



Identifying The Barriers of Leaving Abusive Relationships For South Asian Immigrant Women in Canada : A Comprehensive Literature Review

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Abstract

This study critically examines the complex and intersecting barriers that South Asian immigrant women in Canada face when attempting to leave abusive intimate partner relationships. Through a comprehensive literature review of seminal qualitative studies, this research identifies key cultural, familial, and systemic obstacles—including family honour, economic dependency, social isolation, and systemic distrust—that significantly impede survivors' help-seeking behaviors and access to appropriate support services. The analysis exposes critical gaps in culturally competent programming, systemic biases within legal and institutional frameworks, and immigration-related vulnerabilities that further marginalize these women. Central to the study is an intersectional understanding of how race, culture, gender, and immigrant status shape experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) within South Asian communities. Guided by anti-oppressive and feminist theoretical frameworks, this review advocates for culturally informed, trauma-informed, and intersectional approaches in social work policy, practice, and service delivery. Recommendations include developing individualized, culturally sensitive care plans, peer-led support groups, accessibility-driven service models incorporating interpreters and cultural brokers, and mandatory professional training on anti-oppressive practices. Policy reforms aimed at mitigating immigration-related barriers and expanding linguistically and culturally appropriate services are emphasized. The study further highlights the urgent need for enhanced research employing longitudinal and community-based participatory action research (PAR) methodologies to empower survivors as active participants and co-researchers, fostering agency and resilience. Ultimately, sustained advocacy, community-driven interventions, and systemic reform are essential to dismantle the structural barriers sustaining IPV within South Asian immigrant communities in Canada and to promote equity, safety, and social justice for survivors.

INTRODUCTION

Our research for this paper explores the barriers that South Asian immigrant women face in Canada when leaving abusive relationships. This issue is complex due to the intersections of race, culture, and immigrant status, all of which significantly influence these women's experiences with domestic violence. South Asians, the largest visible minority group in Canada, face distinct challenges influenced by cultural, familial, and systemic factors, as identified in the qualitative study by Gupta and Randhawa, 2022. This issue is complex due to the intersections of race, culture and immigrant status, all of which significantly influence these women's experiences with domestic violence.

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South Asian women often encounter challenges shaped by cultural expectations, immigration status and language barriers, making it difficult to seek help or leave abusive environments (Thandi, 2012). These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of culturally tailored services and systemic biases that further isolate them (Slakoff, Aujla & Moton, 2023). The experiences of South Asian women with intimate partner violence (IPV) remain largely underexplored in Canadian context (Thandi (2013).

Due to the paucity of the study in this areas, we primarily focused on three key articles exploring the barriers preventing South Asian immigrant women in Canada from leaving abusive relationships. Through analyzing these articles and utilizing supplementary research from our previous resources, we found stigmatization due to family honour, systemic and institutional barriers, and economic and structural vulnerabilities to be common themes central to understanding our topic. Ahmed (2023), through their qualitative study, provides foundational insights into the cultural and systemic factors directly impacted by accessibility issues, particularly relevant for policy implications and understanding service gaps here in Canada. The next author we reviewed, Hulley et al. (2022), offers a comprehensive qualitative metasynthesis of global research on barriers to help-seeking among immigrant women, providing a broader contextual lens. Although Hulley et al. (2022) does not explicitly focus on Canadian South Asian women, our justification for incorporating this article is that it amplifies the voices of racially diverse women across the globe that are experiencing the same barriers in relation to IPV. The decision to include this article specifically also demonstrates the lack of research and representation that presents South Asian women the platform to share their experiences with this form of abuse. Finally, our last main source, Slakoff et al. (2023), provides insights from a qualitative study that contributes to the contemporary perspectives on service providers' experiences with immigrant women, including challenges related to biases and systemic distrust. Together, these sources establish a robust framework for analyzing the complex interplay of cultural, institutional, and economic factors in this context.

We approach this topic from a very privileged and humbled point of entry in relation to our social location. Living in a society where we may not

understand, or have experience with barriers primarily linked to culture causes us to tread carefully with these sensitive topics. All three authros (1, 2 and 3) have been born and raised as first or second generation immigrants here in Canada and the author (4) is a south Asian immigrant living in Canada over 20 years. . Each of us currently reside in British Columbia where we are grateful to receive education and support from the institute of the University of the Fraser Valley. We have differing intersections related to this research such as race, gender, culture, religion, and socioeconomic status. However, a commonality we present with the subjects of our study is geographical location.

Research Questions and Objectives

The aim of this study is to **critically examine the barriers and challenges faced by South Asian immigrant women in Canada when attempting to leave abusive relationships**. This research seeks to explore the structural, cultural, and systemic factors that shape their experiences and limit their access to support services. To guide this inquiry, the study is structured around the following **research questions** and corresponding **research objectives**:

Research Questions

1. What are the key cultural, familial, and social factors that prevent South Asian women in BC from leaving abusive relationships?
2. What challenges do South Asian women face in accessing legal and support services when attempting to leave abusive relationships in BC?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the influence of cultural, familial, and community expectations in the South Asian diaspora on women's decisions about abusive relationships.
2. To identify gaps in services for South Asian women experiencing IPV and develop culturally informed recommendations.
3. To inform cultural competence in intervention strategies, policies and programs for professionals working with South Asian women in abusive relationships.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Research Methods

To answer the research question and achieve the stated objectives, this study primarily relied on **secondary data collection methods**. Specifically, a **comprehensive literature review** was conducted by searching peer-reviewed journal articles and other scholarly resources across a range of academic and professional databases, including **Google Scholar**, the **Digital Object Identifier (DOI) system**, **Taylor & Francis Online**, **SAGE Journals**, **Science Direct**, and materials from the **Ontario Bar Association**. The search strategy incorporated key terms such as “*South Asian women*,” “*immigrants*,” “*Canada*,” and “*abuse*.” These were further expanded using related terms such as “*intimate partner violence*,” “*barriers*,” “*challenges*,” and “*leaving abusive relationships*.” This approach enabled the identification of a wide range of scholarly sources relevant to the experiences of South Asian immigrant women navigating gender-based violence in the Canadian context. To further refine and expand the scope of the search, additional keywords were used, including “*leaving abusive relationships*,” “*barriers*,” “*challenges*,” and “*intimate partner violence*.” For the purpose of this article, the collected literature in total of 8 was analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method that enables researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning (or “themes”) within data. According to Politz (2024), thematic analysis allows for the exploration of recurring concepts and the relationships between them. It provides a flexible yet rigorous approach to understanding complex social issues by focusing on how themes emerge and interconnect across the reviewed studies. It is important to note that this review is not presented as a systematic or scoping review. Rather, it is a **comprehensive literature review** designed to provide depth and contextual understanding of the issues under investigation.

Theoretical Frameworks:

This article is guided by the two social work theories including anti-oppressive theory and feminist theory. Sande and Schwartz (2017) claim that anti-oppressive theory provides a lens to critically examine the systemic inequalities and power imbalances that shape the participants’ experiences, in their theoretical synthesis of community-based participatory research approaches. Additionally, feminist theory emphasizes the role of gender and intersecting oppressions in understanding IPV in respect to our study (Sande & Schwartz, 2017). Together these frameworks challenge traditional one-size-fits-all approaches and advocate for research that is transformative and rooted in social justice (Sande & Schwartz, 2017). By combining these

theories, our study seeks to highlight the resilience and agency of South Asian immigrant women while advocating for systemic changes that address their unique needs and realities.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Drawing on the reviewed literature, three key themes emerged: (1) **cultural and social barriers**, (2) **systemic and institutional challenges**, and (3) **economic and structural vulnerabilities**. These themes collectively illustrate the complex and intersecting factors that influence the experiences of survivors. Each theme underscores the dynamic interplay between individual, community, and systemic forces that shape survivors’ realities, responses to violence, and access to support systems.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BARRIERS

A number of studies Cultural and social norms shape the experiences of South Asian women facing IPV, often isolating survivors and discouraging them from seeking help (Ahmad et al., 2009; Hulley et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Slakoff et al., 2023; Thandi, 2012). For example, Ahmad et al. (2009), in “*Why Doesn’t She Seek Help for Partner Abuse? An Exploratory Study with South Asian Immigrant Women*”, and Slakoff et al. (2023) in “*Navigating Biases and Distrust of Systems: American and Canadian Intimate Partner Violence Service Providers’ Experiences with Trans and Immigrant Women Clients*”, highlight how family honour and community stigma create significant barriers to reporting abuse. Thandi (2012), in “*Working with South Asian Male Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence in British Columbia, Canada*”, and Ahmed (2023), in “*Accessibility of Domestic Violence Services in Canada for South Asian Immigrant Women*”, discuss the intersections of patriarchal values and cultural expectations of endurance and its contribution to survivors remaining silent. Rai & Choi (2022), in “*Domestic Violence Victimization among South Asian Immigrant Men and Women in the United States*”, examine how traditional gender roles pressure women to prioritize family stability over their own safety. Thandi (2013), in “*A Tale of Two Clients: Criminal Justice System Failings in Addressing the Needs of South Asian Communities of Surrey, British Columbia, Canada*”, and Liu et al. (2023), in “*Lessons From Canadian Judgments: The*

Consideration of Culture in Intimate Partner Violence Legal Cases Involving Asian Canadians”, critique systemic biases that further limit survivors’ autonomy. Hulley et al. (2022), in *“Intimate Partner Violence and Barriers to Help-Seeking Among Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, and Immigrant Women: A Qualitative Met synthesis of Global Research”*, explore how legal and cultural structures continue to perpetuate IPV on a broader scale. Together, these studies reveal that family honour functions as a powerful mechanism at the personal, community, and systemic levels, contributing to the isolation of survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). Upon reviewing the literature, three distinct cultural and social barriers have been identified: (1) family honour and stigma; (2) cultural expectations of endurance; and (3) the impact of patriarchal norms.

FAMILY HONOUR AND STIGMA

Three studies reported Family honour and stigma as critical barriers for leaving abusive relationship south asiam immigrant women (Ahmad, 2009; Slakoff, 2023; Thandi (2012). Each author highlighted that family honour and stigma prevent South Asian immigrant women from seeking help for IPV. Family honour, as highlighted by Ahmad et al. (2009), refers to the cultural imperative that family reputation must be upheld. Disclosing abuse is often seen as dishonorable, deterring survivors from accessing support (Ahmad et al., 2009; Slakoff et al., 2023). Ahmad et al. (2009) found that survivors delayed seeking help to avoid being labeled as ‘failed wives’ or disrupting familial relationships. Similarly, Slakoff et al. (2023), based on interviews with IPV service providers, noted that community pressures discouraged women from reporting abuse to avoid ‘shaming the family.’ Thandi (2012), through analysis of South Asian male perpetrators, critiqued patriarchal norms that place responsibility for family honour solely on women, perpetuating cycles of silence and control. Together, these studies reveal how family honour operates at personal, community, and systemic levels to isolate IPV survivors.

Cultural Expectations of Endurance

Three studied reported that cultural norms in South Asian communities emphasize endurance and sacrifice, discouraging women from leaving abusive relationships to maintain family stability (Ahmed,2023; Rai & Choi, 2022; and Thandi, 2013). For instance, Ahmed (2023), found that survivors

internalized these expectations, viewing abuse as a burden necessary to uphold family cohesion. Similarly, Rai & Choi (2022) noted that societal norms labeled women who left their abusers as failures, further deterring help-seeking. Thandi (2013) critiqued these norms by illustrating how traditional gender roles burden women with preserving the family, often at their expense. While Ahmed (2023) and Rai & Choi (2022) focus on survivor experiences, Thandi (2013) connects these cultural pressures to patriarchal systems. Together, these studies reveal how endurance, framed as a virtue, perpetuates IPV and isolates survivors.

Impact of Patriarchy

Three studies found that patriarchal norms underpin family dynamics and societal structures in South Asian communities, reinforcing male dominance and control (Thandi, 2012; Liu et al., 2023; and Hulley et al., 2022). These norms often place the responsibility for family stability on women, perpetuating silence and dependence. Thandi (2012), in her analysis of South Asian male perpetrators, demonstrated how patriarchy justifies abusive behaviors by framing women as solely responsible for maintaining family cohesion. Liu et al. (2023) revealed that cultural considerations in court proceedings sometimes inadvertently reinforce patriarchal biases, limiting survivor autonomy. Hulley et al. (2022) highlighted global patterns where patriarchal norms restrict women’s agency, further complicating their ability to leave abusive relationships. These studies collectively critique how patriarchal systems perpetuate IPV by embedding control within cultural and legal structures.

Systemic and Institutional Barriers

Five studies have identified that South Asian woman experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) face significant systemic and institutional barriers that complicate their efforts to escape abuse. These barriers include distrust of law enforcement, a lack of culturally competent services, and inefficiencies within the judicial system (Ahmed, 2023; Hulley et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Slakoff et al., 2023; Thandi, 2013). Slakoff et al. (2023), in their study *“Navigating Biases and Distrust of Systems: American and Canadian Intimate Partner Violence Service Providers’ Experiences with Trans and Immigrant Women Clients,”* and Thandi (2013), in *“A Tale of Two Clients: Criminal Justice System Failings in Addressing the*

Needs of South Asian Communities of Surrey, British Columbia, Canada,” highlight how fears of discrimination, deportation, and legal inaction deter survivors from engaging with formal institutions. Hulley et al. (2022), through a qualitative metasynthesis titled *“Intimate Partner Violence and Barriers to Help-Seeking Among Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, and Immigrant Women,”* further demonstrate how systemic racism and institutional biases contribute to the isolation of immigrant women. Ahmed (2023), in *“Accessibility of Domestic Violence Services in Canada for South Asian Immigrant Women,”* alongside Liu et al. (2023), in *“Lessons From Canadian Judgments: The Consideration of Culture in Intimate Partner Violence Legal Cases Involving Asian Canadians,”* emphasize that support systems often fail to address the linguistic and cultural needs of survivors, resulting in inadequate assistance. Both Thandi (2013) and Liu et al. (2023) critically examine judicial delays and systemic biases that further impede survivors’ access to justice. Collectively, these systemic failures perpetuate isolation and significantly hinder South Asian women’s ability to leave abusive relationships or obtain necessary support. The following sections individually discuss three primary systemic challenges: (1) distrust of formal systems; (2) inaccessibility of culturally competent services; and (3) delays and inefficiencies within the judicial system.

Distrust of Formal Systems

Authors such as Slakoff et al. (2023), Thandi (2013), and Hulley et al. (2022) assert that South Asian immigrant women experiencing IPV often distrust formal systems, including law enforcement, judicial processes, and social services. Slakoff et al. (2023) found that survivors frequently feared police involvement due to potential deportation threats, cultural misunderstandings, and discrimination. These fears were particularly pronounced among immigrant women with uncertain legal statuses, highlighting the intersection of systemic and immigration-related barriers. Thandi (2013) critiqued judicial inefficiencies in Canada, noting that long delays and perceived inadequacies in protecting survivors exacerbated their distrust. Hulley et al. (2022) identified global patterns where systemic biases and institutional racism discourage minority women from engaging with formal support structures. While Slakoff et al. (2023) focused on

immediate fears linked to law enforcement, Thandi (2013) and Hulley et al. (2022) expanded the discussion to broader systemic failures. Collectively, these studies emphasize how distrust of formal systems reinforces survivors’ reluctance to engage with institutional support.

Inaccessibility of Culturally Competent Services

A common theme identified by Ahmed (2023), Liu et al. (2023), and Hulley et al. (2022) is that the lack of culturally competent services is a significant barrier for South Asian immigrant women experiencing IPV. Ahmed (2023) identified gaps in Canadian IPV programs that fail to address linguistic, cultural, and religious needs, leaving survivors feeling unsupported. Liu et al. (2023) highlighted similar deficiencies in the judicial system, where cultural considerations often perpetuate biases. Hulley et al. (2022) noted that globally, IPV services rarely adapt to the unique needs of immigrant women. While Ahmed (2023) focuses on immediate program-level deficiencies, Liu et al. (2023) and Hulley et al. (2022) emphasize broader systemic failures. Together, these studies show how the absence of culturally tailored support isolates survivors and discourages help-seeking.

Delays and Inefficiencies in Judicial Systems

Both Thandi (2013) and Liu et al. (2023) identify that the delays and inefficiencies within judicial systems consequently exacerbate barriers for South Asian immigrant women seeking help for IPV. Thandi (2013) highlighted long delays and inadequate follow-ups in Canada’s judicial system, leaving survivors feeling unprotected and distrustful. Liu et al. (2023) revealed how cultural biases in court proceedings further hinder survivors, as decisions sometimes reflect stereotypical assumptions about South Asian family dynamics. While Thandi (2013) focuses on procedural inefficiencies, Liu et al. (2023) broadens the critique to systemic biases that perpetuate IPV survivors’ marginalization. Together, these studies expose how structural flaws in judicial systems deepen survivors’ isolation and impede justice.

Economic and Structural Vulnerabilities

Economic dependency and structural barriers trap survivors in abusive relationships. Ahmad et al. (2009), in *“Why Doesn’t She Seek Help for Partner Abuse? An Exploratory Study with South Asian*

Immigrant Women"; and Rai & Choi (2022), in *"Domestic Violence Victimization among South Asian Immigrant Men and Women in the United States"*, showcase how financial instability can anchor survivors to their abuser. Ahmed (2023), in *"Accessibility of Domestic Violence Services in Canada for South Asian Immigrant Women"*, discusses how the lack of accessible resources leave financially disadvantaged survivors without support. Slakoff et al. (2023), in *"Navigating Biases and Distrust of Systems: American and Canadian Intimate Partner Violence Service Providers' Experiences with Trans and Immigrant Women Clients"*, identified language barriers as a major issue, preventing survivors from accessing services. Thandi (2013), in *"A Tale of Two Clients: Criminal Justice System Failings in Addressing the Needs of South Asian Communities of Surrey, British Columbia, Canada,"* and Hulley et al. (2022), in *"Intimate Partner Violence and Barriers to Help-Seeking Among Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic, and Immigrant Women: A Qualitative Metasynthesis of Global Research,"* provide insight into how cultural expectations and inadequate support systems increase isolation. Liu et al. (2023), in *"Lessons From Canadian Judgments: The Consideration of Culture in Intimate Partner Violence Legal Cases Involving Asian Canadians,"* show how immigration status can force survivors to stay with their abusers out of fear of deportation. Each element exacerbates the other, complicating the path to safety and autonomy. Economic and structural vulnerabilities are categorized and discussed individually under three main themes: (1) economic dependency; (2) isolation and language barriers; and (3) immigration-related fears.

Economic Dependency

Ahmad et al. (2009), Rai & Choi (2022) and Ahmed (2023) focus on the reality of economic dependency being a significant barrier preventing South Asian immigrant women from leaving abusive relationships. Ahmad et al. (2009) found that survivors often relied financially on their abusers, which reinforced fears of homelessness and economic instability. Similarly, Rai & Choi (2022) highlighted how limited access to well-paying jobs exacerbates survivors' vulnerability, making financial independence difficult to achieve. Ahmed (2023) connected economic dependency to systemic gaps, noting that survivors with limited resources often struggle to access legal or social support. While

Ahmad et al. (2009) and Rai & Choi (2022) focus on survivors' immediate financial struggles, Ahmed (2023) critiques the broader systemic failures, such as the lack of affordable resources for low-income survivors. Together, these studies reveal how economic dependency traps survivors in abusive relationships and underscores the need for systemic changes to address financial vulnerabilities.

Isolation and Language Barriers

Authors Slakoff et al. (2023), Thandi (2013), and Hulley et al. (2022) all share the certainty of social isolation and language barriers heightening the challenges faced by South Asian immigrant women experiencing IPV. Slakoff et al. (2023) identified language barriers as critical obstacles, leaving survivors unable to navigate services or access resources effectively. Thandi (2013) emphasized how cultural expectations and systemic shortcomings reinforce isolation, cutting survivors off from support networks. Hulley et al. (2022) echoed these findings, noting that immigrant IPV survivors globally experience isolation, which deepens their sense of helplessness. While Slakoff et al. (2023) focuses on linguistic challenges, Thandi (2013) and Hulley et al. (2022) highlight the cultural and systemic factors driving isolation. Together, these studies reveal how language barriers and isolation compound structural challenges, further limiting survivors' ability to seek help.

Immigration-Related Fears

The authors Ahmed (2023), Liu et al. (2023) and Slakoff et al. (2023) all recognize that immigration-related challenges, such as visa dependency and fear of deportation, create significant barriers for South Asian immigrant women experiencing IPV. Ahmed (2023) highlighted how precarious immigration status forces survivors to rely on their abusers, fearing legal repercussions if they leave. Liu et al. (2023) revealed that court decisions often reflect biases against immigrant survivors, while Slakoff et al. (2023) noted that deportation fears discourage help-seeking, especially for those without secure legal status. Together, these studies demonstrate how immigration-related fears entrench survivors in abusive relationships, amplifying their vulnerability and isolation.

Gaps in Literature

Although the existing literature provides a critical understanding of the challenges South Asian immigrant women face when attempting to leave abusive relationships, our review reveals significant gaps in scholarly engagement. Notably, there is a lack of research that provides a platform for these women to share their lived experiences (Hulley et al., 2022). A persistent absence of culturally safe, competent, and accessible resources contributes to the perpetuation of these gaps. While some studies explore cultural and religious norms, the intersection of these norms with other structural factors—such as race, class, and immigration status—remains under examined. This limits a comprehensive and intersectional understanding of the barriers experienced by South Asian immigrant women in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Hulley et al., 2022; Slakoff et al., 2023). In particular, the long-term psychological impacts of cultural and religious pressures on survivors of IPV are notably absent in the literature, with limited attention to the mental health consequences within this population. Additionally, our review identifies multiple gaps in Canadian policy and practice. First, there is a lack of culturally competent and linguistically accessible services tailored to the unique needs of South Asian immigrant women (Ahmed, 2023; Slakoff et al., 2023). Legal systems also often fail to adequately address the distinct challenges faced by immigrant women, including fears of deportation, systemic biases within judicial processes, and barriers to legal recourse (Slakoff et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023). Moreover, policies tend to overlook the psychological burden imposed by cultural and familial expectations, particularly in relation to honour-based norms and gendered roles (Hulley et al., 2022; Slakoff et al., 2023). Economic dependency and social isolation, further reinforced by community and family honour, pose additional barriers to accessing support (Ahmad et al., 2009; Rai & Choi, 2022; Thandi, 2012). These findings underscore the urgent need for more **intersectional, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive** approaches in both scholarship and practice to effectively address IPV among South Asian immigrant women in Canada.

Implications for Social Work Policy, Practice and Research

As emphasized by Slakoff et al. (2023), the complex and intersecting challenges faced by South Asian

immigrant women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) necessitate a **multifaceted approach** that incorporates cultural competence, accessibility, and systemic advocacy. In response, the following recommendations propose key strategies for **social work policy and practice**, as well as **program and service design**, to dismantle structural barriers and better support survivors. These strategies advocate for the integration of **intersectional, culturally responsive frameworks** and **accessibility-focused models** aimed at promoting safety, autonomy, and equity for South Asian immigrant women. By centering survivors' diverse social locations—including gender, race, class, immigration status, and cultural identity—these approaches seek to address the unique vulnerabilities and systemic exclusions these women face, while advancing more just and inclusive support systems.

Social Work Policy/Practice

Social workers should be grounded in **social justice principles**, as outlined by the **Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW, 2005)**, which emphasizes a commitment to equity, human rights, and the dismantling of systemic oppression. In alignment with these values, we offer the following recommendations to address the challenges identified in our findings. These recommendations aim to enhance culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and intersectional practices in supporting South Asian immigrant women experiencing intimate partner violence in Canada.

- Develop individualized care plans that consider cultural and economic related vulnerabilities by using trauma-informed approaches that respect survivors' cultural backgrounds and decision-making processes.
- Create peer-led support groups to empower survivors, providing a safe space for women to share their experiences and receive guidance from others with similar lived experiences.
- Require ongoing professional development for social workers, focusing on anti-oppressive practices and the unique challenges South Asian women face. Introduce reflective practice sessions within social service organizations to assess biases and improve cultural responsiveness.
- Accessibility-Driven Service models: Mobile services to reach isolated women with limited access to transportation or living in rural areas.

Incorporate interpreters and cultural brokers into service delivery to overcome language barriers.

- Implement community outreach programs to inform immigrant women about their rights and available resources.
- Practitioners need to prioritize preventive strategies for addressing domestic violence rather than solely concentrating on the rehabilitation of victims (Chaze & Medhekar, 2017).
- Practitioners should ensure their interventions are guided by the settlement needs expressed by clients themselves, rather than those defined by dominant institutions (Chaze & Medhekar, 2017).

Programs and Services

- Mandate training programs for all professionals (such as social workers, law enforcement, and legal personnel) to build awareness of the cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers that South Asian immigrant women face (Ahmed, 2023).
- Advocate for federal and provincial policies that provide expedited pathways to permanent residency for IPV survivors with precarious immigration statuses, reducing dependency on abusers (Hulley et al., 2022).
- Allocate provincial resources to develop IPV shelters and counseling centers with multilingual staff trained to address the cultural nuances of South Asian communities. Expand legal aid services to include support and prevention for survivors navigating immigration and family law systems, which often intertwine with IPV cases (Slakoff et al., 2023).
- Policymakers to revise immigration laws that tie dependent visa holders to abusive partners, creating pathways for survivors to report abuse without fear of deportation (Hulley et al., 2022).
- Allocate funding for professional translation services to eliminate language barriers, ensuring equal access to crucial resources and support (Ahmed, 2023).
- Providing accessible legal services and clinics within South Asian organizations to ensure immediate access to information on immigration and criminal matters. These services should be available in a language that women are comfortable with to ensure clear

communication and support (Ahmed 2023, Hulley et al., 2022; Slakoff et al., 2023).

RESEARCH

- More statistics are needed on the prevalence of IPV in South Asian communities in North America (Thandi, 2013)
- Slakoff et al. (2023) suggests that very little research exists from service providers' experiences serving immigrant women and the barriers for accessing services.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This comprehensive literature review elucidates the complex and multifaceted barriers encountered by South Asian immigrant women in Canada when attempting to exit abusive intimate partner relationships. The analysis draws upon the seminal qualitative studies conducted by Ahmad (2009), Slakoff (2023), Thandi (2012, 2013), Ahmed (2023), Rai and Choi (2022), Liu et al. (2023), and Hulley et al. (2022), whose work forms the foundation of this inquiry. Collectively, these studies identify salient cultural, familial, and institutional factors—including concerns related to family honour, economic dependency, social isolation, and systemic distrust—that operate as significant impediments to help-seeking and leaving abusive environments. These findings directly address the research objectives by delineating key barriers and revealing critical gaps within service provision and legal frameworks. Importantly, the literature underscores the necessity for culturally informed, accessible, and intersectional strategies to support South Asian women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV). The reviewed research further highlights an urgent need to confront systemic obstacles through comprehensive policy reform, community-driven interventions, and enhanced service delivery models tailored to the unique socio-cultural contexts of South Asian immigrant women. Moreover, this review emphasizes the importance of amplifying the voices of South Asian immigrant women within both academic discourse and policy-making arenas, ensuring that their lived experiences inform the development of effective intervention frameworks. Upon synthesis of the emergent themes and alignment with the research objectives, it becomes evident that disparities in research focus, resource allocation, and policy implementation significantly

contribute to perpetuating the barriers faced by this population.

To advance knowledge and practice, future research should prioritize longitudinal designs, culturally responsive methodologies, and community-based participatory approaches that foster collaboration with affected communities. In particular, a qualitative study employing a participatory action research (PAR) methodology is strongly recommended. PAR not only facilitates a nuanced exploration of the cultural and structural barriers confronting South Asian immigrant women but also actively engages participants as co-researchers. This approach promotes empowerment, bolsters self-efficacy, and supports women's agency in challenging and resisting entrenched patriarchal norms and values. Ultimately, sustained advocacy, culturally sensitive policy-making, and strategic resource enhancement are imperative to dismantle the systemic barriers that sustain IPV within South Asian immigrant communities in Canada and to effect meaningful social change.

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