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WORD TO THE WISE

ISSUE 8 - MARCH 2019

Unique and Diverse Barriers for Immigrant and Refugee Older Women

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Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Older Women

Landed immigrant (Sponsored, Family, Economic, and Other status) and refugee (Assisted, Sponsored, and Asylum status) older women were born outside of Canada and have been granted permanent resident rights. Canada's immigrant and refugee population is diverse in country of origin, cultures, languages, and religions, with over 200 languages reported as mother tongues. In languages where there is no equivalent to the word "abuse" this is often described by older women as disrespect.¹ Older immigrant women represent a larger proportion of Canada's rapidly aging population than their male counterparts, and experience unique barriers to accessing services including: increased isolation, strong dependency on family members who may be abusive/neglectful/violent and in a sponsor and/or caregiver role and living in poverty.



Factors Contributing to Abuse and/or Increased Vulnerability of Older Immigrant and Refugee Women Experiencing Violence

- Social isolation of older immigrant and refugee older women and/or their families
- Language barriers
- Financial constraints in the family
- Financial dependency of the older immigrant or refugee woman on family members
- Lack of information about rights, resources, services, caregiver burnout, and potential post migration status changes in the community and at home³
- Older immigrant and refugee women may be hesitant to trust police, health, and other services as a result of their experiences in Canada and/or their country of origin
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate approaches and services, screening and assessment tools, and information about resources and services, including translation and interpretation services⁴
- Intersections of systemic oppression including sexism, racism and ageism
- Lack of research focused on abuse of older immigrant and refugee women
- Lack of knowledge of LGBTQ+ and VAW specific terms translated appropriately
- The Canadian job market devalues the training and education from the older woman's country of origin

"A significant issue we see impacting older immigrant and refugee women experiencing violence in Ontario is dependency on family members. They may have limited information and live with family members who limit access to information. For 10 years they do not qualify for assistance, leaving them open to abuse and financial dependency, especially from family members."

- Kripa Sekhar, Executive Director, South Asian Women's Centre



Ontario Association of Intra- & Transition Houses

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Immigrant and Refugee Women Who Are Older Experience Violence in Distinct Ways

Research shows older immigrant women may experience violence exerted by her community in relation to leaving an abusive partner, living independently, refusing unpaid work or gaining paid employment.⁵ They are also more likely to live with family members than their younger counterparts, with 41% of immigrant women aged 65 and older in Canada living with at least one relative, compared to only 4.6% of Canadian born women.⁶ Older immigrant women in Ontario may have their citizenship status threatened by their employer, (ex)partner, caregiver, child, or other family members such as adult grandchildren and daughters and sons-in-laws. They may have experiences of intergenerational and complex trauma including experiences of war in their countries of origin and may distrust official services, systems, and authorities.⁷ If an older immigrant or refugee woman has cognitive capacity issues, abusive family members and/or caregivers may exert control by providing misinformation regarding her rights and choices in relation to Canadian Power of Attorney Laws.

Financial dependency on family members (including sponsors) is a significant factor for older immigrant women in Ontario who may be experiencing violence. Immigrant and refugee older women are typically ineligible to receive age specific government income supports which require a 10-year residency such as Old Age Security, and employment-related settlement services for older immigrant and refugee women are extremely limited. They may rely on abusive caregivers, partners, children partners or other family members for learning and communicating in English and/or French, transportation, and assistance accessing services including settlement organizations, age specific supports, healthcare specialists, and violence against women services.⁸

RESOURCES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS:

Canadian Council for Refugees - Violence Against Newcomer Women:

<https://ccrweb.ca/en/violence-against-women>

Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative - Culturally-Informed Risk and Safety Strategies:

<http://cdhpi.ca/domestic-homicide-immigrant-and-refugee-populations>

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants - GBV Initiative: <http://www.ocasi.org/gender-based-violence>

Violence Against Women Learning Network- Issue 26: Intimate Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women: <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/issue-26-intimate-partner-violence-against-immigrant-and-refugee-women>

1 Matsuoka, Atsuko & Guruge, Sepali & Koehn, Sharon & Beaulieu, Marie & Ploeg, Jenny. (2013). Prevention of abuse of older women in the post-migration context in Canada. Canadian Review of Social Policy. (Special Issue on Aging). 107-120.

2 South Asian Women's Centre - www.sawc.org

3 Territorial Committee of Officials (Seniors).

4 Matsuoka, Atsuko & Guruge, Sepali & Koehn, Sharon & Beaulieu, Marie & Ploeg, Jenny. (2013). Prevention of abuse of older women in the post-migration context in Canada. Canadian Review of Social Policy. (Special Issue on Aging). 107-120.

5 Violence Against Women & Girls. (2016). "Brief on Violence Against Older Women."

6 Statistics Canada (2016). "Women in Canada: An Gender-based Statistical Report, Seventh edition."

7 Neighbours, Friends, and Families. Violence Against Senior Newcomer Women. Accessed from: <https://www.immigrantandrefugeeff.ca/violence-against-women/seniors>

8 CERIS. (2018). "Recent Canadian Immigrant Seniors: A Literature Review of Settlement Experiences and Services."