Introduction

The contemporary salience of forced migration and the need for robust and principled international, national, and local responses are evident. In recent history, the world has borne witness to mass migrations of Afghans, South Sudanese, Rohingya, and Venezuelans, among many others. In 2018, over 70 million people migrated due to persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations (UNHCR, 2019). In spite of the millions of Syrian refugees seeking refuge in the Middle East, tensions in the West erupted in 2015 following the migration of tens of thousands of people who risked harrowing journeys to reach Europe. Similarly, in 2014, continuing decades of northbound migration, adults and children fleeing gang violence and economic strife in Central America refueled a debate in the United States (US) on the criminalization of migrants, use and conditions of detention centers, denial of asylum claims, deportation, and border security. Similar patterns of conflict, human rights violations, and structural oppression spur migrations around the world.

Recent re-escalations in anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, reflective of global resurgences of nationalism, have served to deny the humanity of people fleeing inhumane circumstances and hinder short-term responses and long-term change. Structural solutions for entrenched conflicts and political impasses appear elusive. The universally recognized right for people to seek asylum has become increasingly tenuous. The enormity of unmet basic needs—shelter, food, water, and security—coupled with faltering political will to launch and maintain adequate responses, obscures additional concerns. The violence women experience at the hands of a partner or spouse is one such concern relegated to the “private” sphere and frequently overlooked in forced migration discourse. With the aim of shining light on the complexity of human experiences of forced migration, this chapter examines how intimate partner violence (IPV) and forced migration intersect in women’s lives.

Forced migration

Broadly, forced migration refers to the physical movement of individuals, families, and communities due to circumstances that threaten people’s security and well-being. Circumstances that incite forced migration, or displacement, may include persecution, armed conflict and war,
political instability, repression, environmental disasters, famine, ecological degradation, large-scale development initiatives, and other situations that put people’s rights, lives, and livelihoods in danger (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long, & Sigona, 2014). People whose migrations are deemed voluntary or primarily driven by economic concerns are protected under international human rights law, but do not automatically have access to specific protections defined under international and regional refugee law (UNHCR, 2016). In contrast, legally constructed categories of forced migrants who are potentially eligible to claim specific protections under international law include refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and returnees (UNHCR, 2016).

It is important to consider the language used in narratives of forced versus voluntary migration. “Forced” evokes compulsory and coerced physical movement spurred by circumstances beyond people’s control and against their will, which render living conditions and the possibility of staying untenable. In contrast, “voluntary” implies an individual’s choice to leave behind acceptable or “livable” circumstances in pursuit of personal, educational, professional, and/or economic goals in another geographic location. In reality, the motivations spurring migration (“push” and “pull” factors) and the degree to which people are able to exercise agency exist along a spectrum or continuum (Nawyn, Reosti, & Gjokaj, 2009; Snyder, 2012). Subjective and “objective” assessments of circumstances as tenable exist along a similar continuum, complicating notions of “forced” and “voluntary” migrations. The term “forced” can obscure the myriad ways in which people as individuals, families, and groups decide when, how, where, and whether or not to migrate (Turton, 2003), even in what might appear to the external world as clear-cut life or death situations (i.e. Rohingyas fleeing persecution in Myanmar or Haitians displaced by a magnitude 7.0 earthquake). Scholarship challenging rigid categorizations of forced and voluntary migration notes that these delineations fuel notions of more or less “deserving” migrants, with “forced” migrants often considered more worthy of protection and humanitarian assistance than “voluntary” or “economic” migrants (Gibney, 2014; Turton, 2003).

This chapter employs an understanding of forced migration as a dynamic process and lived experience in which people, exercising varying degrees of agency, uproot under difficult circumstances to seek safety and the opportunity to care for themselves and their families. We emphasize the importance of situating forced migration processes within specific contexts, simultaneously recognizing the diversity and variation of people’s experiences within given contexts. The consideration of historical and contemporary structural forces that create the conditions for, and shape responses to, forced migration are paramount to understanding lived experiences of individuals, families, and communities in conjunction to macro dynamics (Wachter & Snyder, 2018). Migratory processes are often more complex than linear trajectories of leaving home and arriving to fixed destinations. The distances and directions people travel in search of respite and safety can vary dramatically. Some migrate in close proximity to their home in order to avoid endangerment on a regular and even seasonal basis. Others cross an international border, apply for asylum or register as refugees on the other side, and regularly return home to assess the situation. Some cross multiple international borders only to be apprehended, detained, and deported to their country of origin, while others flee their countries of origin, never to return.

**Intimate partner violence**

The chapter focuses on IPV as defined by behaviors that inflict physical, sexual, or psychological harm on an intimate partner or spouse (past or present), including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and controlling behaviors (World Health
IPV against women in forced migration

Organization, 2017). Although the definition is gender-neutral, women and girls are globally disproportionately the target of IPV by a male partner (World Health Organization, 2012). In acknowledgment of this reality and inherent limitations in the scope of this chapter, we focus exclusively on IPV experienced by women.

As in any context, IPV in forced migration does not occur in isolation of other interpersonal and familial dynamics, which may also involve violence and abuse. Broader definitions of domestic violence are more inclusive of the violence women face by immediate and extended members of the family, and/or within a domestic sphere, and are an important reminder of the range and spectrum of violence against women across the life cycle, inclusive of child sexual abuse, non-partner sexual violence and exploitation, stalking, and harassment. In considering IPV in relation to forced migration, it is critical to examine the intersecting roles that race, class, nationality, and other positionalities play in shaping migrating women's experiences. An intersectional lens recognizes that race, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and class co-exist to shape social identity, behavior, opportunities, and access to rights (Crenshaw, 1991). Women who face systematic discrimination, such as Black, Brown, and Indigenous women, and women whose gender identities and sexual orientations do not align with cisgender and heterosexual norms, are frequent targets of persecution and also can be disproportionately affected by IPV (Black et al., 2011; Rosay, 2016; Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013).

The chapter examines literature from various disciplinary traditions that increasingly study IPV in forced migration, and highlights examples from diverse regions around the world that are by no means exhaustive. Guided by feminist perspectives (Mohanty, 2003), the chapter seeks to examine women’s experiences of IPV in forced migration in their deserved complexity and to call attention to the myriad ways IPV affects women across distinct phases of forced migration. Although conceptualized as a complex, varied, and dynamic process, for heuristic purposes it is helpful to situate forced migratory trajectories within time and space. As such, the chapter begins with an overview of IPV within the pre-migration context of armed conflict, followed by considerations of IPV as a catalyst or motivation for migration. We then examine the literature related to IPV during migration and displacement. The subsequent section reviews IPV in post-migration contexts and considers IPV in relation to immigration detention.

Intimate partner violence in armed conflict

Armed conflict – inclusive of warfare, widespread gang violence, and acts of terrorism – is a significant precipitator of forced migration and an important factor to consider in understanding women’s past, present, and future experiences of IPV and its consequences. In armed conflict, civilians are indiscriminately or deliberately threatened, extorted, tortured, murdered, and disappeared. Armed factions punish individuals or any combination of groups based on perceptions of disloyalty. Regardless of motivation, armed groups carry out inhumane acts against civilians to maximize power and control. Local and international efforts brought long overdue acknowledgment and condemnation of the pervasive use of sexual violence in the Guatemalan, the former Yugoslavian, Rwandan, and Democratic Republic of Congo conflicts, among others. Yet, the rise in international attention on conflict-related (non-partner) sexual violence inadvertently obscured the violence and abuse women and girls experience at home, prior to, during, and in the aftermath of armed conflict (Stark & Ager, 2011).

A growing body of evidence, policy, and practice has highlighted the extent to which women and girls experience violence in the home during armed conflict. Studies included in a systematic review of gender-based violence in complex emergencies indicated higher rates of physical IPV than most reports of non-partner sexual violence, which suggest that even at times of
political instability women are at greatest risk for violence at home (Stark & Ager, 2011). In the war-affected context of Côte d’Ivoire in West Africa, IPV may have been more widespread than sexual violence perpetrated by armed actors (Hossain et al., 2014). In a study of gender-based violence in Somalia – a context affected by decades of war, natural disasters, and mass population displacement – 35.6% of women reported adult lifetime experiences of physical or sexual IPV (Wirtz et al., 2018). However, capturing an accurate picture of IPV in settings marked by armed conflict and displacement is inherently difficult due to challenges associated with access, and heightened fear and stigma; moreover, inconsistencies in measurement hinder direct comparisons between studies that measure rates of violence against women (Stark & Ager, 2011).

Exposure to armed conflict over time contributes to cumulative stress, which strains family relationships (Al-Krenawi, Graham, & Sehwail, 2007) and exacerbates risks of violence against women at home (Annan & Brier, 2010). Adding to Heise’s (1998) ecological model of violence against women as operating across personal, situational, and sociocultural factors of the social environment, Usta and Singh’s (2015) conceptual framework highlights key factors contributing to domestic violence in armed conflict at different levels of the social ecology. Factors at the structural level include deepening of gender inequalities, displacement, breakdown of legal systems, impunity, and widespread poverty and unemployment (Usta & Singh, 2015). Community- and social-level factors include altered sex ratio, changing norms, and civilian adoption of violence (Usta & Singh, 2015). Relationship-level factors include shifting gender roles and relationship dynamics, and women’s loss of intra-household bargaining power (Usta & Singh, 2015). Factors operating at the individual level include trauma, physical insecurity, lack of resources, death of loved ones, and displacement (Usta & Singh, 2015). Furthermore, men’s responses to stressors may involve using violence against women in attempts to regain power and control, and turning to alcohol and drugs as a negative coping mechanism (Usta & Singh, 2015).

With a focus on El Salvador, Mo Hume (2008) reports that women’s fears of reporting the abuse they experience is related to the broader context of public and gang violence in the country. She suggests that men use this wider context as a way to threaten and control the women they abuse. Hume describes the outcry against “public” violence (gang violence) amidst a simultaneous silence around “private” violence (IPV). Cecilia Menjívar (2011) also relates interpersonal violence to larger and multiple structural inequalities and state violence. Consistent with Hume’s work, Menjívar argues for recognizing interconnections of various forms of violence, stating that violence experienced within intimate relationships is connected to violence perpetrated against indigenous communities. Menjívar asserts that the current state of violence against women in Guatemala, in particular, is rooted in the atrocities committed during the political conflict.

Compelling research in occupied Palestinian territories underscores the intersection between armed conflict and IPV. A nationally representative survey of married women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip generated 12-month prevalence estimates of IPV that showed high rates of psychological aggression and physical assault (Haj-Yahia & Clark, 2013). Risk factors associated with psychological, physical, and sexual IPV included stressful life events, political violence, community resources, and locality-level acceptance of spousal abuse, among other variables (Haj-Yahia & Clark, 2013). Findings from a mixed methods study conducted in the Gaza Strip indicated that an Israeli military operation in 2014 increased domestic violence, even at relatively low levels of destruction (Müller & Tranchant, 2019). This analysis suggests that the effects were due to displacement, decreased married women’s abilities to contribute to household decision-making, and reduced social support networks caused by the military operation (Müller & Tranchant, 2019). Another study with Palestinians affected by armed conflict showed
significantly higher odds of physical and sexual IPV among women whose husbands experienced political violence (Clark et al., 2010).

Intimate partner violence as a catalyst for migration

IPV often plays a role in motivations to migrate and in migration-related decision-making. In addition to recognizing IPV as a precipitating factor in forced migration, evidence points to migration as a strategy to escape or resist violence and related oppression (Salcido & Adelman, 2004; Nawyn et al., 2009; Upegui-Hernández, 2012). Parson (2010) demonstrates the co-existing elements of force, choice, and agency in the life history of Antonia, who migrated from Peru to Chile, fleeing an abusive husband in order to provide a better life for her children. Antonia’s migration is “one of the many instances in her life when she resisted intimate abuse and the structural violence of poverty and asserted her agency” (p. 888). Analysis of data collected at migrant shelters participating in the Kino Border Initiative in the Southwest region of the US demonstrates that migrating women experienced multiple episodes of violence from the time of childhood until the present, and that in this chronic context of violence, migration is a strategy for survival (Conrad, 2013).

In addition to the immediate risks to safety experienced by survivors, scholars attend to the multiple structures of oppression that contribute to relationships of unequal power and control. An ecological perspective recognizes that in addition to the role IPV may play as a motivating factor to migrate, it is important to consider the ways in which racism and poverty act as interrelated factors influencing migration-related decision-making (Parson, 2010). Salcido and Adelman (2004) found that Mexican survivors of IPV might cross the border to seek both safety from violence and economic security. In addition, Belanger and Rahman (2013) found that IPV, in concert with economic issues, functions as a motivation for women to migrate in search of employment. Pre-migration decision-making involves interrelated problems of domestic violence, financial predicaments, social status, underemployment and/or limited employment opportunities in the home country (Belanger & Rahman, 2013).

Intimate partner violence during migration and displacement

Whether people suddenly flee their homes or decide to migrate because the costs of remaining become untenable, they face dramatic changes in all aspects of life. Whatever degree of stability and security their home and community had afforded them dissipates. In forced migration, people suffer the loss of financial assets and material goods. Some have to choose whom to leave behind; for others, the circumstances under which they flee relinquish any semblance of choice in that regard. Forced migration frequently separates loved ones from one another, temporarily or permanently. The journey, whether by foot, car, train, boat, or plane, can be harrowing and fraught with danger and the possibility of exploitation. In transit, women are vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation (Freedman, 2016). At some point, people reach a destination and the physical journey ceases, temporarily for some and indefinitely for others. People face the possibility of being unable to move forward to an intended destination and unable to return home. Some journey to an area of relative safety within the political borders of their country of origin, others cross one or more international borders in their search of safety and respite. If they are able to avoid detention and deportation, people will journey to and ultimately remain where they can receive some assistance and protection, and/or make an asylum claim. In this state of displacement, people cobble together resources to survive and the cycle of daily life – including IPV – persists, often under dire circumstances.
Studies in displacement contexts in the past decade have provided important insights into the scope of IPV. A study conducted with Somali women in Ethiopian refugee camps and host communities indicated that gender-based violence was widespread and largely domestic, prevalence was higher in town than in the camp, and women faced a higher risk of violence in the camp compared with in flight (Parcesepe, Stark, Roberts, & Boothby, 2016). In a camp for displaced persons in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, over 58% of women who formed part of a non-representative sample of married couples (n=46) reported past-year experiences with IPV (Goessmann, Ibrahim, Saupe, Ismail, & Neuner, 2019). Results from a study that spanned three refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border indicated that close to 8% of women reported experiencing IPV in the past year (Falb, McCormick, Hemenway, Anfinson, & Silverman, 2013). Research points to an association between experiences of non-partner violence (i.e. sexual violence by an armed actor in war or another form of conflict-related violence) and IPV in displacement (Wako et al., 2015; Falb et al., 2013), although other studies have failed to demonstrate a relationship (Sipsma et al., 2015). In displacement contexts associated with natural disasters, women who screened positive for mental health symptoms post-Hurricane Katrina (2005) in the US were 2.7 times more likely to have also reported post-disaster gender-based violence (Anastario, Larrance, & Lawry, 2008).

A robust body of research has brought to light key factors associated with the perpetration and experience of IPV in displacement, which bear close resemblance to Usta and Singh’s (2015) ecological framework of domestic violence against women in war and armed conflicts, in which displacement forms both structural- and individual-level factors in women’s experience of IPV. As in any context, people carry with them entrenched ideas, beliefs, and attitudes about gender when they migrate despite everything left behind. Pre-existing social norms that sanction IPV to greater or lesser degrees do not dissipate in displacement and in fact can reconfigure and strengthen as people struggle for stability, identity, and any semblance of power and control over a situation marked by loss of agency. Global and culturally specific norms that excuse and/or encourage violence against women in the home by an intimate partner and other family members— for instance, as a mechanism of instruction, discipline, and punishment— are well researched, play a significant role in empirical explanations of IPV, and point to significant areas for intervention (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015; Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015). At the same time, displacement disrupts, challenges, and destabilizes entrenched ideas and norms stipulating and regulating the roles delegated to women and men.

Research with displaced persons has identified the connection between such changes in social roles and marital conflict (Okello & Hovil, 2007; Ondeko & Purdin, 2004). Displacement can make it exceedingly difficult for some to fulfill traditional roles and compel people to push the boundaries of prescribed gender roles, creating tensions between new and old roles (Cardoso et al., 2016). Displacement often sparks dramatic shifts in social status and roles (Hynes et al., 2016). In qualitative research with displaced women in Colombia, changes to the roles women and men filled brought about by conditions of displacement— such as men’s underemployment and women’s employment outside the home— stood in stark contrast with entrenched gender norms held by both women and men, and were understood by participants to spark conflict (Hynes et al., 2016). Similarly, a qualitative study in three refugee camps spanning South Sudan, Kenya, and Iraq highlighted partners’ unmet expectations of one another across a spectrum of gender roles, and particularly related to who provides and controls financial resources (Wachter et al., 2018).

The significant economic hardships for people displaced from their homes are intrinsically interrelated with changing gendered social norms. A qualitative study with people displaced by the armed conflict in Colombia highlighted how war and the resulting economic insecurity and
IPV against women in forced migration

Stress exacerbated IPV against women (Wirtz et al., 2014). In a qualitative study with internally displaced persons in northern Uganda, participants systematically pointed to economic deprivation as contributing to all forms of gender-based violence, including IPV (Ager, Bancroft, Berger, & Stark, 2018). In Côte d’Ivoire, urban poverty characterized by unemployment, food insecurity, and housing instability contributed to IPV among people displaced by conflict (Cardoso et al., 2016). Among Syrian refugees who fled to Lebanon, women reported IPV, as well as harassment and community violence, difficult living conditions marked by crowding and lack of privacy, and unemployment (Usta, Masterson, & Farver, 2019).

Marriages that take place in the context of displacement may carry a high risk of IPV against women. In Colombia for instance, women displaced by the conflict noted patterns of successive abusive marriages, in which women sought help with supporting themselves and their children in a new urban context and were frequently significantly younger than their spouses (Wirtz et al., 2014). In Côte d’Ivoire, the absence of supportive networks, and changing gender roles and norms, were salient factors contributing to IPV among people displaced by the conflict (Cardoso et al., 2016). Across three refugee camps, participants emphasized women’s separation from their parents and extended families, and resulting loss of potential protection and support, as contributing to women’s experiences of IPV (Wachter et al., 2018). Finally, research has highlighted how even the humanitarian infrastructure set up to address IPV in displacement can inadvertently contribute to women’s experiences of violence in the home. Official responses that destabilize community structures, instead of encouraging them to work on behalf of women and girls, can exacerbate vulnerabilities by forcing women to choose between their community and safety (Horn, 2010a).

Post-migration intimate partner violence

The threat and experience of IPV may traverse time and space alongside women who migrate, or may emerge for the first time post-migration. Post-migration implies an arrival to a particular destination, when the physical migration ceases or pauses and people take steps to settle in a new community with or without legal protections. In the post-migration phase, additional socially and legally constructed labels are applied to categories of newcomers – such as documented or undocumented immigrants, resettled refugees, and asylees – implying varying degrees of welcome and unwelcome. However, the post-migration phase is not always easily distinguishable from contexts of long-term displacement (e.g. generations of Somalis or Palestinians living in camps with no solution, such as permanent settlement or repatriation, in sight). To be “post” migration – that is, to arrive and settle – implies a release from dynamics that compel migration, and being safe enough to carry on with the business of life and providing for oneself and one’s family. Arguably, “post” migration is a matter of subjectivity, a state of mind, which only the subjects of any forced migration can define for themselves. Similar to experiences of IPV, forced migration processes may not have a definitive end; the ongoing effects and lived experiences of forced migration do not end simply when the physical migration ceases. People may settle, only to migrate again. In the post-migration phase, however fluid, women with previous or current exposure to IPV often contend with policies and practices that both promote and hinder social integration and exclusion, further shaping the impact of IPV on their lives.

While crossing borders may be an avenue to escape public and private violence, women face ongoing and new risks of violence upon arrival and post-migration (Cook Heffron, 2018; Freedman, 2016; Salcido & Adelman, 2004). Studies have reported women experiencing an escalation or initiation of violence and abuse by their partners after migrating (Guruge,
Karin Wachter and Laurie Cook Heffron

Khanlou, & Gastaldo, 2010; Kiwanuka, 2008). Amanor-Boadu and colleagues (2012) found that immigrant women experiencing IPV face greater physical, financial, legal, and social risk associated with leaving abusive relationships, in comparison to non-immigrant women. Yet, estimating the prevalence of IPV among immigrant populations is challenging. Language and social marginalization are barriers to participating in research, especially among undocumented newcomers. Immigrants are underrepresented in crime statistics, due to low rates of formal reports to law enforcement. Rates reported by immigrant survivors of violence may be lower in comparison to other survivors, given fears of deportation. It is generally considered that the risks of abuse are potentially higher among undocumented immigrants (Bhuyan, Shim, & Velagapudi, 2010), and immigrant women face higher risks of intimate partner homicide (Sabri, Campbell, & Messing, 2018). Studies in the US, however, report conflicting estimates of IPV rates among immigrant groups (Runner, Yoshihama, & Novick, 2009), complicating the discourse that immigrant women experience higher rates of abuse than their non-immigrant counterparts.

Intersecting aspects of post-migration experiences related to language proficiency, acculturation, gender roles and expectations, employment, immigration status, discrimination, and knowledge of laws and services are factors associated with the perpetration and experience of IPV (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002). Post-migration risk factors for IPV mirror and interrelate with barriers limiting women’s access to services (Bauer, Rodriguez, Quiroga, & Flores-Ortiz, 2000; Reina, Lohman, & Maldonado, 2014). Again, shifting gender power dynamics is a salient factor (McIlwaine, 2010). While migrating may serve to challenge traditional gender inequalities and offer some protections to women (Hirsch, 1999), it can conversely recreate or intensify pre-migration gender norms. Studies have also highlighted intersections between violence against women post-migration and sending remittances to countries of origin in support of partners, families, and community projects (Erez, Adelman, & Gregory, 2009; Upegui- Hernández, 2012). In particular, Erez et al. (2009) found that the economic marginalization of immigrant survivors of abuse, combined with the continued responsibility for sending remittances home, contributed to batterers’ justification for abuse. Bui and Morash (2008) also found that IPV survivors reported experiencing IPV in connection with conflicts about sending remittances as they relate to gendered interpretations of economic responsibilities and disagreement over the amounts and recipients of remittances.

Fear of law enforcement and deportation create significant barriers for immigrant women experiencing IPV, particularly among those with precarious legal status (Levine & Peffer, 2012). Survivors in the US, for instance, often fear that reporting crimes, seeking shelter, or requesting help will lead to their deportation, and they may lack familiarity with or access to available social service or criminal justice systems, albeit systems that possess limited immigrant-related cultural and linguistic competencies (Becerra, Wagaman, Androff, Messing, & Castillo, 2017; Erez et al., 2009). Abusers may take advantage of precarious immigration status and constructed “illegality” as a mechanism of maintaining power and control in an intimate relationship, threatening to report their partners to immigration officials, feeding legitimate fears of deportation, separation from children, and loss of financial support (Erez et al., 2009; Parson & Heckert, 2014).

Discrimination, racism, and anti-immigrant or xenophobic sentiments also serve to restrict access to services among immigrant survivors (Bauer et al., 2000; Crandall, Senturia, Sullivan, & Shiu-Thornton, 2005), thereby contributing to women’s vulnerability to IPV in post-migration contexts. For instance, recent policy changes in the US have restricted access to legal remedies for asylum-seekers fleeing IPV; as of June 2018, IPV as a basis for asylum claims in the US has come into question and become increasingly restricted (Smith, 2020).
Intimate partner violence and immigration detention

A largely unexplored area of research is the risk of violence women face during and following apprehension and incarceration in immigration detention systems. Researchers have identified immigration detention practices in Australia as incurring negative mental health outcomes among asylum-seekers (Silove, Austin, & Steel, 2007; Steel et al., 2011) and the US serves as another relevant example. On any given day, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement detains as many as 55,000 individuals accused of violating US immigration laws, the majority seeking asylum from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, 2019). Anecdotal evidence suggests that an overwhelming number of women in immigration detention are survivors of violence, abuse, and trauma.

Detention facilities rely on control, coercion, and containment, and exacerbate the lack of stability women feel, by creating a persistent state of alertness, heightened fear, and hypervigilance, replicating tactics used by abusers, traffickers, and other perpetrators (Cook Heffron, Serrata, & Hurtado, 2019). These include restricting mobility; disrupting sleep with bed checks; insults and humiliation; withholding information; ever-changing rules and expectations; restricting access to support; isolating women from one another, from their own children, and from the community; intimidation; and threats (Cook Heffron, 2018; Cook Heffron et al., 2019). This context may re-trigger negative mental health outcomes associated with IPV. While there is little empirical evidence on post-release risk, advocates anticipate that these compounding and multi-level factors contribute to increased vulnerability to exploitation and other abuses (Canning, 2019; Cook Heffron et al., 2019).

Conclusions

This chapter calls attention to the myriad ways in which IPV affects women across diverse geographies at various phases and contexts prior to, during, and following migration. The discussion highlights the importance of understanding the intersections of forced migration and IPV as lived experiences and processes marked by complexity and heterogeneity, in which people exercise varying degrees of agency. Other perspectives not included here, legal and otherwise, are also important. While numerous challenges impede knowledge production with migrating populations, a growing body of research shines light on the scope of IPV across global contexts and the multiple levels across the social ecology at which factors associated with exposure to and consequences of IPV persist. Together, these elements of complex stories serve as a reminder of the shifting landscapes of forced migration, and how, across time and space, IPV both shapes migration and is shaped by migration.

Research highlights the importance of expanding current understandings of suffering in armed conflict to include violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Usta & Singh, 2015). However, gaps remain regarding the consequences of and needs associated with IPV throughout various stages of forced migration. Cycles of abuse and physical, emotional, and economic consequences of IPV can traverse transnational geographies and complicate efforts to rebuild life and home. Temporal considerations complicate understandings of needs as women may continue to suffer consequences of IPV they no longer experience, or live with the continuous threat of violence because they migrated with an abusive partner or remain connected to an abusive partner, transnationally (Wachter, Dalpe, & Cook Heffron, 2019).

The ecological perspective highlighted in this chapter helps to elucidate IPV in relation to forced migration and serves as a useful tool to inform approaches for IPV prevention and intervention throughout migration. By formulating solutions as individual-level and IPV-only
interventions, however, we risk failing to respond to structural factors that not only foster IPV against women but also are associated with other forms of oppression. By tackling community-, systemic-, and structural-level factors, and moving beyond the temptation to respond to IPV at a purely individual level, we expand possibilities for shifting inequalities related to socio-economics, health and wellness, overall living conditions, and access to rights. Examples from field-based work point to important avenues for interventions, community organizing, and macro-level structural change (see Bhuyan, Osborne, Zahraei, & Tarshis, 2014; Cook Heffron et al., 2019; Horn, 2010b; Michau, Horn, Bank, Dutt, & Zimmerman, 2015; Usta & Singh, 2015). Feminist community-based organizations and activists play vital roles in addressing violence against women at multiple levels of the social ecology. Collaborative partnerships between community-based activist groups, domestic violence and sexual assault agencies, immigrant-led organizations, and agencies serving asylum seekers, refugees, and marginalized immigrants form the foundation for developing meaningful action across geographic settings. In addition, local and international humanitarian organizations play an important role in advancing policy, practice, and research to mitigate vulnerabilities associated with IPV in armed conflict and forced migration.

It is important to bear in mind that formal acknowledgment of IPV in times of armed conflict, as a catalyst of forced migration, during migration and displacement, and post-migration is relatively new. Indeed, recognition of women as forced migrants with valid claims for asylum on their own terms is only a recent development (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2014). The literature from which this chapter draws to present facets of the intersection of IPV and forced migration points to positive developments in this regard, as it represents an energized and growing body of knowledge with significant potential for informing policy and practice, ongoing research, and advocacy. At the same time, it bears highlighting inherent limitations in perspectives presented here, which draw almost exclusively from academic scholarship and thus do not capture the courageous and revolutionary efforts of women and allies on the ground who have long strove to dismantle structures, practices, and norms that condone violence against women and girls in all spheres of life. Likewise, while this chapter has reflected researchers’ efforts to explain and describe the risks, vulnerabilities, and consequences of IPV on migrating women, it also reveals the paucity of attention to women’s individual and collective resistance to IPV at multiple levels. Alongside the contributions of academic scholars referenced here, migrating and immigrant women must be at the center of formulating an understanding of IPV and of deciding when and how to address IPV at every phase of forced migration.

Acknowledgment

We thank Cherra Mathis, MSW, a social work doctoral student at Arizona State University, for her judicious and thoughtful assistance with this project.

Critical findings

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects women across diverse geographies at various phases and contexts prior to, during, and post-migration.
- IPV plays a role in motivations to migrate and in migration-related decision-making. The threat and experience of IPV may traverse time and space alongside women who migrate, or may emerge for the first time in displacement or post-migration.
- While numerous challenges impede knowledge production with migrating populations, a growing body of research shines light on the scope of IPV across global contexts and the
IPV against women in forced migration

multiple levels across the social ecology at which factors associated with exposure to and consequences of IPV persist.

- Key factors associated with IPV in forced migration include pervasive poverty and unemployment, early and quick (re)marriages, shifts in gender roles, changing norms around violence, and deepening inequalities.

Implications for policy, practice, and research

- Although existing evidence points to high rates of violence within private spheres of life, IPV is likely under-reported due to challenges with measuring violence against women in contexts shaped by forced migration. Ongoing research is necessary to bring the full scale of the problem to light.
- Gaps remain regarding the consequences of and needs associated with IPV throughout various stages of forced migration.
- An unexplored area of research is the risk of violence migrating women face during and following apprehension by immigration officials and incarceration in federal immigration detention systems.
- Collaborative partnerships between community-based activist groups, domestic violence and sexual assault agencies, immigrant-led organizations, and agencies serving forced migrants are fundamental to addressing IPV among forced migrant groups across geographic settings.
- Women with relevant lived experiences must be at the center of advocacy, intervention, and research efforts to address and mitigate intersections of forced migration and IPV.

Notes

1 In armed conflict and forced migration, men face various manifestations of violence and children are especially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. 
2 Examples include the International Rescue Committee GBV Responders' Network (gbvresponders.org); the World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_1); UN Women (https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women); and the Women's Refugee Commission (womensrefugeecommission.org).

References


425


IPV against women in forced migration


IPV against women in forced migration


429