



# From Awareness to Action

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## BRIEF

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Understanding Barriers to Accessing  
Legal Support for Family Violence  
Faced by Immigrant, Refugee and  
Non-Status Women in Canada



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# Understanding Barriers to Accessing Legal Support for Family Violence faced by Immigrant, Refugee and Non-Status Women in Canada

## INTRODUCTION

A 2018 report by Statistics Canada (Cotter, 2021) found that 29% of visible minority women had experienced some form of intimate partner violence<sup>1</sup> (IPV) in their lifetime, which includes psychological, physical, and/or sexual violence. Specific groups such as Arab (44%), Black (42%), and Latin American (47%) women reported higher lifetime rates of IPV in comparison to the total visible minority population (29%). Between 2019 and 2023, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) issued 594 temporary resident permits (TRP) to victims of family violence (Government of Canada, 2024a). The majority (83%) of these TRPs were issued to females and to individuals between the ages of 31 and 40 (approximately 39%). In 2023, approximately 15% of family violence TRPs were issued to individuals from Mexico and 15% from India (Government of Canada, 2024a). More on the eligibility of TRPs is discussed below on page 5.

These recent data show that immigrant women and women in precarious immigration status such as non-status women and refugee claimant women can be vulnerable to IPV and face extensive barriers in receiving support to leave abusive partnerships and situations. These experiences mean facing hardships in accessing information, support, and services that can help immigrant and newcomer women escape circumstances of IPV. Clear and accessible legal information is crucial for immigrants and refugees coming to Canada as it can equip survivors with the necessary knowledge to seek protection and support

<sup>1</sup> There is not yet universal agreement on terminology. This brief will largely use “intimate partner violence”; however, other works may use domestic violence, domestic/intimate partner violence, family violence, and/or spousal violence interchangeably.

## ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This research brief explores the numerous challenges immigrant, refugee and non-status women in Canada encounter when seeking legal assistance for family violence. While there are legal frameworks and support services that exist to support those who experience family violence, it is important to grasp the specific issues that newcomer women encounter that make it difficult for them to seek legal support. Some of the barriers to accessing legal services discussed in this brief include the lack of legal assistance and information about rights and available supports, language barriers, fear of immigration consequences, financial constraints, socio-cultural and patriarchal norms, and systemic discrimination and bias. The intersection of these barriers and their compounded effects can leave women feeling isolated, vulnerable, and unable to escape abusive situations. Research that examines these barriers can help to create awareness about the unique challenges faced by immigrant, refugee and non-status women experiencing family violence and to show the gaps in family law interventions to support the population.

services. The prevalence of IPV among visible minority women creates a pressing imperative to invest in resources to help immigrants and refugees navigate the complexities of the Canadian family legal system to ensure the safety and well-being of newcomers and their families.

Although the Canadian legal and immigration systems have created provisions for immigrant and refugee women in recognition of the vulnerabilities they face, several barriers remain for survivors of IPV who are new to Canada. Importantly, there are many differences in how immigrant women experience and respond to IPV due to different cultural contexts, norms, values, and beliefs as well as differing structural and systemic barriers (Miedema & Wachholz, 1998; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). Immigrant and refugee women therefore face a diverse array of challenges when seeking help or interventions to address family violence.

This brief explores several barriers that are specific to newcomer women within the context of family law and family violence. Some of these barriers are interconnected and can lead to compounded effects and vulnerabilities experienced by immigrant, refugee and non-status women in Canada. The brief explores the issue of reduced access to legal assistance and the interconnected issues of language barriers, fear of losing immigration status, and fear of losing custody/access to children. Second, it highlights the impact of financial dependence on immigration and difficulties in separating from abusers. Third, it investigates the socio-cultural, religious and patriarchal norms that create fear of shame, stigma and loss of honour in family and community. Lastly, the brief reflects on the experiences of systemic discrimination, racism, and ethnic or cultural bias that ultimately hinder the provision of culturally appropriate support services.

## LACK OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE

This section explores the impact of, lack of, or limited access to legal assistance for newcomers in Canada. Several issues arise, three of which will be discussed in more detail including fluctuating immigration programs and eligibility, language barriers, and fears of deportation and child custody concerns.

### Immigration Programs And Eligibility

Immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada are provided essential information about their rights, freedoms, and the Canadian law and justice system through resources such as the "Welcome to Canada" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013) handbook. The Government of Canada (2024b) website also offers additional information on what to do before and after arrival to Canada, information on housing, employment, healthcare, education, foreign credential recognition and other related information. There are also specific websites that offer information for newcomers regarding family law and violence including Public Legal Education and Information Service of New

The "**Welcome to Canada**" guide provides information to newcomers about family violence, emphasizing that it is illegal and a serious crime. The document highlights various forms of abuse and informs on the legal protections available. It explains signs of abuse and encourages contacting support services such as hotlines, shelters, and counselling. The document also highlights the importance of understanding Canadian laws and the justice system's role in safeguarding victims and ensuring their safety and well-being (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013).

Brunswick (PLEIS-NB) (2017) and the Family Law Education for Women (Family Law Education for Women, n.d) website offer insights into family law issues, implications of relationship breakdowns on immigration status, and specific concerns for permanent residents, refugees, and those without legal status. These resources emphasize the importance of legal advice, particularly in cases of abuse, and highlight available support such as TRPs for abuse victims and their children.

**TRPs** specifically allow victims of family violence to apply free of charge. Their considerations include definitions of family violence including, “physical abuse, including forcible confinement; sexual abuse, including sexual contact without consent; psychological abuse, including threats and intimidation; financial abuse, including fraud and extortion; and neglect, consisting of the failure to provide the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, medical care, shelter, any other omission that results in a risk of serious harm” (Government of Canada, 2024c). They also recognize abuse witnessed by foreign national’s children. The application requires a paper application form and supporting evidence of abuse such as police records, criminal or family court documents, witness statements, assessments by psychologist/psychiatrist or therapist/counsellor, photos of injuries, and/or text messages (Government of Canada, 2024c). TRPs help ensure that victims can separate from their abusers while also giving them time to decide whether they would like to remain in or leave Canada, child contact is maintained, and they may be issued work permits (Government of Canada, 2024c).

The **PLEIS-NB** (2017) webpage provides critical information for immigrant women facing family violence, detailing various forms of abuse: physical, sexual, psychological, and financial. It emphasizes that abuse is against the law in Canada and describes a comprehensive overview of support systems available including lawyers and family courts for legal problems, immigrant women groups, and family counsellors for emotional support, as well as contact information for hospitals, police and transition houses. It addresses concerns regarding the deportation of abusers and victims, the rights of victims, custody of children, and legal options to take if the abuser bothers the victim after the latter has left, among others.

While there are several tactics of IPV addressed in the TRP application guide, there are additional criteria not located in their definitions that are otherwise recognized in the *Divorce Act* (1985, c.3). For example, the *Divorce Act* also recognizes the presence of coercive controlling behaviours (some of which may include threats and intimidation, but not limited to such), and behaviours that cause fear for safety of other family members. Additionally, while TRP assessments recognize abuse witnessed by children, specifics are not provided, whereas the *Divorce Act* considers this to include direct victimization, witnessing someone else being victimized, or seeing a family member afraid or injured. Therefore, criteria to grant TRP’s to victims of IPV do not yet contain a comprehensive consideration of IPV otherwise found in federal legislation. Victims of IPV who receive a TRP may also undergo an expedited Permanent Residency (PR) application if they wish to remain in Canada. Processing times for

PR are decreased if they are experiencing “urgent situations” of family violence and may apply for PR on humanitarian and compassionate grounds (Government of Canada, 2024h). These applications; however, are subjectively assessed, costly, and cannot be appealed if denied (Alaggia et al., 2009). The application also does not consider risk factors such as threat to life when considering the application which can be a barrier for immigrant and refugee women fleeing violent situations (Mattoo, 2017).

Despite the presence and promotion of these support systems, there remain significant barriers to accessing them for newcomers to Canada. The rules and regulations of immigration policies are subject to frequent amendment, and the process of obtaining residence and citizenship may be difficult for non-Canadians to understand (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018). Rules and regulations also frequently change due to the fluctuating requirements of the host country along with the introduction of new immigration programs. For instance, due to recent labour shortages in Canada, a new PR pathway called Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) was introduced in 2023 which allows firms to hire qualified refugees and displaced people (Singh, 2023). These ever-changing criteria can quickly become a barrier for women and other survivors of IPV when searching for legislative support to escape their abusive situation. Fonteyne et al.'s (2024) study highlighted such concerns, noting barriers to leaving specifically for immigrant women. They confirmed that women and their families face difficulties navigating the Canadian immigration system such as completing visa applications, sponsoring children, and understanding Canadian legal rights. Immigration status is also impacted if their partners destroy their applications, permanent residency card or passport, or cancel their sponsorship (Fonteyne et al., 2024).

### **Language Barriers**

Another interconnected issue with the difficulty in accessing legal assistance is the language barrier experienced by newcomers in Canada. Women experiencing IPV have few options that they can undertake to escape the violent situation at home ranging from reaching out to the police or seeking space in shelters/transition houses as mentioned above. However, newcomers may struggle to reach out for support and access information and services due to language barriers, lack of readily available translation/interpretation services, and the added pressure of being unfamiliar with the rules or cultural expectations in Canada. In a study on immigrant women's experience of IPV in Southern Ontario, findings highlight that “not only can lack of English proficiency act as a barrier to seeking help with IPV, but also how speaking with an accent with its attached assumptions can lead to unique challenges” (Ahmadzai, 2015, p. 73). It has been noted that speaking with an accent can lead to discrimination as they are often linked to ethnic and cultural identities which influence perceptions of those individuals, such as in professional contexts (Munro, 2003). Such perceptions can also influence those providing support and services to those impacted by IPV. This means there is a need for not just “accessible, certified and preferably trained” interpreters (Ahmadzai, 2015, p. 74) but also a culturally sensitive, non-discriminatory and non-stereotyping mindset to help immigrant women seeking help to avoid further harm. This aligns with the argument that translation is crucial for migrants to access rights and services effectively. Polezzi (2012) highlights the significance of comprehending migration and translation together as it shows that not just written text, but people also travel with it, emphasizing that “translation takes place not just when words move on their own, but also, and mostly, when people move into new social and linguistic settings (p. 348). This makes interpreters' roles essential to provide support and information to newcomer women experiencing IPV in Canada as they introduce not just legal information but also through the social and cultural norms present in the country.

## **Fear Of Deportation And Losing Custody Of Children**

Other issues linked with the lack of legal assistance are fear of deportation and fear of losing custody of their children. Immigration-related abuse involves immigrant women experiencing isolation, increased dependency on their abusive partners, and/or fear of deportation (Criminalization of Women Forum, n.d.; Government of Canada, 2023; Raj & Silverman, 2002, p. 377-381; Tabibi et al., 2018). Naturally, experiencing IPV in Canada raises concerns for victims regarding their children such as leaving them in the care of an abusive partner (Adamali et. al., 2008; Alaggia & Maiter; 2006) and concerns for the children's safety and wellbeing (Rossiter et al., 2018, p. 12).

Immigrant women often face pressure from perpetrators, family, and community to not seek support; "if women speak to relatives about D/IPV, they are advised to endure, make sacrifices, and keep the family together for the sake of the children" (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018, p. 297). Additionally, immigrant women who have received, or are applying for, PR through the sponsorship of their partners may also experience false reporting from their abusers, the latter alleging that the marriage or partnership was to attain legal status in Canada. This spurs an investigation and if the allegations are believed by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), the victim cannot apply for residency for five years (Mosher, 2023, pp. 328-329).

This misuse of the immigration system should be seen as a tactic of coercive control, where the abuser manipulates legal and bureaucratic processes to isolate and control their partner. As a form of coercive control, the abuser can deliberately prevent the victim from understanding their rights, dominate, harass them and adopt other coercive measures to undermine the victim's ability to seek help or justice (Jaffe et al., 2023). Abusive partners may threaten to, or withdraw applications for residency, or mislead the victim into believing documents have been submitted when in fact, no application is pending (Government of Canada, 2024c). Women and Gender Equality Canada (2022) created a guide for immigration lawyers helping immigrant women victimized by coercive control by their partners. The toolkit provides information on coercive control indicators, tips on interviewing the victims and how to document coercive control and other related evidence. Amongst others, there is a specific section on how to assemble the file that contains descriptions ranging from experiences of fear, impact of coercive behaviours, collection of affidavits from witnesses such as family and/or friends, and concerns for children's safety (Government of Canada, 2019e).

There are also non-status women in Canada who do not have legal immigration status on a temporary or permanent basis, some due to expiration of former permits (Rights of Non-Status Women Network, n.d.). Non-status women can face a greater risk of experiencing IPV and barriers to accessing support services (Rossiter et al., 2018). Holtmann and Rickards (2018) confirmed that some frontline shelter staff were reluctant to provide space for undocumented women due to concerns they may be liable for supporting an illegal resident. Due to their lack of status, it makes it difficult for them to call the police for fear of deportation and losing custody of their children (Tabibi et al., 2018). Refugee claimants can apply for asylum in Canada from within or at the border. A separate application process is in place, providing individuals with information such as understanding refugee protection in Canada, accessing legal representation, and preparing for and attending their hearing. (Kinbrace, 2024). However, refugee claimant women could be unaware of their legal options due to misrepresentation of rights explained to them by their abusive partner, or lack of legal literacy and language barriers described above. (Tabibi et al., 2018). These overlapping vulnerabilities highlight that immigrant, non-status, and refugee women experiencing IPV face unique challenges that make it harder for them to access resources and protection without the fear of repercussions related to their immigration status.

## FINANCIAL DEPENDENCE

Newcomer women in Canada often face challenges related to financial dependency, which can severely impact their ability to seek help for IPV. Many families migrate to Canada with one partner (often male) already employed while the other (often female) remains dependent on them (Adamli et al., 2008). This dependency becomes a critical barrier for women experiencing abuse, as it restricts their access to necessary support services. Without financial independence, these women may feel trapped and unable to leave their abusive situations (Adamli et al., 2008). Moreover, abusive partners are likely to control the household income, bank accounts, and collect money from Canada Child Benefit (CCB) (Giesbrecht et al., 2023, p. 1241).

Even before settling in Canada, the gender inequity in immigration policies limits women's ability to enter Canada on their own. Entry is often based on a “points system” and is consistently skewed against many women. In 2006, the Community Coordination for Women’s Safety noted that points were awarded for education, professional experience, and language ability. These often disadvantage women from other countries who have fewer opportunities to develop these qualifications. Even today, the Express Entry programs follow the Comprehensive Ranking System which is another point-based system grading skills and experience, spouse or common-law partner’s language skills and education, education and experience skills transferability, and additional points are given if the applicant has Canadian education, a job offer, or family member living in Canada (Government of Canada, 2024f). For someone who would prefer to move to Canada on their own and not want to associate with or travel with their abusive partner, the point system focuses on many criteria which women might not be able to meet to be considered a viable applicant. Moreover, high application fees exacerbate these barriers further. As of 2024, seeking PR, even on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, costs \$1,210 (including processing fee and right of permanent residence fee) and an additional fee of \$175 per child (Government of Canada, 2024g). Applicants must also have a valid email address and either a credit or debit card (Government of Canada, 2024i). This can be a hinderance for victims of IPV, especially newcomers, whose partners have otherwise regulated daily activities and taken control over finances. Such fees may then seem exorbitant and unattainable.

There is also the lack of recognition of foreign credentials such as educational achievements and work experiences which can render women dependent on their abusive partners (Ahmadzai, 2015). It can lead to “significant demoralizing and disempowering downward social mobility, unemployment and underemployment” (Guo, 2009, p. 48). Consequently, many women cannot qualify as independent applicants and migrate through programs such as Caregivers or Family Sponsorship programs (Government of Canada, 2024d). Previous recommendations were to rework or abandon the points system and application fees to improve women’s ability to come to Canada independently (Community Coordination for Women’s Safety, 2006). However, as the point-based system is still largely in effect, and fees are still applied to each PR application, such recommendations have not been carried out to date.

Once in Canada, there exists legal restrictions related to work visa or immigration status that often force women to wait before they can gain employment (Allagia et al., 2009). With the lack of financial means, abused women have no income to afford legal fees or other essential expenses needed to escape abusive environments. Additionally, abusers may prevent women from seeking employment. As noted above, abusive partners use the immigration rules and regulations as means to coercively control their partners, isolate them financially and threaten them with loss of immigration status/deportation. Thus,



the combination of financial dependency, restricted employment opportunities, lack of information about immigration rules, language barriers, fear of deportation and losing children and their abusers manipulating these issues as a means of control can make many immigrant, refugee and non-status women vulnerable, isolated, and unable to speak out against IPV in Canada (Allagia et al., 2009).

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL AND PATRIARCHAL NORMS**

Social and cultural practices require attention as they profoundly impact risk assessment, risk management and safety measures when it comes to immigrant and refugee women experiencing IPV (Rossiter, 2018). Collectivist values, family unity, and concepts of honour and shame often serve to conceal IPV thus, complicating risk assessment and intervention efforts. Forms of gender-based violence such as ‘honour-based’ crimes and forced marriages, while sometimes associated with specific cultures, are rooted in patriarchal norms and affect various vulnerable populations (Tabibi et al., 2018). Many women are unable to seek help because of the pressures exerted by certain collective cultures and norms which include assertions from family, relatives and community to ‘make things work’ and solve the problem within the family. Additionally, if they are religious, then perceptions about family and family structure are also in conflict with Canadian law as IPV is sometimes not seen as a social problem (Holtmann & Rickards, 2018). Divorce or separation is considered taboo in some societies (Adamli et al., 2008; Miedema & Wachholz, 1998; Rossiter et al., 2018). Akinyele-Akanbi (2021) highlight that all immigrant and refugee participants in their Winnipeg study, originally from Africa, Asia, The Caribbean, Europe, South America and the Middle East equivocally emphasized that the wives being seen as slaves along with continuity of systemic, socio-economic, cultural and religious factors made the immigrant and refugee women vulnerable to IPV postmigration.

While keeping in mind these environments are created due to cultural norms and beliefs, it is also important to note that such observations can quickly transcend into culture blaming and stereotyping of communities (Ahmadzai, 2015; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Discrimination based on language proficiency or accents, as discussed above, also applies here. Stereotyping communities based on their accents often leads to associating individuals with specific cultures and

**Risk assessment tools** assist with measuring the level of risk for victims or future potential for offending. Common tools used by frontline service providers in Canada are actuarial or structured professional judgement tools such as the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA) and the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA). However, there may be limitations to their use with immigrants/newcomers; for example, the ODARA can only be scored with perpetrators who have lived in Canada for at least 10 years. The development of culturally appropriate tools are increasing in circulation, identifying culturally-specific aspects of risk that may be used in collaboration with other more commonly used tools. For example, the CRAT-P assesses for unique risk factors amongst Chinese perpetrators, the DASH includes considerations of honour-based violence, FAST is created for minority, newcomer and immigrant groups within collectivist cultures, and the PATRIARCH contains a checklist of risk and vulnerability factors for patriarchal violence where honour may be a motive (Rossiter et al., 2018).

stereotypes, reinforcing negative biases. Ahmadzai (2015) highlights an experience of their participant who did not have a positive experience in seeking support from service providers:

*She shared that experiencing DV was already traumatic enough, and then when she sought out help with DV, she experienced additional trauma and stress due to harmful cultural perceptions held by professionals. This example shows that culture blaming can prevent visible minority immigrant women from fully benefiting from DV services, and they may actually experience greater trauma.*

This demonstrates that lack of awareness about cultures combined with acceptance of stereotypes can create judgmental and unwelcoming spaces, making it difficult for immigrant and refugee women to receive the support they need.

## SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION

To understand systemic discrimination faced by immigrant and refugee women experiencing IPV in Canada, it is crucial to consider how racism, sexism and other forms of systemic discrimination intersect in their lives. It is important to remember prior experiences such as pre-migration stress along with post-migration racism and discrimination can lead to psychological harm for men that can negatively impact their families, including the presence of family conflict and violence

(David & Jaffe, 2021; Lorenzetti et al., 2023, p. 14). Premigration trauma is a contributing factor to IPV among refugees due to stress and exile experienced in their home country and can impact families postmigration (Timshel et al., 2017). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental illness, as well as the shift in cultures are risk factors for IPV (Timshel et al., 2017). Following interviews with refugee men and women from Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Serbia, Bosnia, and Croatia – who were now living in Australia – Rees and Pease (2007) found that prior torture and trauma, particularly experienced by men, were linked to current IPV events. Men would experience depression and aggression due to war trauma, leading to subsequent violent behaviours of their own (Rees & Pease, 2007). They also noted:

**Honour-based crime** or honour-based violence is referred to as “Premeditated killings of family members, primarily women, who are thought to have brought shame or dishonour to their family by engaging in certain behaviours considered unacceptable (e.g. premarital or extra-marital sexual relationships, or relationships with boys not approved by the family)” (Department of Justice Canada, 2021a, para 1). Important factors such as planning by family and stigma associated with the actions of the victim are part of honour-based crimes.

*India v. Badesha* (2017) is one example of honour killing in Canada that ultimately led to the extradition and deportation of the perpetrators. Malkit Kaur Sidhu (mother) and Surjit Singh Badesha (uncle), Canadian citizens, were accused of orchestrating the honour killing of Jaswinder Kaur Sidhu in India in 2000. Jaswinder had married a man from a lower social caste against her family's wishes. The Indian authorities alleged that Malkit and Surjit conspired to have her murdered to restore the family's honour and requested their extradition. The Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruled in favour on the extradition of Malkit Kaur Sidhu and Surjit Singh Badesha.

*Although the connection between torture and trauma and the male victim becoming the perpetrator of domestic violence was made in our study, it is pertinent to recognise that the women's cohort also experienced high levels of torture and trauma in the country of origin, without correlating evidence of them becoming aggressors. This supports an argument for a more complex analysis of the causes of domestic violence, involving an awareness of the effects of patriarchy and sanctioned violence against women by men with legitimised power and privilege. (p.13)*

Rubenstein et al. (2020) also conducted a systematic review of IPV literature to identify factors predicting household violence in humanitarian settings. The findings suggest exposure to conflict and political violence is one of the factors linked with increased household violence. The study does point out the need for longitudinal studies tracking violence before and after conflict to confirm this connection. Lorenzetti and colleagues' (2014) accentuate that "Racism was an overarching construct that underscored racialized immigrant men's experiences such that unmet expectations and resettlement stress could not be uncoupled from the realities of racialization and racism in the host country" (p. 15). An intersectional approach reveals that efforts to prevent violence against women must also address racism and other forms of discrimination they encounter (Guruge & Humphreys, 2009). The prevalence of IPV as a cultural issue diverts attention from structural inequalities that make immigrant and refugee women vulnerable to IPV (Henderson et al., 2014; Thompson, 2022).

A training toolkit for service providers, created by Deepa Mattoo (2017), provides information for those working with racialized women who experienced IPV and are living with precarious immigration status. The document highlights the complex interplay of race, gendered violence and immigration status, emphasizing that IPV is often exacerbated for racialized women with precarious immigration status. The document describes how gender inequality intersects with other power structures, such as race, immigration status, and economic conditions, shaping the experiences of survivors of IPV. The toolkit identifies a significant gap in existing literature in terms of an inadequate consideration of racial identity in analyses of gendered violence, especially concerning women with precarious immigration status. Along with fears of deportation, additional challenges for racialized women are experiencing racial profiling, cultural stereotyping and racism/xenophobia. While it has been established that IPV is not a problem persisting solely in visible minority communities (Cotter, 2021; Rossiter, 2018), it is still perceived as part of the cultures of racialized women (Mattoo, 2017). Such attitudes only make it logical that along with fear of deportation, victims can experience racial profiling or cultural stereotyping that can also make them hesitant to ask for support from law enforcement and service providers. Moreover, experiences of racism and xenophobia also create a sense of isolation and mistrust towards institutions that are supposed to offer protection, thereby hindering their pursuit of justice.

Discrimination and fear of racism can hinder women's access to intervention and prevention programs, social networks, services, and safe spaces (Tabibi et al., 2018). This can make them feel unsafe, disrespected, and alienated within their communities. Fear of the police is one of the major reasons for not reaching out for help as visible minorities fear being on the receiving end of biases and stereotypes by the police towards them or women fear contacting the police because of prior negative experiences with the police in their home country (Adamali et al., 2008; Ahmadzai, 2015). False reporting by abusers to the police that the victim is the true perpetrator can make immigrant and refugee women more vulnerable as it can lead to criminal charges and potential deportation (Mosher, 2023). Additionally, accessing support with the aid of interpreters can also be risky if the translator is a member of their community and/or is connected to the abusive partner. Questions are then raised as to the accuracy of translation, and confidentiality and safety of the victim (Giesbrecht et al., 2023).

Understanding these intersecting forms of discrimination is essential for developing comprehensive and effective strategies to support immigrant, refugee, and non-status women experiencing IPV in Canada. Addressing both gender-based violence and the systemic racism that compounds it is crucial for fostering a safer and more inclusive society (Tabibi et al., 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

The intersection of multiple barriers—such as lack of legal assistance, language barriers, financial dependency, socio-cultural norms, systemic discrimination— create compounded vulnerabilities for immigrant, refugee, and non-status women experiencing IPV in Canada. These women face unique challenges, including fear of deportation, financial constraints, and cultural stigmas, which make it harder for them to access support and legal resources while in Canada. A review of these barriers shows that addressing IPV at legal, policy and social levels must consider these intersecting factors. There is a need for culturally sensitive and inclusive strategies to accommodate the circumstances of immigrant, refugee, and non-status women. Moreover, it is critical to spread awareness and knowledge about their legal rights, information on accessing culturally appropriate support services, and addressing systemic discrimination within law enforcement and the court system in order to create a safer and more inclusive environment. It also portrays that Canada, as an exponent of multiculturalism, cannot support a one-size-fits-all approach to IPV. A targeted focus on the specific needs of immigrant and refugee women, alongside reforms in family law and support services, is crucial to support those impacted by family violence and to foster a society where all individuals can seek help without fear of discrimination or further victimization.

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