

Transitioning Out of Violence: Intersections of Motherhood and Precarious Immigration Status

by

Catherine Taylor
BASc, University of Guelph, 2012

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School of Child and Youth Care

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

This study explores the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious immigration status who have experienced domestic violence while residing in a mid-size coastal city in British Columbia. Using semi-structured interviews with service providers and an intersectionality-informed thematic analysis, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do mothers with precarious immigration status seek help when experiencing domestic violence? (2) What facilitates or impedes women's help-seeking processes? (3) How do existing services and systems respond to mothers with precarious status as they seek help with domestic violence? (4) What can be done to improve these responses? Qualitative data from service providers reveal that mothers with precarious status face numerous, intersecting and often insurmountable barriers as they seek help with domestic violence. Findings also indicate that despite the dedicated and collaborative efforts of participating service providers, many mothers with precarious status are forced to either return to their abusers or to return to their countries of origin. This research also shows how existing services and systems are not structured, funded, mandated or equipped to meet the needs of these mothers and their children. Moreover, the findings show how some of the systems and structures that these women encounter as they seek help seem to actively exclude, oppress and/or marginalize them. The findings of this exploratory study and the recommendations provided by service providers have implications for policy, practice and further research.

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Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Sibylle Artz. I am grateful for your dedicated support, mentorship and guidance throughout my graduate studies. Thank you for challenging me and encouraging me. Your time, understanding, support, wisdom and advocacy have been such a gift to me as I worked to complete this project and navigated unexpected roadblocks along the way.

Thank you, as well, to Dr. Jessica Ball who also supported this thesis. Thank you for helping me to develop the idea for the project and for supporting me as I conducted this research. Thank you for sharpening my critical thinking skills and for helping me to grow as both a scholar and a practitioner.

I also want to thank my family and friends for encouraging me throughout this long journey. Thank you for supporting me, feeding me and letting me borrow office space in your houses when I needed somewhere to hideaway to write. Thank you especially to Uncle Gus and Aunt Claire and to Allison and Jody for your hospitality.

I cannot go without thanking my mother, who has always been my biggest supporter and advocate. Thank you for sticking with me through this process right up until the end. Thank you for always being available and for being such an inspiration to me. Thank you for your encouragement, advice and perspective.

Finally, I want to thank my husband, Tim Likely. Thank you for your partnership, presence, patience and kindness throughout this process—which turned out to be much longer than either of us expected. Thank you for listening to me rant, cry and laugh about this thesis. I am so grateful for your uncanny ability to make me laugh regardless of the circumstances.

Chapter 1: Introduction

*We had a woman come [to the transition house] who had charges placed against her and she didn't have access to her child . . . the police had responded because her ex-partner had called and said "She is attacking me" and had managed to get custody of the child. [Here's] the **real story**: she [was] defending herself and English wasn't her first language and . . . she was in the process of completing her permanent residency application so . . . she was **in this weird in between zone**. She couldn't access income assistance [or legal aid because] she has some savings . . . but that's all the money she had. She didn't have access to her child and . . . she didn't even know [what she was charged with]. . . She was [too] fearful [to] access any other service. . . She [was] too afraid to go home—where she came from originally—because . . . she [was] too afraid to tell her parents what has happened . . . there were a lot of cultural expectations around the importance of marriage. She was also being told that she was a **bad mother** and so she was having a lot of self-doubt . . . She [was] only allowed to see her child once a week or something. And she was experiencing abuse from her mother-in-law . . . at the same time . . . **there were so many barriers** . . . After a couple of months [at the transition house] we couldn't extend [her] any more so we helped her find some housing and helped her with money but really it was just a **Band-aid on a broken leg** . . .*

My inquiry into the help-seeking processes of a group of women in Canada who are in the particularly complex and perilous situation of being mothers who have a precarious immigration status has its roots in my experiences of working as a children's support worker in a transition house that provided emergency shelter for women and their children who were fleeing situations of domestic violence (hereafter DV). There, I witnessed the extraordinary challenges that women faced when trying to leave DV and rebuild their lives. During my time at the transition house, I supported several women who were actively mothering small children while trying to complete all the tasks associated with transitioning out of DV. Several of these mothers also had precarious immigration status and the vulnerable situation of these women shocked me; it seemed like they faced insurmountable challenges at every step of their journey towards safety. I watched these women work to learn English, secure access to income, find stable housing and affordable childcare, navigate family court, criminal court and the immigration system while also working to recover from the trauma and violence they had experienced. Moreover, these women

were mothering multiple children while living in community in a transition house for *months* on end without the rights and resources available to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. Needless to say, the long and winding and often perilous journey towards safety and security that they were on was exhausting and challenging.

While I was working at the transition house, several of the mothers with precarious status who I worked with made the incredibly difficult decision to return to their abusive partners. They told me that trying to get across all the barriers on the road set before them by the “system” while they were also becoming single parents without access to income assistance, subsidized housing or the rights that accompany citizenship, was harder than living in violence and abuse. It seemed as though the help provided to these mothers by service providers like me was not enough to overcome the barriers they faced; it seemed as though we had failed these mothers and their children, but not for lack of trying. I watched several social services agencies and employees extend themselves far beyond their mandates and budgets to try to accommodate and support the needs of mothers with precarious status. However, with limited funding, training and support, these agencies and employees (including myself) were not in a position to help mothers with precarious status effectively or sustainably. It became clear to me that motherhood and immigration status not only shape how women understand and experience domestic violence, but they also shape and constrain women’s access to resources on their journey in and out of violence.

The mothers with precarious status that I met at the transition house and their stories are the primary inspiration for this thesis. Their stories and their experiences of trying to break free from domestic violence moved me deeply and drew my attention to the unique set of interlocking and seemingly insurmountable barriers they encountered. These personal

motivations were strengthened by a gap I observed in the academic literature when I began researching this topic: I could not find any peer-reviewed Canadian research that examined the help-seeking processes of abused mothers with precarious status. This thesis then focuses on this very group of women and produces research that will begin to address this gap in the literature and, in some small way, support the efforts of mothers with precarious status as they seek safety for themselves and for their children.

Research Questions

This preliminary qualitative project applies an intersectional analysis to the help-seeking process of mothers with precarious immigration status who have experienced DV while residing in a mid-size coastal city in British Columbia. More specifically, this analysis is guided by the following questions: (1) How do mothers with precarious immigration status seek help when experiencing DV? (2) What facilitates or impedes women's help-seeking processes? (3) How do existing services and systems respond to mothers with precarious status as they seek help with DV? (4) What can be done to improve these responses? As I pursued these questions, I used a number of key terms:

Key Definitions

Domestic violence. Domestic violence—also known as woman abuse, wife abuse, wife battering, partner abuse and intimate partner violence—refers to physical, emotional, sexual, psychological and financial violence in the context of an intimate and sexual relationship (Sinha, 2013; Vine & Alaggia, 2012). While DV can and does occur in all forms of sexual relationships, most of the literature on DV to date has focused on heterosexual couples (Vine & Alaggia, 2012). Within the context of a heterosexual relationship, females are much more likely to be the victims of DV than males (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2015; Sinha, 2012, 2013). This

thesis uses the term DV to refer to a male perpetrating abuse against a female intimate partner while acknowledging that this is not the only form that DV can take.

I also want to acknowledge that there is considerable controversy surrounding the term ‘domestic violence.’ Strega captures the essence of the controversy with the term DV when she writes: “by describing men beating [women] as “domestic violence,” our attention is directed towards the location of the violence and drawn away from who is perpetrating it and who is experiencing it.” (2012, p. 247). This gender-neutral terminology is further problematic, for as Strega points out it suggests a “mutuality of participation and responsibility” (2012, p. 248). In spite of the problematic associations connected to the use of the term domestic violence, I will use it throughout this thesis in conformity with extant literature on this topic.

Intersectionality. While there are numerous and competing definitions of intersectionality, it is generally understood as referring to “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation—economic, political cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). More specifically, American critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989, in relation to her metaphor of intersecting roads to describe how gender, racial and other forms of oppression ‘crash’ into one another other to create a unique intersection in which there is a “double, triple, multiple, and many-layered blanket of oppression” (Dhamoon, 2011, p. 232). It is important to note however, that core concepts of intersectionality have a long history that extends far beyond Crenshaw’s work and includes the work of “Black activists and feminists, as well as Latina, post-colonial, queer and Indigenous scholars [who] have all produced work that reveals the complex factors and processes that shape human lives” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2).

Precarious immigration status. A growing number of immigrants in Canada fall into the category of having an immigration status that is labelled as precarious (Goldring, Berinstein, & Bernhard, 2009). Precarious immigration status is defined as:

the absence of any of the following elements normally associated with permanent residence (and citizenship) in Canada: (1) work authorization, (2) the right to remain permanently in the country (residence permit), (3) not depending on a third party for one's right to be in Canada (such as a sponsoring spouse or employer), and (4) social citizenship rights available to permanent residents (e.g. public education and public health coverage). (Goldring et al., 2009, p. 241)

Precarious status is conceptualized as a continuum and works to disrupt binary conceptualizations of immigration status, such as documented vs. undocumented and legal vs. illegal (Goldring et al., 2009).

Social location. For the purposes of this research, I am using Hulko's (2009) definition of social location as, "referring to the relative privilege and oppression that each individual experiences on the basis of specific identity constructs, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender and sexual orientation" (p. 48).

Help seeking. Help seeking is a term that challenges the binary notions of leaving or staying in abusive relationships and instead, views the transition out of DV as a difficult and non-linear process that involves coping with the violence while trying to access and make use of informal and formal supports and services with the intention of seeking safety from DV (Alaggia, Regehr & Jenney, 2012; Ansara & Hindin, 2010). The help-seeking process does not necessarily end with physical separation from the abuser and often involves numerous attempts to break free from the violence and numerous reconciliations (Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2009).

Thesis Organization

This first chapter provides an overview of the rationale and focus of this study and includes definitions of key terms. The second chapter contains an overview of the literature on help seeking with DV and identifies key trends in this literature. The third chapter reviews extant literature on motherhood and DV. The fourth chapter reviews the literature on immigration and domestic violence with a specific focus on the Canadian literature on precarious immigration status and DV. The fifth chapter focuses on the methodology and method used in my research and outlines my process of data collection. The sixth chapter outlines the findings of my thematic analysis. In the seventh chapter, I discuss the findings of my research in relation to the literature reviewed in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this thesis. The final chapter summarizes key findings and discusses their implications for practice and policy.

Chapter 2: Seeking Help with Domestic Violence

The Development of Domestic Violence as a Social Problem

The women's movement in the 1970's helped DV to gain traction as a widely-recognized social problem in North America (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). The key tenets of the feminist understanding of DV included the following: (1) DV is based in gender inequality and men's oppression of women; (2) DV is common and (3) DV affects women in all social locations—respecting “no barriers—including those between language, nationality, age, social class, gender, or race” (Sokoloff & Pearce, 2011, p. 251). This seminal feminist framing of DV—as a common and gendered form of violence affecting all women equally—helped transform the public perception of DV from a private issue only affecting ‘certain types’ of stigmatized women into a widespread social issue that merited considerable public support (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

This feminist framing of DV is also reflected in research, as gender-based theories of DV began to replace theories that located the source of the ‘problem’ of DV inside the minds and bodies of individual women (e.g. Freudian theories of female masochism) (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). The focus on the common experiences of women helped to dispel myths that portrayed abused women as deserving and/or willing recipients of the violence. Increasingly, in both research and the public discourse, abused women were portrayed as ‘sympathetic victims’ which helped to generate widespread public empathy and support (Krane & Davies, 2002; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Feminists advocated for the development of specialized services for abused women, such as shelters, and recognized that public support was essential to secure funding for these social services. Increased support meant that since the mid-1970s, over 500 shelters for abused women

were opened in Canada (Krane & Davies, 2007). These violence against women (VAW) shelters provide an essential service, as without a refuge, many women would be unable to leave abusive partners. In addition to providing refuge, shelter services offer counselling programs, crisis lines and various social programs to support women's transitions out of violence. As Nancy Janovicek writes, "because they offered safety from abusive husbands, transition houses [were] also a profound critique of the assumption that the family offered protection to women and children, its more vulnerable members" (2007, p. 3). Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that Canada has the best DV services in the world (Shirwadkar, 2004).

Towards an intersectional framing of domestic violence. While this feminist framing of DV has been integral to the success of the movement against DV and to the development of VAW services, the message conveyed by many early feminists that DV is equally dangerous to all women has been criticised in recent literature for trivializing and "minimizing the differential experiences of, and potential vulnerabilities to, domestic violence" (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010, p. 147). Increasingly, DV researchers and theorists have "challenged the primacy of gender as an explanatory model" and advocated for the examination of how gender oppression intersects with other forms of oppression and systems of power to shape DV (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, p. 39, see also Damant et al., 2010; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010)

This critique of the way DV had been framed must also be understood within the broader and shifting landscape of feminist theory. Briefly put, over the course of the last two decades, feminist scholarship has been increasingly concerned with accounting for and studying differences among women. In addition, intersectionality has been gaining popularity as the

dominant theory¹ used for studying categories of difference and the complex effects that occur when categories intersect in specific cultural and historical contexts (Collins, 2015; Davis, 2008). Intersectionality will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5, but for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note that the critiques of the traditional feminist framing of DV have emerged in conjunction with the “changing face of feminism,” which is moving towards more intersectional understandings of women’s oppression (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). Indeed, feminist theorists and researchers alike are now using intersectionality to re-examine a variety of topics, including DV.

Researchers have begun to pay attention to how race, class, sexual orientation, ability and immigration status intersect with gender to affect women’s vulnerability to DV, their help-seeking process and their access to social services (Erez et al., 2009; Hunting, 2004; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Sokoloff, 2008). As Bograd (1999) suggests, “intersectionalities color the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained” (p. 276). Johnson (2006) demonstrated that Aboriginal Canadian women are less likely to report DV but still are statistically more likely to experience DV than non-aboriginal women. Walby and Allen’s research (2004) uncovered a clear connection between poverty and DV in Britain: women living in poverty were three times more likely to experience DV than more affluent women. The same study showed that employed women were less likely to experience DV than unemployed women (Walby, & Allen, 2004). Alaggia, Regehr and Rishchynski (2009) found that for Canadian immigrant women, “structural obstacles, ethno-

¹ While disputed in the literature, I have elected to refer to intersectionality as a theory throughout this thesis. I will explore this further in Chapter 5. See Davis (2008) for a comprehensive justification for considering intersectionality a theory.

cultural prohibitions, language barriers, lack of resources, cultural prohibitions, and fears about being deported or losing their children” impede women’s ability to access help when trying to escape situations of DV (p. 335).

In addition, extant research demonstrates that most VAW services are structured to support the needs of white, heterosexual, middle class, single women with full citizenship rights (Bhuyan, Osborne, Zahraei, & Tarshis, 2014). For example, Latta and Goodman found that Haitian women in the U.S. were hesitant to access help from shelters because they did not perceive them to be culturally sensitive (2005). Similarly, Fraser, McNutt, Clark, Williams-Muhammed and Lee (2002) found that African-American women felt like outsiders when accessing shelter support; their fear of being isolated as the only black person in a shelter functioned as a barrier to their help seeking. Bui (2003) found that Vietnamese-American women were hesitant to seek help from formal social services that did not offer services in Vietnamese. Moreover, the Toronto-based Migrant Mothers Project found that women without citizenship or permanent residency were not well served by traditional VAW services, which rely heavily on women’s eligibility for social assistance and subsidized housing. As a result, VAW services struggled to support these women because they did not qualify for these amenities (Bhuyan et al., 2014).

It is clear that while DV does affect women across various social locations, women’s experiences of DV and how they go about seeking help are shaped significantly by where they are “socially located at the intersections of particular race, ethnic, class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigrant systems—each within its respective culturally embedded hierarchies of power” (Sokoloff & Pearce, 2011, p. 252). Designing VAW services that assume that ‘battered woman’ is a homogenous category can lead to the false assumption that services will be

equally effective for all women (Kanuha, 1996; Sokoloff, 2008).

In response to this research and critiques of the traditional feminist framing of DV, intersectional frameworks of violence are increasingly being adopted into the language used by organizations serving abused women. For example, the B.C. Society of Transition Houses, which provides oversight and training to various VAW services in B.C., states on their website, “We approach anti-violence work through an intersectional feminist framework incorporating a critical lens to the systems of power and oppression” (2017). Moreover, while the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence (POVD) does not use the language of intersectionality in its published materials, it acknowledges that certain groups of women have unique vulnerabilities and needs when it comes to DV; they have committed to improving services for four groups of under-served people: Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and men (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, 2014). Further, the POVD is trying to develop more “culturally responsive and relevant training, programs and services” for those affected by DV (2014, p. 13). While the increasing attention to diverse and traditionally under-served groups affected by DV is promising, it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives. It remains to be seen how the emphasis on intersectionality at the organizational and policy level will impact direct service provision.

While intersectionality has changed the face of research, policy and practice surrounding DV, it must be acknowledged that it remains a hotly contested concept in the literature (see Davis, 2008 for details). There are multiple understandings of what intersectionality means and how it should be employed in research and in practice. Most intersectional DV research to date has focused on ‘giving voice’ to battered women in ignored or marginalized social locations, but it has not identified and made visible the structural inequalities that shape the lives of battered

women. Nixon and Humphreys (2010) are critical of this research; they write, “[it] can lead down the road of “identity politics” with every individual holding a different standpoint—a unique and different struggle. For a social movement, such individualized politics can be problematic” (p. 151). Similarly, this research can lead to what Hankivsky and Dhamoon (2013) refer to as “Oppression Olympics” in which different groups compete for the title of “the most oppressed” in order to gain recognition (p. 899). This competition can be detrimental to the success of the social movement against DV.

To address these issues, which have been under discussion long before Nixon and Humphreys (2010) weighed in, Sokoloff (2008) suggests that intersectional DV research should involve a multi-level analysis where identities, categories *and* structural processes and factors are considered; she call this an “intersecting and interlocking” approach (p. 230). This intersectional and interlocking framing of DV situates individual stories of multiple oppressions within the macro-level systems of power and domination (Dhamoon, 2011; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). This brief history of movement towards an intersectional understanding of DV helps to provide the context for the current study. This thesis adopts an intersectional and interlocking frame to study the help-seeking process of mothers with precarious immigration status. This frame is analyzed in more detail in Chapter 5.

The Evolution of the ‘Why Doesn’t She Just Leave’ Question

Multiple theories exist to explain women’s decision-making processes in the context of DV, their help-seeking actions, their motivations for seeking help, and the barriers they encounter as they seek help. The following section will provide an overview of the literature on leaving a violent intimate partner relationship focusing specifically on themes that will help to contextualize the current study. As with DV literature in general, the shift in feminist research

and theory towards more intersectional understandings of women's oppression has also had an impact on the research on leaving a violent relationship.

Research on why abused women stay in or leave violent relationships began to appear in the literature in the mid-1970s (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Prior to this, psychodynamic theories of female masochism prevailed (Snell, Rosenwald, & Robey, 1964; Young & Gerson, 1991, as cited in Anderson & Saunders, 2003). As Anderson and Saunders write, "battered women were believed to harbor a conscious or unconscious need for pain and punishment, which was used to explain their "provocation" leading to abuse and/or a lack of motivation for leaving" (2003, p. 164). In the mid-1970s, the feminist movement and the recognition of DV as a gendered social problem spawned research that focused on identifying why women stay in or leave abusive relationships. Anderson and Saunders (2003), who conducted one of the most thorough and frequently cited literature reviews of research on women's transitions out of DV to date, classify these early studies as 'stay/leave' studies. 'Stay/leave' studies were primarily quantitative projects in which 'leaving' the relationship was considered a discrete and desired outcome variable (Anderson & Saunders 2003).

Stay/leave studies. According to Anderson and Saunders (2003), the early 'stay/leave' studies helped to identify a range of psychological and environmental factors, which influenced abused women's decisions. The most commonly researched factors were: (1) the nature of the violence; (2) women's life histories (i.e. history of previous abuse); (3) social-psychological factors (e.g. commitment to the relationship); (4) external resources (e.g. income and access to childcare) and (5) previous coping strategies. Overall, Anderson and Saunders found that external factors were more predictive of women's 'stay/leave' decisions; income variables in

particular were found to be powerful predictors (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Strube & Barbour, 1984, as cited in Anderson & Saunders).

This line of ‘stay/leave’ research—especially the inclusion of external factors—was a marked improvement from psychodynamic theories and helped to support those who challenged the traditional portrait of abused women as masochists who incited their abuse, by arguing instead that these women faced “multiple internal and external obstacles to leaving” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003, p. 172). However, this approach to the ‘stay/leave’ issue has also been shown to be inadequate. Firstly, it conceptualizes leaving as a discrete action resulting from the decision of an individual woman, an assumption that numerous studies have challenged. In reality, leaving involves multiple decisions and actions, and for most women, permanently transitioning out of violence involves multiple attempts to leave followed by multiple reconciliations. For example, a recent Statistics Canada survey of women staying in Transition Houses revealed that 31% of all women residents had accessed this same shelter service more than once, and approximately 90% of those readmissions had occurred within the last year (Taylor-Butts, 2005). Moreover of these same 31% of women, 40% had accessed the same shelter once in the last year and 38% had been there between two and four times in the previous year. A final 10% of these women had accessed shelter services more than five times (Taylor-Butts, 2005). Additionally, by conceptualizing leaving as a discrete action, which ends with the physical separation from the abuser, the ‘stay/leave’ studies do not explore what happens to women and the challenges they face *after* deciding to leave (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

A second major flaw with this early ‘stay/leave’ research, as noted by Anderson & Saunders, is that it “designat[es] the decision to leave as *the* ultimate outcome variable of interest [thus] equat[ing] leaving with the cessation of violence”(2003, p. 172). Other studies, by

contrast, suggest that leaving can actually increase the risk of threats, violence and homicide for women and their children. According to Statistics Canada, 39% of women who experienced DV said that they were assaulted after leaving; additionally, their risk of being murdered also increased (2011). Moreover, the Canadian Homicide Survey found that between the years of 2007 and 2011, women were six times more likely to be killed by a legally separated spouse than by a legally married spouse (18 homicides per million vs. 3.1 per million)² (Sinha, 2013). Similarly, using data from Statistics Canada's General Social Survey, Brownridge and colleagues found that compared with married women, separated women reported nine times the prevalence of violence and divorced women reported approximately four times the prevalence of violence (2008). Data also suggests that the period immediately after leaving a domestically violent relationship is the most dangerous (Brownridge, 2006; Brownridge et al., 2008). For example, the 2008 Death Review in Ontario found that two thirds of homicides involving separated couples occurred within six months of separation (Office of the Chief Coroner, 2008).³ Other studies of homicides confirm the connection between homicide and leaving; out of the 605 homicides that happened in B.C. between January 2003 and August 2008, for example, 73 were the direct result of DV; 75.3% of these DV homicide victims were female (Coroners Service, 2010). While child homicides are rare, parental filicides often happen in the context of domestic violence (Jaffe, Campbell, Olszowy, & Hamilton, 2014). Of the 230 DV-related homicides in Ontario between 2002-2007, 23 of the victims were children (Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee, 2008). Parental filicide in the context of DV is typically, 'retaliating filicide' in which the child is killed in order to punish the woman for leaving the relationships (Jaffe et

² No population level data is available on homicide rates among common-law or same-sex partners.

³ Of the 72 cases reviewed, the DV Death Review Committee observed actual or pending separation in 81% of cases (Office of the Chief Coroner, 2008).

al., 2014). Clearly, leaving DV should not be equated with safety and/or the cessation of violence.

A final critique of the ‘stay/leave’ research is that it tends to reinforce the stereotype of battered women as passive and helpless, because it puts the spotlight on women who have not left DV (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Staying is equated with passivity and women’s resistance strategies and agentic efforts to cope with the abuse *while still in the relationship* go unnoticed. Furthermore, this research contributes to victim blaming by reinforcing the perspective that the ‘problem’ with DV is that women do not leave or do not leave soon enough (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000).

Leaving as a process. A second major group of studies on leaving DV identified in Anderson and Saunders’ (2003) review conceptualizes leaving as a *process* in which the decision to leave is one of many steps involved in breaking free from a violent intimate relationship. This line of ‘leaving as process’ research is primarily qualitative in nature and focuses on understanding women’s experiences of DV through their own voices (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). This research complicates earlier dichotomous conceptions of leaving by conceptualizing leaving as an individual and internal process that is influenced by a woman’s socio-cultural context and by various intra and interpersonal factors (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Most of the research classified by Anderson and Saunders as ‘process’ research theorizes that leaving involves women “passing through a series of stages or phases leading to an eventual separation(s) from the abuser... periods of return to earlier phases are considered normal” (2003, p. 175). Typically, these stages include some variation of the following: (1) living and coping with violence and isolation; (2) recognizing the violence, reframing it and beginning to resist it; and (3) separation and help seeking (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Many ‘leaving as process’

studies make use of Prochaska and DiClemente's (1984) Transtheoretical Model of Change to understand women's leaving (e.g. Brown, 1997; Burke, Geilen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001; Williams, 2000). Other examples of theories reflecting this conceptualization of leaving include, but are not limited to, reasoned action and planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985; Byren & Arias, 2004), the investment model (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult, 1980), psychological entrapment (Brockner & Rubin, 1985) and the two-part decision-making model (Choice & Lamke, 1997).

'Leaving as process' studies are primarily grounded in traditional feminist perspectives of DV; emphasis is placed on how the role of the patriarchy, female socialization and traditional conceptualizations of 'family' affect how women cope with and make sense of their abuse (e.g. Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Wilson, 1999). Studies identify various factors that function as catalysts for change in women's understandings of DV, such as escalation in the violence, external influences such as family and friends, and realizing the negative effects of exposure to DV (hereafter EDV) on their children (Anderson & Saunders, 2003).

'Leaving as process' studies emphasize the agency and strength of abused women and help to weaken the stereotypes of battered women as passive. Anderson and Saunders (2003) write that gradually "a more complex psychology of woman-as-survivor [appears] in which battered women slowly regain control over their own lives" (p. 176). Survivor theory (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988) proposes that abused women are agentic help seekers who resist and respond to DV in accordance with the nature of the violence *and* in accordance with the nature of support they have. Survivor theory accounts for the various ways that abused women work to survive abuse; these include both personal coping strategies and informal and formal help seeking (Brabeck & Guzmán, 2008). While Anderson and Saunders (2003) only reviewed research

published prior to 2001, many recent studies can be considered ‘leaving as process’ studies, especially research emerging from the psychological disciplines (e.g. Alhalal, Ford-Gilboe, Kerr, & Davies, 2012; Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Haggerty & Goodman, 2003; Lacey, 2010; Lacey, Saunders, & Zhang, 2011; Lerner & Kennedy, 2000; Nurius, Macy, Nwabuzor, & Holt, 2011). Alaggia, Regehr and Jenney (2012) note that the shift away from binary conceptions of staying and leaving represents the most significant theoretical shift in the literature on women’s transitions out of violence to date.

While these ‘leaving as process’ studies have certainly been recognised for making important contributions to the literature, they are also critiqued for assuming not only that women can only regain their independence and agency if they leave their abusers but also that staying is *never* healthy or safe. For example, stage and process theories, such as the Transtheoretical Model of Change, which are often used to explain the cessation of problematic health behaviours, like smoking and drug dependency, depict a woman’s progress towards the decision to leave as movement towards health, wellness and agency (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Leaving, while portrayed as a complex process, is the desired outcome; staying is constructed as unhealthy and a sign that women have not broken free from entrapment. The pervasive assumption is that women *should* leave the relationship and little to no room is left for considering if, when and how staying can be a rational and appropriate choice for women. When helping services and intervention models are structured around the assumption that battered women must leave, services providers working with battered women are, “likely to be of little help to women who experience less severe abuse and may wish to achieve nonviolence from within the relationship” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003, p. 177; see also Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000).

Peled and colleagues argue that most research and practice focusing on leaving DV adopts the cultural script, “battered women should leave, but most do not” (2000, p. 14). This pervasive cultural script contributes to what Peled and colleagues call “ready-made ‘shelved solutions’” to DV, which involve helping and equipping women to leave relationships (2000, p. 12). Some women, especially women who choose to stay with their abusers, find these interventions narrow and restrictive; the conflict between service provider’s goals and women’s goals can lead to attrition (Peled et al., 2000). For some women, especially those from minoritized cultures, divorce and separation may not be a plausible or desirable option. Peled and colleagues argue that services providers must acknowledge that some women want help finding ways to end the violence *while* staying in the relationship (2000). Peled and colleagues encourage services providers to develop respect for this choice and ask the following questions: “How and under what circumstances can we empower battered women who wish to stay with their abusers while providing them with measures of safety to which they and their children are entitled?” (2000, p. 13).

Despite the intuitive idea that abused women’s emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing will improve after they leave DV, some recent research suggests that leaving is not necessarily associated with wellbeing improvements (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2009). Anderson and Saunders (2003) found that three main factors influenced the wellbeing of women who had recently separated from their abusive partners: (1) continued violence and abuse; (2) secondary stressors resulting from separation (e.g. feelings of attachment and loss, material losses and changing family roles and responsibility); and (3) internal and external coping resources (e.g. social support, material resources, institutional resources).

In one of the few longitudinal studies on post-separation wellbeing, Bell, Goodman and Dutton (2009) examined the evolution of relationship status, mental health and wellbeing among women who had sought help with DV over the course of one year. They found few differences in the mental health and quality of life between women in four different relationship status groups: women who had completely separated from their abusers, women who had reconciled, women who had returned once but left again and women with “fluid” relationship status—that is women who were continually going back and forth to their abusers. This study suggests then that leaving a relationship—either permanently or just for a short period of time—was not significantly associated with women’s mental health or quality of life. Bell and colleagues explain this finding by suggesting that, “any improvements in stressors and emotional wellbeing brought by shifts in relationship status were offset by the new difficulties created by those shifts” (2009, p. 159). Examples of these difficulties include navigating complex systems, mourning the loss of the relationship, healing from the abuse and finding employment, affordable housing, child care and transportation (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Bell et al., 2009; Strega, 2012).

All the women in the Bell and colleagues’ (2009) study experienced some form of ongoing violence and abuse from their partner as well as stressors associated with being the victims of DV, regardless of their relationship status. Another significant finding was that women in the ‘completely apart’ or ‘completely together’ group reported fewer incidents of violence over the course of the year than women whose relationship status fluctuated. While Bell and colleagues were cautious in drawing conclusions from their research, they suggest that because relationship consistency appears to be important, “battered women contemplating ending their relationship may do best to wait until they are emotionally and financially able to sustain their decision to leave” (2009, p. 159). This research complicates the presupposed

relationship between leaving and wellbeing and suggests that for some women, staying with their abuser, at least in the short term, might be their safest option. It also highlights the importance of supporting women throughout their abusive relationship. Indeed according to Bell, Goodman and Dutton, “improv[ing] women’s experiences after leaving, rather than focusing on leaving per se, may ultimately be most valuable in helping women take steps to improve their general well being” (2009, p. 169).

A second major critique of the ‘leaving as process’ research described above is that it ignores how structural factors other than patriarchy and sexism shape women’s help-seeking processes (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Velonis et al., 2015). According to Anderson and Saunders, these studies suggest that leaving is primarily dependent on internal and psychological shifts in how women make meaning out of their relationships. What is more, they also “come close to the psychological reductionism for which theories of female masochism and learned helplessness have been criticized” (Anderson & Saunders, 2003, p. 177).

In addition, the ‘leaving as process’ literature largely ignores such varied social and structural forces as poverty, racism and classism that facilitate and sustain men’s violence. Moreover, even when these factors are considered in the research, they are reduced to individual-level variables; instead of talking about institutional racism, the lack of affordable childcare options and the shortage of subsidized housing, this research focuses on “unemployment,” “the number of children” “employment status” and “income level” (Velonis et al., 2015). As a result, suggestions for interventions include increasing efforts to educate women about the cycle of violence, the harms associated with EDV and counselling interventions to facilitate women’s decision making. The need to provide external and material resources to support women experiencing DV goes unmentioned. Generally speaking, abused women’s leaving processes are

individualized and individual women are identified as the target for interventions (Velonis et al., 2015).

A third critique of ‘leaving as process’ literature, which has also been applied to the ‘stay/leave’ literature, is that little or no attention is given to the post-separation period (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). As discussed above, this is problematic because the numerous obstacles women face *after* physically separating from—including post-separation violence—are not explored. Anderson and Saunders (2003) join with Bell and colleagues (2009) to argue that the leaving process should be extended to incorporate the post-separation context and the complex challenges that accompany it.

Overall, both ‘stay/leave’ and ‘leaving as process’ studies have made valuable contributions to the DV literature and advanced our understanding of why, how, when and from whom women seek help with DV; they have also isolated what factors constrain and facilitate women’s help-seeking efforts. At the same time however, these studies have been critiqued for being myopic, for contributing to victim blaming and for minimizing how women’s experiences and actions are shaped by complex structural and systemic forms of oppression (Alaggia et al., 2012; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Velonis et al., 2015). In response to these critiques, a new line of studies has emerged in the last decade that has shifted the focus from women’s ‘stay/leave’ decisions to an exploration of how women *seek help* with DV. Instead of asking why women stay or leave, this research asks questions such as: How do women reach out for help? What facilitates and/or constrains help seeking? Who responds to women’s help seeking? Are these helpers effective in meeting the needs of DV victims? The language of help seeking is arguably more inclusive and less definitive than the language of leaving, which implies physical separation, and staying. Help seeking, nevertheless, can encompass the wide range of actions

taken by women to resist violence and can extend far beyond the time a woman physically separates from her abusive partner. Moreover, help seeking can be a less stigmatizing concept than “leaving” because it is less associated with the success/failure dichotomy.

Help-seeking literature views help seeking as a contextual and ecological process that is shaped by a variety of multi-level external factors. It is this explicit focus on external *and* multi-level factors that sets help-seeking studies apart from the ‘leaving as process’ studies described by Anderson & Saunders (2003). By paying explicit attention to how structural forces constrain the options women have when seeking help with DV, a more complex, nuanced picture of help seeking emerges that “highlight[s] the ways in which multiple and complex factors beyond individual characteristics work both alone and synergistically to constrain women’s choices and influence their strategies for keeping themselves and their children safe when a partner is violent” (Velonis et al., 2015, p. 3).

Help seeking as an ecological and intersectional process. Over the past decade, several theoretical frameworks have been used to explain and to research women’s help-seeking efforts in situations of DV. Liang, Goodman, Tummala-Nara, and Weintraub (2005) propose a model to explain how women’s decision making in the context of DV is a cognitive process that is influenced at each stage by individual, interpersonal and sociocultural factors. Their model has a strong individual and cognitive focus but also accounts for the influence of multiple factors beyond the control of individual women. According to Liang and colleagues’ empirical research, factors such as social support, poverty, immigration status, the severity of the violence, cultural norms and the availability of culturally-competent social services influence women as they a) define the problem; b) decide to seek help; and c) select a source of support (2005). Their theory is similar to earlier stage theories such as the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska &

DiClemente, 1984), but extends them because it incorporates multi-level external factors directly into their theory of decision making; for a visual model of their theory, see Liang et al. (2005).

The concept of social entrapment, first proposed by Ptacek (1999), provides an alternative framework for understanding how women respond to DV and focuses exclusively on socio-structural forces. According to Ptacek, women actively try to resist men's violence and seek help but their attempts are hampered by inadequate institutional responses (1999). Women thus become socially entrapped in abusive relationships. Abusive men are supported by society, which is patriarchal, racist and classist (Moe, 2007). The concept of social entrapment provides an alternative to theories of learned helplessness (Walker, 1984); social entrapment constructs battered women as agentic survivors and draws attention to the failure of factors outside the woman's control. Moe (2007) used the concept of social entrapment to demonstrate how women in her study sought help with DV and demonstrated that the success or failure of their help-seeking attempts was shaped by structural inequalities. Moe found that women who encountered "unconditional and empathetic institutional and/or social support" when they reached out for help were empowered to continue resisting violence and able to move into violence free lives (2007, p. 692). Women without those supports, by contrast, faced multiple socio-structural barriers that contributed to their "failed help seeking" (Moe, 2007, p. 692).

Several studies have adopted the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a framework for understanding women's transitions out of DV (Alaggia et al., 2012; Bliss, Cook, & Kaslow, 2006; Lee, 2010). Alaggia and colleagues (2012) critique both cognitive models (e.g. Liang et al., 2005) for focusing primarily on intrapersonal processes and the social entrapment theory for concentrating exclusively on macro-system level issues. Instead, they advocate for the use of an ecological theory, which views the individual as a "person-in-environment" and seeks

to “recognize and integrate all levels of human ecology” in the study of help seeking in the context of DV (Alaggia et al., 2012, p. 308). Alaggia and colleagues found that individual women’s decisions about disclosing DV were influenced by intrapersonal factors (e.g. personality traits), the microsystem (e.g. interpersonal relationships and religious values), the exo-system (e.g. availability and response of community resources) and the macro-system (e.g. immigration policy, criminal justice policy and culture) (Alaggia et al., 2012). The ecological theory provides a helpful lens as it accounts for the inherent complexity involved in women’s help seeking in the context of DV. Ecological studies, such as Alaggia and colleagues’ (2012), advocate for multidisciplinary and multilevel responses to DV that address the barriers that women face in each level of their ecosystem.

Research using the ecological framework often generates a list of key influential factors but, as Velonis and colleagues (2015) suggest, the framework tends to minimize the relationships *between* the various multilevel factors. Furthermore, research on women’s transitions out of DV—including ecological research—has largely treated “woman” as a homogenous category and until recently, little attention has been paid as to how other aspects of a woman’s social location shape her help-seeking decisions and experiences. In response to this gap in literature, Velonis and colleagues (2015) join many others in the field to advocate for the application of the theory of intersectionality to the study of help seeking in the context of DV (Earner, 2010; Erez, 2002; Hunting, 2004; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010; Sokoloff, 2008; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Intersectional studies on help seeking typically select a group of individuals with several shared aspects of social location (e.g. women of colour with disabilities) and examine how their help-seeking processes are shaped by interlocking systems of power and domination (e.g. racism, classism, nativism, sexism) (e.g. Cramer & Plummer, 2009; Erez et al., 2009; Kapur, Zajicek, &

Gaber, 2017; O’Neal & Beckman, 2017; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Vidales, 2010).

Intersectionality accounts for more complexity than the ‘person-in-environment’ ecological systems theory; it analyzes the relationships between identity, processes of differentiation and systems of power and domination (Dhamoon, 2011). For example, when O’Neal and Beckman (2017) used an intersectional framework to explore the barriers to help seeking for Latina victims of DV, they found that Latina women encountered multiple intersecting barriers including: language barriers, social isolation, gender norms and beliefs, educational attainment, poverty, unequal distribution of resources, anti-immigrant laws and policies and the fear of law enforcement. Kapur, Zajicek and Gaber (2017) used intersectionality to examine how non-profit organizations in the U.S. respond to the needs of South Asian women seeking help with DV. Similarly, Cramer and Plummer (2009) use intersectionality to examine what they call the ‘help-seeking *and* help-receiving’ behaviours of battered women of color with disabilities. They document how race, immigration status, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, gender and the presence of an accent influence women’s help-seeking decisions and the responses they receive both formally and informally (Cramer & Plummer, 2009).

The focus on ‘help receiving’ is an important contribution to the literature because, much like Ptaeck’s theory of social entrapment (1999), it draws attention to the important role that services, systems and structures have in either facilitating or constraining women’s help-seeking efforts. It raises such important questions as: Are there resources available to her? Do these resources meet her needs? Are they sustainable resources?; it suggests that a woman’s ability to seek help and to find safety depends on her choice to reach out for help *and* on the response she receives to her help seeking. The focus on help seeking and help receiving opens space to consider the possibility that even after women decide to leave, many are forced back into abusive

relationships because of inadequate resources and unresponsive systems. This literature considers what happens to women and explores the challenges that they face *after* deciding to seek help with DV.

In comparison with recommendations drawn from earlier ‘stay/leave’ and “leaving as a process” research, the practice suggestions that emerge from this intersectional research go beyond targeting individual women’s psychological and cognitive processes to include providing psychoeducation and counselling services. Intersectional research on help seeking expands the ‘target’ of DV interventions and advocates for better training for services providers to help them be more attentive to women’s social locations and understand how these social locations impact help-seeking processes of diverse groups of women. In addition, the literature advocates for multi-agency collaboration to address the complex and intersecting needs of women fleeing DV. For example, Kapur, Zajicek and Gaber (2017) recommend that mainstream DV organizations receive training from organizations that have specific expertise in working with particular groups of women (e.g. Asian Indian women) in order to address the issue of “over-inclusion” (Patel, 2001). Over inclusion occurs when the “intersectional needs” of a woman in a particular social location are “absorbed within the broader gender-based understandings of domestic abuse” (Kapur, Zajicek & Gaver, 2017 p. 58). Specialized agencies can help mainstream agencies “zoom-in” on the particular and specific needs of diverse groups of women and thus be able to provide more effective helping interventions.

Overall, intersectional research on help seeking has helped to elucidate the relationships between social location, systems of power and domination and the help-seeking processes of diverse groups of women who are seeking help with DV. It understands seeking help with DV as a process, which is shaped and constrained by a woman’s social location at the intersections of

particular systems of power and domination (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This intersectional understanding of seeking help with DV is a significant departure from the earlier individualized and binary conceptions of ‘leaving’ reviewed extensively by Anderson & Saunders (2003).

This brief review of the literature on women’s help-seeking processes in situations of DV provides a context for the current study. As evidenced in this chapter, intersectionality is increasingly being employed as the theoretical framework of choice for understanding and responding to women as they seek help with DV. While intersectional research on help seeking has yielded important insights, to date, most research has studied the help-seeking processes of women at various intersections of race and class. In order to support women who seek help with DV and to promote institutional and systemic changes, Lockhart and Mitchell recommend that, “advocates and social work practitioners must focus on *all* the points of intersection, complexity, dynamic processes, and structures that define these women’s access to rights and opportunities” (emphasis added, 2010, p. 21). Research examining how women at the intersections of categories other than race and class seek help with DV is needed.

I suggest that in the particular social and historical context in which the current study takes place, research is needed to explore: (1) how women at the intersections of motherhood and precarious immigration status seek help with DV and (2) how the various services and systems they encounter respond to their help-seeking efforts. With these questions in mind, this thesis adopts an intersectional perspective on help seeking and focuses on how intersectional and interlocking identities and structures shape how mothers with precarious status seek help with DV.

The following two literature review chapters provide a review of the literature on the help-seeking processes of mothers and of women with precarious immigration statuses

respectively. These chapters have been separated because they review distinct bodies of literature that are equally relevant to this thesis.

Chapter 3: Mothers and Help Seeking

Although recent literature on DV acknowledges that transitioning out of DV is a complex process that is influenced by a woman's social location at the intersections of particular systems of power and domination (Damant et al., 2008; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005), only a small body of literature has explored how a woman's mothering status relates to her transition out of violence. In this chapter, I review this literature and join Krane and Davies (2007) to argue that in order to help women and their children who are seeking safety, we need to take women's mothering status into consideration when designing and implementing DV interventions in order to move beyond "an intervention model that treats "woman" [as] an uncontested, taken-for-granted, singular category" (p. 8).

This review recognizes that transitioning out of violence depends on both women's decisions to seek help and the responsiveness of their environment to their help seeking efforts. Accordingly, in this review I ask the following questions: (1) How does being a mother⁴ shape women's help seeking? (2) How do formal services and systems respond to mothers affected by DV? This narrative review includes both qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed literature. It also includes research that documents both the perspectives of service providers and the perspectives of mothers who have experienced DV.

This first section of this review discusses how a woman's mothering status can affect her vulnerability to and experience of DV. The second section reviews the literature on mothers' help-seeking decisions in the context of DV. The third and most detailed section reviews the literature that documents what happens when mothers reach out for help and attempt to leave

⁴ For the purposes of this review, the term 'mother' is used to refer to a woman who is actively parenting one or more child(ren) (under the age of 18) at the time she is seeking help with DV

situations of DV. More specifically, this section reviews and critiques how two formal systems and services respond to mothers as they seek help with domestic violence: the violence against women system and the child protection system.

Motherhood and Domestic Violence

Women with children are three times more likely to experience DV than childless women (Radford & Hester, 2006). In their quantitative study of the impact of motherhood on DV, Norwegian researchers, Bø Vatnar and Bjørkly, found that being a mother increased the duration of physical, psychological and sexual abuse by a male partner when compared to childless women (2010). This effect was true even when the authors controlled for socio-demographic variables and the duration of the relationship in their multivariate model. Bø Vatnar & Bjørkly (2010) also found that the presence of young children in the home offered no protection for mothers against the severity and frequency of violent incidents leading to the serious injuries or even lethal violence.

Being a mother has also been shown to increase the frequency of lethal and non-lethal post-separation violence (Brownridge, 2006; Brownridge et al., 2008). Mothers often have to be present for family court and custody and access transfers, which present the abuser with opportunities to continue to intimidate, control and abuse women and their child(ren) (Brownridge, 2006). Furthermore, the increasing trend towards granting parents joint custody orders can contribute to post-separation violence as both the mother and the domestically violent father must make parenting decisions together (Brownridge et al., 2008; Jaffe, Lemon, & Poisson, 2003).

In addition to affecting women's vulnerability to violence, research demonstrates that being a mother can influence the nature of the violence. Domestically violent men humiliate and

denigrate what women judge to be a great source of strength, namely, their identity as mothers. (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Lapierre, 2008; Peled & Gil, 2011; Rasool, 2016; Semaan, Jasinski, & Bubriski-Mckenzie, 2013). More specifically, abusive men use the following strategies: (1) intentionally harm women in front of their child(ren) and vice versa; (2) recruit the child(ren) to abuse and humiliate their mothers; (3) threaten to take the child(ren) away or report mothers to child protective services (CPS); (4) control women's sexuality and reproduction and (5) openly accuse women of being bad mothers (Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Damant et al., 2008; Humphreys, Mullender et al., 2002; Krane & Davies, 2007; Peled & Gil, 2011). Overall, mothers who experienced DV described feeling less control over all aspects of their mothering. At the same time, they felt solely responsible for protecting their child(ren) from their father's violence *and* responsible for the harm done to their child(ren) who witnessed the violence (Lapierre, 2010).

Mother's help-seeking decisions. The bulk of the literature on mothering and DV analyzes how mothers make decisions about seeking help with DV. This literature focuses on identifying intra- and interpersonal factors that affect mothers' decisions and contextualizes these decisions within feminist frameworks of men's oppression of women. This research then fits within Anderson and Saunders' (2003) 'leaving as process' category, which was described in Chapter 2. This research identified a common pattern within mothers' retrospective narratives of help seeking; that is to say, mothers report enduring abuse as long as they believe staying is in the best interests of the child(ren), but when they realize that DV is harming their child(ren), they seek help and begin the transition out of violence (Moe, 2009; Randell et al., 2012; Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, & Barg, 2010; Semaan et al., 2013). The research also showed that mothers who perceived staying to be in the best interests of the child(ren) held strong beliefs that

a two-parent home was best for the child(ren) and as a result, focused on keeping the family intact. These beliefs were reinforced (or potentially originated from) cultural discourses that idealize the nuclear family. As Rasool (2016) writes, “women face enormous pressure to ensure that fathers are present in their children’s lives to avoid stigmatism because of widespread notions that ‘children need their fathers’ even when fathers are violent, absent, alcoholics, or involved in criminal activities and mothers are in any case playing the role of primary caregivers” (p. 1666). Research has found that mothers can be subjected to shame and ostracism if they choose to leave and ‘break up their families’ (Kearney, 2001).

Further, mothers stayed in relationships because they wanted to protect their child(ren) from the economic instability associated with leaving (Moe, 2009; Rasool, 2016; Rhodes et al., 2010; Semaan et al., 2013; Strega, 2012). More specifically, they feared being unable to provide their child(ren) with adequate food, shelter and clothing if they left (Hague & Wilson, 2000; Moe, 2007b; Rasool, 2016). Mothers also described fearing triggering violent retaliation from the abuser, losing custody of their child(ren) in family court and/or losing their child(ren) to child protective services (CPS) (Alaggia, Jenney, Mazzuca, & Redmond, 2007; Moe, 2007; Randell et al., 2012; Rasool, 2016; Rhodes et al., 2010). Mothers also wanted to avoid uprooting their child(ren) from their everyday lives.

It is important to note that women’s informal support networks often reinforce women’s fears. In Alaggia, Regehr and Jenney’s 2012 study, several mothers discussed being warned by people in their informal support networks about such negative repercussions of seeking help as being reported to CPS, immigration authorities or the police, who could then incarcerate the abuser and/or remove the child(ren). Abusive men also used women’s fears to threaten and further entrap them. Unfortunately, women’s fears are not unfounded, as they reflect the lived

experience of many women seeking help and encountering ill-equipped, uninformed and unresponsive services and systems.

This being the case, many mothers choose to stay in abusive relationships, at least in the short term. Many sacrifice their own needs, desires and safety in order to protect the best interests of their child(ren)—which they believe includes preserving the family (Alaggia et al., 2012). This research provides a helpful contrast to the pervasive assumption that leaving DV is in the best interests of the child(ren) and that a mother who decides to stay is not considering the best interests of her child(ren), but rather is exhibiting bad mothering and failing to protect her child(ren) (Bourassa, Lavergne, Damant, Lessard, & Turcotte, 2008; Hester, 2011a; Lapierre & Côté, 2011; Strega, 2012).

The mothers interviewed in the studies cited above were all women who had accessed formal violence against women (VAW) services for help with DV and as such, at some point, they all decided to seek help with DV. Most mothers described the ‘tipping point’ or ‘last straw’ that pushed them to seek help was when they realized that the violence was negatively affecting their child(ren), and/or when the abuser began to directly victimize the child(ren) (Alaggia et al., 2012; Moe, 2007b; Randell et al., 2012; Rasool, 2016; Rhodes et al., 2010; Semaan et al., 2013; Vine & Alaggia, 2012). At this point, mothers’ perceptions of the best interests of the child(ren) shifted and most women began the challenging process of transitioning out of DV. As Rasool and colleagues highlight, “women seem to feel that protecting children from the abuser is seen as a legitimate reason for seeking help and leaving the abusive relationship, whereas the normalization of domestic violence in communities makes seeking help for the actual experience of domestic violence less justifiable” (2016, p. 1677).

There are several key limitations to the research reviewed above. First, the sample size was limited and based on the retrospective accounts of mothers who accessed formal help with DV and who were, at the time of the study, either living in shelters or living independently from their abusers. In addition, this research did not include the experiences and perspectives of mothers who either never accessed help with DV or who left abusive relationships without the help of formal services. Another key limitation is that—analogue to other ‘leaving as process’ studies—the social and structural forces that work to maintain men’s violence and restrict women’s choices, such as poverty and racism, are ignored or reduced to individual-level variables (Velonis et al., 2015). A final key limitation of this research is that it fails to contextualize women’s decision-making narratives within existing hegemonic discourses of what a ‘good’ mother is and does.

Idealized constructions of mothers. A robust body of literature exists on the cultural constructions of motherhood and how these constructions shape policy and practices that affect families. Sharon Hays (1996) describes the dominant North American ideology of good mothering as “intensive mothering.” This ideology dictates that a mother should be completely devoted to her child(ren) at all times and have little to no regard for her own needs and interests (Hays, 1996). Mothers are assumed to be inherently nurturing and are expected to find their ultimate sense of personal fulfilment in mothering. Being a mother is assumed to be an integral part of a woman’s gender identity and as a result, women and not men are held responsible for the labour involved with parenting (Hays, 1996). At the same time, mothers who do not live up to this ideal are seen as deficient and dysfunctional.

Critiques of the intensive motherhood ideology have done little to assuage its pervasive use in DV research and practice and its support of simplistic moralistic constructions of a mother

who is a victim of DV: as the ‘good mother’ and the ‘bad mother’ (Semaan et al., 2013). The ‘good mother’ lives up to the ideal of intensive motherhood but is trapped in bad circumstances. She is a helpless victim who usually manages to leave once she realizes that leaving is in the best interest of her children whose needs she prioritizes, even at her own peril (Peled & Dekel, 2010; Semaan et al., 2013). By contrast, the ‘bad mother’ is selfish and fails to protect her children from the harm caused by her abusive male partner (Lapierre & Côté, 2011a; Peled & Dekel, 2010; Strega, 2012). Canadian researcher Simon Lapierre (2008, 2008, 2010a) documents how battered mothers are viewed through a “deficit model of mothering” in which mothers are held solely responsible for any harm that their children suffer, regardless of whether or not they inflicted this harm. This approach minimizes the mother’s own victimization as it assumes that her identity as mother-protector should supersede all other factors, including the risk of homicide and filicide after leaving (Jaffe, Campbell, Hamilton, & Juodis, 2012; Jaffe, Campbell, Olszowy, & Hamilton, 2014). In the context of violence, mothers’ parenting skills are also assumed deficient, though, as Amy Mullender writes, men’s violence creates an environment that is, “deeply inconducive to achieving even ‘good enough’ mothering” (2002, p. 157).

The good and bad mother binary. Mother’s help-seeking narratives need to be contextualised within the dominant and binary good-bad mother constructions of abused mothers. The literature on mother’s decision making described above tends to portray abused women as ‘good mothers’ trapped in bad circumstances, who practice “intensive mothering” by selflessly staying for their children and leaving only when they realize that the violence is harming their children. While this portrayal of abused mothers provides a helpful contrast to the deficit model of mothering, it is criticized for being equally one-dimensional and for

perpetuating idealized constructions of mothers which ultimately function to restrict and oppress all mothers (Peled, 2011; Peled & Dekel, 2010; Semaan et al., 2013).

Seeman, Jasinski and Bubriski-Mckenzie's (2013) narrative analysis of mother's help-seeking decisions complicates the good mother/bad mother dichotomy. Their in-depth interviews of abused mothers revealed that while most mothers described a realization that the violence was harming their children as a turning point that caused them to reach out for help with DV, women had multiple reasons for leaving. Similarly, although participants often identified being a mother and caring for their child(ren) as "everything to them," their narratives revealed many other aspects of their identities that brought them meaning, purpose and strength in the face of violence.

In light of these findings, Semaan and colleagues proffer that a woman's relationship with her children and abuser, as well as her motivations for leaving, are complex (2013). They call attention to the shaping influences of cultural expectations and discourses on women's lives and narratives of help seeking (2013). Semaan and colleagues argue that these discourses limit women's ability to express "the dynamic range of experiences, feelings, and beliefs associated with motherhood" and also "contribute toward an overemphasis on mothering in battered women's narratives (2013, p. 85)."

Furthermore, since all the participants in these studies on decision-making accessed help from formal DV services, it is very likely that they received psycho-education about the harmful effects of exposure to domestic violence (hereafter "EDV"), which often emphasizes how leaving is in the best interests of the child. This information may have influenced their retrospective accounts of why they left their abusive situations.

Regardless of these limitations, it is clear that a woman's mothering status is a significant aspect of her social identity and one of the many factors that influence a woman's help-seeking decisions in the context of DV. As Rasool writes, "there are ethical implications both in relation to women making decisions to stay or leave based on the supposed interests of their children, as both staying or leaving could result in the woman and/or the child being harmed or even killed" (2016, p. 1665). Making a decision to seek help, however, is only one part of the challenging process of transitioning out of DV. The following section reviews the literature that explores what happens *after* mothers decide to seek help with DV.

She's Decided to Get Help . . . Now What?

It is well documented that women face numerous and sometimes insurmountable barriers as they seek help and try to break free from DV. Common barriers include: fear of and financial dependence on the abuser, fear of various authorities, homelessness, lack of transportation, lack of knowledge about available services, the inadequacy and restrictiveness of these services, geographic location, language barriers, lack of culturally specific services, substance use issues, stigma and shame (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Liang et al., 2005; Moe, 2007; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Vine & Alaggia, 2012).

While it is possible for women to transition out of DV using informal or even no help, most mothers encounter multiple services and systems as they seek help with DV (Vine & Alaggia, 2012). These include transition houses, police, CPS, legal aid, criminal court, family court, income assistance, childcare, subsidized housing, hospitals and mental health services. The responses of these services and systems to abused mothers can function to facilitate or constrain women's ability to transition out of violence.

Domestic violence interventions with mothers. Intervening in situations of DV to ensure the ongoing safety of women and their children has become increasingly complex. In British Columbia, the Representative for Children and Youth released two scathing reports detailing how multiple systems failed to prevent the DV-related deaths of four children: “Honouring Christian Lee: No Private Matter: Protecting Children Living with Domestic Violence” and “Honouring Kaitlynn, Max and Cordon: Make Their Voices Heard Now” (Turpel-Lafond, 2009, 2012). As a direct result of these reports, the Ministry of Child and Family Services (MCFD) created the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence (POVD), whose mandate is to lead a coordinated and collaborative response to DV through consultation with multiple stakeholders and agencies.

While collaborative and multi-agency responses to DV are upheld as the gold standard, research demonstrates that collaboration is fraught with difficulties (Davies & Krane, 2006; Hester, 2011; Peled, 2011). These varied services and systems have disparate and competing theoretical underpinnings, histories, cultures, priorities and definitions of ‘the client’ (Davies & Krane, 2006; Hester, 2011). According to Marianne Hester, the Chair in Gender, Violence and International Policy at the University of Bristol, the services and systems that intervene in situations of DV are “effectively on separate ‘planets’—with their own separate histories, culture, laws and populations (sets of professionals)” which leads to “tensions and contradictions in professional discourses and practices that make the effective tackling of domestic violence more difficult” and even contradictory outcomes for clients. (2011, p. 839). Collaborative efforts therefore have often led to frustration, contradiction and fragmentation that can exacerbate the already challenging process of seeking safety from DV.

Most literature on intervention with abused mothers focuses on two main service areas: VAW services and child protection services (CPS). A critical analysis of the literature regarding intervention in each of these “arenas of practice” is important as it can help to bridge the gaps and promote a deeper understanding of the systemic problems that inhibit effective collaborative interventions (Hester, 2011). It also informs our understanding of the labyrinth of services that mothers must navigate and sheds light on how these services facilitate and/or constrain mothers’ transitions out of DV. With that in mind, in what follows, I first review the literature that focuses on practice with mothers in the adult-centered VAW ‘planet’ and then focus on interventions in the child protection ‘planet.’

Intervention on the violence against women planet. As described in Chapter 2, VAW shelters began to appear in the 1970s in conjunction with the growing recognition of DV as a gendered social problem. Over the past few decades, VAW services have become increasingly professionalized and institutionalized and have developed stronger working relationships with various levels of government and law enforcement agencies (Bhuyan, 2012). Despite what some criticize as a “neoliberal move” to “eclipse and reframe the historical political role of VAW spaces” (Bhuyan, 2012, p. 217), VAW shelters continue to support thousands of abused women annually and have retained their feminist orientation (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2017).

Canadian VAW services are adult focused and seek to help women liberate themselves from the cycle of male-perpetrated violence (Krane & Davies, 2002). Interventions are designed to provide women with the safety and community support they require to recognize the violence and break free from the abusive relationship (Hester, 2011). While some VAW organizations have integrated intersectionality into their policy language (e.g. BC Society of Transition Houses, 2017), research has demonstrated that services are designed to serve the needs of

Canadian-born, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Caucasian women without children (Bhuyan, 2012; Bhuyan et al., 2014; Krane & Davies, 2002).

A handful of studies have examined how VAW services respond to the needs of help-seeking mothers; they focus on shelter services, which they demonstrate struggle to meet the needs of women in their context of their mothering (Krane & Davies, 2002, 2007; Lapierre, 2008; Peled & Dekel, 2010). Mothering while coping with DV is challenging and moving into a shelter can be stressful as it involves disrupting normal routines of mothering and uprooting children from their everyday lives (Peled & Dekel, 2010). The move can create space for post-traumatic symptoms to surface as women and their children are no longer in the physical presence of their abusers; the emergence of these symptoms can add to the stress associated with the transition into communal living (Peled & Dekel, 2010). In addition, shelter rules (e.g. fixed bedtimes, curfews, supervision requirements) are often rigid and can vary considerably from the routine at home. Moreover, expectations that women participate in shelter programming, attend groups and counselling sessions, work on securing an income, find affordable housing and access legal aid—all while caring for their children—make the transition into a shelter extremely stressful for both mothers and children.

Krane and Davies (2002; 2007) conducted two ethnographic studies of Canadian VAW shelters and found that overall, shelter staff delivered a “one-size-fits all” intervention, which was structured to best meet the needs of staff which involved imposing the institutional structure on both the clients and staff. Staff emphasized the importance of women’s self-determination, autonomy and shared experiences of oppression and sisterhood, and minimized differences, “particularly in relation to women who had and did not have children” (Krane & Davies, 2002, p. 181). Mothers reported feeling like the one-size-fits-all intervention model failed to recognize

the complexity of their situations. They recognized that emphasis on liberation and autonomy did not fit with the reality of motherhood as often their children's needs and desires were in conflict with their own. The one-size-fits-all intervention model as Krane and Davies argue, constructs "woman" as a homogenous category and, "unwittingly compels a woman to put aside a particular aspect of her identity – mother." (2002, p. 186).

Shelters and motherwork. Krane and Davies (2002; 2007) also noted that shelters lacked recognition of the daily labour involved with mothering or what feminist theorists call "motherwork."⁵ The lack of support for motherwork greatly interfered with mothers' ability to heal from violence and to establish new lives independent from their abuser. Staff justified their lack of support for mothers by stating that mothers had to learn how to make it on their own because that would be their post-shelter reality. Krane and Davies (2002) suggest that the absence of help with motherwork perpetuates the ideal of "intensive mothering" and suggests that mothers should be naturally nurturing and always ready and able to attend to the needs of their children, regardless of the circumstances.

Feminist critiques of intensive mothering abound but, as Krane and Davies argue, feminist theorizing about motherhood, "ha[s] barely affected shelter practices" (2002, p. 173). Women's mothering was largely ignored, but when it was noticed, it was scrutinized and regarded with suspicion (Krane & Davies, 2002, 2007; Peled & Dekel, 2010). Krane and Davies attribute this, in part, to the ideals of intensive motherhood held by staff (2007). Shelter staff seemed to perpetuate the binary perceptions of mothers described earlier; mothers were compared to the idealized and standardized 'good mother' and if and when they fell short, they

⁵ Feminists coined the term motherwork to make visible the constant, unpaid and potentially hazardous labour involved in mothering (Levine, 1985; Rosenberg 1988, as cited in Davies & Krane, 2000).

were considered to be ‘bad mothers’ (Peled & Dekel, 2010; Semaan et al., 2013). Thus one shelter staff opined, “It’s your child. Despite everything that has happened [to you] ... you should still sit them down on your lap and hug and kiss and play with them” (Krane & Davies, 2007, p. 3).

When women failed to live up to this idealized ‘good’ mother, they were perceived to be deficient and labelled as ‘bad’ mothers. In Peled and Deckle’s 2011 study of an Israeli VAW shelter, they found that staff generally characterized mothers as, “ineffective, self-centered, indifferent, abusive or loveless” and “helpless, listless victims” of abuse (Peled & Dekel, 2010, p. 1229, 1231). As Peled and Dekel suggest, staff excused clients’ ‘bad mothering’ and maintained a compassionate stance towards them (2010). However, constructing mothers as victims not responsible for their ‘deficient parenting’ is disempowering and contravenes the VAW mandate of empowerment.

In addition to being influenced by the ideology of “intensive mothering,” VAW practices have been influenced by the increasing realization that children, as well as their mothers, are seen as victims of DV and research about the harmful effects of EDV on children continues to proliferate (Artz et al., 2014). As a result, VAW organizations are not only receiving more funding for children’s programming, but also facing increasing pressure to follow mandatory reporting legislation and to notify CPS if children in the shelter have been exposed to DV (Alaggia et al., 2007). Krane and Davies (2002) along with Strega (2008) and others argue that this has contributed to the increased surveillance of mothers and their parenting behaviours inside VAW shelters. Peled and Dekel write that staff find themselves, “on a daily basis, in delicate situations where they viewed the women at once as adults accountable for their children’s well-being and as victims of abuse requiring support” (2010, p 1234).

To summarize, in the changing landscape of the VAW ‘planet,’ intervention is challenging as staff must negotiate the conflicts that arise when both women and children are viewed as victims of DV and clients. Shelters continue to struggle to meet the needs of women in the context of their mothering as they negotiate conflicting ideologies of empowerment on the one hand and classic views of mothering on the other. As Krane and Davies (2002, 2007) suggest VAW services need to stop treating “battered woman” and “mother” as homogenous and dichotomous categories. Instead, interventions need to meet women in *both* the context of their mothering and in the context of their victimization.

Intervention on the child protection planet. In Euro-Western societies, interventions in the child protection ‘planet’ are rooted in the belief that children require the care and protection of adults, usually their biological parents, and if those parents are unable to provide adequate care and protection, governments must intervene to ensure that care and protection are put in place. Increasingly what the government deems to be adequate care and protection and the resulting threshold for child protection interventions are rooted in what King and Piper (1995) call ‘child welfare science,’ which consists of “the knowledge derived from such disciplines as psychology, psychoanalysis, child and youth care, and social work [which is] drawn upon, woven together, and utilized in a scientific mode” (Anglin, 2002, p. 237). While the knowledge generated by ‘child welfare science’ has increased our understanding of child and family development, its claim to be objective and universal is problematic (Burman, 2008; Sclater & Piper, 2001; Skivenes, 2010). Scholars like Jim Anglin (2002) highlight the situated, culturally specific and temporal nature of ‘child welfare science’ and argue that even the concept of child abuse is a social construction. Changing views of child discipline, for example, support this claim, as for centuries, it was considered appropriate to discipline children by striking them with

an object. Today, child protection authorities consider such action to be a form of physical abuse; if parents leave a mark on a child, the Canadian criminal code considers it to be “assault with a weapon” (Criminal Code, 1985). Similarly, how child protection authorities understand and respond to situations of DV has shifted dramatically over the last few decades. In order to understand how contemporary child protection authorities intervene in situations of DV, I will briefly review this evolution and examine the cultural discourses that have shaped DV knowledge, policy and practice with respect to the child protection planet.

History of domestic violence in the eyes of child protective services. Prior to the 1990s, DV was not considered to be a child protection issue. In her (1985) review of social work case files, Maynard found that workers were rarely concerned by father’s violence towards mothers. The general attitude of workers was to ignore and/or minimize the violence by describing it as ‘marital discord,’ to blame mothers for the discord and to encourage mothers to stay with domestically violent fathers ‘in the best interests of the child’ (Bø Vatnar & Bjørkly, 2010; Maynard, 1985). One worker advised a certain Mrs. Blank “not to argue with her husband too much,” promising to “pop in to see her in a week or two” (Maynard 1985, p. 130). Another protection worker recommended to a mother “thinking of leaving her husband again” that “she had Christopher (son) to consider in this and her husband’s feelings for the baby and herself. Reminded her she had married and had to accept the consequences” (Maynard 1985, p. 130). These views need to be contextualized within the discourses that were dominant at the time regarding what was best for children and gendered discourses about parenting. As discussed earlier, it was believed to be in the best interests of children to live with their fathers, even if their fathers were violent. Maynard documented a pervasive belief among workers that a man’s violence had no bearing on whether or not they were considered ‘good fathers’ (1985). Similarly,

early child protection interventions held mothers accountable for keeping their children safe, for preserving the nuclear family model, for protecting the father-child relationship and for controlling men's violence. Violent fathers were absent from child protection interventions and were rarely held accountable for their actions. Gordon (1988) traces the lack of father-involvement in child protection interventions back to the 1930s when "the professionalization of child welfare practice coincided with a shift in gender and family ideology, a decline in feminism and a rising conservative view of the two-parent family which particularly required ideological support amid widespread male unemployment" (Humphreys & Absler, 2011, p. 467).

Since the early 1990s however, the hegemonic discourse about the best interests of the child in situations of DV has shifted and child protection interventions have changed dramatically.⁶ Interventions have moved away from prioritizing the family unit by encouraging abused mothers to stay 'for the sake of the children,' to encouraging and sometimes forcing abused mothers to leave 'for the sake of the children.' This shift has been attributed primarily to the growing concern about the negative impact of EDV on children's wellbeing and development (Artz et al., 2014).

Research on exposure to domestic violence. Research began in the early 1990s into the impact of EDV on children (Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990) and has since proliferated. This literature demonstrates that EDV in the home increases children's risk of adverse physiological, psychological and neurological development (Artz et al., 2014; Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith, & Jaffe, 2003).⁷ As a result of this research and a recognition of the frequency of EDV,

⁶ It is important to note that the discourse about family preservation and father involvement continues to be powerful in many contexts. As described in the section on mother's decisions about DV, this discourse was evident in mother's narratives about their motivations for staying with abuser partners.

⁷ For a comprehensive review of the literature on the impacts of EDV on children, I direct the reader to Artz et al., 2014.

EDV is now considered by most Euro-Western CPS as a form of child abuse that requires intervention, even if the children are not the target of the abuse (Vine & Alaggia, 2012). While this research has been pivotal in the recognition of children as victims of DV and for securing funding for services for children exposed to DV, it is criticized for how it has positioned mothers (Lapierre, 2007). In his review of the EDV literature, Lapierre (2007) argues that in general, this literature has moved away from feminist understandings of DV towards a more individualized, child-centered and gender-neutral perspective on DV, which focuses on ‘parenting’ as a key determinant in how children are affected by EDV (e.g. Edleson 1999; Fortin et al 2000; Jaffe and Crooks 2005, as cited in Lapierre, 2007). Despite the use of gender blind terms like ‘parent’ and ‘parenting,’ the focus of the analysis has been as, Edleson explains, on “mothers and children [who] are often more available for study . . . but this unfortunately leads to findings that focus on mothers' problems, rather than the factors that created them” (1999, p. 863).

Women’s mothering is seen as a key protective factor in mitigating the harmful effects of EDV and as a result, abused women are likely to be perceived as deficient when their children exhibit problematic behaviours. The implicit assumption in the EDV literature is that if the mother was good enough, her children would be shielded from the harm of EDV. This assumption is reflected in Holden and colleagues’ (1998) quantitative work on the parenting of abused mothers. Even though they found that abused mothers’ parenting was not significantly different than the parenting of a comparison group of non-abused mothers, they contend: “that does not mean that the quality of mothering was necessarily good or adequate” (p. 314). Holden and colleagues go on to conclude that maternal adequacy is,

best judged as a function of child outcomes. Given the high rates of child behaviour problems in the violent home, it could be argued that mothers were not providing good-

enough parenting to compensate for the toxic environment. Perhaps a mother in a martially violent home needs to engage in certain parenting behaviours above and beyond what may be needed in non-violent homes in order to be judged as adequate for the violent home context. (1991, p. 314)

This 'deficit-model of mothering' that pervades the EDV literature puts abused mothers in a very difficult situation; for a further review of this literature I direct the reader to Lapeirre's work on mothering in the context of violence (2007, 2008, 2010b, 2010a).

Relevant to my current study is the recognition that the emphasis on mothers' parenting behaviours shifts the focus away from men's violence and works to define the problem of EDV in terms of how mothers fail to act. This shift is concerning in part because the high-visibility of mothering in this literature positions mothers as the 'logical' targets for intervention. Moreover, this change aligns itself with what has also been noted elsewhere in the literature that service providers have a long history of holding women accountable for men's violence and for separating men's identities as batterers from their roles as fathers (Edin, Hogberg, Dahlgren, & Lalos, 2009; Featherstone & Peckover, 2007). This contributes to the failure to hold fathers accountable for their violence. As Devaney points out:

One depressing finding from the research literature is the very low number of men who are challenged about their behaviour and referred for intervention to therapeutic services, or who are prosecuted. Whilst children may be safer if they no longer live with a male caregiver who is abusive of their partner, many men are able to move on to new relationships, placing other children and women at risk, without any change in their behaviour (2009, p. 574).

Child protection services' response to the exposure to domestic violence literature. EDV is now considered by most Euro-Western child protection services as a form of child abuse that requires intervention (Vine & Alaggia, 2012). In the last decade, reports to Canadian child welfare agencies of emotional abuse—most of which concern children exposed to DV—have increased (Alaggia et al., 2007). The recent Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect found that reports of exposure to DV are increasing faster than any other type of abuse and that exposure to DV is the most frequently substantiated form of child abuse (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2010). Despite the growing awareness of the harmful effects of EDV, knowing how to intervene effectively in situations of DV to protect children is an ongoing challenge for child protective services (CPS).

One of the key challenges to child protection intervention in situations of DV is a lack of clarity regarding the definition of EDV and competing perspectives on how EDV should be incorporated into child protection legislation (Nixon, Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop, & Walsh, 2007). In their 2007 review of child protection policies, Nixon and colleagues found a significant range in how different countries were applying the EDV research to their child protection policies. Some countries define EDV as a form of emotional abuse; some define it as neglect; and others leave it out of their legislation entirely (Lapierre & Côté, 2011; Nixon et al., 2007). Vine and Alaggia (2012) note that within Canada, definitions of EDV in policy are unclear and vague. Furthermore, the inclusion of EDV in child protection legislation varies considerably across provinces and territories; there are as yet no national guidelines for child protection interventions in situations of DV in Canada.

British Columbia has witnessed an increase in concerns over the impact of EDV on children over the past few years, in part because of the reports released by the Representative for

Children and Youth (i.e. Turpel-Lafond, 2009, 2012). In response to these reports, the POVD (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence) was created and has implemented multiple cross-sectorial changes. In 2014, the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) was amended to explicitly include EDV as a form of child maltreatment. The CFCSA defines EDV as a form of “emotional harm” and clarifies that the legal ‘duty to report’ includes a situation where a child or youth is living in a situation where there is DV (Child, Family and Community Services Act, 1996, C 46 Part 3 Division 1).

Additionally, the POVD has updated DV training manuals for child protection workers, facilitated joint VAW-child protection training and identified DV “leads” in each of the MCFD’s service delivery areas to provide support and training to front-line protection workers (Provincial Office of Domestic Violence, 2015). While these policy and practice changes help to clarify the role of CPS in situations of DV, they are new and to date, they have not been evaluated to determine whether they are producing the intended outcomes. Generally speaking, there is a paucity of peer-reviewed research that examines child protection intervention in situations of DV in B.C. In light of this dearth, I reviewed research into child protection interventions conducted in other provinces and countries but am cautious about generalizing the results since the B.C. context, has changed significantly since 2014.

The target of intervention: Mother-blame and father-invisibility. It is difficult to ascertain a clear picture of the nature and effectiveness of child protection interventions in situations of DV in Canada. What is clear however is that interventions are focused almost exclusively on abused mothers, while domestically violent fathers are ignored. Even though, as Alaggia and colleagues (2015) argue, “the main thrust of the work to be done logically lies with the perpetrating parent,” mothers are positioned as solely responsible for the safety and wellbeing of

their children and as a result, they become the target of CPS interventions (p. 92). Lapierre and Côté's (2011) qualitative study of child protection files in Quebec found evidence that social workers focused interventions and blame on mothers not fathers; often using the gender-blind term 'parenting' to refer to the behaviour of mothers. Thus one worker declared:

[DV] affects parenting skills, in a way that the mother may be fearful and does not necessarily ensure her children's safety. She might be too fearful to leave and therefore *she is exposing her children to domestic violence* (p. 317, emphasis added).

Similar trends were also documented in a review of interventions in New Brunswick. Bourassa and colleagues found that protection workers "assign[ed] total responsibility to the woman alone for protecting her children, and for controlling the behaviour of her violent partner" (2008, p. 185).⁸

In one of the few large-scale mixed-methods Canadian studies on child welfare practices in situations of DV, Alaggia and colleagues (2015) found that risk assessments centered on mothers' willingness and ability to separate from their abuser. Mothers were the primary targets of CPS interventions and mothers' actions determined the level and the duration of CPS involvement. In their analysis over 758 DV cases in Ontario, Alaggia and colleagues found that child protection workers referred 59% of victimized mothers to treatment services that included VAW services, parenting classes and counselling services. By contrast, only one fifth of children exposed to DV were referred to counselling, which is notable given the fact that concern about the harmful effects of EDV on children is why CPS became involved in the first place.

⁸ Similar research has been found in other countries. Holt (2003) found analogous practices in Ireland; while workers believed that the child was their 'client,' the intervention was focused on the mother. Mills (2000) found that American child protection workers perceived mothers to be the sole target of DV interventions and that they tended to judge mothers more harshly than domestically violent fathers (as cited in Strega, 2012).

In contrast to the sharp focus on mothers and their parenting behaviours is the profound lack of father involvement in CPS DV interventions (Alaggia, Gadalla, Shlonsky, Jenney, & Daciuk, 2015; Lapierre & Côté, 2011b; Strega et al., 2008). Alaggia and colleagues (2015) found that only one third of abusive fathers were even contacted in CPS investigations, let alone mandated to participate in parenting classes or counselling treatment to address their violent behaviours. Fathers that did receive treatment were in the minority and only received treatment because it was mandated by the criminal justice system (Alaggia et al., 2015). Alaggia and colleagues conclude that their study sheds light on the “pervasiveness of mother-blame trends running as undercurrents in the child protection system” (2015, p. 93). Even in jurisdictions that use differential response models, which are intended to be less intrusive and to minimize mother-blaming practices, the gaze of CPS remains fixed on abused mothers; they are held solely responsible for exposing their children to DV (Alaggia et al., 2015).

Canadian Social Work professor, Susan Strega criticizes CPS interventions in the context of DV that target the mothers and children and ignore the perpetrators of violence. She recommends instead direct engagement with the perpetrator of violence:

By making the witnessing of abuse, rather than the violations themselves our concern, we notice the mothers who allow the witnessing rather than the fathers, stepfathers, and boyfriends who perpetrate the violence, and thus mothers become the targets of our interventions. At the same time, the focus on psychological trauma directs us to interventions with children that are primarily psychological or psychiatric treatments and the most necessary and pressing intervention, stopping the violence, often disappears. If we truly want to help children exposed to violence, we must engage purposefully with those who perpetrate it. (2008, p. 247)

There are several reasons that CPS interventions rarely involve fathers. First as Alaggia and colleagues (2015) determined, workers struggled to locate perpetrators and lacked knowledge and training with respect to available resources and services for domestically violent fathers. Nixon (2001) found that social workers avoided interacting with domestically violent fathers by scheduling home visits when the father was absent, by failing to invite fathers to meetings, and by not including their names on court documents, in child protection files or in service planning. Moreover, Alaggia and colleagues (2007) found that although service providers believed in the importance of perpetrator accountability, they felt as though there was no way to accomplish this. While social workers may have good reason to fear domestically violent fathers, Strega (2012) highlights the paradox that “abused women are left to regulate the actions of their abusive partners because others who have the power to intervene with these men (police, prosecutors, child protection workers) often fail to do so” (p. 254).

The solution is not to shift from mother-blame to worker-blame, but instead to advocate for more training to help CPS workers engage with domestically violent fathers. More funding also needs to be allocated to the development and maintenance of services designed to treat and hold men accountable for their violence.

Interventions with mothers: The leaving ultimatum. When mothers who are held responsible for the safety of children are not willing or able to leave an abusive relationship, they are perceived by CPS as “failing to protect” their children from harm and their cases are assigned a higher risk level. As a result, CPS can threaten the removal of the children in order to ‘push’ women to leave (Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Holt, 2003; Lapierre & Côté, 2011; Strega, 2012). Douglas and Walsh describe the ultimatum given to many mothers as: “leave the abuser and keep the children or stay and lose them” (2010, p. 495). This ‘ultimatum’ practice has been

documented in qualitative research in Canada (Bourassa et al., 2008; Humphreys & Absler, 2011; Lapierre & Côté, 2011; Nixon, Radtke, & Tutty, 2013; Nixon et al., 2007), Ireland (Holt, 2003), Australia (Douglas & Walsh, 2010) and Wales (Scourfield, 2001).

While child protection workers describe removing the children from the mother as a last resort, both Bourassa and colleagues (2008) and Lapierre and Côté (2011) found that workers use this ‘last resort option’ more frequently than they would like. Moreover, workers in these cases often direct their frustration towards mothers’ actions or inactions in responding to the abuse.

The increased attention given to risk management in child protection practice has contributed to what Davies and Krane (2007) refer to as a pervasive “culture of fear.” Similarly, Anglin (2002) had previously described the last two decades of child protection practice by the shift away from focusing on the “determination of abuse” to a “assessment or risk” focus, which has contributed to “a decline in trust... an increase in audits of their work, and . . . a search for whom to blame when something goes wrong” (p. 242). As a result, some child protection workers have narrowed their focus to regard the child alone as their ‘client’ (DeVoe & Smith, 2003; Krane & Davies, 2007). Concomitantly, they view a mother’s needs as extraneous and interpret her inability to leave a domestically violent relationship as “evidence that she lacks the individual motivation to change” (Davies & Krane, 2006, p. 415).

The CPS practice of accusing mothers of “failure to protect” has been criticized extensively in the literature. Strega calls attention to the flawed assumptions inherent in the failure to protect discourse:

- a mother has (some) control over the perpetrator’s violence i.e. the mother *could* protect the children;
- leaving will put an end to the violence. As noted previously, violence often escalates when women attempt to leave;

- witnessing violence is so harmful to children that mothers should risk their lives, and the lives of their children to prevent it;
- leaving is the mother's responsibility. In some Canadian jurisdictions, abusers can be legally compelled to vacate their home but are rarely forced to do so;
- leaving is an option. If a mother wanted or needed help, it would be readily available and freely given by the legal and social services systems;
- women and children must leave in order to be safe;
- a mother who fails to protect her children from harm is responsible for that harm even if she made efforts to prevent it.

(Strega, 2012, p. 253)

Despite critiques in the robust literature, the notion of 'failure to protect' is still used in CPS interventions to justify the apprehension of children from their mothers across Canada (Strega, 2012; Vine & Alaggia, 2012).

It is hard to ascertain a clear picture of how often CPS interventions actually involve the removal of children from the home. Large-scale quantitative Canadian research suggests that DV cases are no more likely to result in child apprehension than other forms of abuse (Black, Trocmé, Fallon, & MacLaurin, 2008; Trocmé et al., 2013). Black and colleagues who analyzed data from the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect found that the level of intrusiveness of the intervention depended on whether EDV co-occurred with other forms of abuse (2008). Similar results are found in American studies (Beeman, Hagemester, & Edleson, 2001; English, Edleson, & Herrick, 2005; Kohl, Edleson, English, & Barth, 2005).

By contrast, qualitative research suggests that CPS interventions in situations of DV are highly intrusive and punitive (Alaggia et al., 2007; DeVoe & Smith, 2003; Hughes, Chau, & Poff, 2011; Lapierre & Côté, 2011a; Rhodes et al., 2010). Help-seeking mothers reported feeling shamed and punished by CPS workers for not seeking help sooner (Alaggia et al., 2007; Bourassa et al., 2008; DeVoe & Smith, 2003; Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Earner, 2010; Hughes et al., 2011; Moe, 2009). Mothers were aware that they were held solely responsible for their

children and expressed frustration for being punished for trying to get help and escape DV. Mothers have described this paradox of being punished for seeking help as, “damned if you do, damned if you don’t (DeVoe & Smith, 2003, p. 289), a “double edged sword”(Moe, 2009, p. 253), “walking on a tightrope” (Wilcox, 2000, p. 36) and being “caught in the cross hairs” (Strega, 2012, p. 250).

Mothers also reported that CPS interventions did not meet their needs or the needs of their children as they were transitioning out of DV (DeVoe & Smith, 2003; Moe 2007). Mothers were instructed to leave but not provided with the necessary material, instrumental and emotional supports to do so. Instead, mothers report being required to attend parenting classes, AA meetings and counselling that only offered short term support (Hughes et al., 2011; Letourneau et al., 2013; Moe, 2009). Hughes and colleagues (2011) found that some mothers reached out for help to CPS with DV but were told that there were no services available for them; when CPS did become involved, their focus was on assessing women’s mothering behaviours in lieu of providing support. Overall, women reported feeling that CPS expected them to control the violence, even after they had left the relationship (Hughes et al., 2011).

CPS interventions, especially the ultimatum practice, construct leaving as the only safe choice and view mothers as either “good mothers” because they leave or “bad mothers” because they stay and are thus deemed unfit to continue to parent (Strega, 2012). Again, mothers are constructed as one-dimensional nurturing child protectors who have no ambivalence or conflicting needs and desires. Women’s identities outside of being a ‘mother’ tend to be minimized or ignored. Describing CPS interventions, Davies and Krane write, “women as mothers are simultaneously relegated to the periphery of concern and called upon to act as ‘mother protectors’ in response to children who are deemed at risk” (2006, p. 413).

In addition to the reduction of women's identities as mothers to an idealized construction of "intensive mothering," the 'ultimatum' child welfare practice is criticized for oversimplifying the reality of transitioning out of violence. Research on help seeking has clearly shown that leaving is a *process*, which inevitably involves multiple transitions in and out of violence; presenting staying/leaving as a binary choice is unrealistic and unhelpful. Humphreys and Thiara found (2003) that battered mothers felt coerced by protection workers to leave an abusive relationship before they were ready and/or before they had the support required to successfully transition out of violence.

The conflation of leaving with safety fails to consider the well-established literature on the risks associated with leaving violent relationships (e.g. Jaffe et al., 2012). Children in the post-separation context, for example, may still be exposed to DV because abusive fathers frequently use custody and access visits and family court as opportunities to continue to abuse mothers (Holt, 2015; Jaffe et al., 2003). As Strega (2012) points out, "mothers have more control over the protection of their children when they live with the batterer than they do when they are separated and have to allow the children to be alone with their father, who has had little experience in relating to them in a non-violent, non-controlling way" (p. 245). Clearly, while leaving may reduce a child's EDV, it is not a guarantee that EDV will desist and in the most extreme cases, it actually increases children's EDV and other forms of child maltreatment.

In her critical essay on child welfare intervention in situations of DV, Strega (2012) argues that the binary choice offered to women of leaving or staying is problematic because it fails to recognize the material realities of transitioning out of violence. As mentioned previously, leaving DV is associated with such economic consequences as poverty, inadequate housing, housing in higher-crime neighbourhoods with poorer schools, under-employment and/or

unemployment (Strega, 2012). Strega argues that these factors have been shown to increase women's "vulnerability to surveillance by the child welfare system" and the "likelihood that [mothers'] parenting will be judged an unsatisfactory by the white middle class standards of current child protection practice" (2012, p. 258). Furthermore, mothers may be subject to intense scrutiny in family court and their ex partners may exact retaliation for leaving by making frequently complaints and accusations to child welfare about her parenting (Strega et al., 2008).

Moreover, the idea that leaving is *objectively* in the 'the best interests of the child' is also too simplistic. It implies that a mother who decides to stay is not considering the best interests of her child(ren), is exhibiting bad mothering and is failing to protect her child(ren) (Bourassa et al., 2008; Hester, 2011b; Lapierre & Côté, 2011b; Strega et al., 2008; Strega, 2012). As discussed in the earlier section on mother's decision making, considering the best interests of the child(ren) can lead women to *stay* with their abusive partners (Moe, 2009; Randell et al., 2012; Rasool, 2016; Semaan et al., 2013). Mothers frequently described sacrificing their own needs, desires and safety in order to protect the best interests of their children – which they believed to be preserving the family. In this way, many of the mothers interviewed in the research seemed to be aligned with the discourse that asserts the "paramountcy" of the best interests of the child promoted by CPS (Anglin, 2002; Rasool, 2016). The mothers' perceptions of what constituted the best interests of their children however were different than the version endorsed by CPS. This research demonstrates that implementing the best interests of the child standard is fraught with challenges because it is ambiguous and subjective; what is considered to be in the best interests of the child is constantly shifting in line with research, public perception, cultural values and political ideologies among other things (Skivenes, 2010). Furthermore, in a heterogeneous society, there are multiple and competing conceptualizations of the best interests of the child;

this begs two significant questions: whose ideas of the best interests of the child are privileged and whose is marginalized?⁹

While the majority of the literature reviewed suggests that CPS interventions in situations of DV are unhelpful and disempowering to mothers, there are also examples of positive and helpful CPS interventions (Davies, Krane, Collings, & Wexler, 2007; Emerson & Magnuson, 2013; Lapierre & Côté, 2011; Potito, Day, Carson, & O’Leary, 2009). Efforts are being made in Canada to shed the legacy of mother blaming and implement innovative ways of engaging with families in situations of DV. As mentioned at the outset of this section, many of these changes are recent and have not yet been evaluated or documented in the literature.

Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, it is clear that neither traditional VAW nor CPS interventions support or engage women as mothers. Instead, women’s mothering is either ignored or scrutinized using the lens of idealized social constructions of mothers. Both the VAW and the CPS ‘planets’ need to critically examine their constructions of motherhood and make space for a more complex understanding of motherhood – one which leaves room for contradictions, ambiguities and subjectivities (Davies & Krane, 2006; Davies et al., 2007). As Davies and Krane colleagues write, “a deep understanding of women’s experiences of battery and experiences of mothering is necessary in order to develop sensitive and effective collaborative interventions” (2006, p. 420).

Collaborative efforts between VAW services and CPS are undermined by a lack of trust between systems, conflicting mandates and views of ‘the client,’ power imbalances, poor communication and divergent theoretical origins (Davies et al., 2007; Hester, 2011b; Potito et al.,

⁹ That is not to say that it is best for children to remain in abusive contexts, instead my intention is to challenge the over-simplification of the relationships between ‘staying and EDV’ and ‘leaving and safety’ that shape CPS interventions.

2009). To add to the challenges of collaboration, both VAW shelters and CPS are high-risk and fast-paced work environments. On both ‘planets,’ there are high rates of burnout and workers must manage large caseloads and respond to incredibly complex situations. In order to develop more effective and collaborative responses to help-seeking mothers and their children, workers require more resources, training and supervision. Davies and Krane (2006) recommend that workers on both planets receive additional training to address to complexities of EDV, the experience of abused women *and* the complex realities of motherhood.

This review of the literature from two of the services and systems in the labyrinth that mothers navigate when seeking help with DV has demonstrated that a woman’s mothering status shapes her experience of DV, her help-seeking decisions and the barriers she encounters as she transitions out of violence. It shows conclusively the importance of including mothering status as a critical category in an intersectional analysis of women’s help seeking. Mothers encounter various systems and services as they seek help with DV and the responses of these systems can either facilitate or constrain their help-seeking efforts. What follows is a review of literature on immigration status and DV that raises other issues that must be taken into account when studying the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status.

Chapter 4: Immigration and Domestic Violence

There is a paucity of literature on precarious immigration status and DV in Canada. As a result, I have broadened the scope of this review to include literature that explores how the more general social location of ‘immigration’ (i.e. foreign-born) shapes women’s experiences of DV. This abundant literature focuses on the American immigration context and adopts an intersectional lens to demonstrate how the context of immigration and immigration policies produce vulnerabilities and barriers that are easily exploited in situations of DV (Earner, 2010; Erez et al., 2009; Morash, Bui, Stevens, & Zhang, 2008; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Reina, Lohman, & Maldonado, 2014). One of the key themes in this literature is the crucial role that women’s legal immigration status has in shaping and constraining their help-seeking processes. As Earner (2010) writes, “immigration status, more than cultural issues or language barriers, is emerging as the most significant factor in determining how, or even if, domestic violence is addressed when it occurs in immigrant families” (p. 288).

It is important to recognize at the outset of this review that ‘immigration’ and ‘precarious status’ are not static categories; they are constantly in flux and change in accordance with policy and politics. Since the time that the current study was conducted (May- November 2015), both the Canadian and American political landscapes have shifted dramatically. Accordingly, neither the literature reviewed here nor data derived from the study can be mapped directly onto the current context in Canada.

Immigration and Domestic Violence

Research on immigration and DV began to proliferate in the late 1990s. Early scholarship consisted of small case studies of particular groups of immigrants from specific communities in the United States. For example, research described how localized groups of

immigrants from Vietnam (Bui, 2003; Morash et al., 2008), Mexico (Acevedo, 2000; Salcido & Adelman, 2004), South Asia, Cambodia (Bhuyan, Mell, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005) and Russia (Crandall, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, & Sullivan, 2005) experienced DV. While these studies generated important knowledge about immigration, DV and culture for particular groups of immigrants, they are limited in their generalizability (Erez et al., 2009). Furthermore, as Erez and colleagues (2009) argue, these studies do not consider the particular social location of ‘immigration’ apart from race and ethnicity.

Immigration as a key category for analysis. While immigrants are certainly a heterogeneous group, they share commonalities regardless of their country of origin. This being the case, it is argued that instead of constructing ‘immigration’ as a category *within* race/ethnicity, it should be considered and analyzed as a distinct social location, “with an entire set of dynamics that differs from racial or ethnic origin” (Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013, p. 786). Accordingly, research exploring how immigrant women from diverse countries or origins and cultural groups experience and respond to DV has proliferated.

This new research demonstrates that immigration and immigration policies produce conditions that: (1) leave women vulnerable to DV and (2) create unique barriers that women must overcome in order to break free from DV. In this way, the context of immigration intersects with gender oppression to intensify and support men’s abuse of women (Erez et al., 2009; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Sokoloff, 2008). It is important to note that the literature reviewed gathered data from immigrant women who were abused by *both* immigrant and non-immigrant men; it demonstrates that regardless of their origins, men who batter immigrant women “have access to unique forms of domination and control, some of which are facilitated and even sanctioned by federal immigration law” (Erez et al., 2009, p. 52).

Barriers to help seeking. As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, DV victims face numerous and multi-level barriers when trying to break free from DV. Immigrant DV victims must contend with additional barriers that can leave them in particularly perilous situations and obstruct their pathways out of DV. Generally speaking, the literature on immigration and DV adopts an intersectional lens that contextualizes barriers to help-seeking within the broader systems and structures of power and domination. As Menjivar and Salcido (2002) write, “women’s experiences in DV [are] intimately linked to broader structural forces —political, economic, social—for these create multiple layers of oppression and hierarches within which immigrant women’s lives are enacted” (p. 900).

Immigration policy in particular has been shown to increase women’s dependency on their spouses (e.g. through sponsorship programs). This dependency intensifies gender inequality and gives abusive men access to particular forms of abuse and control which further entrap women (Salcido & Adelman, 2004). Furthermore, the process of immigration itself can be extremely stressful and can contribute to women’s vulnerability to DV. For example, in Erez and colleagues’ study, half of their participants reported that DV began post-migration; another quarter said that immigration intensified and escalated DV (2009).

While numerous factors shape immigrant women’s experiences of DV (see Table 1 for an overview), I will highlight factors related to motherhood and legal immigration status as they are most relevant to this thesis.

Table 1. Key Immigration-related Factors that Influence Women's Help-seeking Processes

Factor	Examples of Manifestation	Source(s)
<p><u>Pre-migration context</u></p> <p>State of DV policy and laws in home country</p> <p>Political context in home country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If DV is not considered a crime in the home country and/or laws are not enforced, women may be unaware that DV is crime in the new country • If women feared police in their country of origin, because of its being a police state or experiencing civil unrest, migrant women may fear police and other authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013)
<p><u>Post-migration context</u></p> <p>Economic Insecurity</p> <p>Access to transportation</p> <p>Access to affordable housing</p> <p>Access to childcare</p> <p>Language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Economic dependence on abuser • Poor employability due to discriminatory hiring practices and unrecognized or undervalued credentials, no work permit • No driver's licenses and/or discomfort using public transit • Living in rural communities • Dependence on abuser for transportation • Inadequate access to affordable housing • Women receive help from abuser's family with motherwork and are reluctant to jeopardize this support • Lack of affordable childcare limits employability and income • • Limited English skills can lead to: isolation, limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Bui, 2003; Kulwicki, Aswad, Carmona & Ballout, 2010; Kyriakakis, 2014; Morash et al., 2008; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013) • (Kulwicki, Aswad, Carmona, & Ballout, 2010; Reina et al., 2014; Thurston et al., 2013) • (Thurston et al., 2013) • (Erez, 2002; Thurston et al., 2013) • (Ammar, Orloff, Dutton,

<p>Isolation</p> <p>Patrilocal living</p> <p>Racism</p>	<p>access to information about laws, policies and resources, limited communication with service providers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on abuser and/or children for translation—abuser can restrict and control women’s access to information. • Migration fragments women’s support networks; migrant women may not have family support networks in new country • Abusers intentionally isolate women • Isolation contributes to and is reinforced by language barriers • Women may live with abuser <i>and</i> his extended family who participate in and reinforce DV • Women fear racist responses from service providers • Women fear that disclosing DV will risk exacerbating the racism directed at their community 	<p>& Aguilar-Hass, 2005; Bui, 2003; Erez et al., 2009; Kulwicki et al., 2010; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Ahmad, Driver, McNally, & Stewart, 2009; Briones-Vozmediano, Goicolea, Ortiz-Barreda, Gil-González, & Vives-Cases, 2014; Briones-Vozmediano, Goicolea, et al., 2014; Bui, 2003; Erez et al., 2009) • (Bui, 2003; Dasgupta, 2007; Kulwicki et al., 2010; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Sokoloff, 2008)
<p><u>Motherhood</u></p> <p>Considering the wellbeing of children</p> <p>Single motherhood</p> <p>CPS intervention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear that mother will get deported and children will be placed into foster care—abusers often threaten this • Fear that the social and cultural repercussions of leaving will impact children’s futures • Fear of jeopardizing children’s immigration status • Fear of economic and social repercussions of single parenting • Fear of punitive and culturally insensitive CPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Abraham, 1998; Ahmad et al., 2009; Erez et al., 2009; Kelly, 2009; Kyriakakis, 2014; Morash et al., 2008; Sokoloff, 2008; Thurston et al., 2013) • (Erez, 2002) • (Earner, 2010)

Family Court	<p>intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear that family court will favour children's father • Fear that if deported, courts in home countries will grant father custody 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Alaggia & Maiter, 2012; Dasgupta, 2007; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013)
<u>Culture*</u>	<p>* Influences DV in complex ways; functions primarily as a barrier to formal help seeking but can be a source of strength</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Ahmad et al., 2009; Bui, 2003; Erez, 2002; Kulwicki et al., 2010; Morash et al., 2008; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Reina et al., 2014; Thurston et al., 2013)
Familism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women must prioritize the needs of the whole family above her own • Pressure to keep family intact at all costs 	
Collectivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No role for single women in community • Pressure for women to keep issues 'within' communities and avoidance of outsider intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Acevedo, 2000; Bui, 2003; Raj & Silverman, 2002)
Gender role expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectation of fidelity, silence and subordination • Restrictive gender roles which emphasize men's power over women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Ahmad et al., 2009; Alaggia & Maiter, 2012; Bui, 2003; Morash et al., 2008; Raj & Silverman, 2002)
Patriarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchy of home culture intersects with patriarchy of North America to reinforce DV • DV is considered normal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Alaggia & Maiter, 2012; Sokoloff, 2008)
Stigma and Shame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma associated with formal help seeking • Shame about leaving family unit and violating cultural values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Ahmad et al., 2009; Erez, 2002; Reina et al., 2014)
<u>Immigration Policy</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsored spouses are dependent on abusers to secure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Abraham, 1998; Ammar

Motherhood. As discussed in Chapter 2, women's roles as mothers and their commitment to what is in the best interests of their child(ren) are key factors that influence women's help-seeking decisions. Immigration introduces additional factors that affect how women evaluate what is in the best interests of their child(ren). For example, undocumented immigrant women with native-born child(ren) fear that disclosing DV will result in their deportation and separation from their child(ren) (Ahmad et al., 2009; Kelly, 2009; Kyriakakis, 2014; Morash et al., 2008; Reina et al., 2014). An American research report identified thousands of children in foster care as a result of their parent's detention or deportation (Wessler, 2011). While his report did not focus on DV, Wessler concluded: "[i]mmigrant victims of gender-based violence. . . [were] at particular risk of losing their children"; one in nine cases in this study involved DV (2011, p. 33). In Canada, there is no data documenting what happens to children whose battered mothers are detained and deported, but anecdotal evidence suggests that children either live with their fathers, are placed into foster care or are detained and deported along with their mothers (Alaggia & Maiter, 2012). A report published by the University of Toronto Faculty of Law estimates that at least 48 children are detained with their parents in the Toronto Immigration Holding Center annually (Gros & Muscati, 2017).

Additionally, mothers may fear that the social and cultural repercussions of leaving DV will impact their children's futures. For example, mothers interviewed by Pearce and Sokoloff (2013) reported that the stigma associated with divorce would affect their children and limit their future choices for a romantic partner. Mothers whose children were undocumented feared that seeking help would alert authorities to their children's immigration status and jeopardize their futures in America (Erez, 2002). So too, abusive men capitalized on the fears of their spouses/partners by threatening to take the children and/or report them to CPS and immigration

services. As evidenced in Erez and colleagues' research focused on the intersections of DV and immigration, "the connection between immigration and domestic violence [is] particularly painful for mothers" (2009, p. 47).

Earner (2010) interviewed Mexican immigrant mothers who were involved with CPS because of DV and found that these mothers faced a "double risk:" they were first victimized by their abusive partners and then re-victimized by CPS workers who appreciated neither the cultural issues involved in DV nor the impact of immigration status on women and their children. Mothers reported that after CPS intervention, they felt like 'bad mothers' because they failed to protect their children from EDV and 'bad women' because they reported DV, which resulted in the deportation of their family members. Analogous to the research reviewed in Chapter 2, Earner (2010) found that immigrant mothers felt that CPS interventions did not support them in their roles as mothers.

Intervention with immigrant women in situations of domestic violence. Research suggests that immigrant women are less likely than non-immigrant women to access formal services when seeking help with DV (Zadnik et al., 2016). Barriers to accessing formal services include: lack of knowledge and/or misinformation about services, stigmas associated with accessing help, fear of police intervention, fear of being reported to immigration authorities, fear of racist and culturally-insensitive responses by service providers, the lack of culturally-specific services and the fear that these services will not keep information and identity confidential because of their strong ties to the cultural community (Bui, 2003; Erez, 2002; Kulwicki et al., 2010; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013).

When immigrant women do seek help from formal services, they usually turn to immigrant-serving agencies, such as settlement services, instead of mainstream DV services

(Thurston et al., 2013). Immigrant women report that the one-size-fits-all intervention provided by DV-focused services (i.e. supporting individual women to leave the relationship) may not be helpful (Abraham, 1998; Dasgupta, 2007; Earner, 2010; Sokoloff, 2008; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). The expectation that they leave the relationship is especially challenging as it may come into direct conflict with cultural values that prohibit divorce and value family unity (Alaggia, Regehr, & Rishchynski, 2009). This point is illustrated in the following poignant quote from an abused immigrant woman, “in our [Punjabi] culture we have to stay with our partner, right? But [in] their [Canadian] culture you cannot stay because of lots of violence. What can I do? I have to stay (Punjabi Woman)” (Alaggia et al., 2009, p. 338).

In addition to delivering a one-size-fits-all intervention, mainstream VAW shelters are criticized for lacking linguistically and culturally diverse staff and for failing to provide culturally sensitive food and programming (Sokoloff 2008). Shelter-based interventions often rely on women’s eligibility for social services (i.e. subsidized housing and income assistance) and struggle to serve women whose immigration status precludes them from the receiving these amenities (Bhuyan, 2012).

Service providers to immigrant women also attest to the inadequacy of resources available for immigrant women seeking help. Service providers in Spain,¹⁰ for example, described their attempts to keep immigrant women from abandoning the help-seeking process, “as a chronicle of anticipated failure” (Briones-Vozmediano, Agudelo-Suarez, Goicolea, & Vives-Cases, 2014, p. 1006). They also expressed frustration at their inability to help immigrant

¹⁰ Service providers interviewed included: social workers, psychologists, judges, lawyers, public health professionals and intercultural mediators (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2014).

women overcome structural barriers that led them to return to their abusers (Briones-Vozmediano et al., 2014).

Involving the criminal justice system in situations involving immigrant women victimized by DV has proven not to be a viable option, “because of the continuous threat of deportation of their husbands/partners, children, and themselves” (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 246). Immigrant communities have responded to this reality by developing alternative community-based models rooted in social, as opposed to criminal justice, that provide an important alternative to mainstream DV interventions. Examples include the Cultural Context Model (Almeida and Lockard, 2005) that connects gender oppression with other forms of oppression and works with both men and women to promote social justice. In this model, men receive ‘political education’ to dismantle masculine norms of power and violence, are assigned sponsors who model non-violent behaviour and are held accountable for their violence. Almeida and Lockard write that, “this system of intervention offers a range of new options: the possibility of [abused women] returning to their now nonviolent partners, the possibility of children rebuilding relationships with their abusive parent, the possibility of having a civil and safe divorce, and lastly, the possibility of maintaining safety through community rather than criminal justice intervention” (2005, p. 315) (see Sokoloff, 2008 and Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005 for more examples).

Legal status as barrier to help seeking. Women’s legal immigration status stands out in the literature as a key determinant in women’s ability to seek help and in their help-seeking processes. By means of various immigration policies, governments confer a variety of legal statuses upon migrants, which determine their access to legal and social rights and services. According to Earner (2010), American immigration policy has become “a sort of negative

immigrant policy whose intended outcome is, presumably, to make it difficult for immigrants, specifically the undocumented, to stay and hopefully, make them go back to wherever they came from” (p. 289). Such immigration policies produce vulnerabilities and dependencies that are exploited in situations of DV. Indeed as Bhuyan and colleagues argue, immigration policies can be considered a form of structural violence (2014).

In the US, immigration status is conceptualised as binary: legal vs. illegal and documented vs. undocumented (Goldring, Berinstien, & Bernhard, 2009). The southern border of the U.S. is the site of large-scale unauthorized and highly-politicized border crossings (Bhuyan, 2012; Goldring et al., 2009a). The ‘problem’ of illegal immigrants was a key issue in the 2016 presidential election and the newly elected President Donald Trump vowed to build a wall along this border and deport masses of undocumented immigrants. With approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S., illegality is a high visibility and thoroughly researched topic (Passel & Cohn, 2016). Some of this literature on immigration status focuses specifically on women with an undocumented status (e.g. Adams & Campbell, 2012; Salcido & Adelman, 2004; Zadnik et al., 2016).

While this research generates important insights into the intersection between legal status and DV (see Table 1 for a summary), caution is required when applying the results to a Canadian context. As the following section argues, the Canadian immigration context is unique and because of this, there is a need for Canadian research on the relationship between immigration status and women’s help-seeking processes in situations of DV.

Precarious Status and the Canadian Immigration Context

Changing global trends have lead to increasing rates of migration to Canada; the 2011 National Household Survey estimated that 20.6% of the Canadian population were immigrants

(i.e. foreign-born) (Statistics Canada, 2016). While it is difficult to determine the prevalence of DV among immigrant families, it is assumed that, given the high incidence of DV across the globe, large numbers of newcomers are victimized by DV (Alaggia et al., 2009). A report released by the Ending Violence Association of BC suggests that immigrant women are disproportionately affected by DV; they point to the B.C. Coroner's statistics that demonstrate that while immigrants make up 25% of the population of B.C., between the years of 1994 and 2009, immigrant women made up 40% of the DV-related homicides in B.C. (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). This disproportionality is striking.

By contrast to the U.S. immigration context, the Canadian southern border has accounted for little unauthorized migration and before the spring of 2017, there had been little media coverage or political discourse about illegal border crossings into Canada. With the exception of such immigration crises as the arrival by boat of unauthorized Chinese migrants in 1999 in B.C. (Sisler & Ho, 2014), the presence of unauthorized people in Canada has not been perceived as a structural problem; instead it is an invisible issue (Goldring, Berinstein, & Bernhard, 2009).

Some Canadian activists and academics advocate replacing the American labels of "illegal" or "undocumented" with the term "non-status," arguing that most immigrants in Canada are in fact documented, but because their temporary status has expired or their application was denied, they no longer have legal immigration status (Goldring et al., 2009). Goldring and Berinstein and Bernhard (2009), however, are critical of the term "non-status" as it also constructs immigration status as binary— status or non-status. They point out that the Canadian immigration context, "produce[s] a confusing array of gradations of uncertain or 'less than full' migration status" and advocate for the use of the term "precarious status" to capture these

uncertain and “less than full” statuses (Goldring et al., 2009, p. 240). More specifically, they define precarious status as:

the absence of any of the following elements normally associated with permanent residence (and citizenship) in Canada: (1) work authorization, (2) the right to remain permanently in the country (residence permit), (3) not depending on a third party for one’s right to be in Canada (such as a sponsoring spouse or employer), and (4) social citizenship rights available to permanent residence (e.g. public education and public health coverage). (2009, p. 241)

Precarious status disrupts the dichotomy between the discrete categories of citizen and non-citizen and draws attention to presence and vulnerability of people living with unstable immigration status (Goldring et al., 2009). As Goldring and colleagues write,

Lack of visibility compounds the vulnerability and marginalization of people with precarious status and their families by reproducing an underclass that is vulnerable on several fronts, including inadequate access to health and other services, limited recourse in the event of abuse at work or other arenas, and deportation. (2009, p. 241)

In this way, immigration status is an important aspect of social exclusion as those with precarious status are prevented from being fully included in democratic society (Bhuyan, 2012).

Growth in precarious immigration is a global trend and policy changes in Canada, such as the Safe Third Country Agreement¹¹ and the introduction of Conditional Permanent Residency,¹²

¹¹ The Safe Third Country Act is an agreement between Canada and the U.S. that was implemented in 2004 (Loney, 2014). According to this agreement, refugee claimants must request refugee status in the first “safe” country they arrive in. The U.S. is the only other safe country that Canada recognizes in this agreement. The implications of this act are far reaching; many refugee claimants are immediately rejected at the Canadian border simply because they travelled through the U.S. on route to Canada. The Canadian Council for Refugees opposes this Act because they believe the U.S. is not truly a “safe” country for all refugees because the U.S. frequently detains asylum seekers, frequently denies claims and has discriminatory refugee policies. Only seven months after implementing the Act,

produced a growing number of people with precarious status and longer episodes of temporary and precarious status (Bhuyan, Osborne, Zahraei, & Tarshis, 2014; Government of Canada, 2003, 2012). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), approximately one million people with temporary residency lived in Canada in 2009 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). The RCMP estimated that in 2012, 500,000 people were living in Canada with no status at all (Bhuyan et al., 2014). These numbers indicate that one in thirty-four people live in Canada without access to the rights and recourses provided to citizens.

Peer-reviewed scholarship on precarious status in Canada is limited for several reasons: (1) the concept of precarious status is relatively new; (2) the practical issues associated with recruiting people who may wish to remain unknown; (3) the ethical considerations of working with this group that require, for example, vetting by university ethics committees (Bernhard, Goldring, Young, Berinstein, & Wilson, 2007). In any case, existing research suggests that immigration status has a role in determining health and social outcomes for migrants and their children in such areas as: housing (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005; Thurston et al., 2013), employment and economic outcomes (Goldring & Landolt, 2012), access to health care and social services (Bernhard et al., 2007; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005) and vulnerability to domestic violence (Alaggia et al., 2009).

Most of what is known about precarious status and DV in Canada comes from the grey literature (e.g. Bhuyan et al., 2014; Burns, 2010; Justice Institute of B.C., 2007; The Safety of

CIC reported a 40% reduction in the number of claims for 2005, compared to the same period during the previous year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003; Loney, 2014).

¹² Conditional Permanent Residency was introduced by the CIC in 2012 as a way to prevent “marriage fraud.” According to this amendment to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, spouses or partners who are being sponsored must cohabit with their sponsor for two years after being granted conditional permanent residency before they will be considered permanent residents. This amendment gives the government greater investigative authority and enforcement options if they believe the relationship is “fraudulent.” Conditional permanent residency can be revoked by the government (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b).

Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). Collectively, this grey literature demonstrates that Canadian immigration policy contributes to men's oppression of women by increasing women's vulnerability to DV and restricting women's access to rights and services, thereby obstructing their ability to seek help with DV. After a brief overview of how Canadian immigration policy relates to precarious status, I outline what the literature says about precarious status and DV in Canada.

Canadian immigration policy. Canadian federal and provincial governments, guided by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) (2001) share jurisdiction for immigration policy (Bhuyan, 2012)¹³. While the IRPA outlines eighteen different objectives for Canadian immigration policy, Canadian migration scholars have argued that policy is shaped primarily by economic priorities and political discourse (Bhuyan, 2012; Bhuyan et al., 2014; Goldring & Landolt, 2012). Immigration policy changed dramatically when conservative MP Jason Kenney became the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism in 2008. Bhuyan and colleagues (2014) described this period as “the most active in Canadian immigration policy development since the country's inception” (p. v). Overall, these policy changes expanded precarious immigration categories, restricted access to permanent residency (PR) and restricted the criteria for the humanitarian class (refugees and humanitarian and compassionate applicants) (Bhuyan et al., 2014; Goldring & Landolt, 2012). Before discussing these policy changes and how they impacted women seeking help with DV, I offer a brief overview of Canadian Immigration Classes and pathways to PR.

¹³ At the federal level, there are three government agencies that control the implementation of immigration policy: the Canada Border Services Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. Increasingly, provinces have been gaining more control over immigration oversight through various bilateral agreements with the Federal government (Bhuyan, 2012).

Pathways to immigration. Generally speaking, there are two main categories of legal entry into Canada: (1) the settlement category in which people enter with the intention of obtaining PR and citizenship, and (2) the temporary resident category for migrants entering for various reasons for a short-term period. The first category includes three main ‘tracks’ for becoming a PR in Canada: the economic class track, the family class track and the humanitarian track (see Figure 1).

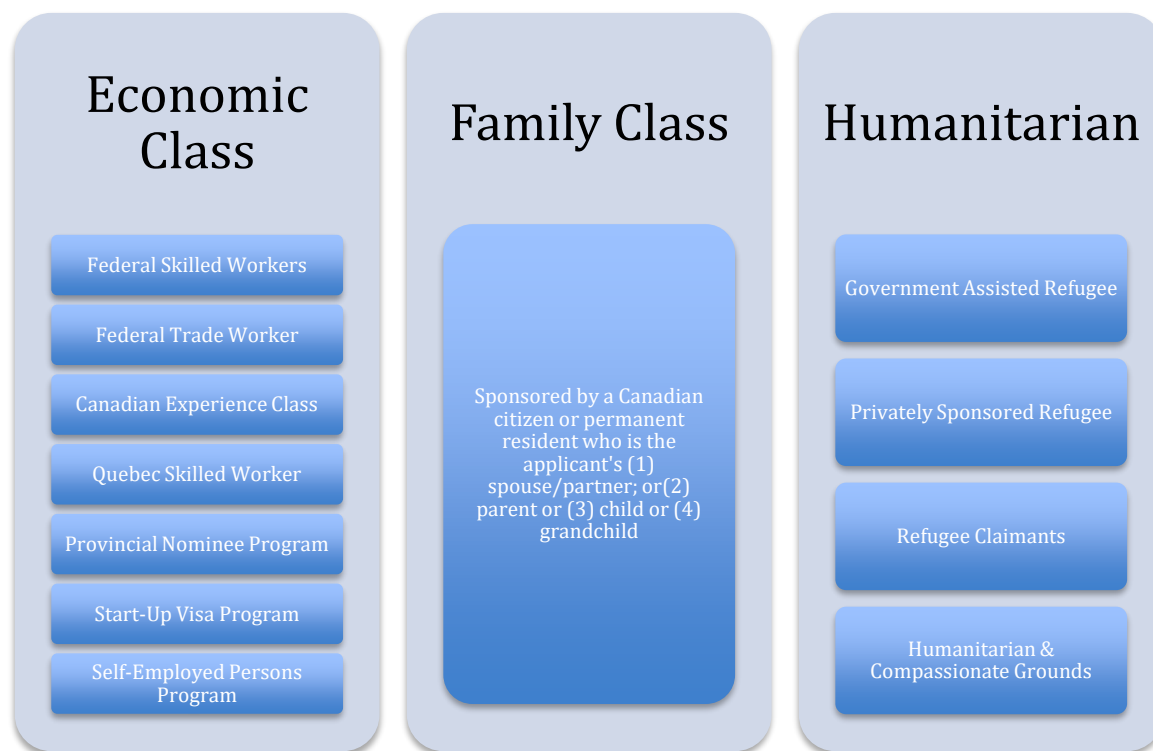


Figure 1. The settlement track.

The second category includes temporary foreign workers, live-in caregivers, international students, tourists and visitors (see Figure 2). Increasingly over the last two decades, space has been opened up for selected temporary residents to seek PR.¹⁴ As a result, the immigration

¹⁴ The pathway from temporary residency towards PR occurs primarily through three programs. The Live-In-Care-Giver program, The Provincial Nominee Program and the Canadian Experiences Class. The Provincial Nominee Program permits provincial and territorial governments and employers to nominate certain temporary residents for PR status. The Canadian Experiences Class permits international students with work experience in Canada and high-

system has become more complex as the boundaries between these two categories have been blurred.

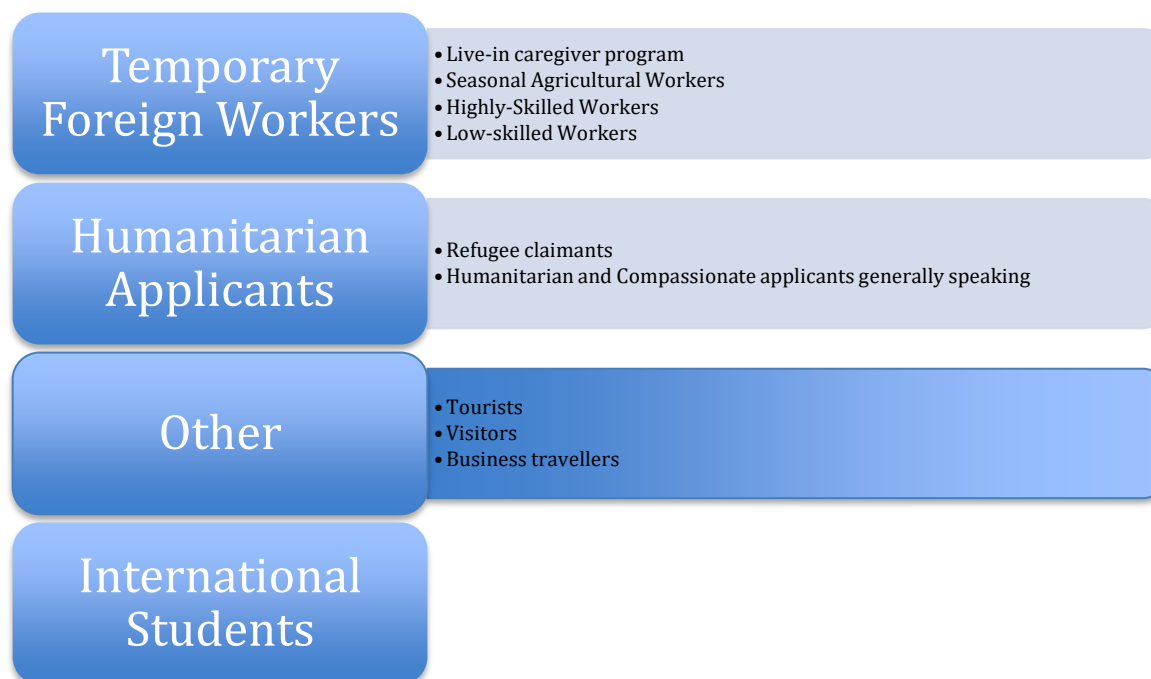


Figure 2. Temporary residency categories.

Goldring and Landolt (2012) describe the Canadian immigration systems as a “chutes and ladders model” that is characterized by a multidirectional movement between categories and statuses (p. 9). Many migrants who enter Canada in the temporary track (see Figure 2) experience multiple status shifts; some move towards PR but many move through various temporary statuses, fall out of status and become unauthorized. According to Goldring and colleagues, even “[settlement track] statuses are becoming increasingly precarious and conditional on requirements that are difficult to meet or maintain” (2009, p. 6). For example, if a migrant is convicted of a crime, fails to stay in the country for the mandatory period, suffers

skilled temporary workers to apply for PR. These pathways to PR have become increasingly popular; in 2011, 22.3% of permanent residents obtained PR from these three programs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012a; Goldring & Landolt, 2012)

from a sponsorship breakdown or has their refugee claim or Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C)¹⁵ application rejected, they may lose status and are at risk for detention and deportation (Bhuyan et al., 2014).

Canadian Immigration Policy and Domestic Violence

Canadian research on precarious status and DV has focused primarily on the situation of women sponsored under the Spouse or Common-Law Partner Class (SCLPC), which is a subset of the family class. While there are many routes to PR, women are more likely than men to obtain PR when they depend on their family or employers as sponsors. According to Bhuyan and colleagues (2014), more than 75% of women who obtain PR in Canada do so through the SCLPC. The power imbalance inherent in sponsor/sponsored relationships, however, can fuel gender inequality and contribute to DV. Being a sponsor can give abusive men access to such particular immigration-related forms of control as: restricting access to information about immigration, hiding immigration papers, threatening to revoke sponsorship and having the woman deported (Alaggia et al., 2012; Burns, 2010). Within the SCLPC, there are two primary categories of sponsorship: (1) traditional SCLPC and (2) inland SCLPC. Each category involves periods of precariousness for the sponsored spouse and in situations of DV this precariousness can be perilous.

Traditional SCLPC. The majority of SCLPC applications occur before the sponsored spouse/common-law partner arrives in Canada. The sponsor—who is either a PR or a citizen who lives in Canada—files an application that must demonstrate that the relationship is

¹⁵ According to the CIC website, the H&C application allows the CIC to grant PR status to immigrants who, “would not otherwise qualify in any class, in cases in which there are compelling H&C grounds” (n.d., para. 1). CIC considers factors such as: “how settled the person is in Canada, general family ties to Canada, the best interests of any children involved, and what could happen to you if we do not grant the request” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, n.d., para. 2).

‘genuine.’ If the application is approved, the sponsored spouse/common-law partner will migrate to Canada and be granted PR upon their arrival. The sponsor must sign a legal undertaking and commit to being financially responsible for their sponsored spouse/common-law partner and any dependent children for three years (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, n.d.-b).

Until 2012, women sponsored via the traditional SCLPC were granted full PR status upon arrival to Canada and thus would not be considered to have precarious status. In 2012 however, the Canadian government introduced several amendments to the IRPA with the intention cracking down on “marriage fraud” and brought in new restrictions on the SCLPC and created a new class of precariousness called conditional PR (C-PR) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b). If a sponsor and his or her spouse/common-law partner had been in a relationship for less than two years and had no children together at the time of the sponsorship application, the sponsored spouse/partner was granted C-PR instead of full PR. C-PR required that the sponsor and sponsored spouse/common-law partner cohabit for a minimum of two years, post-migration, to ‘prove’ the authenticity of their relationship (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012b). During these two years, if the sponsorship broke down, the sponsored spouses C-PR could be revoked leaving them at risk for detention and deportation.

When introduced, women’s rights activists and VAW services providers severely opposed C-PR, because it meant that if a sponsored woman was being abused and left the relationship, she would be at risk of losing status and being deported; the precarity of C-PR greatly increased the vulnerability of sponsored spouses and functioned as a barrier for seeking help with DV (Bhuyan et al., 2014). In response to this criticism, the government introduced an exception to the policy for victims of DV, but the victim had to prove that DV has occurred.

While this exception has helped some abused women flee DV and maintain status, research has demonstrated that this exception does not do enough to mitigate the risks associated with C-PR. For example, many abused women cannot meet the burden of proof required by the government to qualify for this exception¹⁶ (Alaggia et al., 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2014; Burns, 2010). Additionally, many migrant women are isolated, do not speak English and must rely on their abusive sponsor to translate their immigration documents. Research has demonstrated that many sponsored spouses do not understand C-PR and are not aware of the exception for victims of abuse (Alaggia et al., 2009; The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). This policy has created vulnerability and dependencies that are frequently exploited in situations of DV: abusive sponsors may lie about how sponsorship works, threaten to dissolve the sponsorship, report the woman to immigration authorities and/or file a claim stating that the relationship is fraudulent and/or that the application was inaccurate, thus fuelling the victim's fears (Alaggia et al., 2009; Justice Institute of B.C., 2007). So while the exception provides a way out of DV for some women, the precariousness of C-PR leaves many women trapped in situations of DV.

Inland-SCLPC. Immigrants with temporary resident status in Canada can be sponsored for PR by a spouse or common-law partner who is a PR or a Canadian Citizen. The application for sponsorship is extensive and requires documentation to prove that the relationship is genuine; it can take months to file the paperwork and up to a year after filing for the government to process the application. During this processing time, the sponsored spouse is in limbo and continues to have whatever temporary—and thus precarious—status they had upon their arrival

¹⁶ The government requires documentation of abuse, which can include pictures, doctor's notes, letters from the police, lawyers and VAW service providers and sworn affidavits from witnesses (Bhuyan, Osborne, Zahraei, & Tarshis, 2014)

to Canada. If this temporary status expires before the sponsorship application has been approved, the sponsored spouse is at risk of detention and deportation. Even once the application has been approved, the sponsored spouse may be granted C-PR, which extends the period of precariousness by an additional two years.

In situations of DV, women who are waiting for their SCLPC-in Canada application to be filed and/or processed are extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Research has demonstrated that abusive men exert control over women by repeatedly promising to file for sponsorship, by delaying the application, by lying about filing the application and by threatening to withdraw the application (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). Up until the time in which CIC has approved the SCLPC-in Canada application, the abuser can withdraw the application without explanation by writing a letter to CIC (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). The threat of deportation is very real for women in this situation and as discussed earlier, this threat is even more potent when the woman has children and deportation may involve being separated from Canadian-born children or may threaten the immigration status of foreign-born children (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011).

If women who are waiting to be sponsored decide to leave their abusive sponsors, or if their sponsors withdraw their application, women's only recourse for securing status apart from the SCLPC is to file for status based on H&C Grounds.

Humanitarian and Compassionate application. According to the CIC website, the H&C application allows the CIC to grant PR status to immigrants who, "would not otherwise qualify in any class, in cases in which there are compelling H&C grounds" (n.d., para. 1). The H&C application is extensive and labour intensive; women who have experienced DV must provide an

extremely detailed account of the abuse and support this account with evidence (e.g. police reports, affidavits from shelter staff, hospital records etc.) (Alaggia et al., 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2014). Additionally, women must demonstrate that they are established in Canada and have contributed to their Canadian community by providing evidence of educational achievements, job experiences, social commitments, language acquisition and community engagement (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). As the instructions to the H&C application acknowledge, the evaluation of H&C applications is highly subjective: “An H&C decision is more complex and more subjective than most other immigration decisions because officers use their discretion to assess the applicant’s personal circumstances” (Statistics Canada, 2006, as cited in Alaggia et al., 2009, p. 337).

Alaggia, Regher and Rishchynski (2009) conducted a study examining the impact of Canadian immigration policies on women who have experienced DV in the Greater Toronto Area. The results of their interviews with immigrant women and service providers clearly indicate that “the criteria required for a viable immigration application are unrealistic, and in many cases impossible to meet in situations of domestic abuse” (Alaggia et al., 2009, p. 339). With regards to the H&C application specifically, one immigration lawyer reported: “the success rate for the H&C application? I've heard anywhere from between 3% to Immigration [authorities] saying they have a 48% success approval rate” (Alaggia et al., 2009, p. 339). Similarly, a second immigration lawyer commented:

For a lot of women, that is so daunting. It’s horrible, but I think our [immigration] policy as it stands encourages people to not to leave their abusers, even when the abuse is really bad and their life is at risk because, you know, most of the women, you know are smart, they get it. (Alaggia et al., 2009, p. 339)

Immigration lawyers also document how the conditions of DV and precarious status (i.e. isolation, fear of police, economic barriers etc.) make it challenging for women to meet the requirements of the H&C application—especially the requirements of being self-reliant and established in the community. Many women fleeing DV need to access income assistance; relying on income assistance however can jeopardize an H&C application. Immigration policy leaves women in a lose-lose situation; women either report the abuse and risk losing their status and their families or they do not report the abuse and, later, if they choose to leave and file an H&C application, they risk not having sufficient documentation to ‘prove’ that the abuse occurred (Alaggia et al., 2009).

Furthermore, the H&C application is costly; applicants must pay \$550 plus \$150 per child under the age of 22 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2017). For many women with precarious status who have fled DV, the cost of the application is prohibitive (Alaggia et al., 2009). According to a 2011 report released by the Ending Violence Association of B.C., H&C applications can take between two and three years to be processed. During this processing time, if a woman’s temporary status expires, she can be detained and deported by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA), even though she has applied for status on H&C grounds. Because the CBSA operates largely in isolation from the CIC (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011), they are not mandated to consider H&C applications before executing a deportation. If CIC denies an H&C application, there is no right to appeal.

Other forms of precarious status. Most of the Canadian literature on DV and precarious status focuses on the abuse within the SCLPC class. It is important to acknowledge however, many types of precarious status outside the SCLPC that leave DV victims in perilous situations. For example, most women who arrive in Canada as refugee claimants are listed as dependents on

their husband/partner's refugee claim; as dependents, women's applications for status are tied to their husband's refugee claim (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). If women choose to leave their husbands because of DV, they jeopardize their status because their claim is based on their husband's persecution; they must either file an H&C application or try to claim refugee status independently from their husbands (The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011).

To conclude, this chapter demonstrates that immigration status plays a key role in shaping and constraining women's ability to break free from DV. As Sokoloff and Pearce (2013) write, "society is hierarchically segmented along the lines of nativity and even further segmented according to immigration status and accompanying rights or lack thereof, though in a state of constant flux" (p. 252). As was shown in Chapter 3 of this thesis motherhood also shapes women's experiences of DV and their help-seeking processes.

There is a need for scholarly Canadian research that examines the help-seeking processes of women who are at the intersection of motherhood and precarious status. What are the needs of these women as they seek safety? How do they seek safety? What factors facilitate their help seeking and what factors constrain it? Are the systems and social services they reach out to equipped to meet their needs? Where are the gaps and what can be done to fill them? In the next chapter, I outline how this thesis addresses these questions and describe the conceptual framework, method of data collection and data analysis that I use for this study.

Chapter 5: Methodology and Method

In this chapter, I restate my research questions and present the theoretical orientation, methodology and methods of data collection and data analysis used in this thesis.

Research Questions

The following questions guided my thesis: (1) How do mothers with precarious immigration status seek help when experiencing DV? (2) What facilitates or impedes women's help-seeking processes? (3) How do existing services and systems respond to mothers with precarious status as they seek help with DV? (4) What can be done to improve these responses?

Intersectionality as Theory

As discussed previously, feminist theory and practices have shifted away from a traditional monolithic approach to embrace the controversial and yet useful theory of intersectionality. Patricia Hill Collins describes intersectionality as a “travelling knowledge project” that has moved from its origins in a variety of grass roots social justice movements in the 60s and 70s into the academy where it has become “thoroughly institutionalized” (Hill Collins, 2015, p. 7). ‘A Black Feminist Statement’ (1977), a document produced by a small group of African American women known as the Combahee River Collective reflects many of the core concepts found in what is now known as intersectionality. ‘A Black Feminist Statement’ identified multiple “interlocking” systems of oppression, including race and gender, that “required a comprehensive response” (as cited in Hill Collins, 2015, p. 7). While these ideas were rooted in specific historical contexts in the U.S., they had ties to countless social justice and academic projects across the globe that in hindsight could also have been labelled as ‘intersectional’ (see Yuval-Davis, 2011). These projects however, are “neither identified as

foundational to intersectionality nor valorized within contemporary intersectionality origin stories” (Hill Collins, 2015, p. 7).

Key concepts from these social justice movements were incorporated into academic thought and research in the 1980s and became identified as “race/class/gender” studies (Collins, 2015). This burgeoning area of studies was united by the following core concepts: “community organization, identity politics, coalitional politics, interlocking oppressions, and social justice” (Collins, 2015, p. 9). These core concepts travelled through multiple disciplines and race/class/gender studies proliferated.

Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with coining the term ‘intersectionality’ in her paper, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color* (1991). In this paper, she introduced ‘intersectionality’ in relation to the metaphor of intersecting roads, as a way of explaining how gender and racial oppression ‘crashed’ into each other to create a unique intersection where black women are uniquely marginalized.

Intersectionality has been applied broadly across disciplines and is used in research, policy analysis and practice (Dhamoon, 2011). Intersectionality has become a parsimonious term, however, and multiple definitions exist; it is referred to as a concept, a paradigm (Damant et al., 2008; Sokoloff, 2008), a theory (Erez et al., 2009), a catch phrase (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006), a buzzword (Davis, 2008) a framework for analysis (Dhamoon, 2011; Hancock, 2007), and a methodology (McCall, 2005). Some scholars have abandoned the term intersectionality all together used instead such terms as, multiplicity (Wing, 1990), interlocking (Razack, 1998), multiple jeopardy (King, 1988), discrimination-within-discrimination (Kirkness, 1987), multiple consciousness (Matsuda, 1992), and multi-dimensionality (Hutchinson, 2001) and intersectional-type (Dhamoon, 2011).

Although intersectionality is an often contested and ambiguous term, scholars, human rights activities, policy analysts and practitioners continue to draw upon it in order to study and respond to DV. Davis argues that, “paradoxically, it is precisely [intersectionality’s] alleged weaknesses—its ambiguity and open-endedness—that were the secrets to its success and, more generally, make it a good feminist theory” (2008, p. 67). Intersectionality addresses a central theoretical concern within contemporary feminist scholarship: the issue of differences among women (Hill Collins, 2015; Davis, 2008). Intersectionality has been adopted both by race/class/gender theorists concerned with exploring how women’s identity and experiences are differentially influenced by race, class and gender and by postmodern feminists focused on “deconstructing the binary oppositions and universalism inherent in the modernist paradigms of Western philosophy and science” (Brah and Phoenix, 2004 as cited in Davis, 2008, p. 71). Intersectionality functions as a critique of the theoretical hegemony of gender and addresses the exclusions of white, western feminism (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Zack, 2007). Davis argues that intersectionality can be considered a ‘good’ feminist theory because it opens up space for creativity, critique and political interventions (2008; Butler & Scott, 1992). Instead of minimizing complexity and clearing up confusion, it allows us to engage with the “multiplicity of divisions and inequalities” (Davis, 2008, p. 78). For the purposes of my thesis, I will be adopting the perspective that intersectionality is a valid—albeit highlight contested and ambiguous—theoretical framework.¹⁷

According to Hill Collins (2015) intersectionality has retained its general contours even amidst the proliferation of intersectional research and theorizing. These general contours include:

¹⁷ Engaging in all aspects of the debate regarding intersectionality is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a more extensive review of intersectionality, I refer the reader to the special 2006 Issue of the *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, Volume 13, Issue 3. Alternatively, Davis (2008) provides a good review.

- Race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation from one another.
- These mutually constructing categories underlie and shape intersecting systems of power; the power relations of racism and sexism, for example, are interrelated.
- Intersecting systems of power catalyze social formations of complex social inequalities that are organized via unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for people who live within them.
- Because social formations of complex social inequalities are historically contingent and cross-culturally specific, unequal material realities and social experiences vary across time and space.
- Individuals and groups differentially placed within intersecting systems of power have different points of view on their own and others' experiences with complex social inequalities, typically advancing knowledge projects that reflect their social locations within power relations.
- The complex social inequalities fostered by intersecting systems of power are fundamentally unjust, shaping knowledge projects and/or political engagements that uphold or contest the status quo.

(Hill Collins, 2015, p. 14)

Intersectionality as Methodology

While there is a shared understanding of the general contours of intersectionality, discussions of its methodology are limited (McCall, 2005). Leslie McCall (2005) identifies three main methodologies used in the intersectional literature that she differentiates based on how they relate to categories of difference: (1) anticategorical complexity; (2) intracategorical complexity and (3) intercategorical complexity (2005).

The 'anticategorical complexity' approach deconstructs analytical categories and considers life to be too "irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determination of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying

social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences” (McCall, 2005, p. 1773). Accordingly, processes of categorization and research based on categorization are viewed with suspicion and critiqued for leading to “demarcation, and demarcation to exclusion, and exclusion to inequality” (McCall, 2005, p. 1777). Feminist poststructuralism is strongly associated with this approach (McCall, 2005).¹⁸

The ‘intercategorical complexity’ approach requires scholars to use categories (as imperfect as they are) to examine relationships of “inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (McCall, 2005, p.1773). It uses a multigroup and systematically comparative approach that focuses on both privilege and oppression (McCall, 2005).¹⁹

The ‘intracategorical complexity’ approach, the most common methodology described by McCall (2005), approaches categories critically but provisionally adopts them for use in analysis. This methodology involves studying a specific group of individuals who occupy a “particular social location at the intersections of single dimensions of multiple categories” (McCall, 2005, p. 1781). Like the case study methodology, it can produce thick descriptions of the complexity, diversity and variation of the lived experiences of particular social groups (McCall, 2005).

Most intersectional DV research to date can be categorized as intracategorical studies (McCall, 2005; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). It is not surprising that most DV research has used this approach because it includes the perspectives of diverse groups of women; it pushes policy and practice to be more relevant to diverse segments of society. This thesis also uses this intracategorical methodology to study individuals who occupy the single identity dimensions of

¹⁸ Examples of research using this anticategorical methodology include Ruth Behar’s *Translated Woman* (1993) and Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) research on HIV/AIDS (McCall, 2005).

¹⁹ For examples of this methodology see McCall (2000, 2001).

‘woman’ ‘mother’ and ‘immigrant with precarious status’ at the intersection of multiple categories of differentiation, i.e. gender, mothering status and immigration status.

The intracategorical methodology however, presents a number of potential risks. Firstly, it can perpetuate essentialist ideas, which construct identities as bounded, binary and rigid (Dhamoon, 2011; Prins, 2006). Dhamoon (2011) cautions those using this methodology to remember: (1) identities are complex and not all identities fit into categories; (2) single dimensions of identity (e.g. immigrant) can be interpreted in multiple ways and (3) “there is no authentic way of living an identity, [since] some identities are legally imposed rather than self-constituted” (2011, p. 233).

Secondly, the intracategorical methodology risks constructing humans as passive subjects who are inducted into static categories and thus ignores the agency that individuals have in constructing their own identity (Prins, 2006). To mitigate this risk, it is important to recognize that research participants may not experience their lives in relation to the particular category selected by the researcher. The participants in Acevedo’s (2000) study on DV among Mexican immigrants for example, revealed, that their identities as mothers were more influential than the categories of identity that Acevedo had set out to analyze, which included nativity, race and gender.

A final key risk of using the intracategorical methodology is that it can lead researchers to focus their analysis exclusively on identities and categories while ignoring how processes of inequality and differentiation function at structural levels (Dhamoon, 2011; Hankivsky, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 2, most DV literature to date has used the intracategorical approach to ‘give voice’ to battered women in ignored or marginalized social locations but has not identified or made visible the structural inequalities that shape the lives of battered women (Sokoloff &

Dupont, 2005). To remedy this, Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) advocate for an “intersectional and interlocking” approach which situates individual stories of multiple oppressions within the macro-level systems of power and domination (Dhamoon, 2011; Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). As Jiwani (2006) writes, “embracing an intersectional and interlocking framework involves a further examination of ways in which different systems work in concert with each other to engender particular forms and expressions of violence” (as cited in Sokoloff, 2008, p. 230).

Using the “intersecting and interlocking” approach to studying DV can help mitigate the risks associated with the intracategorical methodology by pushing researchers to pay explicit attention in their analysis to how interlocking forms of structural oppression shape the aspect of social life they are studying. As Dhamoon writes, “the focus on processes and systems shifts the gaze from the Othered identity and category of Otherness to a critique of the social production and organization of relations of Othering and normalization” (2011, p. 235).

This thesis used the intercategory methodology (McCall, 2005) and to mitigate some of the risks associated with this methodology, I adopted Sokoloff and Dupont’s (2005) intersectional and interlocking approach; I focused on the help-seeking processes of women at the intersections of motherhood and precarious immigration status and paid explicit attention to how interlocking forms of structural oppression shape these experiences.

Methods

Participant selection. Given the exploratory nature of this project, I used purposive intensity sampling (Palys & Atchison, 2008) to select participants. My original intention was to recruit two to six mothers with precarious immigration status who accessed formal help with DV to participate in this project. During the recruitment process however, I encountered multiple barriers and was not able to recruit any mothers with precarious immigration status. As a result, I

amended the project and recruited service providers who work with mothers with precarious immigration status who had experienced DV. Below, I describe both phases of my recruitment process even though only the second phase yielded any participants.

Phase one: Recruiting mothers with precarious immigration status. The selection criteria for the first group of participants included the following: (1) over the age of nineteen; (2) actively mothering at least one child under the age of eighteen; (3) living apart from their domestically violent partners; (4) having had a precarious immigration status at the time they sought help with DV; and (5) comfortable communicating in English for the purpose of the interview. After careful consideration and consultation with the Human Research Ethics Board, I used a third-party recruitment strategy to contact potential participants. I arranged a meeting with the program manager at the transition house where I had worked to describe the project and recruit the support of the transition house. I provided the program manager with a letter describing the project and an organizational permission form (Appendix A) and she agreed to help facilitate recruitment. In addition, she agreed to introduce me (via e-mail) to the program managers of two other local VAW agencies. I followed up with an e-mail, which included the introduction letter and the organizational permission form. I heard back from both agencies, but only one agreed to participate.²⁰

I collaborated with the consenting program managers to determine a recruitment strategy that would best fit their respective agencies. Both program managers agreed to place recruitment posters (Appendix B) in communal spaces and directly approach clients whom they thought might be interested and that fit the recruitment criteria. As per the suggestion of the Human

²⁰ The program manager who declined to participate said that she was too busy. VAW work by nature is crisis driven, which can make it hard for agency staff to take on additional work.

Ethics Review Board, I created a brochure (Appendix C) for the program managers to use as a verbal script when explaining the research to clients. As staff were in a power-over relationship with clients, there was a risk that some women would feel obliged to help the staff and thus agree to participate. To mitigate this risk, staff were instructed to clearly convey the following information when approaching clients: (1) Participation in the study would be voluntary; (2) Individuals could leave the study at any time; (3) Services from the second-stage housing agency would not be impacted if the individual did not participate or left the study; (4) Names and information would be kept private; and (5) If the individual was interested in participating, she could choose to have the staff facilitate communication with the researcher or contact the researcher directly.

My plan was to meet with women who were interested in participating to give them more information, to answer questions, to obtain verbal consent for participation (Appendix D), and to arrange an interview time and location. Careful consideration was put into the recruitment strategy to mitigate any risks to participants. I chose third party recruitment because the assistance and expertise of the program staff were needed to conduct this research safely and ethically. The third party recruiters were familiar with the potential participants and the details of their abusive relationship(s). Most of them were also trained counsellors and skilled in crisis intervention. The recruiters were able to screen out women in unstable and high-risk situations whose safety might be jeopardized by participating in the research.

As mentioned previously, this recruitment strategy did not yield any participants. One program manager did not have any current clients who were mothers with precarious immigration status at the time of the study and was not able to contact former clients as per her agency policies. The second program manager informed me that she had approached three

mothers with precarious immigration status and each expressed interest and took my contact information, but I never heard from them. While disappointing, this outcome was not altogether surprising. As demonstrated in the literature review chapters, mothers with precarious immigration status fleeing DV are faced with complex obstacles and competing demands; they may not have had the time, energy or motivation to participate. Language and/or cultural barriers²¹ and fears regarding safety and confidentiality may also have limited participation.

Phase two: Service provider recruitment. After consulting with my supervisor and with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Board, I expanded my recruitment process to: (1) include a wider variety of organizations from which to recruit mothers with precarious immigration status and; (2) expand my sample to include local service providers who have experience working with mothers with precarious immigration status who were seeking help with DV. I identified three additional local agencies whose client populations seemed likely to include mothers with precarious immigration status who had transitioned out of violence: two settlement agencies who served immigrants and refugees and one employment agency serving DV survivors. Following the same processes described in Phase One, I contacted the program managers at these three organizations to request their assistance in recruiting mothers with precarious immigration status who had transitioned out of DV. One program manager reported being too busy to participate and the other two consented and shared the information about the project with their clients who fit the recruitment criteria. But again, I did not hear from any of the clients approached by the program managers and as a result, my sample does not include any mothers with precarious immigration status. I was able to recruit seven service providers to

²¹ It is possible that the concept of participating in a research study was unfamiliar to women. It is also possible that they were hesitant to share their stories with a stranger, especially a stranger from outside of their linguistic and cultural community.

participate in this project however. Five program managers—three from the VAW agencies contacted in Phase One and one from each settlement agency—agreed to recruit service provider participants from their respective staff teams. Program managers were given the choice of approaching staff directly or distributing recruitment posters (Appendix E). Interested service providers were instructed to contact me and I followed up with them to arrange a time and location for an interview and to obtain written consent (Appendix F).

Sample. The final sample for this project consisted of seven service providers and included three program managers, two program managers who also functioned as front-line staff and two front line staff (see Table 2). Each participant, including the program managers, had worked directly with at least one mother with precarious immigration status who had accessed formal help with DV. The four participants from the immigrant and refugee settlement organizations were themselves immigrants from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. By contrast, the three participants from VAW organizations were Canadian-born and spoke English as their first language.

Table 2. Sample Description

Participants	Agency	Services Provided by Agency
1 program manager with previous front-line experience	Transition House	Emergency housing for women and children fleeing DV, 24/hour crisis line support, outreach, counselling for women and children
2 program managers who are also front-line staff	Second-Stage Housing Program	Non-emergency housing for women and children fleeing DV for up to one year, wrap-around social work support and counselling
1 program manager	Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Organization	Wrap-around settlement services, English classes, employment services, diversity training, community, children and youth programs, interpretation and translation support
1 program manager and 2 front line staff	Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Organization	Wrap-around settlement services, health and legal information clinics, children and youth programs and employment services

Data Collection

Prior to the interviews, I developed a semi-structured interview guide that was organized around my research questions (Appendix G). As recommended by Lichtman (2013), I included several different types of questions in the interview guide, including such grand tour questions as, “Can you tell me about your role in helping women transition out of DV?” and concrete example questions such as, “Would you like to share a story that describes some of the challenges mothers without status in Canada face?” In an effort to focus the conversations specifically on mothers with precarious immigration status who were accessing help with DV, I asked such comparison questions as, “Based on your experiences, what are some of the needs of mothers with precarious immigration status who have experienced DV? In what ways are these needs similar or different to women who are not mothers, to women without precarious status?” At the same time however, I welcomed unanticipated topics and themes. For example, one participant discussed several situations in which he supported men who were abused by their female immigration sponsors. While not directly related to my research questions, these comments helped to highlight the vulnerabilities produced by immigration policy and the power imbalance inherent in sponsorship relationships.

Following Kvale and Brinkman (2008), as I conducted my study, I viewed my qualitative interviews as ‘inter-views,’ “where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee and the interview is really an *inter view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 2). While my focus was on developing an understanding of each participant’s experiences of working with mothers with precarious immigration status, I viewed myself as an active participant in the interview and a co-

constructor of knowledge. I occupied two positions during the interviews; I was a student-researcher with an understanding of the academic literature on this subject and a former service provider with direct experience of working to support mothers with precarious immigration status as they sought help with DV.

Throughout the interviews, I relied on prompting questions, such as ‘can you tell me more about that?’ and ‘what happened next?’ to elicit details. I also made use of paraphrasing and summarizing to make visible my interpretations and to check in with participants about the validity of these interpretations. For example, I responded to a participant’s story by asking, “*So the big difference between those two women and how their stories played out was the one woman’s ability—well her proactiveness . . . is that right?*” The participant responded by saying, “*I think it was also that she had a level of English from the get go. I think that’s what made it easier for her to find services.*”

The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to two hours and were audio-recorded.

Data Analysis

I chose to combine two approaches to data analysis: thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and intersectionality-informed data analysis (e.g. Hunting, 2014). I chose this combined approach in part because I conducted interviews and the qualitative and exploratory nature of this interview data lent itself most readily to thematic analysis (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kvale & Brinkman 2008). At the same time, intersectionality helped me to continue to focus on the multiple social and political dynamics that were a part of my participants’ lives; it assisted me with hearing what participants had to say in that I was prepared to tune into the multi-level aspects of their narratives.

I foregrounded thematic analysis because, as Braun and Clarke outline, “through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (2006, p. 5). Further, given this theoretical flexibility, Braun and Clarke encourage the use of a “named and claimed” thematic analysis in which the researcher clearly identifies the theories that inform their analysis as well as their “process and practice of method” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8). Since thematic analysis involves finding repeated patterns of meaning across an entire data set and provides a robust and systematic method for coding data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I searched for such patterns in my data as I conducted my analysis; I also maintained an intersectional standpoint. I believe that my approach to data analysis is therefore best described as a thematic analysis couched in intersectionality.

While there is no set method for conducting an intersectional thematic analysis, Gemma Hunting, a researcher at the Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy at Simon Fraser University, recommends a two-stage thematic analysis that combines inductive and deductive approaches (2014). In the first inductive stage, analysis is data-driven and the data coded without trying to fit it into a pre-conceived frame. The second stage involves an intersectionality-informed deductive analysis in which data is contextualized and connections are made “between individual participant accounts, social categories and broader social relations” (Hunting, 2014, p. 17). As Bowleg asserts, researchers using intersectionality “bear the responsibility for interpreting their data within the context of socio-historical and structural inequality” and accordingly, the researcher’s “interpretive task” is to “make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality, when participants do not express these connections” (Bowleg, 2008, p. 322). This second stage of analysis highlights the often overlooked intersecting and

interlocking systems of power and domination that shape women's experiences of seeking help with DV (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005)

Stage one. Initially, I immersed myself in the data set to get a sense of its depth and breadth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I listened to the audio-recordings, transcribed them and actively read and re-read the transcriptions. I viewed transcription as an interpretive act and as “a key phase of data analysis” (Bird, 2005, p. 227). I created a verbatim account of the interviews while acknowledging that the resulting transcripts were “impoverished, decontextualized renderings of live interview conversations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 186). When the transcriptions were completed, I reviewed them while listening to the interview a second time to check for mistakes and misrepresentations. As I read and re-read the transcripts, I made notes in the margins of the transcripts about initial ideas about possible codes and themes. I also made notes about the data in a research journal that I returned to throughout the analysis.

After familiarizing myself with the data and consulting with my supervisor, I realized that my interviews generated two kinds of data. One kind of data was largely thematic in that it involved repeated patterns of meaning across the shared experiences of the participants and as per, Braun and Clarke, (2006), “capture[d] something important about the data in relationship to the research question, and represent[ed] some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (p. 10) and fit nicely with intersectionality (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hunting, 2014). The other kind of data was largely descriptive. Further, as I extracted the descriptive data from the transcripts, I discerned that this data contained three distinct content areas: (1) descriptions of the services provided by participating agencies; (2) descriptions of how mothers with precarious immigration status access services at participating agencies; and (3) service providers' suggestions about how to better meet the needs of help-seeking mothers with precarious status. I

used the descriptions of the services provided by participating agencies to provide a thick and rich description of my participants. I then summarized the rest of the descriptive data, which addressed my first and fourth research questions, in Chapter 6: Findings.

Secondly, I worked systematically through each transcript—which had been culled for descriptive data—and assigned thematic codes to each data item. I considered codes to represent, “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data ...that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 18). My intent was to identify the “explicit or surface meanings of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.14). I reformatted each transcript, creating a table with three columns; the first assigned a number to each row, the second contained the codes assigned to each data item and the third contained the data item (see Figure 3).

Number	Codes	Transcription
52.	<u>Waiting for client to acknowledge the abuse</u> <u>Don't push clients</u> <i>Helping by building social network, resourcing</i>	K: <u>Just talking with her and you know discussing if um they are open to talk about it because they have to acknowledge that it is happening because if they don't acknowledge that it is happening or if they don't want help then I definitely wouldn't push it. But I would continue mentioning different types of services they could access. Maybe counselling or something like that to support them. I think I would focus more on building a social network so if the need arises they have somebody or somewhere they can go</u>

Figure 3. Example of coded transcript excerpt.

I coded each data segment for as many patterns/meanings as possible and used formatting tools in Microsoft Word to identify the codes associated with each data segment. I also used Microsoft's “comments” tool to make notes, observations and pose questions.

Once all the data was coded, I collated all the data segments within each code in a Microsoft Excel Spread Sheet (see Figure 4).

Code	Item Source	Data Item	Comments
"No options"	K.64	[describing client] she would have been someone who wasn't technically one of my clients. She literally was like my only other option is the street, she was crying. And her kids knew what was going on and her kids looked so stressed. They are 5 and 7 you know like.... Really hard. Really hard.	
"No options"	A. 11	But most times when person comes, you have not Some cases come and they have visitors visa and they come and they know that they have no where to go .	
"No options"	K. 121	Knowing that her son really had her, she didn't have support here and she knew that she didn't have anyone to rely on. Her family back home they were supportive of her, which was a bonus, but they couldn't financially support her. So for her there was just no other option it wasn't I could do this or I could do this ... it was I HAVE to do this.	

Figure 4. Example from the collated coding document.

I then re-read the initial codes, associated data segments and refined the codes.

Stage two. I categorized codes into meaningful themes using an intersectionality-informed deductive analysis. As I was clustering codes together to identify themes, I kept the following theory-driven questions in mind: How do the specific social locations of 'mother' and a 'precarious immigration status' influence the help-seeking process for women who have experienced DV? How do other aspects of social location show up in the data? What structures and systems of domination are present in the data? How do they influence the help-seeking process and how? What are the symbolic representations, ideologies, cultural norms etc. that influence the help-seeking process?

I used an online mind-mapping tool to develop a thematic map. As I worked to develop themes, I considered the relationships between codes, between preliminary themes and between these themes and my data set as a whole. I soon realized that my themes clustered together into two main groups: the first themes focused on the help-seeking experiences of mothers with precarious status (as described by service providers) and the second concerned service providers' experiences of supporting these women. Accordingly, I developed a thematic map for each of these content areas. There was some overlap in the coded data between these two content areas

as some codes fit into multiple themes. This was not surprising given the complex and intersecting aspects of women's experiences with DV. Furthermore, there were parallels between the experiences of women (as described by service providers) and the experiences of service providers that prevented the themes from having clear and impermeable boundaries. For example, service providers described how women's help-seeking experiences are shaped by inflexible policies and restrictive services; these same inflexible policies and restrictive services were a great source of frustration to service providers and shaped their experiences of trying to help women find safety from DV.

Next, I collated the coded data extracts within each theme using the Excel spreadsheet developed in Stage One. I then reviewed the data extracts within each theme to ensure that they formed a "coherent pattern" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 20). I revised several of my themes, moved several data extracts to different themes and set aside data extracts that did not fit with any themes or were not significant enough to warrant their own theme. At this point, I felt satisfied that my themes "adequately capture[d] the contours of the coded data" and I began reviewing the themes in relation to the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21). I re-read my entire data set and after a few minor adjustments, felt satisfied that my thematic map represented my data well and fit with the purposes of this study.

Using the material gathered at the end of these two stages of analysis, as well as the descriptive data, I identified nine themes; seven focused on the help-seeking experiences of mothers with precarious status and two focused on the service provider's experiences supporting these women. I then began to write the report, which I considered to be the final stage of analysis. As suggested by Braun & Clarke, I worked to create a "concise, coherent, logical, non-

repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes” (2006, p. 23).

Trustworthiness

“The quality of the craftsmanship in checking, questioning, and theorizing the interview findings leads ideally to transparent research procedures and convincing evident results”
(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 253)

I took several steps in order to ensure the trustworthiness of my data analysis and the reported findings. Firstly, throughout the research process I adopted a reflexive stance and maintained an awareness of how my social location, my biases, values and motivations contributed to the research process (Hankivsky, 2014; Lichtman, 2013). For example, throughout the research process I worked to keep in mind that although I have experience as a service provider in this field and have had the opportunity to get to know several mothers with precarious status and their children as they sought help with DV, I am an outsider to the experiences of motherhood, immigration and DV. Moreover, apart from my identity as a woman which in many contexts, is associated with marginality, my social location is marked with privileged; I am white, able-bodied, Canadian born, English speaking, gender conforming, married to a man and the list goes on. I acknowledge that while my experiences as a service provider contribute meaningfully to the perspective that I bring into this research, I cannot make any claims to understand or represent the experiences of the abused mothers with precarious status featured in this research. As Lichtman writes, “reflective research is characterized by recognizing that all data are the results of interpretation and systematic reflection” (2013, p. 159). I kept a research journal in order to document and reflect upon my analytic process; I kept track of my questions, my concerns, my preliminary interpretations and any questions or concerns that arose during the data analysis.

For example, a significant point of tension that I encountered during data analysis concerned discourses of culture. I entered into data collection being aware of problematic discourses that construct immigrant cultures as static, patriarchal and vested within racialized immigrant bodies (Sokoloff 2008). These discourses function to blame culture for DV within immigrant communities; they suggest that DV is a problem which immigrants ‘import’ into Western countries and thus attribute violence to “the ethnic and cultural characteristics of victims or perpetrators” (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 235). Immigrant women are constructed as passive “victims of their cultures” (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 234). This discourse is pervasive; as Menjivar and Salcido write, “there has been a common tendency to stereotype domestic violence in some ethnic groups as inherently part of their cultural repertoires” (2002, p. 907). I entered into this research process determined to avoid perpetuating these problematic discourses and to—as suggested by Humphreys, Sharps and Campbell (2005)—look for and highlight alternative discourses which show how some characteristics of women’s cultures can be protective against DV.

As I analyzed my data however, the comments of participating service providers seemed to reflect and perpetuate these negative constructions of immigrant cultures as barriers which women must overcome in order to break free from DV. Participants made such comments as:

Sometimes women are from a culture where violence has been OK. . . This is a barrier for sure.

A lot of the cultures [of women we work with] are patriarchal cultures, women are used to men having the control and the power and there is such a lack of support for them within the culture.

Often when they are in their most vulnerable situations, their families will shun them, or force them back- force them not to speak. . . I personally blame our culture . . . I hate my culture sometimes.

As I analyzed this data, I worked to maintain an awareness of my ethical obligations to both honour the perspectives of my participants *and* to resist the harmful, racist and nativist discourses which construct minority women as “victims of their culture[s]” (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 234). Moreover, as I chose quotes from service providers to use as examples, I had a heightened awareness of my ethical obligations to contextualize participants’ comments about culture while protecting their anonymity and confidentiality. In addition to carefully considering my ethical obligations, I worked to maintain a heightened awareness of the how my own social location affected how I engaged with this data. I also explicitly searched for examples of how the less visible and often unmentioned white, Western patriarchy showed up in my data *and* for examples of data in which culture was portrayed as positive, dynamic and/or protective against the effects of DV. I wrestled to maintain an awareness of these dimensions throughout this research.

A second way that I worked to promote trustworthiness in my study was to explicate, in detail, my methodology, methods and process of data analysis. By providing clear and transparent descriptions of my research process, I worked to ‘think out loud’ and to make it clear to the reader exactly how I analysed my data (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Thirdly, throughout my data analysis I consulted both Clarke and Braun’s (2006) “15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis” and Hunting’s (2014) primer on “Intersectionality-Informed Qualitative Research” in order to evaluate and guide my analysis. I also consulted regularly with my supervisor in order to receive feedback on my process and analytic decisions. Overall, I endeavoured to create a trustworthy interpretation of my data and to provide convincing, cogent and sound evidence in order to support my findings. As Angen writes, trustworthiness “lies more in a subjective, human estimation of what it means to have

done something well, having made an effort that is worthy of trust and written up convincingly” (2000, p. 392).

The findings of my intersectionality-informed thematic analysis are presented in the next chapter.

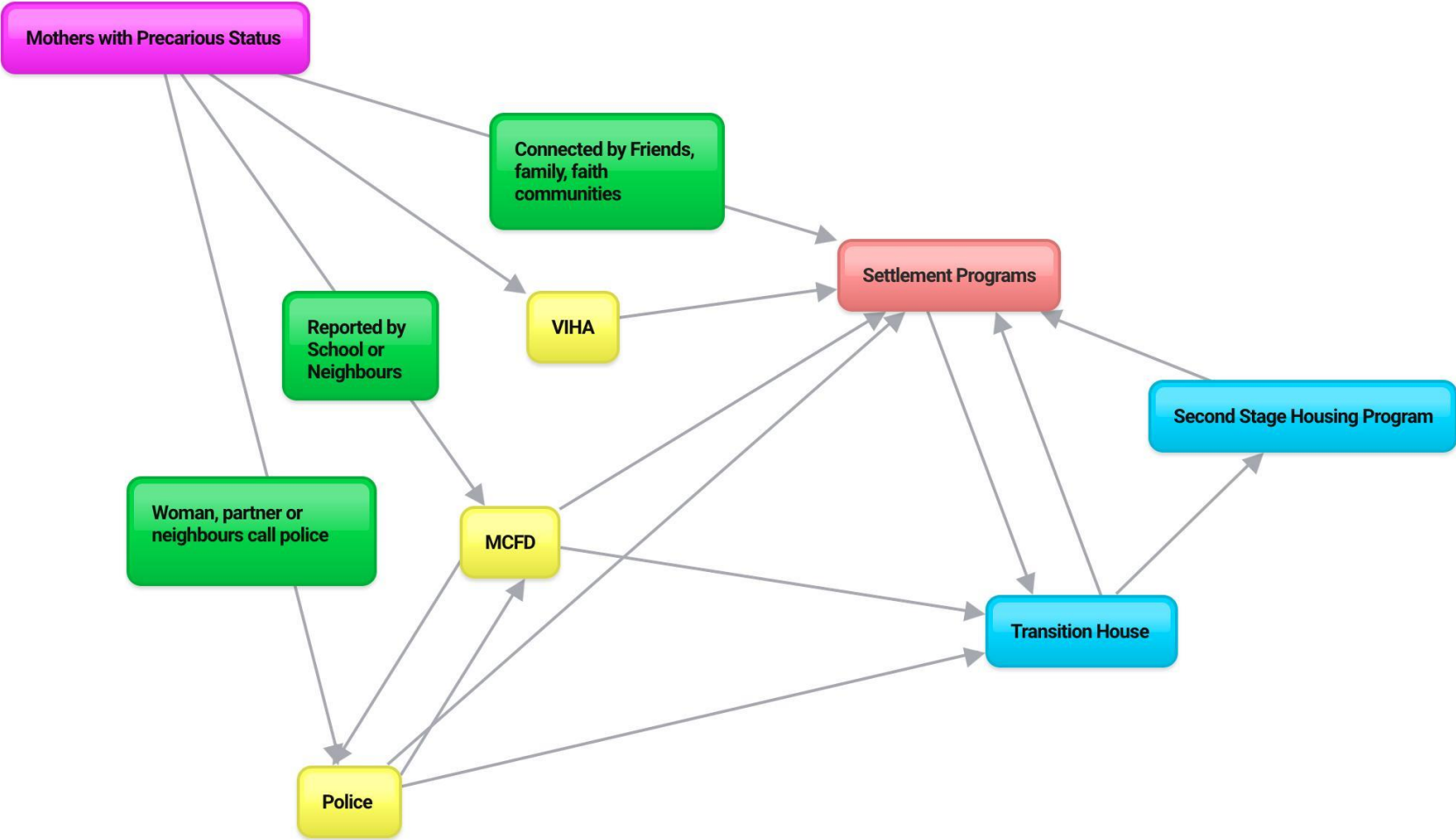
Chapter 6: Findings

*“...in the traveller metaphor the interviewer is a traveler on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home”
(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.48).*

This chapter tells the story of the data gathered from seven service providers who supported mothers with precarious status as they sought help with DV. The first section summarizes the descriptive data related to my first research question: How do mothers with precarious immigration status seek help when experiencing DV? The second and third sections outline the findings of my thematic analysis and pertain to my second and third research questions: What facilitates or impedes women’s help-seeking processes? And how do existing services and systems respond to mothers with precarious status as they seek help with DV? The fourth and final section of this chapter summarizes the descriptive data arising from my fourth research question: What can be done to improve these responses? In this chapter, quotes from participants are italicized.

How Mothers with Precarious Immigration Status Access Services

Mothers with precarious status become connected to formal services and with that help with DV via a number of different paths (see Figure 5). Settlement workers reported that some mothers with precarious status self-refer to their program after hearing about the program through friends, family or faith communities. Alternatively, mothers with precarious status are referred to the settlement program by another agency, most often the transition house (TH), the police, the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) and Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) who all rely on to settlement programs to provide mothers with precarious status with linguistic, cultural and/or immigration-related support.



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Figure 5. How mothers with precarious status access formal help with DV.

Settlement workers also reported that it was rare for a woman who was not already a client in their program to contact them and request help with DV.

Mothers with precarious status who were connected to the TH had almost exclusively been directly referred to the TH by either the police or MCFD:

Usually she has been assaulted and is brought directly here by the police or by MCFD. We see this happening a lot: there is abuse in the home and somebody calls MCFD so then the woman and children are brought here by MCFD who says, “if you don’t stay here then we’re going to take your kids away.” So women are mandated... to be here.

Staff at the TH reported that it was very rare for them to have a woman with precarious status self-refer to the program through their crisis line, which is how most of their clients access services. Staff at the second-stage housing agency reported that in general, they receive applications from a variety of sources but mothers with precarious status are referred, almost exclusively, through the TH. Like the TH, they report receiving no direct calls from mothers with precarious status.

This descriptive data, while limited because of the small sample size, is informative as it highlights the importance of women’s connections with service providers. Few, if any, mothers with precarious status access formal help with DV by ‘cold-calling’ services. Settlement workers reported that their clients were very unlikely to call either 911 or a crisis line when they need help with DV. Most often, women access help with DV because they already have a relationship with a supportive settlement worker, or because they become involved (voluntarily or involuntarily) with the police, MCFD or VIHA and are then referred—or in the case of MCFD, mandated—to go to the TH.

Challenges and Barriers: The Help-Seeking Process of Mothers with Precarious Status

Economic barriers. Service providers repeatedly provided examples not only of how economic barriers prevented mothers in abusive relationships from seeking help in the first place,

but also of the increased economic challenges faced by the women who tried to leave their abusive partners. Many women migrate to Canada under sponsorship agreements and as a result, are financially dependent on their partners and have few, if any, employment options. Even if women have work permits, finding work is very difficult given such challenges as inadequate language and unrecognized credentials. Additionally, financial abuse is common in situations of DV (Alaggia et al., 2009) and many abusers further their abuse by exploiting the financial dependency of women with precarious status:

There's a lot of financial abuse that happens, she might have no finances, no capacity to actually leave based on finances.

There was financial abuse, the husband had put her name on a truck loan and on the house --things like that. And they had just drained and drained her account and she had no family.

Another one is bank accounts are usually in the husband's name so once the woman leaves she can't access money.

This kind of financial dependency makes it very difficult for women to see leaving their violent partners as a viable option. All of the participants reported that women feared the economic consequences of leaving and viewed it as a barrier to help seeking:

There are financial insecurities, women think, "I have no job, I can't work because I either don't speak the language or I have no skills or I have no status."

If you can't support your kids, you aren't going to leave you know?

It is so insurmountable to imagine getting legal support when you have no income because...there can be so much financial abuse that goes on with it-- like lack of ability to access financial resources and if you don't know the language, how on earth would you contact a lawyer?

The data also show that women's fears are not unfounded as the economic consequences of leaving DV as a mother with precarious status are stark. Women with precarious status are not eligible for most government-funded social services and as a result, most women cannot rely on

the support from Income Assistance or B.C. Housing. Securing legal aid can also be a challenge. Without access to the social safety nets afforded to permanent residents and citizens, mothers with precarious status who leave their abusers are pushed into poverty. In order to survive economically and provide for their children, many women are forced into the informal (i.e. underground) economy to make ends meet:

[When you leave] you either become a charitable case where someone is willing to give you money—that's very unlikely that someone is willing to give you money on an ongoing basis, [maybe] for the interim—or they go back home. Or they go to the underground economy- and that is unfortunately what happens... It's a very suboptimal outcome and leaves [women] vulnerable to further abuse.

Life here is expensive so if someone has no ability to get an income, its really tough if they want to stay. At some point they have to legalize their status, or they work under the table. That happens a lot too...we tell people how dangerous that is. We tell people they have no protection you know... but that's what people do because they essentially have no options. They are essentially pushed into the underground economy.

The participating second-stage housing agency workers reported having a discretionary “slush fund” financed by a local women’s organization to use to help clients living in poverty cover unexpected expenses (e.g. medical treatment, the application fee for permanent residency). They also acknowledged how rare it is for a social service agency to have access to such discretionary funds. For the six families they house annually, this funding is very helpful. Other service providers however, reported going to great lengths to try to help women with finances as their agencies do not have the discretionary funds needed to support women:

We look around. We go to churches, and that kind of stuff. We go around begging. Sometimes, I donate, I give [her] my money and don't get that back. It's a personal donation.

While most women arrive at the transition house without any money in hand, some arrive with limited savings. Having even limited funds however, puts women in a grey zone in which they can neither afford to access market housing nor hire lawyer, qualify for income assistance or

legal aid. They are forced to drain their savings before they can qualify for any financial assistance and in the interim are left without income assistance, housing support or legal aid. One worker expressed her frustration with this situation:

Just because she has savings doesn't mean she should use all of those savings right away. It's just not fair... when [her savings are] depleted then what is she going to do? And what about her kids?

While some women with precarious status may be eligible for income assistance,²² the process of applying for income assistance is confusing and labour intensive; the application process is computerized, which presents barriers for women who are not comfortable reading and writing in English and/or comfortable with using computers. Service providers emphasized how challenging it is for women (and for themselves) to access clear information about the impact of immigration status on women's eligibility for income assistance. Additionally, while on income assistance, women have to provide ongoing justification to the Ministry of Social Development that they are still eligible and still in need; the sheer volume of paperwork that women must complete can be a barrier.

A final barrier to accessing income described in the data was that relying on income assistance jeopardized women's chances of being granted permanent residency (PR), as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) considers using assistance to be evidence of a lack of 'independence.' The intersection between immigration policy and economic barriers will be discussed further in section titled, Precarious immigration status as barrier.

Housing barriers. Service providers identified access to immediate, safe and affordable housing as an urgent need for mothers with precarious status transitioning out of violence. More

²² Service providers expressed confusion with regards to which women were eligible for income assistance. Most agreed however, that women with conditional PR who leave their sponsors can access income assistance while they work on applying for PR. Women with other forms of precarious status (i.e. student visa, visitors visas) however do not seem to be able to access support from income assistance.

specifically, mothers' needs include access to *both* immediate emergency housing and long-term, affordable and sustainable housing that can accommodate their children. Staff working at settlement agencies described how essential transition house supports are and how hard they can be to access.

[A mother who had left an abusive relationship in Europe] had spent all of her money for accommodations and I guess somehow her husband found out they were here and found out that she was fleeing him and he was going to come to [this city] and she was terrified and wanted somewhere to stay. She had gone to the shelters and they told her that because she had kids they would have to stay in a separate shelter, but she was not comfortable with that because her kids were about 5 and 7. So she just thought-- no way. And then there was another shelter they could stay at, but it was a wet shelter so she didn't want to stay there. The transition house here . . . had no room. She literally [thought] . . . my only other option is the street, she was crying. And her kids knew what was going on and her kids looked so stressed. They are 5 and 7 you know like.... Really hard. Really hard. So I just called the whole [region] and tried to find a place for her. And someone was just leaving that day in [another city] so she would have been able to go the next day. So literally I got her on a greyhound the next day with the kids. We got her bus tickets and she made her way up to [the other city].

While this story is uncommon in that the woman had left an abusive situation in another country before arriving in Canada, it demonstrates how difficult it can be for women to access housing – even emergency shelter.

Despite the waitlists, many women are able to access immediate support that does not discriminate based on immigration status through the TH. The TH however, is only mandated to provide emergency shelter to women and children fleeing DV for up to 30 days, which, according to transition house staff, is never long enough for women with precarious status to secure long-term housing. Such women face a number of indomitable challenges: first, access to subsidized housing through B.C. Housing is contingent on having permanent residency or Canadian citizenship; second, space in second-stage housing is extremely limited, and third, private market housing is financially inaccessible for most mothers with precarious status. As a result, some mothers and their children end up living at the transition house for months on end:

There are certain check boxes and if you don't meet them like for income assistance or housing or for jobs and things you need to have some status [for] and if you don't well that is where we run into trouble is trying to help women that don't fit into the boxes that you need for the system. And that's when we end up extending people who end up staying here for months because we can't figure out where they can go so they would be safe. They don't have money. Trying to figure out their immigration status, and all these pieces, so sometimes there is, well, it's called shelter hopping that ends up happening. We end up supporting them to stay at another shelter after a couple of months here . . . the only other option would be homelessness. That's why we do extend, extend, extend, which puts the house in a tricky situation because then our beds aren't open for crisis situations because, this is kind of a crisis situation for these women so we wouldn't, we don't ask women to go to the streets so we end up going past our mandate so that we can support them.

Other than shelter hopping, second-stage housing programs are the only other viable option for mothers with precarious status given their exclusion from B.C. Housing and the private market. The participating second-stage housing agency however, reported that unless women have already started an application for PR *and* appear likely to be approved for PR, they may not be accepted into the program. Applying for PR is itself a lengthy process and according to participants, unless women have started the process prior to moving into second-stage housing, it is very unlikely that they will receive PR and thus access to B.C Housing before their one-year stay in second-stage housing is completed. Furthermore, without PR, women are unlikely to be able to secure an income that would allow them to find housing in the private market.

We probably wouldn't take her into the program unless we thought PR was going to happen cause, there's no point. We don't like the idea of bringing somebody into reasonable rent and then being like, "Well your year is up, you're out on the private market." So it doesn't feel like the ethical thing to do, unless we are really at the end of all of our options . . . We don't usually extend people at all but sometimes we are willing to do that—but we can't fill our entire community like that either.

When probed for further information about access to second-stage housing, one staff responded:

It's a case-by-case thing. I think if they had already received a decline [from CIC] and there was no avenue for appeal then we might not. And some of that is going to be about cost, right, because it is very costly to move somebody in and have them move out in a

short period of time. Like that turnover is expensive to our program and we can only absorb so many costs. But if there was a good chance of appeal then we would probably consider [accepting her].

Staff reported placing an unofficial ‘cap’ of two out of six housing units at a time on mothers with precarious status in their program because of their drain on both their time and resources. Thus it seems that even organizations officially funded to support mothers with precarious status are not always accessible to highly vulnerable women at a high risk of deportation. Without access to a sustainable source of income and/or housing, these women and their children are left with few options:

We see a lot of women who are returning to their home countries or returning to their relationship.

Language barriers. Mothers with precarious status often have limited English ability, which contributes to their isolation and hinders their ability to access help with DV. What makes things worse is that women with precarious status in this region do not have access to English language support as their status renders them ineligible to attend the only free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes:

Our ESL classes are absolutely packed so we have people on waitlists, even refugees have to wait... we have very few spaces because the funding we get from the government means that we can't have people in our classes who don't have PR... There are no exceptions.

Additionally, service providers reported that the services and systems that women encounter as they seek help are linguistically inaccessible and contribute to women’s isolation and marginalization. There were many examples throughout the data of services that either were not funded for translation or were just not making use of available translation support. The police in particular were reported as not using translators:

Something was lost in translation, I mean if you are telling someone about their charges without translation. It doesn't even feel like its safe or honouring or right.

The police, they just . . . I don't know why they don't use translators.

[Sometimes] women are told [by the police], "we don't understand you" or "you need to write it down." And they can't, so right from the start [women] feel like there is this huge barrier . . . [Women] go through different organizations they are [told] the same thing and you know, when you are already in a traumatic situation and you are going to two or three places [and the response you get is], "we don't understand you or we don't have anyone who can translate for you," [women] will likely stop trying to access services . . . it is also so hard to access services without English.

Another service provider described her experiences supporting clients at legal aid whose experiences were equally oppressive:

[The lawyers] don't talk to them- they just talk to us. Especially if they assume they can't speak English or understand English. They just completely ignore the women. Um so that's problematic because they are trying to get information and they are being ignored. Language is a huge barrier.

Both transition house and second-stage housing staff reported struggling to overcome language barriers faced by those seeking to use their services. At the transition house, for example, staff recognize the importance of translation support but face funding issues. As a result, women are often isolated within their shelter, as they cannot communicate effectively with staff or other residents.

There is a need for translation within the shelter. More than half an hour every couple of days or an hour and a half a week . . . there are so many questions . . . but we don't have an ability to communicate with the women or the services in a way that we can actually support what they are needing and it's not the women's fault. It's us. We need more people with different accesses to languages, we need better translation support and we need somebody who knows the legal system [as well as] the immigration system that can actually help and not just [give] . . . like one hour of legal advice that we can't translate.

Second-stage housing staff reported similar barriers and also highlighted the lack of linguistically-accessible counselling options for women. One service provider reported being

uncomfortable providing counselling with a translator present and another, while comfortable and willing, said that they do not have enough funding to offer this support to women.

A clear exception to the absence of language supports for women is found within settlement agencies. Settlement agencies intentionally hire staff with diverse racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds in order to meet the needs of their clients.

I think that is one of the main things that is great about here. Because there is always someone who can translate. Because staff and volunteers are so diverse. Very very important.

At the same time, staff at the transition house and second-stage program reported that some women did not want to use translators because they were from the same small cultural and linguistic community as the translators and felt unsafe as their privacy could be violated:

We've heard from a lot of women they just don't feel safe using interpreters from their own community, or they don't feel that confidentiality. I think there are quite a few barriers around the safety and confidentiality of translators.

Isolation. According to service providers, mothers with precarious status experience isolation not only while living with their abusers but also after leaving. The migration experience can contribute to women's isolation as women often leave behind strong communities of support and arrive here with no one, except perhaps their abusive partners and their children. A service provider (who is an immigrant as well) described this loss of community as follows:

There is no community support [in Canada]. If you want support you come to a settlement service, which offers professional, official support. But at home, you have family, you have your cousin, your brother... you know family support. The whole idea of community is different here. So it is very hard. Before you come here, you have false hope about the place. Then you come and see the realities on the ground of the place – this haunts us. Many times . . . I hear people saying I wish I could go back home.

This sense of isolation can be exploited and furthered in situations of DV:

She was sponsored by her husband . . . and you know, there is no one other than him here for them in this new country.

So the partner, through power and control tactics, might have some influence over [her] contact with family and friends. So the woman might be quite isolated and that might also play into her ability to access technology, phone, ways to access formal support . . . she might be physically kept from contacting supports.

Service providers reported that women often live with their abuser and his family, who often reinforce and/or participate in her abuse. Apart from his family, women may only have contact with people from within their cultural and linguistic communities, which, as will be discussed further in the Discourses of Culture theme, can further women's isolation as the community may minimize the abuse and/or discourage women from accessing support from outside the family and cultural community. Accordingly, service providers report that women's connections to people *outside* their small cultural communities and/or to service providers can determine whether or not they are able to seek help with DV:

[Seeking help] depends on connection with outside community. I think there are extra factors involved with their own [cultural] communities being small, and that being a barrier to leave sometimes.

I think having contact with professionals, or even helpful individuals who have some sense that what is going on isn't OK is [important] because some people can have [abuse] happening in their lives and they don't really know that it isn't OK.

It all depends on whether they are connected with people that can steer them in the right direction. I had a call on the weekend from a hospital social worker who had someone in the hospital who had... been very abused and she is from another country and she doesn't know English and it struck me that she wouldn't have even known that she could access help here if she hadn't been connected to the hospital social worker.

Settlement workers described how, in response to the problem of women's isolation, they worked hard to connect women still living with their abusers to social supports. Their primary motivation was to ensure that women knew about available resources and connections if they decided to reach out for help:

I focus on inviting them to different workshops here, so they can make friends. And then showing them different places they can go like the YMCA... just safe spaces that might not be in their environment now . . . I let them know about services like the transition

house. I usually just say, “by the way, there are also these services- not that you need them right now.” I just want to make sure that women know what is out there.

I focus on building a social network, so if the need arises, they have somebody or somewhere they can go . . . Social supports are everything – just making sure that there is somebody, somebody around for them.

In addition to making it difficult for women to reach out for help, women’s isolation continues to be a challenge throughout their help-seeking processes. As discussed earlier, the dearth of linguistically diverse service providers and the lack of translation support function to exclude and isolate women living in both transitional and second-stage housing. Furthermore, some women are ostracized from their communities and families (both in Canada and in their countries of origin) as a consequence of leaving their partners:

[She] might be cut off from her church community . . . or she can no longer access her faith because [the abuser] is part of that community. So the few places that she can reach out to culturally are cut off from [her].

To add to the isolation and loneliness, some women are separated from their children as a consequence of leaving. (This is described in more detail in the section on mothering).

Service providers described women’s help-seeking processes as being very lonely. Often, the only connections women have after leaving are with service providers, which are helpful, but are not an adequate substitute for family and friends. The loneliness of the help-seeking process drives some women back into DV.

I remember talking about [this] with my supervisor and there was this [case] where she worked with an [Ethiopian] woman who had left a very very very bad domestic situation and she had like three kids and she always wanted, you know, to have coffee with my supervisor because she felt so lonely and she would cry because she was so lonely. She ended up going back to her husband who was extremely abusive because she was so lonely. My supervisor said she still feels so much guilt about that to this day. This all makes little sense to me – it’s another barrier that I personally see in this work. We are forced to perpetuate their situations because of our limitations and it sucks.

She ended up going back to her husband. She said that one of the biggest reasons was that she was lonely and tired of trying to raise her children all by herself. The only people

she [had] to talk to were the staff at the second stage house. But, like she said, the staff would go home at the end of the day and she was still there. She said that they would always be her 'staff' and never be her friends.

Mothering while help seeking: Children as barriers, motivators and mobilizers.

Another overarching theme in the data was that children complicate women's help-seeking processes in contradictory ways. Service providers reported that mothers consider the wellbeing of the children as they make decisions about how to respond to DV. Mothers are often motivated to stay in relationships because they believe it to be in the best interests of their children. Service providers reported that this seemed especially true for immigrant mothers:

[The children] are just another reason why [she] might stay . . . the mother has to weigh her own wellbeing and what's happening to her with the wellbeing of the children. So it's almost like she might want to sacrifice herself for the sake of the children who are Canadian citizens. They are growing up in Canada, she thinks they will have a better life here . . . So there are these kinds of considerations because we know that many immigrants . . . do not come [to Canada] for their own sake, they come for the children's sake. So that carries over into this situation as well.

Sometimes the mother will endure the suffering because of the kids. [She will say,] "Oh I don't want to cause the kids harm, I want to stay together for the kids."

The fear of being separated from their children is a significant barrier to help seeking for many women. Mothers fear losing their children as a result of deportation, losing their children to MCFD and losing custody of their children in family court. Abusers capitalize on these fears by threatening to take the children away if she tries to leave:

He said, "If you tell anyone I will take custody of the kids and you will never see them again"

These fears are particularly intense for women with precarious status, as they must contend with the risk of deportation and the implications this would have for their children:

[Mothers] worry about leaving in terms of being sent back to their country and their Canadian children being kept here . . . they fear anything that is going to jeopardize them being with their kids.

There is so much fear. Especially because usually, the spouses are Canadian citizens and the children are citizens. The fear [is that] my child is going to have to stay with his father and I am not going to have a say.

Service providers also reported that mothers fear MCFD intervention and believe that MCFD will take their children away from them:

The perception among immigrant families [is that] child welfare workers are family wreckers.

As a result, service providers—especially settlement workers—report avoiding involving MCFD in situations of DV; they do not view MCFD as a supportive resource.

Analogous to women’s fears of the economic insecurity associated with leaving, the data demonstrates that women’s fears of being separated from their children as a consequence of leaving their partners are not unfounded. Service providers recounted many stories of children being removed from their mothers because family court granted an ex-parte custody order²³ to the children’s father—who was also their mother’s abuser. These stories highlight how abusive men—who are also fathers—use the family court system to punish women for leaving. They also highlight how the family court system contributes to women’s marginalization by privileging the powerful voices of abusive men who, because of their knowledge of how the system works, their command of English, their economic security and their professional credentials, are able to present a case that convinces the court system that the woman is endangering the children.

As soon as she leaves with the kids the man goes to court and says that she is not fit to care for her children. He says, “I have a job and I have a steady income.” And the law

²³ An ex-parte custody order is an order, ‘without notice’ meaning that the parent applying for the order does not have to notify the other parent that the matter is before the court. The judge will make a decision solely based on the information provided from the parent who has applied for the order. Ex-parte orders are intended to be used when the child is in danger and there is a significant risk that notifying the other parent will cause the child further harm (Feldstein Family Law Group Professional Corporation, n.d.).

does side with the man sometimes, even though there is a clear indication that the woman was abused by that man.

Many times we have had the police attend [the transition house] and remove children [because] the father has gone in and gotten a court order... [After she leaves] the situation gets turned on the woman where [the father claims] she has had mental health problems, that she's crazy, and that's why she left, that she is unstable.

Sometimes the profession of the man is used in an argument [in court] against the woman, sort of implying that somehow, by virtue of his profession, he must be speaking the truth. And she must not be speaking the truth, probably by virtue of the fact that she can't express herself properly in English.

Fathers may apply for ex-parte custody orders before mothers have been approved for legal aid or been able to access translation support. As a result, these mothers are not able to attend the follow-up court date and have no chance of presenting their cases. Service providers shared stories of family court judgments that granted women only intermittent and supervised access to their children; at the same time, the mothers were held responsible for finding and paying for supervisor for the children. Multiple and intersecting barriers prevent mothers with precarious status from being able to access the resources required to navigate the system as efficiently and effectively as men; this can result in mothers' separation from their children.

Additionally, mothering children while transitioning out of violence presents women with numerous logistical challenges. Service providers unanimously reported that the logistical aspects of transitioning out of violence were harder for women with children than for women who were not mothering:

It is more expensive to find housing with kids, and it is harder to find shelter if they have to leave [the transition house]

Women without kids have more options... When you have kids its harder to access services... you have to take your kid everywhere you go, to all your appointments. And there are so many appointments.

She has to figure out everything like, the daycare and child support. She has to find a job too . . . sometimes she just gets stuck because of the kids. Literally.

While all participants reported that doing the work of rebuilding their lives after violence is harder for mothers, they also described how the presence of children can be helpful for women because children can help mobilize services. Service providers reported being more likely to help women who fell outside of their mandates if they had children:

She wasn't technically one of my clients. I just think morally for myself, I could just never say "OK bye." I felt so limited and helpless in what I could do—you know she had two kids and there was just no way I was going to be—like well ok—you just have to go. It just wasn't going to happen.

We are not funded to help people who have a visitor's visa only, but we do look at cases where there are children involved . . . [we] help them anyway.

Motherhood can also be a source of strength and motivation for women to keep seeking safety from DV even as they encounter obstacles. Service providers attributed at least some of women's ability to endure challenges to their commitment to their children:

There was just this resilience that I can't explain. Sometimes [I] am like, how do you have the will to carry on, despite everything you have been through? I think . . . they know they have to be that person, especially if they have a child, because they know there is no one else who will do it for them.

[Mothers] have this capacity to move within a really difficult system. With so much isolation. The loneliness is just so impactful to me . . . just like --how could she do this with having no one? And they still do it. They still get up every day and try for the kids a lot of the times.

Discourses of Culture. As outlined briefly in Chapter 5, dominant discourses about DV in cultures which mainstream Western society has “othered,” construct cultures as “completely negative” and attribute violence to “the ethnic and cultural characteristics of victims and perpetrators” (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 235). More specifically, dominant groups in society tend to construct immigrant cultures as negative, static and as vested within racialized immigrant bodies (Sokoloff, 2008). “Othered” cultures are seen as especially prone to violence and abused women

are seen as passive victims of their cultures. These discourses function to minimize and/or to render invisible the insidious role of white Western patriarchy in shaping immigrant women's experiences of DV. Furthermore, since so much of white Western patriarchy is embedded within systems and dominant discourses, it can be harder to identify as it is like "the water that we are all swimming in" (Personal Communication, Susan Strega, August 22, 2017). It is important to contextualize the data derived from service providers about culture within these dominant discourses.

The service providers in my study seemed to reproduce these problematic discourses by primarily constructing the cultures of mothers with precarious status as "barriers" which mothers must overcome in order to find safety from DV. Before describing this construction of "culture as a barrier" however, I want to highlight the more meager data, which speaks to the role of white Western patriarchy and "mainstream" Canadian culture in shaping the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status. I have chosen to start here in order to make explicit what seemed implicit in the data and to highlight the "structural and cultural environments—both immigrant and mainstream—within which abuse occurs" (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 235).

When discussing culture and its relationship to DV, several service providers acknowledged how the patriarchy, which is embedded in mainstream "Canadian" culture, functions to stigmatize abused women, regardless of their immigration status or ethnic and cultural backgrounds:

There is a big stigma around DV [in Canada] . . . we are still hiding women in secret places . . . we are saying this is something that is secretive and you need to hide away. I mean we are not hiding the men, we are hiding the women. So there is obviously still stigma involved.

There is stigma [about DV] in every culture, for Canadian born people too.

The data also demonstrated that services providers are aware that the cultures of mothers with precarious status are not static; they discussed observing “*a shift*” in some of the local cultural and religious communities which has helped to support abused mothers with precarious status:

There has been, from what I've heard, a shift from some of the religious leaders towards the safety of women versus the family unit. So I think that is something that has helped women make that decision to reach out. So I think that even little shifts within their communities and attitudes and approaches can make a difference as to whether somebody reaches out or doesn't.

Furthermore, service providers identified women’s faith communities as important sources of support; faith communities were reported to refer women to services and to provide invaluable financial support to women transitioning out of violence. While service providers did not discuss faith communities as a part of women’s cultures, it is safe to assume that some women’s faith communities are also a part of their culture and as such, illustrate how culture can be much more than just a barrier women have to overcome in order to find safety.

The data of this study also shows however, that service providers tend to reproduce dominant discourses of culture by constructing immigrant cultures as barriers to help seeking for mothers with precarious status. Specifically, service providers identified the cultures of mothers with precarious status as patriarchal and discussed how these cultures can encourage the acceptance, normalization and legitimization of men’s violence against women.

A lot of the cultures [of women we work with] are patriarchal cultures, women are used to men having the control and the power and there is such a lack of support for them within the culture. They don't usually know their rights.

Sometimes women are from a culture where violence has been OK and they might come from a view where patriarchy is dominant and the role of the man is accepted to be violent. This is a barrier for sure.

Given their cultural contexts, service providers discussed how women may not seek help because they either do not consider spousal violence to be abusive and/or they do not know that in Canada, there are enforceable laws to protect women from men's violence.

Notably, one of the participants who was himself an immigrant suggested that Canadians, and police in particular, overreact to what he refers to as "arguments."

Some of us believe that people disagree, but you can work at something . . . say I do this- I push my wife. [In the country of origin] this is normal for the husband and here it is assault (laughter). Or you raise your voice in arguments and they will call the police on you . . . Sometimes you think a push is OK, you think OK, pointing my finger is OK. But here, you go to jail. Here, there are so many do's and don'ts . . . Elsewhere, in other countries, when the police come you can say to them, "no, no" then you can explain what happened. Here it's a structured thing . . . it's just the law. Even if the woman says, "he's harassing me" and it's not true, the police have to investigate (laughter). If you push your wife, maybe unconsciously or consciously, there you go, you're in prison now (laughter).

He went on to say:

I was telling [a male client that] in Canada, children come first, then come women, third [are] dogs, then men.

While this participant's comments reflect dissatisfaction with police intervention and mandatory charging policies, they also reflect his own patriarchal assumptions that work to minimize, justify and maintain men's violence. Interestingly, another participant, who is employed by the same agency, described his concern with the attitude expressed by the participant above:

There is another issue . . . that has to do with the way [that] sometimes families claim that, you know, they were just having a loud argument and some neighbours call the police and they get immediately classified as DV when they were just having an argument. So that kind of distinction about how verbal abuse is not considered DV or abuse in some cultures has created some tension in many communities. And mostly our men are the ones who complain about that struggle, "the neighbour called the police and now I have a criminal record and I don't know how to deal with that." Because sometimes even settlement workers who are immigrants themselves may have a tendency to accept that argument, "It was just an argument, Do I need to call the police?"

Clearly, there is confusion and tension within communities with regard to what constitutes DV and how to respond to it when it does occur. It is not surprising that in some cultural contexts, women struggle to identify men's violence as DV and to know how to respond.

Service providers also identified that women fear the familial and social repercussions of acknowledging and/or seeking help with DV. Families often pressure women to stay quiet, to remain (or return) to their husbands, because of the stigma associated with accessing help and sharing what are perceived to be private 'family issues' with anyone outside of the family.

Both my clients [come from the same cultural group] and they were told by their family not to tell anyone [about the DV] because it was shameful or it would be embarrassing. One of these clients, her mother-in-law told everyone and anyone who was connected to her that [this client] had done things that she didn't do, just to make [her] side of the family look better, because culturally they see it all as very shameful. They don't want anyone to know their family's business.

There is an attitude of—keep it in the family, keep it in the community—that makes [disclosure] more difficult.

According to service providers, seeking help from formal services can be seen by families as violating cultural norms; some families may respond to women's help-seeking efforts by blaming them for the violence. One service provider, who shared a story about someone in her own family who was an immigrant and sought help with DV, reflected on how members of her own family and cultural community respond to women who seek help.

Women are blamed. The shame that is put on women, the excuses that are made for men, the lack of support that women receive from their entire family as a result of something that was way beyond their control. And often when they are in their most vulnerable situations, their families will shun them, or force them back—force them not to speak . . . I personally blame our culture . . . I hate my culture sometimes.

Service providers identified that the stigmatization of divorce puts women who are risk of deportation in particularly vulnerable situations; families who are "back home" are often more deeply rooted in the culture and as a result, may subject women to severe stigmatization.

Very often women cannot return home because of the cultural stigma. So coming back from Canada as sort of . . . a wife that has abandoned her husband in the eyes of family members. [This] might jeopardize her in the home country even more than here because she [would be] totally at the mercy of [her] relatives that are much more deeply steeped in cultural practices than they are here.

She was terrified of being deported with her children [who were not citizens] back to [her country of origin] because she said as a divorced woman, her family would have no choice but to shun her. And her husband's family would take the kids away from her because in her country, children belong to the husband's family.

It is important to contextualize service providers' constructions of culture as a barrier to help seeking within the dominant discourses about DV and immigrant cultures outlined at the outset of this section. We must work to examine how the patriarchy of "othered" immigrant cultures intersects with and is reinforced by the more embedded white Western patriarchy. We must do this because *not* acknowledging the role that white Western patriarchy has in shaping the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status reinforces the problematic discourses that suggest that immigrants 'import' DV into Western countries and attribute violence to "the ethnic and cultural characteristics of victims or perpetrators" (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 235).

Precarious immigration status as barrier. Running like a red thread throughout the data gathered from services providers is the theme that precarious immigration status presents diverse but interrelated barriers for mothers ensconced in abusive relationships. This section introduces many of the complex issues women face related to their immigration status.

Immigration status and the threat of violence. Precarious immigration status contributes to women's vulnerability to abuse as it gives men unique forms of potentially abusive power and control over women and children who are dependent on them.

Women get abused by men from all backgrounds. Guys who are local take advantage and abuse them because they are desperate to gain their legal status.

It can be a huge abuse tactic of just letting visas expire and delaying the process, or even just the man being in control of all the paperwork. He says, "I'll file it, I'll file it," but he never does.

The sponsorship relationship affects people deeply, women are dependent on their sponsors and women don't understand the rules of sponsorship.

Abusive men play on a variety of women's fears related to their precarious status. Service providers consistently reported that the primary reason mothers with precarious status don't seek help with DV is their fear of deportation. Abusers take advantage of this added vulnerability by threatening to report women to the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) if they leave.

Husbands say, "You can't say anything because you will get deported."

He was like, "Well I am a sponsor and will send you back home, or I will keep the children here and you will get deported."

Abusers may also restrict women's access to accurate information about their status and the rights associated with their status. For example, service providers reported that many of their clients did not know that they had the option to apply for PR based on Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) consideration or that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) sometimes grants exception to the standard application processes when sponsorship agreements break down because of DV.

Should I leave or should I stay. The data demonstrated that women's fears of losing status and/or deportation are not unfounded; leaving can, and often does, put women's immigration status in jeopardy. One service provider reflected on her experience of supporting mothers with precarious status as follows:

Fear of deportation is a real fear; it's not just a perceived fear. For example, if she has conditional permanent residence, then for two years she can't leave. There is an exemption in place for abusive situations, but we know from experience that it is often very hard to prove that and there is a very real fear that people are going to get deported. If they have no status—and that happens quite a bit with our clients—there are cases where a husband brought over the wife as a visitor maybe and then they

overstayed their visitor's visa and then the husband will say, "I am going to sponsor you," but the sponsorship never goes forwards . . . So if at this point, the wife decides to leave because there is abuse going on, he could essentially turn her in to immigration. He could make a phone call to the CBSA and say there is this person and she is illegally in the country. She will be gone—detained and deported—in no time. So this is a real fear. So we can't—you know—tell women that this is not a concern, because it is a concern.

Service providers acknowledged the risks associated with leaving and instead of presenting leaving as the only safe and logical choice for women—which the literature suggests is common practice—they helped women develop a clear picture of their options:

All we can do is outline what it is, the situation, and what kind of options she has and what kind of risks she has with these options. She needs to weigh those risks and options and then find what the balance is for her.

When they are reaching out for help, we can't always give them clear information like, "yes it is all just going to be good down the road." Because you just don't know . . . We say, "Likely, based on what we have seen, it is possible." It is a complicated system and certainly supports can help, but as they are making the decision to leave, there [are] not necessarily great guarantees.

Towards permanent residency: insuperable systemic barriers. Despite the potential risk of deportation, some women without PR decide to leave their abusers and these women, the data shows, face numerous and often insurmountable barriers that are directly related to their immigration status. As discussed in previous themes, women with precarious status are denied access to many government-funded social services and as a result, are often left without access to an income, safe employment options, affordable housing, subsidized health care or English language classes. Women who decide to leave face the additional barrier that is erected by the economic reality that settlement agencies, such as the two participating in this study, receive funding from CIC, which excludes immigrants with precarious status.

Our funding criteria make it very difficult because... right now we are only supposed to work with people who have PR cards. We cannot work with refugee claimants, temporary foreign workers, visitors, student or people who are in the process of applying for PR.

While both participating settlement agencies reported serving women with precarious status despite CIC's funding restrictions, the 'official' exclusion of women with precarious status from these services is striking. One service provider described how the lack of funding to support these women sends the message that either these women don't exist or they are not important.

Given this exclusion and the vulnerable place in which it leaves women and their children, it is not surprising that service providers report that their first priority, after ensuring women's immediate safety, is to help them get PR. Successfully navigating the immigration system in order to get PR however, is described as an uphill battle that requires complex expert knowledge and the concerted effort of multiple professionals. Service providers discussed how the immigration system seemed to be set up to discourage people—especially women living in poverty—from getting status.

Just thinking of all the hoops she had to jump through . . . [the government] has definitely made it so only the people with the most support around them . . . are going to get to stay. I can't even imagine how many families that we are not connected to . . . end up [being deported].

There are so many hoops that you have to jump through. Even our client here, she had an interview for status, but it was in Vancouver and she didn't have the money for childcare or for the [transportation required] to get there. So just the logistics . . . all the little hoops they make you jump through to get that PR are almost impossible for someone who is in poverty and single parenting.

Further, service providers identified that expenses incurred during the process of getting status makes getting status almost impossible for women living in poverty—the cost of filing the application itself is prohibitive.

I think the fees are the barrier. If you can't find someone in the community to pay them . . . I mean (laughter) being on income assistance isn't going to do that. I mean the medical costs alone are like \$450.

We worked with Lifeline which [helped to cover the fees]. But also [the settlement agency] helped with some of the funds and then we also had to go to a church group for the rest of the funds. And that was just for one family. The fees are just so high.

Additionally, as discussed in the *Economic Barriers* theme, it is hard, if not impossible to get PR while relying on income assistance as, in the eyes of CIC, it demonstrates a ‘lack of independence.’ Women must also be able to prove in their applications, that they have contributed to the community and that they have worked to develop their English skills (and of course, women with precarious status are normally excluded from ESL classes). Service providers have to go to great lengths to help women ‘prove’ that they are capable of independence and are thus ‘good’ candidates for PR:

[The government] wants you to have independence [when] you might not even have a work permit to work. It's a catch 22. Your language skills might not be high enough yet [to get PR] and yet you can't access ESL until you have PR. So you know, it's crazy making. The only way we have been able to get around that, with one of the women here, is that we wrote letters that suggested [she had] an ability to shift into independence . . . it did work. But she also got about six letters from the community supporting that . . . she was really well connected so if you are not really well connected . . . She also had support from [a settlement program] despite not having her PR because she got grandfathered in. But they wouldn't allow her to go to [English] classes or [do] coursework until she got PR. She just happened to start in the services before that funding cut happened so they let her stay. Because of this she also received translation services, but that wouldn't necessarily exist.

Some are able to [say], 'I have family here,' 'I have my roots here' and they get it that way. Some will say, 'I have been working in the community' . . . and we can say well 'we know that [she] has been doing this . . . and this and this . . . ' So. Proof, letters from different —hundreds of letters. Yea—speaking on your behalf then yea.

According to service providers, getting PR also depends on the particular legal aid lawyer assigned to the woman who receives their file at CIC.

It's a roll of the dice, who you get and how open they are [and] how willing they are to trying to look for the avenues to say yes. So who you receive, in that system, can really bias [the outcome].

[One client] had a good lawyer [and] that makes a really big difference. I mean if the lawyer doesn't know what they are doing with this stuff, or [if they] aren't really willing to help with it because this isn't exactly their legal aid mandate, then [women] are kind

of left flailing. But [this particular client] had lots of support to get her status. She got really lucky with the systems aligning somehow.

Clearly, for mothers with precarious status, moving out of precarity requires the support of multiple service providers and community members who have expert knowledge and access to money to pay for the application; it also requires being connected to the right service provider at each point along the way.

What is more, service providers called attention to the fact that in order to qualify for PR on H&C grounds, women had to be able to ‘prove’ that they were abused. One settlement worker reported advising all of his clients to do whatever they could to document the abuse:

If you have the proof, if you are being beaten, maybe show it to the kids, hide your phone in your pocket and take pictures of bruises, that kind of stuff. Or invite your neighbours to see the injuries . . . It all depends how you play your cards.

Document, document! Report to the police, report to the Ministry, report to the abuse counsellors. Record it all. Because when it comes to immigration, we can write a letter, the police writes [sic] a letter and you are covered. And [try to get] proof of the marks.

The requirement to prove abuse is challenging to satisfy—not to mention potentially dangerous—for women who are being abused. It intimates that the CIC’s a priori assumption is that women lie about being abused. Several service providers described how Canadian immigration policies are suspect of immigrants:

Sometimes there are clear H&C grounds but [CIC] doesn’t want to go there, because it plays into the whole idea that the government perpetuates-[that is] this idea that people come here to just give birth so their children have citizenship so then they can get status via the children. This plays into the whole myth of ‘anchor babies’ . . . the government is so worried about people cheating the system that they deny abused women H&C and essentially . . . they end up tearing the family apart. It’s just the way the laws are structured.

The conservative government has this idea that if they open the door, people will come here just to give birth and anybody who is here without status will try to get themselves pregnant by anybody in order to secure status. There are these ideas floating out there that make it so hard to get these women status.

In Canada, you have rights- if you document!

Given the challenges facing mothers who are not only victims of abuse but who are living with precarious immigration status, it is surprising that any have enough courage and resilience to seek help to leave their abusive relationships and establish violence-free lives for themselves and for their children.

Going Above and Beyond: Supporting Mothers with Precarious Status

The data shows conclusively that the participating service providers working with mothers with precarious status recognize their exceptional needs and often go above and beyond their mandated responsibilities to meet these needs. It also shows how important interagency collaboration is as mothers with precarious status, especially those experiencing DV, are often passed off from one agency to another as they navigate the long road to permanent residency and freedom from abuse.

Helping requires collaboration and communication. Given the complex and intersecting barriers faced by mothers with precarious status, helping interventions require the combined efforts of multiple service providers from various disciplines. Service providers from both VAW and settlement agencies emphasized the importance of strong interagency partnerships in order to help women overcome barriers.

There needs to be a concerted effort in how we are going to provide services for [these] particular women, we are trying to work together.

I think it is always about the good working relationship.

[Staff at the TH] have a sense that they need others to support them and that they need a team working together to support [women]. That is so important.

More specifically, service providers emphasized how important it is for the VAW staff to access the linguistic and cultural expertise of settlement organizations, as current VAW staff teams are predominantly Canadian-born women who only speak English:

We [settlement workers], often work with the transition houses [to] try to secure support for [our clients] who want to leave. Then we work with these community partners that often have very little cultural and linguistic ability to interact with these particular women . . . So we support the whole process, so we work closely together.

Service providers also emphasized the importance of developing trusting relationships with other agencies; they want to be sure that when they refer their clients to another agency, that that agency will provide them with respectful and effective services. Accordingly, service providers are committed to developing in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of local resources. This includes knowing which specific service providers within local agencies to refer their clients to. As service providers reiterated throughout the interviews: “it really depends on the worker.”

We referred [her] to a lawyer that is very very good at ensuring that the woman’s voice—whether she agrees with it or not—is heard. [This lawyer] is present and available and [ensures that womens’] rights are really well protected. So we really tried to ensure that we link people with the right lawyer . . . [We] try not to send people to legal aid without names of lawyers [who we trust].

The cost of referring a client to the wrong agency or to someone that service providers do not know or do not trust is high. Wrong referrals waste resources and often lead to multiple referrals; they also may be so discouraging for the women involved that they give up on their plans to leave and return to their abuser

[Otherwise], they are trying to get support and trying to leave and they are being getting bounced around; they will be sent in circles.

The thing is, if [the referral] is not good, there is a huge huge chance she is going to go back. And that would be the worst thing.

While there is always room for improvement, the data pointed to a strong and collaborative working relationship between VAW and settlement services. Service providers in both fields regularly go above and beyond what they are mandated and funded to do in order to support mothers with precarious status. By contrast, participants reported struggling to collaborate effectively with the police and MCFD as they perceived these organizations to be culturally insensitive, oppressive and racist.

Abuses of authority. Service providers from both VAW and settlement agencies recounted stories of the police perpetuating racially-motivated stereotypes of immigrants as being prone to violence:

I still see a lot of stigma amongst police against people of colour and like I said, if [the police] get called to an immigrant's house because the neighbours hear noises, they will automatically classify it as DV without doing a thorough investigation.

The police [are] not overly helpful [and are] outright insensitive to the situation.

There was a strong bias [that one of our clients] was at more risk because of cultural – uh ideas – around the Muslim community. She ended up being forced [by the Police and MCFD] to leave our housing unit for “safety,” which I don't think would have happened if she was not a coloured person . . . The perceptions of things like honour killings . . . can affect how women are treated within the systems . . . and it limits women's choices . . . It is helpful when the police take risk seriously but on the other hand, they often perceive a bigger risk than there is and women [are] forced into choices that aren't very empowering. The police and MCFD told her, “you've got a day to move out of second-stage housing.” I don't [think] that was justified . . . The police and MCFD need better tools to help assess risk in those situations [because] honour killings happen, but I think they are still pretty rare. So . . . there [are] extreme views on [how] Muslim [men] treat of women that [are] blown up based on racist attitudes... [Police and MCFD] take Muslim extremist views and apply them to all Muslims . . . They can sometimes get ramped up more than they need to be without doing an extremely thorough risk assessment. So I just think . . . just the view of culture as extreme or unsafe is just amped up right? So it just might be harder to look at an individual situation if you are someone with MCFD or the police or in a position of power.

Most service providers held equally negative perceptions of how the MCFD intervene in situations of DV with immigrant families. Settlement workers in particular, tried to avoid involving MCFD in situations of DV, if it was at all possible:

We avoid calling MCFD because it scares the woman and when you are already in a traumatic situation, we don't want to put them in greater fear... [calling MCFD] is one of the last resorts here.

Involving the ministry may not be the best thing when you have someone intervening with a different agenda, perhaps making the situation worse.

One settlement worker provided several examples of how MCFD intervention with immigrant families was racist and oppressive:

MCFD is racist . . . for example there [was] a woman from the Middle East and [her family] generally ate on the floor, it's not that they can't afford a table, they just eat on the floor. MCFD forc[ed] her to go to parenting classes and forc[ed] them to eat at the table. It was a requirement of the parenting class to be able to eat at the table with her children . . . They constantly send parents to parenting classes, which is really annoying. You know just because you are coloured and have an accent doesn't mean you don't know how to parent . . . There was another instance where the parents stole from a store and the kids were taken away, there were a bunch of things going on but [the stealing] was the last straw. The parents were forced to come to all these parenting classes here . . . in order to show that they are fit to get their kids back, but the main reason that they stole and did all these things in the first place was that they were living in poverty – their kids were living in malnutrition you know? [MCFD] never assess the bigger picture [or] the main problems that newcomers are having.

While these examples did not necessarily involve DV, they demonstrate one worker's perceptions of how MCFD responds to immigrants. Another worker criticized MCFD's tendency to deliver 'one-size-fits-all' interventions:

When agencies want to treat everyone like they are equal, it's a problem because they are not equal. You have to realize that they are marginalized or they are oppressed or they are racialized, or their status. You have to acknowledge these things in order to give them the services they need. And so I think when agencies don't acknowledge differences and don't personalize services to these differences, they sometimes keep the client in this cycle of oppression.

By contrast to the majority views of MCFD as unhelpful and oppressive, one participant from a VAW organization acknowledged that, in her opinion, MCFD intervention could be necessary, even if mothers perceived it as unhelpful:

There is inherently a power-over relationship with MCFD, so that's not viewed as supportive, even if it's sometimes necessary.

Frustration and helplessness. Throughout the interviews, service providers described going above and beyond what they are mandated, equipped and funded to do in order to try to help mothers with precarious status transition out of violence. Much like the efforts of the women they support however, service providers' efforts are impeded by inflexible and under-funded systems; service providers expressed a deep sense of frustration and helplessness as they reflected on their interventions with mothers with precarious status. *It is a bit ridiculous that they are doing everything they need to do and still, they can't get PR. Our government systems are so slow.*

[I get frustrated] with the red tape and bureaucracy of government agencies. It is a horrible thing to have to tell a woman in a vulnerable situation that she is going to have to wait.

Its like the government systems don't talk to each other and I just can't figure it out, why? Why?

It is difficult as a worker when you know your clients are trying to access services and they are being oppressed where[ever] they go.

In addition to feeling exasperated and angered by slow and ineffective government systems, service providers reported feeling frustrated and restricted by the lack of funding for social services:

There have been so many funding cuts in vulnerable populations. And it is always the people that don't have a voice that get funding cuts . . . we're scrambling to support everyone with half the money.

There [aren't any] transition houses in the province which [are] fully funded for anything. We have to fundraise 800,000 a year. That's crazy. It's not like it's an essential service (sarcasm) . . . Every shelter is running a waitlist. It doesn't make any sense.

Service providers also shared a deep sense of helplessness with the women they work with; they experienced a discrepancy between how they would *like* to help women and the help they can actually provide.

You want to do, but you can't do much.

Our hands are tied in the sense that the immigration process is very very rigid. You know, sometimes they come to you, they have nowhere to go, they need medical support but there are no funds to help them . . . my hands are always tied.

Being a social support agency you should be able to help clients with their needs whatever they are, but sometimes it feels like you are just working with the status quo; it feels like you are not changing anything because you can't. Your hands are always tied whatever direction you go in.

The frustration and fatigue experienced by service providers who work in this field were evident in the following comments:

It's just a really frustrating topic because the women a lot of times have so much to say and we can't . . . Uh . . . support them. We just can't because of what we are able to do and what we want to do—its just—its just hard. And I get really scared for them and concerned for them . . . Are they going to stay safe? I get really really worried about them. And often we end up following them for a really long time because we are also concerned about them . . .

It is just hard working in an environment where there is that constant tension of not being able to live out the work in the way that you feel is right. It is exhausting and frustrating.

While a sense of helplessness and frustration predominated how service providers described their experiences of working with mothers with precarious status, they did not seem to be defeated. Rather they provided clear and concrete suggestions for how things could be

changed to improve the lives of mothers with precarious status and some described how they were already working on implementing some of these suggestions. The final section of this chapter outlines these suggestions.

Recommendations for Change

Participants were quick to provide recommendations when asked questions such as: What do you think could be done to make the responses of the services and systems that women encounter more helpful and empowering? What do you think is needed to overcome the barriers you face in your work? What kind of support do you need as a worker in order to adequately support mothers without status in Canada? The data included eight key recommendations, many of which directly addressed the barriers faced by mothers with precarious status outlined in the themes above. These eight recommendations are summarized in Table 3; the two most prominent recommendations (1) increased funding and (2) improved access to funded training opportunities are fleshed out below.

Funding. Each service provider expressed a need for more funding for both program-specific purposes and social services in general. Settlement workers expressed a need for a special discretionary fund (much like the one that the second-stage housing agency has) that they could access to support mothers with precarious status. For example, service providers would like money to pay for bus tickets and ferry passes for women who cannot find space in a local transition house or who have to attend an immigration hearing in Vancouver. VAW staff also expressed their desire for more general funding so they could expand services and reduce waitlists. All service providers recommended that CIC should expand their funding for settlement programs and make ESL classes available to people of all immigration statuses.

All service providers suggested that funding for translation services be increased and more specifically, they wanted to see linguistically-accessible counselling available to all women who have experienced abuse. A final suggestion with regard to funding was to increase the legal aid budget, which, according to service providers, has been cut drastically in the last few years. In summary, I quote the heartfelt words of a program manager from one of the settlement agencies: “*Unfortunately, it is all about money . . . you can never have enough funding.*”

Training and education. Given how frequently Canadian immigration policy changes, service providers need ongoing access to specific and up-to-date information. VAW service providers report feeling consistently confused by immigration policies and needing significant training. A program manager at the transition house described the training she would like her staff to have as follows:

[We need training] regarding . . . each of the immigration statuses that would put someone at risk. So, sponsorship breakdown, refugee status and then if they are coming with a visitors visa . . . where [their visas] are close to expiring and they need to apply for permanent residency, or if they have applied for permanent residency, but it hasn't registered in the system. So like [training as to] what risks occur in each situation. And then [training to keep us] up to date [on] current legislation and what is passing soon; so

there is a whole [lot of] legislative knowledge [that we need]. And then [training that outlines] what [women] need to do, what paperwork they need to file, who are we accountable to for the CIC and . . . and then how do [all of these] pieces interact with our local systems like income assistance and BC housing? So you know, (laughter) just a little bit of training!

Three service providers suggested that instead of investing time and resources into providing this specialized training for all VAW staff, that a position be created for a designated VAW service provider who would specialize in supporting mothers with precarious status who are seeking help with DV. This worker would be responsible for staying up to date on immigration policy and its impact on women who are experiencing DV. This worker would liaise between VAW and settlement services, work flexible hours and be available for outreach work.

Table 3. Service Providers' Suggestions for Improving Services and Systems

Recommendations	Specific and Actionable Items
Improve interagency collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase opportunities for service providers to network • More investment into community-wide collaborative efforts
Increase funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase general funding for programs • CIC should expand their funding to include people with precarious status • Reinstate the funding for Family Mediation Program that was cut in 2014 at the settlement agency • Increase funding for linguistically-accessible counselling • Increase funding for translation support • Create a discretionary fund for settlement workers to use to help women finance immigration application fees and other related expenses
Improve access to funded training opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing training for service providers about the legalities of status and how they intersect with domestic violence • Provide cross-cultural communication training for VAW service providers • Provide ongoing sensitivity training for the police
Policy changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand immigration policy to be more inclusive and less rigid • The Provincial Office of Domestic Violence should create more actionable policies • Consider the best interests of the child and the family when making immigration decisions

Develop a greater range of DV interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop programming to intervene in situations of DV where the woman does not want to leave • Develop programming to work with domestically violent men
Community education and prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAW services should provide preventative education about DV to faith communities • Community education about verbal abuse
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a position for a specialized outreach worker to work out of the transition house with women who have precarious status • Outreach worker would have flexible hours and stay up to date on immigration policies and their impact on survivors of DV • VAW services should hire culturally and linguistically diverse staff
Create a sanctuary city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designate the city as a sanctuary city

Settlement workers suggested that cross-cultural communication and sensitivity training be provided to all local “mainstream” services including but not limited to VAW services, VIHA programs, the police, MCFD and legal aid lawyers. While this training would be beneficial, one worker was clear that no amount of training in cross-cultural communication would be enough to address the root causes of racism:

I think it is very important to promote cross-cultural communication at every level, starting with children. But I think it is also important to turn it into an effective tool. Sometimes we say, “Oh yea, I’ve done a cross-cultural communications class [and now] everyone can talk to each other. Look, I have my certificate.” But we don’t really commit; we don’t really address the structural issues around racism. That’s what we are really talking about.

To conclude, this chapter set out the themes that were drawn from the data gathered from seven services providers who have helped mothers with precarious status who were experiencing DV. Both the descriptive and thematic data outlined in this chapter explicate the multiple and intersecting challenges that both mothers with precarious status and the service providers who support them face while seeking safety from DV. The next chapter will bring the findings of this

thesis into discussion with the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 to 4 and highlight points of convergence and divergence.

Chapter 7: Discussion

In this chapter, the observations and themes drawn from the data are placed in conversation with the literature on women's help seeking in the context of DV (Chapter 2), motherhood and DV (Chapter 3) and immigration and DV (Chapter 4). More specifically, points of connection and disconnection between the findings of my study and the literature will be highlighted.

Re-addressing the “Why doesn't she just leave”? Question

Chapter 2 discussed the recent theories used to explain women's responses to DV. Criticisms of the earlier theories used in what Anderson and Saunders (2003) referred to as ‘stay/leave’ and ‘leaving as a process’ studies included: (1) equating leaving (i.e. physical separation) with safety, women's empowerment and improvements in wellbeing for women and their children; (2) disregarding women's experiences *after* leaving; (3) reducing or ignoring how structural factors, other than patriarchy and sexism, shape women's responses to DV; (4) ignoring how varied aspects of women's social locations shape help seeking; and (5) suggesting that interventions target women's psychological and cognitive models of relationships in order to solve the problem, which is defined as women not leaving, or not leaving soon enough (Velonis et al., 2015; Bell et al., 2009; Peled et al., 2000). As an alternative to these theories, many in the DV field now advocate for the use of intersectionality as a framework for understanding women's help-seeking processes in the context of DV (e.g Earner 2010; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Although service providers in my study did not explicitly address the theories of help seeking or their limitations, their descriptions of the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status both demonstrate the limitations of ‘stay/leave’ and ‘leaving as a process’

studies and the usefulness of intersectionality as a theoretical framework for understanding the complex factors influencing the lives of the mothers with precarious status using their services. For example, service providers made it clear that for mothers with precarious status, leaving was not the unidirectional movement towards health, safety, agency and wellness described in ‘stay/leave’ and ‘leaving as process’ research; rather they associated leaving with such “*sub-optimal outcomes*,” as increasing economic and housing insecurity, ongoing isolation, stigma and shame, separation from their children and deportation. These ‘outcomes’ were described as unique in comparison to women who were not mothers with precarious status. The following comments of a program manager from one of the settlement agencies speak to this issue:

You know we often experience that... people who don't have precarious status... have access to all services after they come out of the transition house, they can work you know. I think that [for them], the experience of realizing that they were able to this [and] start a new life for themselves [and] that they are not entirely dependent on somebody [is] a huge strength for them... throughout the leaving process, they learn and grow and are empowered... For the women who have precarious status, it's a whole different situation. [When you leave] you either become a charitable case where someone is willing to give you money—that's very unlikely that someone is willing to give you money on an ongoing basis, [maybe] for the interim—or they go back home. Or they go to the underground economy—and that is unfortunately what happens. It still shows that they have strength and resilience but it's a very suboptimal outcome and leaves [women] vulnerable to further abuse.

Moreover, while service providers recounted stories of exceptional circumstances that led to positive outcomes for women, in general, their perceptions of women's help-seeking processes mirrored the Spanish service providers interviewed by Briones-Vozmediano and colleagues and can be described as “chronicles of anticipated failure” (2014, p. 1007). As with Bell, Goodman and Dutton's (2009) research on the relationship among the emotional well-being, experiences of violence and the relationship status of low-income help-seeking abused women in the U.S., the findings of my study suggests that leaving is not necessarily associated with improvements in

women's mental health or wellbeing as the multiple challenges women face *after* leaving may offset any positive outcomes associated with leaving DV.

Service providers' stories of mothers with precarious status's help seeking also implicitly critique the older 'stay/leave' and 'leaving as a process' models and embrace principles of intersectionality as they make reference to how multiple systems of oppression, including racism, classism, nativism and sexism constrain women's help-seeking experiences. For example, while service providers did not always name racism, they described how the police, based on cultural and racial stereotypes, automatically classified situations of DV as higher risk because they involved Muslim men who they assumed were more violent. Similarly, while not naming classism, service providers described how help-seeking women were less likely to be approved for both permanent residency and Humanitarian & Compassionate (H&C) applications if they relied on income assistance because Citizenship and Immigration and Canada (CIC) considers 'dependent' immigrants as less desirable candidates for permanent residency. Even just the cost of the applications was a major barrier for financially insecure women. By recognizing that mothers with precarious status's experiences and their help-seeking efforts were shaped by multiple forms of oppression, the service providers interviewed in this study were reflecting an intersectional understanding of DV that goes far beyond earlier depictions of the problem faced by abused women.

Similarly, the recommendations offered by service providers show that they embrace intersectionality at the level of praxis, having moved well beyond what Peled and colleagues call "ready-made-'shelved solutions'" to DV, which focus on educating and empowering individual women to overcome the violence of individual men (2000, p. 14). Rather, as the structural focus of the recommendations put forward by this study's participants reveals, service providers in this

study are both aware of the numerous systemic and structural obstacles women face—even after separating from their partners— and concerned that existing services and systems are not set up to respond effectively to the needs of mothers with precarious status (see Chapter 6, Recommendations, for specific examples). Moreover, when outlining their helping interventions, service providers described helping mothers with precarious status to develop a clear sense of their options and the risks associated with each option rather than instructing and encouraging mothers with precarious status to leave their abusers. Overall, the information provided by service providers’ suggestions echoes the assertion of Bell and colleagues that, “improve[ing] women’s experiences after leaving, rather than focusing on leaving per se, may ultimately be most valuable in helping women take steps to improve their general well being” (2009, p. 169; see also Peled et. al, 2000).

In sum, this research contributes to the substantial body of research that criticizes the older theoretical models for dealing with women’s responses to DV and embraces intersectionality as a useful theory for describing what Velonis and colleagues helpfully describe as “multiple and complex factors beyond individual characteristics [that] work both alone and synergistically to constrain women’s choices” (2015, p. 3). The intersectional model fits with my study’s findings that for many mothers with precarious status, the material realities of transitioning out of violence (e.g. poverty, homelessness, unemployment and underemployment, limited access to legal support etc.) inhibit their ability to establish safe and sustainable lives outside of DV.

It needs to be acknowledged that my thematic analysis consisted, in part, of a deductive intersectionality-informed analysis in which I aimed to “make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality” and that this, in combination the nature of my interview

questions, likely contributed to the structural and intersectional focus of the data (Bowleg, 2008, p. 322). That being said however, when asked general questions such as, “*In your experience, what influences whether or not mothers with precarious status seek help from formal services with DV?*” service providers’ answers reflected a clear structural focus as they described the various social and structural barriers that feature in my study’s themes. Moreover, if this study had included participants who were mothers with precarious status rather than just service providers, the data would have included more insight into the psychological, relational and cognitive processes involved in mothers’ help seeking and may not have reflected the same structural focus. As Hill Collins writes, “individuals and groups differentially placed within intersecting systems of power have different points of view on their own and other’s experiences with complex social inequalities” (2015, p. 14).

Revisiting the Literature on Mothers and Help Seeking

While the role of motherhood in shaping the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status did not feature in the data as prominently as the role of precarious immigration status, it nevertheless emerged as an important theme in this study. With few exceptions, the findings of this study are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, which demonstrated that women’s mothering status shapes both how women seek help with DV and how services and systems respond to women as they seek help (e.g. Damant et al., 2008, 2010; Lapierre, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2010).

Mothers’ help-seeking decisions. In contrast to the studies of mothers’ decision making in the context of DV that were based on in-depth narrative interviews with mothers, which were reviewed in Chapter 3, my study accessed the subject of mothers’ decision making through the experiences and perceptions of service providers. Though this data was based on interviews with

services providers and not the mothers themselves, it still provides us with helpful information. It suggests that like the mothers interviewed by Moe (2009), Randell and colleagues (2012), Rhodes and colleagues (2010) and Semaan and colleagues (2013), who were not distinguished based on immigration status, mothers with precarious status consider the wellbeing of their children as they make decisions about how to respond to DV. More specifically, service providers in my study reported that mothers with precarious status were often motivated to stay in abusive relationships for the sake of the children. This motivation was intensified by their migration to Canada, which was often driven by a desire to provide a better life for their children. Additionally, the data suggested that mothers with precarious status, like the South African mothers interviewed by Rasool (2016), remained in their homes with violent partners in part because of their belief that children need their fathers and that a two-parent home is best for children. While service providers in my study did not speak to this issue, previous research suggests that these beliefs are reinforced by cultural discourses that idealize the nuclear family and that mothers may feel compelled to preserve the father-child relationship because of “widespread notions that ‘children need their fathers’ even when fathers are violent, absent, alcoholics, or involved in criminal activities” (Rasool, 2016, p. 1666; see also Semaan et al., 2013).

Moreover, service providers in my study reported that mothers with precarious status feared the economic consequences that leaving would have on their children. This same fear functioned as a barrier to formal help seeking (see Chapter 6, Economic Barriers). So too the mothers interviewed in the research of Moe (2007), Rasool (2016) and Rhodes et al. (2010), reported similar economic fears that caused them to delay help seeking. Furthermore, echoing the mothers interviewed by Rhodes and colleagues (2010), service providers in my study

reported that the material realities of transitioning out of violence were stark for mothers as their options were often constrained by their inability to provide for their children without their partner's financial and logistical support. For example, one service provider commented, "*If you are a single mother working minimum wage, you are going to have a very difficult time getting by.*" While leaving abusive partners has financial implications for all mothers, the data in this study suggests that the economic implications of leaving DV are even more stark for mothers who have precarious immigration status, as they are often denied access to income assistance, subsidized housing and legal employment opportunities, amenities that mothers with PR or citizenship are usually able to access.

In addition, the views of participants in my study are consistent with previous literature on mothers in general (e.g. Alaggia, Jenney, Mazzuca, & Redmond, 2007; Bancroft & Silverman, 2002; Lapierre, 2008; Moe, 2007; Peled & Gil, 2011; Randell, Bledsoe, Shroff, & Pierce, 2012) in showing that (1) mothers with precarious status fear that if they leave they will be separated from their children via MCFD intervention and/or family court proceedings and (2) abusive men capitalize on these fears to further their control of mothers. Unique to mothers with precarious status however, is the fear of being separated from their children because of the immigration-related consequences like deportation. Accordingly, my study suggests that the intersection between domestic violence and motherhood can be especially challenging for women with precarious status.

Children as service mobilizers and help recruiters. While service providers primarily described children and what mothers think is best for their children as barriers that prevent or delay help seeking, they also reported that children often help mobilize services and recruit support for mothers with precarious status who have sought help but do not 'officially' qualify

for services because of their immigration status. In this way, mothers with precarious status may have access to resources and support that single women with precarious status do not. This finding is significant as it contributes something new to the literature on mothering and domestic violence as the role of children in mobilizing services and support was not found in the literature reviewed in Chapter 3.

Interventions for abused mothers. As discussed in the literature review, intervening in situations of DV to promote the safety of mothers and their children is complex. Such interventions often involve multiple agencies that are focused on conflicting mandates, cultures, discourses, policies and priorities that make inter-agency collaboration challenging (Hester, 2022; Davies and Krane, 2006; Peled, 2011). While the literature review focused on violence against women (VAW) interventions, child protection interventions and the challenging relationship between these two “arenas of practice,” the findings in my study addressed these two arenas of practice as well as family court interventions (Hester, 2011).

Violence against women intervention. In-depth research on VAW shelter interventions with mothers suggests that shelter staff deliver a one-size-fits-all intervention that constructs “woman” as a homogenous category and as a result, does not meet the needs of women in the context of their mothering (e.g. Krane & Davies, 2002, 2007; Peled & Dekel, 2010). Because this thesis did not set out to explore service provider’s perceptions of women’s mothering in the context of DV, but rather to explore the help-seeking process of mothers with precarious status more generally, I did not specifically ask service providers about their perceptions of women’s mothering in the context of DV. Nevertheless, there were several points of contact between my data and the more in-depth work of Krane and Davies (2002, 2007) and Peled and Gil (2010).

First, the findings of this thesis both support and contradict Krane and Davies' (2002; 2007) finding that shelter staff deliver inflexible one-size-fits-all interventions that fail to recognize the complexity of mothers' lives. On the one hand, staff at the transition house and at the second-stage housing agency reported that their agencies have rigid mandates, which specify how long women and children can live there and participate in their programs. These official time limits can be described as an example of a "one-size-fits-all" intervention model, which does not take into consideration the specific needs of mothers with precarious status. On the other hand however, staff consistently described circumventing these official agency policies and catering their interventions to meet the specific needs of mothers with precarious status. For example, one staff described her intervention model as follows: "*we work to meet women where they are at and do whatever [they are] identifying [that] they need for support.*" Similarly, another VAW staff said, "*[We focus on] whatever she deems to be [her] most important need.*" Clearly, while sometimes limited by institutional structures and agency policies, VAW staff in my study work to deliver flexible services that recognize the diversity of women's needs.

Secondly, both Krane and Davies (2002; 2007) and Peled and Dekel (2010) found that shelter staff minimize and/or ignore motherwork and suspiciously scrutinize women's mothering. By contrast, the three participating VAW service providers in my study (along with the settlement workers) demonstrated an appreciation for motherwork. While participants did not use the term motherwork, they discussed how providing for children—both financially and physically—complicates the help-seeking process for mothers with precarious status and adds to the already labourious process of trying to break free from DV and of establishing new lives. While participating VAW services reported not having enough funding to adequately support

mothers with precarious status with motherwork (e.g. limited funding for childcare), staff certainly did not ignore or minimize motherwork.

Child protection intervention. To begin, the literature on child protection interventions in the context of DV demonstrates that, generally speaking, interventions hold abused mothers as solely responsible for protecting their children *and* for controlling the behaviour of their violent partners (Alaggia et al., 2015; Bourassa et al., 2008; Lapierre & Côté, 2011). The literature shows that child protection workers insist that mothers leave their DV relationship and when mothers are not willing and/or able to leave their partners, they intervene by giving women an ultimatum: “leave the abuser and keep the children or stay and lose them” (Douglas & Walsh, 2010, p. 495). Thus child protection interventions have been extensively criticized in the literature for blaming and disempowering mothers, for constructing leaving as the only safe and logical choice for women and for failing to recognize the economic and material implications of transitioning out of violence (e.g. Davies & Krane, 2006; DeVoe & Smith, 2003; Hughes, Chau, & Poff, 2011; Strega, 2012). Given that multiple agencies are involved in interventions involving mothers and their children who are affected by DV, it is not surprising that the literature and data attest to tension and a lack of collaboration (Hester, 2011; Davies & Krane, 2006).

The leave ultimatum. The findings of my study are consistent with previous research in that service providers discussed how child protection workers (hereafter MCFD) use the “leave ultimatum” in practice with mothers with precarious status (e.g. Bourassa et al., 2008; Douglas & Walsh, 2010; Hughes et al., 2011; Lapierre & Côté, 2011). When asked how mothers with precarious status access services at the transition house, a participant replied, “*We see this happening a lot: there is abuse in the home and somebody calls MCFD so then the woman and children are brought here by MCFD who says, “if you don’t stay here then we’re going to take*

your kids away.” *So women are mandated . . . to be here.*” While VAW participants did not directly critique the “leave ultimatum” practice, they described how mothers with precarious status, as with mothers in general, do not think that MCFD intervention in their lives is helpful. More specifically, service providers described the “power-over” relationship between the MCFD and mothers with precarious status as a source of tension and frustration for mothers.

The problem with collaboration: MCFD as culturally insensitive and racist. As with Hester (2011) and Davies and Krane (2006), my study suggests that VAW service providers struggle to collaborate with the MCFD. This was especially true for situations that involved racialized mothers with precarious status. Each of the VAW service providers shared stories of how MCFD—and the police— automatically classify situations of DV involving Muslim families as “high-risk” and under the guise of protecting women from honour killings, intervene in more intrusive and punitive ways. For example, despite the protests of second-stage staff, the police and MCFD forced one Muslim mother with precarious status and her children to move out of the second-stage house because of their racially-based risk-assessment. The VAW staff recounting this particular story explicitly identified the role of racism in this situation when she stated, *“I don’t think [this] would have happened if she was not a coloured person.”* Despite these negative and racist experiences with MCFD, VAW service providers still report following the MCFD directive to report children who have witnesses DV to the MCFD.

By contrast, settlement workers in my study unanimously reported that they avoid involving MCFD in situations of DV with mothers with precarious status, and their clients in general: *“Calling MCFD is one of the last resorts here.”* Settlement workers described trying to protect their clients from MCFD intervention, which they regard as racist, culturally insensitive and oppressive. They also challenged MCFD’s propensity to perceive ‘parenting’ as the problem

that they try to solve by “constantly” forcing mothers and fathers to take parenting classes which, according to settlement workers, are intended to teach parents how to act like more like “Canadians.” While settlement workers did not refer explicitly to the ‘mother-blame’ discourse, their narratives, which detail how MCFD constructs mothers’ ‘parenting’ as the problem, are consistent with previous research which describes the “pervasiveness of mother-blame trends running as undercurrents in the child protection system” (Alaggia et al., 2015, p. 93). Moreover, as with Hughes and colleagues (2011), Strega (2012) and Lapierre and Côté (2011), settlement workers in this study were critical of MCFD interventions for targeting “parenting” instead of addressing and supporting the material needs of mothers and children affected by DV.

Family Court. The findings of my study suggest that the Canadian family court system contributes to the oppression of mothers with precarious status by privileging the voices of abusive fathers and granting custody orders that separate mothers with precarious status from their children. Service providers described how abusive men use the family court system to carry out their threats of taking the children away from mothers with precarious status.

These findings are consistent with the literature on family court cases in the context of DV,²⁴ which was not reviewed in Chapter 3, but has documented, quite extensively, how family court decisions tend to privilege the concept of father involvement by granting domestically violent men custody and/or contact, while at the same time ignoring, minimizing and/or disregarding men’s perpetration of DV (Featherstone & Peckover, 2007; Hester, 2011; Holt, 2015; Jaffe, Campbell, Olszowy, & Hamilton, 2014; Jaffe, Crooks, & Wolfe, 2003; Strega, 2012). In her analysis of family court processes in cases that involve DV, Hester (2011) writes,

²⁴ In the literature, this research is often referred to as “post-separation contact” research. For an extensive review see Jaffe (2014; 2012; 2003) and Holt (2003, 2015, 2016)

“domestic violence although increasingly recognized, still ‘disappears’ within the family court process” and that even “extensive knowledge of domestic violence tends to be deemed of minimal relevance in recommendations for outcomes for children and is overshadowed by the more hegemonic discourses regarding presumption of contact” (p. 848). Similarly, Trinder and colleagues found that when mothers brought up fathers’ histories of perpetrating DV, family court advisors would make this information ‘disappear’ by ignoring and/or reframing it (2010). Family court officials often respond to women’s concerns about domestically violent fathers by encouraging them to “overcome their fears of further abuse from ex-partners, rather than challenging the violence of men” (Hester, 2011, p. 850).

Canadian researcher Peter Jaffe and colleagues have done extensive research on family court decisions in situations of DV and found that courts tend to hold abused women’s stress-related behaviour against them in custody decisions (Jaffe et al., 2014; Jaffe, Campbell, Hamilton, & Juodis, 2012; Jaffe, Lemon, & Poisson, 2003). Mothers are expected—in the midst of crisis—to navigate the legal labyrinth and at the same time appear calm, collected and un-antagonistic towards their abusive partner (Jaffe et al., 2003). Otherwise, women may be accused of “parental-alienation” and the court may further favour the father in custody decisions (Jaffe, 2003; Strega 2012). Jaffe and colleagues write that in response to pressure from both fathers’ rights activists and domestic violence activists, the family court system is “immobilized by the prospect of accusations of bias” and “erroneously believe that considering the relevance of domestic violence is tantamount to being partisan to mothers” (2003, p. 9). Jaffe and colleagues summarize the experience of abused mothers in the family court system as follows:

Victimized women must not only contend with a complex, and at times, hostile court system but must also manage their fear that the batterer will carry out his threats. Many

battered women report that their ex-partners threatened to obtain custody of the children after separation as a means of ensuring their silence and compliance within the relationship. Some batterers incessantly remind their spouse that their charm, believability, or tenacity will successfully convince the court of their superiority in family court proceedings . . . For many women, the burden of battling their former partner, traversing a court system that is highly suspicious of allegations of violence, and coping with a visitation schedule that delivers children into the arms of their abuser can be crushing. (p. 10)

The findings of this thesis suggest that for mothers with precarious status, the already arduous task of navigating the family court system, which often requires women to provide ‘hard evidence’ to ‘prove’ their abuse (e.g. a police report), is further complicated as women may not speak English or have access to translation support, may not be familiar with how the Canadian family court system works, may not have access to legal aid, may be at risk of deportation *and* may appear to be less capable of parenting by virtue of their financial insecurity and precarious housing situation. It is not surprising that, as Jaffe and colleagues write, many mothers “have concluded that it would have been better to stay with their ex-spouses than to fight the family court system and uninformed professionals, and endure many years of custody litigation” (2003, p. 7).

Re-visiting the Literature on Immigration Status and Domestic Violence

The findings of this thesis line up well with the copious studies of immigration and DV in the American context and the more meagre but more relevant Canadian research, much of which is found in the grey literature. Key points of convergence between my data and this literature are discussed below.

Barriers to help seeking. As discussed in Chapter 4, research on immigration and DV has primarily focused on the experiences of immigrants in the U.S. With a few notable exceptions (i.e. Salcido & Adelman, 2004; Zadnik, Sabina, & Cuevas, 2016; Reina et al., 2014), this research has not focused on women with precarious immigration status but on immigrant women in general—many of whom have citizenship and access to the rights and freedoms associated with citizenship. Nevertheless, this research has demonstrated that, while all abused women face barriers when trying to break free from DV, immigrant women confront additional barriers that impede their help-seeking processes (Ammar et al., 2005; Bui, 2003; Kyriakakis, 2014; Morash et al., 2008; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Thurston et al., 2013). These barriers are summarized in Table 1 in Chapter 4 and include but are not limited to: the state of DV policy and laws in women’s countries of origin, economic insecurity, housing barriers, language barriers, isolation, mothering status, cultural barriers, immigration status, racist responses from service providers and transportation barriers (e.g. Abraham, 1998; Ahmad et al., 2009; Ammar et al., 2005; Bui, 2003; Dasgupta, 2007; Dutton et al., 2000; Erez, et al., 2009; Kelly, 2009; Kulwicki et al., 2010; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Reina et al., 2014).

With a few minor variations,²⁵ the findings of this thesis are consistent with the research summarized in Table 1 and show that, like immigrant women in general, mothers with precarious status must contend with multiple intersecting barriers as they seek help with DV including: economic barriers, housing barriers, language barriers, isolation, mothering status, culture (which

²⁵ For example, in the research of Kulwicki and colleagues (2010) and Reina and colleagues (2014), immigrant women expressed that inadequate access to transportation was a significant barrier to their help-seeking. In this study however, only one service provider mentioned transportation as a barrier for mothers with precarious status and accordingly, it did not constitute a theme in the data analysis. Additionally, Erez (200), Sokoloff (2008), Bui (2003) and Pearce and Sokoloff (2013) identified the lack of culturally specific services as barrier to immigrant women’s help seeking, but this was not identified as a barrier by service providers in this study. Service providers did however indirectly address this issue as they expressed frustration with how VAW staff were not racially, culturally or linguistically diverse and recommended that this be addressed in the future as VAW services hire new staff.

includes the dominant culture's white, Western patriarchy) and immigration status. As with previous research on abused immigrant women (e.g. Erez et al, 2009), this thesis shows that the barriers faced by mothers with precarious status are complex and multifaceted. As outlined in Chapter 6, these barriers can function to (1) reinforce men's violence by giving abusers additional means to further their power and control (2) prevent women from seeking help and physically separating from their abusers and (3) thwart women's abilities to establish sustainable violence-free lives even *after* they have sought help and physically separated from their abusers.

For example, service providers described how the isolation of mothers with precarious status functions as a barrier to breaking free from DV. Abusive men contribute to and then capitalize on women's isolation; they may restrict women's access to friends, family and to information about domestic violence, their immigration status and available services and resources. Without access to information and/or supportive people, mothers with precarious status may, quite literally, be physically kept from leaving the relationship. Even if mothers with precarious status are able to physically separate from their abusers, their isolation continues to be a challenge as women may be shunned by their families and cultural communities as a consequence of leaving *and* may be isolated within transition houses and second-stage housing agencies as language barriers may prevent mothers with precarious status from connecting with staff and other residents. The isolation and resulting loneliness experienced by mothers with precarious status drives some women back into DV. As one service provider commented: "*She ended up going back to her husband . . . because she was so lonely.*" For further examples of the multifaceted nature of the barriers faced by mothers with precarious status, see Chapter 6.

The findings of this thesis lend support to the proposition found in the literature that immigration intersects with gender oppression to intensify and support men's abuse of women

by complicating the already challenging process of transitioning out of DV (e.g. Erez et al., 2009; Pearce & Sokoloff, 2013; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Accordingly, this thesis supports the argument put forth by Sokoloff and Pearce and many others that immigration should be considered and analyzed as a distinct social location as “society is hierarchically segmented along the lines of nativity and even further segmented according to immigration status and accompanying rights of lack thereof” (2013, p. 252).

Precarious immigration status as a barrier to help seeking. My findings also converged with the research on how women’s legal immigration status functions as a key barrier to women’s ability to seek help and to establish sustainable violence-free lives for themselves and their children (Alaggia et al., 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2014; Burns, 2010; Earner, 2010; Erez et al., 2009; Raj & Silverman, 2002; The Safety of Immigrant Refugee and Non-Status Women Project, 2011). Three points of intersection with my findings and that in the extant literature are highlighted below: (1) dependency and threats of violence; (2) access to services; (3) the disconnection between Canadian immigration policies and practice. Taken together, these three areas show that precarious immigration status is not only a barrier to help seeking in an of itself, but also a barrier that interpenetrates and complexifies all other barriers faced by immigrant women.

Precarious immigration status, dependency and the threat of violence. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that suggest that precarious immigration status—as with ‘undocumented’ status in the U.S. context— contributes to women’s vulnerability to DV (in part) by giving abusive men access to unique forms of power and control over women (e.g. Alaggia et al., 2009; Erez et al., 2009; Kelly, 2009; Reina et al., 2014; Salcido & Adelman, 2004). As with Alaggia and colleagues (2009) and Bhuyan and colleagues (2014), service

providers in my study described how the sponsorship relationship in particular, by positioning women as legally and financially dependent on their partners/spouses, amplifies and reinforces the power imbalance that characterizes abusive relationships. So too, these service providers recognized that the very desperation experienced by many women with precarious immigration trying to secure permanent residency, made them more vulnerable to exploitation by abusive men who, by the virtue of their own permanent residency or citizenship, could take advantage of their liminal and dependent state. Like the Canadian service providers interviewed by Alaggia and colleagues (2009) and by Burns (2010), service providers in my study reported that abusive sponsors—and abusive men who control women by continually promising to become their sponsors—restrict women’s access to accurate information about their status and the rights associated with their status, control women by hiding their immigration paperwork and continuously delaying their sponsorship applications and threaten to revoke sponsorship and to have women deported.

In Chapter 4, I described in detail the two types of ‘Spouse or Common-Law Partner Class’ (SCLPC) sponsorship agreements in Canada (traditional SCLPC and inland SCLPC) and reviewed the research on how each type of spousal sponsorship, in slightly different ways, puts sponsored women in vulnerable positions that are easily exploited in situations of DV. The findings of this thesis are consistent with this research and further demonstrate how Canadian immigration policies, and sponsorship arrangements in particular, work to fuel gender oppression. For example, one service provider described how the “conditional permanent residency” (C-PR) granted to sponsored spouses, whose relationships are deemed to be suspect by CIC by virtue of their “short” relationship history (under two years), increases abused women’s vulnerability as it requires women to cohabit with their spouses/partners for a minimum

of two years in order to gain unconditional (e.g. normal) permanent residency. While service providers were aware of the exception granted by CIC for situations of DV, they reported that many mothers with precarious status are not aware of this exception and thus remain with their abusers out of fear of losing their C-PR and being deported. My participants' observations are consistent with those of the Canadian service providers interviewed by Alaggia and colleagues (2009), who reported that many sponsored spouses do not understand C-PR and are not aware of the exception for victims of abuse. Similarly, as with the Safety of Immigrant, Refugee, and Non-status Women Project (2011), service providers in my study noted that mothers who are waiting for their abusive partners/spouses to file an inland-SCLPC application or who are waiting for their application to be approved are vulnerable to exploitation as abusive sponsors can, with one letter to CIC, withdraw their application without explanation and put women at risk for deportation. Accordingly, my research supports the argument made by Bhuyan and colleagues (2014) that "[Canadian] immigration and refugee policies contribute to women's social risk for intimate-partner violence and thus represent a form of structural and symbolic violence" (p. 17).

Precarious immigration status restricts access to services. In addition to increasing women's vulnerability to DV and giving abusive men access to immigration-related forms of power and control, my study shows that precarious immigration status interferes with mothers' help-seeking processes by restricting their access to public benefits and services (e.g. legal aid, income assistance, health care, subsidized housing). This finding is consistent with previous research and is concerning because, as Bhuyan and colleagues write, "for women who have faced violence, access to shelter, income support, and legal assistance can often be the difference between returning to an abusive situation and independence from a violent relationship" (2014,

p. 4). Indeed, as service providers in my study suggested, without access to these vital services, many mothers with precarious status are left with the unsatisfactory options of either returning to their country of origin or returning to their abusers. This finding is also consistent with research on the impacts of precarious immigration status more broadly, which shows that access to services “contributes to people’s wellbeing, health, social inclusion or exclusion, and sense of belonging to society” (Omidvar and Richmond 2003, Berinstein et al. 2006, Goldring and Berinstein 2003, Oxman-Martinez et al. 2005, Bernhard et al. 2007, Simich et al. 2007 as cited in Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard, 2009, p. 252).

Access to essential services and resources however is not straightforward and my study suggests that confusion abounds among service providers as to which specific services and resources mothers with different types of precarious status (e.g. visitor’s visa vs. visitor’s visa with an inland-SCLPC application in progress vs. refugee claimant) were entitled to. Service providers told me that policies and funding restrictions are constantly changing, making it hard to stay up-to-date with changes. This finding is consistent with Goldring, Berinstein and Bernhard’s analysis of the impact of precarious status on access to services:

People may be entitled to different elements or configurations of rights, for limited and variable durations of time. This translates into uneven and often confusing access to services, which is also shaped by geographic location, service availability, social networks and access to information (2009, p. 255).

The disconnection between Canadian immigration policy and practice. As with previous Canadian research (e.g. Alaggia et al, 2009; Bhuyan et al., 2014), my study suggests that Canadian immigration policy works to discourage mothers with precarious status who have fled DV from becoming permanent residents or Canadian citizens. Service providers in my study

described how the requirements set out by CIC, in both permanent residency and Humanitarian and Compassionate (H&C) applications, are incompatible with the context/reality of the lives of mothers with precarious status who have left abusive relationships. From requiring women to travel three-to-four hours out of region to Vancouver to attend immigration interviews, to the extensive (and arguably unrealistic) documentation required in order to ‘prove’ that they had been abused, mothers with precarious status are made to jump through multiple hoops just to have their applications for status *considered* by CIC. Moreover, in both the permanent residency and H&C applications, CIC requires applicants to provide evidence that they are established in Canada, are self-reliant and have contributed to their community; examples of such evidence include proof of language acquisition, job experiences and community engagement. Service providers in my study, like those interviewed by Alaggia and colleagues (2009), underlined the importance of understanding that these requirements are unrealistic and unattainable for abused mothers with precarious status.

In spite of the seemingly unachievable immigration requirements, the findings of my study suggests that, with the help of multiple, knowledgeable, dedicated and collaborative service providers who are willing to go above and beyond what they are mandated and/or funded to do, and the confluence of favourable circumstances or as one service provider described it “[*getting*] *lucky with the systems aligning somehow*,” some mothers with precarious status are able to overcome the obstacles created by CIC policies and obtain permanent residency. As one service provider commented, “*the government has definitely made it so only the people with the most support around them . . . are going to get to stay.*” This reality highlights the crucial role that service providers play in the helping mothers with precarious status and begs the haunting question: what happens to mothers with precarious status who never get connected to services?

While previous research has identified “immigration status” as a key barrier for some abused immigrant women, my study with its specific focus on the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status and not immigrant women in general extends these findings. Specifically, it suggests that having a precarious immigration status is *not only* a barrier to help seeking in and of itself, *but also* a barrier that interpenetrates and complexifies all the other barriers faced by immigrant women. For example, the economic insecurity that has been identified as a barrier to help seeking for immigrant women (e.g. Peace & Sokoloff, 2013) can easily become an insurmountable barrier for mothers with precarious status because their immigration status often bars them from accessing work permits and income assistance. The service providers in my study provided cogent examples of how the exclusion of most mothers with precarious status from both legal employment and the safety net provided by income assistance leaves them in perilous economic situations and drives many women back into DV. Similarly, as these service providers noted, the language barriers faced by many immigrant women are intensified for mothers with precarious status as, at least in the city where this research took place, they are excluded from government-funded ESL classes because of their status. Moreover, my study suggests that mothers’ well-documented and well-founded fear of being separated from their children as a consequence of leaving DV is heightened for mothers with precarious status, as they also must contend with the additional risk of being separated from their children as a consequence of detention and deportation. As one service provider commented: “*the family gets ripped apart, the mother is deported . . . there is a good chance [the children] will never see her again.*” Viewing precarious immigration status as a barrier that intersects and interpenetrates all other barriers has implications for how both policy writers and

practitioners engage with mothers with precarious status who are seeking help with DV, some of which will be explored in the conclusion that follows.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

“Intersectionalities color the meaning and nature of domestic violence, how it is experienced by self and responded to by others, how personal and social consequences are represented, and how and whether escape and safety can be obtained”
(Bograd, 1999, p. 276)

In this final chapter, I explore the implications of my research on the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious immigration status who had experienced DV for practice, policy and research. I will also discuss the limitations of my research, probe the lingering questions and suggest opportunities for future research.

Implications

This exploratory qualitative research project has shown that for mothers with precarious immigration status in one mid-size coastal city in B.C., the transition out of DV is fraught with difficulties. Mothers with precarious immigration status—and the children in their care—must overcome multiple intersecting barriers throughout their help-seeking processes in order to find safety and sustainability. While previous literature has shown conclusively that abused women, regardless of their mothering or immigration status, face barriers as they seek help with DV (e.g. Anderson & Saunders, 2003), this thesis suggests that women who are socially located at the intersections of motherhood and precarious immigration status— in the particular historical, political and geographic context examined in this thesis—must contend with a particular confluence of major barriers, including economic barriers, housing barriers, language barriers, isolation, barriers related to mothering and concern for the children, cultural barriers, and barriers related to having a precarious immigration status. Indeed as argued throughout this thesis, women’s help-seeking experiences are shaped significantly by where they are, “socially located at the intersections of particular race, ethnic, class, gender, sexual orientation, and immigrant

systems—each within its respective culturally embedded hierarchies of power” (Sokoloff & Pearce, 2011, p. 252).

More specifically, this thesis has shown how the existing services and systems are not structured, funded, mandated or equipped to meet the needs of mothers with precarious status who are seeking help with DV and their children. Additionally, some of the systems and structures that mothers with precarious status encounter as they seek help with DV, such as B.C. Housing, CIC, the police and MCFD, seem to actively exclude, oppress and/or marginalize mothers with precarious status thus reinforcing and even perpetuating the violence from which women are trying to escape. While participating VAW and settlement service providers repeatedly described going above and beyond what they are mandated, trained, funded and equipped to do in order to fill the gaps left by underfunded, restrictive and exclusionary systems, the findings showed that despite their dedicated and at times extraordinary efforts, many mothers with precarious status are pushed to either leave Canada and their citizen children, or to return to their abusers—an outcome which has been shown elsewhere to frequently lead to punitive CPS interventions and separation from their children (e.g. Bourassa et al., 2008; Douglas & Walsh, 2010a). Moreover, these above-and-beyond interventions (e.g. extending the TH’s 30-day mandate for months on end or workers paying out of their own pockets) do not seem to be sustainable and do not address the root causes of the multiplex problems faced by abused mothers with precarious status. Furthermore, it is possible that these above-and-beyond interventions may have the unintended consequence of masking both the extent and the severity of the problems faced by mothers with precarious status. For example, why would the systems change, if service providers are consistently doing work that is unfunded, unrecognized and undocumented?

Participating service providers expressed a clear awareness of the seemingly insurmountable barriers faced by mothers with precarious status who are trying break free from DV. They described experiencing this work as “crazy-making” and described feeling like their “hands were tied” constantly as they tried to help mothers with precarious status. Accordingly, they outlined very clear and concrete suggestions as to how services and systems could be improved, many of which are feasible and do not require a complete overhaul of the social services systems. Many of their recommendations directly address the barriers faced by mothers with precarious status and were they to be implemented, they would have a significant impact on the lives of abused mothers with precarious status and their children. These suggestions, which are outlined in detail in Table 3, Chapter 6 include for example: (1) improving interagency collaboration and communication by creating opportunities for interagency networking; (2) providing ongoing and up-to-date training for front-line service providers about the legalities of immigration status and how they intersect with domestic violence; and (3) creating a position for a specialized VAW outreach worker to work specifically with mothers with precarious status.

It is important to note however, that the dissemination and implementation of these recommendations should not and cannot be the sole responsibility of the service providers who work directly with mothers with precarious status. Service providers—especially those working on the front line—are in need of more training, more support, more funding and more resources—not more work. Even just finding the time to participate in this study was challenging for the many service providers who had neither the time to help recruit mothers with precarious status to participate nor the time to participate themselves; as one service provider said, “*we are consumed with the tyranny of the urgent.*” Instead, coordinated and directed advocacy and action are required at the organizational and policy levels in order to study and implement changes that

will address the gaps left by underfunded, restrictive and exclusionary systems. That being said, there has been further research and encouraging developments at the policy level since the time of my data collection (the fall of 2015) that have begun to address some of the concerns raised in my study. Several of these initiatives are listed below.

“Building Supports Practice Guide.” The “Building Supports: Housing Access for Immigrant and Refugee Women (IRW) Leaving Violence” project is a three-year community based research endeavour co-led by the B.C. Non-profit Housing Association, the B.C. Society of Transition Houses, and the FREDA Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children. In 2016, those involved in this project published a practice guide based on both previous literature and the data gathered from their mixed-method study involving abused immigrant and refugee women and the service providers who support them on the front-lines. This guide, while geared towards transition house staff specifically, contains practice guidelines and suggestions that can be applied more broadly to help organizations develop culturally-safe services and better address the needs of immigration and refugee women seeking help with DV—some of whom are mothers with precarious status. This guide adopts Johnstone and Kanitsaki’s (2007) definition of cultural safety as:

an environment which is safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening. (p. 250)

The guide also includes suggestions to be implemented at the both the individual practice and organizational levels. For example, the guide includes suggestions as to how to rephrase standard intake questions to make them more culturally safe. Thus instead of asking women, “Are you

Canadian?” the guide suggests asking, “We serve all women regardless of their citizenship status. How would you describe yours?” (Godard & Lee, 2016, p. 17). Further, the guide includes helpful resources, such as “culturally safer” intake forms translated into multiple languages and a “Cultural Safety Assessment Tool” to be used to at the organizational level (Godard & Lee, 2016, p. 127).

While this resource does not address all of the training needs expressed by service providers in my study, it is a helpful and free training resource nonetheless, which could help to address some of the language and isolation barriers mothers with precarious status experience while accessing VAW support. It should be noted however, that without increased funding and resources, it is unlikely that front line staff will have the time or energy to transform their practice based on suggestions in this training tool. As one participant in my study commented: *“Who has time, honestly? . . . There is no time to do anything with reports and training manuals unless there is some tangible funding for programming, it doesn't matter.”* That being said however, even such small changes as rephrasing standard intake questions to be more culturally safe and printing off the pre-made linguistically accessible intake forms seem feasible in the context of fast-paced and under-funded practice—like the ones involved in my study.

Furthermore, materials in the “Building Supports Practice Guide”, such as the Cultural Safety Assessment Tool, could be adapted for use by the MCFD and the Police, both of whom were described in my study as being racist, culturally insensitive and oppressive in their interactions with mothers with precarious status. While I do not think that implementing cultural safety training alone is enough to address the systemic issues underlying the reported interactions of MCFD and Police with mothers with precarious status, it could be a helpful starting place.

The “You are Not Alone” campaign. Another promising collaborative initiative that was launched by the Building Supports initiative is a province-wide multi-media public campaign to educate immigrant and refugee women about what transition houses and safe homes are and how to access them (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2017). This campaign took place in February and March of 2017 and consisted of posters on buses, in bus shelters and in women’s washrooms, as well as public service announcements on TV and radio; campaign materials were published in Arabic, Mandarin, English, Punjabi and Farsi (BC Society of Transition Houses, 2017). This campaign is an important step in addressing the need for linguistically-accessible prevention and education about DV and DV resources. As shown in the findings of my thesis, mothers with precarious status are often either uninformed or misinformed about their rights and the resources available to support them if they are experiencing abuse. Moreover, the participating program manager of the TH reported that to the best of her knowledge, the TH had never received a cold call to their crisis line from a mother with precarious status looking for help with DV; this is striking as most women access TH support via the crisis line. Linguistically-accessible public education campaigns, such as the “You are Not Alone” campaign, might help mothers with precarious status connect with transition houses.

Changes to Canadian immigration policy. My study’s data collection occurred weeks before the 2015 Canadian Federal election in which the Conservative government was replaced by the Liberal government. As discussed in Chapter 4, the period under Conservative Minister of Immigration and Citizenship Jason Kenney was described as “the most active in Canadian immigration policy development since this country’s inception” in which policy changes, including the creation of conditional permanent residency (C-PR) were rooted in the suspicion of immigrants and focused on protecting Canadian society from the threat of “ ‘fraudsters,’

‘criminals’ and ‘terrorists’” (Bhuyan et al., 2014, p. 3). By contrast, the Liberal government has focused on rebranding Canadian immigration policy, focusing particularly on family reunification and refugee resettlement (Mas, 2016). Among other changes, the Liberals renamed Citizenship and Immigration Canada as Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada; budgeted 25 million dollars to reduce immigration application processing times in 2016-2017 and 50 million dollars more a year for the next three years; and most significantly, repealed C-PR—effective April 18, 2017 (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017; Mas, 2016). Repealing C-PR was an important step towards reducing the vulnerability of abused women with C-PR and removing barriers for help-seeking women with C-PR (Tang, 2017; Canadian Council of Refugees, 2017). While this policy change is significant and laudable, more needs to be done. Indeed, as Tang, an advocate from the University of Toronto based Migrant Mothers Project writes:

Repealing Conditional Permanent Residence is an important step towards acknowledging the power imbalances that create vulnerability, especially for immigrant women, through Canada’s immigration policies. Over the next few months, it will be imperative for immigration officers to fully inform immigrant communities of this policy change. While the repeal of Conditional Permanent Residence has been a primary advocacy goal for the past few years, the threat of being abused by a sponsoring relative continues to impact vulnerable immigrants. Such power imbalances exist across a range of situations in the family sponsorship process, including: in-land sponsored spouses/partners who are waiting for their applications to be processed; the threat of being investigated for “misrepresentation”; and sponsorship agreements for sponsored spouses, children,

parents, and grandparents that may tie victims of abuse to their abuser. (Migrant Mothers Project, 2017, para 3)

Clearly, ongoing advocacy is required in order to address the multiple ways in which Canadian sponsorship policies reinforce men's violence against women, and more specifically against mothers' with precarious status. Moreover, change is needed to address the policies that confer other forms of precarious status upon mothers, exclude mothers with precarious status from essential services and obstruct women's pathways to PR by maintaining application criteria, which are incompatible with the lives of abused mothers with precarious status. In addition, the Liberal government has only reduced the processing times for family-class sponsorship applications; processing times for H&C applications remain lengthy and leave applicants in limbo for an average of 30 months (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

The implications of my study are numerous and it is my sincere hope that my thesis will, in some way, support both the efforts of mothers with precarious status who are resisting the multiple forms of violence that shape their lives and the service providers who work alongside of them. In addition to implementing the changes recommended by participating service providers, I contend that there continues to be a need for both individual and organizational advocacy that supports the efforts of such organizations as the Canadian Council for Refugees and Ending Violence B.C. that have been advocating for change long before my thesis weighed into the conversation.

Limitations, Lingering Questions and Future Research.

This exploratory research yielded important insights into the help-seeking processes of mothers with precarious status and into service providers' experiences supporting these women in a mid-size coastal city in B.C. My study was limited in several ways; it leaves a number of

unanswered questions, which point to the need for further research to explore these lingering questions and to advance our understanding of this topic.

What about the voices of mothers with precarious status? My study's sample was limited to seven service providers from the VAW and immigration and settlement fields and while these participants provided rich data on the help-seeking process of mothers with precarious status, the perspectives of mothers with precarious status themselves are sorely missing from this thesis. Without hearing from mothers with precarious immigration status directly, our understanding of their experiences with DV and help seeking is limited and partial at best. The questions I initially planned to ask of mothers with precarious status remain questions that deserve answers: How do mothers with precarious status experience the help-seeking process? What challenges and constraints do they experience as significant? How do they respond to these challenges? How do mothers with precarious status suggest services and systems change to better support them as they seek help? How do they experience the helping interventions of the various service providers they encounter? Further research exploring these questions with mothers with precarious status would make an important contribution to the literature and help to extend and expand the findings of this study.

What about the voices of service providers from other organizations? Also missing from my study were the perspectives and experiences of a broader spectrum of service providers who encounter mothers with precarious status as they seek help with DV. In order to develop a more complete and complex understanding of both the help-seeking process of mothers with precarious status and the responses of services and systems to mother's help seeking efforts, further research is needed explore the experiences of a broader range of service providers which could include: child protection workers, police officers, teachers, legal aid lawyers, family court

representatives, counsellors, hospital staff, leaders in faith communities, income assistance and B.C. housing employees and Canadian Border Service Agency employees. How do service providers in these diverse contexts come to be connected to mothers with precarious status who are experiencing DV? How do service providers working in these contexts respond to mothers with precarious status as they seek help with DV? What gaps in services and systems do they observe? What do these service providers recommended be done to fill these gaps?

Addressing oppressive responses. Given my study's findings regarding the oppressive responses to mothers with precarious status from the police, MCFD and the Family Court System, there is a clear need to challenge and understand such responses, giving attention to the issues underlying them. Questions, such as the following, need to be answered: What, if anything, is being done in this region to address these oppressive responses? How have similar issues been addressed elsewhere? Are there intervention models that could be used in this region? What have been the outcomes of these intervention models? What training do police, child protection workers and family court judges receive about domestic violence, precarious immigration status and culturally safe interventions? Could implementing an integrated DV court model that combines criminal DV charges and family court matters, as has been done in New York and more recently in Toronto, be helpful? (The Judges Library, n.d.)

What about mothers with precarious status who are not connected to formal services? While the focus of my study was on mothers with precarious status who have accessed formal help with DV, future research is needed to explore the experiences and perspectives of mothers with precarious status who have never connected with formal services or supports and are thus unknown to service providers. As discussed in Chapter 7, the common thread in service providers' stories of mothers with precarious status who were able to transition successfully and

sustainably out of DV were mother's connections to multiple dedicated service providers and informal supports; it was only the mothers with the most support around them that were able to overcome barriers and secure permanent residency. This finding is striking given the well documented isolation associated with DV in both my study and the literature (e.g. Lanier & Maume, 2009). It raises several important questions, which demand further examination: What happens to mothers with precarious status who never get connected to services? What can be done to create and reinforce community connections and support networks for isolated mothers with precarious status? What can service providers be doing in terms of outreach? How can research be done in safe and culturally sensitive ways with abused mothers with precarious status who are not connected to services? What are the access points?

What about the children of mothers with precarious status? Given the well-documented deleterious impact of exposure to DV (EDV) on children (e.g. Artz et al., 2014) and the harmful effects of parents' precarious immigration status on their children²⁶ (Bernhard et al., 2007; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) further research is needed to explore the following questions: How does the intersection of DV and mothers' precarious immigration status impact children? How do the children of mothers with precarious status experience the help-seeking process? What are their needs? How do services and systems respond to these needs?

What about the fathers? As discussed extensively in Chapter 3, domestically violent fathers have been largely absent from both the literature on children's EDV and from DV interventions—especially child protection interventions (Alaggia et al., 2015; Devaney, 2009;

²⁶ Previous research has documented such negative impacts as: feelings of isolation, uncertainty and a lack of belonging, restricted access to services for children and poorer educational outcomes (Bernhard, Goldring, Young, Berinstein, & Wilson, 2007)

Humphreys & Absler, 2011; Maynard, 1985; Strega et al., 2008). This father-invisibility is striking and problematic as it contributes to mother-blame by positioning mothers as the logical targets of intervention and fails to hold fathers accountable for their violence (Alaggia et al., 2015; Edin et al., 2009; Strega et al., 2008). While my study focused explicitly on the help-seeking process of mothers with precarious status and clearly showed how significant and multilevel change is needed in order to better support these mothers, I want to be explicit in aligning myself with Strega (2008) and countless other advocates who assert that in order to truly help abused mothers and their children who are exposed to domestic violence, “we must engage purposefully with those who perpetrate [the violence]” (2008, p. 247). Further research is needed to explore questions such as: What is being done to intervene with the men who abuse mothers with precarious status? How do services and systems respond to domestically violent fathers in this region? How do mothers with precarious status want their abusers to be held accountable? What programming is available for these violent fathers? Does precarious immigration status function as a barrier to participating in these programs? What resources do service providers need in order to better engage with the domestically violent fathers?

Final Thoughts

Since the 1970s, when domestic violence was first recognized as a social problem in North America, scholars and advocates and practitioners have been working to advance the state of knowledge, policy and practice in the hopes of supporting abused women’s efforts to resist violence and to hold men who perpetrate DV accountable (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). It is my hope that this thesis, by examining the help-seeking process of one particular group of abused women—mothers with precarious status—has contributed in some small way to the work that has been underway in this field for decades.

As discussed in the introduction, this thesis was inspired by and is dedicated to the mothers with precarious status and their children who I worked with at a transition house during my graduate studies. At the transition house, I was moved by their resilience, shocked and angered by the numerous and seemingly insurmountable barriers they faced as they sought safety; I was deeply challenged by what Vicky Reynolds describes as “the injustices and indignities suffered by my clients and my frustrating inability to personally change the unjust structures of society they struggle with and live in” (2011, p. 28).

My intention in this thesis has not been to engage in the “Oppression Olympics” by suggesting that mothers with precarious status are “the most oppressed” (Hankivsky & Dhamoon, 2013) but rather to highlight how, in the particular temporal, political, social and geographical context of my study, abused mothers with precarious status and their children are falling through the cracks left by underfunded and inflexible systems. Moreover, by using an intersectional analysis, my thesis has shown how ‘motherhood’ and ‘precarious immigration status’ are not simple or singular factors that influence women’s help-seeking processes; instead they, along with interlocking systems of power and domination, interpenetrate and complexify women’s help-seeking processes. It is my hope that this thesis has drawn attention to the complex and interpenetrating barriers mothers with precarious status face as they seek to break free from DV and to the pressing need to implement the recommendations generated by participating service providers in order to break down, or at least poke holes in these barriers.

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Appendix A



**University
of Victoria**

School of Child &

Youth Care

University of Victoria

P.O. Box 1700, STN

Date

Dear ___ :

This letter is a request for *[name of organization]*'s assistance with a research project being conducted by Catherine Taylor, an MA student in the Child & Youth Care Department at the University of Victoria under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball. The title of this research project is "Transitioning Out of Violence: Intersections of Motherhood and Precarious Immigration Status." We would like to provide you with more information about this project.

The purpose of this study is to gather information regarding the experiences of the experience of transitioning out of domestic violence for mothers who have a precarious immigration status (i.e. are not permanent residents or citizens). The research is designed to: (1) include the voices of these mothers and anti-violence service providers who work with them in scholarship about domestic violence; (2) identify specific interpersonal, social and structural factors that facilitate and/or constrain their ability to stay out of their abusive relationship(s); (3) identify the nature and quality of their interactions with social service agencies; (4) gather concrete recommendations from mothers and service providers describing how services in British Columbia could be improved to support their needs as mothers and their children's needs as they transition out of domestic violence. Knowledge and information generated from this study may help to inform policy and practice.

We are hoping to invite both mothers with precarious immigration status who have transitioned out of violence *and* the service providers that support them to participate in this research project. We believe that both these groups have valuable things to share about the transition out of violence for mothers with precarious status in [Name of City]. During the course of this study, I (Catherine Taylor) will be conducting interviews with mothers and service providers to hear their stories and gather their recommendations. At the end of this study, this research will be published as Catherine Taylor's Master's Thesis. An Executive Summary of the research will also be available for distribution to interested social service agencies in [Name of City].

To respect the privacy and rights of the *[name of organization]* and its participants, I will not be contacting women or service providers directly. What I intend to do, is provide the *[name of organization]* with information flyers to be distributed by the *[name of organization]* at your discretion. Contact information for Dr. Ball and myself will be contained on the flyers or packages. I am hoping that you will be able to identify mothers who have a precarious immigration status and service providers who might be interested in participation. At your discretion, you can provide them with information about the research. Interested persons will be invited to contact me, Catherine Taylor, to discuss participation in this study in further detail. Alternatively, mothers and service

providers give you their consent, you can pass along their contact information to me and I will follow up with them. I would also be happy to come and give a short, informal presentation about the research to any of your staff and clients.

Participation of any person is completely voluntary. Each person will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study. I will sit down with each participant and provide them with detailed written and verbal information about this study, as well as informed consent forms.

To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts from the stories will be used labelled with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Names of participants will not appear in the thesis or reports resulting from this study. Participants will not be identifiable and participants will be given the opportunity to pre-screen any results I plan on publishing to ensure their ongoing consent.

If the *[name of organization]* wishes the identity of the organization to remain confidential, a pseudonym will be given to the organization. Participants will get to select the location of the interviews and can choose to have a friend, counsellor or advocate present during the interviews. Only myself, Dr. Ball in the Department of Child & Youth Care will have access to the data from this study.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board. However, the final decision about participation belongs to the *[name of organization]*, and the participants. If you have any comments or concerns with this study, please feel free to contact Office of Research Ethics, at XXX-XXX-XXXX or at *[insert e-mail]*.

If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email: *[insert e-mail]*. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Ball by email: *[insert e-mail]*
I hope that the results of this study will be beneficial to the *[name of organization]*, to the families you work with, women affected by violence across Canada, as well as the broader research community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Taylor
Master's Candidate
Department of Child & Youth Care
University of Victoria

Dr. Jessica Ball
Professor
Department of Child & Youth Care
University of Victoria

Organization Permission Form

We have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Catherine Taylor of the Department of Child & Youth Care at the University of Victoria, under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball at the University of Victoria. We have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to our questions, and any additional details we wanted.

We are aware that the name of our organization will only be used in the thesis or any publications that comes from the research with our permission.

We were informed that this organization may withdraw from assistance with the project at any time. We were informed that study participants may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

We have been informed this project has received ethics clearance through, the Human Ethics and Review Board at the University of Victoria and that questions we have about the study may be directed to Catherine at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email [*insert e-mail*] and Dr. Jessica Ball by email [*insert e-mail*].

We were informed that if we have any comments or concerns with in this study, we may the Office of Research Ethics at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

We agree to help the researchers recruit participants for this study from among the families who are users of the program and services of the [*name of organization*]

YES NO

We agree to help the researchers recruit participants for this study from service providers who are employees of the [*name of organization*]

YES NO

We agree to the use of the name of the [*name of organization*] in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES NO

If NO, a pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the organization.

Director Name: _____ (Please print)

Director Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH on MOTHERHOOD, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & IMMIGRATION



http://media-cache-akc.pinimg.com/originals/e6/50/79/e650798b3d85f61a70ecbc14f4728d.jpg

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN ONE-ON-ONE INTERVEIWS IF YOU ARE:

- + **19+**
 - + A **mother** of at least one child under 18
 - + **Not** a Canadian citizen (you could be a permanent resident, refugee claimant, on a tourist visa....)
 - + Have been out of an abusive relationship with an intimate partner for at least 3 months
 - + Participation is voluntary and you can leave the project at any time
- + Services from the second-stage housing agency will not be affected if individuals do not participate or leave the study.
 - + Names and information will be kept private.

YOU WILL BE ASKED TO TELL ME ABOUT:

- + Your ideas about what it is like being a mother who has migrated to Canada *and* who has experienced abused
- + What you think could be done to help other mothers in similar situations

Your participation would involve at least **one** interview about **2** hours long. The researcher will cover any travel or child care costs during the time of the interview.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? Please contact:

CATHERINE TAYLOR

Department of Child & Youth Care

XXX-XXX-XXXX

Email: taylorca@uvic.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board

Appendix C

About the Researcher

I am a 25-year old Master's Student who grew up in downtown Toronto. I moved to Victoria a year and a half ago. I have worked with women and children who have experienced violence in several different places [List Names of Organizations]. I am interested in learning more about how immigration affects women's experiences of domestic violence and motherhood. I hope that this research will be able to improve services available for women and children in British Columbia.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study or would like to participate, you have two options: 1) the staff at the second stage housing agency can pass along your contact information to Catherine Taylor or 2) you can contact Catherine Taylor at: XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email at: taylorca@uvic.ca

The results of this study will be available in the fall of 2017. You can contact the researcher by email if you would like to receive a copy.

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board
 Phone:(250) 472-4545
 Email: ethics@uvic.ca

My faculty supervisor, Dr. Jessica Ball, can be reached at jball@uvic.ca

University of Victoria

Transitioning out of
 Violence: Intersections
 of Motherhood and
 Precarious Immigration
 Status



Research Investigator
 Catherine Taylor

Masters Student
 Department of Child & Youth
 Care
 University of Victoria
 Victoria, BC

What is this Research About?

This research is about being a mother without Canadian Citizenship who has experienced abuse from an intimate partner (this could be a spouse, a boyfriend, a girlfriend etc.). It aims to get your views on the following:

- What is it like being a mother while abuse is happening?
- How does not having Canadian Citizenship affect being a mother?
- What are the main difficulties mothers who experience abuse face?
- When services like the police, and MCFD are involved, do they make life easier or harder?

Who will be involved?

I am hoping to interview women who:

- ✓ Are 19 and older
- ✓ Are mothers of at least one child under 19
- ✓ Are not Canadian citizens (permanent residents, refugee claimants, on a tourist visa... anything!)
- ✓ Have been in an abusive relationship with a partner
- ✓ Are comfortable speaking English

What will be involved?

I am hoping to interview women without Canadian Citizenship who are mothers and have experienced abuse from a partner. I want to learn about your experiences, hear about what has been helpful to you and get your ideas about how things could be made better for mothers who have precarious immigration statuses and who are experiencing abuse.

You will be invited to participate in one or more interviews with me (Catherine Taylor). The interviews will take about 1-2 hours, depending on your availability. You will not have to answer any questions that you don't want to and you can stop the interview at anytime you like.

Our interview will take place at a time and in a place that works for you. It will be a safe place that is easy for you to get to. If you participate, I will reimburse you for any child-care and travel expenses you had for the interview.

Important

- Participation is voluntary
- Participants can leave the study at any time
- Deciding not to participate or leaving the study early will not have any impact on the services you are receiving from the second stage housing agency

Confidentiality

All that you say will remain confidential. Names and personal information will be kept private at all times. If I become aware that, at the time of the interview, a child is in a situation where he/she may be hurt or harmed, I have the responsibility to seek professional help. Whenever possible, I will keep the child's mother informed about this. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw at **any time** without having to give a reason or facing any pressure to continue.

Why should you participate?

Taking part in this research may be a chance for you to talk freely about your experiences. It may not make you life any easier but it may help other women who are facing similar situations. It will help make the services available to help women and children experiencing abuse better.

What difference will this research make?

It is important to find out what women think about these questions, so that services can be improved and new services can be planned. Part of this study will make sure that main points made by women are given to services and agencies.

Appendix D



University
of Victoria

School of Child & Youth Care

University of Victoria

P.O. Box 1700, STN CSC

Verbal Consent Script

Transitioning out of Violence: Intersections of Motherhood and Precarious Immigration Status

Introduction

Hi, I'm Catherine. I am interviewing women who have been abused by a partner about their experiences getting help. I am doing this for a research project because I am a Master's Student in Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. My supervisor is Dr. Jessica Ball in the University of Victoria's Child and Youth Care department. You can contact her at *[insert e-mail]*.

What is this study about?

This study is about being a mother without Canadian Citizenship who has experienced abuse from an intimate partner (this could be a spouse, boyfriend, partner etc.). I want to learn things like:

- What is it like being a mother while abuse is happening?
- How does not having Canadian Citizenship affect being a mother?
- What are the main difficulties mothers who experience abuse face?
- When services like the police, transition house and MCFD are involved, do they make life easier or harder?
- What advice would you give to other mothers who are in similar situations?
- What do you think need to change to help mothers without Canadian Citizenship who are being abused?
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Why did I ask you to participate?

As a mother who doesn't have Canadian citizenship and who has experienced abuse, I think you have important things to say about this topic.

What will happen during the study?

I'm inviting you to do a one-on-one interview that will take about an hour or two. We can set up a time and place that works for both of us. I will ask you questions like:

- What motivated you to get help?

- How did you first try to get help?
- What made getting help easier and what made it harder?

I will use an audio recorder to make sure I don't miss what you say. At the end of the interview, we can decide if we want to set up a second interview. If we decide to do a second interview, this will also take about 1-2 hours. In total, if you include getting to and from the interview, participating could take up to six hours.

Confidentiality

Everything you say to me will be kept confidential. I will not tell anyone who you are; when I write my research report I will not use your name, the names of anyone in your family, your contact information or any information that could give away your identity. This includes what country you are from and specific information about your experiences. I will give you the chance to read my final report and tell me if there is anything in there that you think might give away your identity. I will keep your identity confidential even if you are in Canada illegally. The only circumstance in which I would share your identity is if your safety or that of your child's is at risk. If this happened, I would make a report to either the Ministry of Child and Family Development or the police.

Voluntary participation

Deciding to participate in this research is your choice! You can change your mind at any time including part way through the interview and I won't pressure you to continue. You won't have to give me a reason either. If you choose not to participate, or stop at any time, there will be no consequences. It will not have any influence on the services you are receiving at the (Insert name of second stage housing agency).

Risks and Benefits of Participating

Taking part in this research may be a chance for you to talk freely about your experiences. It may not make your life any easier but it may help other women are facing similar situations. It might also help make the services available to women and children experiencing abuse better.

Some people might find it hard to talk about their experiences of abuse. You might feel tired during and/or after the interview. You might find it hard to answer some question. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to. If you choose to participate, you can ask to stop, slow down or skip a question whenever you like. You can also change your mind about participating in the research at any point. If you feel tired, overwhelmed or upset, I will do my best to help you find the support you need.

Travel and Child Care Expenses

If you have to spend money to travel to the interview (bus tickets or gas money) and/or money for child care during the interview I will pay you back. If you decide to withdraw from the research, I will pay you back for any travel or child care costs you have had up until the point you withdraw.

Sharing the Results

After I finish interviewing all participants, I will write up a research report about common themes that came up during the interviews. This report will be shared with the members of my thesis committee at the University of Victoria. Eventually, this report will also be available online. I am also planning on making a short version of the report and sharing it with agencies in [name of city] that try to help women in situations like yours. This might include: [name local organizations].

Destroying the Data

I will keep the data (the recording of our interview, the transcripts and any notes) locked in my computer for up to seven years. To destroy the data, I will use electronic file deletion.

Future Use of Data

I have no plans to use the data for anything other than this research project. If something comes up, like a different research project, I am wondering if you would be OK with me using your data? If you prefer, I could contact you if I wanted to use your data in the future. This is your choice, you do not have to say yes. If you would prefer that your data is not used in the future and that I don't contact you again you can say no and there will not be any consequences. If you want to give me your contact information, I will keep it safe in a locked file on my computer and I will not share it with anyone else.

Service Provider Participants

As a part of this project, I am going to also interview some of the staff at [Organization Name]. They will be asked questions about what it is like trying to help mothers without status who have experienced abuse.

Contacts

If you have any questions about this project you can contact me, Catherine Taylor at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at *[insert e-mail]*. You can also contact my supervisor by e-mail at *[insert e-mail]*.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria *[insert contact information]*.

Consent questions:

- Do you have any questions or would like any more information? [Answer questions.]
- Do you agree to participate in this study knowing that you can withdraw at any point with no consequences to you?
 - If yes, move onto the next question

- If no, thank participant for her time
- Do I have your permission to contact you again?
 - If yes, what contact information would you like to give me?

Appendix E

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH on MOTHERHOOD, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & IMMIGRATION



TOPIC: How mothers with precarious immigration statuses (i.e. not Canadian citizens or permanent residents) transition out of violent relationships in [Name of City].

WHO? We are looking for **service providers** who have experience supporting women who are affected by domestic violence to share their thoughts and ideas.

WHAT? Participants will be interviewed by the researcher at a time and place they choose.

WHY? To gather information about mothers with precarious status affected by violence in Victoria, to improve services and to advocate for policy change.

Participation is **voluntary** and you can leave the project at any time. Names and information will be kept **private**.

Participation involves **one** interview about **1.5** hours long.

Please contact:

CATHERINE TAYLOR
 Department of Child & Youth Care
 XXX-XXX-XXXX
 Email: taylorca@uvic.ca

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board

Appendix F



University
of Victoria

School of Child & Youth Care

University of Victoria

P.O. Box 1700, STN CSC

Participant Consent Form

Transitioning out of Violence: Intersections of Motherhood and Precarious Immigration Status

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Transitioning out of Violence: Intersections of Motherhood and Precarious Immigration Status* that is being conducted by Catherine Taylor. Catherine Taylor is a graduate students in the department of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phoning XXX-XXX-XXXX or e-mailing [*insert e-mail*].

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jessica Ball. You may contact my supervisor at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to gather information about the experiences of precarious status mothers who have left situations of domestic violence. This project focuses on identifying factors that helped and hindered women's ability to leave and stay out of abusive relationships. This research is intended to pinpoint gaps in the services available to precarious status mothers in abusive relationships and generate suggestions as to how services could be improved.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have valuable experience and knowledge about this topic. I want to learn about your experiences and hear how you think the services available in [Name of City] could improve to better support mothers with precarious status in [Name of City].

What will happen during the study?

I'm inviting you to do a one-on-one interview that will take about an hour or two. We can set up a time and place that works for both of us. I will ask you questions like:

- What is your experience in supporting women transition out of violence?
- What barriers (financial, political, knowledge, legal... etc.) have you faced in your work supporting mothers with precarious status?

- What in your view, is the biggest challenge and or/ barrier that mothers with precarious status face when trying to get help with DV?
- What kind of support do you need as a worker in order to adequately support mothers without status in Canada?

I will use an audio recorder to make sure I don't miss what you say. At the end of the interview, we can decide if we want to set up a second interview. If we decide to do a second interview, this will also take about 1-2 hours. In total, if you include getting to and from the interview, participating could take up to six hours

Confidentiality

Everything you say to me will be kept confidential. I will not tell anyone who you are; when I write my research report I will not use your name, the names of anyone in your family, your contact information or any information that could give away your identity. The only circumstance in which I would share your identity is if your safety or that of a child's is at risk. If this happened, I would make a report to either the Ministry of Child and Family Development or the police.

Voluntary participation

Deciding to participate in this research is your choice! You can change your mind at any time including part way through the interview and I won't pressure you to continue. You won't have to give me a reason either. If you choose not to participate, or stop at any time, there will be no consequences.

Risks and Benefits of Participating

Taking part in this research may be a chance for you to talk freely about your experiences. It may not make your life any easier but it may help other women are facing similar situations. It might also help make the services available to women and children experiencing abuse better. Some people might find it hard to talk about their experiences supporting women who have been abused. You might feel tired during and/or after the interview. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to. If you choose to participate, you can ask to stop, slow down or skip a question whenever you like. You can also change your mind about participating in the research at any point. If you feel tired, overwhelmed or upset, I will do my best to help you find the support you need.

Sharing the Results

After I finish interviewing all participants, I will write up a research report about common themes that came up during the interviews. This report will be shared with the members of my thesis committee at the University of Victoria. Eventually, this report will also be available online. I am also planning on making a short version of the report and sharing it with agencies in [Name of City] that try to help women transition out of violence. This might include: [list local agencies].

Destroying the Data

I will keep the data (the recording of our interview, the transcripts and any notes) locked in my computer for up to seven years. To destroy the data, I will use electronic file deletion.

Future Use of Data

I have no plans to use the data for anything other than this research project. If something comes up, like a different research project, I am wondering if you would be OK with me using your data? If you prefer, I could contact you if I wanted to use your data in the future. This is your choice, you do not have to say yes. If you would prefer that your data is not used in the future and that I don't contact you again you can say no and there will not be any consequences. If you want to give me your contact information, I will keep it safe in a locked file on my computer and I will not share it with anyone else.

Contacts

If you have any questions about this project you can contact me, Catherine Taylor at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at [insert e-mail]. You can also contact my supervisor by e-mail at [insert e-mail].

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria [insert contact information].

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

<i>Name of Participant</i>		<i>Signature</i>		<i>Date</i>

Future Use of Data

I consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I **do not** consent to the use of my data in future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

I consent to be contacted in the event my data is requested for future research: _____ (Participant to provide initials)

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix G

Draft of Semi-Structured Interview Guide For Service Providers

Background Information

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the services your agency offers?
2. Can you tell me about your role in helping women transition out of DV?

As you know, this project is about how mothers with precarious immigration status transition out of DV [offer definition of precarious status]. I am interested in learning from your experience supporting this group of women.

3. How do mothers with precarious status come to be involved in your agency?

Help Seeking Processes & Service Provider's Responses

If the agency specifically supports women who are transitioning out of violence ask:

4. In your view, what influences whether or not women seek help from your agency when trying to leave situations domestic violence?
5. In your view, what influences whether or not mothers with precarious status seek help from your agency?
6. Once a mother with precarious status has connected with your agency, how do you help them?
 - a. Possible probing questions to find out more: What kinds of help are **frequently provided** to mothers with precarious status (i.e. what services are actually delivered)? What (if anything) influences who gets offered what?

If the agency's does not specifically support women who are transitioning out of violence

7. What are some of the ways that you learn that your clients are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence?
8. In your view, what influences whether or not mothers with precarious status seek help with domestic violence?
9. How do mothers with precarious status go about seeking help?
10. Once a mother with precarious status has connected with your agency and has expressed help transitioning out of violence, how do help you help them?

- a. Possible probing questions to find out more about the help provided- direct support? Referrals?

Regardless of Agency Mandate Ask:

11. Based on your experiences, what are some of the needs of mothers with precarious status who have experienced DV?
 - a. In what ways are these needs similar and or different to women who aren't mothers?
 - b. To women who don't have precarious status?
12. Based on your experiences, what are some of the strengths of mothers with precarious status who have experienced DV?
 - a. In what ways are these needs similar and or different to women who aren't mothers?
 - b. To women who don't have precarious status?
13. What, if anything you haven't already articulated, is your biggest source of frustration in working with mothers without legal status in Canada?
14. Would you like to share a story or stories with me that describe some of the challenges mothers without status in Canada face?
15. What kind of support do you need as a worker in order to adequately support mothers without status in Canada?
16. What in your view is the biggest challenge and or/ barrier that mothers with precarious status face when trying to get help with DV?
17. If you could share insights or suggestions with new workers who are just beginning to work with mothers without status what would you say?
18. Based on your experience, in what ways do think like your agency is equipped to support mothers with precarious status? In what ways do you think like your agency is not equipped to support mothers with precarious status?
 - a. What barriers (financial, political, knowledge, legal...etc.) have **you** faced in your work supporting mothers with precarious status?
 - b. What do you think is needed to overcome these barriers?

Services and Systems

19. As you know, mothers with precarious status may come into contact with many different agencies, services and systems when trying to get help from DV. Can you tell me which other agencies your clients get involved with?

Can ask for each service depending on time:

20. Can you tell me, based on your experiences with clients, what kinds of responses from these services and systems you have found to be most helpful or most empowering to your clients who are mothers with precarious status?
21. Can you tell me what kind of responses have you found to be the least helpful or most disempowering for mothers with precarious status?
22. What do you think could be done to make the responses of these agencies and systems more helpful and empowering?
23. Is there anything else that you want to share with me about working with mothers with precarious status in Canada?