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CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF RELATIONS:
GIVING VOICE TO ABUSED PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING IMMIGRANT WOMEN

By

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A Thesis Submitted In Conformity With The Requirements For The Degree Of Doctor Of Philosophy In The University Of Toronto

Faculty of Social Work

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the experiences of ten Portuguese-speaking women who have immigrated to Toronto, Canada (either from Portugal, including the Azores, or from Brazil), and who, on experiencing abuse at the hands of their male partners, have subsequently sought social services. This qualitative research study is informed by both feminist and social constructivist theories, as well as by a central metaphor—the web of relations—which is the network of institutional relations in which, I argue, the women in my study are ‘embedded’. The ‘threads’ of this web may be said to represent the social constraints these women experience in their relations with the various institutions that surround them, and with which they ‘share the web’. When the constraining ‘threads’ of this web are loosened, however, then various ‘rights’ and ‘opportunities’ (symbolized by the ‘spaces’ in the web) ‘open up’ to them, empowering them and improving their options in society. Thus the web has a dual potential: on the one hand, restrictive, on the other, enabling.

The institutional relations I specifically explore include those that exist between the women in my study and, respectively, immigration, welfare, the labour market, the family, the church, and, finally, the social service agencies these women access.

The data were collected through interviews with the ten selected women. Additional data (concerning abused immigrant women in general, and abused Portuguese speaking immigrant women in particular), were obtained from a second group recruited
both from within and outside the Portuguese-speaking community. Of this particular group, 14 are service providers (whose professional experience has included working with abused immigrant women) and 8 are other key informants (who work in an administrative capacity in various social service agencies in Toronto).

I conclude that if society is to respond more appropriately to the needs of abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in particular, and abused immigrant women in general, then policy makers, community leaders, and service providers must become more aware of the vast web of relations in which the lives of such women are pushed and pulled in multiple and often erratic ways, specially given the combined impacts of a neo-conservative agenda, government cutbacks, funding guidelines, and professional ideology (among other factors) which have affected the potential of social services to empower such women and improve their options in society.
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CAUGHT IN THE WEB OF RELATIONS: GIVING VOICE TO
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Chapter 1: The Research Problem and Research Objectives

1.1. Research Problem

The illusion that women have achieved equality is almost as pervasive as the reality of oppression. Women's inequality is invisible because it is so ordinary, so massive and so accepted. The failure to see women's inequality is not, however, simply the result of socially induced blindness. Not seeing it is useful; it serves the interests of those who are dominant. Perpetuating the myth that women have already achieved equality justifies doing nothing (Brodsky and Day, 1989:11).

One out of every three women living in Canada, whether currently or previously married or in a common law relationship, has experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a male partner (Rodgers, 1994) [my emphasis]. This statistic, however, fails to reveal differential rates of abuse among marginalized women (e.g., women with disabilities, aboriginal women or, in the case of this study, Portuguese-speaking immigrant women). Although there are no statistics available in Toronto on the extent of such violence in the Portuguese-speaking immigrant community, one can infer, from the significant number of Portuguese-speaking women currently seeking help from social service agencies in relation to this issue,¹ that a problem exists.

¹ For example, in the Barbara Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, 50% of the clients are battered women, of whom 20-25% are immigrants. St. Christopher House, a multi-service community agency, attends 90-120 cases of Portuguese battered women per year. Riverdale Immigrant Women's Center has an annual case load of some 300 women (85% of whom are victims of wife abuse) (Coutinho, 1986). This data shows only the tip of the iceberg, since few abused women report the abuse or seek formal help.
Since most North American research on violence against women has focused to date on the mainstream Anglo-Saxon population, the particular experiences of marginalised women either have been minimised or ignored (Bonilla-Santiago, 1996; Burns, 1986; Davis, 1985; Zambrano, 1985). Most of these studies fail to reveal how these women's experiences of abuse are socially organised, both within their own particular reference group and in Canadian society as a whole. With respect to Portuguese-speaking immigrant women no such studies appear to exist.

Since the voices of these women have not been heard in the research literature, their views have had little if any influence, either on policy making or on improving the quality of their lives, a state of affairs that clearly contributes toward maintaining the current power differential among women in Canadian society. Moreover, there is an under-representation of women from different cultural and ethnic groups on the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. Thus, the possible influence that the voices of these women might have upon the development of government policies to address the problem of wife abuse is curtailed (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993).

Finally, I am motivated to ‘give voice’ to abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women not only because their voices have rarely been heard (either in studies on Portuguese-Canadian life or in feminist literature on wife abuse) (Higgs, 1981; Marques and Marujo, 1993), but because Brazil is where I was born and educated, where I conducted research on abused women living in a shelter, and where the official language (like that of the women in my study) is Portuguese.
1.2. The Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is two-fold: a) to give voice to Portuguese-speaking women who have immigrated to Toronto, Canada (either from Portugal, including the Azores, or from Brazil), and who, on experiencing abuse at the hands of their male partners, have subsequently sought social services, and b) to identify the ways in which these social services either enable or constrain these women’s attempts to improve their lives.

1.3. Terminology

Experiences with violence occurring in the context of women’s intimate relationships with male partners have become the subject of governmental discourse, legal discourse, medical (and in particular, psychiatric) discourse, and the discourse of the social services. A profusion of terminology relating to the problem has thus emerged. For example, such terms as battered woman, battered woman syndrome, learned helplessness, and traumatic bonding have become part of the discourse of victimisation constructed by a “therapeutic society” (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). Such terms, however, tend to camouflage the phenomenon of male domination and power in our society by transforming the social problem of violence against women into one of individual psychopathology (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; Walker, 1990; Gordon, 1988; Davis, 1987). Other terms tend either to reveal or conceal certain aspects of the problem, as, for example, wife assault, domestic dispute, conjugal violence, marital aggression, domestic violence, family violence, and partner abuse (Pizzey, 1974; Del Martin, 1976; Walker, 1984, Jones, 1994).
Feminist researchers have criticised such terms as *domestic dispute, conjugal violence, marital aggression, domestic violence, family violence, and partner abuse* on the grounds that they fail to identify gender (either of the abuser or of the victim) as well as tend to conceal both the social context and the nature of the abuse (Yllö and Bograd, 1988). Some feminist researchers also argue that gender-neutral terms fail to signal that the abuse is related to the patriarchal structure of our society (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Yllö and Bograd, 1988). Thus it may be argued that all such terms fall short in fully representing the issues informing wife abuse. Throughout this study, I shall use the term *wife abuse* to signify the various ways used by men to control their female partners. While this term does not capture all aspects of the issue, the benefit of using it is two-fold: first, it clearly indicates the gender of the abused individual and, second, although the term is most commonly applied in cases in which a woman has a husband, it may also be applied in cases where a woman has a common-law relationship and or an intimate relationship with her male partner. Furthermore, it is the particular status of a "wife" within a patriarchal society that makes these women more vulnerable to situations of wife abuse (Dobash and Dobash, 1979).

The term *immigrant* (as in *immigrant women*) is used in this study more as a social construction (Ng, 1988) than as a legal definition. Many women who, despite having obtained their Canadian citizenship may continue both to be perceived and referred to as *immigrants* in their interactions within Canadian society. Moreover, the term *immigrant women* is sometimes used, incongruously, to refer to non-immigrants, e.g., "women of
colour, …women who do not speak English well, and women who occupy lower positions in the social hierarchy” (Ng and Estable, 1987:29).

The participants in my study include three groups: the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, the service providers and other key informants. For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in my study simply as the women or, alternately, the women in my study. If the context requires that I specify a participant’s country or region of origin, then I shall refer to that woman as a Brazilian (or Portuguese or Azorean or Angolan) woman. However, whenever I quote directly from other authors, or when I transcribe interview material, I retain the terms that are used in the source material rather than my own.

Some of the service providers, in certain contexts, will be called counsellors, because counselling is the main function they perform with respect to the women in my study. Interestingly, there are certain recent funding guidelines directed to services for abused women that ‘reward’ this function over other possible functions of service providers. The term, other key informants, refers to individuals who work in an administrative capacity in the social services system.

While most of the service providers and other key informants interviewed in this study used the more general term immigrant women, others used terms that specified the geographical origins of the women, such as Angolan women, Brazilian women, Portuguese women, Azorean women, and so on. One used the term new Canadians. According to Estable and Meyer (1989:17), some people use the term new Canadians rather than immigrant women:
...because it is felt that the latter description simply excludes and ghettoizes immigrant women out of the Canadian 'mainstream'. Others argue that it is precisely due to our exclusion and ghettoization that we want to develop our identity as 'immigrant and visible minority women.' Simply referring to ourselves as 'new' Canadians will not resolve the social problems of racism, sexism and exclusion (Estable and Meyer, 1989:17).

Other terms that are used in the literature when referring to immigrant women include visible minority women, women of colour, and ethnic minority women. With respect to Portuguese-speaking immigrants, in particular, studies have used the terms invisible minority group or ethnic minority group (Noivo, 1997). Interestingly, key informants from Angola whom I interviewed for this study rejected the term woman of colour in favour of Black woman, Angolan woman, or African woman. They explained that the term women of colour groups all non-white women together and thus fails to reveal the unique qualities and experiences of women from each ethnic or racial group.

In general, I share Das Gupta’s view (1986:38) that “women in the community must retain their ability to name themselves collectively based on their historical experience, level of organisation and their particular needs [and] artificial labels must not be imposed for legal or bureaucratic reasons.”

1.4. Description of the Text

My study is divided into four major parts which contain, collectively, seven individual chapters. In Chapter 1 of PART ONE: INTRODUCTION, I introduce the research problems and objectives and, in addition, attempt to clarify certain terminological issues. I conclude with the present description of the entire text. In Chapter 2, I discuss the two broad theoretical approaches I use in my analysis: feminism and the social construction of reality. The reader will note that these two theoretical approaches often
appear to overlap. I also introduce the central metaphor that emerged from my study—*the web of relations*—within which web, I argue, abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women are alternately constrained and enabled; alternately oppressed and resistant. Finally, in dealing with the background of the study, I explore both the historical and social contexts of the problem.

PART TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY contains Chapter 3, in which I state my rationale for having selected a qualitative research design as well as deal with some methodological issues.

PART THREE: UNTANGLING THE WEB OF RELATIONS contains Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In Chapter 4, I explore the implications for the women in my study of a number of *institutional relations*—which I call the *web of relations*—relations which entangle them in a set of complex constraints and opportunities. I show that this ‘web’ contains many ‘threads’ that have been spun, historically, in relation to the social co-ordinates or ‘location’ of such women (i.e., gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, immigrant status, and language ability), as well as with respect to the various kinds of *institutional relations* that have developed between these women and certain social institutions with which they interact. These institutions include immigration, the labour market, welfare², the family, the church³, and social services. Here I argue that if the ‘threads’ of this ‘web’ may be said to represent ‘constraints’ (arising from oppression, both external and internalised), then the ‘spaces’ (which become ‘enlarged’ whenever the ‘threads’ are ‘loosened’), may be said

² Although I use the term welfare, it is technically called “social assistance” in the province of Ontario.
³ Since the great majority of Portuguese-speaking immigrants living in Toronto are Catholics as well as the women in my study, I will refer specifically to the Catholic Church.
to represent these women's 'rights' and 'opportunities'. In Chapter 4, I explore these implications in relation to immigration, the labour market, and welfare; and, in Chapter 5, both in relation to the family (showing how both family ideology and household organisation 'feed into' the problem of wife abuse), as well as in relation to the church (showing the role it plays in the women's decisions either to leave or remain with their abusive male partners). I also make the important point that a woman's 'agency' may be expressed not only in her decision to leave but in her decision to remain in the relationship.

In Chapter 6, I proceed to examine the women's institutional relations with social service agencies. Here I show how the experiences of the women may be influenced, directly or indirectly, by the particular history, mandate and funding guidelines of the agencies they access, and by the bureaucratic, time and budgetary constraints that impinge upon the service providers and that are exarcebated by the current neo-conservative government agenda. I also discuss the client-agency interface, showing how both women and their service providers negotiate boundaries in their attempts to accommodate one another's needs. I show how the service providers' professional knowledge and ideology influence their understanding of wife abuse in the immigrant community, but 'shape' the services they provide to women, and also influence the way women redefine and respond to their abuse. I also describe how a more personalised approach that women often expect from service providers is not always possible to achieve depending on the structure of the organisation. Finally, I examine one aspect of the woman abuse counsellor's role, i.e., the development of safety planning. I demonstrate how feminist concerns with safety and well-
being of women often become ‘absorbed’ and ‘institutionalised’, so that the various structures that perpetuate violence against women remain unchallenged.

In PART FOUR: CONCLUSIONS, I indicate, in Chapter 7, some of the social and policy implications of my findings, as well as their implications for the field of social work.

Finally, I also include a set of recommendations for helping to empower the women in my study and improve their options in society.

1.5. Relevance of the Study for Social Work

This study is relevant for social workers for several reasons. First, since social workers often are confronted in their daily practices with situations involving abused immigrant women, a better understanding of the web of relations in which their clients’ lives are embedded will help them in developing more effective interventions. For example, understanding the dual nature of the web will enable service providers not only to identify more precisely the constraints imposed by the web (and thus work toward reducing their ‘victimizing’ impact of such constraints on the women), but also would enable service providers to identify more precisely the opportunities provided by the web (and thus work toward optimizing the options of these women in society). Second, recognizing that the web is not made of steel but is flexible; that it is not forever fixed but can be influenced in various ways, will encourage social workers to challenge taken-for-granted policies and practices that perpetuate women’s victimization. Clearly, there is more than one way to effect change. For example, what might not be accomplished by tightening one ‘thread’ could conceivably be accomplished by loosening another. Finally, while social workers typically deal with many different aspects of the web (e.g.,
immigration, the labour market, welfare, family, religion, and social service agencies), gaining a better awareness of how these aspects are interrelated will lead them toward a more integrated and holistic understanding of these women's lives, as well as to a less fragmentated approach in dealing with these women's problems. Finally, my analysis has shown that social services alone cannot attend to the wide ranging needs of these women. One must look also to structural change in order to redress this compelling example of social injustice.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Background of the Study

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Attempts to explain wife abuse appear in the literature from a large number of different perspectives. This, in itself, suggests that wife abuse is a complex and multifaceted problem. When the subject of inquiry is the abuse of immigrant women, then the issue becomes even more complex.

To analyse the subject of wife abuse among immigrant women, I have adopted two broad theoretical perspectives. The first perspective derives from feminist theories while the second, from theories espousing the notion of the social construction of reality. As indicated earlier, these perspectives tend to overlap at certain points.

While each perspectives admittedly has its strengths, each also has certain limitations, and alone cannot account for the complexity of the issue of wife abuse. In applying both perspectives to the present topic, however, I was able to optimise their combined strengths.

2.1.1. Feminist Perspectives

The world of an immigrant woman is “determined, shaped, organised by social processes beyond her experience and arising out of the interrelations of many [...] experienced worlds. They are relations that co-ordinate and codetermine the world’s activities, and experiences of people enter into them at different points.” (Smith, 1987:134). Smith uses the term “social relations” to refer to “concerting courses of
action in which what people do is already organised as it takes up from what precedes and projects its organisation into what follows” (Smith, 1987:183). Thus, when an immigrant woman goes to a social service agency, she enters into a set of relations that emerges from outside her immediate experience, and that will almost inevitably shapes the way her needs will be addressed.

Over the past several decades, feminist theorists have contributed greatly toward our understanding of women’s realities. I have attempted to achieve this same objective for the women in my study. Along with many other feminists, I embrace the widely cited maxim that “the personal is political” (Stanley and Wise, 1983). This maxim reminds us that women’s experiences are shaped by, and thus must be seen within, the larger social context, that women’s experiences ‘count’ in the broader world, and that so-called private issues that concern women (domestic violence, child-bearing, and sexuality, among others) belong as well to the public sphere.

One of the concerns of some feminists has been how the use of such terms as women and gender has created categories that fail to take into account differences among women (Stanley and Wise, 1990:21). Hudson, for example, highlights certain problems that follow from the feminist argument that sexism alone is the basis of oppression:

The pursuit of greater gender equality has sometimes been at the expense of recognising other oppressions, particularly those experienced by Black and working class women and by lesbians. The dynamics and effects of oppression are like a kaleidoscope where the configurations of and relationships between different forms of oppression are constantly moving and changing. Feminist perspectives must constantly take account of such changes; to do otherwise is to contribute to oppression rather than to challenge it (Hudson 1980: 93).
Some feminists have argued that no universal category, women, exists (Spelman, 1989; Riley, 1988). Yet, it is clear that women from different nations often discover common interests based on their experiences as women (or more precisely as mothers, wives and/or female workers) and as such are subjected to patriarchal values to a greater or lesser extent. What is needed, however, is a more inclusive feminist framework (Dill, 1983; Yuval-Davis, 1994), one that does not erase differences among women but, instead, replaces perceived unity and homogeneity “by dialogues which give recognition to the specific positioning of those who participate in them…” (Yuval-Davis, 1994:194).

The project of feminism itself must be more inclusive than a focus on gender alone permits. If feminism is to liberate women, it must virtually address all forms of domination because women fill the ranks of every category of oppressed people ... Each lives in a different node in the web of oppressions. Thus, to refer to a liberatory project as ‘feminist’ cannot mean that it is only for or about ‘women’, but that is informed and consistent with feminism. It seeks, in current feminist parlance, to unmake the web of oppressions and reweave the web of life (Alcoff and Potter, 1993:4) [my emphases].

Although there has been a call for an inclusive feminism, no single feminist theory to date has been able to account for all experiences of oppression among different women (Eaton, 1994). However, while each theory may be only ‘partial’, together they provide both a broader and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of wife abuse, an understanding that takes into account, in addition to gender, the issues of race, ethnicity, class, and other ascribed attributes of women.

Drawing upon Smith’s insights, I argue that “intimate and personal experiences of oppression” (which clearly include the experience of wife abuse), “are anchored in and sustained by a patriarchal organization of political ruling” (Smith, 1987:211). In light of
this argument, it is interesting to note that the kinds of power and control tactics that characterize wife abuse are also used in our society to sustain and reinforce racism, ageism, classism, and other forms of group oppression (Pence and Paymar, 1993). Among such tactics are physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and spiritual abuse; imposed isolation; the use of threats and intimidation; and the use of children as pawns.

In the sections that follow, the related themes of oppression and resistance (the subject of many feminist writings) will be discussed. Wife abuse, after all, is linked not only to violence against women in particular, but to violence upon society as a whole, e.g. through poverty, racism, and discriminatory practices that affect not only women but all oppressed groups (McLeod and Shin, 1990).

- **Oppression:**

  Although we are all born with that “divine spark” of our common humanity- with the power to think, to choose, and to act according to our own interests - all the institutions of our socialisation - family, school, media, church, and State, collectively shape our consciousness into that of a victim: someone who accepts the subordination of her own needs and desires to those of others; someone dependent on the goodwill of others; someone powerless to control her own life. (Antrobus, 1989:195)

  Theorists analyse oppression from a number of different perspectives (hooks, 1984, 1989; Barrett, 1980; Lorde, 1984; Frye, 1983; Brittan and Maynard, 1984; Young, 1990; Collins, 1990). For example, oppression has also been variously associated with immobilisation, restraint, and lack of mobility (Frye, 1983), with absence of choice (hooks, 1984), and with lack of autonomy (Sherwin, 1996). Brittan and Maynard (1984:223) argue that oppression occurs during socialisation processes within both the family and the educational system. These authors also relate oppression to social class and capitalism.
They describe oppression not merely as a simple mechanical process, but as a “two-way process in which both parties are engaged in a continuous struggle to establish the terms of their existence” (Brittan and Maynard 1984:223). This way of characterising oppression thus includes not only the “continuous struggle” it entails but, in addition, the possibility of resistance that oppression implies.

Young (1990) maintains that oppression consists in:

systematic institutional processes which prevent some people from learning and using satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognised settings, or institutionalised social processes which inhibit people’s ability to play and communicate with others or to express their feelings and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen. While the social conditions of oppression often include material deprivation or maldistribution, they also involve issues beyond distribution (Young, 1990:38).

Young thus relates oppression to the broader issue of social justice, contending that to achieve social justice, institutionalised domination and oppression must be eliminated. Her argument that social conditions of oppression involve issues beyond that of inequitable distribution of goods and services is also pertinent to the present study. For example, despite having certain rights under the law, Portuguese-speaking immigrant women often are unable to exercise them because of social constraints based on class, race, gender, immigrant status, and English language ability. To illustrate: a Portuguese-speaking immigrant woman may have the right to file a complaint against her abusive husband, but in doing so she may jeopardise her immigrant status. She also has the right to a fair trial in child custody issues, but may be unable to pay for proper legal counsel. Similarly, in a situation either of job harassment or inadequate working conditions, she has the right to lodge an official complaint, but doing so may jeopardise her job, on whose income the family usually depends. Finally, she also has the right to leave an abusive male
partner. However, should she do so, not only may she lose her main source of economic support, but she risks the withdrawal of her system of family and social support. Moreover, upon leaving him, he may in retaliation withdraw his sponsorship of her, and in some cases seriously jeopardize her ability to remain in Canada as a consequence. As Young (1990:25) points out: “rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain actions.”

Similarly, opportunities refer “to doing more than having.” To say that a Portuguese-speaking immigrant woman has the opportunity to study English, to obtain an education, to upgrade her skills, and to find a better job by no means implies that she can also take advantage of such opportunities. For example, a woman who had immigrated to Canada within the past ten years ago (which is the case of the women in my study), her only opportunity to learn English at that time was to attend subsidised English classes. However, if her immigrant status happened to be that of family class or dependent, then this ‘opportunity’ would have been meaningless. Oppression thus refers to all forms of control that prevent the full advancement and fulfilment of an individual’s goals. Moreover, individuals experience different kinds of oppression according to their “social location” (Hartsock, 1983). Thus, while we can speak of ‘oppressed people’, we cannot precisely assess the type, nor measure the degree of, oppression in their lives. For example, an abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant woman is likely to be oppressed not only because of her gender, but because of her ethnicity, race, immigration designation, and socio-economic status.
Oppressions originating from multiple sources tend to become intertwined in the individual’s identity. While we cannot readily separate them, we can openly acknowledge the fact that certain groups of people are subject to certain types of oppression based on class, race, age, appearance, etc., while others clearly are not. We can also acknowledge the fact that some individuals and groups may benefit significantly from the oppression of the disadvantaged. As Lorde (1990) maintains:

In a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematised oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the space of the dehumanised inferior. Within this society, that group is made of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people, and women. (Lorde, 1990:182)

Mullaly (1997:139), who argues that oppression is systemic, maintains that it occurs for several reasons: (a) to enable dominant groups to access a wide range of better paying and higher status jobs; (b) to protect the oppressors’ preferential access to and treatment from social institutions; and (c) to exploit the oppressed as a ready labour supply for carrying out menial and dangerous jobs. Mullaly further contends that the oppressed often are characterised in society as resentful, envious, and dangerous, thereby providing a convenient rationale for any action that is taken by social institutions to control and exploit them.

Hence, clients of social service agencies may internalise their own oppression, such that they come to assume that their life situation is a result of their own doing rather than an outcome of structural forces (Mullaly, 1997). Oppression serves to maintain the dominant-subordinate relationships in our society (although not all dominant groups perceive themselves as oppressors). This process of naturalization of oppression is fuelled
by an ideology of *meritocracy* in which those who succeed are presumed to possess ‘the right stuff’, whereas for those that fail, ‘it’s their own fault’. As Freire points out:

> The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanises others and themselves... For them, having more is an inalienable right, a right they have acquired through their own ‘effort’, with their ‘courage to take risks’. If others do not have more is because they are incompetent or lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the ‘generous gestures’ of the dominant class (Freire, 1970:45).

A belief in meritocracy thus hides the reality of structural inequality that exists in Canadian society as well as in other societies that restrict the number of choices available to individuals. As hooks (1984:5) points out: “being oppressed means the absence of choices.”

Using a geological metaphor, Wineman (1984:173) notes that “taken together, stratification *within* each oppressed group, divisions *between* oppressed groups, and the *overlapping* of oppressed groups can create an enormously intricate and complicated maze of criss-crossing hierarchies” such that “one continuum of stratification cannot be addressed in isolation from all others” (Wineman, 1984:173) [my emphases]. Wineman further argues that these hierarchies of oppression create obstacles to coalitions, given that persons who are oppressed often seek, in turn, to oppress others. He proposes a commitment that “values community over fragmentation, ... cooperation over competition, and ...the flowering of diversity of human capabilities over narrow hierarchies that define people as superiors and inferiors.” Wineman further stresses that the first step in building coalitions is to recognise the realities that keep people divided. Women, for example,
have contradictory interests that keep them divided by race, culture, class, and sexual orientation (Ramazanoglu, 1989:178).

To expand on Wineman’s insights, we must go beyond the view of oppression as the conscious and intentional acts of one group against another. Thus, my study analyses oppression in the structural sense that Young proposes below:

In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms - in short, the normal processes of everyday lives. We cannot eliminate this structural oppression by getting rid of the rulers or making new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions (Young, 1990:41).

Although the abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in this study do not conceptualise their problems of everyday living in terms of oppression, it is clear from their accounts that oppression plays an important role in their everyday lives. Their narratives reveal that their oppression is manifested not only in the abuse they experience at the hands of their male partners, but in the fact that their basic survival needs (e.g. food, housing, clothing, health care, jobs, and income) often remain unfulfilled. They also experience oppression through discrimination, whether direct or indirect. For example, owing to the language and cultural barriers they face, they tend to have unequal access to the services of lawyers, doctors, and counsellors. Yet, although many of these women clearly are oppressed within Canadian society, resistance is still a possibility.
Resistance:

Resistance is rooted in woman's being for itself. On the visionary side, it begins with women's ability to see through hegemonic pretensions despite the mystification and confusion. All oppressed groups have dual vision because all must keep moving between their own nascent understanding and the oppressors' if they were to survive...Strategies of resistance may start by building a relationship of solidarity with other women, resisting patriarchal role expectations, promoting values such as cooperation, connection, nurturing, adaptation, and power sharing rather than competitiveness, individualism and power over other people (Burstow, 1992:16-17).

An immigrant woman's resistance to oppression is also linked to the processes of consciousness-raising and empowerment. This implies that she not only understands her society and the place she currently has in it, but that she makes efforts to modify social relations (Stromquist, 1988:12). First, however, she must both recognise the systemic forces that oppress her, as well as challenge the idea that her powerlessness resides solely at the level of herself as an individual.

Lee (1994) addresses an issue which she refers to as biculturality, i.e., the ability to live in two cultures: first, the more nurturing culture of one's own cultural group and, second, the wider culture that may oppress, but may also provide opportunities for self-actualisation. The ability to live in two cultures is based on the premise that disempowered people or oppressed people have "double knowledge." Not only are they aware of what are considered to be 'truths' according to the majority culture's perception of reality, but they understand still other 'truths' based on their experiences as minority people (Butler, 1992; hooks, 1989; Weick, 1993). Other authors have also drawn this distinction. For example, Norton (1978) uses the concept of "dual perspective" to explain how people of
colour can have more than one perception of reality. Such multiple perceptions evolve from the differences in assumptions that are articulated, respectively, in their micro-environment and their macro-environment. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa (1990:379) uses the concept “mestiza consciousness” to explain the ability of ethnic-minority people to survive in the two different worlds in which they live by becoming “hybrids”. She further argues that to maintain one’s own language means recognising all possible interpretations while at the same time resisting one’s dissolution into the dominant culture. Mestiza consciousness thus provides the tools for understanding the contradictions and ambivalence that invariably result from living in dual cultures. Moreover, mestiza consciousness can also generate the energy that enables women to operate in a “pluralistic mode ... [in which] nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (Anzaldúa, 1990:379). In short, the culture of one’s own group may be both restrictive and yet nurturing, just as the dominant culture may both oppress and yet present opportunities for liberation.

Foucault provides other interesting insights that can be applied in my study, for his notion of power incorporates the micro-level practices carried out in the everyday lives of individuals. Using the metaphor of ‘capillaries’ when describing the strategies, networks, and mechanisms of power that operate at a micro-level (Barret, 1991; Foucault, 1988), Foucault argues that individuals ‘circulate’ within and among these ‘capillaries’ of power, during which time they both are subject to, as well as capable of exercising power (Foucault, 1980). His notion of power thus implies the possibility of resistance, a
possibility which becomes highly relevant to the issue of abused immigrant women. Power, Foucault contends, is something that is exercised rather than possessed. It is not ‘attached’ to agents nor to interests, but is ‘incorporated’ within numerous practices.

Foucault further argues that power, unlike domination, is not necessarily oppressive. Thus, in his view, there is a basic difference between relationships of power and relationships of domination. In the first instance, there is a subject who exerts power, against which there may be multiple points of resistance. Thus, power is circular, fluid, and exists in a dialectical and often contradictory relationship. In a relationship of domination, on the other hand, there is no possibility of resistance, since domination is characterised by fixed and asymmetric relationships of power. Thus in a relationship (or, more appropriately, a state) of domination, power has become ‘congealed’. Foucault thus assumes that resistance is possible only for free subjects, i.e., subjects who face a field of possibilities, an array of options. He remarks:

the important question ... is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system (Foucault, 1988:294).

Foucault’s insights on the importance of establishing “practices of freedom” that is, new attitudes and patterns of behaviour that affect change, is particularly relevant for Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in my study. Despite being marginalised and subjected to unequal discriminatory policies and practices, these women are still able to resist the social constraints that surround them.

Traditional accounts assume that power as domination operates from the top down, forcing and controlling unwilling victims to bend to the will of more powerful superiors. These accounts, however, fail to address the question of why, for example, women stay with abusive men even when
they have ample opportunity to leave, or why slaves did not more often kill their owners. In short, the willingness of the victim to collude in her or his own victimisation is overlooked. Such accounts also fail to explain instances of sustained resistance by victims, even when chances for victory appear remote. (Collins, 1990:227)

Many abused women, however, do not ‘collude’ in their own victimisation, are not merely passive recipients of male power. Indeed, they demonstrate that they are able to resist interpersonal violence in many ways, e.g., by threatening to leave their abusers, successfully persuading them to change, taking steps to become economically independent, withholding sex, refusing to do the daily chores, confronting the abusers’ behaviour, fighting back, leaving the home, etc. (Grossi, 1994). Indeed, abused women have demonstrated an enormous capacity for resisting and enduring violence occurring in a relationship of unequal power (Hoff, 1990; Hanmer and Maynard, 1987; Gondolf and Fisher, 1988; Grossi, 1994). This resistance has been linked to social position, political consciousness, and support networks (Hanmer, Radford and Stanko, 1989), as well as to the woman’s race, ethnicity, language fluency, ability, age, family history, cultural values, access to information, and the socio-political context. All such variables play a role in determining how narrowly or loosely constricted are women’s options for ending wife abuse.

My understanding is that wife abuse, as a form of oppression and an expression of power, does not preclude the possibility of resistance on the part of ‘the oppressed’ (Grossi, 1994). Indeed, to consistently characterize immigrant women as helpless ‘victims’ of violence, or as ‘subordinated’ individuals, serves only to reinforce the stereotype of their powerlessness and alienation in society (Dubois and Miley, 1996:166). In a relation
of oppression, the ‘oppressed’ individual (or group) can still challenge that relation, whereas in a relation of subordination, the ‘subordinated’ individual (or group) has internalized the power differential and no longer challenges it (cf. Laclau and Mouffe cited on Cannel, 1992:31).

As bell hooks maintains in *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (1984:118), violence against women is inextricably linked to all acts of violence in society that take place between the powerful and the powerless, the dominant and the dominated. She maintains that it is the Western notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence. hooks’ notion of violence is useful in an analysis of immigrant women’s lives, for it suggests that individual struggles to end violence must be linked to a collective struggle to transform the larger structures that perpetuate and condone violence against women.

2.1.2. The Social Construction of Reality

The concept of the *social construction of reality* was first introduced by Berger and Luckmann (1967), two German sociologists whose interests lay in an epistemological search for the very ‘grounds’ of knowledge. According to these authors, the assumption that there are various processes through which ‘reality’ becomes ‘socially constructed’ necessarily implies that many versions of ‘the truth’ are possible. They argue, however, that only certain versions of ‘the truth’ become reified and legitimated.

According to Hale (1990), the *social construction of reality* (which theory the author associates loosely with Marxist theory), refers to the taken-for-granted practices and rules for practical reasoning through which people create and sustain their notions of
what is going on. This approach, according to the author, allows us to explore how the immediate and practical activities of people in their everyday working lives produce patterns that we subsequently come to recognise as social structures, structures that not only reflect the patterns of organisation in society as a whole, but how social relations become structured around specific functions or needs.

In this section, I argue that such concepts as abused woman, immigrant woman, and abused immigrant woman are ‘socially constructed’ in objectifying and often negative ways by powerful social forces that generate various kinds of discourse. Some of the sources of discourse that affect the women in my study include the government, the legal system, the medical system (in particular, psychiatry), the media, the criminal justice system, and the Immigration Act.

One example of such discourse can be found in Canada’s multicultural policies, creations of the government intended to solve ‘the immigrant problem’ which purportedly, has arisen from an increase in immigration and ethnic diversity across the country (Elliot and Fleras, 1990:62). Multicultural policies, however, promote the assumption that it is possible to treat ‘culture’ as only one more aspect of an individual’s identity. This assumption avoids the issue of how to integrate immigrants into the wider social, economic and political institutions of an often racist society (Hale, 1995:424).

Moreover, the exhortation—‘unity within diversity’—a slogan that is perpetuated throughout multicultural policies, discourses, and initiatives, often contrasts sharply with the reality of racism, discrimination, and the lack of economic and political power of ethnic minorities (Li, 1988, 1990; Bolaria and Li, 1985). Indeed, multiculturalism’s focus
on 'culture' may prevent the reality of race, class, and gender oppression from emerging in analyses of the experiences of immigrant women in Canada.

Accordingly, race, gender, ethnicity, and class (all of which, in varying degrees, participate in the social construction of immigrant woman), are not so much objective givens as they are processes or aspects of relations between people that emerge through “struggles over the control of the means of production and reproduction in a given society.” (Ng, 1993b) In a capitalist system such as Canada, only certain groups or classes control the means of production. To a great extent, they also control the ‘preferred ideological hegemony’—‘the truth according to x’, with x representing the ruling social, economic, and political elite.

In the writings of some 20th century Marxists (especially the Italian, Gramsci), [the term ‘hegemony’]...is used to denote the predominance of one social class over others...[a class that projects]...its own particular way of seeing the world, human and social relationships, so that this is accepted as ‘common sense’ and part of the natural order by those who are in fact subordinated by it (Bullock and Stallybrass 1977:279).

Hegemonic ‘truth’ becomes so powerful, so taken for granted, so much a part of ‘common sense’, that it often ‘disappears’ from our conscious awareness:

In our society, dominant discourse tries never to speak its own name. Its authority is based on its absence. The absence is not just that of the various groups classified as ‘other’, although members of these groups are routinely denied power. It is also the lack of any overt acknowledgment of the specificity of the dominant culture, which is simply assumed to be the encompassing norm. This is the basis of its power (Fergusson, 1990:11).

This same process is at work in social constructions surrounding the term immigrant woman, a term that evokes a set of assumptions prevalent in Canadian society, i.e., that immigrant women are uneducated, that they are attached to a traditional and essentially patriarchal model of the family in which the authority of the husband is
accepted as ‘natural’ (Grosner, 1995), and that they are generally unaccustomed to working outside of the home (Estable and Meyer, 1989). At least, the last of these three assumptions is suspect, given that most immigrant women in Canada currently are active in the labour force (Statistics Canada, 1995), and also were often working outside of their homes in their countries of origin (Almeida, 1991).

Moreover, such ‘common sense’ knowledge concerning abused immigrant women is maintained not only through government discourse but through ruling institutions in general. This knowledge is distributed by the educational system, communication networks, and other social institutions that reflect the ideological apparatuses of society (Smith, 1981). Within the discourse of such systems, networks, and institutions, immigrant woman and abused immigrant woman are often portrayed as a weak, passive, uneducated, and impoverished ‘victims’. This filtered-down ‘common sense’ knowledge serves only to perpetuate the discursive practices that construct immigrant women as ‘other’, and that determine both the encompassing norm and the referent for people’s behaviour and actions.

The problem is that these forms of objectified knowledge often do not acknowledge significant differences among people and tend to objectify difference itself. Thus, individuals are left in a situation in which they have to reconstruct knowledge in order to make sense of their own experiences and other’s actual practices (Smith, 1990). Such forms of knowledge erase the subjectivity of the individual. Thus, structural constraints that immigrant women face (e.g. discriminatory policies) become often
transformed into individual problems and constructed as problems of “culture” or of “adaptation” (Ng and Ramirez, 1981; Bodnar and Reimer, 1979).

Discourses arising from all such ideologically-driven structures and practices in society generate a vast ‘inventory’ of social imagery. One image of *immigrant woman*, according to Ng (1987:29), is that of “a woman with an accent from a Third World country in a low-skilled job [who] is perceived as an immigrant regardless of the time living in Canada, while a white university professor from the United States is not perceived as such.” Another such image is that of any woman who is a member of a visible minority and whose culture and language make it difficult for her to cope with and adapt to Canadian society (Ng, 1986, 1988; Wiebe, 1985; Riuort and Marjuri, 1986). In short, the term *immigrant women*, which appears at first glance simply to denote, in an impartial way, someone who is both ‘an immigrant’ and ‘a woman’, also functions as a political and a social construct.

Typically, an immigrant woman suffers discrimination not because who she is as individual, but because she comes to be seen as belonging to a group that has been stereotyped in negative ways. The markers of her ‘otherness’- her skin colour, gender, dress, class, ethnicity, accent, or other attributes - are not individual traits *per se*, but are outcomes of processes that organise Canadian society in ways that influence how people interpret what is going on (Hale, 1990). In short, all such traits influence how others will perceive and interact with her, both on an individual and institutional level. A woman wearing a purdah, for example, who often is constructed in Canada as ‘oppressed’, may find herself exposed to patronising glances or comments, despite being a successful
professional. In a similar vein, wife abuse involving an immigrant woman often is constructed as a ‘natural part of her culture’. One of the implications of such a construction is that any institutional oppression that she may report may be summarily dismissed.

The ‘common-sense’ knowledge that constructs immigrant women as ‘other’ has been largely informed by Eurocentric values. For example, there is a common assumption that Asian women (many of whom have ‘arranged’ marriages) are more oppressed in their marriages than are their North American counterparts. However, in many ‘non-arranged’ North-American marriages (which are presumed to be based on love and romance), there are implicit social arrangements based on class boundaries that often are subject to rigorous parental regulation (Amos and Parmar 1992 quoted in Day, 1992:19).

On becoming aware of the oppressive perceptions of the society that surrounds them, immigrant women may or may not internalise them; may or may not adopt them as their own. Should they internalise such perceptions, they are more likely to behave according to the stereotype. However, those who do not internalise them and who, instead, challenge them in their attempt to preserve their preferred identity, demonstrate their potential to empower themselves.

Hegemonic discursive practices can never fully ‘fix’ an individual’s identity because of that individual’s “multiple subject positions” (Carrol, 1992). For example, the social construction of the identity of Latin-American women as passive, conformist, and holding of traditional values stands in dramatic contrast to their intense political participation and involvement in social movements. In Brazil, for example, 90% of the
popular social movements are comprised of women (Grossi, 1994). Moreover, women in Latin-America, in addition to managing their households, play a major role in their communities. For example, they also create innovative ways to deal with such problems as poverty and hunger through establishing soup kitchens, joint-purchasing of food, food co-ops, community crops, etc.

Counter-hegemonic discourse (as the term suggests) provides a challenge to hegemonic discourse. Hegemonic discourse, transmitted to individuals during their socialization (via media, family, school, church, etc.), instructs them on how to behave. Over time, such individuals come to accept certain attitudes or behaviour as ‘natural’. Whenever an attempt is made to demystify this ‘official reality’, or whenever a new and different ‘account’ is produced by the people at the margins, a dialectic results. This dialectic implies that a transformation of the hegemonic knowledge is in process.

Counter-hegemony is not about imposing the ‘truth’ of any one view or about imposing a one-dimensional identity upon a political movement. It is about many transformations in the process of relating experiences, recognizing needs and creating alternatives (Adkin, 1992:154).

Counter-hegemonic discourse is produced by members of a subgroup or class within society that contradicts or opposes the official knowledge concerning norms, values and practices that prevail within a society (Hale, 1990). Thus, counter-hegemonic knowledge would seek to revise ‘common sense’ notions of abused immigrant women, autonomy, power, agency, domination, etc. Counter-hegemonic knowledge also tends to generate a plurality of ideas and meanings, vitalize democratic discourse, and make possible social and political transformation.
Counter-hegemonic discourse has recently been developed both by immigrant women and women of colour. These two groups are now challenging ‘mainstream’ feminist theory which, initially, had been developed by and largely for white middle-class women. Because early feminists had made little attempt to draw attention to the diversity of all women with respect to race, class, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or other attributes (Bannerji, 1991; hooks, 1989; Collins, 1990; Spelman, 1988), their underlying assumption concerning woman was that she was neither black, Hispanic, lesbian, nor poor (Minh-ha, 1989).

The production of meanings that are generated by immigrant women located at the margins of Canadian society can never be entirely separated from the production of meanings that are generated by and central to the dominant culture: both ‘productions’ are part of the same social process (Fergusson et al., 1990; Bannerji, 1993). Thus, the concept of counter-hegemonic knowledge is highly relevant to the present study. To illustrate: the ways in which service providers define an immigrant woman’s situation may lead that woman to redefine her experience and thus, possibly, to gain some degree of empowerment. In turn, the ways in which immigrant women define their situations may prompt their service providers to revise their understanding of wife abuse and thus, possibly, modify their working practices.

It is important to emphasise that our understandings of and our knowledge about wife abuse in the immigrant community are also constructed through the research literature on the subject. Feminists properly remind us that all science is a social activity embedded in a socio-historical context (Code, 1991). Furthermore, recent research on
wife abuse, produced by white feminists, acknowledges that women from different ethnic and racial groups experience a range of oppressions (e.g. class, race, and gender) that probably shape their experiences with violence in their homes; that wife abuse is an outcome of patriarchy and racial inequality; and that the “integrated oppressions” of race, class and gender keep these women in abusive situations (Randall, 1989; Walker, 1990; Guberman and Wolfe, 1985). Other literature on wife abuse occurring within the immigrant community, however, fails to address in an adequate way the extent to which social, professional, and political ideologies shape not only ‘problem construction’, but subsequent responses to such constructed problems (Edelman, 1988), that is ‘solution construction’.

Immigrant women themselves have been producing literature concerning the way they experience wife abuse in their own communities, and address the issues of institutional racism, discriminatory policies, and unequal access to services. They also counteract some common stereotypes associated with immigrant women (Papp, 1990; Rafiq, 1991; Kohli, 1991; Razack, 1994; Paredes, 1992; McLeod and Shin, 1990; Riutort and Small, 1985).

One must also become aware of the way the immigrant woman tends to be socially constructed by the media and by the government:

The popular stereotype reflected in the media and in many government programs is that ‘immigrant women’ comprise a fairly homogeneous group, with some superficial variations in language and dress. In fact, the immigrant women’s community in Canada is strikingly diverse. All immigrant women do not share the same history. Nor do they live the Canadian reality the same way. Race, class and language intersect as significant factors to determine the specific quality of any immigrant woman’s life. (Estable and Meyer, 1989:11)
Resistance to the social construction of immigrant women is the first step in mobilising for change. For immigrant women, this means the ability to appropriate new knowledge about themselves that broadens their understanding of the world and creates the possibility of transforming taken-for-granted assumptions about the way they live (Giroux and Mac Laren, 1986:229).

One variation of the social construction of an *abused immigrant woman* is that of a *battered immigrant woman* who is constructed as a helpless and passive individual whose identity has become ‘frozen’ into the paradigm of victimisation. ‘Victimising’ such women, however, tends to objectify their experiences, to separate them both from non-victimised women as well as from those who victimise them. This construction also tends to individualise the problem of male violence in society, locating it solely in the context of private interpersonal relationships. As hooks maintains:

> This label “battered woman” places primarily emphasis on physical assaults that are continuous, repeated and unrelenting. (...) the term “battered woman” is used as though it constitutes a separate and unique category of womanness, as though it is an identity, a mark that sets one apart rather than being simply a descriptive term. It is as though the experience of being repeatedly violently hit is the sole defining characteristic of a woman’s identity and all other aspects of who she is and what her experience has been are submerged (hooks, 1989:87).

Many immigrant women who are assaulted by their spouses do not choose to identify themselves as *battered women*, nor do they want to be perceived as such by their communities (Sinclair, 1985). By emphasising the physical violence they experience at the hands of their male partners, other aspects of their experiences are dismissed. To be a *battered wife* or an *abused wife* is not what uniquely constitutes that woman’s identity, for her identity is complexly constructed by her culture, race, ethnicity, class, sexual
orientation, nationality, religion, politics, etc., all of which will influence her behaviour, her choices, and her way of life.

The term *battered woman* has now become a part of the victimisation discourse which, in large part, has been constructed by our therapeutic society. As noted earlier, such diagnostic terms as *battered woman syndrome, learned helplessness, traumatic bonding*, and so on transform the problem of male violence against women into either personal psychopathology or individual moral inadequacy, rather than acknowledging it as a social problem resulting from male dominance and gender inequality (Dobash and Dobash, 1992, Walker, 1990; Gordon, 1988; Davis, 1987).

In the sections that follow, the related themes of oppression and resistance will be further developed. Wife abuse, after all, is linked not only to violence against women in particular, but to violence upon society as a whole through the poverty, racism, and discriminatory practices that affect not only women but all oppressed groups (McLeod and Shin, 1990). Hence, an appropriate response to violence against immigrant women includes working for broader social justice.

In summary, the wide-ranging complexity of the issue of *abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women* requires a set of intersecting analyses. In this section, I have attempted to offer two: first, an analysis from a broad *feminist* perspective and, second, from the perspective of *the social construction of reality*. 

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2.2. Background of the Study

In this section, I examine, through a review of the literature, certain historical factors that have influenced the immigration of Portuguese-speaking immigrants to Canada and which are relevant to the issue of wife abuse within this group (Section 2.2.1). Next, I examine some of the sociocultural and institutional factors that have affected wife abuse within this group in a variety of ways (Section 2.2.2).

On reviewing the literature, I found relatively little published research on abused or battered immigrant women, a gap which has been acknowledged by other authors as well (Coutinho, 1986; Pilowsky and Mor, 1990). Of the few studies that I found, most either had failed to isolate immigrant women from mainstream groups (Coutinho, 1986) or had tended to group all immigrant women into a single category, without taking into account differences based on race, class, ethnicity, or country of origin.

2.2.1. The Historical Context

Portuguese immigration to Canada is a relatively recent phenomenon, the reasons being both historical and economic. Canada has always been a country rich in natural resources but lacking in labour. Thus, to develop its resources, Canada has had to import labour from other countries. Canada’s inequitable immigration policy had for many years favoured the preferred Northern European and North-American populations over immigrants from other countries. This policy changed, however, in response to the country’s growing labour needs (Das Gupta, 1994).
A large-scale immigration of Portuguese to Canada occurred in the 1950’s. Prior to that decade, any Portuguese who sought immigration to Canada was classified in the non-preferred group: “the type that we are not looking for in Canada...his way of life, even his civilisation seem so different that I doubt if he could ever become an asset to our country” (Iacovetta, 1992, cited in Marques and Marujo, 1993:1).

This ‘first wave’ of Portuguese immigrants was made up of men, the majority of whom came from the virtually undeveloped islands off Portugal, the Azores, in which high unemployment was the rule rather than the exception. This immigration was the result of a mutually beneficial agreement between Portugal and Canada. On the one hand, Canada needed to look outside its own borders for cheap labour to ensure its continued economic growth and national development, largely because Canadian workers were refusing to work at menial jobs for low wages (Anderson and Higgs, 1976). On the other hand, at that time there were many unskilled and unemployed men in Portugal’s rural areas who were seeking work. The solution was to send these men to work in Canada (a clear example of how fluctuations in the labour market can affect immigration policy).

For the Portuguese immigrants who arrived at that time, being perceived as ‘second best immigrants’, permitted to enter Canada only because the country was desperate for cheap labour, no doubt was a humiliating experience. Moreover, they were not allowed to bring their wives and families with them, which placed an unusual strain on the traditional family structure that continue to be characteristic of Portugal’s rural areas (Anderson and Higgs, 1976; Alpalhão and da Rosa, 1980). Indeed, narratives recounting the effects of such separations have been documented in stories of rural Portuguese
women who were left behind by husbands who had immigrated to other countries (Brettel, 1986).

In 1991, it was estimated that there were approximately 300,000 people living in Canada whose ethnic origin was Portuguese, two-thirds of whom were first generation immigrants who had come mostly from rural backgrounds (Statistics Canada, 1991 quoted in Grosner, 1995). More recent immigrants from Portugal, however, have tended to come both from rural and urban areas, and to have achieved higher levels of education than those Portuguese immigrants who preceded them.

Some of the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in my study include those who immigrated to Canada from Brazil. According to the Brazilian Consulate in Toronto [personal communication], there are relatively few Brazilians in Canada, as compared to other immigrant groups. Immigration from Brazil increased during the 1970’s, when many Brazilians (along with other South Americans from Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay), left their respective countries in the wake of various military coups. The first immigrants were primarily young men and women who were semi-skilled, lower-middle class workers. Most of them were from Governador Valadares in the state of Minas Gerais (Grosner, 1995). Later immigrants came from urban rather than rural areas and generally had higher levels of education than those who preceded them. While Brazilian immigration to Canada has included people from a wide range of social classes, the profile of Brazilian immigration has changed over the years, and more qualified professionals from the higher social classes are now establishing themselves in Canada, although they still represent only the minority (Statistics Canada, 1996). In the 1980s, the pattern of Latin American
immigration to Canada shifted, for the majority were now coming from Central rather than South America, in particular, from the countries of El Salvador and Nicaragua (Mata in Romero-Cachinero, 1987:19). Such changes in Latin American immigration patterns not only were affected by political changes in the home countries (in particular, increasingly repressive governments), but by changes in Canada’s immigration policy. One such change was the removal of selection criteria relating to race. This change came about in part because many workers from preferred countries no longer appeared to be interested in immigrating to Canada. With the drying up of its usual source of labour and in order to meet the demands of a growing capitalist economy, Canada now had to look to non-traditional sources (which in many cases were sources previously designated as non-preferred) (Das Gupta, 1994:62).

In Canada, Brazilians generally are considered to be ‘non-whites’ or ‘people of colour’. ‘Ethnicity’ arises in the process of becoming an immigrant (Ng, 1981) since in Brazil, slightly more than half (53%) of the population is considered to be white. Of this group, 15% are of Portuguese origin, 11% of Italian origin, 10% of Spanish origin, and 3% of German origin. The remaining 14% have various other designations. Many Latin-Americans prefer not to be identified as ‘Latin Americans’ (i.e., on the basis of the larger region from which they come) but, rather, on the basis of their particular nationality, e.g. Brazilian, Chilean, Argentinean, or Peruvian.

Before the 1980s, very few Brazilians had established themselves in Toronto. Today, according to the Brazilian Consulate, there are approximately 6,000 Brazilians...

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4 There was a category called “racial origin” which was used to exclude Blacks and other ethnic minority groups from entering Canada. This category was removed from the Canadian immigration regulations in 1967 (Daenzer, 1991).
living in Toronto, although this statistic is not precise, since many Brazilians are in Canada illegally while others are here but awaiting landed immigrant status.

2.2.2. The Sociocultural Context

In this section, the implications for abused immigrant women of some sociocultural issues will be discussed.

Some women choose to stay with their abusive male partner because the realities of being a single mother are more harsh than living with the threat of violence from day to day. Discrimination within the workplace, unequal employment opportunities, difficulty in securing adequate housing, poverty, social isolation and loneliness are only a few of the consequences of leaving the relationship (Coutinho, 1986:2).

Other difficulties immigrant women experience within Canadian society include the double workday, a lack of recognition of their professional skills, increase in family responsibilities, a lack of access to information and resources, and a lack of social and political involvement (Ng and Ramirez, 1981; Estable and Meyer, 1989). Although both immigrant women and ‘mainstream women’ may find themselves at risk of experiencing wife abuse (including abuse that may be life-threatening), the difference is that abused immigrant women not only are confronted with additional barriers, but tend to have fewer options than women born in Canada (Riutort and Small, 1985). These barriers have been linked to the triple jeopardy of sexism, racism, and immigration status, and become further reinforced by the women’s economic dependence upon their partners (Wiebe, 1985; McLeod and Shin, 1990). McLeod (1987) suggests yet another barrier, namely, the women’s fear of deportation. Moreover, the racism that often is encountered tends to reinforce the need for family and community ties. Thus, immigrant women often choose to remain in
their communities, side by side with their abusive male partners, for reasons of survival (Schechter, 1982; Santinolli, 1991).

In general, all abused women (including ‘mainstream’ women) tend to suffer some degree of isolation, (McLeod 1987). Immigrant women, however, experience “double isolation”, both in relation to the abuse they experience and their often lack of English skills (McLeod, 1987). Even though an immigrant woman may speak English, she often encounters services that are not culturally appropriate to her needs.

When venturing outside of their communities, immigrant women also become exposed to values, norms, and laws that may differ significantly from those of their own culture (Wiebe, 1985; McLeod and Shin, 1990). Moreover, although Canada espouses multiculturalism in principle, what often happens in practice is that individuals are expected to assimilate Canadian values that are alien to them. Thus, integration into Canadian society often results not only in an increased exposure to racism at the individual, community, and social levels, but an awareness that assimilation comes at the price of negating one’s own cultural identity, distinctive values, and patterns of behaviour (Bolaria, 1991). Furthermore:

...while the Canadian government encourages immigration, not all immigrants are given the tools they need to integrate successfully into all aspects of Canadian life. They are often viewed as not quite Canadian and frequently treated as second-class citizens. Cumulatively, these factors make integration and adjustment difficult and intensify the risks for women already in violent situations who must face a double layer of male dominance - that of their own situation and that of the society to which they have come (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993:86).

Typically, an immigrant woman’s isolation is neither a particular attribute nor an inherent trait, but arises in the social organisation of Canadian society. That racism and
sexism are “systems of oppression and inequality based on the ideology of the superiority of one gender and/or race over the other gender and races” (Ng 1993a: 280) is relevant to the understanding of the social context in which these women’s lives are located. Thus, while groups of immigrant women may come to Canada from widely different backgrounds, they nevertheless face similar experiences, experiences that are shaped by the racism and sexism inherent in Canada’s legal, social, and economic systems.

One of the factors that has contributed toward the lack of integration of immigrant women into Canadian society has been their unequal access to the kinds of linguistic resources that would help them upgrade their language skills and thus gain access to better job positions (Paredes, 1987; Giles, 1987). In addition, some labour-market policies, such as Canadian Job Strategy (Daenzer, 1991:29), generally exclude certain services to immigrants. Thus, many of these women tend to become part of a ‘captive labour pool’ (Ng and Ramirez, 1981:48). As such, they have little chance of advancement or job stability. Those that can get jobs become part of an ethnically segregated labour force, which is evident in the concentration of immigrant women in particular areas of work (e.g. garment factories, domestic labour, service industries, etc.), where English skills often are not required (Cassin and Griffith, 1981:110); hence the high concentration of Portuguese-speaking women with minimal English skills in the cleaning industries in Toronto (Neal and Neale, 1981). While such jobs provide flexible schedules that enable the women to balance household and job responsibilities (Grosner, 1995), the jobs also become ‘traps’ that prevent the women from achieving upward social mobility (Anderson, 1974). Thus, continuing to be economically dependent upon their male partners, they are hampered in
their ability to leave their abusers, should they wish to do so.

hooks (1984:121-122) links the workplace situation with violence at home, arguing that the cycle of violence does not begin in the home but rather at the workplace “wherein the male worker is subjected to control by a boss or authority figure that is humiliating and degrading.” hooks argues that since the husband is dependent on his job for material survival and cannot strike out at his employer (who probably would retaliate either by taking away his job or by calling in the police), he suppresses his anger until he can release it in a ‘control situation’ (usually the home), in which the target most often is the woman. hooks understands this cycle of violence as the male attempt to "actualise the fantasy of masculinity that is socially constructed by ruling groups in a capitalist patriarchy." To help men break out of this ‘cycle of violence’, hooks urges us to challenge the notion of power as the ability to exert control over others (especially through the use of coercive force) and, to examine the pervasive impact of capitalism upon people’s lives.

Participation of immigrant women in the labour market has also been linked in the literature to wife abuse in immigrant communities (Alpalhão and da Rosa, 1980, and Grosner, 1991). One of the studies focuses on the Portuguese population living in the province of Quebec (Alpalhão and da Rosa, 1980); another, on Azorean women living in London, Ontario (Grosner, 1991). These authors agree that women’s greater economic independence tends to cause their husbands to feel that they must apply physical force to reassert their male power in the home. This suggests that the entry of women into the labour force is a factor that may lead to an increase in family tensions which, in turn, may lead to an increase in violence. Epstein, Ng and Trebble’s study (1978) on various
immigrant communities in Vancouver - Chinese, East Indian, Hungarian and Portuguese - found that the immigrant women's economic dependence on their husbands makes them more vulnerable to wife abuse. My own findings tend to support this latter view.

Family structure and family ideology also play an important role in wife abuse in the Portuguese-speaking community, in which the family is considered an entity (Anderson and Higgs, 1976). According to Alpalhão and da Rosa (1980), most Portuguese immigrants come from a highly patriarchal culture in which the men are the heads of the household and, in many cases, of extended families as well. Such patterns, however, are now in the process of changing (Rodrigues, 1983; Almeida, 1985). In Portugal, moreover, problems such as wife abuse tend to be dealt with inside the family realm, often with the intervention of the priest (Grosner, 1995). A Brazilian study of abused women who had become shelter residents found that the women sought help primarily from family, friends, neighbours, or other informal networks (Grossi, 1994).

On immigrating to Canada, many Portuguese families undergo a major change in the family structure and power dynamics (Anderson and Higgs, 1976; Grosner, 1995). For example, they discover that many of the functions that are performed by the family or extended family in Portugal and Brazil (e.g. such as intervention in cases of wife abuse), are performed in Canada by specialised institutions or agencies.

In addition, many Portuguese-speaking immigrants tend to believe that the Canadian family is more ‘egalitarian’ when compared to their own families (Anderson and Higgs, 1976):
It appears that the patriarchal family of immigrants is moving slowly toward the egalitarian type of family idealised by many native-born Canadians. Children are particularly influential in this process, for they exert strong pressures on the family for change. Parents, kin and older members of the Portuguese community try to resist these pressures and attempt to arrest the changes (Anderson and Higgs, 1976:131).

In many Canadian families, however, this egalitarian ideal is far from being realised. Indeed, there is a widespread reluctance to acknowledge the prevalence of wife abuse in the Canadian population as a whole, despite the fact that one in three Canadian women who have ever married or lived common law has experienced at least one episode of violence at the hands of her male partner (Rodgers, 1994). While there exists a wide range of feminist literature that maintains that the family is a site of struggle, conflict, and gender inequality (Bishop, 1983), many Portuguese men still tend to blame the changes they see occurring in their own family structures upon the host culture, their incorrect assumption being that the majority of Canadian women have achieved liberation from their traditional roles (Anderson and Higgs, 1976).

Bishop (1983) provides a brief review of the socialist feminist critique that argues for the need to debunk three myths: (a) that the family is a natural or biological unit (rather than a social construction); (b) that the family is a unit with common interests (rather than an ideology that masks divergent interests among family members); and (c), that the family is ‘apolitical’ (rather than the site of economic, political, and psychological struggle in which inequalities of the status quo are reproduced).

Michelle Barret (1980) separates the social from the biological components of the family. She argues that family ideology plays an important role in the construction and reproduction of women’s oppression, and that a particular household organisation and
ideology of familialism are central dimensions of women’s oppression in a capitalistic society. It is only through an analysis of ideology that we can grasp the oppressive myth of an idealised, ‘natural’ family to which all women must conform, and witness how the gendered subjectivity of men and women is constructed. She maintains that the challenge for feminism is to explore how and why women have sought, consciously or unconsciously, to embrace the dominant constructed interpretation of femininity. She further notes that the ideology of gender is not static, and that the meaning of gender in capitalism is tied to that of a household structure and division of labour, both of which occupy a particular place in the relations of production (Barret, 1980):

The ‘family’ [...] does not exist other than as an ideological construct, since the structure of the household, definition and meaning of kinship, and the ideology of ‘the family’ itself, have all varied enormously in different types of society (Barret, 1980:199)

Building upon this understanding, I argue that it is not only the household structure per se that is oppressive to women. Rather, it is the perpetuation of the patriarchal system in which men assume power and control over women while devaluing domestic work (as well as other activities that traditionally are assigned to the female sex). Challenging these dominant norms, however, requires a restructuring of family relations, such that they become based on mutuality, respect, solidarity, and power-sharing, rather than on domination, control, and oppression.

Although families usually tend to reproduce sexual inequality (Barret, 1980; Hartmann, 1981), they can also simultaneously be the locus for resisting such kinds of inequality. Rubin’s work with working families has shown that families can be oppressive, protective, or both (Rubin, 1976:6). Other writers, in their analyses of family power
dynamics, have also examined how, in some families, the intersection of race, gender, and class may influence such dynamics (Davis, 1983; Maraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Zinn, 1980).

For immigrant women, wife abuse should be understood as part of broader societal violence and oppression (McLeod and Shin, 1990). Many immigrant women claim that violence against women should be understood as a community and social issue that affects not only women but men and children as well. Therefore, strategies for change need to target the entire family, the community, and society at large.

On immigrating to Canada, many Portuguese-speaking immigrant women often leave behind their immediate and extended family support network. Thus, they are obliged to rely almost entirely on their communities for support. Framing violence toward immigrant women as a community issue is thus critical in understanding the struggle that many face when trying to find a solution to their abuse. Indeed, their moral dilemma over the fulfilment of collective versus individual needs undoubtedly prevents many such women from seeking help. They fear the social ostracism that typically occurs when the fact of their abuse is exposed. They also fear that if they press charges against or leave their abusive partners, they will threaten the community’s cultural cohesiveness (Riutort and Small, 1985; Santinolli, 1991; Coutinho, 1986; Shin, 1991, 1992). Thus, for many abused immigrant women, loyalty to their community ends up taking precedence over their individual problems. To a certain extent, this is not unreasonable, given that the community helps preserve group survival within Canadian society by protecting its members from the destructive impacts of racism and discrimination. Finally, many
immigrant women claim that to fight for their liberation as women is senseless as long as their communities as a whole continue to be subordinated and oppressed (Yuval-Davis, 1994:187).

The church also plays a role in the issue of wife abuse:

As long as marriage and family relationships maintain a facade of normalcy, there is often a refusal both by the church and the community to acknowledge wife abuse or violence in the home (Fortune and Herman, 1980:15).

In many countries, the church provides not only the basis for local laws and government, but prescribes customs and traditions. Both in Portugal and Brazil, Catholicism continues to reinforce the sanctity of marriage and adherence to traditional gender roles (Grosner, 1991; Grossi, 1994). Despite recent changes in women’s roles and in family composition (Fernandes, 1994), the ‘ideal family’ is still seen to be that of a husband, a wife, and children, with the husband acting as the dominant figure. Two well-known Portuguese sayings (personal knowledge) reflect these gender differences in marriage: “A man’s home is his castle” and “The woman is the thermostat of the home.” The first saying serves to reinforce the husband’s power relative to his wife and his children; the second, to reinforce the notion that the role of women is to control the emotional climate of the household (which often includes absorbing and, in many cases, concealing domestic conflict). If she fails to do so, she generally is subject to a cascade of blame—by the church, by the community, and by the members of her own family. In a exploratory study of abused women who lived in a shelter in Brazil, it was found that religion played a powerful role for some women in their decision to remain within the abusive marriage (Grossi, 1994). A particular value associated with religion is fatalismo,
in which Portuguese men and women are urged to accept their fates as God’s will (Grosner, 1991). Fatalismo was incorporated into the Portuguese culture through the fado (a Portuguese song form which means ‘fate’). Some studies suggest that fatalism may lead Portuguese women to accept abuse as a normal part of life (e.g. “that’s life”) (da Silva, 1991).

Also associated with religion in Portuguese-speaking societies are the cults of Fatima and of the Virgin Mary (Marianismo) that proclaim that women are superior to men but solely at the spiritual level. Marianismo emphasises purity, motherhood, and self-sacrifice. The implication of such beliefs is that women should be able to endure suffering and forgive their men for the pain the latter inflict on them (Comaz-Diaz, 1988; Pinedo and Santinolli, 1991; Stevens, 1994). These religious beliefs reinforce women’s submission to traditional gender roles and imply that women must endure abuse from their male partners. Although certain aspects of religion may provide positive experiences for immigrant women by contributing toward their sense of continuity and identity in the new country, it may also “... set barriers to [the] adoption of new ideas, new roles and new ways of seeing” (Wiebe, 1985:9).

One problem that arises for some Christian women who have been abused is that the doctrinal position against divorce may inhibit them from choosing this option. This belief concerning divorce is typically supported both by the extended family and the religious community. One common assumption is that any marriage is better than no marriage at all, and that women should therefore try to maintain marriage at any cost, even when there is violence (Fortune and Herman, 1980). In addition, Fortune argues that
‘directives on marriage’ based on the Bible often are evoked by abusive men who argue that ‘a wife must submit to her husband’, which implies that she must always and unquestioningly obey him. Some service providers, working within the Portuguese-speaking community, produced a booklet that contained the stories of six Portuguese women who had been abused. One section deals specifically with religious beliefs, and provides counter-interpretations of Biblical writings that husbands have often used to justify wife abuse (St. Christopher House, 1985). An award-winning video produced for the Portuguese-speaking community addresses the issue of Portuguese women who have been abused, showing how their experiences with the criminal justice system, family law, social services, and religious institutions are interwoven with their personal experiences of abuse (St. Christopher House, 1988 quoted in Mc Leod and Shin, 1990: 31).

Still another aspect of the sociocultural context of the issue of wife abuse include the women’s encounters with the ‘helping professions’. The role of the government in promoting the management of ‘family violence’ through encouraging medical and professional interventions (both for victims and assailants), and in organising such interventions through public and mental health facilities, has served to create a supportive environment for individualising the problem of wife abuse (Walker, 1990). Walker argues that doing so enables the government to eliminate the need for inquiries into the social, economic, and political conditions of all women in society. Significant differences among women also ‘disappear’ when all are thrown together into a category called “battered women” - when each becomes a particular medical, legal or welfare ‘problem’ to be dealt with by various social service agencies.
Studies have also documented the contradictory role played by social service agencies which, on the one hand, provide care, support, and help to their clients while at the same time exercising social control (Galper, 1975; Mullaly, 1997, Carniol, 1995). Indeed, the characterisation of ‘family violence’ as a social issue was an outcome of “conflict and negotiation between people troubled by domestic violence and social-control agents attempting to change their supposedly unruly and deviant behaviour.” (Gordon, 1990: 178) This social control aspect of the working practices of service providers is carried out through bureaucratic and ideological practices that differ according to each agency’s setting, history, mandate and funding guidelines.

Tensions between various forms of social control within the agencies, as well as tensions between various services or approaches that might contribute to the improvement of one’s life are likely to be encountered when women access social services agencies. Also, an increase in the professionalization and bureaucratisation of social service agencies affects the ways in which service providers’ work is accomplished on a daily basis (Montigny, 1995; Swift, 1995; Walker, 1990). The essence of professionalism is its connection with the right of power and authority to speak for the client’s needs, based on specialised knowledge and training (Levine, 1982). The problem is that a disjuncture often occurs between how the client perceives her own needs and how her needs are perceived by the service providers. Professional training in psychological and gender role theories may contribute toward this disjuncture. Family problems often addressed in terms of interpersonal relations and roles are individualised, and thus are removed from the socio-political context (Montigny, 1989, 1995). However, a disjuncture between a woman’s
understanding of her situation and her service provider's understanding of that situation may prove to be positive, as for example, when a service provider challenges the dominant ideologies that contribute toward a woman's oppression and sense of powerlessness. All such tensions, contradictions, and disjunctures clearly shape immigrant women's understanding of, and responses to, their abuse.

The way social services are structured will also either enable immigrant women to access the services they need or else prevent them from doing so. Among the barriers identified by abused immigrant women who have accessed social services are bureaucracy, racism, class oppression, ethnocentrism, and lack of cultural understanding (Rafiq, 1991; Paredes, 1992; Moussa, 1994). Many immigrant women who seek help from social service agencies (especially "women of colour"), are either struggling with poverty and unemployment or are working in low-paying jobs (Estable and Meyer, 1989; Ng, 1988; Pilowsky, 1993). These women may resist going to social service agencies because they are more preoccupied with economic survival and the protection of their children than they are with such therapeutic goals as 'self-awareness' or 'self-actualisation' (Coley and Beckett, 1988). Lack of knowledge of English and/or French was also identified as one of the major barriers that immigrant women face in Canada in accessing social services (Coutinho, 1986; Romero-Cachinero, 1987; Paredes, 1987; Riutort and Small, 1985; Estable and Meyer, 1989).

Racial and cultural barriers in service delivery have been associated with the lack of agency policies that address the concerns of specific ethnic communities, the lack of anti-racist education and training around ethnic issues, the lack of cultural interpreters, and
the lack of ethnic personnel, among others (Tator, 1996). Christensen (1996) also points to the failure to address institutional racism in the education of social service workers, including how such inherent racism prevents the service worker from providing appropriate service to ethnic minority individuals. Another problem that immigrant women face when seeking services is that the clinical models of intervention and treatment that are employed in many social service agencies are inadequate in helping them meet such practical needs as housing, day-care, lack of an adequate income, etc. (Coley and Beckett, 1988).

Furthermore, access to many of the services provided by social agencies often is dependent on the individual’s immigration status. “Class of immigration” is a legal, social, and institutional construction that directly affects the way an immigrant woman becomes integrated into Canadian economic and social life, for example, her degree of access to a variety of government sponsored programs (Estable and Meyer, 1989:48-49) that provide language, job training, and skills upgrading.

The problem among immigrant women in accessing such services has culminated in the development of immigrant service agencies or ethno-specific agencies in Canada. These agencies were created in the 1970s out of a recognition for the need for ‘settlement services’, as well as an awareness that mainstream service organisations were not able to adequately attend to the needs of growing immigrant communities (owing to language barriers, racist policies and practices, and a lack of understanding of the culture and life experiences of immigrants) (Beyene, Butcher, and Richmond, 1996:172). These agencies initially were called “settlement agencies”, because they assisted immigrants in finding
housing, jobs, day care, and other services that might help them in their adaptation to Canadian society. Although it was not part of the mandate of such agencies to provide counselling, many settlement workers began assuming this role in order to meet their client's needs. Many immigrant women who were being abused by their male partners began turning to the settlement worker for help, since these women were either not familiar with other resources within the community, or those resources were not sensitive to their needs (Allmen, 1988; Sedhev, 1991). A proliferation of ethnic agencies subsequently occurred. In addition, many so-called 'mainstream' agencies started to incorporate programs designed to address some of the emerging needs of an ethnically diverse community (McLeod and Shin, 1990).

Such ethnic-specific social service agencies often attempted to increase women's autonomy by empowering them to obtain resources that would allow them to gain better control over their environment. Many of these agencies continue to be actively involved in anti-racist work and counter-hegemonic practices that challenge dominant ideologies. Previous studies indicate that services run by immigrant women for immigrant women tend to be more effective in meeting those women's needs (Ng and Ramirez, 1981; Bodnar and Reimer, 1979). One way this could be accomplished is through the integration of ethnic values into the service delivery process of ethnic agencies (i.e. in the worker-client interaction, agency's structure, agency's policies, etc.) (Iglehart and Becerra, 1995).

Morrison (1993) makes a distinction between "culturally-sensitive" and "culturally-based" approaches, a distinction that is useful for social workers and other professionals
who work with ‘ethnic-minority’ populations, for it leads to a better understanding of how the identity and subjectivity of the individual is formed within a cultural context.

Whereas “culturally sensitive” means being aware of, and sensitive to, someone’s cultural background, “culturally-based” means both understanding that a woman’s culture is essential to who she is as well as operating from within her cultural framework (Danica Women’s Collective, 1993:22).

Operating from a woman’s cultural framework does not imply that the distinction between a ‘unitary us’ and a ‘unitary them’ needs to be made. It means that perspectives needed to be shifted so that the interrelations of such constructs as race, class, and ethnicity in women’s lives are taken into account. This implies validating the experiences of immigrant women without a felt need to compare them with the experiences of women from the dominant group. As Das Gupta argues:

> The way that immigrant women have organised has been through community development efforts that are antithetical to the traditional approach, while helping individuals to overcome their immediate problems does not necessarily empower them to take control of their own lives (Das Gupta, 1986:13)

Ethnic agencies were created in response to communities’ needs. Thus, community organising often becomes part of the work carried out by service providers. However, funding may shape the way services are provided, and service providers often are caught in a dilemma, i.e., whether they are to be more accountable to the women’s needs or to those of the sponsors (Ng, 1984). This problem has little to do with the intention of the service providers vis-à-vis the clients. The problem is that tensions arise in attempts both to meet women’s needs and to fulfil funding criteria. This is relevant to the present study, since
funding guidelines also shape the work of woman abuse counsellors, often restricting their ability to provide what the women need.

In summary, both the historical and socio-cultural contexts that surround the issue of abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women are densely and complexly interwoven. The incorporation of such contexts is particularly relevant for this study that they help us to better understand how both Portuguese-speaking immigrant women respond to wife abuse, and the options that are available to them. I have attempted to show some of the historical factors relating to the immigration of Portuguese-speaking immigrants to Canada that may have contributed to the way they are perceived and treated in Canadian society. These factors are very important, since they may explain why a Portuguese-speaking woman may be reluctant to disclose wife abuse in order to protect the image of the community, one of the few places in which she can obtain some help and support. The preservation of the community image is even more important for Portuguese-speaking immigrants, whether from Brazil, Portugal or Azores, considering that these groups were subjected to discriminatory immigration policies and had been classified into the ‘non-preferred’ groups.

The socio-cultural context is also relevant to our understanding of how an immigrant woman may be limited by obstacles and barriers beyond her control. Moreover, I have attempted to show that the influence both of historical and socio-cultural contexts become filtered through the immigrant women’s perceptions, attitudes, expectations and beliefs. To a significant extent, both of these contexts inform and entangle the web of relations in which these women are embedded.
3.1. Rationale for Research Design and Qualitative Methodology

My research interest in the area of wife abuse grew out of my professional experience both in United States and Brazil. Working with women who had been abused by their male partners gave me a depth of understanding of the problem that theory alone could not possibly provide. The doctoral research I have since undertaken reflects my effort to more fully understand the experiences of abused women in general and, with respect to the present study, of abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women living in Toronto.

My initial research goal had been simply to investigate the various ways in which the women’s interactions with social services had shaped their responses to their abuse. Shortly after I had begun interviewing the women, however, I discovered that many factors other than their interactions with social services seemed to have been equally relevant in shaping their responses. I decided that those other factors could not validly be dismissed in my analysis of their experiences.

Thus, starting from what were essentially inductive observations obtained during the first few interviews, that is, on the basis of data gathered in the field, I developed (as well as identified) various “abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theories” (Creswell, 1994). My inductive approach was primarily concerned with discovery:
Early on in my research, as I was reviewing the literature on the subject, I noted that while much had been written about the various factors that influence women's responses to wife abuse, these factors had never been 'pulled together', had never been analyzed as a complex, intricately interwoven, multi-nodal 'matrix' which had the potential both to constrain and to enable the options of these women in society. After a fortunate 'prompt' from one of my professors (Ng), the idea of a web of relations slowly began to emerge and take shape. This notion can best be described as a network of institutional relations. I include under institutional relations the following: (a) a relation between an individual and an institution and (b) a relation between two or more institutions.

To achieve my research goals, I selected a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology given the fact that a qualitative methodology would allow me to locate the women's actions and experiences in context (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), which I accomplished by situating their experiences within both an historical and sociocultural context.

After the slowly evolving notion of a web of relations took shape in my mind, it functioned in an heuristic way, suggesting new paths to pursue, new 'circuits' to explore, new channels to investigate. Most of all, it evoked the notion of 'interconnectedness', which I increasingly perceived within, between, and among the women and the network of institutional relations in which their lives were embedded. I also discovered that the two
broad theoretical approaches I had adopted - feminism (Section 2.1.1.) and the social construction of reality (Section 2.1.2) - similarly had strong methodological implications for my study.

Feminism assumes that ‘women’s lives matter’ and that the researcher must therefore ‘give voice’ to women who hitherto have been marginalized in academic discourse. I attempted to achieve this by capturing, through semi-structured interviews, the women’s own descriptions of their experiences, thereby ‘giving voice’ to them. Moreover, because these interviews involved free interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Reinharz, 1992:18), they were consistent with one of the epistemological assumptions of a feminist methodology, namely, that to discourage a strict separation between interviewer and interviewee is a prerequisite for producing a more valid account (Cook and Fonow, 1990:76). Still another way in which I attempted to treat my research participants more as ‘subjects’ than as ‘mere objects of my research’ was by encouraging them to “talk back” to me (Cook and Fonow, 1990). For example, in one interview, a Brazilian woman remarked: “Now it is my turn to ask you. Do you like living in Canada?” In another interview, a service provider asked me: “How do you view this way of handling the interview?” Somewhat surprised at her question, I responded that I had tried to cover all aspects of the interview guide. She responded in turn: “Yes, you covered all of the questions but I think you went even beyond the interview guide, for you got the context, which I think is very important and very positive.”

The use of semi-structured interviews also allowed the conversation itself to influence both the content of the interview and how the information was to be obtained.
Thus, in narrating their stories, the women themselves, rather than I, provided the interpretive context.

Next, within the theoretical framework of social constructivism, it is accepted that multiple and often conflicting constructions are possible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:83). Furthermore, social constructivism tends to orient itself around analyses of discourse, rhetoric, and representation (whether 'hegemonic' or 'counter-hegemonic'). This theoretical approach also proved to be methodologically relevant to the present study, for I attempted to capture from the women's discourse not only their own 'take' on their experiences, but to solicit the views of others whom I interviewed. Here, the comments of the service providers were especially telling in that, owing to their unique training and role definition, they functioned as 'conduits' not only for 'social work discourse', but for numerous other discourses (i.e., government, medical, legal, correctional, welfare, immigration, religious, etc.) that originate in the various institutions with which both they and the women in my study interact. I tried to obtain "multiple constructions" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:83) by interviewing a total of ten abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women from a variety of agency settings. To further enrich my understanding of the complexity of the problem, I also interviewed a group comprised of fourteen service providers and eight key informants, all of whom were employed by the various social service agencies I had contacted.

In summary, in the course of my research (which I have characterised above as qualitative and inductive), theory and methodology intertwined with the data I was collecting in an ongoing manner. To illustrate: in responding to my interview data, I had to
'try on' various theoretical 'lenses' in order to understand the scope and depth of the problem. The particular 'lenses' that together afforded me the most comprehensive 'view' included feminist theory (specially Smith's notion of 'social relations', and Young's notion of 'structural oppression') and social constructivist theory (specially Edelman's notion of the social construction of problems and their solutions, and Ng's notion of the social construction of an immigrant woman). Particular dimensions of social work theory that focus on feminism, structural issues, ideology and empowerment also proved useful in the analysis of my data (Langan and Lee, 1989; Mullaly, 1997; Carniol, 1995; Dominelli, 1988, 1997). In turn, each of these theoretical approaches, as I have attempted to show above, informed my methodology in various and significant ways.

3.2. Research Questions

My study has been guided by two main research questions as mentioned before: a) "What do Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who have been abused by their male partners reveal about their interaction with social services?", b) "How do social services they received either constrain or enable them to improve their lives?" These questions were addressed to the women, to the service providers and to the other key informants:

The first research question "What do Portuguese-speaking women who have been abused reveal about their interactions with social services"? generates the following set of operational questions:

1. What do Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who have been abused by their male partners expect from social service agencies?

2. To what extent are these expectations being met?
3. To what extent are these expectations not being met?

The second question, "How do social services they received either constrain or enable them to improve their lives?" generates the following set of operational questions:

1. In which ways, if any, women feel that social services have failed to meet their needs?
2. What steps can be taken to ensure that the constraints that are related to certain social service practices are reduced?
3. What steps can be taken to help improve the women's options in society, thereby providing them greater access to their rights, to opportunities, and to a greater control over their lives?

3.3. Recruitment of Participants

In a quantitative research approach, the selection of a random and representative sample allows for confident generalisation to a larger population. In a qualitative approach, however, generalisation to a larger population is usually not appropriate. Instead, information-rich cases (also referred as "purposeful samples") are selected for study in depth. Information-rich cases address issues that are of central importance to the purpose of evaluation (Creswell, 1994). In the present study, these issues concern abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women living in Toronto who have accessed various social service agencies.

Following a qualitative research guideline, the number of participants should be large enough to be credible but small enough to allow for the development of adequate depth and detail (Lincoln and Guba, 1989).

The selection criteria applied in recruiting these women for my study were: (1) that they had experienced both abuse by an intimate male partner and accessed social services
within the previous five-year period and (2) that they had immigrated to Canada within the previous ten-year period.

In order to gain access to these women, I selected (from a list of agencies contained in the Appendix to Canadian Profile: Portuguese and Brazilian Communities in Toronto [Grosner, 1995]), four individual social service agencies that provided specific services for abused Portuguese-speaking women and, in addition, employed Portuguese-speaking staff. I also selected two ‘mainstream’ agencies from the Blue Book, Directory of Services, in which were listed services for abused women in general (i.e., that were not targeted specifically to Portuguese-speaking women). My reasons for including these two ‘mainstream’ agencies were to see how their services to abused immigrant women compared with those offered by the four agencies I had already identified; also, to compare how the service providers who were employed by these two different kinds of agencies ‘understood’ wife abuse arising from within the Portuguese-speaking immigrant community. Incorporating these two different perspectives was relevant to my study, for I suspected that many abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in need of social services had either contacted, or had been referred to, both types of agencies. However, I later had to revise this strategy after I encountered difficulty in accessing these agencies to the extent that my research required (in particular, the two ‘mainstream’ agencies).

Subsequently, I recruited the women in my study from among the following four types of agencies: (1) ethno-specific agency (provides family and marital counselling, individual and group counselling for abused women and other services targeted mainly to the Portuguese-speaking community); (2) multicultural multi-services agency (provides a
variety of services and programs to individuals from different ethnic groups; the woman’s abuse program is targeted mainly to Portuguese-speaking community); (3) settlement (provides a variety of services to help immigrant women and men adjust to their new country - orientation services, information, consultation about different mainstream services and systems, English classes, supportive counselling and women’s groups); and (4) women’s centres (provide a variety of services for women who have been abused, individual and group counselling, referral, advocacy, etc.). Counsellors working at these respective agencies informed their abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women clients about the study, either at the group meetings these women attended, or during their individual counselling sessions.

I was allowed to participate in only one group meeting held at only one of the agencies - the settlement agency - (after the counsellor had first asked permission of the women). At this meeting, I described my study, distributed introductory letters and interview guides to all the women, and asked them to call me to arrange an appointment if they were interested in participating in the study. Of ten women from this particular agency who had expressed interest, I was able to arrange appointments with seven. Three other women telephoned me from the other agencies and agreed to participate in my research.

3.4. Data Collection

Since the design of my inquiry was clearly emergent, in that it was not possible to anticipate all research issues or risks prior to approaching the respondents, I undertook a new sampling strategy (‘opportunistic sampling’)(Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This strategy
enabled me to take advantage of opportunities that arose only after my fieldwork had begun. For example, shortly after I began my field work, I decided that instead of focussing on the structure of social services, I would reorient my study around the perspectives and experiences a) of the women themselves, b) of their service providers (who not only provided information that resulted from their interaction with the abused immigrant women but were also important ‘conduits’ of various kinds of institutional discourse), and c) other key informants.

In what turned out to be a case of ‘snowball sampling’, these participants (more precisely, service providers and other key informants) suggested the names of other members of the Portuguese-speaking community whom, they felt, could help me (a) identify abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who had accessed social service agencies; (b) identify the needs of these women; (c) identify what was being done to address their needs; and (d) obtain information about how social services were organised to address such needs.

As indicated above, data for the study were gathered mainly through in-depth semi-structured interviews (Reinharz, 1992:18). This approach encouraged ‘here and now’ constructions of events and allowed my research participants to move back and forth in time to reconstruct the past, interpret their present, and predict the future (Bryman, 1988). These interviews also made it possible to locate in depth both the historical and socio-cultural contexts of the women’s experiences with wife abuse.

In stories, data and interpretation are fused, the story-line providing the interpretative framework through which the data are constructed. The story, moreover, marks the boundaries of what the individual is prepared to tell... It is a method too, consistent with a feminist research program which
seeks to involve women in the faithful recording of their experiences (Graham, 1984:12).

Other important elements I tried to incorporate into my research methodology included *flexibility* (both in the manner in which I conducted the interviews and in the types of questions I asked), as well as *reflexivity*:

Reflexivity implies a shift in our understanding of data and its collection - something that is accomplished through detachment, internal dialogue, and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of "what I know" and "how I know it". To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment (Hertz, 1997: vii-viii).

Another important feature of the qualitative research process is that both the subject's reactions and the researcher's own experience enter into the research (Stanley and Wise, 1980). A number of factors helped me interact with my research participants: first (and as previously mentioned), I spoke Portuguese as they all did; second, some of the participants, like myself, were Brazilian; third, some of my participants had been exposed to a similar type of professional background to my own; and, finally, I had had previous experience in Brazil and United States counselling and facilitating groups for women who had been abused by their male partners, an experience that had sensitised me to problem areas that were likely to arise during the interviews.

Some problems surrounding the issue of trust occasionally arose during my interviews with service providers and other key informants. However, only one service provider refused outright to participate in the research, although she did agree to mention my study at a meeting of one of the women's groups to see if anyone was interested in participating. The lack of trust was also evident in the fact that I was not accorded the degree of access I had requested to attend group meetings, nor was I given access to
certain documents.

The first set of interviews was with the ten abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women whom I had selected as my participants. I conducted all of the interviews personally and in Portuguese and, with one exception, tape-recorded them. Transcriptions were made immediately after each interview in order to record the women's responses while they were still fresh in my mind. For the one interview that was not tape-recorded, I took notes instead. I constructed the transcriptions and translations in a way that ensured the confidentiality of the participants.

In all of the interviews, I adopted a conversational rather than a more formal approach and in this way obtained all standardised information, such as the woman's age, how many children she had, the age of the children, her current marital status, her immigration status, her level of education, the composition of her household, etc. Using this conversational style, such information tended to flow naturally from the women, rather than being 'extracted' as a result of a more intimidating, interrogatory style. The conversational style also enabled me to identify with greater sensitivity the feelings of the participant as each question arose, especially while she was in the process of disclosing her experience with wife abuse. These informal, face-to-face interviews also made it possible for me to respond not only to the women's verbal communication, but to their non-verbal communication as well.

The interviews with the women ranged from between two to four hours in duration, the average time being two hours. Six of the women were interviewed at the agencies while four, at their own request, were interviewed in their homes.
My interviews with the service providers and with other key informants included a broad range of questions and issues (see appendix 4), among which were: how were services organised at their respective agencies, what type of work did they themselves carry out in their respective agencies, what kinds of referrals did they make, how did they perceive the needs of abused immigrant women, what types of resources were available to meet the women’s needs, what types of clients were served, what types of issues did the clients present, how were the clients’ issues handled, what were the limitations of their work, what were the perceived gaps in services for abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, how did they understand the causes of such violence, and what were their ideas concerning alternative ways of working with the immigrant women. All such questions were designed to tap into the experiential knowledge base of this group without infringing on the confidentiality of individual clients. No individual case files were examined.

These interviews ranged between one and one half to two hours in duration and (with the exception of interviews with service providers from Angola and Brazil), were conducted in English. Five of the twenty-two service providers in my sample were interviewed twice. During these second interviews, I was able to identify issues not discussed during the first interview, as well as clarify some of the points that had earlier been addressed.

All interviews (i.e., with the women, with the service providers, and with other key informants) were conducted between December, 1997 and May, 1998.
3.5. Description of the Participants

- The Women in the Study

In this section, I provide background data on the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women interviewed in this study, i.e., their place of birth, level of education, occupation in their home countries and in Canada, type of housing, marital status, number of children, English level, immigration status, age, income, and length of time in Canada since immigration.

While the women belonged to different social classes, age groups, nationalities and educational backgrounds, they nevertheless shared certain commonalties. First, all of them had immigrated to Canada within the past ten years in search of ‘a better life’. Second, all had originally come from a Portuguese-speaking country (either Brazil or Portugal [including the Azores]). Third, all were white. Fourth, all had experienced, within the past five years of their current or past relationships with male partners, some type of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Finally, all had sought social services in Toronto, although not necessarily with respect to the issue of wife abuse.

At the time of the interviews, only three women were still living with their abusive male partners. Two of these women were considering divorce. The remaining seven women left the abusive relationship.
Figure 1 - Place of Birth

Number of Women  
(Total = 10)

20%  40%  40%

Figure 2 - Level of Education

Number of Women  
(Total = 10)

50%  30%  20%

Table I - Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>In Home Country</th>
<th>In Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home-maker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sewing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanny/Baby-sitting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Work</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observation: All women were home-makers both in their home countries as well as in Canada. In their home countries, five of them were exclusively home-makers; while in Canada, only two of them were exclusively home-makers, since they were unemployed at the time of the interviews. Some of the women had more than one occupation in Canada, which explains the difference in numbers between the columns.
Figure 3 - Housing

Number of Women
(Total = 10)

- 40%
- 10%
- 50%

- Own
- Public
- Rent

Figure 4 - Marital Status

Number of Women
(Total = 10)

- 70%
- 30%

- Married
- Divorced

Figure 5 - Number of Children

Number of Women
(Total = 10)

- 60%
- 10%
- 30%

- None
- One-Two
- Three-Four
TABLE II: English Level, Immigration Status Upon Entering Canada, Current Immigration Status, Age and Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speaks With Fluency</th>
<th>Some Language Ability</th>
<th>Minimal Language Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Level (n):</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observation:** Only three women speak English with fluency. These women have been enrolled in college courses and professional courses. The women who have some English language ability are the ones that are taking courses (Language Instruction for Newcomers - LINC), levels 2 and 3 and ESL courses. The ones who have minimal language ability are the ones who never studied English and most of the time, have to rely on translators or children in their interaction within Canadian society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitor</th>
<th>Family Class</th>
<th>Domestic Worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Status Upon Entering In Canada (n)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Immigration Status (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landed Immigrants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observation:** The majority of women have immigrated to Canada within the ten year period, and came sponsored by their husbands or their husband's families, under the family class category. Only two of the women have been living in Canada for more than 10 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 - 15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Living on welfare: 4, OSAP Recipient: 1, Pensionist: 1, Self-employed (cleaning): 1, Factory worker: 1, Totally dependent on husband's income: 2
• Service Providers and Other Key Informants

This section provides background information about the 14 service providers and eight key informants interviewed for this study (n=22). Service providers included the following sub-categories: woman abuse counsellors, employment counsellor, community support counsellor, volunteer, family therapist, social work student, case managers and shelter worker. Eleven of these service providers were Portuguese-speaking. Nine service providers who were counsellors were interviewed, of whom seven were social workers. The family therapist was social worker as well. Only two of the counsellors did not speak Portuguese. All the service providers are female, except one.

Other key informants included professionals who did not necessarily provide services directly to the women but were responsible for administrative functions, staff management and supervision, evaluation reports for funding agencies, etc. Among this group were directors of agencies, a staff trainer, a volunteer co-ordinator, a cultural interpreter co-ordinator and a fund-raising co-ordinator. Four directors of agencies were interviewed, of which only one was Portuguese-speaking. All service providers and other key informants were white with the exception of two service providers who were black. All key informants were women with the exception of two. Both the service providers and the key informants came from a variety of settings: settlement agencies, neighbourhood agencies, ethnic-specific agencies, multi-services agencies, ‘mainstream’ agencies (such as family services associations), women’s shelters and women’s centres. I made an attempt to obtain representatives from a variety of social service agencies to get a multiple
perspective on the topic of wife abuse and the network of institutional relations in which women's lives are entangled.

I will be using the following codes to distinguish the accounts of service providers and other key informants from the accounts of the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in my study:

PSIW: Portuguese-Speaking Immigrant Women

SP: Service Provider

SP[C]: Service Provider who is also a Counsellor

OKI: Other Key Informant

Figure 6: Employment Settings (n = 22)

- Multiservice Agencies (N=7)
- Mainstream Agencies (N=5)
- Ethnic-specific Agencies (N=4)
- Settlement Agencies (N=2)
- Others (N=2)
- Shelters (N=1)
- Women's Center (N=1)
3.6. Ethical Considerations

Before interviewing each immigrant woman, I explained the objective of the study and ask her to read both the information letter (in which details concerning the study were outlined) as well as the consent form, both of which were written in Portuguese. Each was asked to sign the consent form signalling her agreement to participate in the study before the interview commenced. Each service provider and key informant also received an information letter about the study and a consent form, both of which were written in English.
Several procedures were taken to help to protect the confidentiality of the study participants: (a) I was the only person who had access to the tapes and who made the transcriptions; (b) all tapes were destroyed after the study was completed; and (c) all identifying information about the subject or research site was omitted in the transcriptions.

To protect the confidentiality of the agencies I contacted, I have not included the specific agency's mandate or other identifying information in this thesis. No information was obtained from the agency's case files. In short, all information (other than that obtained through the literature review) was generated mainly through the interviews.

3.7. Data Analysis

The database for this study was derived from the transcriptions of the interviews with the abused immigrant women, the service providers, and the other key informants. The procedural steps applied in the analysis of this raw data were those recommended by Collaizi (1978:59), namely:

(a) to review all of the subject's responses to a given question;

(b) to extract from the transcripts all "phrases and sentences that directly pertained to the investigated phenomenon; this is known as extracting significant statements";

(c) to try to identify the underlying meaning of particular responses (Collaizi calls this "formulated meaning"); and

(d) to organise the meanings derived from the transcripts into clusters of themes.

The data gathered from my interviews with the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, service providers, and other key informants eventually became clustered under the
emerging theme - the web of relations - and then further categorized under a set of institutional relations between the immigrant women and various institutions. These categories included the women’s relations with (1) immigration; (2) the labour market; (3) welfare; (4) the family; (5) the church; and, finally (6) social service agencies.

Data analysis was undertaken as the data were collected. After each interview with the woman, service provider, and other key informants I did the transcription, and started the reflection on how these participants experience social services and were enabled and/or constrained when trying to meet these women’s needs (with respect to service providers) and when trying to have their needs met (with respect to the women).

3.8. Trustworthiness of the Findings

In this study, I have adopted techniques proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for establishing the trustworthiness of findings. The conventional research criteria of ‘reliability’, ‘objectivity’, ‘internal validity’ and ‘external validity’ were replaced by the qualitative naturalist’s equivalents of ‘dependability’, ‘confirmability’, ‘credibility’, and ‘transferability’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1987) identify steps for ensuring credibility, confirmability, and dependability:

(a) Research respondents must have extensive exposure to the phenomenon about which the information is being gathered.

(b) Informal checking occurs on an ongoing basis. This is accomplished by soliciting feedback from the respondents as the interview progresses.
(c) Formal checking occurs. This is achieved by asking for additional input beyond that which has been sought so far, and by presenting the respondents with a summary of the findings.

In the present study, I have sought credibility, confirmability, and dependability through the following means:

(a) I have collected information on wife abuse in the Portuguese-speaking community both from the abused women and from well-informed and experienced service providers and other key informants.

(b) I have solicited feedback from my participants as the interviews progressed.

(c) I have requested additional interviews to obtain missing information or to clarify information that had been transmitted during the initial interviews.

In order to combine strengths and to correct any shortcomings relating to sources of data, my research design has included the use of more than one data collection approach. This fulfills the triangulation criterion (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Robson, 1993), which improves the probability that the research findings and interpretations are deemed credible. As indicated above (and in addition to a wide range of literature dealing respectively with wife abuse in general, wife abuse in the immigrant community, social services, and feminism) my data base was comprised of transcriptions obtained from 10 women, 14 service providers and 8 key informants (the last both from within and outside the Portuguese-speaking community). Through accessing these multiple sources of data, I have been able to compare and crosscheck information, thereby satisfying the criterion of
triangulation and hence increasing the probability of credibility regarding both the data and the interpretations of those data.

Concerning the confirmability criterion, i.e., "the extent to which the data and interpretations of the study are grounded in events rather than the inquirer's personal constructions" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:324), I frequently have used the direct quotations of my participants. In addition, my analysis is heavily referenced.

3.9. Limitations of the Research

This research is limited to the extent that its findings are not generalizable to the entire population of abused Portuguese-speaking women living in Toronto, given the relatively small number of participants. However, although the selection of a small number of participants does not allow for generalization to a whole population, it does allow for the production of rich data from which one can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of evaluation.

Another limitation of the study is that I was unable to recruit for my study any abused immigrant women from Angola (which, like Portugal and Brazil, is also a Portuguese-speaking country). I did, however, interview two service providers from Angola, who shed some light on abused women belonging to that population.

Another limitation of this research was the fact that I did not extend the scope of my interviews so as to include 'representative voices' of the various other institutions with which the women in my study interacted, such as immigration officers, welfare workers, employers, priests, and so on. Although conducting such interviews would have provided
me with additional perspectives on how the issue of wife abuse among immigrant Portuguese-speaking women is situated within the web of relations, to conduct such interviews would have been far beyond the scope of the present dissertation. However, as indicated earlier, I did succeed in acquiring some information about those other institutional relations through my interviews with the women, with their service providers, and with other key informants. Since many of the women received counselling from their service providers (who often functioned as ‘conduits’ of information transmitted by these institutions), they were able to gain important insights into the workings (whether restrictive or enabling) of those various institutions, information that otherwise might not have been available to them. In turn, they were able to communicate to their service providers their own experiences with such institutions, and thereby expand the service providers’ scope of knowledge as well.
PART THREE: UNTANGLING THE WEB OF RELATIONS

Part Three contains the results of my analyses of interview data obtained from the 10 abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, 14 service providers, and 8 other key informants. Transcriptions of the data (which, in some cases, I have translated into English from the Portuguese), are interspersed with references to the literature (including relevant references to legislation), as well as with my own arguments.

Part Three has been organized according to the six different kinds of institutional relations that make up the web of relations in which the women in my study are embedded. These institutional relations include, respectively: the women’s relations with immigration, the labour market, and welfare (Chapter 4); their relations both with the family and the church (Chapter 5), and their relations with social service agencies (Chapter 6).
Chapter 4: Immigration, the Labour Market, and Welfare

4.1. Immigration

My data show that the particular immigration status—whether independent, family class (alternately, sponsored) or, on the other hand, visitor—of the women in my study (both on their arrival to Canada and subsequently), has influenced their response to wife abuse in two major ways. First, depending on their immigration status, the women may remain in an abusive relationship because they fear deportation (a fear that often is exploited by their male partners in order to 'keep them in line'). Second, because of the complexities and constant changes in immigration policy affecting the granting of a visa, along with the inadequate transmission or concealment of such changes, the women in my study were often unaware of their legal rights. This lack of knowledge makes them even more vulnerable to situations of wife abuse. Moreover, some of the service providers themselves were often unable to provide the women with accurate information concerning the implications for wife abuse of their immigrant status.

In order to understand these complexities surrounding immigration (which, from the perspective of the women in my study, is one of the most powerful 'threads' in their web of relations), it is important to provide some legislative context. In 1978, an Immigration Act (which has since undergone various amendments) was introduced. This Act has had important implications for individuals hoping to gain landed immigrant status in Canada. The Act designates three main categories: (1) independent immigrants, (2) sponsored or family class immigrants, and (3) Convention refugees (Ng, 1987:32).
Independent applicants are adults (men or women) who apply for immigration to Canada on the basis of their skills and ability to contribute toward the Canadian economy. Sponsored or family class applicants are individuals (the majority of whom are women), who are sponsored by someone currently living in Canada, either a Canadian citizen or a landed immigrant. Finally, Convention refugees are persons who are unable to return to their home countries, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular group (1951 United Nations Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees; Canada’s Immigration Act of 1976). Another relevant category is that of visitor, which refers to an individual whose duration of stay in Canada is restricted and who is allowed neither to work in the country nor to receive any social benefits. Thus, visitors who remain in Canada beyond their specified date of departure are commonly referred to either as illegal or as out of status.

While the present study does not address the experiences of Convention refugees, it is concerned with the experiences of persons belonging to the first two categories: independent immigrants and sponsored (or family class) immigrants, as well as with visitors.

In order to determine whether an independent applicant can obtain an immigrant visa to enter Canada as a landed immigrant, Canada has developed a point system. (This point system, however, does not apply in the case of an application of a family class or sponsored immigrant).

The point system assesses individuals according to the following nine categories, each of which is worth up to a certain maximum number of points: education (16 points),
education and training (18 points), experience (8 points), occupation (10 points),
arranged employment (10 points), age (10 points), knowledge of English and French (15
points); and personal suitability (10 points). Still another category assigns applicants
points according to the number of immigrants from that country who annually are allowed
to come to Canada. The number of points assigned in the case of this or other categories
may change from time, depending on the needs of Canadian society, including the need to
control the flow and diversity of immigrants (CLEO 1997). Unpredictable changes in how
the point system is to be applied, as well as the fact that such changes are not always
transmitted effectively and in a timely manner to the public, no doubt contribute toward
feelings of deep uncertainty surrounding the point system, feelings that were expressed by
three of the women in my study. These three had entered Canada as visitors but
subsequently attempted to gain independent status. However, in the case of two of the
women, this attempt proved unsuccessful. The transcripts that follow illustrate how
immigration status has affected the women's responses to their abuse.

SP[CJ]: There is a woman [illegal] who used to call me, but she never left
her name, and she was so fearful. She was waiting for the immigration
papers in order to be able to leave.

PSIW: He hit me several times when I was illegal. I talked to a friend
about it to see what I could do, and she said: If you want to remain in
Canada, just shut up and endure it a little bit more till you get the
immigration papers. So, that's what I did. Now, that I got my papers, he
stopped beating me.

SP: There is a big problem with people who are illegal. If the family is
illegal, the wife will not report the assault, because she knows that they
are going to be deported. So, there were many incidents...where the men
... said that they knew that they could hit their wives because if she called
the cops they would be deported, and husbands have control of the
passports and documents. The wives couldn't run away.
SP: If a woman is abused and doesn’t have her immigration papers, she will stay in the situation because of that.

SP[C]: They (the men) say: you are not legal, you are not Canadian citizens, you are not entitled to receive money, those types of things. They use that to control them for sure.

Interviews both with the women and the service providers showed that those who are illegal or out of status (that is to say, whose visitor visas had expired), often are kept captive in abusive relationships. One of the women in my study who was illegal said that she had never sought any help in the past because she was not aware of any resources that she could access, since she was completely isolated at home. Whenever she was beaten by her partner, he went to the hospital with her and was the one who explained to the doctors how she got hurt. This woman had entered Canada as a visitor, and subsequently lived with the man who had promised to marry her but did not. When her visitor visa expired, she had to ‘go underground’. The man finally decided, four years later, to marry her. During that period, however, the woman was beaten and treated like a slave.

Another woman from my study revealed how her illegal immigrant status had shaped her experience in Canadian society.

PSIW: I had never sought social services before. I entered as a visitor here, and that was my major mistake. I was always in a state of fear. I was afraid that my children might get hurt at school and that I would have no money to pay for health expenses. I didn’t have any health card. I didn’t have any social insurance card. I was always running away from doctors. Everybody told me that if I went to a social service agency, the next day, immigration would find out, and I would be deported. So, I never sought help.

Three of the women in my study had entered Canada as visitors and remained in Canada after their visas had expired. Their illegal status and fear of deportation delayed their access to social service agencies. They reported that their male partners had used
threats of deportation to instil fear in them and to control them. This fear prevented them from reporting the abuse. Moreover, they stated that because they were illegal, they were also exploited at work: they were paid less for the same work performed by legal employees, had to work longer hours, and had to do the 'dirty work'. This made it more difficult for them to break the cycle of economic dependence upon their male partners, which rendered them more vulnerable to abuse.

The women who were illegal also reported that they had remained in abusive relationships and refrained from seeking help because the prospect of having to return to their own countries was harder for them to bear than enduring the violence. According to the women's accounts, sacrifices were made in the name of the children and "in order to provide a better future for them."

My data indicate that because of their insecure immigration status, some women may resist going to social service agencies. The intake forms produced by some of these agencies include questions concerning immigration status, address, family composition, and other personal information. Thus, the women might well have perceived social service agencies as agents of social control on behalf of the government rather than as sources of help. Moreover, some of the agencies I contacted claimed that they did not serve illegal immigrants.

Besides the kinds of problems associated with illegal status, there are problems associated with family class or sponsored status as well. In 1992, almost half (45%) of the women who had immigrated to Canada entered under the family class or sponsored category (Statistics Canada, 1995). Sponsors of such women (usually their husbands)
were required to sign a form issued by Employment and Immigration Canada called ‘Undertaking of Assistance,’ in which the husband agreed to provide economic support for the woman for a period of up to ten years (as determined by immigration authorities). That a woman had a *family class* or *sponsored* category thus implied that she was financially dependent upon her sponsor.

During the determined period of sponsorship, several conditions apply. First, the sponsored woman, under normal circumstances, is not eligible for welfare or for other kinds of public assistance. Second, if she obtains a work permit that allows her to get a job, she is entitled to unemployment insurance or worker’s compensation (however, only on the condition that she has paid into these benefits) (Segall, 1994).

According to Coutinho (1986), many immigrant women are not aware of the fact that if they have already succeeded in obtaining *landed immigrant* status, then they cannot be deported on the basis of sponsorship breakdown. On the other hand, if their application for *landed immigrant* status is still in process, then their fears of deportation are well-founded (Ottawa-Carleton Regional Committee on Wife Assault, 1991).

If the husband withdraws his sponsorship of the woman for any reason, and if the wife has suffered abuse at his hands but has not yet received *landed immigrant* status, then she may apply for that status, either as an *independent* or under what are called “humanitarian and compassionate grounds” (CLEO, 1998a). Two components make up the *humanitarian and compassionate* review application: first, the *humanitarian and compassionate grounds* and, second, the *establishment potential criteria* (considered the most essential part of the woman’s application) (Pope, 1991; Pratt, 1995; CLEO, 1999).
With respect to the first component, i.e., *humanitarian and compassionate grounds*, the woman has to provide evidence of the history of her abuse, including copies of reports from shelters, health professionals, and/or the police (CLEO, 1999). This documentary evidence, however, is not always easy or even possible to obtain. Moreover, immigration officers have discretionary powers in deciding if the woman’s evidence is sufficient. With respect to the second component, i.e., *the establishment potential criteria*, the woman has to show that she can establish herself successfully in Canada without her spouse. To do so, she needs "proof of self-sufficiency", which includes documents relating to her employment history in Canada, job references, level of education, skills updating and training, volunteer work in Canada, language ability, length of time residing in Canada, letters of support from friends, children born in Canada, financial assets, and the availability of relatives who are willing to help her (CLEO, 1999). Again, such documents are not always easy or even possible to obtain and, again, immigration officers have discretionary powers in deciding if a woman has the potential to establish herself successfully in Canada. This is particularly difficult for a woman who is underpaid, or whose long hours at work prevent her either from taking classes to upgrade her skills or from doing volunteer work that would favourably influence her application (*Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women*, 1993).

Moreover, the discretionary view of wife abuse held by the particular immigration officer involved in the case may come into play. For example, such an officer may characterize wife abuse as an outcome of the applicant’s own doing, or as something for which she is somehow to blame. Thus, while that officer at one level might accept that the
woman in question is 'a victim', he might not necessarily see her as 'a deserving victim' (cf. Morton cited in Pratt, 1995:90). In short, it is especially difficult to predict the outcome of applications made under humanitarian and compassionate grounds, and even strong cases have been turned down (CLEO, 1998a). Finally, according to one immigration lawyer, the new guidelines (IE5) for humanitarian and compassionate grounds applications introduced in April, 1999 put an even greater emphasis on settlement potential, which makes it even more difficult for some abused women to gain permanent resident status on a humanitarian and compassionate basis (Personal communication, Marie Chen 1999).

Six of the service providers indicated that some husbands use the threat of withdrawing sponsorship as a tool of power and control over their wives, which in many cases prevents these women from seeking outside help. This finding is consistent with other studies carried out in immigrant communities that have found that immigrant women often are afraid to report their abuse out of fear that their husbands will withdraw their sponsorship and that they will end up being deported (Pope, 1991; Pratt, 1995; Ottawa-Carleton Regional Committee on Wife Assault, 1991). Three women in my study who were family-class dependents resisted going to social service agencies for fear that should their male partners decide to withdraw their sponsorship, they would then be deported.

Six of the service providers revealed that lack of information concerning legal rights is one of the main factors keeping Portuguese-speaking women in abusive relationships. Moreover, both a lack of information (Godin, 1994) as well as an unequal access to such information (Estable and Meyer, 1989) have been documented in the
literature [Godin, 1994]). Also, a lack of knowledge concerning the implications of immigrant status for the abused women was not restricted to the women alone:

SP(C): Once they (women) get here, we reassure them that this is not true. We are able to inform them about sponsorship, that they cannot be deported. In the past, 1994, it was not like that, it was not enforced. If a woman was sponsored and applied for social assistance or welfare, those agencies could go to her sponsor and tried to obtain the sponsorship agreement.

The account cited above reveals that the service provider herself was not fully aware of the legal implications of immigrant status for women who leave their male partners. As was earlier shown, deportation is a real possibility when sponsorship is withdrawn before the woman has received her permanent resident status. Most women in the study were not informed about the implications of the various categories or classes under which one might gain entry into Canada.

Although most family class members apply from outside the country, and are granted permanent resident status before they enter Canada, some apply from within the country. According to an immigration lawyer, the most complicated cases involve those who apply from within. There is a spousal policy which permits a spouse to apply for landed immigrant status from within the country, since it is considered a hardship for that spouse to be forced to leave the country in order to apply. However, this process is long: one usually must wait 6 to 8 months for the interview that precedes the landing process, and an additional 1 to 2 years following the interview before one is granted landed/permanent resident status. If the marriage breaks down before landed/permanent resident status is granted, the spousal policy no longer applies and the woman becomes potentially subject to deportation (personal communication, Marie Chen, 1999). As
indicated above, a woman may apply as an \textit{independent} immigrant or under \textit{humanitarian and compassionate} grounds, but there is no guarantee that her landed/permanent resident status will be granted. Clearly, the women's difficulty in obtaining accurate information about changes in immigration policy, as well as her lack of control over how such policy will be applied, demonstrates the oppressiveness of immigration policy.

Most of the women interviewed claimed that since arriving in Canada, they had never been informed of their rights. Nor had they been informed about resources they might contact if they encountered problems in Canada. Only one woman was told by an immigration official to go to an Employment and Immigration office if she had any problems in her adaptation to Canada, or difficulties in the workplace. Moreover, previous studies have indicated that newly arrived immigrant women under the \textit{family class} category often are excluded from the orientation sessions offered by Canada Employment and Immigration. Most of the time, the only person allowed to participate in these sessions is the applicant named on the file, i.e., the man (Estable and Meyer, 1989). Such unequal access to information confers greater power to the man, who may either distort or omit such information in order to control the actions of his female partner. Thus, according to two service providers:

\textit{SP(C):} ...\textit{there needs to be more education, more information for women on their legal rights. Women come sponsored by their husbands and come here asking us about deportation. Sometimes we answer. Other times, we make a referral to a lawyer.}

\textit{SP:} \textit{Immigration is one of the factors contributing toward women remaining in the relationship. The husband tells her that if she leaves, he will call Immigration and send her back. Many times, the husband writes the "carta de chamada" (sponsorship letter), sponsors her, and she tolerates all the abuse, because the husband tells her that he will send her back without the children or that he will send her to the immigration...}
authorities. Then she stays. Many times, it is a lie, for if this person is already landed, he doesn't have the power to send her away. But often she is not aware of this, and remains for years and years. There was one Portuguese woman who came to the shelter and after I told her that he doesn't have the power to deport her she said: "Then, all these years of abuse for nothing. I could have left him."

Thus, immigration policies often serve to reinforce male power at home, both through imposition of the sponsorship criteria that render women vulnerable to deportation prior to becoming permanent residents, as well as through perpetuating poor or uneven access to information.

In addition to the problems associated respectively with illegal status and with sponsored or family class status, there are problems associated with independent status. Three women in my study who applied for independent status were refused. Two of these women, both illegals, reported that they had applied several times. "I applied five times for immigration and it was always denied. The money that I put in, I never got it back." 5 These two women were about to be deported when they married men who held Canadian citizenship (and who subsequently abused them). One of these women received an extradition order since her marriage was not considered to be a bona fida marriage by immigration authorities. She was required to remain one year outside of the country, apart from her husband. Another woman who had applied without success for landed immigrant status finally received that status only after her boss, an influential lawyer, acted on her behalf. However, because she had to leave Canada in order to apply for her status, she lost all of her Canadian job contacts. On returning to Canada as a landed

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5 It seems that Canada's Department of Immigration also benefits from the situation of these women, since they receive a significant amount of money (a processing fee) that each woman is required to pay for each application for permanent residency.

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immigrant, she not only ended up unemployed, but also began to be abused by her husband. This woman told me that had she been aware that she could have applied for her landed immigrant status within Canada, she would have done so in order to keep her jobs.

Women now have to pay the Immigration Department approximately $1,000 to apply for landed immigrant status under the independent category, an amount that has increased over previous years. This requirement was particularly difficult for the women in my study whose incomes were limited.

The data indicate that a woman's immigration status affects not only her responses to wife abuse but other dimensions of her life as well (e.g. her access to social services, the types of jobs she can obtain, and her level of income). This shows the complex interconnectedness of the web of relations in which these women's lives are embedded.

My data is consistent with previous studies that indicate that women who are considered illegal immigrants, who are on a student visa, who are on a visitor's visa, or who have a work permit (e.g. as a domestic worker) generally have fewer rights, less access to social services, and more restricted options. Thus, immigration policies relating to criteria for sponsorship, self-sufficiency, education, language ability, personal suitability criteria, etc., place immigrant women at greater risk of experiencing abuse. Since they cannot meet the requirements for independent status, and since there is no guarantee that even under humanitarian and compassionate grounds they can remain in Canada, the women often end up having to make hard choices in a context with restricted options. As indicated earlier, many of the men, knowing the implications of the women's immigration status, may use that as a form of control.
In summary, data acquired through the women’s narratives (augmented by that of the service providers and other key informants), reveal that the women’s interactions with immigration play a significant role in shaping their responses to wife abuse. The situations these Portuguese-speaking immigrant women face in Canadian society, especially if they do not speak English, are very similar to those of other immigrant women. This is because their experiences are shaped by the way Canadian society is organised, as well as by the fact that their immigrant status (as determined by Canadian Immigration legislation), renders them economically dependent on their partners and thus more vulnerable to abuse.

Immigration, as the other strands of the web of relations has a dual nature. Although the women in my study reported the negative effects of immigration policies in their lives, they also acknowledge positive aspects associated with immigration such as a “better future for their children”, more job opportunities than in their home countries and more institutional support.

4.2. The Labour Market

This section focuses on the labour market, another powerful ‘thread’ in the web of relations that shapes women’s responses to wife abuse. I will attempt to demonstrate how women’s experiences in the labour market either enable or constrain their options to escape from their abuse.

On the basis of data collected from the participants, I have identified three main factors relating to the labour market that have significantly affected the women’s responses to wife abuse: (a) the fact that the women tend to work in low paying jobs that often are segregated on the basis of ethnicity; (b) their lack of access to education and
training (including language instruction in English); (c) the labour market's lack of recognition of the academic credentials or work experience the women have acquired in their home countries. As a consequence of all of the above, the women are prevented from achieving upward economic mobility, and are thus rendered at greater risk of wife abuse, owing to their continued financial dependence upon their male partners.

Particularly in times of high unemployment, immigrant women, like other Canadian women, may be subject to mental and physical abuse by their husbands. Where can these women turn? Our current social and cultural environment lacks the traditional family support networks and familiar resources of the past. Language difficulties, the need to care for young children, and the tight controls exerted by husbands all contribute to the immigrant women's isolation. The result is that many women now rely on tranquilisers for temporary relief, while others, pushed beyond their limits, end up in institutions. The double exploitation of immigrant women in domestic and employment situations is beyond the grasp of the majority of the Canadian women (W. Ng, 1982:252).

The women's desire to be financially independent was one of the main themes that emerged in the interviews, as expressed in the following 'goal statements' made by the women: "to get off welfare", "to have my own house", "to have my own car", "to have my own business", "to provide a better future for my family", "to get enough money to go back to my country", and "to save money to pay for a good education for the children." All of these statements demonstrate their desire for greater security and control over their lives. Among the obstacles that prevented the women from achieving these goals were: their inability to save money while on welfare; their inability to study while on welfare; their inability to study while both working and caring for young children; their inability to return to their home countries (given that they could not save enough money to return, or that their prospects for a better life in their home countries were severely limited).
How these women’s experiences are socially organised in the labour market, however, prevents them from becoming financially self-sufficient. For example, the Canadian government of late has amplified its support of the values of self-sufficiency and independence by inscribing these values in government documents, welfare policies, and funding guidelines for projects (see Ontario Women’s Directory, Agenda for Action, 1998). Despite such lip service, if no corresponding changes occur in Canada’s social structure, then immigrant women will continue being a part of a captive labour force (Ng, 1988) that offers few if any chances for upward mobility and advancement. Hence, such terms as ‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘independence’ ring hollow, and the government’s failure to practice what it preaches makes it even more difficult for abused immigrant women to leave their male partners if they choose to do so.

The women in this study earn salaries that range from $800 to $1,500 per month. Their work is concentrated in such activities as sewing, cleaning, baby-sitting, restaurant work, and factory work. These activities are an extension of their domestic activities, and reflect the gendered nature of their work which, in turn, is reflected in the low salaries they earn. These types of activities also reflect the ethnically-racially segregated labour market which has been identified in studies on Portuguese immigrant women (Neal and Neale, 1987) and immigrant women, in general, in the labour force (Ng and Estable, 1987; Ng, 1988; Cassin and Griffith, 1981; Paredes, 1987).

The fact that the government does not effectively monitor employment standard legislation allows employers to pay their workers less than minimum wage. Moreover, the
labour of raising and caring for children generally is devalued, which also perpetuates poverty, especially among women (Baines, Evans and Neysmith, 1991).

The women in my study who had immigrated to Canada ten years ago or longer also had to face unequal access to language training, which had set still other limits on their role in the labour market. Seward and Mc Dade (1979) shows the implication of the status of immigrant women with respect to their access to language training was evident in the stated objectives of language training, as summarised in the CEIC\(^6\) (Canada Employment Immigration Centre):

... language courses (are) specifically designed to remove the employment barrier which stifles the job-search efforts of two categories of clients, namely:

(i) skilled workers who cannot secure employment in their trade or profession or in a suitable related occupation because of a lack of fluency in a second language;

(ii) unskilled workers who cannot be placed in suitable employment because of a lack of fluency in a second language.

These eligibility criteria limited immigrant women's access to Canada's Employment Immigration Centre (now known as Canada Immigration Center) language training in two ways. First, as sponsored immigrants, women themselves were not eligible for a training allowance (only the sponsor is eligible). This often has prevented a woman from participating in the language program full-time since, typically, she needed to earn an income. Second, these women had to demonstrate that their lack of fluency acts as a barrier to suitable employment. However, in the case of unskilled workers with limited qualifications, employment generally is to be found only in low-wage and low-skill jobs in

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\(^6\) Now it is called Canada Immigration Center (CIC).
the service sector or in manufacturing. Because knowledge of English or French is not a requirement in such occupations, these workers (mostly women) were prevented from learning either of these two languages (Seward and McDade, 1979). Some women in my study who were working in cleaning industries, for example, stated that they were unable to learn English in the workplace. Not only were they isolated by the nature of their work, but most of their co-workers also spoke mainly Portuguese. Another woman who used to work in a factory stated that she was unable to learn English in the workplace since all of her co-workers were themselves immigrants (which shows the ethnically segregated nature of the labour market). One of the women in my study acknowledged that nowadays there is greater access to English classes, but when she arrived in Canada, she needed a paid job and "learn English, forget it."

While the underlying philosophy of language training is that language is a skill that contributes to the individual’s value in the labour market, the women in this study view language as a social skill, one that enables them to function more effectively in society as a whole (e.g. to communicate more effectively with their children, to interact with others, to avoid having to rely on their children or others for interpretation, and so on).

Another type of discrimination that the labour market often posits upon immigrant women is that neither their previous work experience nor their university degrees are recognised. Thus, highly qualified immigrant women in many cases are forced to accept low level jobs (e.g. service, sales, manual, and janitorial work). Three Brazilian women in the study had university degrees that were not recognised in Canada. They refused to take

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7 The current Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) courses are more open and accessible. Convention refugees and landed immigrants who are in Canada longer than three years are allowed to enroll in these courses (personal communication from Usha George).
the course work again, which was both time-consuming and costly, and so they ended up working as cleaners and baby-sitters instead.

Portuguese women’s work outside the home typically is geared more toward the economic survival of her family than to her own desire for economic independence or emancipation. Indeed, work becomes a part of the family’s collective strategy for survival (Almeida, 1985: 430-431):

PSWI: People who come to Canada end up working more here than in Brazil. Women have to work outside besides their domestic responsibilities. To have a job is not an option. We must work or we cannot survive. The rent is very high here and the cost of living is high too. I met very few women who could stay at home after they gave birth. They stay at home for a very short period of time, and then go back to work... The husbands help more here, they take turns, men take care of the children while women work outside. They do that because of economic need, to be able to save money, otherwise they cannot do that.

In my study, however, I observed that some of the women worked not only out of economic necessity, but out of the desire to have a certain amount of economic independence and greater power in the relationship. One woman commented that when she was still living in Portugal, she did not have any power because she was not working outside the home. Another woman explained that the “feeling of being more independent” by having a job made her feel good about herself; she also stated that her husband “was always cutting that part from me.” This particular woman was the only one in my study whose husband was opposed to her having a job. In her view, her refusal to comply with her husband’s wishes was the main reason for the husband’s increased violence and coercion towards her.
Having a salary also enabled the women to have more control over their lives and more autonomy. For example, if they wanted to buy a ‘luxury item’ (such as a dress, shoes, or cosmetics), they didn’t have to ask their husbands’ permission, or ask him for money. Only two women in my study were homemakers exclusively, but even they were planning to go back to paid work. The only times the women in my study were not working outside of the home were when they were taking care of small children, were ill, had suffered a job accident, or had lost their jobs.

I also learned that while three of the women had joint bank accounts with their husbands, it was usually the man who controlled the account. Two women gave their paycheques directly to their husbands, and when in need of some money, they asked their husbands for it.

The cycle of abuse appears to be related to the cycle of economic dependence in the case of the women in my study. When the women ask for money, their husbands often deny their requests, complain that they are spending too much, or argue that their purchases are unnecessary. Also, when not working outside the home, the women tend to be more vulnerable to situations of abuse, especially, economic abuse. This finding is consistent with Epstein, Ng and Trebble’s study (1979), in which the authors argue that women’s economic dependence increases their vulnerability to abuse. It is also consistent with the argument that in situations of domestic violence, abusive men often control the money as a tool of power and control over women (Pence and Paymar, 1990; Shepard, 1991).
My data indicate that abuse often occurs in relation to reduced revenues, for as the financial pressure on the family increases, so do tensions rise up. One woman in my study mentioned that her abuse began when she stopped working and had to control the budget more closely, since she needed to stretch the family income to make ends meet. Her husband thought that this was inappropriate behaviour for a woman, since he believed that his salary belonged to him and that only he knew how to make the best use of it.

**PSIW:** The abuse started when I stopped working. At that time, there were lots of unemployment problems, a job crisis, and we started having problems. While I was working, I was not aware of what was going on around me, because I used to work all day, while at night, I was studying. Then, I never missed anything, I never made any budget calculations. Then, when I came into Canada as an immigrant, there was no work for me. I was pregnant. After he was born, I went on welfare. Welfare gave us some help, then my husband found a job, but he started spending his paycheques. Then, the problems started because it was only his paycheque, and the money disappeared. He worked but there was never money around, and he used to say that I was the one who was spending the money. Then, he started forbidding me to look at the bank book. I couldn’t get the bank book. He used to give me some money. It was a joint account, but I couldn’t see the bank book to check where the money was going. At that time, I was thinking of getting the account number and checking it out, but when I tried to get the bank book, the fights started because I was unemployed, I was at home, and then I got pregnant again.

One shelter worker pointed out that Portuguese-speaking women who came to the shelter identified their husband’s unemployment as one of the factors that precipitated the violence. According to these women, their husbands ‘felt less like men’ when they were not working outside and were not able to provide for their families. The women seemed to define their own living situations through available ideologies about ‘men’s role’ as the providers. The same shelter worker pointed out that the women were more predisposed to leave the abusive situation when the man was not fulfilling his role as ‘provider’. Thus,
ideologies about both men’s and women’s roles become detrimental to them both.

Some women in my study have had to face a situation in which they, their male partners, or both were previously employed but suddenly found themselves unemployed after the drying up of traditional ‘immigrant jobs’ (e.g. in manufacturing, cleaning, or construction). One woman whom I interviewed and who used to work for the same employer for years, making dresses, watched as more than half of the staff got laid off. Many of these women apparently had no other alternative but to work from home, doing piecework for pay, often at less than minimum wage. They generally worked long hours, slept little, and ended up exhausted and stressed. One woman in my study pointed out that she had worked so hard and for so long that she was unable to work at all, and ended up with a diagnosis of clinical depression:

*PSIW*: I used to send more money to my family left in Brazil when I used to work day and night, but I ended up sick, working 14 to 18 hours a day. It happened that I worked the whole Thursday, the night of Thursday till Friday and Friday the whole day. I didn’t sleep. It happened more than once. But my age does not allow me to do that anymore. A young person has more energy, but when you are over 40, you can’t. And if you have a small child it is more difficult... Today, I work very sporadically. Sometimes, I feel like I’m in a state of mental confusion. I take medication for depression.

This woman had been in an abusive relationship that she subsequently left, and has had to seek social assistance. The only family she has in Canada is her small child. Other children, now young adults, were left behind in her home country. She states that she feels lonely. She was prescribed tranquillisers by her doctor to help her deal with her depression. When I asked her what she liked most in her group experience at the social agency, she replied that she had greatly enjoyed a talk given by a psychologist on the subject of depression, which mirrored how she herself had been feeling. The speaker had
related depression to chemical imbalances on the brain. This woman had begun incorporating the medical discourse she had heard by way of explaining her physical condition of depression. In short, she totally discounted how the social conditions of her life—the stress associated with her abuse, her long hours of work, and the responsibilities of raising a small child with no support—had contributed toward the problem. Levine notes that:

Men's stress and distress are generally linked with occupational hazards—too much pressure or responsibility on the job or unemployment or absence of adequate nurturance and support at home. For women, stress and distress are typically defined as mental health problems. Our turmoil is not linked to the occupational hazards of child-care and domestic labour, to poverty, unemployment, or the double workload, to the misogyny that assaults us daily at multiple levels. We are not expected even to claim a support system at home— we are supposed to provide it. Women's distress is said to be primarily 'in the head' (Levine. 1982:191)

Even though many of the women in the study are working and trying to gain a sense of independence, the exploitative and discriminatory practices they face in the labour market made it hard for them to break the cycle of dependence upon their husbands.

**PSIW:** Now it is more difficult to get a job, and they are paying only $6.95 per hour, and you have to work from 6 to 8 hours doing cleaning. It is work that almost breaks you apart. I worked in a cleaning company that used to pay me $6.85 per hour and I had to clean 28 bathrooms in 6 hours. I always worked in cleaning. It was the only job that I could get. I think that they pay very little to do cleaning...

**PSIW:** When we work in a cleaning company, there is a huge floor, and you have to clean in a certain number of hours, and you have to do it. A person can do a lousy job, but the person needs to do the job in those hours. They do not allow you to stay longer. If you don't have time to have a break for a coffee or snack, that is your problem. They do not care. It is 6 ½ hours that you have to work. Now it is worse. Thank God I left the job. Now, they want people to work 5 hours per floor... There are lots of accidents in the job. Many Portuguese women are blackmailed and accused by companies, and were laid-off. The bosses do not analyse the
worker's situation, it is the boss who has the power, you have to please the boss.

PSIW: Here, to have rights, you need to have a union, but there are few places that have unions, and only the person who has been working for longer periods of time have unions. Now, the Ministry of Employment has cut the job transfer. If the job stability wasn't good in the past, now it's worse.

This lack of stability in the workplace places even more stress on the women's lives. The labour market is organised to take advantage of women without language skills and without the legal knowledge they need to act according to their rights to secure protection from sub-standard working conditions and pay (Seward and McDade, 1979). As Young (1990) notes, in a context of oppression, certain individuals may have rights, but are not able to exercise them.

Job instability may also prevent some women from filing a complaint against sexual harassment in the workplace. One service provider in my study revealed that Portuguese-speaking women often suffer sexual harassment at work. Many of these women do not take legal action since they wish to preserve their jobs. Also, they often fear that their male partners will blame them for the sexual harassment, suggesting that they have done something to provoke the harasser. This situation thus may place these women at greater risk of violence at home, as well as play a role in their decision not to proceed with legal action. All these features compound women's experience with abuse and influence the way they respond to such abuse. In short, the fear of becoming unemployed and thus being placed in a situation of greater economic dependence upon their male partners acts as a deterrent for many women to the exercise of their rights. In
addition, there is no guarantee that they will win a legal battle against their employers who are in an economically privileged position and thus can afford proper legal counsel.

The women's accounts revealed that violence often escalates when there are financial problems, unemployment, work accidents, or any other circumstance that place added pressure on the family.

**PSIW:** He had a work injury, so he had to go on unemployment, and everything started to get worse, because the money was not the same as before. We didn't have the freedom to do the things that we used to do before. Then, came the children, and everything got worse, and I had to call the Worker's Compensation all the time to ask for the cheque. This situation put a lot of pressure in the family.

**PSIW:** The freezer was empty. He didn't pay the rent for three months. Every time I asked him about where the money goes, he starts complaining that he had debts, that I do not work, that it is only one pay-cheque. But I have three young children. If I work and pay day-care, the money I will get in the end of the month is not worth it. Every time I asked for money, the fight started all over again.

These women's accounts reveal how abuse emerges in the social and economic contexts of their lives. Unemployment, inadequate insurance payments, low incomes, and lack of subsidised day-care contribute to the family's problems and trigger violence.

All of the women in this study entered into the labour force immediately on their arrival in Canada in order to contribute to the family income, most often in low-paying jobs that did not require English language skills (e.g. cleaning, baby-sitting, factory work, etc.). The women who did not study English explained that they had neither the time nor the energy to study, either because they needed to take care of the children after work or were too tired to study.

When these women did have jobs, they still depended on their male partners who often were the main providers. When such women decide to leave the relationship because
of increasing violence, they often have to rely on social assistance. Child support awards often are not enforced or, if enforced, are inadequate. This shows the role of economic dependence and abuse in these women’s lives.

In this section, I have described how issues surrounding the labour market create a profound impact on how Portuguese-speaking immigrant women respond to abuse from their male partners. I have also attempted to show how unemployment, poverty, immigration status, and language ability all affect the women’s relations with the labour market. While the labour market seems to promise ‘a way out’ for abused women, it often generates a cruel, ‘Catch-22’ situation in which the woman considering working outside of the house is both ‘damned if she does and damned if she doesn’t.’

In summary, data acquired through the women’s narratives and augmented by that of the service providers and other key informants reveals that the women’s interactions with the labour market play a significant role in shaping their responses to wife abuse.

4.3. Welfare

This section focuses on yet another important ‘thread’ in the web of relations surrounding abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, namely, welfare. Here I have attempted to describe not only how welfare reform has affected the lives of these women, but how issues relating to welfare have influenced (whether directly or indirectly) the women’s responses to their abuse. Finally, I have attempted to show how, paradoxically, the women’s experiences with welfare were alternately perceived as constraining and enabling.
The interview data show that three main factors relating to welfare have affected the responses of the women in my study to wife abuse: (a) the fact that welfare cuts have reduced the women’s options in society; (b) the fact that welfare reform has reduced the autonomy of the women; and (c) the existence of social stereotypes surrounding welfare that have affected, on one hand, the attitudes and behaviour of the women and, on the other, the attitudes and behaviour of others towards the women. In order to understand how the women’s encounters with welfare affect their responses to wife abuse, it is important, first, to explore some of the legal complexities surrounding welfare and, second, point out their implications for the abused immigrant women.

When immigrants come to Canada, they come with dreams for a better future, including the dream to be perceived as ‘citizens’ rather than ‘immigrants.’ Not infrequently, however, these dreams become dashed by economic realities. Nevertheless, the women in my study continue to dream of a better future. One woman told me at the end of our interview, “I have been living here for ten years, but it seems that my life is starting now. I have no house, no money in the bank, no car, no job. But the chapter of my future is very important. I am learning English, I am going to take a course and maybe start my own business.”

My data indicate that when women immigrate to Canada with their families, their goal is not to live on welfare but rather to make a contribution to Canadian life. Seven of the ten women in my study, however, have ended up on welfare, mainly as a result of the loss of a job (either the woman’s or that of her male partner), or because she has attempted to escape from an abusive relationship without the availability of financial
support. Since almost all of the immigrant women in my study have low incomes, most have had to rely on welfare after leaving their abusive partners.

Studies have shown that whereas men tend to turn to welfare following loss of employment, women's applications for welfare relate to parenting or other caregiving responsibilities that are strongly linked to poverty (Bakker and Broddie, 1995 quoted in Mosher, 1999:6). While on welfare, these women also commonly face problems in finding affordable housing. For example, two-thirds of Ontario families on welfare are already paying more in rent than is covered by their shelter allowance. Consequently, welfare recipients end up being one of the poorest segments of the population. Moreover, single mothers (two thirds of whom receive welfare), experience the highest rate of poverty (57.3% up to 82.8%) (National Council on Welfare, 1997, quoted in Mosher, 1999:5). Within the group of women in general, those most vulnerable to poverty include Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, immigrant women, and racial minority women (Day and Brodsky, 1998). It has also been found that among the one in three Canadian women who have ever married or lived common law and have experienced violence in the year preceding the survey, the women whose incomes were lower than $15,000 were also more vulnerable to wife abuse than were women with higher incomes: 6% as compared to 3% (Rodgers, 1994).

According to the accounts of two service providers, many abused immigrant women who were unable to manage financially following the recent cuts to welfare were forced to go back to their abusive partners. This is confirmed by previous studies that
show that the 21.6% reduction in welfare benefits was a key factor in many women's decision to return to their abusive partners (OAITH, 1996).

"Do you think that I can make it on my own?" is a question that an abused woman commonly asks her service provider when she is considering leaving her male partner. According to the service providers, the women's feelings of insecurity surrounding that question arise not only because the male partner continually 'puts her down,' instilling doubt in her mind as to whether she has the ability to live without him, but because of the current and harsh socio-economic realities that she knows she will have to face.

Programs for abused women currently place emphasis on developing strategies that "promote women's economic independence" and that "help abused women go through the transition from crisis to economic independence" (OWD, 1998). However, the very social services that might help these women achieve such goals have either been eliminated or have suffered severe cutbacks. According to one of the key informants, Adult Education Programs in the past had provided practical, integrated, and highly valuable instruction to such women, not only could they attend classes, but could receive counselling, attend information sessions, and participate in life skills programs. Such programs made it possible for such women go off welfare and leave their abusive male partners. Following recent cutbacks to social services, however, only the educational components of such programs remain. Furthermore, according to the annual reports of two social service agencies I had contacted during my research, other programs that had
originally been targeted to women's employment needs had also been eliminated because of funding restrictions.

Another aspect of the reform of social services is that there are now very few job training programs available to the women in my group. Because many Portuguese-speaking women do not fit into the job training eligibility criteria (i.e., a minimum of grade 8, in some cases; of grade 12, in other cases), they have to pursue additional education before becoming eligible to apply. Thus, at the very time that the government is generating discourse promoting women's economic independence, it is eliminating the social structures that would make such independence possible for these women.

These cuts in social programs, especially the drastic cuts in welfare payments, represent a shift from an ideology of 'community responsibility' to that of 'personal' or 'individual' responsibility (OAITH, 1996:59). Under the latter ideology, the government, invoking the need for deficit reduction, has withdrawn from its social responsibility of providing a wide array of much needed services: women's shelters, crisis lines, community counselling, child protection services, multi-service agencies, and culture-specific agencies, not to mention legal aid, welfare, housing, child care, language interpretation services, violence prevention education, and so on. Clearly, this lack of an adequate support system (the consequence of cuts in social services spending amounting to 7 billion dollars over a two year period) (OAITH, 1996:5), has dramatically shaped the women's responses to their abuse.

Eight of the ten women in the study ended up on welfare after leaving their male partners. However, under the Social Assistance Reform Act (SARA) (S.O.1997) more
restrictions are now being placed on women’s actions. The *Ontario Works Act* (*OWA, Appendix A to the SARA*) was introduced by the Ontario government in 1998 to replace the *General Welfare Assistance Act and Family Benefits Act*. The general effect of the *OWA* is to replace the notion that welfare is a right for people in need with the notion that welfare recipients and adult beneficiaries must work for the assistance they will receive. All who are now on welfare (with a few exceptions) must take part in some form of workfare, as stated in the requirements of the *OWA*. Welfare recipients must “satisfy community participation requirements, participate in employment measures, accept and undertake basic education and job specific skills training or accept and maintain employment” (*OWA* Section 7.4, cited by Mosher, 1999:9).

While some individuals may be exempted temporarily from workfare requirements, the rules tend to be confusing: some of the exemptions are specified in the regulations, while others are specified government policies. That single parents with children under school age may be excused from the workfare requirement is an exception that is specified in the *Regulations*, not in the *Act*. Hence it could easily be changed given a change in the government or change in the government’s mind (CLEO, 1998b:1).

The regulations state that exemptions can be granted in “special circumstances” that are approved by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. For example, victims of violence (who “declare themselves” as such) may receive a temporary (three month) exemption from employment participation requirements (CLEO, 1998c:8). However, two service providers expressed concern that these women may no longer be eligible for these exemptions in the future, given the fact that this exemption has not been legislated. Thus
there is concern over how these policies will be applied in practice.

The expressed aim of Ontario Works is to get people off welfare as soon as possible and to encourage people to work in any type of job that is available (CLEO, 1998c). The problem is that jobs that are available tend to be both low paying and low skilled, which constrains the ability of these women to become economically independent after leaving their abusers.

_PSIW:_ When I got a job it was very good. It was the first step. I told welfare as soon as I got the job. It was a relief because when you are on welfare, you need to go there every three months. They asked you what are you doing, and if you are looking for a job. Sometimes, they give you a list, a paper in which you have to prove that you are looking for a job. You go to a place, knock at the door, and ask if there is a job. If there is no job, the person needs to sign that there is no job at present, but that next time, there may be a job.

The need for welfare recipients to look actively for a job forces many of them to accept low-wage work. In the case of this woman, the job she eventually got paid only $500 per month.

_PSIW:_ Welfare made me cry. They told me to live with my husband’s unemployment insurance that was $800, and I just got a place for $700. How could I live with $100 for food and clothing per month? Then, I told them, what do you want me to do? Do you want me to commit suicide? I started crying, and I told them that I couldn’t handle anymore that depression.

_PSIW:_ The Mike Harris cuts affecting single parents puts a lot of strain on mothers who have to raise children with less money. Financial problems are always number one. They place too much pressure on families.

Three abused women in my study who have school-age children stated either that they felt that they were not emotionally ready to look for a job, or that the jobs that were available did not suit their needs. As one woman remarked: “I could only get job
cleaning, and that pays very little, 700 per month." A service provider also mentioned during an interview that "abuse takes away your energy, your self-esteem, your whole view of the world. You have to readjust yourself, and going back to work is not necessarily the first thing they (women) think about it."

Additional barriers facing abused women in seeking employment or participation in job training is that they cannot study while on welfare. This places a great toll on immigrant women who want to upgrade their education and become economically independent. Thus, paradoxically, people on welfare are not able to acquire the very skills that might help them get better jobs and stay off welfare in the long term.

PSIW: I suffered a lot the second time that I separated from my husband. We always lose friends, we lose our self-confidence. And my pride was very high. I suffered a lot because it is hard to accept the reality that here, if you are a single mother, we don't have any support. I was on welfare all this time. My friends stop talking to me.

PSIW: Society looks down on me and says - look at her, she is on welfare at home. They asked me all the time, are you working? If you are not working, they look down at you. We feel like they are saying: What is the matter with you, lazy bum?

PSIW: I want to work to be independent, self-sufficient because I do not want people to look down at me. I think that this is more the pressure that society puts on me to work than pressure that I do not have on myself.

SP: There has been always a stigma about welfare but it was not as bad. Now, if you are on welfare, you are a bum, you are no good, it is really bad the stigma, the perception out there is terrible.

Thus, another problem faced by many of these women is the social stigma attached to welfare recipients. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in Portuguese families living in Canada. Those studies indicated that the phenomenon of single mothers within a Portuguese community is rare. Thus, when women in that
community become single parents, they are criticised, ostracised, and suffer a decrease in their social status (Alpalhão and da Rosa, 1980:141). This finding also coincides with the accounts of the Portuguese-speaking women in my study of their experiences after they left the abusive relationship to raise their children on their own. In addition to the social stigma of a being a single mother, they also reported the added stigma of poverty. Some of the women in my study even stopped going to church after their separation in order to avoid the ‘gossip’ and ‘dirty looks’ they encountered.

Another woman in my study, explaining why she was on welfare, connected her own personal situation to broader structural issues. She argued that the common view of welfare recipients as ‘lazy bums’ must be challenged; that relying on welfare was not a matter of choice but of survival; that welfare recipients were struggling to have their needs met.

**PSIW:** I always worked. I am not working now, because the money that I make by cleaning is $700 and I have to pay $600 in rent, and I cannot live with $100 for me and my children. I got $1,080 on welfare. I pay $600 in rent, and the rest is for food.

**SP:** the amount of money [welfare] that is [now] given [makes it] much more difficult to survive ... with the cutbacks, over 20%. ... when you are trying to leave the situation, there might be money in the family, but she has no access to [it and] so she does not have access to the last month [of rent], so she can't even rent an apartment, a flat if you cannot pay the first and last month of rent. Welfare will pay the first, but it will not pay the last, so if you do not get $800, $700 together, how can you get a place, specially if you have a bunch of kids along? ... when the rates of welfare went down, we had women go back to their partners, they couldn't make it.

This finding is supported by the results of a survey conducted by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, a 60 member coalition consisting primarily
of emergency shelters for abused women and their children across Ontario. The results of a survey of 38 shelters in Ontario indicated that 66% of these shelters reported that welfare cuts were the key factor in the women’s decision to stay with abusive partners, while 63% of the shelters reported that welfare cuts were the key factor in the women’s decisions to return to their abusers (OAITH, 1996:28).

Thus, cuts to welfare payments implemented by the Canadian government in the name of greater accountability to tax payers, greater efficiency in services, and less dependence of welfare recipients on the government are contributing toward the increased dependence of women on their abusive husbands. The human costs of these cuts seem not to have been taken into account in the government’s decisions to reduce welfare rates and benefits (OAITH, 1996; Mosher, 1999). The cuts have also had an impact on the eligibility criteria on women who are abused:

SP: I had a case of a woman whose child turned 18, and thus may no longer be considered as a dependent. Now, she is just receiving welfare just for herself, $550, which doesn’t cover her rent. I think that those types of cuts will deter people from leaving for financial reasons. Where are you going to go with $550?

SP: The cuts on welfare have had a great impact on people, and the price of housing is very high. They cut everything and still want the woman to be self-sufficient and independent. They do not care about the lives of women. Even before the elections, they never talked about women. They think that now we have the same rights, that’s what is going on.

As indicated earlier, the government’s discourse on “self-sufficiency” and “independence” is meaningless, given the erosion of public funding for essential social services. The failure to acknowledge the basic inequality of how women are treated in society is reflected in the lack of specific policies that address women’s needs. Since the
majority of welfare recipients are women, these cuts to spending will drive them further into a second-class status. For example, in Ontario alone, there are about 200,000 sole support parents, mostly women, who are on welfare. High rentals affect over 70% of welfare recipients in Ontario who live in private rental units in which there are no rental subsidies (Campaign 2000 Child Poverty in Canada, 1995 Report Card, the Ontario Social Safety Network). Furthermore, the high prices of rental accommodation lead many people on welfare to live in ‘dangerous places’ as is shown in the account below:

**SP:** The government cuts are making people live in very dangerous places. I don’t know if you are familiar with Dundas and Sherbourne area, where there are very dangerous places [that] I call ghettos. You can pay $150 per month, but there are drugs around… Victoria Park is the same thing. [If] people cannot live in a house with suitable conditions, then they end up in these marginalised places. Everything is dirty, no conditions to live in. People try to clean their houses, but when they put their feet in the hall, it is really sad and unhealthy. People come to your door to sell drugs. Many people have to live there because they have no money to pay the rent. They accept that because they will pay less rent, and they will have more money for food and to help their families.

In such a situation, women’s choices become severely limited. Government cuts to welfare perpetuate the victimisation of these women and hamper their ability to assert control over their lives. One woman described the dilemma she found herself in when trying to find a suitable house for her children after leaving an abusive relationship. She stated that the amount the government provided for rent meant that she could find only a one-bedroom apartment, which landlords refused to rent to her owing to the size of her family. In addition, she was not eligible for public housing because she was not considered to be a “priority”, given that her husband was living “outside the country.” In addition, she was facing pressure from shelter workers to find a house as soon as possible, since she had
already overstayed the maximum period of shelter stay. She voiced her concerns to her MPP with the help of her counselor, and she finally got a town house for her family. Although she liked the fact that she was able to get a house, it was located in a “very dangerous neighbourhood with drugs and gunshots.”

Another woman in my study revealed how welfare policies affected her life as a welfare recipient:

**PSWT: A person needs to have some money to start her life over, but the government does not allow you to have any money, to make the money grow. We cannot save any money, the government does not allow us to grow, they want to keep us poor. Now they are saying that you need to have a certain amount in the bank and that’s it. If a person wants to save, she cannot. The limit of the amount of money that the person needs to keep in the bank is smaller than before. If a person has a car, it needs to be $5,000. If a father gives $5,000 to a daughter, and the daughter has $5,000, wouldn’t it be better to put $10,000 in a bank instead of having to spend money to maintain a car? The way the government is doing things is not helping the person who is poor and is trying to save. The government helps the poor go down instead of up... The government used to give 25% more if the person was working, and now they are cutting that too. If you are working you have more expenses, clothing, TTC, food, but they just want to cut, cut and cut...**

Government cuts to welfare benefits have prevented this woman from realising her goal of saving up enough money to buy a house. Acceptable asset limits for persons on welfare (i.e., the amount of money they can have in the bank) have been reduced. A single mother with one child used to have an asset limit of $5,000. Now, this asset level has been reduced to $1,020, based on $520 for the mother plus $500 for the child (CLEO, 1998c:5). The rules that formerly had allowed this woman to retain some of her earnings have now been changed. For example, if she has worked for a year, instead of being allowed to keep 35% of her earnings after the basic exemption, she now is allowed to
keep only 20%. After working for 2 years, this would drop to 15%; after 3 years, to 10%; at 4 years, to 5%; and after 5 years to nothing (CLEO, 1998c:7). In short, recent welfare reforms ignore the human costs associated with the cuts, as well as deny the gendered nature of both workfare and welfare. The following account shows how welfare cuts, domestic financial problems, psychological depression, and wife abuse all participate in the web of relations in which an immigrant woman can become entrapped:

PSIW: [The government] should have programs that empower women, give them that boost, but the government is always cutting, cutting. If the person has less money, then depression increases, the woman stays down, to get a job is much more difficult if this person is down. If you want to go to school, you need to have your mind clear of problems to be able to learn, to be able to concentrate on the studies, but if you have financial problems, husband’s abuse, or separation, like I am going through, it is very hard for the person to be able to study... I tried to study, but I have a very weak memory, I forgot many of the things because of my problems, my memory now is weak, concentration is much more difficult.

Although this woman, a welfare recipient, recognises that structural problems such as government cuts and unemployment affect her mental health, the structural ‘explanation’ disappears as she attributes her difficulty in finding a job and in studying to individual problems (e.g. a weak memory, difficulty in concentrating, her abuse, her divorce, etc.). Thus, her problems become ‘contained’ within an individualised rather than a social framework. This ideology of ‘personal responsibility’ avoids any consideration of the community and collective responsibility for poverty and social improvement (OAITH, 1996, Carniol, 1995). In short, her problem becomes removed from its socio-political and economic context. In this situation, she may internalise her oppression, and feel that she is to be blamed for her situation.
Another finding of my study that reflects this ‘personal ideology’ refers to the women’s belief that individuals ‘have to make it on their own’, since they are the perceived by society as having the main responsibility for raising their families. It follows that if these women cannot provide for their families, then ‘it is their own fault’. The following statements reflect this ‘personal ideology’, as well as the feelings of gratitude that often accompany it.

**PSIW**: They [the government] cut 23%, it was a lot, but it is still good. Thank God, I have that. People always complain about welfare, that welfare is that, because government is like that, but the government is giving this money spontaneously. We have to say thank you God for the Canadian government, because he is giving money to us. The government gives the money if he wants, he is not forced to support the children of anyone. If there was this support in Portugal, do you think that I would stay here? I would stay with my family who are all there.

**PSIW**: Canada is like a mother who hugs everyone, I mean, the government. How many women in Brazil would love to have the opportunity that I am having now, to be able to leave home, and rent a cheap place, and even stay at home for a while receiving government assistance?

**PSIW**: Even with the cuts, it is a great help that the government gives us because in Brazil, there is nothing, even $25 for a mother who is alone. I know that because I was a 19 year-old widow with three small children and pregnant. I suffered a lot. Here I suffered a lot too, but at least I have more financial support and even emotional support, a word that helps...

These women’s statements indicate that they perceive welfare as a concession, a benevolence on the part of the Canadian government rather than a right for people who are in need. Other abused women in my study who ended up on welfare have similarly internalised the government’s hegemonic discourse in justifying government cuts, and in ‘blaming the victims’ for their poverty. The following statements reveal the internalisation of such discourse:
PSIW: The cuts had a great impact on single mothers raising children but at the same time made a lot of people go to work which is good. Many people who could work before used to stay on welfare.

PSIW: The government has to do that because many people abuse the system, and the government has no money anymore.

PSIW: My mother was not supposed to come here because she is ‘too expensive’ for the government. She is old and sick.

Two of the women above were on welfare, while the other went off welfare after returning to her abusive husband. Such examples indicate that some women participate in their own victimisation. The hegemonic discourse that constructs welfare recipients as ‘undesirable others’ and that is sustained by the Ontario Work Act is nicely summed up in Mosher’s analysis of welfare reform:

Government rhetoric and policy actively construct welfare recipients as lazy, unmotivated, unskilled, sexually immoral and deceptive (if not fraudulent). By deepening the negative stereotype of the ‘welfare recipient’ (presented as an homogeneous category) the strategy distances the ‘welfare recipient’ from the ‘taxpayer’. This distance is also created by the common government trope when implementing and justifying these reforms that the welfare system is being made accountable to ‘taxpayers’ and benefits only paid to the truly ‘needy’. This creates the impression that welfare recipients are taking advantage of taxpayers (because they are not genuinely in need, or otherwise are not deserving of benefits) and that welfare recipients are not, themselves, taxpayers... In perpetuating this discourse to support its welfare reforms the state, rather than working to promote equality, plays a significant role in perpetuating the negative stereotype which is at the core of discrimination against welfare recipients generally, and poor women, in particular (Mosher, 1999:23).

On the other hand, one woman in my study maintained that since she has contributed toward the Canadian economy, “there is nothing wrong in asking [for] temporary help...[from] the government if I cannot make it on my own”. Another woman resented being treated like “someone who is going to abuse the system.” In her words: “We immigrants work hard, we came here to succeed. We do not like to be on welfare.”
She adds: "I am white, have university degree, do not come from a poor family, and they still treat you as a third world person."

Such examples indicate that while some women participate in their victimisation, others resist and refuse to accept the social constructs that shape their lives (i.e., that as welfare recipients, they are necessarily lazy, or that as immigrants, they are necessarily a burden to the system) by claiming that "we work hard"; "we have rights"; "we contribute to the Canadian economy." This resistance becomes possible only when these women refuse to accept the negative stereotypes that mark them as 'different' or as 'inferior' (Young, 1990:60).

Finally, in an economic climate in which 'welfare' and 'immigrant' are often spoken in the same breath, it has rarely been properly acknowledged that the Canadian government, by and large, benefits rather than loses out economically from the presence of its immigrants: first, immigrants purchase goods and services; second, they provide a steady supply of cheap labour; and, third, they contribute toward the tax base, even in cases where, because of their assigned status, they are prevented from accessing social services enjoyed by Canadian citizens.

In the following chapter, I look at two other institutions in the web—the family and the church—and show how the women's relations with those institutions affect their responses to wife abuse.
Chapter 5: The Family and the Church

5.1. The Family

5.1.1. Family Ideology

*PSIW: Somos uma família e quero viver como uma família* ("We are a family and I like to live as a family.")

Based on interview data obtained from my participants, I observed that family ideology plays a significant role in the responses of Portuguese-speaking immigrant women to wife abuse. This is evident in the women’s emphasis both on keeping the family together and on their children’s need for a father. The women also maintained that while the family provided support in some cases, at other times the family blamed them for provoking their abuse. Friends, employers, and neighbours were also mentioned by some of the women as sources of support, and were described as being “like a big family.” This shows the contradictory nature of the family, on the one hand, the source of love, support and fulfilment; on the other hand, the source of conflict, abuse, and competing interests.

Family ideology refers to a set of beliefs and ideas concerning gender and intergenerational roles within a family, as well as how these roles are seen as relating to one another. Family ideology is thus a powerful factor in shaping the way the women in my study respond to situations of wife abuse. Notions of an ‘ideal family’, comprised of a father, mother and children, are passed down from generation to generation, as well as continually reinforced through community norms, the Catholic church, and other institutions. Family ideology thus becomes expressed in everyday action (Barret, 1980).
However, this hegemonic image of an ideal family in which only support, love, and nurturance are expressed ignores the reality of wife abuse.

_SP: We have to realise that we Portuguese place much emphasis on the family value system, which is good. At least this is my bias. The system that is called family is extremely good, this is what keeps us struggling, and keeps us helping [one another] in so many circumstances._

The view cited above is consistent with the literature on Portuguese families, which typically emphasises the supremacy of the family unit as an important feature of Portuguese culture (Anderson and Higgs, 1976; Alpalhão and da Rosa, 1980). However, it is important to acknowledge that the traditional line of authority of the Portuguese family is now undergoing change. 'Authority' in Portuguese families has always been vertically organised, flowing from the parents to the oldest son or daughter, with the highest respect always accorded to the father. More recently, however, the women and children in Portuguese families have begun sharing decision-making to a far greater extent (Almeida, 1985).

According to some women in my study, one of the factors that significantly affected their family structure was their immigration to Canada. This is consistent with the literature on Portuguese-speaking families (Grosner, 1991; Anderson and Higgs, 1976). Two of the women in my study reported that their husbands (who in the past had abused them) had not adapted well to Canadian society and had returned to Portugal, leaving their wives with the new status of 'single mother.' Two other women mentioned that their husbands had been urging them to return with them to their home country but that they had refused. Moreover, their refusals sometimes provoked incidents of wife abuse. Another woman told me that when she began going out after work with some of her
female friends, her husband complained that this was “Canadian-style” behaviour (which again provided ‘sufficient grounds’ for incidents of wife abuse). This same woman remarked:

*PSIW*: this is not Canadian-style, it is just more freedom that women have. Why [can] men ... go to ... billiard halls and pubs with their male friends and we cannot go out with our friends? If I go to a pub, I am a "bad woman", a "whore."

That the woman’s husband characterised his wife’s behaviour as “Canadian-style” might be interpreted to suggest that some Portuguese men believe that Canadian women are more liberal than their own wives and, as such, pose a threat to their male dominance. However, I would argue that this statement is more reflective of gender politics in general, rather than of a characteristic attitude of Portuguese men. According to this particular woman, the first time her husband beat her was when she came home late after going out for a few drinks with her female friends after work. He hit her head on the wall several times, which left her with a strong headache for weeks afterwards. She stated that she had experienced “shock” and “disbelief” when this violent episode occurred, following which she became increasingly fearful of him, such that she never again went out with her friends. She considered getting a divorce at that time, but decided to give him another chance. It would appear that regardless of the ethnic group to which they belong, abusive men use violence as a tool of power and control (Pence and Paymar, 1991), as a way to coerce women to conform to what they consider to be ‘appropriate’ behaviour.

My data indicate the women in my study do not necessarily keep their abuse a secret. Rather, they reveal the abuse to people whom they trust, to “people who will not tell others about it.” All women in my study first used informal systems of help (e.g.
family, friends, neighbours, and employers) before using more formal systems (e.g. social service agencies and the police). This pattern of seeking help is consistent with the pattern found in the population of abused women in general. For example, 51% of women who were assaulted in 1993 sought help from friends and neighbors, and 42% turned to family members for help (Statistics Canada, 1995). Generally speaking, these women disclosed the abuse after they perceived that the violence was increasing and that they no longer could control their husbands' behaviour. Their delay in disclosing their abuse to others was linked to their concern over what others might think and how that would affect the family’s image. This is consistent with previous studies that show that in Portuguese families, every effort is made to protect the family's privacy. Hence wife abuse often is kept secret (Grosner, 1995; Noivo, 1997).

Tensions concerning family values affect the women when they are in the process of deciding whether or not to disclose their abuse. My data indicate that the lack of support by family members (especially on the husband’s side of the family) along with the pressure placed upon the women to stay in the relationship, make them more vulnerable to situations of violence. Often, the women are blamed for not being sufficiently understanding and supportive, for nagging, or being overly demanding.

A woman is supposed to be the ‘pacifier’ in the home. If the man is angry, she must appease him. If she fails to do so, then she and not her husband is at fault. This is evident in the account of one of the women in my study:

**PSIW:** His family thought that I was “desvairada” (crazy) because we had financial problems. He was laid-off and I was blamed for having financial problems at home, because I was not able to control the finances. I was blamed for spending too much.
Here one sees the pattern of ‘blaming the victim,’ for her husband’s family failed to consider that family tensions had originated from the structural problem of unemployment, over which the woman had no control.

**PSIW:** My husband’s family has always blamed me for the abuse. I never received any support from them. In the end, it is hard for you to think about leaving, because everybody says that it is your fault.

**PSIW:** I told his brother that he beats me, but he didn’t care. My family never knew, only now. They offered me some money, but the emotional support that I needed they didn’t provide. In the end, it is almost [as if] they were saying, see we told you not to get married and live in Canada? Why did you get married in the first place, stupid?

When the family ‘blames the victim’ for her own abuse, it is very demoralising, especially for an immigrant woman who often does not have any other source of support. Thus, she experiences a double betrayal: not only does her husband beat her but her own family (or the family of her husband) fails to support her. Consequently, she tends to feel both trapped and resentful.

**PSIW:** I felt ashamed. Many times, my brother-in-law came to me, pointing the finger on me, saying that I was wrong, that I should not tell anyone. Then I used to feel bad and told him that I will not tell anyone because there were so many accusations against me, and all the people in our community respect him a lot. Then, I had to remain silent like a little bird that had to remain covered. So, now his family doesn’t want anything [to do] with me, and I cut all the relationships with his family also.

In this woman’s account, we see how the perceived priority is the need to protect the image of the family, especially the husband’s image, so that he may maintain his social status in the community (which would be at risk if she were to disclose the abuse to outsiders). Moreover, leaving her husband would likely result in community ostracism, which has been identified in the literature as one of the reasons immigrant women are reluctant to disclose the abuse (Coutinho, 1986; Riutort and Small, 1985, Rafiq, 1991).
this situation, this woman tends to internalise shame and self-blame, which is reinforced not only by her husband but by her in-laws. This finding is consistent with the literature that indicates that many immigrant men may use the influence of the extended family to keep the woman ‘in her place’ (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993).

PSIW: You know what my father said when I left my husband and came back: “if a woman is beaten and goes back to the husband she is no good” (mulher que apanha e volta para o marido é sem vergonha)

Again, victim-blaming is evident, as is a lack of understanding of the dynamics of abuse on the part of the woman’s family. This may contribute to the women’s sense of hopelessness and despair; alternately, it may lead women to explore other forms of support besides the family.

PSIW: My sister told me to be strong, to find a job and stick to it... She told me that I didn’t have to feel bad, because I am not doing anything wrong. My husband used to accused me of having men around and all stuff that you could imagine...My sister always told me that she didn’t want to see me in that situation. If you want anything for your child, you have to ask his authorisation, .... you always have to be under him, you have your life, be someone, you don’t have to be below him. ...When we got the divorce, every person that I worked for was like a piece of the puzzle, that with God’s help, I was able to form. With my situation, all these people helped me in one way or another with ideas and advice. They were always asking, do you need something? I didn’t know how to speak English well, but I always hear my children speaking English and I wanted to collaborate, participate, and talked to the English-speaking people that I work for about my problems. It was at this point, that I started to disclose about my situation to the people that I had some connections, that showed that care about me. Then, my bosses tried to encourage me, they were all like a big family for me.

This woman’s account reveals the importance of social support from her informal network (sister, friends, employers) in helping her gain enough strength to return to work and to deal with the pain and trauma of abuse. Interestingly, family ideology is evident in this woman’s discourse in her referral to her informal support system as ‘one big family.’
This same woman had also referred to the woman’s group in the agency as a ‘big family.’ This metaphor invokes an ideal family, one that views family as a source of support and strength (which seemed to be in contrast to her own family, in which her husband had physically and emotionally abused both her and their children). In this sense, the term ‘family’ refers not so much to a “tangible unit” as it reflects discursive practices associated with the notion of family (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990; Stack, 1974).

*PSIW:* After I separated from my husband, I stayed one month living in my brother’s house with the children. But we didn’t have any freedom. My children couldn’t make any noise. I had to be careful when I was going to heat the milk in the microwave at night in order that I did not wake him up. In the end, I decided to go to the shelter with my children. At least, they had more freedom there.

This account shows that although the family can provide some kind of support to the woman (i.e. temporary housing), this support often is less than adequate. This same woman told me that when she decided to leave her abusive husband, it was her father (who himself used to abuse her physically and emotionally as a child) who provided her with the money that enabled her to take that step. Once again, this example shows the contradictory nature of the family, in which family members act at times as oppressors and, at other times, as supporters.

The internalisation of a family ideology that would insist that a child needs a father, and that the family must stay together, shapes the way these women have responded to their situations of abuse. The power of family ideology is evident in the following account:

*PSIW:* I allowed my husband to come back because my child was asking for his daddy, but that was my major mistake. We are almost in the year 2,000. We cannot stay living together just because of the children.

*PSIW:* I stayed because of the children, you know, to keep the family together.
**PSIW:** He was the only man of my life.

**PSIW:** He is a good father, and my daughters love him. I know that it is not good for them to live in an environment with fights, but I feel sorry for my daughters, to live without a father.

**PSIW:** I was stupid because I did not believe that we could get a divorce for those reasons (violence). I thought that someday he will say, I am sorry, I am sorry, and will not do it again. We think that he will not do it (beat me) again, that's why couples make up all the time. He was a romantic person in bed, he was the father of my children.

**PSIW:** I did everything to make the marriage work because I think is important for the children to have the family together, the parents getting along well. I tried to be a good wife, make delicious food for him, bolinhos (little pastries), let him control myself, even my body I gave to him when I was not really in the mood, just to please him. I stopped going out with my friends, but nothing worked.

Another aspect of family ideology that places the women in a bind relates to the notion, prevalent in traditional Portuguese culture, that it is ‘not natural’ to be unmarried or to be living without a husband (Noivo, 1997). One of the women told me that her husband, who was born in a small island off Portugal, dropped out of school in the second-grade because he was constantly harassed and called “son-of-a bitch” because his mother had left her abusive husband.

Although family ideology spins a powerful ‘thread’ in women’s responses to wife abuse (especially the pressure to remain in the marriage), my data indicate that the turning point in women’s consciousness that leads many Portuguese-speaking women to leave a violent relationship is their belief that their husbands would not change: “I realised that he was not going to change”; “he doesn’t think that he has a problem”; “I realised that there needs to be two people for the marriage work.” Another turning point was their acknowledgement that keeping the family together in an abusive environment was more

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detrimental to the well-being of their children than raising them without a father: "my children were very traumatised"; "he didn't have patience with the kids, and started calling them names. My son used to cry every time he went to the table because he knew that his dad would fight with him if he didn't eat everything on the plate..." Pilowsky (1993) reached similar findings in her study on Latin-American women who have been abused.

In summary, this section has focused on the influence of family ideology upon the women’s responses to their abuse. I have also shown the contradictory role of the family, at times reinforcing traditional family ideology and exerting pressure on the women to hold their families together; at other times, empowering and supporting the women in their attempts to break free from their abuse.

5.1.2. Household Organisation

The women in my study all assume major responsibilities for their household organisation (i.e. the activities necessary for the functioning of the family unit such as cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, making beds, looking after children, buying groceries, controlling the budget, etc.). One of the persistent problems that these women have whether they are from Brazil, Portugal or Azores is to convince their husbands that they need to help out in the household and assume more responsibility with the children. For example, one woman told me that it took two years of "luta" (struggle) to convince her husband to help her with the cleaning and taking care of the children. She said that he would occasionally cook (since cooking is one of his "hobbies") but he would always make a big mess that she would have to clean up afterwards. Nowadays, her husband cooks,
washes up the dishes afterwards, and takes care of the children while she cleans the house or goes out to work. Another woman told me that her husband would take care of the children while she was studying at night. There were two other women whose mothers would take care of their children so that they could go out to work.

Looking at my data, I can see that the household organisation of these families is primarily shaped by family ideologies concerning gender roles. These family beliefs or ideologies define norms and expectations concerning both household activities (such as her ability to control the family’s economic resources), and extra-household activities (e.g., her participation in the labour force). These beliefs also shape power relations among members of the family, including the degree of autonomy a woman achieves, and her capacity to live independently of the abuser, if she so chooses. My data also indicate that although the women in my study assume the main responsibilities for the household, their ability to control its economic resources is limited, since their husbands are still mainly responsible for controlling the money in the family (even when they do have joint accounts).

Previous studies have shown that to understand the way a household is organised, one needs to become aware of beliefs about family life (Kibria, 1994; Moen and Wethington, 1992). Ideologies about women’s versus men’s roles structure their respective subjectivities. Portuguese men and men in general, are taught to be the breadwinners, the main providers, while the women are taught to look after the home and children (Lucena, 1976). Consequently, even when a woman has ‘help’ with housework, it is generally not structured in a way that allows her to go to school. (There were, however,
some exceptions, for two of the women reported that they studied while the husbands took care of the children).

Since the woman's place is assumed to be in the home, there are no expectations on the part of her family or community that she become socially upwardly mobile—that she 'move ahead'. Thus, when the men take care of the children in order that the women can work outside the home it is it more a matter of economic need than concern for her own development. This is evident in the woman's account below:

**PSIW:** I would like to go back to study but in order to do that, I would need lots of support with the children as well as financial support. But my husband is not the type of person that would make financial sacrifices in order that I could go back to study. This [study] is not important for him. For him, the most important thing is that I get a cleaning job and bring money home instead of taking money away from home. I tried to explain to him that if I finish school it would be good for our future. I could get better jobs, but he just keeps saying, you are not going to stay all this time studying. (...) When I go out to work, he stays with the children.

In recounting their experiences in the labour market, the women also spoke about how their work schedule was connected to the organisation of the household, as well as to their children’s school schedules, their husbands’ job schedules, and, importantly, the transportation schedules on which all other schedules depended. Most of the women remarked that if they were to work or to study, they would have to rely either on their husbands’ availability to take care of the children, or else that of a baby-sitter, a family member, a neighbour, or a day-care:

**PSIW:** I went to school because I lost my job. I am going to feel sorry when I have to leave school to be able to work. Because if I study during the day and work at night, who will be taking care of my children during night? They are still young. I could find someone to baby-sit, but it is a lot of pressure on me. When I separated from my husband, I continued working at night, but I had to pick up someone (a baby-sitter), and take her home at 1 am. It was too much for me. When I had classes, I used to
do that, I studied, I worked, and I left someone with my children, but it is not easy. It is difficult for this person to work at my home till 1 am, unless this person has a car.

PSIW: I used to work 9 hours, and earned $5 per hour. I had two children, and at night, I was taking a course. As soon as I finished the course, I continued working. There were nights that I got home at 2 a.m. and had to wake up at 6:30 am to work again in my job that started at 8. He took care of the children at night.

PSIW: I was working for 3 and a half years in a cleaning company. I was already integrated in a union, when they started requesting me to do "overtime" till 2, 3 am. At this point, there were lots of blackmail from my husband. He used to accuse me (of having affairs). I almost reach the point of a nervous breakdown. I ended up very sick and unable to work. When I was working at night, I was to be able to stay with the children during the day, to be able to take them to school and pick them up at school, and then go to work. I reached a point that I got to work sleeping. I was really exhausted. I used to work from 5:30 till 2, 3 am. When I worked only 6 hours, I finished the work at 10:30, 11 p.m. He worked during the day and stayed with the children at night. When the children came from school, I stayed a little bit with them, and then went to work again.

If a woman wants to learn English or take a professionalization course that might help her become more economically independent, the pressure increases, for she continues to be the one responsible for maintaining the household organisation. The demands that are made of her - both in the job and at home - place her in a situation of stress and sleep deprivation. The abuse that often results if she is unable to perform her expected role in the home only compounds the problem.

In summary, this section has focused on an important thread of the web of relations that has influenced women's responses to wife abuse. The fact that Portuguese-speaking women are responsible for the household organisation, with little or no family support (which is often left behind in their home countries) place these women in a situation of increasing dependence upon their husbands or other social support networks.
to be able to work, study, and at the same time provide for the emotional and material needs of their children. When we analyse these women's lives from this perspective, we can see that ethnicity, culture and other attributes that are frequently used to explain women's actions are not the major determinants of their behaviour, but, rather it is the social organisation of their lives within Canadian society (Bodnar and Meyer, 1979). The women's desires to improve their living situations (including to lead a life free of abuse) are often thwarted by the social constraints that surround them.

5.2. The Church

The accounts of the women and the service providers reveal that the Catholic church is yet another social institution that operates as a powerful 'thread' in the web, influencing the women's responses to wife abuse (since all the women in my study were Catholics, I will focus on the Catholic church, in particular). My data show that when the women are seeking solutions to the problem of wife abuse, the church can be either empowering or constraining:

*SP:* They (Portuguese women) have the pressure from the Church because they are Catholics, the Church says that they should be obedient to their husbands, the Church preaches that. Another factor is the family pressure, again, my daughter, how can she separate from her husband? It is so bad for the community, so all these factors work against our women.

*SP:* A lot of the men pull out from the Bible things that justify hitting a woman. From the Bible you can extract parts of it that says that's it is more or less ok, but if you read the whole thing or part of it, and [consider] how long [ago] it was written,... what the counsellor does is that he brings the Bible, and ask them (men) to show, and goes from there. A lot of the men quote the Bible and quote priests to justify their actions, but we just have to come back with statistics, because they are going to try to justify anything. They say, oh the Bible says that a woman... It is difficult, but we have to do it all the time...
Although the women in my study have all had different experiences with the church, its strong support of a family ideology, in combination with the community’s pressure for the women to remain in the marriage, often turns out to be detrimental to the women. The belief that the sanctity of the family must be preserved at all costs (Zambrano, 1985; Vasquez, 1994) is reinforced by Catholicism (“marriage for better and for worse” or “until death do us apart”). Hence, when Catholic women were abused, they often struggle with these beliefs that trap them in abusive relationships.

My data indicate, however, that the church may also provide a source of support for Portuguese-speaking immigrant women. Some of the women in my study became involved in support groups at the church that have helped them to increase their self-esteem, build their self-confidence, and ultimately rebuild their lives. Three of the women received material goods from the church, such as furniture, clothing, and food. Some progressive priests have even been helpful to the women by removing the blame that many felt upon leaving their husbands. One Portuguese woman told me that the priest said to her: “if you are worried about going to hell, don’t worry anymore, because if you live with him, you are not going to hell, you are going to be living in hell.” For some Portuguese-speaking women, involvement in the church was a very positive experience which is evident in the account below:

PSIW: I tried to know better the Christian life, so I got involved in a group from the Catholic Church. I got involved in this group through friends. We make orations, but we also study the Bible and we learn that we need to have independence, that we need to believe in ourselves. At that point, I was like dead inside of me because I was accused of so many things without having done that. It was like I was dead, I had no feelings. I did not know how to react anymore, and what to say. It was at this point,
that I found a source of support and freedom where I could talk about my problems. I started to enjoy life again and I realised that I was not wrong.

Some Portuguese-speaking women in this study have disclosed to their priest the problem of their abuse, since they felt that it was safe to do so. The advice they got from the priest was “to be strong”. There was an implicit assumption that strong women endure abuse and are able to keep the family together. According to some service providers, some of the Portuguese women who have disclosed the abuse to priests have been referred to social service agencies. However, they report that the great majority of priests try to keep the family together, and often the abuse continues.

One Portuguese woman in my study told the shelter worker that she had tolerated suffering because Christ also did. The shelter worker tried to challenge this woman by saying “Christ suffered for us in order that we do not have to suffer.” The belief that suffering is part of life is often associated with marianismo which emphasises self-sacrifice and implies that a woman should be able to endure suffering and forgive her partner for having abused her (Comaz-Diaz, 1988; Pinedo and Santinolli, 1991; Stevens, 1994). However, a counter-point to marianismo is hembrismo (femaleness) that values the multiplicity of female roles, and denotes a woman’s strength, perseverance, flexibility, and the ability for survival (Comaz Dias, 1988:45).

In summary, this section showed that the church is one strand in the web of relations that can reinforce traditional gender roles and perpetuate women’s victimisation. Alternately, the church can help the women to break free from abuse by challenging those beliefs that keep them in abusive relationships (e.g. that endurance of abuse is part of life, or, that it is the woman’s duty to keep the marriage together).
Chapter 6: Social Service Agencies

In this study, social services occupy a somewhat different status than the other institutions that are located in the web of relations. The reason for this ‘special status’ is that the representatives of social services whom I interviewed (i.e., service providers and other key informants), collectively were able to communicate information concerning three different ‘levels’ of the web: first, information about the women in the study (here, the service providers who counselled these women provided the richest data) and, second, information about the inner workings of the various types of social service agencies. Finally, because of the nature of their working practices (i.e., referrals, advocacy, outreach, community education, and administration, among others), these service providers and other key informants were able to function as highly effective ‘conduits’ of the different kinds of discourse that are characteristic of, and are transmitted by, other institutions in the web (including other social service agencies). As such, they became ‘ideal informants’ regarding the broader subject of my dissertation. However, the point must also be made that both service providers and other key informants may be ‘differently located’, depending on the constraints imposed by the particular contexts and environments in which they work as well as by their particular ideologies. They may also, as a result, have access to and/or use different avenues of change for improving the options of the women they serve.
6.1. The Neo-Conservative Agenda

I shall also attempt to show below how the particular history, mandate, and funding guidelines of each agency, as well as the bureaucratic, time and budgetary constraints (exacerbated by the neo-conservative agenda of the current government) impinge directly upon the service providers and, indirectly, upon the women whom they serve, such that when a Portuguese-speaking immigrant woman accesses one of the various social service agencies, she enters into a whole new set of relations that are far beyond her typical realm of experience. Thus, both the service providers and the women are caught in a web of relations, a web in which they are pushed and pulled through practices that are related to the combined bureaucratic effects of professional discourse, political ideology, funding guidelines, agency mandates, and job descriptions, among others.

One constraint that all agencies that I contacted experience relates to government funding, upon which all depend to a greater or lesser extent. Consequently, all of these agencies have been affected by the current government’s neo-conservative agenda - an agenda which has resulted both in tax decreases (which mainly benefit large corporations while eroding the tax base) and in cuts to social services (which penalize marginalized groups, such as the women in my study). Cutting social welfare programs has been justified through discourse relating to the need to save tax dollars, a discourse promulgated in order to gain public acceptance and justify the Ontario Conservative regime of Premier Mike Harris. However, a 1991 Statistics Canada study on the origins of the debt found out that only 2% of the federal debt could be attributed to costs for social
The "reorganization" of social services initiated by Ontario's conservative government (e.g., through amalgamation and 'partnerships'), has had a major impact on the agencies contacted for this study. No doubt the current move toward privatization and corporatization of social services will have many economic and political implications. The message given to some agencies that they must "go corporate" implies that Canada's commitment to social justice is no longer being fulfilled under the present system. While the government's explanation for reducing social programs is a tight budget, private support is not necessarily available either:

**OKI**: Canada was not built on the idea that there is a lot of private support. There is mostly public support through government. Where are we supposed to get money? In Canada, only 1% of corporations gives money to non-profit organisations. How are we going to get that? Then, we go to the government and we say, change the tax rules to make that possible. And then the government says well, we are not really sure we want to do that, that takes away our tax pay. Then, we say, it takes away your tax pay and all the organisations. Who is going to take care of these people? But, since there are different departments involved, different bureaucracies, different politicians, no one talks about that, and they do not realise that if they take money away from one place they have to put it back somewhere else.

As indicated in a report released by United Way in July, 1997 (information source: The Portuguese Interagency Network files), social service agencies funded by United Way lost 14 million dollars in 1996 due to the government cuts in funding. Moreover, during 1995 and 1996, 54 social service agencies closed outright. Of these, 17 had offered community development services, 9 had offered immigration and settlement services; 5 had provided shelter programs, and 3 had provided programs for children. The remaining
20 agencies (which provided community health, legal services, education, training, food and clothing, information, referral services, and counselling) were also closed. According to the United Way report, those most likely to be affected by the cuts included, among others, low income families, victims of abuse, and immigrants.

These cuts, therefore, have had a major impact on the women in my study, who belong to all three of these groups. The impact of such cuts is evident both in the accounts provided by my research participants, as well in studies conducted by coalitions of services for abused women, e.g., The Ontario Association for Interval and Transition Houses. For example, after the Progressive Conservative government took place in 1995, cuts of over 1.9 billion dollars to direct services for abused women and children (e.g. emergency women’s shelters, second-stage women’s shelters, crisis lines, community counselling, child protection services, etc.) as well as to other essential supports for abused women (legal aid, social assistance, housing, child care, language interpretation services and violence prevention education) were announced. Some abused women have made the decision to concede hard-won custody battles to their violent ex-partners in order to ensure that their children will be fed (OAITH, 1996). Moreover, one woman in my study reported that her oldest daughter decided to live with her father because she felt that she would be better off economically. Another woman in my study, on welfare, reported that for three years, she was unable to give either a Christmas or a birthday present to her son. Still another woman in my study reported that there were times when, because there was no food in the refrigerator, she had to feed her children with a mixture of flour and water. Finally, as indicated earlier, some of the service providers reported that certain women
whom they were counselling decided to return to their abusers when their welfare payments were decreased.

The pain, struggle, and human suffering that affect these women's lives all seem to disappear in the documents and forms that social service agencies are required to fill out in order to satisfy their various funding bodies (such as the 'Year to Date' report sheet, budget summary analysis, service data summary analysis, service targets, levels of variance, and impact on staffing). This bureaucratic data framework controls many service decisions, for the clients' needs are analysed according to cost-benefit calculations. If the agencies fail to operate within their prescribed and highly restricted budgets, then any requests they make to provide new services or to expand upon existing services will probably be denied. Thus, options for improving the lives of the women in the study will necessarily be constrained. In this regard, Ng (1988, 1990) argues that because government funding demands standardized forms of documentation, case notes, budgeting, and audits, it serves to "import state and market relations into community and grassroots agencies."

Furthermore, the government's emphasis on accountability and on outcome evaluation (to ensure that the programs are effectively producing the desired results) has had a tremendous impact on how service providers address the needs of the women whom they serve. Moreover, the outcome that a government or funding agency seeks is not necessarily the same outcome that is sought by the client, as indicated earlier.
OKI: We shouldn’t be saying that we are successful because a woman is going to a community college in order that the stats show up somewhere else. We can say that so many women are now “employable”, but they are not employed. Why do we say that they are employable if probably they are not, and will not be ready to be employable? There are other issues, other problems that are stopping them from doing that, and we have to be able to understand that...

OKI: We change the things that we are doing because those things depend on what the clients expect from them, but our evaluation should be based on the things that we decided to do, that’s the problem. What shouldn’t be changed are the people’s objectives, where they want to be, rather than say, you have to go to this level.

Attaching outcomes to funding guidelines restricts an agency’s ability to develop innovative programs and projects based on a first hand perception of the needs of the population that is being served. Thus, many funding proposals from the various agencies contacted are created around programs that will tend to guarantee funding, rather than that respond to community needs. Funding for agency’s programs is thus a crucial component in determining the way services are to be delivered. The clients' best interests often become dismissed, and service providers tend to feel overwhelmed by their increased workload, and because they are now required to ‘do more with less’, not only less money but less time.

SP: They (a government funding agency) sent us a letter in the mail, saying that we have more money for wife assault, and this is what we want (she showed the letter that was sent). They say, we have $50,000... and what we are looking for is [a project] that would stop abuse, that would build the self-esteem of women, that would give them employment opportunities, that would make them more employable. So imagine what I had to do on deadline. We had this funding proposal, and we needed a new one, so we had to redo it, ... trying to make it fit. We started calling employment centres ... asking if they could provide a job training seminar, [that would] cover the "more employable" criterion. Then, we had to call different places to see if they could provide training opportunities for women, and then they would say, maybe we can work something out. (...) we had a perfectly good project going on right here, but if we wanted the
same project for different cultural groups we had to cover the specific things they wanted, so we had to rewrite the proposal ... [so that it] fit into this new one. It is the same money from the government, but it is a different kind of red tape, bureaucracy; a different agency of the government that is giving money for the same thing.

The scenario presented above shows how a program is developed more from the standpoint of administration and bureaucracy than from the standpoint either of the clients or of the service providers, the latter of whom clearly are in a better position than the government to understand what their clients need.

Some of the agencies that were contacted reported that budget cuts resulted in many profound changes: staff layoffs, elimination of certain programs (e.g. job training), reduction of staff hours, elimination of extra-group activities, of transportation and child care services, etc. Space constraints also had become a problem, in that funds for renting space had also been cut back. Moreover, some of these agencies now have to rely more than in the past on students and volunteers (e.g., to carry out escorting and advocacy services), since most of the staff’s time must now be devoted to counselling sessions (more precisely, the agencies that provide woman abuse programs funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services) or because of their workload increase (this was particularly exacerbated in the settlement agency). With the closures of many social service agencies, the demand of services in certain agencies has increased significantly which is evident in the long waiting lists, as one service provider reported: “Women do have to call themselves and get their names on a waiting list for the group. We keep pretty long waiting lists. Sometimes, the waiting list is months, sometimes, a year, year and a half.”
The fact that the Ministry of Community and Social Services emphasizes, in its funding guidelines, "direct services" (such as one-a-one counselling) over 'indirect' services (such as outreach, advocacy, and prevention), has also forced some of the agencies that provide wife abuse programs to redesign their own priorities accordingly. While at first glance, one can argue that this might benefit the women (i.e., by giving them greater access to counselling), it not only reinforces the individualization of the problem, but prevents broader social needs of the women that could only be met through advocacy, outreach, prevention and community education initiatives from being met.

SP(C): I think that the biggest thing that has received a slash is outreaching and advocacy, which are very important. But again, funders want to see the numbers, and numbers are direct services, and are not so much focused on community development, and community work.

SP(C): As workers, we are pressured to see more people individually. And when there is a push to time, the priority is to see people individually. That's what it counts, what it matters. Community development is not viewed as a direct service, it doesn't count in the stats. If I do a workshop for 200 people it doesn't count, just one to one counselling.

SP(C): We have to go out and reach women, but there is not much time left for outreach. They (funders) really want us to focus more on direct services. The counselling is the most important aspect of our work. That was certainly the message that we got. (...)

SP(C): That's another thing, when we see clients, it enters in our statistics, and if we go to a public meeting doesn't enter in our statistics, we just got busier doing counselling. In terms of statistics, direct services take a priority.

Although these service providers quoted above come from different agencies, they are all subject to the same funding guidelines from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. To a certain extent, this makes their experiences in providing services to abused women generalizable from one setting to another. These funding guidelines shape the way the service is delivered by these service providers, and do not always work in the clients’
best interests. Although such guidelines state that work done “on behalf” of a client is important, this work is not funded since “direct hours” is defined as “the time spent actually interacting with the individual, whether in a group or individually, face to face or on the phone” (Ministry of Community Social Services, Service Data Element Definitions - Violence Against Women, 1998, information from one of the agency’s files).

Work done “on behalf of clients”, such as telephone calls, advocacy and the administrative support to the service is not included in the “direct services” definition. This will have a great impact on abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, many of whom face isolation due to the fact that many lack both English skills and family support. Furthermore, these women often are unaware of the social resources that could help them, according to accounts both of the women and the service providers. Without outreach, they will most certainly become even more isolated. Moreover, an abused immigrant woman often relies on the service provider to advocate on her behalf, to “help her through the bureaucracy”, “to write a letter to get housing”, “to make phone calls to police and court”, “to help in filling out the welfare form”, according to accounts both from the women and the service providers. The emphasis on ‘direct’ services means that outreach and prevention work (which are ‘indirect’) will become either limited or non-existent. Hence, the rigid linking of social service practices to funding policies narrows the range of choices available to these women. As one agency’s director remarked:

OKI: For example, the new Ontario Works Program where we are supposed to help people on welfare to find jobs, they only pay us after the person finds a job, and they only pay us after this person stays in a job for 6 months, so it means that if we worked with 50 women and tried to work as hard as we can, and work with them everyday, but if only 20 of them find jobs, we get paid for only 20, the other 30 that we spent our time, we
don't get a cent. That's the most extreme situation... the other problem is that if you want to meet the goals, the tendency is to work with a person who is easier to get a job, so if I have to pick it up, I will get a white male with working experience who can find a job, because that's how we get paid. Who is going to take the unemployable illiterate immigrant who just arrived and helped her to find a job, and help her establish? The chance of getting her a job is not high. This means that many agencies are forced to exclude these people and get people who have higher chances to be employed.

This account makes two things clear: first, that bureaucratic practices and funding criteria can significantly shape the way services are delivered and, second, that these same practices and criteria may thwart attempts on the part of immigrant women to obtain jobs. Thus, in the face of these constraints, agencies often have to struggle to satisfy a wide spectrum of often complex and conflicting needs of clients and at the same time satisfy the criteria imposed by the agencies' various funding sources.

The end result is that women's experiences often 'disappear' into the vast matrix of documentation, objectification, and quantification of social data, where in many instances the number of clients served by the agency they access are the basis for funding renewal. Some service providers and other key informants challenge these funding criteria, and argue that the number of clients served should not be the basis for funding renewal, since social service agencies serving abused Portuguese-speaking women need to spent more time with their clients than their English-speaking counterparts (e.g. "to make calls on their behalf", to "explain the implications of their immigration status if she calls the police", etc.).

As reviewed above, the government's neo-conservative agenda, focusing on 'deficit reduction', 'downsizing', 'fiscal restraint' and 'accountability' (which often
translates into funding formula with stringent conditions attached) has a tremendous impact on social service agencies that have to stretch their dollars as never before. Although all the social service agencies contacted for this study share the constraints associated with such agenda to a greater or lesser extent, large mainstream agencies tend to experience fewer constraints than smaller agencies (e.g., the ‘ethno-specific’ agencies), that are far less able to absorb the risks associated with government cutbacks and its new funding priorities.

The lack of support services is particularly detrimental to abused women, and will constrain service providers’ ability to address some of their needs:

**OKI:** One of the big difficulties that our clients have is that there is not enough information out there. Information is a really big gap. We don’t get enough funding, practically no funding to do public education. It would be so good if we have programming on television, regular advertisement like Ontario Women’s Directorate used to do, but it is very expensive to do.

**SP[C]:** If a woman needs someone to go to Court with her, we tried to go, but it is very costly in terms of our time, since the most important aspect of our work is the counselling.

**SP:** When they cut back legal aid, it had a real impact on our clients. If they are poor or if they are on social assistance, and even if they are lower-middle class and own part of their home, legal aid will pay for very little of their time with the lawyer, so the lawyer will say no to legal aid in family matters.

**SP:** Another problem now is that it is becoming more and more difficult for women to leave due to the cuts. Social assistance has been cut back, legal aid is gone, there is no second-stage housing left. After they leave the shelter, where do they go? And what are the options? Going to a housing project? Do I need to say more? In the end, we are almost saying, ‘you are better off staying’.

**SP[C]:** We make referrals to housing if women needed it, but unfortunately, sometimes because their system is on a merit system, and under a certain point you haven’t left the abusive situation within the last six months, and you are over a certain expire date, you don’t get housing.
What happens is that a lot of organisations that exist are too focused on protocol, on fixing people in categories without understanding their particular, unique situation.

SP[C]: Women who are in violent situations, they get priority in housing, but you know what, they still wait six, eight months, a year, that is considered a priority. ... They stay in shelters, I had a woman that ended up in a coop housing because the Metro Toronto housing doesn't came through. You know what I mean. That's why many of these women stay. They say, what can I do?

Four women in my study, for example, reported that without receiving social assistance (although inadequate) they would not be able to live independently of their abusers. Furthermore, another woman in the study, who was still in an abusive relationship, was on a waiting list for housing. She said that she was waiting for the housing without which she would not be able to leave. Another woman was initially denied public housing, because she was not considered a “priority” since her husband was living outside the country.

Although government’s discourse is that “prevention of violence is everyone’s responsibility”, and “everyone has a right to live without violence” (Dianne Cunningham, Ministry Responsible for Women’s Issues, Ontario Women’s Directorate, Agenda for Action, 1998), such statements are empty jargon since the government fails to provide the social structures necessary to end the violence in women’s lives.

6.2. The Client/Agency Interface

After initiating contact with the various social service agencies, the women began interacting with their assigned service providers in the counselling context. Seven women who were clients of the settlement agency presented a variety of problems and needs to the settlement worker (e.g. unemployment, problems with their children, and information
about how to obtain welfare, housing, and subsidised day-care). All except two of these women disclosed abuse in their first encounters with the counsellor. They waited until a relationship of trust has been established with their service providers before disclosing this problem. However, the women who had accessed the other three kinds of agencies (ethno-specific, multicultural multiservices and women’s centre) disclosed their abuse during their first encounter with their counsellors. Nevertheless, they mentioned other problems related to abuse (e.g. lack of housing, need of social assistance, need of a job, etc.). The willingness to disclose abuse cannot be attributed solely to the behaviour of the woman or the service provider. In part, it reflects the way the counsellors’ working practices are socially organized by the intake forms and the reports that they are required to complete, as well as their specific functions inside the organization. With respect to service providers specifically designated as woman abuse counsellors, their ‘needs assessment’ covered all issues concerning the abuse, in addition to the women’s family history, available networks, income, and immigration status.

SP[C]: We have an outline of what we do with the clients, so certainly our general practice is to check out for wife assault, and from there we go on. That’s probably the part that we lead more than the client, we ask the questions, otherwise we wait for the client to see what she is presenting, and we go from there. We certainly have in the back of our minds if there is any issue of wife assault, or if there are any issues of power and control, we give the client information on this.

OKI: From the assessment, our staff knows that she is in an abusive situation, then she is in this program without even necessarily saying... The moment we know that a woman is in an abusive relationship, there is a protocol that we use that we have to apply. So, this is not seen as a “family service case”. If a woman is in an abusive relationship, we treat [her] as a woman in an abusive relationship, we are not doing joint marital counselling. Do you understand that? Even if she hasn’t said “I’m
in a violent situation" or "I've been abused", because I know how deep denial runs, and minimisation.

SP[CF]: A woman comes here to deal with the problem of abuse. My title is already self-explanatory. I am a woman abuse counsellor, although I deal with a lot of employment issues.

As indicated earlier, service providers are 'differentially located' according to their own job descriptions, as well as their agency's mandate, history, funding structures, and relationships to different levels of government. All such 'relations' shape the ability both of the service providers and the agency to address their clients' needs. Agencies that have links with immigrant women's movements and coalitions that serve immigrants (e.g., the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants) seem to be better able to attend to immigrant women's broader social needs within Canadian society.

OKI: We do advocacy a lot through the Ontario Women's Association, and OCASI [Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants], and Social Planning Council, is also a big advocate body. We also write letters to the government on issues, and usually what we tried to do is, for example, the immigration policy has thousands of recommendations, we tried to get a perspective of the front-line [counsellors], so we will say, this is how your policy is affecting women that we see everyday, and I think that our council voiced there because they say that we see 10,000 women a year, and so it has a certain credibility... A few years ago, the NDP government understood our issues, and some of the legislation that we were worried that they will pass, they didn't...

Settlement agency and other immigrant service agencies (Das Gupta, 1986) were created to serve the diversity of needs of growing ethnic immigrant communities in Toronto, communities that often felt "silenced" and "constrained" by the structures of 'mainstream' agencies. These 'mainstream agencies', historically, displayed ethnocentric and racist approaches to clients (Butchene, Butcher, and Richmond, 1996), which often inhibited their clients' "ability to play and communicate with others or to express their
feelings and perspectives in contexts where others can listen” (Young, 1990:38).

Although some ‘mainstream agencies’ have hired counsellors from different ethnic groups, the problem of access for non-English speaking clients has never been satisfactorily resolved. For example, one Portuguese-speaking counselor working in a ‘mainstream’ agency reported that if a Portuguese-speaking woman wanted to access that agency’s services, she had to follow the same intake procedures to which other clients were submitted, procedures that were conducted only in English. Hence, if a woman does not speak English, she is denied access to services, even when there are Portuguese-speaking staff within the agency that might help her address some of her needs.

Two of the service providers interviewed from different ‘mainstream’ agencies did not consider interpreters to be an ideal solution in terms of access to an agency’s services. They both argued that the presence of a third person is disruptive, both to the counsellor and members of the women’s group. The solution proposed by the service providers to this barrier was to refer the women to community-based agencies. One service provider acknowledged that women were better able to access their services if they speak English “it is not that we do not serve Portuguese-speaking women. We do have some second and third generation of Portuguese-speaking clients in the agency, but they all speak English.” The other service provider reported that the criteria for participation in the women’s group in her agency is to have experienced abuse and to be able to speak English (although the program’s flier says, “all women are welcome”). She added: “we have some immigrant women in the group. Some of these women say, I do not speak English well, but when they come to the group, they speak just fine. So, there are different levels of
English-speaking in the group, but they all need to speak English." Thus, barriers to service were simply taken for granted, and access to these agencies was explained in terms of women's ability to speak the language. One of these agencies hired counsellors from other ethnic groups in order to be more responsive to the needs of immigrant women. However, such gestures tended to be mere 'add ons' which did not fundamentally change the philosophy of the agency, for the counsellors were still expected to follow the same intake procedures, and to complete case files in the prescribed way (personal telephone communication with 'ethnic' service providers).

It seems that the structure of these 'mainstream' agencies to which these counsellors are connected reflects an ethnocentric approach, one, which has clear implications for the provision of services:

rather than looking at ways in which the existing agencies procedures, structures, or treatments can be altered to better respond to the needs of ethnic minorities, the ethnocentric approach assumes that the problem in accessing and using services exist in the client's group and that it is their responsibility to change (Gutierrez and Nagda, 1996:204).

The 'mainstream' agencies contacted for this study developed training in 'ethnic-sensitive' and 'cross-cultural' approaches for their service providers in order to be more responsive to the needs of different ethnic groups. Despite the development of such training, and the hiring of service providers from different ethnic groups, the overall structure of these organizations remains the same.

The way social service agencies are organized resulted, in many instances, in a revictimizing experience for the women in my study, since their needs became fragmented or 'splintered' (Nurius, Hilfrink and Rifino, 1996). One woman in my study reported that
she had to go to seven different places to be able to have her needs met (e.g. which included the services of a lawyer, counselling for herself and for her child, free day-care, and social assistance). She ended up having to go to a woman’s centre, a legal aid office, a child protective agency, a welfare office, a domestic violence court, a psychiatrist’s office and a mental health facility. This same woman complained to me as follows:

PSIW: The services are here and you are the one who needs to go after them. But it is not so simple, you don’t know where are all those places. (...) it is too much bureaucracy. Each agency that I went to asked me a different type of documentation, and I also had to be subjected to the same questions over and over.

Based on this woman’s experience, one might well argue that her need to seek out so many different social service agencies in order to solve issues that were related to her situation of abuse turned out to be yet another experience of ‘revictimization.’ She added that in some agencies such as the legal aid office, she felt like a “case number”, a feeling which is probably related to the huge workload, and impersonality of large bureaucratic organizations. In these types of agencies, service providers often have to follow protocols, and guidelines, and do not take into account the different needs of women. The end result is that women’s experiences become objectified thorough the vast documentation that they need to provide to be eligible for a service.

Some service providers tried to ‘subvert’ certain agencies’ bureaucratic practices in their attempts to meet the women’s needs. Many of them work beyond their job descriptions and their agency’s service guidelines because of their personal ideology and commitment to the needs of clients. “Playing with words” is one of the strategies used by counsellors in trying to meet the needs of abused immigrant women.
SP: I am a settlement worker, so I am not supposed to do clinical counselling work, but if I cannot refer to anyone else, or if she doesn’t want to go there, I do a little bit of counselling, supportive counselling not clinical counselling.

SP: One of the most difficult things is when women need therapy or psychotherapy. That is very hard, the waiting list is very, very long. It can take about three months. If I feel that a woman is really in bad shape, and cannot wait three months, I end up doing [therapy], although I am not qualified for it. It is very stressful for me, and a big responsibility, but if there are no resources to send her, I cannot tell her to wait three months.

SP: My role is community support worker, but I end up doing lots of things that I am not supposed to do. For example, I was supposed to do just the intake, but if a Portuguese-speaking client comes to the agency, and the person is very depressed, and needs to talk to someone, then I end up doing counselling although I am not getting paid for that.

SP: Another thing that you asked me about was public education. We are not funded for that, even a large part of our funding comes for wife assault, and we have to work individually. We don’t get any funding to do public education, that’s one of the criteria, they fund us to do individual work and work with children, and for groups, but they won’t fund us to do a media campaign on wife assault, they won’t fund us to do community education to go to different groups to do talking about wife assault. Those types of things are not part of the contract. We still do that but it comes out of our family counselling budget.

SP: We do some advocacy, and some public education although we are not supposed to call public education anymore, because provincially it is no longer considered something that the province wants to pay for.

Two service providers pointed out how difficult it is to send a woman to another centre when she does not live in the catchment area that the centre serves, or when the woman has been living in Canada more than three years and is no longer eligible for certain services. One strategy of resistance was to overlook information provided by the woman and not verifying if the address provided was correct. Sometimes, a woman gives the address of a relative or an acquaintance as if it were her own in order to be eligible for
services at a specific centre. Often, there are no other culturally-specific services available in the area she lives, or the waiting lists for services are too long.

*SP:* I have to check where the client lives because if the client does not live in the catchment area of the centre, she is not eligible for services. Often, I ask for a document with the address or name of this person, but sometimes, I don't. Once I had a problem because the agency found out that a Brazilian woman whom I spoke to was not living nearby as she said. It is a difficult situation for me, because she was really sick and she needed the services. We shouldn't deny assistance to anyone regardless of status or area she lives.

Although there is the possibility of resistance from workers, these measures tend to be mere band-aid solutions given the neo-conservative agenda described above. In fact, the various policies and practices related to funding of social services need to be challenged so that agencies do not feel forced to play the 'number game' or 'playing with words' to ensure funding of their services.

6.3. Personalism

Eight women interviewed reported that they objected to the overly rational and professional stance of certain service providers, and had tried, subsequently, to connect with them in a more personal manner (i.e. by seeking *personalismo* in their interactions) (Grosner, 1991; Pilowsky, 1993). The women placed great value on service providers who were ‘humane’, ‘friendly’, and ‘caring’. Some of these women perceived their service providers not merely as professionals or bureaucrats, but as caring human beings. As one woman reported “people who come to the centre they are not like anyone, they come as friends, to help us out and we trust them”. This woman was referring to the community centre where she is an active participant in a woman’s group that is staffed by service providers familiar with her culture. Interestingly, I noted that in the ‘services description’
of this particular agency (whose mandate is to serve the immigrant community), services are provided by 'non-professionals'. Such individuals receive less pay and provide counselling (but unofficially).

However, depending on the structure of the organisation, a more personalised approach may not always possible to achieve. Large bureaucratic organisations are often avoided by immigrant women who tend to prefer a 'drop-in' type of atmosphere staffed by service providers who are familiar with their culture (Almen, 1988). The women who were clients of the settlement agency refer to service providers who are helpful as "family members", or "friends" rather than an "experts". Two of these women also referred to the women’s group in that agency as a "big family". The metaphor of 'family' seems to be used not only to describe a set of relationships, but to convey "the idea that the relationships under consideration are trusting and giving, not calculated" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990:13).

One woman in my study reported that she resented the bureaucratic practices of some of the agencies she had been in contact with. She also complained that she had to wait eight hours in line until she was seen by a service provider. Such long lines, typical of large bureaucratic organizations, convey to clients the expectation that service providers do not have much time to spend with a client (Lipsky, 1980). Moreover, rigid questioning may sometimes be perceived by the women as a re-victimising experience. One woman mentioned in relation to a welfare agency: "if I feel that the worker is just interested in filling out the form, and it is not interested in my story, I just stop talking."
The way service providers apply their agency’s forms (a significant dimension of their bureaucratic work), often varies from individual to individual. Lipsky (1980) argues that a service provider can still attend to the personal needs of their clients through the way he/she fills out the form, i.e., politely, rudely or indifferently (Lipsky, 1980:102). A service provider (herself a member of an ethnic group) from a ‘mainstream agency’ subverts bureaucratic practices by challenging the ways in which the assessment of women’s situation is commonly done within her agency:

SP: Sometimes, the tendency in a more western context is to have a list of questions that you go through to ask the women, very linear, very rigid, very structured, and some of that I found very intrusive. You still can get a lot of answers to those important questions to assess a particular situation by ensuring women to tell their stories, and their stories have a lot of these answers. So, you sort of wonder, who sets the agenda, the counsellor or the client? What are the needs that we are meeting, the needs of the workers who need to ask all those questions for her notes to be able to write the assessment or the needs of the women?

Aaron Wolfgang (1981) suggests that counsellors try to model the client’s behaviour (e.g. greeting, listening, touching, speaking, and so on) in order to facilitate cross-cultural communication. Wolfgang adds that the counsellor must make himself/herself aware of the client’s background and then use this knowledge to facilitate intercultural communication. For example, to achieve a more personalised approach with a Brazilian, Angolan, or Portuguese woman, the counsellor can make a positive impression by greeting the client as soon as she arrives in the agency, shaking hands, addressing her by her first name rather than by a formal title, and making sure that a certain amount of ‘small talk’ takes place.
However, in some agencies, the intake process takes place over the telephone, which is a very impersonal approach, one that does not fit with the type of interaction that Portuguese-speaking women seek with their service providers. The women in my study argue that they need to trust the professional before disclosing wife abuse. Moreover, counselling is often an alien concept to them. As one woman said: "I never sought counselling before. I thought that it was just another person to know about your life."

Another woman in my study told me that she called one agency several times, and only got the answering machine. In the end, she stopped trying to make an appointment. Only one of the agencies contacted in this study did not use an answering machine. The director of that agency argued that this was a deliberate decision that was based on the fact that most immigrant women are not familiar with how an answering machine works.

In addition to the structure of an agency, the political ideology of the various service providers, as well as their ‘location’ within Canadian society (e.g. as a member of a particular ethnic group) will tend to influence both their working practices and how they address women’s concerns.

SP: The fact that we have a relationship with our clients, we are from the same language, we become almost [...] part of their family support network, right. They treat us and see us very differently than they would if they go to a place that they will receive similar service but they see other people... They have been coming to the agency for 15 years, but they never disclosed [abuse] before to the other workers who were English-speaking.

SP[C]: I think that we definitely have a connection (with the client). It is funny that sometimes just language and culture make a connection. It is not that you cannot do the work, someone that is not Portuguese, you can do the work. I just think that sometimes it is easier for people to open up when they feel more comfortable, in their own language...
The fact that service providers share the same ethnicity and language usually ensures that an immigrant woman can disclose the abuse in a more comfortable environment. One can argue that Portuguese-speaking service providers are in a better position to understand what these women need, as well as how they behave, think, and feel, since they share many cultural values and beliefs. This is consistent with feminist studies that indicate that ethnic minority people are in a better position to define their own realities and problems since they have “double knowledge” (Butler, 1992; hooks, 1989), “double consciousness” or “mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldua, 1990), or “double vision” (Burstow, 1990). As such, they are aware of the values, norms, and assumptions not only of the majority culture, but have an additional layer of understanding based on their experiences as a minority people.

Some Portuguese-speaking service providers argue that because they share the same language and cultural background with their clients, they are also more sensitive to “issues concerning racial comments about women from different ethnic groups” (e.g. mainstream workers may perceive these women as ‘lower class’). Four of the service providers interviewed raised this issue, and also indicated that they strongly rejected social constructs that imply that Portuguese groups are both ‘inferior’ and ‘more prone to violent behaviour’; or that among the Portuguese, “violence is a cultural thing”:

SP: you hear people saying that it (abuse) happens more in the Portuguese community. There is no culture that experiences (violence) more than another. There is no "Portuguese thing", "Brazilian thing", "Latin-American thing". It is the same to say that Canadian men do not do that. ...I do not agree with that. It is not a cultural thing.
SP: We notice a lot when we deal with mainstream agencies that there is a tendency to say "in some cultures, it (abuse) happens more so", and we take a very strong stance against that, which is widespread. There are lots of people from mainstream agencies who do not want to touch the issue - because in some cultures, this is more acceptable. And us, as an agency are very quick to stand up to that - violence against women is unacceptable in any culture. It is funny because we listen to the Portuguese-speaking community, and many people say, oh, this is only the Portuguese, and we take a strong stance against that. When we speak with people from the Chinese community, they say that they got that too from mainstream agencies. This makes us frustrated because it is an educational thing for us, for clients, for service providers, for everybody.

SP: I do not think that some cultures are more prone to violence, I do not believe that. I think that violence looks different in every culture.

SP: There is no community that accepts violence. They may have different concepts of violence, different definitions of what is abuse or what isn't, but the fundamental thing is that people agree that it is wrong and that people have rights.

The stigmatisation of certain ethnic-cultural groups as "more violent" has been acknowledged in the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993:80) as well as in studies conducted on immigrant communities (McLeod and Shin, 1990). Such stigmatisation may reinforce discriminatory practices against these communities (Leadership Summit, 1995). Many discriminatory practices may be explained by the fact that many social service providers were educated under a system of Anglo-Saxon values, and thus may have a tendency to stigmatise cultural norms and practices that deviate from the dominant white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and middle-class norms, against which all others are deemed either similar (and thus normative) or different (and thus deficient) (Greene, 1994: 334). For example, mainstream Anglo-Saxon values emphasise the individual over the collectivity (Comaz-Diaz, 1989). This may be problematic for a
Portuguese-speaking woman, whose values may be more centred on her family and on the community (Coutinho, 1986).

Given the fact that in Portugal, Brazil and Angola, such ‘family problems’ as ‘wife abuse’, as indicated earlier, tend to be resolved within the family realm (Grossi, 1994; Grosner, 1995), counselling is often an alien concept.

*SP:* We come from a culture where the person doesn't open up with anyone unless it is a family member, and an adult. In our culture, we do not go to counsellors. We have an adult person that comes into our home to find out what is the problem. Generally, these persons that come into the home are the oldest members of the family. Sometimes, it is very difficult for an abused woman to go to a counsellor.

*PSIW:* I never sought counselling before because I thought that it was not going to help, it was just another person to know about your life.

In addition to characterizing certain cultures as more ‘violence-prone’, some counsellors also challenge those Portuguese-speaking abused women who have internalized their oppression by providing alternative ways for them to look at their situations. These counsellors avoid ‘victim-blaming’, as well as try to discourage the women’s sense of powerlessness (e.g., the powerlessness that is expressed by such statements as: “Portuguese men are all like that”; “The violence was not that bad”; “The problem is the drinking”; “If I stay quiet, he will not beat me”; “I provoked him”, etc.).

This attitude of self-blame is common among abused women in general regardless of the ethnic group to which they belong (Sinclair, 1985). Some abused women may internalise beliefs that keep them in a powerless position. Service providers, in turn, may offer counter-hegemonic discourse that contradicts or opposes the norms, values and practices that prevail within society (Hale, 1990), discourse in which Portuguese women become
constructed and perceived as “strong”, as "resilient”, as "survivors”, yet at the same time having few options; as “blocked from developing their full potential” due to violence and other forms of oppression they experience.

Some service providers try to establish a ‘feminist practice’ in their work with abused immigrant women. They attempt to diminish both the professional-client distance and the view of the professional as the “expert”. They also try to mobilize these women to organize themselves into coalitions within the agency, and to become involved both in the evaluation of services and on the Board of Directors. Some of the women in my study started doing volunteer work in a settlement agency and in a shelter for abused women. They also began bringing other abused women to the women’s group. Some of the women in my study started challenging the kinds of patriarchal beliefs that had perpetuated their victimization.

**PSIW:** I started to have another way of looking at things. My mother and grandmother always taught me that the man inside the home, even if he beats me, he is the man. We cannot talk. If he is angry at you, don’t reply. I used to live all the time like this, but with the help of the social workers, I realised that this was wrong; that we have to think more about ourselves (...). I left him to be free. I did that to avoid been controlled because I was controlled even the clothes that I should wear. We, women have to change because if we don’t change, they (men) never change. They will never change if we accept that. From the beginning, we have to say, no, this is no good.

**PSIW:** After I started going to the centre, I changed a lot. I realised that my boyfriend was abusing me. Then, I talked to the counsellor and I started to change. My boyfriend noticed my change. He said: after you started going to the group, you changed a lot. He doesn’t put his leg on my neck anymore because I changed. Before, when he got home with a sad face, I used to go there and talked to him to see what was going on. Then, he fought with me and I cried. I was always around him till he felt better. Now, if he is OK, he is OK, if he is not OK, I am not going to stay around him till he stays OK like a rug where he puts his feet.
From these accounts, it is evident that their challenge of existing power relationships began only after their encounters with their social service agencies. Both women were participants of women's groups attached to the agencies in which they received counselling. They demonstrated a new capacity to resist situations of oppression (such as wife abuse) by challenging “patriarchal role expectations” (Burstow, 1992), and rejected their status as victims, as “someone who accepts the subordination of her own needs and desires to those of others” (Antrobus, 1989:195).

PSIW: In my case, there was no violence, but I didn't know that I was being abused. I let him control me because I was taught this was part of the marriage because the man has more rights than the woman, so I accepted that. It came from my mother who used to accept abuse, it comes from our culture. Then, the way I was raised was like that. I accepted being controlled by my husband because I was controlled in my father's house. My sisters and I couldn't go out alone. It was from school to home. I was beaten by my dad, and I was abused by my dad, emotionally and mentally abused. Then, I got married and I could go out. I could do shopping by myself that I couldn't do before. So, in my mind, I had more freedom.

It is interesting to note that wife abuse itself is socially constructed differently according to people's 'locations'. In the view of the woman cited above, she was not an 'abused woman'. She accepted the way that she had been controlled by her father and husband as “the way the world is constituted.” (Edelman, 1988:13). However, after she began going to the social service agency, she started to redefine abuse as a “power and control issue”. This particular woman told me during an interview that she only became aware of the extent of her abuse after reading a pamphlet given to her by her counsellor:

PSIW: One day I was feeling very depressed, then I was looking at my stuff, and I saw the pamphlet about the wheel [power and control wheel]. After reading that I said, oh God, I have been abused my whole life. Then, I decided to do something about it.
This woman stressed that her awareness and understanding of her abuse helped to remove her feelings of guilt for deciding to leave her husband. Some service providers acknowledge that “when you are working cross-culturally, people have different concepts of abuse. What we may see as abusive, they may see as not abusive”. Such an acknowledgment may discourage a service provider from blaming a woman for staying in an abusive relationship, for having ‘false-consciousness.’

*PSIW*: My mom raised me for the feminine life, civilised. I was not raised to go to farming. My country has these things. My mom raised me to be a housewife. I learned all the feminine things: cooking, cleaning, sewing, embroidery. I was studying Arts, I used to perform in a theatre. The problem was when I got engaged. If you get engaged, you cannot do anything anymore. You cannot walk alone anymore. If you have walked by yourself till that point, the fiancée comes and tells you that you cannot do that anymore, and we agree because we are so “parva”, “parva”, “parva” (compliant) that we agree with him in order to avoid loosing his love. I have always agreed with him. He used to work at home and when the husband works at home, he controls everything. He used to control who I was talking to over telephone, who were my girlfriends, if he doesn’t like my girlfriends because of the way they dress or if they go out too much, I could not see them anymore. I never thought that this was abuse.

Gaining new knowledge about abuse can be positive for a woman, since it enables her to transform taken-for-granted assumptions about the way she lives (Giroux and McLaren, 1986), which, in many cases, is oppressive to her. This particular woman, for example, told me that prior to coming to Canada, she had been unaware that she could get a divorce on the grounds of violence.

When working with Portuguese-speaking women (or, for that matter, women from any other ethnic group), it is important to look not only at the person and her problem but at the particular context in which her life is embedded. Thus, not only is fluency in the client’s language important, but also the issues of race, class, gender, religion, and cultural
differences in the service provider’s working practices. Feminists have recommended that advocates of abused women “must first examine their own values and beliefs,” and only then present themselves as “role models of competent, successful, and assertive women” (Sinclair, 1985:48). My study indicates that service providers can sometimes innovate in their practices, and use their feminist political ideology to resist bureaucratic practices and empower women—by providing them with new knowledge and by presenting them with new options’.

There appeared to be a consensus among the service providers interviewed that there is no ‘ideal theory’ into which immigrant women’s experiences with abuse might fit. However, they all share a common understanding concerning violence as a “male power and control issue”, one that is reinforced by patriarchal relations within society, as has been demonstrated by many feminist theorists and activists (Yllo and Bograd, 1988; Schechter, 1982; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). This shared understanding is evident in the transcripts below:

**SP:** I think that wife abuse is an issue that crosses every culture. For me, it is more part of the culture of being a woman, and this can be Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, because they are women. Women are oppressed, and this refers to all women. Men have been the ones who say we had the power, and all women experience in some degree that. It is definitely not a cultural issue, because abuse does not happen just in the Portuguese-speaking community. It happens in every community. It happens more because she is a woman and as a woman, she is the target of many things.

**SP:** We talked about violence as a social problem, it is not about an individual thing, it is about power dynamics. I mean, what it comes down to me is that adults do it to children because they can, and husbands do it to wives because they can, and I think that we live in a world that allows that to happen.
SP: In our work we use the feminist theory, feminist practice, and definitely, it is a unanimous kind of thing right now that abuse is a form of power and control issue. A lot of times we look at the patriarchal system, things that women can recognise in their partners, and all go back to power and control issue...I have to clarify a lot of the myths that this is not just the Portuguese men and whatever, that this is happening in all Canadian society and all over the world, and even though, we still do a lot of talks about patriarchal society and how this has been constructed in our society for so many years.

Feminist underpinnings are visible in the way these service providers understand wife abuse. Some also recognise the integrated nature of race, class and gender oppression (Ramazanoglu, 1989), but agree that 'patriarchy' is still the major factor associated with wife abuse. They argue that immigrant women become targets of violence because they are, first of all, women.

Furthermore, although there is an understanding among the various service providers and other key informants of some of the concerns of their abused Portuguese-speaking clients (e.g. their fear of deportation, legal and language issues, and the need to involve the extended family) such understandings reflect more an "add-and-stir" approach rather than a challenge the way the various social structures are organized impinge on their clients’ lives.

SP[C]: there are unique issues that face immigrant women such as isolation, possibility of ostracism from their community or extended family, language barriers (...) Then, women who are immigrant have more obstacles to face than women from non-ethnic specific population: information is not always available, where to get services, sometimes the system is very disconnected, and there are lots of services gaps with respect to how to get all the services such as social assistance, day-care, and so forth. Everything is not always placed under one roof. You always have to access the system and often in a complex manner, and this can be very frustrating, especially when you don’t have the information in your language. You don’t know how services work in a different society, and
that can delay the access to services, and for many immigrant women, they do not have lots of options.

The counsellor cited above (herself a member of an ethnic-minority group) clearly seemed to be aware of the barriers that many abused immigrant women faced when trying to access social services. Such barriers (e.g. isolation, community ostracism, language, fragmentation of services) were faced by many women in this study and have been already discussed in the literature on wife abuse in the immigrant community (Mc Leod and Shin, 1993; Pinedo and Santinolli, 1991; Riutort and Small, 1985; Shin, 1992; Paredes, 1992).

However, this same counsellor (who works in a family service agency), fails to challenge the barriers that immigrant women face when attempting to access that agency's services (her solution is referral to ethno-specific agencies).

Some service providers acknowledge that the 'professional knowledge' received through social work was inadequate to attend to the complexity of issues brought by abused immigrant women.⁸

*SPIC:* Many of the institutions are still teaching very traditional, westernised models for intervention that basically do not fit every woman that we see, because a lot of these models are very individualistic where the philosophy behind it is that you work with a woman individually to empower her, you focus on her strengths, and you work just with the individual. However, when you work cross-culturally, you need to remember that a woman may be physically coming to the office alone but when she exits your office you need to remember that she may have extended families that she has to contend with, that in her extended families, she may have members that may also be abusive to her, or they can support her (...)

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⁸ Some counsellors acknowledge that schools of social work are now trying to respond to the needs of clients from different ethnic groups by including in their curriculum, courses on cross-cultural social work, oppression, and multiculturalism. However, not all of these courses are mandatory.
Some agencies (e.g., the settlement agency) try to involve both immigrant men and women in their interventions. They address the larger community as well, e.g., through campaigns in the radio against wife abuse, public demonstrations, and other activities that go beyond individual counselling with the woman. In the other agencies, the woman abuse counsellor is not mandated to work with the abusive man. Most women in my study feel that the man needs help too, and want the violence to stop (rather than wanting to leave the relationship). Two of the women in this study stressed that they felt pressure both from their counsellors and from shelter workers to leave their husbands.

**PSIW:** I believe, as a victim, that I could say, that the type of treatment that is given, that pressure for a woman to separate scares even more the woman... I think that needs to be changed. There is a lot of pressure for women to leave. (...) if a woman remains in the relationship is because she has hope, and wants that man.

This particular woman indicated that her counsellor had told her during the first interview that her husband was not going to change his behaviour, that her home was not a safe environment for their children to live in, and that she should consider leaving him. This woman, however, informed me that her husband was “a good father” (a statement which was challenged by her counsellor on the grounds that “a good father does not beat his wife”).

**PSIW:** When I told the counselor that the children need a father, and that he was a good father, she said that a good father does not beat his wife, but I think this is relative. She also said that I had to do it (divorce) now while the children are small. She said that later it is more difficult to do it. It is too much pressure for the woman to separate.

The woman expressed disappointment with the counsellor’s intervention (who was a worker from a ethnic-specific agency). She explained to me the importance of being
listened to, that each woman has a different life history and different needs. In her view, the counsellor should first know the women’s history before recommending that she take certain action. At the end of the counselling session, the counsellor had asked this particular woman what she wanted, and the woman confessed to me that she felt ashamed to tell the counsellor that despite the counsellor’s comments, she still wanted to stay with her husband. A woman may thus distance herself from her counsellor if she does not share the same world view and belief system (indeed, that woman stopped going to the agency).

Many years later, this same woman returned to that same counsellor to gain help in identifying her options and to apply for subsidised housing. She told me that she had finally decided to leave her husband because she realised that he was not going to change, even after she had made many attempts to make the marriage work (e.g. marital therapy, and threatening to leave him if he did not enter into individual therapy and stop using drugs). Although her husband did change his behaviour in some respects (e.g. he began giving her his paycheque, helped her with the household chores, and stopped using drugs), he was still physically abusing her from time to time without taking responsibility for his behaviour. This account shows that the fact that a woman remains in an abusive relationship does not necessarily imply that she accepts and tolerates the abuse or that she is a willing or passive victim. Furthermore, women often need to have sufficient time to make decisions concerning their relationships, since the implications either of staying or leaving are profound. It is important that service providers be “aware of how a client’s cultural context affects all aspects of problem assessment and remediation” and that clients are the ones who should take on the “expert” role. By achieving that, clients can provide
the “interpretative context of determination of a presenting problem’s nature and the best intervention approach” (Van den Bergh, 1995: xviii), an approach that is consistent with feminist practice.

**PSIW:** Counselling didn’t change my way of thinking. What changed my way of thinking was time and experience because what the counsellors told me I already knew, that my children would be traumatized, I already knew that, I read a lot. I changed my way of thinking with time. I realized that I cannot change his behaviour, because he doesn’t want to change. He denies what he does, and after he beat me, I am afraid of him.

This statement indicates that the turning point in her consciousness was the belief that her husband would not change his abusive behaviour, given her failed attempts to ‘fix him’. Many women are not successful in ending violence in their relationships, insofar as the responsibility for the violent behaviour ultimately remains with the abuser. As Susan Schechter points out in her analysis of violence against women in the family:

Battered women are not passive; rather they engage in step-like logical behaviour as they attempt to stop the violence or leave. Not all of them are successful because the major variable, the violent man, is outside their realm of control. Staying, especially given the lack of resources and social supports for leaving, should never be read as accepting the violence. The more any woman is denied control over her life, especially in violent situations where self-assertion is dangerous, the more difficult change becomes. (Schechter, 1982:233).

One woman in my study emphasised that she liked her counsellor because she was supportive in respecting her decision to go back to her husband.

**PSIW:** She (counsellor) respected my decision to go back to Portugal because each woman knows when it is time to say stop. It is important for the woman to be able to decide when she wants to leave the relationship. It is not the professional that should tell us to do so: women know when enough is enough, not the counsellor.
On the other hand, one male counsellor noted that while "some approaches will say, you have to leave right away, I do not believe in that, because I understand my culture. If you say that, you lose the client." He further emphasised that the importance both of the family and the community for the Portuguese woman to remain in their marriages cannot be underestimated, nor the pressure from the Catholic Church. The awareness of such cultural factors in the counsellor's choice of intervention is extremely important, given that these factors seem to play such a major role in the women's responses to wife abuse.

Three other service providers agreed that the main issue is not whether the woman should leave or not leave her abusive husband, but rather the need to provide such women with the "information", "knowledge" and "options" they would need should they decide to take such a step. These service providers argued that women occupy a more "advantaged position" when they know that they have options. By doing that, women may feel that they have greater control over their lives. Concerning this issue, one service provider maintained that "the clients make the decision, but I try to give enough information so that they know that there are options for them to make the decision." If the women express the wish to remain in their relationships, service providers often try to make sure that the women do not feel guilty for having provoked the abuse; also, that they are sufficiently aware of the need to look after their own safety and that of their children.

Another service provider from a multi-services agency stressed the importance of respecting the client's self-determination:
when people (abused women) come here is not like [we say], "you have to leave, you have to call the police." A lot of times, people come here to chat, to talk about what is going on. ...Our relationship is [based on] how the client wants [it] to be. (...) I go with the facts, if they ask me, "what is your opinion, do you think that he will change?" I say, "he will only change if he does this and this but since he is not doing this, he probably won't."

The counsellor's statement clearly indicates that she tries to respect the client's context, as well as the boundaries that set her apart from her client, i.e. "our relationship is [based on] how the client wants [it] to be." However, this same counsellor also mentioned that she often challenges a woman's beliefs when she is considering returning to her abusive husband. Another counsellor told me that the way she deals with such a situation is by telling the woman that she will support her in any decision that she might take. At the same time, however, she points out to the woman that although she has been trying to "fix" him for so long, it has never worked; moreover, that the fact that he has not demonstrated any change so far probably means that he will not do so in the future.

One of the women in this study (a client of the counsellor cited above) mentioned that after she went back to her husband, she regretted her decision because the abuse only got worse. In the end, she told me:

PSIW: sometimes the counsellor tries to give advice but we don't listen because we think that we know what is best for ourselves, but sometimes we don't.

In short, even though a woman may eventually regret her decision to go back to her abusive husband, it is important that the counsellor respect her decision, even when that decision is not the one the counsellor would make for herself. This helps the counsellor demonstrate her "belief in women's strength" (Sinclair, 1985) and capacity for
agency. However, when women internalise oppression and blame themselves for the abuse, it is reasonable to argue that it is appropriate for the counsellor to challenge the women’s beliefs. By helping to remove a woman’s feeling of blame for the abuse, the counsellor opens ‘possibilities’ to this woman that were previously unavailable to her. As one woman in my study remarked:

*PSIW:* the thing that helped me the most was the fact that the counsellor said that it was ok if I leave him. Everybody blames me for the abuse, and in the end you end up believing that you are the one responsible for it.

By providing new knowledge to an abused woman counsellors may add a new layer of understanding about the client’s situation which may lead to a change of consciousness which can reduce her internalized blame and sense of failure in the marriage.

*PSIW:* The counsellors helped me to think more about myself, because I used to think only of him and the children. All the time I was abused and suffered domestic violence. I had to start thinking about myself.

*PSIW:* After I started going to the Center, I learned to like myself because I did not like myself before.

*PSIW:* I am not paying as much attention to what others think or say as before, and I am believing more in myself...

*PSIW:* I realised that not everything is lost.

*PSIW:* We try to hide and keep it (abuse) secret, but I learned that if we communicate and ask for help, we get out of the situation, we get rid of the stress, we get rid of sadness. If we get stuck with the problem, the problem gets bigger, and it becomes more difficult to solve the situation.

*PSIW:* After I started participating in the programs of the agency, I do not know what is loneliness anymore.

*PSIW:* When I talk to the counsellor, I feel more relieved, less guilty... because I feel so guilty as if I carry all the guilt of the world on my shoulders...
Although the women reported that they have benefited from counselling in some ways, the emphasis on counselling may contribute toward the individualization of the problem, and thus give the message that it is the woman who requires change. While a counsellor from a family services organization states that “counselling provides an opportunity for women to find the solutions to their problems within themselves,” solutions to the women’s problems clearly cannot rest exclusively within the women themselves, since the roots of their problems tend to be structurally located, as the data indicate. Thus, counsellors not only must “alleviate distress” but “constantly seek out ways to transform the client’s position” (Langan and Lee, 1980: 475) by “using interventions which enable those with whom [they] interact to be more in control of the interactions in exchanges... [as well as have] the capacity to influence the forces which affect ...[their] life space for ...[their] own benefit (Hunzeker, 1989:14-15 quoted in Dominelli, 1997).

6.4. Safety Planning

One special type of action plan for women who have been abused is what the counsellors call “safety planning”. “Safety planning” is described by various participants in my study as follows:

SP[C]: First of all, we have to measure her level of safety, if the partner has weapons, making her aware of the possibility of him using them, if she had to leave, where she will go, making sure that she knows what to take with her, who can she go to if she has to leave in a hurry, making sure that she knows how to call the police, all that, making sure that she knows how to call a taxi, making sure that she has a wallet somewhere that is accessible, in the garage or something in case she has to flee at the spur of the moment, making sure that she knows what resources are available, what are the options, what is she entitled to and what she can access, that’s basically what we do and talk about it, just making sure that she knows what type of danger she might be in.
SP[C]: It is very practical, how to call the police, when to call the police, to give her permission to call the police. What she has to say to the police, how she might ask for identification, that if she lives in an abusive situation, she always needs to have her documents in her purse or put away in a place that is accessible to her if she has to leave in the middle of the night. For some women, we suggest that they have a bag ready with some clothes for them and their children, so if they have to leave, they have something to grab before going to a shelter... We tell them that they are legally entitled to those things (money and documentation), that there is nothing wrong in finding out about what are their bank accounts.

SP[C]: Safety planning would be like a woman calls us on the phone, is she safe right now, because we just talk over the phone, we have never met before. Or if someone is here, and we are doing a safety plan, it is kind of like, if you are in danger, are you able to call 911? Are you comfortable calling 911? Do you know the number? Are your children able to call or can you go to a safe place? Kind of having a plan of action if the situation occurs. Does this make sense? If he is coming after you and is going to hit you, what are you going to do? Can you leave right away? Do you have someone that you can call to, friends, all these things are part of the safety planning. It is very practical.

OKI: There are certain levels of safety planning. If you are still living in the house, how can you maximise your physical safety while he is still in the house? So, part of the safety planning is for a woman to think about her house because she is not going to leave him, so think about your house, and think about all the things you can do to at least avoid an accidental killing due to more serious injuries that otherwise you might get because of where you are located. Put knives in a bottom drawer instead of hanging them up where kids or someone in a rage can quickly get to them, those types of things. How helpful is it? I don’t know. The more helpful safety planning is to get a woman to anticipate living. It is more like planning what are the things that I will need before I leave and getting all of that in place, getting photocopies of your documents or a bank book if there is any way to get it, a copy of the key, taking $50 every week out of the grocery money so that you can have taxi money put away somewhere...

SP[C]: We talked a lot about safety planning, especially about women giving information to each other. We develop safety stuff together, women say, I do this, the other said I do this and my sister did that. There is stuff about documentation, being able to access some things. One of the things is telling people that this happens. We talk about it, and we certainly talk about how violence escalates when women talk about leaving, and so we talk about shelters, assaulted women’s help lines, and things like that, you know trying to have money put aside even to make phone calls although
you can make phone calls to 911 without money, whatever, but things about money, things about important possessions of the kids, or even familiar things of the kids, clothing sometimes...

Safety planning is part of the discourse of woman abuse counsellors, independent of the particular agency setting in which they work. ‘Safety planning’ is a term found in manuals that have been developed by feminists for counsellors and for advocates of victims of wife abuse (Sinclair, 1985; Riutort and Small, 1985). Such manuals help organise relations among the key players in wife abuse. Indeed, such ‘texts’ are active constituents of social relations (Smith, 1990). Through the use of carefully selected terminology, women’s situations are described in ways that suggest that their problems can be managed within and through the bureaucratic apparatuses of the state. Such specialised language is used to engage in socially organised discourse, discourse that reinforces institutionalised power and authority (Montigny, 1995). Knowledge of this terminology serves to distinguish the expert from the non-expert:

SP[C]: Woman abuse counselling requires a different approach than general counselling. It requires that counsellors have the ability to develop safety plans with the women, and that’s a speciality skill.

The language of safety planning is also intended to allocate the working activities of counsellors into proper institutional categories. It would appear that feminist concerns with women’s safety and well-being eventually became ‘absorbed’, ‘institutionalized’ and transformed into ‘technical steps’ to develop ‘safety planning’. Into other words, feminist demands for change and challenge of the various social structures that condone and perpetuate violence against women are erased and redefined so that proposed ‘feminist’ solutions are transformed “into something consistent with the existing social and political parameters.” (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 1988:181).
There is often a disjuncture between the way counsellors establish safety planning with the women and the way women protect themselves from their abuse. For example, while the counsellors tend to emphasise police intervention as part of safety planning in cases of wife abuse, the women in this study tend to see the criminal justice system as a last resort when dealing with the violence in their lives. They resist calling the police for any of the following reasons: “because he is the father of my children”; “because it was hard to get him out of jail the last time I called the police”; “because I had to find someone to pay the fine”; “because I do not want to jeopardise his job”; “because I want him to get treatment and do not want him to go to jail”, etc.). Moreover, the very nature of the crime implies the existence of a relationship and, quite often, the victim wants to preserve that relationship (Johnson, 1996).

While service providers tend to provide institutional solutions as part of the development of safety planning with women (e.g. to call the police, to call a shelter, to call an assaulted women’s hotline), the women from my study try to prevent violence in the first place by staying quiet, by trying to please the partner, by avoiding confrontations, and so on. Thus, there is a disjuncture between the way counsellors define safety planning and the way women understand safety planning. Typically, these women do not perceive the State as capable of providing a solution.

Most women in my study wanted to obtain help in stopping the violence, both against themselves and their children, rather than to punish their partners. They maintained that mandatory arrest policies do not always work in their best interests. This finding is
consistent with other studies carried out on abused women from Latin America (Martin and Mosher, 1994).

In addition, safety planning applies a standardised approach when dealing with wife abuse cases (e.g. by measuring the woman's safety level, by informing her of her options, by assessing available resources available, by informing her of her rights, etc.) as was shown in the counsellors' statements. However, to exercise some of the rights that are pointed out to her by some counsellors may place a woman at risk of further abuse. For example, the counsellor that informs a woman that she is "legally entitled to money and documentation, and that there is nothing wrong in finding out about her bank account" ignores the reality that although women have rights in principle, many of them are actively prevented from exercising them (Young, 1990). Three women in my study who attempted to obtain information about their joint bank accounts suffered reprisals from their abusive husbands. One woman who withdrew half of the money from a joint bank account in order to be able to leave her husband received death threats from him.

In summary, in this chapter, I have attempted to highlight certain features of the various social service agencies, the way the working practices of service providers are shaped by funding guidelines, agency's mandate and structure, professional and political ideology. I have shown that there is a possibility of resistance from service providers who subvert bureaucratic forms of the agencies. Social service agencies may be both supportive and constraining to women. The constraints that service providers currently face in trying to meet these women's needs is particular exacerbated by the current neo-conservative agenda of the government with its emphasis on 'personal responsibility'.

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PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

Chapter 7: Social and Policy Implications and Recommendations

The complexity of the problem of wife abuse in the immigrant community does not lend itself to simple solutions. This study represents my desire to move beyond an examination of causes, incidences, prevalence and categories of abuse experienced by women. My intent has been to provide a broader analysis of the problem of ‘wife abuse’ against the context of the social organisation of these women’s lives, to more adequately represent the way these women's lives are actually lived. Given this context, my findings have shown that there is a vast ‘web of relations’ in which abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women are ‘caught’ when trying to find solutions to their problems. The institutional relations that I specifically identified from my research participants included those that exist between the women in my study and, respectively, immigration, welfare, the labour market, the family, the church, and, finally, the social service agencies these women access.

The following diagram of the ‘web of relations’ was developed on the basis of my research findings, and shows the intricate web of institutional relations in which the women in my study are embedded.
This diagram represents the concept which slowly evolved in the course of my research, namely, *the web of relations*. This diagram shows the main components of the web of relations (i.e., immigration; labour market; welfare; the family; the church, more precisely, the Catholic church; and the social services). There are also horizontal 'threads' in the web that are implicit in the diagram, and that I have discussed in my analysis. For example, between immigration and the labour market, between welfare and the labour market, between the family and the church, and so on. I have shown that the relations of women to the various 'threads' of the web are socially organized through discursive practices that link the different institutions. I have used the term *web of relations* to refer to that *network of institutional relations* in which, I have argued, abused Portuguese-
speaking immigrant women are ‘embedded’. I have included under institutional relations: (a) relations between an individual and an institution and (b) relations between two (or more) institutions.

Thus, I have used the term web of relations to show the interconnectedness of these women’s lives to “the social context surrounding them,” a context which (unfortunately) makes their abuse not only “possible …[but] socially acceptable” (Young, 1990:61).

To develop the web metaphor even further: one cannot readily see from a distance the details of an actual spider’s web because it is both fragile and translucent. Only when one approaches more closely can one see that a ‘fly’ has been caught, is struggling, and cannot escape. However, just the opposite is the case when speaking of a web of relations, for if one looks too closely, or if one looks at only one part of the web, then it is often difficult to understand why the woman will not ‘simply leave’ the abusive relationship (or, conversely, why she chooses to remain). However, if one steps back and takes a broader view of her struggle, one notes that there are many barriers standing in the way of her desire to lead a life free of abuse (whether that entails leaving or remaining within the relationship).

Based on the analysis of my data, it is clear that the web of relations has a dual nature, since it has the potential both to constrain women’s options, as well as empower them. One excellent example of this can be seen in that part of the web occupied by the family. For an abused immigrant woman, a family may provide a source of support, fulfilment, and love. At other times, however, it can become the locus of conflict, tension,
and abuse. Another example relates to the women’s interactions with social service agencies. From the perspective of the woman, a service provider may be seen (and may indeed act) as an agent of social control, an indifferent bureaucrat. At other times, that service provider may be seen (and may indeed act) like a ‘family’ member, a helper, or a friend - someone who genuinely cares about the plight of the woman whom she is counselling. Moreover, I have shown that the service providers themselves may either be constrained or enabled in their attempts to deliver services to the women whom they counsel, and often resist managerial, instrumentalist, and rationalistic methods, narrow job mandates, and funding restrictions that often reduce their working practices to nothing more than a series of bureaucratic steps.

While the ‘spaces’ of the web may be said to represent ‘rights’ and ‘opportunities’ available to abused Portuguese-speaking immigrant women, the ‘threads’ may be said to represent ‘constraints’. These ‘threads’, however, may either be tightened or loosened. When they are tightened, the women experience increased oppression from without. That oppression, however, can become even more onerous when the women rationalise, internalise, and individualise it and, thus, perpetuate it.

The ‘web of relations’ metaphor was an attempt to capture the lives of these women in their social context, allowing me to look not only at the individual’s inner strengths, but also at the social structures that contribute to the way she feels, acts and thinks. Thus, it was possible to relate the situations that these women experienced (unemployment, hard working conditions, stress, and wife abuse) to the social context of their lives, rather than merely attributing their problems to individual personal failure.
The metaphor of the ‘web’ was chosen since all relations are interconnected in the lives of these individuals. Thus, we cannot adequately address their needs without taking a look at the backdrop of their lives. I propose a ‘reconstruction’ of this web, such that the spaces between the ‘web’ that represent ‘opportunities’ be enlarged while the ‘threads’ representing the ‘constraints’ be released. This may be achieved by implementing changes in our present social system. This proposal is compatible with critical social work thought that argues that it is the social system that requires change, rather than the people who suffer the consequences of defective social arrangements (Langan ad Lee, 1980: 475).

The ‘web of relations’ metaphor also allows us to realise that “women are not entirely responsible for their outcomes or even their choices; their choices are a function of both their preferences and of constraints” (Friedman and Diem, 1993:9). Drawing upon Friedman and Diem’s insight, I was able to show that the women in my study were rational actors and “purposive agents” who were subjected to external constraints which I have represented by the ‘threads’ of the web that had shaped their options. My study has shown that an immigrant woman who stays in a abusive relationship is not irrational, suffering from false-consciousness, or to be blamed for her situation.

This study gave special emphasis to one particular ‘thread’ of the web, i.e., social service agencies, in which service providers and other key informants were interviewed. I have argued that such special attention was given since the majority of service providers can communicate information both about the women in the study and about the workings of their own social service institutions and the network of institutional relations in which these women’s lives are entangled. I contend that while service providers typically deal
with particular aspects of the web (e.g., immigration, the labour market, welfare, family, religion, and social service agencies), interrelating all of these aspects will lead them to a more integrated and holistic understanding of these women's lives, as well as to a less fragmented approach in dealing with these women's problems. I have also shown that service providers and other key informants are also embedded in a 'web of relations' that is somewhat different depending on the particular agency's mandate, history and funding guidelines. However, I have shown that the various social service agencies that the women access are affected by the neo-conservative government agenda - an agenda that focuses on accountability, downsizing and budget cuts - which has a clear impact on the women in my study and the agency's ability to meet the women's needs.

In the background of the study, I explored the historical and socio-cultural contexts relating to the problem. These provided background information on the issues addressed in this study, and enhanced one's understanding of the complexity of the problem. Given the understanding of such contexts, I have argued that to have the 'right' to a life without abuse is merely empty jargon if there are no social structures that make such a life possible. I have also shown, however, that while some social structures that could provide 'opportunities' currently exist, women often are prevented from taking advantage of them. Indeed, these same social structures (e.g. labour market, welfare, social services) may often contribute toward women's victimisation and dependence.

I have also demonstrated that the women sometimes appear to have contradictory and conflicting interests. Often, for example, an immigrant woman on welfare may express the government's hegemonic discourse - a discourse that conflicts with the interests of
low-income immigrant women, or more generally, of low-income families as a whole -
(e.g. a view that welfare access should be restricted). The challenge for feminism to avoid
treating women as an homogeneous group and be aware of the internal contradictions and
ambivalences that many women may feel.

This dissertation attempted to reveal these ‘multiple perspectives’, including those
of abused Portuguese-speaking women who have sought social services in Toronto, and
who have generally been marginalized in academic discourse. While differences between
women must not erased, there is clearly a need for dialogue, which is critical for the
vitalization of ‘democratic discourse’ (Fergusson, 1990). Moreover, while ‘reality’ indeed
may be socially constructed, it does not follow that oppression does not exist, nor that
measures should not be taken to address some of ‘the needs’ of oppressed groups (such as
the Portuguese-speaking immigrant women in my study). I argue that neither an
exclusively relativistic approach, nor an exclusively essentialist approach, will help to solve
the dilemmas that service providers and other key informants face when trying to meet the
complexities of these women’s needs. While the former approach leads to political
immobilization, (which prevents social change from taking place that might benefit these
women as a collectivity), the latter approach is likely to lead to the ‘homogeneization’ of
women’s needs and problems and proposed solutions.

I acknowledge that even my own recommendations have been influenced by my
ideological beliefs. Nevertheless, I have attempted to challenge taken-for-granted policies,
attitudes and practices that shape much of how we understand ‘reality’.
My study is thus an attempt to demonstrate that the way many individuals come to understand the world of an ‘abused immigrant woman’ is shaped by dominant discourses and ideologies (e.g. that certain ethnic-cultural groups are more violence-prone; that immigrant women are passive, etc.) that often shape the ways in which their lives become socially organized by a web of relations that give rise to their experiences.

I have demonstrated that the particular immigration status of the women in my study will influence their responses to wife abuse in two main ways: a) by delaying their access to social service agencies, and b) by influencing them to remain in the abusive relationship out of fear of deportation. Most of the women in my study entered Canada under the family class category - a category that identified them as dependents of their husbands or their husband’s families through the sponsorship criteria, in which the independent applicants (usually their husbands) are responsible for the women’s welfare for a period of ten years. Thus, the ‘sponsorship criteria’ of immigration policies serve to reinforce their husbands’ power at home (e.g. by making threats of deportation), making these women more vulnerable to situations of wife abuse. Assumptions that are built into immigration policies, and that are shaped by gender roles, i.e., that a man is the provider and the woman is not destined to enter the labour market, ignore the reality of the women in my study, who typically must enter the labour force in order to contribute to the family income. Studies have demonstrated that this pattern relates not only to the Portuguese-speaking women in my study, but to immigrant women as a group (Ng and Ramirez, 1981; Ng, 1988). Given the way these women’s lives are socially organized, I agree with
Ng's (1998:19) argument that such taken-for-granted immigration policies, in which only one spouse is assigned an independent status, need to be challenged.

One important point that I made was that although some of the women in my study entered Canada as landed immigrants (and thus could not be subjected to deportation), their husbands often used threats of withdrawing sponsorship as a tool of power and control (since most women in my study were unaware of their legal rights), these threats often succeed in terrifying them. Furthermore, I have shown that the complexities surrounding immigration policies make it difficult for even experienced service providers to provide accurate and up-to-date information to immigrant women on immigration issues. Clearly, such legal trainings on immigration issues to service providers would benefit immigrant women, especially given the highly restrictive funding environment in which legal aid services were cutback and the waiting lists for lawyers in some legal clinics are long. One woman in my study, for example, was told to wait a month to see a lawyer. One of the service providers from a community service, who has received such type of training, often end up working as a paralegal to attend to the diversity of needs of immigrant clients that she serves. Another service provider from a multiservice organization in my study who identified legal advice as one of the most urgent needs from her clients, is developing a project to establish a partnership with legal services clinics that would make available such kinds of services to her clients (although the number of hours of such service will be very restricted).

At a broader level, immigrant women’s groups have been organizing and lobbying for implementation of changes in immigration policies, so that women who have been
abused and are not yet landed will not be subjected to deportation if they cannot meet the self-sufficiency criteria. One of the proposals of these groups is that women who are in abusive relationships be allowed to stay in Canada, and that the policies should be changed to allow the women access to language training with living allowances. Also, a three-year Minister’s permit should be given, so that women will have the chance to show their potential to become self-supporting and thereby to satisfy the immigration criterion of “self-sufficiency”. In the case of women whose sponsorships have been broken, there has been a proposal to allow them to work, to study, and to be eligible for social assistance, for subsidised housing, and for day-care (Ottawa-Carleton Regional Co-ordinating Committee on Wife Assault, 1991). Unfortunately, most of these proposals mentioned above have not been implemented thus far.

Concerning my findings related to the labour market, I have also shown that the way Portuguese-speaking women are organized in terms of the labour market will shape their degree of autonomy and control over their own lives. The women in my study with various degrees of education are still in low-paid jobs (e.g. cleaning, sewing, restaurant, factory, etc.). These women often are part of an ethnically-racially segregated labour market (Ng, 1988) which offers few chances of upward mobility. This hampers the ability of these women to achieve economic independence and leave their abusers, should they choose to do so. I have also demonstrated that for the women in this study (since most were from low-income families), the cycle of economic dependence appears to be directly connected to the abuse they experience.
My data also indicate that even immigrant women who speak English well, and who have university degrees from their home countries, are generally assigned to low-paying jobs and are subjected to discriminatory practices that are ‘justified’ by the fact that the degrees they acquired in their home countries are not recognized, and that they lack Canadian experience. These restrictions thwart their attempts to improve their lives, according to the women in my study and other immigrant women, in general (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993).

My findings also indicate that the way Portuguese-speaking women are organized within the labour force will determine the number of options they have to live independently of their abusers. This study has shown that the situation of these women in the labour market, women who have to manage hectic work schedules, their children’s school schedules, transportation schedules, their husband’s job schedules, and the household, becomes extremely burdensome. I have demonstrated that the household organization of these women is also shaped by gender ideologies in which the man is assumed to be the provider and the woman, to be responsible for the household. These gender role ideologies mask the fact that women also are actively in the labour force. If these women started challenging such ‘gender-role’ arrangements, conflicts were likely to arise. Some women developed their own politics of resistance in which they challenged their husbands to help them out in the domestic chores. Although some of the husbands often help the women with the housework by taking care of the children, while the women go to her job or study, this was done out of an economic need rather than concern for their own wives’s development. Given the way the lives of these women are socially
organized, structures need to be in place to attend some of their needs (e.g. a woman sometimes cannot return home, because there is no public transportation after she finishes her job; a woman cannot work after 3:30 p.m. because the free after-school programs where her kids could spent the afternoon have been eliminated, extra-school activities are no longer funded by the government; another woman had to quit her night job because she has no one to take care of her children while working, and could not afford a baby sitter etc.). The end result is that the cuts on services such as day-care and after-school programs to address a wide variety of needs of the population in general, have reduced even more the autonomy of abused women within Canadian society.

Even though the women in my study now have greater access to English classes (and many of them are indeed taking such classes), learning English will not necessarily guarantee that they will get better jobs, especially given the elimination of job training programs and other structures that would enable them to become more self-sufficient. All the women in my study who were taking English courses were unemployed at the time of the interviews, and also on welfare. The government’s current neo-conservative agenda with its rhetoric of ‘personal responsibility’, ignores the effects of widespread unemployment, downsizing, job displacements, the loss of job creation programs, labour market restructuring, and finally, the “drying up” of traditional immigrant jobs (e.g., in garment industries and factories) all of which exarcebate women’s experiences with wife abuse and also increase the workload of agencies serving immigrants.

Seven of the ten women in my study had to rely on welfare at some point in their lives (e.g. if her husband became unemployed, if the woman was laid off from work, or if
she walked out of the abusive relationship). I have also demonstrated that while welfare has enabled many of these women to leave their abusers, living on welfare can reinforce their sense of lacking control over their lives. The “personal responsibility” ideology of the Ontario government, with its emphasis on “self-sufficiency”, “self-employment” and “independence”, ignores the inequalities built into a society that are divided along racial, class, and gender lines. In fact, welfare policies often become detrimental to abused women, since they become entangled in bureaucratic and discursive practices that do not take into account their needs and their realities. First, welfare policies do not recognize the valuable work of a woman (e.g. the time that she spends performing household activities, such as baby-sitting, cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, making beds, and so on). Second, the pressure for a woman to have a job forces her to take a low-paid job. Thus, workfare ends up serving the interests of the people who hold the means of production rather than the women per se, who all too soon become a ready supply of cheap labour. Welfare reform is associated with the discourse on “cutting taxes”, “reducing the national debt” and decreasing “welfare fraud”, a discourse that creates an inventory of social imagery associated with welfare recipients, such as “lazy bums, unmotivated and fraudulent” (Mosher, 1999). My data have shown that such discourse may sometimes be internalized by women on welfare, thus further contributing to their oppression, and reinforcing the stereotypes. Some women in my study challenge these stereotypes, and show that relying on welfare is not a matter of choice but of survival. Finally, among the constraints identified in this study by abused women on welfare were the inability to save money while on welfare, the inability to study, pressure to earn money by working,
difficulty in finding housing while on welfare, and the inadequacy of welfare amounts. Even 'progress' can become penalized, for example, one woman in my study, who was on welfare, reported that her rent was increased as soon as she got a job. In short, current welfare policies produce significant and often punitive effects upon women who want to improve their living situations.

Furthermore, some of the women in my study have shown that they also have to cope with the stigma of poverty and single motherhood, which creates still other forms of oppression. In some instances, a woman can benefit from this new status as a 'single mother', by gaining greater access to opportunities previously denied to her (such as the woman in my study who had obtained an Ontario Scholarship Assistance Plan (OSAP) allowing her to study under the category of 'single parent').

Although Canada has been dominated, traditionally, by a commitment to the welfare state and to government intervention in the economy, under the current neo-conservative regime of Premier Mike Harris, this commitment no longer is being fulfilled. Social service cuts, amalgamation, downsizing, fiscal restraints and the privatization of services are all part of the current government's agenda. Feminists have been organizing against the current government to expose the violation of basic human rights that are a result of cutbacks to welfare policies that were designed to meet the needs of individuals marginalised by the system. No longer is the government committed to "an adequate standard of living... including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions," as is guaranteed in the International Convenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 11 (Ontario Women's Declaration, 1995).
As one woman in my study complained, “the government is not helping the poor, the government is helping to keep the poor down.” One service provider argued that if women could retain a greater proportion of their earnings, they would become more self-sufficient in the short-term and not have to rely on welfare.

Instead of challenging taken-for-granted policies and practices associated with welfare, agencies often try to accommodate to meet their clients’ immediate, practical needs that follow from welfare cuts. One woman in my study on welfare suggested the creation of “services that teach the woman how to cook and live with a short budget, where to go shopping, how to cook healthy food and still save money,” etc. With cuts to welfare payments, more of these women have been using food banks. However, some of the service providers, along with three women in my study who had to begin using the food bank, acknowledged that most Portuguese-speaking people find this to be a very humiliating and degrading experience, and would rather starve than submit to bureaucratic procedures that require proof that one is truly poor. (One of these women stated that for this reason, her own brother refused to give her a ride to a food bank). It would appear from these findings that it would be more effective if agencies serving immigrants were instead to provide income-generation programs, co-operative food programs, and community kitchens. By way of responding to some of these urgent needs, one of the agencies in my study created a community kitchen project geared to the Portuguese-speaking community (although at the present time it is not in operation). Another community worker from a multiservices agency revealed that, given the significant increase in the use of food banks, she had advocated with success for the increased
provision of free meals within the agency. Although the worker acknowledged that this represented only a band-aid solution, one that neither addresses the roots of poverty nor promotes social change, it was the only alternative she could think of to address her clients’ most basic need for food.

Service providers (either from within or outside the agencies) who could offer job training and placement for Portuguese-speaking women with low levels of education must be recruited. For some agencies, the majority of their Portuguese-speaking clients are unable to meet either the grade 8 or grade 12 requirements for Employment and Immigration Canada’s job training programs (information from service providers and other key informants). One of the social service agencies with a mandate to serve the Portuguese-speaking community currently is advocating for such services with Employment Immigration Canada. Agencies serving the Portuguese-speaking community need to organize themselves, and to coordinate efforts to implement recommendations for addressing the urgent needs of this clientele. One of the problems is that agencies that are targeted to serve abused women belonging to Portuguese-speaking communities must compete for the same sources of funding, which may discourage them from combining their strengths through the formation of coalitions. Thus, immigrant women’s lives get caught in a myriad of institutional, social, economic, and political relations that are outside of their immediate experiences. Interestingly, it not only the women in my study who are unaware of the ‘broader relations’ that shape their experiences when they access services, women who have what Smith (1987) refers to as a “bifurcated consciousness.” Service providers themselves often are not aware of these relations. Indeed, the way in which a
service provider's work is socially organized within the various social service agencies often prevents her acquisition of such knowledge (as is often the case with front-line service providers who are not required to fill out the reports demanded by funders). Thus, many service providers are not even aware of the kind of outcomes that are expected by the agency’s funding sources. However, this very lack of knowledge sometimes motivates these service providers to innovate around the bureaucracy.

In order to qualify women for the labour market, some women’s centres are developing pilot-projects that are targeted to immigrant groups. These women would receive an allowance while undertaking their training, and would also be placed in an employment setting following their completion of the course.

Coalitions for abused women, and organizations such as Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, Ontario Association of Women’s Centres, and NAC, must continue to expose the harsh realities of abused women on welfare. Many of these women are not yet ready for the labour market, and thus should neither be forced to work nor to engage in employment training programs as a condition for becoming eligible for social assistance (a requirement of the Ontario Works Act). As indicated earlier, while some individuals may be exempted temporarily from workfare requirements (including victims of violence), the rules tend to be confusing. For example, some of the exemptions are specified in welfare regulations while others are specified in government policies. Many women in my study report that they do not feel ready to work (as required by the Ontario Works Act). The reasons are both varied and valid: depression, problems with the children, abuse, divorce, and so on. Given these findings, I recommend that exemptions
from work requirements for victims of wife abuse should be stated clearly in the Act rather than in the Regulations (the latter being easier to revise). Moreover, feminists have been organizing themselves through the Metro Network for Social Justice, and have developed workshops relating to the issue of workfare in order both to raise public awareness and mobilize the broader community to this issue. Some feminists have also argued that the introduction of workfare will violate the right to a “freely chosen or accepted” job, to “just and favourable conditions”, and to “equal remuneration for work of equal value,” and all without discrimination, as guaranteed in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Ontario Women’s Declaration, 1995:4).

My data have shown that the nature of such institutional forms as the family, the church, and social services is inherently contradictory: each can be alternately empowering or constraining to Portuguese-speaking women who have been abused. The family may constrain a woman by blaming her for the abuse, and by reinforcing the family ideology that every child needs a father (an ideology that is reinforced both by the Catholic Church and by the Portuguese-speaking community). On the other hand, family members, as well as friends and employers, may also become a source of support (e.g. the woman who challenged her abused sister’s feelings of guilt over her abuse, and who motivated her to try to achieve economic independence by finding a job; the father who gave money to his daughter to enable her to leave her abusive mate; the brother who provided temporary housing for his abused sister). This inherently contradictory nature of the family plays a powerful role in women’s responses to wife abuse. Moreover, that a woman is an immigrant also may affect her behaviour and decisions concerning her family. For
example, some of the women argued that sacrifices were sometimes necessary in order provide a better future for their children. Such evidence of self-sacrifice, however, should not be interpreted to mean that this is an inherent trait of Portuguese-speaking women or in some way is characteristic of her ethnicity. Instead, given the constraints imposed by her environment, such self-sacrifice is often a rational choice. In short, within ethnically and racially segregated societies conflicts are likely to occur over whose needs take precedence.

Given these findings, interventions with Portuguese-speaking clients need to be centered on the needs of the entire family. A 1986 survey on the needs of Portuguese-speaking community conducted by the Portuguese Interagency Network reveals that the Portuguese place a great value on the family and on the community (Coutinho, 1986). This finding is consistent with my study. Probably, this accounts for the fact that some women in my study refer to the women’s group to which they belong as a “big family,” or expect the service provider to behave like a “family member”. Because the women as a group tend to embrace family ideology, service providers who challenge such beliefs systems can reasonably expect one of these possible outcomes: a) a woman may reframe an earlier understanding of her situation and take action accordingly to this revised understanding (as did the women when challenged about their patriarchal beliefs, reframed their understandings of abuse, b) she may simply leave the agency (as did the woman in my study who stopped going to the social service agency after the counsellor told her to leave her relationship, and who had also challenged the woman’s notion of what constitutes ‘a good father’), or c) she may succeed in challenging the service provider’s
assumptions and understandings concerning immigrant women’s lives, causing that service provider to adopt a more culturally-based approach.

In relation to the Church, my findings show that the women in my study have had varied experiences with this institution, most commonly, with the Catholic church. Although all the women in my study were Catholics, some have been influenced more than others by Catholicism. My data indicate that the Church (like the family) can also be either supportive or constraining to abused Portuguese-speaking women. Although the overall structure of the Catholic Church is patriarchal, and thus tends to reinforce the family ideology, some of the more progressive priests can help a woman overcome her guilty feelings about leaving her abuser (for example, if the priest challenges her belief that she must stay in the relationship and endure the suffering).

One of the agencies contacted for this study has reported that the priest is one of the first persons to whom their Portuguese-speaking clients disclose their abuse. This is not surprising, given the fact that the large majority of the Portuguese in Toronto are Catholics. Furthermore, confession is still perceived by an abused woman as a ‘safe place’ to disclose such a sensitive issue. The woman’s worries about what the community might think if they found out that she is an abused woman are thus diminished because of the ensured confidentiality of confession. Moreover, in Portugal, the problem of wife abuse is often dealt with by the priest (as well as by family members) (Grosner, 1995).

One of the problems is that the secrecy surrounding abuse reinforces the individualization of the problem and of its solutions. Moreover, the most common messages received by the women in my study by their priests were to “be strong”, which
implies that strong women are able to endure suffering, and through that strength, can preserve the sanctity of their marriages.

On the other hand, one woman in my study found that the experience she had with the Church’s group was very positive, and that learning about the Bible’s teachings and Christianity had reaffirmed her own strength, and had removed her feelings of guilt for having suffered abuse. Some of the more progressive priests may also act as referral sources to social service agencies. Agencies serving Portuguese-speaking clients try to involve such priests in certain initiatives, such as the production and distribution of pamphlets. One service provider, a feminist activist working in one of the agencies serving Portuguese-speaking clients, invites a progressive priest to the women’s group to provide new interpretations of Biblical writings that deconstruct statements that could contribute toward the women’s feelings of victimization.

In relation to social service agencies, my study has attempted to shed some light on the social organization of the working practices of service providers within various agencies, as well as how this has affected the way services are delivered to abused Portuguese-speaking women. I have shown how the service provider’s work is organized both by and within a web of relations that is outside his/her immediate experience (e.g. government funding guidelines, an agency’s mandate, job descriptions, etc.). A critical revision of their working practices might prompt them to explore strategies for change. Indeed, I have argued that although service providers must submit to their agency’s bureaucratic forms, there is still space for them to resist this bureaucratic dimension of their work (e.g. subverting bureaucratic forms by changing the names of certain activities
that no longer are funded by the government, e.g., public education and advocacy, while still continuing to carry out such activities.

I have shown that the neo-conservative agenda of the government has affected the various social service agencies in significant ways, and that some agencies are more affected than others due to their overall structure, operational budget, and other funding mechanisms that have a direct effect on how services are to be delivered. In some agencies, for example, direct services such as counselling are assigned priority. However, it seems that the current move towards the privatization of social services not only represents a shift of ideology from 'public' to 'personal responsibility' for problems that are essentially 'structurally located', but also helps to contribute toward the 'absorption' and 'institutionalization' of feminists concerns and demands.

Moreover, by focusing on counselling, the problem of violence against women is transformed from a political into a personal issue. The need for 'personal change', and for structures that contribute to the way women 'feel' and 'behave' goes unchallenged. In my conceptual framework, however, I have attempted to show that women's experiences are shaped by and within a web of relations, in short, that 'the personal is political'—a slogan whose power derives from "its ability to cut across the isolation of individual experience, and to situate that experience in the context of a socially constructed oppression of women" (Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 1988: 211).

This study has demonstrated that when these women seek social services, they enter into a set of relations that are constrained by the agency's mandate, by funding guidelines that shape the type and amount of services delivered, and by the professional
knowledge and ideology of the service provider. These relations are shared both by the women and service providers, who often try to accommodate one another. Either the women redefine their needs in the 'language' of the agency, or the service providers attempt to adapt to the women's needs (e.g. by requesting additional services for the women; by using a more personalised and less professional approach; by going beyond her job mandate; and by learning how to 'play with words').

Contact with social service agencies often generated a change in the women's understanding about their living situations. They began redefining abuse and challenging patriarchal beliefs. Participation in women's groups within the various agencies was also an essential part of the work of service providers, work that helped these women to change their consciousness of their situations, as well as to take action to improve their lives.

The way social services are organised may empower women to take control over their lives. Alternately, it may contribute toward their oppression by limiting their options to end the abuse in their lives. Often, there are additional options offered to women, but nevertheless the way social service providers sometimes handle the women's situations often seems to imply that the women are not rational agents and that they are thus unable to make rational choices.

One way in which service providers can influence the network of institutional relations in which women's lives are entangled is through their engagement in social movements outside of their organisational constraints. Social movements provide resources that the workers can access to learn about innovations in practice, to purchase
services, to develop support networks for themselves and their clients, to obtain feedback on proposed changes for service delivery, and to campaign for better services (Moreau and Leonard, 1989). Many service providers in this study were already engaged in coalitions, inter-agency work, and advocacy councils that attempt to develop strategies for change at the political and social levels, and to develop more consistent anti-oppressive practices. They were also involved in other groups, such as the Parkdale Coalition Against Abuse, Ontario Association of Women’s Centres, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Portuguese Interagency Network, and Metro Woman Abuse Council. These types of practices may enable the service provider to reach out to and connect with more women and to the community, and to address more effectively the client’s problems in a holistic manner. Such practices help the service provider enlarge the ‘spaces’ of the web of relations that affects their clients’ lives.

This study indicates that the sources of the ‘problems’ presented by Portuguese-speaking women have to be understood within the social context of their lives, as well as in relation to the ideological structures outside of their experiences, structures that are not directly controlled by them. For example, ideologies about a woman’s role in the family structures her subjective experience and shapes her response to wife abuse. Thus strategies for change must go beyond simply working with the woman to empower her. They must also involve her extended family, her community, and society in general. Thus, the network of institutional relations in which these women’s lives are entangled must, despite its complexity, continue to be analysed and understood. Only then can structural change truly occur.
The web of relations metaphor also serves to discourage overly simplistic, ‘dichotomous thinking’ (e.g. such conceptual ‘pairs’ as ‘victim/agent’, ‘oppressor/oppressed’, ‘dependent/independent’, ‘family/labour market’, and so on). The individual needs to be recognised as a whole person, someone who is on a quest to discover the interconnections between different parts of social reality (Collins, 1991). This can occur only through the application of more holistic approaches that “enable individuals to maintain their connections between their personal and public lives” (Dominelli, 1997:80). For example, separating the issue of wife abuse faced by an immigrant woman from the other oppressions she faces results in a limited understanding of her problem and, in turn, limits the range of possible solutions. In short, wife abuse needs to be understood within the entire socio-political-cultural context of Canadian society.

Service providers may empower woman in the counselling context by reframing their beliefs, beliefs that may indeed perpetuate their oppression (e.g. “I provoked him” or “Portuguese men are all like that”). By providing new knowledge to abused women, service providers may add new layers of understanding concerning the client’s situation, which in turn may lead to personal change and a change of consciousness, both of which can reduce the internalised blame and sense of failure in the marriage that so often characterizes these women’s responses to their abuse.

An anti-oppressive social work practice also means that the service provider needs to be concerned with issues relating to social justice. Such barriers as a lack of interpreters or of ethnic personnel in the agency should not simply be taken for granted. On the contrary, they must be vigorously challenged. Moreover, access to services must not be
limited to women who speak English. Attention must be paid to specific issues regarding culture, life style, and the social relations that may be affecting these women’s lives; to the range of options available to them; and, finally, to the adequacy and feasibility of these options.

An important part of feminist practice is to recognize the power differential among different groups of women, and to try to incorporate such differences by creating new meanings and understandings concerning each women’s situation. As hooks (1984) points out, to achieve social change, knowledge of people who have been marginalized needs to be centered, so that their voices may better be heard.

As a final remark, I would like to emphasise that differences among women can be used as a source of creativity and strength, and need not imply the domination of one group over others (Lorde, 1984; Hartsock, 1998). Different communities can learn from each other in order to develop alternative ways to approach immigrant women who have been abused (Moussa, 1994; Mc Leod and Shin, 1990) Approaches that are sensitive to women’s different social ‘locations’ and cultural backgrounds require flexibility, as well as an openness to new forms of knowledge and practice. An empowering practice needs to be rooted in women’s experiences as lived. By challenging stereotypes and rejecting the construction of immigrant women as ‘other’, we can move beyond the dualistic thinking that is so pervasive in our society.

There is a need to struggle actively against all forms of oppression built into the historical, political, social and economic organisation of Canadian society. One of the ways to struggle against these forms of oppression is through women’s engagement in
groups that provide a sense of belonging (through the formation of social networks), as well as a way to mobilise for social action (through raising awareness of their similar oppression within Canadian society).

A feminist practice may start by listening to these women's individual needs as they are defined by them:

A practice informed by listening to many ways of knowing, centred and located within diverse client life experiences and co-created through relationships that are reflexive and intersubjective, can provide a context for caring, connecting, partnering, and community building. That, very simply, may be how we move out of the problem and into the solution (Van den Bergh, 1995: xxxiv).

Furthermore, there is a need for the Portuguese-speaking immigrant community and social service agencies to organise themselves and work together to develop multiple strategies and to find ways of resisting forms of ruling imposed by funding policies and other mechanisms that tie them to the apparatuses of the government. This requires an ongoing analysis of the forces that oppress them, and a critical examination of their own practices.
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APPENDICES

1. LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

I am a Doctoral student in Social Work at the University of Toronto, and I am doing a thesis on the structure of social services for abused women, in particular, Portuguese-speaking immigrant women. The availability of a social support system (social assistance, housing, day-care, legal aid, adequate income, shelter, etc.) will help to shape the responses of women to abuse. Although I acknowledge the complexity of factors that intersect in women’s experiences in trying to end the violence and abuse in their lives, the specific purpose of this study is to examine how the structure of social services for abused women will impact on Portuguese-speaking immigrant women’s responses to abuse.

I would like to be able to interview service providers that have worked with Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who have immigrated to Canada within a ten-year period and are or have been in an abusive relationship for the past five years, and the women themselves. The interviews with women will be directed mainly at the way they experience the services provided to them by social service agencies and to their practical needs as perceived and defined by them. Questions will be directed at the way women’s experiences are organized daily (e.g. networks established, household organization, types of help sought, types of help received), and what they expected from the services contacted. The difficulties experienced by an immigrant woman in accessing services, her understanding of her present situation, the types of avenues available, and the types of barriers encountered in her social interactions will be asked as well.

The interviews with the service providers will be directed at the way services are organized, the types of work they do in the agency, the types of referrals made, how they perceive the needs of abused immigrant women, the type of available resources to meet the women’s needs, the types of clients served, the types of issues the clients present, how the client’s concerns are handled, the limitations of their work, the perceived gaps in services for abused immigrant women, their understanding of the causes of violence, and their ideas about alternative ways of working with immigrant women.

In addition, I would like to be able to have access to some of the agency’s documents (e.g. referral forms, agency constitution, funding policy, intake form) to analyze how they structure the service provider’s work. This study is not intended to evaluate the service provider’s work or the agency’s programs, but rather to describe the work processes that shape the way the work is accomplished within the agency, and how these work processes may affect the recording of data and the delivery of services.

The precise manner of recruitment of women will be decided in consultation with the agency. Some possibilities for recruitment include a short description of the project via poster, mailings to the clientele of the agency, and through oral explanation about the project in a women’s group. I would like to be able to conduct the interviews with the
women at the agency, and have a counsellor available for them if necessary since some women may experience some discomfort and distress when talking about the abusive situation. At the first sign of distress, women will be asked if they want to stop the interview, and referral to a counsellor in the agency will be made if necessary.

All the interviews will be tape-recorded, but any identifying information concerning the agency, service providers or women will be removed from the transcripts. I will be the only person to have access to the tapes, and will make all the transcriptions by myself. The tapes will be destroyed after the study is done.

The participating women will receive $30.00 after the study is completed to cover some expenses related to child care, transportation, etc. The indirect benefits are that the research results may help to develop, in the long term, services more sensitive to the needs of Portuguese-speaking abused women.

If you need any additional information, I will be glad to discuss this study with you. Any feedback would be much appreciated.

Sincerely yours,
Patricia Krieger Grossi
35 Charles St. W. apt.902
Toronto, ON M4Y 1R6
(416) 926-9667 e-mail: <grossi@fsw.utoronto.ca>
2. SERVICE PROVIDER'S INFORMATION LETTER ABOUT THE STUDY

TITLE: SOCIAL SERVICES AND WIFE ABUSE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

INVESTIGATOR: PATRICIA KRIEGER GROSSI

I am a Doctoral student in Social Work doing a thesis on the structure of social services for abused women and its impact on Portuguese-speaking immigrant women’s responses to wife abuse. Immigrant women’s responses to violence and abuse cannot be seen in isolation from the social possibilities available to them. The right to have a life free of abuse and violence means little if the social and political structures to make it possible are absent.

I would like to do an interview with you about your experience in providing services for abused immigrant women, specifically Portuguese-speaking immigrant women. If you agree to participate in this study, some of the issues that will be covered in the interviews are: a) the way the agency’s work is organized, b) the types of services provided, c) types of referrals made, d) types of clients seen, e) types of concerns that the client brings, f) your understanding about wife abuse; and d) possibilities and constraints in trying to meet the women’s needs. In addition, I will ask you some questions concerning some of the agencies’ documents (e.g. intake form, constitution, funding evaluation form), and how they structure your work. I will tape-record the interview, but any identifying information will be removed from the transcription. I am the only person who will have the access to the tapes. All the tapes will be destroyed after the transcription is done. Your name, as well as the agency’s name, will not be identified in any part of the study. A pseudonym will be used instead. You are free to participate in the study and have the right to withdraw from it any time. The interview is estimated to last 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

The interview is not intended to evaluate your work, but rather to describe the work processes that shape the way the work is accomplished, and how these work processes may affect the recording of data and the delivery of services. If you need any additional information, I will be glad to discuss this study with you. Any feedback will be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Patricia Krieger Grossi (416) 926-9667
3. SERVICE PROVIDER’S CONSENT LETTER

I understand that the research procedures of the study described in the attached form and of which I have a copy, have been explained to me clearly and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that the possible benefit of joining this study is that its findings may help, in the long term, to develop services more sensitive to the needs of Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who are dealing with abuse. I know that I have the right to not answer any question and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I also have been assured that any information given in the interview will be kept confidential, and that no information will be released or printed that would disclose my personal identity without my permission.

I hereby consent to participate.

Name
Signature
Witness
Date

The person who may be contacted about the research is:
Patricia Krieger Grossi
(416) 926-9667
4. SERVICE PROVIDERS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Describe to me your typical working day.
Is there a certain procedure to be followed when a client enters the agency?
How are the decisions concerning clients made (individual, staff meeting)?
How does the client come to the agency (e.g. word of mouth, referral by whom, media)?
What types of concerns do the clients present?
Have you experienced a situation in which a client presented issues concerning racial or ethnic discrimination that she suffered? Did the client name that situation as racism? How did you handle this situation presented by the client?
Which factors do you think might help to explain violence against women? Do you think that those same factors apply to immigrant communities? Do you think that are additional factors that might be relevant to understanding violence against Portuguese-speaking women?
Which particular theory or theories do you think is (are) relevant to understand wife abuse? Do you find this theory helpful to understand wife abuse in the immigrant communities?
How do you do your record-keeping?
What do you take more into account when doing a report (e.g. your clinical experience and knowledge, the client’s experience and knowledge, other factors)?
Do you think that funding policies play a role in your decision-making when working with a client? If so, in which ways?
How does your ethnicity and cultural background shape your understanding of the client’s situations?
If the service that the client needs is not part of the institution mandate, do you make a referral to another service?
What type of referrals do you make?
Do you have a follow-up on these clients that you referred to another agency?
How many clients on average do you see daily?
Do you see these clients individually or/and in groups?
What types of information do you think is important to include in a client’s assessment?
What outside resources are you aware of that the clientele is using or has used? How do you view these resources? Explain.
Do you involve family members in your intervention?
How do you handle possible discrepancies between your views of the problem and the client’s own view of the problem? Do you record the discrepancies and contradictions that might appear?

How do you establish plans for working with the clientele? What alternatives are considered? How are alternatives selected?

What types of information do you decide to include or omit from a client’s record? On what grounds do you make this decision?

What special knowledge, theory and/or experience do you use in working with your client (e.g. feminist theory, gender role theory, systems theory)?

Did you receive an anti-racist or cross-cultural training? If so, does this training made a difference in your understanding about the situations that clients from ethnic-minority groups present? Explain. Is there any change in the way you handle these client’s issues after the training?

Is anti-racist training part of the agency’s work structure?

If a client is experiencing problems that might be associated with wife abuse, do you wait for disclosure of abuse or do you try to facilitate the disclosure? Explain.

Do you use a certain guide to identify situations of wife abuse? Do you find it helpful? What are its limitations?

Is there a special term that you use to refer to women who have been abused by their partners? What terms do you avoid using? Explain.

Are there any special issues that need to be taken into account when working with immigrant women who are abused?

There is a image of “battered women” in the media as passive, submissive, and hopeless. Often, these women end up being blamed for the abuse they suffered or for failing to protect their children from the abuse. Many abused women do not perceive themselves as passive victims, and resist violence in various ways, and struggle to find solutions to their problems. Others seem to collude in their own victimization. How do you view the women you see in your daily practice who are dealing with situations of wife abuse?

What types of terms, concepts or categories do you find helpful in explaining the women’s situations? Are you able to use these terms in your record?

What types of information do you think is relevant to include in a case file? On what basis do you make this decision?

Is there a specific form that you have to fill out concerning a client? Is this form adequate? How this form shape the way you handle the client’s concerns, and the types of services provided?

How do you handle a situation in which a woman blames herself for the abuse and is adhering to patriarchal beliefs concerning family and marriage?
Do you perceive any limitations in your work due to organizational constraints (e.g. caseload size, organization of work, budget constraints)? Explain. What can be done or what have you been doing to deal with these limitations?

There are many current cuts in social services. Does these cuts have affected the way the services are provided within this agency?

How well is this agency connected to other social service agencies? Do you feel the need for a more integrated work with other agencies that might help abused women to get access to what she needs? What are the possibilities and limitations of this type of integrated work?

Does the agency structure allow you to expand the clients' options (e.g. by initiating a different service, a special group, etc.) to meet the clients' needs?

Do you perceive any gaps in services for abused immigrant women? If so, what are these gaps and limitations?

Which suggestions do you have in order to fill out these gaps?

Does the agency has a program of community outreach? How is it done?

Describe the types of intervention (e.g. short-term, long-term, individual, group counseling, family therapy, community-oriented, etc.) that are usually used with abused immigrant women in this agency.
5. WOMEN’S INFORMATION LETTER ABOUT THE STUDY (ENGLISH VERSION)

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES AND WIFE ABUSE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING IMMIGRANT WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE

INVESTIGATOR: PATRICIA KRIEGER GROSSI

I am a Doctoral student at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, and I am doing a study about how social services for Portuguese-speaking abused women may increase or not your options in trying to deal with situations of wife abuse. I would like to do an interview with you about your experience in seeking help from social services agencies, and how these services could empower you in trying to deal with situations of wife abuse. If you agree to participate in this study, some of the issues that will be covered in the interviews are: a) the types of services you receive, b) the types of services you would like to have received, c) the way you experience(d) the services available, d) the difficulties that you may have found in obtaining services, e) how you deal(t) with these difficulties, f) the changes that might have occurred over time in your understanding about the abuse, and g) the impact of these changes on your life decisions.

The possible risk of joining this study is that you may experience some discomfort when discussing your experiences. Referrals to a counsellor in the agency will be given if you feel the need to discuss your issues more deeply. The indirect benefit of joining this study is that its findings may help to develop, at the long term, services more sensitive to the needs of Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who are dealing with abuse.

Your participation will consist of one or two interviews that will last approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours. To help ensure confidentiality, I will do the interviews, tape-record them, and write all the information contained on the tapes by myself, i.e., transcribe the tapes. When I am transcribing the tapes, I will remove any information that could identify you or the agency. Your name will not appear in any part of the study, and will be replaced by another one. In addition, I will also destroy the tapes after the study is completed. You may ask to read my thesis, and notes that are relevant to you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to stop the interview at any time, to not answer any question and to withdraw the study without providing any explanation. You will receive $30.00 after the study is completed to cover some expenses related to child care, transportation, etc. If you need any additional information, I will be glad to discuss this study with you.

Sincerely,

Patricia Krieger Grossi

(416) 926-9667

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INVESTIGADORA: PATRICIA KRIEGER GROSSI

Sou uma aluna de Doutorado da Faculdade de Serviço Social, Universidade de Toronto e estou fazendo um estudo sobre o funcionamento de serviços sociais para mulheres de língua portuguesa que sofreram abuso e como o tipo de serviços recebidos aumentou ou não suas opções para lidar com sua situação.

Se você estiver interessada em participar desse estudo, gostaria de fazer uma entrevista sobre sua experiência quando foste procurar ajuda nas agências sociais, e como os serviços podem melhor lhe ajudar a enfrentar situações envolvendo violência doméstica. Alguns dos assuntos que iremos abordar nas entrevistas são: a) tipo de atendimento recebido, b) tipo de atendimento e serviços que gostaria de ter recebido, c) dificuldades encontradas para obter determinado serviço ou benefício, d) como você lidou com essas dificuldades, e) possíveis mudanças no seu modo de pensar acerca da violência, f) impacto dessas mudanças nas suas decisões. Sua participação consiste em uma ou duas entrevistas, em português (se assim o desejar) que irão durar aproximadamente 1 1/2h a 2h. As perguntas são flexíveis e irão ser adaptadas conforme sua necessidade. A entrevista irá se centrar na sua experiência nas agências sociais com as quais teve contato na busca de um atendimento para problemas relacionados a violência doméstica.
Se você sentir qualquer desconforto, você pode parar a entrevista. Você não precisa responder nenhuma pergunta se assim o desejar e pode sair do estudo a qualquer hora sem dar explicações. A entrevista(s) irá se realizar na agência. Se você necessitar conversar sobre seus problemas com maior profundidade, uma conselheira estará disponível na agência para escutá-la. Sua participação ou não no estudo não irá afetar nenhum tipo de atendimento que esteja recebendo ou possa vir a receber nessa e outras agências.

As entrevistas serão gravadas, mas o seu nome não irá aparecer em nenhuma parte do estudo. Eu serei a única pessoa que terá acesso às fitas e essas serão destruídas após o estudo. Você pode ler minhas anotações das nossas conversas se assim o desejar.

Se você estiver interessada em participar desse estudo, receberá a quantia de $30.00 para compensar eventuais despesas com creche, transporte e outros que poderá ter. Essa quantia será entregue pessoalmente por mim no final da primeira ou segunda entrevista, se necessário. Espera-se que os resultados desse estudo possam ajudar a implementar serviços mais adequados a necessidades de mulheres de língua portuguesa que estão enfrentando situações de violência doméstica. Se você precisar de qualquer informação adicional sobre o estudo, por favor me contate.

Obrigado!

Patricia Krieger Grossi
(416) 926-9667
6. WOMEN'S CONSENT LETTER (ENGLISH VERSION)

I understand that the research procedures of the study described in the attached form and of which I have a copy, have been explained to me clearly and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that the possible benefits of joining this study is that its findings may help, in the long term, to develop services more sensitive to the needs of Portuguese-speaking immigrant women who are dealing with abuse. I also understand that the possible risk is that I may experience some discomfort when discussing about your experience. I know that I do not have to answer any question and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide any explanation for that.

Notwithstanding the steps to protect my confidentiality, I am aware that if there are criminal charges against my husband (or partner) or if I am involved in a custody dispute, there is a small possibility that a lawyer acting for my husband (partner) might seek a court order requiring the researcher to provide to the lawyer a copy of the transcript of my interview. I understand that the chances of this happening are quite unlikely, and because the researcher will remove all the identifying information she may not be able to tell which transcript is of my interview. However, because of this small possibility, I understand that the researcher cannot guarantee my confidentiality.

If I agree to participate in the study, I will expect to give one or two interviews that will last approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours, and I will receive $30.00 after the interview(s) is completed. I understand that my decision to participate or not in this study will not affect in any way the services that I may receive.

I hereby consent to participate.

Name

Signature

Witness

Date:

The person who may be contacted about the research is:
Patricia Krieger Grossi

(416) 926-9667
WOMEN'S CONSENT LETTER (PORTUGUESE VERSION)

CARTA DE CONSENTIMENTO

Eu compreendo os procedimentos do estudo conforme descritos na carta informativa, da qual tenho uma cópia e todas as perguntas por mim feitas foram respondidas satisfatoriamente pela pesquisadora. Eu também compreendo que esse estudo poderá contribuir, a longo prazo, no desenvolvimento de serviços mais adequados às necessidades de mulheres de língua portuguesa, que estão lidando com situações de violência doméstica. Também compreendo que posso sentir algum desconforto quando estiver falando sobre situações envolvendo violência doméstica. Não sou obrigada a responder nenhuma pergunta e posso sair do estudo a qualquer momento sem precisar dar explicações. A entrevista será gravada, mas meu nome não irá aparecer em nenhuma parte do estudo. A pesquisadora será a única pessoa que terá acesso às fitas e nenhuma informação será divulgada que revele minha identidade sem minha permissão.

Apesar das medidas tomadas para proteger minha confidencialidade, estou a par de que existe a possibilidade remota do advogado(a) de meu marido(ou companheiro) pedir à corte uma ordem para que o pesquisador forneça a cópia da minha entrevista, em casos em que o meu marido esteja envolvido em processo criminal ou disputa de custódia. A pesquisadora pode alegar que não sabe qual é minha entrevista, uma vez que foi retirada toda informação que possa me identificar. Entretanto, por causa dessa pequena possibilidade, compreendo que a pesquisadora não pode garantir minha confidencialidade.

Se eu concordar em participar desse estudo, irei dar uma ou duas entrevistas que irão durar aproximadamente 1 1/2h a duas horas e irei receber CAN$ 30.00 após o término da entrevista(s). Minha decisão de participar ou não do estudo não irá afetar de nenhuma maneira nenhum serviço que esteja recebendo ou venha a receber nessa ou outra agência.

Sendo assim, eu concordo em participar desse estudo.

Nome
Assinatura
Testemunha
Data

A pessoa a qual pode ser contatada sobre este estudo é:
Patricia Krieger Grossi
(416) 926-9667
7. WOMEN’S INTERVIEW GUIDE (ENGLISH VERSION)

Early Experiences in Canada

When did you immigrate to Canada?
From what country did you immigrate?
Did you come here alone or with your husband (partner)? Which family members came to Canada with you (e.g. children, parents, etc.)?
Was the decision to immigrate a joint decision?
Did you know someone in Canada before you arrived here? What type of relationship did you have with this person(s)? What type of help did they give you in your settlement in Canada?
Why did you immigrate to Canada?
What were your expectations of life in Canada?
How did Canadians relate to you when you came to Canada? What were your thoughts and feelings at that time? Were you able to communicate your thoughts and feelings with anyone?
How did the immigration authorities receive you? Did they inform you about potential resources and agencies that could help you in the settlement in Canada?
What was your immigration status when you arrived in Canada (landed, visitor, etc.)?
What was your understanding about your immigration status?
How much did you know when you arrive in Canada about different sources of help outside your family? How did you find about them?
Did you go to any social service agency to deal with problems that you might be experiencing at that time (e.g. housing, language, day-care, employment, family problems)? Did the responses you get from these resources meet your expectations? Explain.
Have you being informed about your rights in Canada?

Household Organization, Social Networks and Relationship within the Family
What has changed in your life since you came to Canada (e.g. relationships in the family and in the wider community, educational opportunities, jobs, social networks established)? Explain.
Describe for me your typical day (household organization, child care arrangements, working schedules).
Who does live in your home?
How many people are working?
How are decisions concerning money, children, and social activities made?

**Experience in the Agency Contacted**

How did you find out about this agency?
Why did you go to this agency? What type of help did you expect? What type of help did you get?
What would you like to have seen happen when you disclosed about your abusive situation?
What types of issues did you present to the worker?
What is your understanding about the causes of violence in your relationship?
Did your understanding about the causes of violence changed over time? In which ways?
Did the agency play any role in this change?
Does this change in your understanding affect your decisions concerning what you might do to improve your life situation?
Have you ever been in a women’s group in this agency? If so, what have you learned from your group experience?
What do you do now that you didn’t do before the participation in the program?
If the service that you needed was not available in this agency, did you receive a referral to another one? Did you go to the referred service? How was your experience there?

**Women’s Experiences in Accessing other Networks or Services**

Has your immigration status changed after you being here? If so, has this change in your immigration status affected the way you respond to situations of abuse (including access to services)?
Did you seek help by family members or friends? What help, if any, did you get?
What do you think you would like to be able to do, but couldn’t do to end violence in your life?
Have you ever been in a women’s shelter? How was your experience there?
How could the services available be more responsive to your needs? What kind of choices you would like to have to be able to have more control over your life?
What do you think should be done to prevent violence against women? Do you think that are specific things that can be done in the Portuguese-speaking community to prevent this type of violence?
Based on everything that you told me about your life situation, where do you see yourself in the future?
WOMEN'S INTERVIEW GUIDE (PORTUGUESE VERSION)

ROTEIRO DE ENTREVISTA DAS MULHERES

EXPERIÊNCIAS INICIAIS NO CANADÁ

1 - Quando você imigrou para o Canadá?

2 - De que país você imigrou?

3 - Você chegou aqui sozinha ou com o marido? Quais foram os membros de sua família que vieram com você para o Canadá?

4 - A decisão de imigrar para o Canadá foi uma decisão tomada em conjunto com seu marido? Explique.

5 - Porque vocês escolheram o Canadá para ser o novo país para vocês morarem?

6 - Você conhecia alguém aqui antes de você chegar? Que tipo de relacionamento você tinha com esse conhecido (a)? Que tipo de ajuda essa pessoa (s) lhe deu quando você veio morar aqui?

7 - O que você esperava da vida aqui?

8 - Quais foram as primeiras impressões que teve do Canada?

9 - Como os canadenses se relacionavam contigo quando você chegou? Você conseguia se comunicar com eles? Quais eram os seus sentimentos e pensamentos naquela época? Você se sentia a vontade para falar com as pessoas sobre o que estava se passando contigo?

10 - Como as autoridades da imigração te receberam? Você foi informada por eles de recursos que poderiam lhe ajudar no processo de adaptação no Canadá? Você foi encaminhada a alguma agência quando chegou?

11 - Como é que você entrou no Canadá (landed, visitor, family class)?

12 - Que tipo de informações lhe foi fornecido sobre o visto concedido?

13 - Como é que você ficou sabendo de recursos da comunidade que poderiam lhe ajudar na sua estadia aqui no Canadá?
14 - Você chegou a ir em alguma agência social para lidar com problemas relacionados a moradia, língua, emprego, escola, creche, ou no relacionamento com o marido e filhos? Que tipo de ajuda você recebeu nessas agências?

15 - Você foi informada sobre seus direitos no Canadá?

16 - O seu marido ou companheiro a ameaçava de ser deportada se contasse sobre o abuso para alguém? Como isto influenciou sua resposta frente ao abuso?

ORGANIZAÇÃO DAS RELAÇÕES FAMILIARES E DE TRABALHO

1 - O que modificou na sua vida desde que veio morar no Canadá (relações familiares e na comunidade, trabalho doméstico, emprego, educação, etc.)?

2 - Você trabalhava fora no seu país?

3 - Que tipo de trabalho você possuia?

4 - Que tipos de trabalho você encontrou aqui no Canadá?

5 - Você deixou de conseguir trabalho por não possuir “experiência canadense”?

7 - Como é sua relação com os colegas de trabalho? Você pede ajuda a eles em relação a problemas familiares?

8 - Como é o seu dia-a-dia? (trabalho em casa, filhos, atividades sociais e recreativas, etc)?

9 - Quem mora na sua casa?

10 - Quantos trabalham fora?

11 - Como as decisões são tomadas em relação a despesas, filhos e atividades sociais?

EXPERIÊNCIA NAS AGÊNCIAS SOCIAIS

1 - Como você ficou sabendo dos serviços prestados nessa agência?

2 - Qual foi o motivo inicial de procura de atendimento nessa agência? Que tipo de ajuda esperava encontrar? Que tipo de ajuda recebeu?

3 - Quando é que iniciou o abuso? Você procurou ajuda em seguida? Explique.
4 - Quantas vezes você falou com alguém sobre o abuso antes de procurar uma agência social (familiares, amigos, vizinhos, colegas de trabalho, padre, etc.)? Que tipo de ajuda você recebeu dessa(s) pessoas?

5 - Você mudou esse seu modo de pensar sobre o abuso com o passar do tempo? De que forma? O atendimento recebido na agência influenciou essa mudança no seu modo de pensar? Explique.

7 - Essa mudança no teu modo de pensar influenciou as decisões que tomou em relação ao relacionamento? O que você fez para tentar melhorar sua situação de vida?

8 - Você já participou em algum grupo de mulheres? O que você aprendeu nesse grupo?

9 - Você mudou de atitude desde que participou deste grupo? De que maneira?

10 - Você recebeu algum encaminhamento para outra agência se não havia o serviço disponível? Você chegou a ir nessa outra agência? Como foi a sua experiência lá?

11 - O que você pode fazer para melhorar sua situação de vida? De que forma isso influenciou no relacionamento com seu marido e filhos?

12 - Que tipo de atendimento você acha que deve ser criado para atender suas necessidades? Que tipos de opções você gostaria de ter para ser capaz de melhorar sua vida e de seus familiares?

13 - O que você acha que poderia ser feito na sociedade, em geral, para prevenir o problema da violência contra a mulher? Você acha que tem medidas específicas que podem ser tomadas na comunidade portuguesa para prevenir esse tipo de problema?

14 - Baseado em toda a experiência que me contaste, como você imagina a sua situação de vida daqui a dez anos?

Obrigado pela sua participação.

Dados Demográficos (Demographical Data)

Local de origem (Place of Birth)
Idade (Age)
Número de filhos (Number of Children)
Estado civil (Marital Status)
Grau de escolarização (Educational Level)
Ocupação (Occupation in home country and in Canada)
Pais de onde emigrou (Immigrating country)
Tempo de imigração (Length of Immigration)
Immigrant status
Renda familiar (Income)
8. CASE VIGNETTE

The following case vignette was created on the basis of my accumulated perceptions following the interviews I conducted. Although it is a ‘dramatization’, it effectively captures the essence of many of my findings.

Mariana was a 34 year-old woman who came to Canada ten years ago from Brazil. Brazil’s worsening economic conditions and the high inflation made Mariana and her family immigrate to Canada in search of better living conditions. She came with her common-law partner, Mario, and her three year-old son, Jose. They were from a small rural area located in the Northeast of Brazil. Mario was a small farmer in Brazil and Mariana was a housewife who occasionally would do some sewing to make some money. The family entered Canada as tourists and for five years, lived ‘underground’. A friend offered to baby sit her son and so Mariana started working as a cleaner, using a false social security card. She was always fearful of being caught, but she had no choice, for she needed the job to make ends meet. Her need to make money prevented Mariana from learning English. Also, since her work did not require that she speak English, she had no opportunity to practice it.

Mariana felt frustrated being unable to communicate with other people. She was also afraid of getting lost in the city, for she had trouble mastering the transportation system, which she found confusing. A friend would display a Brazilian flag in her window so that Mariana would know when it was time to get off the streetcar.

Mario frequently was without work, despite the fact that he tried to get all types of jobs (e.g. washing dishes, cleaning, construction work, factory work, etc.). He began drinking and abusing Mariana emotionally. Most of the fights were over the fact that he wanted to go back to Brazil and Mariana wanted to remain in Canada. One day, Mario withdrew all their savings from the bank account and left Canada without a note. Mariana began feeling desperate, was unable to pay the rent with her low salary and was without enough food to feed her child. She lived with a friend for a while, but since there was little space, she had to move out. She finally got food from the Church; otherwise she would have starved along with her child.

Immigration authorities sent her a notice of deportation. Mariana didn’t know what to do. She went to the Church to get some “peace of mind”. There, she met a Portuguese man, Alfredo, for whom she started doing some sewing. They began dating and got married right away, so that Mariana could stay in Canada. The marriage was not considered a ‘bona fide’ marriage by immigration authorities, and Mariana received a notice of extradition. She had to remain outside Canada for a year, and so she moved to Portugal and lived with his parents, only to find out that she was pregnant.

After Mariana returned to Canada with her child and newborn baby, she began working at home, doing some sewing and working long hours. Sometimes she didn’t sleep
at night, trying to finish her work. Alfredo, who was a recovered alcoholic began drinking again, and he started calling her names and tried to beat the baby. One day, Mariana hadn’t finished preparing dinner when Alfredo got home and he beat her. He was drunk. Mariana thought that the beatings would stop if he stopped drinking, or if she were a better wife. She started feeling nervous, and was unable to finish sewing for her clients. Unable to cope with the household chores, childcare, and her sewing, Mariana was referred by her family doctor to a psychiatrist, who made a diagnosis of depression and prescribed tranquilizers. She was not questioned about the violence, and was ashamed to tell the doctor what was going on in her life.

One day, Alfredo beat her and forced her out of the house on her bare feet with her two children. The neighbors asked Mariana if they should call the police and she agreed. She did not know that the police would arrest Alfredo, otherwise she would not have allowed the neighbors to call the police. Mariana just wanted a ‘piece of paper’ in case Alfredo ever decided that he wanted to take the child away from her. The police arrested Alfredo and referred Mariana to a Portuguese social service agency. There, she read a pamphlet about immigration and she found out that she could not be deported, since she was already a landed immigrant. Alfredo used to make threats that he would withdraw his sponsorship and arrange that she be deported if she ever disclose information about the violence. At the social service agency, the service provider informed Mariana that she could get a divorce and obtain social assistance from the Canadian government, since her income was not enough to provide for the family’s needs. She left Alfredo and went on welfare for a while. Alfredo begged her to give him another chance, and so she took him back. After a few months, the beatings started again and got even worse. Alfredo also began hitting the children. The youngest son began showing signs of distress. She decided once again to leave Alfredo, and again went on welfare. Her service provider helped Mariana get subsidized day-care for Jose, her oldest son, and arranged for a psychiatric evaluation for Joao, her youngest son. Joao was diagnosed as “a child with emotional problems” that required special needs. Mariana was able to get free day-care for him as well.

Mariana now is trying to look for a job, but she feels that she is too old to do cleaning. She believes that she cannot get a better job because she doesn’t speak English and has only a grade 6 education. Mariana stated that her goal was to get enough money to return to Brazil, although she thinks that in Canada her children will have better educational and job opportunities.

Mariana likes her woman abuse counselor because she listens to her and helps her sort things out. Mariana also likes her new psychiatrist because she feels that she is a very humane person, someone who not only is a professional but a ‘friend’ who truly cares about her situation. While her psychiatrist dealt with the medical aspects of depression, she also helped Mariana in her decision-making process, pointing out her options, and showing Mariana how her present life condition was affecting her overall health. She also showed her how she could take advantage of the opportunities available to her in Canada, such as specialized care for her son (which in Brazil is very expensive and beyond her ability to pay). Mariana states that she often feels that she belongs
neither to Brazilian nor to Canadian society. She also states that she feels like an ‘empty shell’.

One of the service providers invited her to join a women’s group in the agency. There she found out that she was not alone, and she began developing some connections and friendships. She came to realize that many of the women had experienced feelings that were similar to her own, and had found ways to overcome adverse situations, such as unemployment and illness. Mariana decided to take English classes so that she would be able to communicate better with her children and with their school teachers. She also decided to take some upgrading classes to prepare herself for a professionalization course. After completing the upgrading classes, she applied for a scholarship to take a course at the college level. She is now completing that course, and feels that she now has more options in the labour market. Her plan is to begin working in the near future in order to pay back the scholarship money.

Mariana also does some volunteer work at the agency, trying to encourage other women who are in abusive situations to seek the help they need. She has already recruited three new women into the group. She believes that after they have had a group experience, these women will feel more motivated and self-confident in their capabilities as women, independent of their role as mothers and as wives. As she expressed it: “In the group, I feel like a woman.”

She states that she feels that the Portuguese community is still very disorganized and not united. In her view, more men and women need to participate in meetings held at the center. She maintains that the Portuguese-speaking community still has a lot of prejudice toward single mothers, for she has herself experienced it. After she left her abusive husband, she stopped going to church and even stayed at home in order to avoid the gossip.

This case vignette is a composite made up of various parts of the actual stories of the Portuguese-speaking women in my group who have survived wife abuse, along with poverty, unemployment, and harsh working conditions. However, certain details were either omitted or modified to protect the anonymity of the participants.