

National plan needed to address violence against immigrant and refugee women

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Recent changes to Canadian immigration policy mean fewer social and health supports for immigrant women with a precarious immigration status – putting them at an increased risk of violence, researchers say.

"Between 2008 and 2013, the Canadian government introduced an unprecedented number of legislative and regulatory changes that have affected immigrants' and refugees' access to legal representation, access to social and health services, and pathways to permanent residence," said Associate Professor Rupaleem Bhuyan of the University of Toronto's Factor Inwentash Faculty of Social Work.

Bhuyan is the lead author of *Unprotected, unrecognized: Canadian immigration policy and [violence against women](#), 2008-2013*. The study is part of the Migrant Mothers Project, a collaborative research project led by Bhuyan in partnership with a network of community groups working to address violence against [immigrant women](#).

The report calls for a national plan to address violence against immigrant and refugee women and immigration policies that better support immigrants in precarious circumstances. It calls on the federal government to abolish the two-year conditional status for sponsored spouses, reinstate access to the Interim Federal Health program to all refugee claimants and uphold the privacy of all people who have access to social and [health services](#).

More than one million people live in Canada on a temporary visa, as

international students, temporary foreign workers or refugee claimants, Bhuyan said. They are regularly turned away by service providers in health care, women's shelters and other support services because they are not permanent residents or convention refugees and, therefore, not eligible for services.

At the same time, stringent new policies have been introduced, such as the two-year conditional permanent residence for newly-sponsored spouses/partners, bring "undue hardship for newcomers who are facing domestic violence," said Bhuyan.

"For women who are facing [violence](#), access to shelter, income support and legal assistance can often be the difference between returning to an abusive situation and independence from a violent relationship."

The project also includes a collection of digital stories by migrant women and their advocates, documenting their personal struggles first hand: [Till Immigration Tears Us Apart: Stories of Strength through Struggle](#). The threat of detention and deportation is poignantly described in the digital story [Leaving my child behind](#), Bhuyan said.

Provided by University of Toronto

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