

**An Analysis of How Community Organizations Support
Abused Chinese Immigrant Women in the Canadian Context**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis explores the assistance provided by community organizations in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, and Vancouver regions to Chinese immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence. Guided by postcolonial feminist insights and through interviews with community service providers, this study examines how the service providers define the needs of these women. In addition, it explores how they act with cultural sensitivity and acknowledge the distinct experiences of racialized immigrant women, while challenging orientalist narratives about ‘minority cultures’ causing domestic violence.

My findings reveal the complexity and contradiction in how service providers conceptualize and respond to the women’s needs. Specifically, they blame ‘Chinese culture’ and the ‘women’s foreignness’ for their victimization and reluctance to seek support. They strive to inculcate a ‘non-culturalized’ way of thinking, despite knowing the multidimensional barriers and complex immigrant reality that shape the women’s actions. At the same time, this understanding encourages them to offer additional support, addressing the women’s immigrant- and cultural-specific needs. While doing so, they strategize to reduce the impact of structural constraints on women with limited resources. Their objective is to mitigate the system’s harm and women’s vulnerabilities. However, their understanding of ‘immigrant realities’ is not always accurate. This inadequacy is reflected by their assumption that financial empowerment approaches would also help immigrants.

By analyzing the logic of these support services and what they entail, this study reveals a grassroots anti-violence approach that is culturally sensitive and informed by understandings of immigrant women’s distinct experiences, even though this approach can prove insufficient. At

the same time, my findings indicate that the practices of anti-violence workers are both informed by and reproduce orientalist, hegemonic assumptions about abused immigrant women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Framing the Issue

Domestic violence is considered a serious and pervasive issue affecting many women in Canada and elsewhere (Women and Gender Equality Canada 2021). It is defined as a pattern of behavior used to establish or maintain power over a domestic partner or family member in a current or previous marital, dating, or cohabiting relationship (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; OCASI 2006). Such behavior may include an act of violence, a threat of physical, sexual, and/or emotional/psychological abuse, intimidation, isolation, and so on, implemented to control or coerce the other person (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; OCASI 2006). Studies strongly indicate that its nature and consequences are more severe for women than for men (Ahmad et al. 2009; OCASI 2006). Women in an abusive relationship are three times more likely than men to be killed, and twice as likely to be injured and/or experience chronic mental and physical problems, including addiction, depression, physical injury, and suicide attempts (Ahmad et al. 2009; Midlarsky et al. 2006; OCASI 2006).

Although research on domestic violence against women is extensive, scholarship focusing specifically on Chinese immigrant women is largely lacking (Midlarsky et al. 2006; Tam 2004). Several factors contribute to this neglect in academic research. For instance, official police-reported data on domestic violence do not distinguish between women belonging to visible minorities and to non-visible minorities (Ahmadzai et al. 2016). Additionally, scholars tend either to portray immigrant women as a monolithic group with common struggles and anti-violence needs as ‘immigrants’ and ‘women’ or to divide them into subgroups, such as ‘East Asian women’ and ‘South Asian women’ so as supposedly to represent the Asian community as a whole, despite heterogeneous cultures affecting community members in different ways (Ahmad

et al. 2009; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Midlarsky et al. 2006). This essentialized subject formation of ‘immigrant women’ leads to understudy of the distinct experiences of abused Chinese immigrant women.

Similar oversights are present in scholarship studying how community based anti-violence organizations assist victims of domestic violence. The handful of studies on abused Chinese immigrant women point out that cultural beliefs, fear of deportation, and language barriers prevent many from seeking police intervention (Lee 2000; Midlarsky et al. 2006; Yoshioka et al. 2001). Moreover, living with their abusive partner and lack of personal contacts in their new land restrict these women’s access to informal assistance such as friend and family support (Midlarsky et al. 2006; Tam 2004). In the absence of police intervention and personal support, the only other resource left for these women to mitigate violent incidents is community-based anti-violence services. As a crucial mechanism to ensure women’s safety (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Midlarsky et al. 2006), it is essential to understand what community-based anti-violence services entail, how they assist the women, and, most important, whether or not women engage with them in the first place. However, answers have been elusive due to the neglect of Chinese immigrant women in domestic violence scholarship.

Along with this lack of discussion, there is a misconception on the underlying cause of the violence women experience and the support they need. Some scholars repeatedly posit ‘culture’ as the root cause of domestic violence and the reason why migrant and racialized survivors fail to seek help (for example, Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006). Informed by these assumptions, these scholarly writings suggest that community organizations address women’s ‘cultural constraints’ by educating them on their rights and that wife abuse is wrong (Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006).

Culture, as a contributor to male violence, undoubtedly shapes women's experience and their needs, but so do structural factors (Crenshaw 1991). Scholarly works that blame culture while ignoring the impact of structural factors misrepresent these women's reality and their multifaceted anti-violence needs. Additionally, services informed by cultural discourses risk reproducing the narrative of oppressed 'Third World Women' (Mohanty 1988), which may further alienate Chinese and immigrant women, thereby counteracting the services' efforts (Crenshaw 1991). All of these limitations reiterate the need for inquiries into how community services assist their Chinese immigrant clients and illuminate how crucial it is to move away from cultural discourses to generate more accurate, reflective knowledge about these women and the support they need.

Research Questions

To address the knowledge gap and issues identified in the literature, my study explores community-based supports developed for abused Chinese immigrant women in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, and Vancouver regions. My research seeks to answer two questions:

1. How do service providers define the needs of abused Chinese immigrant women?
2. How do community-based workers ensure an approach that is culturally sensitive and acknowledges racialized and immigrant women's distinct experiences, but does not perpetuate orientalist narratives about 'minority cultures' as a root cause of domestic violence in the community?

Terms

For this analysis, I use the term 'abuse' interchangeably with and define it identically as 'domestic violence.' In addition, I employ 'survivors' and 'victims' interchangeably to describe those who experienced domestic violence without insinuating one group as having more agency

or being more empowered than the other. In recent years, some feminist scholars and advocates have favoured ‘survivors’ to emphasize abused women’s agency and their empowerment endeavor (Brosi and Rolling 2010; Morrison 2006; The Language We Use n.d.). In doing so it also aims to shift the narrative away from women’s victimization and non-departure towards the violent conduct of abusers (Morrison 2006). While acknowledging Chinese immigrant women’s agency and the abusers’ role, my study is concerned rather with disclosing the multidimensional factors that constitute the violence and the women’s vulnerability, of which the abuser is one factor, rather than the entire explanation. Being in a marginalized position, although the women have agency to exercise their ‘choices’, their choices and actions are limited. In a sense, they are both ‘survivors’ and ‘victims’ of a disempowering system and of their individual circumstances, which have together permitted the abuse.

Contributions

Existing studies on violence against Chinese immigrant women reveal two major knowledge gaps that my study seeks to address. One of them is the lack of data on community-based services developed for such women. Another one is the reproduction of orientalist discourses by some domestic violence scholarship, which in turn generates incomplete, even false narratives about these women’s reality and the support they need. My study aims to fill these gaps through in-depth interviews with seven community organization workers, who are uniquely positioned to grasp the grassroots resources and practices believed to be crucial to women’s safety (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). In doing so, my study sheds light on how these services conceptualize the needs and vulnerabilities of abused Chinese immigrant women.

By actively challenging and disengaging from orientalist discourses, my study produces empirical knowledge that more accurately reflects these women's reality and needs and enriches existing postcolonial theories. Specifically, I draw on the theoretical framework of 'Intersectionality' (Crenshaw 1991) and the postcolonial insights on the production of 'Third World Women' (Mohanty 1988) to examine how service providers make sense of their clients' experiences and vulnerabilities, most notably how they understand 'Chinese culture' and structural factors that render women victims. My research thereby reveals the structural barriers that persistently marginalize these women and yet are downplayed by some scholars. At the same time, it sheds light on the difficulties in moving away from cultural discourses, despite knowing the complexity behind the violence.

By examining the design and provision of services, as well as the service gaps, my findings can assist the development of more suitable services and programs for abused Chinese immigrant women. As discussed, despite being aware of the important role of community organizations in supporting these women, we know little about how they support them and the impact of such support. My research offers practical insights, which may help generate more suitable interventions for abused Chinese immigrant women, and immigrant survivors more generally.

Roadmap

My thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the relevant theories and literature and of the knowledge gaps this study intends to address. Chapter 3 describes my methodology, outlining the considerations shaping the study and my procedures to collect and analyze data. Then, in the three chapters that follow, I present the findings and

engage in analytical discussions. Chapter 4 discusses the education services deployed to Chinese immigrant women to raise their awareness about abuse and their legal rights. I illustrate how these services stem from orientalist assumptions about immigrant women and their ‘cultures.’ Chapter 5 presents the tangible actions taken by service providers to reduce harm for women. The discussion shows how they apply their understanding of the immigrant reality to service delivery, meet women’s immigrant- and cultural-specific needs, and strategize to mitigate the impact of structural barriers. Chapter 6 discusses the life-skill training that service providers rely on to cultivate women’s financial stability and freedom but, I find, fails to do so. I show how this failure stems from an inadequate understanding of immigrant realities and neoliberal assumptions that self-improvement alone would address these women’s vulnerabilities. Finally, in chapter 7, I outline the key findings and the limitations of my study, as well as potential directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

This chapter outlines the theories and literature about the subjects of my study and the knowledge gaps that I intend to address. I begin by reviewing the scholarship on violence against Chinese and immigrant women followed by a critical evaluation of their analysis. I next highlight the literature about community services specific to abused Chinese and immigrant women and the gaps in these scholarly works. I conclude this chapter with the limitations of the existing literature and how my study addresses them.

Portraying ‘Minority Cultures’ as the Root Cause of Domestic Violence

In studies on domestic violence, feminist scholarship largely theorizes the phenomenon as a construct of socioeconomic, cultural, and historical factors, as well as women’s individual circumstances (Conner 2014). However, when the focus is on racialized immigrant women, some scholars focus overwhelmingly on women’s ‘cultures’ and ‘traditions’ – specifically, on how their cultures and traditions underlie male violence and discourage women from seeking assistance and leaving their abusers (Ahmad et al. 2009; Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006), especially in the case of non-white subjects perceived to “have culture” (see critiques by Grewal 2013; Volpp 2000:89). Similarly, some studies examining anti-violence work and community services for abused immigrant women suggest ‘educating immigrant women’ on their ‘patriarchal cultures and traditions’ as a means to escape their abusive relationships.

For instance, when studying why Chinese and South Asian immigrant women are reluctant to report abuse and seek assistance, both Midlarsky et al. (2006) and Ahmad et al. (2009) blame cultural constraints, cultural stigma, traditional family values, and the women’s

powerlessness. They suggest that patriarchal norms, which they assume to be pervasive and embedded in these cultures and communities, prevent victims' recognition of some forms of abuse, and may even lead the communities to encourage violence against women when they violate gender expectations (Ahmad et al. 2009; Midlarsky et al. 2006). They argue further that this unawareness among women and justification of wife abuse by the communities perpetuate patriarchy (Ahmad et al. 2009; Midlarsky et al. 2006).

In addition, according to some scholars, even when Chinese immigrant women recognize abuse, they may not leave because of cultural limitations. Both Lee and Au (1998) and Midlarsky et al. (2006) argue that 'Chinese culture' legitimizes women's subordination and emphasizes 'saving face' through the appearance of family unity. They believe that women therefore choose to endure abuse to conform to gender expectations and avoid bringing 'shame' to their family (Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006).

Under these perspectives, scholarship suggests that social service agencies must factor in cultural issues and educate women on their rights and on gender equality while informing men about the serious harms of domestic violence (Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006). They recommend service providers consider the Chinese cultural value of keeping families intact and from public shaming, which they believe is at the core of women's decision to tolerate abuse and stay silent (Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006). They also suggest that community educators refrain from using culturally unacceptable words, such as 'batterer,' which they perceive would alienate Chinese immigrant clients (Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006).

The absence of discussion on systemic barriers and structural constraints

The overwhelming emphasis on 'cultural factors' and 'traditional values' as primary sources of violence against Chinese immigrant women and their unwillingness to report abuse

have obscured a structural analysis of their experience of domestic abuse. Specifically, drawing a relationship exclusively between domestic violence and ‘Chinese cultures and traditions’ negates the impact of these women’s social environment and structural barriers on violence. These barriers include neoliberalism (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018), systemic racism (Mohanty 1988), discriminatory work environments, and hostile immigration policies (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). For instance, studies suggest that neoliberal immigration policies in Canada helped add a layer of vulnerability onto already marginalized immigrant women who experience domestic violence (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018).

In “Immigration Policies and Immigrant Women’s Vulnerability to Intimate Partner Violence in Canada,” Jayasuriya-Illesinghe (2018) demonstrates that neoliberal immigration policies have embraced a points-based system and favor economic immigrants (yield 60%) who are wealthy, highly educated, and self-sufficient. This practice intends to maximize human and economic gain from immigrants and minimize the cost of settling newcomers (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Under the points-based system, women from the Global South are less likely to be selected as economic immigrants, due to their constrained access to the types of education and work experiences preferred by the Canadian government (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Therefore, to many women, the access to permanent residency is inevitably tied to their male spouses under the condition of a two-year cohabiting relationship (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). For the many women who have experienced domestic violence in their homelands, this requirement forces them to continue living with their abusive partner over the fear of losing residency status and financial support (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018).

According to Jayasuriya-Illesinghe (2018), this stipulation may generate further domestic violence in the new land. Given that sponsored females’ residency status are conditional and

dependent upon conjugal relationships and living with their male sponsors, the policy has granted disproportionate power to male sponsors over sponsored females (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). In addition, immigration policies' reproduction of sexism and racism renders sponsored women ineligible for some training and assistance (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018), forcing many into low-paid employment (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Moreover, decredentialization and deskilling resulting from current immigration policies have kept many immigrant women in poverty, hence financially and emotionally vulnerable and dependent on their abusive partners (Hudon 2015; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018).

The 'racialized other/progressive us' narrative

By attributing domestic violence in immigrant communities to 'culture' and 'tradition,' some scholars not only neglect the complexity and multiple dimensions of domestic violence experienced by Chinese immigrant women but also invoke and perpetuate orientalist discourses of 'bad Chinese Men,' 'unconscious Chinese women,' and the 'backwardness of Chinese culture' (Mohanty 1998; Volpp 2000). The reproduction of orientalist discourses is not limited to writing about the Chinese community but relates also to knowledge production about racialized immigrant communities in general. Moreover, the repercussions of this orientalist approach are even more notable than those associated with denying systemic barriers, given that the former reproduces a racist and falsified conception about the 'Chinese community' and its 'culture.' This in turn could potentially misinform feminist and community-based initiatives developed to address domestic violence and support Chinese immigrant women in abusive relationships.

Various scholarly works perpetuate orientalist misconceptions about 'racialized minority cultures' in discussions of violence against women. For example, in the discussion on the debate between advocating for multiculturalism and for feminism, Okin (1999) creates a false

dichotomy between minority cultures/multiculturalism and gender oppression, arguing that minority cultures perpetuate practices such as polygamy and child marriage, which allow men to use and to control women. She notes that because patriarchy is so deeply rooted in the culture, to an extent, these constructs have become “virtually equated” (Okin 1999:16). Okin (1999) also stresses that ‘Western liberal cultures,’ in contrast, treat women differently, offering them more freedom and rights. She asserts that, although Western liberal cultures still struggle with forms of gender discrimination, such as sexual violence, workplace discrimination, and unrealistic beauty standards, they are less patriarchal and have largely guaranteed women the same freedoms and opportunities as men (Okin 1999:16).

Believing that minority women’s rights are constrained by their cultures, Okin (1999) suggests that, although the racial discrimination experienced by minority communities need to be considered, the primary concern is to protect women from ‘minority cultures’ and abusive men. Moreover, she perceives that minority women born into a patriarchal culture may be “better off” (22) if their cultures “become extinct” (22), so they can integrate themselves into a less sexist, and liberal majority culture (Okin 1999:23).

Such a viewpoint – ‘racialized other/progressive us’ – have been criticized by many postcolonial feminist works for reproducing and promoting orientalist and racist discourses to explain immigrant women’s experiences of domestic violence (for example, Grewal 2013; Mohanty 1988; Razack 2003). Specifically, the discourse flows from an assumption that the ‘Third World Women’ (Mohanty 1988:65--85) is a coherent entity, victimized by backward cultures and traditions, and that immigrant women share the same interests regardless of class and race, and need to be rescued from Third World men by the progressive First World (Honig 1999; Mohanty 1988:65--85). This binary discourse between the ‘racialized other’ and

‘progressive us’ constructed by scholars such as Okin misconceives Western society as less sexist (rather than being sexist in a different way) than non-Western societies, and assumes that Western liberal values and moralities can solve domestic violence against immigrant women (Grewal 2013; Honig 1999; Volpp 2000).

Moreover, the equating of ‘minority cultures’ with ‘patriarchy,’ so that some immigrant women can be saved from patriarchy only when their cultures are altogether “eradicated” (Okin 1999), decontextualizes concepts such as ‘culture’ and patriarchy (Grewal 2013; Honig 1999; Mohanty 1988). In this case, neither the interlocking factors that constitute and exacerbate violence against immigrant women, nor the ‘minority culture’ that is believed to produce the violence, are apparent. In addition, the proposed solution – ‘saving’ immigrant women from their abusers and ‘removing’ them from their communities – may cost them financial and emotional support, which in turn may work counterproductively in assisting these women (Honig 1999; Singh 2010).

Community-based Anti-violence Services for Abused Immigrant Women

Many studies on domestic violence against immigrant women reveal a reluctance among women to report their abusive partners, which underscores the value of community support and social services. Many also find, however, these services are not always in place (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Midlarsky et al. 2006; Singh 2010). According to Jayasuriya-Illesinghe (2018), neoliberal policies have slashed government support for agencies that serve immigrants in general and those for abused immigrant women. The decreased availability of both has constrained those women who are more vulnerable and more likely to rely on welfare programs, including immigrant women (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Given that immigrant and newcomer

women may be hesitant to call police for help for fear of losing their sponsorship or immigration status, some can draw only on social service agencies (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). However, with the decline of the welfare state and funding towards social services, the only resources in place to support the immigrant women and mediate domestic violence are constrained (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018).

Findings about abused immigrant women's reluctance to call the police are widespread in scholarship on domestic violence (Ahmad et al. 2009; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Singh 2010). Scholars point out that this fear results from mandatory criminal justice interventions in the cases of domestic violence against women (Singh 2010). Although mandatory charging may counter police neglect in the field, it has proven disempowering and detrimental, particularly for immigrant women (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Singh 2010). In light of mandatory interventions and their repercussions, some scholars suggest increasing community services for immigrant women (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Midlarsky et al. 2006; Singh 2010). Given this, the following questions are worth exploring: How do community services assist abused immigrant women in overcoming domestic violence? What actions do anti-violence workers take to ensure an approach that is culturally sensitive and acknowledges racialized and immigrant women's distinct experiences, while rejecting orientalist narratives about 'minority cultures' as a root cause of domestic violence?

Community services for abused immigrant women in Canada

Singh's "In Between the System and the Margins" (2010) illustrates how community service providers in Toronto interact with and assist abused immigrant women. She finds an array of services on offer, such as help with applying for financial aid, legal advice and referrals to lawyers and translators, and counselling (Singh 2010). Moreover, a common practice is for

organizations to hold open door policies, given that they define ‘cultural sensitivity’ as synonymous with creating a home-like environment for abused immigrant women (Singh 2010:46). According to Singh (2010), service agencies, when intervening in abuse, always inform women about mandatory charging and its consequences. Due to the consequences, service agencies often suggest that victims of violence not invoke police assistance (Singh 2010).

She also points out that while scholars view outreach work as effective in informing women about their rights and the consequences of mandatory charging, depending on the content and delivery, the reality may be otherwise (Singh 2010). Specifically, initiatives that lack specific details about mandatory charging and other aspects of the criminal justice system will likely do very little to assist victims of abuse in making informed decisions (Singh 2010). Additionally, victims’ reluctance to name and discuss domestic abuse publicly may also prevent the delivery of violence-prevention education through outreach (Singh 2010).

Feminist scholarship also draws attention to the perspectives of racialized service providers about services for abused immigrant women in Canada and about alternative practices (Singh 2016). According to Singh (2016), most racialized immigrant service providers in Toronto feel frustrated by constraints that limit assistance, such as over-intake and restricted services, impersonal and business-like environments, bureaucracy, the short time for each client, and unrealistic expectations on service outcomes (Singh 2016). They believe that such factors compress what should be a long-term anti-violence project into a “one-time activity” (2016:159) and ignore structural barriers and other root causes of gender violence, which in turn, fail to truly empower victims (Singh 2016).

Moreover, service providers’ flexibility when deciding the amount of time and types of services needed to help abused immigrant women are constrained by bureaucracy and funding

directives, which conflict with their philosophy of the ideal approaches to assist these women (Singh 2016). Some prefer the anti-violence strategies that they practiced in their country of origin, which did not restrict location and time, allowing them to truly help abused women (Singh 2016). For example, some had the freedom to extend counselling sessions and regularly meet victims in their homes, and to conduct outreach in the communities as opposed to in their offices (Singh 2016).

In the light of their frustration with the “Canadian system” (2016:520) and their philosophy of true empowerment, some service providers adopted and incorporated strategies from their old practices as a way to challenge bureaucratization and structural oppression from the system that hinders abused women from getting full support (Singh 2016). The practices include training abused women as anti-violence counsellors, providing them with employment, avoiding government funding, being flexible on the numbers of sessions offered, and initiating a survivor-centered approach (Singh 2016:521--3).

The logic behind ethno-specificity and cultural sensitivity

Some feminist scholars studying community services for abused Chinese and immigrant women believe anti-violence services that are culturally sensitive can better serve the needs of these women. This belief is based on the notion that abused immigrant women, while facing barriers similar to their non-immigrant counterparts, also face migrant specific barriers, one of which is cultural constraints (Tam 2004; Yoshioka and Choi 2005). Therefore, community services that assume homogeneity in abused women’s needs will likely be inadequate, or even detrimental to the Chinese and immigrant service seekers (Midlarsky et al. 2006; Milani et al. 2018; Yoshioka and Choi 2005).

There are only a handful of studies on community services for abused Chinese immigrant women. They show that, on the one hand, scholars associate culturally sensitive intervention with the provision of services by Chinese ‘language and cultural insiders’, who, they believe, can address the women’s language and ‘cultural’ needs (Midlarsky et al. 2006; Tam 2004). On the other hand, culturally sensitive practices could vary depending on how one conceives of women’s needs and their relationship to Chinese culture.

For example, in her study of culturally sensitive intervention, Tam (2004) examines a model wherein Chinese-language and -cultural insiders deliver services to Chinese clients. Tam (2004) believes in applying this model to Chinese clients regardless of their English proficiency, given that it makes them more comfortable by expressing themselves in their language. Moreover, Tam (2004) notes, Chinese culture continues to have a profound impact on Chinese women even long after immigration. Therefore, having a cultural insider, who understands their cultural concerns about shame and reluctance about divorce, is always critical (Tam 2004).

Midlarsky et al. (2006) echo Tam (2004) on the effectiveness of ethno-specific intervention to Chinese immigrant women, while emphasizing ‘cultural competency’ and its educational purpose. Midlarsky et al. (2006) insist on cultural competence in serving Chinese immigrant women as the only way to create effective anti-violence outcomes. They argue that ‘Chinese culture’ dominates these women’s lives and way of thinking, resulting in ignorance to abuse and feelings of shame about disclosing it and leaving their abuser (Midlarsky et al. 2006). Therefore, Midlarsky et al. (2006) believe that would-be educators and intervenors must understand this cultural aspect and adopt culturally appropriate terms so as to reach these women.

Some studies disagree that language and cultural insiders are always beneficial. For instance, the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) (2007) suggests that cultural insiders may inhibit some immigrant women from comfortably reaching out to the agency, due to concerns about confidentiality that arises from receiving services from one's own community members. While this JIBC report deals with immigrant women at large, it isolates a potential practical dilemma of culturally sensitive intervention vis-à-vis abused Chinese immigrant women.

Another issue that arises from 'cultural sensitivity' is its emphasis on 'culture' and the subsequent reproduction of orientalist discourses (Grewal 2013; Mohanty 1988; Razack 2003). Given racialized immigrant women's historical exclusion from community anti-violence services, it could be beneficial to have a service mechanism that makes women feel seen and included (Crenshaw 1991; Li et al. 2020; Tam 2004). However, the emphasis on 'cultural impact' and the assumption that 'cultural understanding' is the determining factor to effective service outcomes (Midlarsky et al. 2006) ignore the multiple dimensions of domestic violence that shape the women's needs, while reproducing the orientalist narrative of immigrant women as victims of their culture (Grewal 2013; Mohanty 1988; Razack 2003). In this case, we should further explore how service providers can balance anti-violence work with cultural sensitivity and understanding of immigrant experiences without perpetuating orientalist narratives.

Limitations

Scholarship on domestic violence against immigrant women and how social service agencies assist them provides significant knowledge to ground my study. However, it also presents limitations and knowledge gaps which my study intends to address.

One of the limitations, as stated, is the overall lack of discussion on how community services assist abused Chinese immigrant women. Feminist scholars have showcased the valuable role of community services for abused immigrant women (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Singh 2010) and described in detail the available services. However, there is little research on how these services assist abused Chinese immigrant women. While Tam (2004) offers insights, she is assessing the effectiveness of a specific culturally sensitive intervention model. Her narrow focus and scholars' general silence on the topic result in a knowledge gap. My study bridges this gap by detailing available services and how they intersect with the women's needs, as identified by providers. It also documents the needs that are beyond the scope of existing community anti-violence programming and service providers' approach to them.

Another limitation, as reflected in literature, is the reproduction of orientalist assumptions. Spurred by cultural discourses, some feminist scholars portray the women as victims of their 'backward' culture and sharing the same anti-violence needs. While doing so, their discussions minimize the structural factors that exacerbate violent incidents and the women's vulnerability. As a result, they produce knowledge that perpetuates orientalist assumptions and misrepresents the women's reality.

Therefore, it is central for me to disengage from and resist the orientalist and hegemonic assumptions in this production of knowledge. Specifically, I apply to my analysis the theoretical framework of Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and postcolonial feminist insights on the production of the 'Third World Women' (Mohanty 1988; Grewal 2013). Drawing on these insights, I approach domestic violence as an issue constructed by multidimensional structural and social oppressions (Crenshaw 1991) and bring into light the structural forces some scholars downplay. While disengaging from cultural discourses, my study does not deny the impact of

Chinese cultural practices on domestic violence. Instead, it positions those practices as one dimension of Chinese women's oppression rather than as a whole explanation (Crenshaw 1991). Moreover, I analyze and contextualize the information received reflectively. In doing so, I refrain from reproducing the 'Third World Women' discourse prevalent in orientalist scholarship on domestic violence, which may also mislead community initiatives to assist abused Chinese immigrant women.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodological choice of this study and the ethical considerations that shaped this process. Specifically, I discuss my choice of qualitative interviews and how they support my research objectives. I also outline the ethical considerations and actions I took throughout this study to minimize risks to participants. In addition, I demonstrate my procedure for collecting data, including my sampling and interview procedures and my analysis of data. Finally, I explain how I establish the trustworthiness of my research.

Qualitative Interviews

This study relies on qualitative methods to examine community services for abused Chinese immigrant women in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, and Vancouver regions. I collected the data through seven semi-structured interviews with community providers of anti-violence services and organization workers.

The use of qualitative interviews is consistent with my research purposes. The purposes include: to disclose the experiences of a small sample of service providers in assisting their Chinese clients; to gain an in-depth understanding about their opinions on their clients' needs and the services delivered, and; to gain a contextual understanding about the underlying reasons for their perspectives (Bryman and Bell 2016; Small 2009). Overall, it is to fill the knowledge gap in the scholarship on domestic violence. My qualitative interviews allow service providers to share their experiences and perspectives in detail and in their own words (Bryman and Bell 2016; Small 2009). Moreover, both the participants and I had the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on the information provided for a greater understanding and accurate interpretation (Bryman and

Bell 2016). In addition, although findings from qualitative interviews are not generalizable, nor replicable, the new knowledge and insights they produce can enrich existing theories in the field of domestic violence scholarship. These attributes serve my research in ways that other methods do not.

The nature of qualitative interviews also assists my study in other ways. Their flexible collecting of data ensures the minimum disruption on the participants' lives. I conducted interviews with service providers via Zoom, which allowed them to choose timing and location and avoid the potential health risks associated with in person interactions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ethical Considerations

As my research involved collecting new data from human participants, I applied and received approval from the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics, and I obtained the certificate of TCP 2 Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. I followed the guidance from the Office of Research Ethics and took additional actions to minimize the risks for participants, which were anyway considered minimal.

For example, during recruitment I provided consent forms to participants and reminded them that they could withdraw from the study anytime without negative consequences (Thorne 1980). Before the start of interviews, I offered the participants the opportunity to ask questions about the consent form and my research, and I reconfirmed their consent to be audio-recorded. Furthermore, I provided them the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in the final report (Bryman and Bell 2016). Most of them did not appear to be concerned and chose to use their real name instead. However, I assigned them pseudonyms when

quoting them in my study, given that their real names, together with the description of their background and the geographical location of their organization could easily make some of them identifiable.

Choosing service providers as the targeted population of the study also involves ethical considerations. From a knowledge production perspective, while this study could benefit from the voices of abused Chinese immigrant women, interviewing them at home during the pandemic was fraught with risk. In contrast, interviewing service providers posed few risks to the participants.

Data Collection

Sampling procedure

I designed this study to select participants using internet searches and snowball sampling, but the latter was largely unsuccessful: some of the referrals had already been recruited during my internet search, while the others did not respond to my e-mails. The latter could be a result of increased workload and reduced capacity of community organizations during the pandemic, which was communicated to me when some organizations from the internet search declined my interview invitations.

The idea of using snowball sampling on top of an internet search was that having an existing service provider acting as a stakeholder, who can be used to recruit other participants, would be more time and resource-efficient than looking for participants randomly (Bryman and Bell 2016). In addition, the recommendation from a stakeholder could increase the number of respondents, given the increased trust vis-à-vis the researcher (Small 2009), which may “translate to a greater openness” (14) and generate “deeper interviews” (14) from the participants

(Small 2006). While my snowball sampling did not bring in more participants, it broadened my recruitment pool and reduced recruiting time.

Therefore, all seven participants were recruited via internet searches. Specifically, I sought out assistance services for immigrant and abused women on the 211 Ontario website to locate suitable organizations and then made contact with them. I recruited some participants through Google search for community anti-violence-service organizations.

Organizational profiles

The seven community organizations in the study vary in location: two are in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, four are in Greater Toronto, and one is in Greater Vancouver. All seven have a long history of service, ranging from 25 years to almost a century.

Six of them are mandated to offer front-line services to victims of domestic violence, and the other specializes in anti-violence advocacy and community education. Amongst the first six, some are structured with a focus on supporting immigrant settlement and families, and others are shelter-based, with victim support at their core. While the program resources and infrastructures available to support women vary across organizations, all of them reported women-centered, culturally sensitive delivery of services.

The locations of the research sites align with the objective of my study. Specifically, I gathered empirical data from workers at community organizations to derive a sense of the services they provide for abused Chinese immigrant women. Meeting this objective requires workers to have experience serving this population. The probability of a worker having this experience is higher in cities that have large Chinese immigrant populations, such as Toronto and Vancouver. While Kitchener-Waterloo has a smaller Chinese immigrant community, the participating organizations there serve as a comparison to those of larger cities. The data on these

organizations sheds light on whether there is a difference in how the workers approach ‘Chinese culture’ and women’s needs, and on how this understanding translates into services.

Participants

Of the seven participants, six have hands-on experience in assisting abused Chinese immigrant women; the other has a director role, focusing on anti-violence advocacy in immigrant communities. The findings of this study flowed mostly from the accounts of the former six. Three of the participants in the study speak Chinese, allowing them to take on a language interpretation role on top of their regular responsibilities. Moreover, some participants reported that the experience of belonging to a visible minority, or of having once been a newcomer themselves, has contributed to their knowledge of unique barriers facing immigrant women and instilled in them a passion to make a career out of immigrant support and anti-violence work.

Interviews

I conducted seven semi-structured interviews for this study. The interviews took place on Zoom, which allowed flexibility in scheduling and location. The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to about an hour. As I mentioned above, I provided the consent form to participants in the recruitment phase and ensured that the consent was given, and the participants were aware of audio-recording before the start of interviews. I also allowed them to choose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. During the interviews, I used prepared interview questions to guide the conversation while remaining willing to skip and change the sequence of questions and to probe and ask additional questions when needed. I audio-recorded the interviews using my phone.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the data, I used MAXQDA to facilitate the early stage of data coding and analysis and built analytical memos while analyzing the data. As new data continued to come in, I went back and forth to code new data, add it into the existing categories, and refine categories and themes in the memos when new concepts emerged.

I used in-vivo coding and causation coding most frequently to assist data analysis. In-vivo coding involves the coding of the words or short phrases from the participants' own language (Miles et al. 2014). This approach helped me understand their perspectives and made my research results more trustworthy, as it disclosed and honored their true voices (Miles et al. 2014). In addition, I used the key words and phrases extracted to locate common themes, thought patterns, and contrasting ideas in the data.

I deployed causation coding to extract causal beliefs from participants' opinions and in turn to explain particular outcomes (Miles et al. 2014). Aside from identifying causal links, it helped me discover the "conditions, contexts, and consequences" (79) of events and the "efficacy of a particular program" (Miles et al. 2014:79). For example, some providers believed that the services they deployed did not fully meet their clients' needs, some of which were tied to structural conditions, which fell outside of community organizations' control. Causation coding allowed me to delineate a causal sequence, along with the context of the event, providing a story that is holistic and rich in detail.

I integrated analytical memos into my collecting of data and coding. The memos summarize the collected data descriptively and include my reflections on and thoughts about the data (Miles et al. 2014). I continued to refine the themes and assertions in the memos until all the relevant data were coded and used the memos to support the development of this thesis.

Establishing Trustworthiness

I took various actions during my research to ensure my findings were trustworthy. For instance, along with following proper research procedures, as I described above, I checked my interpretation of data with participants when in doubt. I will share my thesis with participants who expressed interest in reviewing it, which will help to ensure it represents their true experiences and views. These actions helped establish my study's credibility. To meet the criteria of transferability, I included rich descriptions of participants' experiences and opinions, and I sought to be transparent when drawing conclusions from limited data sources.

Chapter 4

Raising Women's Consciousness: Deculturalization and the 'Third World Woman' Discourse

Some scholarship on domestic violence emphasizes 'cultures and traditions' as the 'root causes' of domestic violence against Chinese and immigrant women and the reason survivors do not seek help. These orientalist discourses reduce women to foreign subjects 'trapped in their traditions' and unaware of their oppression and rights, needing to be saved by the 'progressive' First World from their 'cultures,' abusers, and, in some cases, communities, which are assumed to normalize the abuse (Honig 1999; Mohanty 1988). The culturalization of the issue of violence and of its solution informs some scholar's understanding of and approach to mitigating women's vulnerability. For instance, Midlarsky et al. (2006) attributes Chinese immigrant women's victimization and reluctance to seek help to Chinese culture and the women's ignorance about abuse. As a proposed solution, Midlarsky et al. (2006) recommend that community anti-violence organizations educate women about their rights and oppression, which they believe will stir them to seek help and leave their abusers. Such analysis perpetuates the orientalist and racist discourse of "unaware Third World Women" and "violent Third World Culture" (Mohanty 1988). At the same time, it ignores the fact that the women's disadvantageous social location often renders them vulnerable to abuse and hinders them from leaving their abusers (Crenshaw 1991).

The same cultural narratives and anti-violence practices surfaced in my interviews with community-based service providers. In this chapter, I show that 'raising women's consciousness' about abuse and their legal rights, both perceived to be absent, are the central objectives of the services women receive. I reveal that service providers attribute this 'ignorance' to Chinese

cultural constraints and the ‘women’s foreignness.’ In addition, I draw attention to the underlying assumptions service providers make, which emphasize instilling in women a ‘non-culturalized’ way of thinking about abuse to make women realize they need to leave their abusers. I argue that this interpretation perpetuates cultural narratives, and that the assumption misrepresents women’s reality by neglecting the multiple dimensions of domestic violence experienced by them.

Before discussing these points in detail, it is worth noting that none of the education initiatives directed to Chinese women appeared on the participating organizations’ website as a part of their broad anti-violence programming. Rather, the deployment of the initiatives was largely at the discretion of the service providers, based on their conceptualization of the needs of the women.

Raising Women’s Consciousness on Abuse

Community service providers raise the consciousness of abused Chinese immigrant women through education interventions. These interventions fulfill two objectives. First, they address clients’ lack of awareness of abuse and help them see the damage it inflicts beyond what they could grasp through the lens of ‘Chinese culture.’ The aim is a non-culturalized way of thinking, to invoke women’s desire to seek assistance and leave their abusers. Underlying this objective is the orientalist assumption prevalent in discussions on domestic violence against immigrant women. That is, these women are victims of ‘Third World’ cultures and unaware of their oppression and thus need progressive, First World education to gain awareness (Mohanty 1988). Second, these interventions aim to foster women’s legal consciousness. The focus of these interventions is to help them understand that in Canada, women have the right to live free from

gender-based violence and that the justice system exists to ‘guarantee’ those rights. Service providers assume women are unaware of Canadian law and attribute their lack of awareness to women’s foreignness and ‘otherness.’

Interviews with service providers echo scholarship on abused Chinese immigrant women, indicating that women are reluctant to access community-based anti-violence services (Midlarsky et al. 2006; Tam 2004). Service providers aimed to raise women’s consciousness through education to encourage help seeking behaviors. Their aim was to ensure women understood that safety was more important than their children’s material success and saving face.

A Chinese service provider, Olivia, noted a shift to prioritizing education to her Chinese clients, inspired by these women’s apparent lack of awareness about abuse and their reluctance to approach services. She notes that although the existing anti-violence programming remains sufficient for women, there is a need to educate them about domestic violence and women’s rights in Canada. She believes that gaining this awareness permits women to seek help, which they did not know they needed. She illustrates the logic behind the initiative and how it stimulates women’s awareness of abuse:

The education part is the biggest part of the battle. If they are not aware, they wouldn’t come in for help...When people meet with her, the public educator, what are their reactions? They first become...you know, “It’s none of my business... it certainly never happens to my family.” And then after a while they become aware -- “Oh, yeah I think, you know, my neighbor, or my child’s friend at school, I’m sure something is going on” ...being aware, but still not self-aware. And I would say self-awareness is not something very much taught in Chinese, across all spectrums of Chinese, all education curriculum...So the public ed[ucation] we need to do is -- you need to be aware of this is the law, then you convince them that that is not just a boy next door going through this, it’s you actually will experience this. (February 2022)

Clearly Olivia believes that ignorance about abuse is the biggest obstacle facing both the women and community workers who assist them. She believes that the solution to this ignorance is adding education interventions to existing anti-violence programming.

In addition, service providers conceptualized Chinese women as having little understanding about how abuse affects them and their children. They assume that women stay to help their children financially and save their own reputation without realizing that their actions “traumatize their children” and “destroys themselves.” Service providers blame their ignorance on women being ‘trapped in a culture’ that stigmatizes divorce, encourages their devotion to traditional gender roles, and prioritizes their children’s material success. Accordingly, they believe that the priority should be addressing Chinese women’s ‘cultural constraints.’ The following is how two service providers, Olivia and Sarah, understand the issue and offer education to overcome this ‘culturally informed’ false consciousness:

We need to do a lot more public education now because apparently family violence is very stigmatized within a lot of East Asian families, especially traditional families... They [abused Chinese immigrant women] will tell us “I can suck it up. I will do it for my child. I will wait till my child goes through university education then I will divorce this ass.” The lack of self-awareness is...well you are destroying yourself...your social skills are poor, you can’t keep a job, your mental health is poor...and therefore...your level of independence has become so low that you cannot break away from this violent perpetrator. [They are] not aware. Your quality of life has been compromised...It also affects the child, right? When the mom is suffering...all that affects a child as well, and they are not aware of that. I would say public education meets all of these. (February 2022)

There was a level of cultural taboo...kind of frowned upon to leave your family home, or to leave your husband...so the women that I supported had experienced and expressed almost a form of shame I would say? They feel shameful that their marriage didn’t work...[and] they left their home especially when it was children involved. My experience with Chinese immigrant mothers has been that they are so committed to their children and the success of their children that they felt they were kind of failing by leaving the marriage because they’re removing some opportunities, specifically financially from their child, because now they’re not in a home, now they’re in the

shelter. So now they don't have Dad's money or home to rely on -- "I don't really have that much money to support us. What have I done to my children? What have I done to my reputation?" Reputation was a lot as well... (March 2022)

...So, part of the work with these women is reminding them and helping them see that remaining in a violent relationship is much worse for your children than the stigma that your culture is putting on divorce or leaving your marriage or living in a shelter. The children will be able to flourish in an environment where they're not experiencing violence or they're not seeing Mom experiencing violence. Even if nothing happened to the kid, it is very traumatizing for a child to see the mother be assaulted even if it's just verbally, even if it's just the father screaming at them is still very traumatizing for a child. And they internalize that...So that was kind of the work -- helping them step into their power, to be confident in their decision to leave, that the decision to leave was the right one for them. And helping them start to rebuild their lives. (March 2022)

These accounts reflect a widespread notion: that abused Chinese and Asian women would sacrifice their freedom for their children's financial stability due to 'cultural expectations' (Ahmad et al. 2009; Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006; Yoshioka et al. 2001). This notion ignores the fact that staying in an abusive relationship for fear about children's finances is also common among non-Asian women (Conner 2014; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Thomas et al. 2015). Moreover, this concept overlooks immigrant women's multiple constraints, such as dec credentialization, language barriers, and ineligibility for welfare, which disadvantage them financially and leave them dependent on abusers (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Thomas et al. 2015).

In the above examples, the service providers deployed awareness-raising education specifically to Chinese immigrant women, in an attempt to recognize the violence that they were experiencing was wrong. They did so under the logic that if the women could see their own oppression, move beyond the cultural stigma on divorce, and realize that they and their children would be better off without abuse, they would then accept assistance and leave their abusers.

Providers believe the instrument that enables women to grasp what they could not do on their own is awareness-fostering education. This seemingly logical reasoning reveals a deeply embedded notion of women as the ‘cultural other’ and victims of Third World traditions (Mohanty 1988). Assumed to be unconscious about their victimization and ‘trapped’ in their traditional gender roles (Mohanty 1988), they are perceived as not possessing the power to see other possibilities and make good judgements for themselves and their children. Therefore, they need to be educated on the ‘right way’ – a ‘de-culturalized’ way, to look at abuse, so they can “step into their power and start to rebuild their life.”

In addition, the assumption that awareness leads to accepting assistance and leaving abusers oversimplifies these victims’ conundrum. It reduces their situation to two dimensions: ‘culture’ and gender. However, the reality facing abused immigrant women is more complex than that. In reality, their structural disadvantages interact with their pre-existing vulnerabilities, creating a multidimensional barrier that hinders them from leaving abusive relationships (Crenshaw 1991). For instance, discriminatory hiring and decredentialization often generate financial hardship, forcing their dependence on abusers (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Moreover, fear of social isolation and losing linguistic support render some immigrant women reluctant to leave their abuser, who is often their only support (Singh 2010; Kim and Sung 2016). Furthermore, the exclusionary anti-violence practices of some community-based organizations ignore the distinct needs of racialized immigrant women, such as language access and cultural understanding. These practices hinder the women from accessing the services (Crenshaw 1991; Li et al. 2020; Menjivar and Salcido 2002). In this case, all these barriers are left unaccounted for by awareness raising education.

In chapters five and six, we see that the service providers also recognized these structural barriers and the dilemma of choosing between safety and material support. Misgivings about authorities, which keep them from seeking legal assistance, also surfaced in the interviews. If the challenges and misgivings indeed exist, it is not surprising that these women would refrain from accessing organizational support in the first place, or all together. Despite this recognition, service providers nonetheless prioritized education as a solution and foregrounded Chinese culture and traditional gender roles in the education discourse.

Raising Women's Consciousness of Their Legal Rights

In addition to transforming Chinese immigrant women's understanding of abuse and its repercussions on their well-being, service providers also deployed education to foster their legal consciousness. Counselors assumed that Chinese immigrant survivors do not know that law could be used to (supposedly) achieve justice and protection for survivors of domestic abuse. They attributed women's 'ignorance' to the limited human rights protections in their countries of origin. Interviewees further claimed that this lack of awareness contributed to their clientele's ignorance of and hesitancy to use the Canadian criminal justice system. They believed immigrant survivor's unwillingness to view the criminal legal system as a form of 'protection' prevents them from making informed decisions about invoking police assistance and ultimately normalizes abuse in their household.

Singh (2010) finds that community anti-violence workers raise the legal consciousness of their migrant clients on various fronts, such as their rights and how the criminal justice system works. They also advise their clients about mandatory charging to help them make informed decisions on invoking police assistance during violent incidents (Singh, 2010). My data show, in

contrast, that service providers typically do not ‘proactively’ advise their Chinese clients about their legal rights and options. There are two reasons for this oversight. First, Chinese clients are reluctant to approach anti-violence services until ordered to do so by police or social workers, which restricts legal education. Second, the organizations that provide legal education typically receive the majority of their cases as referrals from police-based victim services and the courts. Because the women are already involved in the justice system, legal education after criminal justice involvement will be limited. Service providers stressed that women’s lack of knowledge created considerable challenges and left them confused and traumatized.

Olivia offered limited details on the legal consciousness education she deploys to her Chinese immigrant clients. However, she noted that her organization has made fostering their legal consciousness a priority. This is because, she argued, Chinese clients typically have no knowledge that Canadian law protects them and their children, and that domestic violence is not a private matter in Canada. She indicated that this ignorance prevented reports of abuse and delayed assistance. Scholarship has discussed the reluctance among Chinese and immigrant women to report abusers, suggesting cultural stigma, language barriers, and fear of deportation or loss of support as the primary reasons (Couture-Carron et al. 2021; Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Tam 2004). In contrast to what the literature suggests, Olivia believes the reason to be the absence of legal consciousness. She described the following scenario:

A lot of times I found my clients saying “What does that have to do with the police? What does that have anything to do with teachers and social workers? I want to sue them because this is a family business.” No, it is not! It’s the law!
(February 2022)

In her explanation, Olivia attributed women’s ignorance about the legal consequences of abuse in Canada to ‘Chinese culture’ and its normalization of violence. Drawing on her

understanding about ‘Chinese culture’ and its impact, she asserts that Chinese immigrants are accustomed to a culture where the state power is above the rule of law, which is the opposite of Canada, where “the law is above the government.” Based on her interactions with her Chinese clients, she believes that domestic violence is normalized in their homes. She further suggests that the combination of cultural influence and lack of education about women’s and children’s rights in Canada resulted in her clients importing their ‘violence practices’ into Canada. The following is the explanation from Olivia:

Chinese newcomers typically are not aware of the law of the land. They came from a culture that is very different, you know, the government is above the law, where they came from. Here the law is above the government...I cannot stress enough. We do not have this kind of education for newcomers before they come. If you do not understand the laws of human rights and women’s rights and children’s rights...you will violate the law. So we don’t have enough education for that, and that’s why we are in the situation right now. And it’s with immigrants from China, the PRC [People’s Republic of China], I see a lot of that. I see a lot of them telling me that I didn’t know it was wrong. I didn’t know it was anything illegal, cause I grew up seeing my parents fight in front of me, fist fights. I’ve never lived in China, but my clients are telling me that they grew up in China and they see their parents fist fight and that is okay. (February 2022)

In line with widespread orientalist narratives, Olivia depicts ‘the West’ as the standard for women’s rights and morality, and the ‘non-West’ as a signifier of their absence (Grewal 2013; Honig 1999; Volpp 2000). Through this contrasting image of ‘racialized others’ versus ‘progressive us,’ she portrays Chinese culture as inherently violent and being the root cause of women’s oppression back home and in the new land (Grewal 2013; Mohanty 1988). She sees women and their abusive partners, who have embraced ‘violent culture,’ as unaware that ‘normal’ practices from the homeland are illegal and wrong in the West, and therefore needing education from the West on the rule of law and morality of violence against women (Mohanty 1988).

Contrary to Olivia's assertion about the 'unaware' Chinese immigrants and their 'violent' culture, a survey by Yoshioka et al. (2001) shows that only about 5 percent of Chinese immigrants in the United States view domestic violence as acceptable. While some Chinese immigrants may not know domestic violence is wrong, Olivia's assertion, which is based on the display of the 'ignorant few' and her conceptualization of the sameness among the "others" (Mohanty 1988), is not reflective of the reality. By relying on essentialist and hegemonic assumptions, she produces a narrative that perpetuates the 'Third World Women' discourse (Mohanty 1988) and misrepresents victims' reality. In addition, Kim and Sung (2016) find that abusers' level of acculturation is not associated with the frequency of abuse in Chinese immigrant households. The authors measure 'acculturation' using legal status and English language proficiency, and they hypothesize an association of a more stable legal status and higher English proficiency with less frequency of abusive behaviors (Kim and Sung 2016). However, their findings show that neither indicator correlates with the frequency of abuse (Kim and Sung 2016), which contests Olivia's assumption that Western values and morality are the solution to Chinese immigrant women's oppression.

In the interviews, not all the service providers conceptualize women as completely unaware of criminal-justice responses to abuse or that abuse is simply wrong. In fact, two Chinese interviewees, Heather and Jade, noted that their Chinese clients chose to invoke police assistance when experiencing abuse. It is not clear if they did so because of awareness about their rights, adaptation to the 'Canadian way,' or understanding abuse to be wrong. However, it is clear that they were aware of police intervention as an available resource from which they could draw to mitigate violent incidents.

Heather, however, indicated that women who sought police assistance to stop violence were unaware of the implications: arrest of the abuser and mandatory charging and prosecution. This turn of events often left them confused and frustrated about the system that was supposed to help them but took away their support system instead. This sentiment echoes Singh's finding on abused immigrant women's feeling of "revictimization, rather than being helped by the law" (2010:55) in the face of mandatory criminal justice intervention and the resulting loss of support systems. The following is Heather's observation and her understanding of what constitutes her Chinese clients' confusion:

Because many of my Chinese clients came from China. A very common situation they encountered is that when they call the police, in their mind when the police come, they just want the police to tell their husband not to do this or that, and they think then that's it, no follow-up, nothing else happens. They didn't realize that once they called the police, police intervened, things got out of their hand. In the end, they were like "Why did the police do this to me? Why did they arrest my husband? Why did they do this, do that?" They are not familiar with the system. I'm not saying they are wrong, but in their mind, the police are not helping them. On the other hand, the police cause more trouble for them. (August 2022)

Heather attributes women's lack of knowledge to "coming from China" and assumes it stems from their foreignness. Contrary to her assumption, studies indicate that Canadian-born survivors of abuse are largely in the same boat and unaware of mandatory charging (Johnson and Connors 2017). By blaming the women's foreign background for their (re)victimization, she perpetuates the 'Third World victim' discourse (Mohanty 1988) and overlooks the fact that most abuse survivors, Canadian-born or immigrant, find the justice system opaque (Johnson and Connors 2017; Landau 2000).

In her attempt to resolve women's confusion about the justice system and frustration over having little say in the justice process, Heather advised clients that "once they call the police...things will no longer be in their hands." In addition, she was aware that they contacted

the police to stop the violence, not the relationship, and that the source of their frustration was partly the forced separation and loss of support. Therefore, she also consoled the women and introduced victim protection to ease their frustration. The following is Heather's legal education technique:

So it is my work to explain to them the system here, to make them understand that even though she's the one calling the police, it doesn't mean she's the one charging her husband...Also, I explain to her that the police and court involvement isn't trying to jeopardize her family or break up her family, but to protect her. To give them a positive way to look at...let them know that things happened and got out of control, but look into the long term, big picture, even though right now it's difficult for them. I tell them that "...We have to look beyond, especially if you want to continue with your relationship, working things out with your husband, for sure you don't want this incident to happen again." ...if her husband is willing to be responsible and admitted getting help, things will be better. If not addressing the issue and just covering it up, the problem will still be there, it's not solved. (August 2022)

This account shows that part of legal education is to convince women that mandatory justice is in their interest, which is protecting their safety. Some scholars of domestic violence cite this protection to justify the criminalization of spouse abuse. In the immigrant context, this justification is extended to saving immigrants from their 'patriarchal culture.' For instance, Lee and Au (1998) view mandatory charging as advantageous to Chinese immigrant women, because it sheds light on a hidden issue and saves them from their abusers and the 'patriarchal, oppressive culture' they otherwise had to 'endure.' Apart from their orientalist portrayals, their assumption that personal safety is the women's end goal and only goal ignores the multiple dimensions of abuse (Crenshaw 1991; Mohanty 1988; Weissman 2016).

While Heather is convinced that justice intervention protects the women and allows them to gain clarity on "what is best for themselves and their children," she also believes that the protection is only temporary and conditional and that they cannot always act on "what is best for

themselves and their children.” In a way, her account contests her own notion that Western justice ‘solves’ the issue of domestic violence for Chinese immigrant women. Specifically, years of accompanying victims to court taught Heather that the long process for divorce and the bureaucratic hurdles for child custody often left those intent on leaving the abuser in limbo. Therefore, while she often welcomed women leaving abusers and “provided them with a positive way” to look at justice intervention, she also saw the need to keep them informed about the reality. The following is how Heather explains the reality to the women to help them make informed decisions:

I always tell my clients that if you have children with your husband, and you want a divorce, it’s going to be a long battle because of custody, the parenting time, parenting ability, child support, spousal support...It’s just another big mess. It is a mess, and that’s only [if] her husband [is] willing to cooperate. Otherwise, I still have clients, their court files opened for years, they are still having issues because it involves children. Even though there is no violence happening, because they are separated, not living together, the emotional abuse for the children still exists. (August 2022)

In sum, my analysis above features services providers’ discussions of two types of legal education to address the apparent lack of knowledge amongst abused Chinese immigrant women. While these initiatives may have a different starting point, they both aim to empower women with ‘appropriate’ knowledge for informed decisions. Specifically, the first initiative assumes that women are completely unaware that the violent practices imported from home are illegal and wrong in Canada. The second is based on women’s apparent lack of understanding of the Canadian justice system and their lack of understanding that the system is there “not to jeopardize her family, but to protect her.” Both service providers depict women as signifiers of lack – of rights consciousness, of moral judgment, of understanding of the justice system. They attribute this ‘lack’ to Chinese culture, which they perceive to be backwards, violent, and dominating the women’s thinking, as well as the women’s foreignness. Therefore, they believe

that only by introducing the women a new way of understanding about abuse, which centers rights and Western justice, can they move away from their 'backward' thinking and acquire the knowledge to make informed decisions.

Chapter 5

Meeting Women's Needs and Reducing Harm

To address Chinese immigrant women's apparent ignorance about abuse and their legal rights, community-based service providers sought to cultivate awareness. However, education alone may not mitigate the women's vulnerabilities because of structural barriers. Specifically, abused immigrant women encounter not only barriers facing all abused women, but a multitude of complex, immigrant-specific challenges (Crenshaw 1991; Singh 2010). Scholars of domestic violence emphasize that decredentialization, coupled with discriminatory hiring, create financial hardship and dependence on abusive partners (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Singh 2010). For some immigrant women, this financial dependency is also constituted by their ineligibility for welfare support due to their precarious immigration status (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). In addition, studies illuminate that community-based assistance, a frequent alternative to police intervention, is not always in place (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Specifically, the anti-violence practices of some organizations, such as requiring proof of citizenship, or their staff's lack of language and cultural competence, hinder some immigrant women from accessing services (Raj and Silverman 2002; Thomas et al. 2015).

Service providers in my study echo the scholarship when discussing the challenges facing abused Chinese immigrant women. They indicate that the multitude of immigrant-specific factors intertwines with structural barriers, often leaving both those who intend to leave the abusive relationship and those who intend to stay in limbo. However, they also express that the biggest obstacles, such as decredentialization and insufficient material support, are often out of their control. Under these circumstances, other than 'non-culturalized' thinking about abuse,

what else do service providers believe these women need? How do they offer support knowing they can do little to address institutional violence and structural barriers?

This chapter highlights the tangible strategies service providers use to reduce harm for abused Chinese immigrant women. I begin with their efforts to offer ethno-specific assistance to their Chinese clients. I show that these services intend to meet women's needs, which include bridging communication barriers and encouraging a sense of comfort and belonging. Ultimately, these forms of services are designed to reduce harm. I then show how these services can at times address clients' immigrant and culturally specific needs, while also reducing the impact of structural constraints. I argue that, even though these services do not remove the biggest obstacles, which are largely structural, they can create temporary relief and mitigate the system's harm and the women's vulnerabilities.

Anti-violence Programming: Overarching Design, Ethno-specific Delivery

My inquiry into anti-violence services, and whether those available to Chinese immigrant women differ from those for other women, received a common response. All the service providers advised that their services accommodate a diverse background of clients. Overall, interventions typically include providing or locating transitional housing or shelters for abused women and their children and supporting applications for social assistance. Additionally, service providers offer individual, family, and group counselling, language interpretation and court accompaniment, employment assistance and life-skill training, and referrals to other services. Organizations with a mandate in newcomer settlement assistance also provide services such as second language training, network building, and parenting support. The service providers noted that the array of support services form a comprehensive anti-violence intervention framework

from which they could draw relevant resources to support the needs of individual clients. In addition, they assess individual service needs at intake, informed by the level of risk and tailored to reflect the individual's choice. Overall, their objective is to center the women's needs in service delivery and reduce harm.

Service providers largely indicate these interventions meet the needs of their Chinese immigrant clients. Hannah, who works at an immigrant-settlement agency, explained to me any difference in needs between their general and Chinese migrant clientele evolved from personal preference and comfort levels, all of which their women-centered services could accommodate. Heather also commented on how similar the services were for her Chinese and her non-Chinese clients, except for providing interpretation service to the former, but this addition was not exclusive to immigrants with a Chinese background. The following quotes are from Hannah and Heather on how their service model meet the needs of their Chinese immigrant clients and the logic behind the service design:

The services are the same [for Chinese and other survivors of abuse]. The only difference is going to be trying to make the person comfortable, and trying to make sure that we provide an opportunity to be with somebody who you trust. If you trust a certain settlement worker more than the other one, if it's based on gender, if it's based on language, or if it's based on anything else, we will respect that preference. The services are the same. (April 2022)

In terms of our services or support, it's the same. I think the biggest difference between Chinese and non-Chinese clients is just the language piece. Generally, the types of work are similar, no matter if they are Chinese or non-Chinese, it's very similar in the way that we are supporting the family. (August 2022)

Under this apparent 'one size fits all' rubric, service providers emphasize their deployment of ethno-specific assistance to their Chinese clients, aligning with many scholars' recommendation (Lee 2000; Midlarsky et al. 2006; Tam 2004). Scholars often associate ethno-

specific intervention with culturally sensitive, language-appropriate services delivered by providers who share language, ethno-racial identity, and/or cultural background with their clients (Lee 2000; Menjivar and Salcido 2002). In studies on domestic violence against Chinese immigrant women, the emphasis on ethno-specific assistance falls under the logic that insiders understand the women's cultural nuances and allow them to express themselves in their first language, which in turn would cultivate comfort (Lee 2000; Tam 2004). In other words, both the linguistic and cultural understanding are important to the women, and this duality in needs makes Chinese service providers preferable.

Service providers in my study affirm the importance of ethno-specific assistance. They even view the presence of Chinese providers as a barometer for adequate support. Within this shared sentiment, their views differ over what the women need and how ethno-specificity manifests itself and improves the services. Behind those differences, they all seek to fulfill the women's needs and reduce harm.

Some of my interviewees believe that Chinese service providers break down communication barriers, and therefore would be unnecessary for the women who are proficient in English communication. Ashley, a service provider at an ethno-specific, migrant serving agency, shared with me her frustration over not having Chinese-speaking staff in her organization, which impaired its support for non-English speakers. The source of her frustration is well-founded, as scholarship indicates that language barriers are a primary hindrance for immigrant women to access community anti-violence support (Raj and Silverman 2002). To address the service gap, she often refers the Chinese clients whose needs are not met due to language barriers to the organizations with Chinese-speaking providers. The following is how she supports her Chinese clients and the logic behind this support:

Right now, we have counselors that speak Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Tagalog, and English, but as many as it sounds like, it's not a lot for the people that call...If there is the language barrier, I know that I'm not able to help them as much as another person that speaks the language would be able to. Again, on top of that, it's a sensitive subject matter, and it's not in our basic vocabulary, some of the intake questions. I would want that person to be completely comfortable talking about the scenario to get the actual help they need. Mainly for the Chinese clients, it would be a referral to a place that speaks that language. That would be my first decision during the intake. (March 2022)

Protecting clients' safety in urgent situations also shapes the need for Chinese-speaking service providers. According to Ashley, even though translators and translation tools facilitate basic communication between support staff and women who face language barriers, neither mechanism was adequate during a crisis. She described a 'close call' that reinforces the need to have Chinese service providers:

If calls turn into crisis calls, it's slightly more difficult with the language barrier...I would say the language goes both ways because they're calling for help and not able to articulate as well, and we are trying to provide help and not able to articulate as well. That's the main point there...it's just a couple of scenarios that I've had. It has been the crisis line that and we were, I think, successful in de-escalating the situation and then having them call the right services after. It did end well, but the process to get there can be difficult. (March 2022)

Ashley's preference for ethno-specific assistance comes from the standpoint that it resolves the language barriers that would otherwise pose harm to the women. However, most of my interviewees view such assistance more as cultivating comfort and belonging, which are what the women need, regardless of their English proficiency. Their view aligns with Tam's (2004), which is that linguistic and cultural insiders should be available to all Chinese immigrant clients, given that first-language based communication and cultural understanding make them comfortable. In addition, the service providers view that ethno-specific assistance meets the women's need to feel a sense of belonging.

Cultural and linguistic understanding, according to service providers, help women feel understood without “the need to explain themselves and the background story with cultural nuances.” They believe that this perceived mutual understanding makes the women feel an instant connection with the service provider and a sense of belonging in the program. To them, it is crucial to make every Chinese client feel this way, and the ability to cultivate this feeling is what makes Chinese service providers preferable for this population. As Sarah who intended to hire Chinese staff for her organization put it, “I can provide support to a Chinese immigrant of course...but the familiarity and intimacy that you get from somebody who speaks your language and who understands where you come from is different.” Given the women’s reluctance to access and stay in anti-violence programs, ethno-specific assistance which forms bonds and consequently makes them want to remain may be a crucial mechanism to ensure their safety.

The above account illuminates one of the women’s needs: the feeling of comfort and belonging. It also highlights the way to fulfill this need, which involves linguistic and cultural connection with service providers. While emphasizing the role of shared language and culture, Jade perceives sharing ethno-racial identity as equally effective. She asserts that seeing a Chinese service provider signals, “There’s an understanding about the culture,” which instantly invokes comfort. That feeling matters, from the moment when the women enter the door and throughout the services. The following is a highlight from Jade on how ‘seeing’ a Chinese service provider cultivates comfort in the women:

It helps a lot when a Chinese woman comes to shelter, and she sees a Chinese worker. It helps a lot! Because they feel that there’s an understanding about the culture, whether or not I speak the language is not the most important...Like the women from Thailand, women from Malaysia, they’re comfortable just because I’m Chinese and I understand the culture. I don’t always speak their language, but just understand their culture, understanding the level of shame we feel just to come into shelter. (January 2022)

It is worth noting that Jade speaks Chinese, and her downplaying of language understanding is likely more applicable to women who are not linguistically dependent on others. However, her view on the ways ethno-specific assistance serves the needs of abused Chinese and immigrant women raises questions worth further exploration. For instance, why do ethno-specific anti-violence services better aid these women? What do these women need from community-based service providers? Scholarship credits cultural and linguistic understanding, and often with an emphasis on the former (for example, Midlarsky et al. 2006; Tam 2004). Many service providers in my study share this notion. However, it is clear from chapter 4 that a shared ethno-racial background does not always mean shared cultural understanding. Yet the Chinese service providers in my study have reported Chinese immigrant women as their main clientele. Without negating the role of cultural and linguistic understanding in creating comfort, it may be worth exploring how much of that feeling comes from ‘seeing’ someone who looks like them and the subsequent perception of “an understanding about the culture.” Alternatively, could the perception be that “there is an understanding about their overall ‘needs’?”

So far, I have illustrated the service providers’ efforts to incorporate ethno-specificity into anti-violence services to better support abused Chinese immigrant women. Examples showed that some viewed ethno-specific assistance as bridging language barriers, whereas others viewed it as cultivating a sense of comfort and belonging. I showcased that the difference of approach comes down to differing concepts of the women’s needs, as well as how such assistance manifested itself and made the services more suitable. However, behind that difference is the shared objective amongst service providers on meeting women’s needs and reducing the harm they experience.

Fostering Stability and a Safe, Supportive Environment

Marginalized and positioned at the intersection of sexism, racism, and classism, Chinese and immigrant women face complex challenges that render them more vulnerable to abuse than non-immigrants, yet less supported after leaving abusers (Ahmadzai et al. 2016; Milani et al. 2018; Thurston et al. 2013). Many service providers in my study share this sentiment and want additional support for these women. Some also urge structural change to ensure women's safety. For instance, Jade shares her frustration about the lack of Chinese anti-violence workers in her region because of racist hiring practices by community organizations. She is also disappointed at the police's constant dismissal of Chinese immigrant women's voices when their abuser is a white man. She notes the resulting lack of support for these victims and the need to eliminate institutional racism. However, she and others are also aware of their limitations in addressing structural barriers, which are not going away and will continue to marginalize these victims.

In the face of this conundrum, service providers focus on harm reduction by supporting women's immigrant- and cultural-specific needs, while trying to ease structural constraints on them with the limited resources at hand. The intention is to create a 'buffer' for the women during and after the service period in order to mitigate the system's harm and their vulnerabilities. The specific ways of support include creating a home-like and violence-free environment, making anti-violence service flexible, and cultivating and locating support systems for the women.

Creating a home-like and violence-free environment

Service providers strive to create a comfortable, inclusive space for their Chinese and immigrant clients. In a mainstream, shelter-based anti-violence organization, making immigrant

clients feel ‘at home’ is a critical component in creating that space. In her study on how community anti-violence workers assist abused migrant women, Singh shows the “welcoming, home-like environment” (2010:46) they create through cultural sensitivity to make their migrant clients feel a sense of comfort and connectedness. Similarly, Sarah creates “homes” for her immigrant clients using cultural sensitivity, specifically by celebrating cultural events and offering ethnic food. She notes, this approach generates a sense of belonging and reduces alienation and homesickness that clients often experience after leaving their home country and local community (Vaughan et al. 2015). The following further details how Sarah creates a sense of ‘home’ for her Chinese and immigrant clients through cultural sensitivity:

Everything that we do we’re being culturally sensitive to that person, so regardless of their ethnic background, racial background, and religious background, we’re making sure that we know important dates and times. When they come into [the shelter], we ask, What are some important dates in your culture or in your religion that we can notice for you that we can recognize? We did a Chinese New Year thing. We had the little red envelope for the children with the money. We are trying to make sure that they feel as at home as they can because this is their new home. Like I said, it’s not specific to one specific culture, but we make sure that we’re looking at everybody’s walk of life and making sure that we’re making it as comfortable and as accessible as for everyone. (March 2022)

We take into account the dietary needs and restrictions... The funding is low, but when we do get food, we ask women specifically where should we go shopping? What grocery stores have what you want? Because food seems like something small, but it actually is a very large part of somebody’s identity, and when you’re leaving your home country, not being able to eat the things that you’re used to can be extremely alienating and very stress-provoking... Even just being able to connect to your home, to your roots, through your food is so important. (March 2022)

Sarah believes that making a shelter space a home for immigrant women also involves fostering intimacy and connection between the residents. To that end, she facilitates sharing of cultural foods and “family nights” to promote positive interactions and cultural understanding

between the ‘family members,’ thus cultivating a bond between them. The following is how she creates ‘homes’ for her Chinese and immigrant clients by forming connections among the residents:

The women will cook their cultural food dishes for each other, and they will share that. Once a month we have a family night...so we learn about each other, we learn why certain dishes are significant...and it’s a way to really bond. (March 2022)

Making a mainstream shelter space a home for abused Chinese immigrant women does not stop at culturally sensitive care and connection-building activities. It also means making the space safe. Sarah notes that this requires collective actions and accountability among residents and staff members to ensure that the space is “free from violence, oppression, racism, discrimination, and isolation, any of that.” In practice, she manages the shelter following a “zero tolerance” policy, which includes seeking a ‘violence-free agreement’ from intakes, deploying education after violent incidents, and relocating the responsible resident to another shelter if education fails. Amid the rise of anti-Asian hate in and beyond the shelter during the Covid-19 pandemic (Wang and Moreau 2022), she stresses cultivating a safe space for her Chinese clients and being explicit against racism and xenophobia, so the women do not “flee violence” but “come here and experience that all over again.” The following is how Sarah fosters a safe and inclusive environment for her Chinese immigrant clients:

For Chinese immigrant women, they can come into [the shelter] knowing that we are very committed to ensuring that this is a safe space for them to come. If there were any instances of violence, or oppression, racism, discrimination, isolation, any of that, it would be put to an end immediately. (March 2022)

And now we’re coming into Covid...There was a lot of discrimination both in the shelter and outside. People making comments and remarks: “I don’t want to be in the room with her. She just coughed. she has Covid” ...So the rise in Asian hate in general not just within the shelter system but within society is a reason, and so that brings extra challenges for the women who are trying to access our support. What we did to

combat that is, like I said, there is zero tolerance on racism, so a lot of women just had to leave the shelter. For the women who remained, like I said, education piece, right? I am somebody who likes transparency: “So okay, you were making comments on this person being Chinese and they’re bringing Covid into the shelter or whatever, let’s have a conversation about racism, let’s have a conversation about what Covid is and how it started...” That’s how I approach my work. I don’t like the “somebody made a comment...” No! You said this specifically, so let’s openly talk about it. The specific clients were very supported by that. (March 2022)

This account shows that the service provider focused more on anti-racism in order to create a safe space for Chinese women during the Covid-19 pandemic. This home-fostering strategy is a response to the rise in anti-Asian hate in and outside of shelters, which could hinder Chinese women from seeking assistance due to fear of hostile environments. To ensure they do not “flee violence” and then find it again, the service provider paid more attention to racism amongst the shelter residents.

Introducing flexibility into the services

The intensified anti-Asian racism is not the only byproduct of the pandemic. Being trapped in the same space as the abuser together with reduced access to anti-violence services because of public-health measures, put abused women more at risk (Quinlan and Singh 2020). Service providers echo the scholarship and note that this risk is exacerbated for immigrant women, partly due to unaffordable housing and the women’s disadvantageous financial positions. Scholars of domestic violence demonstrate that the spike in rents in market-dominated housing has left immigrant women, many of whom have lower incomes, with fewer affordable options for shelter when separating from their abusive partners (Lenon 2000; Thurston et al. 2013). These barriers, according to service providers, pose the question of “Where can the women go?” after the anti-violence program.

In the face of these structural conditions and immigrant-specific barriers, service providers made their services more flexible to meet the critical needs of Chinese and women victims of abuse. In women's shelters, this flexibility is manifested as allowing extended stay, which also guarantees uninterrupted access to interpretation services that immigrant women often need.

For the ethno-specific, immigrant-serving organization Ashley works at, flexibility means remaining client-centered during the pandemic – for example, by providing unlimited counselling and service follow-ups, rather than putting a cap on services like ‘other organizations.’ This client-centered approach is captured in Singh's (2016) work. According to Singh (2016), some ethno-specific service providers in Toronto approach anti-violence work with flexibility, such as by extending the length of sessions and the overall service period. They believe that this strategy empowers women better than the “one-time activities” (Singh 2016:519) in the ‘mainstream’ anti-violence organizations (Singh 2016). In our interview, Ashley did not identify the “other organizations,” but she believed that her approach captured the essence of anti-violence services, which is that “you're getting the help that you need.” She did, however, note that her approach, which focuses on the needs of existing clients, delays services to those on the waiting list. The following is how service providers implement flexibility to meet the women's critical needs in the face of structural constraints and immigrant-specific barriers:

With the pandemic and housing shortage now, things have to change, which is the duration of the stay, so we do extend the stay from two months to...six months, could be eight months, even eleven months, which is pretty much unheard of before the pandemic. (January 2022)

It's just that other services are able to put a cap on it to say, okay, ten sessions...but I like the fact that we have unlimited services because those who need it are getting it, and that's kind of the main point is that you're getting the help that you need and who's to say, “Oh, four weeks is enough” or “Ten weeks is enough.” (March 2022)

Cultivating and locating support systems

Gurm et al. (2020) observe that the immigration process often results in the loss of friends, family, and co-workers. Deficient local support in the new land hinders immigrant women from leaving their abuser, who is often their only support (Raj and Silverman 2002; Thomas et al. 2013). This deficiency, according to the service providers, also places childcare and other life stressors entirely on the women when their partner is in custody. Conversely, being confined to domestic duty makes women less likely to develop formal support networks, which reinforces their vulnerabilities (Conner 2014; Gurm et al. 2020). Drawing on what they witnessed, service providers add that inadequate support also means the lack of advocates for the women's interests to institutions when the women are not English speakers. For those who can manage in English, they do not always receive equivalent assistance from institutions as someone who is white or "sounds like a Canadian." Service providers therefore try to cultivate and locate social support for their Chinese and immigrant clients while making themselves part of clients' support networks. Their objective is to alleviate harm and ensure better support for the women going forward.

Through ongoing engagement with the women and comprehensive assistance to their needs, service providers and their organizations become part of the support systems to the women. Hannah echoes the scholarship, explaining that her immigrant clients often refrain from disclosing abuse at the outset and to unfamiliar people (Singh 2010). In addition, knowing that many women often have no choice but to rely on institutions for support (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018), yet are often under supported because of institutional racism, her organization also assigns them to case managers. The role of case managers is to provide accompaniment and to advocate for the women as they navigate institutions. The following is how Hannah and the staff

in her organization attempt to mitigate the consequences of structural and immigrant-specific barriers on their clientele:

In a domestic-violence situation, they would end up with a case manager...The case manager really monitors the situation very closely...They are tracking. They're really checking in. They're making sure that they're supporting people with the referrals. They can actually go with them...They can support you with making these connections to other organizations, making sure everything is being done and carried out from the settlement plan that you've developed together with the clients, based on the needs that they have and supporting them through the process and even trying to help them break barriers if they're experiencing barriers or complications in working with other institutions or other organizations in the region, helping them break that for them. Advocating on their behalf with different organizations and really representing their interests in those conversations with other partners.

Being away from family and friends takes away not only resources, but emotional support that immigrant women need during hardship (Menjivar and Salcido 2002). Studies reveal that immigrant-specific factors, such as language barriers and reduced economic status, create emotional stress (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Menjivar and Salcido 2002). Heather notes that, in an abuse situation, immigrant-specific factors, along with structural barriers such as exclusionary shelters and scarce welfare support, have left Chinese immigrant clients who intended to leave their abusers feel powerless. Some even feel hopeless when they realize that the court procedure for child custody has left them with only two options: return to China for support but leave their children behind, or stay in Canada with their children and no support. Either way, the women were traumatized.

To address the trauma, Heather saw the need to create cultural and language appropriate emotional support groups for her Chinese clients. While affirming the value of support groups, she also believes they do little to address the trauma's 'core': structural barriers. In her opinion, financial support would be more helpful. She is not alone. Conner (2014) argues that anti-

violence intervention is of limited value, in the absence of financial security. However, the provision of financial support is not within the ability, nor the mandate of her organization. In fact, many participating organizations face this dilemma, partly because of the scarce government funding for anti-violence initiatives. Heather believes that, as the second-best option, the support group could offer the women a platform to connect and “know that they are not alone” and “can get out of the situation”, which restores hope in the women. The following is what she hopes to achieve with support groups:

Other than my support for her, having culturally appropriate, language-appropriate support groups for them will be better. Even though it’s not going to solve their immediate issue, but more support a woman can have, it’s making her emotionally stronger, also making her feel more connected. It’s a huge help to address their emotional needs. Also, it makes them know that they are not alone in this fight. Other people suffer the same situations, but some can get out of the situation. If she knows she is not alone, there are people walking along with her, it’s a huge help. (August 2022)

For shelter service providers, cultivating support also intends to reduce harm to women after services end. Given that shelters’ anti-violence services are temporary, leaving the services is inevitable. However, this also means the women would be left alone to face the constraints that previously constituted their vulnerabilities, such as social isolation, language barriers, and underemployment (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Weissman 2016). Jade explained that, even though she could refer her Chinese clients to other community workers, many of the latter are not Chinese, due to the scarcity of Chinese workers in her region. The lack of language and cultural understanding, coupled with the women’s hesitation to seek help from unfamiliar people, may inhibit proper support.

To address these constraints, immersing Chinese and immigrant women into a community of their choice, where they can make friends and find jobs, is part of the anti-

violence service. Sarah comments that the women's choice of communities is often those of their racial and linguistic background. The following is Sarah explaining why she locates communities for her Chinese and immigrant background clients:

One of the goals that I always require staff to follow through for our clients is connect them to their communities outside of here...It doesn't always have to be racial or ethnic. It could be religious or could be like a sport that you like to play or activity you like to do, but where is that community for you? Many, many, many times it is the racial or the ethnic community. so the community that speaks the same language as you. Once you are involved in the community and then they help you get jobs, you meet friends. It just helps you network in that way. So what we would do for a Chinese immigrant is the same as we would do for other immigrant women, is find out where these communities are based...find you a home maybe in the hub of that community, so you are surrounded by people that you're familiar with and people who speak your language. (March 2022)

Sarah appears relatively optimistic about personal networks' ability to resolve social isolation and employment barriers abused immigrant women encounter. However, the entirety of her interview data suggests the limited impact of personal networks on employment in the immigrant context. I will dive deeper into the discussions on the employment barriers facing abused Chinese and immigrant women in the next chapter. Before then, it is worth noting that drawing attention to the limitations of the services is not to say that service providers have not done their best or to devalue the services. Virtually all the providers are aware of the gap between what the women need and what the services could provide. As illustrated, they are aware of the need for concrete, multifaceted support and elimination of structural barriers. Yet they know their limitations in addressing structural barriers and the women's most pressing needs, such as financial assistance.

With that awareness, they went above and beyond basic anti-violence programming, by, for example, fostering a culturally sensitive, racism-free transitional home, lengthening shelter programs amid the housing crisis, acting as the women's personal advocates with institutions,

and mobilizing support for them. While these actions do not abolish institutional violence and structural barriers, they create temporary relief, and allow the providers to work around the system, alleviating its harm and addressing the women's vulnerabilities.

In sum, this chapter discussed the tangible strategies adopted by service providers to reduce harm to abused Chinese immigrant women. I started this chapter by outlining the providers' effort to make ethno-specific assistance available to their Chinese clients. I demonstrated that they did so to permit communication and foster a sense of comfort and belonging, both intended to reduce harm. I then highlighted the services deployed to meet their clients' immigrant- and culturally specific needs, while reducing the impact of structural constraints. This harm reduction strategy created a gap between the services and the women's needs, due to its limitations in addressing the structural barriers that continuously marginalize these women. However, this strategy created temporary relief, mitigated the system's harm, and reduced the women's vulnerabilities.

Chapter 6

Life-skill Training: The Path to a Safe, Financially Secure Future?

As discussed in the previous chapter, community anti-violence services are designed to provide temporary assistance to service seekers. Although they are helpful, when they end, abused Chinese immigrant women still face the systemic constraints and immigrant-specific barriers that made them vulnerable in the first place. These include underemployment, lack of family support, and financial dependence. To address these constraints, service providers also direct resources to empower the women financially, notably through the provision of life-skill development programs that teach abused women employment skills and money management skills. Conner (2014) notes that financial independence ‘frees’ victims from abuse, given that financial dependency is one of the biggest obstacles for them to leave their abuser. Under the same logic, service providers teach life skills to empower Chinese clients financially, so they could – according to one participating organization – “take greater control of their lives” and “live a life free from violence.”

In contrast to the ideal service outcome of a self-sufficient, violence-free life, my data suggest that women often return to their abusers, despite receiving life-skills training designed to ‘free’ them from abuse. The gap between the ideal and the actual outcome indicates the limitations of training programs. While we have established in the previous chapter that anti-violence services can only reduce harm, not eliminate it, the training is also limited and does not live up to its promise to ‘free’ women from abuse. In addition to the realities of women’s structural marginality, which undermines the abilities of training programs to meet their

objectives, the fact that women return to their abusers illuminates problems within the life-skills program itself.

This chapter contrasts the ideal service outcome, which envisions women living a financially secure, violence free life, with the reality that they typically return to their abusive relationships. I demonstrate how the life-skills program, which is intended to facilitate financial stability and safety, fails at both. Drawing from service providers' own accounts, I argue that this failure is a result of the mismatch between the program design and women's actual needs. In a way, it reflects the ignorance of neoliberal informed, anti-violence interventions, which emphasize individual empowerment and assume that immigrant women can overcome structural vulnerabilities through hard work and better choices. As a result, many women are forced to stay with or return to their abusers.

The Ideal: Leaving the Abuser

To date, I have not found sufficient scholarly evidence of anti-violence service outcomes for abused Chinese and immigrant women. Instead, there are more data on the services' objectives, which, according to scholars, are to help women leave the relationship while respecting their choice to stay (Tam 2004; Yoshioka and Choi 2005). For instance, Tam (2004) recommends ethno-specificity in anti-violence services, given its ability to "increase [the Chinese immigrant clients'] options to leave" (276). However, Tam (2004) also emphasizes women's autonomy, which includes respecting their choices to stay. The anti-violence ideology of centering women's 'choices' is supported by other scholars of domestic violence, such as Yoshioka and Choi (2005). Yoshioka and Choi (2005) call for a paradigm shift in anti-violence practices, which they argue are informed by Western feminist values of encouraging women to

leave abusers and become independent. They believe that this essentialist practice excludes racialized immigrant women, who often hold “tight, collectivist cultural values” (516), and their choice to stay (Yoshioka and Choi 2005).

My limited findings show that service providers believe the ideal outcome is victims leaving their abusers and living financially secure and independent. They view that achieving this outcome is also in accordance with their Chinese clients’ needs. Contrary to the research finding that Chinese immigrant women would rather stay with the abuser because of gender and cultural expectations (Lee and Au 1998; Midlarsky et al. 2006), Heather disclosed that many Chinese clients wanted to leave, but struggled to obtain resources and support to do so. The lack of financial stability and family support also forced some to return to their abusers. The following is Heather’s conceptualization of her client’s ‘choices.’ She asserts that her Chinese clients did not ‘choose’, but were forced to stay with their abusers due to financial constraints and other barriers:

One client wanted to leave for so many months...the couple has a 4 year old son. She always wanted to leave...but where she can go? She has no place to stay. She tried to go to a transition house with her son, but a transition house is not an ideal situation for young children. Maybe you can stay there for a month or two, but how much longer can you stay there? You don’t have a sense of belonging. So it may be even more problematic for her to stay in the transition housing. So she decided to go back home to share with her husband. She continues planning to leave the relationship, but where can she go? She doesn’t have income, no local support. Her family is in Hong Kong. She can’t take her son back to Hong Kong, and there’s nothing she can do. The husband made it clear: “You can go, but the son has to stay.” [Can he do that?] Because of the custody issue. The mother can’t remove the child without a court order. And the husband knows. So how can a mother leave her son here? (August 2022)

I know many of my clients want to end their relationship and leave their husband, but they have no financial means to be on their own. Even though they can apply for welfare or income assistance...for the amount they can get, I don’t think they can get through it, cause it’s very limited for them to get by. Because the housing issue is crazy. How can you live with \$1,200 income assistance from the government? How can you get by, pay

rent, and care for your children? It's very, very difficult. I just can't imagine how they manage it. (August 2022)

To meet the women's needs for safety and stability, service providers deployed the life-skill development program designed to teach victims employment skills and money management skills. They believe that these skills will financially empower the women, allowing them to "go out living on their own and live a life that is exciting for them and that is safe from violence."

Life-skill Development

Life-skill development consists of a series of services to financially empower abused women, offering professional employment skills, such as career planning, preparing for job interviews, writing résumés, and professional conduct in workplaces; sewing skills; food services; and money-management skills, such as banking and paying rent. For immigrant women, instruction in English and French languages is also available. According to the service providers, life-skill development is designed for voluntary access, with some delivered at the clients' request, rendering them highly flexible and client-centered.

Service providers encourage women to take the training program to build up their skills in money management and become financially stable. They conceptualize women's lack of financial skills, such as not having a bank account or not knowing how to pay rent, as an indicator of prolonged financial abuse by their partner. They believe that the training program will equip women with money management skills and ultimately enable them to live a self-reliant, violence free life in the future. The following is from Sarah on how the life-skill training can change abused Chinese and immigrant women's lives:

A lot of times, what happens is you are in these abusive relationships, and one of the major abuses that they're experiencing is financial abuse. So they either never had a job,

or their abusive partner is taking that money away from them. So a lot of these women have never had a bank account, they never know what it is to pay rent and the price of things. So we are giving them those tools and teach money skills in order for them to go out, live on their own, and live a life that is exciting for them and that is safe from violence. (March 2022)

The training is also intended to provide technical skills that clients can leverage for employment, which allows them to be financially independent. Essentially, the logic behind the program is that technical skills lead to employment, and hence to financial independence. Service providers echo scholarship, noting that financial dependence often prevents victims from leaving their abusers and living a safe and independent life (Conner 2014; JIBC 2007; Lee and Au 1998). However, they are also aware that, compared to non-immigrants, immigrant women face greater challenges in securing gainful employment, given that immigrant-specific factors such as language barriers and de-credentialization already put them in a disadvantageous position in the job market (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Menjivar and Salcido 2002). They disclose that, without gainful employment, their Chinese clients are forced to stay with their abusers or in a transitional setting. They note that this reality underscores the need for training in professional skills to make the women more employable and thus more independent. The following is a quote from Sarah, who discusses the training her organization provides to make women more employable:

We have someone right now who wants to enter the workforce, but they don't have strong enough English skills, so we're connecting them to like ESL classes and helping them improve their level of English. And then we have women in the corporate world who actually come in and run programming to show women how do you interview for a job, how do you write a résumé, how do you carry yourself professionally once you do enter the workforce [and] once you do have a job. (Sarah, March 2022)

However, service providers' own accounts suggests that, despite their program's focus on financial empowerment, its benefits to survivors are limited due to their precarious legal status and structural factors. Jayasuriya-Illesinghe (2018) discloses that those with precarious immigration status are often forced to take on low-pay, poor condition jobs. Sarah made similar points. She describes a Chinese client whose abusive partner was supposed to sponsor her but did not do so as being "at the mercy of the employer." While the training focuses on developing their linguistic and technical skills for employment, without the status to work in Canada legally, their employment options are limited, regardless of their skill level and education.

Programs' promise of financial empowerment also falls short in the face of marginalizing structural forces. Studies reveal that decredentialization and deskilling by current immigration policies force many immigrant women into underemployment, which renders them financially vulnerable and dependent on their abusive partners (Hudon 2015; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Due to decredentialization, downward economic mobility is also common amongst Chinese immigrant women with advanced education and skills. In a non-immigrant context, both attributes tend to be economically empowering (Conner 2014; Man 2004; Zong 2004). However, in the immigrant context, the lack of recognition of women's foreign credentials prevents them from obtaining professional employment and the 'Canadian work experience' that employment often hinges on (Man 2004; Zong 2004). In specialized fields that some of them were trained for, such as teaching and medicine, decredentialization disqualifies them from entering the field altogether despite years of training and experience (Man 2004; Zong 2004). Sarah notes that having skills and expertise, yet being stuck at a minimum wage job due to decredentialization, was a conundrum facing her Chinese clientele. The following examples demonstrate the employment challenges facing many abused Chinese immigrant women:

She came in with a visitor's visa, and then the partner was supposed to sponsor her, but he did not sponsor her. She's here now...She cannot legally work because she doesn't have status, so she could not receive social assistance. What ends up happening in those situations -- they take poor-paying jobs in poor condition for getting paid cash, and they are at the mercy of the employer, so they end up working terrible hours, working really difficult jobs...The employer ended up not even paying her. He just used her for work and work and work, and then he didn't pay her, and he knows that he's okay to do that because she's in the country illegally, so she cannot take legal action on him...They might be very educated in China or in a different country. But when they come here, [their] papers don't work anymore. You might be a doctor in China but you're not a doctor here. So they have to end up taking the jobs that are low paying and poor conditions, but they kind of just have to deal with it. It's very difficult for them to restart back up. (March 2022)

One of my Chinese immigrant clients was a teacher in China, and she came here. Unfortunately, her license and stuff like that [don't] match Canadian standards, and so she had to take a job in a nail salon doing nails. What that did to her self-esteem was really bad, because she was talked down to by customers, and the boss was really terrible to her, and people just yelled at her. The self-esteem, because in her mind "I'm an educated woman, I'm a teacher, I shouldn't even be doing this, they are horrible to me." But you are in this situation where you are not financially stable, and you are in this country, just left a violent relationship, so you have to take what you can get to make ends meet, to make your life go forward. There's not a lot of options for them. It's unfortunate. (March 2022)

These two examples illustrate the limitations and contradictions of life-skill training designed to help abused Chinese immigrant women "take greater control of their lives" and "live a life free from violence" within a broader structural context that systematically disempowers and decredentials them. Clearly the women's vulnerability results not from their lack of financial literacy or employment skills but from institutional and structural forces. Systemic marginalization limits the empowerment of life-skill training, which focuses on nothing but women's personal transformation. For instance, the woman from the first example would not benefit from the program, because the skills assist only those with secure citizenship status and

money to manage. In the second example, while citizenship permits her working legally and leaving her abuser, she was not able to “take control of her life” due to decredentialization and the resulting financial instability. Training programs which target entry-level jobs and leave the core issue of decredentialization unaddressed, are unlikely to financially empower women like her. This is due to being confined to an entry-level job despite having advanced skills is what keeps them from achieving financial stability from the start (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018).

The mismatch between life-skill training and women’s needs reflects the failure of neo-liberal anti-violence interventions to recognize women’s realities. As we saw above, training intended to ‘free’ women from abuse assumes that technical skills lead to employment, financial security, and ultimately ‘freedom.’ Neo-liberal ideologies, which emphasize personal transformation and self-sufficiency, are based on the notions that survivors are the source of their own oppression and that they should be responsible for their own recovery (Mehrotra et al. 2016; Weissman 2016). Along with individualizing the social and structural forces that contribute to their marginalization (Mehrotra et al. 2016; Weissman 2016), neo-liberal practices assume a linear relationship between personal improvement and immigrant women’s emancipation. None of these assumptions reflects the everyday and material realities abused immigrant women confront. Immigrant women face multiple structural barriers to employment, such as deskilling, decredentialization, and workplace discrimination (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018), which render them less likely to achieve the same level of employment and financial stability as their Canadian-born counterparts, regardless of their skill level (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018; Man 2004; Zong 2004). As a result, life-skill training, which attempts to address women’s (supposed) lack of knowledge, rather than the core structural factors that contribute to their disempowerment

in the first place, does little to provide the financial stability and independence service providers assume it offers immigrant survivors of domestic abuse (Weissman 2016).

The Outcome: Return to the Abuser

Life-skill training aims to help women “take greater control of their lives” and “live a life free from violence.” Ideally, Chinese immigrant women would become financially stable and live independent and free of violence after the training program. Contrary to this outcome, my data show that most women return to their abusers. As I mentioned above, I have not found sufficient data on the outcome of anti-violence services for abused Chinese and immigrant women. Briones-Vozmediano et al. (2014), the only point of reference other than my own data, report that abused immigrant women returning to their abuser is common, principally because of precarious immigration status, job insecurity, and financial instability.

So far, I have explored each of these contributing factors in detail. I have also looked at the nature of these factors, most of which are structural and institutional and beyond the control of service providers and their clients. These barriers include disempowering immigration policies, decredentialization and discriminatory hiring practices. Under the structural context that systematically disempowers the women, it is not surprising that life-skill training, which takes the women’s vulnerability out of the structural context and confines the change to the women themselves, has failed to deliver its promise of empowering the women to “take greater control of their lives” and “live a life free from violence.”

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This thesis explores how community-based service providers in three Canadian regions assist Chinese immigrant women who have experienced domestic violence. The study aims to uncover how service providers define women's needs. In addition, it examines how they ensure an approach that is culturally sensitive and acknowledges racialized immigrant women's distinct experiences, but does not perpetuate orientalist narratives about 'minority cultures' as a root cause of domestic violence. I intend these areas of focus to address the gap in academic scholarship on abused Chinese immigrant women and their anti-violence needs from community services. The intention is also to challenge orientalist discourses that suggest 'culture' is the root cause of domestic violence experienced by racialized immigrant women (Mohanty 1988; Grewal 2013). I aim instead to produce a more accurate, holistic, and reflective analysis of this population and its needs. With these objectives in mind, I have gathered data from seven community workers using semi-structured interviews and applied to my analysis the postcolonial feminist lens of Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and the production of the 'Third World Women' (Mohanty 1988).

The service providers identified clients' three principal needs: a mindset change through 'deculturalization' and consciousness raising, harm reduction, and financial empowerment. My analysis reveals that, on the one hand, their approach is overall culturally sensitive and driven by their understanding of Chinese and immigrant women's distinct experiences and needs. On the other hand, this understanding can be insufficient at times, as their approach perpetuates orientalist narratives that 'minority cultures' cause domestic violence in the community. This

complexity and contradiction are demonstrated by the way they conceptualize women's oppression and anti-violence needs, and the way they respond to these needs.

Changing 'women's mindsets' involves raising the women's consciousness on abuse and their legal rights through education. Service providers deploy education services based on their conceptualization of the women's 'needs.' They believe that 'Chinese culture,' which is assumed to be backward, violent, and dominating over women's thinking, is the root cause of the abuse experienced by the women. Specifically, they note that the cultural stigmatization of divorce and women's devotion to traditional gender roles prevent them from recognizing their oppression and the 'benefit' of ending the abusive relationship. This in turn results in their reluctance to access community assistance and leave their abusers. While seeing women as victims of 'Chinese culture,' the providers also believe that women perpetuate the violence by not reporting their abuser and seeking assistance. They attribute this reluctance to women's ignorance about legal rights and the normalization of abuse in Chinese culture. These assumptions lead providers to focus on education on abuse, as well as the rule of law and the immorality of violence against women in Canada.

Some service providers report that their clients seek police assistance, but their unawareness of mandatory charging leaves them feeling victimized by a 'protective' system. They believe that this lack of knowledge and resulting victimization are due to women's foreign background. Therefore, part of education is to teach the women how the justice system works, so they can make informed decisions about police assistance and divorce.

These findings reveal service providers' belief that their clients are a 'cultural other' and victims of 'Third World traditions,' and thus, need to be educated by the 'progressive' First World (Mohanty 1988). By assuming that education alone would invoke women's desire to seek

help and leave their abuser, and that non-immigrants would better navigate the justice system, they assume the problem faced by women is a cultural problem and the problem of the 'other'. Not only does the assumption misrepresent Chinese immigrant women's realities by discounting the structural forces that constitute their marginalization; it also reproduces the orientalist narrative that culture is the root cause of violence experienced by these women.

Along with deculturalizing the women's mindset, service providers also attempt to reduce the harm women experience through ethno-specific assistance. Some believe that Chinese staff members break the communication barrier that would otherwise jeopardize the women's safety but are unnecessary for English speakers. However, many others believe that ethno-specific assistance should always be available, because it generates comfort and belonging, thereby meeting the women's needs and helping them stay in the program. Despite the differences in views, service providers share the objective of using ethno-specific assistance to protect clients.

Service providers aim to foster stability and a safe, supportive environment to reduce harm. They realize the multidimensional barriers facing women and their anti-violence needs. Some even acknowledge the need for structural change to ensure their safety. Yet they are aware that their services fail to address structural barriers, which they believe have marginalized women and hindered their escape from violence. Accordingly, they focus on meeting women's immigrant- and cultural-specific needs, while strategizing to reduce structural constraints. They do so by creating a home-like and violence-free environment, being flexible about the service period, and cultivating and locating support for clients. While these types of assistance do not shield the women from institutional violence and structural barriers, they create temporary relief and allow the providers to work around the system to alleviate its harm and the women's vulnerability.

In addition, service providers offer training to empower the women financially so as to make them financially stable enough to leave their abuser. They do so through life-skills training geared to finding jobs and money management, which they believe would allow women to “take greater control of their lives” and exist “free from violence.” However, contrary to their assumptions, the training failed to deliver these promises by disregarding women’s precarious immigration status, de-credentialization, and underemployment. Also at play are neo-liberal informed interventions, which individualize both the sources and solutions to women’s disempowerment and assume that standard ‘financial empowerment’ models designed to assist all women will work just as well for immigrant survivors of abuse (Mehrotra et al. 2016; Weissman 2016).

Limitations and Future Research

My study contributes to sociology by generating empirical knowledge largely missing in the field. However, this process did not include the abused Chinese immigrant women’s voices, partly to avoid the risks of interviewing victims at home, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic when abusers could be home more often. Ultimately, given that the women are knowers of their own needs and the users of the services, it would be crucial to also center their perspectives on knowledge production, rather than relying on service providers’ accounts alone. Inquiries into the women’s perspectives become more critical when considering their reluctance to access community services, which are believed to be central to ensuring their safety (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe 2018). Therefore, if conditions allow, future research should incorporate the women’s voices and reveal their needs and their experiences with anti-violence services.

Due to a sample that is small and diverse, findings of my study are not generalizable. A small sample, in and of itself, is not a limitation in qualitative research, and diversity in participating organizations can be an advantage at times (Bryman and Bell 2016). However, given a sample of seven institutional participants and their different mandates, some of my findings are supported by data from only one or two participants, and are applicable to only a select type of organization. For instance, the finding that service providers create home-like environments for the women is more relevant to shelters than to immigrant settlement agencies. To make findings more generalizable, future studies should either increase the sample size or narrow the types of participating organizations.

Lastly, my study enriches the empirical knowledge on ethno-specific assistance to abused Chinese immigrant women by illuminating the nature and purpose of this service delivery. My findings also point out a potential research direction that is worth exploring. In chapter 5, I raised two questions: what makes the anti-violence services that are ethno-specific better at serving abused Chinese immigrant women? What is it that the women need from community-based service providers? These questions flowed from two findings. One of them is that ‘seeing’ a Chinese service provider and the resulting ‘perception’ of cultural understanding could potentially create the same positive impact on Chinese immigrant clients as cultural understanding itself. Another one is that, Chinese service providers in my sample, regardless of whether they have a full grasp of ‘Chinese culture,’ report that Chinese women form their main clientele. These findings challenge the scholarly assumption that ‘cultural understanding’ is the key success indicator of anti-violence intervention to Chinese immigrant women (Midlarsky et al. 2006). In this case, could the answer to the questions above be ‘seeing’ someone who looks

like them and knowing that the person will grasp their overall anti-violence needs? All of these could be explored by future studies.

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