

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Chan, Wendy.** *Hiding in Plain Sight: Immigrant Women and Domestic Violence*. Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2020, pp. 126, \$20.00 paper, (9781773631882).

*Hiding in Plain Sight* by Wendy Chan provides a timely discussion of immigrant women and domestic violence based on in-depth interviews with service providers across four different communities in British Columbia. The book offers an overview of the gaps in service provisions across the immigration, criminal justice, and family justice systems and how immigrant women navigate these available supports. Moreover, the book sheds light on how immigrant women experiencing domestic violence remain underserved by their communities and interrogates the multiple barriers and gaps that prevent them from finding safety. By applying an intersectional lens, Chan highlights how broader structural forces such as neoliberalism, racism, and immigration policies influence immigrant women's experiences of domestic violence and access to services.

The book is well-written and organized into five substantive chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. The introductory chapter reviews what domestic violence is and the main argument "that immigrant women experience multiple, complex issues when they suffer abuse, and as a result, a comprehensive and holistic response is required to meet their needs" (p. 3). Chapter two summarizes policies and legislation in British Columbia and presents a short literature review that is valuable for understanding immigrant women's help-seeking behaviours. Chapter three describes intersectionality as a theoretical framework along with the methodology and methods to conduct in-depth interviews with diverse service providers in British Columbia's rural and urban regions.

The subsequent chapters focus on key findings and build on each other. Chapter four explores three significant themes: 1. social and economic barriers; 2. legal barriers; and 3. immigration, settlement and cultural issues. Here the reader gains insights into vulnerabilities that include fear of the police and immigration officials, deportation, loss of support networks, language barriers, and a lack of awareness of domestic violence and available services. Chapter five details geographical challenges in service delivery and how service providers negotiate the

obstacles of organizational mandates, funding challenges, and training. Chapter six covers immigrant women's risks of domestic violence victimization through cultural differences such as ostracization from family and community and stereotypical responses from police and other professionals. The reader also develops an understanding of structural and systemic challenges such as a lack of interpreters and translators and risk factors such as precarious immigration status that influence help-seeking approaches. The concluding chapter reinforces key themes and how gender, race, class, and immigration impact immigrant women's access to services. As Chan stresses, the process of leaving an abuser is not straightforward since immigrant women navigate many barriers and some services are not readily accessible.

While other scholars have covered some of the themes presented in this research, the academic literature on domestic violence is scant, and empirical work on immigrant women is even more limited in the Canadian context (see Fong, 2010). This short book provides a good summary for those who may be less familiar with immigrant women's challenges in accessing domestic violence services and supports. Another strength of the book is that the definition of domestic violence is broad enough to include abuse from both immediate and extended family members. Chan accurately reflects how extended family members can also act as abusers and how insensitive the family justice and immigration system are when the abuse involves multiple perpetrators. She also gives examples of distrust in the criminal justice system, especially police, judges, and lawyers who might appear insensitive to a client's experience. A further strength is the book's ending, where Chan reflects on participants' views of engaging immigrant men in domestic violence prevention efforts to suggest that they become antiviolence allies.

I commend Chan for exploring complex issues with service providers, but at various points in the book, she fails to offer any practical solutions or policy recommendations to improve the supports available. Chan stresses access to professional interpreters but does not suggest ways to improve this service gap. Chan also argues that immigrant women should not be treated differently because of their culture or race. She comments on how "a support system for abused immigrant women involves recognizing the importance of cultural practices and norms and ensuring that their cultural needs are met as well" (p. 73), except she does not expand on what this involves. She adds that client-centered approaches when working with this population prioritize immigrant women's safety concerns, but more discussion is needed about "cultural safety," which according to Rossiter et al. (2018), "is defined by clients themselves, and requires service providers to recognize that structures

and systems themselves may threaten client safety, and make an effort to transfer power to clients” (p. 10). Chan’s analysis section could generally benefit from domestic violence literature on victimization, revictimization, and training.

Despite these few shortcomings, the book provides an excellent intersectional analysis of abused immigrant women’s experiences in Canada. Chan conveys how much more still needs to be done to support these women and how helping professionals need to understand their multiple and complex challenges. “The intent of giving this book the title *Hiding in Plain Sight* was to make the point that the problem of immigrant women experiencing violence is not a new or exceptional phenomenon, but it has been rendered invisible” (p. 108). There is no doubt the book title is appropriate as Chan demonstrates why immigrant women are at greater risk of domestic violence, stay in abusive relationships, and underutilize services. Chan’s research findings are a valuable contribution to the existing literature, and they may encourage academics to build upon this work, which can serve as a helpful guide in exploring service providers’ perspectives and access to culturally competent services in other jurisdictions.

Chan’s book merits a place on the bookshelf next to *Domestic Violence of the Margins* (Sokoloff & Pratt, 2005) and *Out of the Shadows* (Fong, 2010) as it challenges scholars like myself to incorporate an intersectional analysis of domestic violence. Chan’s perspective offers new insights that will help academics, practitioners, and policymakers determine what is required to meet immigrant women’s needs in abusive relationships. Beyond academia, a wide audience interested in domestic violence and intersectionality will benefit from reading this book as it offers in-depth knowledge from service providers surrounding the current challenges in service gaps. The book would be of most interest for organizations, policymakers, and front-line service providers such as the police to re-think domestic violence service delivery for immigrant women by adopting intersectionality as an analytical tool to guide unique responses.

## REFERENCES

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