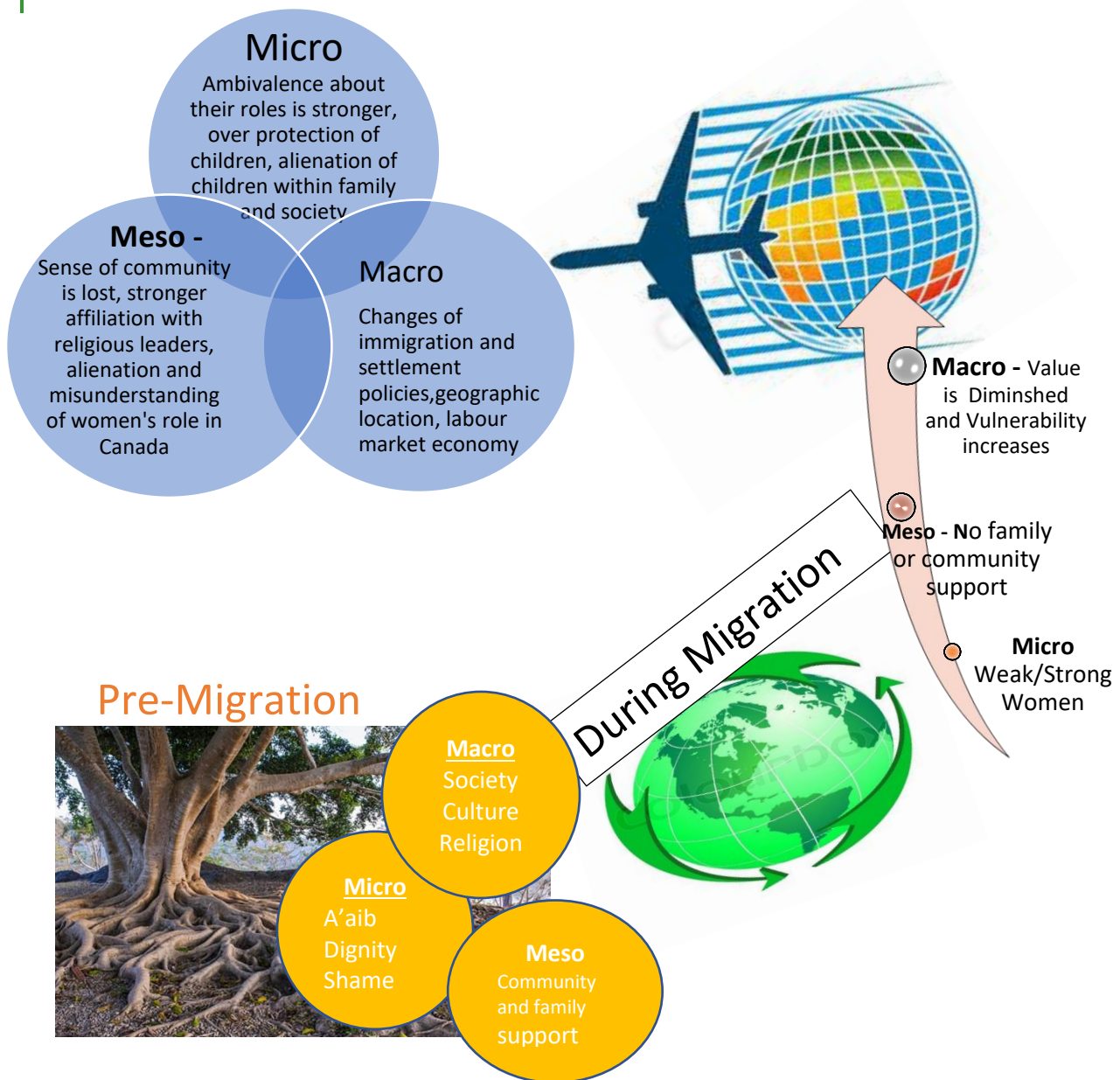


Family Services of Peel – Peel Institute on Violence Prevention

Voices of Refugee Women from the Middle East: Strategies for Violence Prevention

A Pathway to Violence Prevention



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

CMA	Census Metropolitan Area
CWF	Canadian Women's Foundation
FSP	Family Services of Peel
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees Citizenship Canada
PIVP	Peel Institute on Violence Prevention
RoP	Region of Peel
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAW	Violence against Women
WHO	World Health Organization

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FOREWORD

Miloud Chennoufi, Ph.D.
Professor, Canadian Forces College

Canadians who encountered Syrian newcomers have had the opportunity to witness their cordiality, dignity and generosity. They knew how to preserve these qualities despite the misfortunes of the war, despite the test of forced uprooting, and despite the pain of a long and painful journey from a war zone to Canada. However, those who welcomed them, whether private sponsorship groups or institutional structures such as governments and settlement agencies, were rarely aware that they were paying just a small part of a colossal debt that humanity owes to Syrians. Long before the concept of refugee status was included in the international law, Syrians welcomed thousands of persecuted Algerians fleeing the violence of French invasion and occupation. Over a century later, their descendants still living in Syria and, as with their compatriots, have suffered the horrors of the civil war since 2011. Moreover, the survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide also found refuge in Syria. Almost all the Armenian population of Syria has these survivors as ancestors. Since the war against Israel in 1948, Syrians welcomed several waves of Palestinian refugees. More recently, Iraqis found refuge in Syria after the United States invaded their country.

The Syrian civil war has now entered its eighth year and is indubitably the greatest humanitarian tragedy of our time. However, the war was not inevitable. For it to be avoided, all the actors who made it possible, fueled and benefited from it, should and could have shown restraint. The singularity of the Syrian conflict is that wisdom was overshadowed quickly by war fever. This was true not only for Syrian protagonist of the conflict, government and opposition but also among regional and international actors—without the destructive action of whom the cycle of uprising and repression would have never turned into a ferocious civil war. A new, plural and inclusive Syria would undoubtedly have not emerged, but the country would not have been destroyed, the dead would not have fallen in the hundreds of thousands, and the Syrian refugees would not be in the millions. Also, a process of change, albeit long and tumultuous, would have been irreversibly imposed on both the authoritarian government of Damascus and the less democratic or frankly undemocratic fringes of the opposition. Alas, in politics, when ideological convictions do not blind protagonists, their wisdom is reduced to prudence, and political prudence rarely goes beyond the mere strategic calculation of the adequacy of means to ends.

The Syrian civil war struck a society that, despite experiencing a process of modernization, has mostly retained the patriarchal modes of regulation of gender relations. Men play the roles of income provider and protector, and women play the roles of wives and mothers. Within this system, women are protected from social violence by their closest related male relatives. This is also the case in cases of domestic violence: women's only resort is often to appeal to the male segment of their extended family (father and brother). In this sense, violence against women is considered a family affair. Not that violence against women is tolerated, but that the protection of women is limited to the family circle.

Civil war destroys both sources of women's protection—that of the husband if he loses his life in the conflict or is held prisoner and that of the extended family in case of forced separation due to population displacement. As one woman interviewed for this study puts it, *“When there is war in the land you are living in, it almost becomes like anything/any act becomes acceptable... anything ranging from theft to kidnapping and rape.”* The risk of violence against women is real in a war-torn country, but unfortunately

also during displacement. Moreover, this risk does not necessarily disappear when women manage to settle in a country like Canada where institutional remedies guaranteed by law are available.

Over 50,000 Syrian refugees now live in Canada. This figure is in addition to the other tens of thousands of refugees driven by war and instability in other Middle Eastern countries. The risk of violence against women is similar for all of these populations. This study attempts to answer critical questions related to this topic. What are the dimensions of the risk of violence against women among refugee populations from the Middle East? By what mechanisms does war multiply this risk? Why, once in Canada, do female victims of violence not always use the available institutional, legal, and judicial resources to their advantage?

The present report has the merit of pointing out the complexity of this phenomenon. In case of violence, refugee women are held hostage to a dead end situation. On the one hand, they are the victims of patriarchal cultural norms that prevent them from asserting their rights outside the family circle. On the other hand, patriarchal mechanisms of protection are no longer available because of the dislocation of social relations and their remoteness from their society of origin. The nuclear family is often the last social network that war and refugee status have not yet destroyed. Women who prefer to bear the effects of abusive relationships rather than appealing to social services, the police or the courts, do not do so solely to comply with oppressive cultural codes. This study tells us that the reason is also the fear that the solutions offered in Canada mean the destruction of the family and the loss of the only precious good they have left.

Policy makers and social workers can learn from this report how to adapt to such complexities, accentuated by another element mentioned in the present study. For example, domestic violence against women is inseparable from the trauma of war and its effects on the mental health of refugees. These effects can have a disastrous impact on relationships between spouses and result in violence against women. Similarly, the violence experienced by refugee women is also part of the violence that refugees, in general, may experience. Violence is of a complicated and structural nature and includes racism, stigma, discrimination, non-recognition of diplomas, and so on.

Awareness of the different dimensions of this problem will be of great value to all those who want refugee women to find in Canada the means to overcome suffering they apparently did not deserve.

1. Abstract

Violence against women is a social epidemic; it is economically costly and is a significant public health concern in Canada and around the world. Immigrant and refugee women face multiple barriers due to their migratory experience in addition to experiencing a higher risk of violence. With the increased number of Middle Eastern immigrants and refugees that settled in Ontario over the past few years, it is of utmost importance to provide a good understanding of the needs of this ethnocultural population in order to deliver culturally competent services that will move the province one step closer to eliminating violence against women in this population.

The Peel Institute on Violence Prevention – Family Services of Peel developed a “Pathway to Violence Prevention” model for Middle Eastern women based on a comprehensive literature review, analysis of demographic data and three focus groups with Middle Eastern Refugee Women. This work has aided us in understanding their pre-migration, migration and resettlement sociocultural experiences, and provided the evidence to suggest a pathway for violence prevention. Our pathway takes into consideration the traditional beliefs and values of Middle Eastern women in the context of the sociocultural norms in their host country which can be used as a guide for both service providers and policy makers to enhance the competency of social service providers when dealing with this ethnocultural population.

1.1 Introduction

In this project, we are aiming to learn more about the violence faced by women refugees from Middle Eastern countries, and we hope that our findings act as a stepping-stone towards building prevention strategies. These women’s voices will help us understand their experiences of gender inequality, firstly in their countries of origin, during their journey to Canada, and finally after their arrival.

Moreover, we structured the study model so that groups, institutions and organizations that have the power to influence the development of services, programs, policies and research proposals for women refugees from the Middle East, could hear the women’s recollections firsthand. We hope that our efforts to bring these women together will provide them with the necessary empowerment to start the process of healing from abuse and violence. We are committed to supporting women in this journey by providing a safe space for them to connect and feel less isolated, share information, develop awareness, coping and recovery skills, and plan for a life free from abuse. We also hope that this project produced the necessary synergy to re-establish the Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network in Peel and across Canada.

1.2. Violence against Women

Violence against women (VAW) is a social epidemic, a significant public health problem and a violation of women’s human rights (World Health Organization Fact Sheet, 2017). According to the World Health Organization, one in three women (35%) worldwide is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by an intimate partner in the course of her lifetime (the United Nations Department of Public Information, Fact Sheet – DPI/2498 -- February 2008). This occurs in all countries, irrespective of the social, economic, religious or cultural group (Heise et al. 1999). The Public Health Agency of Canada (2008) and Statistics Canada (2013) define domestic violence as “any actual or threatened form of physical, emotional, sexual, financial abuse or neglect directed towards a family member within a relationship based on kinship,

intimacy, dependency or trust. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most predominant violence against women where physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse inflicted on women by a current or former intimate partner (Heise & Garcia, 2002). Violence against women can affect women's physical, psychological, and mental health directly and indirectly and affects children's health and social life resulting in poor school performance and health outcomes (Heise & Garcia, 2002). The socio-economic effects of violence against women are enormous ranging from direct cost including treatment and prevention of violence such as medical, justice, police and social services to indirect effects such as increased morbidity, mortality, use of alcohol and drugs and the emergence of mental health issues, namely depressive disorders. A recent Justice Canada study estimated the cost of one type of intimate partner violence, spousal violence, on Canadian society at \$7.4 billion in 2009 (Zhang et al., 2013).

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1. Gender, Migration and Health: A Conceptual Framework

We applied the "Gender, Migration and Health: A Conceptual Framework" (2006) developed by Dr. Arlene Biermann. The framework assisted in the analysis of gender roles within the geopolitical environment that affects the macro, Meso and micro level of the target population. This framework facilitates the development of methods in evaluating the impact of the environment on health and wellbeing outcomes of individuals, families and communities.

1.3.2. Literature Review

This literature review focused on intimate partner violence that is directed towards Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee women, with a particular focus on the sociocultural aspects that determines and shapes their traditional beliefs and values. Literature will help us to understand better about their resettlement needs about their pre-migration experience. The review scanned existing literature, including academic publications, government reports and other grey literature to review violence against Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee women.

The review of the literature included the following databases: PubMed, Medline, Sage Journals, Statistics Canada and Google Scholar for open source literature. Reference lists of the relevant articles have been examined for further research of interest. Key search terms included: domestic violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), spousal abuse, statistics on Arab immigrants, Middle Eastern women, Arab pre-migration experience, Arab resettlement context in Canada and The United States first-generation immigrants, Middle Eastern family structure, gender roles in the Middle East, Middle East and North Africa, family honor in the Middle East.

1.3.3. Highlights of Demographic Data Analysis

We are also reporting the demographic analysis of data collected through three focus groups with women from the Middle Eastern who are a refugee living in the Region of Peel, (number of valid surveys =32).

1.3.4. Focus Group Analysis

The subjects selected for this study were women:

1. Between the ages of 20 to 60

2. From a Middle Eastern country
3. Have refugee status, or have entered Canada as a refugee or asylum seeker
4. Have lived in Canada for no longer than five years
5. Reside in the Region of Peel including Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon.
6. Have experienced or had the likelihood of experiencing any form of interpersonal violence (IPV) in any of the following settings: (a) In their country of origin, (b) At the borders or in the land of asylum (c) After having reached Canada

The project participants were recruited through a Flyer that was emailed to service providers from the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector in the Peel region, and invited service providers to circulate it to their service users. It included details on the purpose of the project, the funder or the sponsor, the name and contact of the manager and facilitator, participants' selection criteria, number of sessions and length of each session, terms of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study.

All sessions, as well as outreach, were done in Arabic, with whispering interpretation provided to the principal researcher while the meeting was taking place. The dialogue during the group sessions was recorded, transcribed, and was later subjected to thematic analysis. Middle Eastern food was provided, and fifty Canadian Dollars were given to the women attending.

During the life of the project, we brought a total of 34 women together, split into three separate groups. The data from one group was lost because we were not able to record the session. The first group had 13 participants and the other 12 participants. The women described their journey to Canada and their experiences before and after arrival. The main themes are divided according to the stages: Pre-migration, during, and resettlement.

2. Findings of the Study

Political unrest, economic instability, violence, and wars in the Arab world resulted in an increased influx of migration from these countries to Canada (Khoury, 2003). Most Arab immigrants were admitted under the economic migrant class, followed by refugee and family class (Hennebry & Momani, 2013) and they are considered one of the largest and fastest growing ethnic population in Canada (Khoury, 2003). One of the top recent immigrants to Canada from the Middle East is Iranian and Syrian immigrants, 3.5% and 2.5% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2016 Immigration and ethnocultural diversity: (Key results from the 2016 Census. The Daily, Wednesday, October 25, 2017).

The number of people in Canada of Arab origin is growing considerably faster than the overall population. Statistics Canada (2016) reported that between 1996 and 2001 the number of people who reported Arab origin rose by 27%, while the overall population grew by only 4%. Moreover, the majority of the Arab population living in Canada was born outside the country, which indicates that the Arab population in Canada is young. In this population, a higher representation of the younger group that are more likely to live in a family setting as compared to the general population (Khoury, 2003). The majority of Arabs settle in Ontario and Quebec, and their religious affiliation equally distributed between Islam and Christianity. In the last few years, Ontario witnessed an increased influx of immigrants from the Middle East along with Syrian Refugees, Arabic language was the 4th top non-official spoken language in Peel Region while it ranked 3rd in Mississauga (2016 Census Bulletin Languages, Region of Peel, 2017).

Despite the massive influx of Arab immigrants to Canada, it is one of the understudied communities particularly when it comes to social issues (Rasmi et al., 2014; Shalabi et al., 2015). Hence, it is critical to examine social, cultural issues and belief systems that this immigrant population experiences especially when it comes to violence against women.

2.1. Syrian Refugees

In 2011, the civil war broke out in Syria, which resulted in massive displacement of Syrians due to the lack of access to necessities such as food, water, physical safety and shelter. By November 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had documented almost four million Syrian refugees that lived in camps in neighbouring countries in addition to six million displaced inside Syria. In response to this humanitarian crisis the Canadian government committed to the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees by early 2016 (UNHCR, 2015; Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2015; Hansen & Huston 2016). According to the Government of Canada, Syrian Refugees – Monthly IRCC Updates, Syrian refugees resettled by Province/Territory and Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Intended Destination and Immigration Category, Immigration), between November 04, 2015 and March 31st, 2018 52,720 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada, and 23,055 of them settling in Ontario. Also, between January 2015 and March 2018, there were 99,300 Syrian refugees landed in Canada with 40,455 of them settling in Ontario (IRCC Monthly Updates). This reflects that the numbers almost doubled as Canada's efforts to extend responses to Syrian refugees' crisis.

Seven hundred thirty-two Syrian refugees (6.4%) settled in Peel Region (The Council of the Regional Municipality of Peel, 2016). About 500 service providers are funded by the Department's Settlement Program to deliver settlement services for Syrian refugees across the country. Moreover, funds increased by Department's Settlement Program for settlement services for Syrian refugees by \$116

million, from \$141 million over four years to \$257 million over five years (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2017). Specialized Service Provider Organizations provided services through the Resettlement Assistance Program of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Services provided to refugees aimed at providing a wide range of services in the first few days and weeks of their arrival, and that included: port of entry services, interpretation services, temporary accommodation, general orientation, financial orientation, and help to locate and to move to a permanent location (Government of Canada).

Studies have shown that immigrants and refugees who resettle in Western countries experience mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety as compared to the general population in those countries (Fazel et al. 2005; Beiser, M. 2005). Many of the Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada recently have experienced psychological and social distress after living in war zones, being displaced from their homes several times inside Syria, and witnessing the death of friends and relatives (Hassan et al. 2015; Hansen & Huston 2016; Quosh et al. 2013).

2.2. Domestic Violence among Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Women

There is a paucity of research on violence in the Arab world (Obeid et al. 2010; Gharaibeh et al., 2009; Haj-Yahia, 1995; 2000a, b, c; 2002; 2003; Oweis et al., 2009; Gharaibeh & Oweis 2009). Despite the increased degree of resettlement of immigrant and refugee Arab women in Canada, little known about domestic violence from this population (Shalabi et al., 2015; Baobaid, 2012). In his study, Baobaid has identified the lack of specific intervention programs that address domestic violence in the context of migratory experience and the impact of pre and post-transient experiences on family interrelationships and IPV. Hence, the following section of this literature review will examine research studies in the pre-migration experience, during migration experience and post-migration experience to establish a baseline for future research based on the structure and sociocultural risk factors that are rooted in the collectivist Arab society and influence violence against women (Baobaid, 2012).

2.3 Pre-Migration Experience

Arab women are raised with collectivist values, and they are expected to be selfless, obedient, maintain the family's reputation and devote themselves to attending to the needs of family members. Family ties are strong; women's identity depends heavily on interpersonal relationships within the family, community and society. Therefore, it is defined in the context of the family (Haj-Yahia, 1998a; Joseph, 1993; Kulwicki, 2002). Men are the head of the family and women's roles are mostly restricted to be homemakers and mothers (Haj-Yahia, 2000b; Wehbi, 2002). Few studies have demonstrated the prevalence of domestic violence in the Arab world, and documented its detrimental effects on the social, health and wellbeing of abused women (Obeid et al. 2010; Gharaibeh et al., 2009; Haj-Yahia 1995; 2000a,b,c; 2002; 2003; Oweis et al., 2009; Gharaibeh & Oweis 2009; Diop-Sidibé et al., 2006; Douki et al., 2003; Hajjar 2004; Yount & Li 2009; Yount & Li 2010; El Zanaty et al.,1996; Usta et al., 2011).

Due to the patriarchal and patrilineal nature of Arab families, the sociocultural context of the Arab society enforces family unity, gender roles, female obedience, and maintaining family's reputation (Haj-Yahia, 1998a, 1998b; Haj-Yahia, 2000c). Women tend to stay in abusive relationships to keep the family values and honour and not to bring shame to their families (Haj-Yahia, 1998a, 1998b; 1998c; Joseph, 1993; 1994; Haj-Yahia, 2000b; Kulwicki, 2002). Family honour is one of the most important traditional values that is reinforced by the patriarchal and patrilineal ecological systems and is rooted in social standing and cultural mores in the Arab world. In this male-dominant collectivist culture, females can

bring shame to the entire family and their reputation might be tarnished if they do not abide by the honour code. Dishonourable acts include any sexual relationship outside marriage, adultery, pregnancy out of wedlock, and even contact with a man who is not a relative. On the other hand, an honour for men rests on socioeconomic status and the policing of their female blood relations, which as a result considers women their subordinates and strengthens their submissive position (Abu-Odeh, 2000; Kulczycki & Windle, 2011; Kulwicki, 2002).

Middle Eastern women not only stay in abusive relationships, they also tend to remain silent considering it a private and personal family problem (Usta et al., 2011) and they show a strong tendency to justify their abuse (Haj-Yahia, 2002; Gharaibeh et al., 2009; Yount & Li, 2009). In a small study of 28 abused women, Gharaibeh et al., 2009 explored why Jordanian women stay with an abusive husband. They have identified five main reasons for staying in abusive relationships: the inherited social background, financial dependency, lack of family support, sacrificing self for the sake of children, and the adverse social consequences of divorce, which reflects the social norms and gender inequality in the Arab society.

Other traditional attitudes that can explain the continuation of domestic abuse in the Arab world are 1). Lack of public condemnation and intervention by police 2). The absence of a family legal system that can replace religious courts (Haj-Yahia, 2002; Douki et al., 2003; Obeid et al., 2010), 3). The absence of attitudes justifying reporting abusive men to the police and that they should be punished for their abusive behaviour (Haj-Yahia, 1998b), 4). Opposition by women to receiving formal assistance from social services agencies (Haj-Yahia, 2000c, 2002), 5).Tolerance level to abusive behaviour (Haj-Yahia, 1998a).

Risk factors that can predict violence against Arab women are age, education, work status, level of income, health status, size of families (Usta et al., 2011; Haj-Yahia, 2001; Yount & Li, 2010) and exposure to corporal punishment as children (Yount & Li, 2010). Exposure to political violence is another risk factor. It is estimated that 48 – 54% of immigrants in Canada and the States report that they were exposed to political violence pre-migration (Rousseau & Drapeau, 2004; Eisenman et al., 2003) and it has been shown that the rate of abuse among families coming from conflict zones is higher than immigrants that come from non-conflict zones (Baobaid, 2012 p.3). Based on the UNHCR Report many Syrian refugees have experienced psychological and social distress that can lead to emotional reactions such as sadness, grief and anger, or physical, social and behavioural problems (Hansen & Huston, 2016).

2.4. The Migration Experience

Migration can be a risk factor for immigrant refugee women due to many factors at the macro, Meso, and micro levels. At the macro level, immigration policies determine how long and how easy immigrants and refugees can come to Canada. In a study that examined the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants' perspective on violence, it was indicated that immigration policies made it difficult for them to apply for refugee status when they resided in Sri Lanka (Guruge et al., 2010). Exposure to pre-migration political violence, such as witnessing or being victims of war violence, was linked to being angry, aggressive, suspicious and intolerant at home (Baobaid, 2012 p4, Guruge et al., 2010). Migration from war zones is associated with chronically experiencing fear, anxiety, uncertainty, living in unacceptable daily conditions, and stress. During migration, refugees are exposed to a violation of their human rights by those in authority across borders and in countries that they claim asylum in, which will impact their psychological health negatively both short - and long-term (Guruge et al., 2010). Accordingly, these pre-migration experiences will carry through their post-migration settlement and will shape how they view their relationship with

authorities whether it is health care professionals or social service providers. Other studies have demonstrated that immigrant women are at a higher risk for post-partum depression due to stressful life events, marital strain and lack of social support (Zelkowitz et al., 2004; Stewart et al., 2008). At the Meso level, migration leads to changes in social network support, absence of extended family members support, inability to find employment opportunities, discrimination, and changes in socioeconomic status adds more stress to the marital relationship and can lead to violence against women (Hyman et al., 2008; 2006, Guruge et al., 2010; Shishehgar et al., 2015).

Refugees are exposed to stress during their migration including the trajectory (the route and the duration), uncertainty about immigration or their refugee status, exposure to harsh living conditions in refugee camps, exposure to violence, disruption of family and community connections and network, and uncertainty about migration outcome. Assessment of 113 articles, including ten systematic reviews and five meta-analyses, revealed that refugees who have severe exposure to violence have ten times higher rates of trauma-related disorders often including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and chronic pain as compared to the general population. The effects of the migratory factors on the mental health of refugees vary depending on the severity of migration factors and exposure time to these factors. The increased risk is associated with migrants coming from developed countries indicating that racism and discrimination play a role in higher mental health incidences (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Refugee women seen in specialized clinics have high rates of exposure to violence and post-traumatic stress disorder that has not been addressed clinically (Redwood-Campbell et al., 2011). The studies above indicate that migration strongly affects immigrant and refugees' wellbeing when they arrive in Canada. New immigrant's wellbeing should be considered when offering programs based on the sociocultural context of these immigrant women.

2.5. Resettlement Experience

Domestic violence that examines Arab immigrant women in a Canadian context is limited and, hence, this segment of the literature review will draw on relevant themes from studies performed in North America and from another immigrant population in Toronto with a focus on sociocultural factors and gender-roles. Several studies have demonstrated that immigrant women are vulnerable to domestic violence due to systemic factors, cultural and interpersonal factors. Overlapping social hierarchies that are at the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, marital status, language and religion makes immigrant women more vulnerable post-migration (George & Rashidi, 2014; Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Baobaid, 2012; Ono, 2013; Villalón, 2015). These systemic factors such as oppression, racism, sexism, colonialism, ageism, and classism shape immigrant women's experiences and responses to domestic violence. Hence, studies have recognized the importance of social factors at the macro and Meso-levels of the society such as gendered immigration policies, socioeconomic insecurity and challenges to labour market conditions. Further social isolation, cultural expectations, rigid gender roles and acculturation and resettlement stress and availability of resources for immigrant women and resistance to the use of such available social services (Choi et al., 2016; Alaggia et al., 2016; Abraham & Tastsoglou, 2016; George & Rashidi, 2014; Guruge et al., 2010; Hyman et al., 2008). These challenges during resettlement to a new environment affect marital relationships, (Guruge et al., 2010) as well as affecting their psychological and well-being negatively both in short and long-term (Noh and Avison 1996; Beiser & Edwards 1994).

The ecological environment around Arab families' post-migration differs from the environmental setting in the Arab world (Status of Women Canada, 2013). This change in sociocultural context can cause

increased tension that can amplify violence against women due to their vulnerability during the migration process, where women may question or reject gender-roles (Ahmed et al., 2005; Alaggia et al., 2009). Ahmed et al. (2005) reported that the proportion of emotional abuse among immigrant women is significantly higher than it is among Canadian-born women. Because of the new ecological sociocultural context in the host country, immigrant and refugee women can find employment and hence break some of the traditional expectations of their gender role in the family. As a result, immigrant males feel threatened by the new role of immigrant females, which makes them feel less recognized as the head of the household, giving them a reason to be violent (Baobaid, 2002).

Moreover, cultural norms and expectations in their country of origin prevent immigrant and refugee women in North America from taking advantage of formal services and getting help for partner abuse (Abu-Ras, 2007; Kulwicky, 2002; Kulwicky et al., 2010; Kulwicky & Miller, 1999; Shalabi et al., 2015). These results are consistent with findings obtained from studies on violence against women in the Arab world (Haj-Yahia, 1998a, 1998b, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Gharaibeh & Oweis, 2009), which confirms the importance of keeping these attitudes in mind when dealing with immigrant and refugee women during their post-migration resettlement.

Immigrant and refugee females usually stay in abusive relationships due to many factors including traditional beliefs and attitudes, language barriers, social isolation, and financial dependence on their husbands (Baobaid, 2002; Alaggia et al., 2009; Abraham, 2000). The most prevalent barrier to abused immigrant women is the continuous attempts of their husbands to isolate them from social life in their host country, which further confines them to their households, and makes them more financially dependent on their husbands, and less trusting of individuals in public agencies (Shalabi et al., 2015; Baobaid, 2002; Abraham 2000). Another critical factor that keeps the women in abusive relationships is cultural expectations, where the women do nondisclosed abuse so that they do not “bring shame” to their families (Alaggia et al., 2009).

2.6. Highlights of Demographic Data Analysis

- Age and Country of Origin: The participants’ age range was 20 years to 57 years with average age 38.1 years, and the country of origin for the majority is Syria (81.25%)
- Language Preference: 59% the participants prefer Arabic language only for speaking, 13% of the participants speak Kurdish only (this language is widely spoken in the Kurdish regions of Syria), and only 22% of the participants replied that they could speak English.
- Immigrant Legal Status and the Year of Landing: Almost 65% of the participants were government-assisted refugees and refugee claimants, 35% had a permanent residence, and 75% of them landed in Canada 2016
- Marital Status: As shown in the figure the percentage of ever-married women are 91 % of the participants (88% married and 3% widowed) with an average of four children
- Education: 56 % of the participants had a Middle school or less, and 35% of the participants had a Bachelor's degree or higher, or University certificate, or diploma below bachelor level
- Occupation: More than 50 % reported that they do not work, and 26% did not answer the question
- Reason to Leave the Place of Origin: 84% of the participants replied that the reason to leave their country of origin is the war and the situation there, and only 6% responded that they left their country of origin for a better life for their kids.

- Countries of Asylum: Over a third of the participants (38%) reported that they came directly from their country of origin, and 28% said that they came from Turkey
- Average family income: The average family income was \$2,088 for how answered this question (22 participants answered this question), and four participants replied that they do not know the family income.
- Source of family income: From participants who answered the question (16 participants responded to this question), 25% reported that the source of family income was the employment income and child tax benefit, and 75% explained that the source of income was governmental support and child tax benefit.
- Family support (financial): Ten participants answered this question nine of them reported that they receive financial support from their extended family, and one responded that they support a family member(s) financially back home. (More demographics details are given in annex 6.2)

2.7 Focus Group Analysis

2.7.1. Pre-Migration

2.7.1.1. Early Struggles

The women's discussion revealed insight into both the extreme hardship they faced in their homes countries, as well as the motives for their departure.

"We were destroyed in every aspect; mentally, socially, financially, the rich went down to the middle class, and the middle class went down to the poor class."

Apart from the catastrophic economic collapse, there was also the fear of forced recruitment into radical groups and persecution, whether by affiliated government groups, or others. Fear and threat are particularly true for ethnic minorities.

"Absolutely, because dad was already threatened when he was in Syria. And because we were related to him as his family, we were also threatened in the same way. So, the only solution was for my dad to leave Syria so he can actually bring us to a safer place... For example, my brothers... they [in ref to the regime] were going to take them to jail. really... Therefore, my parents had to smuggle them to a different city within Syria. So, the issue with seeking refuge and running away to a different place is something I have known since I was a child. "

Ethnic minorities also face greater bureaucratic barriers, which further increase the difficulty of travelling as a refugee.

"To add something about the Kurdish people who were present and living in Syria... they had no Identification card...even when they were living in Syria before the war started. They had no Syrian legal residency status. Nothing at all. If someone came up to you and said, "Where are you from?" and you reply, "I'm from Syria," and they ask you to show them your ID card, you because he knows that now the Syrian is cursed in every way and from everyone."

2.7.2. Alienation and Isolation

The women described the feelings of alienation and isolation that they have experienced once they moved away from their home city

“Anybody can attack any house they want. I would hug my kids during the night and shake from fear. I always felt like I was a stranger in the city of Daraa because I am originally from Aleppo.”

“Yes, that is true. I was originally from Beirut but living in a different city in Lebanon called Nameh. They would still treat me like a stranger. As if I do not belong.”

It is important to note that a considerable portion of refugees who managed to secure shelter in a bordering country and not in refugee camp did so use their life savings. A part of them managed to open successful businesses; others who failed and left destitute.

“I felt mentally shattered the minute I set foot in Egypt. I did not feel comfortable in it, and my husband was not working at all there. The money we were able to save in Syria we brought with us...that money covered our living expenses for a year. A year and a half.”

2.7.3. Stigma Against Unaccompanied Female Refugees

Women are expectedly at higher risk of abuse when they make a move and start their journey, and they additionally face great stigma and scorn from people in Middle Eastern host countries not just for being a refugee, but more so for being a female refugee without any family. How these women view themselves and believe others perceive them is shaped powerfully by the regional culture.

As one woman said it: *“Women are considered weak and broken within the society. “It is believed that living without a male in the house leaves women vulnerable to exploitation by other males since the husband is expected to provide physical protection.”*

“Just by leaving your country, your value decreased as a woman; you are viewed as a woman who may accept anything that comes her way.”

“Because I am a woman who lives alone. I am afraid of society and what they think of a woman who lives alone. If I accepted any of their help, they might take me for granted or think of me in a bad way. So I would rather avoid the hassle and just do my things alone.”

“I know many women during that time... many of whom lost their husbands in the war... she had daughters who were maybe 14-15 years of age, and they married them off. Because they were scared for them... scared about them getting assaulted and kidnapped... from everything. When there is war in the land you are living in, it almost becomes like anything/any act becomes acceptable... anything ranging from theft to kidnapping and rape. Because the basis of any country is safety and security... the absence of security destroys a country.”

2.7.4. Sexual Harassment in Host Countries

Sexual violence against women in war zones has always been a topic that is not discussed candidly, despite increased attention in recent years. In fact, violence against women during the conflict has now reached epidemic proportions and become an intrinsic part of the “war process.” This problem is also apparent in the host countries, where men assume that the desperate conditions of female refugees will make them willing to provide sexual favours in exchange for resources.

“When you go outside and leave your home in Jordan... there are those who want to give you their number and those who want to buy you because you are a refugee. The Jordanians...the Jordanian men... unless you are strong and will try to fend them off from you, so they can leave you alone....they try of course. Because now they know that, most refugee women want to live. They want money, and they

want to be able to live a good life. So, the smart woman was able to preserve herself and fend these men off her...”

2.8. During Migration

There were concerning anecdotes about maltreatment of the refugees during their early days before coming to Canada, from receiving false information and harsh comments from customs employees, to limited access to food and resources.

“One woman talked about her husband trying to bring her and their disabled daughter to Canada as he had already come here. His immigration lawyer told him the disabled daughter did not qualify and if she came, the whole family would have to leave. The lawyer’s statement turned out to be false. She and the daughter have now joined the husband in Canada, and the daughter is receiving good health care.”

“Another woman described an experience with an immigration officer when she first came to Canada. She had been told to say ‘no English’ in response to questions by a family member, so when she did so she got this response: He said, “If you do not speak English, why are you here?”

2.9. Resettlement

2.9.1. Access to Education

The women talked at length about the importance of their children, and the decision to relocate was motivated mainly of the concern for their children’s wellbeing. Safety, access to education and access to good health care emerged as the primary drives to seeking refuge. This decision requires immense strength and determination:

“Any woman... any mother who has children is forced to be strong by the circumstances life puts her in”.

Many women noted that one of the most significant problems with their stay in a neighbouring Middle Eastern country as a refugee was the lack of access to education for their children and that Canada had an extreme advantage in that aspect. The lack of proper access to the school was the result of both the absence of organized governmental effort to provide such a service, but also the negative attitude of employees in the educational sector.

“In moving through other countries on the way to Canada these experiences continued. Being Syrian carried stigma that limited life is leaving them marginalized. While many found refuge after leaving their homes, it was not a positive experience. Several women talked about being discriminated against in countries around Syria because they were Syrian. Children were not allowed to study in school, as they were ‘Syrian.’ Education was seen as important hence the decision to move on.”

“I honestly was happy in Jordan... like I did not go through a very bad experience. It is very true however that there is no access to education there, even teachers in schools would tell the children “If you want to study, study if you do not want to study, do not study, sit down and be quiet. I will not teach you”. The problem was that these teachers were not willing to teach refugee kids... they would say, “Oh you are refugees, and you came into our country, and now you want us to teach you?”

“The problem was that these teachers were not willing to teach refugee kids... they would say, “Oh you are refugees, and you came into our country, and now you want us to teach you?”. So that was the problem.”

“Of course, it was for our kids... for our kids to have a better life than us...so that they are not living under war. A mother is always and automatically the person who sacrifices the most in a family. What do I want right now? I want my kids to be in the best state possible. But if I leave them to live in the unknown, without an education without access to schools, without anything they will go through what I am going through right now. When my children gain an education, they make me proud.”

2.9.2. Finding Employment

One of the biggest, more impactful hurdle faced by refugees and new immigrants alike is finding a job, and coming to terms with the painful reality that their past education and extensive experiences are unrecognized in Canada.

“I thank Allah that we came here as Syrian refugees and we are educated... but one major obstacle we faced is when you want to apply for a job. Sister getting your diploma recognized or equated here is very challenging... I am not a doctor... My friend who is a doctor, she studied for seven years and also had an added specialization but she cannot work with her degree, and in the end, she got thrown aside because she could not equate her degree here. Why don't you tell me what my degree is worth in Canada so I can study more and consider my qualifications and experiences? They should really improve the system that validates and equates foreign diplomas. This affects a woman mentally because if she spent her years studying in her country when she comes here, she is made to feel as if she is worthless. “

2.9.3. Language Barriers

Many women also explicitly mentioned the lack of opportunities or initiatives for them to learn English in the Peel region. Until they can effectively communicate, they have no hopes of integration, career-wise or otherwise.

“I want to tell you about the English language. In Toronto, I have many my friends who live in a building there... all refugee women like us... they tell me that in Toronto there are a lot of English language volunteers who come to their building to teach them English. But here in Mississauga, I did not hear of anything like that. We would really need this in Mississauga because refugees live around each other, sometimes we live together in the same building. All of our talks is in Arabic. So, this affects us too because we do not talk in English. Even the teacher would tell us please not talk in Arabic but still they talk in Arabic. We have been here for two years, and we still cannot talk in English.”

2.9.4. Split families

The abrupt escape of many of these women meant that they were indefinitely separated from family members, and in many cases, their children. The separation expectedly severely affected their mental health and tainted their experiences here in Canada.

“I swear if it were for me I would not have come; I swear if it were for me I would not have come I swear. Because now all my other kids are...every single one of my kids is in a different place. Every one of them is thrown in a different spot in this world.....if we said no to immigrating here to Canada we would have been gone, we would have died...because we just wanted to leave to secure a safer stable life here. I told him [in ref. The Canadian ambassador] OK. I stopped talking; I stopped reacting and showing emotions and said OK. So, he took his pen.... did some work on the computer and said explicitly to me “Here on the computer, I made sure that tomorrow when you make your way to Canada, and when you get there... you tell them that you want your kids and they will bring your other kids to you”. This was the reason

why I said yes to coming here.and everything was set, and they even told us my kids would come in 2017. And here see, we were in 2017, and it is almost over, and my kids are not with me. I swear nothing will happen. We went to [inaudible], and nothing happened. So, what do I do? One of my kids is disabled and paralyzed in Turkey, and the second is threatened in Beirut, and nothing...they do not give them residency permits, there...nothing...I got depression, and I feel like I am suffocating. Do you know what suffocating is? "

In another case, a family in Canada sponsored a woman, but when she reached the airport, her passport was temporarily rejected. Her children managed to fly, while she was delayed for a few days until her passport was accepted:

"I felt my soul left my body. It was the first time I was ever apart from my kids. And it is hard for them to arrive in a new country without me. However, my son was 13 and thanked god his English was good, so he was able to communicate well."

"Thank Allah we are happy, and my kids are happy, and we were good [in ref. To financial matters] ...but when we came here, we faced many difficulties, and I wish my other children came with us here [in ref. to Canada] because then my happiness would be completed. But my happiness will not be complete until all of my children are with me here."

"We all want our parents to come here... if our parents come here, we would never leave Canada. Our kids would not want to go back home either..."

"I talk to my kids in Turkey daily, and I am devastated that I cannot see them. However, I will live in the hope that someday they would be able to come to Canada and reunite. "

2.9.5. Familial Instability

In the instances where women were fortunate to remain with their family members, they described that the transition to Canada has dramatically destabilized their family dynamics, particularly when compounded with the collective trauma that the family members have experienced.

A great emphasis was placed on their relationship with their spouses, and their struggles in trying to raise their children in a different environment. The women communicated a need for counselling services and awareness initiatives in this field.

"There are university graduates who despite their extensive education still do not know how to raise children, especially here. Here, children do not behave as they used to have in Syria. They can tell you they want to leave and they can open the door and leave the house."

"People who have had strong husband/wife relationships may have survived the hardships the war put on them. But people who have had weak relationships, to begin with... they would not have survived."

"I just wanted to add on a significant point, this sister [in ref. to another woman] mentioned on family counselling and awareness sessions...for the mom and her children and her husband... if this happens, it will be amazing for us. She is referring to sessions on teaching parents how to deal with and discipline their children properly and raise them properly."

"I would like to request some family counselling sessions that bring awareness to families, awareness on family-related matters. And not just for women, some women who need more education and awareness on family-related matters but some men need more awareness on family-related matters. Any, by the way, this awareness is not related in any way to access to education or gaining an education.....this is

something that is missing and should be mandatory sessions for refugee families. And it should be attended as families' altogether or men alone and women alone. So, they can raise these men's awareness of how to handle teenagers, how to treat your wife. And the same sessions and awareness would apply to the wife."

"I swear to Allah there is a family who lives in our residential building...there was an incidence where there was extreme physical beating...between the husband and wife...and their children till this day are somewhat homeless....and we hear of many cases like this until this day. So, we need these sessions to be integrated into new refugee assistance programs because they will help us a lot."

"There is nothing....No services... no institutes....What institutes? (When asked about services and institutions to help women)"

2.9.6. Gratitude

While much of the time in the groups was devoted to the experience of fleeing conflict in search of refuge, there was also time to talk about what it means to have shelter in Canada. The road was not always easy or clear, and several had been trying to get to Europe before an offer to come to Canada appeared. Their family who is already here sponsored a few. Some women are still hoping to have family members, grown children and their families, and parents join them. While some said they would like to go back to visit, returning to their former home was not as much of a theme as was the topic that Canada is now home.

Despite the negative experiences that the women have gone through in transit and after their arrival in Canada, a significant number have expressed genuine gratitude for being given a chance to settle here in Canada.

"When I came to Canada, I too was very... I thank Allah for this... when I first came here, they did an interview with me and I told them I thank Allah because here it is Safe... In Canada, there is safety for everyone, and my kids are safe... I thank Allah for that. We were happy at most because my kids were safe."

"I am not the kind of woman who is staying in Canada for three years and plans on taking the passport and leaving. I am loyal to the community and the country that took me in at my weakest... because it would be unfair of me to leave this community that accepted me at my weakest in life..."

"I am hoping that we as Syrian refugees would have left a good impression about Syrians in Canada... that we work and that we give back to the community that took us in...that we are in the giver and donor position despite our jobs and skills."

All women were optimistic about their children getting a good education and securing a good life here. Several talked of looking forward to becoming citizens so that they could travel as Canadians, and they will not be discriminated for being 'Syrian.'

2.10. Additional Themes

2.10.1. The Position of Women

"Patience" is the motto of many Middle Eastern women. She is the shock absorber for all the family turmoil, expected to accept emotional abuse, and is simultaneously a scapegoat when things take a left

turn. One woman summarized this paradox: Their importance as wives and mothers is emphasized, but simultaneously they are viewed as weak. This attitude is independent of religion and is purely rooted in culture. This concept is also familiar and seen in many other Eastern, African, South American, and even Eastern European communities.

"In general, the woman in an Arabic society is already viewed as the weakest link or the weakest member. Just by leaving her hometown and because she is the weakest link, they [in ref. to people/men] try to exploit her and take advantage of her. Despite that she is a woman, she is the foundation of society, she is the mother who raises children, and she is the patient link that looks after her husband or takes his place if he were dead or imprisoned."

"Yes, because usually the mother... usually the mother is who is fighting for her kid's access to education and her kids' safety and security... the husband is usually distracted by finding a job and financial matters of the matter... so I mean... the mother is patient to the very end, she suffers silently from her husband's ill-treatment. In our traditional eastern society, this is the norm..."

"Any woman... any mother who has children is forced to be strong by the circumstances life puts her in. The source of her strength but also her weakness."

"... and if the roles were reversed...so she [in ref. to an Arab wife] was angry he would threaten to leave her.... They [in ref to people/society] would blame her for disrupting her family's living conditions. "

"Some men are not like that; some will tell you "This is who I am if you like it okay if you do not like it, then I will leave you and travel to someplace else and leave you."

"I say like blessings to Allah of course...but I say yes, it is true that as women sometimes we fight, and sometimes we make up but when living with your partner becomes impossible then... it is like when I need to divorce and separate from my husband then there is that intention which keeps me going, to live my life."

"We knew of it [in ref. to mental and emotional abuse] but we did not exactly understand what it is despite that maybe we were living through it. Any violence... despite whom it comes from, we [in ref. to Arab women] are always asked to suffer through it."

"You must always sacrifice your rights when you are an Arab woman."

"Almost everyone is living through this, but many women do not say anything about it."

"If he is angry and he verbally assaults her, they [in ref. to society/people] would tell her to be patient and it is not right of her to blame him... maybe he came home angry from work pressures."

2.10.2. Taboos Around Divorce

This double standard is very apparent when an abusive relationship drives a woman to consider divorce. Women in this position are subjected too much pressure from their community, who might readily point out that their actions are "disrupting the family."

"... even if she does file a complaint against her husband, they will call her [in ref. to a woman's extended family] and they will threaten her in coming to Canada and killing her. I am telling you this in all honesty and all reality... this is how it is... the woman ends up being scared of her extended family now... because her father will be angry with her, her brother will be angry with her and not talk to her; her sisters would disown her.... this is how it is in reality. So why would you want to do any of that? A woman would tell

you that she would rather “sit down and shut up” and continue to suffer and not file a complaint, but not have her entire family disown her. But of course, that is not the ideal solution but what can we do.”

“No not just for the kids... it is also because they are afraid of what people would say... A divorced woman in our society is not an accepted social member...it may be the case that she will not get any other marriage proposals and even if she does, she will most definitely get a far worse experience with a new husband...Secondly, her parents cannot cover her expenses and her children’s expenses. So she has to leave her kids behind with their father. so it is a far worse circumstance to be in.”

2.10.3. Reluctance Towards Seeking Help

A woman will face even greater disdain when she introduces a third party (such as a counsellor) to resolve her marital issues. This topic has greater significance in Canada compared to many Middle Eastern because of the abundance and “commonplace” nature of marriage counsellors, and because of the stricter enforcement of anti-domestic violence laws and better divorce laws.

“Our customs and traditions prevent us from doing this to our husbands... it is “Aib”[in ref. to what is a social taboo]. Is a woman going to file a complaint about her husband? I swear to Allah whatever it is he would do to me; I would never go and file a complaint about him to strangers.”

“And even if I go file a complaint on my husband, how do I face my children? She must factor her kids in the scenario.”

“No, we did not access these services; our dignity prevents us...; we have heard about it, but we did not access these services.”

“And you must respect your husband for your husband to respect you. If you did not do anything wrong, he would not do anything wrong.”

“Nothing will change, and I will not leave him, I will not leave him in Syria, and I will not leave him here [in ref. to Canada]. And despite the presence of violence here [in Canada] and there [in Syria] and this will continue....”

“I saw all of this hardship with him for 40 years... does it make sense that I left him when we came to this foreign land? I swear to Allah that is not right.”

“... You can divorce your husband in a Syrian court, but you do not get anything out of it... no financial support for you or your kids.”

However, one woman pointed out that if she decided to make this decision in Canada, the repercussions would be less severe.

“I wanted to say that if a woman leaves her husband here [in ref. to Canada] she will become stronger than she was in Syria...”

“If she can decide on Syria she can make that same decision here... But if you were weak in Syria, you will stay weak here, and if you were strong in Syria, you would still be strong here. Nothing will change. Nothing will influence her... no services no institutes...”

Sometimes women’s reluctance towards divorce stems from their fear of losing the physical protection and support (not necessarily financial) that a partner -even an abusive one- provides

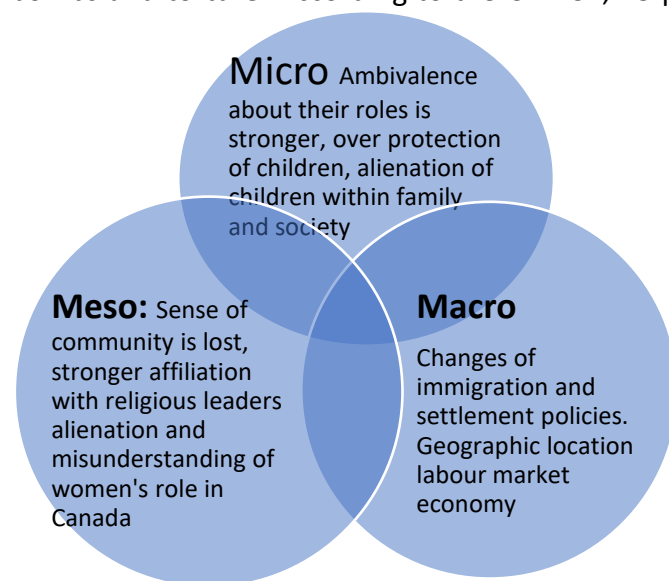
“Yes, and I can tell you why. This is not because we need financial assistance. I can tell you that we as Arab women do not need financial assistance. But it is because when we were raised, we were raised very poorly. An Arab woman would feel weak by herself if she was alone at her own house with her kids and no husband. The first people to dominate her in that situation are her kids; when if her husband was the strongest figure in the family and he leaves her, her kids become the strongest members of the family. Specifically, her sons. If her husband leaves, her eldest son would raise his voice and scream at her...”

Each Woman’s Struggle Is Unique; it is essential to emphasize that the experiences of Middle Eastern women under these themes are not uniform. They are substantially dependent on a multitude of factors including but not limited to socioeconomic status, education level, geographical region, ethnic background, family lineage, religious group, religiosity, age, and marital status.

One woman unexpectedly added; *“Actually, in Egypt, this is not right; it is the other way in Egypt... Egyptian women have the upper hand. She is the ruler of the home; the husband is scared of his wife in Egypt...”*

2.10.4. What Is Behind Their Tears?

Trauma and Mental Illness: Population Profile: Syrian Refugees, CIC, November 2015. “Trauma mental health and psychosocial support services will be essential for many Syrians after arriving in Canada. Mental health is one of the most prevalent health concern in this group since much of the Syrian refugee population has experienced some form of trauma, including losing family members, being subject to or witnessing violent acts, or suffering from conflict-induced physical disabilities due to the use of barrel bombs and torture. According to the UNHCR, 43 percent of Syrian refugees referred for resettlement



were submitted under the Survivor of Violence and Torture category in 2013 and 2014. The UNHCR reports a high prevalence of mental health conditions particularly among children and adolescents. The UNHCR (2013) found mental health issues are the most prevalent health concern for people ages 5 to 17 in both Lebanon and Jordan. Mercy Corps conducted focus group discussions with adolescents in Jordan and Lebanon and found that trauma causes immense physical and social isolation of refugees, particularly among adolescent girls. As a result, 20 percent of the children and adolescents interviewed left their home once a week or less. Boys mentioned broken social networks and a

growing sense of hopelessness. They also described feelings of vulnerability and discomfort due to tension between Syrian refugees and the host community. Syrian attitudes toward mental health have shifted a great deal according to the Cultural Orientation Resource Center. Before the crisis, receiving treatment for mental illness had a negative stigma, making people more reluctant to seek treatment or even discuss problems. However, with large numbers of Syrian men, women and children being in psychological distress, they are now more open to receiving mental health support. The need for treatment is difficult to predict, as symptoms can arise several months after arrival in the country of resettlement; therefore, follow-ups are crucial.

2.11. Final Consultation with Advisory Committee

The Findings from the qualitative analysis were presented to the project Advisory Committee at a lunch meeting. After the presentation, an intense discussion with members of the Advisory Committee took place where findings were validated because they reflected the service provider's experiences working with Middle Eastern Women. Much of the discussion focused on the changing roles of women and the need for revising the type and the focus of the services provided for refugee women in Peel. The educational section regarding the women's movement in Canada where suggested. To continue collecting data and consolidating the participatory action research approach of the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention were emphasized. Members also insisted on the need to keep having a meeting where under the auspicious of the PIVP exchange of knowledge, innovative ideas and strengthening of the network might occur.

2.12. Café Scientific

The Peel Institute on Violence Prevention hosted an informal discussion on the findings of this project. (See attached agenda, list of presenters and facilitator and PowerPoint presentations). A group of empowered panellists, with experience in the geopolitical situation of Middle Eastern Countries, refugees, settlement and gender, openly discussed their own experiences as services providers, researchers and educators. They provided attendees with the opportunity to connect with them and with each other on this crucial topic in an informal setting. The attendees discussed issues related to collective versus individualistic cultures, gender roles and the challenges refugee experience attempting to settle in Canada.

The fruitful discussion about services providers in Peel Region follows where issue specific to English as a Second Language and access to health and social services were debated.

The following graphic represents the main components of a potential "Pathway for Violence Prevention" as discussed at the Café Scientific:

3. DISCUSSION

Arab immigrants belong to one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Canada, with the majority arriving in the last four decades (Khouri, 2003), and hence, most are first-generation immigrants with 75% having entered between 1991 and 2011 (Canadian Arab Institute). The Arab migrant community is heterogeneous but shares similar cultural traditions and language, and most of them belong to the economic migrant class, followed by the refugee and family class (Hennebry & Momani, 2013). Political unrest, wars, violence, and economic instability in the Arab world have led Arabs to leave their countries (Khouri, 2003; Jamal, 2000) and despite the increase in Arab migrants, this community is one of the most understudied populations in Canada when it comes to social issues and services offered (Rasmi et al., 2014; Shalabi et al., 2015). Domestic violence is prevalent in the Arab world; however, it is considered a “personal and private” “family” matter and hence not reported (Gharaibeh et al., 2009; Haj-Yahia 2000a,b,c; Oweis et al., 2009; Gharaibeh M, & Oweis A. 2009; Haj-Yahia 1995; Haj-Yahia 2002; Haj-Yahia, 2003; Usta et al., 2011).

Since the Arab society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society that is grounded in collectivist values, females grow up viewing themselves as inferior to males, and they define themselves in the context of their position and role in the family and their interpersonal relationships with family members (Haj-Yahia, 1998; Joseph, 1993; Kulwicki, 2002). Hence, understanding the pre-migratory experience in the context of social structure, socio-economic, cultural, religious, gender roles, and traditional beliefs and values is paramount to offering services to Arab immigrant and refugee women. Immigrant Arab families face multiple overlapping barriers and discrimination related to ethnocultural and religious profiling and stereotyping that harms their resettlement and integration in the host country (Sonny & Jackson, 2003). Furthermore, one of the biggest challenges for Arab migrant families is that their host country predominantly embraces individualistic values (i.e. places more value on individual goals rather than family goals) as opposed to their collectivist values, which might lead to family tension and violence, when family members stray away and adopt more individualistic values (Baobaid, 2012). Institutional racism and overlapping social hierarchies that are at the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, marital status, language, and religion makes immigrant women more vulnerable (George & Rashidi, 2014; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002; Baobaid, 2012; Ono, 2013; Villalon, 2015). Accordingly, any intervention to reduce violence against Arab immigrant and refugee women must take into consideration all these factors and must try to consider the traditional cultural beliefs that shape the group’s behaviours and attitudes.

While violence against women is a global social concern, Arab immigrants and refugees are affected by a myriad of factors that increases their risk of facing violence. This issue appears to be especially problematic among minorities, where it claims more lives than in Western populations (Kulwicki et al., 2010; Abu-Ras, 2007; Lee, 2007). The complexity of the Arab immigrant and refugee women’s situation is worsened by barriers such as isolation, financial dependence on the husband, the language gap, racial discrimination, and social ostracization, which makes women reluctant to leave their abusive husbands. Also, oppose the idea of divorce as it will leave them without support. Moreover, also they do not bring shame to their families (Kulwicki et al., 2010). Some researchers point out the lack of social services that are culturally appropriate and their ability to respond to the needs of these women. Lack of appropriate services adds another obstacle for Arab immigrant and refugee women when it comes to deciding between staying in abusive relationships (Hamlin, 1991; Sullivan et al., 1992; Kulwicki et al., 2010) while other researchers emphasize their unique stressful life-experiences (Abu-Ras, 2007; Lee, 2007).

In identifying barriers to abused women seeking help; it is empirical to divide these barriers into two categories: the first category is related to cultural norms, while the second category is related to the format of formal services and the availability of culturally appropriate alternatives for this segment of immigrants. Traditional collectivist values continue to drive the behaviour of immigrant and refugee Arab women during their resettlement. Striving to keep the family intact, viewing abuse a private matter, wanting to protect their relationships with family members, upholding the value of honour, and not wanting to “bring shame” to the families are essential values to Arab women and it is these very same values that the perpetrators use against women in the host country. For instance, facing threats of having their children kidnapped (Aswad, 1997), and the social isolation and stigmatization that revolves around divorce are some of the forces that keep Arab women in abusive relationships (Kulwicki et al., 2010). On the other hand, lack of access to and utilization of culturally sensitive services prevent women from getting help.

Moreover, Arab women, as previously mentioned, do not welcome intervention from formal authorities such as the police or social service agencies. Abu-Ras (2000) revealed that 70.1% of battered women in Dearborn, Michigan were discouraged from seeking outside help by their social networks and that 74.6% reported barriers such as stigma and shame related to what family and friends would think of them. Based on the outcome of the above study in the US, and the identification of barriers to the use of services among abused women, the Health and Human Services providers along with Arab Muslim and Christian leaders, police department, local schools and universities got together. Staff trained in issues related to domestic violence in the Arab community to attempt to make these services more accessible to this population. These efforts highlight the importance of multidisciplinary action and involvement when it comes to addressing violence against women in the Arab community.

An important concept that can be over-emphasis, which drives immigrant and Arab refugee women’s attitude and behaviour, is the family value of “honour” and “shame.” Family honour rests on females, and any misconduct will bring shame to the entire family. Female honour attached to purity, chastity, and not having contact with men outside the family while men’s honour rests on protecting females in the family and preserving family honour. The concept of honour adds more pressure on women to behave in a manner deemed acceptable by the family and society; it has at times some definite benefits to women. Women can use their patrilineal kinship (fathers and brothers) to confront the violent behaviour of their husbands, and women can return to their parents or brothers’ home during a dispute (Kevorkian, 1994). These kinship norms are in many instances not present in the host country since women might migrate with their husbands only without extended family members. In this case, the patrilineal kinship is not current, and women are left alone without protection (Aswad, 1997). Since honour and shame both given great importance, immigrant and refugee women continue to be, faithful to these values, and it continues to drive their attitude in the host country when it comes to domestic violence.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A considerable portion of Middle Eastern women burdened heavily by societal expectations is in addition to being affected by political turmoil and economic issues. While women are being viewed as the “weaker sex” and raised in a way that makes them in one way or another still dependent on the support of a male relative or spouse. They are considered completely responsible for their family’s “success.” With the recent pressures on families to uproot and flee war-affected areas, women are consequently the most negatively affected group. Their journey leaves them vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse, as well as scorn and prejudice from people in their host countries.

It is clear that all the mothers interviewed were solely motivated to leave their homeland to seek their children’s well-being, namely their education. While earlier host countries have offered them some temporary stability, the absence of school education has left them feeling hopeless about the future.

The concept of “Aib” which can have several definitions, such as “honour” or “socially undesirable” was intensely discussed in the focus group. “Aib” permeates many aspects of women everyday lives in the Middle East, particularly those relating to family, marriage and divorce. These issues are rooted in culture and are entirely independent of religion or religiosity. Even with the removal of pressure from the immediate society with the arrival of these women to Canada, many of them continue to hold these standards, even if it jeopardizes their comfort and well-being.

Many of the women have explicitly communicated that they would like to have access to family counselling services that aid them with interacting with their family, particularly as to how to raise their children in a new environment. However, they remained very reluctant towards the idea of marital counselling, since the involvement of a third party was deemed as inappropriate.

Most of all, women expressed their desire to keep their families together. This attitude also extended to reporting domestic abuse where many of the women believed that “complaining to strangers” about their husband of many decades was unforgivable.

On another note, they have also expressed their dissatisfaction with the programs available for learning English. It is an integral step towards them finding employment and integrating into the community.

Overall, the women expressed genuine gratefulness towards finding a new home here in Canada, and many pledged to continue to support the communities that welcomed them over the upcoming years.

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5. Appendix

A PATHWAY TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION

