Immigrant and non-immigrant women: factors that predict leaving an abusive relationship

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IMMIGRANT AND NON-IMMIGRANT WOMEN: FACTORS THAT PREDICT

LEAVING AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This research used logistic regression to test components of Choice & Lamke's (1997) two-part decision making model and Hamby's (2008) holistic risk assessment as predictors in the decision to separate from an abusive partner, comparing significant predictors for immigrant (n=497) and non-immigrant (n=808) women. Findings demonstrated that immigrant women reported higher levels of perceived risks/barriers to leaving, and provided some support for the use of a holistic risk assessment in understanding women's decisions to leave, while also demonstrating that immigrant and non-immigrant women have both similarities and differences in the factors that predict leaving. Clinical and policy implications are addressed.

Immigration rates have been on the rise in the United States since the passage of the Immigration Act in 1965 (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), and some have noted that the trends of increasing migration rates within the U.S. call for a closer examination of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) within immigrant families (Denham et al., 2007; Erez & Hartley, 2003). Prevalence of IPV has been found to be at least as high among many groups of immigrant women as among non-immigrant women, and higher among some ethnic immigrant groups (Bauer, Rodriguez, Szkupinski Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Klevens, 2007; Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002). Yet research into IPV in immigrant families has lagged behind research on the mainstream population (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Tran & Des Jardins, 2000).

Prior research has suggested that developing domestic violence frameworks that fit the experience of immigrant women requires examination of similarities and differences in the experiences of immigrant and non-immigrant women, rather than simply adding in factors that are assumed to be relevant for immigrant women (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). The use of comparative reasoning to examine the experiences of immigrant and non-immigrant women could contribute more to a theoretical understanding of domestic violence for all women, bringing with it a broader scope that would encompass all experiences, rather than a particular focus on the factors that are thought to specifically affect immigrant women. Without the ability to rigorously test the similarities and differences in experiences, we are left with a limited understanding of the implications regarding domestic violence in general. Most of the previous research seeking to understand the experiences of immigrant women in abusive relationships has consisted of exploratory studies of specific immigrant groups (e.g., Abraham, 2000; Bhuyan, Mell, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005; Crandall, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton,

2005). Although these studies provide useful information, they have neither compared immigrant women to non-immigrant women, nor examined the factors that predict immigrant women's decision to leave an abusive relationship.

The purpose of the current study, therefore, is to utilize a comparative framework in a secondary analysis of a data set including both a substantial proportion of immigrant and non-immigrant women, in order to examine the similarities and differences between groups in regard to the risks and barriers that predict leaving an abusive relationship. Although differences in experiences may exist between immigrant women from different cultural backgrounds, there are some experiences that are shared by many immigrant women, such as experiences of disenfranchisement and feelings of isolation stemming from relocating far from home, possible language barriers in access to services, and experiences of discrimination in interactions with social service and criminal justice systems (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002).

THE DECISION TO STAY OR LEAVE AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Choice & Lamke's (1997) two-part decision-making model and Hamby's (2008) holistic risk assessment model were used to frame the study. By integrating many of the theoretical constructs brought to previous research on women's stay/leave decision (e.g., constructs stemming from the approaches of learned helplessness, reasoned action/planned behavior, investment model and psychological entrapment), Choice & Lamke (1997) argued that in deciding whether or not to leave an abusive relationship, women ultimately examine the two questions of "Will I be better off?" and "Can I do it?". They posited that the decision-making process in answering the first question is influenced by a woman's evaluation of her relationship satisfaction, her perception of irretrievable investments, her quality of alternatives, and her subjective norm. The current study utilized this model of a two-part decision making process in

deciding whether or not to leave an abusive partner, however, rather than examine the constructs identified in Choice & Lamke's first part of the model, Hamby's (2008) holistic risk assessment was utilized in the current study to define an additional set of considerations involved in answering this question. Hamby's (2008) holistic risk assessment suggested that, in addition to considering the risk of personal physical harm, women in abusive relationships who are considering leaving also weigh a number of risks, including the risk of harm to others, and the financial, social, and legal risks. This study tests the extent to which these types of risks are examined by immigrant and non-immigrant women in their decision to leave.

Additionally, in examining the second question, "Can I do it?" Choice and Lamke (1997) posited that a woman examines the available resources and potential barriers to leaving. These resources and barriers may be personal (e.g., feelings of self-efficacy and feelings of control) or structural (e.g., access to money, employment, shelter or other services). To investigate this part of the model, the current study examined personal and structural barriers for immigrant and non-immigrant women, thus combining Choice and Lamke's (1997) and Hamby's (2008) models.

 Studies of Holistic Risk Assessment Factors: 'Will I be better off?'

Because the concept of a holistic risk assessment is an emerging one, there is little empirical research in this area with either immigrant or non-immigrant populations; however, the types of risks identified in Hamby's (2008) holistic risk assessment, particularly the risk of physical harm for women and others, have received empirical attention. Women's perceptions of their risk for future physical harm (Cattaneo, Bell, Goodman, & Dutton, 2007; Heckert & Gondolf, 2004; Weisz, Tolman, & Saunders, 2000) and the risk of harm to children (Hilton, 1992; McCloskey, Figueredo and Koss, 1995; Zoellner et al., 2000) have been investigated with

non-immigrant populations and in studies that have not differentiated participants based on

immigrant status, but have not been a focus of study for immigrant women specifically.

The financial risks of leaving have been identified in research with non-immigrant study

populations where abusers' attempts to increase or maintain women's economic dependence has

been identified as a form of abuse (Moe & Bell, 2004; Weaver, Sanders, Campbell, & Schnabel,

2009). Research with immigrant women has focused on economic dependence resulting from

immigration laws and policies that prevent them from working, and from abusers manipulating

the immigration system in ways that perpetuate women's economic dependence on partners

(Abraham, 2000; Bauer et al., 2000; Bhuyan, et al., 2005).

Previous research with immigrant women has identified a number of social risks of

leaving, including feeling disloyal to their culture or losing their cultural identity (Dasgupta &

Warrier, 1996; Tran & Des Jardins, 2000), community sanction and stigmatization (Crandall et

al., 2005; Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Sullivan, Senturia, Negash, Shiu-Thornton & Giday, 2005)

and the risk of family breakup through the loss of access to their children or through separating

children from their fathers (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Kelly, 2009). Research with non-

immigrant women has also noted the social risk of family breakup or of losing or alienating

children or depriving children of the benefits of a father (Shalansky, Ericksen, & Henderson,

1999), stigmatization and stereotyping by case managers or social service workers (Busch &

Wolfer, 2002), and the legal risk of "failure to protect" charges (Busch & Wolfer, 2002).

Research with immigrant women examining legal risk has focused on the risk of

deportation for women themselves or other family members (Latta & Goodman, 2005; Sullivan

et al., 2005). This is applicable to both documented and undocumented immigrants, as abusers

may manipulate the immigration system, keeping women uninformed about immigration

policies, or denying women access to their own immigration papers (Crandall et al., 2005).

Furthermore, individuals on temporary visas or with Lawful Permanent Residency can be

subjected to deportation if they are convicted of a crime, including domestic violence (Bui, 2003;

Erez & Hartley, 2003). Thus, previous research has demonstrated that immigrant women

consider the risk of deportation for an abuser in calling the police, as well as for themselves in

case of mandatory arrest policies, or if contact with authorities increases their vulnerability to

child abuse charges.

Research On Barriers to Leaving: 'Can I Do It?'

High levels of feelings of commitment and love and hope that the situation will improve

are personal barriers that have been widely found to prevent women from ending a relationship

with an abusive partner or seeking help through the social service or criminal justice system

(Davis, 2002; Dziegielewski, Campbell & Turnage, 2005; Griffing, Ragin, Sage, Madry,

Bingham & Primm, 2002). For immigrant women, commitment is often described as a desire to

live up to a cultural ideal (e.g., being a "good wife" or "good mother") rather than an emotional

attachment (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Kelly, 2009; Shiu-Thornton, Senturia, & Sullivan,

2005). Other personal barriers to ending a relationship with an abusive partner identified in

research with non-immigrant women are self perceptions, particularly feelings of low self-esteem

and an external locus of control (Johnson, 1992; Kim & Gray, 2008) and fear of repercussions

from an abuser, especially the escalation of violence (Fleury, Sullivan, Bybee, & Davidson,

1998; Kim & Gray, 2008; Wolf, Ly, Hobart, & Kernic, 2003), though these barriers have not

been a focus of research with immigrant women.

A lack of awareness of services has been noted as a structural barrier to leaving in

research with both immigrant (Abu-Ras, 2003; Keller & Brennan, 2007; Moracco, Hilton,

Hodges, & Frasier, 2005) and non-immigrant women (Lutenbacher, Cohen, & Mitzel, 2003;

O'Campo, McDonnell, Gielen, Burke, & Chen, 2002; Short et al., 2000). Other structural

barriers identified for both groups include experiences of discrimination (Wolf et al., 2005 with

non-immigrant women and Bauer et al., 2000; Latta & Goodman, 2005 with immigrant women)

and a lack of financial resources (Griffing et al., 2002; Lutenbacher et al., 2003; Wolf et al., 2003

with non-immigrant women and Bauer et al., 2000; Murdaugh, Hunt, Sowell, & Santana, 2004;

Sullivan et al., 2005 with immigrant women). The current study included measures of age,

employment status, and education because of their relation to victims' ability to earn income.

Immigrant women have been reported to experience additional structural barriers, including

language barriers (Bauer et al., 2000; Keller & Brennan, 2007; Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005) and

cultural beliefs and practices, such as beliefs in traditional gender roles (Bauer et al., 2000;

Keller & Brennan, 2007; Sullivan et al., 2005), that marital violence is normal (Latta &

Goodman, 2005), beliefs that prohibit going outside of the family for help (Abu-Ras, 2003;

Bhuyan et al., 2005; Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005), and practices that prevent women from going to

school or obtaining employment (Abraham, 2000; Bhuyan et al., 2005; Sullivan et al., 2005).

Finally, research with non-immigrant women has identified previous negative interactions with

the criminal justice system as a structural barrier to leaving (O'Campo et al., 2002; Fleury et al.,

1998; Wolf et al, 2005),

Although research with non-immigrant and immigrant populations has identified a

variety of risks, as well as personal and structural barriers to leaving, research has not attempted

to determine how these risks and barriers predict the decision to leave an abusive relationship for

immigrant and non-immigrant women. This analysis, therefore, focuses on two research

questions. First: How do immigrant women compare to non-immigrant women in the types of

risks and the barriers that influence leaving a relationship with a violent intimate partner?

Second: How do these risks and barriers predict the decision to leave the relationship for

immigrant and non-immigrant women? These questions lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: immigrant women face greater financial, social, and legal risks, and have higher

structural barriers to leaving.

Hypothesis 2: the ability to predict the likelihood of leaving an abusive relationship for both

immigrant and non-immigrant women is significantly improved by the inclusion of additional

perceived risk variables (risk of harm to others, financial, social and legal risks) over and above

the inclusion of the risk of personal physical harm.

Hypothesis 3: the financial, social and legal risks of leaving will be stronger predictors of leaving

for immigrant women than for non-immigrant women.

Hypothesis 4: the personal and structural barriers to leaving will lower women's likelihood of

leaving a relationship with a violent man for both immigrant and non-immigrant women.

<div align="center">METHODS</div>

<u>Data Collection and Sample</u>

This study used the data set from the RAVE (Risk Assessment Validation) Study

conducted by Campbell, O'Sullivan, Roehl and Webster (2005). The RAVE study was a multi-

site field test funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ 2000WTVX0011) to collect

predictive validity data on two risk assessment instruments used by practitioners to assess the

risk of IPV recidivism, and two methods used to assess the risk of lethality or near lethality and

repeat offending. This data set was chosen because it includes data on IPV and participants'

country of origin, with nearly 40% of participants reporting foreign-born status.

Data was collected through structured interviews in New York City and Los Angeles County at two points in time; only Time One (T1) data is used for this analysis. Interviews were conducted in person or by telephone, and bilingual (Spanish/English) interviewers were available. In New York City, participants were recruited at the Family Courts of Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, at domestic violence shelters and the Safe Horizon Community Offices in Brooklyn, Staten Island, the Bronx, and Queens, at one domestic violence shelter in Manhattan, and through four public hospitals. In Los Angeles, participants were recruited through the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and one domestic violence shelter.

T1 interviews gathered information on demographic and background characteristics, the history of abuse in the relationship and over the past 6 months, any actions taken by the participant or the criminal justice system that could mitigate risk of future violence, the victim's assessment of risk, the impact of the questionnaire on perceived risk and on intention to take self-protective measures, and administered two risk assessment questionnaires. Questions about history of abuse in the relationship were taken from the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2; Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996), the Women's Experience of Battering (WEB; Hall-Smith, Smith, & Earp, 1999), and the HARASS Scale (Sheridan, 1998). Measures of the risk of revictimization by the abuser were the DVSI (Williams, 1999) and the K-SID (Gelles, 1998) and measures of the risk of lethal assault by the partner were the Danger Assessment (Campbell, 2007) and an adaptation of the DV-Mosaic (de Becker, 2000).

Demographics

Foreign-born participants in the RAVE study made up 38% of the total sample, and came from a total of 58 countries. For those born outside of the U.S., Mexico was the country of origin most frequently identified by participants, with 127 (25.87%) of the foreign-born participants

originating from there, followed by 75 (15.27%) from the Dominican Republic, 37 (7.54%) from

Jamaica, 30 (6.11%) from Ecuador, 28 (5.70%) from Puerto Rico, 23 (4.68%) from Guyana, 21

(4.28%) from Trinidad, and 14 (2.85%) from El Salvador. The remaining countries of origin

were each represented by less than 10 participants. Additionally, 53% of the sample was

Latina/Hispanic; 47% of U.S.-born respondents were Latina/Hispanic and 64% of those born

outside of the U.S. were Latina/Hispanic. Significantly more respondents born outside of the US

were Latina/Hispanic [X^2 = 37.52, p <.001]. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 67 years, with a

mean of 31.1 years. Immigrant women were slightly older than non-immigrant women on

average (33.31 years vs. 29.75 years). Less than half of the sample (43.8%) was employed full or

part-time. More immigrant women were employed full or part-time (46.5%) than non-immigrant

respondents (42.3%). The highest education level completed also differed slightly between

groups, with higher percentages of immigrant women at both extremes of this measure: more

immigrant women had an 8th grade education or less (18.5%) than non-immigrant women

(1.5%), and more immigrant women were college graduates (8%) or had some graduate school

(1.8%) than non-immigrant women (6.8% and 1.4% respectively). Table 1 summarizes key

characteristics of the sample.

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Table 1 about here

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Relationship with Abuser

        At the time of their interview, the majority of non-immigrant (74%) and immigrant (69%)

respondents indicated that they were no longer involved with their violent partner; although the

proportion of immigrant women no longer involved with their partner was significantly lower

for immigrant women [X^2= 4.02, p<.05]. That respondents were no longer involved with their violent partner makes sense given that many respondents were recruited at the family court and emergency domestic violence shelters. The US-born and foreign-born samples also differed significantly in marital status [$X^2(1) = 85.37$, p < .001]; the majority of immigrant women indicated at the time of the interview that they were married (54.6%) and the majority of non-immigrant women indicated that they were single (60.2%). Finally, the mean number of children in respondents' households was 1.82 for the total sample, with a non-significant mean difference between non-immigrant (*M*=1.76) and immigrant women (*M*=1.90).

<u>Measures</u>

As a victim's perception of risk has a more direct impact on individual decision-making than do indicators of risk, risk for physical harm was measured with the question: How likely is it that your partner will be physically abusive with you in the next year? Respondents could answer on a scale of likelihood (ranging from 0 = no chance to 10 = they are sure it will happen). The risk of harm to others was measured by the question: How frequently in the past six months has your partner threatened to hurt your children, family or someone you care about? Respondents could answer on scale of frequency (ranging from 1 = never to 5 = very frequently). Financial risk was measured by partner's current employment status. If the partner was (1) employed, the victim was considered at greater financial risk if she left than if the partner was (0) unemployed. It should be noted that a victim's own employment status was not included in the risk models as it was not conceptualized as a risk (something that she would lose access to in leaving, as with her partner's employment income and benefits), but rather as a barrier, and thus was included in the barriers model instead. Social risk was measured by the question: Do you fear that your partner will take the children away from you or gain custody of them?

Respondents could answer on a scale of intensity (ranging from 0 = not afraid, to 2 = very afraid). Legal risk was measured by the question: How often in the past six months has your partner threatened to report you to child protective services, immigration, or other authorities? Again, respondents could answer on a scale of frequency (ranging from 1 = never to 5 = very frequently).

Legal commitment to the relationship was measured with the question: What is your legal married status? Respondents had the options of married, single, separated or divorced and this was re-coded into low legal commitment (single, separated, divorced = 0) and high legal commitment (married = 1). Fear of the abuser was measured by the degree of respondents' agreement with the WEB item: He can scare me without ever laying a hand on me. Respondents could answer on a scale of agreement (ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 6 = strongly disagree); responses were reverse coded with a higher number indicating higher fear. Similarly, feeling controlled by the abuser was measured by respondents' agreement with the WEB item: He makes me feel like I have no control over my life, no power, no protection. Respondents could again answer on a scale of agreement (ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 6= strongly disagree), with responses reverse coded so that higher agreement indicated higher levels of feeling controlled by an abuser. Age was measured in continuous years. Employment status was measured with the question: What is your current employment situation? It was constructed as a dichotomous variable (0 = unemployed; 1 = employed). Education level was measured by the question: What is the highest level of education you have completed? Respondents responded on an ordinal (1-6) scale from (1) 8th grade or less to (6) graduate school. Finally, social isolation was measured by the question: Has he tried to prevent you from going to school, getting job training, or learning English? It was a dichotomous variable (0 =no; 1= yes).

The dependent variable of the study is the act of physical separation. This variable was measured with the question: In the past six months have you gone someplace where he couldn't find you or see you? This was a dichotomous variable (0 = no; 1= yes). This act of physically separating is a behavioral indicator of victims' ability or willingness to leave an abusive partner, and may be a stronger indicator of leaving than the intent or desire to leave, however, it has some limitations as a measure of permanently leaving a relationship. Leaving a relationship can be a difficult variable to capture, as research has shown that the process of ending the relationship may include repeated attempts to leave (Griffing et al., 2002; Johnson, 1992). It is possible that women decided to return to their relationship after this separation; therefore, this question captures a physical separation at one point in time, and independent variables are factors related to this particular physical separation or attempt to leave the relationship.

Immigrant status was measured by the question: Were you born in the U.S.? Respondents could answer (0) no or (1) yes to this question. It is important to note that this dichotomous variable does not allow for variations in immigration experiences based on country of origin, length of time in the U.S., or type of immigrant/visa status.

Methods of Analysis

Bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted using SPSS. As previous research with immigrant women has been unable to test the significance of differences between immigrant and non-immigrant women, the first hypothesis regarding significant differences in risks and barriers between immigrant and non-immigrant women was tested using t-tests and chi-square statistics. Logistic regression analyses were conducted to test hypotheses 2 to 4 regarding how specific types of risks and barriers predicted immigrant and non-immigrant women's decision to separate from an abusive partner. Risks and barriers were investigated in different

models because the questions of "Will I be better off?' and "Can I do it?" were conceived as separate questions. After an initial logistic regression analysis indicated that immigration status was a significant predictor of physical separation, separate models for risks and barriers were constructed for immigrant and non-immigrant women (four models total).

RESULTS

Differences Between Groups: Will I Be Better Off?

As demonstrated in Table 2, immigrant women were significantly less likely to have gone somewhere their partner could not find them in the past 6 months, and perceived significantly greater risk on the following variables: personal physical harm, social risk, and legal risk. Immigrant women also faced more financial risk than non-immigrant women, as measured by their partner's employment status. There were no differences between groups in perceived harm to others. Although effect sizes were small (r<.2), these findings support hypothesis 1, that immigrant women face greater financial, social, and legal risks than do non-immigrant women. Additionally, despite the fact that differences between groups in perceived personal physical harm were not hypothesized, findings also suggested that immigrant women perceived a greater risk in this area than non-immigrant women.

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Table 2 about here

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Differences Between Groups: Can I Do It?

Also demonstrated in Table 2, there were significant differences between immigrant and non-immigrant women in their barriers to leaving. On average, compared to non-immigrant women, immigrant women had a greater legal commitment to their relationship, felt more

controlled by an abuser, were more afraid of an abuser, were older, had completed less

education, and were more socially isolated by their partner. Although effect sizes for these

relationships were small (r<.2), these findings provide further support for hypothesis 1, that in

addition to facing higher perceived risks, immigrant women also face higher structural barriers to

leaving than do non-immigrant women.

Predictors of Leaving: Will I Be Better Off?

Table 3 provides the results of the two logistic regression models predicting the

likelihood of leaving for immigrant and non-immigrant women based on the types of perceived

risks, including the risk of personal physical harm, the risk of harm to others, and the financial,

social, and legal risks. The regression models were completed in two blocks, the first included

only the risk of personal physical harm, and the second included all of the risk variables, in order

to determine whether or not the predictive ability of the model would be improved by the

addition of risks over and above the risk of personal physical harm.

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Table 3 about here

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As Table 3 shows, for immigrant women, Block 1 appeared to explain none of the

variance in the decision to separate from a violent partner. The risk of personal physical harm

was not predictive of the likelihood of leaving for immigrant women and the overall percentage

of cases classified correctly from Block 0 to Block 1 remained the same (70.5). When other types

of perceived risks were added to the model in Block 2, 5% of the variance in immigrant women's

decision to leave was explained, a significant improvement over the first block [$X^2(4) = 13.66$, p

< .01]; however, the overall percentage of cases classified correctly remained at 70.5. In the

second block, the variables that significantly predicted the likelihood of leaving for immigrant women were risk of harm to others [OR = 1.27, p < .001] and financial risk [OR = 1.73, p < .05]. These results indicated that immigrant women were more likely to separate as the risk of harm to others increased, and as the financial risk of leaving increased.

Table 3 also shows the results for non-immigrant women, for whom Block 1 explained 3% of the variance in the dependent variable; as the risk of personal physical harm increased, non-immigrant women were more likely to leave the relationship [OR = 1.08, p < .001]. The model in the first block correctly classified 60.3% of cases overall, compared to 59.2% for Block 0. This pattern contrasts with the finding for immigrant women, as the risk of personal physical harm was not predictive of their leaving and did not result in any improvement in the percentage of cases classified correctly. As with immigrant women, when the additional perceived risks were added to the model in Block 2, the percentage of variance explained by the model increased significantly to 7% [X^2 (4) = 20.50, p < .001] and this model resulted in 62.2% of cases being correctly classified overall. In the second block, the variables that significantly predicted the likelihood of leaving for non-immigrant women included the risk of personal physical harm [OR = 1.07, p < .01] and risk of harm to others [OR = 1.22, p < .001], indicating that non-immigrant women were more likely to leave as the risk of personal physical harm and harm to others increased; in contrast with immigrant women, other risk variables were not significant.

Hypothesis 2, which proposed that the ability to predict the likelihood of leaving would be significantly improved by the inclusion of additional perceived risks, was supported for both immigrant and non-immigrant women. Hypothesis 3, that the financial, social, and legal risks of leaving would be stronger predictors of leaving for immigrant women than for non-immigrant women, receives partial support as the financial risk was significantly predictive for immigrant

women, while none of these risks was predictive of leaving for non-immigrant women.

Additionally, the model in the second block for immigrant women correctly classified 70.5% of

cases overall, compared to 62.2% for the model in the second block for non-immigrant women.

<u>Predictors of Leaving: Can I Do It?</u>

Table 4 presents the results of the two logistic regression models predicting the likelihood

of leaving for immigrant and non-immigrant women, taking into account the personal barriers of

legal commitment to the relationship, fear of the abuser and feeling controlled by the abuser

entered in one block, and the structural barriers of age, education, employment, and social

isolation entered in the next block.

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Table 4 about here

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As Table 4 shows, for immigrant women, Block 1 explained 10% of the variance in

leaving. The personal barriers of legal commitment to the relationship [OR = .55, p < .01] and

fear of the abuser [OR = 1.31, p < .001] significantly predicted the likelihood of leaving for

immigrant women, indicating that immigrant women with low legal commitment to the

relationship and greater fear of an abuser were more likely to leave. However, the overall

percentage of cases classified correctly remained unchanged from Block 0 to Block 1 at 69.9. In

contrast, Block 2 correctly classified 71.9% of cases overall and explained 17% of the variance

in leaving, representing a significant improvement over the first block [$X^2(4) = 28.20$, p < .001].

In the second block, variables that significantly predicted the likelihood of leaving for immigrant

women were legal commitment [OR = .64, p < .05], fear of the abuser [OR = 1.31, p < .001], age

[OR = .96, p < .001], education [OR = 1.22, p < .05] and employment [OR = .50, p < .01].

Immigrant women were more likely to leave an abusive relationship if they were single, more afraid of an abuser, younger, had more education, and were unemployed.

For non-immigrant women, Block 1 explained 11% of the variance in leaving and, in this block, feeling controlled by an abuser is predictive of non-immigrant women's likelihood of leaving [OR = 1.31, p < .001]. This model classified 62.2% of cases correctly overall, compared to 57.3% of cases overall in Block 0. These results are different from the results for immigrant women, for whom legal commitment and fear were predictive; for non-immigrant women, the likelihood of leaving is increased if they felt more controlled by an abuser. As with immigrant women, the percentage of variance explained by the model increased significantly, to 18% of the variance, with the inclusion of structural barriers [$X^2 (4) = 45.47$, p < .001] and the overall percentage of cases classified correctly increased to 67.5. Once structural barriers were included in the model, variables that were predictive of non-immigrant women's likelihood of leaving included feeling controlled by an abuser [OR = 1.32, p < .001], age [OR = .97, p < .01], and employment [OR =.39, p < .001]. Non-immigrant women were more likely to leave an abusive relationship when they felt more controlled by an abuser, were younger, and unemployed.

Thus, Hypothesis 4, that personal and structural barriers would indeed act as barriers, decreasing women's likelihood of leaving an abusive relationship, receives only partial support. For immigrant women, legal commitment, age, and education acted as barriers, as victims with lower legal commitment, who were younger and who had more education were more likely to leave. For non-immigrant women, this was only true for age, as those who were younger were more likely to leave. However, this relationship was opposite of what was hypothesized for the remaining significant barriers to leaving, so that immigrant women were more likely to leave

when they felt more fear and were unemployed, and non-immigrant women were more likely to

leave when they felt more controlled and were unemployed.

DISCUSSION

Key Findings: Differences between Groups

In keeping with previous descriptions of immigrant women's unique needs and increased

vulnerabilities in relationships with violent men (Abraham, 2000; Erez & Hartley, 2003), the

current analysis found that immigrant women reported higher perceived risks and barriers to

leaving an abusive relationship in comparison to non-immigrant women. Comparisons between

groups in this analysis found that immigrant women reported higher risks in the areas of personal

physical harm, social and legal risks, and financial risk (as their partners were more likely to be

employed) than did non-immigrant women. Additionally, immigrant women faced higher

barriers to leaving a violent relationship in terms of being more likely to be married, reporting

higher levels of fear of and feeling controlled by an abuser, were older, had less education, and

were more likely to be socially isolated by an abuser. Small effect sizes indicated that differences

between groups may not translate into large meaningful differences in experiences and this may

help to explain why some of these factors (e.g., social and legal risks, social isolation) did not

predict immigrant women's leaving, despite the higher reported levels of these variables.

Key Findings: Predictors of Leaving

Results of these analyses indicated partial support for a holistic risk assessment, such as

Hamby's (2008), and for examining risks and barriers separately for immigrant and non-

immigrant women's leaving. Differences between groups may indicate different needs that

immigrant and non-immigrant women have in services for IPV, while similarities would suggest

that for both groups, additional risks, over and above the risk of personal physical harm, inform

women's decision making. What may be most striking was the finding that immigrant women's perception of the risk for future physical harm was not predictive of their leaving, while non-immigrant women were more likely to leave their relationship when their perception of this risk was higher. These findings support previous research with non-immigrant women showing that when women perceived their risk of future harm to be elevated, they took steps to mitigate that risk (Heckert & Gondolf, 2004). As previous research with immigrant women has not addressed their perceptions of the likelihood of future harm, the finding in the current study that these perceptions were *not* predictive of the decision to leave is informative.

Both groups of women were more likely to leave when the risk of harm to others was higher. Again, this risk has not been a focus of research with immigrant women, but previous research with non-immigrant women in domestic violence shelters found that one reason victims offered for leaving was fear for their children's physical safety (Hilton, 1992). Of the remaining holistic risk assessment factors, only financial risk, measured in terms of partner's employment status, was significant and only for immigrant women. The findings of this study contrast with previous research with immigrant women, where partner's employment has been noted as a factor that may keep them in a relationship with a violent man given the difficulty that immigrant women face in finding employment for themselves (Abraham, 2000; Bauer et al., 2000). This contradiction may be accounted for by the fact that previous research included in-depth qualitative studies that sought to understand women's experiences of abuse and, even though participants talked of economic dependence, these studies did not treat this variable as a predictor of separation. Moreover, this finding may need to be examined in the context of legal immigration status. For immigrant women in this sample, it may be that partner employment is in some way related to legal immigration status; therefore, being more likely to leave when a

partner is employed may be an indication of being more enfranchised, having more access to services, and having less fear of involving outsiders. A relationship between partner employment status and immigration status may explain why this risk was predictive of immigrant women's leaving, but not predictive of non-immigrant women's leaving.

The final risk factors, the social and legal risks to leaving, were not predictive of immigrant or non-immigrant women's leaving. Although research with immigrant women has documented their social and legal vulnerabilities when leaving (Crandall et al., 2005; Latta & Goodman, 2005; Sullivan et al., 2005), the findings here did not suggest that these vulnerabilities were significant predictors of leaving. These findings may differ from those of previous studies because the latter did not empirically test these types of risks as predictors of separation. Or it may be that measures of social and legal risks in this analysis did not capture all of the components of these risks, such as stigmatization and loss of cultural identity within the category of social risk, due to the constraints of measurement in secondary analysis.

The results of this analysis further suggested that barriers were more important than risks in predicting women's decisions to separate from a violent partner, as more variance was explained for both immigrant and non-immigrant women by barriers than by risks. Consistent with previous research findings (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Shui-Thornton et al., 2005), immigrant women in this study were more likely to leave if their legal commitment to the relationship was low. However, legal commitment was not predictive of non-immigrant women's leaving in contrast to previous studies that have identified commitment, measured more broadly in terms of emotional commitment, as a barrier to leaving (Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Short et al., 2000). The finding that legal commitment was a barrier for immigrant women may be indicative of the ways in which social norms or pressures to be "a good wife" keep immigrant

women from leaving relationships with violent men (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005).

There were other results with respect to barrier variables that contradicted previous research findings. For immigrant women, increased fear of an abuser increased their likelihood of leaving, while for non-immigrant women, increased feelings of being controlled by an abuser predicted a greater likelihood of leaving. While previous research would suggest that women would be less likely to leave at higher levels of these variables; these contradictions may stem from measurement differences as previous research studied fear of repercussions (Short et al., 2000) and internal locus of control (Kim & Gray, 2008), rather than general feelings of fear of abuser or feeling controlled by him. The difference between groups is interesting to note here, with increased fear being predictive of immigrant women's leaving, and increased feelings of being controlled being predictive of non-immigrant women's leaving. Previous research has not identified this kind of a difference between these two variables, nor suggested any reasons why one of these variables would be more predictive for one group rather than the other. One possibility for this difference between groups may have to do with cultural beliefs surrounding control; it may be that because of cultural beliefs, immigrant women have different expectations regarding control, with control being less important in their decision making; future research would be helpful to understand the implications of these findings.

Additionally, findings from previous research that indicated that social isolation increased immigrant women's risk of violence and prevented their leaving as partners restricted their access to employment or educational resources (Abraham, 2000; Bhuyan et al., 2005) were not upheld in this study. Social isolation was not predictive of either immigrant or non-immigrant women's leaving. Similarly, immigrant and non-immigrant women were both more

likely to leave if they were unemployed, contradicting some previous research with both groups. This discrepancy could be attributed to measurement differences, as previous studies identified economic dependence as a concern without testing it as a predictor of leaving, or because other measures of economic independence, such as access to informal income or welfare assistance (Kim & Gray, 2008) were included. However, this analysis included other structural barriers that may relate to the ability to earn income, and found that women were more likely to leave when these variables indicated a greater possibility of earning income. For instance, findings suggested that both groups were more likely to leave when they were younger, and immigrant women were more likely to leave when they had more education. It may be that younger women are more likely to leave because they have more income earning potential, or more flexibility in looking for employment. Alternatively, age could be related to other factors that would make leaving more likely when women are young, such as being less likely to have children or having more alternatives in forming relationships with other partners. Additionally, for immigrant women, increased education could be indicative of more comfort or familiarity with the English language, and this may be one reason why it was significant for immigrant women but not for non-immigrant women.

Strengths and Limitations

Conducting a secondary analysis of a pre-existing data set placed constraints on the ways in which some of the components of the holistic risk assessment and the personal and structural barriers could be measured. This was particularly true with the measure of social risk as it did not capture elements such as social stigmatization and impact on social identity, with the measure of immigrant status as it did not account for variations in acculturation, or length of residency, and with the measure of leaving, as it was limited to one act of physical separation at one point in

time. An additional limitation is that a large proportion of the sample was Latina/Hispanic and, therefore, these results are not necessarily independent of cultural background. However, Latina/Hispanic immigrant participants were not a homogeneous group, as they came from countries in Mexico, Central and South America, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, indicating the presence of some diversity of experiences based on countries of origin, or differences in cultural beliefs based on nationality or region.

A final limitation of this study is that the sample was made of primarily help seeking victims, as participants were recruited from courts, law enforcement and domestic violence shelters. Results may therefore be skewed towards those women who seek help, many of whom were doing so as part of a process of leaving. It may be that such a small amount of variance was explained in each of the regression models because access to information about barriers from women who have not shown that tendency towards seeking help is absent from this data set.

These limitations may be offset by some of the strengths offered by this analysis. One of the strengths of this study is that immigrant and non-immigrant women were compared with respect to leaving an abusive relationship. Findings suggest that differences do exist between these groups and that it is important to conduct such comparisons in order to shed light on factors that influence immigrant and non-immigrant women's process of leaving. An additional strength was the use of a large data set that allowed for the testing of relationships between risks, barriers and physical separation. Previous research, particularly with immigrant women, has described these concerns, but has not tested their impact on leaving. For both immigrant and non-immigrant women, factors previously assumed to be barriers to or risks of leaving did not always prevent women from leaving. A picture of women making choices and taking action based on

their own and their children's best interests emerges and calls into question previous theories or assumptions that may have cast women in a more passive light.

<u>Future Research</u>

A number of areas for future research can be identified from the findings of the current study. First, following from the finding that the risk of future physical harm did not predict immigrant women's leaving, future research should explore perceptions of risk more fully with immigrant women, exploring both the accuracy in their estimation of future risk and their threshold level for when future risk becomes high enough to prompt leaving or other help seeking behaviors. Additionally, future research to investigate the components of a holistic risk assessment would be beneficial, particularly if those studies employed more standardized measures to capture risks and barriers, or used a sample without a bias toward help-seeking. Some components of a holistic risk assessment were predictive of leaving; however, given that the percentage of variance explained by all models remained small there were clearly many other factors that women considered when making these decisions. Future research to identify other factors, perhaps by adding those factors typically studied with Choice & Lamke's (1997) model, would also be helpful. Finally, to further understand some of the contradictions with previous findings, particularly with regard to the barrier variables, longitudinal mixed methods studies to examine the factors that women identify as important in their decision making process at different points in the leave-taking process would be helpful. The factors that women have identified in qualitative research as important concerns may not be the factors that predict their decision to leave. It would be very interesting to examine more closely the process of leaving, to determine what types of supports can be provided based on certain demographic characteristics, and how decisions about leaving – even in the face of difficulty – are made.

<u>Clinical and Policy Implications</u>

The findings of this study indicated that women considered a wide range of factors in separating from a violent partner, and immigrant women may have considered these factors differently than non-immigrant women. As immigration rates rise and advocates find themselves working with more immigrant women, they might find the need to pay more attention to the specific areas of partner employment status, marital status, fear, and education level, as well as legal immigration status, and the ways in which these factors affect immigrant women's decision making. Additionally, recognizing that immigrant women were not more likely to leave when their perceived risk of personal physical harm was higher is important and may indicate that more safety planning, or a different type of safety planning, is required in advocacy with them.

Findings also indicated that both immigrant and non-immigrant women left their relationships despite facing high levels of barriers. These findings suggest the need for an expanded view of what women may need once they leave. In addition to needing space that allows them physical safety, women would also benefit from job training programs, and employment search assistance; for immigrant women, English language services and immigration help are also important. Both groups of women appeared strongly motivated by an increased risk of harm to others. Women who leave and those who chose to stay would benefit from service providers who were keenly aware of women's concerns about their children and the way these concerns inform their decisions about leaving their relationship. While this research found differences between immigrant and non-immigrant women in regard to some factors, it also points to areas of similarity, and for both groups, it highlights the complexity of the issues involved in the process of separating from a violent man.

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Table 1: Demographic Information for RAVE Sample

Demographic Variable	All Respondents N (%)	U.S.-Born Respondents N (%)	Foreign-Born Respondents N (%)
Racial/Ethnic Group			
African American	362 (27.8)	273 (33.8)	89 (17.9)
Latina/Hispanic	693 (53.1)	376 (46.5)	317 (63.9)
Middle Eastern	3 (0.2)	----	3 (0.6)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	6 (0.5)	5 (0.6)	1 (0.2)
European Descent/White	130 (10)	109 (13.5)	21 (4.2)
Asian/Pacific Islander	20 (1.5)	1 (0.1)	19 (3.8)
South Asian	9 (0.7)	1 (0.1)	8 (1.6)
Biracial/Multiracial	41 (3.1)	35 (4.3)	6 (1.2)
Other	38 (2.9)	7 (0.9)	31 (6.3)
Declined	2 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.1)
Total	**1304 (100)**	**808 (100)**	**496 (100)**
Employment Status			
Working Full or Part-Time	573 (43.9)	342 (42.3)	231 (46.5)
Other	732(56.1)	466 (57.7)	266 (53.5)
Total	**1307 (100)**	**808 (100)**	**497 (100)**
Highest Education Completed			
8th Grade or Less	105 (8.1)	13 (1.6)	92 (18.5)
Some High School	339 (26.0)	227 (28.1)	112 (22.5)
High School Grad/GED	411 (31.5)	260 (32.2)	151 (30.4)
Some College or Vocational School	334 (25.6)	241 (29.9)	93 (18.7)
College Graduate	95 (7.3)	55 (6.8)	40 (8.0)
Graduate School	20 (1.5)	11 (1.4)	9 (1.8)
Total	**1304 (100)**	**807 (100)**	**497 (100)**

Table 2: Results of Bivariate Analyses for Outcome, Perceived Risk and Barrier Variables

	Independent T-Tests							
Variable	Immigrant Women			Non-Immigrant Women			df	t
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
Personal Physical Harm	487	5.80	3.85	803	4.77	3.77	1011.24	4.72***
Harm to Others	497	0.97	1.47	806	1.08	1.46	1046.84	-1.29
Social Risk	407	0.98	0.91	624	0.74	0.87	843.92	4.24***
Legal Risk	495	0.92	1.44	804	0.66	1.25	1297.00	3.46***
Controlled by Abuser	497	4.67	1.95	805	4.35	2.05	1300	2.80**
Fear of Abuser	496	4.81	1.89	806	4.54	2.01	1300	2.33*
Age	497	33.31	8.40	807	29.75	8.52	1302	7.41***
Highest Education	497	2.81	1.27	807	3.16	1.01	1302	-5.60***

	Chi-Square				
Variable	Immigrant Women		Non-Immigrant Women		$X^2(1)$
	n	% yes	n	% yes	
Left Relationship	497	30	808	42.8	21.56***
Partner is Employed	434	74.4	736	51.9	57.83***
Legal Commitment	496	54.6	805	28.9	85.37***
Employed	497	46.5	808	42.3	2.15
Social Isolation	493	47.3	803	41.4	4.32*

* p<.05, **p<.01, *** p < .001,

Table 3: Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Leaving for Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Women (Risk Variables)

Predictor	Immigrant Women					Non-Immigrant Women				
	ß	SE	95% Confidence Interval			ß	SE	95% Confidence Interval		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Block 0										
Constant	-.87***	.11		.42		-.37***	.08		.69	
Block 1										
1	.02	.03	.96	1.02	1.08	.08***	.02	1.04	1.08	1.13
Constant	-.97***	.19		.38		-.76***	.13		.47	
R^2			.00					.03		
Model $X^2(1)$			.393					16.08***		
Block 2										
1	.00	.03	.95	1.00	1.06	.06**	.02	1.02	1.07	1.11
2	.23***	.07	1.10	1.27	1.46	.20***	.05	1.10	1.22	1.36
3	.55*	.27	1.03	1.73	2.91	-.17	.16	.62	.84	1.14
4	.01	.02	.97	1.01	1.05	.03	.03	.97	1.03	1.10
5	-.00	.00	.99	1.00	1.01	.00	.00	1.00	1.00	1.01
Constant	-2.09***	.53		.12		-.70*	.28		.50	
R^2			.05					.07		
Block $X^2(4)$			13.66**					20.50**		
Model $X^2(5)$			14.05*					36.58***		

1: Risk of Personal Physical Harm, 2: Risk of Harm to Others, 3: Financial Risk, 4: Legal Risk, 5: Social Risk; Reported R^2 values are Nagelkerke's; $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$

Table 4: Logistic Regression Predicting the Likelihood of Leaving for Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Women (Barrier Variables)

Predictor	Immigrant Women					Non-Immigrant Women				
	ß	SE	95% Confidence Interval			ß	SE	95% Confidence Interval		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Block 0										
Constant	-.84***	.10		.43		-.30***	.07		.75	
Block 1										
1	-.60**	.20	.37	.55	.82	-.21	.17	.59	.81	1.12
2	.27***	.08	1.13	1.31	1.52	.08	.05	.99	1.08	1.18
3	.07	.07	.94	1.07	1.22	.27***	.05	1.20	1.31	1.43
Constant	-2.25***	.41		.11		-1.78	.23		.17	
R^2		.10					.11			
Model $X^2(3)$		35.15***					69.87***			
Block 2										
1	-.45*	.21	.42	.64	.97	.02	.18	.72	1.02	1.44
2	.27***	.08	1.13	1.31	1.53	.09	.05	1.00	1.09	1.20
3	.07	.07	.94	1.07	1.23	.28***	.05	1.20	1.32	1.45
4	-.04**	.01	.93	.96	.98	-.03**	.01	.96	.97	.99
5	.20*	.09	1.03	1.22	1.45	.06	.08	.90	1.06	1.24
6	-.69**	.22	.33	.50	.78	-.95***	.17	.28	.39	.53
7	-.03	.03	.92	.98	1.03	.02	.02	.99	1.02	1.05
Constant	-1.18	.63		.31		-.99*	.39		.37	
R^2		.17					.18			
Block $X^2(4)$		28.20***					45.47***			
Model $X^2(7)$		63.35***					115.34***			

1: Legal Commitment, 2: Fear of Abuser, 3: Controlled by Abuser, 4: Age, 5: Education, 6: Employment, 7: Social Isolation; Reported R^2 values are Nagelkerke's;
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

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