Overcoming Cultural Barriers in Working with Immigrant Women

Letter from the Editor

The National Network on Behalf of Battered Immigrant Women hosted a conference August 2002. The conference explored a variety of ways in which an immigrant woman can access legal and medical rights as a victim of domestic violence and sexual assault. The goal of the conference was to highlight the culturally relevant services available to battered immigrant women. In looking at the workshops it brings to light that there are even fewer services focused specifically on sexual assault which recognize the experiences unique to immigrant communities.

This gap in the service delivery structure is the basis for this issue of the Research & Advocacy Digest. This digest will highlight current research which illustrates the importance of gaining a cross-cultural understanding of the issue of sexual violence. The term "immigrant," unless otherwise noted, will be used in this digest as a general term to also include both documented and undocumented immigrants, refugees and migrants.

A review of current legal, medical, and social science research literature revealed little data. Particularly skim, is information about sexual assault across ethnically/culturally diverse populations. It is difficult to reach information beyond prevalence rates to examine perceptions regarding sexual assault and the rape victim and culturally appropriate interventions of rape survivors and their families.

However, the literature which does exist demonstrates that immigrant women's cultures, contexts, and legal status (a) increase vulnerability for abuse, (b) are used to control and abuse immigrant women, and (c) create barriers to women seeking and receiving help.

INSIDE:

"Culture, Sexuality & Shame..." abstract Page 2
"Latinas and Sexual Assault..." abstract Page 5
Tools for Service Providers Page 8-10
Library Resources Page 11
In the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11th and with recent legislation such as the U.S. Patriot Act, immigrant communities are experiencing increased levels of discrimination. In the interest of national security, targeted measures have created an atmosphere of fear in immigrant communities. These actions only serve to intensify barriers in accessing services. Because of this heightened discrimination, educating ourselves about cultural competency is imperative. A step to cultural competency is ensuring that sexual assault services are open and accessible to immigrants.

Immigrant women who are victims of sexual assault face complex barriers when they seek help. Though many sexual assault victims face a variety of barriers to service, for an immigrant woman, each barrier is exacerbated by her status as an outsider. Her experience may include linguistic and cultural isolation, and may involve fear of deportation. Thus, the need for service providers to understand and be sensitive to the barriers facing immigrant women and to strive to eliminate those barriers is crucial.

Nora Bashir

"Culture, Sexuality & Shame: A Korean American Woman’s Experience"

Chan, Connie S.

This chapter details the treatment and progress of a Korean American sexual assault survivor by a Chinese American clinician (Connie Chan). The chapter begins with an overview of the clinician’s experience of receiving referrals of Asian Americans from other mental health professions in the hopes that she can provide a more culturally relevant treatment experience. Ms. Chan has written many chapters and has a specific focus on sexuality and cultural identity.

The chapter then details the therapeutic process entered into by Kaya (the survivor) and Ms. Chan. Kaya is described as a reserved, academically achieving college student at an Ivy League college. Kaya and her family emigrated from Korea when she was a teen. Her parents are professionals. Kaya’s presenting issues were sleeplessness, anorexia and anxiety. Kaya had few friends and experienced feelings of isolation. During the course of treatment, Kaya discloses a drug-facilitated sexual assault by a former employer, occurring three years prior. The former employer was a married middle-aged Korean man with whom Kaya had a mentoring fatherly relationship. Kaya had never disclosed the sexual assault to anyone before.

Kaya suppressed her feelings regarding the sexual assault and focused instead on her education. As graduation became closer and Kaya achieved her stated goals she began to experience more of her inner turmoil. During the five-month time frame in which Kaya received treatment, Ms Chan was able to explore the effects of Korean culture as well as assimilation on Kaya’s perceptions of the experience of sexual violence. There was a specific focus on the idea of “saving face”. Kaya’s cultural norms reinforced her feelings of shame. After approximately twenty sessions in which the clinician focused on both westernized norms and Korean cultural norms Kaya’s symptoms of PTSD abated. She ended treatment as she transitioned to graduate school. This chapter highlights the necessity of including a client’s cultural experience in developing an effective treatment plan.

-LG
Stolen Lives: Trading women into sex and slavery

Sietske Altink is a journalist and researcher who has studied the issues of trafficking, sexual slavery and prostitution in Europe for over a decade. Her book, Stolen Lives: Trading women into sex and slavery is a distillation of her interviews with over one hundred Dutch trafficking victims. The book was initially published in Dutch two years prior to its English release in 1995. It contains the stories of twenty diverse women, with varied ethnic backgrounds originating from several countries.

Asia 1
(exact location undisclosed)
Columbia 3
Dominican Republic 5
Philippines 4
Poland 1
Thailand 3
Yugoslavia (former) 1

This demographic sample is representative of the victims trafficked to Europe. At the time of the interviews the majority of women had fled their traffickers. However, they were still profoundly affected by their experiences. Additional sources of information utilized by Ms. Altink include data from brochures and publications from women’s groups fighting trafficking, Dutch newspaper reports, documentation from court cases in the Netherlands and information compiled by the Dutch foundation against traffic in women, Stichting Tegn Vrouwenhandel (STV).

Stolen Lives is intended to be a qualitative as opposed quantitative analysis of the issue of trafficking. It attempts to describe trafficking in its various forms, to be inclusive of small to large-scale issues and to provide a personal connection through individual histories.

Chapters 1 – 3 define the issue of trafficking, provide an overview and places the issue of trafficking into historical context. Although it is impossible for one text to capture the complete picture of sexual trafficking throughout the world in all of its incarnations these framing chapters offer information that can be generalized to trafficking issues world-wide.

Chapter 4 provides information specific to the Netherlands.

Chapters 5 – 11, which constitute the heart of the book, are derived from victim interviews. It is here we see the personal and tragic face of trafficking. The personal narratives are illustrative of the tactics and methods used by traffickers, as well as the atrocities commonly enacted upon victims.

Chapter 12 provides an analysis of the issues specific to mail order brides.

Chapter 13 briefly describes the plight of trafficked domestic workers.

Chapter 14 explores options for addressing the issue of trafficking.

The strength of Stolen Lives lies in its ability to put a face on the issue of trafficking as well as providing a philosophical framework and an overview of the issue. The latter chapters of the book briefly touch upon strategies to address the issue but do not offer a comprehensive analysis. However, the book as a whole can act as an effective rallying cry. “Any woman, whether or not she is a prostitute, whether she is unemployed in Europe, toiling to keep a family in Africa, or an eager student in Latin America, who wants to escape a life without a future, to escape from drudgery or tradition can become a victim of trafficking. Global trafficking is a hidden scandal which abuses women in their struggle to emancipate themselves and their families.”
"What Is to Be Gained by Looking White People in the Eye? Culture, Race, and Gender in Cases of Sexual Violence"

Razack, Sherene
*Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*

Aboriginal women and women of color are "obliged to talk about culture and violence within the context of white supremacy, a context in which racism and sexism and their intersections are denied."

Razack, 1994

This article provides a narrative insight into cultural biases built into and perpetuated by systems. By examining the criminal justice system in Canada, Razack emphasizes the necessity of developing culturally competent systems and consequently challenges existing institutions to face the racism and sexism that currently inform dominant culture approaches. Specifically, Razack examines the uses of cultural analyses in the courts, when the issue is violence against Aboriginal women and women of color. She approaches her analysis by explaining that both Aboriginal women and women of color are "obliged to talk about culture and violence within the context of white supremacy, a context in which racism and sexism and their intersections are denied." (pg. 897)

The author examines cases in the court system to see how this context informs the adjudication of sexual assault cases. In her analysis, Razack found that judges are likely to consider the history of colonization and its impact on a culture when sentencing Aboriginal males, but often fail to acknowledge the impact this history has on Aboriginal women as victims of sexual assault. And as culture was considered in some cases, it was likely that white judges and lawyers with little or no knowledge of history or anthropology interpreted Aboriginal culture and its relevance to specific cases. (pg. 903).

As the courts would take into account cultural differences, Razack points out that they failed to acknowledge racism and sexism that is inherent in the criminal justice system. Through her use of case-specific examples, she points out incidents of discrimination in the system. Her use of cases is powerful and underlines the importance of building a culturally competent service structure and criminal justice system.

In addition, Razack explains that immigrant women face problems of access to the services that assist survivors of violence as well as racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system. She continues to explain that while dominant culture groups strive to provide culturally relevant services, the majority group usually knows very little about the impact that racism has on the lives of women of color. Razack cautions that those service providers who use broad generalizations about cultures are prone to stereotype individuals according to racist assumptions.

Overall, Razack's article calls for developing culturally competent systems and services by confronting racism and sexism inherent in our society. She explains that working across cultures must include an examination of contemporary forms of oppression and how they are experienced and reinforced, and that professionals working on behalf of a community should come from that community.

-CH
"Latinas and Sexual Assault: Towards Culturally Sensitive Assessment and Intervention"

Low, Georgiana and Kurt C. Organista

This article points to the need for culturally competent sexual assault services for Latinas. The authors survey the limited research available and highlight service models that provide culturally specific services. The authors explore the cultural and social variables in the life experience of Latinas, pointing out the diversity of history, experience, economic and educational levels, and family structures. They point out such issues as: cultural backdrop, gender roles including Marianismo and Hembrismo, familialismo, and the social and economic status of Latinas. Familismo, for example, refers to the strong identification as a member of an interconnected, interdependent family and may have direct relationships to how a woman chooses to deal with surviving sexual violence.

Sexual Assault Issues

This article highlights a model of Latina support services for women in San Francisco, which takes into account the complex cultural reality and describes why this is necessary. "Culturally competent rape services acknowledge the lived experience of the Latina victim while clarifying both the conflicts and benefits of biculturality." (pg. 146) This hospital-based program located in the heart of the Latino Mission District took steps to decrease the barriers to service for Latinas, including making services free, hospital-based and offering bilingual, bicultural staff members to provide services.

"From assessment through intervention, bilingual and bicultural Latino staff use a Latino relationship protocol to engage clients, emphasizing such culture-based values as respeto (showing proper respect for formal and traditional roles and relationships) and personalismo (formal yet warm and personalized way of speaking and relating to clients)." (page 152)

In addition, Low and Organista discuss the issue of conflicting cultural values and how rape crisis services based on U.S. Western values may counter the values of Latinas. Such values conflicts arise in areas of understanding of self, role of self in relation to authority, communication, and modes of self-expression. Several therapeutic intervention strategies are mentioned with an emphasis on adapting such strategies to align more closely with the cultural values and experiences of Latinas.

-COD

"Dating Violence Among Chinese American and White Students"


This article, aimed at service providers, surveyed a sampling of 289 Chinese American and white students from the University of California Berkeley campus on their perceptions of and experiences with dating violence and gender role beliefs. Past studies have shown significant levels of violence in dating relationships; yet the majority of past research on dating violence has been focused on white college students, and very little has been done with Asian Americans and other minorities. The lack of studies perpetuates the misconception that Asian Americans are problem free (Crystal, 1989).
The study asked the following research questions: 1) What are Chinese American students' definitions of dating violence? 2) What are Chinese American students' gender role beliefs? 3) What is the relationship between Chinese American students' perceptions of dating violence, gender role beliefs, and experiences with dating violence? The study focused on students in Asian American Studies, Social Welfare, and other social science classes. A selection of white students was used as a point of comparison. The study focused on these classes because of their high enrollment of Asian Students, although it was acknowledged the limits of this testing group. The students were given a self-administered questionnaire that took about 15-20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire used was based off of a previous questionnaire used to measure attitudes towards domestic violence in the Chinese community.

This study found that white students were more likely to define dating violence as physical, and sexually aggressive compared to Chinese students. The majority of students from both groups did not agree that dating violence was justified under certain circumstances. This study found no ethnic differences in the rate of dating violence; however, because Chinese American students began dating younger they suffered a higher amount of dating violence between the beginning of dating and taking this study. The study also found that Chinese students were less likely to define dating violence in psychological terms compared to their white counterparts.

The study provided recommendations for service delivery to the Asian American community in a campus setting.

"Sexual Abuse in South-Asian Immigrant Marriages"

Margaret Abraham
Violence Against Women

This article is based on the author's narrative interviews with South Asian immigrant women, and emphasizes their voices and experiences. Abraham sought to frame their narratives within the cultural contexts, tracing the factors that can contribute to sexual assault.

The author interviewed 25 women who were abused in their marriages. The women were "Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi; ranged in age from early twenties to late forties; and were from different socio-economic backgrounds and different religions (Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh)." The author groups the narratives under three types:

- Martial rape as male marital right
- Sexual abuse by controlling women's reproductive rights (forcing pregnancy, or abortion and assault during pregnancy)
- Sexual abuse by flaunting the "sexual other" (using pornography or threatening adultery to get sex or withdrawing from marriage by having an affair)

The author states that South Asian women and other marginalized groups must be included in research and the "discourse on abuse." She calls for further research, and draws attention to the "reality of the race, class, ethnicity and gender divisions" that keep South Asian women from seeking support from "U.S. social, economic, and political structures."

-RW

Reprinted with permission R&A Digest Vol. 2, #4
**Summary HB 2381**

**Trafficking of Persons.** The Washington State Task Force Against the Trafficking of Persons is established. The task force consists of the following persons (or their designees): the director of the Office of Community Development; the secretary of the Department of Health; the secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services; the director of the Department of Labor and Industries; and the commissioner of the Employment Security Department. In addition, the task force must include nine members, selected by the director of the Office of Community Development, represent the public and private sector organizations that provide assistance to persons who are victims of trafficking. With the exception of travel expenses, all members of the task force must serve without compensation.

The task force is responsible for the following activities:
- measuring and evaluating the progress of the state's trafficking prevention activities;
- identifying federal, state, and local programs that provide victims of trafficking with services such as health care, human services, housing, education, legal assistance, job training or preparation, interpreting services, English as a second language class, and victim's compensation; and
- making recommendations on how to provide a coordinated system of support and assistance to victims of trafficking.

The task force must be chaired by the director of the Office of Community Development or the director's designee. Administrative and clerical support to the task force is provided by the Office of Community Development.

The task force must provide a report to the Governor and the Legislature by November 30, 2002, on its findings and recommendations on trafficking in Washington.

The task force expires March 1, 2003

**Summary ESSB 6412**

**Mail Order Bride.** International matchmaking organizations must notify prospective spouses in foreign countries that background checks and marital history information on prospective Washington spouses is available upon request. The notice that background check and marital history information is available upon request must be in the recruit's native language, and must be displayed in a manner that separates it from other information in lettering at least one-quarter of an inch high.

If a prospective spouse in a foreign country requests this information from the matchmaking organization, the organization must notify the Washington resident of the request. The Washington resident must obtain background check information from the State Patrol, and must provide this information, as well as marital history information, to the organization.

The organization must then provide the information to the prospective spouse in the foreign country. Organizations must refrain from knowingly providing any further services to either prospective spouse until the organization has received the required information and provided it to the prospective foreign spouse.

Violations of these laws are considered violations of the Consumer Protection Act.
NEW VISAS
relief for victims of violence

U Visa
The Violence Against Women Act 2000 (VAWA 2000) created a new visa for immigrant victims of gender-based crimes. The U visa is designed for noncitizen crime victims who have suffered substantial physical or mental abuse flowing from criminal activity and who have cooperated with government officials investigating or prosecuting such criminal activity.

T Visa
Individuals who were brought to the U.S. by means of fraud, coercion or deceit and were forced to perform sexual acts and/or were forced to work under conditions of bondage, peonage or slavery, may be eligible for the T visa.

For further information as in crimes covered, who qualifies, procedures and technical assistance contact:
Cecilia Clavama, Immigrant Women Program, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (202) 326-0040, twp@nowdef.org or Gail Pendleton, National Immigration Project of the National Lawyer’s Guild (617) 227-9727, gail@nationalimmigrationproject.org

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

National Network For Immigrant and Refugee Rights
310 Eight Street, Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94607
Phone: (510) 465-1984
Fax: (510) 465-1885
Email: Nnirr@nnirr.org
Website: http://www.nnirr.org

National Immigration Forum
220 I Street, N.E., Suite 220
Washington, D.C. 20002
Phone: (202) 544-0004
Fax: (202) 544-1905
Email: info@immigrationforum.org
Website: http://www.immigrationforum.org
Somewhere to Turn: Making Domestic Violence Services Accessible to Battered Immigrant Women. A ‘How To’ Manual for Battered Women’s Advocates and Service Providers.

Chapter 1 & 2 Highlights are reprinted with permission by NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, Immigrant Women Program. Written and edited by Leslye E. Orloff, and Rachel Little. AYUDA, Inc. (May 1999).

POWER AND CONTROL DYNAMICS USED ON IMMIGRANT WOMEN, INCLUDING:
- Threats related to the immigration status of the victim
- Economic control exerted over immigrant victims
- Isolating the victim and controlling her activities (such as access to money, friends, family, and medical care)
- Use of cultural tactics (such as preventing the victim from learning English)

THE BARRIERS THAT IMMIGRANT WOMEN FACE TO ACCESSING MAINSTREAM SERVICE PROVIDERS, INCLUDING:
- Language barriers between victims and service providers, police officers, and courthouse staff, lack of interpreters and lack of translated documents
- Fears and misconceptions concerning the police and the U.S. legal system
- Fear of deportation
- Cultural issues (such as pressure to keep family matters private and concerns about being able to practice cultural traditions in a shelter setting)
- Religious concerns (including fear of ostracism by their religious community)
- Fears about experiencing racism from justice system personnel and service providers
- Economic barriers (immigration status may limit her ability to find work and live independently)
- Fear that the abuser will kidnap their children

CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING STRATEGIES
- Building agency support for cultural competency training
- Combining cultural competency training with a staff retreat
- Using multiple training techniques to compensate for the different ways that staff members process information
- Locating a facilitator
- Inviting members of the immigrant community to participate
- Cross-training with allied immigrant-based agencies education programs.
- Making cultural competency an ongoing goal of the agency by designating a staff member to be in charge of future trainings and continuing education programs.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED DURING TRAINING EVENTS
- Oppression, stereotypes, and misconceptions
- Myths and facts about immigrants
- Cultural barriers that immigrants may experience when trying to access a service program
- Understanding immigrant cultures
- Understanding the legal rights and special needs of immigrants
  - Rights of immigrant women
  - Relevant immigration legal information
  - VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) immigration provisions
  - Public benefits concerns for immigrants
  - Culturally competent safety plans
This version of the Power and Control wheel focuses on some of the many ways battered immigrant women can be abused.

**Power and Control**

**Physical Abuse**
- Pushing, shoving, hitting
- Stopping,カード, pulling hair
- Punching, kicking, grabbing
- Using a weapon against her

**Emotional Abuse**
- Lying about her immigration status
- Writing her family lies about her
- Calling her racist names

**Economic Abuse**
- Threatening to report her if she works "under the table"
- Not letting her get job training or schooling

**Sexual Abuse**
- Calling her a prostitute or "mail order bride"
- Alleging she has a history of prostitution on legal papers

**Threats**
- Threatening to report her to the INS
- Threatening to withdraw the petition to legalize her immigration status

**Using Citizenship or Residency Privilege**
- Failing to file papers to legalize her immigration status
- Withdrawing or threatening to withdraw papers filed for her residency

**Isolation**
- Isolating her from friends, family, or anyone who speaks her language
- Not allowing her to learn English

**Intimidation**
- Hiding or destroying important papers (i.e., passport, ID cards, health care card, etc.)
- Destroying her property from her country of origin

This version of the Power and Control wheel is adapted with permission from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota. Reprinted with permission from the Family Violence Prevention Fund.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IN WCSAP LIBRARY

BOOKS

YELL-Oh Girls! Emerging Voices Explore Culture, Identity, and Growing Asian American

Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History

Cultural Diversity In Organizations: Theory, Research and Practice

Multicultural Literacy: Opening the American Mind

An Introduction to Multicultural Education

Increasing Multicultural Understanding: A Comprehensive Model

Multicultural Activities for Primary Children

Cultural Awareness in the Human Services

MANUAL

Guidelines for providing culturally appropriate crisis intervention

VIDEOS

Becoming American: The Odyssey of a refugee family

Multi-Cultural Assessments in Sexual Assault Cases

Open Letter: Grasp the Bird’s Tail
Subscription Form

The Research & Advocacy Digest is available free to all WCSAP members.* Others may subscribe for one year (3 issues) at the following rates:

- Individual, $30
- Non-Profit Organization, $50
- Other Organization, $75

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Organization: _____________________________________________________

Address: _________________________________________________________

City: ___________________ State: _______ Zip: _____________________

Phone: ___________________ Fax: ___________________

* For information about becoming a Supporting Member of WCSAP, please contact WCSAP's Administrative Assistant by phone at (360) 754-7583 or by email at wsap@wcsap.org.