PROJECT WILLOW
YWCA-CJI-CMW

Racialized Muslim and Marginalized Women's Experiences of Gender-based Violence and Homelessness

Literature Review by
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Literature Review

Violence against women has escalated in the past few years. Canada has registered a high rate of intimate partner violence, especially since the pandemic began. Immigrant or racialized marginalized women are more vulnerable to violence at home due to financial dependence, language barriers, and lack of knowledge about the community resources and support available to them.

Intersectionality of Gender-based Violence and Race

While GBV can affect anyone, regardless of gender, age, race, religion, or ethnicity, research has proven that women are more likely to experience violence. The intersectionality of racism and sexism impacts women differently, contributing to the severity of violence in racialized communities (Nasreen, 2022). Racialized violence and gender-based violence are deeply intertwined and rooted in discrimination and colonial practices. The level at which a woman is at risk of violence correlates with her race, religion, and ethnicity, among other factors such as socioeconomic status.

According to Statistics Canada, more than 6 in 10 Indigenous women have been physically or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives (Heidinger, 2021). Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than any other women in Canada, and 16 times more likely than white women (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019).

In 2020, 160 women and girls were killed by violence. This is a concerning increase from 118 women and girls killed by violence in 2019. In 2020, one in five women killed in Canada was either First Nation, Métis, or Inuit (Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 2020). When compared to male homicide victims, the same report purported that, females were more likely to be killed by an intimate partner or family member. At the same time, the use of excessive force or 'overkill' was also more common in the killings of females.

There is also a long history of violence directed specifically at visibly Muslim women and women of color. This hate-fueled violence is further perpetuated by Bill 21, which fosters discrimination and prohibits wearing religious symbols.

Poverty is a racialized issue with racialized Canadians earning 81.4 cents for every dollar earned by non-racialized Canadians, and the reality for racialized women is even worse. In Toronto, 62% of people living in poverty identify with a racial group (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022). While poverty doesn't necessarily lead to domestic violence, the consequences of it can exacerbate the effects of violence. In some cases, poverty keeps women dependent on their partners, making it difficult to leave abusive relationships. In other cases it isolates women, therefore limiting their social support to escape violence. Negative outcomes of poverty, disproportionately experienced by racialized women, increase the threat of violence and limit victims' options (Wellesley Institute, 2022).

Multiple barriers to services also affect racialized women. A study by Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre found that one in five women have experienced racism when using the healthcare system, because of cultural insensitivity, stereotypes, name-calling, and inferior quality of care. Further, immigrant women who do not speak English or French have difficulties navigating through an often unaccommodating system. These situations do not encourage or assist racialized women to access help. As well, mainstream services that do not consider cultural norms and practices risk isolating

women from their communities and/or not serving their immediate needs. Such barriers are problematic when considering solutions to violence against women ((Violence Against Women: Why Race Matters, 2022).

Gender-based Violence and the Racialized / Immigrant Community

In the case of Canadian immigrants, Alaggia et al. (2009) conducted a participatory action research to investigate the dynamics of reporting abuse and seeking help in Toronto, one of the largest destinations for immigrants in Canada. Abused immigrant women and service providers participated in focus groups and interviews to elaborate on some of the factors that allowed or hindered reporting abuse. The study confirmed that cultural expectations of these immigrant women did not allow them to disclose abuse, as this would bring shame to their families. This made many women stay in an abusive relationship.

Tam et al. (2015) report that many immigrant women are aware of potential racial discrimination; and fear that, if arrested, their partners would be treated more poorly by police, relative to Caucasian men. These racialized women generally preferred their partners not be charged or prosecuted as they simply want the violence to stop, and not necessarily that their partners be punished and that charges be laid. With mandatory prosecution policies, women lose control over what happens to their spouse once the criminal justice system response has been initiated (Tam et al., 2015). Men are often the breadwinners and women are economically dependent on their husbands. If the men go away, or lose their jobs, the women could lose financial support, which puts them at risk in other ways (Tam et al., 2015).

Abused immigrant women were reluctant to contact the police for fear of making the issue public, raising fears of having their children taken away. Most participating women reported isolation due to language deficiencies and fear of losing their immigration status. It is in fact a manipulative strategy that abusers use to convince immigrant females that they are safer if they stay home and do not interact with the larger society (Shalabi, Mitchell, and Andersson, 2015). Many women with children did not have professional skills that allowed them to find jobs, forcing a decision to depend financially on an abusive husband.

Even though there are limited studies on Arab immigrant families in a Canadian context, the currently available literature shows similar findings to other studies conducted in the United States and other Western countries. On the other hand, some Canadian studies have also depicted a benign shift in the way Arab females deal with changes in gender roles and risk factors that might lead to violence. Arab immigrant females in Canada, according to the following studies, are starting to exhibit cultural resilience while attempting to integrate into the new Canadian lifestyle. In a qualitative study of influences on gender perceptions of nine Muslim Arab women living in Canada, Hamdan (2007) reported that faith was a major factor. Even though the women did not challenge traditional gender roles, they demonstrated agency in their choices and utilization of resources available in Canada, which made their daily lives more dynamic and more open to social interactions. Their experiences with resettlement represented an attempt to find a hybrid, yet less compromising, position at the intersection of home culture and the culture of the host country.

Abdul-Razzaq (2008), through the narratives of seven immigrant Arab women in Halifax, Nova Scotia, demonstrated similar findings to Hamdan (2007). Even though the participants were aware of their western portrayed image of being victims of patriarchy, they re-evaluated cultural gender expectations and perceptions that involved dress codes and daily interactions with the larger society. The women

demonstrated resilience in their attempts to bridge both cultures in order to establish households that were proud of their heritage, yet capable of adapting a new way of life that honors the values of the Canadian society. The participants saw themselves as transmitters of the culture as they felt it was their duty to raise their children according to the Arab cultural traditions and religious teachings.

In the South Asian community in the United States, domestic violence is a prevalent problem of significant magnitude (Dasgupta, 2016). Although the community stridently denies the existence of this horror, women have been systematically organizing anti-violence against women work for the last 15 years. Currently, it is a vibrant movement struggling with several complex issues that are perhaps less common in the dominant white community. As in the lives of immigrant women of color, much of the intricacies of domestic violence in the South Asian context emerge from the intersections of race, class, and residency status problems. Consequently, a slew of personal, institutional, and cultural barriers conflate to form roadblocks for battered South Asian women, who attempt to escape family violence. As the needs of battered South Asian first and second-generation women enlarge and become more perceptible, the community-based organizations must ready themselves for more complicated activities in the future.

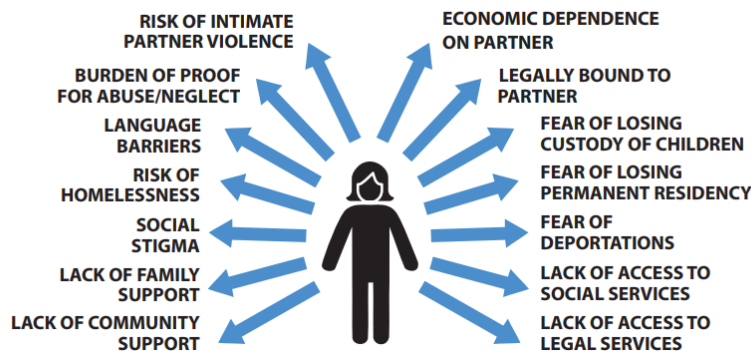## Immigration policies and Tackling Gender-based Violence

Immigrant women face numerous, and sometimes insurmountable, barriers in reporting and seeking services for intimate partner violence (IPV). A number of these obstacles relate to immigration laws, policies, and legal processes they encounter due to their immigration status and sponsorship relationship. Alaggia et al. conducted a study in Canada, in an urban center that boasts one of the largest immigrant populations in the world. Using a focus group methodology within a participatory action research framework, that investigation sought to identify factors that facilitate or impede women from coming forward and disclosing IPV and traced their help-seeking actions.

Qualitative data from helping professionals and women reveal that in cases of sponsorship breakdown due to IPV, the criteria required for a viable immigration application are unrealistic, and in many cases impossible to meet in situations of domestic abuse (Alaggia, 2009). These data indicate that despite claims to the contrary, laws, and policies related to immigration have remained unchanged for over a decade. Systemic and structural barriers that these create for abused women are still clearly present in immigration laws and policies. The result is that many women stay in abusive relationships, often with their children, for prolonged periods of time accruing serious negative mental health effects.

Resettlement impacts family interactions where cultural norms might be challenged in the new environment. Immigration adds social stressors and cultural instabilities that families could utilize to produce positive or negative outcomes (Kirmayer et al. 2011). In a meta-synthesis of literature on post-migration changes in marital relationships in Canada (Guruge et al. 2010), common themes included changes in gender and sexual relations, loss of social support, and lack of professional development and de-skilling. These changes were linked to significant outcomes like gender violence, the decision to end the marital relationship, the decision to stay in an abusive relationship, and the development of

resilience where couples reached a mature level of understanding and cooperation with each other to create a more stable environment at home.

VULNERABILITIES FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

RISK OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

BURDEN OF PROOF FOR ABUSE/NEGLECT

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

SOCIAL STIGMA

LACK OF FAMILY SUPPORT

LACK OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE ON PARTNER

LEGALLY BOUND TO PARTNER

FEAR OF LOSING CUSTODY OF CHILDREN

FEAR OF LOSING PERMANENT RESIDENCY

FEAR OF DEPORTATIONS

LACK OF ACCESS TO SOCIAL SERVICES

LACK OF ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES

Source: Migrant Mothers Project | Policy Report | Fall 2014

Immigration policies have a significant impact on the justice-seeking and reporting behavior of immigrant women facing domestic violence (Bhuyan, 2014). From 2008 to 2013, the Canadian government introduced sweeping changes that:

- Increase employer control over temporary foreign workers
- Restrict family sponsorship
- Increase financial and social conditions on family sponsorship applications for spouses, children, parents, or grandparents
- Limit immigrants and refugees' access to health care, social assistance, and legal services
- Deny refugee protection to people coming from countries that are deemed "safe" by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration; or who the Minister considers to be "irregular" because they arrived in a group of two or more
- Criminalize immigrants, making it easier to detain and deport immigrants and refugees

Vulnerabilities and Violence

Women with a disability are three times more likely to experience violent victimization than women living without a disability (Adam Cotter, Statistics Canada, 2021). Women with disabilities experience unique concerns such as increased difficulty leaving an abuser due to mobility or communication issues; greater difficulty accessing shelter services and/or transportation; higher rates of emotional abuse; being prevented from using an assistive device (e.g. wheelchair or cane); and abuse by institutional caregivers and/or other residents (Disabled Women's Network Canada, 2014).

More specifically, the rates of all three types of violent crime measured by Cotter's study - sexual assault, robbery, and physical assault - were higher among those with a disability. Notably, when looking at those without a disability, there was no statistically significant difference between women (57 incidents per 1,000) and men (49 per 1,000). In other words, the elevated rates of violent victimization among women with a disability were a key reason for the overall higher victimization rate recorded among all women. There were 184 violent incidents for every 1,000 women with a disability in 2019, well above the rates recorded among men with a disability (84 per 1,000). More specifically, women with a disability were sexually assaulted at a much higher rate. There were 94 incidents of sexual assault

for every 1,000 women with a disability in 2019, a rate over 4 times higher than that among women without a disability (22), and well above the rates among men with (15) or without (7) a disability.

Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual are 3 to 4 times more likely than heterosexual women to report experiencing spousal violence (Simpson, 2018). 49% of "sexual minority" women indicate they have been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner since age 15, almost double what is indicated by heterosexual women (Jaffray, 2021). Transgender people are more likely to have experienced violence since age 15, and more likely to experience inappropriate behaviors in public, online, and at work than cisgender people (Jaffray, 2021). Three in five transgender women experienced Intimate Partner Violence since the age of 16 (Ferguson, 2019).

Homelessness of Domestic Violence Survivors

Visible homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the housing crisis across Canada. For women, girls, and gender-diverse people, homelessness is often hidden, meaning that they are more likely to avoid shelters, couch surf, or remain in abusive relationships than end up on the streets (Brais et al., 2021). Because of this, their experiences are less known. New data from the Pan-Canadian Women's Housing and Homelessness Survey, the largest gender-specific data collection of its kind in Canada, tells us a clear story. Lack of access to housing has gendered causes and effects, and gender equality in Canada depends on fair access to adequate housing. This survey, completed by 500 women and gender-diverse people in 12 provinces and territories, shows why housing is a women's rights issue (Brais et al. 2021).

Violence from intimate partners or within families is a key pathway to homelessness for women and girls. Oftentimes this violence begins in childhood. For example, research shows that young women experiencing homelessness report higher levels of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse as children compared to young men (Gaetz, 2016). Research on young women experiencing homelessness commonly indicates physical abuse (45%) and sexual abuse (35%) as causes of their homelessness (O'Grady, 2004). Once on the streets, exposure to violence and harassment is a part of everyday life for women, girls, and gender-diverse people (Gaetz, 2016). Such experiences contribute to hidden forms of homelessness and may push women and girls to remain in unhealthy or violent relationships for housing (Baptista, 2010).

Across Canada, women, girls, and gender diverse people face unique inequities and forms of discrimination on the basis of gender. This contributes to housing needs and shapes experiences of homelessness. For example, women are more likely to be in non-permanent employment, receive lower wages, and pay higher rates for rental housing on average than their male counterparts (Callaghan, 2002). Indigenous and racialized women face deeper systemic inequities, with research noting that racialized women in Canada earn only 55.6% of the income earned by non-racialized men (Block, 2011). Pregnancy and child-rearing also have a significant impact on employment and income for women, and research also documents that, single mothers face discrimination when attempting to access rental housing (Vecchio, 2019).

Women-specific homelessness services in Canada are overcrowded and underfunded (Schwan, 2020). Participants of the Pan-Canadian Women's Housing & Homelessness Survey (2021) reported major barriers to accessing emergency shelters, with almost a third (32.6%) being unable to access a bed when they needed one. The survey identified the top 7 problems participants reported at drop-ins and shelters across the homelessness and VAW sectors, suggesting some significant concerns regarding

TOP 7 PROBLEMS AT DROPINS & SHELTERS
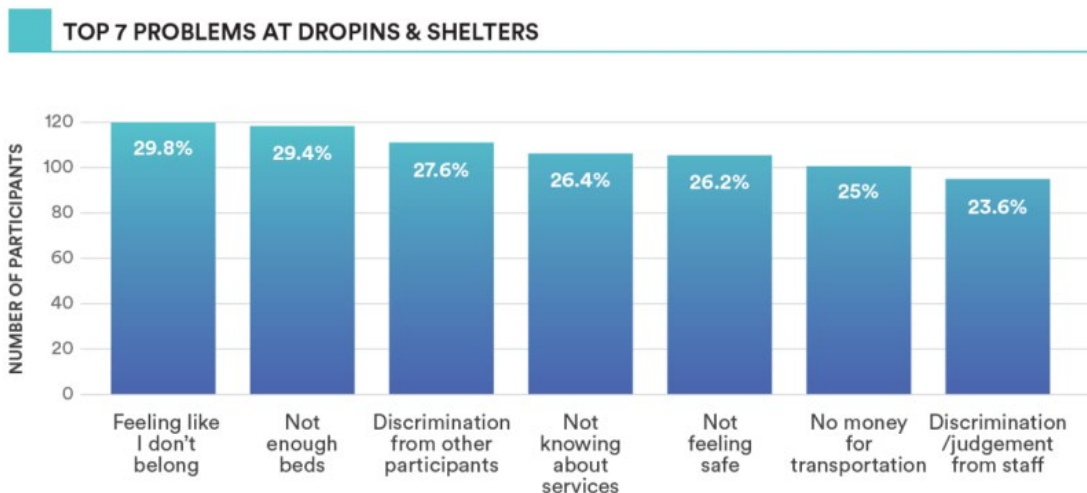
discrimination, exclusion, safety, and gaps in service. Analysis indicated approximately 1 in 5 participants had engaged with both the homelessness and VAW sector in the last year. This problem is even worse in rural, remote, and Northern communities, where there's a lack of shelter beds for women, Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people, as well as people with disabilities. This 32.6% shared that the main reason they were unable to access shelter was that services were too full when they arrived.

Additional barriers are caused by shelters with extra rules for entry. Participants shared examples of being refused service for reasons that included pregnancy, not meeting domestic abuse criteria, shelters unsuited to their physical needs, or for being too masculine-presenting (Schwan, 2020). When they were unable to access shelter, many participants turned to rough sleeping, survival sex, returning to abusive situations, and begging friends or acquaintances to take them in. Addressing the housing gender gap means ensuring equitable access to emergency shelter and services for racialized women and gender-diverse people.

VAW Shelters vs. Emergency Housing

Women escaping violence are at high risk for housing instability and homelessness. Housing instability differs from homelessness because women have a place to live; however, maintaining that residence may be difficult for a variety of reasons (from financial to mental health concerns) (O'Campo, 2017).

Housing policies primarily focus on the material need – that is, the means necessary for housing someone (rent subsidies, social housing units, etc.). However, the psychological instability associated with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) also needs to be considered, including "issues of safety, promoting feelings of home, [and] ensuring that new housing is a refuge…". IPV researchers have also documented that survivors' mental health (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, depression, anxiety, etc.) is exacerbated by housing instability, which makes it difficult for survivors to maintain their housing and puts them at risk for homelessness (Maki, 2017).

Women's shelters offer a variety of services such as 24/7 counseling, children's programs, parenting classes, mental health and addiction services, nutritional classes and community kitchens, legal and housing services, men's programs, and assistance with applications to educational and apprenticeship programs.

The majority of Housing First programs do not meet the needs of women fleeing domestic violence for several reasons:

- eligibility requirements include being homeless for 30 days and if women are temporarily staying at a VAW shelter, they are not considered homeless
- women may not meet the criteria for "chronic" or "episodic" homelessness because their homelessness is invisible for safety reasons
- most potential HF clients are recruited at homeless shelters, which DV survivors often avoid for safety reasons (or because the shelter will not accept them)
- families are often excluded – singles without dependents are the primary beneficiaries of HF supports.

Thus, it is crucial for HF models to integrate a gendered lens when defining homelessness, as homelessness for women "is more likely to be hidden [and] there is a concern that many will be categorically excluded from eligibility for Housing First programs."[124] Additionally, HF models have been criticized for not exploring the specific needs of Indigenous women who are at a much higher risk of violence than non-Indigenous women

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