

# The Immigrant Women's Action Against Violence Evaluation Project:

## Research Team:

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## Summary

The goal of the IWAAV evaluation was to explore "best practices" needed in educating immigrant women and their communities in domestic violence. This presentation describes the process involved in conducting the evaluation as well as the main findings from the study. The evaluation was in part based on a literature review on domestic violence within the immigrant context and prevention interventions developed to deal with this issue in Canada and elsewhere. Collaboration between the Sexuality Education Resource Center, university partners and community members were critical factors in the design, data collection, analysis and dissemination processes. Highlighted are the themes drawn from the research findings, and the implications these have for action at both practice and policy levels.

## A Few Main Findings

### **Understanding, personal growth and empowerment**

All research participants, whether they were trainees, facilitators, instructors, or advisory group members talked about how they learned and grew from having been part of the IWAAV Program. For the participants of the training, the opportunity to come together to address family violence meant discovering the many manifestations of violence, the right to safety within the Canadian context, new insights into women's rights, commonalities across cultures, new instrumental and emotional relationships with each other and with those imparting the training.

It helps you realize that you are not alone.... Here in the group there [were] people who shared things and I realized that there were people who were worse off and people who were better off than me, and that helps you to locate yourself somewhere in the middle.... And to know people you can identify with.... We maintain a relationship when we are in crisis. We only talk to each other when we are in crisis, because we know.  
It was like, you develop your networks, helps you with your emergency plan. We gave each other our phone numbers knowing that we could count on each other. You knew if something happened you were not alone.... If they come at 3 o'clock in the morning crying, hiding...

They realized benefits from their participation that helped them in their own lives. Increased self-assurance to make personal changes and to cultivate social relationships with others were specifically mentioned. They said, "Now, I am okay. I am [on my own]. After this program, really, I feel very strong", and "I could meet some new people who are really nice. And I can give information where I can compare, if I or other people have problems..." All the women spoke of promoting the program in their communities and offered specific information on issues, mainly referrals to organizations, that may provide solutions to preventing violence in their lives. Yet, although other women in the community felt safe to talk about violence in their lives with the participants, the women needed to be cautious.

### **Program Delivery Approach**

For the most part the participants enjoyed the delivery format of the education sessions. There were presentations either by outside resource people from a number of organizations or by facilitators from the partner organizations. The presentations used overheads or videos to highlight different ideas. These were followed by discussions. Attention was paid to the level of English used in the material and during the use of oral expressions during the sessions.

Participants emphasized the value of having immigrant instructors who understood their situation and could extend the discussion because of it.

I think they the people because they are immigrants they could know which way is better... they could put themselves in our place better because they understand better the different cultures. I don't think a Canadian person couldn't understand but.... I think the people who are immigrants can feel it, what is really happening; could have this feeling. For a Canadian person they could do it but it would be a little bit more difficult. It's like learning [from] a book.

The learning environment and atmosphere proved to be as important as the content and the learning methods. Success of the training project was attributed to flexibility in the delivery of the content and the creation of a safe environment by assuring active listening of participants' experiences and expectations.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The IWAAV model is one approach to address violence in immigrant communities. Other approaches need to be considered for their value in preventing violence against immigrant women. Also, it is necessary that the justice, health care and social welfare systems recognize their cultural biases and reassess their policies and practices to be more responsive to all members of our diverse society.

#### **Practice Implications**

- Education and Training: include content in ESL classes, address parenting issues, access to more training, having immigrant educators, involve men in violence prevention
- Program Development: address sustainability of the project
- Staffing: address follow-up work with women who are extending their knowledge and experiences in the community
- Building Individual and Community Capacity: developing awareness to enhance work of women, assist in organization of community events

#### **Policy Implications**

- Project – Program Funding Policies: Address shortcomings of project funding for the sustainability of violence prevention initiatives with immigrant and refugee communities
- Legislation and Legal Policies: Address the implications of mandatory arrest policies for immigrant and refugee women
- Government Policies: Need further examination and research at Federal and Provincial levels, e.g., child and family, immigration/immigrant sponsorship

## Introduction

The *Immigrant Women's Action Against Violence* evaluation project was the result of a need to systematically evaluate a joint training program between the Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC) and Immigrant Women's Counselling Services (IWCS) in Winnipeg, Manitoba:

The partners considered the development of an approach that engaged immigrant and refugee women in Winnipeg to take action against violence either on a personal and community level. The education project aimed at addressing social isolation among immigrant and refugee women along with raising awareness of domestic or intimate violence in the Canadian context.

Our evaluation objective was to research "best practices" needed in preventing domestic violence through education with immigrant women and their communities by determining the effectiveness of the education program; recognizing new concerns and issues as identified by involved parties; and examining achievements and modifications needed for future delivery and sustainability of the educational program.



## Methodology

A case study design was implemented since the evaluation research involved the exploration of a well defined system. Four different areas of data were explored:

- A *Literature Review* of relevant writings on violence against immigrant women, in particular on domestic violence, in Canada and elsewhere set the context and guided with the line of questioning.
- Demographic Information* was collected to assist in understanding more about the backgrounds of the participants interviewed
- Focus group interviews* were held with the following groupings: 1) training participants from various education training sessions; 2) members of the Community Advisory Group; and 3) facilitators
- Individual interviews* were conducted to "thicken" the focus group data, and when time or language constraints prevented participation from those in the groupings above.

Two facilitators, one academic and a community-organization partner, led focus groups of 4 to 13 participants. After discussion and signing of informed consent, participants were asked a series of questions developed in partnership between university and community-organization partners. The facilitators took notes on flip chart paper so that participants could see how their responses were being recorded. The research assistant, a university student, also took notes and the session was audio-taped.

The research team worked in collaboration to organize and facilitate the data collection, data analysis and dissemination activities.

The data underwent an initial independent coding by academics and the community organization partner. Meetings were held to compare codes, develop consensus on the categories and develop themes. Participants in the focus groups were invited to a data analysis session where two main areas of the research, the impact of the training on participants and the recommendations for future programming in the area of domestic violence prevention with immigrant and refugee women, were discussed. This step involved the use of a workshop format which began with a short presentation on data analysis followed by a hands-on thematic analysis activities.



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