

Namrata Users Guide

About the Film

For the first time in 17 years, Namrata Gill wraps herself in her wedding sari. It doesn't bring back happy memories.

Her husband was supposed to be Prince Charming – whisking her away from Punjab to a new life in Canada. But instead of living a fairy-tale dream, Gill found herself in a nightmare. She worked long hours in her husband's Edmonton convenience store, while facing increasing physical and emotional abuse from her husband and in-laws. And the situation only worsened after the birth of her daughter.

In this intensely personal short film, Gill – whose story was one of many real-life inspirations for Deepa Mehta's feature film *Heaven on Earth* – describes her six years in an abusive relationship, and how difficult leaving can be when you are part of a close-knit immigrant community.

Namrata is more than the story of one woman, told in her own words. Its simple and personal approach opens the door for discussions on domestic violence among new Canadians – and may even encourage others to share their stories.

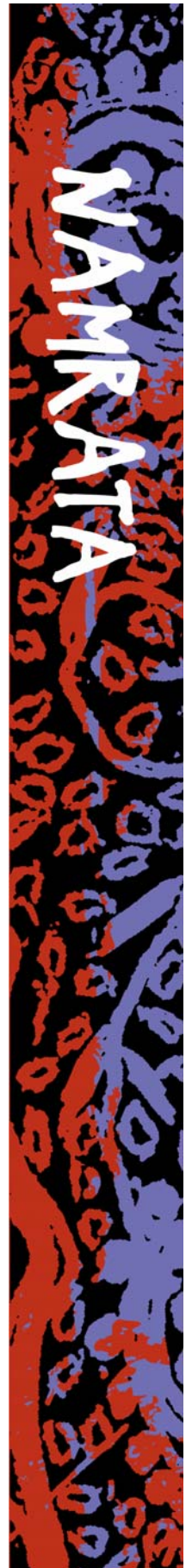
Disclaimer

This video is about Namrata's personal experience of abuse and her eventual healing. Each person in an abusive relationship will have a specific experience that may be both similar to, and different from, Namrata's. Each person must choose for themselves what action to take and when.

Terms

- **Immigrants and refugees** refers those who have come to Canada from another country but may, for the purposes of this video, include first-generation Canadians who have maintained strong ties to their cultural communities. We will use the word **newcomer** in this document.
- **Mainstream** commonly refers to people who are of the dominant culture in society.
- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)** refers to abuse between people in relationships characterized by intimacy, dependency, and/or trust. Most commonly this would include marriage, common-law, and dating relationships.
- **Family Violence or Domestic Violence** commonly includes abuse of children, seniors, siblings and other family members, as well as those noted under IPV.

Audience



While *Namrata* was developed primarily as an education tool for use with newcomers there will be value for mainstream audiences as well.

This video also presents an important perspective for post-secondary students and service providers in sectors such as: law enforcement, social work, immigration, psychology, health care and education.

The richness of the discussion is often enhanced when both newcomer and mainstream viewers are present at screenings or workshops; however, facilitators should be sensitive to situations in which such blending of audiences may inhibit discussion of sensitive issues.

Facilitators must be prepared to address the following issues: family violence (particularly as it may be experienced in ethnic communities), misunderstandings regarding arranged marriages, barriers to leaving abusive relationships (particularly for newcomers), stereotypes of ethnic communities, and support services available in the local area.

Key Learning Objectives of this Guide

- To enhance the viewer's understanding of the nature, consequences and challenges of intimate partner violence experienced by newcomers.

Preparing for a screening of *Namrata*

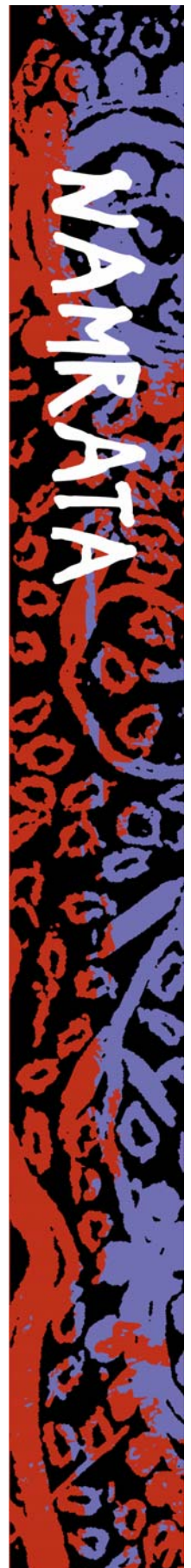
- Preview the film before screening with any audience as the subject matter can be distressing for anyone who has experienced intimate partner violence;
- Consider your own biases and beliefs regarding abuse, people of cultures other than your own and arranged marriages;
- Review background information;
- If the audience is primarily mainstream, consider having someone from an organization serving immigrant and refugee communities attend as a resource.

Discussion Questions

- A. The nature of abuse in intimate partner relationships.
1. Why are some people abusive to the person they love? See background.
 2. Why does the abused person put up with the abuse? See background.
 3. What behaviours are considered abusive? See background.
 4. What types of abuse did *Namrata* experience?

Psychological

- Pregnancy used to isolate her
- Control of movement – required to have permission to leave the house



- Limited access to information and education so she was unfamiliar with legal and social resources
- Put downs
- Criticism of her family
- Blaming – everything was her fault
- Forced to work long hours
- Disrespect for her role as mother and wife
- Trust breached by her husband, his mother and his sister

Physical

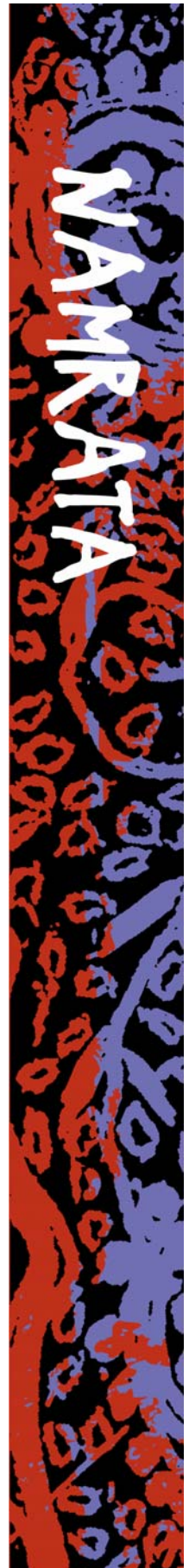
- Pushing
- Shoving
- Hitting
- Twisting her stomach
- Restraint by her mother-in-law and sister-in-law

Sexual

- Attempted rape
- Coerced sex – pressure to have sex when she didn't want to

B. What challenges are faced and what options are available to someone who is abused in an intimate partner relationship.

1. Barriers to leaving. See background.
2. What barriers did Namrata experience as she considered leaving?
 - Concern for the welfare of her daughter – if she stays (safety and exposure to abuse) but also if she leaves (financial, social and emotional well-being).
 - Financial support if she is a single parent.
 - Concern about bringing shame on the extended family and ethnic community.
 - Concern about following cultural traditions.
 - Loss of self-esteem.
 - Lack of information about resources.
 - Loss of self-confidence.
3. Although this was not discussed in the video, what steps are involved in planning to leave an abusive relationship?
 - Recognize that the behaviours are abusive.
 - Recognize that abuse is not acceptable.
 - Seek information on resources: legal, housing, financial, employment/education, as well as counselling. A good place to start finding out about resources is to call a shelter serving people in abusive relationships or an immigrant-serving agency and ask for information. Information is often available on government websites related to services for children or social services.
 - Set some manageable goals toward making the desired changes.
 - Identify a safe place to go and a reliable way of getting there. Identify family and friends who may be able to help. A shelter may

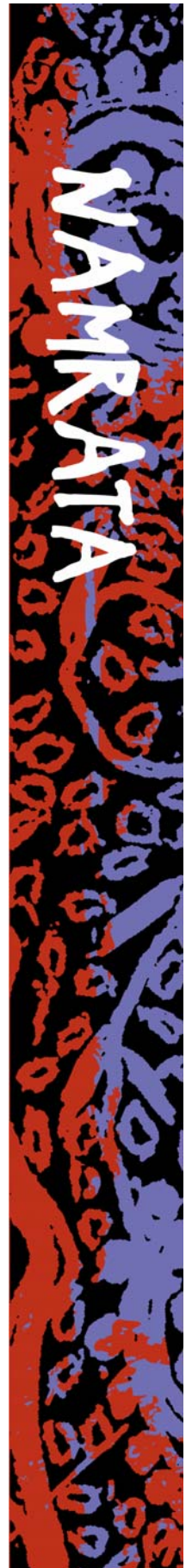


also be a good option. A safe place is one the abusive partner would not know about.

- If possible, find a way to save some money in a separate bank account.
- Plan to leave when it is the most safe to do so i.e. the abusive person is away at work or out of town.
- Consider getting a protection order, especially if the relationship has been physically or sexually violent or if threats have been made. Police, RCMP, or a lawyer should be able to provide information about how to do that in the local community.

4. How does Namrata's experience relate to the experiences of others who are abused?

- Similarities: many people, regardless of culture or sex, will have similar experiences; it is hopeful; it is non-judgemental; it reflects the time it takes for change to occur.
- Differences: the fact that she became a police officer may make some people feel they could not possibly follow her footsteps. Namrata's goal was a somewhat unusual one but it made sense for her because some of her family members were in the military so it was a career she was familiar with. What might be more common goals that people can relate to i.e. as finding a peaceful place, taking back power, protecting children, being independent?



Background Information

Why are some people abusive to the person they love?

Statistically, men are most commonly identified as the abusive partner but we know that women may also choose to use abuse. In some cases there is mutual abuse between the partners.

Research suggests that abuse in intimate partner relationships is a reflection of the need for power and control. Some people who are abusive to their partner may also have an anger management problem and are extremely volatile and abusive to many people. However, many people who use abuse do manage their anger very well as suggested by the fact that they only act out against their partner, regardless of the source of their anger. Family violence is a choice – it is not about losing control.

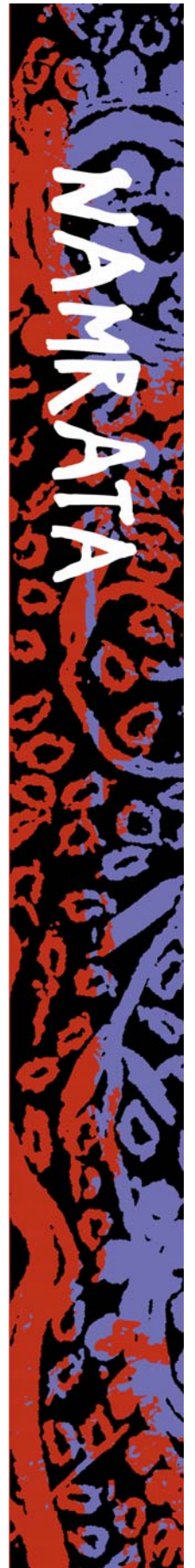
For many people who use abuse this is a learned behaviour. Most often the person was exposed to abuse within their own extended families but the exposure could have been at the community (geographical, cultural, religious) level.

Traditional thinking about male and female roles in relationships is common. Men may be seen as the head of the household and women as subservient to their male partner. This may be a particular issue for newcomers trying to adapt to a country where women may have more power or freedom than in some other countries. However, Canadians also struggle with attitudes, beliefs and values that can foster a climate of tolerance for abusive behaviour.

What behaviours are considered abuse?

There are many different ways that people can practice abuse. What is important to understand though, is that it is much more diverse and insidious than we commonly consider when we only think of physical violence as being abuse. In terms of abuse, the most dangerous time in a woman's relationship is during a pregnancy.

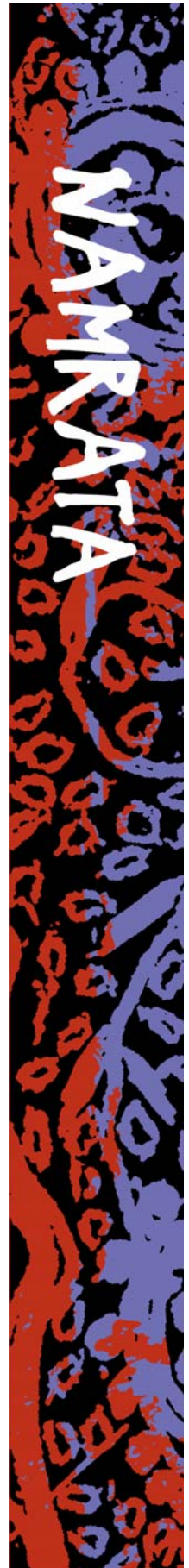
1. Psychological abuse – intended to diminish the abused person's capacity for independent action, this includes:
 - Verbal abuse – includes: name calling, put downs, yelling
 - Isolation – includes: separating the person from their friends and family and limiting participation in activities outside the home. Isolation serves to decrease the likelihood that others will know of the abuse and to increase the abusive person's ability to control their partner's access to information. For newcomers, a certain level of isolation happens as a result of leaving friends and family in the homeland. Lack of English skills and limited access to ESL classes allows the abusive person to maintain their power over their partner. This may happen when both partners are newcomers or when a



newcomer has a relationship with a mainstream person. This may also extend to physically restraining the person from leaving the home.

- Manipulation – intended to make the abused person feel uncertain of what is true and question their own insight and decision making. This may include limiting access to current and accurate information or accusations of poor judgement or lies.
 - Threats/intimidation includes: threatening physical harm, losing custody of the children, or homelessness because the abused person not be able to survive financially. In the case of newcomers, deportation or ostracism by the ethnic community may be threatened. In fact, if the abusive person is the sponsor, he or she may lose their right to sponsor others in the future. If the person who is abused is here illegally there may be some risk of deportation.
2. Cultural abuse includes: on-going criticism of the abused person’s cultural beliefs or values. This may lead to the person not being allowed to participate in cultural events or attend religious events or ceremonies. In some cases the abused person may be forced to act against the beliefs of the community or religion (for example: eating pork or having an abortion). This is particularly common when the partners are from different ethnic or religious communities.
 3. Physical abuse includes: direct or indirect physical harm such as: hitting, punching, strangulation, burning, deprivation of food/sleep/medical care, slapping, forced ingestion of alcohol/drugs, or forced pregnancies.
 4. Sexual abuse includes: forced participation in sexual activities, forced sexual activities with others, exposure to sexually transmitted infections or disrespect for physical privacy.
 5. Financial abuse includes: limiting or forbidding access to money, bank accounts, controlling purchases and how much is spent, putting all the bills in the name of the abused person and the assets in the name of the abusive partner.
 6. Stalking (Criminal Harassment) – often rooted in jealousy, it is intended to intimidate the abused person by letting her/him know they have no place to hide. Stalking includes any persistent unwanted contact such as sending notes/e-mails/letters/gifts, following the abused person, accessing voice mail and e-mails intended for the abused person. The stalking may be done directly by the abusive person or by a friend or family member of the abusive person. Stalking is considered a high-risk indicator of the potential for domestic homicides.

In most situations, the abused person will experience a range of these abuses – it is extremely rare that only one type of abuse will be practiced.



Why does the abused person put up with the abuse?

It is important to note that the person who is abused has often also had exposure to family violence so neither person may have seen intimate partner relationships that are mutually respectful and non-abusive.

The abuse also tends to start very subtly and may be infrequent; perhaps with “joking” insults, embarrassing the partner in public, or jealousy presented as love (always wanting to know where the partner is and who they are with). As the abused person’s sense of self is eroded over time she/he gives up more and more power to their abusive partner.

In the early stages there may also be many good experiences in which the abusive partner is loving and supportive. He/she often apologizes or gives gifts after an abusive event and promises never to do it again. Alcohol, stress, financial problems all may be blamed as the cause however, as mentioned earlier, abuse is a choice and is not caused by these situations. Unless the person gets help to change their behaviour the cycle just begins again with the tension between the couple increasing until another abusive event occurs.

The abuse typically escalates in frequency and intensity over months or years and may eventually include sexual and or physical violence. By this time, the person who is abused may feel unable to take action; may feel responsible for the abuse; and may be so isolated and dependent on the abusive partner that independence seems unimaginable.

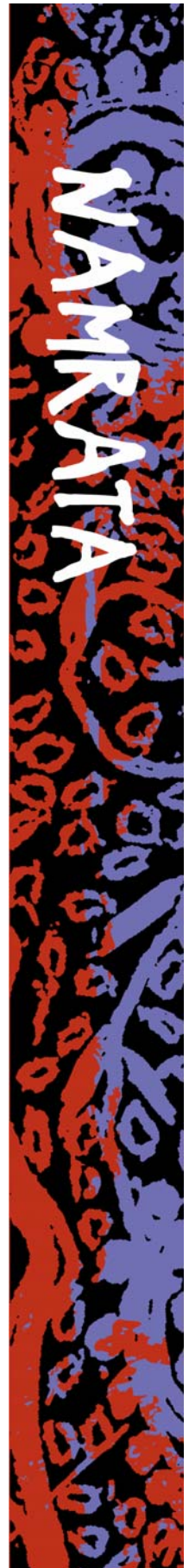
As the abusive relationship evolves the abused person typically experiences loss of self-esteem and self-confidence as they struggle to understand why this is happening to them. The constant messages delivered by the abusive partner that their partner is, for example, ugly, fat, stupid, useless, or that no one else would ever want them add to this erosion of sense of self. Financial dependence, isolation, fear of further harm or death can result in the feeling that staying in the relationship is the only option. Religious or cultural beliefs or family pressure may be complicating factors.

The person who stays in the relationship is not weak or deserving of what is happening, she/he simply has not yet reclaimed the power taken by the abusive partner. It often takes as much strength to stay as it takes to go.

Barriers to leaving

The complexity of these relationships cannot be overstated. The abused person tends to minimize or deny the abuse and focuses on the good times or the loving things their partner does (or did at one time). Jealousy, intensity and power can sometimes be misinterpreted as love. In situations where the abused person has never known a healthy relationship, she/he may not even consider themselves abused. In that case, leaving may never cross her/his mind.

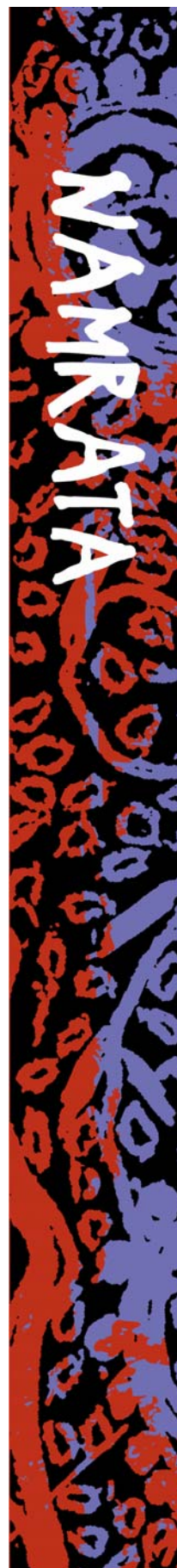
The reality is that leaving is a process – it is not an event. Just like all significant changes we make in our lives, we must first recognize the problem, then explore resources and options, reach a stage of readiness, plan to take



action and then, finally, take steps toward the change we desire. It is never an easy or simple thing to do and sometimes we go back to the old situation for a while until we are ready to try again. Anyone who has ever tried to quit smoking, or drinking, or tried to lose weight has experienced those same stages.

Every person leaving an abusive relationship must consider the following:

- Where to go – ideally, the abusive person would be the one to leave the home but unless the abused person is on the lease or title, she/he may not have any right to the residence. In many cases she/he will feel unsafe staying in the home and feel hiding somewhere is the best option. Women’s shelters are available in most communities across Canada. If the male is being abused, he often has fewer options, especially if he is leaving with his children. If shelters are unavailable or full, then family and friends may be able to help but they may not have the resources to help for long. Social service departments with provincial governments may offer some assistance.
- How to manage financially – in preparation for leaving, it is wise to try to set up some kind of separate bank account. Starting over can be expensive given that many people leave with virtually the clothes on their back. Furniture, damage deposit, clothes, and basic household items such as dishes, small appliances, bedding, and towels can be financially overwhelming. Sources such as thrift shops and garage sales can be helpful. Churches, as well as local and provincial governments, may provide some assistance as well.
- The best interests of the children – while we know that having two parents can be an advantage for children in terms of their growth and development, those parents need to have a healthy relationship for that to happen. Ideally, when parents can’t get along or choose to not live together, they will still find a way to work together to raise the children with positive role models. In many provinces, exposing a child to family violence is considered emotional abuse because of the detrimental effect it has on the child’s development. If someone is leaving an abusive relationship it is important to get good legal advice about how to best meet the needs of the children.
- Bringing shame on the family/community – while this is sometimes a concern for mainstream people, it is often a significant concern for newcomers. Canada is an individualistic society that places great importance on the autonomy of the individual. Family and community are important but people are often encouraged to make choices that meet their own needs first. In many other countries outside of North America, the opposite is true; they are collectivist societies. The person’s first responsibilities are to community and family. The community may feel that issues such as abuse must be taken care of within the community. Ostracism from the ethnic or religious community may be a real concern if the secret is shared outside of the community. This does not mean that



abuse is tolerated although there are many differences in what behaviours are defined as abuse.

- Staying safe – this is a significant concern for all people, regardless of culture, who leave an abusive relationship. Research consistently finds women are most at risk by their partner within three months of leaving the relationship. The risk may escalate again when legal action is taken, divorces are sought, or child custody issues are being dealt with. This means that, as much as possible, leaving should be planned. A safe place to go, a reliable way to get there, gathering some financial resources and, when necessary, getting protection orders can all be part of a planned leave.
- Trusting authorities – if the person comes from a country where there was war, widespread lawlessness, or corrupt and violent police and militia, the thought of calling police or government agencies may be terrifying. Connections to community-based, immigrant-serving agencies may feel like a safer alternative.

Additional Resources

Local services that may be of assistance:

- Local information sources: information lines such as 211, newspapers, radio
- Immigrant serving agencies – settlement services, ESL classes, employment counselling
- Women's shelters
- Churches/synagogues/mosques
- Government services related to children or financial supports
- Agencies specializing in family violence
- Police/RCMP
- Counselling services
- Legal Aid services

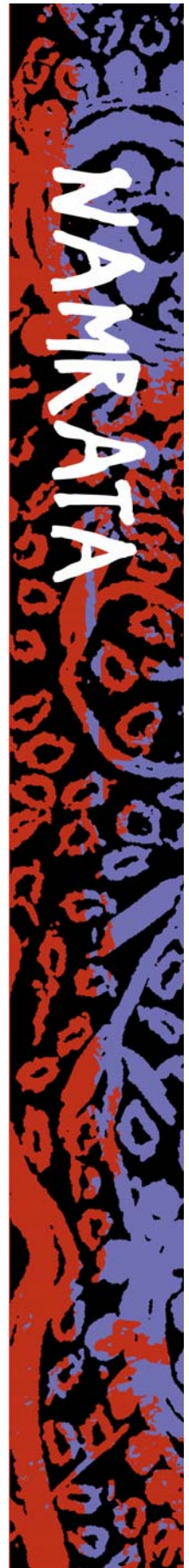
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Campbell, J. (1995). "Prediction of homicide of and by battered women" in J. Campbell (Ed.), *Assessing the risk of dangerousness: Potential for further violence of sexual offenders, batterers, and child abusers* (pp. 93-113). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

"Family Violence In Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2009, 2008, and 2007"
phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/pdfs/fv-85-224-XWE-eng.pdf

Department of Justice Canada. (2004). *A Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors of Criminal Harassment*. Ottawa: Communications and Executive Services Branch.



Warrier S. "It's Their Culture," skccn.com/08CDVC-ED/Warrier/Warrier-Immigrant%20&%20Refugee%20Victims.pdf

Websites:

Rose Net: rosenet-ca.org – Information on the laws in Canada concerning abused immigrant women.

Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System: lfcc.on.ca

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence: phac-aspc.gc.ca/nfv-cnivf/index-eng.php

Article on Domestic Violence In Immigrant Communities: feetin2worlds.wordpress.com/2009/11/11/

Books:

Why Does He Do That? by Lundy Bancroft

The Battered Woman by Eleanor Walker

The Emotionally Abusive Relationship by Patricia Evans

Selected NFB videos on domestic abuse.

Heaven on Earth

2008, 104 min 55 s <films.nfb.ca/heaven-on-earth>

Acclaimed director Deepa Mehta highlights the isolation and disappointment faced by a family of Punjabi immigrants to Canada.

Aruba

2005, 11 min 38 s <onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=53979>

The story of a child of domestic abuse in an immigrant community.

Courage of Women – Walking Beyond Domestic Violence

2002, 34 min 09 s <onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=53871>

Stories from five survivors of domestic abuse.

Out from Abuse

2000, 25 min <onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=50974>

About the experiences of older female survivors of abuse.

Universal Screening for Domestic Abuse: The Emergency Room Nurse's Experience

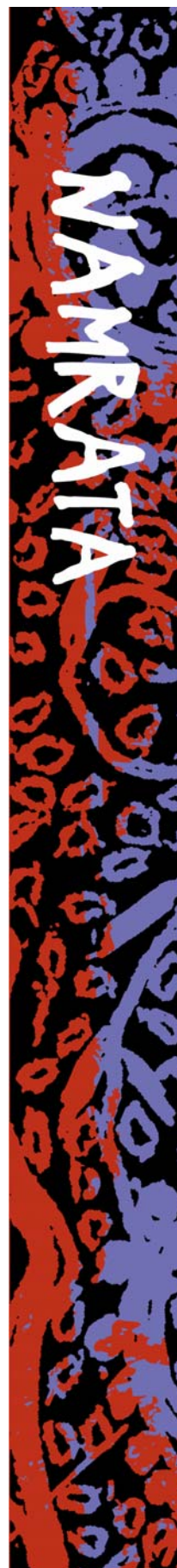
2002, 20 min <onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=53857>

Emergency room nurses share their experiences after the implementation of new abuse screen protocols.

You Can't Beat a Woman!

1997, 95 min 37 s <onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=33383>

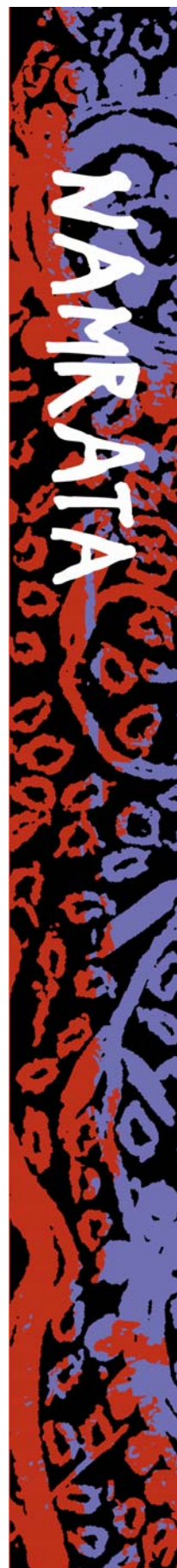
About violence against women in six very different countries.



Your Truth Is Your Truth – Moments With Strong Women from Abusive Peer Relationships

2001, 30 min – <onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=51604>

Profiles of women who have experienced partner, spousal, or dating abuse.



Questions for Namrata

During Abuse:

Were you aware of the services that could help you in Canada? Did you know that you could access them, even as a newcomer?

No, I was told about 911 by my ex-husband because I worked in the store, and if there was a robbery, etc., I could call 911. But for the first couple of years, I did not know that I could call them for anything else.

Did you call the police? Was he charged?

No, I did not call the police, but they (Edmonton Police Service Spousal Violence Intervention team) were contacted by the Indo-Canadian Women's Association on behalf of my father. My ex-husband was never charged.

Transition Period:

What steps did you take to leave your husband? Did you plan things in advance?

I did plan. After my father got in touch with the Spousal Violence Intervention Team, they came and spoke to me at the store and together we planned that I would leave the next day. They would have liked for me to leave right there and then.

What risks did you face when you left your husband? Did you feel safe or unsafe?

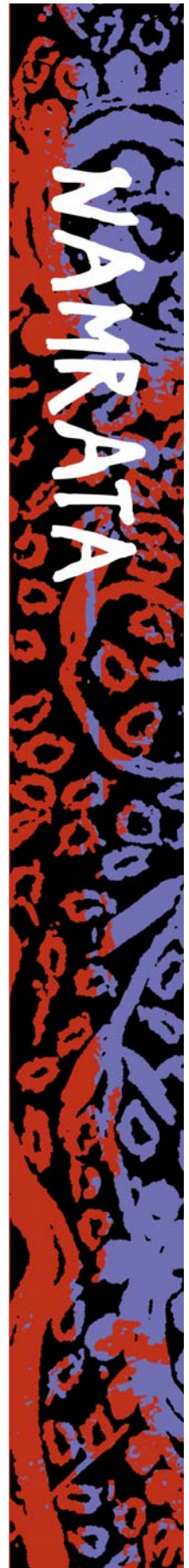
I was very scared for my safety as well as the safety of my daughter and my father. I was scared that if my ex-husband or his family found out I was leaving, I would not be allowed to take my daughter with me – and there was no way I was leaving her behind. I was scared for my father as he had come from India on a visitor's visa to help, and I was worried about what my ex-husband would do to him. I went to a shelter and, as soon as possible, applied and obtained a restraining order.

Did you access any social services (welfare, shelters and immigrant agencies)?

Yes, I was taken to the WIN House <www.winhouse.org> right after I left. The staff there assisted me in applying for welfare and provided me info to apply for legal aid. I was also told about the support groups available, which I accessed after moving into my own apartment. The support groups helped me realise that the abuse was not my fault, and I was not alone. For me it was a healing experience.

How did your father help you?

He contacted several members of the community and sought their advice, and he contacted the Indo-Canadian Women's Association. They advised my father to



contact the Edmonton Police Service and their Spousal Violence Intervention Team, and he was able to obtain their help in assisting me to leave. My father stayed with me for a total of 17 months and was a great support system for me.

How did your husband and his family react to you leaving?

My husband was very angry and contacted everyone (except my mother) and lied to them about me and cursed the family and called us all names. His family tried to file a police complaint, which was unsuccessful. They spread lies about me and my family in the community and alleged that we had stolen thousands of dollars from them. When we were leaving, there was only my mother-in-law in the house, and she cursed me and my daughter. Some of the things she said to my daughter were unbelievable, and I wondered how a grandmother could say those things to her own grandchild.

Did you get any help or support from the community?

Only from the people in the community who were very close family friends. Others pretended to care but were basically interested in gossip.

What special challenges did you face leaving the abusive relationship with a child?

It was tough not knowing how I would support her and what I would do, but other than the worry about providing her with a safe and happy home, I had no major concerns.

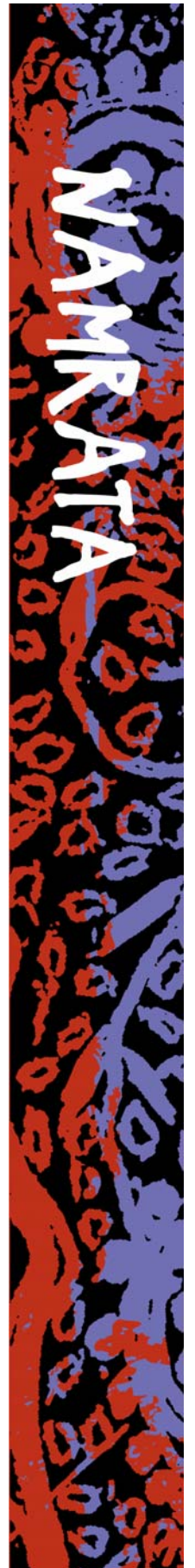
After Leaving:

How long did it take for you to “get back on your feet”?

Two years.

How and why did you become a police officer?

Firstly I came from an army background, so I was always inspired by people who believe in service. Then when I was still married, we used to have a police officer come to the corner grocery store that I use to manage for my ex-husband, and I got talking to him and was interested in police work. Additionally, the Edmonton Police Service provided me with a lot of help when I left. During the child exchange, which for two years took place at a police station, I was inspired by the members that I met and decided that I wanted to repay the country and community that had helped me so much during the toughest time in my life. For me, the best way to do that was to be able to serve the people of Edmonton and to be a productive, contributing member of the society.



How has your life changed since leaving your husband?

Oh where do I begin? I am a happier person, my self respect and self confidence have returned. I can now sleep and not have to keep an ear open to listen for sounds. I live my life according to the way I want to. When I am happy, my daughter is happy. I am a role model for her. I believe this inspires my daughter to have the confidence to be able to work hard and achieve her dreams. Life could not be better.

Do you or your daughter have continued contact with your ex-husband or his family?

I have no contact with him and my daughter rarely speaks to him and has not seen him in over three years.

How did you work out custody of your child?

I fought for sole custody, I did not want any alimony or child maintenance so the courts decided we had to have psychological examinations by a court-appointed psychologist, and she recommended sole custody in my favour.

How do people in the South Asian Community treat you now – both as a woman who left her abusive husband and as a police officer?

Well that is an interesting question. The majority of them do not like me and blame me for “destroying my marriage.” In my experience, South Asian men often do not like women in position of power, and I have faced many frivolous complaints from them. When I respond to the domestic violence calls, sometimes the men will refuse me entry in the home or call me names. I also do have members of the community who are very supportive and encouraging and proud of what I have achieved in my life.

Are you able to offer some tips and tools for others in similar situations?

To anyone in a similar situation I would say, as scary as it is to leave and be alone, life is so much happier and better once one gets out and rebuilds one’s life. I would say the first and foremost thing of importance is the safety of you and your children. Talk to someone about what is happening. Even if you are not planning to leave or cannot leave, having someone you can trust and talk to will help a great deal. Have a plan and be prepared in case you have to leave in a hurry. I am not going to say it is easy, because it isn’t, but if I can do it, others can too. We all have the strength within us.

