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**Breaking the web of silence:**

**An exploration of Chinese women's experience of domestic  
violence in New Zealand**

A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Applied Psychology(Community)**

at

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by

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## **Abstract**

Domestic violence is a serious social issue within New Zealand society. Asian immigrant women with domestic violence experiences often face specific socio-cultural challenges and barriers that hinder them from making sense of their experience, seeking help and accessing necessary intervention. In New Zealand, there is limited domestic violence research which focuses on the lived experience of women in Asian immigrant communities.

This research attempts to fill this gap by exploring Chinese women's experience of domestic violence in New Zealand. It explores the dynamics of domestic violence in the context of family, community and immigration and the impact of violence on Chinese women's health and wellbeing. It examines the cultural and gendered factors which shape Chinese women's experiences and their help-seeking strategies. This research identifies barriers facing the women when they seek help from their informal and formal support networks. It also examines, from the Chinese women's perspective, the role of the Chinese community and statutory and community-based services in offering effective intervention to Chinese women.

Five case studies based on semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted to provide an in-depth understanding of Chinese immigrant women's experience of domestic violence.

The findings suggest that Chinese immigrant women are particularly vulnerable in domestic violence situations and the abuse has long term psychological implications for women's health and wellbeing. Traditional cultural beliefs and gender role expectations add extra potency to the husbands' power and control tactics over the women and their social support. Abused Chinese women are typically socially isolated. The multidimensional analysis shows that a combination of individual, interpersonal, cultural, contextual, and structural and community factors impact on Chinese immigrant women's ability to make sense of the violence and abuse and to employ help-seeking strategies. Majority of the women in this study utilised a mixture of formal and informal intervention. When

the abusive situation reaches crisis point, they prioritised seeking help from informal support networks. Although the women's faith served as a coping strategy when dealing with the abuse, at other times, the women were re-victimised by religious leaders and faith community members. A safe and trusted community space is needed for Chinese women to share their experiences without being seen in a negative manner by outsiders. Community initiatives need to focus on community education and intervention that offers adequate assistance and support to Chinese women in domestic violence situations. Overall, the women had positive experiences when accessing various formal interventions. However, specific challenges and barriers that the women faced were also identified and discussed. Throughout their experiences, Chinese women gained critical consciousness and discovered positive strategies that helped them to heal from the abuse.

This research provides recommendations for an integrated, co-ordinated and collaborative approach and community response to address domestic violence in the Chinese community. It also calls for culturally safe and culturally competent family violence services which meet the specific needs of Chinese women and their families.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive and chronic social issue in New Zealand. Women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and suffer serious injuries or death. The prevalence of ever experienced intimate partner violence in a lifetime was higher for women (30%) than for men (21%) as reported by The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey 2006 (Families Commission, 2009). The New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims (NZNSCV) reported that 26% of women suffered physical abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Lievore & Mayhew, 2007). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (2002) also revealed that in New Zealand 50% of homicides which involved women were committed by the woman's partner or ex-partner. In 2014, the New Zealand police recorded that women were the victims of 5 out of the 7 couple-related homicides (New Zealand Police, 2015).

Women are exposed to and influenced by domestic violence irrespective of their nationality, ethnicity, economic or socio-cultural background (Pan et al., 2006), although, it should not be assumed that violence against women is manifested in the same manner across cultures (Warrier, 2009). In comparison to the dominant ethnic groups, immigrant women with domestic violence experiences often faces specific socio-cultural challenges and barriers that hinder them from making sense of their experience; from seeking help and reaching safety; from disclosing their experiences to their social groups or gaining the necessary community and/or statutory interventions that should help immigrant women to make a significant difference to their situations.

According to the 2013 census, 11.8% of the New Zealand population identified themselves as Asian ethnicity. The Asian ethnic group was projected as one of the fastest growing populations alongside Maori and Pacific. Chinese constitutes 36.3% of the Asian ethnic group which was the largest group of the category (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). Chinese comprised 4.3% of New Zealand population, 73% of whom were born overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

Data on the prevalence of domestic violence in specific ethnic groups remains uncertain (Paulin & Edgar, 2013). One problem is that there are no specific figures for Chinese: instead Chinese people are grouped with other Asian ethnic groups or simply as “other”. For example, data from 2006 revealed that 8.5% of applicants for protection orders and 8.3 %of respondents were categorised as “Other” (Families Commission, 2009). Family homicide data for the years 2002 to 2006 revealed concerning information regarding ethnic groups and domestic violence. In couple-related homicides, 13 out of 77 victims (16.9%) and 10 out of 79 perpetrators (12.7%) were Asian. *The Learning from Tragedy* report also indicates in comparison to the average New Zealand population, people of Asian ethnicity had a slightly increased risk of family violence. Asian victims tend to be younger, new arrivals to New Zealand and more at the risk of a couple-related homicide (Martin & Pritchard, 2010).

It is likely that domestic violence is under-reported in Chinese communities. This could be due to a number of socio-cultural factors. Asian women who are victimised by domestic violence might be reluctant to report to authorities for fear of being ostracised by the immigrant communities. A previous New Zealand study by Au (1998) on domestic violence among Chinese immigrant families faced great difficulty due to the lack of response from community members and refusal of collaboration from the Chinese community organisations. The participants of the study confirmed that domestic violence occurs in the Chinese community but there is much silence on the issue (Au, 1998). Chinese women are often reluctant to report family matters like domestic violence to outsiders Chin (1994) because of stigma, consequence of losing face or bringing shame on the family. Sometimes, immigrant women deny that domestic violence exists due to the lack of awareness of the situation or their different definition of domestic violence (Levine & Benkert, 2011). Asian immigrant women can hide domestic violence as it is often portrayed as private matter and the Asian communities tends to share similar belief (Tse, 2007). These could all contribute to the difficulties of dealing with domestic violence issues in the Chinese immigrant community.

In New Zealand, there is limited research conducted on domestic violence in the Asian and migrant communities and which addresses non-dominant cultural

perspective to the issue (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2006; Tse, 2007). There is limited information on the contextual factors in relations to Chinese immigrant women's experience of domestic violence. The voices of Chinese immigrant women with experience of domestic violence remain unnoticed & silenced. Even in the United States, there is a paucity of domestic violence research focusing especially on women of Asian descent or ethnicity (Xu, Campbell, & Zhu, 2001).

The meaning of domestic violence is socially constructed. It is mainly defined and interpreted surrounding discourses in the dominant culture. When describing the experience of non-dominant group members, there is an insufficient language base and a lack of analysis framework for those with oppression to describe the patterned process of being exploited and dominated (Font, Vecchio, & Almeida, 1998).

This study attempts to fill this gap by exploring Chinese women's experiences of domestic violence in New Zealand. It explores the dynamic of domestic violence in the context of immigration and the implications for women's health and wellbeing. It identifies the cultural and gendered factors which shape women's experiences and their help-seeking strategies. This research hopes to identify issues facing the women when disclosing the violent or abusive relationship to their social groups and the barriers they experience in seeking help. It also examines the role of the Chinese community and statutory and community-based services in offering effective intervention for Chinese women in domestic violence situations.

The findings of this research are expected to provide useful information for family violence agencies to help them respond more effectively when engaging with Chinese women clients. This study also aims to motivate the Chinese community to respond appropriately to Chinese women experiencing domestic violence. Ultimately, this research is aimed to break the silence of domestic violence and to bring encouragement and hope into Chinese women's lives by sharing their experiences of abuse which at the same time also empowers other women with similar experiences.

In the following sections, I will position the present research by explaining the relevant terminology used in this study, introduce the researcher and establish the theoretical framework for this research.

## **Terminology**

The terms domestic violence, family violence, violence against women and intimate partner violence will be used interchangeably. According to section 3 of the Domestic Violence Act 1995, domestic violence is:

- Physical abuse:
- Sexual abuse:
- Psychological abuse, including but not limited to, -
  - i. intimidation:
  - ii. harassment:
  - iii. damage to property:
  - iv. threats of psychological abuse, sexual abuse or psychological abuse:
    - a. financial or economic abuse (for example, denying or limiting access to financial resources, or preventing or restricting employment opportunities or access to education):
  - v. in relation to a child:
    - a. causing or allowing a child to witness or hear the physical, sexual or psychological abuse of a person with whom he child has a domestic relationship;
    - b. putting a child or allowing the child to be put, at risk of seeing or hearing that abuse is occurring.

The term psychological abuse and emotional abuse will be used to describe non-physical violence or harm in this research. Generally, there is a lack of consistency in the conceptualisation of the definition and constitution of psychological/emotional abuse among researchers and professionals (Follingstad & DeHart, 2000; Johnson & Sigler, 1995; O'Hagan, 1995).

The term 'Asian' or 'Asian people' is used to describe the diversity within the Asian communities. The term Chinese is used to describe the women's ethnicity, to address individuals from China. The term 'migrant(s)' and 'immigrant(s)' will be used interchangeably to describe people who have moved from one country of abode to another.

Generally, the term "culture" is used to describe one's cultural belief systems, values and practice as well as cultural identity. Cultural identity is importance for people to construct the self and helps people to build a strong sense of collective wellbeing. According to American Psychological Association (2002), 'Culture' has been defined as:

the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes (language, care taking practices, media, educational systems) and organizations (media, educational systems...).

Culture has been described as the embodiment of a world view through learned and transmitted beliefs, values, and practices, including religious and spiritual traditions. (p.8)

## **The Researcher**

I am a 33 year old Chinese woman who was born in China and immigrated to New Zealand in my early teens with my family. I have been living in New Zealand for the past 20 years and I have gone through both secondary and tertiary education systems. I do consider myself a Chinese-New Zealander as I have a bi-cultural identity. I have been through a number of different and difficult transition periods in early years in New Zealand as a migrant child and later as an ethnic woman trying to find her voice and a sense of identity. I'm proud to say that I have become a stronger and better person because of those experiences. It is through trials and tribulations that I've learnt to appreciate and grow the most. It was during my years of tertiary education at Waikato University that I started to critically examine the issue of violence, cultural and gendered identity and the position of ethnic women within the family system and in the wider context of the society. I became more critically conscious of the gendered norms and

expectations that I have both internalised and resisted being a Chinese immigrant woman.

My interest in the present research stems from witnessing Chinese women being the victim of domestic violence scenarios as a child in my wider family. I understand the concept of emotional pain and suffering very well as I grew up in a broken family which, I came to understand, exhibited power and control issues and inequality between men and women in the Chinese culture. My passion for this topic grew when I became more aware of the limited research and information on the prevalence and dynamic of domestic violence in the Asian and migrant communities of New Zealand, particularly the absent voices of Chinese women with domestic violence experiences. I came to realise the importance unveiling the specific barriers and challenges that Chinese immigrant women face when seeking outside help and finding an alternative to escape the abusive relationships.

I am aware that as a researcher, my cultural values, views, positions, assumptions and belief system might be both influential and contribute to the biases that might be present in the research. Thus, I could never claim to be neutral as they shape my understandings and perceptions of people and communities. However, I believe that my lived experiences as a Chinese immigrant woman and my childhood experiences of witnessing domestic violence has provided me with understanding of the topic and which was helpful during the interviewing process and for analysing the research data. I am also a community psychology student, so I'm grounded in multi-levelled critical analysis and taking a holistic and collaborative approach to the understanding of Chinese women's experience of domestic violence in the Chinese immigrant community of New Zealand.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The present research is primarily grounded in a feminist framework. Fundamental to feminist theoretical analysis is that domestic violence must be explained and analysed utilising the constructs of gender and power context in men and women's lives (Bograd, 1984, 1988; Loseke & Kurz, 2005; Yllo, 2005). In feminist ideology, violence against men and violence against women are different in terms of context and meaning. Although women do exhibit violent behaviour

towards men, men and women typically have different motives behind their violence. Feminists theorise that attempts to highlight violence against men are a way to justify and deny violence against women as a serious issue and to remove the resources available from women being victimised (Loseke & Kurz, 2005).

From a feminist perspective, family is examined and analysed in historical and social contexts (Bograd, 1988). Ferree (1990) suggested:

The feminist perspective redefines families as arenas of gender and generational struggles, crucible of caring and conflict, where claims for an identity are rooted, and separateness and solidarity are continually created and contested. (p.880)

Feminist analyses of violence against women stressed how gender is shaped by cultural constructions which produce unequal distribution of power and status in heterosexual intimate relationships (Mitchell & Vanya, 2009). Feminists commonly point out that male supremacy in the family happens at women's expense and is intentionally sustained and reinforced by the wider social and political systems (Ferree, 1990). Men and women have different socially prescribed roles within the family. Within the family dynamic, these gendered roles generate inequitable income, resources and opportunities for women Loseke and Kurz (2005) and are embedded in and maintained by male dominated power in the patriarchal structure of the society Yllo (2005) Women are more vulnerable to experiencing violence by men. Men use violence as a form of control and coercion towards women, particularly as a tactic for women be subservient and conform to men's ideals and demands in the family (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Domestic violence research guided by a feminist framework is centred on research that targets social change (Bograd, 1988). It allows women to reconstruct the understanding of abuse from women's perspective by providing a wider scope of their lived experiences. Feminist research aims to improve women's living circumstances; help women to transform from victims to survivors of domestic violence by examining existing social systems and ultimately eliminates violence against women by challenging the status quo in patriarchal structures of the society (Mitchell & Vanya, 2009).

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature review provides a rationale for carrying out the present research. The review focuses on violence against Asian women in heterosexual domestic relationships. Firstly, I will identify relevant theoretical frameworks and domestic violence. I will particularly focus on feminist theories, the social ecological theory and sociological theories. Then, I will provide an overview of the attitude and perception of domestic violence in the context of the Asian family and the Asian communities. Particular attention is paid to the gendered, socio-cultural and structural contexts and analysis in domestic violence experiences by Asian and Chinese women. The impact of the domestic violence on Asian women's wellbeing will also be outlined. Lastly, I will examine the multilayered challenges Asian immigrant women confront when disclosing abusive experiences to their social groups and seeking necessary interventions such as cultural constraints, immigration related issues and barriers to access available help services and legal provisions. I will also identify available support systems and common help-seeking strategies employed by Asian women.

The majority of the literature originates from the United States and Canada as New Zealand studies specifically addressing domestic violence in the Asian and/or Chinese immigrant community remain sparse.

### **Defining Domestic Violence**

Dasgupta (2002) suggested that domestic violence could be defined within a narrow or broad frame. The broad definition incorporates all behaviour patterns that aim to threaten, intimate, isolate or exploit, and ensures the inclusion of all potential victims of domestic violence. When defining domestic violence, feminist theorists focus on general analysis of women's oppression by gender and power inequalities and their broad definition is male coercion of women (Yllo, 1993). Thus, feminist theory favours terms such as wife assaults, wife beating and battered women (Davis & Hegen, 1992).

Overall, there is a lack of cultural specific consideration when defining domestic violence within Asian communities Fernández (2006) pointed out that in some

cultures, the term 'domestic violence' does not exist or there might a lack of words to describe it so it cannot be clearly understood or efficiently translated. The term 'domestic violence' does exist in the Chinese language. However, a survey of 262 Chinese Americans found that in general, the Chinese participants tended to limit the meaning of domestic violence to physical and sexual assault rather than include emotional abuse (Yick, 2000). Likewise, Midlarsky, Venkataramani-Kothari, and Plante (2006) described general differences in defining domestic violence among American, Chinese and South-Asian populations and showed that Chinese immigrants usually accepted physical forms of violence as domestic violence but generally rejected viewing verbal or psychological maltreatment as abusive. In terms of sexual violence, only forced sex was identified as abuse.

Gordon (2000) emphasised that how violence against women is defined and conceptualised will impact the explanations of violence against women, research procedures and the interpretation of outcomes. Thus, defining domestic violence from a cultural perspective entails the identification of a wide range of behaviour patterns which considers cultural differences and that can be easily comprehended by people from a particular cultural context. It is also important to explore the interpretation of domestic violence by abused women within their cultural framework (Fernández, 2006).

In addition, research has stressed that in order to develop culturally relevant and sensitive interventions that are effective, domestic violence must be perceived and interpreted within the clients' social context and cultural value systems. (Almeida & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999; Fernández, 2006; Warrier, 2009; Yick, 2001).

## **Feminist Theoretical Approaches**

### **Gender and violence.**

Feminist ideology suggests that domestic violence in an intimate partner relationship is rooted in male domination; the unequal distribution of power for men and women that occurs in a patriarchal society (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Schechter, 1982; Yllo, 2005). Violent acts occur in a gendered context and are

reinforced through the existing cultural, economic and political systems (Loseke & Kurz, 2005). Feminist understanding suggests that violence against women and wives has been widely accepted by society, within which men's violence is justified through portraying women or wives as legitimate victims for abuse (Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

Domestic violence stems from the gender based inequality between men and women in an intimate relationship which produces male superiority and female inferiority. Traditional gender roles that are socially and historically associated with male and female duties, obligation and expectations within the family system also play a part in maintaining and justifying the violence (Yllo, 2005). A number of studies have found that men with abusive tendencies and female victims of abuse hold more traditional views of marriage and adhere strongly to traditional sex roles (Pagelow, 1981; Telch & Lindquist, 1984).

Within a feminist ideology, violence is not gender neutral. There is a gender distinction between those who conduct violent acts and those who suffers the consequences. On the whole, men use violence as a means to keep women in their subordinate social positions they are socialised into. Violence is the most overt and effective means to achieve that (Bograd, 1988). In contrast to women, men are more likely to report using violence as a way to intimidate or punish women for undesirable behaviour. Men use violence much more commonly than women when their power, supremacy and self-esteem are perceived to be challenged or threatened (Saunders, 2002). In addition, more women are likely to suffer severe injuries in violent intimate relationships. The fact that more women than men report heightened fear or being afraid during marital violent incidents Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Neidig, and Thorn (1995) shows that domestic violence is primarily about male dominance and control. Many more women than men report using violence as a form of self-defence or as response to being abused (Dasgupta, 2002; Pence & Paymar, 1993).

### **Power and control.**

The issue of power and control must be taken into account as a part of a feminist analysis of domestic violence. As the dominant class in a patriarchal society, men

have power over women in terms of differentiation of access to structural resources that are both material and symbolic. The multi-ethnic qualitative study by Hanmer (2002) examined social process in maintaining violence against in refugee and other communities. She portrays violence as when men sustain their socially constructed privileged position by exploits and benefiting from women. Hanmer suggested that “men from varied cultural and ethnic groups have in common cultural and family advantages that come from being male, from being sons, husbands and fathers (Hanmer, 2002, p. 129).

The “Power and Control Wheel”, developed at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth (Pence and Paymar (1993) provides a valuable framework for understanding the interconnectedness between violence and other forms of control tactics by men to women (see Figure 1). The wheel indicates the abusive behaviours experienced by women who have been abused by men at the interpersonal level. It illustrates that physical and sexual violence are connected to the hub of power and control. The wheel suggests that domestic violence is a not a single incident but a part of patterned behaviours characteristic of men who use power to control women. The abuser often employs a wide range of coercion tactics to control his victim, including minimisation, denial, initiation, isolation, emotional abuse, economic abuse, use of children, threats and assertion of male privilege.

Figure 1. Power and control wheel



Adapted from [www.theduluthmodel.org](http://www.theduluthmodel.org) Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, Minnesota. 55802 218-722-2781

The power motivation theory by McClelland (1975) suggests that in an intimate relationship, controlling and dominating behaviours are employed to sustain power and dominance in confrontational situations. Men use violence with intention. Men are also socialised and culturally prescribed to hold a dominant status within the family. Their use of aggression as a way to sustain that power and privilege is often justified by their experiences in a culture that normalises male dominance and female subordination (Pence & Paymar, 1993).

Women often suffer a combination of physical, emotional and/or spiritual wounds after being abused on a repetitive basis. When a woman challenges the position of inferiority, her spouse may retaliate. Then, she will be labelled as deviant character by the abuser. She is also likely to be portrayed as having a lack of confidence and even seen as someone who encourages violence by her community (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Mirroring this belief, research has shown that there is a generally held view that Chinese American victims of domestic violence are often blamed for being the cause of their husband's violence towards them (Yick, 2000). In addition, the effects of power and control extend beyond the immediate domestic context. Research shows that women face greater life risks and dangers when they try to end a violent relationship (Lees, 2001). Feminist social constructionist argues that psychological explanation and victim-blaming discourses of violence against women enables abusers to blame and criticise women for their own dilemma. This serves to maintain male dominance by shifting men's responsibility onto women and neglects analysis of social systems which women are engaged with (Tang, Wong, & Cheung, 2002).

The Duluth power and control wheel lacks consideration of ethnic immigrant women, as they are at risk of experiencing additional control and threats that are cultural and context-specific to their situation. As an additional dimension to physical and emotional abuse, threats and intimidation, immigrant women are more vulnerable to isolation due to their immigrant status, coupled with cultural and social barriers that could make leaving the abusive relationship a more difficult option. This is particularly true for undocumented immigrant women;

they are at greater risk of abuse with these added variables (Chin, 1994; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004).

### **The ‘Intersectionality’ analysis of domestic violence.**

In general, the current model of analysis for domestic violence is based on a Western framework. The feminist analysis of domestic violence is socio-politically orientated, which focuses on the influence of cultural and historical backgrounds, gender-roles socialisation and the availability of resources for women when leaving a violent relationship (Martin, 1976).

Feminist theories emphasise the macro structural dimensions that contribute to the gender inequality and power struggle between men and women in intimate partner relationships. However, by emphasising the commonality of gender and power dynamics among all women, it neglects the specific socio-cultural contexts that are associated with ethnic women’s experiences of violence. Mainstream feminist theories have been criticised by other feminists for the lack of attention they give to the consideration of gender interlocking with other social constructs such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class or sexual orientation in domestic violence analysis (Kasturirangan et al., 2004; Yllo, 2005). Warrier (2009) suggested that “intersectionality focuses attention on specific contexts, distinct experiences, and the qualitative aspects of equality and discrimination” (p.82). Thus, violence against women must be understood within a localised historical cultural context and be explained within the specific community context in which it occurs.

Crenshaw (1993) also pointed out that the issue of violence against women should focus on context-specific situation which “often varies considerably depending on the race, class, and other social characteristics of the woman...” (p. 15). These dimensions can be analysed by “a framework that links them to broader structures of subordination which intersect sometimes in fairly predictable ways” (Crenshaw, 1993, p. 15).

Kimberlé Crenshaw reminded us that intersectionality derives from women’s lived experiences. Similar to black women who experiences the effects of intersection of sexism and racism, Asian immigrant women are also further disempowered and potentially thrice subjected to abuse and violence by their

spouses due to the interlocking of race, class and gender. Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable when they experience immigration related control tactics by their spouses, such as threats of deportation, uncertainty with legal status, language barriers and unavailable legal access (Price, 2005); these women are trapped in an abusive relationship which could be difficult to break free from.

Furthermore, mainstream services and intervention programmes for abused women have also largely neglected the issue of intersectionality for ethnic women, which are vital for developing culturally appropriate interventions (Almeida & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999). In similar vein, feminist framework-based interventions target at the macro system, aiming for long term change of hierarchical gender relations. Values of empowerment and self-determination lay the advocacy foundation which encourages abused women to step out of their socially regulated roles with adequately provided resources (Yick, 2001). Such advocacy, centred on individualism and self-determination, may contradict traditional Chinese values of maintaining family harmony and family wellbeing (Rimonte, 1991; Yick, 1999).

### **The cultural context model.**

Rhea Almeida developed the Cultural Context Model (CCM), which is a multicultural approach for addressing and understanding domestic violence (Almeida & Durkin, 1999). CCM focuses on the cultural dimensions of intersectionality analysis and social structural analysis. The model seeks change at both the micro and macro levels. Central to the Cultural Context Model is the systematic examination of the aspects of hierarchies of power and privilege that overrule social interaction at different levels. This model positions domestic violence discourses within the wider social context of power, privilege and oppression and it prioritises the safety of women, children and their families in the community context (Almeida & Lockard, 2005). The model recognises the significance of cultural factors in perpetuating the victimisation of women in domestic violence which is crucial to understanding ethnic immigrant women's experience of domestic violence.

One underpinning principle of the model is that men's accountability for violence and abuse is an integral part of the social process that frees women from the abuse.

A critical aspect of this multi-level model is to dismantle the power dynamic at the interpersonal level as well as examining the redistribution of power and privilege between men and women which are influenced by their race, religious practices, sexual orientations, age, class at the community and institutional level (Font et al., 1998). Regarding domestic violence, the model explores the misuse of power and privileges in the domestic context and the prescribed societal roles for men and women at the community and societal level. It describes ten significant power dynamic categories that exist within an intimate relationship. One of these fundamental categories examines immigration-related issues, such as the abuser threatening the removal of rights and privileges based on women's residency status (Almeida & Durkin, 1999).

Prominent in this model is the recognition that women's experiences of domestic violence are largely shaped and influenced by cultural factors. Within the intervention phase, different culture circles are created for men and women. This aims at raising critical consciousness regarding different forms of power and oppression experienced by both groups (Almeida & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999). This recognition of culture and gender dynamic creates a safe space for men and women to explore ways they are affected differently patriarchal values, power and privileges. Women's cultural circles are designed to focus on empowerment, where individual women are provided with the opportunity to build coalitions with groups of women. Throughout, this approach stresses the need for women to bear less of the overall responsibility for the family's collective wellbeing (Almeida & Durkin, 1999).

### **The Social Ecology Theory**

Among other theorists, the social ecological approach was proposed by Belsky (1980) for the analysis of child maltreatment. Belsky (1980)'s multidimensional framework encompasses of four nested layers: individual, family or primary relationships (microsystem), the community (exosystem) and the society (macrosystem).

This framework was applied to the construction of knowledge on the causes and risk factors for wife abuse by theorists such as (Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Heise,

1998). The social ecological model for intimate partner violence highlights “a series of systems interact in a web of relationships that affect the development and maintenance of violent behaviours” (Edleson & Tolman, 1992, p. 12). Based on this model, the microsystem refers to the interactions between the abusive man and his abused partner and the subjective constructed meaning that assigns to these interactions in a particular setting such as the family which most violent incidents occur (Edleson & Tolman, 1992). Factors such as the traditional family structure and ideologies could influence these interactions (Heise, 1998). The exosystem refers to the formal and informal social structures that influences and has an effect on the primary relationship and which in turn determines what happens in the relationship. Ecosystem factors such as social isolation after migration and unemployment have been identified which links to domestic violence. The macrosystem refers to societal factors that either encourages or inhibits violence such as set of cultural norms, values and belief systems that permeate through the lower ecological layers (Heise, 1998).

In addition, Edleson and Tolman (1992) emphasised the importance to add the layer of mesosystem which refers the association between the microsystem and different facets of the person’s social environment such as the extended family, workplaces or peer groups and social institutions such as the court and social services.

## **A Sociological Approach**

So far, I have examined feminist theories and social ecological theory in understanding and analysing domestic violence. Here, I will briefly outline sociological approaches to violence within the family.

From a sociological perspective, family is seen as a social institutional system and different forms of violence within the family are examined. A family’s interpersonal and social environments can be great risk factors for violence and abuse (Loseke, 2005). A sociological perspective does not focus on individual psychological explanation of violence but emphasise “the effect of social, cultural, and economical context on violence in the family” (Mitchell & Vanya, 2009, p. 43).

In this light, an understanding of control and resource theory helps to understand family violence. According to resource theory, violence or force is used as a resource to resolve family conflict and sustain family equity in status (Goode, 1971). Violence is more likely to occur when there is a threat to resource or a lack of consistency to the prescribed social norm. According to the status inconsistency theory, the exercising of power is subject to the perceived value of the resources the family member contributes to the family. Typically, this means that men as primary earners have preeminent status (Campbell, 1992). The socialisation of force is reinforced by external agents such as friends, communities and the state. In this sense, force does not only imply to physical forms also apply to tangible forms such as income and intangible forms such as status or respect (Goode, 1971).

Based on the status inconsistency theory, domestic violence is more likely to occur when an individual's pre-migration skills, educational or occupational status are incompatible with the individual's current level. Spousal role reversal has been identified as a stressor for marital conflicts and a contributing factor in domestic violence (Easteal, 1996; Lee & Au, 2007). The status of immigrant women may improve during the early years of migration. In comparison to immigrant men, immigrant women are more equipped to take up unskilled employment work. Husbands who are socialised to maintain traditional patriarchal beliefs may find adversities such as underemployment, language limitations and unrecognised academic abilities threaten their power and status in the family (Chan, 1989). This will challenge the original family rules and values that were once upheld in the home country and lead to redistribution of power in the family which imposes a threat to family status (Lee, 1996; Yick, 2001).

Despite these theoretical claims, social and contextual factors identified in domestic violence analysis cannot be used as an excuse for violence but rather should be viewed as an extra dimension of the factors that reinforce and aggravate violence and abuse in marital relationships, which is underpinned and governed by husbands' power and control over their wives. Contextual factors and structural barriers faced by Asian immigrant women will be discussed later in the following sections.

## **An Overview of Domestic Violence in Asian Communities**

Domestic violence is a serious issue across ethnicity and culture but little is known about its scope and nature in Asian immigrant communities. As a result, the knowledge base on the role of culture and contextual analysis on domestic violence in Asian communities is still restricted. This limits our potentiality to develop culturally sensitive services and culturally competent intervention programmes for Asian women and their families (Lee, 2000).

Domestic violence in Asian communities remains under-researched because of the relatively low number of cases reported to officials and authorities (Ho, 1990). Thus, there is a lack of public awareness about domestic violence in the Chinese community (Xu et al., 2001). A lack of information makes defining the true prevalence of domestic violence in Chinese or other Asian immigration groups very difficult (Weil & Lee, 2004). Chinese ethnicity is not included as a separate category for analysis in family violence related state statistics in the USA and Canada (Lee, 2000), which is also the case in New Zealand. More importantly, scant attention has been paid to the extent and nature of the victimisation of Asian immigrant women in domestic violence incidents (Lee & Hadeed, 2009).

### **Myths about domestic violence in Asian communities.**

There are several myths surrounding domestic violence in the Chinese community. One is that it does not exist in families within the Chinese community and another is the common belief that wife abusers fit the profile of being newly arrived immigrants who are poor, and have low levels of educational attainment. Contrary to these myths, it has been found that while domestic violence is rarely talked about, it is a serious problem in Chinese and Asian communities (Chin, 1994; Nguyen, 2005).

Furthermore, domestic violence occurs across all social and economic levels in the Chinese community, regardless of immigration status. A large US study indicated that in a total of 607 men and women of Chinese, Cambodian, Korean and Vietnamese origins, 38% reported that they knew a woman who had suffered some form of physical injury inflicted by her spouse. Of the total number of

participants, 54.7% of Chinese participants had some form of post-high school education and 71% of the Chinese participants were immigrants (not born in the US or short stays) (Yoshioka, Dang, Shewmangal, Chan, & Tan, 2000). Similarly, a Canadian study by Chan (1989) found that 46% of the perpetrators in the study had received post-secondary education, while 80% of the perpetrators and 61% of the victims were long-term residents in Canada. The situation in New Zealand might be similar to that what has been found overseas. The case studies in this research will provide more insight in this area.

### **The Role of Culture and Domestic Violence**

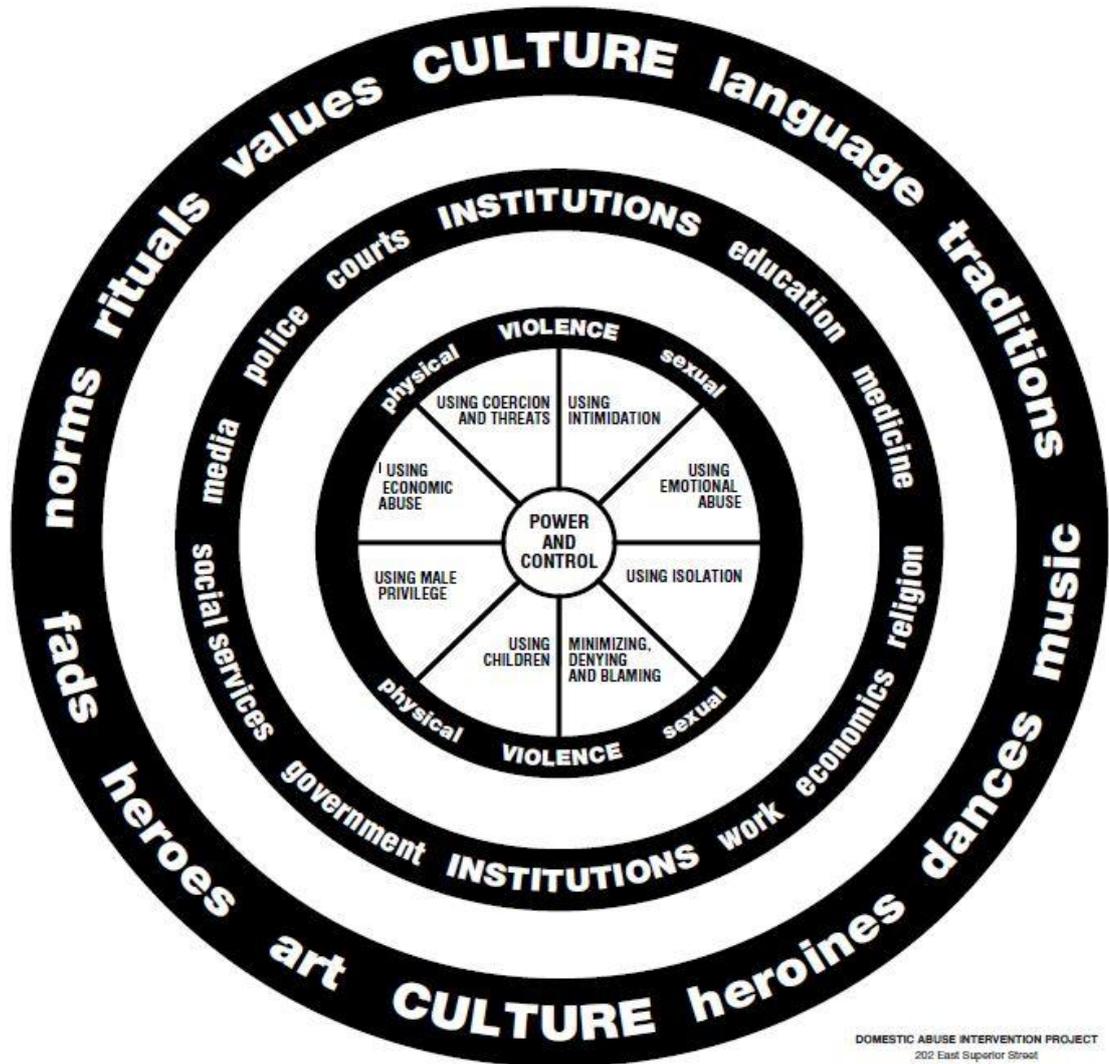
Culture can be defined differently depending on the researcher's orientation and research discipline. Culture encompasses a hybrid set of categories such as ethnicity, religion, ideology, occupation, age, gender and class (Taylor, Magnussen, & Amundson, 2001). However, culture is dynamic. Culture is not only handed down between generations; it is also an active phenomenon that is being experienced, reconstructed and challenged by individuals who are constantly interacting with it (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). Asian communities are diverse and often distinguished based on political, economic and cultural differences, but they still share a commonality of Asian cultural values and beliefs. In general, there is a lack of examination of these diverse external dynamics that cultivate violence against women in the domestic context in ethnic communities (Weil & Lee, 2004).

Domestic violence in the Asian immigrant community is a multi-faceted issue and Asian immigrant women often face multiple hazards and realities (Dasgupta, 2005). Immigrant women experience male supremacy and female oppression which are similar to women of dominant culture. As added dimensions, the immigrant's culture is often blamed for its tolerance of domestic violence and immigrant women are often perceived as passively dismiss domestic violence incidents. Thus, in order to understand this complex phenomenon, critical insights need to be gained in terms of the individual/familial context, cultural context, as well as the institutional and societal contexts. Culture can serve as a social buffering mechanism that either subjugates or empowers women in domestic

violence situations (Dasgupta, 2005). On one hand, there are several characteristics of the Chinese/Asian community that may tolerate and exacerbate the occurrences of domestic violence. On the other hand, certain cultural factors may serve to lessen the occurrence and reduce the condoning of violence in the domestic context.

The Culture Wheel (see Figure 2) demonstrates that violence against women could be reinforced by cultural norms, values at a societal and institutional level. Violence against women analysis should not only examine the individual or interpersonal level in which the husband exercises power and coercion over his wife; we must also look closer at the social, institutional and cultural tapestry of domestic violence, as inevitably institutions and culture reinforce power and control which sustain abuse at the individual level. Thus, violence against women is a choice that is socially and institutionally constructed. It is often congruent with gender role categories and condoned by specific cultural belief systems. Related themes will be evident in the discussion chapter which follows the case studies.

Figure 2. Cultural wheel



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT  
202 East Superior Street  
Duluth, Minnesota 55802  
218-722-2781  
www.theduluthmodel.org

Adopted from [www.theduluthmodel.org](http://www.theduluthmodel.org) Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. 202 East Superior Street, Duluth, Minnesota. 55802 218-722-2781

### **Asian cultural values and the role of family.**

The Chinese cultural context needs to be understood, and in particular, its collective and patriarchal character. Chinese cultural practices and religious beliefs are deeply rooted in ancient beliefs such as Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Yamashiro & Matsuoka, 1997; Yick, 1999). It is evident that these traditional doctrines and practices continue to influence and shape contemporary Chinese immigrants' family lives. In comparison to Western cultures, which focus on individualism and independence, Asian cultures are characterised by collectivism, based on Confucian ideological concepts which emphasise a close-knit family system governed by a systematic, hierarchical structure (Ho, 1990; Yu, 2005).

One underlying traditional belief in Chinese culture is that the self is interconnected with significant others in a particular identified group (Ho, 1990). The family and the individuals within it are perceived as interdependent. An individual's contribution to family life and wellbeing is a significant part of the family's collective identity. In this interconnected manner, individuals' social behaviour is closely linked to the group's social norms, pre-socialised duties and responsibilities. Mutual dependence, family harmony, honour, integrity, filial piety and endurance are vital cultural characteristics in maintaining interpersonal relationships in such collective construct (Ho, 1990; Yamashiro & Matsuoka, 1997). It is expected that Chinese individuals will repress their own needs and wellbeing in order to preserve collective wellbeing and sustain order and harmony in the family unit (Lee, 2000; Yick, 1999). In the past, there were instances of abused Chinese women being sacrificed in an attempt to protect the family from marriage disputes and to maintain the harmony of the family (Honig & Hershatter, 1988).

Within these collective constructs, shame and losing face are social and moral consequences of breaking cultural norms and stepping outside the family boundaries. Shame is an important cultural concept in the Asian community that promotes group values over individual aspirations (Yoshioka et al., 2000). Similarly, shame is a well-recognised emotion and a highly valued moral concept

in the Chinese culture (Mascolo, Fischer, & Li, 2003). The self may go through a complex social process that is associated with shame, losing face and moral awareness of guilt after losing face. However, as pointed out by Mascolo et al. (2003), shame in the Chinese culture is “not a primarily a threat to self-esteem; instead, it is a vehicle for social cohesion and the development of self” (p.395). Shame/guilt notion serve as a social mechanism that reinforces core cultural and family values by providing the individual the opportunity to re-consolidate with the family and community after they rectify the inappropriate behaviours and make right with the situation.

Domestic violence is often treated as a private family matter that should be concealed from the outside world (Tse, 2007; Yoshioka & Choi, 2005), to avoid public shame and humiliation. If one family member displays unacceptable, deviant behaviour such as violence, the effects of losing face and shame not only negatively impact on the individual, but on the whole family, the extended family and even ancestry lines (Ho, 1990; Yoshioka & Choi, 2005). One representation of an ancient Chinese saying, "don't wash your dirty linen in public" which suggests that it is traditionally expected to hide shameful matters like domestic violence from the public eye to avoid being judged in a negative manner (Xu et al., 2001). This further reinforces the culturally orientated concealment of domestic violence.

### **Extended family system and domestic violence dynamics.**

In the Chinese family, cultural beliefs regarding obedience to elders and complying with family traditions often take priority over women's individual rights. Traditionally, Chinese family is based on a patriarchal and patrilineal social system. Power within the Chinese family system is allocated in a hierarchal fashion based on the individual's gender, age and generation (Hsu, 1985). The Confucian concept of filial piety refers to the ultimate obedience and respect for one's parents, grandparents and other respected elders in the family (Ho, 1990). Filial piety as a cultural value fosters family solidarity, loyalty, interdependency and intergenerational bonds as well as maintaining the hierarchical family structures (Ho, 1996; Hsu, 1985). As a way of showing filial piety in the

traditional family, children would honour, be obedient and faithful towards elderly family members as well as providing for aged parents by taking care of their financial, physical and emotional needs (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). In this social context, the relationship between parent and child takes priority over the relationship between husband and wife (Lee, 1996).

Moreover, for Chinese women, marriage implies not only marrying their husband but also marrying into his family. Married Chinese women must take on the obligation to care for their parents-in-law. Caring for and pleasing parents-in-law is an expected way for Chinese daughters-in-law to demonstrate the prescribed gender norm of filial piety (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). In the Chinese families that adhere to this tradition, mothers-in-law may gain power within the family hierarchy. Violence against women might be instigated by in-laws who tolerate violence (Lee, 2000; Lee & Au, 2007). In order to sustain the patriarchal nature of the family, mothers-in-laws may aggravate their sons' abuse or team up with their sons to jointly abuse the daughter-in-law. Not surprisingly, in-law abuse has been found to be an added risk factor for domestic violence in South Asian communities (Dasgupta, 2000) and Chinese communities (Chan, 1989; Lee, 2000). In the Montreal study by Chan (1989), among the 21 % of the abused Chinese women who lived with their in-laws, 64 % suffered physical and emotional abuse from them. Also, 39 % reported in-law complications as contributing factors that perpetuated the marital violence.

Despite these claims, for some Asian women, living with the extended family can provide social and financial support, child care and protection (Kasturirangan et al., 2004; Sharma, 2001). The presence of close family members can serve as a buffer against abuse, which reduces the chance that the women might be isolated. However, as discussed, at other times the extended family structure places women in a more potentially vulnerable position which exposes them to culturally sanctioned violence and abuse in the family. Unfortunately, under the influence of such cultural contexts, many Chinese women fail to recognise domestic violence as a social issue and are confronted with enormous cultural pressure while breaking the vicious cycle of abuse (Lee & Au, 2007).

## **Patriarchy Ideology and Domestic Violence Attitudes**

Fernández (2006) pointed out that the societal structural framework needs to be addressed in the cultural examinations of domestic violence. In societies that are grounded in patriarchal ideologies, men are privileged, prioritised and recognised as authoritarian power figures in the society and the family. This is particularly true for the Chinese societal structure (Xu et al., 2001). Research indicates that there is a persistent strong link between traditional patriarchal norms that support the notion of male privilege and cultural tolerance of violence against women for Asian immigrants (Dasgupta, 2000; Lee, 2007). This traditional ideology stresses the perpetuation of gendered hierarchical relationships within which women are socialized to defer to male power in the family (Xu et al., 2001).

Intimate partner violence in these societies is often justified through cultural values and sanctioned as ethically acceptable. Violence against women is often portrayed as a legitimate form of discipline by the husband to maintain his superiority in the family (Huisman, 1996; Taylor et al., 2001). Domestic violence is often classified as a form of “correction” rather than violence among Nicaragua women (Ellsberg, Caldera, Herrera, Winkvist, & Kullgren, 1999), and this is also true for Chinese women (Liu & Chan, 1999). Such cultural reasoning implicitly or explicitly provides men with a sense of ownership over women; women are often seen as men’s private property and are likely to be physically, emotionally and sexually abused by men without societal intervention. (Liu & Chan, 1999; Pillai, 2001; Sagot, 2005).

Furthermore, understanding attitudes towards domestic violence is a significant part of learning how to address this issue in Asian communities. Domestic violence attitudes entail beliefs that support men’s authority to use physical force and emotional coercion against women, as well as the justification of violence in specific contexts (Finn, 1986; Yick & Agbayani-siewert, 1997). A study by Yick and Agbayani-siewert (1997) suggested that Chinese women disapproved of using force in families significantly more than their male counterparts. However, this is with the exception of physically punishing children for disciplinary purposes.

Also, 46% of the respondents believed that family issues should be solved by family members rather than outsiders.

Furthermore, Ho (1990) examined attitudes towards marital violence in four Asian ethnic group groups: Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian. This focus group study showed that in comparison to other Asian ethnic groups, Chinese men and women found physical forms of domestic violence to be least tolerable. This mirrors the findings by (Yick, 2000) that 97.7% of Chinese American participants classified physical aggression such as pushing, slapping or throwing objects, and forced sex, as domestic violence. Older Chinese Americans were more likely than younger Chinese Americans to adhere to traditional gender beliefs and were more tolerant of the use of physical force to solve marital conflicts (Yick, 2000).

Foo and Margolin (1995) examined the contextual justification of domestic violence and their results suggested that violence is perceived as justifiable in particular situations by some members of society. Domestic violence has been identified as an acceptable form of physical punishment, as a shared commonality among different Asian American communities (Nguyen, 2005). Yick and Agbayani-siewert (1997) conducted a telephone survey of 31 Chinese adults (16 men & 15 women), which reported similar findings. Nearly half of the respondents felt that certain contextual factors could be used to justify violence and abuse in the domestic context. These contextual factors included self-defence and disciplining a child. Also, nearly a third of the participants agreed that physical aggression is justified if the spouse was found to have had extramarital affairs or was screaming uncontrollably. It is worth noting that although the Chinese men and women did not approve of physical interpersonal violence, they tended to agree that physically punishing a child was an acceptable form of discipline.

Yoshioka et al. (2000) found that corporal punishment was a normal practice among Chinese participants in their study and many of them were physically disciplined as children. There was a strong indication that people who experience corporal punishment as a child tend to uphold stronger male privileges and

attitudes that assert men have the authority to discipline their wives. Overall, the respondents disapproved of the use of physical violence as a way to resolve marital conflicts. On the other hand, the respondents tended not to classify psychological or financial abuse as domestic violence (Yoshioka et al., 2000). This is consistent with the view that psychological abuse is a complex phenomenon which is challenging to conceptualise in Chinese culture (Hsu, 1985).

### **Gender roles and the view of women in Asian culture.**

According to Fernández (2006), worldview influences how women perceive domestic violence; how they make sense of their experiences; their choices in disclosing the abusive relationship; and the types of help-seeking strategies that women select. Whether in an individualistic or a collective society, cultural factors serve as “salient mechanisms” to prescribe women’s gender roles and deeply influence women’s perceptions, responses to and experiences of domestic violence (Yoshioka & Choi, 2005).

In many Asian cultures, women’s gender roles are entrenched in a patriarchal ideology in society that goes back to ancient times (Bui & Morash, 1999). In the past, the Chinese government was perceived as an oppressive and authoritarian system. Historically, Chinese women suffered unfair treatment from the Chinese legal system and society at large. As a consequence of the rigid political and societal regulation of gender norms and values, In comparison to Chinese men, Chinese women have been treated as lesser beings and severely exploited since ancient times (Bloodworth, 1967; Honig & Hershatter, 1988; Wolf, 1985). The social construction of Chinese women can be recognised in many ancient Chinese aphorisms. For example, “The wife I’ve taken, the horse I’ve bought: I can ride them both, and I can whip them both” (Xu et al., 2001, p. 298) suggests that Chinese wives are lower class citizens, who are socialised to suffer and endure violence and humiliation in private at the hands of their husbands.

Traditionally, women are perceived as less valuable than men, from birth. During the pre-liberation period in China, women were prevented from receiving education and the main focus of women’s lives was on marriage. Chinese women were trained to comply with gender norms in order to attract good husbands and

were expected to devote long hours to domestic labour at home. Chinese women were not only deemed the cause of any domestic conflict but their ability to resolve marital conflicts in a sensitive, pleasant manner and to maintain a harmonious relationship with the in-laws was considered an important part of women's gendered obligations, which could impact their future. In the past, Chinese women were expected to break off ties with their natal family after marriage. Husband's family needs takes priority over the woman's needs and personal pursuits (Honig & Hershatter, 1988). In addition, specific moral virtues were assigned to women only, such as respect for her husband and her in-laws; maintaining harmony in the family and relationships with sisters-in-law. It was considered evil behaviour for a woman to divorce, to commit adultery or to marry against her family's wishes (Hsu, 1967). Clearly, a combination of psychological, economic and social factors reinforces women's dependency on their abusers in domestic violence situations. Abused Chinese women were also discouraged from making legal complaints against abusive husbands because of the insensitive and unconcerned nature of the authorities. Domestic violence cases brought by women to the local authorities were often dismissed as family disputes without any legal consequences (Honig & Hershatter, 1988).

Domestic violence is a huge problem in Chinese families. Societal awareness of the need to combat violence against women has only entered Chinese society since the Third World Women's Conference in 1985 (Xu et al., 2001). Honig and Hershatter (1988) argued that violence against women was cultivated by the historical foundation of patriarchal ideology, plus state policies that legitimised the reproduction of unequal gender relationships in the family and in society at large. As a result, Chinese women continued to experience various forms of victimisation in contemporary China, including infanticide, child prostitution, arranged or forced marriages and wife abuse (Honig & Hershatter, 1988; Watson, 1991).

It is suggested that cultural beliefs and culturally sanctioned perspectives of women can be expected to influence violence against women at home and to shape the manifestation of domestic violence in the community (Midlarsky et al., 2006). Xu et al. (2001) identified several common societal rationales for domestic

violence in Chinese society. The most common rationale for violence against women is associated with extreme traditional male patriotism and sexism, which goes back many generations (Wolf, 1985).

Furthermore, Chinese women face prescribed codes of behaviours for being a morally good woman and a good wife. The Confucian tenets of the “Three Obediences and the Four Virtues” state that the role of a woman is to honour and serve the men of the family throughout her life: the woman is to follow and obey her father before marriage; she is to follow and obey her husband after marriage; she is to follow and obey her son after being widowed (Ho, 1990; Tang, 1998; Tang et al., 2002). These codes of behaviour clearly establish the cultural notion of absolute submission of women to men. Also grounded in Confucian beliefs is the idea that women are as different from men as earth from heaven (Chin, 1994). Therefore, the wife is not to leave her husband, despite being subjected to violence and abuse, as the earth cannot exist without heaven (Tang, 1998; Yu, 2005).

In addition, the virtues of perseverance, suffering, acceptance and submission are highly valued in Asian culture. These virtues are internalised by Asian women in believing that to become a good woman, their behaviour must match these culturally valued characteristics (Lee, 2000; Yoshioka et al., 2000). Women are socially discouraged from disclosing their suffering publicly. As a consequence, abused women tend to endure the suffering than try to change the unfavourable situation (Ho, 1990; Liu & Chan, 1999). Many Chinese women who have been educated with these ideologies would suffer guilt if they decided to complain about their husbands, as grievance would cause disturbance and disharmony in the family (Tang, 1998). In order to preserve the cultural norms and maintain family harmony, a woman is to disregard her own well-being for the sake of the family well-being and dignity (Lee, 2000; Yu, 2005). This cultural expectation makes admitting the occurrence of abuse and disclosing domestic violence incidents a very difficult matter for Chinese women (Lee & Au, 2007).

Chinese immigrant women also face cultural expectations that prioritise the sacredness of marriage such as facilitating a harmonious marital relationship over

preservations of personal wellbeing (Midlarsky et al., 2006). Domestic violence could lead to separation and divorce which disturbs the idealised family harmony. Such cultural proscription not only hinders disclosure of violence to outsiders but also prevents the abuse being fully recognised by women's family members. Family members may deny the abuse, water down the violence by assigning another label to it which reduces the abuser's accountability (Lee, 2000), or rationalise the problem in a way that re-victimises the women by placing the blame back on them (Liu & Chan, 1999; Tse, 2007). As a result of these culturally sanctioned values, Chinese women are faced with tremendous dilemmas when dealing with or deciding to leave an abusive relationship.

A New Zealand study by Tse (2007) obtained interview data from 56 immigrants (50 women and 6 men) from a mixture of Chinese and South Asian communities. The findings revealed men employ domination and controlling tactics over their wives as a way to preserve cultural traditions and practices. Respondents in the study reported that in Asian culture, divorce or separation is not viewed as an acceptable option as it will bring family shame and dishonour. Similarly, Ho (1990) found that among four ethnic groups, Chinese women respondents were the only group who believed it is appropriate for abused women to leave the family home on a temporary basis; however, they stressed it was important to avoid seeking outside help because of the fear that doing so might bring shame and disgrace to the family.

### **Myths of Chinese women as legitimate victims.**

Chinese women not only bear culturally prescribed norms when dealing with domestic violence, in such collective cultural context, a husband's violence towards his wife is often culturally justified by portraying women as deserving recipients of violence. Tang et al. (2002) pointed out that several widely recognised myths prevalent in Chinese societies (China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) which portray Chinese women as legitimate victims of domestic violence. Firstly, from a psychoanalytical perspective, men who abuse women are depicted as victims who are sick, and most likely their illness is related to past trauma caused by a woman. Secondly, men's violence towards women is often considered to be

instigated by the women themselves and some believed that men's uncontrollable desires could be inflamed by the women. Overall, there was strong gender role stereotyping among the participants, which assumed that wives have pre-assigned duties and obligations within the family which is not entitled for re-negotiation or re-arrangement. A husband's punishment of his wife is believed to be warranted if she fails to fulfil these duties (Tang et al., 2002). Furthermore, Tse (2007) revealed that there is a myth about domestic violence that is unique to New Zealand Asian immigrants. It is believed that Asian women who are married to Western (New Zealand) men are well protected by legal provisions. Thus, family members would fail to accept the occurrence of violence in the family and the victim is often blamed for instigate the abuse in the first place.

Consistent with these claims, previous literature revealed that abused Chinese women tend to be negatively depicted by the media and perceived by the public as being unfaithful to their husbands, failing to fulfil their domestic duties, or being unable to give birth to a son (Liu & Chan, 1999). A large-scale study conducted in Singapore by Choi and Elderson (1996) found that domestic violence was contextually justified by the Asian cultural norms surrounding the role of the good wife and good mother. A majority (94%) of the 510 Singaporean respondents disapproved of the use of physical aggression against a wife. However, one in four participants reported that a husband's violence is justified if a child was being abused by the wife. In addition, one in three participants condoned a husband's violence against his wife if she was found to have been sexually unfaithful.

### **Health Implications of Domestic Violence on Asian Women**

Domestic violence is a serious health issue for women in all cultures that produce long term effects. Women who have been victimised by domestic violence suffer a combination of physical wounds and psychological trauma as a consequence of abuse and violence. A large US study involving 397 female participants revealed that half of them had been abused by their spouse. These women suffered somatic issues including sleep disorders, headaches, chest pains, back problems,

hyperventilation, asthma, pelvic pain and menstrual issues (Sutherland, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2001).

Like some other Asian cultures, Chinese culture tends to downplay psychological problems (Yick & Agbayani-siewert, 1997). One possible explanation might be that Chinese culture prioritises physical causation of psychological problems and less attention is paid to psychological dimensions (Hsu, 1985). Thus, somatisation is a commonly reported phenomenon among Chinese Americans, being the presentation of unexplained physical symptoms related to psychiatric disorders. It is likely that abused Asian women will seek help implicitly by presenting their abusive experiences in a socially acceptable manner, such as headaches and insomnia (Lee, 2000). Yick, Shibasawa, and Agbayani-siewert (2003) examined the cultural dynamics and mental health consequences of domestic violence among Chinese families living in America. The study found a positive relationship between depression and domestic violence among individuals of Chinese descent who experienced verbal and physical abuse; those who were verbally abused in a 12-month period were more likely to present with somatic symptoms.

Nonetheless, the traumatic effects of domestic violence on women's mental health status in Asian immigrant communities are well evidenced (Lee & Hadeed, 2009; Midlarsky et al., 2006; Tang, 1997; Yick et al., 2003). Hicks and Li (2003) conducted interviews with 181 Chinese American women and found the severity of major depression was positively related to the severity of intimate partner violence. A study by Tang (1997) also found that verbally and psychologically abused Chinese women suffered negative effects including depression and anxiety.

Unfamiliarity with social resources, coupled with the loss of self-esteem, is likely to leave Asian women feeling helpless and insecure. Their prolonged social and financial dependency on the abuser could make these women evaluate the situation from the abuser's perspective which may make them feel obligated to stay with their abusers. Moreover, the abuser often reinforces the isolation by preventing the woman from familiarising herself with her new social environment in the host country. This in turn intensifies the woman's feelings of hopelessness

and despair and leaves her with little access to the host community (Midlarsky et al., 2006). As immigrants in the host country, Chinese women face multiple barriers when employing strategies of help-seeking and navigate their way towards safety.

### **Multiple Barriers to Help-Seeking**

In Asian communities, the power interactions between immigrant men and women are shaped by a combination of cultural, economic, racial and structural factors (Pillai, 2001). Although the fundamental patriarchal ideology may be shared across the diverse Asian ethnic groups, women from different ethnic groups may differ in the forms of violence they experience and in their response to violence and help-seeking strategies (Moss, Pitula, Campbell, & Halstead, 1997; Sullivan & Rumptz, 1994).

Immigrant women carry their culture and socialisations with them when they immigrate to another country. Many women's gender roles have already been informed by the patriarchal cultural structure that they were a part of (Dasgupta, 2005). Asian immigrant women living with domestic violence face multiple social and cultural barriers when accessing formal and informal interventions. The most commonly identified factors are fear of the abuser (Bui, 2003); fear of losing the children; shame and protecting the family (Yoshioka, Dinoia, & Ulliah, 2001); cultural expectations of keeping the family together (Pillai, 2001); keeping family matters "inside the closet" (Lee, 2000; Xu et al., 2001; Yoshioka et al., 2001); and women's family responsibility for maintaining harmony in the home (Ho, 1990; Shiu-Thornton, Senturia, & Sullivan, 2005).

However, it is equally important to recognise that not all cultural practices in ethnic communities are oppressive. Asian women who experience domestic violence are not always powerless in the face of unchanged cultural forces. Abused women can gain strength, courage and pride from their cultural milieu (Yoshihama, 2000).

The following sections will examine a combination of cultural, social and structural barriers that Asian and Chinese women face when navigating their coping strategies and options in abusive relationships.

### **The view of marriage and cultural beliefs in help-seeking.**

Cultural norms and beliefs influence Asian women's interpretation of abuse and perceived coping strategies when dealing with domestic violence incidents. Separation and divorce are highly stigmatising within Asian cultures (Lee, 1996; Yoshioka et al., 2001). Women who are socialised into collective cultures are less likely to see divorce as an option than those who are socialised into individualistic cultures (Yoshioka & Choi, 2005). Despite a father's misbehaviours, women from the collective cultural milieu are expected to live up to the gender role of mother who keeps the family complete and keep the father in the family for the children's wellbeing. For many Asian women who are socialised into conforming to gender norms of mother and wife which their gender identities are largely formed upon, such expectation serves as cultural barrier for them to step outside of the marital relationship (Dasgupta, 2000).

In a similar vein, Chinese immigrant women face strong social pressure not to leave a marital relationship, even when it becomes abusive (Tang, 1998; Yoshioka et al., 2001). As a result, when a Chinese woman decides to leave her spouse, she is faced with cultural dilemmas relating to a damaged reputation, the fear of isolation of the community and cutting ties with the available support systems in her community (Xu et al., 2001). Some of the other cultural constrains are threats to collective identity, financial dependency, shame attached to divorce and disclosure, concerns with shaming the family, a lack of understanding that domestic violence is unacceptable, and invalidating immigrant women's experiences of domestic violence (Huisman, 1996; Midlarsky et al., 2006).

Lee and Au (2007) emphasised that under such collective pressure, when Chinese women speak out about domestic violence, they will be easily blamed and viewed as at fault for bringing shame and causing family fragmentation. This will encourage Chinese women to internalise the abuse or feeling guilty about seeking help as they have failed to live up to gendered virtues by revealing family

embarrassment to outsiders. Consequently, the abuser might end up gaining sympathy and assistance from community members rather than the abused women.

Furthermore, Yamashiro and Matsuoka (1997) suggested that Asian and Pacific people pursue balance and harmony between their existences and the external world. Fatalism, a traditional Eastern concept, refers to the acceptance of the natural development of life conditions and events. Not surprisingly, abused Asian women tend to employ such cultural beliefs as a way of dealing with domestic violence. A number of studies suggested that accepting the cultural value of fate reinforces Chinese women's acceptance of domestic violence and prevents them from seeking alternative solutions to their living situation (Ho, 1990; Lee, 2000; Yoshioka et al., 2001).

The issues outlined above serve as contributing factors driving Chinese women to protect the sanctity of marriage at the cost of their personal wellbeing and safety. As a result, Chinese immigrant women are reluctant to seek external interventions for domestic violence. This is clearly evident in the study by Yick and Agbayansiewert (1997), in which 46 % of the Chinese American respondents believed that family matters should be taken care of by family members rather than outsiders. In a similar vein, in a study by Yoshioka and Choi (2005), 18% of the Chinese women reported that the wife should not disclose abuse to others and more than two-thirds declined to consider a shelter as a way to escape an abusive relationship.

### **Immigration-related issues, social and structural constraints.**

Asian immigrant women face multiple contextual, societal and structural constraints which place them in a vulnerable position in regards to abuse and seeking mainstream services for support and safety interventions. Several studies have suggested there is a strong link between domestic violence and family contextual factors such as immigration history, migrant trauma, status inconsistency, children witnessing domestic violence and marital frustrations (Bui, 2003; Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005; Yick, 2001).

In addition, a lot of the barriers faced by immigrant women are difficulties and stresses associated with acculturation and adapting to a new country. Although the role of acculturation in domestic violence analysis is still unclear, several studies have found that immigration-related issues exacerbate the risk of domestic violence and its development in many Asian communities (Chin, 1994; Erez, 2000; Narayan, 1995). Erez, Adelman, and Gregory (2009) explored the relationship between immigration and domestic violence. In their US study of 137 respondents from 35 countries, some immigrant women reported that abuse by their husbands often occurred within immigration related contexts. In the following sections I will examine some of these immigration-related contextual issues.

Lee (2000) pointed out that it is dangerous to homogenise Chinese women's abusive experiences. The analysis of Chinese women's experience of domestic violence is multilayered and should extend beyond the examination of cultural factors. Some of commonly identified constraining factors include patriarchal beliefs, immigration issues, language, access to social resources and access to social and legal systems (Chin, 1994; Huisman, 1996; Lee, 2000).

Like other immigrant women, Chinese women are particularly vulnerable to the harming effects of social isolation. Social isolation prevents women from accessing information that helps them become aware of available services (Lee, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002). In the Chinese culture, it is common for older family members to serve as mediators in marital conflicts (Ho, 1990). As a result of migration, immigrant women lose the support network formed with kin or non-kin members that was available to them in their home country (Pillai, 2001). The abuser can use social isolation as a mechanism that reinforces the abuse by keeping the woman from recognising the abuse, seeking outside help and leaving the abusive relationship. Depending on the progress of adaptation to the new culture and levels of assimilation, an immigrant woman may feel particularly isolated by the host culture, which could reinforce her dependency on her spouse on a day-to-day basis and for social interactions (Bui & Morash, 1999; Pillai, 2001). Thus, immigrant women face added risks of domestic violence due to migration and relocation. Abusive men can easily manipulate the intimate relationship and the

family by employing implicit and explicit power and control tactics because they realise the degree of dependency the women have on them, and the women's perceived lack of social and legal independence.

Furthermore, the language barrier has been repeatedly identified in the literature as a primary factor that prevents immigrant women from seeking help and formal intervention (Dutton, Orloff, & Hass, 2000; Kasturirangan et al., 2004; Lee, 2000). Language limitations prevent immigrant women from seeking formal intervention on two levels. On one level, monolingual immigrant women cannot accomplish certain tasks that most English-speaking people take for granted. Therefore, language severely limits immigrant women's access to vital information and services. An Australian study found that 70% of non-English-speaking respondents had little knowledge of legal provisions relating to domestic violence (Easteal, 1996). On another level, limited English language ability makes accessing mainstream family services difficult as it hinders effective communication with the service. And even when the woman is actively seeking help, limited English is a barrier to calling the police or crisis services (Raj & Silverman, 2002); they also prevent abused women from gaining financial independence such as securing employment so they can look after their children.

### **Barriers of social infrastructure and legal provisions.**

Another immigration-related issue faced by many immigrant women is immigration status. Immigration exacerbates domestic violence and produces specific vulnerabilities for immigrant women, and prevents them from leaving the abusive relationship by seeking formal intervention (Erez et al., 2009). Newly arrived, non-resident and undocumented immigrant women are also less likely to use social and health services (Dutton et al., 2000; Sorenson, 1996).

Similarly in New Zealand, immigrant women in abusive intimate relationships face legal obstacles and a lack of social resources due to non-resident status issues. The fact that legal aid is not available for non-resident women who wish to appeal decisions made by Immigration New Zealand certainly presents a significant barrier (Robertson et al., 2007b). Women who depend on their spouse for immigrant status rely on their spouse more in terms of economic, psychological

and social needs than do women in general. Robertson et al. (2007b) pointed out that non-resident immigrant women are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence when they depend on their partner for residency sponsorship and when their abusive partner is the key applicant for their residency.

Xu et al. (2001) suggested that unfamiliarity with the social infrastructure and legal system of the country of migration further prevent abused Chinese immigrants from reporting domestic violence or seek restraining orders. New Zealand offers a range of legislative remedies for domestic violence such as the Domestic Violence Act 1995 (Pillai, 2001), and the Crimes Act. The New Zealand Police policy states that “domestic violence is not just domestic, but it is a crime and the victims must call for help” (Pillai, 2001, p. 971). However, in comparison to Maori and Pākehā women, other ethnicities face additional barriers to reporting domestic violence to law enforcement (Tse, 2007). As a result of cultural, social and structural issues, immigrant women are not only less likely to apply for protection orders, but they also are sometimes pressured to abandon an application or a protection order before a permanent protection order is granted (Robertson et al., 2007b). Statistics prepared by Ministry of Justice as shown below in Table 1 and Table 2 provide an analysis by ethnicity of applications for protection orders and the granting of permanent orders over the period 2005 to 2014. Comparing the data in the two tables shows that 45% of Chinese applicants were granted final protection orders, a significantly lower proportion than the 61% overall. This suggests that Chinese women are significantly disadvantaged when seeking protection in the Family Court.

**Table 1. Number of Applicants/Other protected people of Protection Order applications, by ethnicity, 2005-2014**

Ethnicity		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
European/Pākehā		2033	2310	2442	2317	2382	2383	1980	1775	1865	2065
Maori		959	1043	957	906	1025	1060	972	779	791	840
Pacific	Samoan	83	111	113	127	101	103	112	84	74	87
	Cook Island Maori	39	55	36	50	45	53	31	35	42	37
	Tongan	38	45	44	45	62	37	34	37	40	44
	Other Pacific	30	24	28	33	48	41	22	10	27	24
	Total	190	235	221	255	256	234	199	166	183	192
Asian	South Eastern Asian	28	17	36	40	42	38	32	23	35	32
	Chinese	42	41	49	53	44	49	38	44	55	44
	Fijian Indian	94	106	123	154	155	142	115	131	139	172
	Other Asian	22	30	37	36	34	30	30	33	42	38
	Total	186	194	245	283	275	259	215	231	271	286
Other		49	38	44	51	48	33	27	34	29	45
Unknown		1292	803	816	823	890	1060	1231	1432	1710	1889
Total		4709	4623	4725	4635	4876	5029	4624	4417	4849	5317

Note: The number of Applicants/Other protected people each year will not equal the number of Protection Order applications or the number of Respondents/Associated respondents.

**Table 2. Number of Applicants/Other protected people of granted final Protection Order applications, by ethnicity, 2005-2014**

Ethnicity		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
European/Pākehā		1122	1264	1380	1271	1310	1298	1113	1000	1056	1135
Maori		615	696	651	619	712	703	672	525	524	576
Pacific	Samoan	46	68	75	71	62	66	70	54	50	58
	Cook Island Maori	30	30	28	36	35	33	17	22	29	29
	Tongan	24	33	26	33	41	23	16	24	23	28
	Other Pacific	15	14	23	19	30	26	11	7	14	16
	Total	115	145	152	159	168	148	114	107	116	131
Asian	South Eastern Asian	13	7	18	18	22	19	13	12	19	10
	Chinese	20	25	23	23	23	22	15	18	28	9
	Fijian Indian	48	50	44	74	70	70	55	57	64	78
	Other Asian	12	15	19	13	16	13	14	20	22	19
	Total	93	97	104	128	131	124	97	107	133	116
Other		27	25	23	21	26	17	19	12	14	17
Unknown		760	464	477	475	504	644	850	1103	1305	1479
Total		2732	2691	2787	2673	2851	2934	2865	2854	3148	3454

Note: The number of Applicants/Other protected people each year will not equal the number of granted Protection Order applications or the number of Respondents/Associated respondents.

New Zealand's Victims of Domestic Violence Policy states that a person may be granted residency if they: a) "have or have had a marriage or intimate relationship with a New Zealand citizen or resident that has ended as a result of domestic violence by the New Zealand citizen or resident"; b) "are unable to return to their home country because they would be ostracised by their family and community as a result of their violent relationship, and" c) "have no means of independent support or ability to gain independent support" (Labour & Immigration Research Centre, 2011, p. 89).

One problem with the policy involves the strict criteria for proving domestic violence. As argued by Robertson et al. (2007b) these criteria impose particular barriers for immigrant women. Firstly, providing evidence of domestic violence is limited and restricted. Despite any other proof of domestic violence, complaints of domestic violence need to be referred to Child, Youth and Family-approved refuge organisations. As mentioned earlier, due to the interaction of cultural, social and contextual factors, immigrant women have a low level of access to legal information and low utilisation of family violence services. As a consequence, such legal requirements further hinder the possibility of immigrant women getting access to the Victims of Domestic Violence policy. Secondly, the policy requires immigrant women to demonstrate future events that are yet to occur such as being unable to return home as they will be disowned by their families, and being unable to financially provide for themselves (Robertson et al., 2007b).

Furthermore, Chinese women who grew up in China, where there is a lack of social welfare systems, may not be aware of the existence of women's shelters, family violence services and domestic violence hotlines. Interviews with a group of service providers in the study by (Huisman, 1996) found that newly-arrived immigrant and refugee women are particularly likely to be ill-informed about their legal rights. The abuser may take advantage of this by deceiving them about their rights or threatening to report them to the authorities if they terminate the relationship. Immigrant women who have had negative experiences with law enforcement and a lack of trust in the legal system in their country of origin or who have experienced discrimination in their country of settlement are less likely

to report domestic violence incidents to authorities or use legal provisions (Bui & Morash, 1999; Ho, 1990; Sharma, 2001; Sorenson, 1996). In fact, many immigrant women wait until the point of desperation before they formally report the violent behaviour to the police and/or other legal authorities (InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, 2010).

Another common concern for non-resident immigrant women is the fear of deportation of themselves or their children (Bui & Morash, 1999; Chin, 1994; Dutton et al., 2000; Kasturirangan et al., 2004). Sometimes a woman may believe that by reporting domestic violence to the authorities, not only will she be at risk of deportation; her spouse and her family and relatives might also be negatively affected in some way (Chin, 1994; Sorenson, 1996). The fear of losing child custody to the abuser can also serve as a barrier to seeking continued legal provision, even for those with residency status (Bui, 2003).

### **Social Support and Help-Seeking Behaviours**

In a Canadian population-based study, it was found that survivors of domestic violence actively employ a wide range of formal and informal help-seeking strategies in response to violence and abuse. The different forms of informal support used by 80% of the 922 women who were survivors of domestic violence emphasised the importance of informal support networks such as family members, trusted friends, religious and faith leaders (Barrett & Pierre, 2011).

While there is a paucity of cross-cultural research on context analysis in which immigrant women seek help, the existing research suggests that immigrant women's help-seeking behaviour is different from that of other Asian subgroups (Bui, 2003; Lee & Au, 2007). The help-seeking strategies employed by Asian people to solve daily problems are culturally entrenched and heavily influenced by their worldviews, interpersonal relationships and socio-historical background (Yamashiro & Matsuoka, 1997).

Even when Asian women choose to break the silence about their abusive experience, their efforts to use formal services may be jeopardised by multiple social, cultural and/or structural barriers such as language difficulties and a lack of

awareness of existing social services. The literature shows that ethnic immigrant women often prioritise the use of informal interventions over formal interventions for both cultural and contextual reasons. Family remains the major source of support for Asian women who are victimised by domestic violence. A study by Bui (2003) on Vietnamese American women also found that 21 out of the 43 participants disclosed their experience of domestic violence to people within their personal networks, such as relatives, friends and religious leaders. Unfortunately, sometimes relatives and friends who adhere to traditional gender role beliefs may prevent women from seeking effective outside intervention (Rimonte, 1989).

Moreover, it is common for Asian women with domestic violence issues to seek assistance from their community leaders (Raj & Silverman, 2002). Domestic violence is often perceived as a threat to community solidarity and group pride in certain Asian immigrant communities (Rimonte, 1991). When acknowledging domestic violence issues, community leaders are often primarily interested in maintaining the community's reputation by preserving cultural norms, which denies the severity of violence, prevents domestic violence from being exposed outside the community (Rimonte, 1989). Literature suggests that community and church leaders often silence women's voices and use religious norms to regulate women's behaviour by keeping them within their marriages (Dasgupta, 2000; Huisman, 1996; Perilla, 1999).

When Asian women access formal services, they still face tremendous barriers. Asian women bring with them specific culturally embedded beliefs about formal help services such as court proceedings (Lee & Au, 2007). In addition, they often have a lack of understanding regarding legal provisions that could protect them from violence and abuse, such as lawyers and protection orders (Robertson et al., 2007b). Family violence services such as counselling and shelters may be unfamiliar to them (Lee, 2002).

A number of studies noted the importance of developing culturally safe and culturally competent help services to fully meet the special needs of Asian women and their children (Lee, 2002; Warriar, 2009; Yoshioka et al., 2000). Warriar (2009) suggested that cultural competency is often lacking. In cultural

competency training, it is important to consider the effects of the intersection of various forms of oppression experienced by the clients.

### **Research Objectives**

This research explores the dynamics of domestic violence experienced by Chinese women and the implications of violence on women's health and wellbeing. This research identifies the cultural and gendered factors that shape women's experiences and their help-seeking behaviour. This research aims to identify issues facing immigrant women when disclosing domestic violence to their social groups, and the barriers they experience in seeking help. It also examines the role of the Chinese community and formal help services in offering effective intervention for Chinese women in domestic violence situations.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Women's experience of domestic violence in Chinese community is a huge area to be explored. Various theoretical lenses offer different perspectives on the issue. In this chapter, I will provide an explanation for approaching the study using a qualitative, feminist approach as well as an integrated ecological approach. I will outline specifically my approach to the research process, address the ways that I have recruited and interacted with the women participants, discuss the ethical considerations in conducting the research as well as the methods that I have employed for collecting and analysing the information of the women's stories. The overall aim was to capture the Chinese women's experience of domestic violence and address the gendered, socio-cultural and structural factors which impacted on their experience and help-seeking strategies through a collaborative research progresses between them and I.

### **Qualitative Research**

The overarching aim of my research was to provide a deeper understanding of Chinese women's experience of domestic violence. This required the use of semi-structured qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews enable participants to understand "on their own term(s)... how they make meanings of their own lives, experiences, and cognitive processes" (Brenner, 2006, p. 357). In qualitative research, open-ended questions that focus on asking "what" and "how" give space for interviewees to use their words to describe their experiences rather than responding to research questions according to the predefined terms by the researcher (Yin, 2011). This also provides the opportunity for the participants to take initiatives, to develop their agenda and follow their own sequences during the research process.

Gao (1996) supports the use of in-depth interview as a way to broadening understanding and constructing knowledge on Chinese interpersonal relationships. By using a semi-structured interview schedule guided by open-ended research questions, I was able to ask the women in-depth questions, particularly those that are significant to them and which require deeper understanding. On one hand this

allows the participant to guide the research process and on the other hand, it provides an insight into the cultural and structural contexts of the women's stories.

Similar to the interpretation of individual's constructed reality based in interpretative sociology, qualitative research focuses on the constructed reality of the participants. The aim is to explore and interpret the individual's behaviour and the way in which individuals give meaning to the social phenomena and the social systems they are embedded in (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, qualitative interviews are social engagements that occur in natural settings where the researcher and the participants develop a consensual language to understand the social world of the participants through negotiated dialogue and collaborative process. In addition, qualitative research takes an inductive stance to analysis. Qualitative data collection allows the interpretation and conceptualisation of data to be developed during different stages of the research (Yin, 2011).

### **The Feminist Lens**

Feminist research utilises qualitative methods in a way that allows women to address the subjects that matters to them in their lives with the ultimate goal valuing, understanding and empowering women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The aim is to liberate women, to validate women's lived experience through deconstruction, "the total transformation of patriarchy and corresponding empowerment of women" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 6). It is important for feminist research aims to understand socio-cultural factors that contribute to domestic violence by giving voice to the story from the women's own perspective and codes of reference (Bograd, 1988). Chinese women are socialized into a patriarchal culture which prioritizes discourses of male dominance over women. Throughout my research, I hoped to address how Chinese women are impacted by traditional patriarchal values and at the same time how Chinese women resist traditional cultural beliefs and practices.

Through the reconstruction of women's experiences as legitimate knowledge, feminist research challenges the status quo regarding women's position in society and promotes gender equality (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Power is a matter of discourse and practice. According to feminist standpoint theory, knowledge is

associated with power and situated in a particular historical and social context. The marginalised or disadvantaged groups of society shift in and out of the boundary between the dominant and the subordinate culture (Hemmings, 2012). In doing so, they are able to access both dominant and marginalized knowledge base. Their experience of marginalisation allows them to access knowledge that is unique and insightful which gives them an alternative perception of reality (Collins, 1989). Thus, they develop a dual consciousness which provides them with a comprehensive view of the social reality (Nielsen, 1990) and allows them to develop more accurate and reliable knowledge based on their marginalized experience. From this perspective, it is important for researchers to actively engage with marginalised groups of the society in describing their experiences and give voice to their perceptions in order to raise consciousness of their condition and promote change for a better society (Allen & Baber, 1992).

Another key tenet of feminism is advocating for social change within the social, economic and political structures by eradicating discrimination and oppression against women (Bograd, 1988; Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The promotion of self-determination and empowerment is central to feminist research and intervention. Feminist theorists promote models of domestic violence research and intervention which promote increased survivor choice in response to criminal, institutional and political systems (McPhail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Rice, 2007).

### **Reflexivity and mutual knowing.**

Reflexivity is an important tool in feminist research practice. Traditionally, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is hierarchical. The researcher takes on an all-knowing expert position. On the contrary, feminist researchers seek to create a non-hierarchical relationship with the participants by sharing personal experiences and information (Oakley, 1988). The researcher becomes a co-learner with the participants to discover and obtain knowledge throughout the research process. Construction of knowledge takes place by “virtue of the interaction of the knower with already known and the still-knowable or to-be-known” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 143). In this sense, the researcher becomes a part of the research instrument throughout the different phases of the research.

Qualitative researchers have both a reflective and declarative self. By presenting the reflective self, the researcher becomes aware and explicit about his or her values, beliefs, motives and background as these impacts on the construction of knowledge and the assumptions made about data interpretation. This also helps to avoid potential bias and idiosyncrasies during data selection and interpretation (Yin, 2011).

Furthermore, from a feminist perspective, shared feelings and emotions between the researcher and the participants are a recognised source of knowledge (Fonow & Cook, 1991). Feminist researchers stress the importance of recognising their own feelings and at the time same time how their emotions are receptive and accommodating to that of the participants during the research process. Hyden (2014) pointed out that women who have been victimised by domestic violence often adopt a non-knowing position as psychological preservation against the pain and trauma. When a safe 'relational practice' is established between the researcher and the participants for mutual understanding and knowledge building, it enables the participants to talk freely and openly about their experiences. This could serve to bridge the gap between experiencing and knowing by the participants. In this sense, the researcher and the participants are in partnership with one another. Each has different tasks and responsibilities in the constructive process of the participant's narration as well as a mutual goal to gain deeper understanding of the research objectives. The role of the researcher is to support and encourage the expansion of the participants' narrative in various ways. Working in partnership also implies equality and initiative that cultivates alliances between the participants and the researcher based on common goals and objectives for the research (Gridley & Turner, 2005). Later, I will explain other feminist tenets which have been incorporated within the research process.

### **The Social Ecological Lens**

My research also incorporates a social ecological approach as explained earlier in the social ecological theory section in Chapter Two (Edleson & Tolman, 1992; Heise, 1998). I am analysing Chinese women's experience of domestic violence in relation to various contexts within the ecological systems which extent beyond

the primary relationship at the interpersonal level. I am recognising that Chinese women's experience of violence are influenced by and being constructed by the interplay between multiple nested layers. These layers include the interpersonal relationship dynamics between the woman and her husband, the woman's family, the community she lives in and the culture which the woman and her family are entrenched in. Also, a part of this research set out to examine how the woman's help seeking experiences are influenced by her family and extended family members, her informal social support systems and the social institutions that she has access to such as the police, court and family violence services.

### **Preliminary Research**

During the preliminary stage of my research, I contacted various family violence agencies in the Waikato area. I had conversations with experienced workers in agencies that provide family violence services to Asian women in Hamilton. These conversations provided valuable insight into the areas of domestic violence in the Asian immigrant community. They also identified cultural specific dynamics of domestic abuse that are unique to Asian immigrant women and the possible social and cultural barriers that Asian women faces while dealing with the abusive relationship.

### **Participant Recruitment**

The recruitment for participants began after the ethic approval was obtained from the University. Initially, a recruitment poster was designed to be distributed at various community spaces (Appendix A). I also spread the word about my research within my personal networks. Contacts were also made with family violence service agencies that provided services to Asian (Chinese) immigrant women and it proved to be helpful.

Upon approaching the family violence agencies, information sheets in English (Appendix B) and in Chinese (Appendix C), consent forms in English (Appendix D) and in Chinese (Appendix E) were provided to the key representative from the organisations. The information sheet explained the research objectives, introduced the researcher's background, outlined the research process, explained the rights of

the participants and provided contact details should participants requires further information. The staff could then provide the information to potential participants among their clients. The contact details of any clients who expressed interest in participating in the research were, with their permission, released to me. Additionally, there was also the opportunity for women to contact me independently via the details provided on information sheet at any time.

The initial contact made with each woman was used to address any questions about the research, to acknowledge participants' rights throughout the research and to confirm that the participant was happy to take part. This was to make sure that the potential participants were fully aware of the research objectives, their rights throughout the research and were not being pressured into participating. More clarification was provided where there was interest. For women who required more time to think about the participation, I made sure that they had my contact details so they could contact me when and if they decided to take part. Due to personal reasons, three women who initially expressed interest in the research subsequently decided not to participate.

### **Description of participants.**

In the end, five participants were recruited. This number reflects the degree of difficulty in reaching Chinese immigrant women as research participants. Comments from family violence advocate suggested that a sense of fear, shame and cultural constrains hinders Chinese women from disclosing their domestically violent relationship to strangers.

The women participants are first generation immigrants from different parts of China. All spoke Mandarin and two also spoke Cantonese. Their ages ranged from 27 to 51 years. All have children. It is worth mentioning that, at the time of the interview, three women were still in the relationship in which they have experienced domestic violence, although one was temporarily separated from her spouse. One woman's spouse passed away a number of years ago while she was still in the relationship. Four women were involved in a relationship with a Chinese man: the other had been in a relationship with a Maori man.

### **Ethical considerations**

The research procedures were approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee acting under the delegated authority of the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee.

### **Informed consent.**

When conducting domestic violence research, safety and confidentiality of the participants should be a prioritised (Riger, 1999). Due to the sensitivity of my research topic which involves Chinese women's personal experiences, it was important for me to explicitly inform the women participants about the nature of the research, their rights and the limitations to confidentiality (that is, the risk that they may be identifiable to people who knew them well). It was paramount that they were aware that no repercussions would occur if they refuse to participate. These precautions information were detailed in the consent form in Chinese and English (Appendix D and Appendix E). Participants were informed that all information would be kept confidential and in safe storage during the research process.

### **Protection of participant's privacy.**

Due to the limited family violence services providers that offer culturally relevant service to Chinese women, it was even more important to protect the anonymity of the woman and her children to prevent them from potential harm. Some peripheral information about the participants has been modified to protect the privacy of the participants and their children. In addition, the anonymity of participants was protected by removing easily identifiable information from interview transcripts and by giving each participant a pseudonym when the research finding was presented.

### **The Interview Process**

Initial interviews were conducted in a mutually agreed place where safety and privacy could be assured. Usually it was conducted in a meeting space provided by the agencies from which the participant was recruited. All interviews started

after the women had signed the consent form written in Chinese. Opportunities were provided to the women to ask any questions about the consent form. The interviews were approximately one hour to two hours duration. Each interview was conducted in Chinese and audio recorded. Before starting the audio recording, I made sure that the woman knew about her right to stop the recording at anytime if she felt uncomfortable and that she also had the right to refuse to answer any questions she did not wish to answer.

The main purpose of the first phase of the interview was to build trust and rapport with the participants. I ensured that participants fully understood the research aims and gave them the opportunity to ask questions. In addition, I shared about my background, life stories and study interest with the participant briefly at the start of the interview and more in depth at the end of the interview during debriefing.

The interview involved mostly open ended questions. The women was provided with a semi-structured interview guide in Chinese (Appendix F; for English version see Appendix G) which covered the following areas of interest: the dynamic of the woman's domestic violence experience and the impact of violence on her and her family; the impacts of participant's beliefs on gender role expectations, cultural values and belief systems on her experiences and on her help seeking strategies; the barriers she faced when disclosing the abusive relationship to her family, friends and to the wider community; and the role of the Chinese community in supporting Chinese women in a domestic violent relationship. I emphasised to the woman that the guide was to provide a general framework regarding research areas rather than a strict guideline for the sequence of the interview. Having the interview guide helped some women to become more familiar with the interview process so there were no surprises. The overall interview procedure was mainly guided by the women's response and interests as the interview progressed. I probed for clarification when it was necessary although I tried to keep the inquisition to a minimum. Some women required more probing than others. Probing questions were more helpful when the participants showed favour in discussing a particular topic and when participants required more response from me in order to provide additional information. Where it was appropriate, I asked the women for permission to talk to other people involved in

the case (e.g. a family violence coordinator) and to obtain copies of relevant documents (e.g. affidavits).

At the end of each interview, I thanked the woman for the time spent in talking to me and explained to her what she could expect from me next. I also presented each woman with a little present to show my appreciation for her participation. The final part of the interview was spent on “debriefing”: allowing time for the woman to reflect on her story, asking if she has any questions or concerns, checking that she is okay and confirming how and when I can contact her the following day after the interview and arrange any follow up procedures if necessary.

I also gave the participants the opportunity to review their draft case study. The draft case study report was proof-read and emailed to the participants for their approval. Three participants preferred to meet face to face to review their draft case study report. The women were all happy with their draft case studies. They were satisfied with how their anonymity was being protected. For example, one participant commented, “it feels as though I’m reading someone else’s story”.

### **Follow up and ongoing contact.**

The day following the interview, I made contact with the participant by phone or via social media to make sure that her wellbeing and safety was assured. I provided a follow-up care plan to the participants that included the contact details of a variety of local help services and some with Chinese language service. All the women were safe and none required assistance.

Riger (1999) recommends that collaboration in research should be developed on an on-going basis which could facilitate the participants to familiarise themselves with the research progress and acknowledge their contribution in the research. Therefore, it was important for me to inform the women participants that they are welcome to contact me during the research process and to be a source of support for them when required.

Four participants agreed to conduct follow-up interviews which took place in a mutually agreed place that the woman recommended and felt comfortable with.

One follow-up interview was conducted via the phone. The main focus of the follow-up interview was to clarify certain information that was provided during the initial interview and, where relevant, to confirm information that was provided by professionals involved in the woman's case. Overall, women participants expressed their interest to help in any way possible as they wish the information they provided could help women in similar situations to them.

### **Cultivating trust and establishing rapport.**

Feminist research supports the use of inductive approaches to eliminate the hierarchal power relationship of researcher and participants (Yick, 2001). As highlighted previously, to create a non-hierarchical, caring and respectful research space is paramount for feminist researchers (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). This enables the participants to share their stories in a safe and trusting environment. Thus, it was imperative for me to be explicit about my standpoint for the research, and my cultural background and personal experiences that might be relevant to the research. Establishing rapport with the participants during the interview process also requires a special responsibility on the researcher's part (Hyden, 2014; Yin, 2011). I tried to be sensitive towards the participants' emotional needs and cautious to avoid language that might create unnecessary stress. I hoped to create a safe, supportive and empowering atmosphere while interviewing the participants.

More importantly, it has been suggested that individuals who socialise within the various social interaction systems in the Chinese culture draw a clear boundary between the categorisation of insiders and outsiders (Gao, 1996). The fact that I am of Chinese ethnicity seems to allow the participants to view me as an insider with whom they had common ground. Lynam (1985) described that immigrant women often view insiders are those from their ethnic group and "assumed would understand them, their needs, their experiences and their past because they share a common basis of understanding" (p. 329). This seemed to promote trust, care, helpfulness and collaboration based on gaining mutual understanding during the interview process.

### **Representing women's voices.**

“Research can give voice to women and to a point of view, using data as support” (Riger, 1999, p. 1109). Feminist researchers desire to empower research participants and seek to represent the participant's voice (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). Through the facilitation of honesty and trust, an equal positioning between the researcher and the participants is established to avoid imposing the researcher's perspective on to the participants during data interpretation (Riger, 1999). Thus, when interpreting the data, it was important for me to preserve the women's voices. I hoped this research would become a part of a driving force to break the silence surrounding Chinese women's experience of domestic violence in the community and to raise awareness addressing this social issue. I was cautious not to project my own expectations onto the women by choosing to be transparent with them regarding the foundational basis and background for this research. Traditionally, Chinese individuals tend to place greater emphasis on the importance of hierarchal relationships and acting according to assigned social roles within the social system (Gao, 1996). In order for me, the researcher, to establish a partnership with the women and encourage their voices in the research, it was imperative that they had the opportunity to share recommendations regarding possible interventions and preventative strategies from a personal and subjective perspective.

### **Data Analysis: Case Study Construction**

Qualitative approaches to research are diverse and complex. Using case study analysis allows the researcher to understand multiple dimensions of social phenomena and at the same time preserve the holistic nature and capture the real characteristics of every day events. Case studies can be applied for various research purposes whether it is exploratory, descriptive or explanatory in nature (Yin, 2009). The strength of case study analysis lies in its ability to examine multiple sources of evidence such as documents, interviews and observations (Yin, 2009). By using a combination of primary and secondary evidences, the researcher is able to compare and contrast the different types of cases.

Yin (2011) suggested that when researcher conducts interviews with participants from the same cultural group and speaks the same tongue, it is quite easy for the researcher presume they understand the meanings. Thus, it was important for me to make sure I understood the meaning of what has been said by the women during the interviews and to render this into English in a manner which best protected the intended meaning. When a study involves studying of a particular culture of people, it is important to gain an inside perspective by capturing the language that the participants use. A verbatim record of the interview helps the researcher to gain insight into the meanings of the participant's perspective (Spradley, 1979). Thus, when transcribing the interviews from Chinese (Mandarin) into English I needed to preserve, as much as possible, the vocabulary and mode of expression used by the women. I did not encounter any difficulties during translation. Sometimes, the women used a Chinese idiom or traditional ways of expression during the interview. While transcribing the interview, I did try to preserve the women's use of language or words. As an extra precaution, I have checked particular phrases via online dictionaries to make sure the original meaning was represented in translation. The women also had the opportunities to check these Chinese idioms in their draft case studies.

### **Thematic analysis.**

Qualitative data is often organised in terms of themes, categories and concepts which allows more space for subjective interpretation and that are more useful in validating the women's experiences as a source of valuable knowledge (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991).

Qualitative thematic analysis is a flexible tool to use to analyse the rich and complex information provided by the participants and to map out ideas within and across the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to depict the social world of the participants from the rich and detailed data provided by them. Thematic analysis of existing historical, economic and socio-cultural realities that affect women can

elucidate the concept of patriarchy and eradicate violence against women in a particular community.

Thematic analysis also allows the researcher to place more meaning on the data by coding the themes from an inductive or theoretical basis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An inductive approach of thematic analysis takes place when data was coded without the assumption of any explicit prior constructed framework or assumptions. This style of theme development was selected as it will give a clearer representation of the current contexts in which Chinese women experience domestic violence in New Zealand. The essence of a selected theme is reliant on the extent that it captures the in-depth information that is relevant to the overall research questions and meaning representation of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Overall, I have chosen to capture the rich and thematic characters across all the cases studies. However, further analysis revealed sub-themes that were salient within a particular core theme which is also examined in detail.

In addition, echoing the feminist theoretical perspective on inter-subjectivity in the construction of knowledge, thematic analysis acknowledges the active role of the researcher in the theme identifying process of the research. Thus, the inductive coding process increases the values that the researcher has for the data which is allowed to reveal information for itself. However, it must be acknowledged that it is inevitable that my prior leanings and readings on this topic will influence the analytical process and the identified themes in the data. Being a community psychology student has actively shaped the way I have interpreted information, the coding of themes and the analysis of data.

### **Trustworthiness.**

Trustworthiness is when the researcher poses questions about why the research findings are important enough to capture the interests of the audience. “Truth values” speaks of the confidence of the researcher regarding the truth revealed in the findings or specific subjects of interest. “Applicability” speaks of whether the findings are applicable in other contexts or with other participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In conventional constructions, these concepts are termed “internal validity” and “external validity”. Threat to validity is a commonly raised issue in

qualitative research. Maxwell (2009) suggested seven strategies for combating threats to validity. Four of these are long-term involvement, looking for discrepant evidence, quasi-statistics and comparison. Here I will focus on another three of the seven practices which have been applied in my research: rich data set, respondent validation and triangulation. My research topic is an explorative study of an under-researched area. Thus, it was pivotal for me to provide a rich description of Chinese women's stories in order to give the reader a detailed analysis of the important themes and an accurate reflection of the overall content of the information gathered. In addition, respondent validation was achieved by providing women the opportunity to give feedback on their draft case study and asking questions served to strengthen the trustworthiness of the research as they had the opportunity to correct or change information that they perceived as incorrectly interpreted.

### **Triangulation.**

Triangulation is one of the ways to improve the validity of a qualitative study. As a principle, triangulation is associated with the data collection phase of the research by seeking to incorporate at least three ways of verifying certain events or information (Yin, 2011).

Patton (2002) has identified four different types of triangulation which consist of the use of different sources, methods, investigators and theories. Conducting multiple case studies is one way of triangulation. In this study, it allows the construction of common interest and themes to merge between the Chinese women's experiences and their stories. In addition, Yin (2009) pointed out that data triangulation could address problems with constructive validity of the case as the same event or phenomena is measured by different sources of data. An attempt was made to gather multiple sources of information when applicable to verify certain information provided by the participants. The main source was the open-ended interviews conducted with all five participants. For two out of four women who had accessed formal interventions, affidavits were obtained to confirm particular event. The family violence coordinator that was involved in the woman's case was also interviewed to provide and confirm information.

Furthermore, investigator triangulation can be accomplished through an honest and negotiated process between investigators or researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Engagement in discussion with knowledgeable researchers allows for the alternative interpretation of findings to be constructed as well as rival explanations to be explored in the study (Yin, 2011). Throughout my research, I have engaged in discussion with and taken on board the feedback from my supervisor who is skilled qualitative researcher in the field of domestic violence.

## **Chapter Four: Case Studies**

The following chapter presents five case studies. The case studies are written in a chronological order based on the women's experiences of domestic violence and their help-seeking strategies. Each case study is written based on specific concepts and themes that are relevant and salient to each of the woman's story.

Each case study starts with a brief introduction of the woman and her spouse's background, marital relationship and an outline of domestic violence dynamics pre-migration. Secondly, each case study provides an account of the woman's domestic violence experiences in terms of power and control tactics and how the violence has affected the woman's health and wellbeing. Thirdly, each case study describes informal support networks and formal interventions accessed by the woman as well as her evaluation of perceived effectiveness of these interventions. Fourthly, women's perception of the role of Asian cultural values and gender role norms in relation to their domestic violence experiences are described. The woman's account of the Chinese community in offering support in the context of domestic violence is also examined. Finally, a summary with the significant points in each woman's story is provided.

## Case Study One: Joy

### Life in China

Joy, a 47 years old Chinese woman, met her husband, Tai, who was a teacher living in China. When Joy first met Tai, she thought that he was a nice person with a pleasant personality. Tai was perceived to be “*a lot mature than his mental age.*”

Joy was a divorced single mother and has a child named Li-Hua from her previous marriage. Joy’s mother was living in the U.K at the time and often encouraged Joy to migrate overseas, to pursue new beginnings and a good life for her and her daughter. Joy came from a middle- class Chinese family. She grew up in a stable family environment which emphasised on family education of disciplines and family values.

Tai is a New Zealand Maori by decent. He grew up in a single parent family with many siblings. Tai has been living in China for few years when he met Joy. He has some comprehension of Mandarin and very good understating of Chinese cultural values and practice in a family context.

After just over a year of courting, Joy and Tai got married in China. They had a son named Li-Jun. After Joy has given birth to Li Jun in China, she noticed changes in her husband’s behaviour. Joy said, “*While I was pregnant, sometimes he doesn’t come back home like night after night.*”

Gradually, she noticed that Tai was in contact with drugs. One night, after giving birth to her son Li-Jun, Joy confronted Tai about his drug use. Tai denied it and explained that someone else tried to drug him. Tai started to create a scene by yelling and shouting at Joy. Then, he pushed Joy while she was holding her newborn baby in her arms. Joy commented,

*Li Jun was still very little, his head is still in a tiny frame and his head collided against the wall. Husband Tai will not recall such incident after the matter.*

## **The migration**

In 2008, Joy and Tai migrated overseas (not, initially, New Zealand) to live with Tai's brother. Joy and Tai settled nearby the business owned by Tai's brother which they occasionally helped out. Around this time, Tai started to use drugs (synthesis cannabis). He couldn't function normally or work properly.

Joy wanted to improve the living condition for her children as the income from the business was very poor. However, she couldn't drive at the time and with limited English finding a well-paid job was a great challenge. Eventually, Joy decided to import some stock from China and to make a living in the weekend markets.

At the time, Joy couldn't drive and was dependent on Tai for transport. Joy, young teenager Li-Hua and toddler Li-Jun, needed to get up very early to prepare for the market. Nothing got sold at first but eventually things started to pick up. One time they earned around \$400 from the market.

*As soon as we got home, nothing got unpacked yet, [Tai] started asking for money. He was yelling towards me and Li-Hua and said that she was lazy and didn't help to unpack the stock. He was giving her all the discontent. He started yelling at me and demanded the money to buy alcohol.*

When Joy refused to give Tai the money to buy alcohol, he became angrier and started to intimidate Joy with foul language and displayed tendency of physical violence.

*He was swearing heavily and badly at me in my room and destroyed all the stock that I've purchased. He kicked everywhere.*

Li -Hua couldn't take it any more while listening between the walls in the next room so she rushed into Joy's bedroom and confronted her dad, telling him that his behaviour towards her mum was unacceptable. Tai's aggression quickly turned towards Joy's daughter and

*He keeps pushing Li- Hua and was being very vocal; His swear words were very bad. He wants to hit her and pushed her away. [He] pushed [her] until she was outside the room and then*

*locked the door and refused to let her inside.*

Since Joy had not long been in the country, she had very limited knowledge as how to handle such matter.

*I didn't know you can call the police. I didn't know what kind of measures I can use for such matter. There was only one Asian that I know. But I was embarrassed; I didn't know her well enough to tell her what was happening. So I held on to my child and cried.*

Then Joy remembered a couple who were her work colleagues at the time, so she told them about the incident. But they were drug buddies with her husband so couldn't offer help at the end.

Joy was the sole provider for a “*big family*”; she had to work very hard not only to provide for Tai and the children but also Tai's brother and his family. In addition, Tai's brother was covertly swindling them. Tai had secretly given money to his brother. “*I give the money to his brother to pay for the rent but he will spend the money on his own terms.*” Joy found herself in an unfamiliar family situation that she can only try to “*bear it.*”

### **Life in New Zealand**

Joy and her family moved to New Zealand in 2009 to pursue a new start. Initially, neither Joy nor one of her child has Permanent Residency. Joy had no income and couldn't claim a benefit from the government. Tai was the sole welfare recipient. After been swindled by Tai's brother, Joy had only very limited funds and she was planning to move out with her children. She paid a bond for a two bedroom place. Coincidentally, at the same time Tai demanded money from Joy as one of his sibling's child was getting married.

When Joy refused to hand over the money as she needed to pay the rest of the rent, Tai's mood turned for the worse and he became very irritable. When they arrived at a supermarket, Tai was high on drugs again. Tai was yelling and swearing at Joy aggressively. He started call Joy names such as your stupid “*bitch*” and “*Idiot*”.

Once again, Joy was in a helpless situation and she had to do what she was told by Tai. She ended up not only losing the bond money but the very opportunity to “*break free from him*”. “*It’s like no one can help me and no one I can seek help from! So, I just have to bear it*” Joy said.

Tai continued to use drugs, often in the company of his siblings. Joy felt terrible that there was no money left to pay a \$200 fee for Li Hua’s school education.

*There was nothing I can do! I was crying day after day. I don’t have any working abilities. Car, I couldn’t drive. I don’t have any income and I had two children with me.*

Literature suggested that newly arrived immigrant women away from their family and social support networks in the home country (Pillai, 2001), who are unfamiliar with the social systems in the host country (Dutton et al., 2000; Xu et al., 2001), are in a more vulnerable position when dealing with domestic violence. Unfamiliarity with the social infrastructure system, unemployment and difficulties to obtain drivers’ license were the contributors to the Joy’s social isolation.

In desperation, Joy decided to tell her parents in China the truth because in her mind there was no solution to the situation. Joy’s parent has given her the advice to return to China as “*there is no solution to be with such person.*”

After Joy told Tai of her decision to return to her homeland. he started begging Joy and tried to keep her in New Zealand by saying things like “*he will give up drugs.*” Joy was adamant about her decision to return back to China with her two children to live for good.

### ***The return***

Joy’s return to China was short lived: she returned to New Zealand within two months. Mostly, this was for the sake of her son. As another Chinese immigrant - “*fellow villager*” told her, Li Jun’s future would be uncertain if he wasn’t able to get New Zealand residency and it will make life very difficult for Li Jun’s future if he was to live in China long term. This fellow immigrant also advised Joy that “*she has walked a long journey*” and should not give up easily. So, with the help

of this fellow immigrant, Joy got a place in New Zealand for her and her children. Upon contacting Tai, Joy's returned to the relationship.

*So I contacted him again, for the sake of my son's residency. There was a lot of up and down but for the sake of my child, I had to take it all.*

Joy wanted to give Tai another chance as she believed that he would change. "*He promised me that He will change, stop taking drugs, He talks well and promised many things.*"

Joy started job hunting and eventually found a job as an assistant in a travel company. During the drug withdrawal period, Tai's unpredictable temperamental and irritable state led to an alarming violent incident: One day they were out at a country market and

*We started to argue because he thought I was playing games with him and he got extremely angry and started calling me names again such as "bitch" and "arsehole". I was embarrassed because people were looking at us so I took Li Jun [to another place].*

Tai demanded to know Joy's whereabouts and verbally abused her again when he met up with her. When they returned home, Joy said that,

*he throw out all the items that we had in the house...he wanted to punch me and pushed me against the wall. He ended up punching a hole in the wall.*

When this happened, Joy was holding on to her child, who was very young at the time. Her child tried to protect Joy by placing his hand on her head.

Information from an affidavit made sometime later suggested that Joy felt intimidated and threatened by Tai as he said to her that "*I just want to punch you...*" "*He really wants to kill me...*"

In the end a neighbour contacted the police. On this occasion, the police did not arrest Tai but they did advice Joy regarding her rights to seek help and pursue personal protection and said:

*You have the right to call the police. You have the right to*

*protect yourself. The police asked whether I had any friends or relatives and I didn't have any. They asked whether I could drive and I said I can. So they asked me to take my child for a drive." Tai was apologetic afterwards about the occurred incident.*

It is not clear why the police did not arrest Tai. During this time Joy was not fully aware about her legal right and actions being the victim of domestic violence other than calling the police when necessary.

### ***Second major attack***

Joy remained living with Tai. Another major incident occurred when Tai took Li Jun to another city without telling Joy. She was shocked as Li Jun was sick at the time and required medication. Joy sought help from a trusted friend. She also made contact with the Police and asked them to escort her while picking up her son. When Joy arrived at the scene, she was really upset as her husband was drinking and high on drugs and he had Li-Jun under his care as well.

*He grabbed my son and left. He just took him and went... I was a stranger in a strange place. I was really desperate so I rang the police. Then the police stepped out to solve the problem.*

They asked Joy and Tai to be physically separated immediately. Initially, the police was questioning about the child's road safety as there was no car seat. So Joy had to quickly go and purchase one. Then, the Police offered for Joy to follow their car back home but they discovered that she was not able to drive properly.

*So the police told me that this doesn't work, you can't go back... that you must remain where you were. You must stay here.*

At the end, Joy did manage to get back home and Li Jun was safely returned home. The police made contact with the family violence agency which Joy had accessed. The police had limited authority at the time of this incident as there was no Protection Order or Parenting Order in place.

Joy believes that being Tai's wife she should protect her husband and the child. She explained that Tai really loves Li-Jun:

*He is not a good dad but he is not a very bad dad either...So*

*that's why when he was high on drugs, I was so afraid that he might take my son somewhere... He is the kind like even when he drives I'm afraid something bad could happen.*

Joy continued to live with Tai and the two children while pursuing a job as an assistant in a travel agency. Tai was able to quit the drinking and drug habit for a period of time which reignited Joy's hope that they could "live a normal life". Then, Tai returned to old habits of drinking and smoking synthetic drug after his sibling passed way. Tai blamed Joy for his misbehaviour,

*He shift the responsibilities back to me and said it was because that I complains to him and I have give him loads of pressure and he was annoyed with his job.*

### ***The most severe episode of violence***

Due to Tai's unclean drug habit, he was not able to maintain his job for a long period of time. Once again, Joy ended up being the only person who was working long hours to be able to maintain the daily expenses for the home as well as doing house works and looking after the two children. "I did everything on my own and he is just a prop." Joy said.

One day Joy returned home from work and discovered that Tai was smoking synthetic drug K2. Tai started accusing her of being unfaithful to him and spoke of how much he hated her. He became angry and started calling her names again like "asshole". While Joy was making a meal that day, Tai walked up to her and farted also "he started to kick [Joy's] rear part", while she was bending down to grab a piece of vegetable.

*I was very upset about it and I had a piece of vegetable in my hand so I hit him with it. Then, he grabbed the chair and throws it at me. He cornered me in a room and was on top of me. He removed his watch and he punched my head and kicked my stomach. That was the most severe episode of domestic violence.*

Here, we can see that Tai's physical violence towards Joy was a deliberate act as he removed his watch before punching her which prevents leaving an easily identifiable mark on her that directly links to him. Joy called out to Li-Hua who was crying at time to ring the police and once arrived, the police removed Tai

from their home. At the time, the police raised the issue of Protection Order as Joy didn't have one in a place. Information from an affidavit has confirmed that Tai was arrested and charged with, Assault with Intent to injure.

Tai was later sentenced to community service and released with conditions that he was not to reside with Joy for a period of time. Joy voiced that she felt being used by Tai when he commanded her to go to the Criminal court with him for his sentencing. Joy also signed a piece of document which given her consent for Tai to continue residing with her.

*He basically said I must go with him. To let the Court know that you're supportive of me and that you're helping me. So I went there with my [young son].*

We can see here the way some abusive men can manipulate the court process by pressurising their partners into making the violence less severe than it was.

*During this time, we were basically in separation. He was waiting for his sentencing. He must live elsewhere; he can't live with me... But he always find his way back, everyday whether it's very late at night or early in the morning. ...he will come and go whenever he pleases.*

Tai's disturbance continued which was a clear breach of his bail conditions that ended with Tai pressuring Joy to agree to him returning home. Joy chose not to report such incidents to the police as she thought that he is still the father of her child. One particular time, Joy did report the incident to the police when Tai refused to leave Joy's house when been told and he also grabbed Joy's bag and bank card, and car keys. Joy was aware of Tai's apparently unbreakable drug cycle and his repetitiveness of violence towards her. However, she did decide then that she wanted "to be divorced but it doesn't work". Tai will sweet talk to Joy and get inside her mind by saying:

*I'm very loyal to you. I'm not a person who will play marriage like a game. We are already married so I will be with you for life. I don't want my child to be fatherless. After all...he is half Chinese and half Maori. He has two cultures within him, so you can't exploit the other half of his culture...*

## **Protection order**

Eventually, with the help of the family violence coordinator and the lawyer, Joy submitted an application for Protection Order. The application took place after being exposed to repetitive emotional abuse and physical violence by Tai. Joy had a strong case against Tai but, even so, initially she found it hard to be assertive and stand firm by her decisions to apply for protection order. Her affidavit showed significant concerns for her safety and was supported by a police report. A without-notice Protection Order was granted to her successfully within one to two weeks of the application. Joy used legal aid to help her with legal cost of the application and she was really satisfied with the legal service that she received.

Joy was made aware of her right to apply for Parenting Order by the family violence coordinator but did not go ahead with this.

Joy was advised to safely secure the document and not tell Tai that she was applying for a protection order to prevent her from potential harm. After Tai found out about the Protection Order indirectly, with the help of his lawyer, Tai tried to argue against the temporary order becoming permanent but he was unsuccessful, probably, because of his criminal past. Then in private, he asks Joy to withdraw the Protection Order. *“He did try to ask me to withdraw the Protection Order but it wasn’t in a form of a threat.”*

Furthermore, at the time of the Protection Order application, Joy had just obtained Permanent Residency. Usually, gaining permanent residency significantly strengthens a women’s position. However, in this case, on numerous occasions, Tai threatened her by accusing that her ulterior motive of marrying him was to obtain New Zealand permanent residency. He would say to Joy: *“I can ring up the immigration now and they can cancel your Permanent Residency.”* Such threats created another layer of fear and a barrier for Joy to have confidence in seeking help. Initially, she thought that she was faced with the possibility of not being able to see her son Li-Jun permanently if Tai did make such threat a reality.

At the time, Tai was ordered by the Court to attend the men’s programme. There was clear evidence which documented that during such period his behaviour has

changed dramatically for the good. Once again Joy said to Tai that: *“If you change, I’m willing to give you another chance.”*

Tai’s reverted to his old ways after things had settled. He used sarcastic words to blame and mock Joy for the consequences of the violence. Tai refused to be accountable for his violent behaviour by saying:

*See, whose wife will call the police to get her own husband arrested? It is because of you that I have a criminal record. It’s all because of you... it has nothing to do with me. It is you that makes yourself unhappy.”*

A sense of guilt and shame sunk in for Joy as she was questioning about whether she has made the right responses by employing statutory intervention measures against Tai and domestic violence.

### **The counselling sessions**

The Family Court has provided Joy and Tai the opportunity to access free family counselling service at Relationship Atearoea. Six sessions were offered but only 3 were provided. Joy said: *“I have been but it didn’t have much effect.”* Joy further explained:

*The counsellor was a Westerner. Because my husband didn’t mention anything about the fact that he takes drugs... He just says that we are very good and we are a couple. The cause of our problem is cultural differences... So I didn’t say anything during the whole session. There is nothing that I can do to change the situation. While the counsellor was trying to mediate between us, [Tai] was arguing with him all the time. Constantly fighting with him and said [his] point of view was wrong. We have very good relationship with each. We don’t need you!*

Joy did find the counselling environment safe but she believes it’s an ineffective remedy for her situation.

*So what can I say? There is nothing that I can say. If I did start talking, we will end up in arguments again. So what is the point?” “I will not use it again as it is person –dependant...”*

## **The women's programme**

The Asian women's education programme at the local family violence agency helped Joy to understand more about self-protection. She started to gain understanding about the legal system of New Zealand and information on the Immigration Act which should give her statutory right to safeguard her permanent residency.

*[The family violence coordinator] advised me of my legal rights and that [Tai] could not make the immigration to cancel [her] Permanent Residency and does not have the right to interfere with the decisions made by the Immigration.*

Such increased awareness of the legal protection has given Joy the full confidence to face Tai's tactics and to become more assertive when making and maintaining the right decisions.

The programme consisted of group and one-on-one sessions. It focused on trust and rapport building, empowering women through active participation, shared experiences and mutual learning. As an agency staff member said:

*Joy is an open-minded person and she can clearly distinguish right and wrong. As time passes, [Joy's] confidence is built and she is more empowered. She is able to take control of her life. She started to realise how to solve problems; how to protect herself and her family and not letting [Tai's] opinion to influence her decision.*

Joy expresses similar breakthrough in her own words:

*All these year when I was married to him... I was very, very weak. When things happen, all I can do is cry. But now I will resist, I will attack him too with words. I will refute and say: I've learnt it all from you! I thank you for teaching me lots. You have taught me how to be strong and tough... When men are unreliable, women will become powerful.*

Having the right legal protection in place has protected Joy from certain continuation of abuse. Now and then when Tai displays certain abusive behaviour, Joy will tell him that:

*Don't think it's okay for you to swear at me. I can call the police*

*and they can arrest you, because it's written clearly on the protection order. So, he will restrict himself. Other times it doesn't work... Most of the time, I'll choose not to call the police.*

Fundamentally, having access to the legal definition of domestic violence has given Joy the confidence and agency to safeguard herself. Initially, Joy had limited understanding of domestic violence in New Zealand to be able to seek help. *"I didn't know that I should ask others for help."*

*Before I definitely believed that domestic violence means physical harm... We will normally think that domestic violence is the husband physically hurting the wife. Since I met the [family violence coordinator], I understood that domestic violence doesn't only include physical harm; it includes languages – swearing at you, malicious talk as well as emotional abuse... Using Intimidation and using money to threaten you.*

### **The effects of violence and abuse**

As a Chinese woman who has been victimised by domestic violence, Joy found herself trapped in a situation which created moral contractions and emotional turmoil. On one hand, she wanted to protect her children. She realises the long-term negative impact it will have on her children's well-being when being exposed to Tai's prolonged drug habit coupled with witnessing Tai's emotional abuse and physical violence towards Joy. On the other hand, she also has hope that Tai will change as after all he is the children's dad, Li-Jun's biological father and *"he loves them dearly"*.

Recalling the earlier violent incident which daughter Li-Hua tried to intervene, Joy expressed that:

*As soon as [I] bring up this incident, she will start crying. Such impact for my daughter is extreme, for her psychosomatic health. Li-Hua has developed excessive hatred toward her dad and she forever remembers what happened that time.*

*She has a strong sense of self-protection. She hates druggie and drunks. She will pretend that [Tai] is non-existent. She is very sensitive and going through puberty. Sometimes she'll blame me and say that it's all because of me.*

Then, Joy briefly explained the impact that the abusive relationship had for her:

*As for myself, I feel as though I am numb. Even the worst things happen; there will be a way to solve it. [Someone] said that I have high endurance ability. Whether it's good or bad, even the worst [happens] still I have to live, right?*

*Basically, I do not trust him at all. So it's the same, whether he is there or not it doesn't make any differences. You can't treat him like a normal functional human being.*

Joy said that the form of emotional abuse that causes the deepest trauma for her is when Tai uses her weakness to attack her:

*He will use what I don't want to hear the most to attack me, for example, my ex-husband... You will feel very hopeless about it. I've treated you with honesty and told you what happened but you will use it to attack me...*

### **Disclosure of violence and help-seeking**

Joy's experiences in the abusive relationship often drove her to a breaking point. During desperation, she often formulated help-seeking strategies in her mind but didn't implement them as she would convince herself not to take action once the crisis passed.

*When I felt helpless, I thought about going back to China or I can hire lawyer or I can just escape with the children or I can call the police to captivate him...but the next day when the sun is up... I will push everything aside.*

Joy has kept her experiences of domestic violence close to herself. She only revealed the truth to a few people that she trusted and one of them being her mother, who was the first contact of help for Joy.

*She told me that such domestic violence situation, you can call the police. So the second time when it was really severe, I've called out to my child to call the police... I'm not associated with the Chinese social circle. It was only since [recent years] that I started to have some Chinese friends.*

There are valid reasons for Joy being weary of disclosing her story to her friends; to save her from the consequences of being the “*talk of the town*” among the Chinese community.

*It's probably a part of Chinese people's saving face issue that I*

*rarely seeking help from friends.*

On one occasion, Joy was very upset when she found out that after confiding in her boss about the abusive relationship, the story had been spread to others. She has politely advised her boss not to tell others as her family matters should be kept private. Joy further addressed the consequences by saying:

*It's not necessarily about saving face; it is because it will make it easier for me to find a job, to be employed. Other people might say this person is trouble... it is better to keep away from her. Because of such negative impact for me, I don't want to tell friends.*

Joy believed that it is better to seek formal help from “government” agencies such as family violence agency than to seek help from friends. An underpinning reason as Joy emphasised because of the nature of the family violence co-coordinator’s work, she will keep things private and confidential.

*Personally, I think [the Asian woman advocate] is one of the key representatives of domestic violence prevention. A representative sent by the government to help the Chinese women in the Chinese community...*

Furthermore, Joy believed it wouldn’t make much of a difference to her experiences or situation if she did have more friends to confide in and support her at the start.

*I don't think they have any concept about [domestic violence]. I don't think they will offer much advice as they are new migrants to NZL as well... Because my friends will say to me that my personality is too weak. My personality is weak and another aspect is that I'm indecisive... Once the [violent] incident is over, I can let it go. My attitude will change. I know this weak spot about myself.*

Joy’s friends and family has given her the same advice when it comes to finding a solution to end the abusive relationship.

*All of them advised me to get divorced! Including friends in my current circle, they will say for your situation, you should be divorced. But it won't work. Because [I] can't even achieve the first step of being separated long enough, he won't leave!*

Through Joy's social lens, she pointed out the complexity of human interaction when it comes to seeking help, in the context of women's experience of domestic violence and the Chinese Community.

*I think Chinese community is a complex matter. I think there is a mixture of contradictions. I think the traditional Chinese way of thinking is like you want other people to know about it but you don't want other people to know about it. I want other people to support me but I don't want other to sympathise with me. I think once I told people all the details, they might say I'm sympathetic about your situation but there is nothing that I can do to help you. In this case, I rather keep it to myself and chose not to disclose to them.*

### **Gendered beliefs and marital attitudes**

Joy believes that there are mixtures of cultural and family factors which played a part in her experience of domestic violence. Tai and Joy had known each other for less than a year before they got married. Joy had never met Tai's family in New Zealand before marrying him and she knows very little about his family background.

There are also discrepancies between the different gendered beliefs held by Tai and Joy on the subjects of marriage and family.

*He holds extremely male-dominant views! He always tells me don't even think about controlling me, you are not my mother. I won't listen to you! I'm a westerner not a Chinese... don't think that I'll have to go home straight after work and that I'll have to bring you with me to social functions...*

Joy further emphasised that Tai would often twist the truth and employ a mixture of Western and Eastern knowledge to attack her. Whenever Joy talks about family responsibility, Tai will refuse to talk about it and deny fulfilling his family responsibilities by saying to Joy:

*There is a reason that I married you because you are beneficial to me, you have good use to me...I married you because you are Chinese, I wanted to do business.*

From a different spectrum, Joy believes that:

*When two people came together is to safeguard and build a home mutually. I didn't intend to do massive business deals with you or to earn heaps of money from it. I just want to be like normal people, to have a health life.*

To illustrate her point about the meaning of marriage, Joy employed a Chinese idiom: “*Marry, marry, a Han Chinese, clothing and meals.*” (An ancient common saying to express the traditional gender role expectation of married man and women. In ancient times, men will work outside the home to provide for the family. Women stay at home to do housework. Once married, women don't have to worry about everyday living such as clothes and food. ) In addition, although Joy believes that there should be gender equality in a marriage but to her it's more about the levels of expectation.

*I wish to see firstly, drugs will never enter my household. If [he] can find a job and don't play games all day then I'll be satisfied. If it's under such circumstance, I rather work more and I'll think that is equal.*

At the time of the interviews, Joy was still living with Tai and the two children. Joy found it very difficult to escape from Tai. He is always with her and needs to know her whereabouts. “*He is adamant to ignore, adamant to not to leave. He will not leave even if you try to force him out of the home.*”

Another concern that she has regarding taking action towards leaving her relationship is the financial burden of seeking a lawyer.”*It is because if I go to the lawyer now, it will cost heaps*” Joy explained. Based on her understanding, since she is the sole provider for the family and with savings, she will not be illegible for legal aid. She will have to bear all the potential legal fees.

Joy has advice for other women in a similar situation: firstly,

*Be well-matched in social and economic status (for marriage). You should know the person's family background very well... in terms of domestic violence intervention, it is best to seek help from government agencies.*

Joy believed that help from friends are important too but it can be restricted in terms of practical help and awareness of appropriate interventions.

## Summary

Joy suffered repetitive physical violence, psychological and financial abuse by her spouse Tai. Initially, Joy was trapped within the web of abuse due to social isolation, unemployment, a lack of awareness of family violence services and legal remedies towards domestic violence.

However, Joy's story is characterised by courage and breakthrough in the midst of making sense of domestic violence during the "*on and off*" intimate abusive relationship with Tai. Despite her suffering, Joy endured the violence to the point of desperation. She has given Tai many chances to change as she believes that Tai loves her children and the importance of keeping the father for her children's sake. Faced with barriers to disclosure, Joy found very few people to confide in. She is an outlier to the Chinese community with her story of domestic violence. Fortunately, Joy's mother was very supportive towards her. Also, she was grateful to have gained access and excellent support from the culturally appropriate service from a local family violence agency. These informal and formal support channels made a huge difference to Joy's coping strategies and problem solving skills when dealing with abusive situations as well as to the wellbeing and safety of her and her children.

## Case Study Two: Hope

### Background

Hope, a 27 years old Chinese women, originally from China. She arrived in New Zealand in 2006, subsequently graduating from university. After a year of meeting Jason and getting to know each other, they got married. They have been together for the past 9 years. Hope is an only child and grew up with her mother in a single parent home. Hope was raised in a prosperous and sheltered family environment. Her mother has a “*tough personality*” and wants to protect Hope in any way possible.

Jason is a 38 years old Vietnamese migrant of Chinese decent. His parents migrated to Vietnam when he was young. Jason has several brothers and sisters and he is the eldest son of the family. Jason is well educated and obtained a University degree from his home country. Generally, Hope and Jason use Mandarin to communicate with each other.

Jason is Hope’s first boyfriend and the only man that she has had an intimate relationship with. They have one young son name Adam. In the early days of Hope and Jason’s married life, they had a harmonies relationship. Hope proudly conveyed that: “*He treated me very well. He treated the child very well too. A lot of people were admiring me for having such good husband.*” Hope gave another example to illustrate that Jason was a good husband. Hope fell sick after giving birth and she could not do anything besides resting. Jason quit his job to look after her and the child.

### Violence and abuse in the family

#### *Emotional abuse and the role of mother-in-law*

Hope could clearly distinguish two types of violence: physical and emotional. “*He doesn’t use physical harm. It’s more verbal and emotional.*” She also questioned whether “*cold war*” could be classified as a type of psychological abuse.

*You feel hard to communicate with the other person. [He] doesn’t want to communicate. That is the worst to bear.*

Hope's mother-in-law holds racist attitude towards her because she is Chinese. She looks down on Hope as a "*Mainland Chinese*." Hope feels that that her mother-in-law sees her as being "*like a dog*". Hope was convinced that the trigger for the violence and abusive episodes started upon the arrival of her in-laws from Vietnam, in particular her mother-in-law. Hope explained:

*Men are allowed to have several wives. Men do not need to work. Women need to work and look after the men. That is their cultural tradition.*

Once the in-laws moved in to live with Hope and Jason, the mother-in law started to project her ideas of gendered role expectations in a marriage on to their son and daughter-in-law. She also believes that she should be the role model for the daughter-in-law.

*My mother-in-law thinks that my husband has done way too much for me. Women should be like her, able to follow the rule of "the three obediences and four virtues." Women should not voice anything if they have been physically harmed or been sworn at by their husband.*

Hope was taken by surprise by the dramatic turn in the marriage. It was "*totally out of expectation*" that Jason's behaviour "*totally changed*" with the arrival of Jason's parents. Hope commented that: "*I remembered the first night when they arrived, my husband started to smack my child.*"

Hope's mother in-law believed it is normal for men to have temper and that smacking a child will not cause any harm. From an affidavit made later, it was clear that Jason's parents told Hope not to call the police as it was a family matter. Hope was angry and suggested that New Zealand is not a male-dominant society. It is an egalitarian society for men and women.

Hope was blamed by Jason for being disrespectful towards his mother when Hope voiced anything contrary to the wishes of her mother-in-law. One time, Hope saw her placing her feet on the dining table and believed such behaviour is unhygienic. Hope told her husband about it. Jason started to swear at Hope and said:

*How come you don't understand? She is getting old and it's comfortable for her to place her feet on the table. You are vile-character person!*

Her in-laws demanded that Hope live up to the expectations of a good wife, a good mother and a good daughter-in-law. During one particular incident, when Adam was sick with a stomach problem that lasted several days, Jason became very frustrated after changing nappies for Adam so he smacked him on his bottom. He blamed the child being “*useless*”. He also insulted and demeaned Hope by questioning her adequacies of being a fit mother. He would yell to her:

*You are useless! All these years I have been looking after you, [you] don't know how to give birth properly and once given birth, [you] don't know how to raise [a child].*

*He will [also] say many things in Cantonese which I don't know how to repeat but I can understand. I can't voice any grievance; if I did he will swear at me.*

There was another dynamic in the relationship. Hope's mother visited her in New Zealand and for a short time, lived with Hope, Jason and his parents. Hope's mother would try to intervene and mediate the situation between Hope and Jason. On one occasion, she tried to stop Jason from yelling at Hope and smacking Adam. Jason got extremely angry, he stood on his bed and pointed at Hope and her mother and said.

*Who do you think you are? She is my wife and I don't know you... You are both deemed not to die a natural death. He will say such hatred things.*

### ***Financial manipulation and control***

Hope is a house wife and Jason used to be unemployed but later got a job. Jason often nags to Hope about saving money for his parents so they can immigrate to New Zealand.

*All of his earnings he will not give it to me. Everything that he does is centered on his parents. He will not consider me.*

Jason has built a negative profile of Hope's mother. At the same time, he is well aware of the financial support that Hope's mother is able to offer. Through

various forms of manipulation, Jason tried to control the distribution of money within the family even at the expenses of the welfare of the child. The family finances were used to benefit his parents' welfare.

For example, Hope received weekly benefit for child care from social services. Due to the allergic reactions to certain baby food, they had to buy special diet for him which is more expensive. Jason doesn't believe such special diet is necessary for a little child so he asked Hope to stop feeding their son and "*just feed [him] rice soup is fine*".

*I am not allowed to buy [special food] for [Adam], we have to save money for his parents...So from then onwards, my husband stopped communicating with me. Behind my back he has open up bank account for my in-laws. The thing is though; my in-laws didn't bring any money with them when they came to New Zealand.*

In an affidavit, Hope stated that within the same month, "*I noticed that [Jason] had transferred all our savings from our joint account into his parent's account.*"

On another level, Jason would create *non-sense* for Hope if she did not meet his financial demands. During the application for Jason's parents to visit New Zealand, the couple had trouble coming up with the sufficient sponsorship money. Jason instigated Hope to take money from her mother's bank account without telling her. When the incident was later disclosed to Hope's mother, she was very angry but also believed it was done under Jason's manipulation.

*He did instigate me to do this. If I didn't use my mother's money to sponsor his parents he will create problems for me. So, I couldn't do anything under such circumstance, it was partly my fault.*

### **Reporting to the police**

Hope did not report the initial abusive incidents to the police until one incident in which Jason, pushed Hope's mother nearly to the ground and grabbed her bag which contained large amount of cash and personal documents. He refused to return it and took off with it. This time, Hope and her mother went to the police to

make a report and they were escorted back home by the police and eventually they found the purse at home and nothing was missing from it.

At the same time, Hope reported to the police about the earlier incidents concerning Jason's abusive behaviour towards her and Adam. *In the following days of the event*, Hope was being contacted by a coordinator from a local family violence agency.

Hope has no language difficulties when communicating with the police. However, she had mixed feeling about the service that she received from the police. On one hand she expressed that:

*Don't think the police should be blamed as they've tried to help. There are so many physical violence incidents happening each day, even if they wanted to help, they cannot look after everyone. It's not like you have been severely injured that you are nearly dying. Under such situation, they'll definitely help you. But if it did reach such state, I would have ran away first.*

On the other hand, Hope expressed that the police can only offer certain help at the scene of the incident and there are priorities when it comes to taking one's case seriously:

*Ayah ... When the police was there, he has to listen to both side of the story right? He doesn't know what exactly has happened to us... which means they were not able to offer help...I think the police prioritise care for children. When I told the police that the dad has smacked the child's bottom then they really care. On the contrary, when I told them that my mum was harmed and her purse was stolen, they seemed[less caring].*

An affidavit made at a later stage reported injuries to Hope's son on several occasions such as bruises on the head and his head hitting a hard object. When Hope voiced these concerns to Jason, "*he didn't care*". Coupled with the accumulated effects from the above incidents, Hope became very worried for the child's safety and wellbeing:

*You can imagine when the child is living under such environment he won't be happy... [He] will be easily timid and afraid. [He] feels anxious and uneasy all the time.*

Although Hope expressed that “*after all, she is an adult*” and able to cope a lot better, she also realised that her own emotional state which was at stake by the effects from the multiple episodes of emotional manipulation and harm.

*It has created heaps of emotional disturbances to me... I was confused and my mind was unclear. I was very depressed so I wanted to move out. I can't go to sleep. If the child is crying, I'm scared that he will hit him. I'm afraid that he will swear at me.*

### **Access to statutory intervention**

There was a lot chaos and tension in the household created by the in-laws forceful and powerful position at home as well as Jason's neglect in this 'cold war' which made Hope felt like a prisoner in her own camp:

*My husband refuses to communicate with me... He was treating me very cold...it's like it's their home not mine.*

Hope decided to move out without notifying Jason in advance as she was scared. While Hope was trying to move out of the house, Jason got home and realised what was happening. A statement from the affidavit supports Hope's account which suggested Jason refused to let Hope and the child leave. He was very angry and an argument broke out. The police were called when Jason demanded that Hope leave in the child in his care but Hope refused. Hope told me that she felt afraid of Jason's reactions and behaviours:

*He was very angry so I was afraid and rang the coordinator from the Family violence agency and so she came. At the time the police was present and my friend was there too.*

When the police arrived on the scene, Jason and Hope were immediately separated. The police served a two day police safety order on Jason which Hope believed it meant Jason could not go near her during that time.

Later, it was under the encouragement of the family violence coordinator that Hope decided to apply for Parenting Order and Protection Order.

Hope was not aware of any statutory protections up until this point or the legal remedies available to protect Adam and herself from potential danger. The coordinator advised Hope of the necessity of having legal protection in place:

otherwise, Jason could simply remove the child from her. This is consistent with statements from the family coordinator that, initially, Hope was not aware that Jason still has the right to visit Adam despite his violent behaviour towards the child. Hope was able to see the bigger picture and “*becoming more accepting of the father’s involvement*” after receiving advice and engaging in discussions with the coordinator.

In addition, Hope was able to communicate well with the lawyer in English but required clarifications with certain technical terms. The coordinator was there to assist her. Hope used legal aid for the applications as she was a house wife and received benefit from Work and Income.

### ***Protection order and parenting order***

Hope had a great understanding of the Protection Order but only certain understanding of the Parenting order. The parenting order was granted on the same day as the application was made. Regarding Parenting Order Hope said that:

*I don’t think it’s been explained that clearly. At the time of the application, all I thought about was the custody of the child. I was concerned that he might take the child away... Parenting Oder basically means that I’m the primary care-giver of the child but he can still have contact with the child.*

Hope went to court for an emergency hearing initiated by Adam’s lawyer as Jason has no contact with the child for a while. During court procedures, Hope didn’t need to speak a lot: thus only minimal interpretation was required. In her words the interpretation service “*can be counted as satisfactory.*”

The court ruled that Hope was to be the primary care-giver for Adam. Jason was able to visit and take Adam away between fixed hours during certain week days and under the supervision of his parents. Hope was dissatisfied that her in-laws were to be the supervisors:

*I didn’t want his parents to be the supervisors because I had suspicion that his dad had a [disease that is easily transmitted]. Another reason was that it was since the arrival of his parents that we started to have problems. So I didn’t felt right for the parents to be the supervisor.*

Hope was advised by the lawyer not to give information that she doesn't have proof of even when such matter could cause detrimental effect to the wellbeing of the child. No further legal advice was given by the lawyer on the procedures to oppose the decision. There is common pattern of women being pressured to be nice and cooperative during court procedures.

*No, my lawyer didn't say anything. I've got told that I should just accept it. I said but what happens if my child do end up with [this disease]. He said there is no solution to that.*

### ***Protection order - Ruling and withdraw***

Hope understood clearly the purpose of protection order. Under the help of the lawyer and the coordinator, Hope submitted a without-notice application. It was clearly set out in the affidavit that delay that would be caused by giving notice to the respondent would or might include: a) "a risk of harm"; b) "undue hardship to me or a child of my family or both me and a child of my family". Hope also stated that she needed the protection order to keep her child and herself safe and that she was concerned for the safety of herself and the child if the respondent was served with a copy of the application.

However, the court determined otherwise: Jason was served with the copy of the proceeding. As soon as Jason was notified, he demanded Hope withdraw the application by contacting the lawyer. Jason also submitted his affidavit to oppose the application. At the time, they were waiting to go to court hearing in a few months.

*He was very angry... He messaged me and wants me to withdraw it... He wants me to withdraw it so I did. I went with him. He grabbed me and told me to go to the family court and withdraw it...*

Information in Jason's affidavit made later to the court has confirmed this statement of Hope's: "Yes, he did appose me. He even wrote a lot of accusations of me". In sum, Jason believed that Hope didn't require a Protection Order and denied several accounts and made counter-claims against her claims. A brief summary of his accounts include: 1) Denying of employing physical or psychological violence towards Joy and the child; denying that he has anger

management issues. 2) Denial of saving money for his parents and accused Hope for withdrawing money from their joint account. 3) Blamed Hope and her mother for his abusive behaviour and accused Hope and her mother for causing physical harm to the child.

When Hope was asked to give her thoughts regarding the court's decision to put her application on notice, she said that she could accept it as Jason had not threatened her life. Also, she believes the reason for such decision is "*because he didn't hit me*". The court could not perceive that Hope and Adam's life were in danger.

In the end, the hearing did not go ahead because Hope withdrew her application for a protection order. Hope believed that the lawyer didn't offer necessary support when she advised her lawyer about her decision to withdraw the application for protection order. She thinks "*they are focusing on financial benefits*" and wanted the case to continue by giving reasons such as the delay to receive documents from the other party's lawyer.

Hope admits it was Jason who instigated the idea of withdrawing the application at first: however, it was partly herself who wanted to do it as well – "*I thought to let it go*". Hope believed it was unnecessary to continue these court proceedings because she and her husband were in the transition into a better relationship and the court process would only worsen their situation. Besides, Jason's parents had left New Zealand by then although their return in the future is likely.

*It will create more hurt for each other. We don't want to meet each other at court... Take a step back as boundless as the sea and the sky. Even in Matthews [5:9 of the bible], it reads that blessed are the peace makers.*

### **Understating of domestic violence and the family violence agency**

Hope was happy with the "friendly" service that she received from the family violence agency. In comparison to China, she felt that she has dignity and been treated like a human being and that "human rights are far more prioritised" in New Zealand. She believes that her case would not be taken seriously in China.

*At least, in New Zealand I have been treated like a human not like a dog. If it was in China... if the man didn't injure the woman until a matter of life and death, no one will care about it.*

In addition, Hope voiced that she has received “a lot” and “a full range” of help from the agency on a personal level as well as statutory level. Through her access to service, she has learnt problem solving strategies, building confidence within herself as well as fundamental changes about cultural factors in relation to domestic violence.

*Before, I did believe that as a woman, I should be obedient to “the three obediences and four virtues” and you should listen to everything that the man tells you. They help me to be more effective when dealing with the relationship between men.*

Hope had had no prior knowledge of domestic violence. She could never imagine that she and her husband would be separated because of it – “*I could not imagine the phrase domestic violence to appear near me.*” Until the time of the interview, she still has the image of a man hitting a woman when the phrase domestic violence has been mentioned. From the coordinator’s perspective, Hope is a well educated person. Although Hope and Jason have very limited income, Hope is not financially orientated: she seeks love from her husband; simplicity in life and is easily satisfied with a good home and maintaining family harmony. On the contrary, Jason has a lot of demands and expectations for Hope and would instigate Hope to do certain things.

### **Disclosure to friends and the role of the faith community**

Hope takes precaution when making decisions around disclosing her abusive relationship to friends. She will use indirect dialogues to find out about her friends’ reactions to abusive relationship if they were the abuser or the abused. Then, she will apply the feedback from her friends to evaluate her own situation and whether she has done something wrong. If so, she will try to correct herself accordingly.

*I have told other people about my experiences as well but not the complete story. I will choose the right person to talk to and I will not tell the same story to everyone.*

Hope has become a Christian in recent years; her husband is also a Christian. Being a Christian, Hope has not thought about divorce especially when she already has a son with Jason. Hope is heavily involved with the Chinese fellowship from her church. She attends church services and fellowship gatherings on a regular basis. She has also developed close friendships within the Chinese Christian circle. A few members from the church know her story really well, although it is kept secret from the wider church community. These trusted church friends would normally try to reconcile the relationship between Hope and Jason by providing mediation from a biblical perspective. Hope believed such help is beneficial to her, she says:

*At least I don't hate them. I want to be a role model for my son. If I'm troubled by it then I will bring vexation to myself. If I chose to forgive them, from my perspective I'm peaceful and joyful.*

Initially, when Hope confided in her fellow brothers and sisters, she felt judged.

*In some people's eyes, I was judged. In other people's eyes, they were truly helping me. Some people will judge you or even amuse oneself by watching other people make fools of themselves.*

In particular, an elderly Asian woman named Zhang-Hong found about her situation by making details inquiries through Hope's mother even when she was reluctant to disclose her daughter's situation at first. Whenever Zhang-Hong spotted Hope at church after gathering, she would chase her and question her in a loud voice in front of everyone whether her and her husband have reconciled and whether Hope has apologised to her husband for her wrong doings. Under such circumstance, Hope could only indirectly advised Hong to not to be so concerned about her private matter. To Hope the most intolerable incident occurred when Hong questioned her again while Jason was next to her and when "*many pairs of eyes were staring*" at her due to the scene this person has created, after a church ceremony. She would say things like: "*are you guys living together now or are you still separated?*"

Due to the chains of event, Hope has missed several Sunday services in a row as she was afraid of encountering Hong face to face at church. Hope said: "*I'm*

*afraid of her to the extent that whenever I see her on the inside I'll get goose bumps."*

It is worth noting that Jason is also a Christian and attends the same church as Hope. In Hope's view, Jason has not behaved in a Christian manner.

### ***Faith as a helper***

While studying a religious book, it was brought to Hope's attention that she is a 'helper' to her husband. She gathered that she should examine her role in a marriage instead of blaming her husband or her in-laws for how they have treated her. Although Hope admits that this contains some degree of self-blaming, she believes such thought has been replaced by self-reflective process while she listens to worship songs like "I lift my eyes to the hills" (based on Psalms 121).

*No, I won't feel that. You will realise you need to do certain things. You will believe that it is me who didn't do things right or should improve on.*

Throughout Hope's dialogue she has placed great emphasis on her Faith in God and the everlasting hope that she carries from developing an intimate relationship with God through prayer, practice daily devotions in His words (The Bible) which is from of drinking from "the living water".

*...Sometimes when we pray and tell God everything, I believe this is an invisible help. I'm able to be empowered by God... You will still have hope and expectations for the family and the marriage. Even if it's not hope of full reconciliation, at least you will not hate him.*

Hope talked about her efforts to be a "good wife" – in the sense of being a good helper to her husband. To some extent, she also realised that even if she is a "good wife" that might not be enough to change Jason's behaviour. It is through exercising faith that she forms protective strategies to prevent herself from been negatively impacted by the emotional abuse. After experiencing negative effects from disclosing her story to untrustworthy member in the church, Hope placed even greater trust and faith in the Lord. She voiced that:

*...I feel it's better to just pray everything to God than to tell*

*people. If you tell the Lord, He would not spread this anywhere else so you won't be treated like laughingstock over a cup of tea or after a meal.*

Here it is evident that Hope expected to be judged negatively by some people if the violence becomes public.

### **Family values and gender roles in marriage**

In Hope's eyes, love between the husband and wife is very important – "Love is endurance like the Bible teaches". Hope's family values are based on the Bible's teaching. From Hope's perspective maintaining family harmony requires the consensus on one standard within the family. However, she also voiced that:

*If you can live up to the standards of the Bible then it doesn't matter how ugly or shameless your spouse is, your family will still be harmonious.*

Fundamentally, Hope believes that man should be pursuing work outside the home and while it is the women's duty to rear children at home and protect the family environment. Women should be doing house work and educating the child until maturity. However, Jason made Hope felt that there is not much value to the way that she was living.

It's very interesting that Hope pointed out that her mother and mother-in-law holds very different cultural beliefs regarding the role of husband and wife in marriage. For her mother, women's role is to look after the home so she is in control over the household. For her mother-in-law, "men are always higher than women. So they will never be standing on the same horizon."

### **The Chinese community**

Hope has given insight that domestic violence is quite common known among some of her friends. However, normally it is been kept in secret among close friends and sometimes it might have spread to acquaintances. "*I think there is a sense of shame. People do not want to talk about it.*"

Interestingly, Hope believe that on contrary to the feminist views hold by New Zealanders and possibly by second generation immigrants, Chinese people (first

generation immigrants) still “*hold very male-dominant view*” and the traditional Chinese views such as “*the three obedience and four virtues.*”

In a broader context, Hope believed regular seminars or presentation on domestic violence within the Chinese community are needed to raise awareness of the issue and more importantly, the services that are available for Chinese women who are in domestic violence situation. She thinks that intervention should start early and be well placed before the matter reaches to the point of reporting to the police.

*So they'll know that there is a way for them to protect themselves... They didn't do that intervention part well. If they did protect themselves through other ways before report to the police, I believe it will be more effective.*

It is worth reiterating that Hope wishes her story will not only be helpful for this research but also helps the people who get to read it. More importantly, Hope believes that bringing the gospel to the women who have been through similar experiences will make a difference to their lives. People are limited but in God all is possible: Hope has given examples of how people such as the police, the lawyer or even her mother are able to offer limited help.

*[The women] should be made aware that humans have finite capabilities but Lord Jesus has infinite capabilities. To go and drink the living water from Him.... It is only when you come back to the Spirit, then God will offer the greatest help and comfort that you need.*

### **Family coordinator's comment**

Information from the coordinator suggested that Hope's case involves a complex family dynamic. A lot of Jason's behaviour is in breach of the Domestic Violence Act such as psychological abuse. There is a pattern repeating within the abuse however whether Hope could clearly distinguish such pattern remains uncertain at the time.

The coordinator told me she could see changes in Hope, especially through talking and by applying Cognitive behavioural therapy. Hope was very emotional and upset about the situation at the time when she was applying for the Parenting Order. “*So whenever they will argue, she gets flustered and she was afraid*”.

In conclusion, the coordinator said she would emphasise and prioritise the safety and the wellbeing of the women and the child while helping the women like Hope to make important decisions such as applying for a parenting order or a protection order. She would explain to women the consequence of withdraw a protection order but nevertheless support them in their decision. However, in the coordinator's view "*at the end it's the women who will be disadvantaged*" if she withdraws application.

### **Summary**

Hope's story is based on emotional abuse, financial manipulation and violence towards the child by husband Jason, coupled with in-law bullying and abuse. Through the integrated help from statutory level intervention as well as community-based family violence intervention, Hope was able to gain confidence and dignity to make a new beginning for herself and her precious child. On one hand, through her unshakeable faith in God and the additional care and support from trusted church friends, Hope was able to gain inner-strength and to form protective strategies to protective herself from the effects of the abuse. On another hand, Hope is uncertain about her future with Jason. While not divorced, Hope remains separated from Jason. She has emphasised that if the relationship dynamic only involves her own family things should be easily dissolved. However, if her in-laws decide to come back to New Zealand to live with them again, "*there will be no solution*".

## Case Study Three: Emily

### Background

Emily and Kevin are both Chinese migrants from south China. They immigrated to New Zealand together as skilled immigration. They migrated in the hope to pursue a better life for their family. They have two children: 16 years old Mike and 8 years old Martin. The first child was born in China and the second in New Zealand. Kevin obtained a degree from a famous university in China. Before arriving in New Zealand, Kevin was in a managerial position at a state service corporation in China. Kevin was diagnosed with anxiety in China since he witnessed a tragic incident at work. Kevin is an only son and, according to Emily, was spoiled by his parents. He grew up in a very strict and traditional Chinese family system where physical punishment was an accepted form of child discipline.

Emily is also well educated with a university degree. Cantonese is her mother tongue but she is also fluent in Mandarin. She came from a middle class family with good family upbringing where family harmony and mutual respect were prioritised. Her family were more “*open-minded*”. Due to the Cultural Revolution in China, Emily didn’t get to know her father until she was 9 years of age. The experience left her wary of the government authorities.

During their marriage life, Emily has experienced multiple forms of domestic violence by Kevin such as physical abuse, emotional abuse and financial control. In China, Emily always thought that domestic violence signifies physical harm. Her understanding of domestic violence has shifted dramatically since her experiences in New Zealand. Kevin has also severely physical harmed their son Mike during a confrontational argument at home which led to the disclosure of the family violence to friends, the intervention of the police and other services.

*Actually, I’m still quite unclear. It was after my husband has caused family violence and then I sought help that I started to realise the definition of domestic violence is also based on psychological, language and even financial harm. I then realised that I have allowed language to hurt me too and that is violence in itself.*

## Physical violence in China

Kevin's violence towards Emily started shortly after they got married. Emily and Kevin were living next door to Emily's parent's place at the time. Emily's father passed away suddenly due an unexpected illness. One day, Emily could not contain herself anymore shortly after her father's death, she started crying out loud. Kevin happened to see Emily crying and shouted at her: "*Crazy! Crazy!*" Then he left by slamming the door. After neglecting Emily for a whole day, Kevin returned home. Emily hadn't spoken much in the whole month so she started to complain to Kevin and questioning why he doesn't care for her wellbeing and "*not feeling anything.*" So, Kevin started to punch Emily in the head. Emily's sister overheard this from next door so she rushed to intervene. She said to Kevin: "*Why are you hitting her? I'm warning you in this family you are not allowed to hit people...*"

The next day, Emily told her father-in-law about what happened. He took his son's side by questioning her: "*why do you allow him to hit you? There must be a reason why?*" At the time, Emily's mother heard of the situation and was extremely surprised as she thought that Kevin looked very gentle.

Another major incident of physical violence by Kevin which left Emily with emotional trauma happened after the birth of their son Mike, who was only 7 months old at the time. Mike's nana (Kevin's mother) played a major part in inducing the violent incident. She was, according to Emily, an "*extremely conservative*" person who "*holds very traditional cultural views.*" Although she is a woman herself she looked down on woman. One major incident occurred when Mike was sick. He was crying after the doctor had taken a blood sample. Kevin's mother blamed Emily, telling her son,

*See! How could such a mother do such things? Allow a child to cry like that. How come you are not hitting her?... So, my husband slapped me on the face. At the time, my heart was broken into pieces. I felt although I haven't done anything wrong but he just slapped me due to one sentence spoken by his mother... He harmed me badly I felt.*

Emily considers that her mother-in-law felt she had the authority over her son's family and family matters. The nana demanded Kevin to leave the hospital despite of the grandson's illness. She imposed gendered role beliefs that women as a good mother should take care for the child at the expenses of her own health. Men being the head of the household should not be tied down by such womanly matters; he should be in control and have the last say.

Emily spoke of hating her mother-in-law and her husband. However, she was afraid to disclose her situation to her parents as there was no family violence or similar matters from her side of the family. Emily kept her story a secret from her family because she does not want to upset them or burden them with her troubles.

## **Life in New Zealand**

### ***Emotional abuse and financial control***

There have been a lot of up and downs since arriving in New Zealand. One of the ups, about 4 years after their arrival, was the birth of their son Martin. The New Zealand lifestyle is very different from China. After settling in, Emily started to look for a church to attend. Initially, she attended a Chinese church as well as a kiwi church with Asian members as a part of the congregation. Emily was not a Christian at the time but later became a Christian. Kevin and the children attend the same church.

For Kevin, the reality of New Zealand was far different from what he has imagined. He couldn't find a good job and his English ability was just average. Emily believed that "*the high point of his life was over so the ugly side of things slowly exposes.*" Kevin started to pressurise Emily to get a job while she had to do all the house work and looking after the two children around the clock without proper rest. Kevin, on the other hand didn't do anything. He slept and watched television all day.

Kevin doesn't normally swear at Emily directly but he will use vicious tactics to harm her emotionally, for example, by comparing her to other women. He will say to her: "*look at other people, whoever's wife, she doesn't even know English but*

*she knows how to earn much money. But look at you...*” Such talk has caused Emily emotional turmoil. Even when Emily was able to bring in some income from part-time work as a cleaner, Kevin was dissatisfied. Even though Emily was earning the money, Kevin controlled it, giving Emily only \$100 a week of living expenses.

*I was afraid to tell. I know it was little... As in China, we didn't have such financial problems so I didn't see it as important...I felt he has already trampled on me to a very low point but still he used language to hurt me. My child will witness such scenarios... at the time he was around 6 years of age.*

Even after obtaining a job, Kevin controlled Emily's freedom by not allowing her to drive. He commanded her to walk to and from work or take public transport.

*I think he has a strong controlling desire ... My husband values money a lot. He thinks that women are not worth of spending money on. She should do whatever he wants her to do.*

In addition, Kevin was bad tempered and easily angered towards Emily and the children whenever they refused to comply with his demand. As a form of punishment, sometimes he would command Emily and the children to walk home after the church service, a walk of approximate an hour. Due to the long term effects of abuse and control by Kevin, Emily was scared to reveal certain truth even when she was aware that was wrong.

Kevin's violence towards Emily took on different forms after arriving in New Zealand. Emily believed it was because they have been given advice by a friend that New Zealand is different from China; one must be careful not to threaten or attack people or otherwise might be departed back to China. At the time, Emily and Kevin had not obtained Permanent Residency, although, this wasn't a concern to Emily as she thought they could go back to China if things didn't work out in New Zealand.

Emily pointed out that Kevin will “*use the child as a way to let off his anger and attack the child.*” There were two major incidents that have especially scarred Emily emotionally. The first incident occurred after they had been living in New Zealand for 5 months. One day Kevin was extremely angry and started physically

disciplining Mike, then aged 10 years, by punching him with his fists “*anywhere on the body*”. Mike was hurt badly so he started crying out loud. The commotion was overheard by a kind-hearted neighbour. This elderly Westerner lady knocked on the window of the bedroom persistently, to make sure that Mike was okay. Kevin answered the neighbour by saying everything was fine. Then, he attempted to silence Mike by saying if the police were called he would no longer have his parents around. Emily realised later that she also helped to down play the incident by disguising Kevin’s abuse as joke to the neighbour.

*I was afraid something would happen.... I was afraid that [my husband] will get into trouble.*

As we will see later, this reluctance to involve the police relates to Emily’s earlier experience with fear of the authorities and the police in China. Often after revealing information about the domestic violence incidents, Emily would try to explain and justify Kevin’s abusive behaviour. Emily believes that a part of the reason that accounted for Kevin’s violence and abuse a malfunction of personality - “*there is some part of his personality that is deficit.*” In certain Asian immigrant communities, the common view that abusive Asian men are sick or mentally ill are often used to justify their violent behaviour and consequently minimises the severity of domestic violence (Rimonte, 1991).

### ***The crisis violent incident***

Under the pressure from church friends, Kevin allowed Emily to learn to drive so she has obtained her driving licences at last. At home, Kevin continued to express discontentment and frustration towards his family as he believed that he was doing “*hard labour*” in New Zealand in comparison to the glamorous job that he had in China. Emily said:

*I was very careful; I lived on my tip toes, as I was constantly preparing myself as if some sort of explosion would occur in any given moment.*

One day at home after dinner, Kevin teased son Mike, then aged 12 years, by asking him to check a message on his phone and then turned the phone off when Mike was about to approach the phone. Mike was insulted by Kevin’s deliberate

act. Emily tried to calm down the situation. Later that night, Kevin insulted Mike by suggesting he wanted to become like the transgendered person on the radio. Mike got extremely angry and started to defend himself by swearing at Kevin. According to Emily, Mike's anger and rage was fuelled by the accumulated effects from years of physical discipline by Kevin. A fight broke out between the two. Mike knew he was young and not able to win the fight so he grabbed a knife out of the kitchen draw. Kevin also grabbed a chair and he said to Mike repeatedly: *"I will beat you to death. I must beat you till death."* During the incident, Kevin was also swearing at Emily and blaming her by saying:

*The reason why we have today's incident is because of you! You as a mother educate the son to behave like this and taught him to kill me.*

Emily was devastated and in an emotional turmoil. She shed a lot of tears. She had tears in her eyes when she was telling me the story. She begged her husband and her son to think about the consequences of the fight if it has continued. She recalled the expression on her 3 years old son's face who was watching in silence the whole time – *"it was pure horror"*.

### **Help offered by Christian friends**

Later that evening, Emily went to a church gathering at a church member's house with her children. Secretly, she prepared spare clothes for the children and herself knowing she shouldn't return home that night. Kevin was extremely agitated and angry. To calm him down and ensure that she and the children could safely escape, Emily promised Kevin she would not disclose the incident to outsiders. Once out of the danger zone, Emily realised that she could hardly drive as her hands were trembling so hard. Then, Emily realised the extent of Mike's injuries. There were blood stains on his upper body from the scratch marks caused by Kevin. Even today there is a deep scar on his body.

Once they arrived at a gathering which was near their house, a sister from church noticed something was out of the ordinary and approached Emily. Emily couldn't bear it anymore so she disclosed the physical violence and psychological abuse by Kevin to this Sister. Emily had tears in her eyes, when she recalled this incident.

Later that night when Emily rang back home to check whether Kevin has calmed down. He threatened her by saying: *“I won’t want you to come back. Go and die if you want!”*

This sister from church prepared a room at her place for Emily and the children to stay then she asked Emily whether she wish to call the police about the incident. When Emily asked her for advice, she recommended calling the police. However, Emily noted:

*I’m afraid to call the police. I couldn’t imagine what the police will be like. I came from China, and I know the police are terrible. They will harm people.*

At the suggestion of the sister they called in a preacher who Emily knew and they started praying. Eventually, they have derived at the option of calling the police. Emily expressed that:

*However, I still couldn’t go over that barrier. I asked whether something could happen to test the situation before I call the police.*

After praying further, they realised that there was a Kiwi brother from church who was a policeman. This brother agreed to assess the situation for Emily before making a formal report. After visiting Kevin, accompanied by the preacher and another church lady, the policeman was convinced that Emily must call the police. According to Emily, he could see that there was something not right with Kevin, it’s like *“he was crazy”*. Besides, noted the brother, Kevin would not be able to attend anger management course if the police were not called.

Three days after the incident, the police were called. This police brother rang someone from the police station to come over to the house to file a police report. While the police did investigate Kevin’s violence towards his son, it is noteworthy that they fail to investigate his abuse towards Emily.

### ***Contradictory views from Christians***

During these events, Emily also disclosed her domestic violence situation to an Asian sister from a second, Chinese, church that she was attending.

Simultaneously, she had conversations about her situation with the Pastor from that church. In the first instance, the pastor praised her by suggesting what she did was a “good” thing as Kevin “needs correcting”. However, later on during a private phone conversation the Pastor judged and condemned Emily for what she did as he believed that she shouldn’t have reported the matter to the police.

*My Pastor said that I am not a good woman and my son should go to jail... Later on, the Pastor started to spread my story to other people at church by telling them how bad I was.*

By contrast, the Asian sister from the same church was extremely helpful towards Emily. She gave Emily her 24hour contact number; offered to be there for Emily whenever she needed and to take her wherever she needed to go. By standing for what she believes was being a true helper and spreading God’s love to one’s fellow sister, Emily believes that the sister has “suffered [verbal and emotional] attacks from the pastor”. She was ordered by the Pastor not to help or interfere with Emily’s family matters.

Emily believed that it was a “learning process” for her to be able to share that part of her story to a stranger – the researcher. Emily’s experience with the Pastor was an eye opener for her to realise that not all church leaders were trustworthy. She has gained more confidence; she has learnt critically analysing a situation before taking action herself.

*I have had misunderstandings about Church. I thought Pastors were perfect...Due to all of these, I can be stronger. Because when you sorting out these matters, you are not complying with what others want so you have to think first then take action yourself.*

### **Access to statutory intervention and help services**

Under the help of the Asian Sister and her family, Emily was able to gain access to legal intervention. They connected Emily to a community lawyer who applied legal aid for her as she didn’t have a job at the time. The lawyer has asked detailed questions about Emily’s and her child’s family violence experiences. After learning that Emily only received \$100 per week of living cost from Kevin, the

lawyer helped Emily to obtain more finances from Kevin for her and her children. With the help of the lawyer, an application was made for a protection order.

Emily was granted a temporary (without notice) Protection Order. Kevin didn't oppose the decision and the temporary became a permanent one. Kevin was outraged as *"he has never tasted what it was like for someone else to oppose him."* The protection order had non-contact conditions which Kevin must comply, such as, not to contact or disturb Emily; not to contact or visit the children.

Kevin was ordered to attend an anger management course which he refused to do at first. He believed that there was no rationale for him to be sent to the course but and if he needed to attend then Emily should too. He also said to the police that *"it has nothing to do with you that I hit my child"*. Kevin strongly believed that being the father of the child and a husband to Emily; he was entitled to do whatever he wanted with them – *"it was a family matter."*

### ***Experiences with counselling services***

As ordered by the court, Emily has been to counselling services. In the first instant, she was provided with a Mandarin speaking counsellor, whom Emily didn't find as helpful. Emily said: *"All she did was comforting me. There was no touch [as referring to being touched on the inside]."*

Although, her friends were recommending her to see an Asian counsellor as it should be more beneficial for her due to the cultural similarities.

While waiting for another counsellor, Emily attended a few Christian orientated counselling sessions with her son Mike. Then, Emily was provided with a female counsellor of Pacific Island descent. Emily found this counsellor particularly helpful as she has similar domestic violence experiences to Emily. The counsellor would encourage Emily by pointing out that she is *"not strong enough"* to make or stand firm by her decisions. Emily found such comment helpful as it gave her guidance to take firm decisions and to make changes that was important for her when dealing with the abuse. Knowing that Emily attends church, she also passes on notes with Bible verses which would empower her. Emily recalls, *"She*

*will say be strong all the time. You are not strong enough. You are not strong enough.”*

A turning point for Emily came with a comment that Mike made to his school teacher: *“My mum is getting stronger and stronger.”* This led Emily to realise how disempowered she had been in the eyes of her son and that she has made great progress towards empowerment. It is worth noting that Emily found Mike’s school principal and teachers understanding and supportive towards her situation and even paid home visits.

### **Threats and intimidation after separation**

While waiting for trial at the criminal court, Kevin continued to ring up people wanting to know Emily’s whereabouts, in breach of the Protection Order – *“He was losing his mind trying to find me.”* At the time Emily was still staying at the church sister’s place. The couple was concerned that there was still potential danger for Emily and the children if the husband did eventually track them down. So they have looked up for a nearby refuge.

A social worker accompanied her and helped her to settle in at the shelter. Emily stayed at this refuge for about a week before leaving as her son desperately wanted to attend school. Emily recalled that her son was in a traumatic state when they arrived at the shelter – *“My [child] couldn’t let go off me when we arrived, she will get scared if she wasn’t holding on to me.”*

Eventually, Kevin tracked down a church sister. He begged her to ring Emily and she did. This person pleaded with Emily to speak to Kevin as *“he was crying sorrowfully”*. Emily stood her ground and refused to talk to Kevin.

At the same time, the lawyer has applied for a Parenting Order for Emily which was granted, making her the primary care giver of the children. Later, Kevin was granted once a week visitation time with the children under the supervision of a third party while Emily was also present. This third person was Emily’s friend. Although Emily felt safe during the visitation, Kevin obtained her mobile number

and started to call her and threaten her online. Emily reported Kevin as saying things like:

*Do you know what the consequences will be once you divorce me? You are an aged woman with two children. Do you believe that someone else will marry you? You can't even find a job, don't you think you will become a burden... Look at how free I am. Without the children, I'm more relaxed. I can go back to China and find as many wives as I please.*

Emily notified her lawyer and her friends of Kevin's harassment. He eventually stopped calling her. However, he continued the intimidation and control over Emily during court hearings that occurred on several occasions. When Emily was about to enter the courtroom for the first time, Kevin stared at her by giving her an "evil" look. Emily's whole body became weak and she could barely stand still. However, the support of her Christian friend made a big difference. She offered to pray with Emily so she was able to face the situation. In addition, when the judge was asking Kevin whether he was pleading guilty for what he did. Kevin pointed to Emily and shouted in front of the judge that she was guilty too. The power of such tactics remains:

*... His one glare continues to control my whole life. Only I can fully comprehend the implications of such glare... I was very sacred... all of my life I was willing to be controlled because I'm traditional.*

#### ***Back together after separation***

By then, Emily was convinced that she wanted to be divorced. Mike was also in support of his mother's decision to leave his father to make a new start. Once again Kevin started to manipulate her. At one point, Kevin started to plead with Emily not to file for a divorce. He begged her by saying that he really missed his young son and needed a family. He couldn't find a better wife like Emily as she has such good personality and provides good education to the children. During visitation time, Kevin would try to give Emily hugs and pats her on the back, gestures she believed were designed to win her back.

*I have never heard of him begging me in the past so my heart was softened... So it looks as though he is turning for the good.*

At the end, Emily wrote a pleading letter to the court and that she wanted to give Kevin another opportunity. She stated that Kevin has changed for the better after the anger management course. Secondly, the children need a family and she needs a family. Also, Kevin needed a family too as he didn't want to be divorced. She could see that "*he has a heart of repentance... to start all over again.*" Emily also mentioned cultural differences in her letter as a plea for Kevin. In China, as a child, Kevin had been severally beaten by his father while hanging on a beam in the roof for the whole night. She thought this might explain his violence to the court.

As a result of her letter, Kevin's two charges were dropped and only the charge of intimidation remained. There are several reasons for Emily's action. Firstly, she was concerned that her husband would go to jail due to his initial criminal charges. Secondly, Emily is afraid of "*trouble making*". Emily's traumatic childhood experiences play a major role in such thought pattern as she is constantly reminded of the severe consequence that comes with "*trouble making*". For example, she has witnessed her father been physically punished by the Chinese government during Cultural Revolution.

### **Lessons learnt and positive changes**

At the time of the interview, Emily was still suffering the long term emotional effects from her experiences such as weepiness and being "*afraid of the dark*". However, Emily believed that she has gained more confidence to stand up for herself since been back together with her husband. Now if Kevin tries to control Emily, she will stand up for herself. She remains a "*positive person*" despite the violence and abuse that her and her child has endured. She could also see transitional changes in her husband as he is less persistent being the way he was.

More importantly, Emily has realised that child physical punishment is not acceptable in New Zealand, although corporal punishment is often perceived as a normal and common way of disciplining children within Chinese families (Yoshioka et al., 2000). Through her son's experience, she truly realised the negative implications of physical violence on children, which has caused

detrimental external and internal damage. As Emily become stronger and more confident in her, her relationship with her son has become closer as well.

Emily also believed that statutory intervention such as protection order is very helpful under emergencies and urgent circumstances to prevent further harm and danger. In the long run though, her friends are the most helpful form of help. They could offer instant help when needed. Also, she is empowered by her faith in God.

*To me, I have seen what true help looks like, they are not just words. Help from people streams from their heart - they use love. Where does love come from? They will say to me it's not me who helps you. Because I am a Christian so I will have to listen to God.*

However, at times social workers could act in a way that is less helpful by shifting the blame on to the woman for their abusive experience. On one particular occasion, the social worker commented to Emily that she had noticed that Chinese individuals who have experienced with domestic violence are often the ones with lower education level. She couldn't believe that a well-educated person like Emily also experienced domestic violence. Emily's reaction to such comments was:

*I felt like oh my God, what kind of a lady am I? I felt like I have been following him all the time and I didn't even know that I was wrong.*

Emily has been in contact with other Chinese couples who might also be in a domestic violent relationship. Emily mentioned that: "Most people would not step out of it." Women are often hindered by their spouse when they try to seek help. To women who have been through similar experiences, Emily noted that gaining self confidence is very important and to be able to share one's story is a way of showing that confidence.

*I think I'm still in transition from being very weak... Due to my weakness, his toughness has incorrectly overtaken me. So for me, one is still fairly weak if she is afraid to tell her story to others.*

## **Summary**

Emily's story involves multiple relationship dynamics within a typical Chinese family. Kevin's traditional cultural belief of male dominance is deeply embedded which gives him a sense of entitlement over his wife and children. During many years of marriage to Kevin, Emily has been repetitively controlled and abused by Kevin on a physical, emotional and financial level. A fear of "losing face" and the consequences from "trouble-making" has influenced Emily's decision to keep her story secret from her informal support networks and prevented her from taking legal actions against Kevin. After realising the severe consequences of the violence and abuse on her children, Emily took courage and sought help from trusted Christian friends in New Zealand. Emily's conception of domestic violence has shifted significantly since accessing service and assistance in New Zealand.

However, Emily was also being re-victimised by her church Pastor after taking statutory actions towards Kevin. Contrary to certain perceptions, Emily found help that she needed through counselling by a female Westerner counsellor. Statutory intervention such as permanent protection order has offered Emily an emergency remedy and protection for her and her children. Ultimately, it was her Christian friends who have offered continuous and "instant help" to her which made a huge difference to her life in the long run.

## Case Study Four: Ruby

### Background

Ruby, a 51 years old Chinese women and ex-husband Steven, both came from China where they lived for the first half of their lives. Steven migrated to New Zealand first, Ruby and their 9 year old son Luke followed after a few years.

There is huge family background difference for Ruby and Steven. Ruby came from a family with high-ranking officials which have provided her with a stable and comfortable lifestyle. She had good family upbringing which taught her about giving and sacrifice for others. Steven, on the other hand, was brought up in a working class family with several siblings. He had to work hard and strived to be successful from a young age. He realised the importance of money and material gains which could bring him a more comfortable and luxurious lifestyle.

Ruby believed that her marriage with Steven “*was built on sand*”. They were “*not like minded*” people. Ruby pursued Steven before they got married as she thought that he was a “gentleman” and someone that she could respect and look up to. She admired his talent and career mindedness. However, according to Ruby, Steven has always looked down on her. She thought that has a lot to do with the fact that she only has a primary school education whereas Steven has tertiary education with honours degrees.

Ruby’s initial understanding of domestic violence was greatly influenced by feudalism and Chinese traditional beliefs. Ruby’s comprehension of domestic violence has changed dramatically over time and she now has a more sophisticated view on violence. She stated:

*To be straight forward, in the past my understanding of domestic violence means 1+1=2, which means direct physical harm, violent behaviours and using force, these are classified as violent and abusive behaviours. I didn’t consider many of my ex-husband’s behaviour towards me as a form of abuse...I don’t have a clear concept; it is due the Chinese traditional ways of thinking. And the feudal society of the past has left scars in my mind. I actually think that psychological abuse is a serious form of ruin for human beings. In the past, I didn’t think of psychological abuse was a form of abuse but in reality, it can*

*cause such devastation for someone to reach death, the brink of death. So I think psychological abuse is more serious than flogging, physical violence...*

### **Domestic abuse in China**

Ruby's experience of domestic violence started early in the marriage life in China. There were a lot of ups and downs in their relationship. Part of the problem was the relationship between her and her mother-in-law as will be explained later.

Ruby believed that although she has negative personality traits such as "*easily tempered and get very angry*", she considers herself a "*down to earth, kind and very giving*" person. She would sacrifice her own needs in order to satisfy Stevens' whether its money, material things or whatever that she can give him.

One thing that Ruby thought was the "*breaking point*" for her relationship with Steven was their sexual relationship. Although Ruby regards it as a very private matter, she wanted to talk about it as she was convinced it was very important. Due to several reasons Ruby found it hard to bear when engaging in sexual activities with Steven. One reason was that whenever Steven tried to engage in sex with Ruby, she would feel "*very nervous*" and "*sore*" so she couldn't relax. Thus, there was a lack of harmony in sexual relationship between Ruby and Steven. Ruby even sought advice from her friends about how best to handle the situation. She used these "*kind measures to find excuses as [she] didn't want to hurt [his] feelings.*" Ruby continued to try to satisfy Steven's needs and even believed it was her fault when she failed to do so. Despite this, Steven still imposed sex on Ruby which Ruby complied with his demand. Ruby explained:

*So that is why I couldn't satisfy my husband's needs in that area. It is true as I feel it is weakness of mine...I couldn't do anything sometimes so I still have to comply with him. Thus why I don't feel it is a pleasurable matter, it is a painful matter to me sometimes. I feel even if I suffer, I will do my best to satisfy him as I loved him very much.*

Another reason was that Ruby has a chronic illness for which she had to be hospitalised several times a year. Steven was very annoyed about this as he thought by being with Ruby; she was his burden that failed to bring him

satisfaction. Due to Ruby's illness, she couldn't bring a lot of enjoyment for Steven. When Steven sees Ruby suffers from her illness, he will say to her: "*F\*\*\* you... You are a totally burden, a dag!...*".

Steven would leave Ruby and be gone for days without caring for her needs. Whenever Ruby tried to beg Steven to stay, he would reply with things like: "*Go to hell, go and die. You are sick all day long and there are no good times...*".

Thus, Ruby believed that it was inevitable that one day Steven might want to divorce her. As far as she was aware, Steven had other woman while being married to her. At the time, Ruby thought it was tolerable that Steven had other women and she was able to "*face it with the right attitude*".

## **Domestic abuse in New Zealand**

### *The initial stage*

Many years after Steven immigrated to New Zealand, he asked Ruby to move to New Zealand with their son Luke. Initially, Ruby thought it was a chance for her to improve herself and to establish a new beginning with Steven. She would not have imagined the pain and suffering that she had to endure for the following chapter of her life.

A few months after settling in New Zealand, Steven revealed to Ruby that he had another girl friend which Ruby continues to call her the "*wife*" as they were already living together behind Ruby's back. Ruby was dumbfounded. Steven demanded Ruby leave Luke under his care arguing that she didn't have the ability or financial capability to look after herself or her son in New Zealand. Then, Ruby realised that Steven's ulterior motive for allowing Ruby and Luke to immigrate to New Zealand was to keep Luke under his wings, to live with him and his new girl friend.

Although, Ruby had not obtained Permanent Residency at the time, she wanted to return to China and forget all the pain. Steven made it very hard for Ruby as well as Luke. He demanded that 9 years old Luke choose between his father and his mother. Ruby recalled it with tears that Steven spoke to Luke with things like:

*You must choose one. Do you want your mum or your dad?" ...  
For the sake of my child's future, I could sacrifice my pain. I  
thought he will have a good future in New Zealand. It was me  
reluctantly parting with what I treasured. I left because there  
was no ground for me to survive in New Zealand. I didn't have  
education or knows any English. My only choice was to go back  
and give up my residency here.*

Ruby returned to China but it was "a living death" for her as she deeply missed her child and she hoped that one day she might hear from Luke. A few months later, Luke rang Ruby. He was crying miserably on the phone because Steven's girlfriend demanded him to call her mother and Steven was swearing at Luke for not calling her. Luke missed Ruby a lot and wanted to live with her. Over the phone, Ruby asked for confirmation from Steven that she was allowed to take the child under her care and he agreed. However, that agreement came with several conditions. Ruby was willing to agree with whatever conditions Steven demanded as long as she could reunite with Luke. Thus, she returned to New Zealand and started a new life with Luke.

The abuse took shape in many forms. On one hand, Steven encouraged Ruby to believe that he and his girlfriend were Ruby's only helpers; he was her "Saviour". On the other hand, he not only controlled Ruby's freedom and financial access, he also emotionally abused and attacked her to the point that she was contemplating on taking her own life.

#### ***Ultimate control and emotional torture after returning to New Zealand***

Steven set up a separation in which he lived with his girlfriend while Ruby lived with Luke under Steven's oversight. That is, he provided very basic financial needs for Ruby and controlled how the finances were spent. Steven placed Ruby and Luke in a rundown rental property. He has given her and the child very primitive second-hand household facilities such as two single beds, a dining table, a few broken chairs and a rundown fridge. They were placed in an unfamiliar and unsafe environment as Ruby said that,

*... And also there were a lot of unsafe factors as the people  
around us were chaotic and cluttered. So I was very nervous all  
the time as I didn't know any English and was living on my own*

*with the child.*

Steve often demanded Ruby to live in “*hardworking and thrifty*” lifestyle. Later, he even refused to take Ruby with him to the supermarket as he told her she “*must learn to save money*”. Ruby was not given any money to spend at all.

*I never knew how to spent money and where can I spent money in New Zealand. He has not given me any money; there was no money in my pocket.*

Ruby explained that the deepest pain was the “*psychological abuse*” and “*psychological torture*”. Ruby was being controlled not only by Steven but his girlfriend. She was only allowed to do things with their approval, such as when to go to supermarket and what food to buy. Steven controlled and managed Ruby’s life in a way that made her felt she was “*living on handouts*” all the time. Ruby felt that

*I was living a life without moral quality and dignity... I had to swallow insult and humiliation in silence.*

Ruby was required by Steven to build a friendship with his girlfriend. He would force Ruby to comply with his demand by saying,

*Because now you must rely on me for living, my ‘wife’ is a [professional] so you must allow her to provide help to me as well...It’s all because out of respect for me! That is why she is helping you...*

On a more humiliating level, Steven demanded Ruby accompany him and his girlfriend to when they went out with their friends. Ruby believed that Steven staged the scene to show that it was Ruby’s freewill to allow Steven to live with his new girlfriend. It was purely for his self-esteem and dignity. “*That was the saddest part. That was his twisted mentality.*” In front of Steve’s friends, Ruby had to wear a happy mask and play nice to them. Whenever Ruby refused to go out with Steven and his friends by begging him, Steven would say things like:

*F\*\*\* you... You are relying on others to help you but you are so picky. What will happen to you if you go? Are you going to die or something?... What kind of virtues do you have? You have no qualifications and you look so ugly, you dressed like a country woman... You don’t know how to drive either. You are a total*

*trash! And you have so much to say. What sort of right do you have in saying whether you should go or not?*

There was another incident which left Ruby even more devastated and heartbroken. Steven's girlfriend tested Ruby by asking whether she was aware of the real reason her ex-husband wanted to leave her. She asked whether Ruby's sex life with Steven was not very co-ordinated. Then, she provoked Ruby by suggesting that her sex life with Steven was very harmonious. She told Ruby that a woman must be gentle towards her husband. Here, "gentle" means she must serve her husband well. Later, upon Ruby checked with Steven. He confirmed what his girlfriend has suggested by saying: "*She has qualification; she is gentle, very gentle. She is a real woman. I feel very happy to be with her my whole life.*" Despite this, during the separation period, Steven demanded sex with Ruby behind his new girlfriend's back on several occasions.

Steven and his girlfriend caused severe emotional trauma and "*psychological devastation*" to Ruby. Ruby found herself in deep despair. Several times, Ruby thought about ending her life. According to Ruby, the only reason that kept her alive at the time was the existence of her child. Like many abused woman, she began to internalise the abuse by believing that she was inadequate.

*That sort of torture for me was a living death...I was attacked my husband to the point where I believed that I was an ineffective person, a useless person... I didn't have confidence in myself. I was in despair. I felt I was a trash and a useless person. I felt I couldn't survive in this society. I thought it was my entire fault.*

Like Emily, Ruby was not provided with the opportunity to learn how to drive. Despite rain or wind, she and her son had to walk to school and back which would take about an hour. Ruby was further isolated by Steve as he refused to install a telephone in her flat. Ruby believed that it was because Steven was aware that she likes to make friends so by refusing to install telephone she could be cut off from her personal network.

One particular incident which left Ruby shaken and scared: one night, Luke had fallen sick with temperature. Ruby didn't know what to do as she doesn't have a phone. So, she decided to walk to Steven's house with Luke which took them 40

to 50 minutes. Near his house, they were chased by strangers in a car. They barely escaped the dangerous situation by running to their destination. After being awakened by the commotion, Steven greeted Ruby by swearing at her:

*You are a Fucking burden! You don't know how to do anything.  
You don't know English. You don't know how to drive. All day  
long you only create trouble; I will be burdened to death by you.*

After the continuous pleading by Luke, Steven eventually allowed Ruby to go to the hospital with them. Even after attending the hospital, Steven didn't provide any information to Ruby about the medical system in New Zealand, such as having access to a family doctor.

During the two years of manipulative control, emotional abuse and torture, Ruby felt like she was in “house arrest”. She was a single mother with a young son in a foreign land. Ruby was extremely vulnerable as she was isolated from the outside world and cut off from possible access to intervention. She was being manipulated into believing that her only helpers were her ex-husband and his girlfriend.

*I was been completely sealed off by my environment. I could  
only circle within my environment in those two years.*

Two years since the verbally agreed separation, Steven gave Ruby an ultimatum to leave the flat. He blamed her by saying that she “can't just get something for nothing.” Besides, he said, he doesn't have the finances to look after her anymore.

At the same time, Steven took Ruby to a law firm to sign a separation agreement which she doesn't even understand. She complied with his request anyway. Later she understood that she was signing for agreeing there was no financial or property dispute after the divorce is settled. She is the sole primary care giver of the child.

*I couldn't understand what those documents meant at the time.  
So, I didn't know what I was signing for.*

### **Help from kind-hearted friends**

During the two years of domestic abuse, one of Steven's best friends couldn't bear to just be an onlooker. She was “compassionate” and “sympathetic” towards Ruby.

She visited Ruby privately and revealed Steven's real financial situation which was the very different from what he had it portrayed to be. She advised Ruby "not to be too good" and that she should seek legal help to gain assets from Steven. However, for Ruby the reality was different. She was trapped and extremely isolated. She believed that there was nothing that she could do to alter the situation.

*I seriously thought that because he doesn't even have conscience, so even if I do try would he give it to me?... I felt I was really weak and didn't know English or have had the ability to do it. More importantly, I felt money and material things are outside of life. So I didn't want to fight for it.*

Eventually, Ruby felt that she had finally been set free by Steven. She got to know a Chinese lady who was the mother of her son's classmate. This lady advised Ruby about the social welfare systems in New Zealand and free English classes available. Ruby discovered that she was eligible for an emergency benefit. Under this friend's assistance, Ruby gained part-time employment in a factory.

*It was after we got formally divorced that I believed I was totally free. I was the bird in the cage and I did fly out. Then, I got to know this wonderful New Zealand; the wonderful nature of this country. New Zealand was a country with good social welfare. It is a merciful country and treats people with love... There were proper legislations and I was able to enjoy the social resources.*

In addition, Ruby received tremendous support and assistance from her Christian friends. There were three people that Ruby specifically mentioned: a Chinese Christian lady who offered to help with Ruby's English needs and to assist with her son's school matters. A Malaysian sister helped her to purchase a car and assisted in obtaining her driver's licences. Another elderly gentleman would take Ruby to church regularly, to give her the chance to be loved by all the "outstanding Christians" there. Ruby said that:

*I'm really thankful to these angels. I'm thankful for a lifetime. I was not a Christian at the time but how they have treated me became a lifetime encouragement for me. So, I was willing to be like them and to give love to other people as well.*

On the flip side, Ruby revealed that there was some disappointment when she followed people's advice to pray to God for the desire of her heart. Ruby was told that God is omnipotent and He listens to all our pain; whatever needs that she had He is able to provide for her. Ruby constantly prayed for her husband to change his heart and return to her. The reality was far different from what she has hoped for.

### **Reasons for not seeking help**

The extent of “*psychological torture*” by Ruby's ex-husband and the entrapment by her isolated environment significantly impacted on her perceived help-seeking strategies. Ruby didn't call the police or seek any statutory intervention after been set free by her ex-husband. She had no concept in her mind to take such actions as she believed it was a part of her life that she was destined to experience. Literature suggested that fatalistic perception prevents abused Asian women from seeking outside help (Lee, 2000; Yoshioka et al., 2001).

*Even until today, I don't have such concept. I believe it is something that happened naturally and it was something that I should experience. It might be my fate...It was a part of my destiny that I had to experience.*

Ruby was asked whether she would seek help if she was aware of community based help services available to her at the time of the abuse. Ruby mentioned that there are no community based family violence service or well implemented social welfare system in China. So, it had not registered in her mind that she should seek formal assistance.

*The accessible boundary was very limited when we first arrived here. As for myself I was too weak.*

Ruby believed that she has been deceived by her ex-husband as he didn't give her any choice or provide her with necessary information to survive on her own. He manipulated her into believing that he was her “Saviour”, her only “helper”. However, Ruby stressed that she was able to prevent the continuation of domestic violence if she was given additional information to access intervention in the first place.

Like many victims of domestic abuse, to some extent Ruby internalised the abuse by believing that it was her own fault that she couldn't escape the abuse. Being in a new country without English, she was afraid to step out of the false comfort zone that Steven forged. Ruby responded:

*If I knew the state could offer help to us, why should I stay under the torture? It was definitely psychological abuse and psychological torture. I could have break free from it... It was because I didn't know English; I couldn't drive and had no friends. I was literally and legally invisible... If my husband had integrity, he should have let me choose. I was a blind and crippled person. A useless person. It made me to reach the point of wanting to take my own life. He gives me disrespect and disguised control... Also, I felt it was my own problem when he told me not to have any friends. I was too weak. Also I was afraid. I had no English. Firstly, I didn't have any confidence in myself... So I didn't have any thoughts about whether I should find some friends and ask them about it. Which friends could help me? If I tell them the whole story, will they be able to help me?*

After Ruby obtained Permanent Residency in New Zealand, life was still very difficult due to her chronic health condition. Ruby thought her only option was to return to China with her child if it wasn't for the financial support from social welfare. On a societal level, Ruby wished she had given more information about community based services such as refuges and shelters.

*Who would have thought that New Zealand was different? ... I think the state should have more promotions in this area. Like promotions on the newspaper or on the radio in Chinese... If I knew about shelters then I would have considered.*

### **Chinese cultural and gendered beliefs**

According to Ruby, the idea of feudalism and traditional gendered beliefs imposed on Chinese women set the foundation for her abusive relationship. Being a virtuous wife to one's husband means total submission and obedience which prioritise the needs of the husband before her own. Ruby considers herself an up-right person and often spoke her mind as she wanted equality between men and women. As a result, she was seen as a "non-virtuous" wife who has committed

“high treason” not only in her husband’s eyes but also in the eyes of her mother-in-law. Ruby explained by using a Chinese parable:

*A good wife means completely satisfying her husband’s needs; whether it’s financially or physically. If he needs you, you’ll have to satisfy him...The man is the sky*

Here, Ruby is referring to a traditional parable. The sky refers to a man’s indomitable spirit. The corollary is that “The woman is the ground” as she gives birth to a seed, yielding fruit. The sky rules the ground.

In the same light, to be recognised as a good wife and daughter-in-law one needs to care for and be obedient to the parents-in-laws (Zhan & Montgomery, 2003). Ruby was silenced by her mother-in-law. To voice her thoughts, she would have been perceived as a disrespectful and dishonouring; been considered as “*not a filial piety daughter-in-law*”.

More importantly, Ruby believed in general there is a lack of awareness for human rights in people’s mind. Chinese are socialised into deeply embedded cultural norms and beliefs. For example, often the husband views his wife and his child as his “*private property*”. He has an ownership over them, so he can do whatever to them as it suits him. As Ruby told me, “*Women are men’s clothes which can be taken off or be putted on whenever they please*”. The fulfilment of the husband’s needs and desires is at the expenses of the wife’s dissatisfaction, pain and suffering. Such belief of entitlement could be reflected in the husband’s demand of sexual satisfaction from the wife. Ruby noted:

*They are his things and they belong to him. They are his property so he can tread on them, he has entitlement.... [Men] also think that sex is like; we women are men’s tools. If they want to use this tool today then you must give it to him... You don’t even have the right to say no. If you did then the relationship will fracture. This is the pressure that it gives you – either its broken relationship or you have to be obedient.*

Ruby believed that a couple’s marital relationship should be based on emotional bonds and spiritual connections. For Ruby, having similar mind sets and meeting emotional needs are far more important than physical satisfactions for a married couple.

Ruby felt it was necessary to emphasise that even after Steven left, he continued to curse and abuse her future by saying to her:

*In New Zealand who will want you? Someone like you with no education, no looks and no abilities. If you are bright enough, you should live on your own with the child. Then, if one day you have trouble you can still come and find me... if you beg in front of my door step, I might give you a bowl of rice.*

Ruby is extremely thankful for her friends who provided assistance to help her break free from the painful situation that she was in and allowed her to “see hope and a future”. Most importantly, Ruby’s second marriage has given her confidence and hope in establishing a non-abusive intimate relationship. She married a Westerner man who is the soul mate of her life. According to Ruby, they have a solid and unbreakable marriage. This new partner is very considerate, giving, patient and understanding towards Ruby. He has taken up a lot of financial responsibilities for the family. He has also encouraged Ruby to find her own voice and values in life such as by finding her self-employment opportunities.

*My life’s real turning point was that I was able to find a similar minded Westerner partner. From the bottom of my heart, I want to say that he helped me to turn my misery into happiness... I was able to find myself again and develop my capabilities. Also he allowed me to realise the values and meanings of my existence... I would say that I am the happiest woman in this world.*

### **Becoming a form of help**

Many years have passed since Ruby’s abusive marital relationship ended. Memories are still vivid and the pain is still deeply felt. Even during the interview, Ruby was often emotional and teary. She reiterated that the abusive relationship she endured in New Zealand was the most painful chapter of her life.

*I was living a life of darkness, the psychological torture; the life from hell on earth that type of life I have experienced. Whenever I think of this, I feel like a knife being twisted in my heart and I’m terribly upset.*

Ruby hoped that her experiences would become a form of help for women who have had similar experience of domestic violence. Especially, new migrants

arrived in the country and those who doesn't have any family or friends around. She wants to warn women that once a husband has betrayed you and manipulated you into believing that he is the only helper available, "*he will not offer you the right guidance.*"

Ruby stressed that being positive and motivated are important characters to develop for abused women. Learning from her example, Ruby was strong enough to face such torture and survived her abusive relationship by not giving up and keeping an open mind. She was motivated to keep living until today for the sake of her child.

Moreover, Ruby believed that there is a lack of discourses and sufficient information on the topic of Chinese women's experience of domestic violence in the society. Ruby's comment below echoes the hopes of other women in this research, which is to become a form of help by sharing their stories,

*It needs to be called for and it needs voices. Through our experiences of domestic violence, I feel we should contribute our part. Through our cases, if we are able to appeal to others, and to this society for a just and positive effect. For people [abusers] to gain conscience or they might want to repent. I feel this is what the society needs – a call for a just voice.*

## **Summary**

Ruby's case represents the marginalised Chinese migrant women with domestic violence experiences that are unreported to authorities due to the many interpersonal, cultural, and environmental barriers that they face. Her experience of domestic violence includes both emotional/psychological abuse and sexual abuse by her ex-husband; coupled with the insults and humiliation by Steven's girlfriend. Like some victims of domestic violence, Ruby has internalised the abuse which made her reach the brink of death at different points during the abusive relationship. Seeking help outside of her immediate environment was beyond her thoughts. Fortunately, Ruby was able to fight back with self-resistance, optimism and persistence. Her son was the driving force for her to continue living. Her circle of close friends provided her vital living tools and stepping stones to establish a new life after the abusive relationship ended. Most importantly, Ruby

has found her identity, her voice and her values in life in her second marriage with new husband.

## Case Study Five: Zoe

### Background

Zoe, 46 years of age, and her husband Eric are both from Hong Kong. They have two children together: an older teenager son, Peter, and a younger daughter Lily, 6 years of age. They immigrated to New Zealand as business migrants about 15 years ago. Zoe and Eric used to own a food retail business but later decided to sell it.

During the courting phase of their relationship in their teenager years, Eric was very caring towards Zoe but at the same time he was over-protective of her. Zoe commented that “at the time, it was the sweet romantic period when you started to build the relationship with someone” So although Zoe had noticed Eric’s jealous nature earlier in their relationship, she thought it was because Eric really loved her. Zoe believed that although Eric was not a very capable person he treated the family well and provided for them.

### Defining domestic violence

Eric’s jealous nature continued after the family immigrated to New Zealand. He was controlling towards Zoe and did not allow her to take up personal interests such as dancing or playing mah-jong (a Chinese tile game). In Eric’s eyes, it was unacceptable for Zoe to talk to males alone or even being the only passenger in a car with a male acquaintance. Zoe’s domestic violence experiences occurred 8 years ago. Due to the tragic ending to her story - Eric’s suicide - she would rather not to remember certain details. Zoe believed that domestic violence indicates:

*Ah...Like husband beating up the wife. Swearing, that is also violence. But my case is slightly different, it is more psychological and the implications on you. He doesn't have to smack you but does something that makes you feel very uncomfortable. Outsiders will not notice this.*

At the beginning, Zoe didn’t recognise that a lot of Eric’s behaviour was abuse. It was after the major incident that Zoe was advised by the family violence advocate and a social worker that she was a victim of domestic violence and that Eric was

using controlling and emotionally manipulative tactics even before the major incident.

*I know that my husband cares for me a lot so he was jealous but I didn't think it was domestic violence. The counsellor has told me that that was a type of violence too. I thought because he loved me a lot so he cared for me so that's why he didn't like me talking to other [men]. Yeah so before I was stupid, I didn't know that was domestic violence...*

### **The trigger of domestic violence**

Zoe started describing her and her family's relationship with one of her nearby neighbours, another immigrant from Hong Kong, a lady named Yan, who had two children of similar age to Zoe's children. At the start, Zoe and Yan had a good relationship with each other. One day, Yan revealed to Zoe that she was having a marital problem with her husband as he decided to leave her. Later, Zoe told her family about Yan's situation as she felt sorry for Yan. Eric "*had a big reaction to her case*" and suggested that the family should offer help to her. Soon after, Zoe invited Yan over to have meals in her family on a regular basis. Eric would often offer to accompany Yan home and to make sure that she was home safe. Sometimes, Eric would stay behind longer than what was needed. As time passes there were more frequent visits to Yan's place by Eric. Sometimes, he would not return home until after midnight.

One day, Eric suggested to Zoe that he would like Yan to be his adopted sister. Zoe didn't like the idea and she thought that was strange; it was unnecessary to label each other as sisters or family members. However, Eric persisted with this idea and he started to change – "*whatever that he does, he would prioritise her*". Eric was "*acting crazy*" as he was concerned that Yan might reconcile with her husband. He was convinced that he must help Yan to get out of her relationship. It was really hurtful for Zoe to bear. Eric cared about Yan a lot and would say things like "*I miss her very much and I care about her...*" to Zoe. Once, Zoe even witnessed Eric embracing Yan and comforting her when she was sad and upset. Whenever Zoe tried to advise Eric about the situation, he would say things like: "*This lady I must help... You don't know. She is in a pitiful situation and you not even helping her.*"

It is worth noting that, Eric has never admitted or confessed to Zoe that he has had an affair with Yan. However, as we will see later that Zoe knew that her husband has “crossed the line” with Yan but he didn’t want to admit it in front of her.

## **Interventions**

### ***Formal help***

After a while, Eric went to visit the family doctor as Zoe suggested that his behaviour was out of the ordinary. The GP suggested Eric and Zoe visit a psychiatrist. Zoe disclosed her situation to the psychiatrist when she felt necessary:

*Before he was extremely caring towards me and he treated me very well... Afterwards, it was like he doesn't care and he was ignoring me. He won't listen to [me] on the phone. At the time, I use to cry heaps at home. No one could help me.*

As Zoe recalls, both she and Eric received a diagnosis of depression and were prescribed medication. The psychiatrist recommended Zoe and Eric attend couple counselling. During this time, Eric started to intimidate Zoe and the children at home:

*He starts to take out all the knives that he had, like hiking knife. He really loved to collect knives, that sort of things. Before, I thought it was his hobby. There were heaps at home like guns, not real ones but air guns. He started to take them out and wave them around. I was very scared. Those knives were very sharp.*

It is worth mentioning that even though Zoe had seen the Chinese Lifeline advertised in the Chinese newspaper, she did not feel it was necessary to use such a service.

### ***Informal help***

Zoe felt Eric’s behaviour was a “*very big threat*” to her and her children. She hired a Feng Shui to see whether there was Feng Shui problems within the family home that had caused the abnormal behaviour of her husband. After shifting many house hold items around, there was no improvement.

Zoe also visited the Buddhist temple on a regular basis hoping to seek a remedy for her situation. She was afraid of Eric's unpredictable behaviour so she disclosed her domestic violence experience to a temple elder. He asked Zoe to abstain from eating meat during moon festival. However, Eric refused the help offered by the temple elder.

*At the time I thought that he was being possessed by evil spirit so that's why I went to the Buddhist temple and tried to sort it out. But it was not effective.*

While Zoe visited the temple every Sunday, Eric met up with Yan. He also spent a lot of money on phone conversations with Yan. Zoe believed that Eric's condition has gotten worse as he started to wave knives around while she was driving. Eric was extremely bad tempered at home and started swearing at their older son. This created a lot of fear for Zoe, especially when Eric intimidated her by placing a weapon beside their bed at night.

*Even when we were sleeping, he will place knife beside our bed. I asked him why does he need to do that and how can I fall asleep like that? He said that what are you afraid of? Are you scared that I might kill you? ... I couldn't sleep well and often wake up in the middle of the night... Sometimes, when I woke up I will see him sitting right next to me and staring at me. I was really scared. I asked what he was doing. He said I'm measuring your body. He was crazy... So what can you do?*

### **The police involvement**

The police were called a few times during abusive episodes. The first time was after Eric was released from the psychiatric hospital which I will discuss later. The neighbour heard the commotion created by a big argument in Zoe's house and called the police when she witnessed Zoe fall on the floor across the road and thought Eric had pushed her. When the police arrived, Zoe pretended that everything was fine.

*I want to protect him and didn't want him to go back to the psychiatric hospital again. So, I said it was all fine and we can sort it out ourselves. That time, the female policewoman came too. She had given me the advice that your husband is sick not that he doesn't treat you well. We will try to help him. She advised me not to hate him.*

Although the police were called several times, Zoe was not advised to apply for a protection order nor was she referred to a family violence agency. It could be that the police were not fully aware what was really happening behind the scene. However, from Zoe's comments, it is obvious that the policewoman was given some indications of Eric's behaviour towards Zoe. Zoe was given the advice by the police that Eric's sickness somewhat given him the justification to mistreat her. The police officer's (mis) interpretation of the situation could be the reason why Zoe's case was not fully investigated or taken seriously.

Another time, the police were called when Eric was drunk and he walked out of the home. Zoe was concerned for his safety so she called the police. It turned out that Eric was deliberately hiding himself nearby the house to test what Zoe would do. When he spotted the police's arrival, he rang Zoe and accused her of calling the police.

All of these could serve to paint a picture that was far from the truth, that Eric was "sick" and Zoe was the caregiver who needs to look after him. In reality, Zoe was the victim of domestic abuse that was been inflicted by Eric.

### ***More formal help***

When Zoe couldn't bear it anymore, she told her psychiatrist about the escalated situation at home. The psychiatrist referred Eric's case to the psychiatric institution. Then, a man from the psychiatric institution paid a visit to the family home. During the family meeting, Eric became extremely agitated and was adamant not to allow Yan to reconcile with her husband. This staff decided to contact the police and escort Eric to the psychiatric institution. After initially refusing to go, Eric went with them.

In the following days after Eric was admitted into the psychiatric institution, Zoe paid a visit to him. Eric kneeled down in front of Zoe and begged her saying: "*please let me adopt this sister. I cannot live without her.*" Zoe couldn't accept such a demand. She told Eric that he is able to have this woman if she was able to divorce him. However, Eric refused to accept Zoe's suggestion. Zoe didn't feel comfortable about forcing the issue of a divorce so she didn't persist.

Then, Eric requested to be released from the psychiatric institution by submitting an application to the court to prove that he was not insane. Although Zoe was extremely concerned for her safety and the unthinkable consequences upon Eric's release, there was nothing that she could do at the time. The judge ruled in Eric's favour and he was able to leave the institution.

Eric's intimidation with knives continued after he was discharged from the institution. Zoe and the children were extremely afraid for their lives. Even worse, Eric would threaten Zoe by saying that he will take his own life if Zoe prevented him from adopting Yan as a sister. As became clear in our conversation, Zoe felt powerless in the face of such threats. She couldn't face the possibility of feeling responsible for Eric's death should he act on the threats.

Zoe's counsellor discussed options available to her to get out of her situation if she wanted to: for example, to escape to a shelter for a period of time.

Zoe believed that follow-up services should have been offered once Eric was being released from the psychiatric hospital by the court's decision. The hospital should have provided follow-up care and continued check-ups for Eric so he was being monitored. Also, Zoe believes that the police should have been more equipped with insights of domestic violence situations.

*Although [Eric] was seen a psychiatrist but how come they [the state] didn't follow things up... How could the police believe that nothing would have happened when I told them that I was fine? They didn't take up the responsibility. They should have come more often to check.*

### **First stay at the refuge**

Zoe talked to her children about leaving and they thought it was a good idea. This was enough for her to leave Eric and go into refuge, taking the children with her. The family violence advocate introduced an Asian social worker to Zoe. The social worker took Zoe and her children to a refuge. Zoe vaguely recalled it was a shelter similar to Women's Refuge. Zoe stayed at the refuge for at least 4 -5 days. Eric made continuous phone calls to Zoe to find out her whereabouts. At first, Zoe turned the phone off as she was emotional exhausted.

The refuge provided Zoe a safe place to stay. However, she was in a vulnerable position when she needed to leave the refuge to sort out her daily needs such as food and money matters. Zoe explained that she has received “*special benefit*” from Winz such as food vouchers to help her to get by. She had to leave the refuge premises to go to the supermarket and swap food with these vouchers.

*I was extremely miserable. How could I have reached such state that I have to live on hand-outs? [The refuge staffs] are very nice people. Originally, I was hoping that I didn't need to go out at all as I was afraid to encounter my husband if I did go out. I have to drive my own car.*

In the meantime, Zoe started to have second thought about Eric and wanted to give him another chance to turn things around as she felt sorry for him. When Eric phoned her again, she answered the phone. Eric was begging Zoe for forgiveness – “*I won't do that again and I will change, please come back. I really missed you guys.*” Zoe's reaction was:

*...I thought about my two children. What will happen to them in the future? I felt maybe it was partly that I was too emotional and just walked out like that...it looks like he wants to change and he still want to keep this marriage. Every woman wishes the family to be complete. And you wouldn't wish your children to be fatherless.*

Zoe asked Eric to change his ways and not to meet up with Yan once she and the children returned home. On one hand, Eric promised Zoe that he would change as he appreciated everyone in the family. On the other hand, Eric became angry and was swearing at Peter the very first night when they have returned home. Again Eric was saying that he will kill himself and described to Zoe how he might take his life: “*he'll shoot himself to death or stab himself to death.*”

### **Disclosure to family and friends**

Living so far away from her family in Hong Kong, Zoe kept her domestic violence experiences from them. Zoe was very isolated. She was the only person from her natal family living in New Zealand. She did not want to burden her family with bad news about her marriage. She concealed her abusive experiences from them until crisis point. Zoe stated:

*At the start, I was afraid to disclose this to my family. I didn't tell my sister about it but until it was really serious then I told her. I feel people like us who don't have friends and family nearby... When you have trouble and if you tell them, they couldn't really offer you help as they are too far away...*

Zoe also had concerns with saving face so she only told a few close friends about her family situation when they showed concern for her wellbeing.

*In terms of saving face, I think there will be. As us Asian people do not like to tell shameful matters to outsiders. Yeah, so I have such problem too.*

Zoe believed that domestic violence is a shameful secret that should not be easily disclosed to outsiders. She only disclosed her experiences of psychological abuse to three trusted friends. A Christian couple helped Zoe to find work opportunities. They were supporting her by visiting the family home and mediating the domestic situation. Another was a male family friend, who often acted as a mediator when critical domestic violence incidents occurred.

*Well, as it says that Chinese people do not like to tell others about shameful matters... If it's friends that I don't know very well then I don't want to tell them about my private things easily... Because the thing is once you have told others about it, they either offer help to you or they might make things worse by spreading the stories to other people or adding additional information and spreading rumours to other people. So it will make matters worse.*

Despite of Eric's continuous psychological threats and verbal aggression towards Zoe, she initially decided to keep the abusive relationship a secret because she also wanted to save face for Eric; to prevent him from suffering the consequences of losing face if he changed for the better. She was concerned that if she "*did tell others first then he changed. Then, he will lose face. He will not be able to get out of the embarrassing situation.*"

### **Attempted escape**

During this time, it was discovered that Eric has not been taking any of his prescribed medications. He told Zoe that she had to learn to look after herself as

he will go and die soon. Eric's threats of self-harm to Zoe continued and even Peter pointed out his father's abusive behaviour to his mother.

One day, Zoe discovered rat poison in the family car boot. There were no rats in the house. Zoe questioned Eric about the purpose for purchasing rat poison and he said it was not her business. Zoe was scared and extremely concerned for her children safety.

*I was scared to cook soup as I was scared that he might put the poison in it. I said to my sister, if one day he did put the poison in it then I will be very sorry for my children.*

Zoe tried to escape the family home on the night she discovered the rat poison. Eric heard them leaving so he rushed out and grabbed the car keys from Zoe's hands. Eric ended up swearing at Zoe throughout the night and threatened her by saying: "do you really want me to die?" The next day, as soon as Eric left for work Zoe took some money and cards with her and left the home with her two children.

*I was scared that I didn't know where to go with my two children. As I felt before I went there [refuge] but I came out myself so I felt embarrassing to go back again.*

### **Second stay at the refuge**

Zoe contacted her counsellor and met with the social worker for the second time. Zoe also rang to police to notify them that she has escaped the home with the children and she was concerned for her husband's safety as he might commit suicide. However, the police didn't follow this up as we will see later.

There was a problem when they arrived at the refuge this time. The social worker advised Zoe that Peter could not stay in the refuge with her and Lily. Peter had just turned 16 years of age and legally speaking he was an adult male not a child anymore. From this perspective, Peter could be a potential threat to the other women and children staying at the refuge. So, they decided to find a nearby motel for Peter to stay. Zoe was still worried as she needed to be with both of her children to make sure they were safe. Fortunately, Peter was attending church

groups at the time, so he asked a Christian brother from church to help him out. This brother agreed to stay with Peter in the motel.

The next night, the social worker and the police (one man and one woman) visited Zoe in the early hours. The social worker delivered the sad news to Zoe that Eric has committed suicide. The police investigated the situation by questioning Zoe what has happened in the last few days at home. They asked her questions like why did she leave and whether she knew that Eric was going to commit suicide before she left. Zoe told the police about Eric threats and intimidation regarding self-harm and knives. Zoe was trapped within her situation and it had reached the point that she must escape to ensure her children's safety.

*...What do you want me to do? I can't do anything...I don't know when he might kill all of us... I can't stay any longer at my home. Our lives were been threatened every minutes and every seconds of the day. So we must leave and I was adamant to be separated from him too.*

*[People] did advice me to get divorced but if I did say that I was afraid that my husband will end up killing all of us. He was crazy at the time. I want to be divorced but I must leave first. When the two children were all away [from home] then I can say that to him.*

From the above comments we can see that few people would comprehend how difficult it was for Zoe to leave Eric. One on hand, she wants to protect her and her children from being harmed by Eric so she wanted to leave. On the other hand, she was scared that something worse might happen if she was assertive about getting a divorce. She was constantly threatened by Eric that he would commit suicide if she did leave.

### **Implication of the abuse**

Zoe's two children have suffered a lot as a consequence of the abusive relationship. Shortly after Eric's death, Lily was holding on to Zoe's leg and begged her not to commit suicide as well, no matter what happens. During and after the abusive relationship, the children tried very hard to conceal from the outside world what was happening at home. Peter was on medications for a period of time to cope with the traumatic experiences that he has witnessed at home.

Even until recent years, Peter have had repeated nightmares and screams during the middle of the night. Both children make sure that their bedroom doors are been secured before they go to sleep at night. Zoe expressed that

*[The children] were very protective of me so they won't tell me [how they have felt or what was going through] as they were worried that I couldn't bear it.*

It has been 8 years since the domestic violence relationship ended. The abuse had serious impact on her health and personal wellbeing. She has been receiving continuous treatment from the psychiatrist and counsellor.

### **What has helped Zoe?**

Although the first few years following her husband's death was very hard for her, Zoe believed that she has changed a lot in recent years. She is able to slowly set herself free from the memory of the past. A few things have helped Zoe with her healing process. Zoe was advised by the counsellor to pick up some interests to occupy her time. She decided to attend university and completed her Bachelor's degree in fashion design. During the four years of learning, Zoe has gained a lot of confidence in herself, problem solving skills and most importantly, to be independent and strong and make a living on her own.

*My friend would say that I am more open-minded in the last few years. Learning at the university has helped me to focus less of this matter. Otherwise, I could not move on. I will be suffering on my own and keeps thinking back to the past.*

In the past, in order to please her husband and to maintain family harmony, she couldn't pursue her personal interests. Since Eric passed away, Zoe could enjoy life the way she pleases.

*In the last few years, I have been going out a lot to go dancing; to play mah-jong. I have changed my lifestyle. The things that my husband doesn't allow me enjoy in the past, I will enjoy them now. He doesn't allow me to play mah-jong or lean dancing. He wouldn't even allow me to go out myself.*

According to Zoe, her Buddhist beliefs have helped her both during the relationship and after it had has ended. On one hand, during the relationship,

Buddhist practices helped Zoe to generate calmness and to forgive her husband's abusive behaviour towards her. On the other hand, this kind of forgiveness would yield yet another chance for Eric to repeat the abusive behaviour which has evolved into more life threatening forms. Despite of this, Zoe still believed that it is in her best interest to be forgiving. Zoe said that

*The religion teaches you to forgive others so that is what I was learning. I've learnt about tolerance. Everyone makes mistakes so we should leave a way for them [the abusers] to return back*

Zoe recommended that other women who are in an abusive relationship shouldn't delay in help seeking. She advised those women to seek professional help, especially if they are afraid of losing face or reluctant to disclose their situation to people around them.

*If you are afraid to tell others, seeing a specialist is a good thing. Because [Eric] wasn't well so he visited a GP and that is how we got led to the specialist. So, someone knew what was happening. And also the social worker is able to help you too. You can try it and you should trust them. They could offer some help to you. If you don't walk out and trapped inside, something miserable might happen...*

## **Summary**

Zoe was been controlled and emotionally manipulated by Eric since the beginning of their marriage life. Once they had migrated to New Zealand, the domestic abuse took on a dramatic turn when Zoe refused to accept the reality that Eric wanted to have two women in his life at the same time. Like many other Chinese women, Zoe kept her abusive relationship a secret until it reached critical point. Zoe found great help from the medical and help service professionals such as doctor, counsellor and social worker regarding possible intervention measures for domestic violence. However, she didn't receive the adequate support from the legal system as she believed that the police and the court could have done a lot more to prevent the tragedy of Eric's death. Zoe's children are the driving force for her to re-build her life. Her religious belief in Buddhism has also helped her with self-healing. Ultimately, under the continued support from counselling service, Zoe found her own strength for healing and recovery. She became

independent and gained self-confidence through completing a tertiary qualification in fashion design, a passion that she had.

## Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion

A core objective of this thesis was to explore the dynamics of Chinese immigrant women's experience of domestic violence in a heterosexual relationship. In particular, I was interested in the role gender, cultural, social and contextual factors play in the abusive relationships and how these influenced women's help-seeking strategies as well as the women's experiences in accessing formal and informal interventions. By exploring the details of each of the women's stories loosely following the broad concepts used in the case studies, I obtained more insights into the complex and multilayered nature of Chinese women's experience of domestic violence. However, differences and similarities between the cases do exist and these will be discussed in detail.

The results have revealed very interesting perspectives and valuable insights which I hope will be useful in future research of a similar nature. The following sections explain the findings from the five case studies and discuss the meaning of the findings in context and in relation to previous literature. Core and sub themes emerged by summarising and examining the women's stories in detail. The themes are categorised under the following sections:

- Violence and abuse in the context of immigration
- Understanding forms of abuse within a cultural context
- Psychological trauma experienced by Chinese women and children
- Multiple factors influencing help-seeking
- Women's help-seeking from informal support network
- Women's experiences with multiple forms of formal interventions
- Returning to the relationship following interventions
- Critical consciousness and perceived effectiveness of the interventions

## **Violence and Abuse in the Context of Immigration**

All the women in this study suffered combinations of different forms of domestic violence: physical, psychological, economic and sexual abuse. These forms of abuse were evident during different phases of their marriages, pre and post migration. For most of the women, the abuse started in the country of origin. Emily and Joy experienced physical assault by their husbands before migrating to New Zealand. For both women, the first instance of physical violence occurred shortly after the birth of their first child. Ruby and Zoe experienced emotional abuse by their spouses prior to migration. Ruby's husband's overt controlling behaviour started when they were courting and Ruby identified that her marital relationship with Steve was "*built on sand*", an unequal marital foundation right from the start. Despite her spouse's physical and emotional abuse during courtship and in the early stages of married life, the relationship survived until the point of migration.

The US study by Erez et al. (2009) found that some immigrant women reported experiencing more physical, emotional and sexual forms of abuse by their husbands after migration. The abusive relationships observed in the present study continued for all women post migration, with added dimensions that complicated the dynamic of the abusive pattern. The women suffered varying degrees of psychological abuse, sometimes being driven to the point of despair, helplessness and even contemplating self harm. Emily's husband's physical violence turned into emotional and financial abuse after they migrated. Joy was the only woman who reported experiencing physical abuse from her spouse post migration. She continued to suffer from major physical assaults by Tai, which led to the police call-out.

Four women in the present study reported experiencing economic abuse. Although the legal definition of economic abuse, according to the Domestic Violence Act, involves "denying or limiting access to financial resources" (Domestic Violence Act, 1995, s.3), the manifestation of economic abuse took on different forms for the women in this study. Emily, Hope and Joy experienced

financial exploitation and were used by their spouses as money-making machines without dignity or respect. Kevin demanded Emily should find decent employment while he stayed at home and he controlled the flow of the income as he believed that women are not worth spending money on. Tai not only demanded money from Joy to feed his continuing drug habit; she was also the sole provider for the “*big family*” which included some of Tai’s extended family. Tai compared his marital relationship with Joy to a business transaction. Jason insisted that Hope secretly transfer money from her mother’s account to theirs to cover his parents’ potential immigration costs. Ruby was tightly controlled financially by Steve to the point that she “*never knew how to spend money and where [she could] spend money in New Zealand.*” From this finding we can see that the women are used as domestic and money-making slaves, often to the point of being the sole provider for the family. In some incidents, the abuser financially exploited not only the woman but also members of her natal family.

Previous literature suggested that immigrant women with dependent immigration status appear more vulnerable to victimisation through domestic violence as they are psychologically, economically and socially dependent on their spouse (Erez, 2000; Narayan, 1995). This was not the case for four of the women in this study. To various extents, Hope, Emily, Ruby and Zoe were dependent on their husbands for their immigration status but this was not used against them as a threat by their abusers. Immigrant status was not a concern for these women. More interestingly, two of the women thought about returning to China if their new life did not work out as planned in New Zealand. Emily had such thoughts, while Ruby took action and returned to China after finding out her ex-husband was involved in an extra-marital affair. However, for Joy it was different. Tai was a New Zealand citizen who married Joy in China. Tai threatened Joy with cancellation of her permanent residency shortly after she received it in New Zealand. Joy was later told by the family violence coordinator that this threat was very unlikely to become a reality under special residence policies. Erez et al. (2009) found that among the 75% of women participants who experienced immigration related threats by their spouse, 10% of them identified experiencing threats to withdraw the women’s immigration application by their spouse. It is worth noting that in this study, Joy’s

spouse was of Maori ethnicity, whereas all the other women's spouses were Chinese. Along similar vein, in the local report "*Living at the Cutting Edge Volume 1*", ethnic immigrant women (Amy from China and Laura from South Africa) who married European New Zealand husbands experienced threats to remove their permanent residency sponsorship (Robertson et al., 2007a). In this study, although Tai not have in fact the power to remove Joy's permanent residency status, it still served to intimidate her, especially when she was not aware of her legal rights in New Zealand.

In addition, consistent with the findings from a Canadian study by Chan (1989) and a U.S study by Yoshioka et al. (2000), nearly all the abusers in the study had mid-level or high educational attainment with tertiary or other higher educational qualifications prior to migration. This serves to challenge the common myths in the Asian community that domestic violence abusers are individuals of poor character, with low educational achievements.

### **Understanding Forms of Abuse within a Cultural Context**

Asian immigrant women experience domestic violence in ways that are both similar and different to mainstream women. Migration and culture accentuate the power and control tactics experienced by Chinese women. Here, I will analyse the multiple forms of abuse that were commonly experienced by the women participants during the different stages of the abusive relationships and discuss these through within the Asian cultural context.

The women participants in this study were socially restricted and isolated by their new environment in a host country. Often, this was further reinforced by their spouses subjecting them to inappropriate behaviour or psychological control. This was true for Ruby, Joy and Emily. For example, initially Emily's spouse refused to allow her to learn to drive and she was required to walk long distances. Ruby expressed her loneliness and frustration in the psychological prison that her spouse constructed for her by saying: "*I was completely sealed off in my environment; I could only circle within my environment in those two years....*" Here we see that abused Chinese women with limited access to social resources

and social participation are more vulnerable to abuse. Abusers take advantage of this by concealing information from the women and isolating them from their social environment.

Psychological abuse is not a commonly researched phenomenon among Chinese families due to ambiguous operational definitions (Tang, 1998). It has been found that Chinese Americans are more likely to define domestic violence in physical and sexual terms as opposed to psychological aggression (Yick, 2000). It is possible that Chinese do not emphasise the importance of intra-psychic concerns; therefore they are less likely to see psychologically orientated behaviour as a type of domestic violence (Yick, 2000). Consistent with these findings and with local research by Au (1998), all the women in this study initially identified domestic violence in physical terms such as “*beating up*” and “*direct physical harm*”. After the women had accessed outside help and formal intervention, they started to realise that domestic violence has multiple forms, including psychological, verbal and economic abuse. In the present study, emotional abuse was a key and distinct form of domestic violence recognised by the women over time after they had received additional information and outside help. They provided vivid descriptions such as “*cold war*”, “*psychological torture*” or “*make you feel very uncomfortable*”.

Sexual abuse is perceived to be a taboo subject for Chinese women to discuss with outsiders and it remains largely under-reported (Lee & Au, 2007). Sexual abuse is often tolerated based on culturally sanctioned reasons. Some Chinese women with low educational attainment often do not easily identify sexual abuse. Such unawareness of sexual abuse is underpinned and reinforced by the belief that marriage is for life and which grants husband unconditional access to the woman’s body (Lee & Au, 2007). However, while Ruby does not have a high educational attainment, she was the only woman who identified sexual abuse from her spouse while living apart from him. Ruby pointed out that the cultural concept of being a “*gentle*” Chinese woman refers to the woman’s ability to satisfy her spouse sexually, albeit at the cost of her personal wellbeing, as a key factor in keeping the relationship intact. For example, Ruby believed that it was tolerable

that Steven was romantically involved with other women as it was her “*weakness*” that she could not satisfy his sexual needs. This is consistent with the suggestion that traditional gender norms legitimise male supremacy and reinforce a husband’s sexual entitlement and access to his wife. As a consequence, this heightens Asian women’s vulnerability to forced sex and marital sexual assault (Dasgupta, 2000; Raj & Silverman, 2002).

The abusers used various tactics to manipulate and force the women to be subservient and comply with their demands. More specifically, Ruby, Emily, Joy and Hope experienced culturally orientated verbal aggression from their husbands. For example, Jason cursed Hope and her mother: “*You are both doomed not to die a natural death.*” In Chinese culture, wishing death upon others is a very serious form of insult. The women more commonly experienced insults and humiliation as forms of emotional abuse. That is, their spouses questioned their roles as fit mothers and dedicated wives according to traditional gender role stereotypes of Chinese women. A typical example of this is when Tai questioned Joy by saying, “*See, whose wife will call the police to get her own husband arrested?*” The abusers used emotional degradation to blame the women and at the same time deny their own accountability for the abuse. This often resulted in the women feeling guilty and responsible for the abuse. Within the traditional hierarchical family structure, Chinese women are socialised into being virtuous wives and mothers throughout their lives (Ho, 1990; Hsu, 1985) and their gender identity is largely shaped by this. It is not surprising that the participants found these tactics the most humiliating and “*hard to bear*” form of emotional abuse. Also, Emily emphasised:

*I felt he has already trampled on me to a very low point but still he used language to hurt me... look at whoever’s wife, she doesn’t even know English but she knows how to earn money. But look at you...*

Similarly, Ruby labelled it “*emotional torture*” when she experienced humiliation of a sexual nature by Steve as Ruby was portrayed as not a gentle woman who knew how to satisfy her husband’s sexual needs. Joy felt “*helpless*” when Tai attacked her by digging deep into the broken marriage in her past. Hope was devastated when her husband insulted her role as a fit mother by saying:

*You are useless... [You] don't know how to give birth properly and once given birth, [you] don't know how to raise [a child].*

It is a widely recognised belief in certain Asian immigrant communities in New Zealand that women are the property of men and are able to be abused by their spouse, often without the need for formal intervention (Pillai, 2001). In Chinese culture, men often believe that as the head of the family, it is their right and duty to physically discipline their wives (Lee, 2000). This study found that some abusers displayed entitlement and ownership over women and children. This suggests that Chinese men may possess a web of control with their wives and children as available targets. Emily's comment about Kevin demonstrated this well. He thinks that "*women are not worth spending money on. She should do whatever he wants her to do.*" Moreover, even after Kevin was charged by the police, he believed that "*it has nothing to do with you that I hit my child*" and "*it was a family matter*" that he abused his wife and child. In relation to husbands' entitlement over their wives in physical and sexual demands, Ruby noted that:

*They are his things and they belong to him. They are his property so he can tread on them, he has entitlement.... [Men] also think that sex is like; we women are men's tools.*

Furthermore, each of the participants did separate from their husbands at least for a period of time. Specifically, all the women participants experienced domestic abuse during or after separation. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the point of separation and this shows that separation is a process rather than a single incident. For Zoe, Emily, Hope and Joy the separation occurred following a major violent incident. In both Emily's and Joy's cases, the crisis incidents involved the father physically abusing children. These women continued to experience intimidation, verbal aggression, threats and humiliation by their spouses. Ruby's ex-husband said to her, "*In New Zealand who will want you? Someone like you with no education, no looks and no abilities.*" In Ruby's case, the separation was strategically planned by Steven as he continued to brain-wash her and controlled her access to social resources. This was evident in Ruby's comment that "*I was the bird in the cage and I did fly out*" when Steven eventually granted Ruby permission to leave him for good.

Separation was not an easy matter for the women. By utilising different tactics, some women's spouses manipulated their way back into the relationship by promising women participants a brighter future for the sake of the family with changed behaviour. Such mind games and manipulation created a sense of moral contradiction for the women and often increased the likelihood of them reuniting with their abusive husbands. Often the women ended up feeling sympathetic and forgiving towards their husbands, which simultaneously encouraged them to downplay the severe implications of the husband's abusive behaviour.

The power and control wheel described by Pence and Paymar (1993) states that abusers will commonly use children to make women feel guilty, often using children to give messages or create harassment during visitations. In contrast to intimidation and threat, the abusers in this study often used children as bargaining tools to regain the women's trust and pull their way back into the relationship. The abusers also used children as a way to portray themselves as caring and loving parents, in order to gain sympathy and forgiveness from the women. These tactics were experienced by Joy and Emily. For example, Joy was convinced that her spouse still loved her child and it was for the benefit of the child that he should remain in the relationship. Joy's husband persuaded her by saying:

*I don't want my child to be fatherless. After all... he is half Chinese and half Maori. He has two cultures within him, so you can't exploit the other half of his culture...*

### **The extended family dynamic exacerbates violence and abuse.**

It has been found that extended family members are sometimes protective of Asian women in relation to domestic violence (Sharma, 2001). On the other hand, the involvement of extended family can sometimes serve to exacerbate Asian women's experience of domestic violence (Chan, 1989; Lee, 2000). Hope, Emily and Ruby all reported that their mothers-in-law played a major part in reinforcing domestic violence by their spouses. In some incidents, the mothers-in-law would accept their sons' physical violence as normal behaviour or worse still, demanded their son should physically harm their daughter-in-law when she was perceived to be disobedient. For example, this was true for Emily. In other cases, the mother-in-law would project traditional patriarchy ideologies and gender role stereotypes

onto the women. The Confucian-based moral values of the three obediences for women mentioned in previous literature Lee and Au (2007) and Tang et al. (2002) as well as filial piety towards elders in the family Ho (1990) were repeatedly mentioned by the women in this study. As Hope said,

*My mother-in-law thinks that my husband has done way too much for me. Women should be like her, able to follow the rule of the three obediences and four virtues. Women should not say anything if they have been physically harmed or been sworn at by their husbands.*

It was an interesting that even though Hope's mother-in-law is of Chinese ethnicity from a South-Asian country, she held racist attitude towards Hope. Similarly, Ruby was seen as “*non-virtuous*” and “*not a filial piety daughter-in-law*” in the eyes of her mother-in-law. Ruby often voiced her thoughts and opinions which were perceived as a violation of traditionally prescribed virtues for Chinese daughters-in-law who are supposed to obey and honour in-laws.

This finding supports suggestions that in-law involvement in the relationship is a risk factor for domestic violence for Chinese women (Chan, 1989; Lee, 2000; Liu & Chan, 1999). It is often perceived to be acceptable for husbands to employ violence as a way of disciplining their wives, especially when Chinese women act contrary to cultural norms and challenges male dominance (Huisman, 1996). Such violent behaviours are often sanctioned or reinforced by mothers-in-law who join force with the husband (Lee & Au, 2007). In this cultural context, many Chinese women fail to recognise domestic violence as a social issue and are confronted with enormous cultural pressure while breaking the vicious cycle of abuse.

## **Psychological Trauma Experienced by Chinese Women and Children**

Research findings show that non-physical abuse can yield more long-lasting and devastating impacts on women than physical forms of violence (Tang, 1997; Walker, 1984). Tang (1997) suggested that Chinese women are more severely impacted by non-physical forms of abuse from their spouses and suffer general stress symptoms such as physical discomfort and anxiety.

The women in this study suffered various forms of abuse but all suffered psychological abuse. They reported experiencing varying degrees of psychological trauma and wounds. Some of the common psychological implications identified by the women were: “*a lack of trust*”, “*emotionally exhausted*”, “*emotional disturbance*”, “*psychological devastation*” and “*weepiness*”. Several women commented that the emotional abuse they suffered was the worst form of abuse, which leaves deep emotional scars that require a long time for recovery and healing. “*I actually think that psychological abuse is a serious form of ruin for human beings*” Ruby stressed. In addition, on numerous occasions Ruby contemplated taking her life as she could not bear the consequences of the “*psychological torture*”. Similarly, Zoe suffered long-term clinical depression and sleeping problems as a result of domestic abuse. Interestingly, in both of the women’s cases, their children served as protective factors for them. Because of their love for the children and their prioritisation of the need for the children to have parents in their lives, they were able to face and conquer the severity of the abuse.

In the Chinese culture, there is a clear distinction between paternal and maternal roles within the family. The father’s role is to discipline children and the mother’s role is to nurture and care for the children’s welfare. Therefore, the relationship between the mother and child is closer in comparison to the father and child (Ho, 1996; Tang, 1997). This could also serve to explain why the women participants would form alliances with their children, creating a protective bond to resist the abuse.

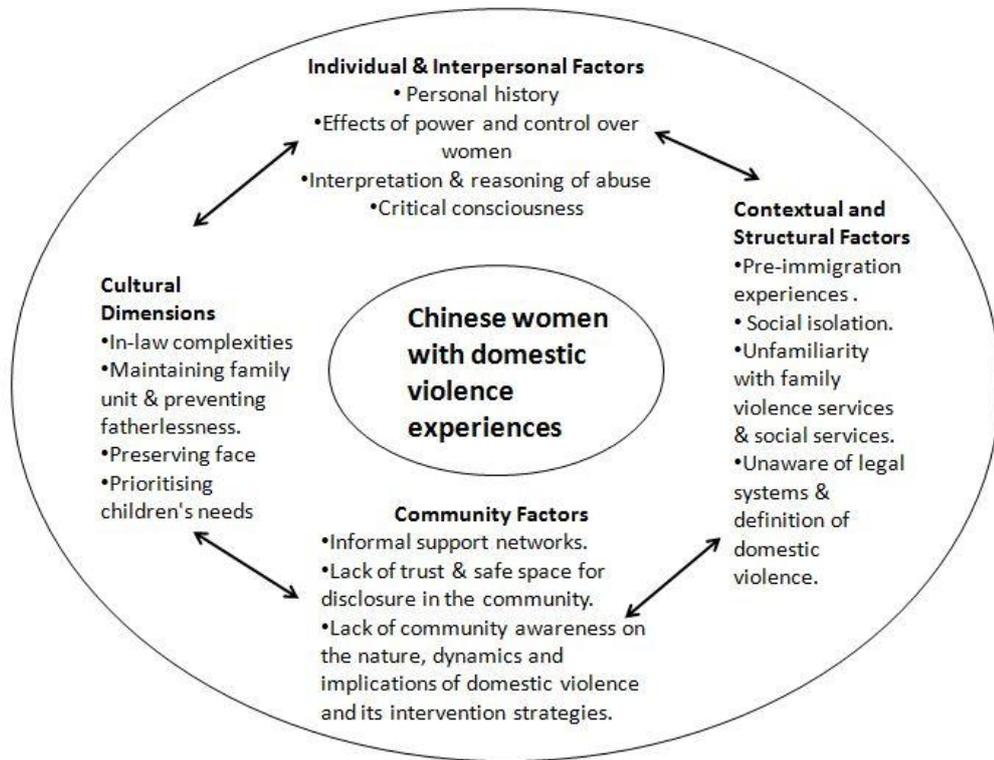
A close link has been established between domestic violence and child abuse by the male spouse. Generally speaking, children are at high risk of being abused if they live in a family environment where domestic violence exists (Rumm, Cummings, Krauss, Bell, & Rivara, 2000). Tang (1997) found that in Chinese families, violence against women was related to symbolic and physical forms of child abuse by the father but not the mother. Chinese children who stayed at shelters were found to be more depressed and experienced mostly father-to-child abuse.

As prominently evident in four women's cases in the present study, there was child abuse by the father. All the children in the family either witnessed the father-to-mother abuse or were physically and/or psychologically abused by their fathers. Although the children's ages varied, they suffered both short term implications such as "*easily timid*," feeling "*anxious*" and "*afraid*" as well as long term implications such as repetitive "*nightmares*," "*depression*," being over-protective towards their mother and showing a lack of trust as a consequence of the father's abuse. It was a challenge for the woman to stand against child abuse by the father when she had a lack of legislative information regarding family violence in New Zealand. For example, initially Emily was not consciously aware that corporal punishment was not a normal child rearing practice in New Zealand. Consequently, she was not able to protect her son from such punishment until the major physical violence incident occurred.

### **Multiple Factors Influencing Help-Seeking**

The diagram below (Figure 3) shows a summary of my findings regarding factors that influence help seeking strategies employed by Chinese women with domestic violence experiences. As illustrated by the diagram, the dynamics involved are multi-layered and multifaceted. A combination of interpersonal, cultural, structural and contextual and community factors influence Chinese women's help seeking strategies and accessing necessary informal and formal interventions. These factors will be discussed in details in the following sections.

**Figure 3. Factors influencing Chinese women’s domestic violence experiences and help-seeking strategies**



### **Meaning making of violence and abuse.**

The ways the women rationalised their spouse’s abusive behaviour impacted on their coping strategies and their help seeking options. Chan, Hum & Guberman (as cited in Yick & Agbayani-siewert, 1997) noted that abused Chinese women were more likely to assign personal factors and character deficits to their spouse’s abusive behaviours, such as a lack of responsibility, selfishness and substance addictions. In this study, the women identified several prominent triggers to their husband’s abuse. These were extra marital affairs for Zoe and Ruby, extended family dynamics for Hope and Emily, her husband’s continuous drug use for Joy and her husband’s negative personality traits for Emily. In addition, Emily and Zoe noted that their spouses were “*sick*” or “*crazy*” which is associated with mental disabilities such as clinical anxiety or depression. At one point, Zoe believed that her spouse “*was being possessed by evil spirit*”. The women would sympathise with their husband by using such rationales to explain or justify his

abusive behaviour towards them. For example, Emily believed that the main reason for Kevin's violence was that he was physically punished as a child and "*there is some part of his personality that is defective*" This is consistent with the findings of Tang et al. (2002) that Chinese women are portrayed as legitimate victims of violence through social constructions of men as sick or unable to control their impulses. Chinese women's behaviour is often treated as the triggering factor, so men are excused from being responsible for their violent and abusive behaviour. Interestingly, we will see later that some of the helpers reinforced these underlying culturally-sanctioned beliefs.

Importantly, divorce is not a common strategy used by Chinese women to end an abusive relationship, due to a combination of social, cultural and familial factors as well as the historical background of violence against Chinese women (Liu & Chan, 1999). Some of the reasons for not leaving an abusive relationship included accepting domestic violence as a part of married life; romanticising a positive outlook on life; and the disadvantaged position of women in accessing resources and interventions (Liu & Chan, 1999). The women in the study largely employed coping strategies that aimed to keep the marriage intact. Such strategies are reinforced by the woman's natal family. Several prominent themes along these lines emerged in decisions by Hope, Joy and Emily's to remain in their relationships with their husbands. Later, we will see that although these women accessed formal interventions, they were temporary remedies as ultimately they wanted to keep the relationship intact for the long run.

### **Multiple factors contributing to social isolation.**

Asian immigrant women are socialised into a system of belief which prioritises the continuity and welfare of the family and community over individual wellbeing. This, coupled with new challenges in the host community and the pressure to adjust to newly adopted cultural norms can result in feelings of social isolation and alienation (Huisman, 1996; Lee & Au, 2007; Rimonte, 1989). Most of all, family is a valuable cultural asset for many Asian women and has been identified as the main source of support for Asian individuals (Rimonte, 1989). Without emotional support and practical assistance from extended family members and

community elders, Asian immigrant women are more isolated and vulnerable to domestic violence from their spouses (Ho, 1990).

In this study, Chinese women immigrated to New Zealand with their spouse and children but without their natal or extended families. Their spouses would use this to further isolate them from building an ongoing rapport with close family members back home as well as hindering them from establishing new support networks within their new mainstream society. An example of the former was that Emily's husband tried to sabotage the well-established rapport between Emily and her sister by making up lies about her. An example of the latter was that Ruby's husband refused to install a phone line at home, in order to control her ability to make new friends.

Furthermore, the case studies revealed that some women had higher educational attainments than others. For these women language was not a prominent factor in their isolation. For women with low educational attainment, language was a prominent factor in their experience of isolation. Ruby stressed several times that she was "*afraid*" as she "*didn't know English*", she "*couldn't drive and had no friends*." As a consequence she believed that she was "*a literally and legally invisible person*." Due to a combination of barriers such as language difficulties, inability to drive or obtain a New Zealand driver's license and a lack of previous work experiences, the women found it difficult to find fulfilling employment. These instrumental barriers also served as social impediments which prevented the women from establishing meaningful social networks within the wider community away from home. Similarly, a focus group research by Yoshihama (2002) found that Japanese women were trapped by a web of abuse due to a combination of factors such the negative effect of the spouse's control over the women's support network, the women's sense of self, and social isolation. More importantly, the web of abuse was often reinforced by a lack of help services received and re-victimisation attitudes from the women's informal and formal support which is also apparent in this study and will be discussed in the following and later sections.

## **Unfamiliarity with family violence services, social services and the legal system.**

Previous literature suggests that ethnic minority women have limited access to relevant information about where to go for help, which highlights the limitations on their entitlement to resources and the availability of services (Burman & Chantler, 2005). Mirroring this, all the women in the present study were unaware of the availability of family violence services and community services as well as a lack of understanding of legislation regarding domestic violence. On some levels, all the women expressed the importance of being aware of the availability of family violence services and knowing how the legal system operates in New Zealand.

Later we will see that it was through the women's formal and informal network channels that they discovered the existence of family violence services, some of which provided services in their native language. In some cases, the abusive husband would deliberately withhold important information regarding the social infrastructure in New Zealand, which deceived the women into believing that there were no escape options. For example, Ruby's ex-husband concealed information from her about New Zealand's social welfare and legal systems. Ruby believed that it would have made a huge difference for her in terms of help-seeking options if she had been made aware of the availability of community and social services when she entered New Zealand. Ruby emphasised that:

*Who would have thought that New Zealand was different? ... I think the state should have more promotions in this area ... If I knew about shelters then I would have considered.*

The literature also suggests that immigrant women who come from countries where government authorities are not a source of support but instead are oppressive and authoritarian are more reluctant to seek formal assistance from law enforcement in the host country when facing domestic violence incidents. Their previous experience cultivates feelings of doubt, avoidance and distrust on the women's part in terms of seeking formal interventions (Grossman & Lundy, 2007; Weil & Lee, 2004). The present study's findings are consistent with these findings.

Joy and Ruby were not aware that it was within the police's jurisdiction to attend to domestic violence incidents. Emily told me:

*I'm afraid to call the police. I couldn't imagine what the police will be like. I came from China and I know the police are terrible. They will harm people.*

Emily's statement clearly shows that she had devastating past experiences dealing with the police in China and she was afraid of "trouble making". Emily's eye-witness account of her father's physical punishment by the Chinese government during the Chinese Cultural Revolution certainly laid a solid foundation for her distrust of government authorities. Hence, she was extremely reluctant to get the police involved in her case even after strong recommendation by her church friends that it was the most sensible thing given her circumstances. Prior to help-seeking, all the women in the study were unaware of the New Zealand law and legislation regarding domestic violence offences and legal protective channels for themselves and their children. They were also unfamiliar with existing family violence services in the community. Zoe mentioned from the Chinese newspaper she became aware of the Chinese Lifeline, but she did not use this service during crisis times. Past experiences with social infrastructure and legal systems in their native country coupled with a lack of English skills further hindered women from seeking formal intervention and social services when facing domestic abuse.

### **Unaware of the legal definition of domestic violence.**

All the Chinese women in the present study were initially unaware of the legal definition of domestic violence in New Zealand and of the legal remedies available. It was through access to formal intervention channels such as the police, family violence coordinators and social workers that they became aware of the legal definition of domestic violence. Initially, Joy, Zoe, Ruby and Emily were struggling to recognise their spouse's abusive behaviours as domestic violence back in their home country, although they did gain a clearer understanding about psychological and economic abuse after they migrated to New Zealand. Throughout their experiences and after receiving external advice, information and/or education, they were able to consciously identify psychological, verbal and

economic abuse as different forms of domestic violence. They came to recognise domestic violence as an on-going process, as indicated by Joy's comment:

*Before I definitely believed that domestic violence means physical harm... We will normally think that domestic violence is the husband physically hurting the wife. Since I met the [family violence coordinator], I understood that domestic violence doesn't only include physical harm; it includes languages – swearing at you, malicious talk as well as emotional abuse...using intimidation and using money to threaten you.*

Becoming aware that verbal abuse is a part of the legal definition of domestic violence also helped Joy to resist some forms of psychological abuse by Tai. However, it must be pointed out that some women still struggled to shift their thinking about domestic violence from overt to covert forms of violence even after accessing interventions. For instance, Hope mentioned that she was not sure whether “cold war” or withholding communication was a type of emotional abuse. Until the time of the interview, when the words ‘domestic violence’ entered her mind, there was still a mental picture of a man hitting his wife.

Cultural isolation and language barriers have been found to prevent ethnic minority women reaching out for help (Bonilla-Santiago, 2002; Bui, 2003; Huisman, 1996). Bui (2003) found that Vietnamese American women were unwilling to contact law enforcement because they did not understand the law properly or know what would happen after contacting the authorities. Similarly, Robertson et al. (2007b) reported that many immigrant women in New Zealand had only very limited knowledge about immigration policies and almost no knowledge about the Victims of Domestic Violence Policy. In this study, lack of awareness of the Domestic Violence Act and the Victims of Domestic Violence Policy coupled with lack of recognition of domestic violence as a crime in New Zealand hindered abused Chinese immigrant women from pursuing legal remedies against domestic violence in the first place.

Awareness of the legal definition of domestic violence alone is not enough for a Chinese woman to alter the cultural tapestry attached to the dominant discourse of domestic violence within her cultural milieu. Domestic violence interventions must attempt to address the combined effects of structural, cultural, situational

and organisational factors that influence ethnic immigrant women's victimisation in domestic violence and their help-seeking behaviours on different levels.

### **Rationalising the violence: Self-blaming, guilt and fate.**

All the women participants in the present study experienced different degrees of self-blaming, and guilt. It is evident that internalising the abuse negatively impacted the women's perceptions of escaping the abusive relationship and seeking outside help. For example, Joy emphasised that,

*It's like no one can help me and no one I can seek help from! So, I just have to bear it*

On one hand, the women were trapped by fear of the unknown and unfamiliarity with social resources and services. For example, Ruby was devastated and helpless about her situation. She believed that she was “*ineffective*” and “*a useless person*”. It was her own fault that she couldn't break away from Steve's control.

*I was in despair. I felt I was trash and a useless person. I felt I couldn't survive in this society. I thought it was my entire fault.*

On the other hand, the women often blamed themselves for utilising outside interventions that might cause negative consequences to their spouses. For example, Zoe blamed herself for being “*too emotional*” when she left Eric to stay at the women's shelter. Likewise, Joy felt guilty about her decision to use formal interventions against Tai. In addition, Emily's statement highlights that some Chinese women who are socialised into culturally prescribed gender roles are likely to suffer abuse. She commented that,

*...I was very sacred... all of my life I was willing to be controlled because I'm traditional. Due to my weakness, his toughness has incorrectly overtaken me.*

All the women participants were first-generation Chinese, brought up in China. Traditional Chinese families emphasise women's submission to parents and husbands. It is likely that some of the women had internalised the patriarchal belief, which is deeply entrenched in Chinese culture, that the woman's happiness and wellbeing is built upon the happiness of her husband and her ability to maintain a harmonious family (Yuen-Tsang & Sung, 2005). For these women, a feeling of guilt and self-blame was heightened when dealing with their husband's abuse. Moreover, a community-based study by Yoshihama (2000) examined the

dynamics and experience of domestic violence of women of Japanese descent in the US. The study suggested that the internalisation of male dominance and female subordination by Japanese women shapes the way women are expected to respond towards the violence, such as to behave in an obedient, submissive, unassertive and accommodating manner toward their abusers.

As an added dimension, Lempert (1996) analysed strategies employed by women in abusive relationship based on in-depth interview from 32 participants of which 9 were women of colour. The study found that during the initial stage of an abusive relationship, abused women would often employ strategies such as rationalisation and self-blame as an attempt to analyse, manage and make sense of the violence. For the abused woman, passive refusals to accept violence are strategic actions used to preserve the self and to survive the abusive situation. These actions are aimed at decreasing the visibility of the violence and preventing its reoccurrence.

Furthermore, the concept of fatalism (e.g. the idea of accepting that all life is suffering) emerged as a salient concept in relation to help-seeking, especially for Ruby and Zoe. Ruby mentioned that the main reason she did not seek help after divorcing her husband was because it had not registered in her mind to take an action that could make things different to what they were. Her fatalistic attitude was evident when she said:

*It is something that happened naturally and it was something that I should experience. It might be my fate... it was a part of my destiny that I had to experience.*

Similarly, Zoe sought help from a Feng Shui master when the abusive relationship intensified to the point that she perceived serious threats for her and her children. Wang, Joy, and Sherry (2013) suggested that in the Asian culture, Feng Shui is a cultural practise of spatial adjustment and orientation in relation to the flow of energy. Feng Shui employed to construct and maintain hope for consolation of the present and unforeseen situations in the future which applies to wide contexts including the family context. Although in Zoe's case, suggestions by the Feng Shui master did not result in any positive changes of the abusive situation, this is

an indication that traditional ways of coping are employed by Chinese women when dealing with domestic violence.

Fatalism originates from the Eastern belief system of accepting the natural occurrence of life events (Yamashiro & Matsuoka, 1997). Chinese respondents in the report by Yoshioka et al. (2000) on Asian family violence in Massachusetts, USA, suggested that a belief in fate and destiny often prevents Chinese women from exploring alternatives to their current family situation. As a way of coping, abused Chinese individuals may accept the difficulties in family situations such as domestic violence and find ways to live through the abuse. Similarly, Huisman (1996) conducted interviews with social service providers in 18 Asian communities also support this claim that belief in karma, fate and destiny serve as cultural impediments for abused Asian women.

### **Resistance to traditional gender roles.**

While the women in the study had internalised aspects of their traditional cultural values, they also resisted and/or reshape the traditional culturally-prescribed roles and gender norms in various ways. Joy's reflective statement is a very good example of such agency:

*...But now I will resist, I will attack him too with words. I will refute and say: I've learnt it all from you! I thank you for teaching me lots. You have taught me how to be strong and tough... When men are unreliable, women will become powerful.*

While in many Asian cultures, men's violence is often explained and sanctioned by cultural reasons, it is not within the cultural norm for Asian women to employ violence towards their spouse and such behaviour is often forbidden in a marriage (Dasgupta, 2002).

Bui (2003) found that Vietnamese women who are victimised by their partner expressed agency by refusing to accept traditional the gender ideologies that were imposed on them. This gave them the strength and courage to resist the abuse. Similarly, in the present study, Hope was not in favour of the rule of "the three obediences and four virtues" imposed by her mother-in-law. When her in-laws

tried to stop her contacting the police, she responded to them that “*New Zealand is not a male-dominant society. It is an egalitarian society for men and women.*” In addition, Joy believed that there should be more equality between husband and wife in a marital relationship. Also, Ruby resisted the traditional authority that the husband has a sense of entitlement and ownership over the wife and that she needs to satisfy his physical and sexual needs at great personal cost. Ruby suggested that a marital relationship should be built and consolidated upon emotional and spiritual connections; meeting emotional needs are very important in a marriage. The women participants engaged in reconstructing process of their gender identities by resisting to and redefining cultural norms. This becomes a source of strength and pride for Chinese women who are able to express their desire for change in their own socio-cultural context.

### **Preserving face.**

In the present study, saving face was a cultural factor identified by the women regarding entrapment and not being able to freely disclose their domestic violence experiences friends and members of the community. Zoe suggested that the notion “*...As us Asian people do not like to tell shameful matters to outsiders. Yeah, so I have such problem too.*” was an underpinning factor for her reluctance to disclose. Hope also commented “*I think there is a sense of shame. People do not want to talk about it.*” To save herself from embarrassment, Joy did not seek help from outsiders. Joy mentioned,

*It's probably a part of Chinese people's saving face issue that I rarely seeking help from friends.*

*There was only one Asian that I know. But I was embarrassed; I didn't know her well enough to tell her what was happening. So I held on to my child and cried.*

In various ways, the women in my study were aware of the consequences of losing face. This, coupled with a lack of trust in the wider community meant that Zoe, Joy, Emily and Hope told only a few close friends about their exposure to domestic violence. For Joy and Hope, saving face was a contributing factor implicitly impacting on the functioning of their daily lives. That is, the consequences of disclosure created rumours in the community, which had

negative effects on the women in regards to employment opportunities or accessing to community space. Hope comment that “*Some people will judge you or even amuse oneself by watching other people make fools of themselves*”.

Similarly, Joy and Zoe expressed a realistic concern that once shameful matters like domestic violence were exposed to the wider community, their situation might be worsened by outsiders spreading rumours and not able to offer practical help. Zoe commented that,

*Because the thing is once you have told others about it, they either offer help to you or they might make things worse by spreading the stories to other people or adding additional information and spreading rumours to other people. So it will make matters worse.*

As a result of this, the women participants believed that rather than receiving support from the community, more trouble would be created for them.

Worries and concerns about the reactions from support network and a lack of trust in the women’s social networks serve as reasons for nondisclosure by victims in violent situations (Edwards, Dardis, & Gidycz, 2012). Asian cultural traditions value family privacy, which places pressure on the individual to turn to insiders such as family and friends before seeking help from the community to avoid losing face for oneself and one’s family (Ho, 1990; Rimonte, 1989). This supports the notion that to avoid the consequences of losing face, Chinese individuals will avoid disclosing disgraceful family events to outsiders (Gao, 1996). It is consistent with previous research that identified shame and fear of losing face serves as hindrance to help seeking for Asian immigrant women (Huisman, 1996; Yoshihama, 2000). Chinese woman could suffer intense conflicts when contemplating disclosure of abuse or seeking outside help. There is often a sense of shame and anxiety attached to not being able to live up to the socially prescribed roles and behaviours in the immigrant community (Rimonte, 1989).

In addition, abused Asian women may employ various strategies to protect themselves from further abuse. Lempert (1996) suggested that abused women are in a constant construction process in which strategies are developed to cease,

transform, as well as to cope with domestic violence and through such process the women develops 'agency'. One way of coping is by employing face-saving strategies during abusive episodes.

In this study, preserving face for the abuser was demonstrated by how the women sometimes minimised the significance of the abuse or rationalised the abuse by finding contextual or external reasons that could account for it. More interestingly, it was revealed that by preserving face for the husband and his abusive behaviour, the women attempted to protect their husbands from shame and unnecessary consequences. For example, Zoe constantly hoped that Eric would change into a better person. She was concerned that if she

*did tell others first and then he changed. Then, he will lose face.  
He will not be able to get out of the embarrassing situation.*

To Lempert (1996), women actively employ face-saving mechanisms to preserve honour and dignity for the men and hide their misbehaviour from public scrutiny as a way to preserve themselves from being publicly recognised as victims of abuse. By doing so, the violence is kept hidden from the public eye and the women's sense of self and identity will not be challenged. This seems to support the common notion that within traditional Asian cultural values, the consequences of losing face not only affect the individual but the reputation and honour of family members (Ho, 1990; Yoshioka & Choi, 2005).

### **Maintaining the family unit and preventing children from being fatherless.**

It is evident in the present study that Chinese women displayed traditional gender role beliefs that preserving the completeness of the family unit and protecting children from becoming fatherless were key factors for them choosing to remain in abusive relationships. Hope mentioned that "*before, I did believe that as a woman, I should be obedient to the three obediences and four virtues.*" Zoe's statement of "*every woman wanted a complete family...*" is a classic statement that could represent the views of the other participants. After Zoe escaped the abusive relationship the first time, she returned home after she contemplated the future needs of her children to have a complete family: "*...I thought about my two*

*children. What will happen to them in the future?”* and she “*didn’t want the children to be fatherless.*” Interestingly, the abusers would play mind games with the women by reinforcing such cultural beliefs in an attempt to keep them in the abusive relationship. For example, Joy commented that “*He is not a good dad but he is not a very bad dad either...*” Joy accepted Tai’s plea that he did not want the children to be fatherless and that “*he loves them dearly*”. On several occasions, Joy did not report Tai to the police when he broken bail conditions because she wanted to protect Tai as he is still the father or their child. Emily believed that Kevin “*has a heart of repentance to start all over again*” and that “*he needs a family too.*” Similarly, Jason placed gendered expectations on Hope to be a good mother to his children and humiliated her when she failed to live up to those expectations. Hope’s in-laws exacerbated the gender role expectations by preventing her from contacting the police, as in their eyes domestic violence should be kept within the family to avoid family breakdown.

Findings from local studies Au (1998) and Tse (2007) suggested that domestic violence and family violence is perceived as a private matter by individuals in the Asian communities. Traditional cultural values and gender role expectations such as preserving the marriage at all costs serve as impediments in addressing family violence in Asian communities of New Zealand (Tse, 2007). Particularly, keeping family together and conformity to traditional gender stereotypes act as barriers that prevent immigrant women leaving abusive relationships (Lee, 2002; Tse, 2007). Asian women who are victims of domestic violence have been identified as using coping mechanisms such as being accepting, being quiet in abusive situations, enduring the abuse Lee (2002) as well as employing strategies like reframing and compromising (Liu & Chan, 1999). In addition, abused Asian women often prioritise the father’s role in children’s lives and they are often confronted with the fear that outside interventions may cause negative implications and fragmentation in the family (Bui, 2003). More specifically, Chinese women often saw their spouses as good and fit fathers despite the violence, which further encourages them to keep the family together in domestic violence situations (Liu & Chan, 1999).

Furthermore, the women in the present study would often evaluate their husband's behaviour and try to learn lessons from it with the aim of mending the relationship and avoiding angering their spouse further. Within the notion of male dominance in the Chinese culture, there is no expectation for abusive men to feel guilty and to take responsibility for changing their behaviour. Most of the responsibility lies with the women to endure the abuse (Lee & Au, 2007). Passive ways of coping employed by Asian women is congruent to the cultural construction of women's gender roles. A US study by Yoshihama (2002) with a random community sample of 129 women found that in comparison to US-born participants, Japanese-born participants are less likely to employ active strategies such as seeking help from friends and confronting their partners, and more likely to minimise the seriousness of the situation.

However, later we will see that the participants in this study also employed active strategies as their attempt to navigate to safety and end the violence while remaining in the relationship. This shows the complex relationship between the roles of cultural prescription and selected coping strategies among ethnic women who are victimised by domestic violence.

### **Prioritising family and children's needs.**

The findings revealed that the participants would often prioritise the wellbeing of their family members over their own. They would conceal their domestic violence experiences from close family members back home, such as mothers and sisters, until the situation became desperate or life-threatening. Consequently, both women and children would suffer the consequences of prolonged exposure to domestic violence. In addition, Zoe and Emily emphasised that they did not want to create trouble or unnecessary burdens for their families as they were living in another country and would not be able to offer practical assistance. Thus, the women decided to delay the reporting of domestic violence incidents to family members.

Yuen-Tsang and Sung (2005) found that among Chinese women in abusive marital relationships, a "culture of concealment" was developed through a process

of social construction. The women's tendency to conceal domestic violence was reinforced by a combination of individual, environmental and cultural factors and co-created by the dynamic interactions with the significant others in her social environment. Erez et al. (2009) also found that abused immigrant women would often delay in reporting domestic violence, even to their family member due to cultural norms of family privacy and violence-condoning community responses.

Furthermore, violent incidents reported by Hope, Joy and Emily often involved children being physically or psychologically abused by the father, which was a part of an accumulation of abusive events that led to outside interventions being accessed. It was also apparent that when contemplating leaving the abusive relationship, the women in the present study tried to prioritise the needs and safety of their children over their own. Zoe consulted her children before leaving to stay at the women's shelter the first time. The second escape occurred because she was scared that her children might be poisoned by Eric. Also, she wanted to make sure that her children were safe before she disclosed to Eric her intention to divorce. Joy was able to call the police herself when Tai took off with their younger son and she was extremely concerned for his safety. Emily secretly escaped the home when she was extremely concerned for the safety of her children after Kevin had brutally battered and threatened their older son. More importantly, some immigrant women are consciously aware of the danger associated with leaving an abusive relationship (Erez et al., 2009). In this study, on one hand, Zoe was constantly threatened by Eric that he would take his own life if she left him. On the other hand, Zoe was aware that her children's wellbeing and safety was seriously threatened by Eric's unpredictable behaviour. Thus, she decided that she must leave for their sake.

This is consistent with previous research that Asian women are more inclined to seek outside assistance when their children's lives are seriously threatened (Kim & Lee, 2011). Both local and international research suggests that a female victim of domestic violence will often endure the violence until her or her children's lives and safety are seriously threatened; only then will she actively seek to escape the abusive relationship (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Rizo & Macy, 2011). In

addition, overseas family violence agencies reported that once the abusive relationship ends, South Asian women hardly seek therapeutic help for their own needs but most tends to prioritise the emotional and practical needs of their children such as in education and employment (Preisser, 1999).

## **Women's Help-Seeking from Informal Support Network**

### **Family and friends as informal helpers.**

Confronted with cultural pressure and unfamiliarity with resources and the availability of social services, Asian women are less likely than women from dominant ethnic groups to report abuse and they often wait until crisis point before reaching out for help (Huisman, 1996; Rimonte, 1989). When Asian women seek help, friends and female family members have been identified as the most-used social support group when disclosing domestic violence to women's personal networks (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). Cross-cultural studies of South Asian, African American and Hispanic women also showed that the majority of the women asked a member of their kin network for help (Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003).

Consistent with the above findings and other literature Barrett and Pierre (2011) and Bui (2003), Chinese participants in this study prioritised the use of informal support channels such as family and trusted friends as their initial contact of help-seeking. For example, after numerous violent episodes, Joy told her mother about the domestic violence and received support and advice from her to contact the local police if more violence occurred. When Zoe reached the point of not knowing what to do, she disclosed her domestic violence experience to her sister and three trusted friends when they showed persistent concerns for her welfare. Emily also decided to disclose the family violence to a trusted sister from the church the day when the major physical violent incident occurred. Overall, the women often contemplated seeking help but did not act until they were desperate or felt the situation was highly threatening. A Korean study on women's experiences in shelters indicated that abused Asian women endured domestic

violence until they experienced physical harm or felt their life was seriously threatened (Kang 2008, as cited in Kim & Lee, 2011).

The literature indicates that the majority of domestic violence victims disclose to at least one form of informal support (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). Sometimes the informal support network could be a form of support for the women; other times it may implicitly or explicitly encourage the violence by men (Hanmer, 2002; Sylaska & Edwards, 2014). The participants in the present study turned to their informal support network before and/or during access to formal family violence services. Some women found the advice given by their friends less helpful than others. For example, Joy's and Emily's friends advised them to get a divorce as a way to escape the domestic violent relationship. Joy said, "*It won't work. Because [I] can't even achieve the first step of being separated long enough*". It was difficult to escape from Tai's constant monitoring. Similarly, Zoe said that divorce was not an easy way out for her. She was constantly being threatened by Eric that he would take his own life if she did.

In addition, stereotypes of gendered responsibilities were at times reinforced by the woman's social interactions with family, in-laws and friends. For example, Hope was expected to adhere to traditional practices by her mother-in-law. After Joy broke off the relationship with Tai initially, her immigrant friend persuaded her to re-consider returning to New Zealand for the sake of her son's future. At other times, family members supported self-assertiveness and self-determination by prioritising the women's safety and wellbeing over traditional cultural norms and values. For example, Hope's mother tried to protect Hope from further experiences of domestic violence by establishing her belief in equality between husband and wife within a marital relationship. Similarly, Joy's mother advised her to report the domestic violence to the police and to end the relationship if the abuse continued. This is contrary to the common notion that older family members would down-play the domestic violence by suppressing the expression of self-assertiveness and discouraging women from leaving the relationship (Lee & Au, 2007; Weil & Lee, 2004).

Overall, the women's informal support networks contributed greatly to the women's ongoing safety and wellbeing. It was at the suggestion and persuasion of family, friends and in some incidents, caring neighbours' initiatives, that the women eventually reported the violence to the police. The Chinese women participants did not report prior knowledge of existing family violence services in the community prior to help-seeking. It was through the police, GPs and in some cases knowledgeable friends that they became aware of family violence services such as social workers and counsellors, especially those who offered services in Mandarin or Cantonese. From the women's experiences with informal support members, we can see that there is a chain of supportive networks which work in collaboration with each other in order to provide women with available community and state services. Shorey, Tirone, and Stuart (2014) emphasised the need to formulate a co-ordinated community response (CCR) and collaborative service frameworks to meet the needs of ethnic immigrant women exposed to domestic violence before their situation reaches crisis point.

### **Faith communities as a form of support and barrier to help-seeking.**

Faith communities within Asian immigrant communities play a vital role in educating women and eradicating domestic violence (Epstein-Ngo & Kanukollu, 2015; Perilla, 1999). Epstein-Ngo and Kanukollu (2015) pointed out the syncretism of Chinese religions in the Chinese American culture. They emphasised the interwoven relationship between the major religions of Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism and how these religious practices relate with the Chinese culture to create a flexible and multi-dimensional framework of spirituality which is highly beneficial in domestic violence interventions. Similarly, spirituality and faith communities played a vital role in the Chinese immigrant women's access to informal interventions in this study. Emily, Hope and Ruby explicitly talked about the importance of their Christian faith on their journey to help-seeking during the abuse and on their road to recovery from the violence and abuse. Without a doubt, these women received tremendous assistance from their Christian friends in terms of moral support and practical assistance. In Emily's words,

*Help from people streams from their heart – they use love...  
They will say to me it's not me that helps you. Because I am a  
Christian so I will have to listen to God.*

Here, Emily is reflecting on the love and kindness that she received from loving friends. From a practical aspect, it was due to encouragement from Emily's Christian friends that she eventually successfully reported the domestic violence to the police. In addition, Zoe sought help from her Buddhist faith. Her meetings with the temple elder and regular meditation at the Buddhist temple provided her with a sense of release from her burdens during the most painful period of the abusive relationship.

Drumm et al. (2014) suggested that a personal faith serves as a prominent coping strategy which makes women more resilient and helps them cope in an abusive relationship. Certain core themes that emerged from their study were experiencing God as a lifeline for survival; using Biblical scriptures and prayer as spiritual coping strategies; and self-efficacy in relation to spirituality. Indeed, the women participants in the present study had developed spiritual coping strategies for resilience when dealing with the violence while remaining in the relationship. For both Hope and Emily, their personal faith in God, which was expressed through prayers and by attending church gatherings, served as a protective factor when they were going through abusive episodes. The omnipresent God is an "*invisible helper*" in Hope's eyes, who holds infinite power that empowers her to continue to hope and expect positive things for the future.

Paradoxically, Pyles (2007) suggests that while religion is a source of emotional support and practical assistance for some women, it can also serve as a barrier that perpetuates silence for women surviving domestic violence. Similarly in the present study, religion created a sense of moral contradiction which trapped the women and prevented them from leaving the abusive relationship. Often Christian women dealing with domestic violence are influenced by explicit religious norms and expectations such as the concept of forgiveness, sacrifice and reconciliation.

In this study, the common theme of forgiveness was identified by the women despite their different religious orientations. For these women, forgiveness and tolerance produced inner peace when dealing with the abusive cycle. It gave them a positive attitude to dealing with their catastrophic situations. In terms of the abuser, forgiveness means “*everyone makes mistakes so we should leave a way for them [the abusers] to return back*” as Zoe commented. Such a state of mind removes blame and hatred towards the abuser on the women’s part. On one hand, the women wanted to change the abusive marital situation but, on the other hand, they felt they must live according to biblical standards set out by their congregations. For example, Hope felt that, from a Christian perspective, love should endure. She felt that despite the violence, it was her Christian duty to be a good wife and try to make the relationship work even if she was the only person in the relationship who made the effort towards change. Such internalisation of religious ideologies further reinforces the traditional Asian cultural practice of keeping the marriage intact and the family complete.

Sometimes, responsibility is placed on the woman to compromise her safety and wellbeing in order to save the marriage, which is often perceived by Christians as being sacred. Such notions are further reinforced by biblical scriptures suggested by Christian friends to encourage the women towards reconciliation. For example, Hope believed that she had been looked down on by some Christians: she told me, “*Some people will judge you or even amuse themselves by watching other people make fools of themselves.*” More unfortunate was that the women sometimes experienced verbal and psychological attacks from the Chinese pastor, unsupportive Christian friends and members of the wider faith community. For example, in a public scene, the pastor praised Emily for how she handled the situation: it was a “*good*” thing as Kevin “*needs correcting.*” During a private conversation Emily was condemned by her pastor who told her that she was “*not a good woman and her son should go to jail.*” The pastor also punished her Asian sister for demonstrating God’s love towards Emily during her marital battle with Kevin. This shows that some pastors and church members enforce biblical ideology of marriage on to the women, especially, those concerning gender expectations, covenants and forgiveness, which could result in inappropriate

responses to domestic violence. This could further contribute to the maintenance of abuse or enhance the woman's self-blame and feeling of guilt if she leaves.

It is evident from this study that women's faith influences their experiences of abuse, help-seeking strategies and recovery (Wendt, 2008). Women from families with a strong Christian faith, facing internal difficulties like fear, vulnerability, self-blame and isolation, and external barriers sustained by clergy and church communities, such as the belief that marriage is for life and optimism about the possibility of change in the abuser, can extend their existence in an abusive relationship (Popescu et al., 2009).

Moreover, Dasgupta (2002) suggests that religious leaders may offer inadequate advice that encourages abused women to stay within an abusive relationship. This could result in a woman believing that there is no authentic help for her. Church lay leaders are unfamiliar with the dynamic of violence and lack relevant knowledge, education and training for safe practices to address the complexity of the domestic violence situation. Instead, they tend to apply regimented religious ideologies that are unhelpful, ineffective or harmful for women (Homiak & Singletary, 2007; Jones & Fowler, 2009).

### **Domestic violence remains a private issue in the Chinese community.**

In general, domestic violence against women is an "ignored, invisible, but significant problem in Asian communities across all socioeconomic strata" (Lee, 2002, p. 473). The local study by Tse (2007) also found unsupportive community responses to domestic violence in various Asian communities in New Zealand. Disclosing domestic violence in the community threatens the community's reputation and brings shame to the family and the country of origin. This creates difficulty in discerning the types of violence in the community and also reinforces the myths surrounding low service utilisation by Asian women.

Through the experiences of the Chinese women participants, this study revealed that a combination of cultural and social barriers still prevents abused Chinese women from coming out of the closet about their abusive relationships. "*People*

*would not step out*” in the Chinese community, Emily said. Even talking to the researcher about their domestic violence experience was a learning curve for some women. In similar manner, Zoe commented that “*Chinese people do not like to tell others about shameful matters*” like domestic violence. Additionally, Zoe mentioned that “*I’m unsure of what is the Chinese community*” which shows that the concept of what constitutes a community needs to be explored further. On the other hand, even for woman who is aware of the broader concept of the Chinese community, she remains an outsider with their domestic violence experiences. Joy commented that: “... *I’m not associated with the Chinese social circle...*”

In addition, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the legal definition and statutory interventions for domestic violence among the members of the community. There is a lack of awareness of available information, resources and domestic violence help services in the community. Hope believed that there should be regular seminars in the community to raise awareness of domestic violence, especially for abused women.

*So [the women] will know that there is a way for them to protect themselves... They didn’t do that intervention part well. If they did protect themselves through other ways before reporting to the police, I believe it would be more effective.*

Some women believed that there was not much point in disclosing their domestic violence experiences to outsiders or members of the wider community. For example, Joy did not think “*they have any concept about [domestic violence]...*” or would offer much advice as “*they are new migrants to New Zealand as well.*” It also became apparent that there is a need for a safe space and a trusted environment in the community where Chinese women can talk about their experiences and share their journeys as survivors of domestic violence with other women.

Traditionally, Chinese culture subscribes to a collective worldview. Problems are often solved through collective means rather than confrontational resolutions (Yoshioka et al., 2001). In a high-context culture like the Chinese culture, an individual’s proper behaviour is determined by the reference of a significant group and their responses in various social contexts (Hall, 1983, as cited in Lee,

2000). Individuals are also encouraged to scrutinise each other's behaviour according to social norms (Yoshioka & Choi, 2005). In such a collective cultural context, the community's effort to condemn domestic violence is an effective way to prevent domestic violence due to the social pressure to eradicate such issues. This also puts pressure on the abuser to change as they become very aware of living under the scrutiny of their fellow citizens (Lee, 2000).

## **Women's Experiences with Multiple Forms of Formal Intervention**

In this study, four women used formal interventions such as the police, lawyers, family violence services and counselling services. This is somewhat contradictory to the notion Chinese immigrant women are more reluctant to use formal services when facing domestic violence situations (Lee, 2002). However, the literature also shows that ethnic minority women face common hindrances to service use, such as a perceived lack of cultural sensitivity, inaccessibility of services and specialised services, and distrust of authorities and service providers which may compromise their help-seeking efforts (Barnett, 2001).

The Chinese women in the present study experienced an intersection of social, cultural and contextual phenomena that were impediments to their help-seeking efforts as well as their access to formal services. I will summarise and discuss in detail the women's experiences in these different service sectors in the following sections.

### **The police and family violence services as key formal help.**

In the present study, the police played a vital role in referring Chinese women to Asian family violence agencies. For Joy, Hope and Emily their first formal contact was the police and that generally occurred following a major violent or abusive incident. This is consistent with previous findings that women who experience more severe type of violence are more likely to seek assistance from formal help services (Bonomi, Holt, Martin, & Thompson, 2006; Leone, Johnson, & Cohan, 2007). This also mirrors findings from previous research that law enforcement was the first place abused Asian women sought assistance outside of

their personal support networks Bui (2003) and the police often act as a very valuable gateway for women to access various support services (Bui, 2003; Grossman & Lundy, 2007).

Overall, there was a general sense that the Chinese women in this study had had positive experiences dealing with the police. However, both Joy and Hope noted that the police tended to prioritise the children's safety over the women's safety. A lesser concern for women's safety could also be reflected in Zoe's account that the police did not advise her about protection orders when they were called to visit her home as a result of a domestic dispute. Zoe's dealings with the police also show that there is a lack of cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness on the part of the police when communicating with Asian women who are victimised by domestic violence. Firstly, Zoe explicitly noted that she wanted to protect her husband from going back to the psychiatric hospital so she pretended that "*it was fine and we can sort it out ourselves*" when the police were called to visit her home. Later, Zoe's husband committed suicide shortly after her escape to the women's shelter with her children. She was interrogated by the police regarding the reasons for her departure. The way Zoe was investigated made her feel blamed and more guilty about leaving her husband when in reality her and her children's lives were in serious danger and escaping was the most sensible and safe option. Hall (1976) pointed out that Asian societies tend to use high-context communication styles, which mean that many things are left unsaid. In order to understand the whole picture, close attention needs to be paid to the person's non-verbal behaviour and immediate interactions, coupled with background knowledge of the person's behaviour.

Bui (2003) suggested that the Vietnamese American women in her US study mainly sought assistance from family violence agencies equipped with Vietnamese employees who spoke their native language. More importantly, many women gained emotional support and comfort from the Vietnamese service provider. In my study, women who accessed culturally specific family violence services received practical assistance such as problem solving skills and education programmes as well as emotional support such as confidence building and identity

development. Specifically, Asian family violence coordinators played a key role in delivering family violence services to the women, such as providing relevant information in her native language, which aided the woman's understanding of domestic violence from a legal perspective with possible legal remedies to address the problems. Asian family violence coordinators played a significant part in assisting the women during the application process for protection orders and parenting orders. Also, Joy and Hope found an Asian women's family violence programme very helpful in terms of self-protection skills, gaining confidence and empowerment, understanding the set-up of New Zealand legal systems and gaining knowledge of the aspects of the Immigration Act that concerned them. Hope mentioned that from the friendly services that she received she felt that she had dignity and "*human rights are far more prioritised*" in New Zealand. More importantly, due to their professional role, the Asian family violence coordinators were able to provide trust and confidentiality that was vital to the participants while they were dealing with domestic violence. Joy noted:

*I believe the reason that I lean towards [the family violence coordinator] is because of the nature of her work, she will keep things confidential.*

### **Women's experience with protection order and the court system.**

The women participants in the present study found out about protection orders through advice from the police and Asian family violence workers who provided services to them. Three of the five women (Emily, Hope and Joy) applied for temporary protection orders against their spouses, although initially, Joy hesitated to apply for protection order as she wanted to protect her husband and family.

It has been found that even when Asian women contact the police for help and become aware of the benefits of protection orders, they are less likely to request a protection order (Bui, 2003). Robertson et al. (2007a) reported that in general new immigrant women in New Zealand lacked knowledge about protection order procedures; mostly they learnt about these through the police or women's advocates who assisted them. In comparison to Pākehā and Maori women, women of ethnic minority in their research were less likely to apply for and obtain protection orders.

The application for protection orders normally followed a crisis violent incident that proceeded from an accumulation of prior incidents. Only Emily and Joy were granted permanent protection orders. Hope, on the other hand, had her application put on notice and her spouse submitted counter-claims. Hope believed that the reason she did not get a permanent protection order was because she was not physically harmed by Jason so it was perceived to be non life-threatening in the eyes of the judge. In reality, Jason had psychologically abused Hope on a repetitive basis and physically harmed her son on several occasions.

Hope emphasised that, “*At least, in New Zealand I have been treated like a human not like a dog.*” Echoing this, Ruby also noted that:

*New Zealand was such a good social welfare country. It is a merciful country and treats people with love... there were proper legislations...*

However, Hope’s experience with protection orders sends a contradictory message to Asian immigrant women living in New Zealand. While it is generally perceived that New Zealand has more comprehensive legal provisions against domestic violence than Asian countries like China. Chinese women and children’s wellbeing and safety might not be fully protected by the law unless they suffer severe and life-threatening physical injuries. This in turn discourages Chinese women from seeking statutory interventions unless the situation reaches crisis point.

In addition, even when the protection order was in place, Joy and Emily’s spouses broke the conditions by contacting them via phone, social networks or personal visits. While the abusers begged for forgiveness in front of the women and asked them to withdraw the protection order, they also tried to attack them through legal means such as lodging an appeal against the protection order. This shows that protection orders provided necessary but limited protection in these circumstances.

Rimonte (1991) identified that in the Pacific Asian Community in America, domestic violence abusers have often been effectively decriminalised through the

acceptance of the cultural defence which argues that an individual's behaviour such as violent acts should be accepted on cultural grounds. Doing so is to validate and respect the distinct characteristics of ethnic cultures. Asian immigrant women's reluctance to pursue legal remedies for domestic violence situations could be heightened by family court judges who dismiss abusive behaviour based on culturally sanctioned grounds (Midlarsky et al., 2006), and also by those that often encourages abused Asian women to remain in the family while employing family remedies for domestic violence (Ho, 1990). While the cultural defence is based on respect for cultural values, the implication of adopting such a stance is the acceptance of Asian patriarchal values which support or facilitate violence against women. In this study, Emily pleaded with the court to dismiss her husband's crime based on cultural grounds such as that need for the family to remain together. Secondly, Kevin's violence derives from being physically punished as a child in China. This excused the severity of his violence. The judge eventually decided to reduce the severity of the crime from three charges to just one charge of intimidation.

In addition, Bui (2003) found that Asian women often use legal and public interventions as a bargaining tool for their safety. Instead of going to court to testify against their spouse, many Vietnamese women participants went to court to help or rescue their spouses by pleading to the judge for leniency or a dismissal of the domestic violence case. The majority of Vietnamese women wanted police to drop criminal charges against their abusive spouses by refusal to admit or de-emphasise the severity of the abuse. Similarly, Chinese women in the current study were manipulated by their spouses to accompany them to go to court for similar reasons. Joy accompanied Tai during his court hearing because Tai wanted to disguise the severity of his violence. Joy was asked by Tai to withdraw the protection order. Joy decided not to but as for Hope, under the ongoing persuasion by Jason she eventually dropped the protection order against him. Hope commented,

*He was very angry... He messaged me and wants me to withdraw it... He wants me to withdraw it so I did. I went with him. He grabbed me and told me to go to the family court and withdraw it...*

Another dynamic that was highlighted was Hope's re-victimisation by the court's decision to appoint her in-laws to be the visitation supervisors when in reality they were the instigators of the domestic abuse in many situations. Unfortunately, Hope was advised by her lawyer to be compliant during court proceedings and not to voice anything she could not prove. The court's insensitivity in the decision-making potentially exacerbates Chinese women's experiences of domestic violence.

### **The lawyer's role in the women's formal help-seeking process.**

None of the women in the present study accessed a lawyer themselves: instead, they were put in touch with a lawyer by family violence services and helpful friends. The women had mixed experiences with lawyers. On one hand, most women found the lawyers' advice helpful especially regarding Protection Order and Parenting Order applications. This is broadly consistent with the overall account provided with regard to ethnic women's experience with lawyers in a report by (Robertson et al., 2007b). Legal aid proved to be very important as three out of the four women who sought help from lawyers accessed it. From this we can see the importance of financial assistance for abused Chinese women while accessing legal intervention. Emily, Joy and Hope had obtained permanent residency status, thus applying for legal aid was not a problem while they were accessing formal intervention for domestic violence. As mentioned in Chapter Two, a lack of legal aid provision for non-resident immigrant women could create an additional structural barrier for ethnic women when accessing legal intervention against domestic violence.

One participant found the service from her lawyer unsatisfactory. Hope said that she did not receive a clear explanation of the parenting order from the lawyer. Also, under Jason's constant persuasion after receiving a copy of the court proceedings, Hope finally decided to withdraw her protection order application. However, the lawyers were not supportive of this decision as "*they are focusing on financial benefits*" and thus delayed communications. From a cultural and religious perspective, Hope believed that taking Jason to court would only worsen the marital situation that was beginning to improve. She wanted to "*take a step*

*back*” and solve the problem privately rather than publicly through legal remedies. The Chinese ancient saying: “Never go to court when alive and never go to hell after death” (Lee & Au, 2007, p. 548) symbolically expresses the culturally subscribed belief when accessing state interventions.

### **Women’s experience with counsellors.**

Previous literature suggests that in general only a low percentage of abused women access existing social services in their community such as counselling and support services to address the abuse (Henning & Klesges, 2002; Hutchison & Hirschel, 1998). As mentioned earlier, due to fear of shame and losing face and other cultural norms, Chinese women tend to delay help-seeking. By the time abused Chinese women access help services like counselling, their situation may be more severe than that of other women (Lee, 1996).

In the present study three out of the five women accessed counselling services. For two, this was at the instigation of the Family Court and one was referred by her GP. Overall, Zoe found her experiences of individual and couples counselling helpful. Her counsellor not only acted as a key contact person during crises in the abusive relationship, she also helped Zoe with safety plans to escape the relationship. While Joy concentrated on couples counselling, Emily focused on her personal counselling experiences. Joy found that counselling “*didn’t have much effect*” on her. The Western counsellor did not create a safe environment for open dialogue between the couple. Although Joy did not perceive any physical threat, she experienced emotional hindrance such as helplessness during the session as she felt “*there is nothing that I can say*”. Tai was overpowering in the session by creating a commotion with the counsellor. Thus, Joy was re-victimised by Tai during the counselling and it was not an effective intervention measure for Joy. This shows the importance of counsellors establishing trust and emotional security in the initial counselling sessions. The counsellor’s ability to understand the client’s culturally entrenched communication style is also vital. Asian women with minimal or no experience with help services should be given clear guidance as to the structure and nature of the therapeutic sessions (Lee, 2002).

On the other hand, Emily did not find her Asian counsellor particularly helpful as there was no emotional engagement - "*there was no touch on the inside.*" For her, a deeper connection with the counsellor on an emotional level was more valuable as it gave her motivation to be firm and decisive. This shows that the implicit communication style and reserved therapeutic approach of domestic violence interventions might not necessarily fulfil some Asian women's needs and desires. Emily found the Pacifica counsellor's direct therapeutic approach more helpful. Although, in general, comments by a professional such as you are "*not strong enough*" could be classified as examples of victim blaming, for Emily such statements provided her with more empowerment and determination for change. More importantly, the Pacifica counsellor would tailor her therapeutic approach to meet Emily's religious needs by providing her Biblical scriptures as a form of encouragement. Lee (2002) stressed that it is imperative for service providers to realise that Asian women face complex cultural barriers when deciding to end an abusive marriage. Empowerment could be achieved through re-analysing and re-identifying Asian women's specific needs in a continuous self-directed and self-paced process guided by the women.

Healthcare professionals such as general practitioners (GPs) and psychiatrists also played vital roles in the women's access to formal intervention. This was especially true for Zoe and she emphasised such approaches when she recommended abused Asian women should seek help from health practitioners, as we will see later. This shows the need for health care professionals to screen for domestic violence in clients. It is vital for health care professionals to engage in open conversations about domestic violence. They also need to undergo cultural competence training when dealing with ethnic women clients (Usta, Antoun, Ambuel, & Khawaja, 2012).

### **Shelter experience and special service needs.**

Ethnic immigrant women can face a range of barriers such as cultural unresponsiveness, racism and a lack of awareness of immigrant policies when accessing formal networks like shelter services (Dasgupta, 2000). Mainstream shelters are often inadequately equipped to meet the special and cultural needs of

abused Asian women (Ho, 1990). Lee and Au (2007) pointed out that a culturally sensitive shelter environment is as important as providing services in an appropriate language. Similarly, as reflected in the women's accounts in this study, both cultural and structural barriers impaired the women's shelter experience. Zoe was embarrassed to go back to the women's shelter for the second time because of the issue of saving face. She was worried that others might judge her original decision to leave. Also, Zoe's older son did not receive the necessary and instant protection he needed when he was at the refuge the second time. Because of his age, he was not allowed to stay in the refuge as he is likely to be perceived as a potential threat to other refuge residents but in reality he too was a victim of domestic violence. This in turn negatively impacted on Zoe's refuge stay experience. A clear distinction is often made between paternal and maternal roles in Chinese families. The mother-child relationship is closely bonded and nurturing (Tang, 1997). Thus, it was natural for Zoe to want to have her teenage son with her in the refuge. In addition, an instrumental barrier faced by Zoe was that she had to leave the refuge to attend to her daily needs such as shopping and banking. This created heightened fear for her as she was concerned that she might be tracked down by Eric. Emily also expressed concerns for her child when they first arrived at the shelter – *“My [child] couldn't let go of me when we arrived, she would get scared if she wasn't holding on to me.”* Emily and Zoe are the only women who accessed the women's shelter services and only stayed at shelter for a short period of time before returning home. Statistics from the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges annual reports for the period 2005 to 2013 suggested that in comparison to an average of 36% of Pākehā women, on average only two percent of Asian women utilised refuge services (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2014).

In addition, when describing shelter experience, Zoe commented that she felt *“extremely miserable”* that she had *“reached such a state that [I] had to live on hand-outs.”* Contrary to the common perception in the dominant culture in which women utilising a shelter is often seen as an expression of independence and liberation from the abuse, for Chinese women it is perceived as a loss of dignity and a temporary measure when other rescue options fail. Some Chinese women

may be reluctant to access shelters due to feelings of shame and a sense of homelessness, although they are aware of the safety and refuge shelters can provide for them (Chan, 1989). Thus, shelter providers catering for Asian women should aim to provide culturally sensitive and language friendly services which foster respect of the client's independence and self-determination based on the client's cultural perspective and frame of references (Lee, 2002).

Overall, Chinese women in the present study were faced with special needs when they accessed state intervention and family violence services especially in the area of personal support, shelter service, legal and financial assistance. The US study by Grossman and Lundy (2007) suggested that in comparison to four other ethnic groups (White, African American, Hispanic American & American Indian), Asian American women were confronted with special service needs which are unique to their situation in terms of personal support (86%), legal assistance (61.2%), shelter/emergency housing (31.7%), child or family assistance (16.6%) and financial assistance was required by 12.9% of the clients.

### **Returning to the Relationship Following Interventions**

When faced with the decision to leave an abusive relationship, abused women are often confronted with intense emotional contradictions. Sometimes, women decided to leave on a short term basis because of the deep emotional attachment they have for their husbands and family. Due to the enormous culturally bound conflicts, Asian women with domestic violence experiences often return to the relationship for the same reason that motivated them to leave originally (Rimonte, 1989). In this study, the women participants often end up feeling responsible for the men's abuse by believing that they could do more to preserve or save the relationship. Thus, after short term respite, the women typically chose to return to the relationship for the sake of their children and their husbands as well as the family's wellbeing. For example, despite Jason's physical abuse of Hope's son, divorce was not an option for Hope, especially because she has a son with Jason. Likewise, Zoe and Emily returned to the abusive relationships with their children as they tried to prevent them from being fatherless. Ruby and Joy came back to New Zealand after leaving initially, for the sake of their children having a better

life in New Zealand. As mentioned earlier, Zoe, Emily and Joy were persuaded by their spouses to gain sympathy for them and eventually allowed them to return to the relationship. An underlying reason for the reconciliation was that the abuser was still the father and also needed a family. This implies that abused Chinese women are engaged in a constant negotiation process in which complex moral contradictions exist concerning their family, marital relationship and their husband's abusive behaviour. In a New Zealand study by Fanslow and Robinson (2010), 20% of the representative sample of women participants who initially left the abusive relationship later returned for various reasons such as forgiveness and sympathy for the abuser, for the sake of the family and for their children's wellbeing.

From the present study we can conclude the ultimate goal for most Chinese women is to remain in the marital relationship without the occurrence or reoccurrence of violence and abuse. This is consistent with previous literature which suggests that abused women actively seek formal and informal interventions as a way to eliminate the violence while residing with their spouse (Campbell, Rose, Kub, & Nedd, 1998; Lempert, 1996).

The fact that most women participants returned to the relationship after accessing public interventions places more emphasis on examining the wider social, cultural and structural contexts which could act as an impediment or support forces when immigrant women leave an abusive relationship. Burman and Chantler (2005) illustrated in their cross-cultural study that, alongside cultural dimensions, a mixture of structural factors such as law, policies and entitlement to social welfare serve as impediments which reinforce abused minority women to remaining in violent relationships.

### **Critical Consciousness and Perceived Effectiveness of Intervention**

Martín-Baró (1994) employed Paulo Freire's term *concientizacion* (critical consciousness) and asserted that it is crucial for people to become aware of themselves and their place in the world in order to perceive more clearly and act

more truly in the historical and political societal contexts they are part of. Critical consciousness highlights the imbalanced power relationship and inequality between men and women. It allows space for the reinterpretation of cultural values and practices in the context of domestic violence, which allows room for positive and effective initiatives to be created and lived out (Perilla, 1999). To some degree, all the Chinese women in the study experienced critical consciousness in relation to their abusive experiences. They also discovered positive avenues on their road to healing and recovery. Emily mentioned that the calamitous experience with the Chinese pastor was an eye opener for her and it helped her to gain confidence and critical analysis skills. Ruby was able to build a positive self-image and found values in life in her second marriage. After the death of her husband, Zoe was able to gain confidence, problem-solving skills and independence by engaging in tertiary education.

Critical consciousness could also be demonstrated by the recommendations that the Chinese women give to other women who are in similar situations. The women are not passive victims but active survivors with the ability to encourage and empower other women. Hope reiterated that bringing the gospel to the life of abused women would also make a difference to them as “*humans have finite capabilities but Lord Jesus has infinite capabilities.*” A common goal for all the women in the study was that by sharing their own stories they wished to encourage and help other immigrant women who might be going through similar abusive situations. Ruby’s statement illustrated this very well. She said that:

*...Through our experiences of domestic violence, I feel we should contribute our part. Through our cases, if we are able to appeal to others, and to this society for a just and positive effect. For people to gain conscience or they might want to repent. I feel this is what the society needs – a call for a just voice.*

During the evaluative accounts of their experiences, the women also shed light on what sort of interventions they believe are the most helpful. Emily, Zoe and Ruby’s help seeking experiences demonstrate that family and trusted friends could offer help in a tangible and long-lasting manner. Similar to previous research findings (Rose & Campbell, 2000; Trotter & Allen, 2009; Wuest & Merritt-gray, 1999), the Chinese women in the study received a wide range of support such as

emotional support, advice and practical assistance from their informal support networks, which they found to be very valuable. Trusted friends provided tangible help (e.g. provided a place to stay and child care) or instrumental support (e.g. advice to contact shelters, lawyers and social services) to the women, which they needed immediately after disclosure of the abuse they had suffered.

This finding is consistent with previous literature suggests that, in general, female victims of abusive relationships usually rated friends as the most helpful form of support, followed by family members (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; Edwards et al., 2012). In addition, the local study by Fanslow and Robinson (2010) on help seeking behaviours based on a representative sample of female victims of domestic violence found that 76.7% had told someone about their violent experiences. Among those that did tell someone, 58.3% had disclosed to family or friends and 36.1% of the women disclosed both to their informal networks and formal services. However, 40% of women who told someone found no help from the person they disclosed to.

In this study, nearly all the women sought a combination of formal and informal intervention during and/or after the abusive relationship. Some found informal support more helpful while others found formal services more important. For example, Emily emphasised that formal intervention such as a protection order is very helpful in urgent circumstances as a form of immediate protection against the violence. Joy said “*in terms of domestic violence intervention, it is best to seek help from government agencies.*” Zoe also urged abused Asian women to seek help from health professionals such as GPs and psychological services by mentioning that,

*If you are afraid to tell others, seeing a specialist is a good thing...You can try it and you should trust them. They could offer some help to you.*

As stated by the women, formal support networks are also very important for abused Chinese women in terms of domestic violence intervention measures in times of crisis.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This research has focused on the dynamic of domestic violence as experienced by Chinese immigrant women and the implications of the violence on women's health. It has identified social, cultural and gendered factors which shape women's understanding of violence, the abusive experiences and their help-seeking strategies. The research set out to identify issues facing the women when disclosing domestic violence to their social groups and the barriers they experience in seeking help. It also examined the role of the Chinese community and family violence services in offering effective intervention for Chinese women in domestic violence situations.

Overall, it is evident that Chinese women's experience of domestic violence is perpetuated by traditional gender role expectations and cultural norms in a patriarchal social system. The participants suffered a combination of forms of abuse (physical, emotional, financial) before and after migration to New Zealand. While the women could easily recognise physical violence often it was not until they had contacted and communicated with service providers that they recognised the more hidden forms of power and control such as verbal aggression and psychological abuse. In addition, all women participants separated from their husband or former spouse for at least some period of time, but this did not stop the violence. The women were often confronted by complex and intense moral contradictions when choosing to leave an abusive relationship. After leaving temporarily, most women participants returned to the relationship for the sake of their children to have a father and for the father to have a complete family. As a result of the prolonged exposure to violence and abuse, Chinese women and children experienced a great degree of psychological trauma and wounds which left emotional scars years after the abuse.

The stories from the five Chinese women revealed that these immigrant women are particularly vulnerable to the exposure of domestic violence. Traditional cultural values and beliefs gave added potency to the abuser's power and control tactics over the women and their social support. A combination of interpersonal, cultural, social and contextual and community factors influences Chinese

women's ability to make sense of the violence experiences and impacts on their help-seeking strategies. Identified cultural dimensions that influenced the women's help-seeking strategies include complexities with mothers-in-law such as in the case of Hope, Emily and Ruby. Preserving face and avoiding its consequences was another prominent factor that served as barriers in help-seeking as salient in the stories of Zoe, Joy, Emily and Hope. Chinese women prioritise family's wellbeing and children's needs over their own and which resulted in enduring violence for a prolonged period before seeking outside interventions. When the violence reached crisis points, they prioritised seeking help from informal support networks. Family members especially mothers and sisters and trusted friends offered both practical assistance and emotional support to the women which they found really helpful. Sometimes, Chinese women internalised traditional cultural values which resulted in a fatalistic attitude, self-blaming or feeling guilty about utilising outside interventions. They would often interpret the abuser's abusive behaviours by attributing them to external factors such as marital affairs, drug use or being sick. Other times, Chinese women disapproved and resisted traditional practices and gendered expectations by utilising agency to fight against the abuse. All of these experiences helped Chinese women to raise their level of critical consciousness about the violence and abuse which encouraged them to find positive remedies to change their situations.

Multiple factors contributed to the women's social isolation such as lack of English proficiency, difficulties obtaining drivers' licenses and finding suitable employment. The abusers would often exploit these factors to isolate the women from social interactions. Unfamiliarity with family violence services, social services and legal systems also contributed to isolation and served as impediments when Chinese women attempted to navigate their way to safety from violence and abuse. After women accessed formal interventions, they found family violence services that offered culturally sensitive and language friendly services really helpful. Overall, the women had positive experiences accessing formal help services. However, they also identified specific challenges and difficulties when dealing with the police, lawyers, shelters and counselling services.

Religious beliefs and faith served as a source of strength and hope when some women were dealing with the abusive relationship. The women's informal support networks (family, friends and faith communities) acted as a source of support and offered practical assistance to the women while in other times, some informal helpers exacerbate the violence by reinforcing traditional gendered responsibilities and victim blaming attitudes which discouraged the women to seek outside help. In most situations, this discouragement stemmed from Christian leaders and faith community members such as in the case of Emily and Hope.

The Chinese community also played a part in cultivating the secrecy surrounding domestic violence. This research suggested that, at large, domestic violence remains a secretive and private issue in the Chinese community. Domestic violence was not a widely and openly discussed social issue among the women's wider community networks. Prominent contributing factors include the cultural notion of shame, avoiding becoming the subject the gossip and concerns around the availability of authentic and practical intervention by community members.

### **Personal Reflections**

The research process has been a meaningful learning journey for me. Engaging in in-depth conversation with the women has been a highlight for me and I really enjoyed the process of interaction with the participants. Choosing a research topic that aligns with my personal experiences helped me to engage with the participants on a deep level. I feel honoured and privileged to have gained the women's trust and for them to share their personal experiences with me. To me, the women's stories are not just data to be collected but lived experiences and memories to be treasured.

The research process has helped me to become critically conscious regarding the importance raising awareness about domestic violence as a social and collective issue in the Chinese community and Asian ethnic communities. The research widened my perspective to the gender power dynamics, cultural dilemmas, social and structural barriers that Chinese women faces when dealing with domestic violence situations and seeking public interventions. This research also highlighted to me the importance of promoting a safe community space for

Chinese women to discuss their experience of domestic violence and to cultivate a collective force that will support women and children to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Furthermore, it is necessary to implement self-care plans for women participants as well as the researcher. I found it important to ensure that a support system was available to me especially during debriefing period after interviewing the participants.

### **Methodological Strengths and Limitations**

This research utilised a case study approach to capture Chinese women's experience of domestic violence in context. This was successful as the in-depth interviews allowed space for the women to share experiences that were significant to them. Themes which emerged from the initial interview were able to be explored and expanded further during the follow up interviews. Presenting the women with a draft of their case study allowed them to revise the information that was provided and at the same time refresh certain memories that they wished to discuss more. This was particularly helpful for women who preferred to view their draft case studies face to face as any information that needed confirming or correcting could be discussed straight away. It also enabled me to take notes of important information that is vital for them. In addition, my lived experiences as a Chinese immigrant woman, familiarity with Chinese cultural practices and my ability to fluently communicate with the participants in their native language were huge advantages for this research.

However, my research also has certain limitations. Firstly, given there is limited local research available in the same research topic, carrying out more field work such as participant-observations could have helped to establish more connections for this research.

Secondly, given the nature of qualitative studies and the time spent in the research processes, the size of the sample was small. The small sample size is a reflection of the difficulty of recruiting Chinese women for domestic violence research. It means that we should be careful about generalising beyond the sample.

Particularly, it should be noted that the participants of this study are first generation immigrant women from China. What has been found here might not apply to second generation immigrants.

At the end, by being actively engaging with the participants and developing a meaningful relationship with the women I hope that I have helped to break the silence surrounding domestic violence discourses in the Chinese community of New Zealand. In a small but valuable way, my research can help to give a collective voice to Chinese women's stories on their own terms and to enhance the lives of the Chinese women who were victimised by domestic violence by raising awareness and advocacy as well as promoting of integrated culturally competent help service systems for ethnic women.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This research has found that certain cultural dimensions served as an integral part of the abuser's power and control of Chinese women. In particular, the relationship between in-law abuse and male entitlement requires further investigation. The women's informal support networks such as friends and religious leaders sometimes served as an impediment to help seeking. Further studies could examine how Chinese women's help seeking strategies are influenced by the women's informal support networks as they proved to be an important part of the help seeking process.

While the women experienced multiple forms of abuse, all women participants experienced separation abuse. Particularly, abusers used children as a way to bargain their way back into the marital relationship, gaining the sympathy of the women. When making the decision to leave or remain in the marital relationship, women often prioritised their children's needs before their own. Culturally orientated values such as saving face by keeping the abuse private and protecting their husband from losing face tended to prolong Chinese women's exposure to domestic violence. Future research could explore more in-depth the different dynamics involved in Chinese women's experience of separation abuse. Examining culturally and socially orientated reasons for staying or leaving an

abusive relationship and the implication of these choices on women and their children's wellbeing are equally important, especially as most of the women participants decided to remain in the relationship after accessing various interventions.

In addition, a prominent theme was that when women experience domestic violence, their children are also very likely to become the victim of child abuse by the father. In most cases, both Chinese women and their children experienced physical and/or psychological trauma from the abuse. It will be important for research to examine this relationship further with particular attention paid to Chinese men's ownership and entitlement over Chinese women and children in a web of control.

This study has identified that multiple factors contribute to Chinese immigrant women's social isolation in New Zealand. Unfamiliarity with local resources and legal services heightened the women's experience of entrapment and made them more vulnerable to abuse. While most times women have had positive experiences when utilising formal services, some encountered cultural and structural barriers which resulted in various degrees of re-victimisation. Future research could identify support systems that help Chinese women to access interventions as well as examining how social and structural barriers could be addressed and eliminated in order to benefit Chinese women's experiences with formal interventions.

### **Implications of the Research**

Chinese women's experience of domestic violence needs to be understood and examined in the broader context of immigration, socio-cultural dynamics and gendered power dynamics. This research calls for an integrated and multi-levelled approach to address domestic violence in the Chinese and ethnic communities.

The case studies revealed the complex dynamics involved in Chinese women's experience of domestic violence which is often reinforced by traditional gender role norms and expectations in a patriarchal social system coupled with social and structural barriers. Chinese women with domestic violence experiences often live in a complex contradictory context when they view their spouse as their and their

children's source of love and support, but, simultaneously, they are the abusers who are dangerous and threaten the family's wellbeing. Practitioners in the field needs to pay special attention to reframe culturally sensitive issues which reflect resistance and resilience and draws on strengths to help domestic violence survivors to engage in culturally sensitive ways of coping (Yoshihama, 2002).

The results shows that abused Chinese women often require additional information to recognise the full spectrum of domestic violence and to identify their experience in specific forms of abuse. Unfamiliarity with the legal definition of domestic violence and availability of local services further hinders Chinese immigrant women to seek outside help and formal interventions. Chinese women should be explicitly informed about their legal rights and personal choice regarding domestic violence. One of the implications of the research is to cultivate supportive, trustworthy community spaces which are vital for Chinese women to engage in domestic violence discourses. When examining the role of culture in domestic violence intervention in the Chinese immigrant community, it is important to be aware of the "Chinese hegemonic discourse" as identified by (Epstein-Ngo & Kanukollu, 2015). It refers to the over-emphasis of certain discourses over others, such as prioritising the discourse of patriarchy and collectivism over the role of pro-egalitarian and pro-women discussions.

Community education should facilitate an understanding of the influences of cultural norms and gender role ideology on Chinese women's experience of domestic violence and their help-seeking strategies. Community education should engage in discourses that remove shame or victim-blaming attitudes as a way to support and empower ethnic women and children who are exposed to domestic violence. This research also revealed that domestic violence is often perceived as a private matter rather than a social issue by Chinese women and their communities. Critical consciousness needs to be raised about the importance of addressing domestic violence as a community issue which requires the support forces of ethnic families and communities to influence change. Furthermore, information on domestic violence could be disseminated by using Chinese radio, newspapers, pamphlets and information printed in Chinese about domestic

violence and the availability of help services (Lee, 2000; Yick, 2000). Given the group diversity within the Chinese immigrant community, it is important to provide prevention information that is not only language friendly but also meaningful within the context of the community being engaged.

In addition, this study shows that lay leaders and faith communities play a vital role in the women's help seeking experience. This calls for formal implementation of domestic violence policies within churches and other religious bodies. Church leaders should be equipped with knowledge, education and training for safe practices to address domestic violence and to ensure that Chinese and ethnic women are not being blamed, silenced or re-victimised upon the disclosure of domestic violence to trusted members of the community.

Alongside the role of faith communities, this research highlighted the importance of Chinese women's informal support network during disclosure of violence and the help-seeking process. An implication of this is to integrate women's informal support networks into a co-ordinated and collaborative domestic violence intervention plan to encourage an active participation by the women's informal helpers and to meet the women's on-going needs. Goodman Goodman, Banyard, Woulfe, Ash, and Mattern (2016) call for formal use of a network-orientated approach in existing mainstream family violence services, advocating for informal support networks as vital partners who work closely with official channels to fulfil the short- and long-term needs of their clients. Raising awareness and educating the women's informal support network to understand domestic violence and the implication of it on women and children, could encourage women to utilise the right interventions before the situation becomes desperate.

Another implication of this study is a theoretical framework that intersects gender analysis with other dimensions such as culture, community and immigration to promote a deeper understanding of Chinese immigrant women's help seeking strategies. When dealing with domestic violence, Chinese immigrant women utilise diverse and multiple strategies to navigate their and their children's safety within different social, cultural and contextual constraints. In addition, it was apparent that Asian immigrant women as a group have special needs that are

noticeably different from those of mainstream women (Huisman, 1996; Wong et al., 2013). Cultural norms, language barriers and lack of awareness of existing local services and resources hinder Chinese women from seeking adequate informal and formal assistance. This implies that intervention and advocacy need to be adapted to meet the special needs of immigrant women.

More importantly, a culturally safe and culturally competent family violence service system is paramount for Chinese immigrant women who are victimised by domestic violence. Effective services are needed to ensure reported violence is adequately addressed and that the multiple needs of ethnic women and children are met. The availability of bi-lingual staff who share the client's cultural background and can engage with the client in her primary language is important within mainstream family violence services. The findings show that Chinese women tend to access formal interventions when violence and abuse reaches crisis point. Family violence services, police, lawyers, shelters and counselling services have been shown to be important formal interventions for Chinese immigrant women as they navigate towards safety. These research findings could inform development of future policies and legislations for cultural safety and competency training in domestic violence as an integral and compulsory part of family violence services and the legal services of New Zealand.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

**邀请华人妇女参与社会学硕士研究项目**

您是从中国，香港，台湾，马来西亚  
或新加坡移居到新西兰的华人妇女吗？

您有过家庭暴力的经历吗？

您是否取得过以社区为基础的家庭暴力  
服务和法定上对家庭暴力的干预措施吗？

您愿意分享您对家庭暴力的看法与  
观念吗？

我盼望听到您的  
经历。如果  
您想参与这个  
硕士研究项目  
请和我联系！

**家庭暴力**

我是琳达Linda。我来自于中国，已在新西兰  
局住了二十年。我曾在奥大获得心理学的学  
士学位，在怀卡托大学获得心理学的社会科  
学头等荣誉学位。我现在是怀卡托社会心理学  
的硕士生。我的导师是内维尔 Neville  
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## **Appendix B: Information Sheet**

### **An exploration of women's experiences of domestic violence in Chinese immigrant communities**

#### **Information sheet for potential participants**

##### **Who is the researcher?**

My name is Linda Gee. I'm originally from China and have been living in New Zealand for the past 20 years. I'm a Masters student doing a thesis in Community Psychology at the University of Waikato. My interest in this area stems from witnessing Chinese women being the victim of domestic violence scenarios as a child, both in my immediate and extended families. I was inspired by my supervisor Dr Neville Robertson to pursue this topic as I became more aware of the prevalence and dynamic of domestic violence in the South-east Asian and migrant communities of New Zealand.

##### **What is this research about?**

The aim of my research is to gain an in-depth understanding of women's experience of domestic violence in Chinese & South-east Asian migrant communities. The primary focus of the research is spouse abuse; physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence against Chinese & South-east Asian women in a domestic context. This research sets out to explore the dynamic of domestic violence and the implication on the women, their health and wellbeing. It will identify the cultural and social factors in relation to the women's experiences as well as the implication of these on her experiences and in seeking help. This research hopes to identify issues facing the women when disclosing the violent or abusive relationship to their social groups and the barriers in seeking help. It will also examine; the role of the Chinese community, statutory and community-based interventions in offering effective intervention measures for Chinese women in domestic violence situations.

##### **Why am I asked to participate?**

I believe that you can contribute valuable insights for this project by sharing your experiences of domestic violence. Your story will not only help and inspire other women who have similar experiences to you but also your story will serve as a driving force and making an influential difference to the wider Asian communities in areas of domestic violence awareness and intervention. I hope to interview 8 Chinese women from different age groups, backgrounds and marital dynamics. I also hope this research will include Chinese immigrant women from certain South East Asian countries such as (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore or Malaysia).

### **What will I be asked to do?**

I would like to meet with you at a time and place that you are comfortable with and that suits us both. I expect that the interview will take about 1 to 2 hours. If there are any questions that you are uncomfortable to answer, you can choose to pass. You are welcome to bring someone with you as a support person.

### **What will I be asked in the interview?**

I'm interested in hearing about your story of domestic violence and barriers you face in seeking help. Also, how your experiences has been shaped by cultural and social factors.

That is I would like to discuss areas of interest such as:

- Your definition of domestic violence.
- The dynamic of the abuse or violence that you have experienced (physical, verbal, psychological and/ or sexual violence), and
- The implication that violence had on you and your family.
- Your perception and beliefs on South-east Asian (Chinese) women's gender roles, traditional cultural norms and belief systems, and
- How these values and beliefs have influenced and impacted your experiences and also in seeking help.
- Issues you facing when disclosing your experiences to family and friends and the wider communities.

- Your views on the role of the Chinese community in supporting women in violent situations and your experiences accessing statutory and/or community-based interventions on family violence.
- Other protective factors that have helped you with your experiences.

If you have not disclosed your experience to any of your family and/or friends, I'm interested to know what factors have influenced your decision.

If you have had statutory intervention such as protection orders, I'm interested in hearing your experience and how it has shaped your perception around statutory protection for Chinese women in domestic violence situations.

If you are currently seeking or have sought help and support from family violence services or help services, I'm interested in hearing your experiences accessing the service.

If you have had no access to community support or intervention, I'm interested in hearing what other factors have helped you dealing with your experiences.

### **What will happen with my information?**

Our conversation will be digitally recorded. I might also take hand written notes. I will then write up your story and, if you wish, give you a copy for comment and correction. You can withdrawal any information that you do not wish to be used. All written material will be in English: I'm able to verbally translate the information into Chinese if you need.

You will be asked to provide feedback within two weeks. If I do not hear back from you I will assume that you are fine with your story as it is.

Your story will be used for my Master's thesis. Later, I will use the information to write articles for academic journals. All reports, theses and journal articles are potentially accessible by the public.

### **Will other people know who I am?**

Generally, no. Your real name will not be used in this research. I will use pseudonyms (false names) and omit or disguise potentially identifying information such as place names, occupations and easily identifiable events. It is my top priority to protect your privacy; however, it is possible that you might be recognised by readers who are really familiar with your story such as your lawyer, social worker or ex-partner. The English translation should help to protect your privacy.

### **What are my rights and what can I expect from the researcher?**

- You can ask questions at any point during the study.
- You can ask for the digital recorder to be stopped at any time.
- Decline to answer any specific questions.
- Withdraw from the research at any point during the interview or after the interview up to two weeks after I send you the draft of your story for comment.
- To have the information you have provided corrected, added or ask to have information removed.
- Expect to receive a summary of the final report and be given details of how to access the full report.
- Expect that information you provide will be kept in secure storage. (It will be kept for up to five years after my thesis is completed and then ensure that it destroyed.)
- You are welcome to contact me or my supervisors if you have any concerns, queries or would like further information about the study.

### **What do I need to do now?**

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact me (contact details below) or, if you prefer, ask the person who gave you this sheet to pass on your contact details to me. Whether you contact me or I contact you, we can arrange a time and place that you are comfortable with to meet. I'm hoping to have up to 8 women to participate in this study and will be selecting women to ensure inclusion of different age, background and relationship dynamics.

### **Contact Details:**

Researcher: Linda Gee: Graduate student: School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Phone or Text: 021-2519793 Email: [lg51@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lg51@students.waikato.ac.nz)

Supervisor: Dr Neville Robertson: School of Psychology, University of Waikato.

Phone: 07 8384466 ext 8300 Email: [scorpio@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:scorpio@waikato.ac.nz)

Supervisor: Dr Cate Curtis: School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Phone:

07 8384466 ext 8669 Email: [ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz)

## Appendix C: Information Sheet (Chinese)

### 参与者需知

#### 华人移民社区中妇女们家庭暴力的经历

##### 致各参与者：

我是琳达（Linda Gee），我原是从中国来，已经居住在新西兰有二十年了。我现在是怀卡托大学社会心理学系的硕士生，这个研究项目是我的硕士研究项目。我对这个研究项目的兴趣是从我小的时候目睹女性成为家庭暴力的受害者而起因的。在我更多的对新西兰华人移民社区中家庭暴力的广布和形态取得进一步的了解时，我的大学导师 Neville Robertson 博士也激励了我对这个主题的追求。

##### 这个研究是关于什么呢？

我的研究项目主要是来更深入的了解在华人社区中妇女们家庭暴力的经历。这个项目的焦点是配偶虐待；家庭中对华人妇女们在身体方面，情感方面和/或性方面所产生的暴力与虐待。这个项目是来发掘华人社区中家庭暴力的形态和它对妇女与家人所产生的影响。同时也会来辨认有哪些社会性和文化性的因素对华人妇女的暴力和寻求帮助的经历中所产生的影响。还有，这个项目会来探索当华人妇女向家人，朋友和外人透露家庭暴力的经历时有哪些是她们所面临的困难与阻碍。此外，这个项目也会进一步的了解华人社区在当中的角色，推究国家法定方面和以社区为基础服务方面对有家庭暴力经历的华人妇女们所提供的倡议与支持 and 有效干预暴力的措施。

##### 为什么我邀请你参加这个研究项目？

我相信您对暴力经历的分享可以帮助这个项目来提供对家庭暴力方面宝贵的识见。您的故事不仅仅可以帮助到其它与您有过相同经历的妇女，也会在广大的华人社区集体中对于家庭暴力的认识和预防带来感染力和推动力。我希望将有 8 位华人妇女们参与这个研究而且将有选择性的包涵不一样的年龄，

背景和婚姻的关系动态（例，配偶是相同或不相同的民族）。我也希望这个项目可以包含从不同东南亚地带（中国，香港，台湾，新加坡 或马来西亚）移民到新西兰的华人妇女。

### **您将要作什么呢？**

我想和您约定一个方便于您和我，以及您舒适的地方来见面。我期待面谈的时间会在一到两个小时左右。您可以选择跳过您不舒服回答的问题并且您也可以带一位支持者。

### **您将回答什么问题？**

我希望可以听到您家庭暴力的经历和当求助时所面临的困难。还有的是在您的经历中社会性和民族文化性的因素与影响。以下是我感兴趣与您讨论的方面：

- 您对家庭暴力的定意与理解。
- 您经历中暴力和虐待的形态（身体，情感/精神和/或性方面的暴力），并且
- 这些行为对您和你家庭所产生的影响。
- 您对华人妇女的性别角色，传统文化规范与信念系统的看法和观念。还有，
- 这些价值观和信念如何感染了和影响了您的经历与寻求帮助的经过。
- 当您向您的家人，朋友或其它的社会群体透露您的经历时所面临的困难与阻碍。
- 您对华人社区在给予经历家庭暴力妇女协助的看法。
- 您的经历：在取得法定上对家庭暴力的干预措施和以社区为基础的家庭暴力服务。
- 其它任何在您的经历中有帮助或保护性的因素。

如果您没有向您的家人和/或朋友透露过你的经历，我感兴趣想知道什么因素影响了您的决择。

如果您有过法定性的干预措施例如保护令我感兴趣听到您的经历。还有，它是如何来塑造了您对有家庭暴力经历的华人妇女在法定性保护方面的感知。

如果您现在或曾有求助于家庭暴力的服务机构或其它的求助机构，我感兴趣想听到您取用服务的经历。

如果您从来都没有取用任何的社区或服务性的帮助与干预，我感兴趣想听到有什么其它的因素有帮助到您来面对您的经历。

### **所收集到的资料将如何处理？**

我们的对话会被数字方式记录。我也可能会记笔记。之后，我会写您的故事，如果您希望的话，为了评语和修改的意图我可以给您一份复制件。您可以撤退任何您不希望被使用的信息。所有写的资料将是用英文：如果您需要的话我可以在口头上翻译信息。

请在您收到初稿案例复制件后的两个星期内提供反馈。如果我没有听到您的回应我会认为您对您原本的故事是满意的。

您的故事将会被用在我的硕士论文中。之后，我会用这些信息编写学术研究方面的文章。所有的报告，论文和期刊的文章都有可能为公众可取得性。

### **其他人将会知道我是谁吗？**

一般来说是不会的。您的真姓名是不会在这个研究中被使用的。我会使用假名字并且删除或掩饰有可能被认辨出的信息例如：地方名称，事业或容易认辨的事件。当然保护您的隐私是我最高的优先级；但无论如何，还是有可能您会被那些非常熟悉您故事的人辨认，例如您的律师，社会工作者或前伴侣。这里值得提出的是，英文的翻译应该会帮助到保护您的隐私。

### **我有哪些权力和我对研究者有什么可以期待？**

- 您可以在研究中任何的时间做咨询。
- 您可以要求随时停止数字记录机。

- 不接受回答任何特定的问题。
  - 您可以在面谈中的任何时候或在面谈后我寄给你故事的初稿后的两个星期，撤退于这个研究。
  - 要求您所提供的信息被修改，附加或删除。
  - 期待会收到最终报告的总结而且被提供如何进接全部的报告。
  - 期待你提供的信息会被保存在一个安全的储存处（在我的论文完成后，它会被保存到最多五年的时间而然后确保它会被摧毁。）
  - 如果您有任何的查讯，问题或想取得更多对着个研究方面的信息，欢迎您和我本人或和我的大学导师联系。
- 这个研究项目已经通过了怀卡托大学心理学系人类研究道德规范小组的审批。

### 我现在需要做些什么呢？

如果您想参与这个研究项目，请和我联系（联系内容在下面）或者，如果您更喜欢，请让把这章需知给您的那位人士将您的联系内容传递给我。无论是您联系我或是我联系您，我们可以安排一个时间和您舒服的地方来见面。

谢谢您花时间来阅读，谢谢您的支持！为了忠心的表达感谢您的参与，参与者将会收到感谢礼物！

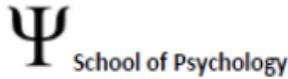
### 联系内容：

研究者：琳达 Linda Gee: 研究生： School of Psychology (心理学系),  
University of Waikato (怀卡托大学)。电或短信： 021-2519793 电邮：  
[lg51@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lg51@students.waikato.ac.nz)

大学导师： Dr Neville Robertson: School of Psychology, University of Waikato.  
Phone: 07 8384466 ext 8300 Email: [scorpio@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:scorpio@waikato.ac.nz)

大学导师： Dr Cate Curtis: School of Psychology, University of Waikato. Phone:  
07 8384466 ext 8669 Email: [ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ccurtis@waikato.ac.nz)

## Appendix D: Consent Form



### CONSENT FORM

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

**Research Project: An exploration of women's experiences of domestic violence in the Chinese immigrant Community**

Please complete the following checklist. Tick (✓) the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
1. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (or it has been read to me) and I understand it.		
2. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether or not to participate in this study		
3. I am satisfied with the answers I have been given regarding the study and I have a copy of this consent form and information sheet		
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any point during the interview or after the interview up to two weeks after I have received the draft of my story for comment, without penalty.		
5. I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that material, which could identify me personally, will be suppressed or changed in writing up the research. However, I understand that people who are really familiar with my story may be able to recognise me.		
6. I have the right to decline to participate in any part of the research activity		
7. I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.		
8. I wish to receive a copy the draft case study for comment and correction.		
9. I wish to receive a summary of the research findings.		

**Declaration by participant:**

I agree to participate in this research project and I understand that I may withdraw at any time, as specified above. If I have any concerns about this project, I may contact the convenor of the Psychology Research and Ethics Committee (Associate Professor John Perrone, Tel: 07 838 4466 ext 8292, email: [jpnz@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jpnz@waikato.ac.nz))

Participant's name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Declaration by member of research team:**

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it. I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name (Please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Consent Form (Chinese)

### 同意书 - 中文

研究者和参与者应该各自保留一份以填写好的表格复制件。

研究项目：华人移民社区中妇女们家庭暴力的经历

请填写以下的检查表。请在合适的点上划(✓)。	是	不是
1. 我以阅读过参与者需知（或已向我读过了）而且我明白需知。		
2. 我有被给予足够的时间考虑我是否愿意参与这个研究。		
3. 我对所给予关于这个研究的回应是满意的而且我有这个同意书的复制件和参与者需知。		
4. 我明白参与这个研究是自愿的（我的选择）而且我可以您可以在面谈中的任何时候或在 面谈后我寄给你故事的初稿后的两个星期，撤退于这个研究，没有任何的惩罚。		
5. 我明白我参与这个研究是机密的并且在写这个研究时可以认辨我个人的资料，都会被压制或改变。无论如何，我明白有些非常熟悉我故事的人可能可以认辨我。		
6. 我有权力拒绝参与这个研究活动里的任何一部份。		
7. 我知道我可以联系的人如果我普遍上对这个研究有任何的问题。		
8. 我想要收到一份出稿案例复制件给予评语和修改。		
9. 我想收到一份研究的总结。		

#### 参与者声明：

我同意参与这个研究并且明白我可以在在以上所指定的任何时间退出这个研究。如果我对这个项目有任何疑问，我可以联系怀卡托大学心理学系人类研究道德规范小组的召集人（副教授 John Perrone, Tel: 007 838 4466 ext 8292, email: [jpnz@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jpnz@waikato.ac.nz)）

参与者姓名：

签字：

日期：

**研究者声明：**

我有在口头上把研究解释给了参与者，而且有回答参与者对于者研究的问题。我相信这位参与者明白这个研究和给予了知情同意参与这个项目。

研究者姓名：

签字：

日期：

## Appendix F: Interview Guide (Chinese)

### 面谈访问指引

#### 华人移民社区中妇女们家庭暴力的经历

##### 介绍和同意

- 感谢受访者参与这个研究项目。
- 介绍我自己和坐在面试当中的人。
- 查问一下参与者是否舒服而且她是否要喝点东西。
- 在开始之前再次强调在参与者需知中的重要点而且讨论任何的问题和不确定因素。
- 签同意书或确认写好的同意书
- 解释数码录音并且获得允准开始录音。

##### 简要

- 我希望这个面谈对于您和我说都将会是一个有趣的经历。我希望这个面谈将会在一个放松的和非正式的方式进行。
- 我意识到我们将讨论的某些问题，对您来说是很私人的。请让我知道如果您对任何的问题感到不舒服回答，我会跳过它们。
- 是没有对或错的答案，而且您告诉我的一切对这个研究都是珍贵无比，很有价值的。
- 我可能会在面谈中写下一些笔记，这些会提醒我在之后我可能会问您的信息。
- 我想当我邀请您来分享你的经历时，我也是同样的敞开来分享关于我自己的信息，关于我的背景，我的生活经历，等等。我们可以在一开始时大概的彼此认识，在最后结尾的阶段详细的认识和分享。

##### 参与者的背景

首先，请你先告诉我关于您的一些背景，包括以下：

- 您的年龄和性别
- 您的国家原属地
- 职业
- 居住在新西兰的时间

- 结婚的年数
- 接触过的机构

在我们进入到关于您经历更细节的阶段之前，我想知道今天您是怀着什么样的心情，您对我们谈话有什么样的期盼呢？

### **对于虐待，暴力的定义和婚姻关系的动态**

现在，我想要了解您对暴力的关念和您婚姻关系的动态还有它对您的影响。请告诉我：

- 您对“家庭暴力”的理解是什么？
- 虐待/暴力是从什么时候开始的，而且随着时间的推移是如何发展或变化的？
- 您所经历过哪种类别的虐待或暴力？
- 对于虐待或暴力的触发点有哪些？
- 有哪些因素负面的影响到您与您的（前）配偶婚姻的关系？
- 您，您的健康和幸福是如何因虐待或暴力所受到了影响？
- 有哪些因素让您保持现在的婚姻关系或让您决择离开这个婚姻关系？

### **婚姻关系的泄露和求助**

下面，我想了解关于您向家人，朋友或外人泄露家庭暴力的经历。同时，也了解您求助和取得服务帮助的经历。

- 谁是您第一线的帮助？ 被提供怎样的帮助？
- 您向家人或朋友有没有泄露过关于您的婚姻关系？
- 当您向其它人诉说您的经历时您所遇到什么样的阻碍或困难呢？（如果您从未泄露过您的经历，我想知道是什么影响到了您的决择。）
- 对于像您有过同类经历的华人妇女来说，您希望从华人社区中得到什么样的帮助和支持？
- 您取得过什么类别法定上的干预措施？ 例，
  - 保护令
  - 律师
  - 警察

还有，您的经历是怎样的呢？可以做一些什么来改善您的经历和渴望达到的结果呢？（如果您没取得过，我感兴趣知道是什么原因而且您取得过其它什么样的干预措施？）

- 您取得过什么类别的求助服务和以社区为基础的干预措施？例，
  - 预防暴力危机热线
  - 受害者支援
  - 辅导服务
  - 给予家庭暴力受害者妇女的议程
- 您可以形容一下您取得服务的经历吗？
- 取得服务后对您的情况来说有什么样的影响和不同？
- 您希望看到些什么来改进您对所提供的服务的经历呢？
  
- 如果您没有取得过任何服务，我想知道有什么其它干预的根源对您的情况有所产生不同？例，
  - 网上的信息/电视上的广告
  - 中文的家庭暴力的手册
  - 教育和自我学习
  - 宗教信仰

### 家庭暴力中社会和文化的因素

最后，我想要了解关于您对华人妇女在家庭中的性别角色的看法和以性别所产生在的期望/要求。我很高兴从您的信念中来明白，传统华人或东方的文化价值观和理念在您经历中所扮演的角色和影响力。

- 您可以来分享一下从男人和女人的角色来说有哪些在传统华人的文化观念和信念对您看来是重要的呢？这些对您的经历有什么样的影响？
- 对您来说有哪些华人或东方人的家庭观念是很重要的而且有在您的婚姻关系中扮演了很有意义的一部份。
- 有哪些是您做为一个女人和妻子来说需要满足的期盼？这些标准和期盼对您的经历有什么样的影响？
- 您是如何来看待在婚姻中男女平等的关系？
- 自从您的经历，您对传统华人的文化观念和期望是否有改变？请解释
- 在您看来，在您的文化社区中对家庭暴力很普遍的观念和信念有哪些呢？这些观念是如何影响了您的经历？

## 结尾

有任何您想要提问或补充的吗？

- 感谢参与者的参与
- 过一遍任何的忧虑或不肯定的因素
- 再次保证参与者的隐私权和无名氏
- 呈递感谢礼物
- 提醒参与者可以退出研究的时间期
- 保证参与者有取得我的联系方式

## **Appendix G: Interview Guide**

### **An exploration of women's experiences of domestic violence in Chinese immigrant communities**

#### **Introductions and consent**

- Thank the interviewee for taking part in this research
- Introduce myself and the person who is sitting in on interview
- Check if participant is comfortable and if she would like to have a drink
- Before starting reiterate the key points on the information sheet and discuss any concerns or uncertainty.
- Reassure her that participation is totally voluntary and that it is okay change her mind.
- Sign the consent form or confirm the written consent.
- Explaining digital recording and gain permission to start recording

#### **Briefing**

- I hope this interview will be an interesting experience for you and me. And I hope the interview will be conducted in an informal and relax manner.
- I realises that some of our discussions can be very personal to you and if you are not comfortable to answer any question please let me know and I will skip them.
- There is no right or wrong answers and everything that you tell me will be valuable for this research.
- I might write down some notes during the interview and these will remind me information that I might want to ask you later.
- I think that as I ask you to share your experiences, I am also equally open to share information about myself, background, life experiences, etc. We could briefly do this at the start and more in detail at the end of the interview if you wish.

#### **Participant's background**

Firstly, could you please tell me a bit about yourself and your background, which includes:

- Your age and gender
- Country of origin
- Occupation

- Length of time been in NZL
- Years of marriage
- Number of children
- Agency accessed

Before we get into more detailed information about your experience, I would like to know what you hope to gain from our talk today.

### **Define abuse, violence and the dynamic of the relationship**

Now, I would like to find out about your view on violence, the dynamic of your relationship and how it has impacted you. Please tell me:

- Your understanding of the term “domestic violence”.
- When did the abuse begin and how it has developed or changed over time.
- The types of violence you have experienced.
- The triggers for the abuse or violence.
- What factors affected your marriage relationship with your husband/partner?
- The impact violence has had on you and your family. How was your health and wellbeing being impacted by your experiences?
- The reasons that you are still remaining in the relationship or decided to leave the relationship.

### **Disclosure of the relationship and seeking help**

Next, I would like to find out about your experiences when disclosing the relationship to family, friends as well as your experiences in seeking help and accessing help services.

- Who was your first contact of help? What form of help was offered?
- Have you disclosed your relationship to family members or friends? What were their views on it and how did they offer help?
- What barriers or difficulties did you face when telling other people about your experiences? (If you have not disclosed your relationship yet, I’m interested to know what has impacted your decision.)
- What sort of help and support do you wish to see the Chinese community offering to women with similar experiences to yourself?
- What form of statutory intervention did you use? E.g.
  - Protection order
  - Lawyer

-Police

And what was your experience like? What could be done to improve your experience and the desired outcome? (If you have not, I'm interested to know the reasons and what other form of intervention you have accessed)

- What form of help services and community-based intervention did you access? E.g.
  - Preventing violence crisis line
  - Victim support
  - Counselling
  - Women's program for victims of domestic violence
- Could you please describe your experience accessing the service?
- How has accessing the service made a difference or impact on your situation?
- What do you wish to see happening that improve your experiences with the service provider?
  
- If you have not accessed any services, I would like to know what other sources of intervention has made a difference to your situation? E.g.
  - Online information / TV commercials
  - Domestic violence brochures in Chinese
  - Education and self learning
  - Religious beliefs

### **Social and Cultural factors in domestic violence**

Finally, I would like to find out about your perceptions on Chinese or Eastern women's gender role and gendered expectations in a family context. I'm interested to gain understanding from your beliefs on traditional Chinese or Eastern cultural values and beliefs that have played a part in your experience and in your relationship.

- Could you please identify traditional Chinese or Eastern cultural values and beliefs about men and women that are significant to you? What influences did these have on your experiences?
- What Chinese or Eastern family values are important to you and played a part in your relationship?
- What expectations did you have to fulfil as a women and a wife in the relationship? How did these standards or expectations influence your experiences?
- How do you see equality between men and women in your relationship?

- Has your views about traditional Eastern cultural values and expectations of women and wife changed since your experiences? Please explain.
- In your opinion, what are the commonly held views and beliefs about domestic violence in your community? How has these ideas impacted your experience?

### **Closing**

Is there anything else that you would like to ask or add?

- Thank the participant for her participation
- Go over any concerns or uncertainties
- Reassure the participant of privacy and anonymity
- Present the thank you gift
- Remind the participant of the time frame to withdraw from the research
- Ensure that the participants has my contact details