

Canadian Domestic Violence Policy and Indian Immigrant Women

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This article explores the problems of Indian immigrant women who face cultural constraints in accessing the benefits of Canadian policies for domestically abused women. Findings from an exploratory study of abused immigrant Indian women and community social workers in Ontario, Canada, are presented. They expose the pressures of cultural, social, and family ties that prevent these women from getting necessary help for domestic violence. The limitations of Canadian policies and programs for these women and the means to improve their access to these policies and programs are discussed. The conclusion suggests how binational research is needed to improve the situation of abused Indian immigrant women in Canada and in India.

Keywords: Asian women; cultural constraints; domestic violence; Indian immigrants

During the past decade, the domestic violence field has made substantial programmatic and policy advances to reduce violence against women. These advances have been most pronounced in the Western developed countries, particularly Canada, the

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United States, and Britain. There is a growing awareness, however, that the programs and policies in developed countries do not necessarily accommodate the diversity of cultures within those countries. This shortcoming is increasingly an issue given the influx of immigrants from less developed countries who bring very different cultural practices and family circumstances. It is especially apparent in Canada among the relatively large immigrant community of South Asian women. The limitations of Canadian policies in addressing this immigrant community, and in particular Indian immigrants who account for the largest portion of South Asians in Canada, warrant more attention and detail.

The Canadian example is potentially instructive because Canada's domestic violence policies are some of the most advanced in the world and are coupled with a well-articulated policy of multiculturalism. However, the established community of Indian immigrants appears to still encounter barriers to program access and support. Many of these barriers are related to the cultural background of Indian women. As previous accounts of South Asian women have described, Indian women face oppressive gender roles and restrictive marriage relationships (Abraham, 2001; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Singh & Unnithan, 1999). They also encounter intensified isolation and limited options as immigrants (Banerjee, 2000; Health Canada, 1999). What specifically do Canadian programs and policies offer battered women, and what keeps many Indian women from benefiting from them? What modifications or alternatives would help Indian immigrant women suffering from domestic violence?

To answer these questions, I first review some of the existing studies on domestic violence against women in India and the experiences of immigrant Indian women in Canada. This research emphasizes the influence of the cultural, social, and family context in domestic violence and the efforts to counter it. I also summarize the findings from an exploratory study with immigrant Indian women and social service workers in Ontario, Canada, and use these findings to expose limitations in Canadian policy and programs and to identify means to improve them. The conclusion suggests how binational research would help us better understand and improve the circumstances of Indian women in their homeland and abroad.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Crime and violence against women in India is only a recent focus of research prompted, in part, by the Indian women's movement and concern about issues such as increasing dowry deaths (Kumar, 1993). The embedded nature of violence against women in Indian social structure is reflected in earlier studies about the status of women in India. These studies have brought out the regional variations in women's status as a reflection of differences in social structure and institutions (Committee on the Status of Women, 1974; Karve, 1965; Madan, 1975; Srinivas, 1976). They expose, moreover, the impact of the patriarchal, extended, joint family, and imposing marriage customs in shaping the role of women.

An Indian woman traditionally faces a range of expectations associated with the principle of "sewa" (selfless service): efficiency in cooking elaborate Indian food, looking after in-laws, maintaining respectful and amicable relationships, entertaining guests, and providing a flow of gifts (Dube, 2001). The construct of femininity emphasizes submissiveness, inferiority, being docile and dependent, and the importance of the patriarchal family (Shirwadkar, 1998). Deviation from these gender role expectations are likely to meet with different forms of abuse and give some justification to domestic abuse as an inevitable part of marriage (Busby, 1999; Rao, 1998).

With growing concern about the issue of domestic violence, recent research in India has highlighted several correlates of domestic violence, such as young age at marriage, family hierarchies, poverty, and economic independence (Ahuja, 1987; Fernandez, 1997; Karlekar, 1998; Kelkar, 1992; Kumari, 1989; Mahajan, 1990; Rao, 1998). Because of the lack of reliable official data, prevalence studies, and surveys, clinical and health aspects of the issue have also been undertaken to examine and record the trends of domestic violence (Narayana, 1996; Poonacha & Pande, 1999; Visaria, 2000). Gender studies have brought out the class-caste context and the rural-urban variations of the problem of domestic violence.

This context helps us to understand how and why development indicators, such as education or employment, may or may not work to reduce violence or dowry demands in some regions,

and why strategies of women to subvert domination in different communities are more or less effective (Deolalikar & Rao, 1998; Liddle & Joshi, 1986; Mukherjee, Rustagi, & Krishnaji, 2001; Raheja & Gold, 1996). The impact of economic development designed to create more employment opportunities for women and bring improvement in their quality of life needs further analysis (Dre'ze & Sen, 1998; Hadi, 2000; Kabeer, 1998; Nussbaum & Glover, 1995). At the same time, creating development opportunities without exploring the regional variation and social complexity of violence against women is likely to limit their impact on domestic violence.

Indian women, moreover, are faced with a scarcity of policies and programs that deal with domestic violence in India. Whereas there are court-mandated counseling programs for men in North America, in India it is the women who primarily have to use the counseling available at family counseling cells, which however, are hardly used. There are also some government-sponsored housing facilities set aside for women fleeing violent relationships. A Supreme Court Justice recently criticized these facilities for being run like brothels ("Government Shelters Are Like Brothels," 2001), supporting the impression that most state-sponsored programs are counterproductive.

Domestic violence is not a priority for most nongovernment organizations and women's groups because of the fear of losing public support by confronting traditional family structure. There is, however, some policy improvement because of recent legislative amendments and a proposed domestic violence bill. Women's organizations have raised several reservations against these. Apart from problems of defining domestic violence, the proposed bill has clearly not given women the crucial right to stay in their matrimonial home (The Lawyers Collective, n.d.). Women's organizations view the administrative setup as inherently patriarchal and not gender sensitive.

This cultural context of domestic abuse in India may help in analyzing the abuse experienced by Indian immigrant women. In the case of Indian immigrant women, the issue of violence within the family has to be situated in the context of Indian womanhood taking place in the Indian culture—albeit a culture undergoing turmoil, transition, and reassertion. The Indian immigrant woman's experience is complicated, however, not only by her

native culture but also by her immigrant community and the new nation in which she resides (Bhattacharjee, 1997). This social complexity and cultural specificity have led South Asian activists and researchers to voice their dissatisfaction with the mainstream battered women's movement, which tends to focus on one dimension of these women's lives—the violent relationship (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Bhattacharjee, 1997).

INDIAN WOMEN IN CANADA

The presence of the Indian immigrant community is strongly felt in some parts of Canada, especially Ontario and British Columbia. Toronto, in Ontario province, has the largest population of Indian immigrants (554,900 or 4.9% of Ontario's total population). Of the total Asian immigrants in Canada, 51% are settled in Ontario (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2002). An Indian immigrant woman usually comes to Canada totally dependent on a spouse and, in most cases, unaware of immigration laws. Her usual close-knit kin and extended family network, and her neighborhood support and community resources, are suddenly lost or substantially reduced (Banerjee, 2000; Metropolitan Action Committee [METRAC], 2001).

Consequently, she becomes very isolated. In some cases, this isolation results in compensating control by her husband that is psychological, physical, financial, and even spatial. Owing to the cultural barriers, she cannot speak about her abuse in public or seek assistance elsewhere. Indian women, particularly those from middle-class backgrounds, are ashamed to admit domestic abuse because of the social stigma attached to it and the fear of "gossip" (Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Raheja & Gold, 1996). They do not like to take help from shelters because of the Indian woman's preference to turn to the natal family for support instead of going to some outside agency (Desai & Krishnaraj, 1987; Preisser, 1999). Patriarchal joint family norms are predominant even in urban nuclear families in India, and, in the immigrant context, the community takes the place of the neighboring kin group (Pillai, 2001; Segal, 1999; Uberoi, 2000).

An Indian middle-class woman is seldom educated about her legal rights as a wife. Innumerable cultural symbols, such as the pan-Indian epic character of "Sita" or "Sati-Savitri" (idealizing

the quiet suffering of women), ingrain the belief that the marital family home is a woman's only alternative (Epstein, 1996; Kakar, 1978; Segal, 1999). Indian immigrant women also often stay in abusive relationships because they have few economic resources and because of language barriers. However, social service workers generally do not have enough information or understanding of Indian immigrant women to effectively reach out to them (Status of Women Canada, 2002).

METHOD

I recently conducted an exploratory study to identify more specifically the problems and needs of Indian immigrant women and the limitations of Canadian programs and policy in addressing domestic violence against them. I did so by contrasting the current program approaches and policy provisions against the actual experience and culture of these women. Official documents and manuals were reviewed to describe Canadian domestic violence policy. The policy description was substantiated and elaborated through interviews with battered women's advocates and activists in the Toronto area. I then interviewed in-depth a snowball sample of Indian immigrant women to identify issues, barriers, and problems that such women encounter when dealing with domestic violence in the Toronto area. Additional interviews with battered women's advocates and activists were used to substantiate and elaborate the interviews with the immigrant women.

Because this was a short-term research project in a foreign land, there were some inevitable limitations. The descriptions of the Canadian system are based on a relatively small set of observations. They reflect perceptions and experiences of the small group of immigrants interviewed for the study and my own direct observations and review of documents. Consequently, the findings, especially with regard to Canadian policy and programs, could be considered impressionistic and incomplete. However, they are sufficient to outline the main issues facing immigrant women.

One of the main challenges in conducting research with immigrant communities is gaining access to its members and obtaining disclosure about sensitive issues. As an Indian native, I was more readily accepted by the immigrant community and visited a

variety of formal and informal community activities. I was able to contact community residents and social workers at the functions held for celebrating Indian festivals and in informal get-togethers of community families. Discussions and observations with them helped me to understand the cultural milieu of the immigrant community and the perception of the issue of domestic abuse within the immigrant community.

These gatherings also helped me to understand the attitudes of the immigrant community toward the problem of domestic abuse. The meaning that the community attaches to the issue of wife abuse is different from that of mainstream society. Certain forms of abuse are not only tolerated but may also be considered legitimate (Rao, 1998). Although most immigrant women admitted domestic violence was a problem, they tended to ascribe the problem to a regional Indian community other than their own. Prominent community social workers and activists, on the other hand, privately elaborated actual cases of abuse among all the Indian communities.

As a third source of information, eight domestic violence victims from the immigrant community of Toronto, who came from five different states of India, were drawn by snowball sampling and interviewed about their experiences. I had some advantage in developing trust with these women because of my being from India. In addition, my short period of stay (3 months) in Canada reduced their worry that I might eventually leak their "family problem" to the community. The interviews with the victims were unstructured, and some of them were spread throughout the time of 3 months. Sometimes the victims gave information about abuse on the telephone when the husband was not around or by e-mail. The joint family of one victim found out that she was talking to someone about domestic abuse and stopped her contact with the researcher.

In three cases, the abuse was physical, combined with psychological, spatial, and financial abuse. In other cases, the abuse was more psychological and financial. However, it has to be noted that in the course of the discussion, most victims expressed that just a slap by the husband in the course of an argument may be tolerated. None of these women had even sought help from service providers. One of the physically abused victims eventually confided to a community support group. Even in the physical abuse

case, the victim did not want to end the marital relationship. (However, one victim had gotten a divorce.) In the case of one victim, the husband of the abused woman cross-checked to see if his wife was meeting with "the researcher."

RESULTS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY IN CANADA

Canada and human development. Canada has been at the forefront of social development in general and has extended this development to its policies and programs addressing domestic violence. It is among the leading countries on the Human Development Index, which measures not only economic growth but also social aspects, such as education and health. It is also the first country in the world to clearly articulate policies addressing multiculturalism. These policies imply a secure life and equal opportunities for its citizens from diverse backgrounds, including immigrants. The human development reports bring out Canada's good record on health and education policies that have created better life chances for people. Wider access to education has encouraged greater female participation in the workforce.

Canada, moreover, has enacted legislation and programs to deal with domestic violence. Most Canadian government initiatives, as well as advocacy and activist groups, cite the United Nations Charter on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as the basis for government action. Article 1 in CEDAW refers to violence against women as

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (United Nations, 1993, p. 3)

The Canadian government has developed several mechanisms to address this violence. The major policy interventions are the criminal justice program and support services, such as housing facilities or shelters for abused women, some of which also offer language services for immigrants. With all these facilities and active voluntary groups, the problem of abuse still persists.

Although Statistics Canada (2000) measured spousal violence on a smaller scale than in 1993, women still accounted for 88% of all reported domestic violence victims. Women victims are in the majority in all types of spousal violence, from battery to murder (Statistics Canada, 2000). In 1999, more than 27,000 cases of spousal violence were reported to Canadian police departments (METRAC, 2001).

The government has begun recently to evaluate its domestic violence policy and programs. The Violence Against Women Survey collected data on different aspects of violence against women (Statistics Canada, 1994). However, it has been criticized for not providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue and for the method and sample used, failure to explain the context of abuse, deceptive statistics about violent women, and trivialization of women's experiences (Johnson, 1996; Morris, 2002; Sommer & Fekete, 1996). Some reports suggest that in addition to racist violence, women who are of racial, ethno-cultural, or linguistic minority backgrounds are likely to suffer violence at the hands of their partners (Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses [OAITH], 1996; Status of Women Canada, 1998). However, these women's access to the justice system and to services is not the same as other women's access. In spite of constant flexibility in the policy and the criminal justice system to make improvements, many women still do not report violence to the police.

The major policy initiatives. One of the important policy measures of the Canadian government is its Criminal Justice Program. Several amendments were made to the Criminal Code to give better protection to women facing violence, including women in intimate relationships or marriages. Ontario opened two domestic violence courts in 1997. The Canadian Judicial Council passed a resolution for a comprehensive in-depth program for judges, as well as training for Royal Canadian Mounted Police, prosecutors, and correctional staff. These provisions, however, have limited impact on Indian immigrant women because of their reluctance to make the violence public and to contact the police.

Usually Indian women do not want to leave the marital relationship because marriage is seen as a relationship for life or as a

"sanskars" or sacrament (Agnes, 2000). In the immigrant context, the wife's perception of community support is as a help to keep her marriage intact. In the case of immigrant Indian women, their legal illiteracy causes further submission to the abuse. Indian women do not have a clear understanding of the implications of their immigrant status in case the abuser decides to divorce his wife. There is also a fear that the woman will be blamed for the abuse or will not be believed by the police. The police force is not necessarily seen as protectors, as this is the general impression back home in India (Kapur, 2001). In Canada, there is the double pressure of abuse and threat of deportation when the police are involved. The women fear racism and racial discrimination from the police and others.

A woman who takes the matter to the public domain is often criticized and loses the support of her community, especially in the middle and upper classes. One divorced woman interviewed for the study observed that she could not socialize with the community members nor could she attend the community gatherings to celebrate cultural-religious functions. In addition, a woman doctor who did not care to keep the public façade of a smooth relationship with her husband got sneers and generated gossip at the community functions.

Housing facilities and their beneficiaries. One crucial policy intervention has been to provide a secure place for women to stay if they need to get away from an abusive relationship. The national housing policy body, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), designs assorted housing programs, funds housing-related research, provides financial resources for some programs, and supports traditional public housing and "transitional housing" for survivors of domestic violence. At the present, in an attempt to place more responsibility on provincial and municipal governments, CMHC has eliminated many programs. However, with all this provision of facilities, do Indian immigrant women feel secure to use them? The question remains unanswered.

The majority (80%) of the beneficiaries of this subsidized housing are Canadian born. Social workers and counselors corroborated that Indian immigrant women do not like to go to subsidized housing but prefer to buy a place of their own within a

"suitable" locality. This reflects Indian women's need to remain in a secure community network. One Indian immigrant woman reported her impressions of her visit to a shelter. All her fears of Western "loose" morals, lesbianism, and racist discrimination surfaced, and she did not dare to even think of leaving her home again, even if her husband was an abuser. A social worker of South Asian origin conceded that we have to fight against racism even within the social service organizations dedicated to helping women.

Even with this impressive record of policies and programs, the present government is facing criticism against fiscally conservative economic policy and cuts to women's programs. The social housing schemes of the government are shrinking, and the private sector is coming in to get the land. The existing subsidized housing is inadequate, considering the demand for housing and the 10-year waiting list for these houses. With the entrance of the private sector, there is no hope of expansion or upgrading affordable housing. The impact of funding cuts to the programs is likely to most affect disadvantaged women who need those programs the most.

INDIAN IMMIGRANTS IN CANADA

The family constraints of Indian women. The most prominent factor related to domestic violence among the immigrant Indian women interviewed for this study was the family constraints derived from Indian culture and tradition. A woman's identity in India is influenced by several complex and dynamic factors. It is influenced by primordial loyalties such as religion, caste, language, and history, combined with cultural specificities, such as particularized beliefs, customs, traditions, and values. All these are ingrained in the process of socialization through local languages and literature, Hindi movies, and the invasion of satellite TV (Chanana, 1996; Dern'e, 1999; Kishwar, 1999; Segal, 1999). On one hand, the mystification of sexuality because of the rigid segregation of sexes in public life and, on the other hand, the elaborate marriage ceremony, dowry, and gifts reinforce the subjugation of women within the Indian patriarchal social structure.

Browsing through the matrimonial columns of the major national daily, the *Times of India*, elucidates the importance of

marrying into a "status" family, preferably an "NRI" (nonresident Indian). These practices pressure women to keep the marriages intact. For example, two abused women interviewed in this study told of "telephone marriages" of second-generation South Asian Canadians of a particular religious community, where the actual presence of the bridegroom was not necessary. The young women said that they were happy about their family's decision to have them marry a person whom they had not even seen at the time of the wedding. "If something unfortunate happens then that is my fate," one of them said.

There are some practices in India that cross the boundaries of religion or caste. As an impact of consumerism, some castes and tribes are taking up the practice of dowry, which was never a part of their tradition. The spread of education and women's employment has not changed their dowry situation appreciably, but in some cases, educated boys carry a higher price tag. If a boy is already an immigrant, this will almost certainly cause an increase in his dowry price. Dowry has become a continuous source of extraction of cash, different forms of gifts that respond to the demand to acquire consumer goods, capital that continues even after marriage (Deolalikar & Rao, 1998; Jejeebhoy, 1998). The marriage ceremonies among the rich are increasingly competitive in terms of opulent expenditures.

Breaking such a marriage means returning to one's family not only with the shame and stigma of divorce but also having wasted all the money spent on the marriage. Even in India, there is a tendency to encourage and almost force young women to suffer the abuse in the marital family and continue to live with their in-laws and husbands. The Canadian television telecast a Canadian Indian arranged marriage that was opulently celebrated but sadly ended in the wife killing the husband in a scuffle. The woman's in-laws attempted to control the son. Ending the marriage in divorce is not an easy option for Indian women, even when they are abroad.

Shelter workers reported that South Asian women do come for counseling, however they are reluctant to leave even a highly abusive situation and avail themselves of shelters. Acceptance of a failed marriage is extremely difficult; speaking about it in public is even more difficult. It can degrade one's self-image of being a "good wife" and daughter-in-law. A "failed marriage" is often

accompanied by a loss of status and ties in the immigrant community, which serves as a support network for Indian immigrant women in an alien society. The fear of losing one's immigrant status imposes an additional burden of having to face one's community back home in India.

Immigrant women's employment status does not necessarily ease these problems. Thus, employment status does not mean that housework and other service for the relatives are shared by the husband. One of the middle-aged working interviewees related that she still observes the Indian dress code because of her mother-in-law's dictates and her husband's disapproval of Western culture. In-laws can maintain control even if they are living in India. The husband, in such cases, becomes the agent carrying out their wishes. One divorced woman told of her mother-in-law writing to her husband to not let her "get out of his control," on the incitement of her husband's sister who stayed with them for some time. As a result, the husband isolated and beat her.

Indian working women seldom have separate bank accounts. They are not informed of financial matters, such as taxes, and as a result, feel more dependent on the husband. In most cases, the immigrant woman earns less than her husband. The husband has control over her pay and spending. The funds required for in-laws' air trips are typically drawn from the woman's resources. Women tend to accept such practices in fear of causing any conflict with family members or kin. Displeasure of in-laws may result in gossip and criticism within the immigrant communities. One agitated interviewee commented, "We are filling their (in-laws in India) 'boriyans' (food grain containers or coffers) with dollars, and here I cannot even buy underclothes for myself. It's not only that you invite husband's hostility if you don't comply but being a 'badi-bahu' (eldest daughter-in-law), the whole family-kin network expects you to do all kinds of sacrifices." In some cases, it becomes a thankless sacrifice.

Isolation of abused migrant women. An elderly and physically handicapped woman brought out other major factors related to domestic violence: isolation and dependency. Even though her abuse continued for years, she could not speak out for several reasons. The abuser, her husband, by virtue of his prestigious government post, threatened her with political reprisals if she spoke

out. She suffered physical and financial abuse as well as the trauma of witnessing an illicit relationship of her abusive husband in her own house.

When she found out about her husband's infidelity, he became more violent. She described her humiliation when her husband not only thrashed her in front of the other woman but also held her hands and asked the other woman to slap his wife. With tearful eyes she said,

Somewhere being a woman, "bai-pan" (this implied the common sufferings of women) was awakened in the other woman and thankfully for me she could not slap me and at least further humiliation did not take place. But then they both made a practice of treating me as a mental case.

Yet she was not ready to consider leaving her husband: "I can't drive a car due to this handicap. So whom can I depend on for even simple things like getting groceries for livelihood, in this icy foreign land?" The abused woman expressed dreamily her wish that perhaps some day somebody will narrate her story in a film or a novel, and after watching that film her husband will have a change of heart and will come back to her.

When this woman revealed her abuse to a small group of Indian immigrants involved in social work, the husband got worried about his own reputation in the community and at least stopped the physical abuse. This shows the role of community pressure in stopping or reducing abuse. The Indian immigrant community in Canada is relatively close knit but is now slowly changing because of the new influx of Indian immigrants from Gulf countries.

Another elderly abused woman, who spoke out about her own abuse as well as sexual abuse of her daughters by her abusive husband, reported that the community advised her to go back to India because the abuser was an important community leader and a fundraiser for community causes. In this case, there was pressure from the community to not speak out about the problems because the community's reputation may suffer a setback. In some states of India, the control of joint family norms is rather strong. The exposure of sexual abuse is still suppressed in some Indian communities. Many younger men from such a community often assume security jobs that require night shifts. Their wives

fear the father-in-law who stays at home with them. He may make sexual advances toward them. They feel helpless, face constant tension, and cannot speak out.

In extreme cases, Indian immigrant women prefer legal intervention than going to shelters, according to social workers and some victims. This is largely a result of their rigid ideas about being middle class. The immigrants come primarily from the middle class, which implies caste-class status. Women tend to face the dilemma of losing their community status and support network if they leave their husband's house. Going to shelters or transition houses and then public housing means a woman has to move away from her community. This presents an additional setback to Indian women who are heavily dependent on their community and seek a network of immigrants from their home country. Immigrant women see social isolation as something that is very difficult to endure.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

The policies of the Canadian government to counter domestic violence are more developed than those in many other nations, particularly India, where domestic violence legislation is yet to be passed. However, the Canadian policies do not appear to meet the complex needs of abused Indian immigrant women. Multiple layers of domination invariably subjugate these women. It is essential to understand the dynamics of this subordination process. Family hierarchy works to contain them along with historical gender inequalities. These factors are combined with the complexities of caste and community pressures. In the Indian context, the role and impact of community cannot be ignored. Some studies also caution against strategies that directly challenge existing structures and beliefs without being culturally sensitive. They may invoke a backlash (Garg, 2001; Kishwar, 1999).

This research reinforces the importance of family and community in the lives of Indian immigrants. The problems of immigrant Indian women carry this context. Therefore, policies need to create more awareness of domestic violence within the immigrant communities and establish networks of culturally specific

institutions to support immigrant women. Strategies, such as the use of folk dramas in the Ganesh festival (which was earlier used in India as a means to subvert the Colonial regime) or reviving the reformist tradition through community-based organizations (as has been done in Bengal and Maharashtra) can be useful in this regard. Active support from the Canadian government of progressive elements within the immigrant community is needed as well. More immediately, abused Indian women need to be linked with facilities that provide social support and reduce isolation, rather than be "rescued" or removed from their abusive situations.

IMPLICATIONS

The current policies may not be sensitive enough to the welfare needs of immigrant Indian women. The gender roles of South Asian women and the cultural barriers they face are not properly understood. As a result, Indian immigrant women find it difficult to access existing welfare benefits or shelter and transition houses. There is a need to develop more legal awareness and community support to counter the domestic violence these women face. The existing accepted channels, such as those related to community cultural activities, may be explored to ensure community support. This may be essential in the era of increasing budget cuts.

Several advocacy groups and activists are pressing for more changes in policies to counter the problem of violence against women. South Asian groups and activists, such as Poonam Khosla and Aruna Papp, have confronted the government about the domestic violence issue and highlighted it in the media. South Asian feminist leadership, such as Thobani, has also advanced the need to understand diversity in the feminist movement. Although Canadian domestic violence policy is laudable, there is a need to address the varied cultural experiences of Indian immigrant women.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory research is limited by a small sample from Ontario only. A representative sample of Indian immigrants of all

the regional ethnic backgrounds was not included, despite the apparent need to understand the variations of domestic violence among Indian immigrants from different regions of India. There is also a need to develop binational research to understand women's needs in India and Canada. What are the differences and similarities between these two groups, and what do they tell us about policy and programs for these women? How do Indian women's experiences of violence in Canada differ from those they may have had in their homeland, and why?

Furthermore, comparative policy analysis of domestic violence initiatives in Canada and India could especially benefit Indian policy makers. As mentioned, domestic violence policy in India is still in its infant stages in contrast to Canadian policies, which are comparatively much more gender sensitive and comprehensive. Sufficient documentation and research, sensitive legal provisions, and sociological and psychological research on the issue of domestic abuse are still lacking in India as well. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is needed to help build up a deeper understanding of the problem among Indian women. Finally, there is a need to link the problem of domestic violence with development issues. Women's access to economic opportunities ultimately needs to be improved to give Indian women more options, status, and mobility.

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