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“No Woman No Cry”:

An examination of the use of feminist ideology in shelters for abused women when working
with Caribbean-Canadian women

By

Tenniel Melisa Hanson
Bachelor of Arts, University of Waterloo, 2003

THESIS
Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Social Work degree
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ABSTRACT

While abused women shelters using feminist interventions make up the majority of services being provided to all abused women, very little research has focused on the efficacy of using feminist ideology with abused minority women. As an initial step in evaluating the aforementioned area, this study identified the major needs and concerns of abused Caribbean-Canadian women staying in feminist abused women shelters. It also identified the benefits and barriers of using a feminist ideology with these women, as expressed by support staff who have worked with Caribbean-Canadian women. Information was gathered in interviews with 6 female staff who work in shelters in Southern Ontario, Canada. A thematic analysis indicated that the research participants felt that there are many barriers with regards to using a feminist ideology with Caribbean-Canadian women. Some include: a lack of support for religion, lack of cultural understanding, and apprehension with feminism. In addition, the participants noted the frequent experiences of racism and discrimination that Caribbean women experience from the shelter organization, the residents and in Canadian society. Also, the participants noted various directions for enhanced services for abused Caribbean-Canadian women. The implications of the study are discussed in relation to the need for services that more accurately integrate the unique ideas, perspectives and needs of Caribbean-Canadian women, as well as services, that work from a truly anti-oppressive framework.

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In Dedication to my mother
Mrs. Adassa Sylvina Hanson-Nero
And to all Caribbean Women
I Love you

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although family violence has always been present (Mornington, 2001), only in the last few decades have we begun to fully and publicly recognize its presence, explore its causes and effects, and systematically seek the means to address it. The problem of violence is rooted in the most fundamental structural and cultural aspects of any society. A long and sustained effort will be required to effectively address those underlying causes and reduce the amount of violence our communities suffer. According to the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence in their annual Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2003) "one-quarter of all violent crimes reported to a sample of police services in 2001 involved cases of family violence. Two-thirds of these cases were violence committed by a spouse or ex-spouse and 85% of the victims were female" (p. 1).

My interest in this area was sparked at a young age as my mother (a Caribbean-Canadian woman) was the victim of nearly 20 years of terror at the hands of my father. This abuse included daily beatings and many broken bones. The beatings were so severe and frequent that my mother decided that she had the choice of leaving or being killed. After my mother made the decision to leave this destructive marriage she noticed that there were few services available in Canada to help women who have been abused. Of the services available i.e. shelters, none focused on her special needs as a Caribbean-Canadian woman. My mother did eventually emancipate herself from this abusive relationship, but she did so without the benefit of services for women who have been abused.

Thanks to the advent of feminist theory and the woman's liberation movement there has been a dramatic increase in the array of services for women who are survivors of wife abuse. The great majority of these services, having their roots in feminist ideology, operate with this philosophical approach in mind. This ideology has been very useful in helping to

understand wife abuse, creating shelters and services to help women who have been abused, and for placing the issue of wife abuse in the public arena. However, since the late 70's when society first began to see feminist style organizations devoted to abused women, Canada has changed dramatically. With the adoption of the "point system" of immigration in 1967, Canada has seen an influx of men and women from all parts of the world, specifically from the Caribbean. By the 1970's people from the Caribbean were immigrating to Canada in large numbers; currently Canada is one of the most multicultural countries in the world and there are many people of Caribbean descent that reside here (Elliot & Fleras, 1990). As a result, women from these countries are in need of services that acknowledge their unique life experiences; services that hold relevance for them. This is why it is important to re-evaluate the efficacy of the use of white Western based ideologies such as feminism when responding to the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women residing in abused women shelters. The main impetus for this research was to answer the following questions: (1) What are the benefits and barriers of using a feminist ideology in shelters for abused women in Canada, when working with women of Caribbean descent? (2) What special issues do Caribbean-Canadian women encounter in the shelter? (3) Why are such a small number of Caribbean-Canadian women accessing abused women's shelters? (4) What services/programs/activities need to be developed to accurately address the needs of abused Caribbean-Canadian women? I used a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate these questions.

For the purposes of this research, Caribbean-Canadian women is defined as Black women who have either immigrated to Canada from one of the countries located in the Caribbean including; Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Bermuda, Bahamas, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Antigua, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts, and St. Croix, or those women who can trace

their ancestry to one of these countries. The term wife abuse, intimate partner abuse and wife battering are used interchangeably several times throughout this study. As described by Brown (1999) wife abuse occurs when a man intentionally inflicts pain on a woman, within a non transient, male-female relationship, whether or not the partners are officially married. For the purpose of this research I have used this definition to focus my work. I have also further restricted my area of interest to physical aggression, as it can be defined unambiguously. However, it is important to note that other forms of violence such as emotional or sexual abuse can be just as injurious to their victims.

Williams (1998) as cited in Oliver (2000) states "it is becoming increasingly clear to many domestic violence practitioners that interventions and treatment approaches based on the implied assumptions that one size fits all have proven to be ineffective..."(p. 533). There are many examples within the domestic violence literature where various scholars outline the crucial need for study in the area of abused women of colour and immigrant women (MacLeod & Shin, 1990; Mama, 2000; Richie, 1996; West, 2002). Pepler and Buset (2002) note "it is essential to reach the women who endure abusive relationships and are reticent to seek support" (p. 18). For reasons that will be explored further in the literature review section, one of the populations of women that fit into this category is immigrant women. As exemplified in the Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2003) the Canadian government agrees that increased efforts need to be galvanized in order to reach immigrant women. This document reports that the government has devoted \$22 million between 1988 and 1992 to establish or add transition homes with special priority to communities without transition homes (such as rural or remote areas and reserves), and shelters for immigrant women and women with disabilities. West (2002) notes that black feminists argue that future research should reflect the

diverse backgrounds and experiences of African American women instead of just focusing on low income Black women. Williams and Jasinski (1998) state “research on partner violence among ethnic minorities is also in its infancy. Research is needed that focuses on minority families” (p. xiii). They contend that there is also the need for program evaluations that aid practitioners and policy makers in learning which programs or policies are helpful, and to what populations. This research aids in filling these gaps in knowledge and provides valuable information that can serve as a guide to future research in order to better serve Caribbean-Canadian women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a prerequisite to understanding the purpose, importance and direction of this research, I provide a review of the literature in the areas of: wife abuse, the shelter system in Canada, feminism in the shelter system, abused Black women, and a critique of feminist ideology and its uses.

2.1 Wife abuse

Wife abuse is best defined as any form of physical, sexual or psychological aggression within an intimate relationship or marriage where the victim of such violence is a woman. Wife abuse is a significant problem in Canada and around the world. According to the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence in their annual Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2002) "since 1974, nearly 2,600 spousal homicides have been recorded in Canada, the majority of which have been against women" (p. 1). That same study also found:

... female victims of spousal violence were three times as likely as male victims to take time off as a result of the violence (33% compared to 10%) and five times more likely to have received medical attention (15% versus 3%) and to have been hospitalized as a result of the violence (11% versus 2%). (p. 1)

These statistics point to the fact that not only are more women experiencing the terror and pain of being beaten by their intimate male partners, but many of these attacks are vicious and severe.

The presence of wife abuse in society can be traced back many years. Mornington (2001) states:

Despite differences in language, religion and custom, women have been beaten by their male partners the world over. In most societies we know anything about, men have considered themselves superior to women. When one group considers itself superior, it presumes the right to oppress the other. Sooner or later, oppression takes the form of physical abuse. (p. 185)

As discussed by Song (1996) the basis of violence against women is in their minority status with respect to the power of men. As a result, wife abuse can be understood as an expression of this power differential between men and women through the use of domination. In the case of Caribbean-Canadian women, they are a minority group within another minority group. In addition, Caribbean women in general have experienced a long history of oppression, exploitation and enslavement where physical, sexual, and emotional punishment was permitted and encouraged. Indeed, this reality has and continues to put Caribbean-Canadian women at risk to encounter violence in their relationships.

As suggested by Brittan and Maynard (1984), the family is the place where one's identity and personality is moulded and shaped. It is also the site where physical and psychological development takes place. As a result, women who suffer abuse in their homes are at a significant risk of encountering many developmental problems and are at higher risk of developing mental health concerns. The Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2002) found:

...women victims of spousal violencewere twice as likely as men in similar situations to have used medication in the previous month to help them sleep (20% compared with 9%), to calm down (19% compared with 8%) and to help get them out of depression (17% and 7% respectively) Female victims were also more likely than male victims to regularly have problems going to sleep or staying asleep (39% compared with 29%). (p. 1)

Gordon (1998) presents several consequences of domestic violence. She states that, "the consequences of violence towards women by their partners range from chronic headaches, sleeping and eating disorders, and multiple injuries to the head, neck, abdomen, and vaginal area to death" (p. 5). Survivors of abuse commonly suffer from a myriad of psychological disorders including depression, anxiety, panic, lowered self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Saunders (1994) reports that the PTSD symptoms experienced by abused

women include intrusive memories, nightmares, and avoidance of situations and reminders of the abuse. Most importantly, Stark and Flitcraft (1988) point to findings that women who are survivors of wife abuse have increased levels of suicidal ideation and completed suicide. Other authors point out why wife abuse is so damaging to society and the individual. Bard (1994) explains that:

...domestic violence is an unusually important form of victimization by one person against another because of the many significant relationships harmed. The multifaceted phenomenon has probably received more recent attention by academics and service provider professionals than have other "personal" crimes. (p. 7)

As shown by the literature, women who have been abused are commonly members of a high risk group which require special attention and services. These women face many daunting challenges along their journey to recovery; however, the literature suggests that these women often have an immense amount of strength as many are able to leave abusive relationships and to start new lives (Hintz, 1985; Sev'er, 2002; Taylor, 2002).

Despite society's increased knowledge and awareness about wife abuse, women who are abused still encounter marginalization and stigmatization fuelled by several myths. As described by Pepler and Buset (2002) some of these myths include notions that wife abuse only occurs in poor families, alcohol or drugs cause men to abuse, and women and men are equally abused in relationships. By studying women of colour (who are generally thought to have come from low-income families) abused by their partners, there is some risk that the negative view of this group of women will be exacerbated, increasing their marginalization in society. Conversely, by studying and understanding the views of these women through research, myths about women of colour who are survivors of wife abuse can be dispelled.

The literature concerning wife abuse also points out the important differences between wife battering and wife beating. As explained by Brown (1999) "in many non industrial

societies, husbands beat their wives as physical reprimand. Where such behaviour is customary it is viewed as unremarkable" (p. 4). According to Brown (1999), it is important to delineate the distinction between wife beating and battering in order to accommodate for the study of cultures in which men who beat their wives are not "abnormal" or "deviant" but merely behaving in a culturally expected manner. Brown (1999) continues:

Wife battering, by contrast, is something extraordinary, possibly resulting in severe injury, incapacitation, or even death. In most instances, such behaviour is not viewed as usual or acceptable by members of society and elicits interventions by a third party or parties. (p. 4)

In some societies such as the U.S. and Canada, there is disapproval of both wife battering and beating as well as legal sanctions to prevent this behaviour. In terms of the way other countries view wife beating and battering Brown (1999) states "other societies condone wife beating and may even view it as necessary, but wife battering is disapproved, rare, and self defeating" (p. 5). In fact, in those countries where women play an active role in subsistence, significant injury to a woman resulting from abuse could cause economic hardship to the family. In still other societies, the practice of wife beating and battering is generally accepted. Brown (1999) cites the murders of wives in Brazil and the dowry murders of wives in India as two such examples of societies where wife battering and beating take place unremarkably. In these societies, women do not play a major role in subsistence, and dereliction of wifely duties such as modesty, fidelity, adequate performance of duties, properly prepared meals etc. are justifiably remedied with vehemence and violent rage due to the belief that the entire social fabric would unravel if the above behaviours are not performed in a prescribed way. Some of Brown's conclusions should be viewed cautiously as her assertions about cultures that condone wife battering and beating seem to characterize these cultures as being static or monolithic way. There is no mention of the evolving nature of culture and society. In reality cultures grow; new

and emergent ways of living and understanding come to be used. She fails to mention those important individuals within these societies that are struggling to put an end to violence against women and for whom the stereotyping of their culture's attitude towards wife beating and battering is detrimental to their cause. In addition, Brown's ideas about which societies do or do not condone wife abuse reinforce a damaging dichotomy between first world societies and third world societies; in this way she is effectively "othering" third world societies. There are many authors in the literature that point to a long history of first world or Western societies condemning other cultures as being invalid or backwards (Mather-Saul, 2003; Oyewùmi, 2003).

The literature on wife abuse is extensive; however, two important points can be made here. The first is that the majority of the literature was written in the 1980's and 1990's. This was a time when violence in the family was on the public radar, and there was a lot of funding available for research. Interest in this area seems to have waned since then, despite the fact that this acute social problem continues in our communities. Clearly, there is more need than ever to continue the study of wife abuse with a special consideration for the relevance of services to Caribbean-Canadian women. The second point is the absence of information on ethnicity and wife abuse in the literature. Asbury (1987) explains that wife abuse research typically handles issues of ethnicity in three ways "by failing to mention the race of the women included, by acknowledging that only European-American women are included, or by including some women of other ethnicity groups but not in proportions comparable to their numbers in the national population"(p. 91).

Wife abuse continues to be an important issue that affects many women within each of our communities. For the most part these women suffer in silence while they are dehumanized by their abusive partners.

2.2 The Shelter System in Canada

Hintz (1985) notes that the first women's shelter was established in 1972 in a borough of London, England called Chiswick. The women that began work on wife abuse were primarily feminists and members of the women's liberation movement. This organization provided a safe refuge for women that protected them from their violent husbands. From this humble beginning sprung other feminist organizations that provided more supports and information for abused women. Hintz notes that this network of feminist organizations became known as the Women's Aid Federation, and by 1975, 82 groups had been established, 25 with shelters. Warrior (n.d.) as cited in Hintz notes the establishment of groups to protect and advocate for abused women often encountered resistance from the communities in which they were situated; she states, "it was a struggle to establish services for battered women. Groups were met with great resistance, zoning permits for shelters were denied, funding was nonexistent or slow or denied. The problem of wife beating was denied" (p. 59).

As noted by Pepler and Buset (2002), in Canada, the primary response to support abused women came in the form of a system of shelters. In general, shelters in Canada find their primary source of funding in the form of government dollars. These shelters provide a range of services in addition to safe housing. Pepler and Buset (2002) write that some of these services include "individual short term counselling, advocacy services, parenting skill development, and housing referrals. The majority of shelters had some programming for children..." (p. 18). As noted in the annual Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2002) "the term shelter is used broadly to refer to all residential facilities for abused women and their dependent children" (p. 46). The report states that there are seven categories that shelters fall into; they are:

- **Transition homes-** Short or moderate term (1 day to 11 weeks) first stage emergency housing.
- **Second Stage Housing-** Long-term (3-12 months) secure housing with support and referral services designed to assist women while they search for permanent housing.
- **Safe Home Network-** A network of private homes in rural or remote areas where there is no full-fledged operating shelter. It offers subsidiary very short-term (1-3 days) emergency housing.
- **Women's Emergency Centre/Shelter-** Short-term (1-3 days) respite for a wide population range, not exclusively abused women. Some facilities may provide accommodation for men as well as women. This type of facility may accommodate residents who are not associated with family abuse but are without a home due to an emergency situation (e.g., eviction for non-payment of rent). Other than residential (room and board) services, these shelters offer few additional client services.
- **Family Resource Centre-** An Ontario government initiative that serves a wide range of clients and provides clients with an extensive array of information and referrals as well as residential services.
- **Other-** All other facilities/shelters not otherwise classified. This category may include Rural Family Violence Prevention Centres in Alberta, Interim Housing in Manitoba, and other types of emergency shelters, such as a YWCA's. (p. 46)

Every year in Canada, thousands of women seek out the help of one of the many shelters for abused women found across the country. As reported in the annual Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2002):

In 2001/02, 101,248 women and dependent children were admitted to 483 shelters across Canada. In comparison, 96,359 women and their children were admitted to 488 shelters in 1999/2000 and 90,792 were admitted to 413 shelters in 1997/98. On April 15, 2002, 110 women and 64 children departed from 430 shelters across Canada. A minority of women, only 12%, returned to their spouse. One quarter (25%) left the shelter for alternate housing, 12% went to stay with friends or relatives, 8% returned home without their spouse, 19% went to other housing... (p. 2).

These statistics show that there is an ever increasing demand for services such as shelters to aid women and their children to leave violent situations. They also show the positive effect that these organizations have on helping women to leave negative situations for good and to re-establish themselves in safer surroundings. Currently, shelters exist in every province and territory and the number of shelters has steadily increased since the 1970's. According to the

Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report (2003) "...between 1992-2002, the numbers of shelters in Canada grew from 376 to 524..." (p. 46).

Although shelters in Canada receive government money it is still a challenge for them to remain open and provide services that are relevant to a population of women that are not homogenous and whose needs constantly change. Since the year 2000 there has been an increase in the percentage of shelters that referred women and children elsewhere because the shelter was full, from 58% in 2000 to 68% in 2002 (The Family Violence in Canada Statistical Report, 2003).

The shelter system in Canada and around the world provides vital support to women and their families. They provide secure and safe accommodation and services to help women deal with the complicated decisions involved with leaving a violent partner. They serve as a launching pad from which women can begin to live more enriching and empowering lives and serve as an ongoing source of support throughout the transition into their new lives.

2.3 Feminism in the Shelter System

As discussed earlier, the feminist movement of the 1970's is primarily responsible for the development of shelters to aid women in crisis. Feminists are also responsible for placing the special issues of abused women in the public sphere and making it possible for women to share their stories and to heal. In light of the fact that the root of the shelter system can be found in feminism, it is not surprising that many of these shelters still adhere strongly to a feminist ideology. The feminist approach to violence against women is unique. Feminists ask the question "why do men beat their wives?" While others ask what psychopathology leads to violence? Or why are people involved in violent relationships? Bograd (1988) asserts that the way in which feminists search for answers to their questions is also unique, as their primary focus is at the social and group level. They seek to understand in general why men use

physical force. There are many feminist philosophies, making it difficult to discern a unified feminist perspective on wife abuse. However, Campbell (1999) explains that feminists view violence against women as being permitted and encouraged by patriarchal societal structure. This patriarchal organization of society mandates that women be dominated by men, and force is presented as a reasonable method with which to achieve this. The feminist perspective includes wife battering with other forms of violence against women (instead of other forms of family violence) as measures that keep women dominated in patriarchal societies. Sevrer (2002) states that "...in feminist explanations, gender, power and control triangulation determines relations in work, politics, law, health, and education, as well as the domination patterns within coupled relationships" (p. 51). Feminists view male sexual jealousy as an expression of a socialized view of women as the property of men; this is usually accompanied by other aspects of male controlling behaviours (Campbell 1999). This conception can provide an interesting insight into which groups of men are more likely to abuse. Campbell (1999) explains that in her studies she can discern a general pattern of strong male sexual jealousy in the societies with serious wife battering (e.g., Iran and India) and very little jealousy among the Wape or the Mayotte, which are two societies with almost no wife battering and far less beating of wives.

Within the shelter system in Canada, the feminist ideology is commonly used to inform the majority of the decisions that organizations make and generally directs their purpose and mission. In a study conducted by Rinfret-Raynor, Paquet-Deehy, Larouche, and Cantin (1992) that evaluated the effectiveness of a feminist model when working with abused women, a feminist intervention was utilized. As explained in the study, feminist interventions with abused women are concrete and consideration is given for each woman's personal experience. Violence is denounced and responsibility for these acts is placed on the aggressor. Women are

aided to see the patriarchy embedded in society which reinforces violence against women. Women are informed of their rights and the resources available to them and they are helped to assert their rights and utilize resources. This is done to help break isolation and to respond to the physical and psychological needs of women. Also, this intervention emphasizes the need for a focus on thoughts, feelings, and behaviours as framed in a woman's particular situation. Group work is commonly used to carry out the aforementioned intervention. The majority of shelters that work solely with abused women use some level of feminist intervention that may or may not look similar to the one previously described. However, interventions such as removing blame from women, galvanizing them with knowledge and resources and helping women to focus on feelings are fairly common. Beaudry (1985) identified two ideological bases with which to classify shelters for abused women; they are: protectionist (or traditional social service orientation) or liberationist (or feminist orientation). Other researchers have classified shelters in a similar way (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Schechter, 1982). Protectionist and liberationist shelters are explained as follows:

➤ **Protectionist shelter organizations (legal and pure)**

- Pure protectionist organizations: uphold the traditional family as the basis of society. There is a moral injunction to help any woman in need. The organization is hierarchal and discourages residents from participating at all in the running of the shelter as there is a firm boundary between the helper and those being helped.
- Legal protectionist shelter organization: women have rights and they are educated about these rights. There is more of a consultative style of decision making among staff although the organization is hierarchal. The residents play more of an active role but not in decision making. Counselling services are provided and there is still a distinct division between staff and clients. (Gadbois, 1996)

➤ **Liberationist shelter organizations (radical and moderate)**

There is a premise that violence against women is the outcome of oppression in a patriarchal society.

- Moderate liberationist shelter organization: focus on issues of class and the priority for shelter work is equality. Residents participate in all aspects of the running of the shelter. Power is distributed horizontally and government influence tends to be resisted and kept to a minimum.
- Radical liberationist shelter organization: emphasis is placed on the autonomy of women through a total restructuring of the patriarchal society. The goals of the

organization are achieved through collective consciousness raising and social action. Women are encouraged to rely on the resources of the group instead of mainstream institutions. Residents are integrated with staff through mutual learning sharing of information and expertise. (Beaudry, 1985)

For the purposes of this study I am most interested in the benefits and barriers of the liberationist philosophy (both moderate and radical) when used with Caribbean-Canadian women.

Included in the literature are a number of studies on the efficacy of shelters (Giles-Sims, 1983; Berk, Newton & Berk, 1986; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). However, few of the studies I found were Canadian and the participants were primarily Caucasian. There were also few studies that looked at the particular philosophy that shelters use to inform their work with women. Instead, there were broad generalizations on this topic. Further research into this area is very important as the philosophy of any organization markedly affects the kinds of services available, access to these services, and the organization's target population. Gadbois (1996) concurs that understanding the philosophical orientation of a social service organization is important. She states:

...it is crucial to examine, at any given time, the philosophical orientation, structures and mandate of a shelter in order to understand how services are delivered. This "how" of service delivery will influence the impact that shelters have on the women who use them..." (p. 18).

These areas are identifiable gaps in knowledge that warrant future research and consideration.

Shelters provide women with a safe place from which to re-build their lives after leaving an abusive situation. Due to the fact that women are usually the victims of abuse it makes sense to use a feminist approach. However, as will be described in the following section, the use of the feminist philosophy when working with abused women has recently been criticized because it does not readily take into account the many important issues that women face other than gender inequality.

2.4 Abused Black Women

Being victimized by an intimate partner is devastating for any woman. It takes bravery, courage and support to break free from a violent relationship. Although all women who have been abused embark on a journey of healing, their personal journeys are extremely different. Nowhere is this truer than with the unique and complicated healing journey of Black women. Through this research I looked at issues that intimately impact Caribbean-Canadian women such as racism, fear and discrimination. Indeed, these concerns are generally applicable to all Caribbean-Canadian women whether they have been in Canada for a short while or lived here all their lives.

Isolation and fear through intimidation are two tactics that abusers commonly use effectively against their victims (MacLeod & Shin, 1990). This can be seen in the after effects of abuse. As was described earlier, women suffer emotional and physical scars that are difficult to heal. This is generally true for all women; however, immigrant women often have their scars deepened by such things as language and cultural barriers, immigration status, racism and the fact that many are far from their friends and family. These added barriers make it all the more difficult for them to leave abusive situations and to get help that is relevant to them. In a study conducted by MacLeod and Shin (1990) they spoke with immigrant and refugee women who had been abused and they found that these women face very complicated issues. Immigration status was one of the areas that they identified as putting immigrant women at increased risk of being abused and at a disadvantage in accessing services. MacLeod and Shin (1990) write that:

...many of the women, particularly refugee women, have not had any choice about moving to Canada or about settling in a particular town or city, Others are picture or mail-order brides who have no family or friends in this country, and who may have the added challenge of adjusting to an interracial marriage. Still other women are in Canada as visitors (students, temporary workers or tourists), who are sponsored by

their Canadian resident husbands, they are vulnerable because they have no permanent status in Canada while their immigration applications are being processed. These women are particularly susceptible to their husband's attempts to intimidate them by threatening to or actually withdrawing their sponsorship. For those women residing in Canada as wives (dependents) of international students, their situation becomes even more precarious. (p. 3)

This reality is true also for Caribbean women who are in Canada as refugees or awaiting immigration hearings. The use of threats of deportation by the abuser is a very powerful tool especially if that woman has children. MacLeod and Shin (1990) also point out that because of the general lack of knowledge about rights, women often fear that if they report abuse inflicted on them by a husband they have sponsored, they put themselves at risk of being deported. Immigrant women often face economic hardship, racism, and culture shock. They also often experience loneliness as they are far from their families and homeland. For some women their partner may be the only connection they have in Canada to their cultural roots. Women are left feeling depressed and vulnerable and they often turn to their partners for support. This adds a dimension to the difficulty that these women experience in contemplating leaving their partners. MacLeod and Shin (1990) concur that the obstacles that stand in an immigrant woman's way of starting an abuse-free life are staggering. These women often have to make tough decisions; they note "most immigrant or refugee women conclude that living with abuse at the hands of their husbands could be preferable to the abuse, uncertainty and bureaucratic obstacles they would endure if they were to leave" (p. 4). Mama (2000) agrees that many Black women face difficult decisions. In her study with Black abused women she found that "...black women may be particularly reluctant to seek outside help; many endure a high level of abuse over long periods of time, rather than run the risk of homelessness and its attendant vulnerability, hardship and indignity, not to mention the bureaucratic intransigence..." (p. 48). West (2002) also cites housing as a particular challenge that Black women face when fleeing violence.

Immigrant women shoulder many fears in relation to their abuse. MacLeod and Shin (1990) note that women who come from cultures where separation or divorce can result in a great loss of family reputation face pressures of humiliation and stigmatization. In cultures where stigma is attached to problems in a relationship and where women are seen as the main creator and protector of the family unit, women fear that they may be accused of bringing shame to the community and as such be ostracized by community members. Women fear that they will be unable to survive if they leave their husbands, and this is especially true if they do not know French or English and have few job skills. For other women, they may be unable to work in Canada due to their immigration status. MacLeod and Shin (1990) also describe the apprehension that immigrant women may feel at the prospect of getting involved with the justice system. This is often because of their experience with police in their home countries as a repressive and even dangerous force. Mornington (2001) agrees that often black and immigrant women will shy away from institutions such as the police because of real or perceived racism. Problems with the justice system can be seen in many Caribbean countries. For example, Jamaican people generally perceive the police force as being corrupt, with little regulation of their activities. As a result, the general population has a lack of respect and trust for the police force. People generally solve problems and disputes by themselves in the community. Some of these concerns with police have transferred themselves to Canada; in black communities all over the country, there is concern about police brutality and racial profiling (Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2000). As a result, Caribbean-Canadian women also fear the prospect of their husbands being treated too harshly by the police if they do report abuse. Mama (2000) presents the experiences of one Black women in relation to this fear, she writes "Yvonne describes the police regularly responding by arriving at the house in large numbers, not to arrest or prosecute her male partner, but to beat him up" (p. 49). Mama (2000)

also points out that another dimension to the negative way Black women interact with the police, is in the authorities' mistaken perception of Black women. She notes:

African and Caribbean women generally report that the authorities respond in ways which suggest that they are not easily perceived as victims of male violence. Perhaps because they are typecast as aggressive, they tend to not be believed when they call for help. (p. 50)

Immigrant women also have a different frame of reference from which they view wife abuse. This is due in part to the amount of hardships they have encountered to get to Canada. As explained by MacLeod & Shin (1990) these women see wife abuse as one part in a constellation of violence. They write that:

Many women come from countries where they, their husbands and their families were politically and economically oppressed. In addition, for some immigrant and refugee women, their personal experiences of abuse are much broader than wife abuse. As well some women, working as domestic workers, have been abused by their employers. These experiences give many immigrant women an understanding of wife abuse as only one type of violence situated in a broad constellation of violence rooted in power, control and suffering. (p. 6)

Within this context, MacLeod and Shin (1990) point out that often abuse can be seen as another hardship that needs to be endured on a path to creating a better life for their families. It is the differing views about violence that immigrant women possess that highlight the need to create and shape services to reflect these perceptions and experiences.

There are many other authors that point to the complexity and uniqueness of how violence affects and is perceived by abused Black women. Deltufo (1995) writes that the racism that Black families experience adds a level of complexity to abuse. Black men who are struggling themselves against racism sometimes continue to abuse women while using racism as an excuse for their abusive behaviour. Mornington (2001) suggests that the common place ignorance of police and other services when dealing with domestic violence cause many problems for Black women. Often, domestic violence in ethnic communities is perceived by the

police as being best solved by that community. This has negative effects on women as they do not get access to the help that they need. Mornington (2001) also discusses the immense need to provide services that are separate and specifically tailored to the needs of abused Black women, she states:

Black women and their children who have left abusers may be further damaged or forced to return by racism and lack of cultural awareness in predominantly white refuges. Black women need; refuges that are specifically for their racial group, female-run interpreting and translation services, agencies gaining the confidence of women from ethnic communities by communicating with women's groups as well as their leaders, the establishment of specialist sub groups within the domestic violence fora, the production of literature and resources material in different languages and formats, the representation of black women on domestic violence groups, special support groups sympathetic to cultural needs, refuges that understand that women may not be able to leave and need support within the marriage, and support groups and counselling to address the needs of black children. (p. 201)

Other authors discuss the increased vulnerability of Black women to suffer more severe and longstanding abuse at the hands of their partners. West (2002) notes that there are documented differences in the type and severity of violence which different women sustain. She writes that:

...battered women who were recruited from family court and battered women's shelters reported comparable levels of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. However, when compared to Latina's and White women, Black women were more likely to have had weapons used against them. They were also more likely to be hospitalized as a result of the injuries sustained during a violent episode. (p. 217)

West (2002) also notes that in studies conducted in the U.S. Black women when compared to white women are at an increased risk of victimization throughout the lifespan of their relationships. The notion of Black women being at greater risk than white women to being abused by their partners is given further credence by a study conducted by Hampton and Gelles (1994). They found that from a survey of 6000 American families, Black women were twice as likely as white women to have been battered. Many women remain at risk of violence after they terminate their abusive relationships; research points to the fact that Black women

are more likely to be victimized. Sullivan and Rumpitz (1994) found that one-third of the African-American women in their sample continued to be abused by the same partner 10 weeks after leaving a battered women's shelter. Fewer white participants reported such an occurrence. West (1998) offers an explanation for some of the variation in rates among abused Black and white women; she states "...ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in a society in which race and ethnicity determine access to economic resources. A lack of opportunities and societal inequalities create stress, which in turn may increase the risk of violence" (p. 193). In a replication study conducted by Hampton, Gelles, and Harrop (1989) it was revealed that wife-to-husband abuse committed by Black women was nearly three times greater than the rate for white women. This study is important in understanding the realities of abused Black women. However, it can be potentially damaging because it reinforces the aforementioned stereotype of Black women as aggressive, which in turn hinders these women from accessing help.

These numbers are startling and indicate the need to conduct more research into violence in the lives of Black women. However, there is some disagreement in the literature as to whether there is a significant difference in the rates of wife abuse among white and Black women. Cazenave and Straus (1990) note that several large national probability samples revealed higher rates of wife assault in African American families. On the other hand, West (2002) notes that research suggests rates of battering among Black, Latina and white women are similar. Richie (1996) argues that "it is important to reiterate that the literature on battering does not indicate a significant discrepancy on the rate of violence within different racial/ethnic groups, experiential nuances do vary by race/ethnicity" (p. 69). Asbury (1987) offers some explanation for this disagreement in the literature. She states:

Many of the studies that found ethnic and social class differences failed to account for differential reporting across these groups. Middle- and upper class women (who are more likely to be European-American) have greater financial resources at their

disposal. Therefore they are more able to afford private physicians and to obtain safe shelter away from the home. In such cases, public officials and social agencies are less likely to become aware of the incidents. (p. 93)

Richie (1996) proposes a shift in focus to look at the varying experiences of women rather than on the actual difference in battering rates. As such, it is within this area that further research should concentrate. West (2002) states that there has been little research focused on the process that battered Black women use to disengage from their violent relationships and this is an area that needs to be explored.

Other literature points to the unique perceptions and beliefs of abused Black women about their abuse. In a study conducted by Richie (1996) she explores the circumstantial and emotional vulnerability of Black women to abuse. She found:

...the gender identity development in the household of origin of the African American battered women converged with their socially constructed loyalty to African American men and their disappointing experiences in the public sphere to create circumstantial and emotional vulnerability to abuse. (p. 70)

Richie (1996) explains that African American women see their responsibilities in their relationships very differently than white women, which influences their vulnerability to violence. She writes that African American battered women often experience a sense of shame and inadequacy. These feelings emerge as they begin to conceptualize the abuse they suffer as a symbol of their failure to accomplish their romantic dreams of intimate relationships. They feel a need to meet the ideological norm of a nuclear family. As a result, Black women generally respond to abuse in their relationships by working harder to try and create order in their lives; this is done instead of leaving. Eventually, the woman's entire sense of self worth becomes deeply attached to the effectiveness of the relationship- it must "work" or their identities will be completely shattered. This may lead to profoundly immobilizing feelings of failure and self blame, which results in increased vulnerability. In contrast, the white battered women in the

study came to a more realistic awareness of the dangers in their relationships sooner. They were not conflicted by a sense of failure to meet the ideological norms, because with the exception of the abuse, their lives mirrored that norm. They did not internalize responsibility for the failed relationship to the same extent, as they did not have an expectation that they could have a mutually positive relationship with a man in the first place. Bell and Mattis (2000) agree that Black women sustain many factors that increase their vulnerability to domestic violence.

They state:

Many of the factors that inform African American women's vulnerability to domestic violence are common to women across all ethnic-racial lines. However distinct factors leave African American women particularly vulnerable to the violence of men. The representations of African American men as victims who must be protected at all costs and the insistence that women must bear the responsibility for protecting men-even the men who harm them- contribute to the vulnerability of African American women. Contemporary representations of African American women in popular culture (e.g., in movies and music videos) reinforce longstanding visions of African American women as castrating, domineering, and intrinsically and hopelessly pathological figures who must be controlled. Furthermore, African American male-female relationships continue to be represented as inherently affectionless and inevitably conflictual. As such, heterosexual relationships emerge as sites where men are encouraged to assert dominance over women... (p. 530)

The literature also discusses religion in the lives of Black women. Neighbors, Musick, and Williams (1998) state that African Americans who are experiencing serious distress are particularly likely to use religious coping strategies and are more likely to seek help from a minister than from other helping professionals. Bell and Mattis (2000) note that the use of religion by Black women in relation to abuse can have both a positive and negative effect; this is because some religions teach that regardless of the amount or severity of abuse, women should stay in the marriage. However, the spirituality of these women can be seen as an asset as their connection to the church provides them with a wider social support network that can be called upon during a time of need. This combats the isolation that an abusive relationship creates.

It is clear through reviewing the literature on abused Black women that the authors commonly presented a somewhat stereotypical view of Black women and some of their conclusions lead to a reinforcement of stereotypes. This is the real challenge in conducting ethical research that investigates ethnic difference. There needs to be a delicate balance between simultaneously presenting the ethnic group as distinct, without playing down the variability within the members of that group.

Another area where the literature is lacking, are studies that focus on African-Canadian or Caribbean-Canadian women. Although the experiences of African-American women serve as an excellent basis for understanding those of African-Canadian and Caribbean-Canadian women, they do not provide a sufficient amount of knowledge in this area. This study will begin to address this gap in knowledge.

Indeed, the aforementioned scholars highlight the importance of assessing the needs of abused Black women separate from other women, as they have unique concerns. Therefore, it is not feasible to expect that one type of service (e.g., a feminist shelter) would be sufficient to satisfy the needs of all women.

2.5 Critique of Feminist Approach to Working with Abused Women of Colour

As discussed in the previous section, women of colour have many unique and contrasting needs. This leads to an important discussion around how the current ideology commonly used with abused women (feminism) is or is not accounting for the needs of women of colour. The feminist ideology has a unique way of looking at the oppressions of women. In this view, the causes of oppression are placed squarely on the shoulders of societal patriarchy. Many authors contend that it is this narrow scope that creates problems for feminism when it's relevance to women of colour is evaluated (hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981; Smith, 1983). This is in part due to the fact that many women of colour do not see societal patriarchy

as their main source of oppression. Johnson-Odim (1991) adds further credence to this notion, she writes "gender discrimination is neither the sole nor perhaps the primary locus of the oppression of Third World women" (p. 315). In fact, the literature notes that women of colour and immigrant women commonly see the role of men in their lives as integral to the survival of their communities. MacLeod and Shin (1990) note that immigrant women have:

...shared experiences of oppression with their husbands and families which often gives them a greater sympathy for the victimization their husbands have experienced, and a desire to seek help for their husbands and their children as well as for themselves. (p. 6)

This notion of the role of men in an immigrant women's healing process is in direct contradiction to feminist understandings of violence against women, which commonly holds that men have little place along this journey. The reality is that many immigrant women and women of colour might identify more with the men in their communities due to their common experiences with racism and oppression than with the Western feminist movement that focuses on the oppressive role of men in society.

Johnson-Odim (1991) states that many Black women have decided to use the term 'womanist' instead of feminist. This is done in response to the need in the women of colour community to join with their men and not to alienate them. The belief is that only in this way can they ensure the survival and wholeness of their people in the face of racism and economic exploitation. This new definition of what it is to be Black and a feminist speaks to the interconnectedness of the life of Black women and to the perception that mainstream feminism is too narrow to encompass that experience. Indeed the feminist ideology has a long way to go in order to increase its relevance in the lives of women of colour; Johnson-Odim (1991) states:

Third World women [which include Caribbean women] can embrace the concept of gender identity, but must reject an ideology based solely on gender. Feminism, therefore, must be a comprehensive and inclusive ideology and movement that incorporates yet transcends gender specificity. We must create a feminist movement

which struggles against those things which can clearly be shown to oppress women, whether based on race, sex, or class or resulting from imperialism. Such a definition of feminism will allow us to isolate the gender-specific element in women's oppression while simultaneously relating it to broader issues, to the totality of what oppresses us as women. If the feminist movement does not address itself also to issues of race, class, and imperialism, it can not be relevant to alleviating the oppression of most of the women of the world. (p. 321)

When the feminist ideology is adapted to look at violence against women there continues to be problems when diverse cultures are considered as shown by studies conducted with a cross-cultural sample. Several of these studies found that there is not a linear correlation between a woman's lowered status in society or in a relationship and incidents of wife abuse (Campbell, 1985; Counts, Brown & Campbell, 1992). These studies seem to contradict the feminist conception of wife abuse as resulting from a powerful patriarchal society when diverse cultures are considered. It is clear that the feminist ideology has a lot to offer in the way of helping to explain some of the whys and hows of abuse against women. However, the feminist perspective encounters significant difficulty when used to analyze abuse in diverse cultures. It is by virtue of this that one might question the blanket use of a feminist ideology when working with women in a setting such as a shelter, since the feminist view of violence against women is not comprehensive enough to include the special issues that women of colour face. This struggle to create a feminism that would be relevant to the experiences of a variety of women began as soon as feminist thinkers began writing. Ramazanoglu (1989) notes:

As soon as the part men played in oppressing women was established, the conception of women as generally oppressed was shown to be problematic. Feminism faced serious divisions. Taking the variety of women's situations and experiences into account is not a simple matter of adding on those which had been omitted. Understanding the full range of women's lives has entailed looking not only at women's oppression by men, but also at women's solidarity with men, and at women's oppression by women. (p. 93)

Over the years, some radical feminist writers have recognized that women's experiences are divergent in terms of race, ethnicity, class and culture. There has also been an acknowledgment that these issues need to be addressed. However, these texts failed to examine their assertions in sufficient detail; as they do not include an examination of the consequences of the omission of issues of race, ethnicity, class and culture in feminism as a political movement. As a result, among other issues, the unbalanced power relationships that can exist between women were largely overlooked (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Ramazanoglu notes "it is the growing recognition within feminism of the material differences of power and interest between women which makes feminism as a general theory of the common oppression of women so problematic" (p. 94). In a shelter where a feminist ideology is used, it is important to look at the oppression that can be at work between a primarily white staff of women and a Black woman accessing services. Ramazanoglu (1989) states "...women from dominant nations, racial, and ethnic groups not only play a part in the oppression of women of subordinate groups, but also benefit from the continuation of such subordination..." (p. 117). This notion defuncts the conception of a universal sisterhood, as women of colour commonly continue to feel oppressed by white feminists.

The idea that all women share common interests arising from our oppression by men has been shown to be too simplistic to explain the realities women of colour face. This inaccurate assumption of sisterhood is one of the main Black critiques of the feminist epistemology (Williams, McCandies & Dunlap, 2002; Comas-Diaz, 1991). This tendency to believe that all women are sisters based on a physiological commonality fails to acknowledge that one's ideology, attitude and activist agenda is created based on one's cultural and racial reality as much as one's experience as a woman (McIntosh, 1992). Black critics also point out that due to cultural conceptions of white being superior to Black, the white experience is valued

and seen as normal, while the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities are devalued or falsified. As described by Willimas, McCandies, and Dunlap (2002) "when women of color and European-American women differ, these differences are interpreted as deficiencies on the part of women of color and not on the part of European-American women" (p. 70). In this process, the lives, struggles and suffering of these women are often rendered invisible not by male dominated societies but by feminism itself (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Ramazanoglu (1989) states that Black critics argue:

Women generally in advanced capitalist societies benefited from, or engaged in, the exploitation of black women, ethnic-minority women, third-world women, and peasant women. Where women can employ servants, wear cheap clothes produced by sweated labour, or eat food produced from cash crops at the expense of food grown for peasant families' own consumption, then exploitation and advantage cut across sisterhood. (p. 125)

It is impossible to ignore the contradictions that are inherent in perpetrators of oppression teaching, and helping women of colour to fight against oppression. Fesi (1984) as cited in Ramazanoglu (1989) states "if one were to measure oppression...we would see white women being greater oppressors of black women than black men ever have been" (p. 127). It is only through recognition of the many contradictions found in the feminist approach that its practitioners can hope to provide anti-oppressive services. There must be a recognition that it is impossible for women to unite to struggle against male oppression when there is an unbalanced power relationship at play between them (Ramazanoglu, 1989).

Inherent in the feminist approach is the danger that women can be seen as homogenous and that a colour blind approach will be taken to working with Black women. Thomas and Sillen (1972) discuss the detrimental effects of this way of working:

"colour blindness" is no virtue if it means denial of difference in the experience, culture, and psychology of black Americans or other Americans....To ignore the formative influence of substantial differences in history and social existence is a monumental error. (p. 58)

Many authors (Mather-Saul, 2003; Willimas, McCandies, & Dunlap 2002) point out that feminism has long been criticized for focusing solely on the plight of European-American middle-class women or for assuming that all women face the same difficulties. This criticism of the Eurocentric focus of feminism is commonly reinforced by the lack of representation in feminist academia, grassroots organizations, radical movements etc. of the full spectrum of women especially ethnic minority women (Fine, 1997). Not only are women of colour underrepresented within the organizing ranks of feminism, but they are underrepresented as subjects in feminist research. Unfortunately, there is still a focus on European-American women in research despite the recognition that race and ethnicity are important issues to look at together with gender (Willimas, McCandies, & Dunlap, 2002). Mather-Saul (2003) calls for feminists to participate in cross-cultural dialogues in order to redesign the feminist approach to be more respectful and relevant to other cultures.

As was described in this literature review, wife abuse is a very pervasive and prevalent problem in today's society. Abused women are at a significant risk and require support in the form of appropriate services. One group of women that have been shown to have special needs in regards to how they are supported to heal from an abusive relationship is women of colour and immigrant women. These groups of women have unique perceptions and experiences that in many ways clash with those of mainstream feminist ideology. In terms of the services currently being provided in Canada many work from the feminist approach. As a result, it is important to delineate both the benefits and barriers of using a feminist intervention with women of colour. In addition, there is great need for a forum within which the voices of abused Black woman can be communicated.

3. PARADIGM

Black Feminism

For this research I have chosen to use Black feminist theory as a way of framing the study as the majority of the participants are black women. The epistemology of Black feminism grew out of an awareness of the uniqueness of the experiences of Black women. This theory has a distinct way of looking at violence in the lives of Black women that is particularly useful in relation to this research. West (2002c) describes the Black feminist perspective:

Race, class, and gender inequalities place Black women at an increased risk for many forms of victimization. Therapists and scholars face challenges of articulating the many similarities among survivors, without negating the particular experiences of Black women. This challenge requires us to develop a Black feminist analysis of violence in the lives of African American women. Such a perspective would not privilege gender oppression over race or class oppression. Instead, a Black feminist approach would consider how living at the intersection of race, class and gender oppression, and other forms of oppression, such as homophobia, converge to shape Black women's experiences with violence. (p. 1)

The Black feminist framework broadens the definition of violence to include violence in intimate relationships, violence in the workplace, and violence in the community (West, 2002c). In this way violence in the lives of Black women is seen through a lens that acknowledges and understands that Black women experience violence at many levels and in many facets of their lives. It is the totality of these experiences that are valued instead of isolated incidences. Violence is an important part of the historical and present reality of Black women, and this aspect cannot be negated. As a result, physical abuse in the lives of Black women is situated within a context of ongoing violence outside the home.

Black feminists assert that many methods can be employed in order to give voice to the lives of Black women. Taylor (2002) notes that research in and of itself, is a valid and important avenue of resistance and healing for Black women. She writes:

...scholars have documented the therapeutic value of research performed through interviews, focus groups, descriptive research with the completion of questionnaires, and interviews on sensitive topics. Participants may receive a variety of benefits from their involvement in the research process, including catharsis, self-acknowledgement, a sense of purpose, self awareness, empowerment, and healing. (p. 144)

West (2002c) states "black feminist scholars value testimonials..." (p. 3). Indeed, testimonials are a powerful way to communicate the voices of Black women in a way that lessens the danger of these voices being appropriated or stereotyped. hooks (1989) as cited in Taylor (2002) outlines the supreme importance of the use of speech and testimonials when working with oppressed communities such as Black women. She writes:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (p. 144)

In addition, Black feminist scholars emphasize Black women's long history of resistance to violence in their lives and communities through the use of literature, music, and spirituality.

Taylor (2002) notes that it is important for researchers working with abused Black women to instill trust. She states that this can be accomplished by first acknowledging the negative history Blacks have experienced with research (e.g. The Tuskegee Experiments¹). She also notes that a sustained and ongoing presence needs to be made in the community through the attendance of various events such as church services. This presence will aid the researcher in reducing suspicion and building trust. Also, an extended level of involvement demonstrates a greater level of commitment. Another important facet in working with Black women is to share knowledge with the participants and the community. As part of this

¹ For forty years between 1932 and 1972, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) conducted an experiment on 399 black men in the late stages of syphilis. These men, for the most part illiterate sharecroppers from one of the poorest counties in Alabama, were never told what disease they were suffering from or of its seriousness. Informed that they were being treated for "bad blood," their doctors had no intention of curing them of syphilis at all. The data for the experiment was to be collected from autopsies of the men, and they were thus deliberately left to degenerate under the ravages of tertiary syphilis—which can include tumours, heart disease, paralysis, blindness, insanity, and death (Infoplease, 2004).

commitment, researchers may choose to publish their results in a community newsletter, or present them on a local ethnic radio station. Taylor (2002) also points to the use of testimonials as a way to shift power from the researcher to the participant. Finally, there is great emphasis placed on involving research participants as much as possible in the research process.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology used to develop an understanding of Caribbean-Canadian's women experiences in a feminist based shelter for abused women. First is a brief overview of the research methodology used and the rationale behind this approach. Next, the process for data gathering and analysis are described. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the research are presented.

As is commonly the case with qualitative research, this study evolved with the integration of knowledge about my area of inquiry. Originally I hoped to interview Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused but found that with the strict time constraints of completing a Master thesis I did not have enough time to recruit these participants. As a result, I changed my focus to interviewing shelter support staff that have worked with abused Caribbean-Canadian women. Obviously, the change in participants altered some areas of the methodology and these changes are reflected in the various sections of this chapter.

4.2 Research Questions

One of the main areas of change is with the research questions. The questions were changed to be more congruent with the topics that the new participants would have knowledge about and to take advantage of their unique perspectives of what is effective or ineffective when working with abused Caribbean-Canadian women. The research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the benefits and barriers of using a feminist ideology in shelters for abused women in Canada, when working with women of Caribbean descent?
- (2) What special issues do Caribbean-Canadian women encounter in the shelter?

(3) Why are such a small number of Caribbean-Canadian women accessing abused women's shelters?

(4) What services/programs/activities need to be developed to accurately address the needs of abused Caribbean-Canadian women?

It is important to note the hard work and dedication of the founders of shelters for abused women and of the people who work selflessly to ensure that these organizations run smoothly. Through this research, it is not my intention to criticize their work, but to provide them with information so that they may better serve Caribbean-Canadian women.

4.3 Research Methodology

Due to the highly sensitive nature of this emergent and poorly understood topic, I used a qualitative methodology; it has also been termed flexible method research (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994). As indicated by Anastas and MacDonald, flexible method research is best used when an emergent and complex topic of inquiry is in need of mapping, clearer definition, and exploration. The general purpose of flexible method research is to discover new phenomena that, by definition, cannot be directly observed. In this study, the phenomena researched are the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused as seen and expressed by shelter support staff. Through the use of a flexible method approach the participants' subjective and objective knowledge about the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women can be assessed along with any contextual factors. Since people's experiences are not often predictable, it was useful to have the flexibility inherent in qualitative research in order to adapt to and incorporate the information that the participants provided along the process. This approach allowed for the presentation of the voices and stories of the participants and provided for an in-depth understanding of their triumphs, struggles, supports,

and needs with regards to working with Caribbean-Canadian women. As such, this approach offered an ideal method with which to collect the information required.

4.4 Participants

Recruitment

Purposive and snowball sampling procedures were used to collect the sample for this study. Six women were recruited, all of whom are abused women support workers and have worked with abused Caribbean-Canadian women. The purpose of the study was to gain a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives on working with Caribbean-Canadian women in a feminist abused women's shelter. Consequently, recruitment was aimed at achieving diversity with regards to experience working with Caribbean-Canadian women, education level, and personal characteristics such as age and socio-economic status. With regards to ethnicity, Caribbean-Canadian participants were actively sought as I believed they have a unique vantage point with which to share their knowledge of the special issues that Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused face. All of the recruited participants are abused women support staff that have or are currently working with at least one Black Caribbean-Canadian woman (i.e. women who have immigrated from or can trace their ancestry to the following countries: Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Bermuda, Bahamas, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Antigua, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts, and St. Croix) for a period longer than one week. The Caribbean-Canadian women they worked with must have been physically abused by a male partner. Finally, all the participants have worked with these women within the context of a shelter with a pronounced feminist ideology.

The first two participants were identified through a poster advertising the research project (Appendix 17.1) placed in the Master of Social Work student lounge at Wilfrid Laurier University. Following the completion of these interviews one of the participants discussed the

study with her colleagues and two declared their interest in participating in the study. They both gave their contact information to the participant inviting me to contact them via telephone to set up a time to meet. I later met with both of these women and conducted interviews. In addition, I contacted the Executive Director at a local shelter for abused women and was invited to speak at a meeting about the research. As a result, two more people volunteered to participate in the study resulting in a total of six participants.

4.5 Development of Research Focus

The focus for this research project, in addition to the concepts outlined in the literature review, is a result of many strands of experience. Firstly, as a child from a family destroyed by violence, my experience of the pain, struggles and triumphs of a family trying to rebuild has played a major role in creating my personal reality and was the main reason for which I conducted this study. Secondly, being a Caribbean woman who grew up in Canada I have experienced racism, ignorance, and discrimination when I have accessed various social services. These experiences have left me with a sense of duty to influence change and to give voice to other marginalized people. Finally, the interests and reflections of other Caribbean-Canadian women with whom I have consulted were vital as I narrowed my area of study. I presented possible areas of research and they expressed interest in learning more about how Caribbean women survive in a feminist setting; an area where little attention has been paid in the past. They noted that this information would be particularly useful in order to assess how shelters impact on Caribbean-Canadian women as well as identifying gaps in service that the Caribbean-Canadian community can fill.

4.6 Gathering Interview Data

Individual, semi-structured, audio-taped interviews were used in order to collect the data for this research. Due to the highly sensitive nature of this topic and its complex intricacies

this was the best method through which to explore the research questions. The individual interviews were also useful in building a strong rapport with the participants, which allowed for more meaningful and honest information to be provided. In addition, this method of data collection fits well with the Black feminist tradition of gathering testimonial evidence (West, 2002c; Taylor, 2002) as a way to give voice to the experiences of Black women. Although it was important for me to gather information regarding my specific research questions, I realized that the participants would have their own ideas about what was important to share. As a result, the interview guide (see Appendix 17.2) was developed using open ended questions across a wide range of topics from a Caribbean-Canadian woman's arrival at the shelter to their stay and life after the shelter. I also asked questions about the participant's recommendations for improved practice with abused Caribbean- Canadian women. The use of open ended questions allowed for the participants to tell their stories without feeling constrained in any way. Additionally, planned prompts (McCracken, 1988) were used to elicit more specific responses and to help maintain focus. The interview guide was developed through a combination of information derived from the literature review, my personal experiences of being a Caribbean-Canadian woman, and guidance and input from academics such as those on my thesis committee. In addition, I received input from other Caribbean-Canadian women about the flow and wording of the interview guide. Achieving a good level of flexibility was a central goal when creating the interview guide, as it was important that the questions allowed for a variety of responses.

4.7 The Interview Process

Four of the six interviews took place at the shelter for abused women where the participants worked. Of these interviews two took place in a borrowed office space and two in a conference room during working hours. One interview took place in a Faculty of Social Work

conference room on campus at Wilfrid Laurier University, and the other interview took place in the participant's home.

Each interview began by reviewing a consent form (Appendix 17.3) and the participants' rights. Once all the appropriate documentation was signed the interview began with various background information questions such as the participants' age, number of Caribbean-Canadian women she has worked with, education, and ethnicity. The purpose of starting the interview in this manner – in addition to the provision of important information – was to relieve some of the anxiety involved in participating in an interview and to allow participants to relax. The questions which followed were open-ended in nature and permitted women to discuss that which was most relevant to them about their experiences working with Caribbean-Canadian women, the special issues that these women face, and their perspectives on how to provide better service. As mentioned earlier I also used planned prompts to elicit more specific information and to provide guidance to the interviews.

The interviews ranged from one to two hours in length. After each interview, I journaled my thoughts about how the interview went, took notes about interesting responses the participants made as well as noted where improvements could be made for the next interview. The tapes were transcribed, with the average document consisting of approximately twenty pages of text.

Each participant was given a pseudonym that was used during the interview and on all documents containing names to ensure confidentiality. These pseudonyms were dropped all together during the write up of the findings of the research. This extra measure was necessary due to concerns from several participants that their jobs might be in jeopardy if their responses were known to their employers. In addition, I took special care in choosing quotes for the findings section of this study that do not reveal the identities of any participants.

4.8 Data Analysis

In addition, to the journaling I did after each interview and the impressions that I recorded, I read each transcript several times and made notes regarding the themes, patterns and insights that were beginning to emerge. Next, once I felt thoroughly familiar with each participant's experiences and perceptions I began to pick out *relevant text* i.e. information from the text that bears relevance to my research concerns and as such requires further analysis. During the next stage, I worked from the subjective experience of the research participants and organized the *relevant text* into *repeating ideas*. According to Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) *repeating ideas* are those similar words or phrases that research participants use to express the same idea; these ideas shed light on the research concerns. Once the *repeating ideas* were delineated this data was then organized into more general themes. In the fourth stage of analysis I worked at a more abstract level in order to group the themes into categories. The aforementioned method of analyzing qualitative data is based on the concept of grounded theory analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Silverman (2000) states, "At different times in our lives we can be both the subjects and the objects of the work in which we are involved" (p. 469). I found this statement to be true with regards to conducting this study. Throughout the research I found my personal experiences of being a Caribbean-Canadian woman to be useful in terms of understanding and connecting with the participants, and developing the interview guide. On the other hand, due to my personal experiences my countertransference could potentially influence the reporting of findings. As a result, as I began to analyze the data I knew it was very important that I keep my personal experiences and views separate, in order to present the true voices of the participants. I therefore read all the transcripts several times so that I could get a very clear idea of what the participants had said. In addition, I journalled all my personal reactions and

opinions; this activity was helpful in getting these ideas out of my mind so that they did not infringe on the data analysis. These activities protected against my views tainting the data analysis process.

4.9 Transferability

Drisko (1997) discusses the importance of assessing the transferability of qualitative research. He further notes that this assessment plays an integral part in providing guidance to research consumers about the appropriate application of the findings. Some limitations with regards to transferability can be found in this study.

Although, many of the participants had similar views of the issues that Caribbean-Canadian women face, because of a small sample size a minority of voices and perspective were heard and recorded. If a larger sample size had been used more variation of response may have been found. Additionally, the information about the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women came from service providers, not the women themselves. The voices of Caribbean-Canadian women were transmitted through the participant's testimonials. As a result, there is a possibility that certain aspects of a Caribbean-Canadian woman's experiences in a shelter were either over or under emphasized. Nevertheless, the extensive quotes provided, my careful journaling throughout the study, and prolonged engagement with the topic enhances the transferability of the findings.

4.10 Strengths of the Study

As highlighted in the literature review, the body of knowledge about Caribbean-Canadian abused women is very limited. This research has aided in the development of information about this topic, in the hope of stimulating further research interest in this area. In addition, this research has provided a clear look at the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused as identified by people who work closely with these women. With this

knowledge in hand, new and improved services and programs can be designed that will more accurately reflect the needs of Caribbean-Canadian abused women. The outcomes of this research will help shelter staff to do their jobs even better by taking into account the unique perceptions, experiences and values of Caribbean-Canadian women, as well as, the best practices of other shelter staff.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

Throughout the following sections I will present the findings of this study. Through the use of quotes, I will give voice to the participants' testimonials². Several themes were discovered with regards to these testimonials and they will be presented. I have also grouped these themes to seven categories. These categories illustrate the main ideas found in each grouping of themes; they are as follows:

- Expectations of the Feminist Ideology versus its Reality for Caribbean-Canadian Women
- Inadequate Services for Caribbean-Canadian Women
- Feelings/Reactions/Survival Tactics for Caribbean-Canadian Women Living in a Feminist Shelter
- Problems Integrating Culture with Services
- Experiences of Racism and Discrimination
- The Lived Reality of Abused Caribbean-Canadian Woman
- Directions for Enhanced Services for Caribbean-Canadian Women

5.2 Description of Research Participants

The six women who participated in the study ranged in age from twenty-five to fifty-nine. The participants came from three separate communities, two small cities in Southwestern Ontario and one city in the Greater Toronto Area. All of the participants had worked with abused women for at least one year with the average years of service at three years. At the time of the interview two participants stated that they had worked with over ten abused

² The term testimonial is derived from the Black feminist paradigm that guides this study. Black feminists emphasize the value of this way of collecting evidence in terms of healing and authenticity of response when working with Black women (West, 2002c; Taylor 2002)

Caribbean-Canadian women, three participants had worked with six to eight women, while one participant had worked with only one Caribbean-Canadian woman. All of the participants had some sort of formal social work or social service education. Two of the participants had social service worker diplomas, three held a Master of Social Work degree, and one participant had a Bachelor degree in sociology as well as a social service worker diploma. Four of the participants reported that they are women of Caribbean descent and the other two participants stated that they were Caucasian. Both Caucasian participants noted that they considered themselves to be feminist while the Caribbean-Canadian participants had difficulty answering this question. One Caribbean-Canadian participant described herself as a womanist as she felt this term better describes her beliefs as a black feminist, while one other participants stated that she was unsure. After some thought two participants agreed that they are feminist; however, they subscribe to feminism only in its pure and original form which seeks to establish equality for all people. They noted this type of feminism is in contrast to the one that they see in their day to day work, which they feel no longer has this as a central goal.

Table 1: Description of Participants

Questions	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	MEAN
Age	59	28	38	50	51	25	41.8
Years worked with abused women	4	1	5	3	6	1	3.3
Number of Caribbean women worked with	12	10	8	6	50	1	14.5
Education	SSW	MSW	SSW	MSW	SSW + BA	MSW	N/A
Caribbean Descent	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	N/A
Feminist	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Unsure	N/A

***Note: MSW= Master of Social Work degree; SSW= Social Service Worker diploma; BA= Bachelor of Arts degree

5.3 Expectations of the Feminist Ideology versus the Reality for Caribbean-Canadian Women

As is often the case with many social movements there is an observable disconnect with regards to the original intentions and goals of the ideology and how it manifests itself in practice. In this study this notion was especially true with regards to the application of feminism with Caribbean-Canadian women. The participants in the study presented a fairly unified view of feminism as encompassing all people, with equality as its central aim. They also stated that when feminism is put into practice with Caribbean-Canadian women equality is not achieved nor sought in an effective way. The following themes and quotes exemplify how this problem plays out in the shelter.

The Expectations of Feminism

Many of the participants spoke in a very monolithic way of their understanding of the main tenet of feminism as focusing on equality:

For me feminist means having equal opportunities in every aspect of life

Feminist to me means that there is an equality of all people. Treat others as they would like to be treated. Respect the differences between people

These statements exemplify the expectations of how feminist practice should proceed with all women. It is from this basic precept of “equality” that all feminist intervention should be built and adapted. This basic right to equal treatment is often not available to women of Caribbean decent accessing the shelter system.

A Caribbean-Canadian Woman's Reaction to Feminism

Participants stated that Caribbean-Canadian women with whom they work do not experience equality. In fact, Caribbean-Canadian women expect that their encounters with the shelter will be negative. To them the term feminism does not denote equality and fairness. Instead the word feminism creates feelings of fear, misunderstanding and apprehension:

I think there is not much regard for feminism in Caribbean-Canadian culture at all in a sense that I don't think they know exactly what it is and what it means and it seems like the dominant cultures way of putting a label on something that may not be applicable to them. So there is not much understanding there and because of the lack of understanding of what it is and what it means and what it stands for and is grounded on there is not much attention paid to it

I think there are a lot of people that would say 'yeah feminism is a white thing'. If you go back home to Jamaica and you say there is this great agency and they have this feminist approach and they are looking at you like 'what do you mean feminist approach? What does that have to do with anything?' So a lot of times you just have explain what it is but when you explain it there is that notion like that is a white man thing. Cause a lot of the theories and a lot of the approaches out there are not developed from the West Indian cultures so people in the community will think it is something the white man is teaching and now you are bringing it over here and everything was working fine from before so why do we need that and that's were a lot of the misrepresentations come from without the education. And they may think that feminism means women should rule and dog all men and women have to rise up. But because there is no education on this topic ignorance grows and stereotypes flourish

Caribbean-Canadian women enter the shelter with a very different understanding of what feminism is, and what little information they have is generally negative. Due to this lack of understanding feelings of apprehension and fear grow. As a result, Caribbean-Canadian women do not feel that a feminist space is a safe space for them. One participant talked about the connection between a misunderstanding of feminism and small numbers of Caribbean-Canadian women going to the shelters:

There is a big piece that is missing as to why Caribbean-Canadian women don't come to shelters. Why is she not coming to the shelter? Does she feel that she is not a part of the group? Does she understand the concepts you are using i.e. feminism? Maybe that alone, just hearing feminism in the introduction of the group saying 'oh we take a feminist approach' or we use certain words or terms that this person is not used to from their life experience and education and now you come with these words that they don't understand. Yes, if they hear feminism up front they may make the quick decision that this group, shelter, program is not for me

Another participant described her frustration with how feminist theory is practiced with Caribbean- Canadian women in the shelter system:

My biggest frustration is what they preach, they don't do it. I don't think they understand the meaning of feminist

Trying to make an ideology work in real life for a diversity of people can be very difficult. How does one ensure that the ideas espoused in the original theory stay pure as they are translated into practice? There is not an easy answer for this; however as the participants' testimonials relayed, there seems to be a significant divide between the basis of feminist thought and the understanding of feminism that Caribbean-Canadian women have and the treatment they receive.

Education, Empowerment and Resource Finding

On the other hand, many of the participants talked about three ways that they felt feminism has positively impacted the Caribbean-Canadian women they support. These are examples of when feminist ideology is inline with the reality of feminist intervention. The first is related to education about abuse and how it is manifested in most feminist interventions. This helped Caribbean-Canadian women to see how their lives have been negatively affected by many forms of abuse:

Feminism helps to dispel the notions out there that abuse just happens and there is nothing much you can do about it. Or I as a woman did something and I failed within the marriage or relationship so I deserved it. Or I hit him first so what else can I expect, he is going to hit me back. Or I raised my hand or voice at him so what can I expect that's my punishment like when you spank a child

I tell people like this, when I came here from Jamaica I never know the word abuse, many Caribbean-Canadian women don't. But I was able to relate it to things I knew and experienced in my life. I remember this one woman when I was growing up that had her head bashed in with a rock by her husband and she died. Now I can associate the term domestic abuse with what I saw before

Many Caribbean-Canadian women arrive at the shelter having experienced abuse in many areas of their lives, communities, and extended families. However, few of these women labeled the violence they have witnessed. The education component found in

feminist intervention provides Caribbean-Canadian women with the term “abuse”. This is very powerful because once the women acquire the proper language they can begin to share their experiences and make connections in terms of other types of violence they have endured and witnessed. In addition, the participants spoke of the empowering effect that education has on abused Caribbean-Canadian. The participants noted that:

The benefits (of feminism) are it serves as a very empowering tool for women in addressing their needs through the educational aspect of telling the woman she still has control and power and there is a systematic reason for certain things happening. There are reasons why some of these young men may turn to violence in dealing with certain things in the home. Also, it is useful in letting people know it is not your fault. A lot of times the blame goes on the West Indian woman and the responsibility to fix it, this is wrong. In feminist pedagogy we talk a lot about power and control. Often Caribbean- Canadian women know very little about these important issues and this knowledge aids in their healing

For a lot of Caribbean-Canadian women the man is the main caregiver so even by educating the women by saying ‘hey listen you were in this relationship and you are the one doing all the work he is there but you are taking care of the kids, cooking, cleaning etc.’ so it can be very empowering to the women by pointing out these things. So you ask ‘what is he really doing, all he is doing is abusing you and putting you down’ it is good for them to hear these things. Feminism gives me the tools to really empower women

Finally, many participants spoke of resource finding and rights advising as primary feminist interventions with abused women that they found to be useful:

One great benefit of a feminist context is with helping women to look at their resources, we do a resource checklist with every woman; and find those services which are appropriate for each individual woman

We inform women about their rights we do one on one support for the women and we tell them about all the resources in the community that they may need. We provide as many resources as we can

Yes, our program informs the women about their rights and resources in the community, but there aren’t many for Caribbean-Canadian women

All of the aforementioned areas of feminist practice with abused women do not function independently. The idea of informing women about their rights, roles where they have

demonstrated their power, and the resources they have available all involve giving knowledge or providing education. As presented by the participants, education affords women the knowledge to take control and change the negative realities they are facing.

As is the case with all interventions, there are positive and negatives with regards to their use with different cultures. When using feminist interventions with Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused some benefits can be seen and the basic theory at the root of feminism sometimes comes through in the services that Caribbean-Canadian women receive. However, there are areas where this sense of equality of services does not come through.

5.4 Inadequate Services for Caribbean-Canadian Women

There are many feminist organizations across Canada that provide vital services to abused women from diverse backgrounds. All of these organizations try to provide the best service that they possibly can to these women. This study found that there are a number of areas where the special needs of Caribbean-Canadian women are being ignored or inadequately serviced. A main part of the problem has to do with a general lack of understanding of Caribbean culture, attitude and, belief systems and even less knowledge about how to access this information. The following section looks at the many areas that have been overlooked with regards to services for Caribbean-Canadian abused women.

Ineffective programming

Many of the participants noted that the programming provided in the shelters where they have worked held little or no relevance for the Caribbean-Canadian women that they support. In most cases Caribbean women must adapt the programming with the hope of transforming the information provided into something that is more salient for their experiences. This can be a huge undertaking for women who are trying to deal with being abused, and often this is too

much to ask. As a result, Caribbean-Canadian women often withdraw and take little from the programs provided:

No programs offered seem to be useful to the Caribbean-Canadian women; because they are not talking what they want to hear and generally it is the majority that rules. Because the black or the immigrant women are in the minority if they want a topic they wouldn't get it. It is the white women who are in the majority so their topic would be discussed

Often Caribbean-Canadian women need to change the program to make it adaptable to their life and situation

I don't think the programs I have seen meet the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women. There was no acknowledgement that people from a different culture would have a different perspective or the approach taken should be altered because there are cultural contexts that need to be considered. That was not thought of at all when the program was put together

Obviously there are Caribbean-Canadian women who access the shelter but they have special concerns in terms of their family and extended family. You know what does it mean that they are at a shelter? What does it mean that they have left their husband or they kicked their husband out of the house? Or they called the cops on their husband, what does that mean? It is great that they have a place to live and food to eat and safety, but what is the rest going to mean in the future and in the long run? Is that even acknowledged? These are the issues that the programs, in my experience, don't prepare Caribbean-Canadian women for

For myself there were some things in the group in terms of the literature and the material provided that I felt would not be applicable in a general sense to people who come from a West Indian background. But because the majority of the people in the group were not West Indian this was not applicable. Sometimes the Caribbean woman I worked with would say to the group 'in my family we do this or the way I see it is different'. But not all Caribbean women would be comfortable speaking up about that

When Caribbean-Canadian women access a shelter for help to deal with an abusive relationship they are provided with programming that does not meet their needs, yet they are expected to benefit from this programming and to heal. Some Caribbean-Canadian women are used to adapting to the environment and can do the same with the programming provided.

These women can benefit in some way, while others are unable to do this and fall through the cracks.

Few Support Services for Caribbean-Canadian Women

In many of the areas where the participants work there are very few, if any services to support the special needs of Caribbean-Canadian women. Many of the participants spoke of this problem:

There are no services specifically for Caribbean-Canadian women but there are resources like the Multicultural centre

For everybody but not for the Caribbean woman. When I say for everyone for example for the Caribbean women in Guelph there is nothing. But if it was K-W there are a lot of programs here but in Guelph it is limited so the only place they could go is maybe the Multicultural organization

Other participants spoke of the need for more support groups that would be geared towards Caribbean-Canadian women where they could be afforded a forum to speak about the issues and concerns that they find to be salient:

More support groups are needed and more intervention programs

Developing a chat group would be good, because some times they want to talk and they want to tell you that their grandmother was abused. It is a cycle and their mother was abused but some of them will say they want to stop it, they know it is wrong, how can I stop it

Support workers do not work in a vacuum; they rely on a network of resources in order to provide the best service to the people they support. When working with Caribbean-Canadian women this can be very difficult because this network is not present. As a result, the Caribbean-Canadian women that they support are not able to access the same level of service that other women can.

Problems Accessing Cultural Foods

For many Caribbean-Canadian women who come to Canada the cooking and eating of their cultural foods are very important, since this may be the only connection they have to their homeland and to their former way of life. In addition, food (as is the case with many cultures) is at the cornerstone of Caribbean culture; it is used as a way to celebrate, to give thanks and, to heal. During this study the participants noted that although most shelters ask women what their cultural foods are, depending on where the shelter is and the shelter staffs knowledge of how to obtain these foods the women may or may not have access to them. The participants noted:

The cultural food in Guelph; there is no Caribbean restaurant, or Caribbean food market. If it is a Caribbean woman from Toronto, they don't know that they sell Caribbean foods in Kitchener. So some of the time it is asked on the intake questionnaire, but they do not get the food

I am the one that will buy plantains and take it to the shelter. A Caribbean woman comes into the shelter and does not get a piece of yam to cook, or salt fish like they would do at there home. If you have heard differently, I have never seen that there. Other immigrant women who have their products sold in the stores, yes they will get their food, but the Caribbean woman would not get it

The reality is, at most shelters there are not many staff that would have awareness of how and where to access the foods that Caribbean-Canadian women request as many of these products are not sold in mainstream grocery stores. So, often these women are not able to access the foods that would make their stay at the shelter more comfortable.

Differential Treatment and Reactions

As noted by many of the participants in the study, Caribbean-Canadian women staying in feminist run shelters for abused women are often the victim of differential treatment based on their race and culture. Many of these incidents can also be attributed to a lack of cultural understanding and racism. The inequities that these women experience contribute significantly to the notion that Caribbean-Canadian women are being inadequately serviced. Many of the

participants voiced concerns and examples of when differential treatment is happening, they stated:

I don't think equality, even for the workers, is being practiced in my feminist organization. I don't know what they think equality means, if they have a different definition for it, but my understanding of equality is justice for all. Every woman must be treated with dignity and respect, but it is not so, even for workers. I am black, I have problems there. Even the other day I had to talk about it, I think that is racist

Yes, and there are many examples of a double standard when it comes to the rules. For example at the shelter we had a problem with people smoking marijuana. There was a woman of colour involved and two white women, they were treated completely different. They called police on the woman of colour and the white women were barely reprimanded

...sometime if it is a white staff dealing with it, that white resident will get off the hook. The black resident would be the one that would be nailed. Nailed in the sense that they will be told we don't practice racism here and the white one get away

Equality doesn't present itself to all women. Sometimes the white women are being favoured by staff and the black women would be in a similar situation and the white women would get more justice. The black women would not get the same level of treatment as the white women

As I said, how racism is handled is the white woman gets the justice and the black woman or the immigrant woman doesn't feel good. It is a win-lose situation

Yes. It is the different treatment that the Caribbean-Canadian women get why they don't stay'

Many of the aforementioned examples deal with the unequal enforcement of shelter rules and codes of conduct. The participants stated that the Caribbean-Canadian women are often treated in a more punitive way and are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to be asked to leave the shelter or to be closely monitored if they return. This atmosphere of inequity isolates Caribbean-Canadian women and contributes to them leaving the shelter early:

If we deem your behaviour to be deviant then at the end of your stay you are ranked. If you have a yellow dot that means when you leave you can come back but under certain restrictions. If you get a red dot that means that your

behaviour was so atrocious that we will not accept you here and you will be referred to another place. The black woman that have been in the shelter are often red dotted when they leave and as far as I am concerned they have no reason to be

Narrow Understanding of Culture

A person's culture is comprised of a number of very complex ideas, issues, attitudes, and feelings. All of these notions intertwine with that person's history and the history of their people. For many of the Caribbean-Canadian women that access feminist shelters, culture is an important area to consider when designing service for these women. All of the participants involved in this study spoke of their shelter's attempts to include the Caribbean-Canadian women's culture so that they may feel more comfortable in the setting. However, the only way that this was thought to be achieved is through the acquisition of cultural foods. At the feminist shelter it appears that culture equals food; No other attempts to understand or incorporate Caribbean culture into their interventions beyond this was reported. As one participant stated:

They may ask what food they will be eating and may ask if they have any religious celebration coming up. For the religious celebrations Afro-Caribbean women may have Bob Marley day, for example. I haven't seen a copy of Bob Marley tapes or nothing, not even Dr. Martin Luther-King. They should have a tape showing what Dr. Martin Luther-King went through and what he is all about. He is the one who makes us who we are, because he had a dream. That tape is not shown there, Bob Marley music is not played there, culture is not just food

This narrow view of the culture of Caribbean women does not contribute to adequate service provision.

Silencing of Caribbean-Canadian Women

Many of the participants talked about how unsafe it is for Caribbean-Canadian women to voice their concerns about issues that affect them in the shelter:

The shelter does not provide a safe space for Caribbean-Canadian women to voice their concerns

...the residents who use the shelter who are Canadians do not treat the Caribbean women with respect. When Caribbean women speak up they are shut down. In this sense no justice is given to the Caribbean women if they speak up about the white women

No Caribbean-Canadian women are safe to speak their minds, they don't feel safe because they feel if they voice their opinion they will be asked to leave

...issues go unaddressed and if a Caribbean-Canadian abused woman brought up the issue I feel that would be met with hostility or their request would be noted but nothing would happen. Sometimes the input of the women are not being valued and within the feminist approach that is a problem and their suggestions should be implemented

As highlighted by the participants, Caribbean-Canadian women are not afforded a safe space to voice their concerns. Even those who are brave enough to present ways to create change do not usually witness their ideas come to fruition. As a result, Caribbean-Canadian women do not have a strong voice in the shelters. If an attempt is going to be made to create more adequate services for Caribbean-Canadian women there will need to be a change in the silencing that takes place in shelters. Caribbean women have important input on how we can better adapt services towards their needs. This input will never be heard if Caribbean-Canadian women continue to be silenced.

Barriers to Using Feminism with Caribbean-Canadian Women

As mentioned earlier there are some benefits to using feminist intervention with Caribbean-Canadian women. However the participants in the study also identified several barriers. The barriers noted were very diverse but all of the examples presented provide insight into how the feminist ideology itself may be contributing to the provision of inadequate services for Caribbean- Canadian women. The participants noted:

Some of the barriers include...Because of the acknowledgement of differences, different needs for different people, it is difficult to do good work. You can see the gaps there and but it is so challenging to meet the unique needs of everyone, it is so big and so diverse, so complex that's the challenge

The view on feminism in the West Indian lens is quite different then what we are taught about the feminist approach. Specifically about the roles of women in West Indian culture and society I think are different than feminist teaching. I think the roles don't get as emphasized as much in the cultural context of it

When feminist organizations attempt to combat racism they often end up minoritizing Caribbean- Canadian women. This is because through the process of "outing" racism and racist practices, Caribbean women must be labeled as different. The labeling of Caribbean women in this way can often be more damaging to their self image then the racist comments themselves. One participant put it best when she said:

One of the frustrations that I heard a Caribbean woman say was we don't have racism there I just heard about it over here and so if we have a strong lens of racism and we are so sensitive to that issue the woman becomes marginalized. It is challenging for me to process racism with her because she doesn't see it. It was very uncomfortable at one point when there was a conversation happening and I was trying to explain racism to someone and this woman was of colour. She was saying well there is no racism there I don't really see the racism here, luckily I have a woman of colour co-worker with me and she stepped in and finished the conversation because I did not know what to say

The situation outlined by this participant highlighted another problematic area of intervention with Caribbean-Canadian women. There are concerns with the differences in terms of perception between how a white and a Black woman conceptualize racism. Often white staff are the people accountable for explaining racism, how effective can they be in this endeavor? This responsibility can be very uncomfortable for white staff because they do not feel they have enough professional expertise or personal experience to deal with these concerns.

Another major barrier to providing adequate service to Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused lies with the feminist view of religion which differs greatly from the Caribbean-Canadian view. As presented by the participants, religion is viewed in a feminist context as something that is very personal it is not encouraged or

discouraged. The emphasis is placed on neutrality as a way to create a sense of equality among all religions. One participant noted:

If the women bring the religion with them and choose to practice it in the shelter it is not discouraged. But I think there is a struggle between...because if we provide resources for one type of religion we feel we need to provide the services for all religions and then the book shelf gets really big and we get into special rooms for special rituals so it is kind of a bigger project and it is almost impossible to provide support for every religion so I feel like the shelter has gone the other way and said that they will not have any religious stuff. If we can't do it equally we will do it not at all

However, as discussed during the literature review religion is often a major part of a Caribbean- Canadian woman's life and is an unexplored mode for healing. Many participants spoke of their frustration with their inability to help the Caribbean-Canadian women they support to use religion to heal, they reported:

No, I don't think they go far enough regarding religious rituals and their healing power. You don't get the support for your religion. So we respect their right and their need to pray but there is not enough encouragement put upon that, I think that it is a dimension that would help Caribbean-Canadian women. So we have a very diverse group coming in the shelter with very diverse beliefs and even though we are respecting their rights not enough support is given

For me many of the frustrations of working with Caribbean-Canadian women in a feminist context are with religion. For me I know I can't speak about religion even though the women may be saying that this is important to them. I am hired to work under a feminist mandate and it is difficult because I might want to say, 'why you don't go to this church or speak to this person? but I can't', because it might seem that I am pushing my religious beliefs on the women

Yes. I think that anybody who is born in the Caribbean sees religion as a form of healing. Prayer and talking to people who can give you positive religious feedback. However, in the shelter you cannot talk about God

And I still think too if a group of women whether black, white or whatever knows about spirituality, praying and singing, if one Sunday morning they get up and decide to do some worship out in the common area, as long as maybe it doesn't offend anybody else and sometime again that person may not want to partake there but when they hear them singing and praying they may participate. But that is a no, no there (at the shelter) if they want to pray they

have to go to the spiritual room which I don't think they should be restricted but they are

This section presented many areas where improvement can be made to change services so that they will encompass the culture, reality and concerns of Caribbean-Canadian women. A marked effort will need to be made in order to collect further information to determine exactly how to amend services and create more flexibility so that they will be adaptable enough to account for the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women.

5.5 Feelings/Reactions/Survival Tactics of Caribbean-Canadian Women Living in a Feminist Shelter

Shelters for abused women where the residents and staff are mainly white can be a very lonely place for a Caribbean-Canadian woman. As a result, they must often develop their own skills for surviving what they perceive to be a hostile environment. By virtue of this notion of one needing to “survive” in a hostile environment many feelings and reactions native to Caribbean-Canadian women can be seen. During this section I will explore the many ways that Caribbean-Canadian women adapt in order to get the services that they need and the unique feelings and reactions that they encounter in relation to their shelter experience.

A Caribbean-Canadian Woman's Survival Guide

The participants presented numerous examples of times in which they encountered Caribbean-Canadian women in the shelters in which they work. Having seen many of these women struggle in the shelter they always advised them in the same way:

When I encounter a black woman in the shelter I tell her while you are in here mind your own business do what you have to do and get out cause I know what will happen

It is a very tough situation, that's why when I see these women I tell them to keep the information to themselves. Sometimes it is good to share but don't share too much. And just do what you have to do that way I won't have to defend anything you're doing or saying. It's really a tough line to walk, but I

just really need to be upfront. If I don't bad things can happen like what they did with one black woman they used her against me

Another participant reported that in her experience with Caribbean-Canadian women they often come into the shelter with a clear understanding that it is best to remain silent and to do what is asked of them. She noted:

My experience with Caribbean-Canadian women is that they feel if you go along with the rules that is the best way, you do your time and get out that is the best way not to cause any waves

For many Caribbean-Canadian abused women they learn early that the best way to access the services they need is to never complain and to keep quiet. As a result, injustice continues and feelings go unspoken.

Feelings of Loneliness and Isolation

Any woman that experiences abuse in their lives goes through a number of complex and sometimes frightening emotions; this is also true with abused Caribbean-Canadian women. However, they also experience feelings of isolation and loneliness while staying in a shelter which adds to an already extremely difficult healing journey. There is a feeling of not fitting in with other residents which results in feeling unwelcome; this was one of the major issues that Caribbean- Canadian women face that the participants discussed. They noted:

I think some of the special issues Caribbean women encounter in the shelter is a feeling of being alone. When they go to the shelter there is a different routine and a different way of doing things there and it may not go with what they are used to from their culture, upbringing and background

Sometimes the Caribbean women feel that they are isolated. One woman said that there is a pecking order in the shelter and she felt that she was at the bottom

Arriving at the shelter definitely is different for them because they are in a space where it is mostly white women

You have the commonality that you are all women but you can still feel lonely because you are the only black woman in the room or the only of West Indian background

Even though we have pictures that reflect diversity and we will accommodate for them in terms of food or whatever they want. Still the shelter is not comfortable for Caribbean-Canadian women. There are a few frustrations coming from Caribbean-Canadian women, often I hear from the women that the staff are great the agency is great the facility is great but they feel that they don't fit in that's really it. Staff are often running from one person to the other so it is difficult for them to make any connection with any resident let alone a Caribbean-Canadian woman who requires extra attention as that connection may not be made easily based on cultural differences

Although many women staying at a shelter may experience feelings of isolation or loneliness, these feelings are felt more intensely for the abused Caribbean-Canadian woman as she has the feeling that she is being unfairly excluded from something due to her colour and/or culture. Additionally, their feelings of isolation and loneliness are compounded by a loss of community caused by breaking cultural mores and leaving their partner to enter a shelter.

Standing Up For Your Rights

Not all Caribbean-Canadian women who access the shelter system allow themselves to be silenced. The participants also talked about a growing group of Caribbean women who have decided to stand up for their rights and to face the consequences. They stated:

Some women feel that they shouldn't have to conform and they may become defensive and the other people at the shelter may read into that in the wrong way and then you could be having a conflict. This is not often seen as a cultural thing or as the woman standing up for her right, but just that the Caribbean woman is trying to be difficult. No attention is given to what is behind that difficulty or why the woman is reacting the way they are

And especially Jamaicans and often they get into conflict with the staff because they stand up for their rights. And they come up against a lot of discrimination and people react to them differently

If you have a real problem with feminism or the way things are done here and you are a Caribbean-Canadian woman and you stand up for your right you will probably be reprimanded It is best to go along with what is taught here

When Caribbean-Canadian women try to show their disapproval with the status quo at the shelter their concerns are explained away as an example of a Caribbean woman's characteristic aggressiveness and the women are reprimanded.

Self Empowered Caribbean-Canadian Women

Many of the participants talked about the need for Caribbean-Canadian women to feel useful while staying at the shelter. They need a sense that they are contributing something and not just taking. This comes from their general unfamiliarity with the notion of social support agencies as they are less commonly used in the Caribbean. It seems odd to the women that they would take and not give. Although some feminist shelters provide a space for residents to participate in the general up keep of the shelter, the participants noted that there has been a move away from this practice. The rationale for this change is that the women have too much stress to handle so they should not have to worry about cleaning. The participants pointed out just how important it is to provide a space for Caribbean- Canadian women to contribute:

What are the things that the women know how to do? Can they contribute to basic activities in the shelter so they can feel useful? I think that's another thing for women across the board especially black women. There is a place in the home and there is a strong role that women play within the home and making it a happy home and a comfortable home for their husband or family members. And going to a shelter, you are the person accessing the services we provide the services and you don't have to do anything sit back and we will tell you what to do. Some times this can be disempowering

They are more grateful for the service we provide and those are the women too that even tend to do other women's chores or keep busy by keeping the place clean. They feel weird about getting these services for free so they want to give back

They feel grateful and they want to give back. Like sometimes it's that role that black people play, that slave like mentality

This section presented some of the unique feelings, needs, and reactions that Caribbean-Canadian women have with regards to staying at an abused women's shelter, as well as the

strategies that they use to navigate the system. These women have proven just how resilient they are in the face of adversity.

5.6 Difficulty Integrating Culture and Services

A person's culture is the basis for who they are. It informs a person's ideas, decisions, attitudes and ability to understand. When working with people who are experiencing the kinds of physical and emotional pain that abused women do, it is very important that the support worker develop a clear idea of who that person is. This must include understanding their culture; understanding the culture will help the worker best assess what to expect from the client, what will work for that person and what won't. In addition, it is from this vantage point of really understanding an individual that the support worker can determine what will harm the client and hinder healing. Understanding how culture impacts the individual is only the first step; the final goal should be culturally relevant service provision. This section will explore some of the pitfalls that organizations encounter when trying to move from understanding to integration.

Lack of Cultural Understanding

As mentioned earlier the first step in developing culturally relevant services is with cultural understanding and becoming culturally literate. For many of the participants interviewed they felt that shelter organizations have a long way to go in order to develop this. They stated:

They don't seem to understand that every black woman from each of the Caribbean islands is different. Jamaicans are a little bit more aggressive in their behaviour and that is normal for them they will always stand up for their rights. If you understand that you will know what to expect, don't antagonize them and respond to the things they say even though you find them wrong. But they don't try to understand. They don't throw them out unless they do something bad. But some of them have been asked to go to other shelters

We (Caribbean people) too, are people with differences and they need to have a common understanding of us and our culture

Talking to the staff, it was hard to make them understand why women might be acting in a certain way and who was getting the blame for certain behaviour. Why are we not doing more to advocate for these women? We know that there are more barriers in the system and that they face racism

I think that staff are generally incompetent with regards to Caribbean women and diversity issues

There is still a need to understand relationships between mother and kids and the different ways of connecting there. Sometimes there are issues, people think because you are in Canada they should be based on the way we do things. But being a diverse culture, they have different ways of dealing with children

For many of the participants the general lack of cultural understanding with regards to Caribbean- Canadian women served as a source of frustration and led to difficulty when supporting Caribbean women. Another participant stated that she felt the problem lies with the use of feminism itself. She stated:

The main barrier to cultural understanding is feminism; it does not take into account culture at all. All of the feminist approaches, I think, sometimes do not apply to people of West Indian background at all. I think there needs to be another whole branch off of feminist theory and approach in the West Indian culture and make it specific to that

The lack of cultural understanding that the participants spoke of points to weaknesses in an area where most organizations feel that they are strong; it may be time for many organizations to re-evaluate where they are at in terms of this and how that may be hindering attempts to make their services culturally relevant.

The Aggressive and Difficult Black Woman

Many participants talked about the false characterization of Caribbean-Canadian women as aggressive and troublesome. This label negatively impacts a woman's self image, the services they receive and the way that they are treated by others. The participants noted:

For example, if there are issues in the house the Caribbean women might be isolated and everybody might think the problem is with her, so if that woman

doesn't want to take it anymore and gets upset she is now labeled as difficult or aggressive

Caribbean-Canadian women are all branded as being aggressive and difficult

This knowledge of how Caribbean-Canadian women can be stereotyped is particularly useful when trying to develop culturally relevant services as it highlights one area where education needs to be directed. In addition, this labeling whether conscious or unconscious ensures that Caribbean- Canadian women will not receive the same level of service that other women enjoy.

5.7 Experiences of Racism and Discrimination

As is the case with many people of colour living in Canadian society, Caribbean-Canadian women encounter racism and discrimination in a number of different areas in their lives. These incidents of racism make it very difficult for these women to access services such as finding employment or securing housing. For the Caribbean-Canadian women that enter into shelters for abused women, racism and discrimination are constant concerns and sources of conflict. Caribbean women soon realize that they are very different from those around them and it is this difference that will affect the support they receive. In this section I will present the areas in which Caribbean-Canadian women experience racism and discrimination and discuss how this impacts their ability to access equalized service.

Responsibility to Report and Combat Racism

In addition to the other problems with discrimination that Caribbean-Canadian women experience, they are often called upon to report and combat racism. The participants reported:

I know for a fact that the onus is on that client to talk with the staff about racism and some women choose to say nothing

We ask the woman who is complaining what she would want to see happen with the complaint. Does she want to talk to the person? Does she feel comfortable addressing it? Does she want us to have mediation? Does she want us to address it? It is her choice because she needs to feel safe. Half of

the time the women will say 'no, don't do anything because it is going to be worse for them and their kids'

But I have found that a lot of Caribbean women are not the one's who come and tell us about racism. Usually other residents tell us or staff hear it a lot of the times, not always. Most of the time they don't want to start any trouble

It can be very difficult for Caribbean-Canadian women to feel safe enough to report racism especially if that racism is coming from the staff at the shelter. Often these women are left feeling powerless and silenced. Additionally, the ever present threat of increased discrimination if they report their aggressor to staff inhibits the development of better ways to protect all women from this kind of discrimination.

Discrimination from other Residents

As described by the participants, one of the major areas that Caribbean-Canadian women face discrimination is from their fellow residents at the shelter. This can be the most damaging of all the discrimination that they experience because they must constantly contend with it, as they are essentially being discriminated against in their own home. The participants reported:

Definitely, racism whether direct or indirect happens. It could be a comment that was made to the Caribbean-Canadian woman and maybe they did not mean it as racist but it still is. Again we always try to address racism as it comes up. It is always really yucky

Caribbean women experience racism. This is something that happens a lot and on intake that is something we address

The Caribbean-Canadian women experience racism in the shelter from white residents

There is always conflict between the white and black residents

On a whole the white women are more prone to make the racist comments than the black residents or if the black ones do say something it's to contribute to what others have said

Other participants highlighted that the general lack of knowledge and respect for Caribbean culture and food is another area where Caribbean women experience discrimination in the shelter, they stated:

Some of the white women would talk about something in the Caribbean that would let the Caribbean woman say it didn't go like that and that's a conflict. For example the philosophy of Bob Marley and Rastafarians is that marijuana is a medicine and that is what they believe in, but it is a sub-culture of the Jamaican culture. So when the white residents would start a conversation with all Jamaicans smoke weed the Afro-Caribbean women may say not everybody does it only the Rastafarian's and then that's a dialogue and the black woman may be upset and curse them out

We have quite a few women that come in and cook for their culture and we get a mixed reaction. A lot of people especially staff are very curious. What is it? How do you make it what does it taste like? And they want to try it so there is a sense of curiosity. However, there are other people who are very strict with what they eat and are very resistant to difference so they might say that smells weird or ask questions like does it taste gross

Sometimes the Caribbean-Canadian women hear comments from the other residents like, oh your food smells bad, and that does not make one feel good about themselves

Other residents say, 'oh that smell stinks', but if a white resident were cooking bacon you would never hear that so I feel this is a form of discrimination. If you cook curry or something like that people might say, 'oh what are you cooking', and it is the same for kids too it does something to their self esteem

White residents often align with each other against the Caribbean-Canadian women making life increasingly uncomfortable. Several participants discussed this situation:

Sometimes I see examples of women aligning against each other regarding racism

But sometimes negative feelings can build between not just the two people involved in the conflict, but the friends of the two people and so it becomes a very big house dynamic that can change from a racist comment to looks on someone's face which is not as concrete as a racist comment

As described in the aforementioned sections Caribbean-Canadian women experience discrimination and racism from their fellow residents. As a result, not only do they experience

discrimination in the community (as many people of colour do) they must also return home to this. The most challenging part of combating this discrimination is that these women usually suffer in silence due to fear of retaliation. A safer environment for Caribbean-Canadian women needs to be fostered.

Experiences of Systemic Racism

Not only do Caribbean-Canadian women experience discrimination from other shelter residents they also encounter systemic racism from the shelter organization. It is important to note that only the Caribbean shelter staff interviewed commented about this form of racism and they described systemic racism as being a major problem for themselves and the abused Caribbean women with whom they work. The participants stated:

The organization is racist. Often I feel that I can't say anything because if I say anything against it its like I am going against all the rules. So the powers will be exercised on me

Women are being treated like guinea pigs at other agencies, in the sense that after discharge they find out all the horrible stuff that the women went through while staying at the agency and all the things that could have been done to provide a better service to Caribbean-Canadian women, but nothing is done

The participants also noted that even though all the organization at which they work have policies against racism in the shelter; when situations of racism present themselves they are often explained away, as a result these policies are not often used. The participants noted:

In one of the agencies I have worked, people would explain away the racism. So it would almost be that you would have to be the KKK before someone would admit that it was racism. They did not understand that with racism, violence is not always a part of it. It comes in different forms. So there is that ignorance level and denial level about what is really going on, they don't even acknowledge it or hear it to address it

Yes, there is always assumptions people always try to minimize the impact of racism that Caribbean women might experience. People may assume that Caribbean men are more violent and as a result there would be more abuse in a Caribbean family

The response to racism is playing it down. 'No, no, no it's not racist' so it's not racist its ignorance. But they cannot see the ignorance. What I notice is that this type of behaviour has been carried around since the beginning of time. Nobody has sit down and looked into and said 'you know we could have did this differently' and until someone stops and listens and looks or has a dialogue with Afro-Caribbean or diverse people they will never see that what they are doing is unjust, not equal

Do I challenge the shelter practices that I think are wrong? I do, and sometimes it's acknowledged that yes we do need work in that area but it will often become my responsibility. I question some practices and then it is explained away or it is explained that this is why we do this because of the anti-oppression mandate

The aforementioned problems can be traced to issues within the organization in terms of effectively defining what racism is and training staff to detect it and not to be afraid to combat it.

Another example of systemic racism that the participants described is a consistent lack of people of colour working at the shelter. Additionally, if you do see people of colour working at the shelter they will be a frontline worker and are almost never in a position to create change. They stated:

Our main staff in upper management is basically white

Yes, I am just the representative to say well yes we do have a mix on the staff I am the only one. Out of 8 fulltime staff I am the only minority and everyone in the administration is white

When there is a job opening where you can step up you are oppressed too. It happened to me they know who they want working there and they don't look like me

We have said things over and over to management, but nothing has been done. There is nothing we can do. I personally believe if we had diverse people working there than maybe things would be better. So those people that have carried on the ignorance from the beginning of time will always be ignorant and are still in the dark

All of the instances of systemic racism that the participants described are important to note and understand. These testimonials indicate that even in those organizations where there is an honest attempt being made to weed out racism in all forms, this kind of discrimination can

flourish. Indeed, the only way for organizations to truly be anti-oppressive and anti-racist is for them to make an open and honest assessment of the inherent belief system of management and of how factors such as white privilege, monolithic use of a theory, and racism hamper the provision of effective services to Caribbean-Canadian clients.

Racism in Canadian Society

As mentioned earlier, many people of colour in Canadian society experience racism and discrimination at their jobs, in social settings, and in a number of different situations and places. This reality is also true for Caribbean-Canadian women. For Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused this experience of racism hinders their ability and desire to obtain help to leave an abusive situation. The participants reported:

...if they report their partner, their partner is going to face racism out there. So sometimes they don't want to give their partner's name because they are aware of the racism in society and they believe their partner might be treated more harshly. So it is like you are betraying your race or your people. And that's the reason why a lot of them stay in the relationship and don't use the shelter

Some women I have spoke to of Caribbean descent are scared and nervous about the legal system and have spoken to me about back home in their country the police are completely corrupt. Then they come here and they do not know what rights and supports they have from the police. So they would be nervous about the legal system and how that affects them

Caribbean-Canadian women also encounter stereotypes that impact the way people react to them and the services they receive. These stereotypes are very damaging and can contribute to a feeling of isolation. One participant stated:

And another thing, I feel that a lot of times people see black women as being so strong and put together, she can overcome anything. Then you are being abused by your husband, as a black woman, and you come to the group or program and some people in the group have that idea. The group members look at the black woman and say 'wow, what happened to you? I thought black women are strong. How come you are not like my other friend? I know she's from the same background and she kicked her man to the curb.' What does that do for the victim who is a black woman? It's like, oh well, I guess I should

be strong and powerful and rule my house and my kingdom but I am not, so what's wrong with me?

As the participant stated it can be very hard for Caribbean-Canadian women to open up and be vulnerable and discuss the issues that they are facing as this stereotype places a large amount of pressure on them to always be strong. The main concerns with this stereotype is that it does not give Caribbean-Canadian women the freedom to ask for help. The discrimination that Caribbean-Canadian women endure hinders their healing process and depletes the number of options that these women have available to improve their lives.

5.8 The Lived Reality of Caribbean-Canadian Women Who Have Been Abused

In order to understand the special issues that Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused face, one must first understand what it is to be an abused Caribbean-Canadian woman. What are her concerns, the influences of her culture, her stresses, and her fears? This lived reality is very different from that of other Canadian women and even other women of colour. How do Caribbean-Canadian women navigate the Canadian system? And what does this system mean to them? These questions and others are answered when the lived reality of these women is explored. Throughout this section I will present the ideas of the participants', many of whom are Caribbean- Canadian women themselves. They discussed what it is that Caribbean women encounter and what informs these women when making decisions about the abuse they sustain.

Absence of Support and Extended Family

Due to the fact that many of the Caribbean-Canadian women the participants work with are often immigrants with little or no connection to any extended family in Canada, creating a cocoon of support for these women can be very difficult. Due to this lack of family support some Caribbean- Canadian women endure hardships. The participants stated:

It is not easy because you have not a soul to depend on, back home in your country you get somebody to do something for you. But they have nothing here, and that is why they know you have to work and they go out there and get the jobs

Often they will have different barriers, like needing support with transportation and childcare, because most Caribbean-Canadian women won't have the extended family they would need to access these things in Canada

This family connection that most Canadians take for granted is often not present for Caribbean-Canadian women. As a result, they must often struggle to get things accomplished. Added to this can be a general lack of knowledge with regards to the services available in the community.

The Concerns of Caribbean-Canadian Women

The decision to leave an abusive relationship and go to a shelter can be very difficult for any woman. But for a Caribbean-Canadian woman this decision can be even more stressful as they have unique concerns about what they will encounter when they arrive at the shelter. The participants stated:

When the Caribbean-Canadian women comes to the shelter they are concerned about how they will be treated and received by others present in the shelter

I think that Caribbean-Canadian women are concerned about experiencing racism in the shelter. That's something that every person of colour carries with them, so it is always there

Caribbean-Canadian women are concerned about shelter staff being racist towards them. Those everyday underlying notions that you experience as a black woman on a day to day basis don't just stop at the door of a wonderful agency that have in their motto and their goal is to accept everyone's culture. It doesn't stop there, people who work there may have biases, people who work there may be racist people themselves, or they may not be racist but the practices they have, or the way they do things or certain questions they have on the form may be racist. So you are constantly facing that in your day to day life

Many of the concerns that Caribbean-Canadian women have surround the expectation that they will encounter racism at the shelter. All the participants report that these women do not perceive abused women shelters as a safe space to heal or a place where they may be accepted.

Cultural Messages

Another area that makes up the lived reality of Caribbean women is the cultural norms and messages that they receive about how to live their lives. One of these cultural messages is that it is inappropriate for a person of Caribbean descent to discuss their family or personal business with others outside of the family. This is a very obvious barrier to accessing support from a feminist abused women shelter, as the programs are based on self report. The participants noted:

People from the Caribbean are not waiting and willing to open up and disclose. I think we don't know anything about opening up and letting anybody know our business. That is something that is very difficult for these women. It has a great deal to do with the way we were brought up

My culture (Caribbean) says there is something that you hold back, keep back. Working with my own people from the Caribbean, maybe they will open up to me better then the other white staff

The attitude in the Caribbean community is that when your family has a problem you fix it yourself. You don't need to hire someone as a therapist to help you out and bring them into your family, keep it in the family and work it out

In Caribbean culture it is not acceptable to talk your business to just anyone

People in our community (Jamaican) say 'well we deal with things in our family don't go out and talk about your problems.' You don't bring others into the family business, that's a big attitude. You deal with your stuff inside; you don't share your business. Sometimes women don't receive support from other family members and sometimes the family members don't know what to do, I feel that it come back to the shame factor. 'Don't bring shame on this family!' So if you go a share with your friends that you are being abused you are bringing shame on the family. You made your mistake you picked the wrong guy so fix it

Another participant's testimonial stated that in addition to this notion that Caribbean people are not to bring shame on their family by discussing family business, they are also in some cases singled out as the one that must fix the problem of their abuse. Other participants talked about similar potentially harmful cultural messages. Shame was one area that the participants noted as being a main determinant of why Caribbean-Canadian women don't access the shelter system, it is not acceptable in Caribbean culture to go to a shelter, they stated:

There is a notion that no black people go to shelters unless you are homeless. People of my colour and my gender don't go to a shelter; let me go to a friend's house instead

Some times the shelter is not the first option that goes through their minds, it is a last resort. A lot of the time they will try to find another route other then going to the shelter and it is that feeling of 'I will be the only one there'. Or it is that it is not acceptable at all and if people found out I went to a shelter they would gossip. All those things come back that we talked about earlier in terms of decision to leave where do I go, what do I do

Another participant noted she felt that Caribbean women often stay in the abusive relationship rather than going to a shelter based on the strong cultural messages they receive. These messages encourage Caribbean women to fix their relationships. In addition, she highlighted their willingness to "sacrifice" in order to achieve successful relationships:

I honestly think they stay in the relationship or they find different means to survive, women sacrifice their souls just to make sure that their partner is okay

These messages highlighted the increase in stress that a Caribbean-Canadian woman feels when contemplating leaving an abusive relationship. These women have more at stake then other women in terms of losing the respect and support of their family if they enter a shelter. There is a perception that they will be talking about their "business" with outsiders, taking the easy way out of their problems, and brining shame on the family.

Religion and Family

For Caribbean-Canadian women, religion and family are two very important areas of their lived realities. Many of the participants stated when considering a program of healing for Caribbean-Canadian women one needs to take into account the importance of religion and spirituality in their daily lives, they noted:

Religion, I would say, it has a big, big, big part to play in the healing process even just the survival of going through such a thing as domestic violence. I think it serves as a source of strength. Also there is support within the church whether it is the person reaching out to another church member or if the person just has that connection with God. They can use this on a daily basis just to get through the day and moment by moment. There are many West Indian women living in fear, the only reason they make it day by day even though they are tearing up inside is just their connection with God and knowing that he is their source of strength. He is protecting them and he will see them through it. It gives that hope. It keeps them fighting

Intertwined with religion is the notion of family life and messages on how Caribbean-Canadian women should care for their families, the participants reported:

Then there is just this general feeling of marriage is the right way, God gave me this man. I have to make it work marriage is pure and it's a covenant and a sacrifice you make and how are you going to break this covenant

It's a sacrifice some may say if you want to have kids or, it is basically a part or a ritual of growing up. If you find a husband who is beating you well that's the sacrifice because you wanted a family. It is something that you have to go through and you're in the family now so make it work. Bring up your kids and keep the family happy and keep him happy so he will provide the support for the family, come what may

These strong messages and beliefs about religion and family are in contrast to those found in feminist based intervention; which tends to encourage women to put their own needs first. This may be one reason why it is difficult for Caribbean-Canadian women to access services at a feminist shelter that resonates with their experience.

Healing from Abuse

Many of the participants that are of Caribbean descent talked about how abuse is dealt with in the Caribbean community. They noted that abuse is seen as an issue best dealt with within the family, they stated:

And even so abuse in every language is the same, but we could also say in Jamaica when a woman is abused by their husband it is the family of either the woman or the man that is the social worker. And what they would do same like how the woman move to the shelter, the woman would move into the parent's home. Later they would call the man over and they would have dinner and talk to the man to see what the problem is. And often they threaten violence

We need to look at how these women do it when there is abuse in a family they actually include the man and the children, everybody, in making solutions. They sit them down with extended family and talk. I wish I could open a program one day and do that for Caribbean families

We are in a country where you know abuse happens. In Caribbean culture it is more on the hush, hush then in North American culture. There is a totally different cultural context. We have campaigns about abuse, seminars and talks about it and TV talk shows about it. Whereas back home in some West Indian cultures that media is not there, the attention to this issue does not get raised up and it is not out there as much as it is here in Canada

But I try to, when they tell me who their abuser is I always ask them is that abuser willing to do counseling. In our culture I would ask do you have an aunt or a family member to talk to, because in Jamaica, yes we have psychologists, but it is the family members that address abuse. So, I steer them back to that when I am working with them. I ask 'Did you tell your aunt what is going on? What was their reaction? So that is what I am saying and will always say that until Canada realizes that everybody here comes from a different background not one way of healing, then things will not be better for all immigrants here in Canada

Other participants discussed the variant view of abuse that Caribbean women hold, they noted:

From my experience with Caribbean-Canadian women their attitude is that violence is just a part of life. Males being violent, in general, are not a strange or a necessarily bad thing to them

Yes, violence is a Caribbean-Canadian women's lived reality, in some sense it happens all the time. A lot of Caribbean-Canadian women have difficulty seeing the violence they experience as abuse. That is a big leap for them

Again, the participants noted that there is a very different approach taken to healing from abuse than is used in a feminist shelter. Many of the programs are not designed to incorporate the abuser, the extended family, or the cultural realities with which Caribbean women are familiar. They also express little knowledge about how Caribbean-Canadian women perceive violence in their lives. As a result, we see few Caribbean-Canadian women coming to the shelter or they leave early. The programs being offered by feminist run shelters for abused women do not take care of the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women as they do not take into account their lived reality.

5.9 Directions for Enhanced Services for Caribbean-Canadian Women

In order to provide truly anti-oppressive and culturally competent services and programs to abused Caribbean-Canadian women, it is important that the areas that require improvement are delineated. From creating more support programs for Caribbean-Canadian women to providing enhanced education to staff, shelter residents and the Caribbean community, there are many recommendations for enhanced services for Caribbean-Canadian women. During this section I will present the findings that pertain to what the participants thought need to be done to attract Caribbean-Canadian women to abused women services, create a safe space for them while they are there, and make for more racial and culturally inclusive feminist organizations.

Education for Staff, Residents and the Caribbean Community

All of the participants talked about the need for enhanced education for staff, residents and the community. With regards to the staff at the shelters the participants noted that there needed to be better education in the areas of understanding, detecting, and combating racism in the

shelter; recognizing their own biases and stereotypes; and becoming more culturally competent. The participants noted:

Staff need to be more educated around diversity and people from different nationalities. We are all different

I think increased training for staff is needed, however, it needs to be done in a different way than in the past as staff have received diversity training but it does not seem to be effective

On the issue of diversity we need more training and more awareness, the more we can see it the better we will be at stopping it

We need more training for staff around issues that Caribbean-Canadian women and immigrant women face

I don't think it is the staff. It is lack of knowledge; they get no training on how to deal with people and how to deal with diversity, and how to deal with different cultures

Other participants talked about the need for staff to have a higher level of education, they stated:

Yes, one of the barriers to the grassroots feminist approach: I went to a workshop and the woman say 'oh you don't have to have a university degree to support a woman or to be a director' and in the shelter one of the staff told me 'you don't have to go to college or university to support anybody or to be a social worker' and that is what is wrong with the shelter. There are only two people in the shelter with university training. The rest of them are high school drop outs, and some of them made up that they went to Conestoga College

Yes, so they need to be educated too, and the other thing is the level of education. Because most of who are supporting finished high school most of them who are fulltime are grassroots and some of them are high school dropouts. Yes, they send them to some workshops but going there, who is doing the workshop. Sometime the person doing the workshop is the same grassroots person. Nobody has any education, so that is why we need knowledge

The participants commented that those staff that have a higher level of education such as a certification as a social worker or social service worker are often more likely to have a higher level of skill and competence when it comes to working with people from diverse backgrounds and in conflict resolution. In addition to the need for education for staff, is the need to educate

shelter residents about what racism and discrimination is and how it negatively affects other people. One of the participants stated:

The shelter does not have a workshop that addresses and teaches the residents what constitutes racism and what constitutes what. I was the one that brought it up the other day. In every step of the way when they are doing groups because the groups are only at night they should be putting something in there to teach the women about racism. They should be reinforcing it every step of the way. Because some of these residents, we are not talking about the staff but maybe some of the staff need to look at themselves too, but behaviour is learned and it can be unlearned so we should be educating the women who are fleeing from abuse

The participants also highlighted the importance of engaging the Caribbean-Canadian community in order to get the word out about the services that shelters offer for women and to break some of the myths about accessing services, they stated:

Breaking down the misconceptions of what a shelter is and what it means through education may have to go on in order to aid that person in accessing services

When you are trying to help Caribbean-Canadian women to leave an abusive relationship, I think a lot of times it has to start with the family and the social circle and their immediate support context. If someone decides to share with a friend or a family member that they are being abused what is that person's initial reaction? Sometimes the victim bases that first reaction and says 'okay all the other people I come across are going to treat me that way so it was mistake to let this person know and I am going to keep it to myself.' So that is a barrier that has to be broken down in terms of educating people in the specific cultural community as to what domestic violence is really about

Education needs to be done in the Caribbean-Canadian community so that the first contact these women have if it is a friend or family member they have information about abuse. I think this will drive or motivate Caribbean-Canadian women or make them feel comfortable to access further resources

Teaching that abuse is not acceptable and it is not right is something we really have to harp on. Because people say 'okay it does happen so what?' And it is the 'so what' part that we have to work on. We need to work on the attitude that you don't interfere with other people's yard business. What does that mean? Are there any exceptions to that? If someone is being abused and their life is being threatened, their children's lives are being threatened and the community is being threatened okay, what is the responsibility of the community?

Education is a very important component with regards to developing and enhancing services and programs for Caribbean-Canadian women. At all levels of contact including community, shelter and peer, there needs to be an improved level of knowledge and awareness of the issues and concerns that Caribbean-Canadian women face.

Integrative Service

When questioned about how services for Caribbean women should be configured to provide the most benefits, all of the participants felt that it would be most useful if the services were provided in a more integrative fashion as opposed to providing services specifically for Caribbean women. This is due to the negative results of segregation that society has experienced, they stated:

I don't want an all black thing, but we need equal opportunity for workers and the client and without that I can't see...because we need to integrate no matter how we look at it why would we segregate into our own shelter. It may be good in light of the fact that all of the women would be similar. But we need to be integrated

Personally I don't think segregation is the goal we should be going for but I think that some (Caribbean women) would come. I don't know. I do see some of the benefits of a shelter like that because some of the women that wouldn't come here might come. I think a woman might feel more comfortable in an all black shelter

I don't think they should segregate the shelters, I believe that if they have a shelter with staff from different cultural backgrounds things would be better. They can identify with each other

When organizations consider how to provide services for Caribbean-Canadian women it is important to note the history of segregation. In that history separate services did not usually mean equal. In this regard organizations will need to work harder to truly integrate Caribbean women throughout their organizations.

Recommendations for Working with Caribbean-Canadian Women

Many of the participants talked about best practices for work with Caribbean-Canadian women.

They pointed to the difficulty that some Caribbean women have in opening up and telling their stories and suggest how to help Caribbean women do this, they stated:

It is useful to connect with the women of a diverse culture on a one to one basis. Inquire about how they are doing. Find out what is working or helping and what is not. Often, even if they are saying stuff in the group, cause some people know how to talk and how to glaze over things and present a façade, but when you speak to them one on one you may find that everything is not okay

Caribbean-Canadian women need to be reassured that you trust what they are. Telling them that things will be okay and that they made the right choice to come, being empathetic and non-judgmental. This is often best done one on one

One on one support, they would be more open because with everybody you go in with empathy but with the black woman knowing that I am from the Caribbean we can start off by talking about where in Jamaica are you from? Talk about some of the good things and the bad things and chat

When working with Caribbean-Canadian women it is very important to spend a lot of time establishing a good rapport in order to make them feel comfortable enough to disclose. This is best achieved through one on one contact with a worker that has knowledge of Caribbean culture.

More Minority Staff

Participants discussed the relatively small number of minority staff working in feminist abused women's shelters. They believed this to be a major factor in why Caribbean-Canadian women don't use the shelter system and why they don't stay, they stated:

It is important to have Caribbean-Canadian women working at the shelter because they may be more likely to talk to them. And the Caribbean worker will know which questions to ask. When you can identify with your own race it is better. Afro-Caribbean woman can identify with another Caribbean woman. If it is an abusive situation, if there is another Caribbean person who is the abuser, then we may know who to call and who to refer her to. But we are not

getting the chance to work with them, they are just going to who the white woman refers them to and then that's it

More staff at the shelter that represents Caribbean culture are needed because the shelter is a very lonely place for anyone and I think having someone to talk to that you can connect with is very important

Yes, of course. I think diversity is really important to have in staff. This is needed so the Caribbean-Canadian woman can go into the shelter and feel represented by seeing their own colour or culture reflected in the staff. It is really positive, someone that can relate to your experience, someone that they can connect with on a higher level

Having a diverse workforce is important because it educates. It educates women that come here because a lot of women have ideas about people. They might leave with different ideas

Yes, I could ask a question and get an answer but the Canadian woman may not get an answer. I see that most of the shelters in (this area) are not diverse. For example, myself I work relief. Another worker who is there is full time but not always there and is out doing other work. So some of the time a Caribbean woman may come in and may not know that a Caribbean woman may work there. They only see the dominant race. Some of the time they come but I don't know if it is because of the treatment, but they leave very quickly. They never spend six weeks, there are no black women who come into the shelter and spend six weeks

You have to look at it in terms of the management. More black people should get on the board

The participants noted that through the hiring and integration of minority staff at all levels in feminist run shelters for abused women positive changes in services can be realized.

Outreach and Coalition Building

As described earlier the Caribbean community is an important part of an abused Caribbean-Canadian woman's support network. In addition, it is from people within this community that they may have their first contact and gather information when deciding whether or not to leave an abusive situation and where to go. As a result, making strong connections with organizations, businesses and people in the Caribbean community is very important when enhancing services for Caribbean-Canadian women. One of the ways the participants

suggested to accomplish this is through having a presence at Caribbean-Canadian events, they stated:

I think that a presence at Caribbean-Canadian events would be useful in getting the word out about services that are offered to abused women

When they have multicultural week they could have a Caribbean booth and encourage them, or hire some Caribbean social workers and let them maybe go into the community where they live or have a hotline or something

Another area highlighted by the participants is coalition building with local Caribbean businesses, associations and groups, they stated:

For sure, coalition building is good because they would know more about the resources there are and they can advertise for the services available

Yes, coalition building, that would be great because we have some strong healthy black women out there

Outreach was also discussed as another important area to develop with regards to the Caribbean community. The participants discussed the importance of doing outreach not just in the community at large but with the Caribbean community specifically. The participants noted:

Outreach to abused women as a whole but the thing is Caribbean-Canadian women don't react to it. On the other hand, outreach to specific groups is good but you don't want to come across as racist or stereotyping, because you are focusing on that culture

Outreach and advocacy are really important to get Caribbean-Canadian women to come to the shelter

In addition, the participants pointed to the need to do outreach with youth in the school system in order to provide knowledge about abuse and the services available in the community. As a result, a higher level of comfort will be created with the services being provided. The participants stated:

We should start in the school system with education. It is best to get them while they are young and impressionable and the students might be more open to talking about these issues rather than others in the community

I think that outreach in the school would be useful. The shelter that I work at does speak to kids about violence. It needs to be done more

Going to schools and speaking to students about date rape and different things. I think there is good that has come out of that. I think it would be useful to try this in the Caribbean-Canadian community

The participants were clear that feminist abused women organizations need to become more active in the Caribbean community. They need to seek out allies and use cooperation to develop services for abused Caribbean women.

A Need for Further Research

All of the participants stated that it is really important for further research to be conducted in order to gain more information on the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women. They stated:

Research has a big role to play, because it is through research findings that we can enhance the services

I think more research needs to be done. It might help the understanding a little bit more. Perhaps the next step is speaking to the women themselves whether women have been abused or not, because everyone knows someone who has been abused

Well to fully understand the complexity and the details of the issues of Caribbean women in feminist organizations we really need to talk to the women of Caribbean descent. We need to listen to their stories about what is useful and what is not. What we can be doing and really learn from the people who know best, which are the women themselves. The research should be conducted by Caribbean-Canadian women themselves

I think that research is very helpful in building a body of knowledge about what other people do and what other people find helpful, what people find the need is, that can help the individual worker and the agency to look at what we are doing to see whether we are meeting those needs that are out there

The participants also stated that it is important for Caribbean-Canadian women to play a major role in conducting this research, they noted:

The people doing the research should be women of colour. Research is important because if we want change, we need fresh ideas

It is the research that the young people will do that will speak; we need to recruit more black people in social work academia

I think women of colour need to be conducting the research. I think we need research that speaks to the women themselves. That's the main thing to get their story

I think research should be done by women of colour. I don't know how receptive some women would be if it wasn't a Caribbean woman

Although, the participants stated that Caribbean-Canadian women should be conducting the research in this area, it is important that we don't too narrowly define what people should study based on their ethnicity. Additionally, much knowledge and insight can be discovered if researchers from different racial and cultural backgrounds were to conduct the research.

All the participants have provided many areas where improvement can be made to provide better services to Caribbean-Canadian women. Additionally, they provided new and unexplored perspectives on what organizations can do to create a sense that a feminist run shelter for abused women can be a safe space for Caribbean women. Indeed, the aforementioned areas of improvement can create better services not just for Caribbean women but for all women.

Summary of Recommendations

The participants in this study described a wide variety of recommendations for the improvement of services provided to Caribbean-Canadian women. A primary recommendation presented by the participants is for the enhanced education of staff, residents, and the Caribbean community. For shelter staff, educational programs should focus on understanding and dealing with racism in the shelter, as well as recognizing personal biases; for the shelter residents, education about racism and its impact on others. In addition, education in the Caribbean community will help to dispel myths about accessing services at a shelter and provide vital information about the services that are available. The participants also pointed to

the need for integrative services for Caribbean-Canadian women and to avoid segregation.

When working directly with Caribbean-Canadian women the participants noted that one-on-one support is often best. Furthermore, there needs to be a good rapport between the worker and the woman for support to be offered effectively. Additionally, the participants stated that more minority staff should be hired to fill positions throughout organizations. Finally, coalition building and conducting further research with Caribbean-Canadian women directly were emphasized.

14. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESERACH

The participants in this study have provided extensive data concerning the needs, experiences and perceptions of abused Caribbean-Canadian women. Much of this data serves to inform, in very clear ways, shelter and community practices. There is, however, another layer of understanding which has been shaped by the information from the interviews, and informal conversations with the six women in this study. This understanding reveals the systemic issues that contribute to an abused Caribbean-Canadian women's experience.

14.1 The Influence of Race, Culture and, Unique Worldviews

One of the most important areas echoed by all the participants in the study was the many trials that Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused face because of their minority status in the shelter and in Canadian society. Starting from their decision to leave an abusive situation following all the way to the arrival and stay at a feminist abused women's shelter, Caribbean-Canadian women face special challenges related to their race, culture and worldview that are not readily recognized nor remedied.

When an abused Caribbean-Canadian woman decides to leave an abusive situation the participants pointed to an added level of anxiety that these women experience because of racism in Canadian society. As a result, one of their major concerns is that their partners (especially if their partner is a Black male) will be treated harshly by police or other institutions. In addition, Caribbean-Canadain women must also contend with their own apprehensions about Canadian institutions which can contribute to their reluctance to access services. These findings confirm the assertions made by other authors outlined in the literature review with regards to these issues (Mama, 2000; Mornington, 2001). Also, the participants echoed the literature with regards to negative stereotypes that Caribbean-Canadian women face about their aggressive nature (Mama, 2000). These stereotypes contribute to the conflict that

Caribbean- Canadian women experience if they choose to go to a feminist shelter. Finally many Caribbean-Canadian women must also contend with the cultural messages that they receive from their community that prompts them to fix the relationship, to be strong, and to avoid the shame of entering a shelter. These cultural messages can be very powerful and persuasive for Caribbean-Canadian women and can alter a woman's orientation towards leaving an abusive relationship and going to a shelter to staying in the relationship and "trying harder". Although, one study outlined in the literature review discusses the pressure that immigrant women experience from family to stay in the relationship (MacLeod & Shin, 1990). The area of how cultural messages interact with a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship has received little attention from scholars of violence against women of colour. As outlined by this study, the influence of cultural messages can be an important consideration for a Caribbean-Canadian woman when deciding if and when to leave an abusive relationship and whether or not to access shelters.

This study provides unique perspectives on the myriad of problems that Caribbean-Canadian women face in feminist based abused women's shelters. As reported by the participants, when Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused arrive at the shelter they often feel uncomfortable and unsafe. This is due to the fact that they are entering into a space that is comprised of mostly white women. Most often Caribbean-Canadian women do not encounter any staff or residents that look like them or that are from a similar cultural background. This is due to the comparatively few support workers from diverse communities employed at feminist abused women's shelters. These feelings of being uncomfortable and not fitting in continue for most of their stay and speaks to one of the reasons why most Caribbean-Canadian women do not spend the maximum stay time at a shelter.

For those Caribbean-Canadian women who choose to stay at the shelter for an extended period of time their experience is not generally improved. Many Caribbean-Canadian women experience both personal and systemic racism, as well as encountering inadequate programming and a lack of understanding and/or narrow definition of Caribbean culture.

The participants all noted a high rate of incidents of racist comments and behaviours directed towards the Caribbean-Canadian women they worked with in the shelter. These frequent incidents led, in some cases to retaliation from Caribbean-Canadian women attempting to stand up for themselves. However, this assertiveness often led to more conflict for these women as they were then subject to the systemic racism embedded in the organizations. As a result, many of the Caribbean-Canadian women who are commonly the original victims of discrimination were unfairly disciplined. The participants noted the unbalanced numbers of Caribbean-Canadian women being asked to leave the shelter or that had to return under probationary terms as two other examples of the systemic racism that Caribbean-Canadian women experience.

In addition to the aforementioned negative experiences in the shelter, abused Caribbean- Canadian women are often provided with programs that are not useful for their culture, experiences, and unique needs. The participants stated that these programs are not generally useful when supporting Caribbean women for many reasons. The first is the fact that these interventions are generally carried out through group work. This can be problematic for Caribbean-Canadian women because once again due to cultural messages that they receive, talking about one's personal business in public is not acceptable. Additionally, the programs being offered are not tailored towards the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women and because they are less likely to express dissent or discuss their feelings with the group, the programs

don't change. This creates a vicious circle and Caribbean-Canadian women continue to receive inadequate services.

As reported by the participants of Caribbean descent, Caribbean culture is not readily understood at the shelter. Due to this general lack of understanding Caribbean culture is represented in any meaningful way in one area only, food. Upon arrival at the shelter, Caribbean-Canadian women are asked what cultural foods they eat and informed that the shelter will endeavor to provide some of these foods to them. This is the only way that these women are offered the opportunity to express their culture as there are no other tools provided or encouraged. Also, many of the participants noted that other women of colour will get access to their cultural foods while the Caribbean-Canadian woman will not. This is because Caribbean food is often not available in mainstream grocery stores and due to the small number of Caribbean staff, there may be no one working at the shelter that would have knowledge about where to access the necessary ingredients. This is even more of a problem in smaller communities, many of which do not have Caribbean grocery stores at all. Additionally, there is a lack of understanding in the shelter with regards to the importance of culture and the worldviews of Caribbean-Canadian women. Little attention is paid to how their culture informs their perceptions and ability or inability to understand certain rules and programs provided by the shelter. The participants spoke of the difficulty that Caribbean-Canadian women have in seeing and naming violence in their lives; most often violence is seen as a normal aspect of life that they must encounter. As a result, violence is a part of a Caribbean-Canadian woman's worldview. The findings of this study are inline with assertions in the literature that talk about Black women viewing their abuse as part of a constellation of violence as opposed to an isolated incident (West, 2002c; MacLeod & Shin, 1990).

Again, research in the area of violence against women of colour has not produced a lot of information about what it is like for a Caribbean-Canadian woman to navigate a feminist abused women's shelter. In addition, few program evaluations have been done on feminist organizations that provide services to Caribbean-Canadian women to assess the efficacy of their interventions.

14.2 The Use of Feminist Ideology with Caribbean-Canadian Women

As mentioned earlier, feminist ideology has been used when working with women for many years. In fact, it was through feminist activism that shelters for abused women became a reality. Currently, feminist organizations work tirelessly to provide services and programs that contribute to the success of all women. As a result, the vast majority of abused women's shelters are feminist organizations. This notion can be problematic for a woman of colour, as some authors have noted the difficulties women of colour face with regards to feeling included or valued by feminists (Johnson-Odim, 1991; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Comas-Diaz, 1991). Although some feminist scholars have made many efforts to include the experiences of women of colour, for the most part feminism has not captured nor understood their voice. This study highlighted some of the tensions between feminism as practiced in abused women's shelters and Caribbean-Canadian women. Additionally, some very important benefits to the use of feminism with Caribbean-Canadian women were found.

The findings from this study highlighted the differences in perception that Caribbean-Canadian women have with the word feminism. When the word feminism is posed to most white feminists it denotes thoughts of equality, empowerment and standing up for one's rights. However, the opposite was found to be true with Caribbean-Canadian women. There was a lot of misunderstanding about what feminism means or how, if at all, it applies to them. For the most part feminism is seen in a negative light and elicits feelings of apprehension. It is

synonymous with white culture made for white women and not for Black women. This perception is particularly troubling when considering why a Caribbean-Canadian woman might not access a shelter.

Other important barriers to the use of feminist ideology with Caribbean-Canadian women involve several areas of feminist intervention. As was discussed in the literature review, when Black people experience stress they are most likely to turn to religion to heal (Neighbors, Musick & Williams, 1998; Bell & Mattis, 2000). The participants in this study stated that this is also true of most Caribbean-Canadian women. Spirituality and religion go hand and hand with Caribbean culture and are a way of life for most Caribbean women. However, in feminist intervention, religion is not discouraged or encouraged based on a belief that this stance will uphold equality. But for the Caribbean-Canadian woman staying in a feminist shelter, religion is a very powerful mode of healing that is not being explored.

In addition to this barrier, problems can be found in the way that feminist programming is offered. As discussed in the literature review feminist intervention is based on a method of participant self report and group sharing. However, this study has found this method of intervention to be particularly problematic for Caribbean-Canadian women as they often find it difficult to talk about their personal "business" or issues in public. There is an inherent expectation in feminist intervention that the women will inform the program facilitators about what it is that they need to heal. It can be seen why feminist intervention can be particularly difficult with Caribbean-Canadian women. Finally, Caribbean-Canadian women have a different view than feminist theory on who should be involved in the process of healing from abuse. The participants in this study agree with the assertions presented in the literature review that woman of colour see their men and extended family as occupying a vital role in healing (MacLeod & Shin, 1990). Healing is not an individual endeavor completed by the woman. This

stance is very divergent from that espoused by feminist intervention where the abuser, extended family and community are not usually included in the healing journey. It is important to note that Caribbean-Canadian women often receive mixed messages about how abuse should be dealt with in their homes. On one hand, the participants noted that they are charged with the responsibility to fix their relationship. On the other hand, abuse is sometimes dealt with through an intervention and mediation conducted by the extended family.

As discussed in the literature review, focusing responsibility for abuse on patriarchy is one area where feminism is sometimes in conflict with the needs of women of colour (hooks, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1981; Smith, 1983). This study however, found that this is not the main area of concern. Instead, the participants contended that the majority of the problem with the use of the feminist perspective with women of colour in general and Caribbean-Canadian women specifically is the lack of understanding about the culture and personal history of these women, and how this impacts their specific needs when healing from abuse.

Other barriers have been highlighted by the findings of this study with regards to feminist thought. Authors presented in the literature review asserted that there is a myth of sisterhood prevalent in feminist organizations (Williams, McCandies & Dunlap, 2002; Comas-Diaz, 1991). This study found that this myth is present at feminist shelters and that Caribbean-Canadian women feel oppressed by white staff and residents. Additionally, the participants that are of Caribbean descent spoke of their personal experiences of oppression by whites at their organization. These findings point to the need for feminist organizations to acknowledge that oppression between whites and blacks is present. As a result, white women that work at feminist organizations must recognize that they are in a position of power over women of colour, whether they are accessing services or working as their colleague.

Many critiques have been levied against feminist thought concerning the influence that women of colour have had in its creation and in its shaping for the future (Fine, 1997). This study confirms that although feminist thought has been expanded to include issues that affect women of colour; these women are not being granted positions of power in feminist organizations such as abused women's shelters. In fact, the diversity policies in terms of staffing that many feminist organizations have is merely a veneer, since few people of colour work at abused women's shelters and very little active recruitment is taking place to remedy this.

The participants in the study also noted that one of the drawbacks to feminism when used with Caribbean-Canadian women is with its grassroots orientation. Although a grassroots ideology may not be central to feminist thought, as practiced in the shelter, grassroots is a central ideology, used as noted by the participants. They reported that this grassroots approach to work with abused women states that one does not need to have any university or college education in order to work with abused women. The participants noted a distinct problem with this notion, as they hypothesized this contributes to the low competency level in terms of diversity issues, and conflict negotiation with regards to racism in the shelter. The participants stated that if all staff had at least a social service worker diploma they would have a base level of knowledge about diversity issues from which to grow. The participants also stated that even when staff are sent to workshops to improve their skills, many of these workshops are run by grassroots feminists. This problem area was not discussed in any of the literature reviewed; as a result, this new information is particularly interesting.

This study also highlights some of the important benefits that feminist interventions with Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused provide. This area of inquiry has not been explored in other studies. One area of feminist intervention that was particularly helpful

when working with Caribbean-Canadian women is empowerment. This is very useful in building up the confidence of Caribbean-Canadian women which will help them to make good decisions about their futures. In addition, feminist intervention is integral in the participants' work to help Caribbean- Canadian women recognize abuse in their lives and to look for those resources within the community, in their families and within themselves to survive, heal and, grow. In addition, a feminist intervention aids in teaching Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused about their rights and encourages them to assert themselves.

14.3 Boundaries of the Study

The choices that are made in the selection of a research focus and methodology result in necessary restrictions. My study has some limitations which should be acknowledged.

Time and financial constraints limited the results of this study in a number of areas. Firstly, due to time constraints I had to change my target population of participants from Caribbean women themselves to people who have worked with these women, and although I gathered a considerable amount of relevant and interesting data about the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women from support workers, I was not able to collect their direct voice. Secondly, due to time and financial constraints I had to conduct many of the interviews at abused women's shelters. This may have negatively impacted the responses that the participants gave as they were concerned about confidentiality. I found that the two participants that I met with away from their workplace were more comfortable and forthright when talking about controversial issues. Finally, due to the problems posed by financial and time constraints; I was only able to interview a small number of participants which negatively affected the ability to derive significant themes as well as the trustworthiness of the study.

14.4 Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Working with abused women can be very complex and demanding work. This is a job that is constantly evolving and changing to encompass new ways of doing things. The most useful research are those studies that indicate not only theoretical and research directions but also practice implications. The findings of this study have outlined some best practice guidelines for work with Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused that require attention.

Group work is generally not useful with Caribbean-Canadian women unless it is a group of all Caribbean-Canadian women, all Black women, or all immigrant women so that they may feel a greater connection to the group. Whether in a group or individual setting, a great amount of attention must be paid to cultural relevance of materials, programming and, rapport building. These interventions are best made by those of a Caribbean background. However, if this is not possible it is essential for the intervener to have at least an intermediate level of knowledge about Caribbean culture and customs.

Although the literature points to the need for different services for Black women (Mornington, 2001), the participants in this study noted that it is more useful for the goal of practice to be better integration of issues such as culture, variant worldviews and unique concerns into already existing programs. As a result, special support groups or workshops for Caribbean-Canadian women within already existing shelters would be more useful than an abused women shelter just for Black women.

Participants in the study stressed that when working with Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused, it is very important for the support person to not only develop a good rapport with the client but also to be keenly aware of other very important social work practice values. Reassurance that you believe and accept what the woman is saying is one such social

work value of importance. In addition, empathy and a nonjudgmental style are also vital. It is essential that the support person be comfortable discussing things that are important to a Caribbean-Canadian woman such as music or memories of her homeland. Informal chatting with Caribbean-Canadian women perhaps while consuming or preparing food might be helpful in achieving this.

At an organizational level, work needs to be done to recognize and weed out the systemic racism present in many social work agencies. The assumption that staff are clear or comfortable dealing with and recognizing racism is naïve and has led to many of the current problems within the system. In addition, active recruitment of women of colour is needed. It would be useful to take an informal inventory of the number of women from a particular cultural background that you frequently see at the shelter and make a concerted effort to recruit staff from that particular group. Another option is to advertise jobs in unconventional places such as multicultural grocery stores, radio stations, and/or newspapers. In addition, direct recruitment at local schools of social work or social service work will certainly yield a plethora of multicultural, highly skilled and passionate workers. While, hiring staff from a variety of ethnicities is an important first step. Organizations must also evaluate the problems within their organizational system that would prevent these new employees from being successful. In addition, organizations need to make an assessment of how their system will react to these new workers.

14.5 Recommendations for Future Research

There is a need for further research concerning the experiences of abused Caribbean-Canadian women. This study focused on the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women in feminist shelters as perceived by shelter support staff. However, the study took place in only three communities and the sample size was small. In order to ensure that future research on

this topic remains relevant and helpful, it should be action-oriented and participatory in nature. In addition, the researchers involved need to have a firm understanding of Caribbean culture and maintain an insider role with in the Caribbean-Canadian community. This is essential in building a rapport and creating a sense of trust so participants can speak freely.

Findings from this study pointed to unique perceptions and ideas about why Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused stay for short periods of time in feminist shelters. However, the participants also noted that there are a very small number of Caribbean-Canadian women accessing the shelter in the first place. Additional research needs to be conducted with Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused directly to find out what resources they utilize when leaving abusive relationships and how services can be configured to better serve their needs.

As mentioned earlier, cultural messages play a very important role in the decisions Caribbean-Canadian women make about their relationships and even how best to heal. Yet, there has been little research directed to how cultural messages interact with such issues as a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship, decision to access a shelter, and methods of healing. This is an area that needs to be explored in greater depth with regards to abused Caribbean- Canadian women and also other abused immigrant women.

Finally, all of the participants noted that there needs to be more training provided to staff with regards to issues such as cultural competence, conflict resolution, and learning to recognize and combat racism. They reported that although many of the staff had received some sort of diversity training most people seem very uncomfortable navigating these issues and show very little skill in these areas. This has led to incidents of racism and discrimination among staff and towards residents. These findings point to the need for research that can look at the efficacy of various methods of diversity training; to find out which method results in the

highest level of competency among staff. The findings from such a study can aid in the restructuring of how diversity training is delivered and designed to better meet staff needs.

15. CONCLUSION

The women in this study spoke of the many ways that feminist abused women's shelters helped, hindered, and ignored the healing process of abused Caribbean-Canadian women. The information that they shared about their perceptions and experiences of working with abused Caribbean- Canadian women repeatedly confirmed the importance of reconfiguring the way that feminist organizations work with these women. As well, the importance of recognizing that racism and discrimination is alive and well in feminist organizations was emphasized.

The participants also identified through their similar and different stories, the wealth of experience, expertise and insight that the Caribbean culture and community have to offer. Additionally, they applauded the bravery, courage and strength that Caribbean-Canadian women show in their ability to navigate a hostile shelter system whilst dealing with their own personal turmoil. Many survive and become success stories. The participants provided an intimate view of the struggles that Caribbean-Canadian women experience and strategies they use to survive. Additionally, they provided information about the kinds of supports that are respectful and useful, and the changes needed to make the healing journey of Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused a positive one. There is however, still much to learn about this topic and this information must be gathered from Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused directly.

The area of women of colour in a feminist environment is a relatively new topic as it has only been in the last decade that feminist scholars have turned their attention to including women of colour. It is apparent that although feminist theory has made this important transition, many areas of feminist practice have a long way to go to truly espouse inclusiveness of Caribbean- Canadian women. The main problem with this transition is a lack of awareness.

There is little awareness about the special issues of Caribbean-Canadian women, little awareness about the importance of culturally relevant programs, and little awareness of the oppression that continues in feminist organizations. This lack of awareness leads to complacency; feminist organizations such as abused women's shelters should not be complacent. These organizations must be vigilant with regards to the aforementioned issues; they can achieve this by incorporating a diversity of views and experiences. This translates to the need for a truly culturally diverse staff. It is also time for abused women's shelters to honestly look at their dogma-like use of feminism; is this ideology indicated with all women and for all decisions? There are many inherent dangers in working from only one ideology. Another dimension to this discussion is the findings from this study which indicates problems with the application of feminist interventions with Caribbean-Canadian women.

Feminism has taken on an integral and important role in altering negative realities for women all over the world and aiding in creating a better society for all genders. The passion and compassion that feminist organizations show towards the women they serve has been unparalleled. Indeed, these organizations have the potential to create better services for Caribbean-Canadian women and to aid all communities to reach the ultimate goal which is to end violence in the lives of all women.

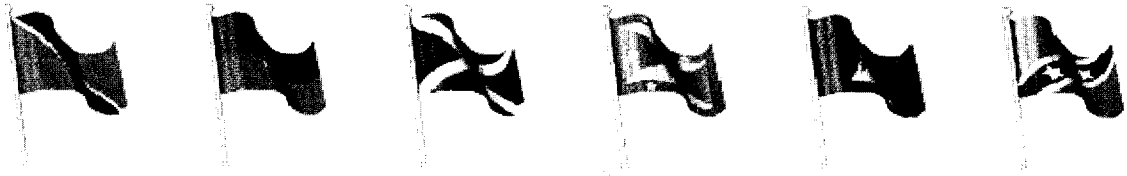
16. APPENDICES

Appendix 16.1: Advertising poster

Appendix 16.2: Interview Guide

Appendix 16.3: Consent Form

Appendix 16.4: Outline of Participation



Have you worked in a shelter for abused women?

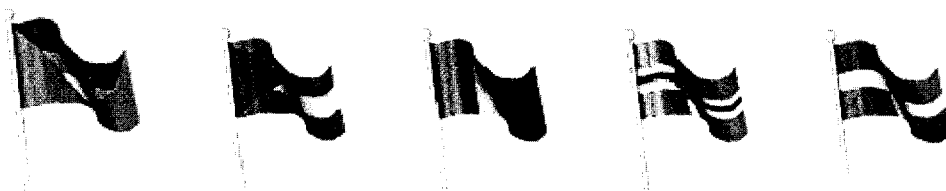
Have you worked with Caribbean-Canadian abused women?

Hoping to talk about how to provide the best service to these women?

Then you may be eligible to participate in a new and exciting study being conducted by a Master of Social Work student at Wilfrid Laurier University into the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women in abused women shelters

For more information please
e-mail

This study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Maiter, Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. She can be reached at



Appendix 16.2: Interview Guide

Background Information

- 1) What is your current age?
- 2) How long have you been working with abused women?
- 3) How many women of Caribbean descent have you worked with?
- 4) What is your educational background and professional experience in the area of violence against women?
- 5) Are you a woman of colour or a woman of Caribbean descent?
- 6) Tell me what the term feminist means to you?
- 7) Do you consider yourself to be feminist?

Arrival at the Shelter

- 1) What are the Caribbean-Canadian women you work with telling you about their arrival at the shelter?

How did they find out about it?

Why did they decide to go? How did they decide to go?

Did they feel comfortable when you arrived?

Did they feel the shelter staff understood their concerns and experiences?

- 2) What special issues (if any) do you see Caribbean-Canadian women presenting at the shelters with?

Are these special concerns being accounted for? If no, how can this be accomplished?

- 3) What are the Caribbean-Canadian women you work with telling you about the concerns they had before arriving at the shelter?

Were they concerned about racism? Discrimination? Misunderstanding?

Were they concerned they would be the only woman of colour there?

Were their fears realized?

- 3) Tell me about the admission process?

Does the process take into account issues of discrimination, oppression and racism and how they may be interacting with the abuse Caribbean-Canadian women are fleeing?

Does the process make assumptions about the experiences of women?

Do the questions asked allow for racially and culturally diverse women to express what they are experiencing, needing and feeling?

Stay at the Shelter

1) Tell me about how the Caribbean-Canadian women you work with feel about the rules or how things are done at the shelter?

What do they agree with? Why?

What don't they agree with? Why?

Do they feel comfortable or are they given the opportunity to participate in cultural rituals, eating cultural foods etc?

Are the women's religious rituals seen as a valuable way to heal? Are they supported to practice religious customs?

Do they feel the shelter provides a safe space for them to voice their concerns about the way things are run at the shelter?

2) Tell me about your experiences of supporting Caribbean-Canadian women with in the context of a feminist abused women's shelter?

What are the benefits of a feminist context when working with these women?

What are the barriers of a feminist context when working with these women?

What are your frustrations?

What are the frustrations of the women?

Do you feel compelled to agree with the shelters approach?

If you disagree with the shelters feminist approach how does this affect your work?

3) Tell me about programs you have witnessed being offered at abused women's shelters?

Do the programs inform women of their rights and the resources available?

Do the programs inform women about any resources available that specialize in the concerns of Caribbean-Canadian women or Black women?

Do the examples or pictures used in programming reflect diversity?

4) How do Caribbean-Canadian women you work with react to the programs offered?

Do they find them useful/helpful?

Are they perceived as meeting the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women?

Are they perceived as taking into account the racism and discrimination Caribbean people commonly experience?

If the content places responsibility for violence on male centered systems, how do the women react to this?

5) Can you share with me the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women you have worked with in terms of relating to other women (especially white women) at the shelter?

Do they experience racism, discrimination or ignorance? If yes, how is this handled?

6) How is racism, discrimination or ignorance dealt with at the shelter?

Are the Caribbean-Canadian women you work with aware of the shelters policies? Why or Why not?

Life after the Shelter

1) Tell me of the feedback you have received from Caribbean-Canadian women in terms of their satisfaction with the services provided?

While in shelter? After leaving?

Do they speak of feelings of oppression or discrimination?

2) Tell me about the supports offered to these women when they leave the shelter?

Are there or should there be support services offered specifically for Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused or women of colour?

Recommendations

1) What services might be useful to improve the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women in abused women's shelters?

Would shelters specifically for black women be useful? Why or Why not?

Would an increase in staff that are women of colour be useful? Why or Why not?

Would specific services for Caribbean-Canadian women that could be run by already existing feminist shelters be useful? Why or Why not?

Would increased training for staff around issues that Caribbean-Canadian women face be useful? Why or Why not?

- 2) What is your perception of the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused based on your experience working with this population of women?

When they arrive at the shelter?

When they leave the shelter?

Are these needs currently being met? Is there a sense that these needs are understood? If yes, give examples, if no why?

- 3) What might be useful in terms of outreach with Caribbean-Canadian abused women?

Would a presence at various events that take place in the Caribbean-Canadian community be useful?

Would outreach with young Caribbean-Canadians through educational workshops in high schools and elementary schools be useful?

Would coalition building with such organization as the Congress of Black Women, local Caribbean businesses or local Caribbean-Canadian Associations be useful?

Would education in the general community about this topic be useful?

Which is a better approach? Outreach to specific populations or to abused women as a whole?

- 4) What role, if any, might research have in aiding those who support abused Caribbean-Canadian women to become more responsive to the needs of these women?

What areas might further research be needed?

Who should conduct this research?

Is there anything that I might have missed that you would like to tell me at this time?

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

“No Woman No Cry”:

An examination of the use of feminist ideology in shelters for abused women when working with
Caribbean-Canadian women

Researcher: Tenniel Hanson

Research advisor: Dr. Sarah Maiter

You are invited to participate in a research study which is being conducted by Tenniel Hanson, a Master of Social Work candidate in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University, under the supervision of her research advisor, Dr. Sarah Maiter. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused, and have stayed at a feminist shelter for abused women in Canada. Based on the experiences of Caribbean-Canadian women the study will assess the benefits and barriers of using a feminist stance when working with Caribbean-Canadian women. The information that is collected will be used to better understand the needs of Caribbean-Canadian women who have been abused, along with their supports, strengths and struggles.

INFORMATION

By choosing to take part in this research study you will be asked to participate in one confidential audio-taped interview which will take place on an individual basis with the researcher. A tape recorder and a microphone will be used to record the interview and will be placed in clear view of the researcher and the participant. The interview will be 1-1 ½ hours in duration and require that you answer questions concerning your experiences of working with abused Caribbean-Canadian women with in the context of a feminist abused women shelter, your reflections of the experiences and reactions of abused Caribbean-Canadian women to the programs and services provided and your recommendations for improved services for these women. Later, the audio taped interviews will be transcribed. The study will involve the researcher interviewing 6 – 8 abused women support staff.

RISKS

I have an understanding that through this research I am requesting that you discuss the painful and traumatic experiences of women who you support(ed). As a result, many feelings including sadness, anger or frustration may be experienced. In addition, you may be concerned about breaking client confidentiality. In an attempt to minimize the risks associated with participating in this research I have ensured that all the questions asked of you are directly related to the goals and purpose of the research so that no undue emotional issues are stirred. Also, you will not be asked to provide any specific information about any past or present clients, and everything you say will be kept confidential and reported anonymously. In addition, at the end of the interview you will be provided with phone numbers and locations of crisis/distress services as well as counselling services. You contact these services if you need support to deal with emotions resulting from participating in the study.

BENEFITS

By participating in this study you may derive the following benefits:

- You can learn more about research in social work

_____ (initials)

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