

Prevalence of Violence against Immigrant Women: A Systematic Review of the Literature

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Abstract Interest in studying the particular case of the victimization of immigrant women has increased. This systematic review intends to document the violence that is experienced by immigrant women within their host country and its prevalence. Research was conducted using five databases: PsycArticles, Pubmed, Web of Science, Scopus and ScienceDirect. We selected 24 quantitative studies, according to the following inclusion criteria: published between 2003 and 2013, that focused on an adult study population, and that revealed the prevalence of victimization that is experienced by immigrant women. These studies were mainly conducted in America (67 %) and Europe (33 %), and the participants were mostly Asian and Latin women. The large majority of the studies focused their attention on intimate partner violence, whose prevalence ranges between 17 % and 70.5 %. There is a high variability of the prevalence rates, which could be due to cultural factors and/or to methodological issues. These matters should be addressed by future researchers to allow for a better understanding of the phenomena.

Keywords Violence · Women · Immigrants · Prevalence · IPV

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, real or a threat,

against herself/himself, by another person, group, or community that may lead to injury, death, psychological damage, underdevelopment or deprivation” (World Health Organization 1996). Violence against women is a global phenomenon that assumes several shapes and involves a large number of controlling, threatening, aggressive, and abusive actions, which can be physical, sexual, or psychological in nature (e.g., intimate partner violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking; Guruge et al. 2012).

Several conceptualizations of violence are used in studies. A broader definition refers to interpersonal violence, that includes all acts of violence occurred between relatives, intimate partners, or other individuals, but also child maltreatment, youth violence, some forms of sexual violence and elder abuses (Rutherford et al. 2007). The most common form of violence studied is the one perpetrated by an intimate partner or a former partner (Fernbrant et al. 2011), however there is a clear overlap of terms used to describe this form of violence such “Domestic Violence,” “Spousal Abuse,” and/or “Intimate Partner Violence” (IPV). In this work we will use the term IPV when discussing intentional emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, or economic abuse or threats of abuse that involve an intimate partner (Liles et al. 2012).

Determining the prevalence of IPV has been the aim of several epidemiological surveys. A transcultural review of approximately 50 surveys that were conducted in 35 countries before 1999 revealed that 10 % to 52 % of women have reported experiencing physical abuse, sexual abuse, or both, perpetrated by an intimate partner during their lives (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006).

The sole focus on violence that is experienced in intimate relationships can be restrictive and underrepresent the real prevalence of violence against women that could also occur in other contexts of life. So, it is important to extend this evaluation to distinct types (e.g., racism, discrimination,

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mobbing) and contexts of violence (e.g., interpersonal, institutional, and structural violence), attending to the sociocultural factors and cultural dynamics of the studied women.

To provide answers to the limitations regarding the lack of comprehensive and comparable data on the prevalence of violence against women, a recent European study was performed to estimate the prevalence of different forms of violence (physical and/or sexual, psychological, stalking, sexual harassment) in the 28 member states of the European Union (EU) (FRA - European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). That study used representative samples from all of the countries and addressed various forms of violence in different contexts and at various stages of life. The results show that violence against women cannot be underestimated: for example, one in three women (33 %) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, with immigrant women reporting higher rates of these forms of violence than native women (FRA 2014).

That study is central because it considered the specificity of certain groups of women who, based on their characteristics and their circumstances in life, find themselves in a situation of greater vulnerability. The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1994; Sokoloff 2008) posits precisely that the vulnerability of victimization is a result of the intersection of several elements, such as gender, social status, age, race, and ethnicity. Erez et al. (2009) believed that being an immigrant is a vulnerability factor, which contradicts the ideas of other researchers who commonly classify the element of immigration based on a mere racial/ethnic category.

Immigration and Victimization: Additional Challenges

Although the immigrant population is heterogeneous (i.e., from different origin countries and having many different reasons for leaving their homes), there are certain common characteristics and barriers that are shared by them in their host countries that may help increase their vulnerability to experiencing different types/forms of victimization. For example, some of these women immigrated illegally, some are confronted with cultural differences and alienation due to social isolation resulting from the migratory process (Turney and Harknett 2010), others have a subsequent lack of social support (Linares 2004) and experience social exclusion, poverty, and economic dependency because it is difficult to find a job (Algan et al. 2010). These specificities, related to their immigrant status, when associated to other linguistic and cultural barriers, may even limit the access to protection, for example, when a woman is illegal in the host country and/or has no access to information about the specialized services available (Freedman and Jamal 2008). Furthermore, the immigrant and refugee women have specific needs that directly result from their status and their victimization experiences related to IPV (Abu-Ras 2007). These women face a set of barriers that place

them in a cycle of violence (Sullivan and Orloff 2013), namely the fear of deportation, losing their children, and not being aware of their rights (Dasgupta 2005).

Intimate Partner Violence within the immigrant population has been the most studied type of violence (Silverman et al. 2007). In a literature review (Menjívar and Salcido 2002), whose aim was to identify the factors that make immigrant women from different backgrounds (class, gender and race) more vulnerable to IPV, the authors emphasized that the connection between immigration and IPV was, at the time, emerging and remained inconclusive. Despite this finding, they concluded that the incidence of IPV in immigrant women is not higher compared to the incidence in native women, but the experiences are exacerbated by a set of factors that are inherent to the immigration status (e.g., limited host-language skills, uncertain legal status, and social isolation) (Menjívar and Salcido 2002). Nevertheless, to clarify the inconclusive results, more recent surveys include immigrant status as a socio-demographic variable, and/or are based on specific populations of immigrant women (Vives-Cases et al. 2010); and, in different countries, institutional policies are now addressing the needs of this population differently (e.g., the Violence Against Immigrants Act in the USA and National Action plans in the European Union against IPV).

The large majority of surveys present prevalence rates for different types of abuse, and most of the studied cases of IPV include physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse. However, the authors typically do not analyze the potential overlap of several types of victimization and do not consider that certain participants can simultaneously experience multiple types of violence (Sabina and Straus 2008) throughout their lives. Finkelhor et al. (2007) note that, in general, one type of violence is frequently associated with other types, and the isolated experience of only one type of abuse is rare. The phenomena of multiple victimization was described, for example, by Hope et al. (2001) as “*the extent to which households or persons are victims of more than one type of offence over a given period*” (Hope et al. 2001, p.595). Additionally, Kilpatrick (2004) adds the need for surveys to include women who suffered from other types of victimization that occurred outside their romantic relationships, to evaluate victimization throughout their lifetimes, and to monitor their perpetrators.

When they arrive in a new country, immigrant women may be vulnerable to various types of violence, which may occur within their families, communities, workplaces, or larger social, institutional, and administrative structures and may be perpetrated by close partners, employers, or even strangers (Freedman and Jamal 2008). One of the difficulties in assessing these types of violence and measuring the vulnerability of immigrant women is a lack of knowledge and data regarding the phenomena (Freedman and Jamal 2008). Despite the focus on intimate partners, there are few studies that exclusively focus on the immigrant women population.

The majority of the studies that have focused on this population (e.g., in the USA) mainly studied ethnic minorities (Birman 2006).

Methodological Issues in the Study of Immigrant Women

There is a group of methodological aspects that must be taken into account when conducting research that is related to culturally different populations. Ely (2004), after reviewing the literature on immigration and domestic violence, concluded that there are certain methodological gaps that are associated with this research (Ely 2004) which are related to the type and size of samples and to instruments that are used for data collection. Additionally, over the last few years, the interest in this research has increased, and surveys have tried to improve the adjustment of instruments and the data gathering procedures by using the participants' native language (e.g., Fedovskiy et al. 2008; Liles et al. 2012; Alvarez-del Arco et al. 2013).

Although several authors have systematized the results of prevalence of violence against women, especially related to IPV, the results of immigrant women appear diluted, being necessary to aggregate the studies that are performed with these specific groups. A holistic and integrated understanding of the phenomenon is important to the researchers and will allow the tailoring of acute policies (in the host countries) that provide support and create resources adapted to the needs of these women. Thus, the present systematic review of the literature aims essentially to assess which types of victimization are experienced by immigrant women, in their host country, as well as its prevalence. This objective will be achieved by a) integrating the results of the prevalence of victimization against immigrant women worldwide; b) synthesizing the main types of victimization assessed, the contexts and the perpetrators; c) identifying the types of violence that co-occur in the host country; iv) identifying the possible gaps in the study of violence against immigrant women.

Methodology

Research Strategy

Articles that were published between 2003 and 2013 and evaluated the prevalence of victimization of immigrant women in their host countries were reviewed. The methodological decision to only consider articles that were published in the last decade is because the main objective is to examine the current data on the victimization against immigrant women, particularly within the last decade. Moreover, despite the interest in this subject emerging in the 1990s, recently, we have seen a greater number of empirical studies on the related phenomena.

The research was based on five databases, including PubMed, PsychArticles, Web of Science, Scopus, and Science direct, as well as a “hand search” procedure of related magazines and newspapers. The reference lists from retrieved studies and specialized interdisciplinary journals and grey literature were hand searched to look for further studies that might not have been recovered by the database searches. Authors of unpublished studies, e.g., PhD thesis, were contacted to obtain copies of their studies. No studies were retrieved with this method, which means that the articles that are included in this systematic review resulted from the search of electronic databases. All citations were exported into Reference Manager Software.

The research included MeSH and other terms, which were combined with the boolean operators OR and AND. The research equation was intended to be so extensive that it made the selection of surveys that were conducted with female immigrant populations who had experienced one and/or multiple type(s) of victimization, whilst being an immigrant and/or throughout their life, possible. The equation (*Women OR female*) AND (*Immigrant OR foreigner*) AND (*Victim OR Victimization OR Violence OR “Multiple Victimization” OR Polyvictimization*) was introduced into the search engines of the previously mentioned databases. The results identified 890 articles. All of the references were then exported and managed in Reference Manager Software Endnote.

Selection of the Articles: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Surveys were selected according to a group of inclusion and exclusion criteria that made identifying the ones that could adequately answer the research question regarding “which types of victimization are experienced by immigrant women, in their host country, and what is the prevalence of victimization”. Therefore, this systematic review included surveys that were published during the last 10 years (2003–2013); surveys that included a sample of adult immigrant women (aged 18 or older); quantitative surveys that evaluated the prevalence of the victimization of immigrant women in their host countries; surveys that were based on a mixed methodology, whose quantitative data revealed the prevalence of victimization; surveys that focused on mixed samples (male and female), whose results regarding immigrant women were separated from the other results; comparative surveys with native women, whose results were separated from the ones that were related to immigrant women; and surveys that were published in English, Portuguese, Spanish, and French.

We have excluded from this review qualitative surveys; literature reviews; theoretical articles; surveys that are based on mixed samples, whose results are not presented separately by gender and/or immigration status; surveys on ethnic minorities, including aboriginal and indigenous women, who are not granted an immigrant status, or surveys where the results that

are related to ethnic minorities, including native and immigrants women, were not separated; surveys that only report the violence that occurred in the country of origin; and surveys that are published in languages that were not previously mentioned.

The research that used different sources allowed for the identification of 890 articles, which were then reduced to 588 after the elimination of repeat articles that were found in the different databases. The titles and abstracts of these 588 articles were preliminarily screened in order to evaluate whether or not their content was able to be used in the review, according to the eligibility criteria that was previously described. For these articles, 510 were excluded based on the information that was given in the abstract not meeting the inclusion criteria: 214 did not provide results of the prevalence of victimization; 196 had a qualitative design; 76 did not show the results for immigrant women separately; 14 were written in a language that was different than those that were defined in the inclusion criteria (English, French, Portuguese and Spanish); 10 used women who were under the age of 18.

This review of the abstracts led to 78 articles being fully read and evaluated in detail based on the inclusion criteria. From those articles, 54 were eliminated because they did not fulfil the previously mentioned inclusion criteria: 12 surveys did not reveal the prevalence of victimization of immigrant women separately; 10 surveys had a qualitative design; eight surveys only evaluated risk factors; seven surveys merely evaluated the impact of victimization; seven surveys included adolescents in their sample; four surveys were literature reviews; two surveys only evaluated the barriers/difficulties of reporting abuse; two surveys were related to clinical procedures; one survey only evaluated the prevalence of pre-immigration victimization; and one survey had the same sample and results of a previously selected survey. Therefore, 24 articles were selected for the systematic review (see Fig. 1).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Two independent researchers conducted separately the selection of articles and the abstraction process of the 24 articles. Discrepancies were discussed between authors, consensus was reached and decisions about eligibility were supervised by a third reviewer. Relevant information was extracted from the studies: general study information, including references, country, settings, information about the participants, instruments, and prevalence of violence (see Table 1).

Quality Assessment

The quality of all studies analyzed was evaluated based on the tool described by Shepherd et al. (2006) developed for quantitative non-intervention studies, which consists in a set of six quality criteria: (1) an explicit account of the theoretical

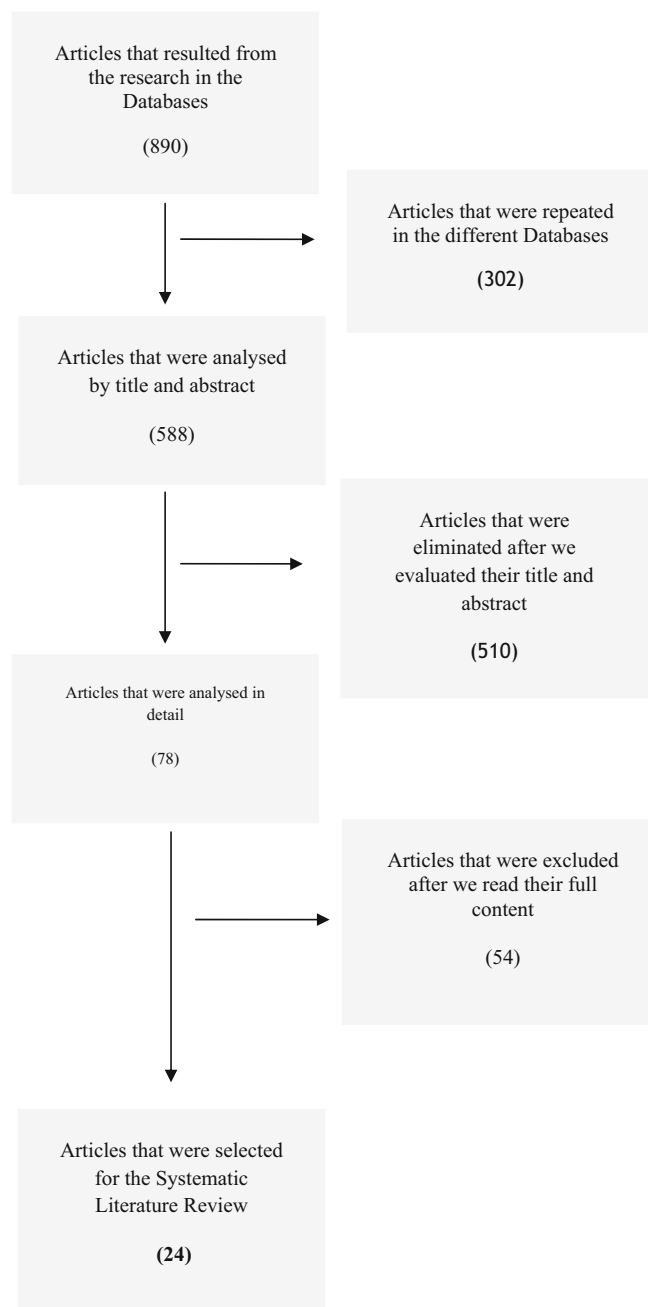


Fig. 1 Flow chart

framework and/or the inclusion of a literature review which outlined a rationale; (2) clearly stated aims and objectives; (3) a well-defined context which includes detail on factors important for interpreting the results; (4) a rich description of the sample; (5) a clear description of methodology, including systematic data collection methods; (6) the inclusion of sufficient original data to mediate between data and interpretation. Each criteria was scored with one point if present in the study. The sum of the punctuation obtained in each quality criteria allowed to obtain a score that ranged between 0 and 6 points for each study (Table 1), and the minimum score for inclusion

Table 1 Data extraction from the included articles

| Author(s), Year, Country | Settings and samples | Measures of violence | Results | Quality assessment |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|--------------------|
| Adam and Schewe 2007; USA | 78 immigrants, from India and Pakistan, aged at least 18, recruited from Asian service agencies and community activists | Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2) | 70.5 % of immigrant women reported IPV over the last year, and 76.6 % reported it over their lifetime; 65.4 % reported psychological violence; 46.8 % reported sexual violence; 39.7 % reported physical violence; and 32.1 % reported injury over the past year. 73.1 % reported psychological violence; 53.2 % reported sexual violence; 48.7 % reported physical violence and 3.7 % reported injury over the past year. 14.7 % of immigrant women reported emotional abuse, and 3.3 % reported physical abuse, which was perpetrated by a spouse. | 4 |
| Ahmad et al. 2005) Canada | Sub-sample of the General Social Survey (GSS), composed of 313 immigrant women in Canada, aged between 18 and 49 (Mean = 37.5; SD = 6.6) | Adapted from the Violence against women survey in order to assess physical and emotional abuse by a spouse | | 4 |
| Alonso and Labrador 2008; Spain | 27 immigrant women, aged at least 18 (Mean = 37.41; SD = 9.58) were recruited from specialized centers of victims. 59.2 % of the women were from Ecuador; 29.6 % were from Bolivia; and 11.1 % were from Peru. | Semi-structured interviews for domestic violence victims by the author of the survey. | 3.7 % reported psychological abuse; 25.9 % reported physical and psychological abuse; and 70.4 % reported physical, psychological and sexual abuse, in context of IPV. 30 % reported violence that was perpetrated by a parent; 19 % were exposed to another trauma; 7 % reported violence that was perpetrated by parents and an intimate partner; and 4 % reported violence that was perpetrated by another intimate partner. | 4 |
| Alvarez-del Arco et al. 2013; Spain | Population based home survey with 267 immigrant women, from Ecuador, aged between 18 and 54 | Questionnaire was built for the survey, composed of nine questions regarding the exposure, during preceding 12 months, to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The questionnaire included questions about the frequency and perpetrators of abuse. | 13 % of the immigrant women reported exposure to violence over the past 12 months. Of these women, 14 % reported psychological abuse; 9 % reported physical abuse; and 3 % reported sexual abuse. The partner was the major perpetrator (48 %), followed by others (28 %) and their father/mother (15 %). | 5 |
| Barkho et al. 2011; USA | 55 Iraqi immigrant women who were aged 18 and older (Mean = 30.3; SD = 9.96) were recruited from offices of the Arab American Chaldean Council (ACC) and from private hair salons. | Questionnaire was adapted for the survey (based on the published instruments) and included questions that measured the participants' exposure to IPV during their entire life and were categorized as controlling behavior, threatening behavior and physical violence. | 93 % of the Iraqi immigrant women reported controlling behavior; 80 % reported physical violence; and 76 % reported threatening behavior. | 4 |
| Denham et al. 2007; USA | 119 Latin immigrant women who were aged 18 or older (Mean = 30.3) were contacted from 12 work sites. | Adapted from the abused assessment screening | 17.1 % of the immigrant women reported psychological abuse; 12.2 % reported physical abuse; and 8.5 % reported threats of abuse, over last year, in the context of intimate relationships. | 4 |
| Dias et al. 2013; Portugal | 368 immigrant women from Africa (191), Brazil (125) and Eastern Europe (50), who were aged 18 or older, were recruited between October 2008 and May 2009 and selected through the snowball sampling technique in the community. | Built for the survey and containing closed-ended questions about interpersonal violence experiences | 11.4 % of immigrant women reported emotional violence; 7.1 % reported physical violence; and 16.6 % reported sexual violence. 43.6 % identified the intimate partner as the perpetrator; 17.5 % identified a relative; 8.38 % identified a friend; 10.5 % identified a co-worker; and 17.5 % a stranger. | 5 |
| Fedovsky et al. 2008; USA | 105 Latin and Spanish immigrant women, who were aged between 18 and 64 (Mean = 35.5; SD = 11.4), were recruited from a primary care clinic in a large, urban public hospital. | Index of Spouse Abuse | Almost one third of the sample (37 %) met criteria for a current or past history of IPV; nearly half of the women (50 %) reported feeling controlled by a partner at some point during their lives. | 4 |
| Ferbrant et al. 2011; Sweden | A sub-sample of the 2004 Public Health Survey in Scania, composed of 2024 immigrant women from 98 countries, aged between 18 and 64 (Mean = 40.54; SD = 12.67). | Exposure to the threat of violence and to physical assault, over the last 12 months, based on the responses of two questions, with possible responses being "yes" or "no". The researchers also asked about the settings where the violence occurred. | 9 % of immigrant women reported perceived threat of violence, and 4.7 % reported physical violence over the last 12 months. The settings of the occurrence of violence included at home (2 %), at work/school (1.3 %), in a public place (1 %), in the neighborhood (0.5 %); and other places (1.6 %). | 5 |

Table 1 (continued)

| Author(s), Year, Country | Settings and samples | Measures of violence | Results | Quality assessment |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|--------------------|
| Fife et al. 2008; USA | 74 Mexican immigrant women, with a regular partner during the preceding 1–2 years, aged 18 or older, recruited from community health centers. | Survey was developed by the Domestic Violence Network of Greater Indianapolis as a screening assessment for domestic violence. Adapted for the survey in order to evaluate psychological abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse, before the age of 15 and after the age of 15 over the past 12 months. | 51 % of the immigrant women reported IPV. Of those, 70.6 % indicated the presence of one to three forms of abuse, and 29.4 % reported more than three forms of abuse. | 4 |
| Gunuge et al. 2012; Canada | 60 immigrant women (30 Iranian and 30 Sri Lankan), aged 21 or older, recruited by their key contacts with the Iranian and Sri Lankan communities. | | Approximately 43 % of the participants in the Iranian sample and approximately 63 % of the Sri Lankan Tamil group reported violence by a partner/spouse during their lifetime. In the Iranian group, a maximum of 30 % reported psychological abuse; 7 % reported physical violence; and 7 % reported sexual violence. In the Sri Lankan Tamil group, 30 % reported psychological abuse; 13 % reported physical violence; and none of the women reported sexual violence. | 5 |
| Lee 2007 USA | 163 Korean immigrant women, aged 18–93 (Mean = 42.19; SD = 8.07), recruited from different community services. | Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2) and Parent-Child Conflict Tactic Scales (CTSPC2) | 72.8 % of the women reported psychological aggression; 29.4 % reported physical assault; and 25 % reported injury, over the past year. 73.5 % reported psychological aggression in their childhood, and 72.8 % reported physical assault in their childhood. | 5 |
| Liles et al. 2012 USA | 495 Korean immigrant women, with a partner over the past year, aged 18 or older (Mean = 46.1; SD = 14.4), recruited by telephone, between 2006 and 2007. | Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2) | 27.4 % of the women reported psychological aggression by a partner over the past year; 17.3 % reported sexual coercion; 2 % reported physical assault; and 1.2 % reported injury. | 5 |
| Prozman et al. 2011 Netherlands | 87 immigrant women, aged 19–90, from different parts of the globe, recruited from a primary care waiting room. | Composite Abuse Scale (CAS) | 37.9 % of immigrant women experienced intimate partner violence within their lifetime. | 4 |
| Raj and Silverman 2003 USA | 160 South Asian immigrant women aged 18–62 (Mean = 31.6; SD = 9.5), recruited via community outreach (e.g., flyers and snow-ball sample referrals). The majority (83.1 %) were Indian, and the remaining 16.9 % were Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Sri Lankan or Nepalese. | Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS) | 40.8 % of immigrant women reported any abuse; 30.6 % reported physical abuse; 18.8 % reported sexual abuse; and 15.7 % reported injury/need for medical care due to the abuse. | 4 |
| Raj et al. 2005 USA | 189 South Asian immigrant women, aged 18–68 were recruited via community outreach (e.g., flyers and snow-ball sample referrals). The majority (95 %) were Indian. | Four items were adapted from the Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System were used to assess physical abuse, sexual abuse and injury from abuse, by the women's current male partners. | 17 % of women reported IPV over the past year from the partner. 55 % reported physical assault; 93 % reported sexual abuse; and 30 % reported injury from the abuse, in regard to their current relationship. | 5 |
| Sabina et al. 2013 USA | Sub-sample of the Sexual Assault Among Latinas (SALAS), composed of 1378 Latin immigrant women, aged 18 or older. | Lifetime Trauma and Victimization History (LTVH), in order to assess interpersonal violence during their lifetime. | 19.7 % of immigrant women reported any type of violence; 12 % reported threats of violence; 10 % reported stalking, 8.9 % reported physical violence; 6 % reported sexual violence. | 6 |
| Shibusawa and Yick 2007 USA | Subset of a larger telephone survey, composed of 77 Chinese immigrants, aged 50–86 (Mean = 59.3, SD = 8.65). This survey was conducted with men and women, presented the prevalence of domestic violence per sex, but did not present the number of females in the sample. | Physical violence subscale of Conflict Tactics Scale (TS) | 7.1 % of women reported that they had experienced minor forms of violence by their spouses/intimate partner during the last 12 months. In regard to lifetime victimization, 14.3 % of the women disclosed being victimized by minor forms of physical violence, and 3.6 % reported victimization by severe physical violence. | 4 |
| Thapa-Oli et al. 2009 USA | 45 Nepalese immigrant women, aged 20–49, married, identified by a female Nepali community leader after previous contact by the researcher. | Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS2) | 54.1 % of immigrant women reported emotional or psychological abuse in a current relationship; 35.6 % reported physical abuse; and 28.9 % reported the threat of physical abuse. | 4 |

Table 1 (continued)

| Author(s), Year, Country | Settings and samples | Measures of violence | Results | Quality assessment |
|---|--|---|---|--------------------|
| Torrubiano-Dominguez and Vives-Cases 2013 Spain | 1607 immigrant women from Morocco, Ecuador and Romania, aged at least 18, recruited from different community services | Index of Spouse Abuse | 15.6 % of Ecuadorian women reported violence over the last year; 10.9 % of Moroccan women and 8.6 % of Romanian women reported violence over the last year. | 6 |
| Vives-Cases et al. 2009 Spain | 599 immigrant women, aged 18 or older, recruited from the community. | Index of Spouse Abuse | 27.9 % of immigrant women reported IPV over the last 12 months. | 5 |
| Vives-Cases et al. 2010 Spain | 635 immigrant women in Spain, aged 18–70, mostly from Latin America (73.1 %), recruited from primary healthcare centers, during 2006–2007. | Index of Spouse Abuse | 23.1 % of immigrant women reported any type of IPV over the last 12 months; 14.3 % reported psychological and physical violence; 4.7 % only reported psychological violence; and 2.7 % only reported physical violence, by a partner within the past 12 months. | 5 |
| Wheeler et al. 2010 USA | Sub-sample of a National representative survey (NESARC Wave 1) survey, composed of 3973 immigrant women, aged 18 or older. | Personal nonfatal victimization was measured by means of a single question that asked how often during the past year a respondent was personally the victim of a crime. | 3.58 % of the immigrant women reported personal, nonfatal victimization over the past year. | 4 |
| Wrangle et al. 2008 USA | 105 Latina immigrant women, aged 18–64 (Mean = 38.5; SD = 11.4), recruited from a healthcare setting. | Three questions of the STAT, an English language IPV screening tool that was developed by Paranjape and Liebschutz, and four other screening questions about emotional abuse and control. | 31 % of immigrant women reported IPV during their lifetime; 27.6 % reported physical abuse; and 25.7 % reported emotional abuse. | 5 |

was 4 points (Shepherd et al. 2006). The methodological quality of studies was assessed in order to control for possible evaluation bias errors and prevent erroneous extrapolation of results.

Results

Sample, Methods, and Instruments

All of the analyzed surveys were transversal or cross-sectional, were implemented at one time point, and were conducted in order to estimate the prevalence of current or lifetime violence in immigrant women. Regarding the sample method that was applied, 15 surveys (63 %) used convenience samples and from the remaining nine surveys (37 %), four used sub-samples of national surveys; two were based on probabilistic samples; one used a stratified sample; one was based on a simple random sample; and one used an intentional sample. Data collection was conducted mostly ($n = 18$, 75 % of studies) in community (population based): in five (21 %) studies the recruitment was in health primary care centers and one (4 %) in specialized centers for victims. Data collection was self-administered questionnaires ($n = 10$, 42 %), face to face interviews ($n = 9$, 38 %), and telephone interviews ($n = 5$, 21 %).

In the selected surveys, the sample size of immigrant women varied between 27 and 3973: eight surveys (33 %) used samples with $n < 100$; 10 (42 %) were based on a sample size that varied from 100 to 500; two surveys (8 %) used a sample size that varied from 500 to 1000; and the remaining four (17 %) were based on a sample size that was greater than 1000 immigrant women.

Half ($n = 12$, 50 %) of the analyzed surveys were based on samples that only included immigrant women. From the remaining 12, eight (33 %) conducted comparative analyzes between native and immigrant, and four (17 %) used mixed gender samples: men (native and/or immigrant) and women (native and/or immigrant).

Relatedly to the quality assessment, half of the studies ($n = 12$, 50 %) scored four, 10 (42 %) scored 5 and only two studies (8 %) scored 6. We must underline the fact that we only extracted data related to immigrant women and their victimization prevalence (see Table 1).

More than half of the selected studies ($n = 13$, 54 %) evaluated violence through the use of questionnaires that specifically were created for the study or were adapted from other published instruments. Regarding the other 11 (46 %), the victimization questionnaires that were used included: four (17 %) adopted the *Revised Conflict Tactic Scale* (CTS2); three (13 %) used the *Index of Spouse Abuse* (ISA); two (8 %) used *Conflict Tactics Scale* (Physical subscale); one (4 %) used the questionnaire that was created by the

Domestic Violence Network of Greater Indianapolis; and one (4 %) used the *Lifetime Trauma Victimization History (LTVH)* measurement. The time frame used in the studies was variable: 16 (66 %) studies assessed violence in during 12 months preceding the study, four (17 %) during lifetime and four (17 %) assessed both (i.e., 12 months preceding the study and lifetime violence).

From the surveys, 16 (66 %) that were included in the present systematic review were conducted in the North American continent: 14 (58 %) in the USA and two (8 %) in Canada. They studied the communities of Asian immigrant women ($n = 10$, 42 %) and women from Latin America ($n = 5$, 21 %). Two (8 %) surveys did not dissect the immigrant population that was studied. In the European continent, eight surveys (33 %) were conducted: five (21 %) in Spain one (4 %) in Sweden; one (4 %) in the Netherlands: and one (4 %) in Portugal. Six (25 %) of these surveys studied immigrant communities from several parts of the world, and only two (8 %) studied communities that were specifically from Latin America.

From the 24 studies that are included in this systematic review, six of them (25 %) focused their attention on the more general definition of interpersonal violence: two (8 %) calculated the prevalence of violence in general and four (17 %) differentiated the prevalence based on the different types of violence that were experienced: four (17 %) reported prevalence of emotional and/or physical violence; three (13 %) reported the prevalence of sexual violence; one reported the prevalence of stalking. Three (13 %) of the articles presented results about where the violence occurred ($n = 1$, 4 %) or about the perpetrators ($n = 2$, 8 %).

The majority of the studies ($n = 18$; 75 %) that was included in this systematic review specifically focused on IPV: four (17 %) presented general prevalence of IPV and 14 (58 %) differentiated the forms of violence that immigrant women experienced in intimate relationships (physical, psychological and sexual violence by a partner were studied in five (21 %) studies; physical and psychological violence by a partner were studied in eight (33 %) studies and one (4 %) study focused only in physical IPV). Only two (8.3 %) studies assessed the co-occurrence of different forms of violence.

Prevalence of Violence against Immigrant Women in Europe

Interpersonal Violence in General

In Sweden, perceived threat of violence and exposure to physical violence, during 12 months, was studied in a group of 2024 immigrant women, from 98 different countries, aged between 18 and 64 years. The researchers concluded that 9 % reported violence threat and 4.7 % physical violence. The probability of violence been occurred at home or at

work/school was higher (2 % and 1.6 % respectively) than in other places (Fembrant et al. 2011).

In Spain, two studies were conducted to estimate prevalence of interpersonal violence in immigrant women, during 12 months. One of them involved a sample composed by 1607 adult immigrant women from Ecuador, Morocco and Romania (Torrubiano-Dominguez and Vives-Cases 2013) and other studied a group of 267 Ecuadorian women in Spain (Alvarez-del Arco et al. 2013). Analysing the prevalence of violence, by country of origin, Ecuadorian women reported the higher prevalence of violence, ranging from 13 % (Alvarez-del Arco et al. 2013) and 15.6 % (Torrubiano-Dominguez and Vives-Cases 2013), and Romanian reported the lowest prevalence (8.6 %) Torrubiano-Dominguez and Vives-Cases 2013). Alvarez-del Arco et al. (2013) discriminated the types of violence experienced by Ecuadorian women: emotional abuse was the most reported (14 %), followed by physical (9 %) and sexual (3 %). The partner was, in 48 % of cases, the perpetrator and in 15 % was the mother and/or the father.

In Portugal, interpersonal violence was studied in the three most numerous communities of immigrants (Brazilian, African and Eastern Europe). The results showed the same pattern described above: emotional abuse was most prevalent (11.4 %), followed by physical (7.1 %) and sexual (1.6 %). The intimate partner was the most reported perpetrator (43.9 %) and the relatives were the second most frequent (17.5 %). In the same study was possible to verify that violence occurred also in the work place (10.5 %). (Dias et al. 2013).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

The most prevalent form of violence was reported in the context of intimate partner relationships (Table 2). In the European continent (Spain), two studies were conducted, that determined the prevalence of IPV in immigrant women: a study with Latina women revealed that 23 % of them experienced IPV in the previous 12 months (Vives-Cases et al. 2010), and a study with immigrant women from different parts of the globe revealed a high prevalence of IPV (27.9 %) (Vives-Cases et al. 2009). During the lifetime of these women, a high prevalence of IPV was reported in the Netherlands by a heterogeneous group of immigrants (37.9 %) (Prosman et al. 2011).

In general, psychological violence was the most reported form of violence, independent of the origin country of the women; however, the results varied from a minimum of 3.7 % (Alonso and Labrador 2008) to a maximum of 4.7 % (Vives-Cases et al. 2010) in intimate relationships, regarding prevalence rates in two independent surveys, whose samples included immigrant Latina American women living in Spain. The prevalence of co-occurrence of different forms of

Table 2 Prevalence of violence against immigrant women in Europe

| Country of immigration Nationality (Bibliographic reference) | Interpersonal Violence | | Physical Violence | | Psychological Violence | Sexual Violence | Co-occurrence |
|--|------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Current | Lifetime | Current | Lifetime | Current | Current | |
| Netherlands Heterogeneous group (33) (Prozman et al. 2011) | - | 37.9 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Portugal African, Brazilian and Eastern Europe (Dias et al. 2013) | - | - | 7.1 | - | 11.4 | 1.6 | - |
| Spain Ecuador (Alvarez-del Arco et al. 2013) | 13 | - | 9 | - | 14 | 3 | - |
| Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru (Alonso and Labrador 2008) | - | - | - | - | 3.7 | - | 25.9 ^a ; 70.4 ^b |
| Morocco, Ecuador and Romania (Torrubiano-Dominguez and Vives-Cases 2013) | 11.7 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Latina America (73 %) and others (Vives-Cases et al. 2010) | - | - | 2.7 | - | 4.7 | - | 14.3 ^a |
| Heterogeneous group (Vives-Cases et al. 2009) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Sweden Heterogeneous group from 98 countries (Fernbrant et al. 2011) | - | - | 4.7 | - | 9 | - | - |

Current refers to 12 months previous to study

^a co-occurrence of physical and psychological violence

^b co-occurrence of physical, psychological and sexual violence

violence was presented in the same two surveys that were developed in Spain: physical and psychological violence varied from 14.3 % (Vives-Cases et al. 2010) to 25.9 % (Alonso and Labrador 2008), and three types of violence (physical, emotional, and sexual) were reported by 70.4 % of women (Alonso and Labrador 2008).

Prevalence of Violence against Immigrant Women in North America

Interpersonal Violence in General

In the USA, a survey including a national sample of a heterogeneous group of immigrants concluded that 3.58 % of women were experienced interpersonal violence, during 12 months (Wheeler et al. 2010). In the same country, another study, conducted with adult (aged over 18) Latina women, with a sub-sample of a national study, concluded that, among the immigrants, 19.7 % reported some type of violence during lifetime. Analyzing the different types of violence experienced, the threats were the most frequent (12 %), followed by stalking (10 %), physical (8.9 %) and sexual violence (6 %) (Sabina et al. 2013).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

In the USA, four studies were developed with women from South Asian countries (Table 3). Two of the studies revealed the prevalence of IPV in the current year from studies, which ranged from 17 % (Raj et al. 2005) to 70.5 %, (Adam and Schewe 2007) while only one study described the prevalence of IPV over the lifetime of the women, which was 76.9 % for the Indian and Pakistani women in the sample (Adam and Schewe 2007). South Asian immigrants were also studied by Canadian researchers, who found that the prevalence rates of IPV in the lifetimes of Iranian and Sri Lanka immigrant women were 43 % and 63 %, respectively (Guruge et al. 2012).

The studies conducted with immigrants from Latin America in USA revealed the prevalence of IPV over the previous 12 months, which ranged from 37 % in Latina and Spanish women (Fedovskiy et al. 2008) to 51 % in Mexican women (Fife et al. 2008).

Psychological abuse in intimate relationships was the most prevalent reported by almost all of the groups of immigrants ranging from 14.7 %, of immigrant women who live in Canada (Ahmad et al. 2005) to 76 % of Iraqi women who live in the USA (Barkho et al. 2011).

Discussion

The results from this systematic review underline the existence of scientific knowledge on the types of violence against

Table 3 Prevalence of violence against immigrant women in North America

| Country of immigration | Nationality (Bibliographic reference) | Interpersonal Violence | | IPV | | Physical Violence | | Psychological Violence | | Sexual Violence | |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|----------|---------|----------|-------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| | | Current | Lifetime | Current | Lifetime | Current | Lifetime | Current | Lifetime | Current | Lifetime |
| USA | Indian and Pakistani (Adam and Schewe 2007) | - | - | 70.5 | - | 39.7 | 4.7 | 65.4 | 73.1 | 46.8 | 53.2 |
| Iraqi | (Barkho et al. 2011) | - | - | - | - | 80 | - | 76 | - | - | - |
| Korean | (Lee 2007) | - | - | - | - | 29.4 | 73 | 72.8 | 74 | - | - |
| Korean | (Liles et al. 2012) | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 27.4 | - | 17.3 | - |
| South Asian | (83 % from Indian) (Raj and Silverman 2003) | - | - | - | - | 30.6 | - | - | - | 18.8 | - |
| South Asian | (95 % from India) (Raj et al. 2005) | - | - | 17 | - | 55 | - | - | - | 93 | - |
| Chinese | (Shibusawa and Yick 2007) | - | - | - | - | 7.1 | - | 14.3 | - | - | - |
| Nepalese | (Thapa-Oli et al. 2009) | - | - | - | - | 35.6 | - | 54.1 | - | - | - |
| Latina | (Sabina et al. 2013) | - | 19.7 | - | - | - | 8.9 | - | 12 | - | 6 |
| Latina | (Denham et al. 2007) | - | - | - | - | 12.2 | 19.5 | 17.1 | - | - | - |
| Latina | (Wrangle et al. 2008) | - | - | - | 31 | - | 27.6 | - | 25.7 | - | - |
| Latina and Spanish | (Fedovskiy et al. 2008) | - | - | 37 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mexican | (Fife et al. 2008) | - | - | 51 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Heterogeneous group | (Wheeler et al. 2010) | 3.58 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Canada | Iranian (Guruge et al. 2012) | - | - | - | 43 | 7 | 13 | 30 | 30 | 7 | - |
| Sri Lanka | (Guruge et al. 2012) | - | - | - | 63 | 10 | 10 | 21 | 10 | 5 | - |
| Heterogeneous group | (Ahmad et al. 2005) | - | - | - | - | 3.3 | - | 14.7 | - | - | - |

Note: Current refers to 12 months previous to study

immigrant women, which mostly occurs within intimate relationships (Silverman et al. 2007). However, over the last three years, a group of empirical surveys on immigrant women was developed, and those surveys broaden the research focus by accounting for the wider spectrum of interpersonal violence (Wheeler et al. 2010), including stalking (Sabina et al. 2013), the perpetrators of violence (Fife et al. 2008), and the context of its occurrence (Femrbrant et al. 2011).

Nevertheless, the multiple types of victimization of immigrant women and its cumulative effects and impacts are features that do not receive enough attention from the scientific community, as suggested by Sabina and Straus (2008), although the literature showed that the experience of one isolated form of violence is rare (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner). In fact, few studies had evaluated the co-occurrence of different types of violence in the same context (IPV) and no study evaluated the co-occurrence of different types of violence in different contexts (e.g. familiar, work, and/or institutional). Two studies in USA (Cuevas et al. 2012; Linares 2004) showed the prevalence of multiple victimization in native and immigrant women, concluding that 37 % of minority women (African American, African, West Indies, and Hispanic) and 62 % of Latinas had experienced more than one type of violence throughout their lives; however, the authors did not present results regarding immigration status. On the other hand, 66 % of studies (16) focused their attention on violence occurred during past year and four of them focused on the lifetime occurrence of violence. Only four studies assessed violence during lifetime and past year and none did a comparison of prevalence data between the two periods. Attending to the intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1994) and the importance of the potential effect of immigrant status (Erez et al. 2009) in vulnerability for violence, it is crucial that future studies focus on the variability of prevalence and in the victimization trajectories of immigrant women.

Prevalence Variability: Cultural and Political Issues

Regarding IPV, despite the fact that all of the types of victimization that were studied had a high global prevalence (mainly emotional/psychological violence), immigrant women in the USA, mostly from Asian countries, reported having experienced the highest levels of violence. We cannot ignore the fact that the USA is a multicultural country that shelters women from different patriarchal cultures that may legitimize victimization against women in intimate relationships (Runner et al. 2009). In some studies, there is disagreement regarding the prevalence of victimization of immigrant women, when compared to the prevalence of victimization of American-born women. Several surveys reveal that immigrant women are more vulnerable to experiencing violence in intimate relationships than American-born women (e.g., Prosmann et al. 2011; Vives-Cases et al. 2010). Other surveys assert that this

difference is not accurate, and some surveys even assert that immigrant women have a lower vulnerability than native women (Wheeler et al. 2010). Immigrant women are generally exposed to the same forms of violence as native women, but it is undeniable that immigrant women face increased demands and vulnerabilities due to their immigration status; these challenges are further increased if they are staying illegally in the host country. Living in a country illegally may, in some cases, increase their vulnerability to certain forms of violence and may limit the forms of protection to which they have access (Freedman and Jamal 2008).

A number of factors may contribute to the different rates of violence that are reported for different immigrant groups, even in groups of immigrant women who are from the same country or ethnic origin. Most of the studies used samples that were composed of women from South Asian and Latina samples. Few studies focused on heterogeneous samples, and only two studies referenced populations of African origin. It is important to know how people from different cultures define abuse and violence and how they identify themselves as victims. For example, samples of Chinese women generally only relate domestic violence to physical and sexual abuse and do not account for psychological violence (Yick 2000); Indian women consider violence that is perpetrated by their partners to include physical, psychological, verbal, and economic abuse (Mehrotra 1999). Thus, victims self-define their experiences differently, which sometimes is manipulated by the effects of their exposure to the abusive story (Desai et al. 2002). The difference in self-definitions may also be because certain women live in a culture that recognizes the abuse as something that is acceptable (Kasturirangan et al. 2004), which hampers the comparison of the prevalence of violence between women from distinct cultures.

The immigration policies of host countries may, themselves, increase women's vulnerability to violence, especially for undocumented women. Despite the interest in and the inclusion of this subject in political agendas, both in the USA and Europe, there is still a lack of effective protection for these women. For example, Ingram et al. (2010) noted that, in the USA, the legislative response to the current environment of anti-immigrant sentiment pushes immigrant women further into the shadows, which makes them and their children even more vulnerable to violence because abusers use immigration law as a weapon of control and abuse. Similarly, in Europe, despite the production of reports and recommendations regarding the protection of female immigrants and their inclusion in certain national plans that act against domestic violence (e.g., Spain, Portugal), immigrant women appear to be a group that is still largely ignored due to a lack of gender mainstreaming with regard to immigration policies, gender equality, and legislation (Freedman and Jamal 2008). Note, however, that in Europe the prevalence rates of violence against immigrant women are, in general, lower than in

USA, even in women from the same origin regions (e.g. Latina women).

Prevalence Variability: Methodological Issues of the Studies

There are a set of factors that may contribute to the variability of the prevalence rates in different studies, which may include the design and methodology of these studies. In the USA, although surveys on immigrant women initially tended to focus on specific populations (e.g., Iraqi women, Korean women, Sri Lankan women) and use small and local samples that are not representative (Malley-Morrison and Hines 2004), currently, the researchers have shown a greater interest in this phenomenon on a global and representative level, so there has been a visible increase in the number of studies that are conducted nationally and contain more diverse groups. This concern is similarly visible in Europe, where researchers have studied heterogeneous immigrant populations from several countries, and the surveys are integrating wider samples. This finding also reveals an increasing interest in broadening the knowledge about and characterization of the problems of this specific population, which promotes building holistic and integrated knowledge of the phenomenon in order to inform the practice and the policies of the host countries. Note that the study of homogeneous groups of immigrants allows the understanding of the dynamics of each culture related to violence and the inclusion of heterogeneous groups of immigrants will notice the commonalities and challenges faced by immigrant women in general and, ultimately, if immigration status is an intersectional factor to violence.

Therefore, although there are large-scale studies that attempt to estimate the prevalence rates at a national level, the majority of them used smaller convenience samples. Although this method has the advantage of making data collection fast and cheap, it does not guarantee that the sample is representative; thus, the results may only be representative of the current study, which also occurs when small samples are used. The type and size of the samples, the choice of the instruments that are used to measure violence and estimate prevalence, and how data will be collected are also important issues in the surveys (Alhabib et al. 2010). Half of the studies only evaluated victimization experiences through the use of one question or with instruments that were built or adapted for the study, which were based on the goals of the researchers. However, the procedures for assessing the adequacy of these instruments were not described, which made it impossible to conduct pilot surveys that could test their cultural validity and adjustment (Runner et al. 2009). Therefore, due to the great diversity of the sociocultural contexts, there must be a balance regarding the usage of standardized instruments that could help researchers compare data from different surveys (Runner et al. 2009), specifically related to instruments that were adjusted to

the language and culture of different populations (Lee and Hadeed 2009). Note that the costs that are associated with multilingual surveys could be a barrier for the researchers in this area (Ely 2004).

The forms of violence that are assessed vary from study to study: not all of the studies distinguish between the various forms of violence; some of them only emphasize physical and/or psychological violence; and in other surveys, is not possible to distinguish between physical, psychological/emotional abuse, or sexual, social, and economic aggression. Moreover, the period of victimization could also influence the prevalence rates and prevent their comparison because several studies refer to the violence that occurred within the last year with their current partner, while others focus on violence throughout their lifetime. However, few studies did not assess the violence that was perpetrated by previous partners.

Another difficulty is related to the variations in the selection criteria of the samples; the different populations that were considered in different studies make it difficult to directly compare the results. For example, there are studies that only focus on immigration status and evaluate women from several different countries; other surveys focus on groups, such as South Asian immigrant women in general; other surveys specify the nationality of the immigrant women. While there are surveys that strategically include immigrant/refugee women in their sample, the large majority of them include women but do not separately present the results of these populations. This grouping procedure can hamper their categorization of immigrants, ethnic minorities, or generational positions (Runner et al. 2009).

Nevertheless, methodologically, it is noticeable that certain recent surveys try to be more rigorous by using representative samples that include a larger number of immigrant women and by adopting data gathering procedures that respect the cultural specificities of the samples (i.e., based on the researchers' training in cultural issues, work experience with the different groups, or nationality being the same as the immigrant women that are being studied).

Final Considerations

Despite the increasing concern about methodological issues, there are certain gaps that must be accounted for in future research, including the size of the samples, the instruments that were used, the data gathering methods and the types of victimization that were studied.

Although all of the surveys that were included in this systematic review presented the prevalence of a type of victimization, few of them used appropriate methodology to determine the prevalence. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct representative prevalence surveys that attend to the cultural dimension of the different immigrant groups and evaluate

the nature, type, level of severity, and context of the abuse. It is also important to include the co-occurrence and the experience of multiple forms of victimization over the lifetimes of these women and their psychological impact in order to understand whether violence precedes and/or follows the immigration status or whether or not there is a life trajectory of violence, in the study of violence against immigrant women.

Examining the occurrence of violence in many contexts, rather than only at home and in intimate relationships seems to also be very important. For example, it is important to evaluate whether or not immigrant women face discrimination, whether or not they are well received and included in institutional and social services in the host country, whether or not they face any type of violence at work and whether or not the policies in the host country appropriately address their needs. To address these concerns, it is also urgent to conduct surveys that may widen the spectrum of the violence that is studied regarding immigrant women (i.e., institutional violence, mobbing, and structural violence). These should also be topics of future scientific concern.

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