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Complexity of domestic violence in a South Asian context in Hong Kong: cultural and structural impact

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ABSTRACT

With the dearth of empirical research related to the experiences of domestic violence among South Asian communities in Hong Kong, this study engages with migrant South Asian women's subjective understanding and experience of domestic violence. Presenting women's narratives of their experiences with domestic violence allow for a better understanding of the complexities that inform and shape women's experiences and decision-making in the face of partner violence. This empirical study investigated South Asian women's experience of domestic violence in the context of Hong Kong through in-depth interviews with 14 South Asian women who had experienced abuse and 6 helping professionals from 4 social service agencies. Analysis of the data revealed that the nature and context of abuse posed as a barrier in their help seeking. The findings highlight the importance of understanding the influence of cultural and structural conditions and the difficulties and complexities women face that increases women's vulnerability to abuse. This paper offers an analysis of how structures thereby come to impact on women's distress and vulnerability. The study also highlights the need for inclusive service provision for minority ethnic women experiencing domestic violence.

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Introduction

Domestic violence is a painful yet common reality for many women regardless of age, class and race, and is not exclusive to any one culture or community and affects all women. It is a devastating social problem with negative consequences on women's well-being and human rights concern (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hague & Malos, 2005; Levinson, 1989; Smith, Thornton, DeVellis, Earp, & Coker, 2002, p. 3; Straus & Hotaling, 1980). Gelles and Straus (1989, p.18) pointed out, 'you are more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten and killed in your home at the hands of a loved one than any place else or by anyone else in our society'.

This study draws on concepts of social cognitive theory, particularly reciprocal determinism (Bandura, Wilson, Kunkel, Neale, & Liebert, 1977) as a way to understand the complexity of domestic violence in an immigrant context. Reciprocal determinism refers to the

continual interactions between environmental influences, personal factors and behaviour, and how these factors influence and operate as interlocking determinants of each other. This perspective acknowledges women's experience of abuse do not work independently but function as interlocking phenomena. Such as traditional beliefs, values, norms and context influence their thoughts and actions and how they respond to domestic violence.

Domestic violence is not a monolithic phenomenon and many of the fears and concerns of immigrant women who have been abused are similar to those of women abused in general. Yet, immigrant women often experience more acute form of isolation and powerlessness because of the complexities and stresses associated with adapting to a new country (Macleod & Shin, 1990). Uncertainty regarding immigration status, the process of leaving one's country of origin, lack of language skill, isolation and cultural norms that differ from mainstream society can compound the problem of domestic violence among immigrant families. Discriminatory practices with social services such as in terms of lack of culturally sensitive services and, shelter facilities and lack of intrinsic and extrinsic support can also complicate the matter for immigrant women. Previous studies have also reported that many ethnic minority women are wary of accessing mainstream services for fear of being misunderstood or having to be cautious about explaining or defending their cultural beliefs, or being seen as more oppressive than the dominant culture (Abraham, 2000a; Burman & Chantler, 2005; Ranjeet & Purkayastha, 2007). Additionally, the fear of deportation also hinders many women from reporting abuse or seeking help. They are fearful of being deported if they report any of the abusive incidents, and many women living in abusive situations are worried their children will be taken away from them if they challenge their husbands or attempts to seek help. A number of studies among immigrant women have also reported that legal risk factors such as fear of deportation might hinder immigrant women from leaving (Latta & Goodman, 2005; Sullivan, Senturia, Negash, Shiu-Thornton, & Giday, 2005). Additionally, the abuser, often their husband or partner, may also manipulate the immigration system, for instance, not allowing the woman to access her own immigration papers, or not informing her of immigration policies (Crandall, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005).

Migration has life-changing effects as it entails leaving one's home country, familiar environment, families and friends and moving to a new country to build up new social networks and adjust to a new cultural milieu. Migration also increases the risk of abuse for women. For instance, the expected gender roles for women might be challenged, especially when migrating from a traditional culture to a less traditional culture (Dion & Dion, 2001; Lim, 1997), which could result in further stress and tension within these immigrant families. Family is often the one stabilising force that enables immigrants to withstand the turbulent process of migration.

In the context of Hong Kong, a number of studies have explored and examined the prevalence, causes and experiences of domestic violence mainly conducted among local Chinese women and immigrant women from mainland China (e.g. Chan, 2005; Chan, Chiu, & Chiu, 2005; Mackay & Lo, 1985; Tang, 1999). Findings from these studies observed that female migrants were more vulnerable to spousal violence compared with local women (Choi, Cheung, & Cheung, 2012). Existing local studies on South Asians and other minority ethnic population have acknowledged some of the particular challenges they encountered, such as in employment, education, housing, experiences of discrimination, lack of information and accessibility to services and resources (e.g. Ku, Chan, & Sandhu, 2005;

Loper, 2004; Tang, Lam, Lam, & Ngai, 2006). A review of local studies on South Asians in Hong Kong revealed the dearth of information on their experiences of domestic violence and help-seeking practice. It is against this background that this study becomes relevant in filling such missing gap in our knowledge in the issue of domestic violence and their help-seeking practice among South Asian women in Hong Kong.

Method

Design

A qualitative methodology in the form of in-depth interview with 14 women who had experienced abuse and 6 helping professional from 4 social service agencies was adopted to help provide a rich contextual understanding of participant's experiences as told from their own perspectives. The use of in-depth interview was also essential to the researcher to help establish rapport with each participant prior to conducting the interview. Additionally, in-depth interview also allow for the active involvement of the participants in the construction of data about their lives and defining their experiences in their own words (Reinharz, 1992).

When conducting qualitative studies, it is imperative for researchers to acknowledge and deal with their own ideological biases (Shek, Tang, & Han, 2005). The researcher kept field notes/journals where she wrote down her experiences at the end of the day after each interview. The researcher was also cognisant of her own biases and worldview, and made every effort to present women's stories as accurately and as fairly as possible by including direct quotes from participants. To bring out the complexity of their experiences, the researcher makes concerted efforts to learn about their views and actions, and to interpret data from their perspective. Despite the frustration at the difficulties encountered in accessing women, the researcher was appreciative of women who willingly shared some of the most intimate and painful details of their lives. In recounting the women's stories, the researcher took effort to abandon the 'expert' stance, and privileging the subjective views of the participants as they are the 'expert' in their own experience with a phenomenon.

Ethical approval was obtained and granted by the University Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to their voluntary participation in this study. Following provision of written informed consent, participants were interviewed individually. All information was kept confidential and pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identification. Interviews were audio taped with permission from participants.

Sampling and recruitment of participants

When conducting research on sensitive issues or taboo topics such as domestic violence, one limitation is the recruitment of participants (Lee, 1993; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1981) as individuals may hesitate to disclose information about such issue. The researcher contacted four mainstream shelter (refuge) homes and eight social service agencies serving ethnic minorities to solicit their assistance in the recruitment of potential participants. The researcher also contacted women through community organisations as well as resource persons in the community. However, only four social service agencies were able to assist in the recruitment of participants, who referred five women, utilising a purposive sampling method. But, not all participants were recruited from these social service agencies, and a snowball sampling method was employed. The snowball sampling method was utilised

which involved asking the five women (who had experienced domestic violence) referred by the social service agencies to refer other women who are or had experienced domestic violence at the time of conducting this research. The snowball sampling method is considered an appropriate sampling method for exploratory studies among the members of a vulnerable or stigmatised group who are difficult to locate (Lee, 1993; Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Nine women were referred by the first five participants. Ultimately, a total of 14 women participated in the study. Following provision of informed consent, participants were interviewed individually

The women who participated in this study were first-generation South Asian immigrants comprising of Pakistani ($n = 10$), Indian ($n = 2$) and Nepalese ($n = 2$). The women are relatively young, ranging in age from 27 to 39 years (mean age = 33.9). The length of residence in Hong Kong ranged from 3 to 20 years. Of the 14 participants, 5 are currently married, 5 are divorced, 3 are separated and 1 is cohabitating at the time of conducting the interview. In terms of educational attainment, all of them had completed some level of high school. Six of the women were employed part-time and eight are housewives.

To obtain perspective of helping professionals on the issue of domestic violence and service utilisation among the South Asian communities in Hong Kong, a purposive sample of helping professionals serving in four social service agencies for ethnic minorities was sought. In total, six helping professionals participated in this study. The majority of helping professionals were the university graduates, ranging in age from 20 to 35 years. Of the six helping professionals, three were local Hong Kong Chinese and were registered social worker (two in managerial position), and the other three helping professional were South Asian programme workers, with one to six years of working experience in social service agencies.

Interview procedure

After potential participants were identified and the initial contact was made, participants were provided with a brief introduction of the research, assuring them of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary nature of participation. Upon giving their consent, participants were asked to sign the consent form. Prior to the start of the interview the researcher spend some time to establish rapport with each participant, asking the woman about her daily life, rather than delving directly into the interview mode. Then the researcher began the interview with an interest in learning more about the participant's experiences of a violent relationship. The researcher showed utmost respect to the participants throughout the interview.

All interviews were conducted in person by the researcher in English with some Hindi. Five of the participants were interviewed in Urdu and Nepalese with the help of social service agency staff (ethnic minority staff). The researcher also could understand and speak some Hindi/Urdu and used these accordingly during the interview. All transcription was done verbatim and for the interviews which were done with the help of translator, these were transcribed verbatim based on the English translation provided by the translator, but were verified independently by acquaintances fluent in Hindi/Urdu/Nepalese.

Data analysis

The researcher began the analysis by reviewing the transcript of each interview and going over the field notes, memo and journal several times in order to foster clarity of thought and

gain familiarity with each woman's story. Interview data were transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed following the procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This involves open coding of data in the first instance whereby data are broken down and examined, and then categorising and labelling according to similar themes or concepts. In the second step, that is, axial coding, the researcher reviewed and re-reviewed the various categories that were identified from open coding, and making connections between categories. Although open and axial coding occurs in two separate phases, they can proceed simultaneously as researchers attempt to organise and analyse the data. In this paper, the key themes relating to help seeking that posed as barrier, cultural and structural impact are discussed. The goal in this paper is to highlight women's experience of abuse do not work independently but function as interlocking phenomena from the micro environment of the family to the macro environment of the society.

Results

What emerged from the experiences of abuse shared by the participants is that in order to fully understand their experiences of abuse and the connected social processes, it is critical that one understands the salient cultural and structural factors in the participants' lives. This is because these salient cultural and structural factors are the implements through which the women make meaning of their experience of abuse. These unique conditions need to be identified and understood in order to create relevant solutions to the abuse. From the review of the data analysis, it is evident that the subjective and objective realities of women's experiences of domestic violence must be situated within the larger cultural, social and political context.

Cultural factors

Although the women in this study shared that they knew it was not right for their husband/partner to abuse them, their response and action were also influenced by their values and beliefs regarding family obligation and responsibilities. This indicates that conformity to their traditional values and norms was not merely because of submissiveness, there is also a stigma attached to divorce. If a marriage breaks up, even if the divorce is initiated by the husband, often the blame is put upon the woman (Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996; Nankani, 2000). Therefore, divorce is usually not an option for many women. This sentiment was also reflected and echoed by most of the participants in this study. As some participants stated:

I am married to my first cousin so tolerated it because women get divorce then many families get affected ... it will disrupt family ... it [divorce] will give bad name to family and relatives. Also ... women are always blamed.

My brother is married to my husband sister ... and I cannot think of divorce as it will also affect his marriage, both families are joined together in marriage ... so I keep quiet about my problem as I do not want my marriage problem to affect my brother marriage ...

Women's determination to keep the marriage in order to avoid undesirable social labelling, and to preserve the family honour were also some of the factors mentioned by the women participants in this study. This has also been supported in previous studies among

the Asian immigrant women (e.g. Abraham, 2000b; Anitha, 2008; Ayyub, 2000; Dasgupta, 2000; Mehrotra, 1999; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Some illustrative quotes from these women are given below:

... divorce women in my culture, people do not respect, it brings shame ... we will lose respect from friends and community ... and nobody will want to talk with you, they will say, she is a bad woman and avoid you ...

My friends' husband stops their wives to be friend with me because I am a divorcee. The husbands are afraid that I may be a bad influence to their wives and may influence them to divorce or speak up against abuse ... divorcee are look down in my culture, nobody would like to talk with you ... people try to avoid you ...

It is not socially accepted that women get divorce, it's the reason why women will not initiate divorce. The situation is, whether the woman applies for divorce or the husband leaves the wife, the woman is the one to be blame for the breakup of the marriage ... yea, women get the blame if there is problem in the marriage.

Some women participants also shared that their response in the face of domestic violence was also influenced by their desire to ensure a better future for their children. As shared by some participants:

I do not consider divorce when I think of my children because I want them to have a father. Moreover, the children love their father very much and the father also love the children ... because of the children I bear it ... we have to think of our children ... they are still young ...

Every time I am disturbed and feel depressed because of the abuse, I will focus on my children and their future ... just thinking for my children's future gives me the strength to bear.

Sometimes I think about divorce but I can't do anything because the children are young. Mostly women don't want the divorce because they don't want broken family for the children. Also I am concerned that divorce will have a bad effect on children ... the children can have emotional problem growing up without a father ...

Even if I divorce, where I will go, who will take care of me and my children ... I cannot go back home as a divorce woman ... the shame and humiliation it will bring my family ...

The above quotes also revealed that the women in this study were concerned about taking care of their children and families. They felt it was their responsibility to make the relationship better so that an intact family could be maintained. All the women interviewed (except those who do not have any children) mentioned that it was the thought of their children that gave them the strength to endure the abuses.

Structural factors

The women in this study also shared that factors such as social isolation, their immigration status (majority of the women are on spouse-dependent visa), lack of support system, process of overcoming language barriers and possessing no requisite job skills, makes them more vulnerable to domestic violence. Some excerpts from participants:

He stopped giving money for household and sometimes would disappear for days without telling me ... whenever I asked him for household money, he would shout at me ... it is to buy food for the children ... it is not good, it is wrong, what he does.

I cannot speak Cantonese (local language). I do not know much about Hong Kong and my husband takes advantages of this and does as he likes ... because he knows that I do not know Hong Kong and cannot get help ... He does not allow me to join the activities in the social service or go out. He does this so that I do not get information ... then I will obey him.

I am dependant on my husband for my visa, he is my sponsor ... I am afraid to anger him and I keep quiet when he shout at me ... otherwise he can send me (deport) back home ...

Some of the participants in this study who have stayed at different shelter homes shared that they did not feel comfortable, mainly due to the language barrier. They also shared that they had no one to talk with, there was no provision of *halal food* (foods that Muslims are permitted to eat under Islamic dietary guidelines) and the strict regulations of the shelter homes, for example, specific times set for preparation of meals, was difficult for them, especially as their children were also with them in the shelter home. This is what they shared:

The police made the referral for me to be at the shelter (refuge) ... while I was at the shelter, I was by myself all the time as I cannot join the program and activities. It was all conducted in Chinese ... I cannot speak the language. I could not talk to the other women there due to the language. I do not speak Chinese and they do not speak English ... so we cannot communicate ...

It was a hard time at the shelter. I had to cook my own food as they do not provide halal food. The shelter has strict timing for cooking, like at a certain time, you are not allowed to cook, and they close the kitchen. So I had to cook within the specific time given sometimes this was hard, as I also had to attend and take care of my little two sons, and also attend to cooking for me and my children. Everyone speak Chinese and I had no one to talk to or share with, as I cannot speak the language ... it was a hard time for me and my little sons ...

At the shelter, me and my [little] sons, we were separated. They told me boys stay in different room. It was difficult. I was not allowed to stay together with my sons, they (sons) were in a different room ... I was the only South Asian woman there at the time; the others are all Chinese ... and due to language problem there was no one to talk with. And all programs and activities in the shelter are conducted in Chinese and I cannot attend ...

Although there are shelter homes and a wide range of welfare services for victims of family violence, many of these services are not easily accessible to the minority ethnic women due to the language barrier. Since most of these services are targeted for local Chinese women, minority ethnic women who do not speak the local language may find it difficult to access. The helping professionals also stated that currently, there are no ethnic-specific services for domestic violence. As some helping professionals remarked:

The shelter homes [in Hong Kong] may not be adequate to meet the needs of South Asian women, which may be due to language barrier and different diet, (like halal food) and hence it may be difficult for the South Asian women to stay in shelter [home].

I think, if there are specific South Asian services, perhaps it may give them an incentive to come out and seek help. I think that not sharing about the issue of domestic violence maybe due to the sensitivity issue and to their culture. The women believe that sharing about the problems in their marriage and about domestic violence in their marriage will bring shame to the family. I think mostly the women stayed in the marriage because they accept it as their fate. They accept it as a natural part of their marriage. This was the same in Hong Kong (Chinese) society many years ago ...

The helping professionals also remarked that the existing social service agencies for ethnic minorities are programme-based and not geared for providing services for domestic violence cases. Another helping professional also shared that service users seek assistance

from the agency mainly in terms of tangible help such as application for public housing or immigration-related issues. Some quotes from the helping professionals are given below:

The nature of service provided by our agency is mainly program-based, and focuses on programs and activities for social integration. Sometimes we assist them with their application for public housing or immigration-related issue. Our service is mainly program-based and it is a limitation as we are unable to provide individual counselling.

The service users who come to our agency are aware that we are mainly program-based and do not provide counselling for issues related to domestic violence. Mostly they come to us to ask for help with immigration related issues or housing issues when the husbands divorce them ...

The helping professionals also observed that even when the issue of domestic violence comes to the surface, it is often indirectly. For instance, a woman comes to seek assistance for immigration-related issues, and in the process of discussing their present predicament, the issue of domestic violence comes to the surface. As one helping professionals remarked:

I think culture also plays a role; the women do not want to come out and seek help because they do not want to betray their family. For them it is taboo subject, they avoided not to shame. Women who have been separated/divorced are more open to share, by our observation.

Another helping professional related that the women fear that if she shares, their family stories will spread through their community and they do not want to bring a bad name to the family. One of the helping professional said:

Women hesitate to talk because they fear that if others in the community know about the abuse, they will look down on her and say that her husband does not respect her so he abuses her ... so many women are hesitant to share with others because the community is close-knit, if one person knows, then that person will tell another and so on and the whole community will know and they will feel ashamed.

However, some helping professionals also think that some women hesitate to talk for fear of being deported. As most women were sponsored by their husband, the husband may withdraw the (visa) sponsorship when the marriage breaks down. As one helping professional remarked:

I think it is not only due to the culture that most women hesitate to talk. There are other factors involved as well. She is sponsored by her husband and mostly husband withdraw the (visa) sponsorship when marriage breakdown. She cannot go back to her country as a divorced woman because of the shame. In Islam divorce is frowned upon so they rarely consider divorce and in most case, the husband is the one to initiate the divorce. She is concerned about who will take care of her even if she gets a divorce. She has no one here (in Hong Kong) to support her, no family or relatives.

The experiences described by the women and the helping professionals provide us with critical information, regarding the needs of women, and the services they accessed. Thus, it provides a necessary step in determining how to improve the existing services/programmes that can also better serve other ethnic minorities women experiencing partner abuse which would enable the needs of women to be more adequately met, with having ethnic minority staff to communicate with women in their own language, thus being able to offer the emotional support that is so crucial to a woman fleeing domestic violence. It is important to take into consideration the language and cultural sensitivity issues of the women experiencing domestic violence who go through this painful process, and support for emotional counselling is crucial.

During the interviews with the helping professionals, they also reiterated that the existing social services for ethnic minorities in Hong Kong are mainly geared towards promoting social integration and social harmony, and not for domestic violence-related issues. Therefore, most of their services are programme-based, such as providing language classes and cross-cultural programmes, among others. All the helping professionals also noted that, in general, the women approach their social service agencies in order to attend the various programmes and activities organised by the respective agencies. The service users mainly seek their (agency) assistance for matters such as immigration-related issue, application for public housing, information about children's education and employment-related issues, among others, and seldom share or discuss their personal lives.

Discussion and recommendation

The findings highlight that women's actions were guided by the cultural and structural factors which reflects the meaning underpinning their respond to abuse. What emerged from the data analysis of this study is that the subjective and objective realities of women's experiences of domestic violence must be situated within the larger cultural, social and political context. Because of the traditional values and beliefs of their culture which often grant men a higher social status, the husband feel that they should have more authority in deciding on whatever issue concern the family and that they should be automatically respected by their wives. Because the women in this study were raised to embrace family unity and harmony, their first response to partner abuse is usually to do whatever will create the least disturbance or disorder to the family unity. The women also felt responsible to make the relationship work so that an intact family could be maintained. Their actions are constructed and based upon their interaction with other elements in their lives such as strong family ties and the values women are socialised into (socialisation that transcends culture) and the structural factors (such as availability of services, economic dependence and women legal status) which can influence their decisions around help.

Women vulnerability to domestic violence was further intensified by immigration-specific factors such as language barriers, uncertain legal status, immigration laws, availability and accessibility to resources and economic support. These immigration-related factors also affect woman's decision to leave the abusive relationship and/or in seeking help. As proposed by the women in this study, when women are isolated in a strange environment, their immigration status (for most women this immigration status depends on their husband), lack of a support system, having to overcome language barriers and possessing no requisite job skills, makes them more vulnerable to domestic violence. Some participants in this study also stated that lack of local language ability blocked them from accessing information, have no idea about social rights perspectives in their new country and often do not know where or to whom they can go for information.

Based on the study findings, there are also some gaps identified between the needs of these women and the availability of services. In addition to language barrier, when a woman cannot speak the local language, and if her literacy level is low, then she is already at a disadvantaged position for gathering information. Moreover, their unfamiliarity with their environment also confined many women within their homes and are unaware of the information they need, thus feeling isolated. Findings from the interview with the participants also highlight the women's desire to maintain family unity and harmony, and that it

was not in their culture to seek divorce or separation (for the women who were divorced or separated in this study, they shared that the divorce was initiated by their husband). Their firmness to maintain their marriage and family unity has surprised many of the helping professions, and they tend to come across as not being active in seeking help, often refusing to even consider going to a shelter home. This is because this solution overlooks cultural factors that make it difficult for the women under the pressure they are in. This is not meant to magnify the role of cultural forces at play. Rather, it is intended to highlight the relative role and magnitude of these social forces at play in women's experiences of abuse and in the process of seeking a solution to the abuse. For the women in this study, their first method of handling or resolving conflicts or adversity is to reflect and use one's own strength. When these prove unsuccessful, she will turn to her immediate family or informal social network for advice.

Implication for practice and education

An important strength of South Asian cultural group is family cohesiveness. Programmes and services can build upon this strength and also focus on developing family support intervention to provide support to women facing domestic abuse. For many South Asian groups, the family is an agent in resolving conflicts and problems. Therefore, the family can serve as an important support structure for women abuse, and to help mediate and intervene and to provide emotional support by brining awareness about the severity of the effect of abuse on the women and children's mental health and physical well-being.

When providing services to members of ethnic minority group, it is important for service providers and helping professionals to understand clients' cultural practices and values, so they can better understand clients' perspective and engage them in a more effective way even if they do not see things from the professional perspective. One way to do this is to adopt culturally sensitive practices and to provide counselling with an understanding of the client's culture and migration-related issues, which are interlined with the women's experiences of domestic violence. Without a culturally competent approach, practitioners often create misinformed assessment and ineffective intervention and evaluation (Bent-Goodley, 2005).

Cultural competence denotes an ongoing process in which one continuously strives to achieve the ability to work effectively within the cultural context of the individual or community. Therefore, any system which seeks to address intimate partner violence needs to commit to culturally competent practice (Dasgupta, 2006). Thus, cultural competence practice is not only determined by the extent of one's awareness of client's culture, but is also determined by the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with the issues clients face in order to serve and address their needs, and is an important aspect of an effective intervention. In working with or providing services to ethnic minority women, it is also imperative for helping professionals to be knowledgeable about the cultural values, community attitudes and social experiences which might influence abused women's reaction and responses to domestic violence. This knowledge and understanding can also help to dispel myths and stereotypes about domestic violence in the South Asian community.

Educating families and community members about the impact of partner violence on women and children's psychological, emotional and cognitive development may be one way to help families and community understands the importance of taking steps to

end violence and extend help and support to abused women. To reduce violence against immigrant women and children, it is important to recognise that immigrant women in domestic violence situations have needs that differ from those of the mainstream population. Developing community-based services and educational programmes that address cultural and contextual factors and build on community support networks is one important step towards intervening in intimate partner violence in immigrant communities.

Domestic violence course can be implemented in social work curricula to educate students about intimate partner violence through integrating content into foundation curriculum such as practice, social policy and research course.

Conclusion

As with most qualitative research, one limitation of this study is the small sample size and the generalisability to other settings and context. Despite this limitation, the findings of this study provide important insights into the barriers and facilitators to seek help and disclosure of domestic violence from women participants and helping professionals, respectively. There is a need for sociocultural sensitive education and awareness programmes for the South Asian immigrant community on violence against women.

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