalance as a root cause of physical abuse." (63)

As an interesting example of a form of abuse arising out of patriarchy, but unique in perception to a particular cultural group, Ahmad et al., (2015) note the "acculturation by gender and an expectation that women are often cultural ambassadors for transmitting values of the culture of origin to the next generation … [which] may explain why the SA [South Asian] women, unlike the men … included a cluster on culture-based abuse with items pertaining to dowry, gender of

newborns, difficulties in seeing a health care provider of opposite gender, and using cultural, religious and moral values to justify abusive behavior." (64)

Of particular note is the apparent tendency of immigrant women to point to the identity of a 'real' or 'good' woman and what that entails; Giesbrecht et al. (2023b) quote a participant in their study as stating, "You're ostracized, you're isolated from your community, and even your friends' husbands tell them not to talk to you because you're a bad woman. If you can't keep your home, it's your fault." (133) According to Ahmad et al. (2009), "In the context of an arranged marriage and a desire for harmony, [SA] women felt obliged to maintain the bond and, hence, identify themselves as a 'real woman'." (617) and further, that South Asian women "tried to tolerate, sacrifice themselves, pray to God and change themselves in order to meet the culturally prescribed expectations for a 'real woman'" (618).

The value of 'silence' as a strength (or compounding factor) was emphasized in the context of identity: Ahmad et al., (2009) noted that South Asian women "used silence as a strategy to divert attention away from themselves, and viewed this practice as an indicator of their own strength, as opposed to their weakness. On the other [hand], women felt that the social prescription of 'silence' enhanced their vulnerability to abuse because their husbands took advantage and the situation worsened." (617) Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) echo this notion, as well as that "compared to men, women also tend to cast a more positive spin on IPV as a part of life's challenges." (804) Consequently, for South Asian women, disclosure and seeking support is foreclosed as an option, due to these unique conceptions and prescribed responses to abuse that

influence its very perception and definition, including "cultural expectations of silence, subordination and obligation from women as wives, sisters and daughters [that] increased their feelings of guilt, shame and social stigma". (Ahmad et al., 2009, 620) Confirming this fear, Aujla (2021) relates how on approaching a community support worker for help, a South Asian woman "was further put down, instructed to be thankful that the family provided her with food, and harshly told she was a "very thankless person" and "not a good daughter-in-law."" (196) Ahmad et al., (2009) also note "the mediating role of patriarchy on the association of collectivism and familism with stress in intimate relationships" (620), and that "women's hope was not driven by their love for the spouse but their obligation to keep the family together." (618)

Stigmas

In the context of IPV or DV, the notion of stigma often overlaps with several other related aspects – most notably, perhaps, with the culturally prescribed identities and gender roles explicated in the preceding section. However, given the cultural space occupied by 'stigma' and the sheer importance given to preserving one's social standing within several immigrant cultures (owing largely, perhaps, to their collectivist natures), and the impact that this has on the cultural meanings ascribed to violence, I believe that it warrants expanding upon as a separate aspect. Several scholars have observed that "[South Asians] prefer not to be involved in social issues like DV and [are] in denial that abuse happens." (Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 2000, 2007 as cited in Aujla, 2021, 194) Ahmad et al. (2009) quote a participant as saying "we consider this situation (partner abuse) very shameful." (617) Of importance here, particularly when they intersect with

factors such as migration, are the "particular meanings ascribed [to] these acts, such as the stigma associated with being a castoff wife sent back to a war-torn country." (Mason et al., 2008, 1407) Stigmas also interact and coincide with other elements, such as a woman's 'duties' to her family within a collectivist culture, as illustrated by a participant in Aujla's (2021) study who "feared that disclosing DV to people in the community would impact her husband's career as a physician. Her fear led her to remain silent, which inadvertently protected the abuser." (193)

Of all the aspects explored in this literature review, stigmas possibly have the most direct and conspicuous connections with language. After all, words omitted from speech, I believe, are often reflections of acts omitted from life. Sometimes, as the research suggests, this connection between stigma and language is quite literal; Alaggia et al. (2017) make mention of "sexually accurate language" (478) that becomes necessary when service providers interact with individuals whose cultures stigmatize the public deployment of sexual terms and descriptions more so than others, and of the particular conundrum wherein "some interpreters refused to translate sexually explicit terms." (478) In this case, the 'progressive openness' of a service provider does not align with the value system of a culturally diverse individual, causing a roadblock in the communication process, and potentially causing discomfort for both parties involved.

Divorce as a subject bears particular mention within the context of stigma, given its rather feared status within several immigrant cultures. "[South Asian] women face enormous pressures to preserve a marriage because the larger community tolerates abuse, demands silence, and shames

or culturally forbids divorce" (Guruge, 2010; Venkataramani- Kothari, 2007 as cited in Aujla, 2021, 192). As an example, Aujla (2021) narrates the experience of a divorced South Asian survivor, whose "friend hesitated to invite her to dinner as she disapproved of her decision to divorce, being concerned about her own reputation in the community if she kept socializing with Jaseena, a divorced woman living independently." (191) Mason et al. (2008) agree, and describe the "serious stigma associated with divorce … [where] a woman seeking a divorce finds herself ostracized by the community." (1405)

Stigmas and the ways in which they impact perceptions of abuse are pertinent because they may affect how and whether survivors choose to seek support. The research found that "as [immigrant] women navigated formal supports, [they] deliberately avoided interactions with people from their own ethnic and/or religious community out of fear of revictimization." (Aujla, 2021, 196) Alaggia et al. (2017) mention that "fear that the clients' private affairs would be aired in their cultural community was a concern often cited – despite reassurances that interpreters are trained to maintain confidentiality". (478) This is key because it points to the fact that increasing access to service providers from within the community may not be sufficient, and highlights that linguistic (and therefore) cultural barriers are bound to be encountered within interactions between immigrant survivors and non-immigrant service providers.

Collectivism and familism

The distinction between immigrant and Western cultures, in terms of how the former frequently tend to favour collectivism over the latter's individualism, has been written about extensively. Here, collectivism and familism bear noting as important elements, not only because they directly produce forms of abuse unique to ethnic cultures, but also because they create particular roles and obligations for women, thus influencing how abuse is perceived and engaged with.

First, we must note that the perpetrator of abuse within immigrant families is not always or exclusively the intimate partner of the survivor, a key detail often missed by investigations and definitions in the West. For all the participants in Aujla's (2021) study, "DV did not occur in the typical gender binary framework, that is, between one male perpetrator and one female victim in an intimate partner relationship. Within this cultural context, the perpetrator was any dominating member in the family" (189) and "all participants suffered severe and varied forms of DV from one or more family members, as they described instances of physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual, economic, and financial abuse." (189) Aujla (2021) reiterates that this unique characteristic of abuse in South Asian communities is often glossed over, leading to disastrous effects for the parties involved: for instance, "It took years before Preet was reunited with her husband after the medical professionals had misunderstood him to be the abuser, when in fact, the main abuser was another female family member." (191) This example remarkably illustrates the conundrums that arise, and the details that are missed, when dominant conceptions and linguistic narratives of abuse and violence are in misalignment with the experiences of

marginalized groups. These mainstream narratives and expectations of how domestic violence manifests can actually become a disservice for the immigrant survivor.

Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) also echo this idea that for newcomer women, "abuse was perpetrated not just by their intimate partner but by mothers-in-law or other extended family members; this included physical and psychological violence and other forms of abuse." (21) Apart from directly perpetrating abuse, a participant in Giesbrecht et al.'s (2023a) study recalled that "IPV began after her husband's mother joined them in Canada. She spoke of her mother-in-law instigating violence and abuse" (12). In other words, even if the violence is perpetrated by the intimate partner, other dominant family members may play key roles in introducing the violence, as they often "have a major role in the decisions involving their son's family." (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a, 12) In such situations, interventions that only focus on the partner perpetrating abuse clearly would not suffice.

Collectivism and familism, along with the emphasis on capital-C 'Community', dictate that one – particularly women – must prioritise the well-being of the collective over the individual at all costs. So for instance, "Japanese immigrant women, compared to Canadian-born women, tend to choose the well-being of their families over their own personal interests and therefore rely on more reflective and internally focused coping strategies than on problem-focused and confrontational ones." (Takano 2006, as cited in Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018, 801) Ahmad et al. (2015) echo this, noting that "Collectivism prioritizes the needs and goals of a collective (e.g. community) over an individual, and this leads to an "insider" and "outsider" group separation

with a desire to protect the face." (64) Further, prioritizing the collective comes with a set of rules for women, often non-negotiable, that then generate vulnerabilities to abuse. A participant in Giesbrecht et al.'s (2023a) study shared that "as the youngest of three daughters-in-law, she had no voice and was subject to the decisions of the older ones." (12) A participant's opinion in the study conducted by Ahmad et al., (2009) reads, "A woman doesn't want to take drastic steps, and she hopes that everything will be okay, and she wants the children and all to live united" (618), reflecting a culturally specific narrative that dictates who a real woman is, and more importantly, that depicts abuse (and strategies encountering it) as a concern not just of the survivor, but of her community. In the same study, "many women described sacrificing their personal happiness and tolerating partner abuse for a long time to bring family unity and achieve a collective good for their significant others, especially their children." (Ahmad et al., 2009, 619). Aujla (2021) echoes this sentiment by citing Shirwadkar (2004), who notes that "Some [South Asians] believe that if they report problems, they risk losing their community's support. As a result, they endure the abuse as loyalty to their family and community." (197)

Collectivism, which treats the problems of one family or couple as those of the broader community, in concert with cultural stigmas may shed light on the delayed help-seeking behaviour of several immigrant survivors; Alaggia et al. (2017) noted that "some clients do not want interpreters from their cultural community as they believed they would talk about their family situations in their community" (479) and participants in the study by Ahmad et al. (2009) "expressed worries about gossip rather than support on approaching others in the community."

(617)

In contrast to these collectivist values, Abraham and Tatsoglou (2016) elucidate that within the Canadian mainstream, "there is the individualization of the problem (everybody, men and women can be victims equally, and both are in need of support); it is the criminal individual that must be penalized (ignoring the structural causes of violence against women); and, finally, services are provided selectively to individual 'victims' as defined and regulated by the state" (577). It is imperative to question if, given the emphasis on collectivism in ethnic groups, the individualistic approach to resolutions that seems to be prevalent in Canada is serving its purpose to every survivor equally.

Immigration-related abuse

A perusal of the articles suggests that while immigration-related abuse may be classified as another unique form of abuse under the 'Fluidity of Abuse' aspect discussed previously in this literature review, it is complex enough to warrant a close examination on its own. Not only do immigration-related factors seem to create particular vulnerabilities to abuse as well as produce particular forms of abuse (that is, they expand the set of behaviours that are traditionally classified as abuse), but they also influence the process of coping and seeking aid for survivors. I believe that these factors must be paid particular attention to, because immigration-related abuse, while rampant, seems to miss the purview of dominant definitions and classifications of domestic violence. The insidiousness of this detail lies in the fact that mainstream service providers may

not receive adequate training to watch out for immigration-related abuse, simply because there isn't sufficient awareness on the subject.

The research indicates that "immigration status continues to be used as a means to control intimate partners" (Cottrell et al., 2009; Dutton et al., 2000 as cited in Abraham and Tatsoglou, 2016, 574), and that "immigrant women may suffer additional vulnerability to intimate partner violence (IPV), due to factors relating specifically to their immigrant status" (Cottrell et al., 2009; Tastsoglou et al., 2015 as cited in Abraham and Tatsoglou, 2016, 574). Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) echo this finding, noting that immigrant women's lack of awareness of law and policy allows abusive partners to take "advantage of their limited knowledge of Canada's immigration system to ensure their compliance and coerce them to stay in the relationship." (22). Mason et al. (2008) cite Sorenson (1996) as reporting on "diverse forms of immigration-related abuse, including isolation of women by limiting external contacts, not allowing English-language training, threatening deportation, and economic abuse" (1399), evidencing how the definition of abuse shifts not just by culture, but by circumstance.

Apart from directly producing these novel forms of abuse, immigration is often accompanied by conditions of life that engender particular vulnerabilities to abuse, and further, to the persistence and continuation of abuse. Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018) state that, "recent immigrants and refugees to Canada are highly vulnerable to IPV; they arrive with limited support systems, wrestle with changing family dynamics, and may have to adapt to new gender roles" (788). Additionally, several women "simply cannot leave their spouses for economic reasons or due to

citizenship requirements (Alaggia et al., 2009; Lucknauth, 2014; Thurston et al., 2013 as cited in Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018, 802). Mason et al. (2008) describe the stigmas and particular meanings associated with returning to the country of origin for an abused South-Asian married woman (1407), highlighting how such immigration-related stigmas may prevent survivors from seeking support. Other South Asian women have reported how they "initially hid the abuse, sometimes for years, from their family because they did not want their parents to worry about them in Canada." (Aujla, 2021, 189) This information also hearkens back to the collectivism of immigrant cultures, where dealing with abuse does not involve just the partner but the extended family, thereby giving domestic violence or IPV unique meanings within these cultures.

The data available on this matter proposes that, whether because of cultural stigmas, economic compulsions or other distinct factors, several immigrant women are unable or unwilling to leave their partners. In other words, mainstream definitions and processes of 'resolution' and 'coping' are often of little use to these women. Moving beyond hegemonic Canadian definitions of abuse and the 'appropriate' responses to it could be particularly beneficial here. For this, it is imperative that all service providers are trained to recognise the layers that migration adds to the experience of abuse, as Giesbrecht et al. (2023b) report that participants in their study "expressed concerns that agencies provide "fragmented services" and that staff working with newcomer survivors do not have the necessary expertise in both working with issues related to IPV and issues related to immigration." (137)

Overall, the literature available suggests that the experiences of violence for immigrant women are determined and defined not just by linguistic diversity, but by linguistic factors in conversation with many other cultural and contextual factors such as gender, stigma, collectivism, the ways in which immigrants are perceived and engaged with by mainstream agencies and institutions, as well as the process of immigration itself. While there is some amount of research already existing on these other aspects without taking language directly into account, any exploration of language within the literature only seems to exist in connection with these cultural and contextual factors. Accordingly, I designed my research to reflect these interconnections and to explore the role of language alongside these factors in order to arrive at a more holistic understanding of the unique ways in which violence is conceived of, defined and experienced by women within immigrant communities, and the implications that this has for the quality of support that they have access to.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methods

In this study, I use a qualitative approach in order to explore and understand immigrant women's experiences and conceptions of domestic violence, by utilizing the perspectives of service providers from mainstream organizations and community-specific organizations who have years of experience interacting with immigrant survivors and listening to their narratives. The main qualitative method that I use for the analysis of the data I have gathered is reflexive thematic analysis, wherein, "Reflexivity involves the practice of critical reflection on your role as researcher, and your research practice and process" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 62), and where the researcher is "a subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 62). My interviews were guided by the principles of feminist in-depth interviewing, useful for "getting at the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 113) Once I transcribed these interviews, I employed the methods outlined by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), along with the suggestions of Hesse-Biber (2007) to guide the analysis of the data collected from interviews. Before I describe these methods, I will first touch upon the theoretical framework in whose context I place my research.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

Feminist standpoint epistemology may be described as

> "a unique philosophy of knowledge building that challenges us to (1) see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and (2) apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change. Feminist

standpoint epistemology requires the fusion of knowledge and practice. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research—an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action." (Brooks, 2007, 55)

Most of the available literature exploring immigrant women's experiences of violence uses intersectional theory as the main theoretical framework. Indeed, feminist standpoint epistemology may not at first glance seem the most appropriate framework within which to situate my work. However, while there is no doubt that this work is inevitably intersectional, several of the ideas outlined by prominent scholars of feminist standpoint epistemology are useful for my particular exploration of the experiences of diverse immigrant survivors of IPV and/or DV.

To begin with, "Feminist standpoint epistemology requires us to place women at the center of the research process: Women's concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge." (Brooks, 2007, 56) Within the scope of this thesis, my primary objective is to uncover the experiences and perspectives of women from immigrant cultures; thus, a theoretical framework that centers women's knowledge is advantageous to my field of research. For much of academic and epistemological history, the perspectives of women have been invisibilized, and this is more conspicuously so the case for racialized women physically located in the context of the 'global north'. By turning to feminist standpoint epistemology, I seek to "give voice to women's lives that have been silenced and ignored, uncover hidden knowledge contained within women's experiences, and bring about women-centered solidarity and social change" (Brooks, 2007, 53-54). Additionally, "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial

and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order". (Harding, 2004 as cited in Brooks, 2007, 69)

At the heart of this framework is an attempt to shine a light on the actual lived experiences of women, that is, a bottom-up approach that generates knowledge and recommendations by valuing and prioritizing the inputs of those whose lives are being speculated upon. This is crucial "if we hope to repair the historical trend of women's misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge canons … [and] succeed in constructing knowledge that accurately reflects and represents women." (Brooks, 2007, 56) At this juncture, I must note that feminist standpoint epistemology is perhaps more suited to research that engages with survivors themselves, as opposed to service providers, given that it is the former's marginalized lives that are being speculated upon here. Nonetheless, I found it to be useful for my own work, as it served as a constant reminder of whose experiences I am attempting to describe. Thus, even if I was interviewing service providers, this framework allowed me to design my interviews in a way that highlighted how these service providers *heard* the voices of immigrant women. This is crucial, I believe, because the nature and quality of support that immigrant women have access to would in turn depend on how their voices are heard by those that can provide or direct them to such support. Certainly, highlighting the voices of survivors is a deeply valuable research objective, and one that, as I mentioned early on, I aspire to as a more experienced researcher in the future. In the meantime, by using feminist standpoint epistemology to guide conversations with support workers, I am still engaging with the process of bringing to light the perspectives of the diverse survivors who interact with them.

Additionally, by interviewing service providers, I am attempting to bring academic scholarship and on-ground practice closer together. For much of my time as a student of Gender and Social Justice Studies, I have been rather anxious about ensconcing myself so deep within the unending theories of justice, that I might lose touch with the actual lived experiences of the problems we are trying to address within this field. My decision to interview service providers and juxtapose their insights with those I gleaned from academic scholarship is an attempt to bridge that gap. Again, even though it is service providers whom I am interviewing, feminist standpoint epistemology becomes particularly advantageous here because,

> "Feminist standpoint epistemology is an innovative approach to knowledge building that breaks down boundaries between academia and activism, between theory and practice. Feminist standpoint scholars seek to give voice to members of oppressed groups— namely, women—and to uncover the hidden knowledge that women have cultivated from living life "on the margins." Feminist standpoint epistemology asks not just that we take women seriously as knowers but that we translate women's knowledge into practice" (Brooks, 2007, 77)

One of the concepts feminist standpoint epistemology gives us is 'double-consciousness', an argument that women, as marginalized members of society, have cultivated "a heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the lives of the dominant group (men) as well." (Brooks, 2007, 63) More pertinently, "women's capacity for double consciousness grows out of their compliance with socially dictated roles, such as those of wife and mother … [and] to ensure their own, and their family's, physical and economic survival." (Brooks, 2007, 63-64) For the purpose of my study, this concept of double-consciousness is useful in two significant ways: one,

it offers a lens with which to look upon the socially prescribed identities and roles for immigrant women from diverse cultures, and how these influence the perception of violence.

Two, 'double-consciousness' provides a reasoning with which to introspect upon the collectivist nature of several immigrant cultures, in which a woman is frequently compelled to weigh her own suffering against the broader social and political circumstances that her partner and her family find themselves embroiled in within Canadian society, and to choose the survival and well-being of the familial unit over finding means of expressing her troubles within that unit. The concept of a double-consciousness, here, can offer an explanation for why and how women from ethnic communities located in the West experience and approach violence differently. In other words, perceptions of abuse and the ways of coping with it are mediated by this 'double-consciousness'. To extend this idea further, if we conceive of the non-immigrant Canadian mainstream as the dominant group, then women from the non-dominant group have a double-consciousness not just of the men within their community, but of the stakeholders in the broader system itself. This can explain behaviour such as delayed help-seeking among immigrant women survivors as a means to shield themselves and their families from what they perceive to be the standard approaches – for instance, divorce, separation, criminalization etc. – of mainstream service providers.

Of course, immigrant women's consciousness of the Canadian mainstream's approach to domestic violence, and the contrasting lack of reciprocity from this mainstream, owes a great deal also to the fact that the knowledge of the dominant culture is simply that – dominant, and

conspicuous. This line of thinking finds its expression in feminist standpoint epistemology as well, as Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) writes, "Given that blacks in our culture are exposed to dominant white culture in school and through mass media as well as in interaction with whites, we can see how it is possible that blacks could know both white and black culture while whites know only their own. The same might be said for women vis-à-vis men." (10) Likewise, "In many societies, feminist standpoint scholars argue, knowledge is produced and controlled by the ruling class. Therefore, in a given society, the prevailing interpretation of reality will reflect the interests and values of the ruling class." (Brooks, 2007, 67).

I extend this rationale not just to women vis-à-vis men, but also to immigrant cultures vis-à-vis the Canadian mainstream. In other words, while immigrant cultures are constantly aware of the ways in which domestic violence or IPV are constructed (and implicated) socially and linguistically in Canadian sociopolitical discourse, the Canadian mainstream does not extend immigrant cultures this same favour, of understanding the unique ways in which they may construct violence. These ideas of double consciousness and the power relations within knowledge production can explain, for instance, why the widely-accepted definitions of IPV and DV primarily stem from Western ways of knowing, and why, even though "Dozens of experts were involved in the development of typologies and definitions, … seemingly missing from these discussions were how abused women, and in particular immigrant abused women, themselves define IPV" (Latta & Goodman, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002 as cited in Mason et al., 2008, 1398). Naturally, the imbalance in the ability to produce knowledge is problematic

when the conceptions of the dominant group are used to address problems faced by the subordinate group(s).

Even more insidiously, the power imbalance in knowledge production could explain the stereotyping and pathologizing of immigrant cultures that one often encounters within Western discourses. This includes what Amrapali Maitra (2018) terms the 'Suffering Sita' model, a "model that is popularly imagined and sociologically deployed to describe South Asian women's experiences of domestic violence" wherein "Sita, a goddess and wife of the Hindu god Rama, is an archetype of the good wife. The "Suffering Sita" model suggests that South Asian women cannot complain." (9) These pathologizing approaches that harness the dominant expressions of knowledge to proclaim the inevitability of violence within ethnic cultures are really just extensions of the age-old project of "saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988 as cited in Abu-Lughod, 2002, 784). That is, there is a universal capital-V Violence (domestic or Intimate Partner violence, that is), conceived of within a particular reductionist Western discourse, and non-white cultures cannot escape it; they need to be 'saved' by a more developed world-view. These approaches misrepresent, generalize and oversimplify the experiences of immigrant survivors, and approaches their situations top-down instead of bottom up. By utilizing the framework of 'double-consciousness' to observe experiences that the dominant narratives miss, we can work towards building a support system that is more effective for more survivors. Because immigrant women (and survivors) can perceive dominant ideologies alongside their own and place them side by side, using their lives as a starting point for research ensures that "certain areas or aspects of the world are not excluded" (Jaggar, 2004, 62). Whatever its origins,

the fact remains that 'double-consciousness' provides us with a potent "space of resistance" and a "site of radical possibility" (hooks, 2004, 156 as cited in Brooks, 2007, 66).

Another idea that feminist standpoint epistemology explicates is 'emotional acumen', a capacity to perceive and understand concealed pain, emotion and how these are produced, that is uniquely possessed by women. (Jaggar, 1997, 192) Perhaps, this expertise arises out of necessity within the subordinate positions that women often occupy within their domestic lives. However, for my research area, I find it useful to imagine harnessing the wisdom of 'emotional acumen' and extend it outward into the world at large. In other words, "women's everyday experience, and the knowledge that accompanies that experience, can serve as a helpful tool for understanding the larger social world." (Brooks, 2007, 59) By having the capacity to perceive that something may be amiss within the hegemonic ways of and approaches to meaning-making, women – particularly ethnic immigrant women – may be able to develop "subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo" (Jaggar, 1997, 191). In my interactions with support workers, I strive to recognize the emotional acumen of the immigrant women they interact with, by asking questions about the ways in which they imbue their realities with meaning, in order to document the diverse forms and modes of violence and abuse that escape the dominant understandings of these concepts. Additionally, I acknowledge my own emotional acumen as a survivor of IPV who is geographically located in Canada[2], as well as that of the scholars before me, who have observed the gaps that exist in diverse cultural perceptions of

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[2] Deutsch (2004) tells us: "The researcher's awareness of her or his own subjective experience in relation to that of her or his participants' is key to acknowledging the limits of objectivity. It recognizes the bidirectional nature of research. I am subject, object, and researcher." (888-889)

violence, in order to tune into non-dominant understandings of reality that often go unnoticed or disregarded.

Feminist standpoint epistemology has previously been the subject of some critique, in that it seems to desire an objective, universalized account of experience that threatens to erase the voices of diverse women, (Brooks, 2007) and disregards the notion that narratives and accounts of experience shift over time. In terms of attending to the diversity of truths and experiences, several standpoint epistemology scholars have addressed this in their approaches to this framework:

> "Instead of attempting to glide over differences between women, Haraway (1991) points to the invaluable insights gleaned from the differences between women's standpoints and the "elaborate specificity" of each (p. 190). Similarly, Longino (1999) asserts that women's knowledge is located in "particular places, in particular times" (p. 333). Women have different standpoints, and embody different knowledges, depending on how they are oriented toward, and interact with, their environments. In this way, each woman's unique experience and standpoint directs our attention to details and features that we might otherwise overlook (p. 335)." (Brooks, 2007, 72)

When I began this research, I was conflicted between focusing solely on the experiences of South Asian women (owing to my own positionality as one) or on immigrant women survivors in Canada as a broader group. I finally settled on the latter because I was interested in the effort of "Connections made, or at least attempted, where none existed before"(Walker, cited in Collins, 1993, 625). My interest lies in bringing together, on one platform, the perspectives of immigrant survivors and their diverse service providers, in affirming the uniqueness of multiple standpoints and experiences, because "it is precisely within the distinctive characteristics of a particular standpoint, or the uniqueness of a particular woman's experience, that we can hope to find new knowledge." (Brooks, 2007, 72) While I might be exploring the perspectives of diverse cultures

and communities, I am attempting to create an epistemological alliance of sorts, and to stitch a common thread through the broader community of immigrant peoples from the Global South navigating life within a Canadian context. As Patricia Hill Collins (1993) explains, "Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives." (626) Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) echoes this notion by describing a "fusion of horizons": "With communication across and among a diversity of women's standpoints, each standpoint may be enlarged, enriched, or broadened such that a fusion, or synthesis, between standpoints may occur" (29). Utilizing this approach, of bringing together diverse viewpoints, also allows me to create room for contradictions and "inconsistencies" in my research. This is a step that I deem vital to developing a more thorough understanding of the nuances of immigrant women's lives, because "it is precisely in the differences, diversity, and even conflict between women's experiences that we can learn the most about society at large." (Harding, 2004 as cited in Brooks, 2007, 71) My hope is for my research to serve as a platform for a dialogue between diverse systems of knowledge, and as a "gathering site on which multiple standpoints converge" (Brooks, 2007, 75).

While situating my work within the framework of feminist standpoint epistemology, I also want to highlight that there is no one eternal truth or representation of reality that I wish to arrive at. As Brooks (2007) notes, "women's experiences, perspectives, and the issues they face are constantly evolving and changing across space and time. Therefore, … dialogue between and

among women does not end with the achievement of a particular alliance, or shared standpoint

… [and] must be ongoing." (76-77) Indeed, one of my main claims, that the definition of abuse is

not universal and is altered by different cultural circumstances and movements, finds its roots in

this assumption that experience is always, already evolving. Any given account of experience is,

after all, ephemeral. To sum up:

> "As Linda Alcoff (1989) argues, women can achieve a positionality, or standpoint, that is simultaneously "determinate" and "mutable" (p. 325). In other words, we can treat women's standpoints on a particular issue or set of issues as legitimate, as serious, as grounded in social reality while also acknowledging these standpoints' location within a "moving historical context" (p. 325). Indeed, by highlighting "historical movement and the subject's ability to alter her context" (p. 325), we take women's standpoints seriously without reducing all women to a universal group with the same experiences, needs, and characteristics." (Brooks, 2007, 77)

By utilizing this framework, my work contributes to an immigrant women's feminist standpoint,

which "sets the stage for intragroup connections and enables the growth of alliances that are

needed to wield power and forge social change." (Brooks, 2007, 75-76)

An overview of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

My approach to this thesis was generally guided by the principles of reflexive thematic analysis.

According to Deutsch (2004):

> "Methodology that recognizes the self as historically located and produced through daily experience, language, and activity (Bloom, 1998) naturally privileges everyday lives. Furthermore, it allows questions, theory, and problematics to emerge from participants' narratives and experiences (Bloom, 1998; Harding, 1987). It recognizes the multiplicity within any category and seeks to examine the experiences of those traditionally excluded from the production of knowledge (R. Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Harding, 1987)." (891)

Given that I am not striving for universal, hegemonic answers to the questions I am asking, I found reflexive thematic analysis to be the best tool for my purposes for two reasons. One, it places the researcher firmly within the context of the thesis: "the reflexive "I" of the researcher dismisses the observational distance of neopositivism and subverts the idea of the observer as an impersonal machine" (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1988; Okely, 1992; Opie, 1992 as cited in England, 1994, 82). Two, it rejects the notion of objectivity and demands "The ability to embrace the idea that knowledge comes from a position, and a disinterest in the idea of a singular universal truth to be discovered" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 68).

When studying the lived experiences of immigrant survivors of IPV or DV through their interactions with service providers, I am not particularly interested currently in the causes of violence itself. Even when I do introspect upon the causes of violence, it is only to aid my primary exploration of the variety of ways in which this violence unfolds and is perceived or experienced. To do this, I follow the prescription of reflexive thematic analysis to focus on "process and meaning, over cause and effect", and to employ "A critical and questioning approach to life and knowledge" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 67).

Reflexive thematic analysis further asks me "to reflect on the dominant assumptions embedded in [a] cultural context – [to be] a cultural commentator as well as a cultural member" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 67). To incorporate this suggestion, I design my interview script in a way as to elicit observations from participants about the prevailing perceptions of abuse, and of abuse within ethnic communities (and ethnic communities themselves), and the most commonly

employed approaches to resolve these problems. I follow these with questions that provoke rethinking these dominant assumptions and approaches, to allow my participants to reflect upon whether what is easily accepted is actually appropriate. With the data collected from these interviews, I try "to read and listen to data actively and analytically – [to develop an] analytic orientation to data" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 68). Finally, in the process of developing themes and articulating a discussion of the patterns I observed in the interviews placed side-by-side with insights gleaned from scholarly sources, I remind myself to embrace "nuance, complexity and even contradiction, rather than finding a nice tidy explanation" and to "tolerate some degree of uncertainty." (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 68)

In an earlier section, I mentioned that I came to this subject through my own trauma. As a survivor of partner violence, as an immigrant woman now living in Canada, and as somebody occupying a position of some socioeconomic privilege in my country of origin, I am constantly aware of the multiplicity of viewpoints around me and within me. According to England (1994), "reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher. Indeed, reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions." (82)

In my review of literature documenting the perspectives of diverse immigrant women, I found myself frequently attaching to and detaching from the pieces of information I was collecting. Similarly, in my interviews, I found that I had numerous unique reasons to resonate with the inputs of each of my interviewees – whether they were immigrants themselves or not – and

numerous reasons not to do so. In navigating this complex web being woven around me, I have realized that recognizing my role within my research and embracing the influence that I (and my worldview) inevitably have on it is the path that I want to be on if I want to bring greater honesty and transparency to my work. For this endeavour, I found that the process of reflexive thematic analysis provided concrete, accessible guidance and an anchor to ground me when I felt lost within the data.

Interview procedure and ethical considerations

I received the approval of the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board to conduct this study in August 2024. Prior to this, I had some knowledge of service providers and community organizations in Edmonton, primarily as a result of networking activities I engaged in while volunteering with Migrante Alberta (a not-for-profit organization in Edmonton that campaigns for migrant justice) over the last two years. Additionally, my supervisor at the University of Alberta (Dr Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika) also referred me to organizations that she had interacted with through her research work. Once I received the ethics approval, I sent out an initial contact letter (see Appendix A) to approximately 10 organizations. These organizations all work with survivors of IPV and DV in some capacity or the other. Their activities include one-to-one counselling, legal support, material support, awareness campaigns, educational programs and so on. While some are intended exclusively for immigrant communities (these organizations also cater to other migrant issues apart from abuse), a few organizations – and these deal exclusively with all forms of family violence – cater to all residents of Edmonton, immigrant and otherwise.

Of the organizations I reached out to, most responded with interest in participating; a few were unable to make time but aided me with referrals to other organizations (thus, to a certain extent, I have used snowball sampling in my recruitment of participants), while a fewer still did not respond to my emails.

Once contact had been established, there were several follow-up emails and phone calls to communicate further details and to schedule interviews. I ensured that all potential interviewees had access to as much information as I could provide, and also made myself available for any clarifications that they might have needed. Once the interviews were scheduled, I emailed them a consent form (see Appendix B) along with additional logistical information about the meetings. Overall, I did not face too many challenges in recruiting participants and was able to collect information from most sources that I originally intended to. Following these procedures, I conducted five semi-structured online interviews over the course of about two months, with service providers from five mainstream and community-specific organizations in Edmonton. One organization caters to migrant issues mainly within the African community here, two engage with clients from the broader immigrant population (that is, mainly from non-Western nations), while two others cater to the needs of survivors of violence – immigrant or non-immigrant. Each of these interviews lasted about an hour, and some participants also followed up with additional inputs over email.

Selection criteria and recruitment

In recruiting participants for the interviews, I used purposive sampling, wherein "The type of purposive sample chosen is based on the particular research question as well as consideration of the resources available to the researcher." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 119) Interviewees were recruited based on the criteria that they a) be over 18 years of age, b) be able to communicate in English (this was a requirement because one, several of my questions had to do with the experience of attempting to communicate in English with clients and two, I did not wish to utilize the services of interpreters at this stage of my research), c) reside in Alberta (the rationale for this criterion was that since most existing research on this subject within Canada speak mainly to the experiences of survivors and service providers in the Ontario region, I wish for my research to contribute to the body of knowledge within Alberta), and d) be actively involved in community building and/or other specific efforts to address IPV and/or domestic violence within immigrant communities in Alberta. I made the choice to reach out to only 10 potential participants with the hope of being able to schedule interviews with fewer than that number, because "The logic of qualitative research is concerned with in-depth understanding and usually involves working with small samples. The goal is to look at a "process" or the "meanings" individuals attribute to their given social situation, not necessarily to make generalizations." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 119)

After I had received an expression of interest from participants over email, further communication ensued to decide upon the date and time of the online meeting, as well as to provide them with a consent form and other details about the interview (such a preliminary list of questions that they would be expected to answer, along with a notice that other questions may

arise out of the conversation during the interview). The consent form explicitly informed participants of their right not to answer any questions they did not wish to, as well as their right to opt out of the study or withdraw any information they provided up to two weeks after the interview, beyond which withdrawal would not be possible as the collected data would have begun to be analyzed. Participants were also informed, by means of the consent form, that if they agreed to have the interview recorded, the recording as well as the transcription would be stored in a secure location for up to five years after the interview. Finally, participants were also informed that their identities and their places of work would not be revealed to anybody other than the principal researcher and her supervisor, and only pseudonyms would be used in the thesis document (they were also given the option to choose their own pseudonym if so desired).

Interview setting

The interviews took place online, at a time of the participants' choosing. While some of the participants chose to take the interviews during work hours from their workplaces, others opted to speak with me after hours, from their homes. As for me, I conducted all interviews from the privacy of my home, in order to ensure confidentiality (this was particularly important to me in case participants chose to share experiences of their clients in the course of conversation). The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. I made efforts to ensure the privacy of the participants, as well as to wrap up the conversation within an hour, as this was the timeframe that I had indicated to them during the recruitment stage. The participants did not receive any honorariums for participating in the research, and they were aware of this at the outset.

All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, in order to allow me to

parse the conversation in detail during the analysis stage. Once the recording began, I reiterated the objective of the research to the participants and requested that they provide their verbal consent to the interview, by reading out a suitable statement that I inserted in the chat window. I also explained, right at the beginning, that the nature of this research is rather abstract, and might require additional clarifications and unpacking now and then; I reminded them to ask for such clarifications as frequently as required. This, along with the reiteration of my objectives for this project, allowed me to set the stage for a conversation.

Interviews were conducted from September 2023 to October 2023. An interview guide was created with four major questions and these were refined with the help of my supervisor, Dr Okeke-Ihejirika, whose vast expertise within this subject was of great help here.

Positionalities and building relationships

I did not have preexisting personal relationships with any of the individuals I interviewed for this thesis. Most were referred to me through other individuals in my professional network for the express purpose of these interviews, and the one participant that I did know beforehand was a professional contact. Thus, it was imperative that I established a good foundation for the conversation within the first few minutes of the interview itself, so that participants would feel a certain level of comfort in divulging their opinions on this oftentimes sensitive subject.

In order to do this, I first described my own positionality, because "As a feminist interviewer, I am aware of the nature of my relationship to those whom I interview, careful to understand my particular personal and research standpoints and what role I play in the interview process in

terms of my power and authority over the interview situation." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 113-114) Further, "Positionality implies that the social-historical-political location of a researcher influences their orientations, i.e., that they are not separate from the social processes they study." (Holmes, 2020, 3) To this effect, I informed them of my own status as an international student, my experience with working in this field as a community organizer in India, as well as what inspired me to undertake this project.

Milner (2007) explains that "when researchers are not mindful of the enormous role of their own and others' racialized positionality and cultural ways of knowing, the results can be dangerous to communities". (388) To account for this danger, I narrated to participants the story that led me here: I told them of my experience with coding the focus group discussion featuring African immigrant women discussing Intimate Partner Violence (described in the Introduction chapter of this thesis), and how these women reiterated multiple times that they did not have a word for this concept in many of their native languages. I explained how that sparked my curiosity and led to ask thesis questions about cultural diversity in meanings attributed to violence. Describing my rationale for studying this topic had a twofold purpose for me: one, to allow participants to see the honesty and intentionality with which I was approaching this study, and two, so they could have a clearer understanding of what exactly I was looking for from these interviews. I believe I was fairly successful in communicating how important this topic is to me and why it is important for the research community in general, as evidenced by the fact that a few participants even emailed me afterward to add additional information to what they had already given me during the interview.

I then proceeded to ask each of the participants about their line of work, and to give me a general overview of the kind of activities they were involved in on a regular basis. Beginning the interview with broad, "low-stakes" questions like these allowed the participant and me to ease into the conversation and create a context and setting for more complex questions. However, even after I proceeded to the more nuanced questions, I ensured that I broke them down into their component parts, "de-abstracted" them as much as possible, and provided examples when necessary to ensure clear lines of communication between the interviewee and myself.

For me, it was imperative that I created a trusting environment for the interview; while I stated explicitly that I did not require any personal or identifying information about their clients (this statement was itself a way to generate trust and respectful intent), I was aware that several of my questions may seem pointed – especially those exploring patterns of violence and coping mechanisms unique to specific cultures – and I wanted participants to know that they could describe whatever they had noticed in their work without worrying about whether they would be held accountable for it in some way. For this reason, I assured them that neither their identities nor their places of work would be disclosed to anybody except myself and my supervisor. I also emphasized that they should feel absolute freedom to refrain from answering any questions that they might be uncomfortable with, and that they could also withdraw any information they provided up to two weeks after the interview. As Hesse-Biber (2007) advises, "Even though the study and the participant's informed and voluntary participation have been discussed in advance, it is important to reiterate this prior to beginning the interview. Interviewees should be given

every opportunity to ask questions and should also feel free not to answer any question they may not feel comfortable with." (120)

Despite these precautions, I noticed that now and then, some participants initially hesitated to share their views on certain subjects, especially when it came to naming specific cultures. This was certainly understandable, and I never pushed these questions; nevertheless, I feel that I was fairly successful in creating a trusting and respectful environment and a conversational tone that eventually helped surmount their initial discomfort and allowed them to describe their thoughts even on seemingly sensitive topics.

My own positionality as an immigrant woman from India, as well as my own experiences with IPV, naturally played a role throughout the research process, and certainly within the interviews themselves. For instance, I found that I was able to provide several examples of concepts from within my own culture that would be difficult to translate into English in a way that would communicate their full essence to the listener. This allowed me to explain my research objectives to interviewees in a way that wouldn't have been as easy otherwise, within the context of this topic. I even found that participants were reflecting upon particular interactions with some of their immigrant clients and coming to new insights and realizations based on the examples that I was offering them.

Of the six individuals I spoke to, two were first generation immigrants themselves, while two others were second generation immigrants. These participants were all, in some way, affiliated

with ethnic groups and cultures of the 'Global South'. The remaining two individuals were

Canadians who did not hail from immigrant cultures. Given this variety of participant profiles, I

noticed that my own positionality as an immigrant woman also influenced the ways in which I

related to each of my interviewees. Hesse-Biber (2007) notes,

> "it is difficult to overlook the attitudes and values that emanate from any given individual's mix of positional ties. In fact, acknowledging the similarities and differences between the interviewer and the respondent allows the researcher to assess the impact of difference on the interview situation. Issues of difference affect all phases of the research process, from the selection of a particular research question, the formation of a hypothesis, to the overall process of data collection. The ultimate analysis, interpretation, and the writing up of our research findings are all affected by our perception of difference." (139)

With the two interviewees who were immigrants themselves, we resonated with several ideas by

way of our common positionalities as immigrants. There was, on many occasions, a greater ease

with which we could touch upon topics and issues that questioned the legitimacy and

effectiveness of several aspects of the mainstream Canadian service provision system. Even

though I did not share a religious or ethnic background with either of these individuals, the very

fact that we were all immigrants made it easier to speak in comparative terms, and the common

understanding of cultural gaps between Western and non-Western cultures and approaches to

domestic issues seemed to be a given.

With the two participants who hailed from ethnic communities but were not immigrants

themselves, several of these features were retained – indeed, in some ways, there seemed to be

greater room for critiques of existing systems because both these individuals had grown up

witnessing the cultural gaps we were discussing throughout their lives, and not just after

immigration. There was also a strong, perceivable sense of injustice, of the need to lay claims to equally effective support systems for all. My positionality as a person of colour in a Western country and the perspectives arising thereof coincided with theirs on multiple levels, but there were also multiple instances where their opinions and insights were new and unexpected to me; this experience resonated with Hesse-Biber's (2007) prediction that "Your role/status might be shared with your respondent on some issues, but you might also discover glaring differences exist on other particularities of your research question or a topic of conversation." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 143) I found great value in these moments, where I was able to witness the ways in which descendants of immigrants view the immigrant cultures that they are simultaneously attached to and detached from.

Finally, with the two remaining individuals who did not hail from immigrant cultures, I had some of my most interesting insights, because they were able to provide a comparative analysis between what they would go in expecting based on their own perspectives of and approaches to domestic violence as white Canadian people, and those of their immigrant clients, that were often unexpected to them. In trying to analyze these contrasts and counter-approaches during the interview, we arrived at several fascinating realizations that were certainly useful to me as a researcher, and that also seemed beneficial to them as service providers. My positionality in these situations contrasted theirs in highly interesting ways that paved the way for curiosity and made room for even simple, basic questions about cultural differences that otherwise get taken for granted so often. As Hesse-Biber (2007) suggests, "being an outsider might encourage you to

ask questions you might otherwise have taken for granted as "shared knowledge," and you might

discover the unique perspectives your participants have on a particular issue." (142)

Interview questions

The interviews that I conducted with each of the participants were about one-hour each and took

place online. For the purpose of in-depth interviewing, I found a semi-structured format to be

most appropriate:

> "A semistructured interview is conducted with a specific interview guide— a list of
> written questions that I need to cover within a particular interview. I am not too
> concerned about the order of these questions, but it is important that I cover them in the
> interview. I have some control then in how the interview is constructed and how I would
> like my respondent to respond, but I am still open to asking new questions throughout the
> interview. I have an agenda, but it is not tightly controlled and there is room left for
> spontaneity on the part of the researcher and interviewee." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 115-116)

According to the advice given by my supervisor, I went in with only four main questions that

served as a guide for the informal, semi-structured nature of the interview:

- In what language do you primarily communicate with survivors of IPV? Have you ever

  felt the need for communication in a different language? If yes, why?

- What are the main barriers to service when it comes to language? What strategies are

  used when somebody cannot communicate in English?

- What are the words and phrases that survivors usually tend to use to describe their

  experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?

- How do survivors from diverse immigrant backgrounds tend to respond to the usage of

  English terms such as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), domestic abuse etc.?

Even while I wished to uncover novel insights about broader areas such as culture and immigration context, I used language as a starting point because I found the specificity of these questions to be a useful starting point from which to move onto broader, more abstract ideas. I emailed participants these questions in advance, in order to give them some time to reflect upon their interactions with immigrant clients in the context of this topic. I have often found in the past, when I have myself been interviewed by peers and colleagues, that having some idea beforehand of what will be asked can generate complex and nuanced insights that may otherwise be difficult to produce within the span of a short interview. Informing my participants of the main questions beforehand also aided the in-depth interviewing process, which prioritizes "the "subjective" understanding an individual brings to a given situation or set of circumstances" and seeks to "explore a particular topic and gain focused information on the issue from the respondents." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 118)

Owing to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, I was then able to follow these questions up with others in order to uncover the nuances within the responses they gave me in greater depth and detail. These follow-up questions covered a myriad of subjects, such as patterns in domestic violence complaints among individuals of different ethnicities, what seems to qualify as violence in different cultures, the broader understandings of violence in the Canadian mainstream, immigrants' responses to the criminalization framework that is often enforced upon them when countering domestic violence, cultural gender roles and stigmas (and the roles they play in the context of violence), the untranslatability of certain cultural concepts, new forms of

violence engendered by the process of immigration, collectivism and familism (and their impact on domestic violence), and finally, the nature of training that service providers receive in order to improve cultural awareness. Before asking any of these specific questions, I first sought out some general information about the demographics of the interviewees' clients, including the countries that they hail from and the gender distribution among clients.

While I had a guide prepared for the main questions and follow-up questions (see Appendix C), new questions often came up in the course of conversation. Rubin & Rubin (2005) note that,

> "Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion. Unlike survey research, in which exactly the same questions are asked to each individual, in qualitative interviews each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share." (5)

Thus, the conversational approach to the interviews allowed me to adjust the interview script, as well as add to and remove from it based on the demands of the circumstances. Similarly, I also did not follow a uniform order of questions for all interviews. I often found that a question that I initially intended to ask much later in the interview would come up organically because of the turn the conversation took, and so, the nature of each interview itself determined the order of the questions asked. When adjusting my script for each interview, I also paid attention to 'markers', which are "a passing reference made by a respondent to an important or feeling state…. Because markers occur in the course of talking about something else, you may have to remember them and then return to them when you can" (Weiss, 1994 as cited in Hesse-Biber, 2007, 136). As a

result of these factors, each interview took on a unique form, with its own characteristic combination and order of questions and a self-directed flow of conversation.

Transcription

Upon completion of all the interviews, I began transcribing the recordings. This allowed me to go back to each of the interviews and review them once more in the context of the information gleaned from the other interviews. I chose the approach of recording and transcribing, instead of taking notes during the interview, as this allowed me to immerse myself fully in the conversations that were unfolding between me and my participants without having to worry abut missing key pieces of information in my notes. Thus, the conversational tone of the interviews was not compromised at any point, and I had the opportunity to go back to the interviews and parse the in detail later. That said, I also had some notes from the interviews – these were mostly insights gained during the conversations that I did not want to lose track of – and I made sure to incorporate these notes within my analysis during the next stage. During the process of transcription, I was already able to see that my questions yielded the kind of responses that I was looking for, and I could perceive the beginnings of themes across the interviews, as well as how these themes interacted with those that I gained through the literature analysis.

Data analysis

According to the reflexive thematic analysis approach, the analysis of data consists of the following phases: "(1) dataset familiarisation …; (2) data coding …; (3) initial theme generation; (4) theme development and review; (5) theme refining, defining and naming …; and (6) writing up…" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 66). Accordingly, I first immersed myself in the data using the

prepared transcripts. I skimmed through each of the interviews individually and made note of particularly interesting observations within each. During this time, I also placed my field notes from the interviews side-by-side with the transcripts and developed primary connections. From here, I proceeded to the second phase – the individual coding of each interview. For this, I perused the transcript of the first interview and generated a preliminary set of codes based on the perspectives and insights offered by that interviewee. This allowed me to categorize and organize the unfiltered raw data into more manageable categories. I then utilized a comparative approach for the interviews that followed:

> "Once you have coded and recoded the first case, you proceed to the second case. As much as possible, code this case as if it were the first one. Once you have coded it, following the procedures for the first case, compare it with the first case. Note similarities and differences between the two cases. Revise and add codes as a result of the comparison. Comparing the two cases usually requires focused recoding of each. At this point, proceed to the third case, code it, and compare it with the first two. Follow this same procedure with each subsequent case" (Bailey, 2007, 155)

This method allowed me to utilize the codes generated during the coding of the first interview to delineate insights from the following interviews that aligned or contrasted with those categories. I repeated this process of extracting excerpts, coding them, and comparing the generated codes with already-existing ones for each of the interviews.

Once I had my full set of codes and excerpts, I proceeded to generate my initial themes. I ensured that in the analytical process, my themes rose out of the data that I had highlighted, and tried my best not to choose excerpts based on preexisting themes that I had in mind. This was key because "Themes are analytic outputs – they are built from codes (which are also analytic outputs) and cannot be identified ahead of the analytic process." (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 70-71) I

also allowed for multiple, repeated overlaps, and made room for "nuance, partiality and messiness [to] remain – constrained within the overarching analytic structure" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 105). Although the inclination to find a top-to-bottom explanation for every theme being produced was strong, the process of reflexive thematic analysis reminded me that "Themes are patterns anchored by a shared idea, meaning or concept. They are not summaries of everything about a topic." (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 70) This attitude also helped keep me rooted within the boundaries of my own data, without overfeeding the impulse to look for explanations and insights elsewhere, which I believe if indulged in too much, can often be counterproductive and an unending endeavour.

Once I had developed my initial set of themes, I developed each of them in greater depth and made particular note of overlaps, as well as any possible explanations for these. Additionally, I emphasized "the importance of purposely seeking "negative cases" that do not fit cohesively or create problems in your research" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 145), so as to minimize the tendency to oversimplify complications and construct generalizations that may not adequately reflect diverse realities.

While most of my thematic sets were built from the observations and opinions of the interviewees, I also added to some of them excerpts that I thought revealed insights stemming from the positionality of the interviewee themselves. That is, instead of limiting myself to the contents of the interviews, I approached the interviews themselves as reflectors of particular standpoints and approaches to IPV/DV within Canada. Leavy (2007) cites Reinharz (1992) as

observing, "Contemporary feminist scholars of cultural texts are likely to see meaning as mediated, and therefore to examine both the text and the processes of its production" (229). This view was particularly beneficial when it came to comparing the perspectives of each of the interviewees, and noting how they coincided and contrasted based on the personal and professional background of each interviewee. Naturally, I recognize that in conducting analysis in this way, where my field is not just the interview but the interviewee themselves, my insights are highly influenced by my own positionality and worldview. As noted previously, however, I see this as advantageous: "Reflexivity is key to good quality analysis; researchers must strive to understand and 'own their perspectives'" (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2022, 71). In order to substantiate my themes and navigate reflexivity meaningfully, I found 'memoing' to be a useful tool; "Memoing will help you track your project's progress, and it is also a fine time to jot down any hunches and ideas you might have about connections within your data. You can reflect on breakthroughs in your memos, but the memoing process will also help you become more reflexive about your own positionality and how it might affect your research." (Hesse-Biber, 2007, 144-145)

Once I had developed each of my themes in adequate depth, I finally moved on to phases 5 & 6, that is, refining and defining my data, and writing up the themes. By the time I arrived at these stages, my themes were fairly cohesive, and it was more or less a matter of removing redundancies and inserting newly discovered connections. As always, in refining my themes and in discussing my findings, I consistently asked myself where my insights were arising from, why I viewed certain inputs in certain ways, and how the knowledge that I already held was

contributing to my analysis. "Researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive TA, as knowledge generation is inherently subjective and situated. Your subjectivity is not a problem to be managed or controlled, to be gotten rid of, but should be understood and treated as a resource for doing analysis" (Gough & Madill, 2012 as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2022, 70).

In the following chapter, I provide the results of my thematic analysis, a discussion of the insights from the interviews in conversation with those I gained from the literature review, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the themes I identified during the course of data analysis. I then proceed to discuss my interview findings within the context of the data collected through the literature review. First, I provide a broad description of the profile of my participants without using any identifying information (including names; I replaced these with pseudonyms in accordance with the procedure I outlined in the consent form), as well as the demographics of their clients.

Interviewee profiles

All the interview participants are currently employed at nonprofit organizations or NGOs located in Edmonton. Most of them have also worked in other nonprofit organizations prior to their current workplace, and referred to experiences in previous jobs while offering inputs during the interview. All six interviewees interacted directly with immigrant individuals in some capacity or the other. While most of their job roles entail one-on-one interaction with clients who are survivors of abuse, one interviewee's interaction with immigrant survivors was limited to group sessions such as orientations and awareness campaigns (although, they noted that several individuals would stay back and engage in one-on-one interactions with them after these group sessions). In order to protect the privacy of the interviewees, and to ensure their anonymity when quoting their opinions, I have used pseudonyms to refer to them in this thesis. Although interviewees were given the option to choose a pseudonym of their choice in the consent form, none of them opted to do so. Therefore, I have chosen pseudonyms at random, and they are not

intended to represent any aspects of the interviewee's cultural background, such as religion or country of origin. Accordingly, the pseudonyms that I have chosen are Mark, Yasmin, Isha, Anna, Sienna and John.

Mark currently works in a prominent Edmonton organization that offers support services to survivors of violence, including but not limited to domestic violence and IPV. The primary objective of the organization is to provide aid to those recovering from sexual assault, but during the interview, it was evident that they also cater to survivors of other forms of partner violence. The organization accepts clients from all backgrounds, and is not specifically intended for immigrants or newcomers, although it does see plenty of clients from these backgrounds. Mark has previously worked with other organizations that also deal with domestic violence and sexual assault (mainly for non-newcomers at one, and including newcomers at another), as well as child protection services. At one of his previous workplaces, he dealt exclusively with cases of IPV. He also has significant experience in helping clients navigate the court process for cases of partner violence.

Yasmin works at an organization in Edmonton that largely functions to address the needs of the African diaspora in Edmonton (as well as the rest of Canada, through research endeavours and such). The organization caters to numerous immigrants – both newcomers, as well as those that have been here several years. The organization executes programs to cater to diverse needs and diverse ages (as well as diverse immigration statuses) – for instance, they have programs for children and youth that support them in school and work, they promote leadership opportunities

and community work, and run campaigns and preventative programs to address Intimate Partner Violence within the community. Yasmin has been at the forefront of several of these educational programs and has interacted with women and survivors of the community through these and through research endeavours in partnership with educational organizations and research organizations.

Isha works at a prominent Edmonton organization that provides services and support to a diverse range of individuals that is not limited to immigrants, newcomers or ethnic groups. Their services include (but are not limited to) disability support, elder care, domestic abuse survivor support, supportive housing, parole support, as well as a range of services oriented specifically towards immigrants and refugees. Isha primarily engages with immigrants and refugees in her work; she has significant experience working as a settlement counselor and also provides active support to newcomers through a reception house. While she provides support to newcomers and immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds, she finds herself primarily working with cases involving individuals from Arabic and Middle-Eastern ethnic communities.

Anna and Sienna are both family violence specialists at a well-known organization in Edmonton catering primarily to survivors of family violence. The organization provides legal assistance, support with finding shelters for survivors of abuse, as well as educational programs around this subject. While the organization is intended for survivors of all backgrounds and may qualify as a mainstream organization as opposed to a community-specific one, several of its clients hail from ethnic and immigrant backgrounds. Anna and Sienna both work one-on-one with survivors of

family violence in order to provide emotional support, safety planning, family violence education, and system navigation. Apart from this individual support, they also run a support group for survivors who have left their abusive relationships.

John works at an Edmonton organization offering support services exclusively to newcomers in the city. Their services cater to language needs, support with finding viable employment, community engagement and other settlement services. As part of these services, the organization also provides support and referrals to families that are coping with violence within the home. In his work, John interacts primarily with individuals from ethno-cultural communities, mostly African or Black groups. That said, he also has experience engaging with clients from other groups, such as some East-Asian cultures. Although John provides support to clients on a wide variety of issues, he has significant experience navigating the support process for survivors of domestic violence or IPV.

Client demographics

The first few questions I posed to participants allowed me to collect relevant information about the background of their clients. Most of my interviewees work or have worked with a vast range of clients, including recent immigrants, immigrants who have been living in Canada for several years, as well as non-immigrants.

Mark described how while his organization is a mainstream one unaffiliated to any particular

community, they make efforts to connect with newcomer organizations as a way to reach out to new immigrants. Likewise, they establish connections with organizations catering to the needs of refugees in order to reach out to these groups, and with community specific organizations to spread awareness of their programs among groups that may not have that information. Mark's clients have previously been primarily non-newcomers, but in his current role, he engages with several immigrant survivors of violence, including many with children. The majority of clients in Mark's current and previous roles have been women or girls – within newcomer groups, too – although there have been some infrequent cases in which the survivors identified as male.

Yasmin's organization serves individuals that hail primarily from the African and Caribbean Black diaspora. These include new immigrants as well as immigrants with long-established roots, regardless of status. Several of their programs that seek to spread awareness of IPV also cater to youth in these communities. Yasmin notes that the gender distribution of clients depends on the nature of service – for instance, programs oriented towards mental health, youth empowerment and mentorship draw women and girls primarily, while a program that uses basketball as a community-building medium sees mostly young boys. Several of their programs specifically target the empowerment of girls and women in the community. Most of the awareness programs that focus on IPV and preventing violence seem to appeal more to women and girls, but there appears to be a more equal gender distribution when it comes to leadership and employment programs. Overall, Yasmin opines that their clients tend to more often be girls and women.

Sienna and Anna engage mostly with female-identifying clients, although they have on occasion engaged with male-identifying clients too. While they don't directly ask clients if they are immigrants, they note that their clients include refugees, those applying for refugee status, newcomers, permanent residents and Canadian citizens. Their clients are usually referred to them by other agencies, friends and family, but they have also often been found online through Google searches and social media. They also engage with clients at various points in their relationships with partners – those that are still in the relationship, those who are in the process of leaving, and those who have separated from their partners.

John's clients have primarily ethnocultural backgrounds, and mostly African or Black communities. He notes that he serves individuals from Uganda, Kenya, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa and Sierra Leone, and that the majority of clients now are Caribbean, Nigerian and Somalian. That said, he also engages with many clients from Asia (largely Southeast Asia). John serves newcomers in his current role. While John meets both men and women, he was the only participant who noted that he works primarily with men who have been accused of perpetrating violence, and who are looking for support with the court process. However, he also interacts with women (survivors and perpetrators both).

Isha's clients are primarily from ethnocultural communities as well, but these include recent newcomers as well as those who have lived here for several years or decades. Most of her clients hail from Arabic and Middle-Eastern cultures, but she also interacts with individuals from other cultures. Her clients tend to mostly be women, but she also often engages with men and women

as couples in some of her workshops and educational programs.

The following table provides a brief summary of the demographics described above:

Participant	Gender Identification of Clients	Cultural Background of Clients	Immigration Status of Clients
Mark	Primarily women and girls; some men and boys	No specific culture identified	Newcomer immigrants, non-newcomer immigrants, refugees, non-immigrants
Yasmin	Primarily women and girls; some men and boys	African and Caribbean Black diaspora	Newcomer immigrants, non-newcomer immigrants, children of immigrants
Anna	Primarily women, some men	No specific culture identified	Newcomers, refugees, permanent residents, citizens
Sienna	Primarily women, some men	No specific culture identified	Newcomers, refugees, permanent residents, citizens
John	Many men, slightly fewer women	African and Black diaspora, Southeast Asian	Mainly newcomers
In Isha	Mostly women, some men (as members of couples)	Arabic and Middle-Eastern, but also several other ethnocultural communities	Recent and non-recent immigrants

Table 4-1: Client demographics identified by interviewees

Major themes identified

According to Braun & Clarke (2022), "Data analysis is conceptualised as an art not a science; creativity is central to the process, situated within a framework of rigour." (71) In line with the recommendations of the reflexive thematic analysis process, I made an earnest effort to locate the analysis of collected data within my own sociopolitical context as a researcher, and to allow for (even emphasize) the contradictions, nuances and conundrums that arise when observing everyday lived experiences. In doing so, my attempt is not to provide clean, easily navigable explanations, but to shine a light on overlapping complexities that determine the culturally unique experiences of violence for immigrant women. On occasion, I also touch upon the perspectives of non-immigrants and immigrant men, but only in the context of or in comparison to those of immigrant women. The six major themes I identified were: i. collectivism and familism, ii. implications of language, iii. gender and patriarchy, iv. stigma, v. immigration-related factors, and vi. differing responses to violence. Each of the themes was in continuous conversation with the others throughout the analysis, and I have attempted to highlight these overlaps in my discussion.

Collectivism and familism

The notions of collectivism and familism were among the most prominent topics that I found my interview participants circling back to when asked to speak to the cultural diversity present in experiences of violence. Connections were made to collectivism and familism in a variety of contexts – as an explanation for delayed help-seeking and the inability to leave abusive

relationships, as a way to elucidate the role of gender roles in defining experience, as a way to describe diverse methods traditionally used by communities to resolve domestic conflicts, and as a direct form or cause of abuse itself.

Participants illuminated overlaps between collectivism and stigmas within ethnocultural communities, and the implications of these for survivors. Almost all of them observed that collectivist cultures often prioritize the reputation of the family within the broader cultural community, and this puts immense pressure on survivors to keep "unpleasant" information hidden away. As Mark noted, "you have that sort of perspective again, that it shouldn't come out, that it should be a family issue". Anna and Sienna also reported several instances of families or communities being unsupportive because of the stigmas attached with domestic violence and IPV, and of elders in families having ordered survivors not to report their experiences

This stigma associated with IPV also has linguistic implications; as John observes about situations where there are language barriers,

> "where we have interpreters that could use that language, they don't want because it's like, OK, you're going to bring somebody who will identify me and who will know who I am. … And so we resorted to doing some kind of telephone interpretation where you don't see the person, the person doesn't see you. There's no mention of name, but the issue here now is, is this person interpreting, really saying what you are asking here?"

Divorce and the stigma attached to it was also emphasized by four out of the six participants, as an explanation for survivors choosing to remain with abusive partners. Isha noticed that for some ethnic cultures, the stigma attached to divorce also implies that survivors may be punished by severed family ties for choosing to separate from their partner, and this is especially relevant in

cultures where "the opinion of the elders is very important". Yasmin categorized divorce as the last resort for many African-origin communities. Speaking about the same cultures, John stated, "there is nothing that is called divorce, no matter how big the mistake is, both sides of the families come back to look into the root issue of the problem, resolve it and still keep you together".

Apart from divorce, the prioritizing of family unity for the sake of the children in the house was reported by most participants as a factor that prevented immigrant survivors from seeking support. John remarked, "because they have children, no matter how terrible this dad is behaving, they don't [want] to expose him and shame their family." Interestingly, Isha described a case where the well-being of her child was actually what pushed a woman to seek help, because she started noticing how the behaviour of her husband was impacting the mental health of her daughter. Nevertheless, almost all other participants seemed to agree that several ethnic communities highly valued the role of a united family in the upbringing of a child, and chose not to report violence for that reason.

Another factor coming into play here is the gender roles ascribed to women in many ethnocultural communities, and the obligations that they have, simply by virtue of being a woman, to keep families together. This was also noted by several participants. Overall, a combination of some or all of these factors seems to compel immigrant survivors of many cultures to delay or avoid seeking external help with their situations.

The fact that violence within domesticity can be inflicted not just by a partner, but by the partner's family as well, seems to be a problem that is more naturalized in ethnic immigrant cultures than Western ones. Interview participants provided many detailed examples of this. For instance, Yasmin commented,

> "And this is when the intimate part of violence can actually include family members too. So it might not even just be the husband or the wife that's abusing, but the family joins in as well because you might have mothers and mother-in-laws [sic] saying, oh, my son would never do that if you're a good wife, if you're a good woman, if you did this and this, maybe this wouldn't happen. So the abuse actually is like familial in nature because of the collectivism and because when you marry, you don't marry just one person, you marry into the family literally."

While these observations exemplify how novel and unique experiences of violence arise within the contexts of collectivism and familism, some participants also described how these same institutions have been relied on historically by ethnic communities as a source of mediation and redress when conflicts arise within the home. According to John, "both sides of the families come back to look into the root issue of the problem, resolve it and still keep you together." Anna and Sienna also noted that even when they do seek formal help, several immigrant survivors are looking for somebody to counsel and mediate a conversation with their partner, and to fill the role that a community or family elder would traditionally play. Anna specifically highlighted this in contrast to "Western culture [where] sometimes it is more just like you deal with your own problems, and you do your own thing". Isha also explained the absence of community elders and family connections as being a reason why immigrants are "not set up to deal with violence in the same way that they would be able to otherwise".

Overall, most interview participants concurred that the contrast between the collectivist approaches of many ethnocultural communities and the more individualistic approach that forms the basis of the Canadian sociopolitical system that exists to counter violence seems to leave many immigrant survivors in the lurch. As Mark succinctly summed up, "they talk about multiculturalism so much in Canada … but there's no actual multiculturalism, I think it's a very individualistic culture. It's performative".

Implications of language

Most participants reported that even if they can only communicate in English or another language that the client doesn't understand, they usually have access to in-person, over-the-phone or online interpretive services. Nevertheless, language seems to play many important roles in determining the experiences of immigrant survivors.

Linguistic barriers seem to influence the support that immigrants can access in multiple ways. Mark described instances where linguistic barriers created debilitating circumstances for immigrant men who did not even fully know what they were pleading guilty to. Anna and Sienna observed the challenges in translating or explaining legal concepts. John even recalled instances where perpetrators refused to speak when spoken to in English because they panicked and were fearful of admitting to crimes they didn't even fully comprehend.

Language also seems to influence the quality of service provision. Mark explained,

> "if someone is speaking English, there's ways [sic] I can de-escalate a situation and provide emotional support, certain terms that I use. When I speak to a newcomer, it's difficult … if they can't speak English, it's difficult for me to apply the same things … because I rely heavily on an interpreter. But the interpreter that I'm getting, I don't know if they're trauma informed … all I know is that they can translate what I'm saying, but they're missing that piece of validation, they're missing that piece of emotional support. So that is a gap I see."

Several participants agreed that using interpreters created multiple challenges. Sienna recalled, "I've had situations where I've had to kind of interrupt because they're talking amongst each other and just kind of the reminder of like, okay, I need you to just stick to interpreting."

Yasmin noted that immigrants were a lot more comfortable talking about difficult concepts to service providers who spoke their language, and that "it is more authentic" and free of censorship that way. Isha agreed, and noted that stressful situations are more challenging for clients to discuss when there is the added challenge of needing to translate into English. John added that when he can speak to a perpetrator in their native tongue, he is able to bring up culturally relevant information and calm the person down without diving into sensitive issues right away, whereas in most cases where the service provider only speaks English, he finds that they apply a down-to-business approach that does not aid the issue at hand.

One of hitherto the least studied ways in which language affects immigrant experiences of violence seems to be the untranslatability of cultural concepts – and this is a two-way street: immigrants seem to struggle to explain cultural concepts to English-speaking service providers, and service providers for their part seem to struggle when it comes to explaining mainstream Canadian constructs and concepts. For instance, even when she can speak the language of the

community (Arabic in this case), Yasmin finds herself "using multiple examples or breaking down certain definitions or phrases in English that I don't have the words for in their language". Likewise, she observed that immigrants "code switch actually. … if they want to say the word "abuse" in Arabic, the specific dialect that they were speaking, … they'll switch to "abuse". So they'll talk in Arabic and then they'll have to switch to English to use the word because they don't have that word." Untranslatability extends not just to concepts themselves, but to the cultural "weight" of certain concepts like IPV, as Yasmin put it:

> "because that word isn't inherent to the language that they're using, they don't, they might not know how serious it is … the seriousness might come from the physical aspect. So for example, if someone is beating or hitting you, and you can see that on someone, and you can see they're hurt, and they've been harmed, then you associate the weight of that. But mental abuse, financial abuse, emotional abuse, all those things … aren't considered abuses, [they're] considered conflict in a relationship or one of the stripes of marriage, … or as part of marriage, just as part, not abnormal to the marriage, but just a part of it, a component of it."

Sienna echoed, "it's hard to tell if it's the language barrier, or maybe even just trying to get [the] point across. Because I find that sometimes immigrants will … provide a lot of examples and a lot of details of the different incidents … And I think now hearing this … maybe they're trying to really just demonstrate how much it is and how in depth it is." However, John commented that switching languages can sometimes be beneficial when it comes to really intense, weighted descriptions of abuse: "it's easier for them to say those words out in the English language than when they speak in their language of origin, that [sic] such words become so heavy to say out." However, he simultaneously noted that when framed in English, descriptions of abuse take on far more accusatory notes and these can actually have counterproductive impacts on perpetrators: "in the local language, there could be better words that are spoken [to] this person. And this

person calms down and tends to understand what has gone wrong and explains. But here, there is no room for that if it is the English language, it's just thrown at you … you are violent, you are accused of violence, you have aggressed somebody."

Yasmin added that because of these factors, "when you now change to their language …you're not using the phrase, you're using the description because a lot of our languages are descriptive." John concurred that "when they're not using English language for those who are able to speak in Arabic local languages, they would be very descriptive". Isha also had the same observation about Arabic, in that violence is described more often than it is christened.

Overall, my conversations with the interviewees seem to suggest that there is much to explore when it comes to the impact of language on the experiences of immigrant survivors who are seeking formal support from service providers.

Gender and patriarchy

Culturally ascribed gender roles and identities, as well as culturally rooted expectations of patriarchy, seem to have a defining influence on immigrant survivors who identify as women. Mark observed that immigrant women specifically prefer to remain in the relationship and "figure it out". But beyond just the cultural expectation from women to keep the family together, he noted that patriarchal environments also create situations where women are entirely dependent on their partners financially (especially abroad), and therefore often have no recourse but to tolerate abuse because they lack educational or professional qualifications that would enable

them to support themselves.

Yasmin observed that situations of dependency are often portrayed as relationships of care, and abusive behaviours are sometimes considered expected acts of disciplining by the man of the house (if the woman does not fulfil her domestic duties as ordained by her gender) within more patriarchal cultures, and this creates much confusion in terms of what counts as abuse. For instance, she remembered an African immigrant woman saying about her husband: "he's telling me not to leave the house or not to go out, it's because he wants to protect me. It's because he wants to care for me." Mark also elaborated upon this confusion between care and abuse, and how it allows for abuse to continue as long as some alleviation concurrently occurs in the form of gifts and proclamations of love. Yasmin added further, "in some cultures, the beating is not even considered abuse. It's encouraged, like as a man, if your wife misbehaves the same way that your children do, you need to discipline her. And that's not considered abuse. It's considered a man fulfilling his role as the head of the home." Anna and Sienna also commented on the frequent occurrence of unilateral decision-making by the husband in homes where patriarchy denotes him the family's head (they note this particularly about African and Indian communities), and the lack of agency that women face in these situations that prevent them from voicing their troubles and seeking support.

Several accounts provided by the interviewees seem to suggest that men perpetrating abuse within ethnocultural immigrant communities see their actions only as fulfillment of their own gender roles as men. Mark recollected an instance where he had to explain to an only men's

group of immigrants that a woman is not obligated to satisfy her partner's sexual needs, and noted that there seemed to be a genuine lack of understanding about this within the group. Likewise, John recalled an incident when he asked a group of men if there was any violence in the home:

> "the majority actually say they are not violent. And so we turned around and said, have you ever pushed your wife or have you ever said any bad words to your wife that has made her upset and angry? And the majority said yes. So in their definition of violence or domestic violence, they say unless they slap the person or kick the person, if it is only pushing, they don't consider that as violence. If it is saying out bad words, they don't consider that as as as violence. And so what they are doing is even when they fight, they're trying to discipline their partner … when you come to the culture, it is that entitlement. Now, if you come to the West, then yes, if you push, you're already aggressing somebody. If you slap, you are not disciplining somebody. You are actually assaulting somebody… [but because of] the culture one is coming from, one would say, … I was just disciplining my wife. I didn't beat her up. If I was [sic] to beat her, she would be in the hospital. That is how they look at it."

Isha also offered similar inputs, that often, "the whole culture enables the male to do whatever they do, and it's [considered] okay because they are responsible, they have a lot of things to deal with, and they have the right to be, you know, a little bit violent". She also described a post on Facebook in which an Arabic woman writing about an abusive husband received comments like "as long as he's providing for the house and paying the bills and buying food why you are complaining, what do you want, what do you need more? [sic]"

Speaking to the idea of what it means to "be a woman" within the bounds of cultural patriarchy, Yasmin observed, "your pride comes from how well you can keep your home, how well you can cook, how you can clean. Those are what increases your value … in the eyes of society, especially from the African background, being able to have kids, to raise your kids, and you want

people to look at you and say, Oh, she's a good wife". She added that abusive behaviours (or "disciplining") are usually consequences of not being "a woman". Anna and Sienna also noted that the identity of a woman revolves around subservience in many patriarchal cultures. John concurred, and explained that within many ethnic cultures, "the woman is a person who does not know anything." Further, "the woman is supposed to be submissive. And that is what a woman is… That no matter what… please, can you be quiet and be submissive." The consequences of not being such a woman, he noted, are severe: "She's a person that has brought shame. So we have nothing to do with her. Even your own parents will disown you in that culture, especially where I come from". He also emphasized that women are expected to have unlimited tolerance, and "can take anything".

One unique conception of abuse identified by Isha was "cheating". While she admitted that there may be several instances where being unfaithful is actually condoned in some immigrant cultures as long as a woman's material needs are being satisfied by her husband, she also explained that "in the West it looks like yeah he's been cheating, but they don't think about the suffer[ing] of the wife at all, like yeah if it's cheating you can just leave, and it's up to you to forgive or to stay … if you can forgive that person then yeah have a conversation and keep going like nothing happened". However, she believes, for many women in immigrant cultures, the focus is on the "suffering" of the wife and thus, cheating is constructed as abuse in a way that it is not in Canada.

Stigma

Although the notion of stigma overlaps constantly and conspicuously with all other themes in this discussion, I believe it warrants its own individual exploration, given how much cultural force stigmatized concepts usually have in immigrant cultures that are more collective in nature. Indeed, my interviewees unanimously agreed that the implications of stigma are highly relevant in discussions of immigrant women's experiences of abuse.

Mark alluded multiple times to the stigmas attached to IPV and how it explains delayed help-seeking among immigrant women. In particular, he noted that stigma and collectivism play a role in convincing immigrant survivors "that it shouldn't come out, that it should be a family issue" (it referring to domestic violence here). John also explained delayed help-seeking as being a result of stigma, and added that "when it comes to questions about domestic violence … people are very careful because… you are exposing the family." Yasmin agreed,

> "on the outside, you want to look as put together as a family and that goes back to the communal aspect where you care … what the collective thinks about you and your family because you want to keep your place in that community … If they find out, you know, certain things, unbecoming things are happening in your household, people will distance themselves from you, and you might be ostracized from the community, … which is why there's a lot of hush hush around the IPV."

This fear of not finding support within the community because of the stigmatized nature of abuse was alluded to by Isha, Anna and Sienna as an explanation for immigrant survivors seeking service providers from outside their community. John echoed similar opinions and in one instance noted, particularly in the context of Sudanese and Ugandan cultures, that women, "are somehow deep in the culture, believing that because they have children, no matter how terrible

this dad is behaving, they don't have to expose him and shame their family."

Yasmin noted that stigma (perhaps uniquely to some ethnic cultures) is attached not just to abuse itself, but extends to several other factors that cause, interact with, and follow the occurrence of abuse. One prominent example are the institutions that are set up to counter abuse. According to Yasmin, association with these institutions can itself be perceived negatively by the broader community, as a result of which, "immigrants want to avoid interaction with police, interactions with courts, lawyers, judges, anything formal like that … if you're associating with the police, it can't be for anything good." John spoke along similar lines, noting that the stigmatized associations are made even with not-for-profits and organizations that support survivors: "People don't want to come to that area because if you are seen to be going there, it means you have issues with violence. You are either violent or you have been assaulted. In the case of the men, there is also the taboo that, oh, your wife has assaulted you. So, man, how do you allow yourself to be beaten by your wife? And so people, people don't come." Yasmin added that standalone stigmas are also culturally attached to the approaches and actions of these institutions, particularly when they threaten family unity. In one instance, "[they] got the kids taken away because of IPV or because the husband was doing this, and that is also a big taboo thing." Yasmin also outlined behaviours that are stigmatized within the community simply because of their perceived association with domestic abuse. For example, "the wife will never admit [that] the husband is an alcoholic [and] the husband will do his best to hide it."

As previously mentioned while describing collectivism, one of the most persistently stigmatized subjects within several immigrant cultures is divorce. Almost all the interviewees discussed this issue and pointed to it as a reason for immigrant women choosing not to engage with a formal system that they believe would compel them to separate from their partners. Yasmin and John both observed that divorce is often the absolute last resort in many African communities, and will only be taken into consideration if the circumstances are extremely dire. Isha offered another angle, whereby divorce and collectivism are in conflict not just because divorce separates families, but also because divorce is often punished by the cutting off of ties from the rest of the community, and "in some cultures the opinion of the elders is very important…so they don't want to cut that relationship".

Finally, in an interesting overlap between stigma and language, Isha observed that the nature of complaints, and the language used to describe abuse itself is impacted by the presence of stigma: "they are afraid from [sic] the stigma … and sometimes they don't want to shock you so they would start with "my husband is angry most of the time and I don't know how to deal with that" so yeah … they don't want to shock you."

Immigration-related factors

Several participants either directly referred to immigration abuse as a unique category experienced by immigrant survivors, or described forms of abuse that arise as a consequence of the immigration process or of the particular circumstances of immigrant life.

Different forms of economic and financial abuse seem to be the most common ways in which the immigrant status makes women vulnerable to abuse, according to the interviewees. Mark observed that survivors often delay help-seeking because they worry that if their spouse is taken away from them, they would have limited means of survival. He explained that this is especially so when a woman accompanies her husband as a spouse to Canada, and not as a worker. In these situations, the limited or total lack of work experience makes her entirely dependent on her partner, with no job prospects available. John concurred, "the pattern I've seen with the Somali and the Nigerians is mainly that of control and economic power. So the husband has the ability to bring enough and wants to control that and control the woman as well." Yasmin echoed this idea of economic dependence, and added interlocking vulnerabilities such as lack of community, lack of awareness of the systems in place, and linguistic barriers:

> "a man that comes here and sponsors his wife, for example, he's the one that's been here, he's established, he's working. She might not [speak] English, she might not have a job, she might not have a support system. So … he could probably do whatever he wanted, and she has no one to talk to, no income to support herself to leave, no opportunity to even communicate explicitly because she doesn't have the language. So situations like that … definitely create a more vulnerable space … you don't even know the system, you're in a new country, you don't even know who to call, you're scared of the police, you don't know which resource to go to, you don't even know there are resources probably that you can get help."

Anna emphasized, "We actually asked about immigration abuse or that's what we call it, which often could be like withholding access to documents, whether that's taking passports or … they use false information to try to induce fear, right … like that they could be deported or that they're, if you tell anyone they're going to take our kids or things like that. So that intimidation." Mark also noted the lack of knowledge of the system among immigrant women: "I've served newcomers who are from Africa, the Middle East, Asia. There's a similarity in the fact that when

they report, they don't really know what the process is [and] the next steps." On the other hand, Isha presented an interesting contradiction where, on occasion, "when the person is already abused long time ago back home, they come to Canada with a decision that as soon as I get there I will find my way to leave this relationship". However, she acknowledged that this is not a common experience and that more often, "the support is not enough for the women who cannot work, and even if they can work, if they didn't work at all in Canada, they don't know how to communicate at work, they don't know the work culture here". John stated that work and finance-related factors may even lead to the perpetration of abuse for immigrant men: "the men who are not employed in their area of study or experience because their certificates are not recognized here tend to be filled with anger and want that money … But then it becomes difficult to ask, you become like a beggar. And so the kind of approach they use then heats up that fire, and then they end up fighting."

Mark observed that the situations are particularly dire for refugees, who have experienced so much and so many diverse forms of violence in refugee camps that IPV or domestic violence is often quite low on their list of concerns, thereby making them even more vulnerable to it.

The lack of community post immigration, especially for individuals hailing from collectivist cultures, was highlighted as a factor contributing to vulnerability by most interviewees. This is particularly insidious in combination with inadequate information, as John noted: "nothing is explained fully … one is not well-informed. It is only excitement, and you are taken away from your roots that could support you, the friends around. And then … even a simple stress that one

could have been able to get some help with … now becomes a problem here because those you trust around you who could help you are no longer there." Anna spoke about "people experiencing isolation as far as controlling who they see or how often they go out and things like that. And that becomes even more relevant because they're already cut off from their families and communities from back home." Isha concurred, "if they've been abused for quite a long time and the abuser… cut them from social interaction with people, they don't go to school, they don't work, and then they feel hopeless, like there's nothing I can do for myself because I cannot manage in this life, in this new country by myself". She added further, "when immigrants come here, and it's a different culture they suddenly lose their family ties, those connections …and mostly the women, they would be accused that, oh you went there, and you're trying to be Canadian now", thus highlighting how identities and the importance of remaining loyal to one's own cultural roots also place pressure on immigrant survivors to tolerate abuse.

When asked if immigration abuse was a formally recognized form of abuse within the Canadian legal system (because they specifically termed it that way), Anna responded,

> "I think theoretically the criminal justice system in Canada has some guidelines in terms of what offenses, if you were charged, you might face deportation depending on your status. But in even trying to find out those answers as to what the scope of that looks like is incredibly gray and frustrating … given that there's probably not this direct legal recourse that if a partner is withholding this person's immigration papers, this is what they're going to be penalized with."

She did believe, however, that immigration abuse was a fairly familiar concept among family violence specialists, at least in Edmonton.

Differing responses to violence

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed how immigrant survivors had different definitions and conceptions of domestic violence, and therefore different approaches to resolving it or coping with it. While this theme overlaps significantly with the others outlined do far, and in some ways encompasses them, I made the decision to explore in its own right, in order to emphasize the tensions that abound between the ways in which survivors of several ethnic immigrant communities counter violence and those options that are made available to them through the Canadian systems set up for this purpose.

One of the most common responses I encountered within the interviews was that, almost across the board, immigrant survivors disidentify with the criminalization framework that is so widely and easily deployed in Canada. Mark observed, "It's almost like when they report, they feel guilty because they're like, oh, I thought he was just going to get a warning. I didn't think he was going to go to prison. I didn't think he was going to get conditions. I didn't think now we're going to go through the court process." He noted that the criminal justice system prioritizes process and pays little attention to individual needs:

> "the way that they see it is if they separate the two, the person who caused harm, the person who experienced harm, if they separate the two, they've done their job. That's great. No one's going to get killed. No one's going to get hurt. The problem that they don't understand is these two people may have been in a relationship for years. They're married, they have kids. They're not going to respect those no condition orders. They're still going to see each other."

Yasmin added, "the police's goal is not to keep the family together, it's to remove the problem, to apply consequences … their goal is not to keep the family together. So that already is a conflict

because it completely opposes the values of the family and the couple to begin with." John echoed, "you go to court and here's a male and a female and the male is told that you know what you are a violent man, you are not allowed to come close to your children …and so the woman would sometimes plead and say, that was not what I thought was going to happen here. I thought he was going to be supported, somehow disciplined." He also observed that in collectivist cultures that value family unity especially for the well-being of children, these mainstream approaches are largely inadequate. Isha also touched upon the cultural hesitation to seek out the police, albeit for slightly different reasons: "calling the police is when you cut everything with that person and back home this is the highest thing, when you go to police you want to really hurt that person".

When asked if there is a gap between what kind of support is needed by immigrant survivors and what kind of support they actually have access to, Yasmin responded,

> "Definitely, definitely … say you put out a poster and say "supporting women experiencing domestic violence", … they don't associate with that word because that's not what they define their experience as. So they wouldn't get support for something they're experiencing because they don't relate to that word because that's not their definition of violence or abuse, or they don't know the definition of violence or abuse. But if you were to describe the situation you're referring to, like … husband keeps all the money, doesn't let you buy the things that you need, doesn't let you work, constantly says these negative things about you, physically harms you sometimes … That's what people have knowledge of."

This highlights that the way in which violence is conceptualized itself has implications for how it is dealt with. John narrated an incident that exemplifies Yasmin's rationale perfectly:

> "when we first call it a domestic violence prevention program, nobody came. They said, we don't have violence in our families, we don't have violence in our community. And then we turned it around, and we said, we are just having a Safe Families conversation, a

'healthy relationships' conversation. We did not change the topics … but then when they come to these conversations under a different name, then these subjects will invariably come up. It comes up, of course, we have the topic and people talk about it and … ask questions comfortably."

Likewise, Anna also emphasized the inadequacy of the existing justice system for the needs of immigrant cultures, that "the scope of what the legal justice system can do when it comes to abuse is a lot more narrow than I think the hope is." She also noted the persistence of "the idea that Canadian culture knows best or has figured it out. And therefore all norms should deviate to this cookie cutter kind of culture … how we might handle it is first labeling that there are different cultures and there is no hierarchy in terms of what is better… maybe dive into historical colonization, imperialism kind of conversations".

Several interviewees also noted that for many immigrant survivors, material needs and survival are more immediate concerns, but are usually not the first areas addressed by service providers. Especially when children are involved, this overlaps with collectivist tendencies. Yasmin explained that mainstream service providers often function

> "without the understanding of a lived experience of an immigrant or someone who comes from that cultural background, who's very collectivist, that need to take care of their family before they want to take care of themselves, and that's also a valid response. Because Western society wants to focus on the individual, like …let's focus on you. Let's take care of you right now. Whereas they're coming from a background where [they] want to take care of [their family] first and then [they] can start taking care of [themselves]. But when you go to service providers, they don't understand that. Then you get that case where they might put you somewhere that's for support that you may still need, but just not right at that moment or at the specific time."

Mark also brought up a rather intriguing observation about the ways in which sexual assault and domestic violence are defined in the law, whereby if somebody is accused of domestic violence,

the police will not remove conditions or charges because the perpetrator "is a harm to society",

but "that doesn't apply for sexual assault. Sexual assault, the client wants to stop the

investigation. They, they stop it." While he was unable to provide a rationale for this, he was of

the opinion that this definition and its consequences discourage and make formal support rather

inaccessible for immigrant survivors experiencing violence in domestic contexts. He

emphasized, "the Canadian legal system is very confusing for those who are born here. So

imagine for someone who is, doesn't even live here, and then they come here, and now they have

to understand how the justice system works".

One commonly resorted to recourse within the Canadian legal system is divorce, which, as

almost all interviewees observed, does not accommodate the needs of survivors from cultures in

which divorce is highly stigmatized. Rather, all interviewees highlighted that within the formal

support system, there is almost no room for the type of response that is typical and desired within

collectivist cultures, where couples in conflict first receive the counsel of community elders and

try to repair their relationships without the involvement of criminalizing forces. John explained,

> "we have a way of getting some elderly women or some of the wise women to talk to this
> woman … it was, yes, terrible and bad, but we don't anticipate it to happen again. And
> also the village comes as a whole and warns [the perpetrator]. But here … It's the law and
> the court to see what evidence is there and just follow that narrow definition. And that's
> it. And so that is a big factor. It is very systemic … people argue about, well, maybe if we
> have diversity in the judges, it will be different… it will not be different because the law
> is the same. The wordings are the same. So there needs to be structural changes."

Similarly, Yasmin explained that within her own ethnocultural community, "if there's any form of

abuse or direct disruption in the home, typically the man or the woman would leave, or the

community members would say, okay, you stay there, she will stay here. So you have the

mediators [of] the opposite sex from the outside and relocation is something that's common, like not relocation permanently, but in terms of removing someone from the space. So that, both parties have time to cool off". Anna and Sienna also noted that this is the kind of intervention that their clients usually seek. Isha concurred as well, and noted that most immigrants she has interacted with want to "fix it".

John also remembered 'people's courts' that were briefly experimented with in Edmonton some years ago, where perpetrators of various crimes were counseled without the involvement of the formal legal system. However, he explained that the project, run by a group of lawyers, ended rather quickly due to a lack of government funding. Isha described the presence of similar citizen-run bodies in other countries, but that the general opinion in Western countries like Canada is usually that there is no need for such bodies when the police system already exists.

Finally, while the responses to violence indeed vary vastly from one culture to another, and interviewees agreed that there is no sufficient accommodation for this within the Canadian system, it is nonetheless crucial to note that responses are also determined by what actually counts as violence within each culture. Most interviewees alluded to this, and noted that several forms of violence simply aren't recognized as such within some ethnic cultures. John explained, "In [my] culture, you don't look at the psychological abuse, you look at the physical. And so even if somebody was to say very negative words that would impact the partner, as long as this person has not physically assaulted the wife, it will be considered no harm done." Likewise, many immigrant women, he believes, are of the opinion that "as long as you don't slap or kick

me, if you push me around, if you shout, yell here, that's not a problem to me. You are just getting some anger out of your chest." Mark also espoused similar views, in that many immigrant communities simply "don't know" what abuse is. Likewise, when asked how immigrant survivors describe their experiences, Yasmin responded, "I don't think they've ever said he's abusing me. Like that actually comes in retrospect once they've gotten out of the situation. And typically after they've realized that's what constitutes abuse".

Across the six themes outlined, there were significant overlaps between the inputs of the interviewees and the information collected from the literature reviews. However, there were also interesting insights received from the interviews that were unexplored within the existing literature. Over the remaining sections of this thesis, I highlight these insights and overlaps, outline the recommendations offered by interviewees as well as the limitations of this study and offer potential directions for future research.

Discussion

There were several moments during this journey when I found myself rather flummoxed, and searching frantically for an anchor with which to ground myself and my research. One thing I have certainly gained a more nuanced understanding of and respect for is the sheer complexity of any undertaking that attempts to parse out cultural explanations for a certain phenomenon. Whether in reviewing literature or in analyzing data from the interviews, I found myself constantly encountering contradictory statements and opinions, often with no explanations in

sight.

For example, while much of the data suggests that immigrant survivors prefer interacting with service providers from their own communities who are able to meet them on their level, linguistically and culturally, an almost equal volume of research (and the inputs of my interviewees) emphatically claims that immigrant survivors also prefer to speak to individuals unrelated to their community (especially when it comes to domestic violence) in order to avoid judgement and the consequences of stigmatization. Even more interestingly, my interviewees suggested that some clients choose to interact with members within their community for that same reason – that is, to escape judgement from non-ethnic individuals who might potentially pathologize and stereotype immigrant cultures.

At moments like these, I was greatly aided by the reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which created the room for me to embrace and explore such complexities, to view them as enriching my research rather than weakening it, and most importantly, to value and incorporate my own reflexivity and understanding of the information I am surrounded by in my work. Through all the data I have collected so far, I find that the diversity of experiences for immigrant survivors of domestic violence from ethnocultural communities is broadly determined by pre-existing cultural factors (unique to each community), certain linguistic factors (that are heavily influenced by culture themselves), as well as the unique vulnerabilities formed by the processes and daily circumstances of migration.

Cultural factors defining survivors' experiences

The perceptions of and responses to domestic violence by immigrant women are shaped by certain features of the ethnocultural communities they belong to. In my work, I observed three key aspects here: collectivism and familism, gender and patriarchy, and cultural stigmas. But collectivism and familism do not operate in exclusion. They constantly influence and are influenced by the gender roles that are prescribed by more patriarchal cultures, as well as the stigmas that punish those that deviate from the rules of collectivism and patriarchy. However, most importantly, the lack of recognition and accommodation of these cultural points of sensitivity within Canadian approaches diminishes the quality of service provision available. As Crenshaw (1991) notes, "cultural barriers often further discourage immigrant women from reporting or escaping battering situations" (1248).

I have spent most of my life in India. Growing up, I did not see collectivism as a defining attribute of my culture. Things were just the way things were. Having lived in the West for a few years now – first in Germany and then in Canada – I realize that I was so surrounded by a collectivist way of life that I would never have been able to look at it without stepping out first. And it didn't matter that I myself grew up in a very nuclear family that only consisted of my parents and me, with barely any contact with extended relatives. Collectivism and familism touched everything. It found its voice in a friend who recollected how when his family suddenly encountered poverty, there was never enough food at home and so, while the younger members of the family would eat rice, his grandmother would fill her stomach with the starchy water that the rice was cooked in. This is not unique to Indian cultures. "Japanese immigrant women,

compared to Canadian-born women, tend to choose the well-being of their families over their own personal interests". (Takano 2006, as cited in Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018, 801) Per Ahmad et al. (2015), "Collectivism prioritizes the needs and goals of a collective (e.g. community) over an individual" (64). In my interviews, too, several participants noted that the well-being of children and the reputation of the family often take precedence over the needs of the woman herself. That is, "because they have children, no matter how terrible this dad is behaving, they don't [want] to expose him and shame their family." (John) Children seem to be a major influencing factor within collectivist communities that deem family unity vital to their well-being, and several interviewees alluded to this. In most collectivist cultures, "Single motherhood is seen as severely detrimental to the development of the children" (Dasgupta and Warrier, 1996 as cited in Venkataramani-Kothari, 2007, 16).

Likewise, collectivism and familism formed the backdrop for the stories that aunties in different pockets of my life and community recounted in particularly tender moments – memories of being repeatedly violated by older men of the family simply because they became easy targets within the joint family, for instance. More commonly so in ethnic communities than in non-ethnic ones, "Abuse can hail from other relationships: from in-laws or other extended family members, each of which impact DV and help-seeking behaviors" (Chokshi et al., 2010; Raj et al., 2006; Shankar et al., 2013 as cited in Aujla, 2021, 189) and newcomer women often suffer this form of multidimensional abuse (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a, 21). As Yasmin told me, "the intimate part of violence can actually include family members too." Aujla (2021) notes that "Within this cultural context, the perpetrator was any dominating member in the family" (189), and while there is a

fair amount of research work that illustrates this, "helping practice fails to reflect that reality." (189)

Collectivism persists insidiously even now in my hesitation to ask these women for permission to disclose the details of their stories in my work, because I know what the answer will be. I know that no matter what, "it shouldn't come out" (Mark). "A woman who takes the matter to the public domain is often criticized and loses the support of her community." (Shirwadkar, 2004, 869) Even as my interviewees noted that patriarchy often permits men to perpetrate violence, the stigmas that coexist within the community render any indication of abuse within the homes "shameful" (Ahmad et al., 2009, 617) and is often the cause of denial among survivors. (Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 2000, 2007 as cited in Aujla, 2021, 194) The stigmatization of violence, as well as of any responses to violence acts as a compelling factor that prevents survivors from speaking up. This explains why Yasmin was of the opinion that even associating with formal institutions such as the police is stigmatized within some cultures, because such associations "can't be for anything good". Indeed, this poses dire circumstances for immigrant survivors, because if associating with formal institutions is the only established solution on the table within Canada, and that act is stigmatized within the survivor's community, there truly exist few ways by which she can resolve her situation and still hold onto her community.

One of the most common recourses to violence in Western nations is divorce, even if it is not always viewed positively and is often characterized as some sort of failure on the part of the couple. However, as most of my interviewees noted, divorce is simply not an option for most

immigrant women, because it is shunned and culturally forbidden (Aujla, 2021, 192) and may result in the woman being completely cut off from the community (Mason et al., 2008, 1405). In South Asian communities for instance, "Divorced women are also stigmatized and their participation in holy events or celebrations (particularly weddings) is discouraged, for they might bring bad luck" (Ayyub 2000 as cited in Venkataramani-Kothari, 2007, 16).

The stigmas associated with these ideas perfectly explain why so many immigrant survivors of DV do not want to engage with service providers or interpreters from their own community (Alaggia et al., 2017; Aujla, 2021) out of a fear of having their reputation ruined among people who know them (Ahmad et al., 2009). Anna and Sienna highlighted this trait in their interview. The presence of stigmas and the hesitation to engage with members of their community reveal that the solution to immigrant survivors' troubles is not to simply provide access to service providers from their own community in an attempt to be culturally competent.[3]

An interesting overlap between stigma and language is the "shock value" of certain terms within immigrant cultures that are usually more easily deployed within Canadian contexts. Isha, for instance, noted that immigrant women will hesitate to describe the abuse they have experienced

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[3] And yet, Agnew (1998) brings up an interesting contradiction in their observation that "A woman who goes to a community-based agency feels more secure in talking to women from her own racial background, because she believes that the counselors understand "where she is coming from." Even if the counselors are from different regions in South Asia or belong to different classes, the woman who is seeking their services perceives them to be like her: female, immigrant, and non-White. This creates a feeling of commonality, even though counselors and service providers may have different views about gender relations in South Asian families or about feminism and the need for social change." [166]

in explicit detail because "they don't want to shock you", and so will choose more "appropriate" language to describe their circumstances. For their part, mainstream service providers may view this as a problem, as Alaggia et al. (2017) describe a service provider complaining about the hesitation of an interpreter from the survivor's community to translate sexually explicit terms. (478) This reveals a rather important mismatch between the nature of support that is desired and that which is available to immigrant survivors.

As mentioned previously, collectivism also overlaps with gender and patriarchy. They are both in constant conversation with each other; they shape each other and derive from each other. For example, it seems to be the case that the responsibility to uphold the unity of the family falls most often upon the shoulders of the woman of the house. Likewise, she is supposed to uphold the reputation of the family within the broader community (Aujla, 2021). These obligations form the basis of her entire identity as a woman and tells her what she can and cannot do. Almost always, disclosing violence and endangering the family's reputation falls within the latter category. Many immigrant women constantly encounter the "fear of bringing shame upon the family or the community-at-large and fear of being ostracized" (Alaggia & Maiter, 2015; Guruge, 2010 as cited in Aujla, 2021, 192). The responses of my interviewees frequently allude to the expectation that a woman is supposed to bear everything that she encounters for the sake of her family, and her strength and tolerance for adversity determine the successful performance of her gender. That is what makes her "a good wife", (Yasmin) or a "real woman" (Ahmad et al., 2009, 618). If she deviates from these roles, she is punished and quite severely so. Most often, this involves being ostracized by the family or broader community (Giesbrecht et al., 2023b,

133) as a consequence for having brought "shame" upon them (John). And so, many women are pushed into "sacrificing their personal happiness and tolerating partner abuse for a long time to bring family unity and achieve a collective good for their significant others, especially their children." (Ahmad et al., 2009, 619).

The identity of a woman in many cultures that I consider within my work are also determined by their capacity for "female obedience and compliance" (Mason et al., 2008, 1405-1406).[4] Likewise, subservience to the patriarchal head of the house is what gives them legitimacy (Anna; Sienna). Both Yasmin and John observed the tendency for abuse to be categorized as a disciplining act (or even an act of love and care) by the man of the household among several African communities. Prescriptions of gender roles thus prevent many women from recognizing certain behaviours as abusive (Srinivasan et al., 1998 as cited in Ahmad et al., 2015, 58). Ahmad et al., (2015) state explicitly in their work that "immigrant women with stronger patriarchal beliefs [are] less likely to see spousal violence as abuse". In her interview, Isha explained to me how very often, the perpetration of abuse is, to some extent, tolerated because men are considered to "have a lot of things to deal with, and they have the right to be, you know, a little bit violent". These patriarchal constructs in turn normalize IPV and DV within the community (including among service providers within the community), and discourage women from seeking support (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a; Alaggia et al., 2017).

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[4] several scholars have noted, for instance, the "three obediences of a woman to her father, to her brother, and to her husband" (Kim et al., 2006, as cited in Ahmad et al., 2015, 63)

A unique perspective uncovered in my interview with Isha was that for many immigrant women, unfaithfulness in marriage by a man may be seen as a form of abuse, because in these instances, immigrant communities focus on the "suffering" that her husband put her through. She explained, "this is a huge abuse … being disrespectful is not only how you talk to me, it's how you treat me while I'm in the room or outside, and when you have a relationship with somebody else you don't respect me at all". While there wasn't much in the reviewed literature that directly explored 'cheating' as abuse, Ahmad et al. (2015) identify a list of behaviours pertaining to public vs. private humiliation that South Asian women uniquely identified as forms of abuse. (61) It seems as if there may be important correlations to be made between what Isha describes as being disrespectful "in the room or outside" and Ahmad et al.'s (2015) ideas of humiliation as a form of abuse that takes on distinct forms when it is within the home versus outside it.

So far, I have highlighted the different ways in which collectivism and familism create vulnerability to violence. However, my intention here is not to pathologize immigrant cultures and locate violence as an inherent part of them, but to distinguish between the vulnerabilities created by collectivist cultures and those created by more individualistic cultures. For instance, while collectivism may foster unique forms of vulnerabilities, my interviewees noted that they also often created unique and consistent forms of material and emotional support from community and family members, that may easily be missed within cultures that responsibilize individuals more than they do communities. My key objective here is to highlight that responses to violence that are founded on individualistic grounds are entirely inappropriate for those encountering violence within collectivist environments. There is simply a mismatch, and it is

beyond the scope or desire of my work to evaluate if one approach is inherently better than the other.

My interviewees emphasized the individualistic nature of the Canadian approach to IPV or DV, and how "there's no actual multiculturalism" (Mark). It tends heavily towards "the individualization of the problem… the criminal individual that must be penalized (ignoring the structural causes of violence against women)" (Abraham & Tatsoglou, 2016, 577). But it is evident that individualistic approaches can never adequately fulfil the needs of somebody who grew up in within the bonds of collectivism. As interviewees noted, immigrant survivors are almost always looking for someone to mediate conflict within the home and counsel their partners, because this is the response that collectivist cultures resort to (Anna; Sienna). John explained that within many African cultures, families will come together to resolve the conflicts that couples find themselves in, while Anna observed the contrast to "Western culture [where] sometimes it is more just like you deal with your own problems, and you do your own thing". In the light of this information, it is imperative to ask questions about the nature of the support system that exists in Canada, as well as its overt and more implicit intentions. For instance, I find myself asking, does the dearth of collectivist responses reflect a lack of true care for immigrant concerns, or could it be that on some level, Canada would like for immigrants to alter their own attitudes and mould themselves more closely to the Canadian way of doing things? Perhaps both, perhaps neither. Nevertheless, I find these to be important questions within the context of a country that has historically been involved in persistent efforts to erase the cultures of

generations of Indigenous peoples whose values didn't align with those of the colonial agenda.

How language comes into play

While the scope of my research grew over time to acknowledge and accommodate the multiple cultural and circumstantial factors that interlock and impact immigrant women's experiences of abuse, this investigation was initially inspired by a few preliminary questions about the role of language. For instance, how do linguistic barriers affect survivors' access to quality aid? How do different definitions and conceptions of violence coexist and conflict within the same geographical space? How do other linguistic factors, such as the untranslatability of certain related or unrelated cultural concepts, factor into this setting? In the literature review as well as in my interviews, I discovered several useful responses to these questions.

First, it is essential to dwell upon the most conspicuous implications of language – linguistic barriers for survivors who may not be able to adequately communicate in English. Interviewees and researchers noted the multiplicity of challenges arising out of this, such as perpetrators lacking knowledge of the crimes they were being charged with (John; Mark), "experienc[ing] general fear due to limited English abilities" (Earner 2007; Ayón et al. 2010 as cited in Alaggia et al., 2017, 473), and a general inability of service providers to communicate complex ideas, specifically legal ones (Anna; Sienna). Given the over-reliance on a difficult-to-translate legal system for recourse and the easy deployment of the criminalization framework when it comes to partner violence in Canada (Abraham & Tatsoglou, 2016), this raises crucial questions about whether immigrants are being short-changed by a system that is assumed to be fair and

accessible to all Canadian residents, and if it does not, in fact, "leave them compromised in informed decision-making about their lives, and the lives of their children and families." (Alaggia et al., 2015, 472)

However, it seems fairly evident that effective translation simply will not suffice either, at least insofar as it is unaccompanied by service provision that is truly culturally informed. This owes to the intangibility of the emotional components embedded within language (Marian & Neisser 2000; Schrauf 2000 as cited in Alaggia et al., 2015, 473), that do not simply carry over with translation. Several scholars including Aujla (2021) and Giesbrecht et al. (2023b) observe that immigrant women may be far more comfortable executing difficult conversations in their own language, even when doing so in English is a possibility. Yasmin and Isha both noted the greater "authenticity" and "openness" present in conversations about violence conducted in ethnic languages, and John explained how he was able to bring up culturally relevant information that could "calm down" the client when he was speaking to them in Arabic. Mark, meanwhile, explained the difficulty he faces as a service provider when a client cannot communicate in English, the language that he is more comfortable with and the language that he is more capable of providing trauma-informed care in. That said, while service providers usually have access to interpretive services, the stigma associated with domestic violence, accompanied by the fact that interpreters usually hail from within the community, means that immigrant survivors often intentionally avoid "interactions with people from their own ethnic and/or religious community out of fear of revictimization." (Aujla, 2021, 196) So the, the question here is, when immigrant clients have to choose between speaking to service providers from their own community – and

thereby run the risk of being judged negatively by that community – and having culturally and emotionally impoverished conversations in English with someone outside their community, which is the easier battle? More importantly, for someone already experiencing trauma, how can the system ensure that they do not actually have to make such a difficult choice? How can the cultural competency of prevention and intervention programs grow and develop such that immigrant survivors have equitable access to quality support within Canada, no matter whom they approach? Language is not merely a translator of thoughts, but like an index page for a culture. The individualistic approaches within mainstream Canadian culture find expression within the individualizing language used by service providers. This stands in stark contrast to the values and desires of women from collectivist cultures, leaving them feeling unseen. Thus, I find myself asking if there is a way in which more attention and care can be paid to the contents of what is being communicated to these women by service providers (both within and outside their community), so that no matter where they go, they find a compatible, receptive ear?

Linguistic factors may additionally increase the vulnerability to abuse itself. Several interviewees mentioned that one of the more common forms of abuse within immigrant communities is isolation and separation of women from the broader community. Giesbrecht et al. (2023a) note that isolation is easily compounded in a foreign country when women cannot communicate in English and linguistic barriers only offer "restricted opportunities for social interaction and help-seeking and [increase] dependency on their partner." (13) There certainly seem to be no easy answers or solutions available to several of these conundrums. Linguistic barriers are almost inevitable accompaniments to migration, and isolation as a perpetrating mechanism easily

follows. But perhaps, once we begin to actually think of these structural aspects that endanger immigrant women in such unique ways, intervention strategies can grow to account for them. Perhaps, given sufficient funding, more efforts can be made to create communal spaces of recreation for immigrant women to frequent like they would back home; perhaps more money can be diverted to ensuring that all immigrants, regardless of their status as sponsors or dependents, have the same access to information about their rights before or as soon as they arrive in Canada. Steps in this direction would certainly make it more difficult for perpetrators to exploit linguistic barriers and isolate their partners.

Many interviewees touched upon the idea that certain cultural concepts are not easily translated into English, even when translation or interpretive services are available. Yasmin often has to use multiple examples and break concepts down to their simplest parts when she doesn't "have the words for [them] in [the clients'] language". This is because "language overlaps with culture, giving immediate understanding of some cultural practices" (Aujla, 2021, 195). Likewise, Yasmin and John both observed that not only are certain concepts difficult to translate to (or from) English, but the cultural and emotional weight that ideas carry within certain languages may be even more challenging to translate. This is supported by Mason et al. (2008) who note that the same words are often more hurtful in ethnocultural languages such as Tamil (1406), and that forms of dominance and subservience are associated with certain words in Tamil that do not find translation to their English counterparts. On the other hand, John is of the opinion that words commonly deployed in English conversations about abuse, such as "violent", "aggressive" give such conversations far more accusatory – and therefore counterproductive – hues than they

would if they were executed in languages that described actions more than they described people. In either case, however, it is evident that even when translation is possible, there are several intangible, almost-inaudible cues contained within language that we do not fully understand, and these can have unforeseen implications for immigrants forced to encounter them.

Finally, language has implications in terms of how certain behaviours are defined within a culture. As I mentioned at the very outset, cultural conceptions of abuse find their containers in the definitions articulated within language, and as the interviewees and the literature suggest, often, there seems to be much disagreement between immigrant and Canadian perspectives on what actually counts as violence. John and Mark both agreed that violence is often termed as such within many immigrant cultures only when it is "extreme" and takes on "physical forms". Yasmin, meanwhile, observed that never has an immigrant woman actually used the term "abuse" (or any of its stand-ins) to describe her circumstances. These opinions find much resonance within the literature. Multiple scholars explain how there does not seem to be much clarity on what actually counts as violence within some immigrant cultures (Ahmad et al., 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018), or that there seem to be several forms of abuse that are recognized only within ethnocultural immigrant communities, such as spiritual abuse (George et al., 2022). Further still, there may be forms of abuse that feel more oppressive or less oppressive to immigrant women than they would to others (Ahmad et al., 2015; Okeke-Ihejrika et al., 2018;).

Most importantly however, no real effort has been made in the West to pay attention to these tensions and to incorporate the perspectives of immigrant women within the broadly accepted

definitions of abuse (Latta & Goodman, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002 as cited in Mason et al., 2008, 1398). Instead, the same language founded upon the experiences of non-immigrant women is imposed upon immigrant women, and consequently, so are the same standards for what counts as abuse. For example, "reports on family violence by Statistics Canada provide rates of spousal abuse by counting only incidents of physical or sexual abuse" (Ahmad et al., 2015, 64). Very often, it seems to me as if the Canadian system does not put much effort into fully understanding and acknowledging the complexities of immigrant lives precisely because they are too complex, and too diverse. There are no easy answers or explanations (I certainly haven't been able to find many), and no clear-cut paths to clarity. And so, migrant concerns are frequently marginalized with the same carelessness with which migrants themselves are. Likewise, (and perhaps more insidiously), the language used by this system often homogenizes the experiences of all immigrant women, and supplants culture-specific communication with general language that may be superficially applicable to all immigrants for the purpose of service provision. This, to me, reeks of the same dynamic non-performativity (Ahmed, 2018), wherein the virtues of multiculturalism are espoused for the benefit of the state, while few concrete benefits are actually available to its multicultural subjects.

Implications of immigration

While immigration as a process may not seem culturally or linguistically relevant at the outset, I chose to emphasize it as a factor shaping the experience of violence for two reasons: one, through my research, I came to the realization that the process of immigration and the way this process unfolds, as well as the particular circumstances of immigrant life, create unique

vulnerabilities (as well as forms of violence) for immigrant women that are not experienced by non-immigrants (in the country of origin or in the country of arrival). Thus, the definition of violence, as it currently exists in its various forms in Canada, does not truly reflect these diversities. Two, perhaps precisely because of its rather niche occurrence, the implications of immigration for the experiences of survivors are not explored or outlined in depth within existing research and policy (Mason et al., 2008), even though service providers seem to be aware of this phenomenon, at least in pockets (Anna; Sienna).

A huge number of women immigrating to Canada do so as spouses of men moving here for job opportunities. Often, as many of my interviewees noted, these women have limited education and/or work experience, and are entirely dependent on their partners for their survival. This renders them particularly vulnerable to abuse because they "cannot leave their spouses for economic reasons or due to citizenship requirements (Alaggia et al., 2009; Lucknauth, 2014; Thurston et al., 2013 as cited in Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018, 802). Along similar lines, Mark notes that women do not want to report abuse because they worry that their source of financial support will be taken away from them. Further, economic dependence overlaps with gender roles and linguistic barriers to create further vulnerabilities to exploitation for immigrant women (John; Yasmin). Along with economic dependence, the system is designed in such a way that immigrant women are bound to their spouses for legal status within Canada, and this creates easy opportunities for exploitation and control (Cottrell et al., 2009; Tastsoglou et al., 2015 as cited in Abraham and Tatsoglou, 2016, 574). At this juncture, it is once again worth bringing up Isha's observation that unfaithfulness may be considered a form of abuse by immigrant women, and

still remains one that they cannot do anything about due to the various ways in which they are dependent upon their spouses.

As I mentioned in a previous section, it is absolutely critical that steps are taken to increase the access to information on migrant rights, as this is often an easy avenue for the exploitation of immigrant women (Anna; Isha; Mark; Sienna). The research also suggests that this form of abuse (including withholding information and legal documents, threats of deportation etc.) are rampant within immigrant populations (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a; Mason et al., 2008) This lack of awareness becomes particularly dangerous when immigrant women suddenly lose access to their families and communities from back home upon migration (Anna; Isha; John; Sienna). This aspect is also echoed by Okeke-Ihejirika et al. (2018).

In recognizing immigration abuse, we must keep in mind that this form of abuse does not occur in isolation and interlocks rather resolutely with other cultural factors that impact immigrant experiences of violence, such as stigmas, gender roles and collectivism. As the interviews and research both suggest, the economic dependence of an immigrant woman on her husband is often the direct result of prescribed gender roles within her patriarchal community. Likewise, while economic dependence may be one factor, most of the interview participants pointed out that the stigma associated with divorce and separation, as well as the tenets of collectivism, compel immigrant women to tolerate abuse so as to not be ostracized from their already-limited communities in a new country (Yasmin), as well as to avoid being cast out by elders and family members back home (Isha; John). Steps need to be taken to formally recognize immigration

abuse within Canada; Anna and Sienna noted that the current legal system provides deeply murky definitions of the scope of this kind of abuse, and this makes any proper recourse highly elusive.

Finally, apart from the vulnerabilities that immigration creates for women at the hands of their partners and communities, it is worth noting that immigrant women suffer a third burden – that of the judgement and identities cast upon them by the Canadian mainstream. Interview participants noted, these identities may alternate between placing immigrants on a pedestal that they then cannot afford to step down from – such as by constantly emphasizing their resilience and adaptability (Yasmin), and negative judgement that takes the form of pathologizing immigrant cultures (Isha), thereby cultivating a fear of approaching mainstream services in immigrant communities.

Overall, there were multiple points of agreement between the literature and the interviews in terms of the factors that play a role in determining experiences of violence for immigrant women that have thus far received limited exploration, understanding and defining within research, legal policy as well as the broader Canadian outlook. However, there were also a number of contradictions that I find highly valuable in my attempts to retain and reflect the complexities of immigrant life. In the final chapter of this thesis, I describe the key issues within the current system in this regard (as identified in interviews and the literature) and a list of recommendations for practice. Finally, I conclude by noting the limitations of this study and outlining the

possibilities for further research in this area.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

To summarize the findings of my research, I go back to the questions I first approached this topic with:

1. How do the experiences of domestic violence and/or Intimate Partner Violence vary from one culture and context (for example, immigrant versus non-immigrant) to another, and how do the roles played by conceptions, meaning and language influence these experiences and the attempts of immigrant women to cope with or resolve it?

2. Further, how do the meanings ascribed to different forms of violence and responses to violence in the Canadian context contrast or coincide with those encountered in diverse cultures, and does this impede efficient and effective provision of aid and support to immigrant survivors?

With regard to the first question, there are many insights I gained from the literature and the interviews. It is clear that diverse immigrant communities experience violence differently, and these have largely to do with how their lives are determined by the intersections of various cultural factors such as stigma, gender roles, collectivism and familism, as well as political factors such as the process of migration. All these in turn have implications for and are impacted by the language used to define and talk about abusive behaviours within these communities.

Across the board, my interviewees and the work of previous scholars in this field suggest that collectivism and familism create unique forms of violence and vulnerabilities for immigrant women. Collectivism often appears to push ethnocultural women to prioritize the needs of their

families over their own (Ahmad et al., 2015; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018), and as many interviewees suggested, this is particularly the case when children are involved. In turn, this results in the formation of stigmas around the notions of violence, separation and divorce (Ahmad et al., 2009; Aujla, 2021; Shirwadkar, 2004; Venkataramani-Kothari, 2007), thereby allowing for unique circumstances within which many immigrant women refuse to classify certain behaviours as abuse (or classify them as less abusive) in order to escape its cultural consequences (Aujla, 2021). Collectivism also creates unique forms of abuse for immigrant women, such as that perpetrated by extended family members (Aujla, 2021; Giesbrecht et al., 2023a), and these are not readily defined or accounted for within the Canadian sociopolitical system, as interviewees observed.

Collectivism also overlaps with gender roles in ways that influence the perceptions of violence for immigrant women. For instance, it is often the woman's duty to ensure the family remains united and enjoys a good reputation within the broader community (Aujla, 2021) and, particularly within more patriarchal cultures, to remain subservient to the man of the house (Mason et al., 2008). Likewise, the identity of a woman, and especially her recognition by the community as a "real woman" or a "good wife" is often tied to how well she carries out these obligations (Ahmad et al., 2009; Mason et al., 2008), and any deviation usually results in some amount of ostracizing by the community (Giesbrecht et al., 2023b). Gender roles of this nature often alter the scope of what counts as abuse in many communities (Ahmad et al., 2015) and impede help-seeking behaviour by immigrant women (Alaggia et al, 2017; Giesbrecht et al.,

2023a).

These insights all have implications for language, because the intangible and emotional aspects of diverse cultures (these include the stigmas, gender roles and collectivist ideals previously outlined) are not easily translatable into English (Alaggia et al., 2015), which explains why many immigrant women are far more comfortable executing difficult conversations in their own languages (Aujla 2021; Giesbrecht et al., 2023b). Likewise, many interviewees noted that there are cultural concepts embedded within language that are often untranslatable (such as the rules of female subservience, as Mason et al., (2008) describe), or whose cultural weightage cannot be carried over into English; this implies that immigrant women are precluded from adequately communicating the extent of abuse that they perceive themselves to be experiencing or that mainstream Canadian standards that define the extent of abuse are imposed upon them. Along similar lines, the research acknowledges that language overlaps with culture (Aujla, 2021), and that forms of abuse identified and defined (or not defined) within a given language may not easily translate into English, and thereby, to the Canadian mainstream. Most of the interview participants agreed that there is a noticeable lack of consensus between what is defined as abuse within the Canadian mainstream and what diverse immigrant cultures define as abuse, and the existing research echoes these opinions (Ahmad et al., 2015; George et al., 2022; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018).

For many of these reasons, some scholars suggest that "effective intervention should ideally emerge from the victim's own community and dominant community organizations that are

familiar with South Asian [or other ethnic] cultures" (Dasgupta, 2000, 179). However, when considered together with stigma and the fear of losing the respect of the community, immigrant survivors are doubly disadvantaged because they often prefer not to talk to service providers from within their community who can speak their language (Aujla, 2021). Linguistic barriers themselves create unique vulnerabilities for women, as it makes it much easier for perpetrating partners to isolate their wives from the broader community (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a) and exploit their lack of knowledge of immigrant rights.

The circumstances of immigration compound the particularities of these experiences for immigrant women and create unique forms of abuse as well. The research notes that many immigrant women are dependent on their partners for financial reasons as well as for their legal status within the country (Abraham & Tastoglou., 2016; Alaggia et al., 2009; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2018), thus engendering novel positions of vulnerability for them. As interviewees noted, the dependence of immigrant women on their partners (and thus their vulnerability to and tolerance of abuse) is actively fostered by the gender roles and stigmas within their collectivist, often patriarchal communities. Immigration also engenders particular abusive behaviours that are not easily recognized, such as withholding legal documents, threats of deportation etc. (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a; Mason et al., 2008), and while my interviewees specifically termed this "immigration abuse", they also noted that there is not much clarity in terms of its definition within the Canadian legal system. Finally, immigration reduces access to family and community, which for women hailing from collectivist cultures, reduces access to recourse without risk (Okeke-

Ihejirika et al., 2018).

I now arrive at my second question, which has more to do with the tensions that abound between mainstream Canadian conceptions and definitions of domestic violence, and the implications of these for the effectiveness of the services currently available to immigrant survivors. The ideas outlined within the purview of my first research question certainly also speak to what is being asked here in terms of the contrasts in definitions and conceptions. That is, by exploring the diversity of these within immigrant cultures, we are already able to see that they stand in stark contrast to how the Canadian mainstream perceives and defines violence. However, as for the effectiveness of service, the literature and the interviews both uncovered much in terms of the conflicts that exist between Canadian and immigrant responses to violence (which is entirely influenced by what counts as "violence" in each environment to begin with), and the gaps that this creates in terms of service provision.

While the collectivism, familism, gender roles and stigmas that abound in many ethnocultural communities create unique forms of violence for immigrant women, the real problem arises when the system set up to respond to violence in Canada is designed to interrupt forms of violence that arise out of a more individualistic, Western culture. That is, "many of the more established practices and policies reflect the specific social, political, and cultural context in which they have originated, including the values of more individualistic Western societies." (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2019, 315) Most interviewees noted this as well, and I believe that this mismatch is one of the less-recognized reasons (though certainly not the only one) why

immigrant cultures are so frequently pathologized by the West when it comes to domestic violence and IPV. That is, I believe that because the system is only set up to respond to instances of violence that arise out of a more individualistic culture in ways that individualize the problem and the parties involved (Abraham & Tatsoglou, 2016), it simply does not have the means or capacity to respond to forms of violence that arise in other kinds of cultures. In turn, the problems of violence within these collectivist immigrant cultures remain unresolved, and the broader Canadian society blames this on the "inherently violent" nature of these cultures, whereas they actually remain unresolved because their resolution exists beyond the current scope of the mainstream Canadian response to domestic violence.

A prominent example of this is that within collectivist cultures, the solution to violence and crime would also typically derive from collectivist values. Several interviewees described how within ethnocultural communities, conflicts within the couple would usually be resolved by the coming together of the broader community, and by elders of the community providing counsel to the couple in conflict before the problem escalates too much. That is, in most collectivist cultures, the end goal of conflict resolution, according to the interview participants, is to alter disruptive behaviours and retain unity, not to separate. This may be a difficult possibility to grasp, and I certainly had troubles stomaching it and suggesting it here, given that I myself have a different, more individualistic worldview when it comes to the resolution of abuse, owing to the kind of circles I've grown up in India. However, as most of my interviewees emphasized, the fact remains that most immigrant survivors who seek support are looking for it in this form. When they realize that the formal system is going to push them in a different direction and

possibly disrupt the unity of their family, they simply stop asking for help and either continue to tolerate abuse or, as some scholars suggest, rearrange their lives in certain ways that enable them to cope with abuse (Maitra, 2018). Likewise, along with family unity, the priority for most immigrant women is the material needs of their children, and their ability to provide for their children if she does actually separate from her partner. However, interviewees explained that within mainstream approaches, the trauma of the survivor is prioritized over her need to earn an income and support her children, thereby discouraging these women from seeking formal support. If the Canadian system wants to provide adequate care to immigrant survivors, then it is essential for it to recognize the actual needs of these individuals and alter or diversify the range of options it offers.

When it comes to language, there are several ways in which the system fails immigrant women. These include inadequate access (often due to reduced funding) to trauma-informed interpreters leaving service providers incapable of providing the same quality of care that they would be able to in English for instance, as interviewees suggest. However, some interviewees noted that even when staff diversity may be available within community organizations to account for this problem, such diversity may not be equally accessible within more formal agencies such as the police or the courts, whom immigrants nonetheless must interact with. Likewise, the very fact that the existing legal provisions are not easily translatable leaves many immigrants (survivors and perpetrators alike) in fear due to their linguistic barriers, and compromises their ability to make informed decisions (Alaggia et al., 2015). In this way, we also see that linguistic barriers overlap with the vulnerabilities produced by the immigration process, where immigrant women's

lack of awareness of their rights, and their lack of access to this information due to limited English-language ability makes them easily exploitable by perpetrators who withhold key information from them (Giesbrecht et al., 2023a; Mason et al., 2008). Interview participants unanimously stressed this gap in the system, whereby immigrant women do not receive adequate information about their rights (or about other resources, such as mental health supports) either before or even upon their arrival in Canada. This suggests the need for transnational co-operation between Canada and immigrants' origin countries, to ensure that all immigrants, regardless of their status, have adequate access to vital information.

As for the definition of violence, the interviewees and research both suggest that adequate efforts have not been made by Canada to understand how immigrants define and conceive of violence differently, and their perspectives have not been accounted for in the hegemonic definitions of domestic violence and IPV that service providers rely upon to design their services (Ahmad et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2008). Interviewees noted that immigration abuse, another category of violence that is unique to immigrants (including behaviours previously listed, such as withholding information and important documents), is not clearly developed in the law and there are no clear steps in the formal system for responding to such violence. This aspect is particularly problematic because the consequences of abuse are determined by what is perceived as abuse here in Canada. So effective, developed consequences and responses exist only for those forms of abuse.

Interviewees all opined that whether at the grassroots level or the most funded levels of service provision, there is inadequate cultural competency training given to service providers, and this leaves most of them incapable of bridging these cultural gaps. While those who are passionate about the work may go above and beyond to better understand immigrant experiences, we certainly cannot expect that level of commitment from all workers. This creates circumstances of inequitable access to good care for immigrant survivors. Indeed, one interviewee noted that even those who lead cultural competency training programs for service providers are often inadequately culturally informed themselves. Cultural competency is particularly important when it comes to language, as interviewees noted that descriptive words in English (such as violent, aggressive etc.) are perceived differently by immigrants and can often have counterproductive results when engaging with perpetrators. Likewise, interviewees noted that mainstream services emphasize "proper procedure" over the needs of the client at that moment, and that this is particularly a problem when the interaction occurs in English, while there may be more room for more affective communication within the client's own language. This "focus on policy" within mainstream services is also touched upon by the existing research (Aujla, 2021).

Finally, the literature emphasized that there is a lack of funding when it comes to addressing the nuances and complexities of immigrant experiences, and this hinders cultural competency within available programs. Alaggia et al. (2017) observe, "This lack of training and protocols seem to be indicative of the devaluing of human services in a neoliberal climate of service provision. The [Canadian] federal government has been cutting funding to immigrant services over the past decade" (480). Most interviewees also alluded to the pervasiveness of this problem, and as one

succinctly put it, "The good ideas usually don't get enough funding." (John)

Recommendations for practice

While the ideas I have discussed within this thesis need much more exploration and understanding in order to design a system that is fully capable of addressing the specific needs of immigrants, there were still several concrete suggestions – some broad, some more specific – made by the interviewees and the researchers whose work I have referred to here. Some of these suggestions are discussed below, although I have to note that this is by no means an exhaustive list.

Many suggestions were offered to improve the quality of services in terms of language. Interviewees stressed the need for a greater number of trauma-informed interpreters or multilingual support workers in many more languages in order to ensure consistency in the care that survivors receive. Alaggia (2017) also emphasizes the need for "training for bilingual workers in developing relationships with their clients, and maintaining clear roles and boundaries" (480) and for more training for other support workers in "how to use interpreters effectively and appropriately" (480). Trauma-informed interpreters and translators are required not just for one-on-one care, but for larger awareness programs as well. Interviewees noted the success of programs where even if the content was designed by somebody outside the community, facilitators of the sessions were drawn from within the community, in order to increase the comfort levels of the audience when discussing sensitive subjects. However,

interpreters may also need training in ensuring the confidentiality of clients, particularly when they belong to the same community. Linguistic compatibility also includes recognizing how immigrant survivors may respond to certain words and concepts, and exercising greater care and sensitivity in that regard. Many interviewees stressed the importance of utilizing the language that the survivor herself is using to guide the conversation. This forms the basis of trauma-informed care when it comes to language.

When it comes to active outreach, an interesting observation made by an interviewee was that immigrant women seem more ready to discuss sensitive topics when they are brought up within big groups (Yasmin). They respond with greater enthusiasm in such environments that they perceive as safer. Of course, when initiating such activities, adequate research must first be done into the nature of stigmas within that community in order to assess how willing women would be to air their opinions in a public space that could potentially endanger their reputation within the community.

It is also imperative to improve the access to education and awareness programs for immigrants immediately upon or even before arrival. These must include education on rights, on how domestic violence is defined within Canadian discourse, what behaviours are typical for healthy relationships, on matters pertaining to gender roles and on the various supports (such as legal, physical and mental health etc.) that they have access to. Adequate and effective education would not only place potential survivors in a position of greater independence, but would also provide knowledge and support to potential perpetrators and prevent them from engaging in violent

behaviour. Such programs may be even more effective if they are conducted in collaboration with recognized leaders of the immigrant community (such as spiritual leaders), whose words would have greater impact and legitimacy within the community, and who have a responsibility towards bettering the lives of its members (Aujla, 2021, 199). Interviewees even suggested that these leaders must themselves have access to education programs in order to be able to provide trauma-informed support when approached by individuals encountering challenges within the community. Further, active outreach in the form of such programs may help counter the effects of delayed help-seeking within immigrant communities by simply beginning the conversation about violence without waiting for survivors to reach out for support.

Many of my interviewees expressed the desire for more collaboration between mainstream service providers, shelter houses and community organizations. Often, bigger organizations receive more funding than grassroots or community organizations, and this gives them greater access to robust, trauma-informed programming. However, this does not necessarily imply cultural competency of care. With effective collaboration, this gap might be bridged, whereby smaller organizations have access to training on trauma-informed care and mainstream organizations are able to benefit from the cultural knowledge that community-based organizations can pass onto them. Indeed, I believe that the collaborative approach must be taken even further and include governmental agencies as well as the court system, so that we may have improved awareness of actual immigrant needs and consistency in responding to these needs across the board. As well, it might be of great benefit to consider transnational collaboration with organizations and institutions in the countries of origin, so that the Canadian response to

domestic violence in immigrant communities is better informed by knowledge of the responses they would have encountered there as well as of the original circumstances that led to their migration.

When it comes to cultural competence, interviewees emphasized that service providers must exhibit greater willingness to sit down with immigrants and listen to everything they have to share. They expressed the need for greater openness to differences in conceptions and approaches, and for more curiosity about the circumstances of immigrant lives and the ways in which those lives have changed since leaving the countries of origin. Nonjudgmental curiosity about cultural diversity, and the cultural factors that engender certain forms of violence, interviewees noted, is the first step towards making culturally competent care available. This will enable support workers to be better informed about the various unique forms of abuse that immigrant women encounter, such as, for instance, "the possibility of women experiencing multiple forms of abuse by multiple perpetrators." (Aujla, 2021, 198) One interviewee observed, "as support workers, we have to become comfortable with asking uncomfortable questions, as long as they are respectful questions" (Mark). Another interviewee (Yasmin) described the toolkits, podcasts and pamphlets that her organization is in the process of producing for precisely this purpose, that is, for increasing awareness of the different ways in which diverse cultures experience violence. This reveals how easily accessible educational resources like these are required not just by immigrants, but by service providers as well, particularly when, as Yasmin notes, there is a common tendency for service providers in Canada to pathologize immigrant communities or valorize their "resilience". As Maitra (2018) explains,

"we need more diverse, nuanced conceptions of both family and violence for the abused women that American [or Canadian, in this case] medical, legal, and psychiatric institutions seek to serve—particularly racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and refugees who face the most complex structural, legal, and cultural barriers to obtaining care. Neither victim nor goddess should suffice as a paradigm for women's experiences of harm and their activities of living." (10)

Cultural competence is not merely about recognizing cultural differences in the experience of violence, but about improving access to client-centered service provision. This includes returning agency to survivors, and deferring to the strategies and approaches that immigrant women actually want to utilize as opposed to imposing prescriptive coping mechanisms upon them. These may include, for example, prioritizing immigrant women's desires to retain family unity and focus on enabling them to provide for themselves and their families instead of pushing them to separation. As one interviewee put it, when it comes to immigrant survivors, support workers must fully recognize that "they're the experts of their lives" (Anna). That said, support workers must still ensure that survivors have adequate access to resources so that the decisions they are making are truly informed ones. An openness to client-directed approaches can pave the way for culturally-relevant, even creative responses to violence, such as these described by Ahmad et al. (2009) that expand the definition of what a coping mechanism may look like:

"one educated participant disclosed her husband's verbal abuse to an Indian doctor and this loss of face resulted in better behaviour of her husband. Some participants talked to other resourceful women in the community who linked them to community-based counselors. Likewise, temporary separation is sometimes practiced by SA [South Asian] women by visiting parents and this makes an aggressive husband worried about his "good" public image, curbing his violent behaviour." (620)

Finally, practice here includes the practice of research and it is important for those of us in research and academic communities to engage with this topic in an intersectional manner that

"provides ways to legitimate the experiences of women who have been marginalized and hidden from dominant cultural discourses about battered women" (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, 49) and to actively "address the paucity of such perspectives in the mainstream literature" (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, 49). The limited number of research articles that I was able to find on this subject revealed to me that there is a great need for more and better research on immigrant experiences. To that end, I now discuss some of the limitations of this paper and the potential avenues for further research in this area.

Limitations of this study and scope for future research

Through the interviews I conducted for this study, I realized that service providers in Edmonton attempt to use their knowledge and creativity in remarkable ways to address the existing cultural gaps in service provision, despite the fact that the knowledge bases that shape their initial training and education are not very culturally informed. Still, several nuances continue to escape their view, and this owes a great deal to the lack of adequate, in-depth research in this field. In other words, even as support workers work to empower immigrant survivors every day, they are being held back by a system of knowledge and recourse that does not appear to give the same importance to immigrant experiences. It certainly seems to be the case that support workers on the ground are much more in touch with the reality of immigrant lives than either academia or the legal system, and I cannot help but wonder why such an important gap persists.

My own research is limited, first, by the fact that it explores several separate (albeit interconnected) ideas and therefore is unable to examine each of them in the depth they demand. This primarily owes to the fact that when I began, I couldn't find much literature on the topics I was considering, and so I was left with no choice but to operate with the assumption that my area of research was actually too narrow. The truth turned out to be that while there is indeed a dearth of research, there is a vast depth of information about each of the aspects I discuss (such as collectivism, gender roles in immigrant society and the role of stigmas and language) that is waiting to be uncovered. Future research could attempt to do so by engaging more with support workers and survivors, who possess many more insights than the research currently does.

On that note, my research is quite limited in that it only reflects the perspectives of service providers, and not survivors themselves. While this was intended to address the current gap in research in this regard, I nonetheless found myself frequently wishing I could compare the perspectives of service providers with those of their clients. So perhaps, this is something that can be explored in the future; while the perspectives of survivors are certainly valuable in their own right, it would be highly interesting to have research available that puts their voices alongside those of their (or other) support workers.

Next, I find that a big limitation of my research is that it groups together the experiences of diverse immigrant communities and therefore runs the risk of generalizing immigrant experiences. Again, while I originally intended to be able to present the experiences and perspectives of multiple immigrant cultures alongside each other, I found that to adequately

reflect the nuances within each of these cultures is well beyond the scope of this one project. I do believe that there is value in studying the experiences of all immigrant cultures side-by-side, given that they are all forced to encounter the same sociopolitical system in Canada, but this would have to be an ongoing project that is much larger in its scope. I also believe that the voice of survivors themselves is of prime importance here. There needs to be deeper development of specific ideas and concepts relevant for each immigrant culture in Canada, and future research would do well to address this gap. In doing so, however, it is vital that sufficient attention is paid even to the smallest immigrant communities and not just to the more dominant ones because "If information is not gathered from all groups of immigrants, their experiences would become less visible than that of those who are included and help support a different and often culturally essentialist discourse about their issues of concern". (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018, 345)

My research was also limited in that it only reflects the perspectives of six service providers, all of whom are located in the city of Edmonton. In order to arrive at a more thoroughly, more widely applicable account of immigrant experience across the country, the research needs to incorporate the insights of a much larger number of individuals from diverse geographical locations. This is particularly important given that immigrant experiences of violence may be shaped by their geographical location – for example, immigrants in urban locations may experience and cope with violence differently than those in rural areas.

While I have tried to address several overlapping factors in my research, there are several other interlocking factors beyond its scope that no doubt also play big roles in determining how

immigrant cultures define and experience domestic violence, that I would be deeply interested in seeing research conducted on. For instance, how do these definitions and experience vary between different generations of immigrants? While parents are often the transmitter of cultural values to children, this may be a more complicated process when the two generations have grown up in worlds that are entirely different linguistically and culturally.

Additionally, there are several cultural institutions that are unique to certain immigrant cultures. These include, for example, particular classifications of religious sects, caste etc. Likewise, the institution of marriage itself has different classifications in some cultures, for instance, when "arranged" marriage is distinguished from "love" marriage. While the process of immigration appears to somewhat obscure the implications of these unique cultural institutions, future research can examine the ways in which they influence the perception and definition of domestic violence and IPV, and if they are indeed rendered less (or differently) impactful by the process of immigration.

Some of the opinions shared by my interviewees also suggest that more scholarly attention needs to be paid to the role of movies, television and social media in defining abuse in an increasingly globalizing world. In particular, it may be particularly beneficial to analyze the cultural power relations at play in these arenas, in order to understand the hegemonies that lurk within the processes of language and conceptualization.

Next, while some research suggests that there are indeed important differences in the ways that diverse immigrant women define and recognize abusive acts as violence, there are few explanations for why this is the case, and how these definitions are formed in the first place. For instance, some of my interviewees observed that the recognition of abuse is often obscured by notions of "care", "love" and "discipline" within some immigrant cultures. Questions need to be raised about how the ideas of love and care are co-opted by patriarchal systems, and the power relations that determine who gets to define violence within these cultures must also be better examined in the future. Likewise, the role of media is once again at stake here, and the forms of it that are frequently consumed by immigrant women (such as movies and TV soaps) must be examined for their role in "teaching" these women what violence looks or doesn't look like for somebody who looks like them.

My final suggestion for future research also has largely to do with the processes that define what counts as violence in different cultures. Many of my interviewees noted that immigrant communities differ from the Canadian mainstream perspective in that only physical acts of a certain intensity get classified as violence within some cultures. The research also suggests that even while abusive actions such as starvation and humiliation persist across cultures (Maitra, 2018), they frequently escape recognition as violence if there is no actual physical act of hitting or beating. Thus, I believe we need to examine the roles that women's bodies and the marks that they bear play in defining violence. That is, just like the age-old question of whether the tree actually fell if nobody heard it fall, is it the case that in some cultures, violence did not actually

occur if there is no evidence of it on the body of the survivor?

While this list of suggestions can go on and on, I believe that answering some of these questions will take us several steps closer to understanding, addressing and preventing domestic violence in immigrant communities.

Concluding thoughts:

This research journey has been challenging to me in multiple ways. First and foremost, the ideas I chose to explore constantly put me in conversation with my own experiences of partner violence and pushed me to closely examine how I coped with it at the time and my reasons for the choices I made. In this, I was fortunate to have the support of a deeply caring community here in Edmonton, as well as the constant love and encouragement of my current partner. And so, this has in some ways been almost therapeutic for me, and I feel empowered by the knowledge and insights that I have been given access to through this work.

However, the other big challenge that I faced was more abstract, and therefore strategies to overcome it seemed far more elusive. This challenge lay in the sheer number of complexities and contradictions that I encountered at every turn on this path. This complexity is reflected most prominently in the fact that what started out as a project intending to explore the role of language in immigrant experiences of IPV was forced to become a discussion of multiple other interlocking factors that have implications for the language used around such violence in immigrant communities. While the methods that I chose here have allowed me to embrace these

complexities and even highlight them, I find greater solace in the realization that the very complexity of this matter is evidence of its importance, and I find myself more convinced than ever that more research work needs to be dedicated to the field of immigrant experiences, and in particular, immigrant experiences of abuse here in Canada.

Having lived in this country for over two years as an immigrant myself, I am often struck by the notion that while Canada greatly benefits from its popularity with immigrants both economically and politically, it doesn't repay this favour as often. I have frequently encountered instances where it seems as if the experiences of immigrants are grouped together with the those of other racialized populations for the purposes of research as well as practice, and while there are indeed useful commonalities that unite and empower diverse groups of marginalized individuals, this also means that experiences that are unique to immigrants do not get the attention that they demand if immigrant justice is to be achieved. Therefore, at the end of this long journey, I invite everybody viewing this work to educate themselves and engage more with matters of immigrant justice whether in academia or otherwise. This may take the form of volunteering at local migrant rights organizations or researching immigrant experiences in a scholarly capacity – or even better, pushing for transnational collaborations in both these contexts. In this study, I have merely scratched the surface of the complexities that immigrants encounter in their daily lives. I strongly believe that with greater intentions and greater incentives for work in this area, we can make exponential progress in providing equitable, quality care to many more survivors of domestic violence and IPV in Canada, no matter who they are or where they come from.

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APPENDIX A: Initial contact letter

Nirupama Rajan

Department of Women's and Gender Studies University of Alberta

Edmonton, T6G 2E7

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research study

Ethics ID: Pro00131416

Hello,

I am a graduate student in the M.A. Gender and Social Justice Studies program at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, currently being supervised by Dr Philomina Okeke- Ihejirika. My graduate thesis is titled "The Role of Language in Seeking and Receiving Aid among Immigrant Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada", and I would like to invite you to take part in a one-hour interview with me to share your perspectives on this matter and contribute to this field of research.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an issue faced by communities all over the world. Immigrant communities in Canada face unique challenges when it comes to accessing support for victim-survivors of IPV. The goal of this study is to understand the role that language plays in this process of providing support to an immigrant victim-survivor (specifically women) of IPV in Canada.

The objectives for this study are:

- to understand the role that language plays in the process of accessing support for immigrant survivors (women from the "Global South") of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada

- to understand how general linguistic barriers prevent survivors from receiving effective formal aid

- to explore how diverse, cultural understandings of ideas such as "violence" and "intimacy" are reflected in immigrant language, and whether or not they align with mainstream Canadian conceptions of these ideas

- to explore how the language used by service providers in Canada might be altered to be more culturally informed and more closely reflect immigrant values and conceptions.

While most studies in this field have focused on the perspectives of survivors, I believe that service providers can provide unique perspectives on these issues based on their interactions with multiple diverse survivors. These perspectives have not been explored sufficiently so far. For this reason, I believe that you are a suitable candidate for this study. In the long-run, my hope is that the information gathered through this research can contribute to improving the accessibility and effectiveness of services available to immigrant survivors of IPV.

If you are interested in participating in this study, I will be happy to provide further details and facilitate the interview in a manner that is suitable to you. Please note that my study does not require the personal identifying details of any survivors that you have interacted with. The privacy of survivors of IPV is of utmost importance to me, and I will do everything in my

capacity to respect that in my study. All of these details and more will be outlined in the consent form that I provide you, should you choose to participate.

If you have any questions or clarifications, please feel free to reach out to me at nirupama@ualberta.ca.

I look forward to your participation.

In solidarity,

Nirupama Rajan

APPENDIX B: Consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: *The Role of Language in Seeking and Receiving Aid among Immigrant Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada*

Ethics ID: Pro00131416

Contact Information

Nirupama Rajan

Department of Women's and Gender Studies

University of Alberta

Email: nirupama@ualberta.ca

Supervisor

Dr Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika

Department of Women's and Gender Studies

University of Alberta

Email: pokeke@ualberta.ca

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you take part, the researcher is available to explain the project and you are free to ask any questions about anything you do not understand. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an issue faced by communities all over the world. Immigrant communities in Canada face unique challenges when it comes to accessing support for victim-survivors of IPV. The goal of this study is to understand the role that language plays in this process of providing support for an immigrant victim-survivor (specifically women) of IPV in Canada. As a service provider, you are being asked to be in this study because:

- Service providers have the experience of interacting with multiple victim-survivors of IPV. Thus, the researcher wishes to understand your perspective based on your interactions with multiple, diverse survivors.

- Considering immigrant victim-survivors are often hesitant to seek formal help, increasing accessibility of supports and services is of prime importance. Studying the perspectives of service providers is crucial for this purpose.

- As an immigrant woman herself, the researcher understands the sensitivity of this subject. As such, she believes she needs to develop her skills more before interacting with survivors of IPV themselves. Interacting with service providers with vast experience in this area, therefore, is a good way for the researcher to develop these skills.

What is the reason for doing the study?

The objectives for this study are:

- to understand the role that language plays in the process of accessing support for immigrant survivors (women from the "Global South") of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Canada

- to understand how general linguistic barriers prevent survivors from receiving effective formal aid

- to explore how diverse, cultural understandings of ideas such as "violence" and "intimacy" are reflected in immigrant language, and whether or not they align with mainstream Canadian conceptions of these ideas

- to explore how the language used by service providers in Canada might be altered to be more culturally informed and more closely reflect immigrant values and conceptions.

What will I be asked to do?

As mentioned above, the study seeks to understand the role that language plays in the process of providing support and aid to immigrant survivors of IPV. These can include general linguistic barriers, such as an inability to communicate in English, a lack of availability of effective translators, inability to access resources only available in English or French etc. However, it can also involve cultural issues. For instance, different cultures may view different behaviours as violence, and the mainstream Canadian understanding of IPV may not align with that of other cultures. Additionally, non-Western cultures may have stigmas attached to certain words and terms such as IPV and domestic abuse, which might prevent them from seeking formal support. The researcher seeks to understand the service provider's perspective of these issues, in order to explore how service provision can be altered to account for these challenges.

For this study:

- You will be taking part in one online or in-person (according to your preference) interview with the researcher about the role of language in providing support to immigrant women in Canada who are survivors of IPV.

- The interview is estimated to take about one hour at a time of your convenience. The researcher may reach out to you for clarifications if at all required.

- The interview will be semi-structured. The researcher will provide you with the questions before the interview, and the interview will be guided by the discussion between the researcher and the participant.

- Participants are being selected through community organisation referrals.

- The researcher will collect your name, your place of employment, your telephone number and your email address for this study. However, your name and contact details will not be disclosed to anybody other than the principal researcher. In the researcher's thesis, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym so that your identity is not disclosed.

- With your consent, the researcher may collect a Zoom recording of the interview. This is so that the researcher can analyse the discussion for the purpose of the study. If the participant wishes, video can be turned off at the start of the interview. This audio/video recording will be stored offline on the researcher's personal laptop, and nobody other than the principal researcher and her supervisor will have access to this recording.

- The interviews will be transcribed manually by the researcher and the transcripts will not be available to anybody other than the researcher and her supervisor.

- **Please note that the researcher wishes to respect the privacy of survivors of IPV and does not require the personal identifying information of any of your clients.**

What are the risks and discomforts?

It is possible, although unlikely, that the discussion of matters relating to Intimate Partner

Violence, sexual and/or physical abuse and trauma might cause you some amount of emotional stress. However, the researcher believes that given your line of work, this will not be greater than what you encounter day-to-day.

To mitigate any potential emotional stress, the researcher would like you to know that:

- You are not required to disclose personal identifying information of any survivors that you have interacted with. The privacy of victim-survivors is of utmost importance to the researcher.
- You are welcome to opt out of the interview at any point, as well as to withdraw the information you have provided for up to two weeks after the interview.
- If you happen to share any personal information (although this is NOT required) over the course of the conversation, it will remain strictly confidential and will not be shared with anybody outside the interview.

It is not possible to know all of the risks that may happen in a study, but the researcher has taken all reasonable safeguards to minimize any known risks to a study participant.

What are the benefits to me?

While there may not be any direct benefit to you, results from this study may help us understand how to improve accessibility and effectiveness of supports and services for immigrant survivors of IPV in Canada. In the long-run, this could be beneficial for bridging the gap between the support that is currently being provided and the support that is actually needed.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Being in this study is your choice. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study at any point up to and during the interview. To withdraw from the study please contact Nirupama Rajan at nirupama@ualberta.ca.

Even if you remain in the research study, you may choose to withdraw some or all of your responses by contacting Nirupama Rajan up to **two weeks after the interview**. We are unable to remove your answers after that time because the information would have already been analyzed and connected with other parts of the study. If you choose to withdraw your responses within that time frame, they will be destroyed immediately and you will receive confirmation of the same over email or telephone.

Please note that you are not required to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with.

Will my information be kept private?

During this study we will do everything we can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. No information relating to this study that includes your name will be released outside of the researcher's office or published by the researchers unless you give us your express permission. Your contact details will not be available to anybody except the principal researcher. Sometimes, by law, we may have to release your information with your name so we cannot guarantee absolute privacy. However, we will make every legal effort to make sure that your information is kept private.

When your interview is transcribed, we will assign you a pseudonym (fake name) to protect your identity. If you would like to choose your own pseudonym, you will have the option to do

so during the interview. If you would like us to use your real name, please indicate this on the signed consent form on the last page of this document.

Zoom recordings of the interviews will be downloaded and stored offline on the personal laptop of the principal researcher until completion of the thesis. Nobody other than the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these.

During research studies it is important that the data we get is accurate. For this reason, your data, including your name, may be looked at by people from the Research Ethics Board. After the study is done, we will still need to securely store your data that was collected as part of the study. The data will be stored on a secure external hard drive, specific to this study, in the supervisor's office for a period of five years, after which it will be destroyed.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about the research now or later, please contact Nirupama Rajan at nirupama@ualberta.ca.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca or 780-492-2615 and quote Ethics ID Pro00131416. This office is independent of the study investigators.

This study is being sponsored by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE). The Institution and Principal Investigator are getting money from the study sponsor to cover the costs of doing this study. You are entitled to request any details concerning this compensation from the Principal Investigator.

How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?

By typing your name below, you understand:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.

- That you will be taking part in a research study.

- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.

- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study

- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigators and involved institutions are not changed by your taking part in this study.

[Additionally, at the beginning of the interview, please read this statement out loud: **"I, (your name), having read and understood all the information provided to me, consent to being a part of this study."** This will be audio recorded and stored by the researcher.]

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____ Pseudonym (if necessary)

Name of Participant

By typing my name below, I am electronically signing this consent form:

_____   _____

Signature of Participant (please type your name here)   Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____   _____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent   Contact Number

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide

This interview will be one-hour long, and will be semi-structured, in order to allow the discussion to be guided by what the participant chooses to share. The following are the tentative main questions that the researcher wishes to ask participants:

1. In what language do you primarily communicate with survivors of IPV? Have you ever felt the need for communication in a different language? If yes, why?

2. What are the main barriers to service when it comes to language? What strategies are used when somebody cannot communicate in English?

3. What are the words and phrases that survivors usually tend to use to describe their experiences of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?

4. How do survivors from diverse immigrant backgrounds tend to respond to the usage of English terms such as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), domestic abuse etc.?

Additional questions and probes (to be adjusted and used as and when necessary/ appropriate)

- Can you give me some background info about your clients? What countries do they come from, how long have they lived in Canada?

- Is there any noticeable gender distribution in the clients?

- How frequently do you get queries that are about domestic violence? What is the nature of complaints usually? Are there any patterns in the kinds of complaints from individuals of different countries?

- What kind of training does your staff receive to address these queries? What ideas are important to receive training in, in order to truly understand how immigrants view and experience domestic violence?

- Do you think that women from different cultures have differing understandings of the behaviours that constitute domestic violence? What qualifies as domestic violence in different cultures? Do you find that domestic violence as a standalone concept does not exist in some cultures? How do they describe it?

- What is the broad understanding of domestic violence in Canada, according to you? Do you feel like this definition is broad enough to accommodate immigrant experiences? Is there a problem with the broader Canadian understanding of what domestic violence is, and what needs to be done about it?

- There is often a criminalization framework used when it comes to mainstream responses. Terms such as divorce, relocation, forced removal etc. How do immigrant survivors respond to this? Is this what they ask for, or do they ask for something else?

- Can you talk a little about gender roles? How do gender roles and patriarchy in different cultures contribute to shaping the idea of domestic violence itself? Is there a certain idea of what it means to be a woman, and does this prevent immigrant women from seeking support? How does this differ from culture to culture?

- What about stigma? What are the usual stigmas you come across (such as divorce, rape etc.)? Does this contribute to a culture of silence? Are immigrant women afraid of their communities finding out? Do they prefer to speak to somebody from their community or outside?

- Are there cultural ideas that are difficult to explain to somebody from a different culture? Are there concepts that are untranslatable? How do you navigate these instances, and how might it affect the support that is received by these women?

- How does the process of immigration affect domestic violence? What are the new forms of violence it creates?

- Can you speak about the ideas of collectivism and familism? Are there forms of violence that are unique to cultures that are collectivist in nature, and do you think the Canadian system recognizes this enough?

- Many of the papers I read suggested that the broader Canadian system looks at immigrant survivors as victims who need to be saved, who do not have much agency. What is your view on this? How does this outlook affect these survivors?