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RESEARCH NOTE

Kim MacInnis



PHOTO: GALAXY STUDIOS

"I thought I would be so happy in the United States. My husband was so nice to me at first. Now he beats me and threatens to send me back to Brazil. I have no power to stop him."

Kim MacInnis began working in a shelter for abused and battered women in Quincy in 1989. Her experiences there led her to enroll in a graduate program in sociology at Northeastern University where she focused in the area of criminology. She completed her dissertation, "They're Only Immigrants: Undocumented and Abused Immigrant Women in Massachusetts" during her first year as a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Bridgewater.

She found undocumented and battered immigrant women to be the most powerless and vulnerable group of women in the United States. She came fully to what she calls this "sad understanding" after five years of working with these women, trying to deal in some way with their almost total lack of voice or power. Besides being too often abused by their husbands or boyfriends, these women are illegally in the United States, and therefore have no access to the already inadequate systems of help for abused American women. The abusers of the women MacInnis studied commonly black-

mailed them with threats of deportation if they even attempted to seek help or report the abuse. The women, then, were often dependent upon their abusers for sponsorship in their attempts to gain legal residency here, though these same men commonly beat them. In fact, their abusers had, by circumstances of American law and social practice, been turned into de facto immigration agents. The emergency financial and medical aid available to these women was minimal, and only unofficially through battered women's shelters such as the one at which MacInnis worked.

MacInnis' research focused on the stories told by twelve such women. They lived in constant fear of deportation and beatings by their male partners. Their voices come through clearly in the research, reflecting the desperation born of being trapped by multiple minority statuses including being illegal, female, poor and unschooled in American ways and language.

Kim MacInnis, who was born and grew up on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia, Canada, is currently working on publishing her dissertation findings, and has become actively involved in Bridgewater State College's Canadian Studies and Womens' Studies Programs.