Breaking Barriers, Building Support:

Intimate Partner Violence in Alberta's African, Caribbean, and Black Communities

A Handbook for Service Providers, Supporters, and Leaders

AFRICA CENTRE

Partnership for African Newcomers

PRAN

le partenariat avec les nouveaux arrivants Africains

Women and Gender Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada

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Introduction

This booklet is intended as a resource for service providers who work with people belonging to Alberta's ACB (African, Caribbean, and Black) communities experiencing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). We developed this booklet to disseminate what we learned during the research stages of our project focused on IPV intervention and prevention in Alberta's ACB communities. Each chapter can be read on its own or as part of the whole. This booklet belongs to a larger toolkit that includes an 11-episode podcast series, animated videos, pamphlets, and interactive sessions developed for service providers, community leaders, and community members.

All communities, regardless of race or culture, are impacted by (IPV) and while it is easy to perceive and approach IPV as a private problem that is produced and experienced by the "couple," it is important (particularly for those who provide support) to understand its relationship to broader systems and external factors that contribute to it and prevent survivors from seeking aid. Most people who experience IPV turn to family, friends, neighbours, spiritual advisors, and other community members for support instead of accessing formal services like counseling. Factors like racism, ageism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination make it even harder for certain victim-survivors to access help or support. For newcomers to Canada, resettlement may deprive them of the kind of support systems they had in their countries of origin, they might grapple with changes in gender roles during resettlement, or fear deportation if they disclose violence in their homes. These are only some of the barriers that prevent victim-survivors from accessing formal supports when experiencing IPV. Ultimately, it is important to remember that diverse communities view, understand, and cope with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in different ways and, as such, there is no single approach to ending IPV. However, empowered and informed community members can create empowered and informed communities. We can end IPV in our communities through information and empowerment— by supporting each other and developing skills to recognize and respond to IPV, modeling healthy relationships and conflict resolution, and mentoring community members, especially youth. Working together can make our communities healthier, safer, and stronger.

This booklet was produced in collaboration with Africa Centre, PRAN (Partnership for Research with African Newcomers), and the University of Alberta through a larger project funded by WAGE (Women and Gender Equality Canada). Thank you to the individuals, organizations, frontline workers, and researchers that made this project possible.

To download an e-version of this booklet or pamphlets, access the rest of our toolkit, or to learn more about our project, please visit:

https://africacentre.ca/enhancing-gender-equity/ or

https://pran-network.ca/knowledge-mobilization/tools/

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), also called domestic violence or spousal violence, is a pattern of abusive behaviours within an intimate or romantic relationship. One partner uses abusive behaviours or tactics to control or gain power over their partner. Domestic Violence usually refers to violence that occurs between people within a domestic situation (who live together)— including extended family members, children, parents, and spouses. We often think of violence as physical in nature, but IPV can also be sexual, financial, psychological, and emotional.

- Some examples of physical abuse: hitting, slapping, pushing, and choking.
- Some examples of sexual abuse: forcing your partner to engage in unwanted sexual activity (touching, kissing, penetration) and refusing to practice safe sex (like wearing a condom).

- Some examples of financial (economic) abuse: stopping your partner from getting a job, not letting your partner have access to family income, and destroying your partner's belongings.
- Psychological abuse attempts to alter or manipulate the way someone thinks. An example of psychological abuse is gaslighting.
- Some examples of emotional abuse: calling your partner names, treating your partner as beneath you, threatening to harm yourself/others, threatening to have your partner deported, shifting blame, stalking, or using technology to track and/or monitor your partner[1].

In Canada, police-reported data suggests that dating partner violence is more prevalent than spousal (marital) violence. Youth aged 15-24 experience the highest rate of dating violence at a rate of 520 victims per 100,000.[2]

IPV affects mental health— people who experience IPV might struggle with depression, anxiety, or thoughts of suicide. Children who grow up exposed to IPV struggle in school, with anxiety and sleep difficulties, might engage in aggressive behaviors, and can struggle with conflict resolution. IPV contributes to family dysfunction and the breakdown of families. People who engage in abusive behaviours might feel shame and have difficulty accessing support to change their behaviour. Women who experience IPV may experience poor mental health, which then impacts their parenting. IPV may impact employment stability, thus impacting the family's finances. It may also lead to exposure to the legal system or the removal of children from the home.

1 Community Initiatives Against Family Violence. (2020, March 16). Our definition of family violence. Community Initiatives Against Family Violence. https://ciafv.com/about-us/our-definition-of-fv/; Domestic Violence Awareness Project. (2018). Helping to End Domestic Violence. Harrisburg , PA; National Resource Centre on Domestic Violence. https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/assets/files/2018-10/NRCDV-HelpingEndDV%28English%29-Sept2018.pdf

2 Statistics Canada (2012). Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, no. 85-002-X. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Ministry of Industry, 2012.

Gender Relations

Gender relations: “Gender relations are the specific subset of social relations uniting men and women as social groups in a particular community, including how power and access to and control over resources are distributed between the sexes. Gender relations intersect with all other influences on social relations— age, ethnicity, race, religion— to determine the position and identity of people in a social group. Since gender relations are a social construct, they can be transformed over time to become more equitable”.[3]

Relationships between men and women in intimate partnerships are often defined by the individual roles they play and the responsibilities they take on within the family. These are often determined or at least impacted by gender. Migration introduces new roles and responsibilities for each partner and, consequently, new dynamics within gender relations including access to spaces and resources, and voice in decision-making. Often, these new dynamics can prove as stressors that lead to conflict and IPV. This requires us to incorporate a thorough, well-rounded understanding of changing gender relations into intervention plans.

3 Gender Relations. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2016, January 3). https://archive.unescwa.org/gender-relations

Migration and Gender Relations

Gender relations are more volatile than we think. They are influenced by prevailing trends, changing social pressures, and by the various challenges of migration. Migration requires people to rebuild their lives, often from scratch, in their countries of resettlement. This means that previously held world views and social hierarchies may need to be reassessed and reconfigured to meet new post-migration needs. All these factors play a role in altering gender relations in migrant communities.

Research suggests that changes in gender relations during and after migration can leave migrant women more vulnerable to violence at home. This isn’t to say that men can’t be victims of violence too, they can and are[4]. Most major family-related decisions relating to the migration process, such as the timing, the destination, and other logistical matters, are often made in the private sphere, where men traditionally exercise more power and control.

Post-migration:

- Men usually take on the role of breadwinner and therefore have access to more social opportunities than women. In families where women are expected to stay at home and focus on rebuilding the family, women often end up financially dependent on their partners and thus, vulnerable to exploitation.

4 To better understand men’s unique experiences and roles please see “Bringing Men into the Conversation on IPV”.

- In cases where women end up earning the main income for the house, men may perceive a loss of their status. This sudden or gradual shift in the power dynamics within the couple can contribute to conflict.
- Many immigrant communities falsely perceive the Canadian system as one that supports women at the expense of men. This perception of systemic benevolence towards women can challenge the traditional authority of men in many communities and contribute to men feeling unwelcome or undermined in Canada, which can become a triggering factor for conflict and violence at home.
- Ties to countries of origin, especially extended family influences, could impact gender relations.

Whether they offer services related to conflict and violence or other general supports, service providers must recognise the complexities of gender relations in diverse communities. Further, to avoid negative consequences in the future, services must be informed by knowledge of how these relations can shift and be altered in the process of migration so that appropriate services can be made readily available as and when they are required. Considering the intersections of migration, settlement, and gender relations will allow service providers to address underlying issues that may contribute to tensions and conflicts experienced in the home.

Parenting

On the surface, it might seem that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a problem faced primarily by the couple involved in the conflict, with consequences only for them. However, it is vital to remember that children often occupy the same domestic spaces as the couple experiencing violence. Indeed, these children, and the parent-child relationships in these spaces are deeply impacted by the presence of IPV in the family, not just in the short-term but over the long term too. Thus, IPV can become a multigenerational problem unless these complexities are recognized and handled effectively by formal and informal providers of family supports.

IPV, Children, and Parent-Child Relationships

The relationship between IPV and the parenting experience is often a two-way street. For instance, conflicts and issues with children, as well as disagreements between couples on matters of child-rearing, can be stressors that contribute to IPV down the road. The broader community is not shielded from this impact. Once IPV occurs, its implications for children and their parents can be even more detrimental:

- Exposure to IPV can lead to the involvement of child welfare services, and potentially to the removal of the child from the home. This is one of the biggest fears of immigrants who are experiencing IPV and often discourages them from seeking formal support.
- Black Canadian children and youth are far more likely to be investigated for exposure to IPV than white children, leading to their over-representation in the welfare system[5].
- Children are also far more likely to be transferred to the welfare system when their parents are employed part-time or receive social assistance.[6]
- Particularly in women, IPV causes mental health issues such as depression and anxiety in survivors, in turn affecting the quality of their parenting and leading to behavioural issues in children
- Children learn from modeled behaviours: research shows that witnessing violence between parents leads to children responding with violence. Witnessing verbal IPV can cause children to direct verbal violence towards both parents. However, witnessing physical IPV often results in children directing physical violence largely towards the mother, not their fathers[7]
- Finally, children exposed to IPV often have issues in sleeping, eating, mental health, academic challenges, irritability, aggression, and reduced conflict resolution skills.

Note that most of the research on children in the welfare system is based in Ontario; there is limited to no research available for other Canadian provinces

What we can do

Child welfare workers may have unique perspectives of IPV and must be included in the formulation of interventions. Family support workers across sectors should work together with culturally appropriate services in the community in cases where children may have been exposed to IPV. Family support workers must be trained to use a macroscopic view, to see IPV not as a problem of one family, but as one that requires the active input and involvement of the broader community. The "rescue and prosecute" approach often used in Western contexts ("saving" women by arresting and prosecuting men who have caused harm) may not work for everyone. Involving trusted community leaders may allow for nuanced understandings and solutions that take into account complex issues of immigration, shifting in family dynamics (i.e parenting, finances, etc.), and potential fear of police involvement.

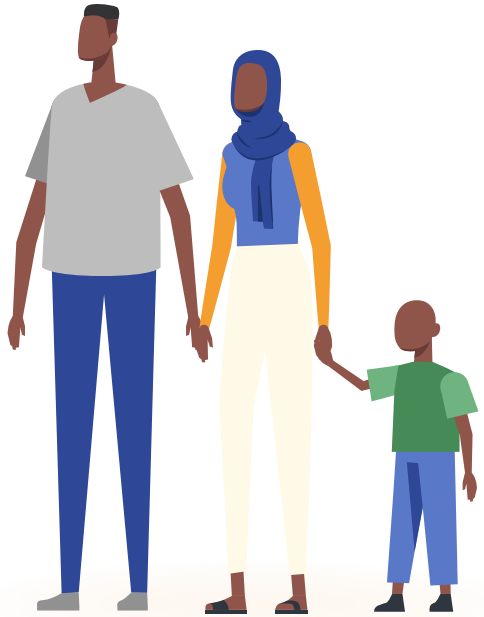
When working with families from African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) communities, family support workers should

5 Antwi-Boasiako, K., Fallon, B., King, B., Trocmé, N., & Fluke, J. (2021). Examining decision-making tools and child welfare involvement among Black families in Ontario, Canada. Children and Youth Services Review, 126(106048), 106048. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106048

6 King, B., Fallon, B., Filippelli, J., Black, T., & O'Connor, C. (2018). Troubled teens and challenged caregivers: Characteristics associated with the decision to provide child welfare services to adolescents in Ontario, Canada. Children and Youth Services Review, 87, 205–215, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.037

7 Lyons, J., Bell, T., Fréchette, S., & Romano, E. (2015). Child-to-parent violence: Frequency and family correlates. Journal of Family Violence, 30(6), 729–742. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-015-9716-8

consider emotional support needs of family members and try to involve trusted community members who share a similar background to those experiencing IPV. Family support workers require training and collaboration with ACB community-based organizations and leaders to create culturally-informed services. Approaches must understand intersectional factors and not be one-size-fits-all[8]. Service providers must understand barriers to seeking help in order to provide proactive support.



8 Yoo, J. A. (2014). Racial variations in the link between domestic violence and children's behavioral outcomes. Children and Youth Services Review, 44, 90–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.06.001

Bringing Men into the Conversation on IPV

In communities across the world, women experience Intimate Partner Violence at rates higher than men. As a result, interventions focus primarily on women. However, by including men in the conversation, not only are we able to shed light on IPV perpetrated against men, but we are also able to analyze the causes of IPV perpetrated by men and intervene accordingly.

The Immigration Context:

Migrating to a new country can have specific implications for men, which may influence their perspectives of IPV and their engagement with it:

- Many immigrant communities– including those of African origin generally perceive Canadian culture as more supportive of women and as one that sees men only as perpetrators of violence. This can discourage men from disclosing the problems they might be facing or from reaching out for help.

Men may enjoy a position of power or authority that is taken for granted. Migration challenges this position by shifting gender roles and economic necessities. Men may struggle to find gainful employment in Canada, women often have to seek formal employment because of the increased cost of living, which may cause decision-making responsibilities about family finances to shift. This could lead to conflicts within the home and, gradually, to IPV.

In addition, we must consider the various external factors faced by immigrant men such as racism, unemployment, underemployment, and so on, which can easily turn into stressors and act as triggers for IPV. Folks immigrate to Canada expecting to thrive, however, these external factors and expectations make it difficult for many to merely survive.

The current scenario:

Although men play a significant role in the process of migration and creating new social ties and norms, existing IPV interventions ignore men as agents of change and focus primarily on the experiences of women.

Existing research on IPV in immigrant communities also largely overlooks men, their roles, and experiences. When it comes to long-term IPV prevention, there is a dire need for mental health and other interventions for perpetrators. These are currently scarce and under-researched.

Why we Should Involve Men

Research shows that most men believe they have a role to play in preventing violence at home. In two different surveys, 78% of men and 99% of men saw a role for themselves in creating peaceful and respectful relationships. Thus, it is not that they do not want to be involved, but that they lack the means to be involved.

In many immigrant communities, men have greater potential to influence and intervene when it comes to married couples. It is therefore essential that they are equipped with adequate, appropriate training to recognize and understand IPV, how to build healthy relationships, communicate effectively, and support survivors.

Research shows that when men are included in the conversation, the community integrates intervention strategies at a significantly higher rate.

Finally, research also suggests that increased access to culturally-aware interventions encouraged constructive, long-term changes in how immigrant men viewed and engaged with their partners.

The time has come to build a system of mutual support where there is enough trust present to encourage healthy, respectful relationships between men and their partners!

Role of Systems

Systems: All external, structural factors that directly or indirectly contribute to and influence the ways in and extent to which IPV is experienced and addressed within a given community. These factors may be economic, political, legal, cultural, racial, gender-related, etc.

As service providers, spiritual and religious leaders, or other community leaders, we become the points of support and guidance when survivors share their experiences of IPV. Thus, we need to view this problem not as a result of mere disagreements between the couple or immediate family. Instead, the aid we provide must be informed by the broader systemic factors that shape IPV and prevent survivors from seeking or receiving aid. This approach will help us tackle the root causes of the problem and not just its consequences. This way, we become capable of providing more effective help to survivors and set the whole community up for long-term success.

Financial and Economic Factors

Immigrants to Western nations like Canada often encounter challenges in finding secure employment. This can be a result of degrees or qualifications from some countries not being recognized here or even explicit discrimination by employers on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, or race. Our research revealed that the frustration accompanying these experiences can contribute to violence at home.

Power imbalances make financial and economic factors more complex when couples do not have the same social and economic status, especially when combined with gendered obligations or duties. Immigrant women also often experience deskilling of labour, unemployment, and underemployment. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by their partners and prevents them from seeking help out of fear of losing their financial support.

Law and Policy

The legal system in the West frequently responds to IPV with mandatory charging and rapid removal of the abusive partner from the household. For many survivors—especially women— this has harmful implications if they are dependent on their partner for finances or immigration status, particularly for those who arrived here through family class sponsorship. This is a strong example of how policies directly contribute to IPV by tying the immigration status of women to their partners and leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

Further, the rapid removal response might not align with cultural values and the desire to keep families together, preventing survivors from seeking help. Many immigrants also deeply fear losing their children to the

social system by reporting violence within the household. Racial discrimination by the police and previous negative experiences with law enforcement in their home countries compound their fear and apprehension of the law.

Services and Barriers to Access

Service providers often approach IPV with a "rescue and prosecute" model facilitated by laws and policies like mandatory charging. This disregards the complexity of gender relations across diverse cultures, discouraging immigrant survivors from seeking formal aid. The lack of cultural awareness is also evident when all non-White immigrant experiences are expected to be the same.

Other challenges include insufficient number of professionals, linguistic barriers (particularly the inability to translate sexual terms), and victim blaming. Immigrant survivors rely on their communities for a sense of home in a foreign land and cannot risk being alienated, which makes confidentiality a big concern. Service providers frequently (dis)miss these cultural considerations.

Further, isolated locations of services and a lack of on-site childcare make formal support more inaccessible. A lack of resource materials and follow-ups, as well as insufficient mental health interventions for perpetrators, undermine long-term effectiveness.

Cultural and Racial Factors

Racial (micro)aggression and resulting stress significantly impact the quality of family life at home and become triggers for IPV. Agents offering aid for survivors can themselves discriminate, especially when they disregard diverse cultural considerations and pathologize violence in immigrant populations or view these cultures as being inherently violent. Immigrant survivors often avoid reporting violence for fear of reinforcing such stereotypes.

Culturally, formal services in the West often use individualistic approaches, which do not align with the community-oriented mindsets of many immigrant groups or cultural considerations that value "togetherness". However, the community itself can perpetuate the problem, especially when family, friends, and religious leaders do not recognise abuse for what it is and prioritize maintaining the marriage at all costs.

Gender— A Focus on Men

Gender roles vary across cultures. Often, on immigrating to Canada, couples face new roles and balances of power within the household. Our research showed that several immigrant communities view Canadian culture as more supportive of women than men. Conflicts often arise when men perceive their power or authority as threatened by the system, which becomes a precursor for IPV. The lack of a space to explore and reassess how masculinity is defined and gender relations shift is the main area of concern in this case.

Surveys also reveal that most men are actually willing to participate in IPV prevention programs and believe they can effectively contribute to healthy relationships at home. Given that displays of IPV through physical violence are more commonly inflicted upon women than men, intervention strategies have mainly been dedicated to women. However, men play an equal— if not greater— role in the process of cultural adaptation and creating new forms of relationships in a new country. They also often have greater influence and power to make changes within the home. By failing to also focus on men, their needs, and their capacities, we fail to address a crucial link in the process of long-term IPV prevention.

What we can do

Our research suggests several ways in which services may be altered to incorporate the available information on the role of external systems and make the provision of support more effective. An awareness of these complexities is a good first step!

Cultural competence: Culturally informed approaches, interventions, and emotional supports that incorporate the perspectives of diverse communities and their value systems are far more effective in bridging the gap between the experience of IPV and receiving formal support. This includes taking the time to understand the broader experiences of immigrant life and proactively making support accessible for non-English-speaking groups. Culturally-specific transition homes for survivors also enable them to leave abusive relationships if they want to. It is also crucial to incorporate existing immigrant knowledge bases in the provision of services— a relationship of mutual learning (as opposed to a top-down one) can increase the scope for conversation, spread greater awareness of IPV and improve the self-esteem of survivors. Further, many immigrant cultures promote collectivist attitudes and value family unity and togetherness. This is often in stark contrast to the individualistic approaches of formal services in the West. Service providers must strive to understand and bridge this gap and be careful not to impose their approaches upon immigrant communities in the process.

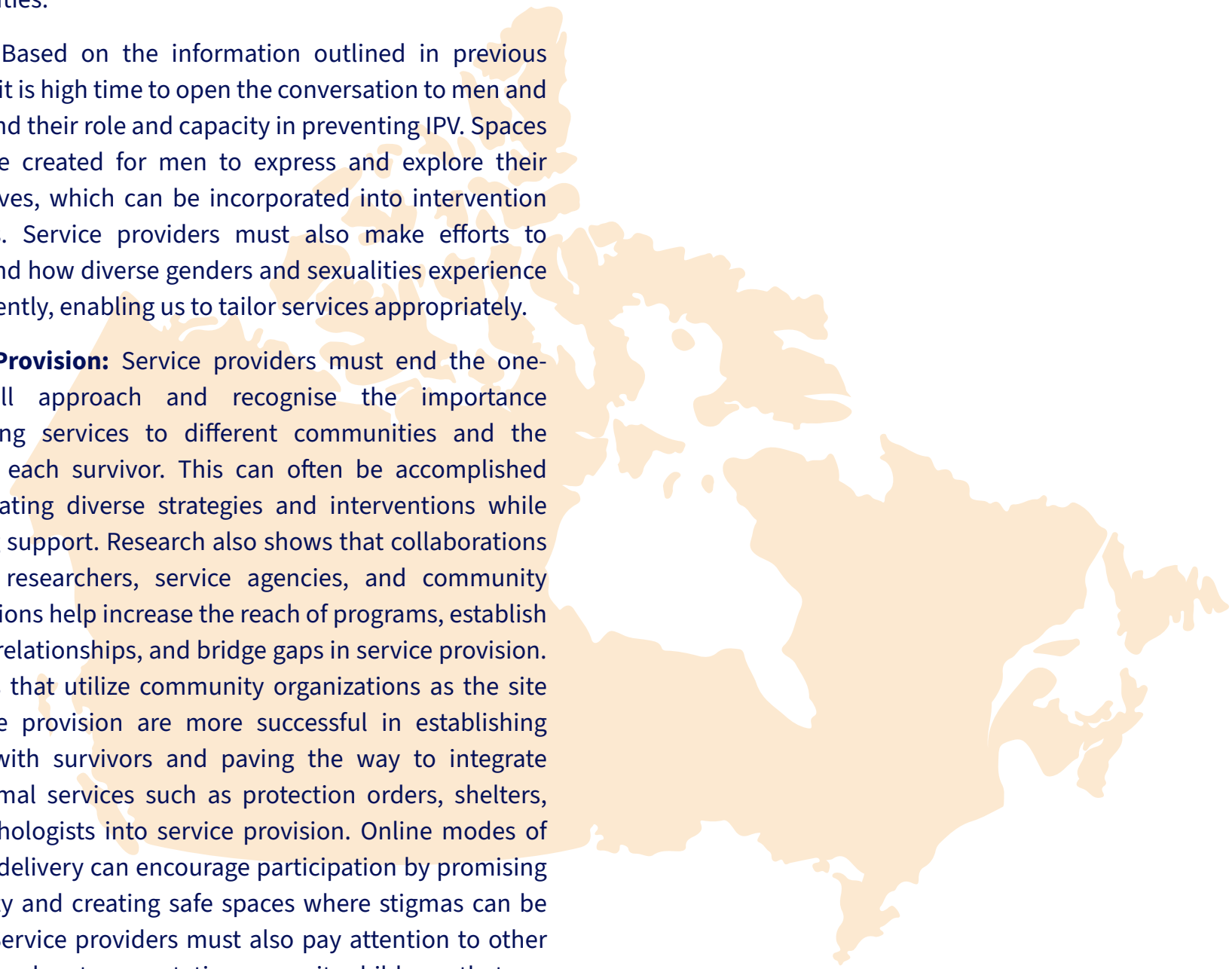
Cultural competence also involves acknowledging broad structures and systemic barriers, such as institutionalized racism, stereotypes, microaggressions, and other racialized experiences that uniquely influence and contribute to conflict and IPV in certain communities. Finally, service providers must recognise that all immigrant experiences are not homogenous; what works for one community might not work for another!

Agency: Immigrant women have diverse and often creative approaches to experiences of IPV. Service providers and policymakers must acknowledge these as legitimate strategies and attempt to broaden the scope and definition of coping strategies. Service providers need to recognise that immigrant survivors actively know and understand their situations and must trust the decisions they choose to make. Immigrant survivors are far more successful in removing themselves from situations of violence when they

are empowered in their decision-making than when service providers impose solutions that do not address their needs and priorities.

Gender: Based on the information outlined in previous sections, it is high time to open the conversation to men and understand their role and capacity in preventing IPV. Spaces should be created for men to express and explore their perspectives, which can be incorporated into intervention strategies. Service providers must also make efforts to understand how diverse genders and sexualities experience IPV differently, enabling us to tailor services appropriately.

Service Provision: Service providers must end the one-size-fits-all approach and recognise the importance of tailoring services to different communities and the needs of each survivor. This can often be accomplished by integrating diverse strategies and interventions while providing support. Research also shows that collaborations between researchers, service agencies, and community organizations help increase the reach of programs, establish effective relationships, and bridge gaps in service provision. Programs that utilize community organizations as the site of service provision are more successful in establishing rapport with survivors and paving the way to integrate more formal services such as protection orders, shelters, and psychologists into service provision. Online modes of program delivery can encourage participation by promising anonymity and creating safe spaces where stigmas can be broken. Service providers must also pay attention to other logistics, such as transportation or on-site childcare, that can make interventions more accessible to immigrant survivors.



Culturally and Contextually Adaptive Prevention

Culturally adaptive services: Accessible services that recognize and are shaped by the experiences and cultural considerations of immigrants themselves. These services recognize the uniqueness of diverse individuals and communities and are adapted to meet the requirements of each.

Most victim-survivors of IPV often turn to informal sources of support over formal ones (approximately 70% according to StatsCan 2011). Less than 22% of victim-survivors will report to the police, and even fewer will seek support from shelters[9]. Victim-survivors belonging to marginalized communities are even less likely to seek formal supports. Research has shown that culturally competent services are highly effective at addressing IPV. Unfortunately, existing services and policies are not adequately meeting the needs of diverse women or men, including those from ACB (African, Caribbean, and Black) communities. Many immigrant women, for example, are reluctant to use confrontational approaches to counter IPV, tend to avoid disclosure, and often view silence as a sign of strength as they try to keep their family together[10]. Like many people who experience violence, shame and fear of victim-blaming prevents some people from coming forward. However, there are many barriers that specifically prevent women belonging to ACB communities from accessing formal services. Broadly, there is a shortage of culturally-informed services, lack of trust in the legal system and law enforcement, and many women fear experiencing discrimination or cultural insensitivity from those working within formal support systems. Conversations concerning immigrant communities often portray IPV as a "disease" produced by immigrant cultures, but we know that all communities, regardless of race or culture, are impacted by Intimate Partner Violence.

Developing culturally appropriate techniques involves understanding that communities perceive, experience, and cope with IPV in various ways. IPV also has unique implications and barriers for each of these communities. The "rescue and prosecute" approach often used in Western contexts ("saving" women by arresting and prosecuting

9 Statistics Canada (2011). Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile: 2009 GSS Victimization Survey, no. 86-224-X. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Justice statistics, Ministry of Industry, 2011.

10 Ahmad, F., Driver, N., McNally, M. J., & Stewart, D. E. (2009). "Why doesn't she seek help for partner abuse?" An exploratory study with South Asian immigrant women. Social Science & Medicine, 69(4), 613–622.

men who have caused harm, regardless of what individual women want) is a one-size-fits-all strategy that may be ineffective for many immigrant women and may discourage them from seeking formal support. Programs and services must address common experiences of victim-survivors of IPV, while also being responsive to specific problems faced by ACB communities like fear of the police, mistrust of the legal system, or immigration status.

Unique Immigrant Factors

While Canadian-born women and immigrant women experience IPV, immigrant women appear to be more vulnerable to IPV. This is not a result of culture. IPV exists in all cultures and societies. When it comes to IPV, there are several contributing factors that are unique to ACB communities, especially those who have immigrated to Canada. Some of these are related to the cultural values of each community. For instance, the concept of Ubuntu prioritizes communal living and joint responsibility for many Sub-Saharan African communities. Conventional individual-focused interventions are often ineffective for these groups. However, it is important to keep in mind that ACB communities are not a monolith and have different cultural values and factors, which should be considered in service provision for IPV. Very often, these considerations are not treated with discretion or given enough importance by service providers. Such dismissive attitudes, combined with survivors' self-blame and fear of being stigmatized by their community, discourage them from placing their trust in external sources of support. Deeper engagement with collectivist cultures can shed light on the complexities they create for individual survivors and inform the creation of culturally adaptive service provision.

Other unique factors are contextual and are a result of migration itself. These include post-migration stress, social isolation, changes in socioeconomic status and social networks, English-language fluency, deskilling, shifting gender relations, etc. The Canadian government often refuses to acknowledge accreditations (certifications, post-secondary degrees, etc.) obtained in foreign countries, especially African countries. As a result, many immigrants experience deskilling (accepting jobs that they are overqualified for) and underemployment (unwillingly working low-paying jobs or only part-time because they cannot get full-time jobs that use their skills)— women even more so, causing them to become economically dependent on their partner[11]. This financial dependence decreases the likelihood that they will report or seek formal support when experiencing IPV. Additionally, immigrant women have lesser power, fewer resources, and fear deportation or a loss of immigration status if they seek formal support. Racism and racialized experiences also form a unique factor that shapes the immigrant and broader ACB communities' experiences in the West. IPV is a social and political issue rooted not just in patriarchy, but equally in the structural violence that people of color encounter every day. Often, these factors can

11 Okeke-Ihejirika, P., Salami, B., & Karimi, A. (2019). African immigrant women's transition and integration into Canadian society: expectations, stressors, and tensions. Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, 26(4), 581–601. https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1553852

lead to a lot of stress that might manifest as conflict and IPV within the home. Culturally competent interventions require an understanding of these factors, which are especially pertinent for recent immigrants, who often lose the support systems that they may have had in their countries of origin.

Gender

Gender relations, as well as genders and sexualities themselves, differ from one community to another. Service providers must be equipped to recognise these complexities to avoid negative consequences for vulnerable individuals. The role of men is of particular importance here, because their perspectives of IPV are often disregarded by researchers and service providers. Interventions into IPV must consider the challenges faced by immigrant men, especially those from ACB communities, that contribute to situations of conflict at home. Research shows that it is easier to integrate interventions in the community when men are included in the conversation.

Returning Agency and Empowerment

Conventional service provision often uses a top-down approach that dismisses cultural and embodied knowledge systems. It views immigrant cultures through a pathological lens and assumes that immigrant survivors of IPV need to be "rescued" from the dangers of their cultural environment. An important step towards cultural competency involves empowering survivors from ACB communities by returning agency to them, rather than taking more of it away. One way to do this is to actively incorporate their unique solutions to IPV, recognise them as legitimate strategies, and work towards broadening and diversifying the definition of "coping". By understanding and integrating immigrant knowledge bases into service provision, we can draw on collectivism, community strength, and resilience to improve the quality of interventions. It is vital for support providers to recognise immigrant survivors as active knowers of their situations and to empower them in their decision-making rather than to impose conventional solutions that do not meet their needs.

Collaborative Approaches

ACB cultures are often collectivist and respond very well to group-oriented approaches that favour togetherness. An effective way of channeling this ideology is by recognizing the potential of community partnerships and networking. Increasing collaboration between service providers, researchers, survivors, and community members, makes support more streamlined and accessible. Moreover, this also allows support providers to gain first-hand sensitivity to diverse cultural dynamics. Research shows that supportive networks like these help bridge crucial gaps in service provision and lead to positive outcomes for the community. The role of community organizations is key here because the familiarity of these organizations with ACB communities helps build comfort and rapport between the providers and

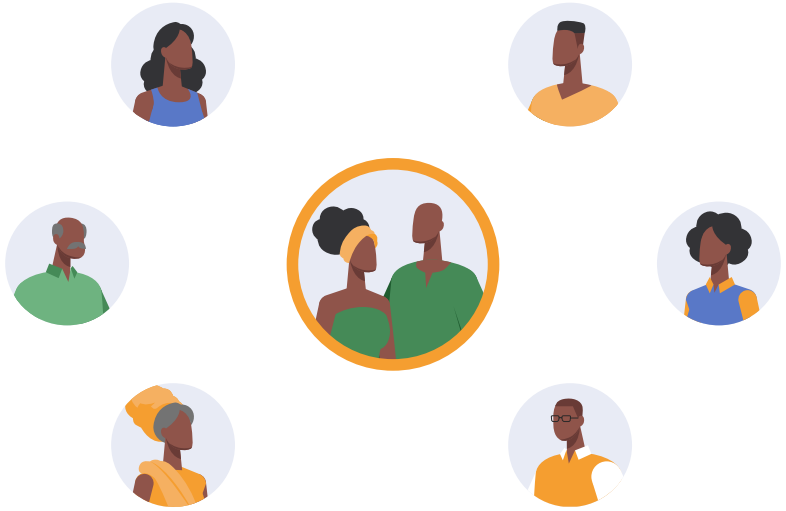
receivers of support. In the long run, community organizations can also become an effective medium for the integration of more formal services such as shelters, protection orders, and counselling.

What we can do

The more service providers engage with immigrant cultures and knowledge bases, the more strategies we can innovate to make services more culturally compatible and accessible to immigrant survivors. Existing research suggests that linguistic compatibility with non-English speaking groups is a good starting point. For instance, one program aimed at Latina women was offered in Spanish, which increased awareness of IPV in the community and fostered greater confidence and self-esteem in participants. Another effective method is the use of online environments for programming, which can create safe spaces and offer anonymity, allowing participants to open up to stigmatized topics. Acknowledging unique immigrant circumstances also implies paying attention to other tangible, logistical considerations such as the location of support services, on-site childcare, follow-ups, and increasing accessibility to resource materials. Culture-specific transition homes can ease the adjustment process for survivors wishing to leave. However, it is equally important to note that many couples may want to remain together and service providers must consider implementing effective, appropriate treatments for abusive partners and survivors— maybe even together.

Working collaboratively with family, friends, and community leaders is key to discovering and devising effective, culture-specific strategies to counter IPV and building multi-layered support systems within the community. One participatory study showed that women who attended a workshop series and increased their awareness of resources became informal bridges between survivors from their community and formal social/health supports[12]. Even one individual with increased awareness can share knowledge and build trust within their community.

The time has come to look beyond our current approaches and integrate multiple strategies and interventions to address IPV. Implementing culturally tailored programs for immigrant peoples can increase awareness of IPV, build trust among survivors, and increase overall access to much-needed support.



12 Blum, E., Heinonen, T., Migliardi, P., & White, J. (2006). Opening the floodgates: The aftermath of an immigrant women's action against violence project and its evaluation. Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme, 25(1/2), 27–31.

The Short List

Understanding the complex factors that impact IPV in ACB communities is only the first step in developing culturally adaptive strategies to support victim-survivors. Together, we can eliminate barriers to service, end IPV, and build healthy communities. Below is a short list of suggestions found throughout this booklet. This list is far from exhaustive; solutions and strategies are as diverse as our communities.

- Understand the intersections of IPV— racism, socio-economic discrimination, stigma, government policies, fear of child apprehension, resettlement, etc.
- Consider how these complex factors prevent African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) victim-survivors— especially immigrants— from seeking formal supports.
- Make efforts to understand how diverse genders and sexualities experience IPV differently.
- Understand that the "rescue and prosecute" model does not work for everyone.
- Use a macroscopic view to understand that IPV isn't individual and requires active engagement from the broader community.
- Understand that many immigrant cultures promote collectivist attitudes and value family unity and togetherness rather than individualistic approaches.
- Collaborate with community-based ACB organizations and leaders to create culturally informed services.
- Offer programs or workshops for community members to recognize and respond to IPV.
- Actively engage men—include them in solutions and offer adequate training (healthy relationships, how to recognize and respond to IPV, healthy communication, etc.).
- Offer support that is informed by the knowledge bases and value systems of those being served.
- Include cultural-based strengths and coping strategies in safety and intervention plans.
- Include a thorough understanding of (shifting) gender relations in safety and intervention plans.
- Acknowledge immigrant survivors as knowers and trust the decisions they make.
- Recognize that experiences are not homogenous and ACB communities are diverse. What works for one community may not work for another.
- Understand how IPV impacts physical and mental health, which potentially impacts parenting.
- Consider collaborating with trusted community members of the family when addressing the emotional support needs of family members.
- Connect victim-survivors (and their partners when appropriate) with culturally appropriate mental health

services (like The Alberta Black Therapist Network).

- Collaborate with relevant community-based organizations to connect children impacted by IPV with culturally appropriate services.
- Consider youth programs or mentorships for conflict resolution and communication skills.
- Connect youth with programs for health relationships.
- Connect victim-survivors (and their partners when appropriate) with financial literacy programs.
- Connect victim-survivors (and their partners when appropriate) with employment skill-building programs.
- Refer victim-survivors to culturally specific transition homes when appropriate.
- Make support and resources available for non-English speaking groups.
- Consider online modes of program delivery as anonymity can create safe spaces.
- Consider other logistics— what transit routes are nearby? Is the neighbourhood one visible minorities feel safe in? Is there childcare available? Is there parking?
- Consider the language we use and do not pathologize violence in immigrant populations (i.e. do not view these cultures as inherently violent).

To download an e-version of this booklet or pamphlets, access the rest of our toolkit, or to learn more about our project, please visit:

https://africacentre.ca/enhancing-gender-equity/

or https://pran-network.ca/knowledge-mobilization/tools/

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Breaking Barriers, Building Support:

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