

Diversity Lost: Immigrant Women and the Gender Based Violence Prevention Strategy*

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Summary Gender and diversity-based approaches are described as powerful policy drivers. The question raised and discussed here is whether loss of diversity in knowledge creation and dissemination could be setting the agenda for government policy making in ways that are exclusionary to some population groups than others in Canada. This paper aligns with the overall conference theme - Embracing pluralism and thriving through diversity.

1. Relevance

Gender Based Violence (GBV), violence against a person based on their gender, gender expression, gender identity or perceived gender, is recognized as a significant problem in Canada. The federal government announced its GBV prevention strategy in June 2017 committing \$110 million over five years. Agencies working with immigrant populations, received only \$1.5 million - the least attention and funds through this strategy.

2. Aims & Objectives

The aim of this paper is to examine the agenda setting for the national GBV prevention strategy as it relates to immigrant women's vulnerability to GBV. Agenda setting is the first stage of the policy cycle and helps understand how a problem gets framed and shaped into a policy.

3. Methods

Journal articles, information in government reports, policy briefs, and action plans in the 10-years before the policy implementation were examined for gender and diversity-driven information including GBV, immigration, gender. Public and political discourses about GBV, immigration, and women were examined within the broader social and political milieu. The representation of immigrants' 'voices' and the attention given to immigrant women's issues by the federal government were examined. Kingdon's (1984) agenda setting framework, which describes three streams - problem politics, and policy streams - guided the analysis.

4. Results

Problem stream: immigrant women's experiences and diversity are lost in the GBV discourse in Canada. While popular media depict it as culture-driven, government documents report it as low priority. Community workers' perspectives, captured mostly in qualitative studies, provide strong evidence of the impact of GBV on immigrant women and their families. Government agencies' rhetoric, mostly based on national surveys that do not represent non-Canadian-born women, than the community workers' perspectives, diminish immigrant women's risk of GBV to less than that of Canadian-born women. Politics stream: changes in national leadership and the parties in power, and international conventions and recommendations influenced the level of government commitment to gender issues, immigration, inclusion, and diversity. Policy Stream: the formulation, implementation, and funding for the family violence initiative, and stakeholders' and advocates' call for a national policy pressured a relatively new federal government to formulate a national GBV prevention policy, albeit, an exclusionary one.

5. Conclusions

When diversity is lost in framing an issue, it can justify the way in which government attention is shifted and policies are made. Lack of diversity-based approaches was a powerful policy driver in this case, an exclusionary one for immigrant women. Those who create and share knowledge have a responsibility in ensuring diversity-based approaches are embedded in their work because they may be the ones that can set a more inclusionary agenda for policy making.

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