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Taking an

iNTERSECTiONAL

Approach



How We Can Improve Services for
Newcomers Experiencing Violence



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ending violence against women

Taking an Intersectional Approach:

How We Can Improve Services
for Newcomers Experiencing Violence

This work began as a needs assessment for one agency, but it ended with a much broader vision for all organizations engaging with people in the non-status, refugee, immigrant, and newcomer (NSRIN) community.

This summary report is a ***call to action*** for all of us to take an intersectional approach to addressing violence against women (VAW).

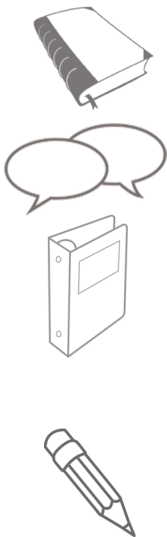
What does an **iNTERSECTiONAL** approach look like?

- **Engage with male partners, families, and communities,** not just the individual woman and her children.
- **Develop new ways to provide services** to women (often non-status women) who choose not to call police or go to a shelter.
- **Adapt services** to reflect an understanding of the ways that political (e.g. war), community (e.g. “corrective” rape), and systemic (e.g. racial profiling) forms of violence intersect with family violence.
- **Adapt services** to reflect an understanding of the ways that socially marginalized aspects of identity (e.g. belonging to a particular culture, being LGBTQ) and embodiment (e.g. having a disability, belonging to a racialized community) intersect with family violence.
- **Collaborate with other agencies** to ensure that people who have experienced multiple forms of violence and social marginalization receive timely and appropriate supports.
- **Lower barriers to accessing services** (e.g. language barriers, mistrust of institutions, fear of deportation) by enhancing outreach efforts and community-embedded peer educator programs.
- **Train VAW workers and peer educators** in the intersections of family, criminal, and immigration laws. Provide workers serving NSRIN and peer educators with training in VAW issues and appropriate and available resources.

Research METHODS

The full report focuses on new directions for Springtide's Immigrant and Refugee Women Connecting for Change Program (IRWP). This summary report pulls out the key findings and recommendations that are applicable to a much broader range of agencies serving the NSRIN community. **The original report is available on Springtide's website at springtideresources.org.**

Between January and July 2012, community researcher Tanisha Sri Bhaggiyadatta connected with 144 people who provide support to women who have experienced violence (VAW) and to non-status people, refugees, immigrants, and newcomers (NSRIN). Her research had four components:



1. Literature review

2. One focus group with 14 peer educators, former IRWP participants

3. Six interviews with key informants from VAW or NSRIN focused agencies

4. One public survey completed by 124 staff members of community health centres, shelters, and organizations providing settlement and immigration services, VAW services, counselling and mental health services, and services to francophones, people with disabilities, and young people

Key FiNDiNGS

People live complex and multi-layered lives, and NSRIN people who are seeking VAW services often have experienced political and structural forms of violence as well as family violence. Non-status people face additional barriers to accessing services. However, available services often address only one layer of identity or one type of violence, and few service providers are well informed on the impact that calling police, entering a guilty plea, applying for social assistance, or leaving a relationship can have on a client's immigration status.



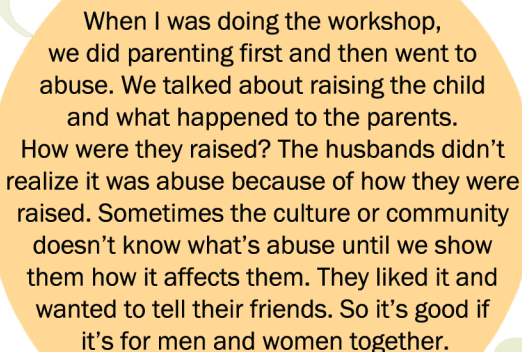
Gaps in Services:

a. Experiences of Violence

The solutions that VAW agencies typically offer women focus on separating from the abuser and involving the police. For non-status women, this approach means risking deportation. Other newcomer women may be reluctant to call police because of previous experiences with police brutality or racism. VAW workers and lawyers working in criminal or family courts do not always understand current immigration laws.

Some communities have normalized some forms of violence through patriarchal gender relationships. In some cases, not only a woman's husband, but also members of the extended family (e.g. parents, brothers, cousins) may be physically, emotionally, or financially abusing the woman. Women may fear that leaving an abusive situation will cut off the support of their extended family or their community.

Some abusers have normalized some forms of violence after living through war or political violence. Women often feel committed to trying to help their partner work through their own trauma to change violent behaviours.



When I was doing the workshop, we did parenting first and then went to abuse. We talked about raising the child and what happened to the parents. How were they raised? The husbands didn't realize it was abuse because of how they were raised. Sometimes the culture or community doesn't know what's abuse until we show them how it affects them. They liked it and wanted to tell their friends. So it's good if it's for men and women together.

Peer Educator

Women's experience of family abuse may be further complicated by their own traumatic experiences of war, human trafficking, state violence, and institutionalized sexism in their country of origin. This may lead to a deep mistrust of government and can be a barrier to accessing services. Existing VAW services, health and mental health services, and other community services do not always have training in trauma counselling for individuals, or a solid framework for understanding the ways that experiences of structural violence can intersect with family violence in whole communities.

Gaps in Services:

b. Identities and Communities

NSRIN women experience multiple barriers to accessing services:

- Reluctance to engage with law enforcement, government bodies, and community service agencies due to experiences of systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, or prejudices against their religion (e.g. islamophobia)
- Fear of deportation
- Lack of services offered in the person's first language
- Lack of services offered within a particular cultural or religious tradition
- Poverty (e.g. lack of phone, permanent housing)
- Difficulties in navigating multiple systems and services and understanding the legal implications of certain decisions (e.g. disclosure and mandatory reporting)

In interviews, service providers identified NSRIN women with sensory or physical disabilities as being at a higher risk of experiencing violence and isolation. VAW and immigration agencies may not offer accessible services at accessible locations. These women may experience barriers in accessing mainstream disability services because of language barriers.

Informants also indicated that Toronto has a large population of LGBTQ people who have come to Canada as refugees or as immigrants in order to escape homophobic violence, forced marriages, or “corrective” or “restorative” rape in their home communities. In Canada, they find that programs serving their community from a cultural or language perspective are unable to respond to LGBTQ issues. In some cases, this is due to homophobia, lack of training, or a perception that supporting LGBTQ people does not fall within an organization’s mandate.

Overview of Gaps in Services:

VAW Services	NSRIN services*	Community services**
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on individual rather than family or community • Focus on police intervention • May not understand legal context for NSRIN • May not understand trauma from intersecting forms of violence • May not have accessible location or services • May not have timely access to interpreters • May not have understanding of cultural or religious norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not understand VAW issues • May not understand trauma from intersecting forms of violence • May not have accessible location or services • May not provide services to LGBTQ members of their community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not understand legal context for NSRIN • May not understand VAW issues • Few services provided in languages other than English or French; may not have timely access to interpreters • May not have understanding of cultural or religious norms

* **“NSRIN services”** includes settlement services, NSRIN-focused legal services, advocacy organizations, and peer educators

** **“Community services”** includes health and mental health services, disability services, LGBTQ services, schools, and social assistance programs

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Family and Community Focus

STARTING POINT QUESTIONS:

How will we work with men to stop abusive behaviour?

How will we address situations with multiple perpetrators of abuse?

How can we deconstruct current models of intervention?

In what ways would a new anti-violence approach change the way our agency operates?

What supports can we offer women who do not want to call the police or go to a shelter?

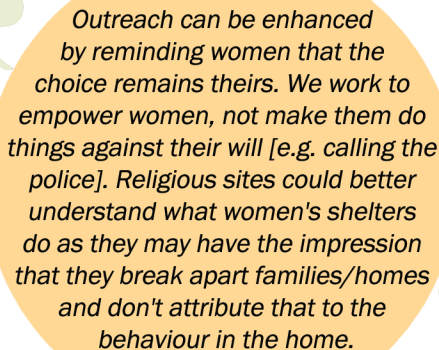
All participants emphasized the need for VAW services to take a family and community-focused approach to addressing violence. This approach would involve:

- **A philosophical component:** Understanding the intersections of political violence, structural violence, and systemic oppression with family violence in NSRIN communities and
- **A practical component:** engaging with partners and extended families as well as with women and children to address violence.

b. Community Outreach and Peer Educators

Many service providers suggested that more should be done to connect with NSRIN people in their communities.

Service providers and peer educators recommended VAW poster /flyer campaigns in women's washrooms, at doctors' offices and health centres, in libraries, salons and barbershops, grocery stores, laundromats, theatres, legal clinics, and faith-based centres such as churches, mosques, temples, and gurdwaras. Additional ideas included holding outdoor public events and workshop series. At events geared towards people with precarious status, service providers and peer educators could hand out flyers and establish connections with individuals and with other organizations serving people in this community.



Outreach can be enhanced by reminding women that the choice remains theirs. We work to empower women, not make them do things against their will [e.g. calling the police]. Religious sites could better understand what women's shelters do as they may have the impression that they break apart families/homes and don't attribute that to the behaviour in the home.

Service Provider

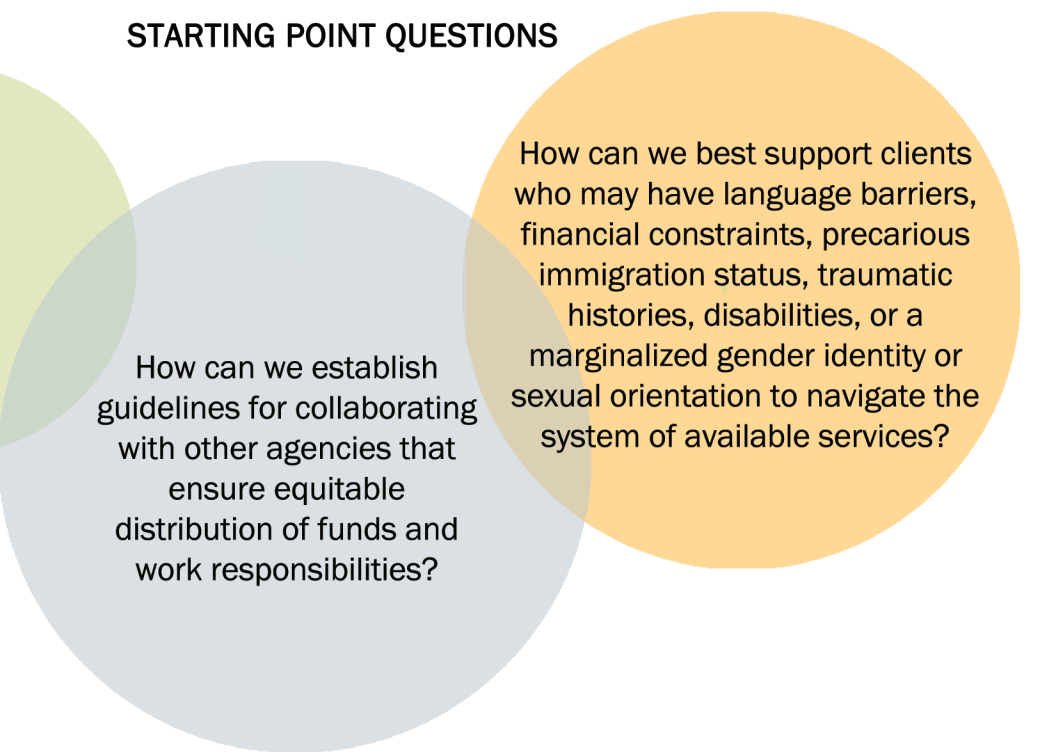
Agencies should establish (or enhance existing) peer educator programs. Peers are often multilingual and can respond in culturally sensitive ways to issues emerging in their communities. Agencies can provide peers with training that allows peers to help others navigate the system of available supports.

All of the peer educators who participated in this research project spoke highly of the peer educator program they had participated in and were interested in participating in any related initiatives. Some shared that the program had given them confidence to pursue postsecondary education, while others said that they had used the experience to find employment in the nonprofit sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

c. Inter-Agency Collaborations and Partnerships

STARTING POINT QUESTIONS



How can we establish guidelines for collaborating with other agencies that ensure equitable distribution of funds and work responsibilities?

How can we best support clients who may have language barriers, financial constraints, precarious immigration status, traumatic histories, disabilities, or a marginalized gender identity or sexual orientation to navigate the system of available services?

To serve people with overlapping experiences of violence and social marginalization, we need to take an intersectional approach to our work. Many service providers suggested that agencies need to collaborate more; in particular, VAW agencies and NSRIN agencies need to develop closer working relationships. However, participants also noted that previous efforts to collaborate have been undermined by competition over funding and a lack of transparent accounting.

Several service providers recommended that agencies should start by attending training sessions in how partner agencies can communicate and clarify expectations, divide tasks and funds equitably, and serve client needs more effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

d. List of Trainings


All participants identified training as an essential component in serving NSRIN communities more effectively:

- **Legal training** for VAW service workers, community services workers, family court lawyers, and peer educators that would cover the intersections of VAW with family, criminal, immigration, and child welfare laws.
- **VAW training** for immigration lawyers, NSRIN-serving agencies, other community services agencies, and peer educators.
- **Anti-violence workshops** for families experiencing and perpetrating abuse, perhaps using parenting as the entry point into the conversation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

d. List of Trainings

- **Trauma-based approaches to counselling** for frontline VAW workers and peer educators that covers child abuse, family violence, community violence, political violence, structural violence, human trafficking, and systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia.
- **Vicarious trauma training** for frontline VAW workers and peer educators.
- **Anti-oppression training** for all VAW, NSRIN, and community services workers and peer educators that covers the intersections of violence and social marginalization for people within NSRIN communities, including LGBTQ people and people with disabilities.
- **Continuous, Integrated and Updated Legal Training** (immigration, criminal, family and child protection)
This training should be continuously upgraded (e.g. every four years) in order to keep up with agency staff turnover and changes to legislation.



This recommended list summarizes the types of training sessions most participants discussed. For a full list of all the training proposed by service providers, peer educators and key informants, please refer to the full report at:

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215 Spadina Ave. Suite 220

Toronto, ON / M5T 2C7

Tel: 416 968 3422

TTY: 416 968 7335

Fax: 416 968 2026

info@springtideresources.com

www.springtideresources.org



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