

Preface

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Working with Immigrant Women: Issues and Strategies for Mental Health Professionals focuses on women's mental health and illness following migration and through the process of resettlement. The vision for creating this book came from conversations about a perceived dissonance between the needs of newcomer women and established structures and practices in Canada's mental health care system. Many of the contributors have immigrated to Canada themselves, and presently work in various health care positions: as nurses, counsellors, social workers, psychologists, social scientists, researchers and educators. They combine their knowledge gleaned through practice, education and research to bring forward perspectives that portray the complexity and diversity of immigrant women's experiences.

Most of the chapters critically interrogate existing literature and current research on the mental health and illness concerns of immigrant women. With an interest in changing paradigms in mental health practice, the authors have used critical frameworks to analyze a range of issues affecting women's mental health and illnesses in the context of post-migration and resettlement. Issues explored throughout the book point to women's concerns at the individual level, within the community and in the larger society.

A key goal of the book is to move the experiences of women immigrants to Canada from the margins to the centre. While aiming to highlight the intersecting oppressions experienced by women, the authors also emphasize the strengths and resiliencies of women, demonstrating how they are active participants in shaping their mental health and in responding to mental illness. Another major goal is to highlight the critical needs of newcomer women who are consumers of mental health services, so that the health care professionals can respond to their concerns more effectively. Each chapter includes strategies that mental health professionals can draw from if they wish to critically examine their practice, incorporate innovative approaches or build on those already established to create equitable, relevant and comprehensive care to the growing numbers of immigrant women in Canada who use mental health services. Where authors identify gaps in knowledge, these are indicated, along with recommendations for ongoing research. Some chapters examine systemic, social and structural issues and identify barriers that interfere with women receiving optimum mental health care.

While the book covers a number of key issues and a wide range of perspectives, some important issues such as homelessness and substance use among immigrant women are not included because there is not much research or practice-based evidence to sufficiently address the topics and make recommendations for practice.

Much work still needs to be done in moving mental health practice forward to meet the needs of all women.

The book is intended primarily, though not exclusively, as a resource for health care professionals working in the mental health field and for students entering the field. We hope the book will also be a valuable resource for administrators, educators, researchers and policy-makers in the mental health field.

A Note on Language

In this book—including in its title—we have used the term “immigrants” to refer to anyone born outside of Canada. However, where someone’s experience differs because of their status in Canada, we have identified them according to this status. For instance, three of the chapter titles include the word refugee because the authors are writing specifically about how being a refugee has a direct effect on mental health that is different from the experience of someone who has arrived in Canada as a landed immigrant.

There is considerable literature on the topic of what is variously called acculturation, adaptation and integration, and on the stages an individual might undergo in the process of settling in a new country. These terms refer to a dynamic process of retaining previously held social, cultural and religious values and beliefs while choosing to embrace certain new values and beliefs in the context of settlement or resettlement. We use the term *resettlement* to apply to the act, process or context of starting a life in a new country in the first 10 years after arriving. The term *post-migration* (as in “after” migration) refers to the happenings any time following migration. Depending on the context, in this book, the authors have used one or the other or both terms.