

# Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative



## **Domestic Homicide in Immigrant and Refugee Populations:** Culturally-Informed Risk and Safety Strategies



### **Domestic Homicide Brief 4**

February 2018  
[www.cdhipi.ca](http://www.cdhipi.ca)

# Acknowledgements

The *Domestic Homicide in Immigrant and Refugee Populations: Culturally-Informed Risk and Safety Strategies* Brief is the fourth in the series developed by the [Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations \(CDHPiVP\)](#). The Brief highlights risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning for immigrant and refugee populations. The Brief provides definitions of key terms and identifies unique risk factors for domestic homicide, using the Immigrant Power and Control Wheel. Barriers to services for immigrant and refugee women are addressed, along with the need for culturally-informed strategies for risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning. Examples of culturally-specific risk assessment tools are provided.

## Suggested Citation:

Rossiter, K.R., Yercich, S., Baobaid, M., Al Jamal, A., David, R., Fairbairn, J., Dawson, M., & Jaffe, P. (2018). *Domestic Homicide in Immigrant and Refugee Populations: Culturally-Informed Risk and Safety Strategies* (4). London, ON: Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative.  
ISBN: 978-1-988412-13-9

## Please evaluate!

Let us know what you think of the *Domestic Homicide in Immigrant and Refugee Populations: Culturally-Informed Risk and Safety Strategies* Brief by completing this brief survey: [https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8002soNG2E6sJwN](https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8002soNG2E6sJwN)

## Download copies of this brief at:

<http://cdhpi.ca/knowledge-mobilization>

## The CDHPiVP Team

### Co-Directors



Myrna Dawson

Director, Centre for the Study of Social and Legal Responses to Violence

University of Guelph

[mdawson@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mdawson@uoguelph.ca)



Peter Jaffe

Academic Director, Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children (CREVAWC)

Western University

[pjaffe@uwo.ca](mailto:pjaffe@uwo.ca)

### Management Team

Marcie Campbell, National Research Coordinator

Anna-Lee Straatman, Project Manager

### Graphic Design

Elsa Barreto, Digital Media Specialist

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada



# Introduction

There is limited existing research examining the prevalence of domestic violence among immigrant and refugee populations. Research reveals that rates of domestic violence within immigrant and refugee populations are not higher than other populations; however, immigrant and refugee women experiencing domestic violence face numerous barriers to disclosing and reporting violence and abuse, accessing support services, and navigating

## Definitions

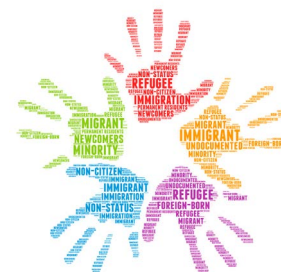
According to the International Organization for Migration, **immigration** is a process by which people move to a new country for settlement purposes.<sup>5</sup>

A **migrant** is defined as “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of stay is.”<sup>5</sup> In Canada, an **immigrant** can be defined as a person who is residing in Canada but who was born outside the country. Immigrant populations may be further categorized as ‘recent’ immigrants (e.g., 0-10 years in host country) and non-recent immigrants (e.g., 10+ years in host country), with recent immigrants commonly referred to as ‘newcomers.’<sup>168</sup>

**Refugees** are individuals who migrate involuntarily or by force for a variety of reasons, including war, political or religious persecution, or natural disasters.<sup>6</sup>

**Protected persons** are persons determined to be Convention Refugees (as defined by the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, signed in Geneva in 1951, and the 1967 Protocol to that Convention) or persons in need of protection. For example, persons who face risk to life, risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, or danger of torture as defined in the *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.

intersecting legal processes and social support systems.<sup>1,2</sup> Understanding and preventing domestic violence and homicide within immigrant and refugee populations requires a culturally-informed lens that accounts for intersecting forms of oppression and recognizes the heterogeneity of immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>3</sup> To be effective, risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning strategies should be culturally-informed and, where possible, culturally-specific.<sup>4</sup>



**Permanent residents** are people who arrived in Canada as immigrants or refugees and who have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently.

**People without status** (also referred to as *non-status* or *undocumented* migrants) are individuals who are living in Canada without legal status. For example, they may have entered Canada legally but stayed beyond the expiry of a work or study permit, or they may have applied for refugee status and been denied.

Immigrant and refugee populations are referred to in a number of ways in the domestic violence literature, including as people of immigrant descent, undocumented immigrants, foreign-born individuals, foreign nationals, non-citizen immigrants, minority groups, and visible minorities; however, not all people of immigrant descent, minority groups, or visible minorities are immigrants or refugees.

In this Brief, the term **culturally-informed** is used to refer to risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning strategies that are informed by, and reflective of, different cultural perspectives of domestic violence and homicide, while the term **culturally-specific** is used to refer to risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning strategies and tools that have been developed for use with specific cultural groups.

# Domestic Violence and Homicide in Immigrant and Refugee Populations

Immigrants and refugees are a heterogeneous population with a wide range of cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and pre- and post-migration experiences.<sup>7</sup> Understanding, preventing, and responding to domestic violence within immigrant and refugee populations therefore requires a multifaceted and culturally-informed approach that addresses well established risk factors and safety needs, as well as considerations that reflect the unique circumstances and cultural contexts of specific groups.<sup>8,9</sup>

Researchers have identified several factors that contribute to increased vulnerability and risk of domestic violence and homicide among immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>10-45</sup>

These include:

- Acculturation level
- Cultural norms and expectations
- Geographic and social isolation
- Length of residency in host country
- Loss of socioeconomic status
- Loss of culture, family structures, and community leaders
- Power imbalances between partners
- Stress associated with migration
- Post-migration strain and stigma
- Strict or changing gender roles
- Traditional patriarchal beliefs
- Unresolved pre-migration trauma
- Victim/survivor immigration status

Post-migration stressors can have an impact on family dynamics and create the conditions for domestic violence within immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>27</sup> The integration process is impacted by many factors, including social isolation and exclusion, limited English or French language proficiency, and limited access to resources.<sup>46</sup> Immigrant and refugee women and their families may experience a variety of unique challenges linked to pre-migration trauma, immigration status, loss of social support networks, neighbourhood factors, and socioeconomic

hardships that can negatively impact the family's well-being, heighten conflict post-migration,<sup>47</sup> and increase the risk for domestic violence.<sup>27,31,48</sup>

Length of residency has been recognized as a risk factor for domestic violence among immigrant and refugee populations, with risk increasing for immigrant women who have resided in their host country for longer periods of time.<sup>7,12,38</sup> Research suggests that recent immigrants experience lower rates of intimate partner violence than Canadian-born women.<sup>49-51</sup> Research has also found that recent immigrants are more likely than non-recent immigrants to report to police but less likely to access support services, and that they are generally less likely to report domestic violence than Canadian-born women.<sup>52,53</sup> Low reporting rates for recent immigrants may be a reflection of limitations in research methodologies, fear of legal consequences, linguistic barriers, or drawing negative attention to themselves and/or their community.

Country of origin is also relevant, with research suggesting that immigrant women from non-western and developing countries are at an increased risk of violence compared to immigrant women from western and developed countries.<sup>12,38,50,51</sup> Women without status, or undocumented migrants, also face greater risk of domestic violence and barriers to support services and protection.<sup>54-63</sup>





## Conceptualizing Domestic Violence

While conceptualizations of domestic violence may be common across cultural groups, unique definitions and dynamics are sometimes observed across cultures. For example, if we shift away from an individualist perspective, we can see that domestic violence may not be limited to intimate partners, male intimate partners may not be the primary or sole perpetrators, and incidents of domestic violence or homicide may involve multiple perpetrators and victims/survivors, including extended family members.

It is important to recognize that domestic violence and homicide among immigrant and refugee populations are not rooted specific in cultures, but in patriarchy. Other forms of violence against women that are often discussed in relation to domestic violence among immigrant and refugee populations include so-called 'honour-based' crimes, dowry-related crimes, and early, child, and forced marriages.<sup>64,65</sup> Yet, these forms of violence are not experienced by any one culture, and may be experienced by other vulnerable populations (e.g., forced marriages also impact people with disabilities and LGBTQ communities). As such, these forms of violence, while relevant to discussions of domestic violence, must be seen as forms of gender-based violence rooted in patriarchy, and not as issues associated with any one culture or religion.<sup>42,66</sup>

It is important to consider cultural differences in risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning for domestic violence and homicide. For example, domestic violence may remain hidden in collectivist cultures, where concepts of family unity, honour, and shame have been found to be important.<sup>18,23,25,34,67-71</sup> Shifting our understanding of domestic violence and homicide (e.g., from an individualistic to a collectivist perspective) can assist us in improving risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning strategies within immigrant and refugee populations. Identifying intersecting forms of oppression can also help us to better understand the unique factors and dynamics at play that contribute to vulnerability and barriers to support for immigrant and refugee women experiencing domestic violence.<sup>28,72</sup>

### *So-called 'Honour-based Violence'*

There remains significant debate about how so-called 'honour-based violence' and 'honour killings' are conceptualized in Canada.<sup>66,73-76</sup> Addressing honour-based violence requires increasing awareness in communities and among service providers, culturally-specific risk assessment and management strategies, and an emphasis on family harmony in place of violence and coercion.<sup>77,78</sup> Recommendations from the United Kingdom point to greater collaboration between law enforcement and anti-violence services, and ongoing support and safety planning for women who are not able to leave violent situations.<sup>79</sup>

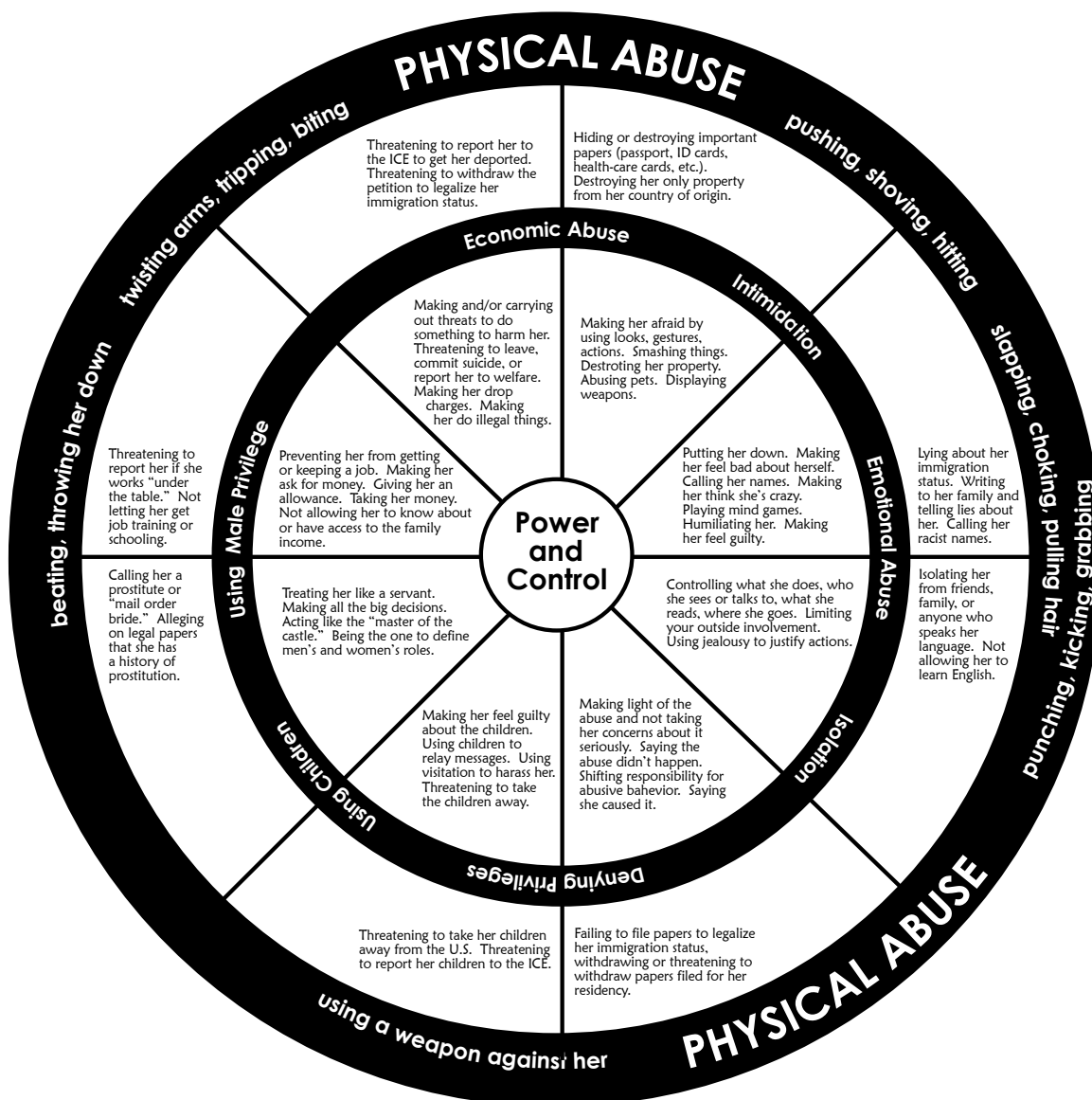


# Power and Control in Immigrant and Refugee Populations

Research points to a number of unique power and control tactics within immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>15</sup> The *Immigrant Power & Control Wheel* was developed by the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, and adapted from

the original Power & Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP). It highlights some of the unique ways in which power and control are exerted against immigrant and refugee women.

## IMMIGRANT POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



Adapted from the original wheel by:  
Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs  
202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
218.722.2781  
[www.theduluthmodel.org](http://www.theduluthmodel.org)

Produced and distributed by:



**NATIONAL CENTER**  
on Domestic and Sexual Violence  
training • consulting • advocacy  
4612 Shoal Creek Blvd. • Austin, Texas 78756  
512.407.9020 (phone and fax) • [www.ncdsv.org](http://www.ncdsv.org)

The *Muslim Power and Control Wheel*,<sup>80</sup> developed by Dr. Sharifa Alkhateeb, is another adaptation of the traditional Power and Control Wheel. This culturally-informed wheel illustrates how religious beliefs can be used to justify

domestic violence, and demonstrates how control tactics identified in the original wheel can manifest in unique ways within the family context for some Muslim families.

## Muslim Wheel of Domestic Violence by Sharifa Alkahteeb



Authored by Sharifa Alkahteeb and Distributed by [Project Sakinah](http://ProjectSakinah.org). An Initiative of Dar al Islam ([www.projectsakinah.org](http://www.projectsakinah.org)). Project Sakinah is an initiative that builds partnerships, enhances community collaboration, organizes programs, and conducts research to strengthen Muslim families and prevent violence.

## Risk Assessment with Immigrant and Refugee Populations

Research has identified several risk factors for increased likelihood and severity of future domestic violence, including domestic homicide. These include relationship problems (e.g., restraining order, recent or pending separation), past violent behaviour, perpetrator mental illness, and suicidal or homicidal ideation.<sup>81</sup> Within immigrant and refugee populations, research suggests that migration history and cultural differences may increase the risk of domestic violence;<sup>35</sup> however, there is little research to suggest that these same factors increase the risk of domestic homicide.

Research on the unique risk factors for repeated, escalating, and potentially lethal violence within immigrant and refugee populations points to migration processes, immigration status, length of residency in host country, acculturation levels, gender role expectations, socioeconomic status, marginalization, and social isolation.<sup>36,76,82</sup> Community and cultural norms (e.g., collectivist values, family privacy, stigma surrounding divorce, social acceptance of violence) may also influence awareness of, and assessment of risk for, domestic violence and homicide,<sup>19,83-86</sup> while culture conflict and racism add to stressors experienced by immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>13,85</sup> Patriarchal and cultural beliefs (e.g., honour, control of sexuality) also contribute to risk by decreasing the likelihood that survivors will seek formal domestic violence supports.<sup>10,83,85</sup>

As outlined in the Domestic Homicide Brief 2, [\*Domestic Violence Risk Assessment: Informing Safety Planning & Risk Management\*](#),<sup>81</sup> there are

several commonly used domestic violence risk assessment tools. Most of these tools have been designed to assess risk for domestic violence within Western contexts. As such, they may not adequately account for the unique risk factors and cultural contexts of immigrant and refugee populations.

Assessing risk with immigrant and refugee populations requires a culturally-sensitive approach that considers specific cultural contexts while avoiding stereotyping groups.<sup>46,66</sup> Given the heterogeneity of immigrant and refugee populations, it is important to have culturally-validated risk assessment tools.<sup>42</sup> Researchers continue to call for the development of more culturally-appropriate and holistic risk assessment tools,<sup>31,58,77,85</sup> and domestic violence risk assessment tools are increasingly being developed or adapted for immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>81</sup> Table 1 highlights several tools that attempt to capture unique risk factors for immigrant and refugee populations. These risk assessment instruments account for culturally-specific aspects of risk, and can be used in conjunction with commonly used standardized domestic violence risk assessment tools that have been validated through research.

Researchers also suggest that domestic violence risk assessment should be conducted in collaboration with others, including religious leaders, healthcare workers, and other social service providers.<sup>3,87</sup> If risk assessments are conducted in English, trained interpreters should also be involved in the process, as needed.<sup>2</sup>





**Table 1. Culturally-Specific Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Tools**

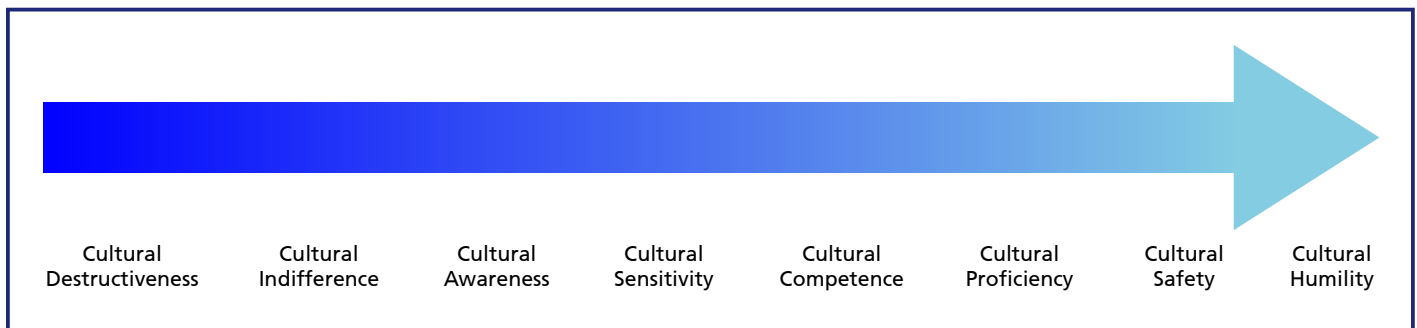
|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Chinese Risk Assessment Tool for Victims (CRAT-V) and Perpetrators (CRAT-P)</p> | <p>The <i>CRAT-V</i> is an actuarial risk assessment instrument developed to predict risk of future domestic violence victimization in Chinese populations. This tool assesses 5 culture-specific risk factors, such as in-law conflict and relationship distress, as well as population-specific variables that impact disclosure and/or reporting of domestic violence. The <i>CRAT-P</i> is a similar tool used to assess unique risk factors for domestic violence among Chinese perpetrators. It accounts for the impact on domestic violence of unique cultural values and experiences such as “losing face.”<sup>88,89</sup></p>  |
| <p>Danger Assessment for Immigrant Women (DA-I)</p>                                | <p>The <i>DA-I</i> is a culturally-competent risk assessment instrument adapted from the original <i>Danger Assessment (DA)</i>. It aims to predict domestic violence recidivism (re-assault) and severe domestic violence among immigrant women, and has been found to have higher predictive validity for immigrant women than the original <i>DA</i>.<sup>90</sup> The <i>DA-I</i> includes 15 risk factors from the original <i>DA</i> and 11 culturally-specific risk factors, such as ‘language of interview is English,’ ‘he prevents you from going to school, getting job training, and so forth,’ and ‘threatened to report you.’ It is a useful tool for safety planning with immigrant and refugee women experiencing domestic violence.<sup>91</sup></p> <p><a href="https://www.dangerassessment.org/uploads/DA-I%20English.pdf">https://www.dangerassessment.org/uploads/DA-I%20English.pdf</a></p> |
| <p>Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH)</p>                   | <p>The <i>DASH</i> is a risk identification, assessment and management model for domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, and honour-based violence. The tool is used by police services in the UK and is aligned with the RARA model of risk management (Remove the risk, Avoid the risk, Reduce the risk, and Accept the risk).<sup>92</sup></p> <p><a href="http://www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk">www.dashriskchecklist.co.uk</a></p>   |
| <p>Four Aspects Screening Tool (FAST)</p>  | <p>The <i>FAST</i> is a domestic violence screening and assessment tool developed for use with minority, newcomer, and immigrant groups, and within collectivist cultures. The tool focuses on four primary and potentially intersecting aspects that operate as sources of risk within families: (1) universal; (2) ethno-cultural; (3) migration experience; and (4) religious faith.<sup>93</sup></p>   |
| <p>PATRIARCH</p>   | <p>The <i>PATRIARCH</i> is a checklist of 15 risk and vulnerability factors for patriarchal violence where honour is a motive. The tool is based on the Structured Professional Judgement (SJP) approach. The checklist includes risk factors such as ‘origin from an area with known sub-cultural values’ and ‘lack of cultural integration’ and victim vulnerability factors, such as ‘extreme fear’ and ‘inadequate access to resources.’<sup>69,94</sup> The tool considers the entire family unit as potentially part of the threat of violence, with research indicating most victims of honour-based violence are ex-wives and daughters.<sup>69</sup></p> <p><a href="http://proactive-resolutions.com/shop/assessment-risk-honour-based-violence-patriarch/">http://proactive-resolutions.com/shop/assessment-risk-honour-based-violence-patriarch/</a></p>   |

# Working with People from Diverse Cultures

Culture is defined as “a complex network of meanings entrenched within historical, social, economic, political processes” (p. 5).<sup>95</sup> Because immigrants and refugees have widely varying pre- and post-migration experiences due to intersecting factors and identities, such as gender, race, nationality, immigration status, socioeconomic status, education, and language, a culturally-informed approach is needed, rather than a traditional ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

Best practice approaches to working with people from diverse cultures have been developed in a variety of contexts, including the health sector. There are several approaches that have been applied in working with immigrant and

refugee populations in a variety of disciplines and sectors. These can be considered on a continuum, which on one end has harmful and ineffective approaches such as **cultural destructiveness** (that is, holding discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes toward clients from minority cultural groups) and **cultural indifference** (that is, ignoring cultural differences or adopting a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to service delivery). On the other end are culturally-responsive approaches, including *cultural awareness*, *cultural sensitivity*, *cultural competence*, *cultural safety* and *cultural humility*, that differ in terms of what is expected of service providers in working with clients from different cultural backgrounds.



**Cultural awareness** means being aware of cultural differences. **Cultural sensitivity** means being sensitive to these differences when delivering services. **Cultural competence** reflects competence in working cross-culturally, without requiring a level of competence with respect to all cultures.<sup>96</sup> **Cultural proficiency** extends further than competence and involves efforts to improve services based on the identified culturally-specific needs of clients.

Concepts that have emerged from work with Indigenous communities, particularly in the health sector, such as **cultural safety** and **cultural humility**, are also relevant to work with immigrant and refugee populations. *Cultural safety* is defined by clients themselves, and requires service providers to recognize that structures and systems themselves may threaten client safety, and make an effort to transfer power to clients.<sup>95</sup>

**Cultural humility** extends this concept further, and asks service providers to recognize that their own cultural values impact the services they provide. Cultural humility involves “a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique [and] to redressing the power imbalances” (p. 117) between service providers and clients, and respectful processes built on mutual trust.<sup>97</sup>

In this Brief, the term **culturally-informed** is used to refer to risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning strategies that are informed by and reflective of different cultural perspectives of domestic violence and homicide, while the term **culturally-specific** is used to refer to risk assessment, risk management, and safety planning strategies and tools that have been developed for use with specific cultural groups.

# Risk Management with Perpetrators from Immigrant and Refugee Populations

Risk management involves strategies such as monitoring and supervision, counselling and education, and addressing other factors associated with domestic violence and homicide, including mental health and substance use issues. It is clear that there is a need for dedicated resources and intervention programs targeting men who perpetrate domestic violence, including immigrant and refugee perpetrators.<sup>11,23,98,141</sup> Yet, research points to a lack of counselling options available to immigrant and refugee men who perpetrate domestic violence.<sup>99</sup>

Research strongly supports the development of domestic violence intervention programs that are culturally-informed and inclusive of immigrant and refugee men, and culturally-specific programs for abusive immigrant and refugee men.<sup>10,33,68,98,100</sup> It is particularly important that culturally-specific interventions are tailored to specific cultural groups to ensure they are culturally-appropriate and effective.<sup>101,102</sup>

Core components of domestic violence treatment programs for immigrant and refugee men include addressing discrimination and exclusion, exploring perpetrators' own experiences of victimization and trauma, discussing cultural values, challenges, post-migration gender role transitions, and enhancing acculturation.<sup>7,13,39,103</sup> Education for perpetrators should focus on the meaning of loss of social and economic status, gender equality to counter traditional beliefs (e.g., that men have a right to control women), and the roots of men's jealousy.<sup>17,104</sup> Differences in settlement experiences between urban and rural communities should also be considered.<sup>7</sup>

Strong relationships with service providers are critical to effective support and intervention with immigrant and refugee men.<sup>103</sup> They may also need support with other issues that may create stress for them post-migration, including securing employment in the host country.<sup>104,105</sup>

## *Preventing Domestic Violence Perpetration*

Men and boys should be targeted in domestic violence prevention and education initiatives within immigrant and refugee populations (e.g., during the immigration process, post-migration).<sup>11,43,106,141</sup> Research suggests that domestic violence education programs may be more effective if they are facilitated by immigrant and refugee men and/or in partnership with immigrant communities.<sup>28,38</sup>

Other researchers have suggested different approaches to domestic violence prevention; for example, men with domestic violence convictions should not be allowed to bring spouses overseas or sponsor their intimate partners.<sup>107,108</sup> For marriage migrants (previously referred to "mail-order brides") in particular, a lack of information about their new partners can put them at risk of domestic violence; so access to important information pre-migration could reduce the risk of violence perpetrated against them.<sup>108</sup>

### ***Cultural Navigators – REACH Immigrant and Refugee Initiative (RIRI)***



A team of 'cultural navigators' is working closely with newcomers and police in Edmonton, Alberta, to prevent domestic violence in immigrant communities. These respected community leaders are involved in the delivery of public education to immigrant communities on domestic violence and the Canadian criminal justice system, the development of tools for front-line workers and community leaders on responding to domestic violence in immigrant and refugee communities, and the development of culturally-appropriate domestic violence services and supports.

# Barriers to Disclosure and Support for Immigrant and Refugee Women

Immigrant women report greater barriers to leaving domestic violence than non-immigrant women,<sup>109</sup> and face many cultural, institutional, and structural barriers to disclosing and accessing support services.<sup>11,14,19,21-24,26,28,35,37,45,51,55,58,68,70-71,83,85-87,101,106,108,110-131,134,142</sup>

These include:

- Collectivist cultural beliefs
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Desire to keep family intact
- Stigma and shame surrounding divorce
- Distrust of authorities and the criminal justice system (e.g., due to negative experiences in their country of origin)
- Economic dependency on abuser
- Experiences of racism, and fear of being ostracized or contributing to racial discrimination and xenophobia by disclosing domestic violence and/or seeking services
- Fear of deportation (self or perpetrator)
- Fear of separation from, or loss of, children
- Geographic, social, and cultural isolation
- Lack of awareness about available domestic violence services
- Lack of coordinated services
- Lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services, particularly in rural communities
- Language barriers and lack of translation and interpretation services
- Limited knowledge of immigration laws and rights
- Precarious immigration status
- Stigma, shame, and silence surrounding domestic violence, and family privacy

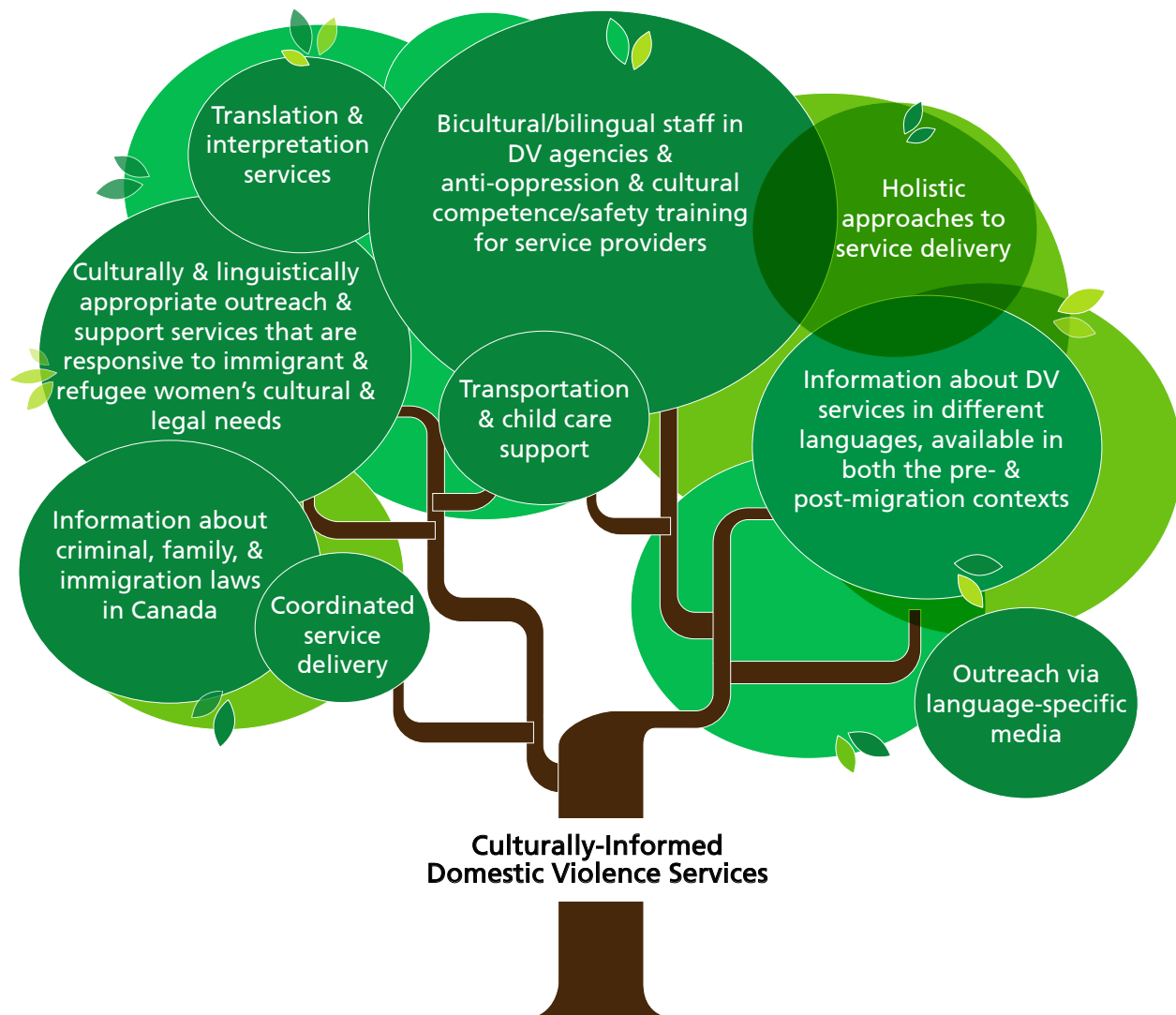
Immigrant women are more likely to access domestic violence support services if people they care about (e.g., other family members) are at risk.<sup>109</sup> In fact, risk to children is one of the strongest motivators for women to take action in response to domestic violence.<sup>37,83,132-134</sup> Research therefore suggests more supportive, and less punitive, responses from the child welfare system as immigrant and refugee women struggle to settle in a new country, while maintaining safety for themselves and their children.<sup>115</sup>



Immigrant and refugee women may be reluctant to use mainstream domestic violence services that inadequately account for, or are outright dismissive of, their cultural values and their complex, intersecting needs.<sup>110,114</sup> For example, if services are not offered in their own language, or women experience stigma and discrimination from service providers and other clients, this can make services feel unwelcoming. Therefore, culturally-sensitive services are needed that recognize and take into consideration the specific contexts, experiences, and needs of abused immigrant and refugee women.<sup>67,110</sup>



# A Culturally-Informed Approach to Domestic Violence Services for Survivors



Understanding the cultural contexts and impacts of domestic violence within immigrant and refugee populations is important for enhancing the safety of survivors. Service providers should also identify ways in which culture can be a source of strength and support for intervention in cases of domestic violence.<sup>68,85</sup>

Support groups may be particularly important for immigrant and refugee women because they reduce social isolation and enhance social connection.<sup>139-141</sup> Domestic violence services and support groups for survivors must also find ways to be inclusive of women who have used violence against their abusive partners.<sup>142</sup>

## ***Other Supports Needed to Improve Safety***

Immigrant and refugee women are likely to benefit from a wide array of supports.<sup>46,106,143</sup> For example, they may need legal assistance to navigate the immigration and/or criminal

justice systems (e.g., seeking protection orders), advocacy to facilitate access to health care, and support to pursue education and/or employment opportunities to increase their economic independence.<sup>10,16,17,55,57,101,108,110,122,128,140-141,144</sup>

Targeting English language proficiency is particularly important to addressing risk and safety for immigrant and refugee women.<sup>16,21</sup> Other services and supports that may enhance immigrant and refugee women's safety include transportation and child care.<sup>17,108</sup>

Emerging research also highlights the significant barriers immigrant and refugee women face in accessing safe housing in Canada, and the critical need for housing for survivors of domestic violence.<sup>16,107,145-148</sup> Immigrant and refugee women may require longer stays in transition housing,<sup>143</sup> and that shelter stays play an important role in reducing risk of domestic violence and homicide.<sup>57</sup>

# Safety Planning with Immigrant and Refugee Women

Safety planning with immigrant and refugee populations requires that multiple intersecting factors and needs be addressed simultaneously. Strategies must address survivors' culturally-specific needs and unique individual circumstances (e.g., immigration status, language barriers, available formal and informal resources).<sup>9,149</sup> Given the pressures to keep families together and shame associated with divorce in some cultural groups, safety planning for immigrant and refugee populations must include strategies to increase safety for survivors who do not plan to leave their abusers.<sup>46,101,119</sup> Women should also be informed about risk factors for severe, escalating, and potentially lethal violence.<sup>150</sup>

## Cross-Sector Collaboration

The value of culturally-safe and collaborative approaches is that they create pathways for abused immigrant and refugee women to disclose experiences of domestic violence and express their concerns and needs.<sup>151</sup> Settlement workers serve as an important resource for women experiencing violence, especially for women who are unlikely to access anti-violence services or seek support outside their cultural community.<sup>107</sup> Collaboration between anti-violence services, settlement services, and immigrant communities

is therefore critical to enhance domestic violence supports for immigrant and refugee women.<sup>11,25,55,114,142,152-153</sup> Collaboration is also needed between mainstream and multicultural anti-violence agencies to reduce culturally-specific risk factors and barriers to support.<sup>114</sup> Advocacy plays an important role in responding to domestic violence in immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>3</sup>

Service providers should collaborate with the education and health sectors, given the important role educators and health providers can play in immigrant and refugee women's help-seeking.<sup>14,58,83,154-157</sup> Safety planning should also involve cultural and religious institutions and leaders who can support survivors in seeking formal supports and contribute to outreach efforts.<sup>10,19-20,23-24,37,49,56,58,65,68,83,101,107,108,141,158-160</sup>

Religious leaders may benefit from domestic violence training and collaboration with anti-violence agencies, particularly given they may feel ill prepared to respond to domestic violence.<sup>3,23,143,161</sup> Formal domestic violence services can better support women by identifying and collaborating with existing informal supports.<sup>117,162</sup>







## Community Awareness

Raising awareness through health promotion efforts and culturally-appropriate education about domestic violence and healthy relationships, women's rights, and support services is an important step toward increasing safety for immigrant and refugee populations.<sup>14,19,23,25,41,83,105,110,119,122,163</sup> Community involvement in domestic violence prevention initiatives is critical in order to increase community leadership and engagement, reduce language barriers, and enhance community

capacity to support survivors.<sup>11,27,38,52,160</sup> Education should involve grassroots organizations, but also religious and community leaders.<sup>49,85,163</sup> Education and awareness for women should be culturally-appropriate and empowerment-based, with a focus on women's rights, understanding the relationship between stage of settlement and risk for domestic violence, and information about local domestic violence services.<sup>33,36,49-50,87,102,128,158,159,164-166</sup>

Below are some Canadian public/community awareness and education campaigns:

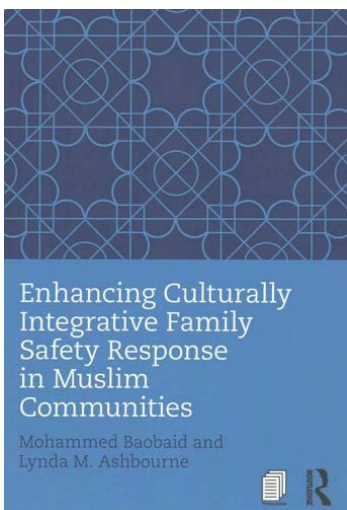
|   |  |
|---|--|
|  <p>Neighbours, Friends &amp; Families<br/>Immigrant &amp; Refugee Communities</p> | <p><b><u>Immigrant and Refugee Communities Neighbours, Friends &amp; Families (IRCNFF)</u></b></p> <p>The IRCNFF campaign was launched in 2012 with the support and effort of the <a href="#">Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)</a>. IRCNFF raises awareness about the warning signs of woman abuse and promotes bystander intervention within immigrant and refugee communities across the province. The campaign provides education on the barriers newcomer women face when seeking support for abuse and advocates for the elimination of these barriers.</p>                             |
|    | <p><b><u>Preventing and Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls in the Name of "Honour"</u></b></p> <p>The <i>In the Name of Honour</i> campaign, developed by <a href="#">MOSAIC BC</a>, promotes awareness among women on violence committed in the name of "honour", creates a dialogue to decrease the risks and barriers associated with shame, and educates service providers to improve standard of care. The campaign includes posters, videos, and a facilitator guide and resources manual for training frontline service providers.</p>   |
|    | <p><b><u>It's a Choice: Forced Marriage is a Form of Violence</u></b></p> <p>The It's a Choice campaign developed by the <a href="#">South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)</a>, provides information and resources to the community and service providers around forced marriage. The campaign includes a forced marriage toolkit, a report contextualizing and explaining forced marriage, a safety card and safety planning, a paper on Bill S-7: Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, posters, brochures, a graphic novel, a legal toolkit, case management, and policy recommendations.</p> |
|    | <p><b><u>Muslims for White Ribbon</u></b></p> <p>The <i>Muslims for White Ribbon</i> is a social media campaign aimed at breaking the silence on violence against women in the Muslim community through community awareness; promoting healthy and non-violent relationships through education; and creating partnerships among mosques, women's organizations, and social agencies to create a future without violence.</p>   |

## ***Considerations for Involving Family and Community Members in Risk Management and Safety Planning***

When working with immigrant and refugee populations, it is important to consider how the involvement of family members may serve to increase risk and/or safety. The involvement of family and community members depends on the level of risk and the survivor's level of connection with her culture of origin and/or her religion.

Research suggests that risk management and safety planning strategies for immigrant and refugee populations can be enhanced by involving family and community members, who may be in a position to provide informal support and resources.<sup>56,68</sup> However, family unity and cohesion are highly valued in some cultures, and involving families in risk management and safety planning may increase risk for some survivors.<sup>34</sup> Immigrant and refugee women may face extraordinary pressure from their families and/or faith communities to stay with abusive partners.<sup>136</sup> Research indicates, for example, that Latina immigrant survivors may suffer domestic violence for longer periods or stay in abusive relationships for longer durations as a result of 'familismo,' a core cultural value that speaks to the importance of immediate and extended family relationships and the involvement of family in daily life and decision-making.<sup>16,26,56,71,83,158,167</sup> On the other hand, familismo may be a protective factor, with Latina immigrant women seeking informal support from family members.<sup>56,167</sup> It is important to respect a survivor's cultural and familial connections when developing culturally-sensitive safety plans with immigrant and refugee women.<sup>46</sup> However, it is also important to discuss the risks associated with involving family and community members in risk management and safety planning strategies within immigrant and refugee populations.

The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) in London, Ontario, has developed a model of response to domestic violence called the **Coordinated Organizational Response Team** (CORT). This model works with a collectivist approach to provide holistic circles of supports. The Fours Aspects Screening Tool (FAST) determines the level of risk in the continuum of violence as well as strengths, including strengths and resources within the family and community. Based on this assessment, and in consultation with the survivor, CORT will decide who needs to be part of the FAST process and how and who in the family or community (including, for example, religious and cultural leaders) could and should be involved to support the survivor.



### **[Enhancing Culturally Integrative Family Safety Response in Muslim Communities](#)**

Mohammed Baobaid & Lynda M. Ashbourne (2016)

This book presents the Culturally Integrative Family Safety Response (CIFSR) model that is currently being used by the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) in London, Ontario. Created to support immigrant and newcomer families from collectivist backgrounds struggling with issues related to pre-migration trauma, family violence, and child protection concerns, the CIFSR model focuses on early risk-identification and intervention methods, preserving safety, and appropriate conflict responses. Also included is a Q&A chapter from the authors that invites helping professionals, educators, and other readers to apply the model globally.



## Community-Based Research and Resources

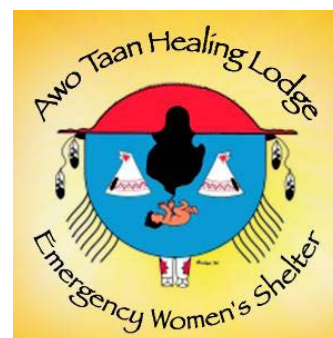
|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p><b>BUILDING SUPPORTS</b><br/>Project of the BC Society of Transition Houses</p>   | <p><b><u><a href="#">Building Supports: Housing Access for Immigrant and Refugee Women Leaving Violence</a></u></b></p> <p>The Building Supports project is a three-year community-based project by the BC Non-Profit Housing Association, BC Society of Transition Houses, &amp; the FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children. The focus of the project is to understand the barriers to accessing secure and affordable housing for immigrant and refugee women leaving violent relationships. The project has produced a promising practices guide <a href="#">now available online</a>, policy recommendations, a public awareness campaign, and an intersectional policy analysis of immigration/settlement, housing, and health sectors.</p>  |
|  <p><b>Caring for Kids<br/>New to Canada</b></p>  | <p><b><u><a href="#">Caring for Kids New to Canada</a></u></b></p> <p>Caring for Kids New to Canada is a guide developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society to help health professionals working with immigrant and refugee children and youth. The guide contains information and resources on assessment and screening; medical conditions; mental health and development; health promotion; culture and health; navigating the health system; and education and advocacy. Issues around domestic violence are included.</p>  |
|  <p><b>NEW BRUNSWICK<br/>MULTICULTURAL<br/>COUNCIL</b><br/><b>CONSEIL<br/>MULTICULTUREL DU<br/>NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK</b></p>  | <p><b><u><a href="#">Overcoming Barriers: A Coordinated Response to Violence Against Immigrant Women in New Brunswick</a></u></b></p> <p>This project aims to assess and understand the current systemic and structural barriers including the state of public services for immigrant women experiencing domestic violence in New Brunswick; and develop and implement a coordinated response. The project has completed a needs assessment report which is <a href="#">available online</a>.</p>   |
|  <p><b>IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S PROJECT:</b><br/>Safety of Immigrant, Refugee, and Non-Status Women</p> <p><b>EVA BC</b></p>   | <p><b><u><a href="#">The Safety of Immigrant, Refugee, and Non-Status Women Project</a></u></b></p> <p>The Safety of Immigrant, Refugee, and Non-Status Women Project was developed in partnership with Ending Violence Association of BC, MOSAIC, and Vancouver Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services to address policy gaps that compromise the safety of immigrant, refugee, and non-status women who experience violence. The project contains many resources including: a literature review; provincial and federal briefing notes; resource guides; focus groups summaries; and links to other law foundation projects.</p>  |
|  <p><b>A FORCED MARRIAGE RISK ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK</b><br/><b>WITHOUT<br/>CONSENT:</b><br/>Strategies for Identifying and Managing Risk<br/>in Cases of Forced Marriage</p> <p><b>ENDING VIOLENCE</b></p> | <p><b><u><a href="#">Without Consent: Strategies for Identifying and Managing Risk in Cases of Forced Marriage</a></u></b></p> <p>The Enhancing Community Capacity to Respond to and Prevent Forced Marriage project by MOSAIC and Ending Violence Association of BC developed a risk assessment framework informed by a literature review, online survey, focus groups, key informant interviews and feedback from pilot studies. The purpose of the framework is to help service providers identify and respond to cases of forced marriage and to increase awareness about the dynamics and dangers associated with forced marriage. The framework is designed for use by settlement and anti-violence workers. The project also developed a <a href="#">website</a> to disseminate the framework widely amongst service providers. The website also provides information on support services and protective practices to those who may be facing, or know someone facing forced marriage.</p> |
|  <p><b>Canadian Council for Refugees<br/>Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés</b></p>   | <p><b><u><a href="#">Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) – Violence against Non-status, Refugee and Immigrant Women</a></u></b></p> <p>The CCR is an organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Canada and internationally and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada. The CCR provides information and resources to help immigrants and refugees experiencing violence secure status in Canada and access protection.</p>  |

## CDHPiVP Partner Organizations

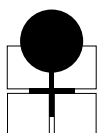
Le cercle national  
autochtone contre  
la violence familiale



National Aboriginal  
Circle Against  
Family Violence



Office of the Chief Coroner  
Bureau du coroner en chef



**The FREDa Centre**  
for Research on Violence  
Against Women and Children



**Western**  
Centre for Research & Education on  
Violence Against Women & Children



Human Services

**ENDING VIOLENCE**  
Association of BC



Canadian Network of Women's  
Shelters & Transition Houses  
*United to end violence against women*



BC Society of  
Transition Houses



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY**

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**  
ENGAGING THE WORLD





**Centre for the Study of  
Social and Legal Responses to Violence**



**cri  
viff**

CENTRE DE RECHERCHE INTERDISCIPLINAIRE  
SUR LA VIOLENCE FAMILIALE ET  
LA VIOLENCE FAITE AUX FEMMES



**MUSLIM RESOURCE CENTRE**  
*for Social Support and Integration*



**UNIVERSITY  
OF MANITOBA**



**BRITISH  
COLUMBIA**



**BC MENTAL HEALTH  
& SUBSTANCE USE SERVICES**

*An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority*



**UQÀM**

**Université du Québec  
à Montréal**

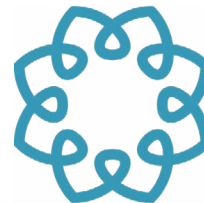


IMPROVE LIFE.



**SAINT MARY'S  
UNIVERSITY** SINCE 1802

One University. One World. Yours.



**FREDERICTON  
SEXUAL  
ASSAULT  
CENTRE**

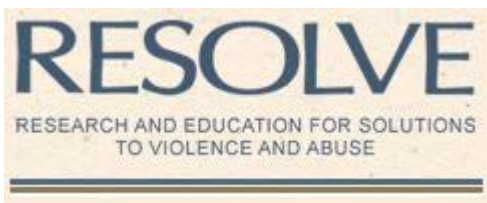


**MA MAWI WI CHI ITATA CENTRE**

*We all work together to help one another.*



**University  
of Regina**



## References

For full list of references, visit

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

## Contact Us!

[www.cdhpi.ca](http://www.cdhpi.ca)

 [twitter.com/learntoendabuse](https://twitter.com/learntoendabuse)

 [facebook.com/CREVAWC/](https://facebook.com/CREVAWC/)

Contact [crevawc@uwo.ca](mailto:crevawc@uwo.ca) to join our email list!