

Review: The Continuum of Gender-Based Violence experienced by Migrant and Refugee Women in Canada: Perspectives from Key Informants.

by

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Sisic, Tastsoglou, Dawson, Holtmann, Wilkinson and Falconer (2024) address the pressing issue of gender-based violence (GBV) and the unique vulnerabilities migrant and refugee women (MRW) encounter due to their legal migration status, gender, race and social positioning in Canada. Drawing upon the “continuum of sexual violence” theory (Kelly, 1987; 2012) and an intersectionality approach, the authors make a case for an expanded range of the continuum of violence against MRW. This necessitates a broadened definition of violence which includes the aggravated threats and consequently amplified vulnerabilities as well as the unique, non-physical forms of violence that can and often do target MRW specifically.

The present paper derives from the Canadian GBV in Migration Program which, in turn, is part of a larger international project focusing on *Violence against Women Migrants and Refugees: Analyzing Causes and Effective Policy Response*.¹ Through in-depth, qualitative interviews, the present paper aims to identify the primary forms of GBV among MRW in Canada, according to the perspectives of “key informants”. The latter consisted of service providers in the immigrant settlement and anti-violence sectors, with some being government workers and others NGO staff. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed to identify key themes relating to the experiences of GBV among MRW. The authors state the study’s limitations, such as their focus on the perspectives of key informants about gender-based violence (GBV) in the context of migration in Canada rather than the migrant and refugee women; the limited forms of violence key informants spoke about (IPV by male partners against cis-MRW) and the limited demographic of MRW that key informants spoke about (cis-MRW, of variable migration statuses and national origins).

While there are several commonalities with Kelly’s “continuum” experienced by the broader population of women, such as the non-physical forms of violence accounting for most of the violence, the interlinking of physical and non-physical forms, and the de-legitimation of the non-physical forms in everyday life, when it comes to MRW, the present study uncovers a different range of the “continuum” of GBV against MRW in Canada, necessitating an “amendment” of the original theory to include the experiences of MRW. The authors’ findings reveal unique or more impactful forms of violence or risk factors precipitating violence, such as using social isolation to gain or maintain control over women, threats of child apprehension, threats against extended family, language barriers and legal status barriers (e.g. refusal to sponsor a woman, withholding paperwork; threats to undermine a MRW status in Canada). While the first three of these forms (i.e. social isolation, threats of child apprehension or threats against extended family) may impact Canadian-born GBV victim/survivors, they appear to amplify or aggravate the legally / socially induced vulnerability of MRW. Finally, the last two forms (i.e. language and legal barriers) appear to uniquely affect MRW. The findings show that we need to

¹ The Canadian GBV program (<https://www.smu.ca/gendernet/welcome.html>) includes researchers at four institutions (i) Saint Mary’s University, (ii) University of New Brunswick, (iii) University of Guelph, (iv) University of Manitoba. The research program has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at each of the four institutions. The Canadian program, funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research, is part of the international project on *Violence Against Women Migrants and Refugees: Analyzing Causes and Effective Policy Response (GBV-MIG)*, a winning project of the Gender-Net Plus Consortium (<https://gbvmigration.cnrs.fr/>)

broaden the scope of “the continuum” of violence” if we want to include MRW, as well as utilize an intersectional lens to understand the additional forms and vulnerabilities to GBV for MRW. Important policy implications follow from these findings, such as the need to develop a more inclusive understanding of GBV in Canadian society, as well as the need to take into account legal migration categories, social, gender and ethno-cultural positionalities and identities of MRW survivors of GBV in Canada.

The authors demonstrate the complexity of GBV when it comes to the MRW as their data shows the implications of gendered and intersectional discrimination for increasing vulnerabilities and compounding the GBV experiences of MRW in Canada. Nevertheless, the differential impact of GBV needs to be looked into closer and with a fresh eye to address each group’s GBV separately rather than taking them as a homogenous group. As a result, better preventative policies, and interventions can be initiated based on the needs of MRW survivors.

Overall, the study's findings contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding GBV among migrant and refugee women. By integrating concepts of the continuum of violence and intersectionality, the study highlights the complexities of migrant and refugee women experiences and shows the need for nuanced approaches in both academic discourse and practical policy interventions.

References:

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