Exploring the health-seeking behaviour/s of immigrant women

How do immigrant women in Australia seek help to improve and/or maintain their health?

Research goals:
• Explore how immigrant women in Australia understand and construct health, wellbeing and illness
• Better understand the lived experiences of immigrant women in improving and/or maintaining their health
• Critically reflect on power in both the health and healthcare contexts
• Determine potential barriers to the effectiveness and utilisation of available services
• Develop potential recommendations to improve the design and delivery of services for immigrant women.

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Methods:
• Ethnographic study to engage immigrant women and their service providers in ethnographic conversations and observations.
• Study occurred part-time over a one-year period.
• Research site - World Wellness Group, a grassroots, independent social enterprise, located in South Brisbane, Queensland, providing general practice, mental health, allied health, traditional medicine and health promotion to a highly diverse client group.

Key findings:
• Participants were highly diverse, and many experienced a complex set of realities, including financial hardship and settlement challenges.
• Participants held extremely broad definitions of health, illness and wellbeing, and intrinsically linked physical, mental, social and emotional domains of health.
• Home generally served as an enduring frame of reference for participants, and participants reported:
  — varying sources of agency (including social and familial supports, personal resilience, survivorship and expertise of a number of international healthcare systems); and
  — various source of vulnerability (including domestic and interpersonal violence, language barriers, and visa and migration status mental health concerns).
• COVID-19 was seen as having a ‘compounding effect’, given pre-existing structural, social and economic vulnerabilities for many immigrant women.

A critical need for partnership - Over 7.5 million Australians (29.7 per cent of the total population) were born overseas as at 30 June 2019, up from approximately 26.4 per cent of the total population in 2009 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). However, extremely poor data continues to plague the multicultural healthcare sector; limiting research, policy and investment (Federation of the Ethnic Communities’ Council of Australia, 2019; Murray, Nebeker, & Carpendale, 2019).