

Scenario One: Neema

Neema is an immigrant woman of colour. Her first language is Arabic and she is fluent in English and French. She has worked hard to get her certification as a medical technician, has a job she likes, and her contribution to her family's income is essential. Both her teenage children are in school and hope to go to university. Neema's wife does seasonal construction work. She insists that she and Neema keep joint chequing and savings accounts, and Neema's monthly pay is deposited directly into the account. She does not allow her signing privileges on cheques, and she can only have access to any money she needs through her. When she is not working, she likes to spend time with friends and often comes home late at night. She expects that there will be a meal kept warm in the oven for her, whatever time she arrives. The last time she came home late and there was no dinner prepared for her, she rampaged through the house at 2.00 a.m., tearing books from the shelves and breaking dishes. When Neema came down to try to stop her, she attacked Neema with a knife, forcing her to run out into the street to get away from her. She was finally able to get some help from a neighbour, who offered to call the police. Neema did not want to get the police involved. She had tried before to get help from the police, but they did not take her complaint seriously. On this particular night, concerned about leaving her children alone with her wife, she made her way back into the house and found her passed out on the kitchen floor. The next morning, she was contrite and apologized, claiming she did not remember anything about the knife attack. That night, she came home for dinner and helped wash the dishes. Lately, Neema's wife has been phoning her at work several times a day and her supervisor is concerned about it and has asked her to put a stop to it. She has also shown up at work a few times in the past couple of weeks, sometimes meeting her at the end of her shift, sometimes watching her from a distance. She has insisted that she choose what clothes she will wear to work, claiming that she dresses in a provocative way and accusing her of having an affair with one of her co-workers. She has started to demand that she account for every hour of her time away from her workplace. She has threatened to force her to quit her job, insisting that she can support her family without her help and that her place is at home with her children. When she reminds her that her income is essential at this time in their lives, she usually responds with a smack across the face. Last week she had to cover up bruises on the side of her face with makeup before she left for work. She very much wants to keep her job but is beginning to feel that it might be better if she quit. That way she can stay at home, like her wife wants her to do. Maybe then she'll stop her violent outbursts and attacks.

Adapted from OCASI Training Manual Prevention of Domestic Violence against Immigrant and Refugee Women by Springtide Resources (2017)

Scenario Two: Sophia

Sophia is a 78-year-old landed immigrant who recently came to Canada from Phillipines under the family reunification program. She lives with her daughter and her son-in-law and their two young children. Her daughter and son-in-law speak Tagalog and are fluent in English, as are the children. The language spoken in the home is English, and she is only spoken to in Tagalog if they need something from her. It is difficult for her to get out of the house because she uses a wheelchair and neither her daughter nor her son-in-law will take her out unless she has a doctor's appointment. At the doctor's office, they belittle and insult her in front of other patients, the receptionist, and the doctor. She does not know the outcome of these visits because the discussions about her health are in English and when she asks her daughter or her son-in-law to interpret for her, they tell her they will explain it to her at home but they never do.

Sophia's expenses are paid from a trust fund that her son-in-law has set up. The money is from her late husband's estate. She has no control over the fund and is never shown any statements or account records. Her family does not give her any spending money and she is not allowed to make any finance-related choices. Sometimes when her family goes out for the evening, she is locked in her room. She is told it is for her own good. She would like to spend time with her grandchildren but is told she is too old to look after them. Her son-in-law has told her that her grandchildren don't like her and that she embarrasses them. She believes that her doctor gave her son-in-law a prescription for her for a heart condition, but he has not had it filled. Lately, she has been left alone more frequently, often locked in her room. She believes that she is a capable, intelligent woman, but it is becoming extremely difficult for her to cope. She is increasingly depressed and afraid for her safety.

Scenario Three: Ramani

Ramani is a recently landed immigrant from Sri Lanka who was sponsored by her husband. She lives with her husband and his father in downtown Toronto. Ramani does not speak English and is dependent on her husband and his father, who have come to Canada with some money to invest in a business they hope start. Both men speak fluent English and spend much of their time outside the home. Sometimes Ramani's husband brings her small gifts or offers to order in take-out food for dinner so that she will not have to prepare the meal.

Ramani attends weekly ESL classes but is not permitted to leave the house to visit with friends, or to go for doctor appointments without her husband or father-in-law. When she is out with them and with other people, her husband or her father-in-law make fun of her cooking, joke about her appearance and her clothes, and criticize her demeanor. She does not say anything, for fear of making the situation worse for herself, and because she is terrified that she might be beaten when they get home. Ramani is a devout Buddhist, but is not permitted to attend the Buddhist Temple in her area. Her husband ridicules her religion and her beliefs. The last time she pleaded with him to allow her to go to the temple, he hit her across the face with the back of his hand. He often berates her, calling her —stupid||, —ignorant||, and —ugly||. Ramani does not interact in any meaningful way with anyone other than her husband and her father-in-law. Her ESL instructor noticed bruises on the side of her face and mentioned it to a settlement worker.

Scenario Four: Rula

Rula is an undocumented woman from East Africa. Her application for refugee status has been refused, as has her partner's. They have remained in Canada and are living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Rula's partner is working for a subcontractor who pays him in cash. They speak English and, though they are living —underground, they have made a few friends at work who are also undocumented workers. Rula's partner insists on controlling all their finances and does not allow Rula to find any work outside the home. Rula does not speak English, but her partner will not permit her to go to English as a second language (ESL) classes, which are offered at a community agency close to their apartment building, where documentation is not required. Her partner tells her that because she has no status, she can be picked up by the police at any time and deported. When she tells him that he too is in a vulnerable position, legally, he accuses her of trying to undermine his confidence, and shouts at her, saying she does not understand the Canadian legal system as he does and that she is dependent on him for her safety.

When she begins to plead with her partner to allow her to attend ESL classes, telling him that she wants a future in Canada, he threatens to leave her stranded and alone if she does not stop pestering him. He begins screaming at her and grabs a framed photograph of Rula's sisters from the table and smashes it to the floor. Rula is terrified by this and hurt that he would destroy something that means so much to her. She stops talking and does not react to her partner's act, fearful for her physical safety. Her partner calms down and offers to prepare dinner for both of them. Throughout the evening, Rula is on her guard, expecting that at any moment, with no provocation, that he will become violent again.