

FOCUS

Newsletter for the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence

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Double Isolation: The Case of the Abused Immigrant Woman

“I really didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t tolerate the beatings anymore. When my husband started talking about hurting the kids, I knew I had to do something. In my situation, finding help was not easy since I could barely speak any English. People in my community didn’t want to hear about my problem; they said that what goes on between a husband and a wife is a private matter. Somebody suggested I call the police, but in the country where I come from the police usually create more problems than they solve. The day came when I realized the only way to end the violence was to leave my husband. I knew my community wouldn’t approve because, like them, I also believed that a woman’s place was with her husband no matter what. When I got to the battered women’s shelter, everybody tried very hard to help me, but the fact that I came from another culture and didn’t understand English well made things quite difficult. I felt very isolated. I felt like I didn’t belong anywhere.”

As with rural, native and disabled women, immigrant women who are victims of violence within their families often have to surmount additional obstacles to break the cycle of violence.

Isolation is a common characteristic of all abused women and this is often felt to an even greater extent by immigrant women who possess little or no knowledge of both Canada’s official languages. Information on wife abuse in other languages is limited and this makes it difficult for some women to know where to go for help in time of crisis.

When immigrant women do manage to locate the appropriate resources, the language barrier they face often prevents



them from getting the help they most need. In addition, misconceptions about issues specific to the women’s cultures and lack of knowledge about family violence dynamics among helping organizations add to the misunderstandings facing many immigrant women reaching out for help.

In a study sponsored by the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, the researcher found that workers (whether they be shelter, government, ethno-cultural or settlement agency workers) who have trained in and experienced both “the dynamics of family violence and cross-cultural differences” are rare. Workers generally have one or the other, but not both.

The Mennonite Centre study supports the findings of another study done in Toronto entitled “Alternatives to Assault: The Utilization of Emergency Shelters by Immigrant Women in Toronto” where it was found that some service providers’ own biases toward women from other cultures tended to further alienate the immigrant women they were trying to help. This can happen when service providers assume that all immigrant women share the same values, beliefs and needs or that all immigrant women are poor, uneducated, and unaware of Canadian culture and lifestyles.

Immigrant women may have different levels of income and education. The length of time they have spent in Canada varies and consequently, may affect the way they perceive themselves as immigrants. Some speak English, while others do not. Some are sponsored, while others are not. For some, coming to Canada has meant leaving behind status, possessions and family members. For others, it has meant escaping conditions of war and torture.

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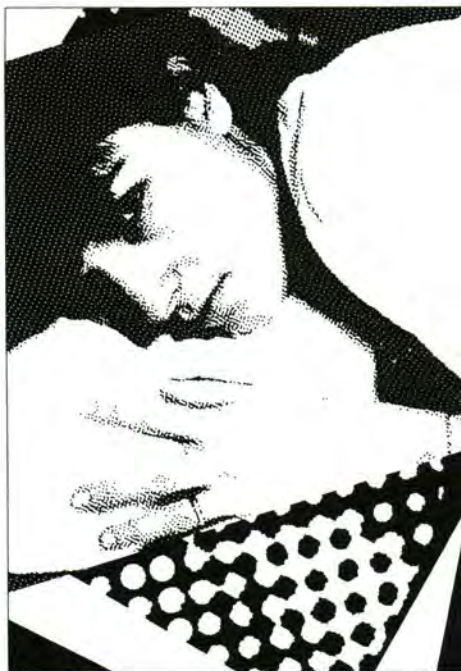
Double Isolation continued

For women who come to Canada under their husbands' sponsorship, the threat of deportation in cases of marriage breakdown is very frightening. Although immigration officials have been advised to be lenient in such situations, a woman can be deported if her husband is convicted of a criminal offense and sentenced to more than six months.

Sponsorship also means that in some areas the immigrant women do not have the same rights and privileges as other Canadian women. As a sponsored immigrant, she finds herself "dependent" legally and economically on the man who abuses her. This may also make it more difficult for the immigrant woman to access services and benefits normally available to Canadian citizens.

For many of these reasons, abused immigrant women are in a particularly vulnerable position as far as legal matters are concerned. Immigrant women need culturally sensitive advocates to help them through the legal maze and ensure they have appropriate information about their rights. This is of primary concern to immigrant women worried about custody issues. Some husbands have taken advantage of women's ignorance of the law to keep them from leaving. They sometimes threaten to kidnap the children or make their wives believe that they would automatically lose their rights to their children if they left.

Some immigrant women also do not feel confident in the help they can get from legal authorities, especially the police. Many of them have come from police states where they have learned and experienced that the authorities are to be feared rather than trusted. Others have lost



faith in this type of intervention after feeling they did not receive the help or understanding they needed.

We are beginning to learn more about the needs and unique problems faced by immigrant women who are abused. Through such studies as the one at the Mennonite centre and others in Canada, ways of improving our response are being proposed.

Some studies have suggested that the answer would be to create a battered women's shelter for immigrant woman as exists in some Canadian communities. However, opinions vary on the need for such a shelter. Some argue that this type of shelter would further segregate immigrant women from mainstream society and reinforce their feelings of isolation and of being "different." Others suggest that the specific needs of immigrant women going to shelters could be better answered by having multi-lingual and multi-cultural staff in existing shelters.

People, involved through their work or otherwise, with family violence in immigrant communities seem to agree that mainstream agency workers need to recognize their own biases toward other cultures and work on changing these attitudes. They also need to become more aware of cross-cultural issues and particularly those issues specific to immigrant women. It is important for ethno-cultural and immigrant settlement organizations to become more knowledgeable about the particular dynamics of wife abuse and appropriate ways of counselling victims. Agencies will then be able to respond better to abused women who come forward.

Communities, as well, need to examine their own attitudes and beliefs about family violence and find ways to reach out and support immigrant women who are victims of violence.

Although much more needs to be done to address the problem of wife abuse in immigrant communities, many groups, locally and nationally, have introduced creative ways to increase awareness and improve our response to these families.

The struggle to dissolve the double isolation experienced by immigrant women has been difficult. However, through the increasing interest and commitment on the part of government and community, our response to these women is improving. Only through this combined understanding of the unique needs of immigrant women and willingness on the part of service providers to adequately respond, will immigrant women reach out for the help they need.

Suzanne Lacroix

Did You Know?

■ The Alberta Network of Immigrant Women is currently developing a position paper reflecting the concerns of immigrant women affected by the problem of family violence. The paper will seek to demonstrate existing gaps in services and information to abused immigrant women. For additional information contact Christine Lasalle at 426-1744.

■ The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence in collaboration with the Department of Career Development and Employment, Settlement Services have developed a brochure for abused immigrant women entitled "I Want the Violence to Stop." The brochure is available in five different languages: English, Chinese, Polish, Spanish and Vietnamese and can be obtained at no charge by contacting the office at 422-5916.

■ The upcoming issue of The English Express newsletter will include a revised version of the wife abuse insert entitled "Wife Abuse: Home Can be a Dangerous Place" that was first published in the June, 1988 issue. Free copies may be ordered from: Bev Burke, Community Programs, 10th Floor, Devonian Building, 11160 Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5K 0L3.

■ Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) have published a series of three brochures on wife assault, sexual assault and child sexual abuse in English, Chinese and Punjabi. To obtain copies of the brochures, contact: Monique Gionet, WAVAW/Rape Crisis Centre, #204, 636 West Broadway Street, Vancouver, B.C., V5Z 1G2, (604) 875-1328.

■ The Shirley Samaroo House is the first shelter in Metro Toronto specifically built to serve the needs of immigrant women. The unique aspect of this shelter is that it provides specialized services for immigrant women in a culturally sensitive environment. The shelter staff is multi-ethnic and multilingual (416) 249-4364/249-7095.

■ "You Are Not Alone" is a slide tape or video (VHS) which provides immigrant women with information on wife assault. It is designed for use in a variety of settings including English as a Second Language classes, women's shelters and community agencies, available in English, Italian, Hindi, Portuguese, Vietnamese and Spanish. For more information contact: Resource Centre, Ministry of Citizenship, 9th Floor, 77 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 2R9, (416) 963-2914.

■ Maria De America Association for Spanish-speaking Women of Alberta organized a one-day workshop on the topic of family violence for Spanish-speaking women last April in Edmonton. Monica Riutort, co-author of the handbook "Working with Assaulted Immigrant Women" and Suzanne Lacroix from the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence were the guest speakers. Monica Riutort also offered an evening training session on how to work with battered immigrant women.

This association is also planning to establish a support group for immigrant women affected by violence at home. The group will be open to all immigrant women.

New office address: #808, 10136 - 100 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 0P1, Telephone: 426-1744.

■ The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton published a brochure on sexual assault available in three different languages: English, Polish and Spanish. Work has begun on the Chinese, Vietnamese, Punjabi and Urdu translations. Copies of the brochures can be obtained by calling the centre at 423-4121.

■ Women who are pregnant or those with a one to six week-old infant and who have been physically abused as a child are presently being sought for a study on the cycle of abuse. Confidentiality is ensured. If you would like to participate in this study or know of anyone who would, please contact Elizabeth White-MacDonald in Edmonton at 435-0879.

■ The federal government organized and hosted a National Forum on Family Violence in Ottawa on June 18 to 21, 1989. The forum was part of the government's family violence initiative announced in June 1988. The main objective of the forum was to bring together individuals from across Canada in order to provide input into the development of a long-term national strategy to combat family violence. Proceedings of the conference are expected to be available in November from the Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada.



Book Review

■ As a follow-up to the National Workshop on Child Sexual Abuse and The National Forum on Family Violence, the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence organized a consultation on October 17. The forty Alberta delegates who attended the two national meetings discussed how the federal government could assist Alberta in responding to family violence.

■ Since May 1989, children anywhere in Canada can access THE KIDS HELP PHONE which provides telephone counselling, information and referral services to children experiencing a wide variety of problems, including child abuse. This service is available free of charge 24 hours a day, and can be accessed by dialing 1-800-668-6868.

■ The Provincial Association of Transition Houses Saskatchewan (PATHS) is participating in a new Family Violence Working Group. The group is composed of representatives of Treaty Indian women, rural women, Metis women, immigrant women, disabled women, transition houses, sexual assault centres and the Battered Women's Advocacy Network. The group is to be a forum for doubly disadvantaged women to share their experiences and discuss solutions (source: VIS-A-VIS, summer 1989).

■ The criminal justice system's involvement in family violence was the subject of a seminar held by The National Associations Active in Criminal Justice (NAACJ) in Ottawa in February. The meeting helped participants clarify the critical issues surrounding family violence and the law. Proceedings of the seminar are available.

Contact:
Ben Offman
Executive Secretary
NAACJ
4th Floor
55 Parkdale Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1Y 1E5
(613) 725-3715

■ Education Wife Assault has published a brochure entitled "My Husband is Beating Me — I Want Him to Stop." This brochure is available in eight languages including English, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish and Vietnamese. To obtain copies of the brochure, contact: Education Wife Assault, 427 Bloor Street West, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1X7, (416) 968-3422.

■ The Centre for Spanish Speaking People of Toronto has produced a wife assault information kit in Spanish/English for female victims of wife assault and related agencies working with them. The kit contains two handbooks, one poster and four fact sheets on legal issues. For more information contact the centre at: 5824 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M6G 1B3, (416) 533-8545.

Violence Against Immigrant Women and Children — An Overview for Community Workers

by Kathy Wiebe, Vancouver, British Columbia. Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre, 1985

Although this handbook discusses at length, the topics of wife and child abuse, its main purpose is to sensitize and inform service providers about the dynamics facing immigrant families affected by family violence. It aims to create an awareness of particular factors encountered by immigrant women such as: language barriers, issues of sponsorship, integration into Canadian society, cultural values and beliefs among others. The author emphasizes that the most suitable intervention is reached when community workers take into account those particular dynamics and try to see the immigrant woman's world through her eyes.

Working with Assaulted Immigrant Women: A Handbook for Lay Counsellors

by Monica Riutort and Shirley Endicott Small. Toronto, Ontario: Education Wife Assault, 1985

Although professionally trained individuals can benefit from this handbook, it is primarily designed for lay counsellors and paraprofessionals working with assaulted immigrant women.

The authors give an overview of specific issues facing immigrant women, who are in an abusive situation, and stress that counsellors should keep these issues in mind when working with immigrant women.

Finally, they suggest counsellors emphasize the criminal nature of wife assault and dispel the myths surrounding the abuse.



Community News

Edmonton Region

"Home is Where the Hurt is. Family Violence can be stopped" is the slogan chosen by the Edmonton Family Violence Treatment, Education and Research Centre for their advertising project in LRT stations. The message, translated in various languages including French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Cree appears, as space permits, in the downtown LRT stations.

The Mennonite Centre for Newcomers is nearing completion of a project entitled "Proyecto Soledad," aimed at breaking the silence of Latin American women regarding wife abuse. To this end, they have developed a self-guided workshop package and a group-created video. For more information contact: Adrienne Wiebe at 424-7709.

Calgary Region

The Calgary Coalition on Family Violence is undertaking a project on family violence that is designed to address the gaps in services for abused immigrant women. Work is already underway to launch a multilingual poster campaign and develop and deliver three training resource packages. For more information contact: Toni Nelson at 245-5980.

Northeast/Northwest Regions

The Honourable John Oldring, Minister of Family and Social Services, has announced the location of six new satellite shelters for battered women to be opened and funded in Northern Alberta. The satellites are to be located in Grande Cache, High Level, Fairview, Whitecourt, St. Paul and a site yet to be determined in the Lac La Biche/Athabasca area.

Northwest Region

PACE (Providing Assistance, Counselling and Education) in Grande Prairie recently hosted a three-day conference entitled "New Perspectives on Sexual Abuse." The conference addressed issues such as the impact of sexual abuse on sexuality, play therapy, stages in recovery of adult survivors, Bill C-15 and child abuse trial issues, working with adolescents and the non-offending parent. The Honourable John Oldring, Minister of Family and Social Services, was also present to deliver the keynote address and visit Grande Prairie's battered women's shelter, Odyssey House.

South Region

Worlds of Women Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women in Medicine Hat has been conducting a survey among immigrant women to find out their perception of family violence, the extent of the violence and the women's knowledge of available resources. The "Study on Family Violence among Medicine Hat Immigrant Families as perceived by Immigrant Women" will become available in October. Copies can be obtained by contacting Nahid Mazloum at 528-2090.



Video Reviews

"Through The Eyes of a Child"

This 30-minute video was produced by the Independent Order of Foresters. The film portrays a wide range of fictitious but realistic life situations in a counselling session setting, with adults recalling their experiences as abused children. The video emphasizes that the abused child is never at fault and discusses the seriously harmful effects of child abuse on the next generations and on society at large: "We parent as we have been parented" as the film points out. This film is easily understandable and a good vehicle for group discussion. The video is available from Florence Hallum, Prevention of Child Abuse Fund, 789 Don Mills Road, Toronto, Ontario, M3C 1T9, (416) 429-3000.

Calendar of Events

November 2 – 4 Calgary
“Children’s Rights, or Lack of: A Conference on Child Abuse, Abduction and Exploitation”

Contact: Child Find Canada Inc.
3150 – 5th Avenue N.W.
Calgary, Alberta T2M 4S3
(403) 270-3463
Fee: \$175.00

November 3 and 4 High River
A Woman’s Place: A Conference for Women with Insight for Men

Contact: Janis Belgum
Sunbow Society for the Prevention of Family Violence
P.O. Box 3989
High River, Alberta T0L 1B0
(403) 652-2726

November 4 Grande Prairie
“You Hold the Key to Crime Prevention”
This workshop will include a session on family violence prevention as well as a panel discussion on “victim rights.”

Contact: R.J. (Jim) Laing, Constable
Crime Prevention/Victim Services Sec.
RCMP
Grande Prairie Detachment
Box 665
Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 3A8
(403) 538-5700

November 6 – 8 Vancouver
The Adolescent Sex Offender: Prevention, Treatment and Management

Contact: Registration Office
Justice Institute of B.C.
4180 West 4th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V6R 4J5
(604) 228-9771, local 311
Fee: Before September 15 – \$155.00
After September 15 – \$175.00

November (various dates) Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray
Protection of Innocence: Child Sexual Abuse, the Law and the Child Witness (This is a one-day workshop to be held in the above locations.)

Contact: Marsha Mildon
Faculty of Extension
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2J7
(403) 492-5732
Fee: \$25.00

November 23 – 24 Edmonton
Cross Cultural Aspects of Mental Health: Mental Fitness from a Multicultural Perspective

Contact: Cross Cultural Conference Registrar
c/o Roxanne McGinn
5th Floor, 108th Street Building
9942 – 108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2J5
(403) 427-3469
Fee: \$65.00

FOCUS is a quarterly publication of the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence. Submissions for future issues, especially news about community activities, are welcome. To put your name on the mailing list or for additional copies, contact the office. Address all correspondence to:
The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence
Alberta Family and Social Services
10030 - 107 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 3E4 (403) 422-5916

**FAMILY
PREVENTION
VIOLENCE**

Alberta

FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES

BREAKING THE PATTERN

Patterns can be broken

Abusive patterns in families are often passed from one generation to the next. But these patterns can be broken! Our booklets tell you how.

The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence has reprinted the original manual, *Breaking the Pattern: How Alberta Communities Can Help Assaulted Women and Their Families*, as three separate booklets. This move was made to accommodate numerous requests from individuals and groups interested specifically in the section on the dynamics of wife abuse.

The revised "Breaking the Pattern" booklets can be ordered individually or as a set. The titles available are:

- I) ***Breaking the Pattern: Understanding Wife Abuse***, which will be of interest to anyone wanting to understand the dynamics of wife abuse and its effect on the people involved.
 - II) ***Breaking the Pattern: Wife Abuse Resource Booklet***, contains information about resources available in Alberta to help families, individuals and groups wanting to address the problem of wife abuse in their communities.
 - III) ***Breaking the Pattern: How Alberta Communities Can Help***, is a working manual designed to help people organize their communities to address any kind of family violence problem. Suggestions are given on how to identify needs, plan strategies, carry out action plans and evaluate their effectiveness.
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