

TRANSFORMING SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATION: NEW INSIGHTS FROM PRACTICE RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

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The Service Provider's Dilemma: Confronting the Challenges of Service Delivery for Undocumented Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

Nicole Balbuena

Social service providers, such as social workers, often confront challenges in the delivery of services. However, there is a better need to understand these challenges for undocumented people. Although intimate partner violence (IPV) agencies claim to offer services to all demographics — race, sexuality, gender, and most importantly, legal status — institutional policies and practices can impose restrictions on how service providers deliver support and services.

IPV is defined as physical, emotional, economic, verbal, and spiritual abuse that occurs within an intimate relationship — regardless of one's racial, income, cultural, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation — where one partner asserts his/her/their power and control over the other partner (Marrs Fuchsel & Brummett, 2020). Prior research has revealed that immigrants who are victims of IPV have limited access to resources such as social and health care (Marrs Fuchsel & Brummett, 2020; Reina & Lohman, 2015). But there is limited research addressing the limitations and experiences of IPV service providers when delivering services to undocumented victims of IPV. It is critically important to understand the

perspectives of IPV service providers, for they can inform state policy that culturally responsive practices and policies need to be implemented to remove structural and institutional barriers impeding IPV services providers — such as social workers — from delivering services to the undocumented populations.

Drawing on twelve in-depth interviews with IPV service providers, the study was conducted to examine how the legal status of the victim influences the way providers deliver their (in)formal services and resources. The snowballing sampling method was used to recruit participants from eight IPV agencies in Orange County (OC), California. OC was an ideal location because it has a relatively high number of undocumented people (289,000), who represent 9.6% of the total undocumented population in the United States (Public Policy Institute of California [PPIC], 2011).

Findings reveal that IPV service providers encounter social and structural barriers when delivering IPV services to the undocumented population, despite those services being “openly” accessible to them. Specifically, IPV service providers face various obstacles such as immigration policies (e.g., public charge), which limit them from providing formal support to undocumented clients; they are further restricted by the politics of the IPV agency (i.e., how funding is being allocated); and they also lack cultural humility.

This study explores the limitations of the IPV service providers when delivering formal resources to undocumented people before, during, and after an abusive relationship. Three key findings were made manifest in this study: (1) restrictive eligibility and selection process; (2) fear of deportation while accessing services; and (3) lack of valid social security number. Overall, the findings suggested that a restrictive process aimed to eliminate undesirable (prospective) clients creates structural barriers and politics within the IPV agency, which, in turn, inform how the agency provides services to undocumented victims of IPV.

Literature Review

A large body of literature demonstrates that the immigrant population in the US has limited access to formal resources such as social, legal, and health services, as well as basic human and social capital resources (Fuchsel & Murphy, 2012; O’Neal & Beckman, 2016; Runner et al., 2009).

While institutional systems in society are, in part, instruments of oppression that exclude vulnerable populations from accessing services and resources in various sectors, the undocumented status of an individual can add another layer of exclusion and social marginalization.

The legal status of immigrant women could influence how they understand and perceive their IPV, how they access resources in the US, and how they should respond to law enforcement regarding the nature and severity of their abuse (Erez et al., 2017). The persistent lack of formal and material resources leads them to find informal alternatives to seek assistance through their immigrant community organizations that offer a sense of “physical security, social standing, and legal stability” (Erez et al., 2017, p. 50). Their inability to seek external support, such as government and social service agencies, is influenced by their negative experiences with the legal system in the US, which produces a lack of trust in the law enforcement agency, government authorities, and immigration policies (Erez et al., 2017). Ingram et al. (2010) found similar responses from immigrant victims of IPV claiming that they fear and mistrust the legal system, especially when applying for legal services (e.g., restraining order), regardless of their eligibility.

Likewise, immigration status can cause complex situations immigrants have to face in their daily lives, especially when they encounter the criminal justice system (Erez et al., 2017). Just like US native-born citizens, noncitizens have basic constitutional rights such as freedom of religion and speech, equal protection, and the right to due process (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2018). However, noncitizens remain a vulnerable population as they face deportation at the federal and state level. With the increase of mass deportation throughout the years, immigrant women are reluctant to seek IPV services and report their abuse to the criminal justice system due to the fear of deportation for themselves, their family, or their partner (Real, 2018). Beyond the fear of deportation and the lack of resources that victims may encounter, the process of obtaining assistance from service providers to apply for legal protection and other legal documentation can be restricting and challenging, and thus, it can place the victim in a state of uncertainty (Ingram et al., 2010).

While undocumented immigrants often receive helpful support from the legal and social service providers, they also encounter “humiliation

and frustration at the hand of police officers, legal services personnel, and social service providers” when seeking assistance for filing and processing their legal documents (e.g., Violence Against Women Act petition; Ingram et al., 2010, p. 869). In other words, service providers in the law and social service sectors instill stereotypes and — implicit and explicit — biases in their line of work when assisting immigrant victims of IPV (Ingram et al., 2010; Runner et al., 2009). According to Reina and Lohman (2015), public service provider’s attitudes and behaviours toward immigrants of IPV “reflect our society’s perceptions of domestic violence and the status of women in U.S. society” (p. 484). Notably, state and federal policies that provide economic support to women are reinforced with the notion of who is “deserving” versus who is “underserving” of public assistance. Here, women who are single, poor, of immigrant status, who lack healthcare, and who have little to no education are viewed as “underserving” (Clark et al., 2014). Beyond the legal and social challenges that undocumented immigrants may encounter, IPV services providers, like undocumented immigrant clients, can confront cultural barriers.

Cultural barriers are not only hampering the immigrant population when seeking services, but they can also manifest themselves within the IPV agencies. IPV agencies, like legal and social service agencies, often fail to incorporate “immigrant-related cultural and linguistic competencies” (Erez et al., 2017, p. 51). Scholars have considered how race/ethnicity, culture, and legal status influence immigrant victims’ ability to access IPV services (Ingram et al., 2010). Linguistic and cultural barriers are major obstacles that prevent victims from seeking governmental, medical, and social assistance due to their incapacity to understand and communicate in English (O’Neal & Beckman, 2016). Most importantly, the lack of cultural sensitivity and therefore humility among service providers may prevent undocumented women from seeking formal assistance.

Moreover, IPV agencies conflate the meaning of IPV as a “homogenous” problem, where IPV service providers assume that every victim of IPV experiences similar challenges in terms of abuse, services, and needs (Burman et al., 2004; Faria, 2020). The implication of homogenizing an IPV population is that agencies ignore the cultural needs and socioeconomic position of minorities and people of colour, and this produces structural inequalities based on sexism, racism, and classism within the IPV agency

(Burman et al., 2004; Faria, 2020). Essentially, previous scholarship has demonstrated the plight of immigrant victims of IPV experiences, but it still lacks understanding on how IPV service providers encounter structural and cultural barriers within the agency when they deliver services to undocumented victims.

Methods

The present study used a qualitative design and conducted 12 in-depth interviews with IPV service providers in OC to analyze the experiences of delivering services to undocumented victims of IPV. The research ethic approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board. Participants had to be 18 years of age or older, and an employee/volunteer from an IPV agency who worked for more than six months and directly with undocumented victims of IPV.

The recruitment of participants began with one IPV agency in OC. The other participants were recruited from other agencies using snowball sampling method, both in-person or email. For the in-person recruitment, the verbal recruitment script was used to inform potential participants about the study, ask for their participation, as well as collect their contact information to follow up and schedule an interview. Google Forms were used for the email recruitment as a method to collect their name, email, phone number, the name of the site they currently volunteer or work for, and finally the location and time they wanted to meet.

Each interview was approximately 45 minutes to an hour and verbal consent was requested before each interview. The interview guide included open-ended questions that were translated into English and Spanish based on the linguistic preference of the participant: seven interviews were conducted in English and two in Spanish. One interview was conducted in code-switching language using both English and Spanish. All participants received \$30 in cash to compensate them for their participation time at the end of the interview. All interviews were audio recorded with the verbal consent of the participant, and each interview recording was transcribed verbatim for analysis. At the end of the interview, all participants completed a 3-minute demographic and characteristic profession questionnaire that asked about their education, race, age, and other characteristics.

Table 13.1: Participants' Demographics

Provider's pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/ Race	Highest Level of Education	First Language	Job Title	Type of Practice	Years of Experience at Current Site
Janet	Woman	25	Mexican-American	College	Spanish	Legal Department Manager	Non-profit	2 years
Tiffany	Woman	24	Vietnamese-American	College	Vietnamese	Legal Advocate	Non-profit	2.5 years
Emily	Woman	26	Mexican-American	College	Spanish	Legal Advocate	Non-profit	2 years
Brenda	Woman	30	Mexican-American	College	Spanish	Housing Navigator/ Case Manager	Non-profit	3 years
Rosa	Woman	40	Mexican	College	English	Volunteer	Non-profit	2 years
Alexandra	Woman	40	Mexican	Some College	Spanish	Volunteer	Community clinic or health care	13.5 years
Maria	Woman	31	Mexican-American	College	Spanish	Confidential Campus Advocate	College (Women's Centre)	1.5 years
Rochelle	Woman	35	Egyptian-American	Grad/Prof School	Spanish	Prevention & Education Manager	Non-profit	5.5 years
Sofia	Woman	42	Mexican	College	English	Volunteer	Non-profit	1.5 years
Vicky	Woman	51	Mexican	High School	N/A	Founder/ President	Non-profit	10 years

N = 10

Note. These stages can vary across IPV agencies and does not represent all the services and programs they offer.

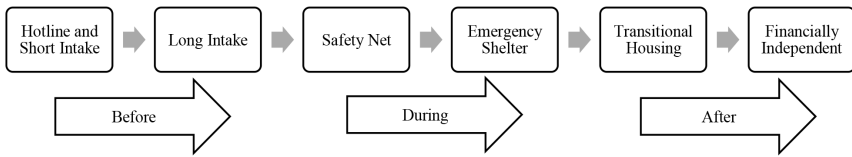
Braun and Clarke's (2006) coding technique was used to analyze the verbatim transcripts of the audio recordings through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a process that identifies themes and patterns by re-reading the raw data through line-by-line coding, examining the codes to identify significant broader patterns or themes, re-reviewing themes, and then developing a detailed analysis of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). HyperRESEARCH, a software program, was also used to conduct selective coding for each participant's responses into key themes. There were two guiding research questions: (1) how do IPV agencies provide access to resources for undocumented victims of IPV; and (2) what types of barriers do undocumented victims of IPV face when trying to access resources before, during, and after the abusive relationship?

The demographic data of the participants included in the study are illustrated in Table 13.1. The participants' age ranged from 24 (the youngest) to 51 (the oldest) years old, with a mean age of 34.4 years. All participants self-identified as women; most were born in the US, with three participants who were born in Mexico and immigrated to the US between the ages of 17 and 25. However, those who were born in the US were overwhelmingly of Mexican origin (four participants), one was of Vietnamese descent, and another one was of Egyptian origin. One participant had a high school degree, one had some college education, seven obtained a college degree, and one completed her graduate program in social work. All participants but one spoke a second language. Occupation title varied across participants: three volunteers, two legal advocates, one legal department manager, one housing navigator/case manager, one confidential campus advocate, one prevention and education manager, and one founder/president. Most participants worked in a non-profit organizational setting, while one participant volunteered in a community clinic and another one worked at a university. Their number of years of experience at the site ranged from 2 to 13.5 years.

Findings

Victims of IPV go through various stages of development to successfully become a self-sufficient, independent person. Findings revealed three re-occurring themes: (1) restrictive eligibility and selection process among service providers; (2) fear of deportation while accessing services; and (3) lack of a valid social security number.

Figure 13.1: Stages of Development



Note. These stages can vary across IPV agencies and do not represent all the services and programs they offer.

Figure 13.1 indicates the victim’s journey when being accepted into the agency’s program(s). The *before* stage consists of how restrictive the eligibility and selection process can be when a victim of IPV calls the IPV hotline and completes an intake. The *during* stage is when a victim of IPV is accessing services and enters the safety net (e.g., hotel) or emergency shelter. The *after* stage includes the victim moving into a transitional home and finally becoming financially independent. However, undocumented victims of IPV generally do not complete the last stage of development because they do not have a social security number.

Eligibility and Selection Process

IPV agencies have a mission to provide services and resources to anyone experiencing IPV, regardless of the victim’s religion, gender identity, race, age, sexuality, disability, or legal status. However, these services are not tailored to accommodate every victim’s individual needs, including undocumented victims of IPV. The selection and eligibility process of IPV for undocumented victims has become intentionally rigid and challenging to limit potential clients from accessing social and health services. The first stages of this restrictive process begin with the intake assessment process.

Depending on the agency’s procedures, victims of IPV go through a lengthy “assessment” process and two short intakes that can last more than one hour. Rigid assessment measures consist of various questions that IPV hotline advocates ask potential clients before they can access the agency specific services such as therapeutic care, emergency shelter, temporary housing, advocacy services, and legal assistance. Questions include the

client's mental health background, whether they consumed or smoked any illegal substances (e.g., marijuana), or if they have been arrested in the past.

The intake and assessment process negatively affects the ability of undocumented victims of IPV to access services. Essentially, IPV agencies, as one participant explained, are seeking "perfect candidates." A perfect candidate has no prior criminal record, has no drug abuse history, has the physical and mental capacity to work, and has legal status in the US. Such candidate supports the agency's reputation to obtain a higher success rate (e.g., participants completing the program). Completing the program is a form of success measurement that allows agencies, in order to obtain funding, to calculate how effective their programs are in helping their clients recover from their abusive relationships.

Domestic violence agencies need to report monthly and annually to both the federal and state governments regarding the services and resources they have provided toward the population they currently serve, and the overall outcomes of each intervention and educational programs the agency offers. Such results depend on how much funding and resources are allocated to the respective non-profit organizations. One participant urgently stated, "We have to show them [the government] how much progress we made to receive additional funding and grants because if not, our programs get cut." Non-profit organizations heavily rely on federal and state funding for the programs to function and keep running.

Essentially, the success rate is measured in two ways. The first is financial. Here, the funding is secured by philanthropists and the government, and for the most part, the measure of success is proven by and tied to numbers, such as "how many clients do you successfully serve? How many [victims] receive restraining orders, [and] how many presentations did you give." The second marker of success is determined by the actual client (e.g., victim). One participant clarified,

We would basically set up what success looks like for them. Success for them may not be leaving the relationship. Like success for them is getting a job and making their own money. Or success could mean going to a shelter and then getting their own housing.

Thus, searching for the “perfect candidate” to successfully fulfill the program could potentially guarantee future funding. The eligibility process of IPV agencies opens doors for “perfect candidates” who have the required qualifications — legal status, no criminal background, or employment — while weeding out those who would harm the IPV agencies’ success rate, respective reputation, and future funding.

Fear of Deportation While Accessing Services

During the process of receiving services, the fear of deportation was paramount for IPV service providers when supporting undocumented victims of IPV. Being undocumented can cause vulnerabilities such as experiencing isolation, violence, limited accessibility to resources, social, legal, and economic marginalization, and most importantly, immigration arrest and deportation.

Interviewed participants voiced concerns among the undocumented clientele who sought services and then left the IPV centre or program due to the fear of deportation. Immigrant women with and without legal status lack knowledge of their legal rights and services that are available to them. The undocumented victim has no way of knowing what type of services are safe to apply and receive, without experiencing legal and social consequences. Therefore, owing to the fear of deportation, in addition to sheer ignorance, undocumented victims are more likely to refuse the services to avoid legal prosecution and possible deportation. For instance, one participant expressed frustration on how undocumented victims seemingly and voluntarily refuse to receive support from the agency:

We cannot help them because sometimes the victim does not stop being afraid of being deported. They arrive [at the agency] and ask for help, and they say they are undocumented. Then, they do not return. Even if you contact them, they do not want help.

The testimony demonstrates the inability for IPV agencies to provide services to undocumented clients, who are avoiding uncertain legal or social consequences. However, there are instances where the victim does seek services but faces another type of barrier: the U.S. Immigration and

Customs Enforcement agency (ICE). Since President Donald Trump took office in 2017, ICE has become prevalent in criminal and civil courts — including family law court — according to most participants. Some participants indicated that there has been an increase of immigration arrests in courthouses and a decrease of reporting crimes (e.g., IPV, sexual assault, etc.) and attending court hearings by immigrants, given the immigration and legal consequences they might encounter when coming forward to the police. Undocumented victims of IPV who do not qualify or apply for U nonimmigrant status (U-visa) and T nonimmigrant status (T-visa) visas — which legally provides immigration relief — are more vulnerable for deportation (ACLU, 2018). The U-visa is given to victims of criminal activity (e.g., mental or physical abuse), while T-visa is provided to victims of human trafficking (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services [USCIS], 2018).

Moreover, the process of filing a restraining order and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) visa or the U-visa consists of undocumented clients “being inside of the legal system,” as one participant explains it, where their legal and social identity can be shared with the immigration authorities by the court or legal system; thus, these undocumented clients are running a significant risk of being located and detained. In essence, according to one participant, undocumented victims are taking the risk to trade off their personal identity to obtain a protection order against their abusers.

Although the U-visa, T-visa, and VAWA offer relief from deportation, one participant clarified that once the undocumented victim applies for one of these visas, the victims “just handed over all of [their] information to immigration services” as ICE is responsible for receiving and approving the visa applications. As for the restraining orders, the participant further revealed that there have been cases in California where police departments (and even the abuser) have cooperated with ICE by sharing the court hearing dates, home addresses, and personal information of the undocumented victims who are pursuing a case against their abuser. Depending on the state, police departments are often told by police unions to cooperate with federal immigration agents to conduct arrest in courthouses, because “some law enforcement agencies [are] now refus[ing] to

carry out immigration holds (‘detainers’) on noncitizens with whom they come into contact” (ACLU, 2018, p. 9).

Such compromise consists of ICE agents waiting outside the courthouse to potentially detain undocumented immigrants, a situation that increases their state of vulnerability even when the client is trying to “lay low.” This process of entering their name into the court system deters potential undocumented clients from seeking support and services, with the significant implication of forcing the victims to return to their perpetrators. This creates more difficulty for undocumented women who have children, because they are more likely to fear that ICE agents will deport them back to their home country while leaving their children with an abusive father.

Sanctuary states and cities represent a space where immigration laws “aim to provide a measure of protection for unauthorized residents” from being questioned about their immigration status (Villazor, 2008). For instance, one participant expressed that sanctuary cities are a form of protection that bars police officers from detaining undocumented victims of IPV to interrogate them about their immigration status. She depicted a scenario that reveals the unintended consequences of a city that does not offer sanctuary, such as Los Alamitos in OC, which caused social unrest in the city, as well as jeopardizing lives of undocumented victims. For undocumented victims, the outcome of a city not being a sanctuary is the separation of family members, especially in mixed-status families or couples where the victim is undocumented and the partner is a legal resident or a natural-born citizen. There are also other types of legal administrative requirements that the undocumented victim must go through, such as completing immigration paperwork for the federal VAWA visa or the U-visa. Another participant also indicated that the legal court system is currently requiring that their clients show concrete and physical evidence of abuse in order to avoid deportation:

It’s really important for them [bruises] to be visible. Immigration courts are denying application very easily and if it does get denied, they [victims] are more likely to get an order of deportation. We’re encouraging clients to have as much information, and physical [abuse] is the most

common type of abuse. If everything [is] emotional abuse, the case won't make it compared to a physical one. It's more likely that they might take the other one [physical case] just because it depends on the type of abuse.

The overall consequences of not establishing a strong case when filing for the VAWA visa or U-visa can result in the undocumented victim to discontinue seeking further services from the agency. The USCIS (2018) implemented the 28 June 2018 *Policy Memorandum* that altered the procedures in which courts operate on its basis of public safety with regards to immigration applications that are submitted for the purpose of seeking legal status.

Currently, the US Immigration courts are persistently denying applications that do not present evidence of physical harm from the abuse. Such violence must be conveyed in a physical manner for the judges to declare that the victim suffered abuse, which is part of the evidence that undocumented victims need to submit when seeking lawful permanent residence. Overall, this weeding-out process could prevent victims from seeking legal status; but this policy also becomes a powerful tool to minimize the pool of undocumented victims seeking legal status in the US, despite the ample support of the IPV service providers.

Lack of a Valid Social Security Number

All IPV service providers identified that the lack of a valid social security number was a significant barrier for undocumented victims to overcome, after the partial completion of their respective IPV programs. Being undocumented in the US brings social stigma, isolation, and a lack of government assistance, in addition to the inability to obtain a valid social security number. Without a valid social security number, undocumented immigrants are not able to obtain legal employment. Nevertheless, some of them work informally for employers who do not request a social security number; however, the unauthorized worker is often paid low wages, experiences unsafe working conditions, and suffers labour exploitation in exchange for a source of income (Enriquez, 2019).

The IPV service providers found that undocumented clients were unable to transition to the next step of the IPV program, because they

were unable to obtain a job to secure financial stability and independence. Participants explained that there was an ethical dilemma within the IPV agencies. Questions arose whether advocates should discontinue providing IPV services, stop providing protection after clients leave the agency, or allow undocumented victims in the transitional housing program, even when 70% of rent funding came from the government. One participant elaborated:

The ethical dilemma lies within the agency. [D]o you collect the funds from work that's under the table? Because if you do that, you are putting this person at risk.... You're having them work under the table, but they are not awarded those same protections that they had in your [emergency] shelter. You're forcing them to work under the table. They're being put at risk because now they must go and secure an income somehow when they legally don't have the ability to do that. They're risking deportation.

The participant conveyed concerns beyond an ethical and moral issue, by underscoring a systemic problem within an agency that is designed to support only certain victims to succeed. Conversely, another participant stated that the most significant barrier was the difficulty to get a job, although this was not an insurmountable problem.

Part of my job was working with participants who were coming into emergency shelters and then, finding out where they're going to go in 45 days. Is it a bigger barrier when you have a mother who doesn't have status [and] is not able to work? Yea, it is a bigger barrier, but it's not impossible and yet right now for transitional it's a little bit different depending on the program that you're trying to transition [in] to. Their requirements might be that you become employed within 30 days or that you are already employed so that you can sustain your transitional housing.

However, the participant also pointed out that there are programs that require clients to satisfy certain “requirements,” such as having a current job or becoming employed within a specific time frame. Such requirements could be challenging for some or all clients who are undocumented, because they cannot find an employer who can hire them without work authorization or a green card. Nevertheless, the percentage of undocumented victims transitioning to the next step, that is, transitional housing, was unknown.

Although it is difficult to gauge how many undocumented victims successfully transitioned into the last step in the program, other IPV service providers expressed distress when undocumented clients were unable to receive assistance from the IPV shelter during their transition process. Instead, the IPV shelter personnel would refer the undocumented client to another IPV shelter/agency. However, the referred IPV agency could not guarantee transitional shelter, causing the undocumented client to be in a state of uncertainty. For example, another participant stated,

For us to be able to give them the proper referrals because I know a lot of the times these clients do want to file [the referral] but I feel that’s where our services just like kind of cut out and it’s like here I [give] you the resources on what you can potentially apply for, what you could do, and some safety planning. Yeah, that’s it.

There is no support system in place after the transition from emergency shelter to transitional housing. Essentially, there is a stopping point that ends at the “referral” stage. This stage holds limited opportunity and mobility to access needed resources. As the participant stated, the services are “cut out” and the undocumented clients must fend for themselves and see what other resources are best for their health and financial and social stability by seeking informal support (e.g., community, friends, etc.). Therefore, the victim must obtain a job to maintain their place in the shelter. Essentially, having a job would make them independent and self-reliable. But, if the client failed to complete the program, there is limited access to alternative shelters. Similarly, another advocate expressed,

The reality is that most IPV survivors never get to step into a shelter. It is ok if we put an undocumented survivor in 30-day emergency shelter, but what happen[s] after? They don't have a job, or they don't have a social security [number]. Even if they do have a job, they are vulnerable to be fired at any given point. Some transitional shelters ... do require their clients to have [legal] status because these agencies require that the victim pays some kind of rent. [T]o pay rent you have to be able to have a source of income and if you are undocumented and you have a job, it's like they are enabling you to break the law. Those type of services are great for some people, but it won't work for undocumented immigrants.

The consequences of not obtaining formal employment are factors that explain why many undocumented victims do not transition to the shelter. The risk of having a job causes undocumented victims to break the law and face legal and immigration repercussions such as deportation. In contrast, a victim who is not employed would be potentially barred from completing the final stages of the IPV program, that is, becoming financially independent. Overall, the IPV agencies (in)directly adopt a bureaucratic system that imposes barriers on undocumented victims throughout the program and, thereby, hinders their ability to recover from abuse. This structure not only limits clients' welfare but contradicts IPV organizational mission to serve all demographics regardless of legal status and state of condition.

Discussion

In this chapter, the experiences of IPV service providers show that IPV services are not accessible to undocumented victims of IPV due to the agency's structural — both internal and external — and political barriers. The structural barriers that IPV service providers experience include rigid agency protocols and restrictive eligibility criteria when admitting clients, which, in turn, contribute to undocumented clients' exclusion and inaccessibility of services and resources. Meanwhile, political barriers are driven by punitive immigration policies that directly influence how IPV service providers decide to serve undocumented clients. The study

identified three themes: (1) restrictive eligibility and selection processes; (2) agency and client fear of deportation while accessing services; and (3) lack of valid social security number. The restrictive eligibility and selection process occurs before the IPV agency allows clients to access their services. Often, the agency is searching for the “perfect candidate” who has no prior criminal record, no drug abuse, and is a US citizen or a permanent resident in the US. This allows the victim to work legally without facing prosecution from the law. This ideal candidate enables the agency to obtain a high success rate with respect to clients completing the program, which then translates into receiving further funding from the state and the federal government.

Moreover, the fear of deportation was a paramount concern for IPV service providers when offering services to undocumented clients. IPV service providers experience the effects of immigration policies that prevent them from delivering services. Undocumented victims are reluctant to apply for specific legal protection, such as a VAWA visa or a restraining order, due to the fear of deportation. As a result, IPV service providers are very cautious about the type of services they are promoting and delivering for fear of causing legal harm to their clients. Finally, the absence of a valid social security number is a significant impediment that IPV service providers face when clients are transferred to transitional housing after completing their terms in the emergency shelter. Various shelters require their clients to work, but undocumented clients are unable to do so without a valid social security number. Often, the undocumented clients are then referred to other IPV agencies or are cut from the program since they are unable to become lawful employees. These findings supplement the gaps in literature and raise important questions for social work practice and field education.

The research findings suggest that social work service providers must become aware of their service delivery and cultural responsiveness to diverse groups of undocumented immigrants who are economically, socially, and politically marginalized. In theory, social work practice promotes services to all clients regardless of one’s legal status as defined by the National Association Social Worker (NASW) *Code of Ethics* (2022). However, there needs to be attention to uncertain legal and ethical challenges arising (e.g., public charge) from oppressive systems that shape the

experiences of how undocumented immigrants receive and respond to services, while the same systems hinder social workers' ability and practice to provide formal support to the undocumented population. Further research and continued discussion about unjust immigration policies and discriminatory ideologies from institutionalized systems are necessary for social workers to assist undocumented immigrants to overcome political, social, and legal barriers when accessing IPV services and other social services. Although the study captured new insights on the scarcity of resources, there are some limitations that need to be discussed.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is the lack of diverse study participants with respect to race, gender, and location of the IPV agencies in the OC area. Most of the participants came from a Latinx background, specifically from Mexico. However, the Latinx participants in this study were able to provide an "insider" perspective since some participants were once undocumented, and one participant was an IPV survivor with close ties to an immigrant community. Moreover, the location of the IPV agency is not representative of all agencies in California or throughout the US. The demographic location of other agencies might have different approaches in serving the undocumented population. Nevertheless, OC is an excellent location to conduct research as it is one of the counties with a large immigrant population. While the results are not generalizable due to the small sample, new insights on the lived realities of service providers who work with undocumented clients are provided.

Conclusion

This chapter provides insight into the perspective of IPV service providers on offering accessible services to the undocumented individuals who face abuse by a former or current partner; it also exposes the limitations these providers encountered in and outside of their agency that hindered them from delivering services. The IPV agencies should acknowledge societal factors that may affect the lives of undocumented clientele and consider their cultural and racial background when delivering IPV services. It is important to understand how the client's immigration status influences the choices and decision making of IPV service providers and,

consequently, affects how resources are distributed to clients without legal status. Overall, the data collected can be used as an entry point, for future research, to better understand the lived experiences of undocumented migrants as a vulnerable population. There is a need for social work field education programs to acknowledge the importance of immigration status as a component of diversity.

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