INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN DENMARK

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence (IPV), is a significant public health issue and a violation of basic human rights. It affects women across all backgrounds but poses heightened risks for immigrant women. This study explored the personal experiences of IPV among immigrant women living in Denmark, the barriers they encounter when seeking help, and their coping strategies. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four non-EU immigrant women from different countries. Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews identified six key themes: IPV experiences, barriers when seeking help, coping strategies, community and formal support, stigma and shame surrounding divorce, and cultural gender norms and patriarchy.

The data reveal that participants endured physical, psychological, and financial abuse from their spouses. They faced multiple barriers when seeking help, including language barriers, difficulties with the police, lack of knowledge about available information, challenges at crisis centers, legal system hurdles, and threats related to visa status and children. To cope, the women employed strategic planning, sought legal advice, and gathered evidence to prepare for leaving their abusive relationships. They emphasised the importance of formal and informal support systems, which provided both emotional assistance and legal guidance.

The study highlights how shame and stigma associated with divorce, as well as cultural gender norms and patriarchal expectations, further complicate the challenges faced by immigrant women. These factors create significant barriers to seeking help, leading to fear, shame, and reluctance to disclose IPV experiences.

Recommendations for improving support for immigrant women experiencing IPV include providing translation services and legal information in multiple languages, raising awareness about different forms of abuse through community outreach, and training police and legal professionals to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by these women. Legal reforms should prioritise the safety of immigrant women and their children over deportation concerns. Strengthening community networks and encouraging healthcare professionals to support IPV victims can also provide crucial assistance. Lastly, legal assistance should be made accessible to help immigrant women navigate the complex legal system.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

Violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence (IPV), is a public concern impacting public health violating women's basic human rights. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that roughly 30% of women globally have encountered physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at some stage in their lives (WHO, 2021). Worldwide, partner violence is the most widespread type of violence experienced by women. A common trend observed in intimate partner violence (IPV) worldwide is that it is perpetrated by men against women. While men can also be victims of violence, within intimate partner relationships, women are significantly more likely to experience victimisation (Heise, 2011). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) encompasses sexual, physical, or psychological harm inflicted by a current or former intimate partner or spouse, including various forms of abuse. It impacts women across diverse racial, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds and has diverse immediate and long-term effects on the physical and mental health of women and their children. Nonetheless, certain women, such as immigrant women, face heightened vulnerability to IPV due to additional challenges like limited social and family networks post-migration, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with the legal system of the host country (Ozturk et al., 2019). Immigrant women are more vulnerable due to the intersectionality of several factors such as culture, gender and ethnicity (Gonçalves & Matos, 2016). Intersectionality can in this context be described as the overlapping of several factors that contribute to shaping the different unique experiences of these women (Sabri et al., 2020). Women originating from various countries and cultures frequently encounter

similar obstacles resulting from cultural disparities in their host country, along with a lack of support and difficulty securing employment due to language barriers. These challenges often lead to financial dependence on their partners, heightening their susceptibility to intimate partner violence (Gonçalves & Matos, 2016). When different women face abuse in their relationships, the typical solution is seeking help and divorce. However, for many immigrant women, divorce or seeking help tends to be more complex than it is for natives due to stigma surrounding divorce, language barriers or lack of knowledge about the legal system. Many victims wish to divorce their abusing partner or seek help, but find it difficult as an alarming concern for them is the risk to their visa status posed by their partners, particularly if they are in the host country under family reunification and authorities designate them as dependents on their visa applications (Ozturk et al., 2019). This association between immigration status and marital ties can deter victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) from seeking assistance. Victims may fear deportation and losing custody of their children if they decide to leave their abusive spouses, thereby complicating their ability to seek help and escape from abusive situations (Thiara et al., 2011). Aside from visa issues, Immigrant women also experience other barriers such as pressure related to their cultural beliefs, social stigmas and their sense of responsibility toward their children. They view IPV as a private matter within the family and are hesitant to discuss their struggles with other family members or seek external assistance (Ozturk et al., 2019). Experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) amongst immigrant women are complex and multifaceted, yet there is not a lot of research that delves into their specific challenges This study aims at exploring the personal experiences of IPV amongst immigrant women in Denmark, the barriers they face when seeking help and their coping strategies. Denmark serves as an interesting place for this study as it is well known for its fundamental principle to prioritise gender equality (Denmark, 2024). It is essential in Denmark that both women and men have the same rights and opportunities and they achieved

this by signing various international agreements, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), that emphasise the principle that everyone is born with equal dignity and rights, regardless of gender (Danida, 2014). Danish society has a supportive stance towards women and has zero tolerance for gender-based discrimination. Danes firmly believe in ensuring equal access to opportunities for women across all domains of life. The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are core objectives within Danish society (Danida, 2014). Gender-neutral laws and policies in Denmark are the norm, except for some measures aimed at assisting women who are victims of violence. Gender equality isn't treated as a temporary concern but is deeply embedded in how laws and policies are crafted and put into action. The government recognizes that women often face more disadvantages than men and prioritises efforts to empower and advance women (Danida, 2014). However, this may not be the same for all women living in Denmark, especially immigrant victims of IPV. Denmark has faced criticism for overlooking disparities among immigrant women and showing insufficient concern for addressing gender inequality issues within this demographic (Siim & Borchorst, 2016). A recent study conducted by the gender equality advocacy group Danner revealed that immigrant women in Denmark face heightened vulnerability to intimate partner violence compared to Danish women due to heightened vulnerability stems from factors such as living in isolation and fear, which deter them from seeking assistance. Additionally, their circumstances often result in limited visibility to authorities, further complicating their access to support services (Wenande, 2018). Immigrant women under family reunification who encounter violence face a unique vulnerability, as leaving their abusive spouse could result in them losing their right to reside in Denmark hence finding themselves in a difficult situation, having to choose between enduring violence or facing deportation (Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2015). If, for instance, an immigrant woman who came to the country through

family reunification decides to divorce her husband due to intimate partner violence, she faces the risk of losing her visa and being sent back to her home country (Wenande, 2018). According to New in Denmark policy it states that "*If you were granted a residence permit in Denmark on the grounds of family reunification with a spouse or a partner, once you divorce, your residence permit will normally be revoked. However, there are special possibilities for keeping a residence permit if you have been subject to violence from your spouse. In such a case, the violence must be physical or psychological and must be documented.There is, however, no guarantee that a residence permit may be retained upon divorce, even if it can be documented, that there have been acts of violence in the marriage, and that the violence was a direct reason for the divorce"* (Minister for ligestilling, 2019). This situation can make it harder for these women to feel secure about seeking assistance or leaving their abusive partner because they're unsure if they'll be able to stay in the country with their visa. Victims may also struggle to provide evidence of abuse, particularly when it involves psychological harm and they face the additional burden of having to demonstrate the abuse while also risking deportation. Individuals with substantial knowledge of the circumstances surrounding immigrant women experiencing violence contend that, in reality, the specific provision addressing violence often fails to effectively safeguard these women (United Nations, 2023). Experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among immigrant women in Denmark are complex and multifaceted and there is limited research that delves into their unique challenges when seeking help and the coping strategies they employ. Therefore the aim of the study is to explore the personal experiences of IPV among immigrant women in Denmark, focusing on the barriers these women face when seeking help and the strategies they use to cope with their situations. The study aims to answer the following research question: *"How do immigrant women in Denmark experience intimate partner violence, what barriers do they face when seeking help and their coping strategies"*. This study is relevant as it will

contribute to the already existing literature on IPV and despite the focus on intimate partners, there are limited studies that exclusively focus on the personal experiences of immigrant women due to many of them not seeking help.

To get to the findings, the study will follow a qualitative research design and data will be collected using semi structured interviews which will be analysed using Thematic analysis.

In this section, the initial context of the thesis has been introduced by outlining the problem and identifying the research questions, along with explaining the significance of the research. In the next section, existing literature will be reviewed to identify important concepts and themes related to intimate partner violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will look at what research already exists about Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The goal is to understand more about IPV, including how common it is, the diverse types, and the effects it has. Firstly, I will talk about the general idea of IPV, covering how much it happens, the different forms it can take, and what happens as a result. Then, I'll focus on IPV specifically in Denmark, discussing how much it happens there, what causes it, and what's being done about it. Finally, I will identify recurring themes through the literature review process, highlighting recurring patterns.

BACKGROUND

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)

Intimate partner violence can be defined as the actions carried out by a current or former partner that result in physical, sexual, or psychological damage, such as physical attacks, sexual manipulation, emotional abuse, and efforts to exert control (WHO, 2021). Historically, efforts within reform movements have targeted family violence, initially focusing on physical abuse and later expanding to encompass verbal abuse. Early research, emerging in the 1970s, utilised terms such as "wife abuse" and "battering" but found them inadequate due to their limited scope and exclusion of certain relationship dynamics. Contemporary discourse favours the term intimate partner violence (IPV), which encompasses physical, emotional, and sexual aggression within various close relationships, including spouses and dating partners. While terms like "dating violence" and "domestic violence" persist, ongoing debates centre on the roles of perpetrators and victims, with conflicting perspectives on whether women are predominantly victimised or if both partners can assume perpetrator roles (Heyman et al., 2019) however, as stated in the introduction, this thesis focuses mainly on women as victims or survivors of IPV. This phenomenon is attributable to the elevated rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced by women worldwide. Globally the incidence of intimate partner violence (IPV) affecting women varies significantly across different geographic regions. For example, prevalence rates stand at 33% in sub-Saharan Africa, 30% in Northern Africa, 29% in Western Asia, 18% in Central Asia, 35% in Southern Asia, 21% in South-Eastern Asia, 20% in Eastern Asia, 20% in Eastern Europe, 16% in Southern Europe, 23% in Northern Europe, 21% in Western Europe, 25% in Latin America and the

Caribbean, and 25% in Northern America. These statistics highlight the considerable variation in the occurrence of IPV among women globally (WHO, 2018). Perpetrators of IPV can posses different factors such as having less education, experiencing child abuse, witnessing violence in the family, having antisocial personality traits, abusing alcohol, exhibiting harmful masculine behaviors like having multiple partners or justifying violence, and living in communities where men are valued more than women (WHO, 2021).

Types of Intimate Partner abuse.

Intimate partner violence (IPV), can manifest in various forms, all of which are deeply damaging to the victim's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Here are some common types of intimate partner abuse (Bailey, 2021)**:**

1. **Physical Abuse:** This involves the use of physical force against the partner, causing bodily harm or injury such as slapping, punching, kicking, suffocating or strangling.
2. **Emotional/ Psychological Abuse**: Intimate partner violence frequently hinges on coercive control and may manifest as persistent psychological or emotional mistreatment, characterised by a cycle of coercion, continual criticism or belittling, and intimidation directed towards a partner in the relationship. It can include verbal insults, constant criticism, manipulation, threats, intimidation, and isolation from friend.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse represents a prevalent means of coercion or violence, occurring in nearly half of all relationships involving intimate partner violence

(IPV), with about half of all female rape victims having experienced rape by an intimate partner. The classification of abuse also extends to situations where the victim is incapable of providing consent for a sexual act, such as when they are intoxicated or experiencing cognitive or physical impairment

4. **Financial Abuse:** This form of abuse frequently involves threats to withdraw financial assistance, thereby trapping the victim in the home, denying access to family funds, or prohibiting them from seeking employment outside the household, withholding money, preventing the victim from working, controlling access to bank accounts, or running up debts in the victim's name to limit their independence and ability to leave the relationship and maintain financial dominance.
5. **Stalking**: This involves stalking, harassing, or cyberstalking a current or former intimate partner is a widespread issue that has seen a rise in occurrences in recent years. The definition of stalking encompasses various actions such as physically confronting the individual at their home or workplace, initiating unwanted communication via phone calls, texts, instant messages, or emails, observing, following, or recording the person without consent, and sending unsolicited gifts. With the advancement of technology, this form of intimate partner violence now includes cyberstalking or cyberbullying, which involves using social media or the internet to intimidate, harass, or divulge private information or images of an individual without their permission. Nearly two-thirds of stalking victims have experienced stalking by a current or former intimate partner, and a significant portion of individuals murdered by their partners had previously been subjected to stalking by them (Bailey, 2021, p.3).

Consequence of Intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence, including physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as sexual violence, has severe short and long-term impacts on women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health. It also affects the wellbeing of their children and incurs significant social and economic costs. This violence can result in outcomes like injuries, unintended pregnancies, gynecological issues, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and moreover can lead to fatal outcomes like homicide abortions or suicide. Additionally, intimate partner violence during pregnancy increases the risks of miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm delivery, and low birth weight babies. It can also lead to various mental health issues such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, and suicidal tendencies. Other health effects include headaches, pain syndromes, gastrointestinal disorders, limited mobility, and overall poor health (WHO, 2021).

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN DENMARK

Denmark firmly rejects all types of violence against women, particularly within intimate relationships. They contend that such violence goes against the fundamental ideals of equality and individual freedom. Consequently, the government believes that they have the responsibility to actively address and prevent this problem. Violence within relationships is seen as a reflection of disrespect and inequality (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2018). Denmark has been focused on preventing and dealing with Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) for a long time. In 2014, the Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration, and Social Affairs launched a national strategy to tackle violence in close relationships. The prevalence of IPV can be challenging to estimate, however estimates from different sources like healthcare records, police reports, and surveys from victims can be used (*Danish Policy*

on Domestic Violence | EUCPN, n.d.). One estimate indicates that around 28,000 women encounter IPV each year in Denmark (Danish Government, 2010). This is 19% higher than the average across the European Union (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). This can be the case because Denmark is among a small number of European nations that consistently conducts thorough examinations of the prevalence of intimate partner violence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2018). According to statistics, In 2013 alone, there were 1,788 reported cases of sexual assault and rape against women. Additionally, an estimated 33,000 women experience intimate partner violence annually, while approximately 9,500 young women aged 16 to 24 encounter physical, psychological, or sexual violence each year. Moreover, more than 100,000 individuals become victims of stalking annually. According to the 2014 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey, 52% of women in Denmark have encountered physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, and 42% of Danish citizens know a woman in their social circle who has experienced domestic violence (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is more severe compared to other forms of violence against women. According to recent data from Danmarks Statistik, 41 percent of women who need to stay at crisis centers are not of Danish ethnicity. Considering that non-ethnic Danes make up only about 10 percent of the population, this indicates a significant over-representation (Gadd, 2018). These figures are an estimate especially among immigrant women as most of them live in isolation and reside outside the purview of authorities, making it challenging to register the actual figures (Wenanede, 2018). Approximately 17 percent of immigrant women disclosed experiencing violence themselves, while 37 percent acknowledged knowing someone who had. Perpetrators come from diverse ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic statuses across Denmark. The dependence of these women on their abusive partners is exacerbated by factors including isolation, language barriers, limited knowledge about available assistance, and

awareness of their rights (Ibid). The Danish government has established a range of institutional mechanisms within social, legal, and healthcare sectors to address violence against women. Women who experience violence in intimate relationships are offered accommodation in crisis centers where they can receive support and treatment. Both the Danish police force and healthcare system play crucial roles in identifying and intervening in cases of violence against women (De Vido & Frulli, 2023). These institutional efforts are reinforced by national action plans that introduce new programs and initiatives to enhance the government's response to intimate relationship violence. For instance, the 2014 National Action Plan focuses on expanding counselling and treatment options for victims of various forms of violence (*Danish Policy on Domestic Violence | EUCPN*, n.d.). Legal measures, such as restriction orders and barring orders, are available to safeguard victims from further harm. Denmark has also ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, which is considered the most comprehensive international treaty addressing this issue. Additionally, Denmark provides a national women's helpline that operates around the clock, offering anonymous and multilingual support, funded by the state. The country has 43 women's shelters with a total of 934 beds, ensuring access to shelter and support services across all regions (De Vido & Frulli, 2023). In Denmark, violence against women is considered a criminal offence, even though there isn't a specific law dedicated solely to addressing it. Instead, various forms of violence targeting women, such as physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse, are addressed under the broader provisions of the criminal code(*Danish Policy on Domestic Violence | EUCPN*, n.d.). Intimate partner violence is commonly linked with physical harm, such as bruises. However, it encompasses various forms, including physical actions like pushing or hitting, as well as psychological abuse like demeaning behaviour, isolating the victim, threats, monitoring, and controlling social

interactions. Psychological abuse can be as severe as those of physical violence. Individuals experiencing psychological intimate partner violence suffer similar negative effects as those experiencing physical violence.(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2018). In 2017, 97% women in shelters had experienced psychological abuse, while a significant majority 83% had also endured physical violence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2018). Since 2002, Denmark has implemented action plans aimed at preventing violence against women and within intimate relationships. On June 27, 2023, a new National Action Plan targeting Intimate Partner Violence was introduced. This plan comprises 26 initiatives, one of which involves an awareness campaign designed to disseminate information about intimate partner violence. The campaign aims to educate the public about the heightened vulnerability of women to such violence, provide guidance on assisting individuals experiencing violence within one's social circle, and highlight available resources for support and assistance. By increasing awareness and understanding, the campaign aims to encourage more individuals in Denmark to intervene and provide support when encountering or learning about violence within close relationships (De Vido & Frulli, 2023). The Danish government promotes open discussion about experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV), urging individuals not to keep it private. They also advocate for neighbours or colleagues to offer support to victims of abuse. There is a growing consensus that domestic violence is completely unacceptable. We all share a responsibility and the ability to aid domestic violence victims, whether we are professionals, family members, colleagues, neighbours, or politicians (Danish Government, 2010). Immigrant women require additional support as they often face greater challenges in leaving abusive relationships compared to Danish women. They frequently return to their abusers and rarely establish independent homes after leaving crisis centers. More research is needed to understand and address the specific needs of immigrant women affected by IPV (Ibid)

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND CULTURAL NORMS

Research conducted across various cultures has identified several norms and cultural influences that contribute to increased levels of violence. Research on intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly among immigrant populations, offers insights into how cultural norms and practices within immigrant communities can heighten vulnerability to IPV and serve as obstacles to seeking assistance (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Cultural norms against women in some contexts may encourage intimate partner violence (IPV) and influence women's choices regarding whether to report IPV or not (Güler et al., 2023). Culture can be defined as the shared beliefs, customs and traditions that guide the lives of a group of people (Eagleton, 2016), while norms are cultural elements that dictate and restrict behaviour within particular situations (Hechter & Opp, 2001). In modern society, the state plays a significant role in governing behaviour, primarily through the implementation of laws. While laws may be influenced by norms, they differ from social norms in their deliberate creation process (Hechter & Opp, 2001). Social norms strongly influence people's attitudes and actions, as individuals may face criticism, penalties, or disapproval from important others if they go against group expectations (Heise, 2011). Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs in all nations, cultural groups, and communities, with significant differences in prevalence rates between countries, indicating the influential role of cultural norms on IPV occurrences (Cañete et al., 2024). Various studies indicate how culture influences how victims perceive and experience violence and abuse. For instance, verbal abuse may be viewed differently across cultures, with some societies considering it less serious due to its normalisation within certain relationship dynamics. This normalisation often stems from the belief that such behaviour is an acceptable part of conflict resolution strategies where both partners engage in

arguments (Cañete et al., 2024). These factors encompass an individual's self-concept and worldview, including whether they adhere to collectivist or individualist values. Individualistic societies are those societies that have weak connections among their members, with individuals primarily focused on pursuing their interests. On the other hand, collectivist societies are societies that emphasise stronger bonds among group members and prioritise communal interests over individual desires, and most of the non-EU women living in Denmark belong to the collectivist society which in turn can influence their decision to disclose IPV (Rinne et al., 2013). These women may hesitate to speak out about IPV due to concerns about how it could affect not only themselves but also their children, family, and community. This reluctance may stem from the stigma surrounding IPV, which could result in blame being placed on their family or community. These women belonging to are willing to sacrifice their needs for the benefit of the group or community (Cañete et al., 2024).

In certain societies where collectivism is valued, actions like wife beating or verbal abuse might be considered acceptable, due to patriarchy structure where men typically hold economic and decision-making power in these households (Mikton, 2010). Many victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) opt not to disclose their experiences to safeguard their family's honour as disclosing IPV is considered taboo. (Heise, 2011). Preserving family honour and privacy is a significant cultural factor, as revealing IPV may be viewed as disrespectful to the family and community. For instance, if a woman shares her IPV experience with someone outside her family, she may be held responsible for bringing shame upon her family and community, particularly in collectivist societies (Güler et al., 2023). In certain cultures, there is a belief that men have authority over women and are considered socially superior, leading to the expectation for women to be submissive and tolerant towards their husbands. Since women are seen as inferior in these cultures, there is a greater likelihood for them to experience suppression or oppression. (Das et al., 2015). For example

in some cultures, there is a misconception that men have an inherent right to engage in sexual activity, including instances of rape within the context of marriage which inturn can suppress a woman's value and dignity. This can potentially increase the occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV), as some men may believe it is their entitlement to engage in sexual activity with their wives whenever they desire (Heise, 2011) . Additionally, there is a belief that men have the authority to physically discipline women for behaviour deemed inappropriate and physical violence is seen as an acceptable method to resolve conflicts within relationships (Mikton, 2010). For Immigrant women, the heightened vulnerability is due to the intersecting challenges of navigating two potentially conflicting cultures while experiencing isolation and being perceived as outsiders within their new context (Raj & Silverman, 2002). These cultural norms contribute to the perpetuation of violence against women and hinder efforts to address and prevent such behaviour.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND DIVORCE AMONG IMMIGRANT WOMEN

When considering divorce, immigrant women may encounter difficulties attributable to the norms and customs prevalent in their countries of origin (Liversage, 2022) Migrant women facing intimate partner violence (IPV) encounter obstacles in seeking divorce from their abusive partners due to significant ramifications. Departing from the relationship could result in the loss of financial assistance from the spouse, and additionally, community support may be lacking due to prevailing biases against divorce (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). Immigrant women, particularly in Denmark, harbour significant apprehension regarding the prospect of deportation following divorce, as their visa status is contingent upon their spouses. In this situation, what men say and threaten holds a lot of power, including claims that migrant women do not have rights in their new country. Despite feeling various emotions, the fear of being deported has a big impact on how they act, even after leaving their abusive partner.

These women often choose not to divorce and to stay in harmful relationships because they worry that going back to their home country would mean facing more mistreatment, shame, and guilt. They also believe that Denmark provides better opportunities for their future, especially since many of them come from countries that are still developing (Jelinic, 2019). When divorce becomes associated with the looming threat of deportation, especially within an environment marked by economic hardships and societal hostility towards female divorcees, it can engender toxic dynamics within relationships, leaving women vulnerable and reliant on their spouses (Liversage, 2022). Since Immigrant women in Denmark often face the threat of deportation after divorce, even if deportation is not an immediate concern, the husbands may exploit this fear to compel their wives to remain in abusive marriages, taking advantage of the women's reliance on marriage for residency permits. This reflects a global pattern of escalating deportations, as sovereign states exert control over immigration. Family migrants in Denmark are particularly vulnerable, as their residency status is linked to marriage. However, One way to alleviate this risk would be for these women to obtain independent residency permits. Nevertheless, recent changes in Danish immigration policies have made it increasingly difficult for married migrant women, particularly those with lower levels of education, to secure permanent residency. The decision by the Danish government to extend the probationary period from three to seven years in 2002 resulted in a notable change in the distribution of power, favouring the sponsoring spouses. As a consequence, some of the most vulnerable individuals, particularly marriage migrant women, have endured intimate violence for over five years due to the fear of being deported from Denmark (Liversage, 2013) Additionally, husbands may isolate their wives and exert control over them, making it challenging for immigrant women to leave abusive marriages (Liversage, 2022). Efforts have been made in Denmark to address the challenges faced by isolated immigrant wives who are vulnerable to domestic abuse but face deportation if they divorce

their spouse, they have introduced exemptions for victims of domestic violence, waiving the requirement for a probationary period before granting settlement. However, the practical difficulties of proving domestic violence mean that accessing this exemption is not always straightforward (Charsley & Liversage, 2015). Research also indicates that many immigrant women facing intimate partner violence (IPV) are not passive bystanders but instead employ various strategies to safeguard themselves and their children. Those with children face particularly complex situations, as they must consider not only their own well-being but also that of their children. When a woman decides to initiate divorce proceedings, it marks a significant change in her life trajectory. Post-divorce, these women prioritise their children's welfare, support, and upbringing, especially given their often precarious financial situations (Güler et al., 2023). The decision to divorce can be fraught with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. At the outset of this process, important questions arise regarding where she will reside, how she will support herself as a single parent, and what impact the divorce will have on her children. Choosing to pursue divorce, therefore, represents a substantial shift in a woman's future compared to what it would have been if the marriage had continued (Liversage, 2022).This concern may sometimes lead them to remain in abusive relationships due to fear of not being able to provide for their them and also losing custody of their children. In certain cultures as well, divorced women are considered flawed, making it difficult for them to find new partners. If they have children, their situation becomes even more challenging because few men are willing and able to marry women with kids. Additionally, in these societies, children are typically seen as belonging to their biological father, which can further complicate matters for divorced women (Ajlan, 2021). According to legal advisors assisting immigrant women regarding their resident permit after divorce, express concern about the lack of clarity and fairness in the process due to the

unpredictability of outcomes stems from the discretionary decisions made by immigration authorities (Liversage, 2022).

PATRIARCHY, GENDER INEQUALITY AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Patriarchy refers to an intricate system of societal arrangements, beliefs, and standards found across political, social, and economic spheres. It systematically establishes and sustains unequal power relationships between men and women, solely based on gender (Nash, 2020). Gender inequality on the other hand encompasses the deprivation of rights, resources, and autonomy, particularly for women, whose societal roles often remain subordinate, limiting their control over various aspects of their lives (European Commision, 2004). Many immigrant women originate from societies that follow patriarchal systems and emphasise collectivism. In collectivist societies, individuals are expected to prioritise the needs of the group over their own, often resulting in the marginalisation of vulnerable and powerless members, particularly women (Kim, 2009). Patriarchy and gender inequality play a significant role in the occurrence of intimate partner violence. In patriarchal societies, gender inequality is promoted, where men typically enjoy more privileges than women, particularly in areas like employment, public roles, and education. Discrimination against women places them in a subordinate position, leaving them susceptible to experiencing violence. Conversely, men's societal position reinforces the idea that it's normal for them to hold power and status, solely because of their gender. This normalisation of male dominance can contribute to different forms of violence, often resulting in women being blamed for provoking their partners (Wessells & Kostelny, 2022). Men often wield power and control

over women, leading to unequal gender dynamics where actions like wife beatings are deemed acceptable and justified if women fail to adhere to cultural norms (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2017). Gender inequality and patriarchal beliefs support the notion that men are more powerful than women. This can lead to harmful actions, like men physically hurting women, to show their dominance and control (Kearns et al., 2020). These practices underscore the historical and ongoing subordination of women to men in many male-dominated societies, making women vulnerable to male violence (Tonsing & Tonsing, 2017). Other practices in patriarchal societies, is the norm for people to believe that the man is the leader of the household, and his wife is essentially his property. He is thought to have the right to treat her however he wants. The woman is expected to obey and respect her husband without question, prioritising his feelings over her own. If a woman shows independence or defiance, the husband may resort to violence to control her. And if she speaks out against this treatment, she's often blamed for causing the violence herself. Any deviation from expected behaviour is seen as a challenge to the husband's authority, leading to accusations of dishonour in the family (Wessells & Kostelny, 2022). Gender roles, especially in patriarchal societies, can significantly influence the occurrence of intimate partner violence (IPV). These roles assign men dominant positions in various areas of life, like economics, politics, and family, while women are placed in subordinate roles. Society assesses individuals based on how well they conform to traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity (Liu, 2023). This pressure to adhere to gender norms reinforces a system where men hold power in important aspects of life, leaving women in inferior positions. Gender roles greatly shape the dynamics of intimate partner relationships, as girls and young women are expected to conform to patriarchal expectations in their attitudes and behaviour within relationships (Llano-Suárez et al., 2021). The pressure can also lead IPV survivors to keep quiet about their experiences and struggle to identify signs of abuse. This silence hinders the

acknowledgment of abuse in society, enabling the perpetrator's actions to be condoned and increasing the likelihood of the victim staying in an abusive relationship. For instance, women with low self-esteem or feelings of insecurity are more prone to remain in violent relationships compared to those who feel empowered (Llano-Suárez et al., 2021). In Denmark, the rules for family reunification create a situation where women rely entirely on their husbands, reinforcing men's power. This reliance on the man's visa status gives him control. Language barriers further complicate matters for women, as they become dependent on men for daily tasks like doctor appointments. The man often acts as the main translator, but this can lead to misinformation and manipulation, allowing him to exert control over the woman (Mirza, 2016). The husband may also exert control by preventing his wives from attending language classes or pursuing education. He may even restrict them from making friends or leaving the house to maintain his dominance (Choi et al., 2012). Overall, patriarchy and gender inequality intersect with various social, cultural, and institutional factors to shape the prevalence and experiences of intimate partner violence among immigrant women.

THEORY

This thesis aims to delve into the personal experiences of IPV among immigrant women living in Denmark, shedding light on the nuances of their experiences within this specific socio-cultural context. The theoretical framework guiding this exploration incorporates three key theories: Power theory, Intersectionality theory, and the Ecological theory. These theories provide a comprehensive lens through which to understand the complexities of IPV experienced by immigrant women in Denmark.

THEORY OF POWER

Michel Foucault acknowledges that power permeates every aspect of society. It's not solely about government control or physical force; it extends to how society is structured and how it shapes people's actions. He illustrates this concept using examples such as military service and familial dynamics, highlighting how power operates at different levels (O'Farrell, 2005). Despite the presence of governmental control mechanisms, individuals also exert power in their personal interactions. Foucault sees power as a constantly shifting interaction between individuals and groups, only noticeable when it's being exercised. This power shows itself through rules, norms, and knowledge. Therefore, power is about the relationships between people and the strategies employed by groups, institutions, and governments. These multifaceted power dynamics interact and influence each other within society. Consequently, the state is depicted as just one facet of these intricate power structures rather than the sole source of authority (O'Farrell, 2005). In relation to Intimate partner violence according to Foucault's power dynamics, he helps us understand the complexities at play. Power in this context extends beyond overt physical force exerted by individuals; it encompasses the societal structures and norms that shape interactions within intimate relationships.

Foucault introduced the concept of discipline power which can be understood as a method of control that operates through surveillance, regulation, and normalisation of behaviour within societal institutions such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and the military. It is used to shape an individual's actions and thoughts to fit specific norms and standards, fostering obedience and conformity. It aims at maximising efficiency and utility within various societal institutions. Foucault underscored the shift from sovereign to disciplinary power, tracing its origins to earlier practices found in entities like Roman legions and monastic communities.

Additionally, he highlighted changes in training methodologies, exemplified by the adoption of rifles in the military, which led to the cultivation of compliant individuals tailored for societal productivity (O'Farrell, 2005). Similar to the way discipline operates in institutions such as prisons and the military, the perpetrator of IPV seeks to shape the victim's actions and thoughts to conform to their own standards, fostering obedience and compliance through manipulation and coercion. The shift from sovereign to disciplinary power, as outlined by Foucault, reflects a transition from overt forms of domination to more subtle and pervasive mechanisms of control, mirroring the dynamics often observed in abusive relationships. Additionally, the emphasis on maximising efficiency and productivity within societal institutions resonates with the perpetrator's desire to maintain dominance and control over the victim within the intimate sphere(Ibid). The abuser may employ tactics of isolation, gaslighting, and intimidation to exert control not only within the relationship but also in the broader social context of the victim's life. Furthermore, the concept of compliant individuals aligns with the impact of IPV on victims, as they may internalise feelings of powerlessness, fear, and dependency, which can perpetuate the cycle of abuse. The abuser's aim is to shape the victim into a submissive and compliant individual, mirroring Foucault's idea of shaping individuals to suit the needs of those in power (O'Farrell, 2005). Thus, intimate partner violence amongst immigrant women reflects the intricate interplay of power relations that Foucault describes, with implications for both individual experiences and systemic responses to violence.

INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY

The term "intersectionality" gained prominence in the 1980s, expanding upon the concept of "interlocking systems of oppression" introduced by the Combahee River Collective. This idea emphasises how various forms of discrimination intersect and impact individuals simultaneously. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced intersectionality within a legal framework, contending that existing discrimination laws often inadequately address the challenges faced by Black women. Through focusing on the experiences of black women, Crenshaw illustrated the shortcomings of current anti-discrimination legislation in addressing their specific issues (Carastathis, 2014).

In her essay "Mapping the Margins" from 1991, Crenshaw examines intersectionality through three main perspectives. Firstly, "structural intersectionality" underscores how being both a woman and a person of colour influences experiences like domestic violence uniquely. Secondly, "political intersectionality" reveals how feminist and antiracist movements have often sidelined issues specific to Black women. Lastly, "representational intersectionality" explores the portrayal of women of colour in media and how these depictions can reinforce stereotypes and objectification. Overall, Crenshaw's analysis underscores the intricate connections between race, gender, and power dynamics in shaping the experiences of marginalised individuals (Ibid).

When applying intersectionality to the context of intimate partner violence among immigrant women, it becomes evident that their experiences are shaped not only by their gender but also by their race, ethnicity, and immigration status. For instance, immigrant women may face additional barriers to seeking help or legal protection due to language barriers, fear of

deportation, or cultural norms which makes them more vulnerable to abuse in comparison to Danish women. It is crucial to acknowledge that immigrant women possess various overlapping identities, such as gender, education, race/ethnicity, and religion. These intersections significantly influence not just their susceptibility to intimate partner violence, but also their encounters and the responses from systems like the justice system. Women experiencing marginalisation on multiple fronts and encountering structural violence due to various forms of discrimination struggle to be believed, obtain assistance, and secure safety (Sabri et al., 2020). Intersectionality is a valuable framework for analysing the diverse experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among immigrant women. It enables us to examine factors beyond gender alone, such as ethnicity, cultural norms, language barrier and immigration status, that intersect to increase vulnerability of these women which in turn influences women's individual encounters with IPV and the obstacles they face when seeking assistance. Therefore, applying an intersectional lens to intimate partner violence amongst immigrant women reveals the complex interplay of race, gender, culture and immigration status in shaping their experiences and access to resources and support.

ECOLOGICAL THEORY

The Ecological theory was initially developed by Bronfenbrenner. This theory can be used to shed light on intimate partner violence. It scrutinises various factors across different levels and posits that behaviour is shaped by interactions within social contexts, impacting the risk of violence. Addressing IPV necessitates considering all these factors collectively. The model underscores the importance of grasping these interactions to devise successful strategies against IPV and violence towards women (Ali & Naylor, 2013)

This theory merge concepts from various psychologists to comprehend individual development within broader social and cultural contexts. It's termed Ecological theory because it examines how individuals intersect with wider societal and cultural influences. Dutton examines people and their connections to grasp intimate partner violence (IPV). He believes that while individuals' matter, their surroundings and relationships also play a crucial role in explaining why violence occurs in relationships. The ecological theory zooms in on individual aspects within broader contexts like cultural beliefs or family situations (Dutton, 2007).

The theory delineates three primary tiers:

1. The macrosystem: This encompasses overarching cultural norms and values that impact societal behaviour. For instance, societal perceptions of gender roles can shape interpersonal dynamics within relationships especially if a society believes men should be dominant over women, it might increase the risk of violence against women being accepted as well as societal factors like patriarchal systems, sexism, and health disparities shape the overall climate regarding violence (Ibid).

2. The exosystem: The exosystem includes external structures or groups, both formal and informal, that indirectly influence individuals, such as social support networks. This model encompasses social structures that impact a person's environment and experiences. Heise identified factors like low socioeconomic status, association with delinquent peers, as part of the exosystem. Specifically, the exosystem includes relationships women have with their formal and informal social networks. At the community or societal level, the exosystem represents how social structures influence individuals. These structures can include friendships, work, or peer groups, which play important roles at this level (Heise, 1998).

3. The microsystem: This pertains to immediate familial or interpersonal settings where behaviours are enacted. It scrutinises interactions within these intimate spaces, particularly focusing on factors contributing to instances of violence or conflict. Interpersonal relationships involve intimate connections with partners, family members, and peers, which can affect an individual's likelihood of experiencing violence. Various aspects of these relationships, particularly concerning family dynamics, have been recognized as risk factors for intimate partner violence (IPV). These factors include male dominance in economic and decision-making roles within the family, male control over financial resources within the family, and conflicts within marriages, particularly in relationships where power imbalances exist (Kelly, 2011).

In ecological theory, intimate partner violence (IPV) is seen as a complex issue influenced by various factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels. These factors interact dynamically, affecting an individual's likelihood of experiencing violence (Dutton, 2007).

For Immigrant women specifically experiencing IPV, this theory is relevant as it offers insights into their personal experiences within broader social and cultural contexts. It suggests that their interactions with their immediate surroundings, including their relationships with partners, family dynamics, and community environments, play a significant role in influencing their risk of experiencing violence.

At the societal level, cultural beliefs and norms, such as gender roles and patriarchal systems, can contribute to the acceptance of violence against women, making marginalised immigrant women more vulnerable. Additionally, factors like social support networks and economic

stressors in the external environment can further exacerbate the risk of IPV among immigrant women (Kelly, 2011).

This ecological theory assists in grasping the intricacies of intimate partner violence (IPV) and highlights the importance of interventions across various levels, such as focusing on individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole (Kelly, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This section provides a thorough explanation of the methods and steps used in the research, as well as the reasons for choosing these methods. The study aims to explore the experiences of immigrant women living in Denmark who have encountered IPV and the barriers they face when seeking help and their coping strategies.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To grasp the personal experience of these women affected by IPV, the philosophy of interpretivism was used. Interpretivism is a philosophical framework centers on grasping the meanings individuals attach to their various experiences within their social environments. It prioritises the subjective aspects of experiences within society. Interpretivism plays an important role in comprehending social life through the viewpoint of those directly involved or affected, known as social actors (Lewis‐Beck et al., 2004).

The interpretivist viewpoint stresses the importance of understanding the meanings behind human behaviour and societal dynamics. It centers on how individuals perceive and interpret events and actions, acknowledging that different people can assign varied meanings to the same event. Additionally, interpretivism highlights the idea that there isn't one universal,

objective understanding of the world; instead, people and groups develop their interpretations influenced by their beliefs and experiences. This recognition of the subjective nature of human experience underscores the significance of taking individual perspectives into account when studying human behaviour (Sheppard, 2006). As a student researcher, embracing an interpretive perspective enables me to gain a better grasp of social dynamics and delve into the intricate meanings of immigrant women's experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV). By listening directly to the accounts of immigrant women impacted by IPV, I acknowledge that people may interpret events and actions in varied ways, acknowledging the diversity of experiences within society as individuals navigate their lived experiences.

This study can also be understood through the philosophy of Constructivism. Constructivism involves examining social interactions, encompassing various forms of social relationships. It integrates insights from diverse approaches to studying this extensive and intricate domain but maintains its distinct framework of concepts and ideas (Onuf, 2012).

Constructivism argues that individuals influence society, and in turn, society influences individuals, forming a reciprocal relationship. This idea emphasises the interaction between people and society, introducing a third component known as rules, which encompass both legal regulations and social norms. Rules serve as guidelines dictating behaviour in familiar situations, and failing to adhere to these rules results in consequences enforced by other Rules. How individuals engage with rules, whether by compliance, defiance, innovation, or abandonment, is referred to as practices (ibid).

Social construction posits that entities such as gender, illness, and reality are not fixed but shaped by human agency. This implies the capacity to question the status quo and envision alternative possibilities. Social construction involves intentional human creation, encompassing both tangible objects like pianos and abstract concepts such as colours. For

example, delineating characteristics of femininity can impact individuals' actions and shape societal perceptions of womanhood (Kukla, 2000). In the context of experiences of immigrant women experiencing IPV, Constructivism provides a framework for understanding how social interactions shape the experiences of immigrant women and influence their coping mechanisms. It emphasises the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society, suggesting that societal norms and regulations play a significant role in shaping the behaviour and responses of immigrant women to IPV.

The study followed a abductive approach which aims to form hypotheses to explain observed phenomena. By doing so, researchers aim to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, which can then serve as the foundation for further theoretical development and elaboration (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). This approach was appropriate for this study because it allows me to delve deep into the complexities of the personal experiences of IPV among immigrant women and consider their unique contexts, and generate new insights.

To understand the personal experiences of these women, the research used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is ideal for capturing the subjective facets of a phenomenon by gathering non-numeric data through methods such as focus groups, interviews, and observation. Given its emphasis on elucidating individuals' experiences through the exploration of language, interpretations, and meanings, qualitative research emerges as a well-suited approach for this research (Silverman, 2010).

DATA COLLECTION

To get to my findings, I conducted face-to-face interviews. Qualitative face-to-face interviewing involves having a unique conversation where the interviewer asks questions about a specific topic, listens carefully, and records the answers. It's a special kind of conversation where the researcher asks questions, and the respondent takes their time to share their story. These interviews can be done over the phone or in person and may be recorded on video or audio. Usually, it involves one interviewer speaking to one respondent and recording the conversation on audio (Lewis‐Beck et al., 2004). Utilising this approach facilitated a more profound comprehension of the women's individual encounters. Its relevance stemmed from its capacity to elucidate the significance of the interview subject for the participants. Through this method, participants were afforded the opportunity to articulate and elucidate their personal experiences. The type of qualitative interviews I conducted were Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are interviews that have some questions planned beforehand, but they are intentionally open-ended. The aim is to allow the participant to respond freely without restrictions or predictability, leading to improvisation based on the respondent's answers (Wengraf, 2001). In semi-structured interviews, researchers use various types of questions and prompts to encourage participants to discuss the topic more deeply. These interviews aim to establish a comfortable environment and ensure that participants understand their rights. Researchers begin by asking broad questions that allow participants to share their experiences, and they probe for clarification when needed. Throughout the interview, researchers mentally note important points in the participant's story, which they revisit later for further exploration. Additionally, researchers probe the respondent for greater depth and guide the flow of the answers in relation to the research topic. This type of interviewing is valuable in research because it can be customised

to different research goals (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Since the aim of my study was to explore the personal experiences of immigrant women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV), semi-structured interviews were relevant because they allowed flexibility. I was able to adjust questions and prompts to suit the unique experiences of the participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore the experiences, emotions, and coping strategies related to IPV in depth, resulting in more authentic and insightful data. They also empowered the participants by allowing them to share their stories in their own words and reflect on their experiences.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPANTS

Participants were chosen through purposeful sampling, a method where researchers seek individuals with specific traits or qualities relevant to the research. In purposeful sampling, researchers consider the research objectives and select participants accordingly, aiming for maximum variation to include diverse perspectives (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). For this study, the goal was to explore the personal experiences of immigrant women facing intimate partner violence (IPV) in Denmark. The selection criteria focused on non-EU immigrant women living in Denmark who had experienced abuse and were married to Danish citizens. Recruitment efforts included reaching out to crisis centers and posting information on Facebook groups such as International Mother Group and Africans in Denmark. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and time constraints, only a few women agreed to participate in the interviews. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the aim of the study and the style of the interview. They were also assured of voluntary and confidential participation, with the option to decline questions or terminate the interview at any time. Four

women from different non-EU countries, fluent in English shared their story. With their consent, interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used for mentioned names, and place names were omitted. Four women from Africa, Asia, Central America and South America participated in the interview.

The table below outlines some of the main questions asked during the interview, along with explanations for why the specific question was asked.

Table 1: Interview questions

Interview Question	**Explanation**
Can you describe your experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) that you have encountered while living in Denmark?	This question aims to directly explore the participants' experiences of IPV, allowing them to share their stories in their own words. By starting with a broad question, it provides participants with the opportunity to discuss various aspects of IPV they may have encountered, including different forms of abuse and their impact
What was your experience with the legal support	This question seeks to understand the participant's experience with the legal support system in Denmark. It allows participants to reflect on their interactions with legal services, such as the police, shelters, or legal aid organisations, and whether they felt supported or encountered barriers in accessing assistance. Their insights

	can shed light on the effectiveness and accessibility of legal resources for immigrant women facing IPV.
What coping strategies have you used to deal with the challenges posed by IPV while living in Denmark?	This question explores the participants' coping mechanisms in response to IPV, aiming to uncover the strategies they employ to navigate difficult situations. Understanding how participants cope with IPV can provide insights into their resilience and adaptation in the face of adversity. It also offers valuable information on the types of support services or resources that may be helpful for individuals experiencing IPV.

DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data was transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves the process of recognizing, examining, and presenting recurring patterns (themes) in data. It provides a basic structure for organising and summarising your dataset. Yet, it often extends beyond this by delving into deeper interpretations of different facets of the research topic, offering detailed insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic Analysis offers structured methods for extracting codes and themes from qualitative data. Codes represent the smallest analytical units capturing significant aspects of the data relevant to the research query. These codes serve as the foundation for themes, which are broader patterns of significance centred

around a common core idea. Themes serve as a framework for organising and presenting the researcher's analytical insights. It aims not only to summarise data but also to recognize and interpret key aspects of it, guided by the research question, which may evolve during the coding and theme development stages. Rigorous analysis is emphasised in thematic analysis, which includes built-in quality assurance procedures such as a two-stage review process (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Thematic analysis was relevant for the study as it enabled me to identify common patterns and themes across the interviews. This approach helped me by providing a deeper understanding of recurring experiences, coping mechanisms, barriers to seeking help, and other important aspects of IPV in the women's lives. Thematic analysis involves six phases and are presented in the table below:

Table 2: Phases in thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the phase
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme

4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)

During the analysis phase, it's crucial to ensure validity by thoughtfully examining personal biases and presumptions linked to the research. As an immigrant in Denmark, my analysis might be influenced by my own biases and presumptions. To counteract this impact, I maintained transparency and continual reflection, regularly revisiting and reevaluating the analysis to avoid allowing preconceptions to skew the findings (Aurin, et al., 2016). To ensure the study's reliability I maintained consistent coding and furnishing the pertinent guidelines utilised during the coding process.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Given the nature of semi-structured interviews, time was a constraint imposed by the interview style. Another noteworthy constraint of this research was the size of the sample. The study's sensitivity and time constraints resulted in a relatively limited sample size, making participant recruitment difficult. The small sample size may make it more difficult for the study to reach thorough, broadly applicable results. However, with qualitative research, the subjects aren't chosen to be representative of the entire community (Bryman, 2016). Instead, they're chosen to demonstrate the various differences and similarities in women's experiences with IPV, including the barriers they face when seeking assistance and how they cope with the barriers. As a student researcher who is also an immigrant woman, my own perspectives might affect how I understand and interpret the data or choose which themes to focus on. This could result in a lack of fairness in the analysis. To overcome this, I regularly reflected on my own biases, assumptions, and experiences that could influence my work. Additionally, there are ethical concerns related to confidentiality, participants feeling vulnerable, and potential triggers of trauma due to the sensitive nature of the topic. To address this, I prioritised building trust and rapport with participants by creating a safe and supportive environment during interviews. I gave participants enough time to share their feelings and provided pauses when necessary. I also made sure to clearly explain the purpose of the research, keeping their information confidential, and respecting their independence throughout the interview.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section details the findings of the interviews, analysed through thematic analysis. The collected data underwent transcription and thorough analysis. Codes emerged during the review, and significant themes were deduced from these codes, addressing the research question. Six themes were identified from the analysis IPV experience, Barriers when seeking help, Coping strategies, Community and formal support, Stigma and shame surrounding divorce and Culture, gender norms and patriarchy. The emerged themes are discussed below with their supporting quotes from the respondents:

1. **IPV experience (Physical, psychological and financial)**

This theme portrays the personal experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) among immigrant women, which is crucial for contextualising the research. The study aims to delve into the personal experiences of IPV among immigrant women. All participants admitted to experiencing some form of abuse. For example, respondents 1 and 2 described instances of physical violence, expressing surprise and shock as they did not anticipate such behaviour from their partners.

Respondent 1: *"And while holding my child, I get this slap that literally turns my face 180 degrees. You know, like literally shifts my perspective of the world"* (Appendix 1a, 44:18 - 46:04)

Respondent 2: " *I'm coming home from work and he slapped my face. He slapped me first time […] I was shocked […] When I said that, he hit me again"* (Appendix 2, 0:44 -35:06)

The following quotes illustrate the respondents vulnerability due to financial dependency on their spouses. Their spouses exerted control over finances by either managing their bank accounts or withholding money from them.

Respondent 1: "*[…] and financial violence was actually the most of it because I was heavily dependent on him financially[….] I never had access to money. He never gave me any money*" (Appendix 1b, 6:03 - 8:30)

Respondent 2: " *I don't have my own money [….]Even if I have a work, my card is with him. Because he said, I'm going to be the one handling your card because you don't know yet here in Denmark that´s his excuse" (Appendix 2, 0:44 - 28:27)*

Respondent 3: *"We had like a shared account. Where everything was put [….] he was deciding [….] he was taking care of my finances" (Appendix 3, 27:18 - 27:47)*

The following quotes show how the respondents were subjected to psychological abuse by their spouses.

Respondent 1: "*If somebody had been asking me about emotional violence, that one was there"* (Appendix 1b, 6:03 - 8:30)

Respondent 3*: " It was really horrible for him that I was pregnant. It was disgusting. It was not attractive anymore [….] He just hated it. So it was a lot of verbal abuse"* (Appendix 3, 4:56 - 14:33).

Respondent 4: *" […] And when Mathew was born, that's the point where Phillip did like this 180 degree change to the worst, of course. I remember, I mean, it was terrible. […] I actually had to cry in the shower so that he didn't hear me, so that he wouldn't get mad at me […] his abuses continued. He was being verbally abusive all the time, treating me like crap. At some point, a friend came home and told me, I think your husband is a narcissist"* (Appendix 4, 0:54 - 28:32)

The narratives vividly depict the respondent's personal experiences of violence, highlighting the deeply personal and often unexpected nature of intimate partner violence. The study reveals that all participants encountered various forms of abuse, predominantly physical violence. However, physical abuse did not occur initially; abusers first controlled finances to gain power, then emotionally abused the victims, which often went unrecognised, before escalating to physical abuse. This progression made victims realise they were being abused.The data also show how abuse can develop over time, with immigrant women experiencing multiple types of abuse, making them extremely vulnerable. The study highlights how immigrant women leave their familiar environments, trusting that their spouses will support them in a new country. Many immigrant women lack family or friends in their new country, which makes them highly dependent on their spouses, and when the abuse occurs they get shocked, since this is a person that they trusted and relied on. This is illustrated through the narratives of respondents 1 and 2, who expressed shock and disbelief at their partners' violent behaviours. The unexpected nature of the violence indicates a lack of

prior anticipation or recognition of warning signs among the victims. Financial dependence on their partners exacerbates the vulnerability of these women and creates power dynamics, as indicated by Foulcart, where the abusers exert control over financial resources, which in turn translates into a broader sense of power and entitlement to exert dominance. This financial dependency not only traps the women in abusive situations but also reinforces the power dynamics that favour the abusers (O'Farrell, 2005). This is also similar to the microsystem in Ecological theory where various aspects of relationship dynamics occur especially in relationships where power imbalances exist , where factors like male dominance in economic and decision-making roles within the family and male control over financial resources within the family, influence an individual's likelihood of experiencing violence in this case the the husband of the immigrant woman controlling the finances (Kelly, 2011). The financial vulnerability of these women can also mean that they struggle to leave since their husbands are the primary providers and some of them have no idea how to start over by themselves with children in a new country. This is in comparison to a study by Menjívar and Salcido where they discovered that abused women refrain from leaving their abusive husbands as this may result in the loss of financial assistance (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002).

2. Barriers when seeking help

Following experiences of intimate partner violence, Some immigrant women seek assistance from legal services. This theme highlights the obstacles they face when trying to get help after being abused. Some challenges include language barriers, navigating complex legal systems (e.g. crisis centers), concerns about visa status and the fear of losing children, and lack of knowledge about available information, and interaction with law enforcement.

The quotes provided by the respondents below demonstrate how language served as a significant obstacle when they sought assistance.

Respondent 1: *“Even when I called, I spoke to them in English and the responses were coming very slowly because the other party needed to kind of translate in their head to understand what I was saying for them to give me the help […] So it takes longer."* (Appendix 1a, 1:06:33 - 1:07:06)

Respondent 2: *“ In the beginning, they were all just speaking Danish. I would just say, I'm ready to leave him. I will not say anything because I don't know what they're talking about. I can feel so much that they don't care about what I say”* (Appendix 2, 43:36 - 46:05)

Respondent 3: *“ I go and tell like, hey, can someone help me? I just received this document in Danish. […] I don't really understand what's going on”* (Appendix 3, 1:00:36 - 1:02:21)

The quotes above show how language can be a major barrier when seeking help. Immigrant women often face language barriers because most do not speak Danish, leading to delays and misunderstandings, as respondent 1 mentioned. Important meetings are also held in Danish, making it difficult for an abused immigrant woman to understand what is being communicated, especially when it concerns her. This can make her feel ignored or unimportant, as respondent 2 noted. Additionally, important documents about their cases are sent in Danish, making it hard for immigrant victims to understand their situations and seek appropriate help, as respondent 3 pointed out.

The quotes below depict the difficulties the respondents encountered when dealing with the police:

Respondent 1: *"So even the police now is looking at me and said, who called the police? I said, I did, I called the police ,you're the one who doesn't feel safe? Yes. […] and then they look at me who has no marks. But I can feel in my body, I can feel the punches. I can feel it. […] . I noticed them looking at me. And I go like, yeah, I'm dark skinned […] You cannot see the injuries (Appendix 1a,1:00:50 - 1:04:42)*

Respondent 3: *"Well you're brown I don't know maybe you know that it takes a lot for us brown people to get bruised […] You have to collect evidence […] " (Appendix 3, 1:33:47* - 1:42:33)

Respondent 4: *" The police told me here at home that they didn't find it very terrible what Phillip did, so I shouldn't press charges. They didn't justify it anymore. They just told me it's going to be a mess, it's not so terrible, move on, don't press charges"* (Appendix 4, 28:55 - 29:13)

When dealing with the police, respondents express facing different challenges. Respondent 1 describes how the police seemed sceptical about her claim of feeling unsafe, questioning her because she had no visible injuries. She felt that her dark skin made it difficult for the police to see her bruises, implying that they might not have taken her claims seriously because of this. Law enforcement are not trained to distinguish how different bruises look on different skin colours which may lead to a racial bias. This makes women of colour even more vulnerable to provide proof. Similarly, respondent 3 narrates a similar situation about racial bias, stating that it takes more for people with brown skin to show bruises. This highlights the difficulty in providing visible evidence of abuse, which is crucial in cases of intimate partner violence. The need to collect evidence becomes even more challenging when physical signs

of abuse are less visible, further complicating the ability to seek justice. These quotes illustrate how race, immigration status, and language barrier intersect and affect the experiences of immigrant women when seeking help. Intersectionality, as described by Crenshaw, makes immigrant women more vulnerable, impacting not only their risk of intimate partner violence but also their interactions with systems like the justice system, in this case the police. Similarly a study also found that women facing multiple forms of marginalisation and structural violence due to various types of discrimination have difficulty being believed, getting help, and ensuring their safety (Sabri et al., 2020). Respondent 4 also describes how the police minimised the severity of her experience and discouraged her from pressing charges. They did not provide a clear justification for this advice, simply stating that it would be a hassle. This reflects a dismissive attitude towards her situation, showing how the police can sometimes not take reports of IPV seriously. This shows how immigrant women navigate different power dynamics. Victims of IPV are not only subject to control from their abusers, but also within broader societal structures such as law enforcement enforcement (O'Farrell, 2005), which are reinforcing power dynamics by making the women feel like their experience is not valid.

The quotes below show how the respondents found it difficult to obtain available information about how or where they could seek assistance:

Respondent 1: *" We don't talk about these things (Abuse). So nobody knows these things. So somebody who's coming without that kind of information will never find out"* (Appendix 1b, 2:48:09 - 2:51:02)

Respondent 3: *"I didn't know that crisis centers existed […] When I tried googling, I remember seeing Motherhelp. I had seen some of the stores […] but like when I looked at it, I*

was like okay. So maybe they only help single moms. So it really didn't seem in that moment like this is something that I can activate" (Appendix 3, 17:42 - 20:57)

Respondent 4:*" Because when you are being physically and mentally abused, like I was, it's very hard to say, no, stop. These are the rules. These are my rights. And it's very hard to get that information […] I actually called Mother help and they could not help me at all. And I called Wichara Resource where the Kommune was involved as well because of the physical violence. And I mean, there were not useful either […]It's not really support of someone telling, I will help you come here. We'll diagram a plan. No, no, zero"* (Appendix 4, 44:10 - 49:40)

The quotes above illustrate how challenging it can be for immigrant women to find information about where to seek help, as people rarely talk about their experiences, according to Respondent 1. Respondent 3 also noted that she was unaware of the existence of crisis centers, possibly because information about them is only available in Danish. Respondent 4 echoed the difficulty of getting assistance from expected sources that are meant to help you by informing you about your rights and help you draft a plan. The respondents expressed feelings of isolation and being uninformed about support services, leading to delays or barriers in accessing assistance.

The quotes below depict the difficulties encountered by the respondents when they sought assistance from the crisis center:

Respondent 1: *"They (police) did not tell me this is a crisis center. They literally talked from one system to another. So I stood there having understood a little bit of what had happened*

[…] l get a room and food. But nobody tells me anything. I mean, like I don't get information about how this works […] You have to pay the crisis center which l was not aware about " (Appendix 1a, 1:13:26 - *1:20:53*)

Respondent 3: *"I went to a crisis center and the whole saga with the crisis center began. It was freaking (respondent started crying..) […] everyone was just like yes, just come but no one explains to me […]basically stop your life, you won't be able to go to work […] and I was not ready for that […]my work is waiting for me […] because if you need to be able to keep fighting for your life, to stay in Denmark, which is what I needed, I needed to be able to work […] they have really good intentions, but they're just either severely understaffed […] I paid, but it was very symbolic. I think I paid like 3,000 kr for three weeks. ..for six weeks"* (Appendix 3, 53:17 -57:00)

The quotes above highlight the challenges respondents faced at the crisis center. Respondents felt that the crisis center lacked information about available help and the steps needed to receive it. For example, Respondent 1 mentioned not being informed about how the crisis center operated and felt unimportant as she was passed from one system to another. She was also surprised to be charged for her time at the center, which is a significant barrier for immigrant women experiencing IPV, as many are financially abused and lack funds to pay for services. Respondent 3 expressed frustration at not receiving help and feeling that her time was wasted. Her situation was urgent, involving custody battles and job-related visa issues. She felt the crisis center did not provide enough information upon her arrival, making her feel inadequate. This is a common issue for immigrant women, who have much at stake when seeking help at crisis centers. Staff may struggle to understand and provide urgent help,

especially when centers are understaffed, as noted by Respondent 3. This just shows how immigrant women are more vulnerable.

The quotes below show the legal difficulties the respondents faced while seeking assistance:

Respondent 1: *" They contact the lawyers and they say, this is not a case that we are willing to take or to use our resources on because it's one that we're going to lose […] two choices, She either gets divorced to this man and knows that she will get deported […] But if that's the choice that she wants to make, she needs to know that the child she has will be left in Denmark, so she will lose her child. And this is the reason child is Danish" (Appendix 1a, 1:20:57 - 1:23:33)*

Respondent 2: *" But then I have a copy of a medical. I give it to them (Kommune). This is how many times I talked to the police and was asking for help. This is what my nurse saw. It's still not enough for them. "* (Appendix 2, 43:36 - 46:05)

Respondent 3: *" And then I call Family house. Which is the one that decides all of this. And I try to explain. My son. He lives with me. But our address are in our old apartment. And I am crying. And I literally said, I am scared this man is crazy., like I am actually saying that on the phone, and I'm asking for like, what can I do? And she's like, oh well but if it's the resident parent. If he has his residence, he can have him"* (Appendix 3, 40:39 - 42:08)

The quotes above highlight the challenges immigrant women face when seeking help from the legal system. For example, Respondent 1 stated how lawyers from the crisis centre deemed her case unviable or advised her to choose between undesirable outcomes, such as

remaining in abusive relationships to avoid deportation or risking separation from her children. She was later advised to return to her abuser to buy time to assimilate, indicating how the system prioritises integration over protecting abuse victims. If a victim ends up returning to their abuser and experiencing worse abuse, they may not seek help, knowing that they will not be helped, especially if they have not yet assimilated. This shows how immigrant women's legal status becomes a challenge, making it difficult for lawyers to help due to the risk of deportation demonstrating how immigrant women are more vulnerable. Furthermore, the system requires proof of abuse to build a case, however respondent 2's experience reflects the frustration of not being believed despite providing medical evidence of abuse, showcasing that even though sometimes you might have documented evidence, it may not be enough for a case. Similarly, Respondent 3 struggled to secure custody despite expressing valid fears about her partner's behaviour. This demonstrates power dynamics, as described by Foucault, where the legal system not only controls victims but also reinforces the abuser's power by sending victims back to their abuser or not believing the victims evidence (O'Farrell, 2005).

The quotes below demonstrate how the respondents were threatened with visa issues and the fear of losing their child who is considered Danish.

Respondent 1: *"But his a Danish citizen and not a Kenyan citizen. So that means even, even when you arrive in Kenya, first and foremost, when you arrive in Kenya, the police would be waiting for you. They would be waiting for you to retrieve the Danish citizen that you have stolen, that you have abducted"* (Appendix 1b, 4:18- 5:07)

Respondent 1: *"[...] he, at some point , [...] he said to me [...]after I got back from the crisis center [...] if you dare leave me, I will take, I will take your son"* (Appendix 1b, 15:40 - 16:14)

Respondent 2: *"He threatened me about, you can never get out of the country because the baby will be taken away from you, he's Danish, he's mine"* (Appendix 2, 42:17 - 42:47).

Respondent 3: *" It was always a threat over my head, your visa"* (Appendix 3, 33:13 - 34:37)

Respondent 3: *" I tried to go to Spain with Elvis I would have, but l heard it's not a possibility. I'd be kidnapping him if l tried. And then they will find me. Then the police does react"* (Appendix 3, (1:15:33- 1:15:47)

The data shows how immigrant women face significant barriers related to their immigration status and child custody, making them more vulnerable to IPV. Respondent 1 and 3 reported that their husbands used threats of visa cancellation and loss of child custody to control them. Immigrant women, fearing deportation and the loss of their children, often choose to stay in abusive relationships. The threat of losing custody of their Danish children is particularly impactful, as it deters immigrant women from seeking divorce. This dynamic creates an unequal power relationship, where the abuser manipulates the immigrant spouse by leveraging their dependency on the visa and the children's Danish citizenship. This power imbalance severely limits the less empowered spouse's ability to assert their own autonomy similarly to the disciplinary power described by Foucault, where the abuser uses manipulation and coercion to shape the victim's actions and thoughts to conform to their own standards, fostering obedience and compliance (O'Farrell, 2005). The system inadvertently empowers the abuser by reinforcing this dynamic, as seen in the experiences of Respondent 1 and 2. The fear of deportation and child custody loss intensifies the victim's vulnerability and

limits their options for seeking safety (O'Farrell, 2005). This dynamic also aligns with the microsystem in Ecological Theory, where custody and visa gives power to the abuser and therefore creates power imbalances that leaves immigrant women vulnerable to IPV (Kelly, 2011).

In conclusion, the narratives provided by immigrant women in Denmark underscore the multifaceted barriers they encounter when seeking help after experiencing IPV.

3. Coping strategies

After experiencing barriers when seeking help, when asked about how they coped with their situation, participants responded to establishing coping strategies to escape. The respondents talked about making a plan before escaping. This theme represents the coping strategies the respondents established.

The following quotes illustrate some of the strategies they employed to secure themselves before leaving:

Respondent 1: *"I went back with a mentality of buying time until I had secured myself and secured my son to be able to get out of it […]So I am waiting for the next time he hits me, but the next time he hits me, I'm going to have, I'm going to be assimilated. I'm going to be secure in Denmark so that I will not be deported"* (Appendix 1b,3:11-30:27)

Respondent 2: *"When he hit me the second time. I went to my doctor. And I asked for a medical report. And the police came to my private doctor. And then they started counseling me secretly. I would go. I wouldn't tell my husband, I will go to the church with our baby, I will stay there for a while to learn Danish. But I was already talking to the Kommune. I was talking to my doctor [.....] I was trying to escape slowly and find out things, find out about crisis center, find out who to talk with [...]No matter what he say, I'm escaping. I'm just finding enough evidence" (* Appendix 2, 35:09 - 42:47)

Respondent 3: *"I was just like beating my time. To be able to finish maternity, so go back to work, save, leave. I already had the plan [.....]And I asked my job, l was very straightforward with my boss. And I was like, listen, right now i'am currently on a visa for family reunification. With my husband, I want to divorce him. Can you sponsor me? And my boss was like, ofcourse, yes you can have a work visa for us. With us [.....]. I was able to do this all behind his back. I got my work visa, I found an apartment, I put down the down payment*" (Appendix 3, 25:15 - 25:37)

Respondent 4: "*[...] what I did was to send an email to a friend, with audio screenshots, videos, whatever explaining what happened, writing down the names of the, of the people who were seeing what happened. So there was a record"* (Appendix 4, 56:03 - 1:00:45)

The quotes above illustrate how respondents establish coping mechanisms when they do not receive immediate help from legal services. They highlight the importance of strategic planning and preparation to leave their abusers without it affecting their visa status or losing custody of their children. Respondent 1 sought advice to understand the necessary steps to take to build a tangible case against her abuser. She decided to return to her abuser temporarily to buy time while she assimilated into society, which would help secure her and

her son's future in any post-divorce legal battles. This process, however, can leave many victims more vulnerable to continued abuse. Respondent 2 adopted a similar approach, gradually gathering evidence and seeking legal counsel while buying time to strengthen her case. She emphasised the importance of documenting abuse and preparing for future legal proceedings, despite the risks if her abuser discovered her actions. Respondent 3 focused on regaining control by secretly changing her dependent visa to a work visa, returning to work, saving money, and securing accommodation. This careful planning and visa security minimised her vulnerability, making her lose her visa dependency from her spouse which made her gain some control however not all immigrant women have the opportunity to change their visa status, leaving many stuck in abusive relationships. Respondent 4 also sought counsel and was advised to document all instances of abuse to build a strong case. However, this situation increases the vulnerability of immigrant women because they must endure more abuse to gather enough evidence to build a strong case.

These narratives underscore the critical importance of making a detailed plan before escaping an abusive situation. They demonstrate that strategic planning, securing advice, gathering evidence, and ensuring a stable future are essential steps for immigrant women to successfully leave abusive relationships.

4. Community Support and network (Formal and informal)

This theme highlights the importance of having both a formal and informal support system when leaving an abusive spouse. The respondents received both formal and informal support from their communities.

The following quotes illustrate the informal support from family and friends that the respondents received, showing the crucial role of community:

Respondent 1: *" They (pastors) found one of the leaders here at church had a business. And on top of the business, they had a little apartment […] church people came and helped me move, took my, everything that I wanted, the toys for the kids, the clothes, everything that I wanted to take."* (Appendix 1b, 1:12:40 - 1:15:41)

Respondent 2: *"I have a friend, Filipino friend who take care of the baby, I found an apartment near a Filipino friend. They helped me find an apartment to stand up for myself"* (Appendix 2, 54:48 - 55:11)

Respondent 3: *"I feel like I was very lucky, I'm privileged to go into a very bad situation with a not so bad hand. With a boyfriend and a family, his family were insanely helpful like, insanely helpful um, they took me and Elvis in, no questions asked, they just provided safety, moral support, a family for Elvis […]"* (Appendix 3, 1:26:21 - 1:28:39)

Respondent 4*: "I called a friend. He had some flats that he was renting. And that's where I slept for the following couple of days [.....] I mean, I was lucky enough to have my mom. She's awesome"* (Appendix 4, 52:40 - 53:36)

The quotes above from the respondents highlight the importance of having a support system during a crisis. They acknowledge the crucial role their community played in providing immediate support and emotional assistance in difficult times. This shows how essential it is for immigrant women to establish a network when they move to a new country. In cases of

abuse, a personal network can offer refuge, stability, and knowledge, helping them seek help quickly and effectively.

Legal and medical professionals play a crucial role in supporting immigrant women experiencing IPV by providing advice and help with documentation which increases the validation of their experiences. The following quotes represent the formal support the respondent received from the medical professionals:

Respondent 2: *"There was a time when the nurse of my son was visiting at home. [.....] the nurse quietly secretly talked to me in my son's room. She said, why your son don't have winter clothes, a baby have to have a winter clothes. And I started crying [.....] And then she saw I have bruises. [.....]At that time, I just gave birth. I was so depressed. I didn't know [.....] What happened to you?Are you OK? And then she already knew I have depression. I look like very skinny. I was really like out of the place. I was like, I cannot live here anymore. That's all I told her. And I'm crying and crying and crying. And she took my baby and she said, let's go to the police [.....] She saw a blue mark. She wrote it [.....] And I said (to the nurse), I'm gonna run now. Will you help me? She said, I'm gonna lose my job but I will not lose you and this child. I will keep you safe. She's supposed to not do that. She just rescue us and drive us to crisis center"(* Appendix 2, 35:09 - 46:05)

Respondent 3: *"I was in a house of doctors. So you get a different doctor. Every time, and they started to pay attention [.....]This girl, a doctor and she asks me directly, we have a suspicion that you are experiencing violence, and I was like, what? We have a suspicion that you are experiencing violence, and I was like, no, no, no, [.....] And she is like, but think about it, and then I just like Started crying [.....] All three advisors were like, you need to go*

to a crisis center, you are in danger, we suggest you go,you need to get both you and your son" (Appendix 3, 45:48 - 50:50)

The quotes above highlight the importance of medical personnel paying close attention to immigrant women, especially when they notice unusual signs. Medical professionals are often the first or only external contact for immigrant women, so they need to ask the right questions and be observant. For example, Respondent 2's nurse asked questions after noticing unusual things, which helped Respondent 2 open up about her experience of abuse. This is essential because immigrant women may not have anyone else to talk to about their abuse experience. Similarly, Respondent 3's doctor noticed signs of abuse during a medical visit and made her aware of the abuse and later advised her on the next necessary steps to take. Medical professionals play a critical role in recognizing abuse and providing advice and safety, highlighting their importance in identifying intimate partner violence (IPV) and guiding victims toward necessary actions.

The following quotes represent the formal support the respondents received from the professional lawyers after hiring them:

Respondent 2: *"She told me I'm going to win. She was a good lawyer [.....] She said, you have all evidence, medical abuse, police record, medical record, and everything else that you recorded on your phone"* (Appendix 2, 50:07 - 50:37)

Respondent 3: *"[.....] we're going to just do it with a private lawyer. We're just going to... We're going to pay [.....] and then we go see this private lawyer for the first time, and then they're explaining us. Okay, like this is like... this is a big deal" (Appendix 3, 1:05:08-1:08:22)*

Respondent 4: *" My lawyer was super helpful at all times [.....] I called my lawyer and I told him, tell me exactly what to do"* (Appendix 4, 0:04 - 0:53)

Legal support is essential because it provides victims with the expertise needed to navigate the legal system. Danish lawyers, who understand the language and system, can guide victims on the necessary steps, as explained by Respondent 4. They can also boost the victims' confidence by assuring them they have a strong case as narrated by respondent 2. This support is particularly beneficial for immigrant women experiencing IPV , as they need to present concrete evidence of abuse in court to obtain a divorce, secure their visa, and gain child custody. However, many immigrant women are financially dependent on their abusers, making it challenging to afford a private lawyer to fight for their case.

Overall, these narratives demonstrate that both informal community support and formal assistance from medical and legal professionals are vital for immigrant women dealing with IPV. The formal and informal support is the ecosystem in Ecological theory of the victim. The formal and informal support influences the experiences of the immigrant women experiencing IPV (Heise, 1998). They provide emotional support, practical help, and essential services that empower women to leave abusive relationships and rebuild their lives.

5. Shame and stigma associated with divorce

This theme represents the shame and stigma associated with divorce. Immigrant women experiencing IPV and seeking divorce fear judgement from family and community which can affect them when seeking divorce. There is a strong sense of shame associated with IPV,

compounded by concerns about family reputation within both the immigrant community and broader society. These women fear judgement from within their own community which makes it difficult to leave abusive relationships. Traditional marriage practices and ceremonies further influence their perception of and commitment to the relationship. The following quotes illustrate the fear and disappointment the respondents felt, which prevented them from disclosing their situation to family members and intensified the shame they experienced due to IPV:

Respondent 1: " *But I think when you say family, I think of my mother because I really didn't tell anybody else [.....] So for me, yeah, for me, it was a strategic decision not to tell anybody and just go through it and do what I did and finish, go through the fire, do all that [.....] . It's because of the stigma, yes. And because of the stigma of now she got married to a white man, now she's no longer married because there's a prestige that comes with being married to a white man. And having a daughter married to a white man, that isn't there"* (2:42:13 - 2:43:32).

Respondent 2: *"First, but my biggest fear was disappointing my parents. Because I left everything [.....] I'm afraid to disappoint them if l divorce. That's why I hold on [.....] the stigma is real. The stigma of fear of, I disappointed my family. Second thing, the shame [.....] I was ashamed with people judging me. Look what happened to her [.....] They (my parents) didn't know I was living in crisis center. They didn't know. I didn't tell them until I won the divorce. Until I won the full custody I didn't want to hurt my mom"* (Appendix 2, 1:16:55 - 1:20:03)

Respondent 3: *" I have already divorced once. So, am I going to divorce again?I'm the problem. Clearly. So I hadn't even told my family and I am literally in a crisis and I'm trying*

to explain to them what that means and they don't understant [.....] This being very passive and just accepting that life is hard. Life is just hard and you need to stick it for the family. You have a child and he is Elvis's dad so like you know no one's perfect and you got divorced once. Are you really going to do it again? [.....] I'm also like a whore like on top of everything" (Appendix 3, 1:16:30 - 1:19:09)

Respondent 3: *"Even here in Denmark like super liberal, and you still get very shamed for not acting sooner, for not talking sooner"* (Appendix 3, 1:19:32 - 1:20:22)

The following quote by respondent 1 represents the complication of divorce when your married traditionally:

"So you have nowhere to come and sleep because you no longer belong here. So everything you and yours is there [.....] So how can you now divorce? So when we now start speaking divorce, it becomes something very complicated. That's why I want to make sure that we understand when I say, I was married, married, what that means. It means there's no going back" (Appendix 1b,20:26 - 21:25)

The quotes above illustrate the significant role of society, especially family, in influencing whether victims seek help and support. Women experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) often face intense shame and concerns about family reputation within their immigrant community and broader society, making it difficult to leave abusive relationships. Respondent 1 mentioned her strategic decision to remain silent about her situation because she knew she would not receive the necessary support and feared the stigma of no longer being married to a white man. This highlights societal pressures and expectations. Respondent 2 discussed her fear of disappointing her parents and the judgement she faced, especially since she had left her old life to follow her husband. This fear kept her from revealing her leaving situation in a crisis center to avoid shame and judgement. Respondent 3 shared the additional burden of a

previous divorce, which led to self-blame and reluctance to disclose her crisis. She described societal expectations to endure hardship for the sake of family, which exacerbated her sense of shame. She also felt shame in a liberal society like Denmark, where she felt that people blamed her for not leaving sooner, reflecting a victim-blaming mindset common among women experiencing IPV. Finally, Respondent 1 illustrated the complexities of divorce within traditional marriage contexts, indicating that deep-rooted commitments complicate the prospect of leaving, especially since divorced women may not be welcomed back home. This reinforces the stigma surrounding divorce and makes it complicated for immigrant women to divorce. These quotes collectively demonstrate how cultural, societal, and familial expectations intersect and create significant barriers for immigrant women experiencing IPV, leading to profound fear, shame, and reluctance to seek help or disclose their situations.

6. Culture, gender norms and patriarchy

This theme demonstrates the cultural beliefs that normalise IPV, gender norms and patriarchy values that influence the occurrences of IPV among women. lt examines how cultural backgrounds and traditional gender roles influence these women's perceptions of abuse and their responses to it, highlighting the impact of patriarchal structures that reinforce male dominance and female subordination. The quotes below reveal the influence of culture that normalise IPV, gender norms, and patriarchy on their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV):

Respondent 1 : *"I grew up in Nairobi where these things used to happen. I grew up in the nineties...women were beaten all the time and they were told it was because they were loved,*

or they were told because they were being corrected by their husbands"(Appendix 1a, 48:01 - 49:01)

Respondent 1: *"No, the woman must have done something. And let's just not even look about culture. Let's just say patriarchy itself. It doesn't really matter where it is, right? Whether it's in, it's in Africa, in a village in Africa or in Asia, or even in Denmark today. Right. Um, if, if a woman is raped, let's just talk about that. If a woman is raped. Yeah. What was she wearing? Where was she? Where, where was she? Very victim-centered. Did she, did she seduce a man or she also send mixed signals? she said yes to the kiss, and she allowed him to touch the rest. Yeah. Then what? Of course. I mean, it's a man after all[.....] it is always a woman that is blamed for the man's behaviour. And then I'm also married to a King. This is a white man. What could he do? [.....] they don't beat their women. If he has , it's because of you and that mouth of yours"* (Appendix 1b, 21:50 - 24:48).

Respondent 2: *"I think it was two different thing. In Philippines, I see my mom and dad. My dad taking care of everything, including my mom. He finance her. He make sure we're eating. He make sure my mom have everything that she need. While my ex husband, he dictate what happened to the house. With me, also not being able to provide me with basic need. So he's just dominant, but not giving you the right basic needs"* (Appendix 2, 1:15:18 - 1:16:32)

Respondent 3: *" [.....] There's a lot of machismo. So there's also like a lot of toxic masculinity being normalized, It's not bad, he was providing for you"* (Appendix 3, 1:18:15 - 1:18:29)

Respondent 3: *"And he had extremely misogynistic points of view [.....] All men want young women. And that if women past certain ages, are not married, or don't have kids, and they're like throwaways, very misogynistic"* (Appendix 3, 4:56 - 14:33)

Respondent 4: *"But they (Danish men) do stuff, for example, like, I don't know, cutting the grass or taking care of the car [.....] Women are still mostly responsible for the things you have to do. Otherwise, your family collapses, like, taking the kids to school, going to the grocery shop, shopping, taking care of the kids when they are sick. I mean, this is mostly women"* (Appendix 4, 1:10:14 - 1:10:46)

The narratives from the respondents highlight the significant impact of culture, gender norms, and patriarchy on their experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). Respondent 1 discusses how cultural norms often normalise violence against women, portraying it as a sign of love or necessary correction by husbands. The quote highlights a pervasive attitude that blames women for the violence or abuse they experience, rather than holding perpetrators accountable. It underscores the prevalence of victim-blaming attitudes that transcend cultural boundaries and exist even in societies that may pride themselves on progressiveness or gender equality. The speaker points out how, regardless of the cultural context, the burden of responsibility often falls on the woman. This attitude reflects a deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset where women are seen as responsible for men's actions, and their agency and autonomy are undermined. A patriarchal ideology that justifies abuse as acceptable and even affectionate. This observation is crucial for understanding the systemic nature of intimate partner violence (IPV) and the need for comprehensive efforts to address it. Similarly, Mikton (2010) also explains that there is a belief in some cultures that men have the authority to physically discipline women, and physical violence is seen as an acceptable way to resolve

conflicts in relationships. The respondent also mentions her marriage to a white man, which she suggests comes with an expectation that he wouldn't be abusive, showcasing a victim blaming mindset as well. Societal norms always try to blame women for the violence that they experience. This underscores how deeply ingrained and universal patriarchal attitudes are, impacting women's experiences of violence across different cultures and contexts. Respondent 2 contrasts her father's supportive role in the Philippines, where he was dominant but provided for her mother, with her ex-husband's controlling behaviour in Denmark, where he was dominant but failed to meet her basic needs. This highlights different manifestations of patriarchy, however her father was justified by providing the basic needs to her mother while her husband didn't. Respondent 3 also addresses the normalisation of toxic masculinity, where harmful male behaviours are excused because the man is seen as a provider. This reflects a cultural acceptance of gender inequality, where financial support is used to justify or overlook abusive behaviours. She also discusses her ex-husband's misogynistic views, which devalue women based on age and marital status. Such attitudes reflect deep-seated gender biases that reduce women's worth to their youth, marital, and reproductive status. These patriarchal ideologies can dehumanise and marginalise women, viewing them as less valuable. Respondent 4 notes the persistence of traditional gender roles in Danish culture, where women remain primarily responsible for domestic tasks despite some shifts in responsibilities. Together, these insights underscore how deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and gender expectations continue to shape and often exacerbate the challenges faced by immigrant women experiencing IPV. This can be understood through the lens of ecological theory in the macrosystem, where societal perceptions of gender roles shape the dynamics within relationships, especially if the society believes that men should be dominant over women, making women more vulnerable to violence (Dutton, 2007).

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DISCUSSION

The findings in this study provide insights into the personal experiences of immigrant women in Denmark who experience intimate partner violence (IPV), the barriers they face when seeking help and the strategies they use to cope with their situations. Participants of this study describe their experiences of physical, psychological, and financial abuse they experience from their spouses. The findings reveal significant barriers immigrant women encounter when seeking help. These barriers include language difficulties, concerns about visa status, fear of losing their children, and lack of knowledge about available resources and how to interact with the legal system, such as the police and crisis centers. The women also discuss the coping and self-help strategies they use when divorcing their spouse is not an option. The respondents acknowledge the informal and formal support they receive from their community, highlighting the importance of community networks and legal support. Additionally, they talk about the shame and stigma associated with divorce, and the cultural and gender norms and patriarchy that affect their experiences of IPV.

This study reveals that immigrant women in Denmark experience various forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), including physical, psychological, and financial abuse. Notably, these women often seek help only when the abuse becomes physical, potentially because they are unaware of non-physical forms of abuse unless it is pointed out by others, such as healthcare professionals or friends. Financial dependency on their abusers gives their abusers power to exert control which further increases their vulnerability.

When attempting to seek help, immigrant women face several significant barriers. Language barriers are a primary issue, as many immigrant women struggle to communicate with the

legal system due to a lack of proficiency in Danish. This difficulty extends to reporting abuse to the police and understanding legal information provided in Danish. Additionally, the study indicates a substantial lack of information among these women about their legal rights and the resources available to them. Many are unaware of the existence of crisis centers or what services these centers provide, making it difficult for them to seek appropriate help.

Challenges persist even when these women reach crisis centers. They often encounter numerous obstacles, such as lacking information about available resources at the crisis centers, what actions to take, and where to seek further help. Furthermore, they are sometimes unaware of the requirement to pay for their stay at the crisis centers, which poses a significant challenge given their financial dependency on their abusers. This financial strain is particularly troubling as crisis centers are meant to provide refuge during emergencies, and the inability to afford these services leaves many women vulnerable.

Interactions with police also present significant barriers. The requirement for physical evidence of abuse, such as bruises, is problematic, particularly for women of colour whose bruises may be less visible. This difficulty in proving abuse evidence to the police can complicate the process of obtaining support. Additionally, the legal system often exhibits biases against immigrant women, especially those who have not been in Denmark long or are not well integrated. Their cases are frequently not taken into consideration, and there is a risk of deportation if they divorce their abusive husbands. This situation is further compounded when children are involved, as the legal system does not allow women to take their Danish-citizen children back home with them.

Abusive husbands often exploit the legal system's weaknesses, using threats related to visa status and child custody to control their victims. This manipulation is particularly effective as

many women prioritise their children and fear losing custody, making them more susceptible to staying in abusive relationships.

Despite these barriers, the data shows how immigrant women employ various coping strategies to manage their situations and plan their escape. Strategic planning is essential, with women taking deliberate steps to leave without alerting their husbands. This planning includes seeking advice from healthcare professionals or police and collecting evidence to build a case against their abuser. Community support also plays a crucial role, as building a network of friends and community members provides practical help, shelter, and emotional support during crises.

Professional assistance from medical personnel can be pivotal. Healthcare providers can recognize signs of abuse, advise on necessary steps, and serve as witnesses, which strengthens the women's cases. Legal assistance is also vital, as lawyers understand the language and legal system hence can provide appropriate counsel although the high cost of lawyers can be a barrier. The data also indicate how immigrant women often fear stigma and shame, which prevents them from disclosing their situation to their families. This is particularly pronounced in cultures where divorce is taboo or seen as a failure. In Denmark, societal attitudes may also blame women for not acting sooner, further compounding their distress.

Cultural norms and gender roles significantly influence the occurrence and perception of IPV amongst immigrant women. In some cultures, violence against women is normalised or viewed as a form of love and discipline. Additionally, societal attitudes often blame women for the abuse they suffer, which can create a barrier for them to seek help.

To address these issues, several recommendations are proposed. Providing translation services and legal information in multiple languages can help immigrant women navigate the

legal system. Increasing awareness about the different forms of abuse and the rights and resources available to immigrant women through community outreach programs and public information campaigns is crucial. Training police and legal professionals to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by immigrant women, including the nuances of physical evidence in women of colour, is essential.

Ensuring crisis centers provide comprehensive information about available resources and financial requirements is vital. Financial support options should be considered for women who cannot afford their stay. Legal reforms should prioritise the safety of immigrant women and their children over deportation concerns, taking into account their integration status. Strengthening community networks and encouraging healthcare professionals to identify and support victims of IPV can provide crucial assistance. Additionally, providing legal assistance to immigrant women can help them navigate the complex legal landscape.

By addressing these barriers and implementing supportive measures, Denmark can better protect immigrant women from IPV and help them rebuild their lives free from abuse.

CONCLUSION

The goal of study was to explore the personal experiences of IPV amongst immigrant women, the barriers they meet when seeking help and their coping strategies.

The study highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by immigrant women experiencing IPV in Denmark. The barriers to seeking help, coping strategies, the critical role of community support, and the profound impact of shame and stigma all underscore the complexity of their experiences. The analysis underscores the complexity of their

experiences, encompassing physical, psychological, and financial abuse. The barriers they encounter when seeking help are numerous and varied, including language barriers, difficulties navigating crisis centers, legal obstacles, threats to visa status and child custody, lack of information about support services, and unsupportive interactions with law enforcement.

Language difficulties are an obstacle because immigrant women find it challenging to communicate with the police and understand legal information. Additionally, many immigrant women are unaware of their legal rights and the resources available to them, such as crisis centers. Financial dependency on their abusers further increases their vulnerability.

When seeking help, immigrant women often face additional challenges. They may not know about the services provided by crisis centers or how to access them. Financial barriers also exist, as some women are unaware that they must pay for their stay at crisis centers, which they cannot afford.

Interactions with the police present another set of problems. Immigrant women often need to provide physical evidence of abuse, which can be difficult, especially for women of colour whose bruises may not be as visible. There is also a bias against immigrant women, particularly those who are new to Denmark or not well-integrated, which can lead to their cases being overlooked and a risk of deportation if they seek divorce.

Despite these barriers, immigrant women find ways to cope and seek help. They carefully plan their escape, seek advice from healthcare professionals, and build support networks within their communities. Community support and professional assistance play crucial roles in helping these women manage their situations and plan their departure from abusive relationships.

To improve the situation, several recommendations are made. Providing translation services and legal information in multiple languages. Increasing awareness about the different forms of abuse and available resources through community outreach programs. Training police and legal professionals to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by immigrant women. Legal reforms should prioritise the safety of immigrant women and their children over deportation concerns, strengthening community networks and encouraging healthcare professionals to support victims of IPV can provide crucial assistance and lastly providing legal assistance to immigrant women can help them navigate the complex legal system.

By addressing these barriers and implementing supportive measures, Denmark can better protect immigrant women from IPV and help them rebuild their lives free from abuse.

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