



Neighbours, Friends & Families
Immigrant & Refugee Communities



RECOGNIZING ABUSE

How to help immigrant and refugee women in abusive relationships

According to Statistics Canada (2021), 44% of women over the age of 15 years report that they have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetimes.



When most people think of abuse they think of it as just being physical because it may leave bruises. But abuse does not have to leave bruises to hurt. It can destroy self-confidence, have a negative impact on the woman's health and wellbeing, and leave her feeling isolated and lonely. Abuse is a pattern of controlling behaviors. The goal is to get and keep power over an intimate partner.

Immigrant and refugee women face many of the same types of intimate partner violence as other women, but they have added vulnerabilities because they may not know English or French, may not know where to go for help, and may not have friends and family for support. They may also be threatened with deportation.

Sometimes the relationship may seem healthy because we don't know what to look for. Sometimes the abuse is normalized by culture and society so a woman may not realize that she is in an abusive situation. For example, in many cultures it is a woman's duty to have sex whenever her husband wants it whether she is willing or not.

Here are some indicators that will help you recognize if your neighbour, friend or family member is in any abusive situation when you observe these behaviors.



Neglect occurs when someone has the responsibility to provide care or assistance for an individual but does not. This could be limiting, delaying or denying access to health supports and medical care like walkers or asthma inhalers, controlling access to food and feminine hygiene supplies, and prenatal support when she is pregnant.



Verbal abuse occurs when someone uses language, whether spoken or written, to cause harm to an individual. This includes shouting, swearing, calling her names, interrupting when she is talking, not letting her learn English or French, threatening to have her deported, insulting her family or threatening to cause them harm by reporting them to the police for terrorism. Sometimes it is not necessary to use words. Many abused women recognize “the look”, which is an expression on his face that says an abusive reaction is coming up.



Mental and emotional abuse occurs when someone says or does something to make a person feel guilty or worthless or as if they are losing their sanity. For example, embarrassing her in public, talking down to her as if she was a child, not respecting her opinions, making threats, being jealous and possessive, accusing her of cheating even when she just talks to another man.



Financial abuse occurs when someone controls an individual's financial resources without the person's consent or misuses those resources. This includes not giving her money to spend, making her account for every nickel she spends, not allowing her to work or get an education so she cannot become independent.



Spiritual abuse occurs when someone uses spiritual beliefs to manipulate, dominate or control another person such as making fun of her beliefs or preventing her from taking part in spiritual practices.



Digital abuse is using technology to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner. For instance, wanting access to the woman's messages, emails, setting up spyware on her phone. For immigrant women, he may also block her from staying in touch with family and friends in their country of origin, thus isolating her.



Physical violence occurs when someone uses a part of their body or an object to control a person's actions. This can range from intimidation like blocking a doorway and breaking things, punching walls or doors, driving recklessly to severe harm like kicking, punching, biting, slapping, choking, burning, pulling hair, strangling, stabbing to murder.



Sexual violence occurs when a person is forced to unwillingly take part in sexual activity. This can range from unwanted sexual touching, pressure for sex, forcing the woman to have unprotected sex, forcing her to get pregnant or to have an abortion. The term "marital rape" is used when a woman is forced to have sex by her spouse. In many immigrant and refugee communities, women are brought up to believe that culturally and religiously they are expected to comply with their husband's wishes.

It is not always easy to identify the type of abuse because some of them overlap. For instance, insulting someone may be verbal abuse because the abuser uses hurtful words, but it is also emotional abuse because it may make the victim feel worthless. In another example, threatening her with a weapon till she signs loan papers is a combination of physical and financial abuse.

All woman abuse victims are at heightened risk of being killed. Police data has consistently shown that women victims of homicide in Canada are more likely to be killed by a husband, boyfriend, or intimate partner.



In 73% of the cases of intimate partner violence, High Risk Factors are involved, which increase the risk of death. The top five high risk factors of an intimate partner violence death are:

1. The abuser has been involved with police before about harming the woman.
2. The abuser has used, or threatened to use, a gun, knife, or other weapon against the woman or others.
3. The abuser has tried to strangle or choke the woman.
4. The abuser is violently or constantly jealous.
5. The woman has threatened to leave or is planning to leave.

When you see abuse, don't ignore it. Do something about it. It could prevent a woman from being severely injured or killed.

Talk to the woman about what you see and assure her that you are concerned. Tell her that it is not her fault.

Encourage her not to confront her partner if she is planning to leave. Her safety must be protected.

Don't become angry or frustrated if she denies the abuse or decides to stay on in the relationship. It is important to understand that she may be afraid or not ready to take the next steps.

Know that you or she can call the Assaulted Women's Helpline toll-free: 1-866-863-0511. Calls are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and information is given in over 150 languages.

Keep yourself safe. Do not get in the middle of an assault. Call the police instead.

Everyone has a role to play in ending woman abuse.

For more information and resources in helping immigrant or refugee women living in abusive situations, visit: www.immigrantandrefugeenff.ca

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