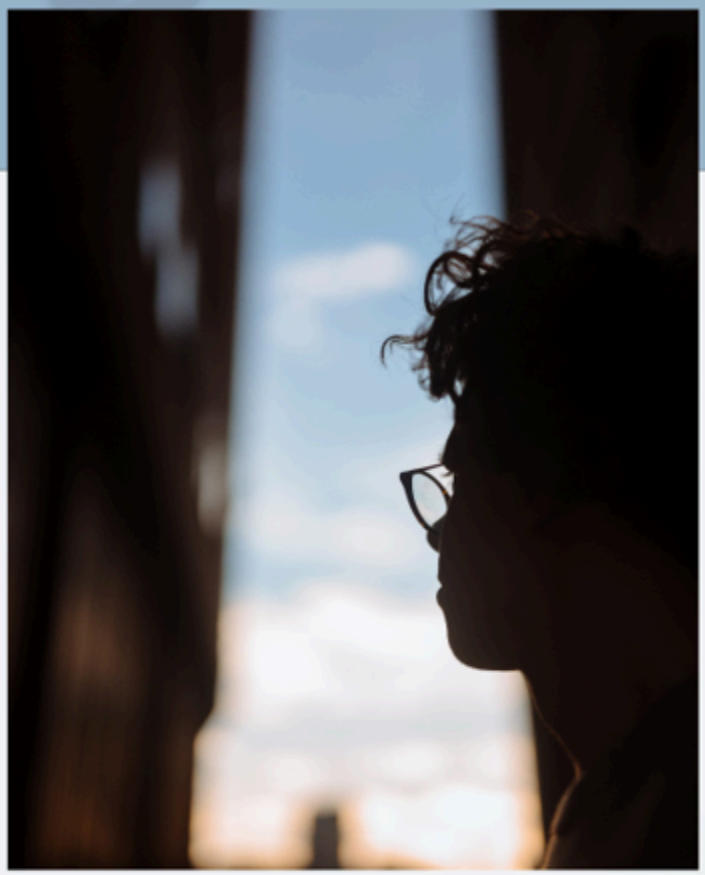
Breaking the Silence



BREAKING THE SILENCE

THE UNTOLD JOURNEYS OF RACIALIZED IMMIGRANT YOUTH THROUGH FAMILY VIOLENCE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are incredibly grateful for the contributions made by our research participants. The rich stories they shared with us have provided immense insight into their challenges and innate strengths in navigating life. While their voices fill a much-felt void in the existing knowledge, their recommendations give direction to all disciplines and professionals engaged in supporting children who have directly or indirectly experienced family violence (FV). We admire their commitment, passion and desire to extend solidarity with other children through their stories and vision.

We acknowledge the support of different institutions that have made this research possible. We thank Toronto Metropolitan University's and Sheridan College's Research Ethics Boards for providing ethics clearance. We also acknowledge the support of Sarah Bukhari, Manager, Scholarly, Research & Creative Activity, Faculty of Community Services, Toronto Metropolitan University, for helping us with recruitment by circulating the recruitment flyer to students in schools within the Faculty.

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We have been fortunate to receive the exceptionally supportive foreword for this book from Dr. Peter Jaffe, Professor, Professor Emeritus, Western University. Receiving authentication and introduction for our work from Dr. Jaffe means a lot for our project, and we are deeply grateful to him. We want to thank Prof.

Nicholas Bala, W.R. Lederman Distinguished University Professor, Faculty of Law, Queen's University, for his incredible support and feedback on the draft of this report. Thank you to our esteemed colleagues from academia and practice who have provided endorsements to this book.

We want to thank our editor, Kerry Fast, for her careful editing of the manuscript. Thanks to Sheridan College student Rebecca Mathews for her help in uploading a draft of this book to the eCampus Ontario Pressbook website. Thanks also to Sanaya Chaze for the cover page design.

Images courtesy: Adobe Photos

FOREWORD

I was touched when I was asked by Archana Medhekar to write a forward for the book she wrote with her colleagues on *The Untold Journeys of Racialized Immigrant Youth through Family Violence.* In reviewing the initial manuscript, I felt overwhelmed with the depth of knowledge and insights provided by this volume as well as the clear implications for our communities and service providers across all sectors.

I have been involved in clinical work and research on children exposed to family violence for almost half a century and have published multiple books and articles on the topic. Reading the manuscript makes me appreciate the limitations of my past scholarship since I never fully addressed this impact within a comprehensive intersectional framework. Often I would describe social and cultural factors as vulnerabilities and added burdens for children and families rather than a much needed central focus. Reviewing the manuscript serves as a reminder that growing wisdom lies in having more questions than answers and knowing all that you do not know.

I appreciated so many aspects of this book and the clarity of its purpose and key messages. The authors outline the many ways in which children experience family violence as well as the multiple negative impacts on mental health and social adjustment. For far too long we have only considered the direct harm of child physical and sexual abuse and have ignored the devastating harm from exposure to violence. The book really does "break the silence" by having such powerful voices of survivors with lived experience growing up with family violence. Having young adults share their stories provides insights into the short-term and long term consequences of family violence that follows children into emerging adulthood and the demands of education and employment. Figure 1 on the impact of experiencing family violence was an important visual aid in capturing all the spheres of functioning impacted by family violence. The accounts provided about the impact of violence within the family was amplified by the harmful effects of intervenors in different service sectors.

The book outlines to readers not only the intersectional analysis of the effects of violence but also the holistic approach by examining family violence within an individual, family, community and societal context. The holistic approach affords the reader with an understanding of all the forces that exacerbate the impact of family violence as well as the factors that might promote healing and resilience. The youth who are interviewed bring to life all their strengths and coping skills in reflecting that they are more than collateral damage in their violent homes.

A clear strength in the book is a focus on solutions. The authors outline well-articulated recommendations for change in our communities to become more aware of the problems of racialized youth as well as having more responsive professionals in the education, social service, health and justice systems. The recommendations aren't just pie in the sky ideas, in fact they are outlined in detail with excellent examples on how they can be implemented in a practical fashion. The recommendations call for a transformation in practice

across multiple sectors and are framed in the holistic model outlining actions that are possible in helping individual children and families as well as broader approaches in public education and prevention. I thought that Figure 2 on participants' recommendations for "Holistic, trauma-informed, culturally informed services for racialized immigrant children living with Family Violence" was a compelling illustration of all the work had to be done in this area. The figure could be framed in most agencies offices as a reminder of a blueprint for action beyond serving individual clients.

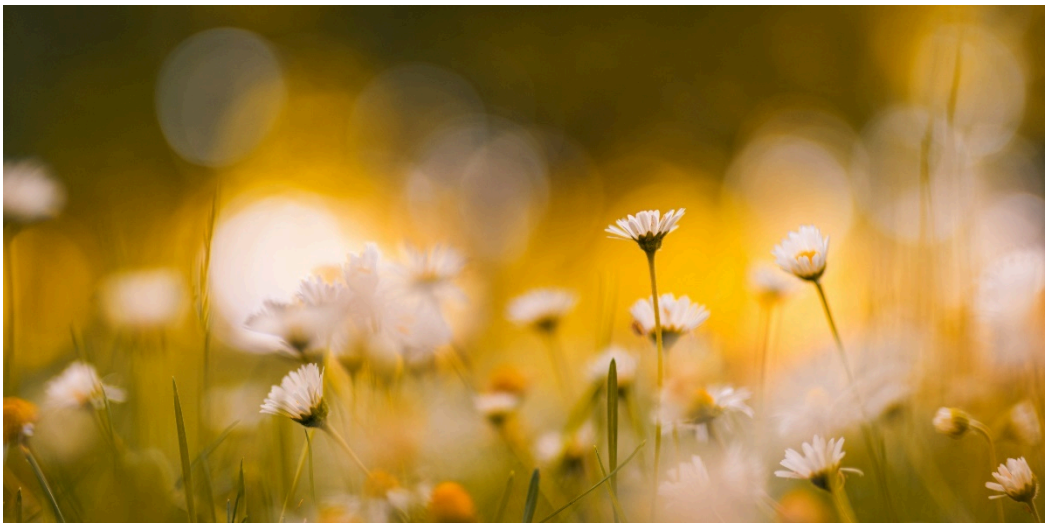
This book is a major contribution to the existing research on family violence. Beyond the findings on the impact of exposure to family violence on children, voices of youth reveal the unique effects of being marginalized as children and racialized immigrants or refugees. The voices loudly call out for change in the need for individualized supports and practical assistance for children in these circumstances. There is a clear need for service providers to collaborate with partners in the community sector to enhance their knowledge and become stronger advocates for reforms in immigration, housing, income support programs, education, and culturally appropriate services for racialized immigrant children. The book documents the need to enhance funding for community-based services for families experiencing family violence.

This book is a stark reminder of the complexity of family violence and the context of being a racialized immigrant youth. There are no simple answers and solutions have to be as multifaceted as the problem. The voice of Sandiran in the study captured the many dimensions of the problem in discussing the impact of war: *So, I think like, like a family approach to domestic violence a family approach to, abuse is so necessary, and I mean like, you know, and I also expand that outward to . . . community approaches to healing . . . you know what does it mean when a war afflicted family, a war afflicted community is now in a region where they, they're not, no longer in that war but that war remains in a lot of internalized ways and so what does it mean to provide proper community services that link, individual to family to community, especially in communities where that trust has been eroded because of the political, social tensions.* Sandiran and the other youth's voices should instill in all of us a search for a deeper understanding of all the communities and clients we serve.

Peter Jaffe, O.C, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Western University

Dr. Peter Jaffe is a clinical psychologist, Professor Emeritus, and one of the founding Directors of the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women & Children at Western University. He has co-authored eleven books, 40 chapters and over 80 articles related to family violence and the impact of family violence on children. In 2009, he was named an Officer in the Order of Canada by the Governor General for his work preventing family violence in the community.

ENDORSEMENTS



"*This is a significant work on a critical issue that is under-researched and often misunderstood by professionals: the experiences of racialized immigrant children living with their parents' intimate partner violence. The book is an important resource for professionals in social services, child protection, education, law enforcement and the justice system, as well for students who want to pursue careers in these areas. It is also vitally important for policy makers to read this book to better understand the needs of these vulnerable children and youth and improve their outcomes.*

The book is based on interviews with 12 young adults, who reflect on their experiences as children of parents who immigrated to Canada and lived with mothers who were victims of abuse perpetrated by their male partners, most of whom were also the children's fathers and included one stepfather. They had a wide range of experiences, but all had significant challenges reflecting intersectional effects of family violence, age, culture, race, and for many of them gender and poverty.

The book has extensive quotes that capture the experiences, emotions, and wisdom of these young adults. It also offers a detailed analysis from an Anti-Oppression Perspective, reflecting the authors' understanding of the effects of both the abuse in the home and the systemic effects of racism, cultural insensitivity, and the lack of adequate social and economic supports for these children, as well as recognizing the importance of children's rights.

While set in a Canadian context, the content of this book will be highly relevant for other countries in the West with increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations."

Professor Nicholas Bala, W.R. Lederman Distinguished University Professor, Faculty of Law, Queen's University

"*This e-book on the voices of racialized immigrant youth who witnessed and experienced family violence is a valuable addition to the field of research on children exposed to family violence and responds to the large gap that is addressed when listening for the views of racialized youth. The quotes provided from the participants highlight the contextual flaws inherent in past efforts to help such youth. The importance of understanding the views of children and youth who have lived through family violence comes through in each chapter. How these children and their families have been impacted by poverty, war related traumas, cultural contexts, immigration, housing problems, educational gaps, systemic abuses, etc., and where to make changes in the various sectors trying to help the families (such as education, mental health, family law, justice, and welfare services) is provided. The ten recommendations and suggested process steps to aid implementation of the recommendations provides excellent suggestions for making changes in all sectors that the youth feel could be improved upon. Rather than the westernized, individualistic model for services, trauma-informed, culturally informed, collectivist frameworks that work with the whole family are encouraged. A must read for those in law, education, the social-service, health, and mental health fields. I wish I had access to it earlier in my work career."*

Dr. Daniel Terrence Ashbourne, Psychologist, Executive Director Emeritus at LFCC, Accredited Family Mediator, and Consultant/Trainer at Navigating Onward (NavOn).

"Breaking the Silence: The Untold Journeys of Racialized Immigrant Youth through Family Violence" is a profoundly moving and honest account that empathetically exposes the hidden stresses endured by racialized immigrant youth in the face of family violence. In this study, the Authors amplify the importance and humanize the voices of racialized immigrant youth. They do so, not only as a pure act of caring and listening, but also to shine light on their voices as a reliable warning signal for increased family violence. Their voices matter and listening to them can make a difference. Through sharing of the racialized immigrant youth's personal experiences, you get a sense that the authors are gently holding up these youth and their stories as a powerful reminder. Such youth are living, breathing, hopeful, angry, sad, accommodating, questioning, thoughtful young people that deserve the professionals that touch their lives to serve them at a higher level, to see them, to trust them, and to advocate for change.

Dear Authors, thank you for this "call to action" we hear you."

Mary-Anne Popescu, Executive Director, Ontario Association for Family Mediation

" I am happy to fully endorse the e-book "Breaking the Silence: The Untold Journeys of Racialized Immigrant Youth through Family Violence" because I believe that it is an essential document for continued work in Family Violence. Having worked in the area of Family Violence for many years I strongly believe that many children

witness Family violence in various forms however often their voices are omitted. I want to thank the authors for beginning to look at the issue of Family Violence through the eyes of the children, the future generation."

Antoinette Clarke, Child Protection Mediator, Executive Director, Peel Family Mediation Service

"Ms. Medhekar and colleagues have conceived, researched and authored an impressive report, based on empirical study, on voices of racialized immigrant youth who experienced family violence as children that deals with a very important and topical problem that afflicts Canadian and other societies around the world. The report reaches detailed and insightful conclusions that ought to spur immediate, urgent and concerted action from both government and the civil society designed to arrest and prevent incidence of the ills identified in the study and reorient state and society in the country. The very specific recommendations offered in the report should assist greatly in this regard. It should also be compulsory reading for every member of our society."

Prof. Obiora Chinedu Okafor, Edward B. Burling Chair in International Law and Institutions, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, The United Nations Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity

"Breaking the Silence is a groundbreaking read that sheds light on the darkness of racialized youth living through family violence. The stories bring us closer to the inner struggles that are unique to racialized youth and are successful in their attempt to broaden the definitions and understanding of family violence, ranging from the individual to the community and system level. Voices of the youth validate the multiple and indescribable barriers shared by both themselves and their parents as first-generation immigrants and refugees. By focusing on an under-explored area, the authors not only help to fill a significant gap in the research field, but also provide recommendations with input from the youth themselves, to enable better support for racialized children and families experiencing domestic violence. Only a deeper understanding and appreciation pertaining to the lived experience of youth in racialized communities would facilitate effective service delivery. As such, this book would serve as an important resource for professionals in the legal, community, and healthcare sector who work with racialized communities and likewise influence policy makers in creating sustainable changes in the area of family violence."

Dr. Pushpa Kanagaratnam, Clinical Psychologist

"The report Breaking the Silence: The Untold Journeys of Racialized Immigrant Youth through Family Violence not only provides an opportunity to deepen understanding of the impact of family violence on racialized youth, but also demonstrates the need to develop and embrace culturally responsive approaches across all sectors and systems.

Hearing the voice of youth with lived experience illustrates further the need for a call to action from all levels

of government to acknowledge and implement change to racist policies and practices that continue to exacerbate experiences of Family Violence.

I highly recommend this book as not only a study guide but also as a road map to bring about change to societal institutions."

Jakki Buckeridge, Manager for Family Services, Indus Community Services

"This book presents a unique and inclusive approach to understanding the experiences of racialized immigrant children in the context of family violence. It uses real-life case studies, personal experiences, and systemic responses to contextualize the social context of violence experienced by these children. The book also provides a legal framework for families and a trajectory for law reform while acknowledging gaps in the existing literature and the compounding impacts of systemic and structural violence. Through moving case studies, the book illuminates the children's diverse experiences, the impact of violence on their lives, and the response of societal institutions. It offers practical information for students, service providers, legal practitioners, and policymakers, making it accessible to experienced and new readers. Overall, this book provides valuable insights into the intersectional migration experience and proposes approaches to bring change to existing systems."

Deepa Mattoo, Barrister and Solicitor & Executive Director, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic

"This is a powerful book as the authors bring together some of the biggest challenges of social work practice: recognizing systemic and political oppression, identifying violence, and offering recommendations for practice that acknowledges personal strengths and struggles while holding the state accountable for providing safety for all families. It is uniquely situated to offer scholars, students, and practitioners with research-based insights into the complex issues of family violence experienced by racialized youth. It resists blaming race, families or youth for violence and centralizes the impact of systemic influences on families while holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

The recommendations for policy and practice will be particularly useful for students and practitioners as they grapple with the multifaceted assessments that are required for intervention. Focusing on the strengths of youth, recognizing individual differences among family members, resisting the urge to generalize about racialized families are more reasons to use the readings to advance ethical practice with racialized families. And finally, it is timely as it centralizes issues of race as part of the Canadian landscape. For too long, practice for racialized families in Canada has been seen as an add on to be addressed if funds are available or other similar 'reasons'; an approach that places racialized people outside the fabric of 'Canadian' society thereby contributing to the denial of the presence of racialized families as part of the core of Canada. I will be using this book for my future projects!"

Dr Sarah Maiter, Professor, School of Social Work, York University.

"Thank you to the twelve individuals who bravely told their stories in this study and thank you to those who witnessed their stories so they could be shared with us- the reader.

It is unfortunate that many readers will recognize their own experience on these pages given FV is prevalent in all cultures and countries. The impact of FV on children's functioning and development is important learning for anyone working with children and their families in any capacity. Trauma specialists are aware that from a neurobiological perspective, children who experience DV do so on a deep visceral level. This means that even though the DV is indirect, the child is not just a witness but is directly impacted as a victim given these experiences kickstart a perpetual state of fear and toxic stress which in turn impacts the development and functioning of the hippocampus area of our brains. This neurobiological state has long standing implications (learning difficulties, mental health challenges, self medicating substance use) given exposure to your primary caregiver being hurt (defined as indirect family violence in this text) means that you cannot be protected either nor feel safe in any of the milieus you function in.

The importance of this study however, is that it shone a light on the additional barriers to safety and treatment for children of racialized immigrant families. Their experiences are often more isolating and the cost of self -disclosure and/or seeking support makes the child even more vulnerable. This book not only shares the precipitating and perpetuating factors of FV but identifies short and long term recommendations for implementation that need to be facilitated with an anti oppressive lens by not only individuals but also systems who interact with children and families.

Thank you to the research team for this important contribution to literature and practice. We need to stop the cycle of FV. The long term effects just cost too much. Consequently, this study needs to be required reading across professions for practitioners and students."

Theresa Fraser, Trauma, Loss and Attachment Specialist

"This groundbreaking seminal text that is available in an accessible format is a robust resource for multidisciplinary professionals. Using a phenomenological approach and by gathering data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with racialized immigrant youth, the authors have brought into view the importance of noticing the people behind the statistics and media reports whose lives are impacted irreversibly by family violence (FV). This focus makes it an excellent resource while teaching in higher education to highlight how intentional selection of particular methodology amplifies the research data in meaningful ways.

As a resource for practitioners, recommendations 4,5 and 10 resonate deeply with the mandate of work within the K-12 educational sector: Recommendation 4 asserts that schools have an important role to play in supporting children, especially those who experience FV. Recommendation 5 invites professionals across the various disciplines to acknowledge "how systemic violence intersects and exacerbates experiences of family violence"(p.16). Recommendation 10 "Provide anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-based, and culturally appropriate training for educators, social, community, and justice practitioners" is especially relevant to the educational work done in schools at all levels as it is a call to action to interdisciplinary collaborations to ensure the safety and well-being of racialized immigrant youth."

Dr. Rashmee Karnad-Jani, K-12 Special Education Consultant, York Region District School Board and Sessional Lecturer, B.Ed Program, Ontario Tech University

NOTE TO THE READER

This research emerged from our 2020 research project, Domestic Violence in Immigrant Communities: Case Studies. We analyzed the case studies and recognized that children are often involved in family violence (FV). Little research has been done on the impact on children living in immigrant families where violence is present. This research was the natural extension of looking at FV in immigrant communities. To do this research, we recruited young adults who had experienced FV as children to participate in the study. This report is the result of the experiences they shared with us and their thoughts on what would have been helpful for them and what might be helpful for others.

For Legal Professionals

We encourage you to read this to learn from children's voices about their experiences growing up in an adverse environment. We invite you to connect these children's voices with your law practice and examine the trends and gaps that still exist after the March 1, 2021, historic legislative amendments to the federal and provincial family laws, which were changed with four key objectives: promote the best interests of the child, address FV, help reduce child poverty, and make Canada's family justice system more accessible and efficient.

For Social and Community Development Workers

We encourage you to read this to learn about adverse childhood experiences through the voices of people who experienced them. We also invite you to engage with the findings to look at the kinds of interventions that were helpful and the gaps that exist in services.

For School Boards and Educators

We encourage you to link the stories you encounter in this book to the concept of student safety as highlighted in the Ontario Education Act. We invite you to consider the roles and responsibilities of school boards, including Supervisory Officers, Principals, Teachers, Educational Assistants, and Parent Councils in the protection of its students, and to identify how current practices can be modified/enhanced to ensure that the school can be a place of refuge and a hub providing supports to children experiencing family violence.

For Students

Reading the youth narratives and case studies is a great way to learn about the experiences of people you may have the opportunity to work with. It can support you in learning how to approach your work and develop future programs and interventions that address the gaps evident through our research. We know it can be challenging to read about children's experiences of FV, so we encourage you to take your time and find discussion partners inside and outside the classroom to discuss what you are learning.

If You Have Experienced Family Violence

If you have experienced FV, reading these case studies may be difficult for you. It may remind you of your own experiences and trigger a reaction. If that happens, please make sure that you reach out to someone from your support network or access this helpful Province of Ontario resource that directs you to support if you are experiencing violence.

A Guide to the Report

This report is divided into ten sections. SECTION 1 introduces the key concepts related to the research approach and analysis. SECTION 2 provides an overview of the literature on FV and its impact, followed by a discussion of the historical evolution of divorce legislation in Ontario and Canada. SECTION 3 provides the

reader with the theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis and recommendations. SECTION 4 outlines the research methodology and discusses the limitations of the research. SECTION 5 provides a brief profile of each participant, and SECTION 6 provides the reader with the major findings of the research. SECTION 7 continues the discussion of the findings but focuses on how systemic violence aggravates FV. SECTION 8 examines the research participants' recommendations, and SECTION 9 offers our recommendations and responses to them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although FV is experienced in every culture and society, racialized immigrant children living with FV are underrepresented in academic literature. While there is significant literature on the impact of FV on children, there is scant literature on the impact of FV on racialized immigrant children in Canada or elsewhere. This lack of understanding of racialized immigrant children's experience of FV can lead to a misrepresentation of their perspectives and an ineffective response by way of services that support these children.

This book presents the findings and recommendations of the research 'Voices of Racialized Immigrant Youth who Experienced Family Violence as Children,' conducted in 2020. The study used Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological approach of inquiry to obtain a description of family violence (FV) and the meaning of the experience for the racialized immigrant youth. As participants recalled their childhood experiences of FV, they simultaneously reflected and made meaning of their experiences.

The study was reviewed and approved by the research ethics boards (REB) of Toronto Metropolitan University and Sheridan College. Efforts were made to recruit racialized youth who reflected diversity in gender, education, culture, country of origin, and immigration status (Kall & Zeiler, 2014). Participants were purposively selected according to the following eligibility criteria:

1. had directly or indirectly experienced FV in childhood;
2. self-identified as a racialized immigrant;
3. were between 21 and 29 years of age;
4. had not had serious mental health challenges that prevented them from articulating their experiences;
5. FV-related formal/institutional intervention in their life had to have ended three years before participation in this research.

Based on these criteria, 12 participants contacted the researcher, Purnima George, and expressed interest in participating in the study. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom using in-depth, semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. Interviews lasted between 90 and 180 minutes. In keeping with the phenomenological approach, the interviews captured participants' experiences and interpretations of FV, the impact of these experiences on their lives, and the response of societal institutions. Additional questions emerged during the course of the interviews. The participants shared their rich, insightful experiences and interpretations.

Care was taken to see that the themes emerging from the data analysis formed a composite description and context of the phenomenon of FV and its impact. The study's preliminary findings were shared with the participants for feedback on the accuracy and representation of the information they shared (Padgett, 2017).

There were a number of findings that emerged from the data analysis. You can find a comprehensive discussion of these findings in SECTION 6: MAJOR FINDINGS. There were also a number of recommendations that emerged from the participants about supporting families and children experiencing FV. These recommendations can be found below and in SECTION 8: RESPONDING TO PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS and SECTION 9: DISCUSSION. Because the research team looked at FV through social, community, and legal lenses, the recommendations address each of these areas.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Focus on the strengths of children who have experienced FV and provide them with support to bolster their strengths.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #1

1. Create opportunities within curricula for children in elementary school to learn about violence, the impact of violence, and safe options for discussing the experience of violence. Normalizing the occurrence of violence but not normalizing the violence is important for reducing the stigma associated with FV
2. Conduct strengths-based assessments of children's skills and interests and design programs and activities in consultation with children

RECOMMENDATION #2

Recognize siblings as unique individuals with different ways of interpreting and responding to FV.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #2

1. Instead of developing common supports for all the children in a family, conduct an individual assessment of their individual experiences of the FV and its varied impact, including changes in family relationships. Based on this assessment, plan individualized support for each child in consultation with the child.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Provide community-wide education to create more awareness about FV

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #3

1. Establish rapport with community members and community and religious leaders and gain the trust of

community members
2. Create audio-visual educational materials highlighting the negative impact of FV on children in the languages spoken in the children's community
3. Develop support groups for men, women, and youth (boys, girls, non-binary youth) and offer safe space for discussion and finding pathways for resolving tensions
4. Challenge mental health and FV-related stigma in ethnic communities
5. Provide free community-based, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate counselling services for anyone affected by FV
6. Engage community members in designing and implementing services

RECOMMENDATION #4

Schools need to play an essential role in supporting children who experience family violence.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #4

1. Organize after-school homework sessions to support children who do not have parental support due to FV
2. Provide training in effective communication, anger management, and life skills
3. Provide sports and arts-based activities as an outlet
4. Support teachers to develop pedagogical strategies that engage quiet and withdrawn children
5. Offer a safe space for children to share their experiences and responses with either a teacher or a guidance counsellor without fear of being uprooted from their family
6. Increase counselling support in schools

RECOMMENDATION #5

Acknowledge how systemic violence intersects with and exacerbates experiences of family violence

RECOMMENDATION #6

Examine and rectify policies that maintain systemic inequity for racialized immigrants

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS #5 AND #6

1. Recognize the role systemic violence plays in exacerbating FV and provide supports to families that are experiencing systemic violence
2. Recognize that systemic violence such as racism, exclusion, poverty, unsafe neighbourhoods, and escaping war creates trauma and children and individuals who have experienced such violence need trauma-informed mental health supports

3. Provide funding and engage community-based organizations to address FV in communities.
4. Provide holistic supports for all family members tailormade to their unique needs with a focus on their recovery and healing.
5. The trauma-informed supports should focus on removing the guilt, shame, and low self-esteem experienced by children experiencing FV by establishing a connection between their plight and systemic factors
6. Provide material support beyond minimum wage, child tax benefits, and welfare support to families facing systemic violence for equity and social justice
7. Establish breakfast clubs in schools for children from low-income families
8. Offer cost-free programs for children to channel and enhance skills and interests
9. Support and initiate a broad-based opposition/coalition that cuts across sectors and disciplines to advocate for systemic change

RECOMMENDATION #7

Ensure that children are informed of and have a voice in the decision-making that is part of the family court process

RECOMMENDATION #8

Canada's child welfare system must interrogate the racism, colonial bias, and classism inherent in its practices

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS #7 AND #8

1. Because the child is not a passive witness, their insights into how the child welfare system should be designed would positively impact the experience of future children experiencing FV. Including the voices of racialized immigrant children would contribute to reducing the racism, colonialism, and classism that are inherent in its practices
2. Training practitioners in the social, community, and justice sectors should include introducing supportive ways to interact with children and youth, with a focus on ensuring that their voices are included in the process

RECOMMENDATION #9

Expand the current understanding of the Best Interest of the Child as outlined by the Divorce Act and recognize the impact of systemic violence on children

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #9

1. The *Best Interest of the Child* is determined not only by personal/family factors, but also by systemic factors, specifically for children from racialized and marginalized families. What it means to be in the best interests of a child needs to be expanded to include systemic violence (i.e., it is not in children's best interests to live with poverty, racism, and social exclusion)
2. Children and youth need to be involved in discussions about what is in the best interests of the child. We must consider not only FV but also systemic factors to determine what is needed to meet individual children's needs
3. Anti-FV policies and practices must become more responsive to the systemic inequities impacting racialized immigrant children in Canada. Until there is a recognition of the systemic violence of racism and poverty and a response to end it and until there is a genuine commitment to address issues faced by racialized immigrant children, and above all, until the rights of these children as individuals are respected, these inequities will persist

RECOMMENDATION #10

Provide anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-based, and culturally appropriate training for educators, social, community, and justice practitioners.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #10

1. Prioritize training for service providers in anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-based and culturally informed practice, conducted in collaboration with community partners
2. Train professionals to focus on early intervention and prevention of FV
3. Train professionals to assess the connections between personal and systemic risk factors as they contribute to FV and respond appropriately using culturally appropriate approaches
4. Train professionals to include practices that focus on recovery and healing from the trauma of FV

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In 2016, racialized people comprised 22.3% of Canada's population, 70% of whom were born outside Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017b). According to Statistics Canada (2022b), immigration was the primary driver of population growth between 2016 and 2021. Individuals from racialized groups make up over half of the immigrants in Canada, and that number is projected to increase by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017a; 2019). According to Nichols et al. (2019), nearly 80% of newcomer youth identified as racialized in the 2016 census.

Based on Canada's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to participate in the judicial and administrative proceedings that affect them. The judge's role in FV cases is evolving. Judges now play a part in ensuring that judicial dispute resolution appropriately reflects substantive equality principles. In the words of the former Chief Justice of Canada, Beverley McLachlin, a judge's role is to exercise an "informed impartiality," which requires an introspective, open, and empathetic approach and an appreciation of the social context within which the matters at issue arose. This "informed impartiality" is especially needed in child abuse and domestic violence cases (Martinson & Jackson, 2012).

Although the 2019 amendments to the Divorce Act have been primarily guided by legal professionals, researchers, and health professionals at the forefront of working with separating and divorcing families, including experts who work in FV (Canadian Heritage, 2019), there are still significant gaps in knowledge grounded in children's experiences. A notable gap is research about young people who have witnessed or experienced high conflict or intimate partner violence (Callaghan et al., 2018), particularly studies using a child-rights, intersectional lens. Much of the available research has been grounded in professional experience

and, more recently, parent experiences (Archer-Kuhn, 2018b). Young people can offer a wealth of knowledge in a context where adults attempt to make child-rights-based decisions to ensure the best outcomes.

Incorporating children's narratives and social contexts

Although FV is experienced in every culture and society due to patriarchy (Razack, 2003), racialized immigrant children living with FV are underrepresented in academic literature (Herrero-Arias et al., 2021; Overlien, 2010). While there is abundant literature on the impact of FV on children, there is scant literature on the impact of FV on racialized immigrant children in Canada or elsewhere. This lack of understanding of racialized immigrant children's experience of FV can lead to a misrepresentation of their perspectives and an ineffective response by way of services that support these children.

This report centres the voices of racialized immigrant youth on the violence they have witnessed and experienced in their childhood to provide new knowledge grounded in their experiences. Emerging from our research findings, there is an urgent need to focus on the impact of FV on racialized immigrant children and, based on their recommendations, develop services that respond to their needs. We also argue for modifying and expanding the principle of the *Best Interest of the Child* to suit the context of FV experienced by racialized immigrant families.

In the last decade, there has been a growing awareness in the family justice system of the harmful effect of spousal violence, not only for direct victims, but also for children. It is estimated that roughly one quarter of all separations and divorces in Canada involve spousal violence. Exposure to spousal violence is the fastest-growing category of child abuse cases reported to child welfare agencies (Bala et al., 2007).

We continue to see family court decisions which assume that someone who is violent and abusive towards an intimate partner can be a good parent. Many justice service professionals, including judges, assume that FV targeted at a parent does not impact young children. This assumption is held by other service providers as well. We continue to see court cases where it is assumed that if a parent has not directly abused a child, their violence does not reflect on their parenting ability. The courts and justice system professionals often expect a victim of abuse to "move on" and develop a co-parenting plan to work cooperatively with their abusive former partner.

There is an increasing concern about child homicide in the context of parenting cases, previously known as custody cases. Child advocates are calling for more effective prevention and more appropriate responses from the family justice system. A Private Members Bill C-233, also known as Keira's Law, which calls for more education and training about domestic violence for federally appointed judges, was passed in the Senate on April 18, 2023, and sent to the Governor General and received Royal Assent on April 27, 2023 C-233 (44-1) – LEGISinfo – Parliament of Canada. The Attorney General of the Province of Ontario introduced Bill – 102. On June 8, 2023 Bill 102, the *Strengthening Safety and Modernizing Justice Act,* received royal assent in the Ontario Legislature. It made it mandatory for all provincially appointed judges and justices of the peace to be

educated and trained in intimate partner violence, coercive control, and sexual assault as a condition of judicial appointment.

On February 9, 2020, four-year-old Keira, whose parents were involved in intense parenting litigation, was found dead with her father in Milton, Ontario, at the bottom of a cliff CBC News, 2023) and was undoubtedly the victim of a murder-suicide. Her mother advocated for the enactment of this Law, in the hope that other tragedies could be prevented.

Historic legislative reform and objectives

On March 1, 2021, significant amendments to the Divorce Act, R.S.C. 1985, c.3 (2nd Supp.) and the Ontario *Children's Law Reform Act*, R.S.O. 1990 c.C.12 [CLRA] came into force. These historic legislative amendments substantially changed the legal relevance of FV, with both acts providing an evidence-based definition of FV. Federal family laws had not been substantially updated in more than 20 years.

These legislative amendments had four key objectives: promote the best interests of the child, address FV, help reduce child poverty, and make Canada's family justice system more accessible and efficient.

The legislative changes aimed at reducing children's adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and introduced a new approach for family courts to focus on reducing family conflict. The dual challenge of reducing ACEs and reducing family conflict demands adequate screening for family violence, followed by all service professionals working with families and children to understand the root causes of FV, assessing the risk, and understanding the context of systems and their cumulative impact on children and their families.

Children's participation in defining their own best interests

A child's right approach to determining the best interests of children is an important consideration. A child's

rights approach views the concept of a child's best interests as ensuring the full and effective enjoyment of all their rights and promotion of the child's holistic development. Canada has ratified various international conventions and participates in international reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Committee statement, "an adult's judgment of a child's best interests cannot override the obligation to respect all of a child's rights under the Convention," which include the child's participation rights. UNCRC is one of the core international human rights instruments and aims to promote and protect the rights of children all around the world. UNCRC defined child as a human being under the age of 18 and advanced the understanding of how the children are viewed and treated globally i. e. as human beings with distinct sets of rights instead of passive objects of care.

On May 18, 2022, Canada concluded its periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Many important questions were deliberated during this reporting period: Would Canada consider establishing a federal ombudsperson to address children's rights? What was being done to ensure greater awareness raising on the rights of children? What was being done to end the large proportion of children living in poverty in Canada? Why are children from migrant and Indigenous populations disproportionately affected by poverty? (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Canada, as a state party, reported that it views the Convention as an anchor for improving children's rights across the country at the federal, territorial, and provincial levels. Even after 30 years, the UNCRC remains a vital, living body of law, guiding the international community to fulfill children's rights better.

Coercive control framework

The amendments to the Divorce Act and CLRA adopted the framework of coercive control. The social science literature recognized Coercive control as a feature of intimate partner relationships since early 1980's. However, it is a relatively new term in the arena of FV legislation. The dynamics of coercive control are challenging due to their insidious nature. The invisible impact of non-violent abusive and controlling behaviour is often more harmful than visible physical injuries because of the pattern of abusive and/ or controlling behaviour and its cumulative impact, which continue to impact victims and their children long after separation.

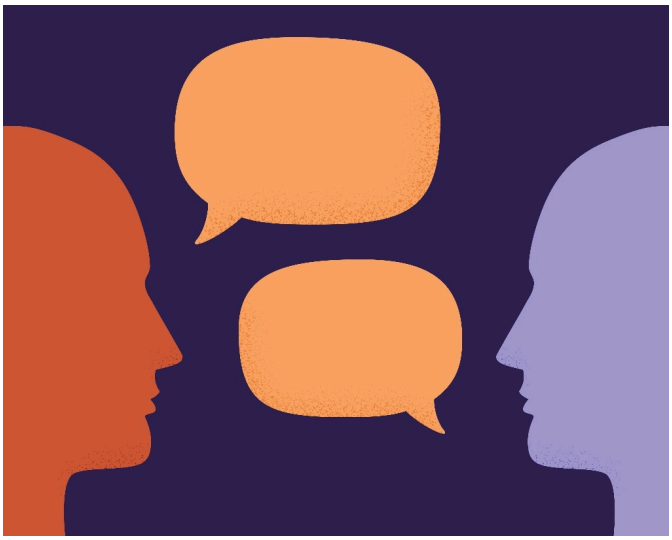
There is a clear connection between the best interests of the child and the children's safety. It is essential to note the cyclical nature of abuse—child abuse is not linear. It is essential to hear children's voices to assess all risk factors regarding the pattern, frequency, severity, and escalation of abusive behaviour. Research demonstrates that the risk of lethal violence is particularly high following parental separation, especially within the first few months (Hotton, 2013). A report from Statistics Canada indicated that from 2007 to 2011, the risk of women being killed by an ex-spouse was almost six times higher than the risk of being killed by a current

legally married spouse, with jealousy and frustration being the motives behind the homicide (Sinha, 2013). This risk exists for adult victims and children (Hamilton et al., 2013; Olszowy et al., 2013).

Between 2002 and 2017, there were 390 domestic homicide and homicide-suicide cases in Ontario. Of those 390 cases, 280 (72%) were homicides, and 110 (28%) were homicide-suicides. The 390 cases resulted in a total of 543 deaths. Of the 543 deaths, 433 (80%) were homicide victims, and 110 (20%) were perpetrators who committed suicide or were otherwise killed (e.g., shot by police). Of the 433 homicide victims, 349 (81%) were adult females, 40 (9%) were children, and 44 (10%) were adult males. Of the 110 perpetrator deaths, 107 (97%) were adult males (Ministry, 2021). This statistic is specifically relevant in understanding the ongoing need to obtain critical information about the existence and escalation of risk, risk management, and safety planning.

The impact of FV on children is evident on many levels, economically, socially, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and there can also be issues of mental health, addiction, and substance abuse. Given this, including children's voices, considering their identities and realities and protecting them is paramount.

The participants in this study shared their knowledge and insights about being marginalized as children and navigating socio-economic marginalization as racialized immigrants.



We have discussed the research outcomes and recommendations from racialized youth in support of comprehensive and multisectoral approaches to prevent and address the impact of their exposure to FV and ACEs.

Our research reveals the importance of giving children a voice to express their views and preferences about FV and its impact on *just* outcomes. There is a growing realization that children's human rights must be recognized, which begins with treating them as holders of their legal rights. By improving the understanding of intersectional vulnerabilities of racialized youth and the impact on them of multiple systems, we can strengthen prevention and improve responses.

Our research endeavours to provide the necessary social context that would be useful for judges and other justice service professionals dealing with family violence cases involving children experiencing or witnessing abuse in racialized immigrant families.

Structural and systemic violence as a factor in enumerated *Best Interest* test:

Family courts in Canada are tasked with determining the best interests of the child, which includes considerations of whether the FV is directed toward the child or whether the child is directly or indirectly exposed to FV (Divorce Act, R.S.C., 1985, 16 (4)). The amendments to the Divorce Act introduced the enumerated *Best Interest* test and took a two-pronged approach to FV: Analysis of what constitutes the harm and what can be done to reduce such harm to children.

The best interests of the child test also requires consideration of the child's cultural, linguistic, religious, and spiritual upbringing and heritage (Divorce Act S. 16 (3) (f)). The amendments to the Divorce Act are focused on the reduction of children's ACEs. However, too little knowledge exists on racialized immigrant children's experiences of FV to correctly interpret the child's *Best Interest* principle in their context.

Based on the above considerations, this study centres the voices of racialized immigrant youth on the violence they have witnessed or experienced in their childhood to provide new knowledge grounded in their experiences. Emerging from our research findings, we argue that it is urgent to recognize children's rights and value their input while dealing with FV cases. The findings provide insight into the agency of participants in dealing with FV, along with the severe negative impact on their overall life. Based on the recommendations shared by young people, we argue for developing holistic, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate services that respond to children's contexts of FV.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we review the literature on the concepts relevant to FV and the impact of FV on children. We review the literature on the history of Canada's Divorce Act and discuss key concepts that emerge concerning recent changes to the Divorce Act. We discuss the compounded impact of FV and systemic oppression on racialized immigrant families.

Family Violence

The latest amendments to the legistlation have replaced the term *domestic violence* with *family violence* (Government of Canada, 2019b). Section 2(1) of the Divorce Act defines FV as

> any conduct, whether or not the conduct constitutes a criminal offence by a family member towards another family member that is violent or threatening or that constitutes a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour, or that causes that other family member to fear for their own safety or for that of another person—and in the case of a child, the direct or indirect exposure to such conduct—and includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, threats to kill or cause bodily harm to any person, harassment, including stalking, the failure to provide the necessaries of life, psychological abuse, financial abuse, threats to kill or harm an animal or damage property and the killing or harming of an animal or the damaging of property (Government of Canada, 2022, para 1).

In keeping with this change, this report will hereafter use the term FV to denote any direct and indirect experiences of FV indicated in the literature and by our participants.

Direct Violence and Indirect Violence

Canada's Divorce Act now makes the legal distinction between a child as a *witness* and a child as a *victim* of FV. Literature has examined the impact of direct and indirect violence on children (Kimber et al., 2018; McTavish et al., 2016). Children experiencing violence directly refers to children being an adult's primary target of violence (Kimber et al., 2018; McTavish et al., 2016). Early definitions of child maltreatment in medical and social science literature it was characterized as neglect, physical violence, or sexual abuse (Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993). Psychological maltreatment, or psychological abuse, was a central concern and integral to all forms of child abuse and recognized as resulting in adverse outcomes for children (Edwards, 2019). However, the definition of child maltreatment has evolved over the years, and many jurisdictions (including Canada) have identified five forms of child maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional harm (psychological abuse), and exposure to FV (Gardner et al., 2019; Mehta et al., 2021).

Scholars have found that children who have experienced violence indirectly or come from FV environments experience adverse health, psychological, and social outcomes (Luthar et al., 2021). In a systematic literature review, Gardiner et al. (2019) found a compelling association between the five forms of child abuse and adverse mental health outcomes. In addition, exposure to personal and systemic factors such as community violence, racial discrimination, poverty, substance abuse, divorce, bullying, and separation from immigrant parents have also been identified as traumatic events with negative consequences on a child's life (Portwood et al., 2021).

The definition of exposure to indirect violence and witnessing violence refers to: children's awareness of an adult's abuse of another parent, caregiver, or family member; awareness of a parent's violence; seeing violent interactions; hearing stories about the violence, or seeing evidence of the abuse (Kimber et al., 2018; McTavish et al., 2016). However, in this report, we use the term children's direct and indirect experience of violence, as advanced by Callaghan et al. (2018) and Overlien (2017), to interrupt conceptions of children as passive witnesses or recipients of violence between/from adults.

Impact of Family Violence on Children

During the 1980s to the early 1990s, research focused on understanding the adverse effects of FV on children. The literature describes adverse behavioural and emotional outcomes that include internalizing problems, such as withdrawal, anxiety, and depression, along with externalizing problems, such as conduct disorders, aggression, and delinquency (Franzese et al., 2017; United Nations, 2020). Research has also indicated that witnessing FV as a child has consequences such as suicidal ideation, body-esteem issues, and adjustment problems during adolescence, that children who witness FV are likely to engage in bullying at school and also to

be the victims of bullying (Nagaraj et al., 2019). Furthermore, children who have experienced abuse, violence, or neglect by their parents are also at increased risk of having poor physical and mental health (Schubert, 2022) that can extend into adulthood (Jewkes & Morrell, 2017; Kumari, 2020), including lifetime depressive disorders and anxiety issues (Kisely et al., 2018).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a condition that may develop after an individual is exposed to a significantly traumatic situation (American Psychological Association, 2022). Children exposed to traumatic events such as interpersonal violence are at an increased rate of developing PTSD (Schubert, 2022; Woolgar et al., 2022). Cross et al. (2018) found that parents who experience PTSD and trauma are at an increased risk of inflicting abuse on their children, thereby increasing their children's chances of developing PTSD. There are also differences in PTSD rates between demographic groups in Canada. A longitudinal study by Davison et al. (2021) demonstrated that individuals with immigrant status (including refugees, uprooted people, and economic migrants) have a significantly greater chance of developing PTSD than white immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts. Despite controlling for social, health, nutritional, and economic factors, this difference in PTSD persisted. Davison et al. (2021) suspect that the relationship between the variables may be mediated by factors not included in their study.

The World Health Organization has distinguished between PTSD and Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) in the 11th edition of its International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) and Related Health Problems (Melton, 2019). To be diagnosed with C-PTSD, individuals must meet all of the PTSD criteria in addition to experiencing distanced relationships, affect dysregulation, and a negative self-concept (Longo et al., 2021; Vang et al., 2021). The designation C-PTSD is meant to address the specific symptoms associated with prolonged or repetitive exposure to traumatic events (Greenblatt-Kimron et al., 2022; Melton, 2019), which includes experiences of violence and abuse in childhood (Gilbar & Cloitre, 2019; Vang et al., 2021). Karatzias et al. (2019) and Longo et al. (2021) found that compared to PTSD, C-PTSD is a more debilitating condition, and those with it have a higher likelihood of major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder than people with PTSD. However, Ford (2020) has challenged the construct validity of C-PTSD and has recommended conducting more research on C-PTSD and PTSD differences.

Individuals who experienced sexual or physical abuse during childhood are also more likely to experience revictimization in adulthood in the form of dating violence (Mazarello et al., 2022; Yan & Karatzias, 2020). However, there is evidence that the transmission of violence changes over developmental stages. Haselschwedt et al. (2021) found that female participants who witnessed FV during childhood and adolescence reported having abusive partners and relationships in high school. Their experience of violence impacted how they

entered, managed, and exited romantic relationships in college. Overtime, however, as they became older, the participants in this study became selective and chose romantic partners who did not share traits with their fathers (Haselschwedt et al., 2018).

There is an intergenerational consequence to FV as well. Children who experience abuse and neglect are more likely to become victims or perpetrators of FV themselves (Lünnemann et al., 2019; Maji, 2018). Forke et al. (2018) argued that male and female adolescents are impacted differently based on who perpetrates violence. When children see a male perpetrating violence on a female, the male child is more likely to learn and repeat the witnessed behaviour, while the female child is likely to feel victimized. However, when a female adult is perpetrating violence either solely or in conjunction with their male partner, the impact of the violence is experienced in the same way by both male and female children.

The relationship between child and parent can also become strained due to the child witnessing FV. Ghani (2018) and Lamb et al. (2018) found that a strained relationship between father and child was one way in which FV impacted family relationships. They further found that their participants were willing to repair their relationships with their fathers if their fathers recognized their violent actions' impact on them. Kong and Goldberg (2022) also found that childhood exposure to FV can impact siblings' closeness in adulthood.

Children exposed to FV are also likely to struggle academically because of vulnerability to hyperactivity and inattention, dealing with basic and advanced literacy and articulation and understanding others (Orr et al., 2021).

Overlien (2017) notes that while the dominant empirical research on measuring the negative impact of exposure to FV is crucial for increasing our knowledge of and identifying needs for children's services, this approach has several pitfalls. First, it frames children as passive bystanders or passive recipients of abuse. This leads to the design of children's services that generalize children's experiences and undermines their agency. Second, it overlooks what qualitative research grounded in children's experiences has revealed: that children are directly impacted when one parent abuses the other parent, and they have agency in how they develop strategies to cope with and manage this impact (Arai et al., 2021; Callaghan et al., 2018; Overlien, 2017). Third, research focused on negative symptoms, behaviours, and outcomes could lead to assumptions that children who do not manifest negative symptoms and behaviours or appear to be thriving are not impacted and do not require services.

Poverty and Its Impact on Family Violence

Evidence shows that food insecurity and FV share a bidirectional relationship (Laurenzi et al., 2020), with a higher correlation among low-income families (Haque et al., 2020). Individuals living in poverty are more likely to report emotional, physical, and sexual abuse (Field et al., 2018; Lacey et al., 2020). When understanding the relationship between food insecurity, poverty, and FV, we must also consider intersectional influences, as some demographic groups are more likely to experience financial issues than others. Mehta et al. (2021) highlight how many refugees and asylum seekers have acquired trauma before migrating to a new country and how these individuals experience financial, social, educational, and health challenges in addition to racism and prejudice in their country of resettlement. As a result, the children of these individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing physical and emotional abuse and neglect as they manage the trauma of their acculturative stress.

Immigrants are more likely to experience difficulty securing employment (Crea-Aresenio et al., 2022), which has a long-term economic impact, including wage-earning loss (Zhang & Banerjee, 2021). Lightman and Good Gingrich (2018) found that women, recent immigrants, and South Asian, Arab, and Black racialized individuals were more likely to experience a persistent disadvantage in the Canadian labour market. Ertorer et al. (2022) also found that first-generation immigrants in Ontario experienced barriers to employment, promotion, and social integration due to discrimination and cultural judgement. Individuals experiencing poverty and FV are more likely to experience violence for extended periods due to their limited financial and social resources (Niess-May, 2019). Furthermore, parents' stress of living in poverty is a significant risk factor for child abuse and neglect (Bennett et al., 2020).

Service Needs

Among children and youth victims of crime in Canada, approximately 30% are victims of FV (Conroy et al.,

2019). In the literature, services for children exposed to FV have been organized into three categories: school services, child welfare services, and mental health services. The idea of trauma-informed care is also discussed in studies on school services (Howard, 2019; Martin et al., 2017), child welfare services (Bunting et al., 2019; Dougherty et al., 2022), and mental health services (Kulkarni, 2019; Levenson, 2017) for children exposed to FV. Trauma-informed care is an approach that recognizes that children, youth, and adults can all have trauma histories and works to decrease the re-traumatization of the client as much as possible (Racine et al., 2020).

Mehta et al. (2021) argue that school-based programs that deal with abuse benefit students because they expand their understanding of the issue. Lloyd (2018) points out that if a teacher approaches a child exposed to FV, the educator must be prepared with information about services and be aware of the procedures they need to follow. According to Dougherty et al. (2022), many children who are at risk of expulsion because of behavioural issues have experienced FV and trauma. They found that establishing a behavioural support service for educators resulted in a significant increase in the students' prosocial skills and a significant decrease in problems of conduct and hyperactivity.

As there is a relationship between FV and poverty, Lloyd (2018) highlights how school breakfast clubs are a helpful service for children experiencing violence. Furthermore, she encourages schools to offer homework clubs, as students exposed to FV might not have a space to do their homework. Bullinger (2019) also outlines how offering paid family leave for working parents could be a helpful service to decrease FV, as this would alleviate financial stress and unemployment.

O'Leary et al. (2018) contend that tension exists between child welfare and FV services because of their philosophical differences in supporting service users. While child protection services hold the child as the primary focus and the parents as the support, FV agencies usually work with a feminist lens and focus on the mother as the primary client. In their study, O'Leary et al. (2018) found that the lack of insight into the importance of integrated responses between FV services and child protection services impacts the sharing of information between agencies, thus adversely affecting the safety of women and children impacted by FV. Cramp and Zufferey (2020) also found that blaming the mother is a recurring problem within and outside child welfare services. O'Leary et al. (2018) and Cramp and Zufferey (2020) emphasize the importance of collaboration among agencies delivering services for mothers and children impacted by FV.

Doughterty et al. (2022) highlight the dearth of mental health professionals trained in trauma-informed, evidence-based interventions to support children experiencing mental health symptoms brought on by trauma. Doughterty et al. (2022) further advocate for establishing a government-funded trauma service program offering free trauma-informed, evidence-based training to mental health practitioners to diagnose and treat children exposed to trauma, based on a model established in the US. In their research, Wekerle et al. (2022) found that Indigenous participants emphasized acknowledging the historical and ongoing trauma affecting the Indigenous community in their online education modules for training healthcare and social service providers. The scholars also recommend that the training of healthcare and social service providers incorporate an intersectional lens that can be used while working with service users.

Some scholars call for integrated supports for mothers and children. Kulkarni (2019) notes that survivors

of FV continue to request FV-informed counselling for the entire family, especially when women choose to remain with their partner or need to interact with their partner as a co-parent. Sullivan (2021) highlights the importance of support professionals offering all available information to mothers experiencing FV so they can make the most informed choices for themselves and their children. Thiara and Humphreys (2017) argue for ongoing support for mothers and their children after leaving an abusive situation, as their relationship will most likely be strained due to the impact of FV.

Callaghan et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of listening to children who have experienced FV and allowing them the space to enact their agency and develop coping strategies. Noble-Carr et al. (2020) found that children exposed to FV coped with their experiences in various ways, depending on the family's level of disadvantage and access to support. In other words, children exposed to FV are a heterogeneous group who require individualized services that address their needs within their specific contexts.

Historical Evolution of Divorce Legislation in Canada and Ontario

The *Constitution Act, 1867* divides the legislative responsibility for family law in Canada. Divorce is exclusively the jurisdiction of Parliament (including corollary matters such as support and custody), while property and civil rights are within the jurisdiction of provincial legislatures. Provincial legislation in the area of family law covers the matters related to the separation of married or unmarried couples, including support and parenting in cases where no divorce is sought, property division, enforcement of support and other issues, including adoption, child protection, and name change. Because of the overlapping federal-provincial family law jurisdiction, most reform initiatives are developed through coordinated federal-provincial-territorial efforts. In spite of this, provincial family laws across the country differ significantly.

The Divorce Act of 1968

The Divorce Act of 1968 established uniform Canada-wide divorce law through federal legislation. The Act aimed to reflect significant social changes, such as gender equity, and introduced the concept "no fault" divorce (Douglas, 2001), while also retaining fault-based grounds for divorce.

1985 and 1997 amendments

Subsequent amendments to the Divorce Act in 1985 and 1997 entrenched child-centred reforms to minimize the harmful impact of separation and divorce on children (Bala, 2020; Payne, 2018). Women's rights advocates also recommended shaping legislation to promote gender equality and address the economic impact of marriage breakdown on women and children (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1980).

Section 16(9) of the 1985 version of the Divorce Act specifically precluded the consideration of the past conduct of a parent in making a custody or access order unless that conduct was relevant to the person's ability to act as a parent to the child. This provision was intended to prevent evidence about marital misconduct (adultery) from entering into the court's consideration of custody and access. However, this provision was also cited to support the proposition that one spouse's violence against the other did not indicate anything inappropriate or negative about the former's parenting, and that only violence directed toward the child was relevant. However, it is now recognized that FV and other forms of abuse witnessed by children do have an impact on their well-being and should be considered relevant in determining parenting abilities.

Bill C-78: Reforms to Canada's Divorce Act

The reform of Canada's Divorce Act and Ontario's CLRA that came into effect in March 2021 clarifies the legal test of the best interests of the child for parenting orders, including consideration of the child's views and whether a parent supports and encourages the child's relationship with the other parent (Bala, 2020; Government of Canada, 2023). The Act implicitly entrenches the goal of maintaining a child-parent relationship unless detrimental to the child (Archer-Kuhn, 2018b; Bala, 2020). The legislation also expects parents and legal advisors, where appropriate, to seek a non-court process to resolve family law disputes, recognizing that this may not be appropriate where family violence is a concern. The Act replaces the terms *custody* and *access* with the child-focused terms *parenting time* and *parental decision-making*. The Act also

requires screening for FV "in the context of parenting disputes and make protection of the safety and wellbeing of the child a 'primary consideration'" (Bala, 2020, p. 46).

Upholding children's rights and ascertaining children's views

Canada signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 (United Nations, 1990) and ratified it in 1991 (Martinson & Tempesta, 2018; Tempesta, 2021). Thus, Canada must ensure that laws and legal decisions affecting children make children's rights a primary consideration (Martinson & Tempesta, 2018). The UNCRC is a critical factor in maintaining the child's best interest, central to the 2019 amendments to the Divorce Act and the only consideration for parenting decisions under the Divorce Act (Government of Canada, 2023).

S. 16(3)(e) of the Divorce Act now specifies that in making a parenting plan, parents, professionals, and the courts "shall" consider "the child's views and preferences, giving due weight to the child's age and maturity, unless they cannot be ascertained."

In the *Best Interest of the Child*: Factors considered in the case of family violence

While the concept of the *Best Interest of the Child* has influenced parenting decision-making from the 1970s onward, the language was not added to Canada's Divorce Act until 1985. With this shift, judges found the complexities of applying the test challenging (Mnookin, 2014). Children are unlikely to participate in court proceedings (Archer-Kuhn, 2016), and child judicial interviews are rare due to concerns about shielding children from direct involvement in the demise of their parent's relationship (Sullivan, 2021). Consequently, Ontario family court judges have increasingly ordered family assessments by a third party, usually a trained psychologist, social worker, or child legal representative, to inform their decisions regarding parenting orders.

In the famous Young v Young case, the Supreme Court of Canada interpreted the *Best Interest of the Child*. Justice L'Heureux-Dubé stated that the best interests of the child is a child-centric analysis and "is the positive right [of the child] to the best possible arrangements in the circumstances of the parties" (*Young v. Young*, para. 102). The test is contextual and future-focused, encompassing a myriad of considerations. It is "person-

oriented" rather than "act-oriented," requiring consideration of the "whole person viewed as a social being" (para 71).

In the recent amendments to the Divorce Act that came into effect in March 2021, a new section titled "Best Interest of the Child" was added, replacing the old S. 16 of the Act and requiring the courts to consider only the best interests of the child in parenting decision-making. These amendments include enumerated criteria of *Best Interest* and require that the courts prioritize the child's safety, security, and well-being.

The amendments (Parliament of Canada, Bill C-78, 2019) direct the courts to consider FV and its influence in ensuring the child's best interests (Government of Canada, 2023). The following factors regarding the best interests of the child are taken into consideration in situations of FV:

Section 16(4), Divorce Act: Factors relating to family violence

(4) In considering the impact of any family violence under paragraph (3)(j), the court shall take the following into account:

(a) the nature, seriousness and frequency of the family violence and when it occurred;

(b) whether there is a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in relation to a family member;

(c) whether the family violence is directed toward the child or whether the child is directly or indirectly exposed to the family violence;

(d) the physical, emotional and psychological harm or risk of harm to the child;

(e) any compromise to the safety of the child or other family member;

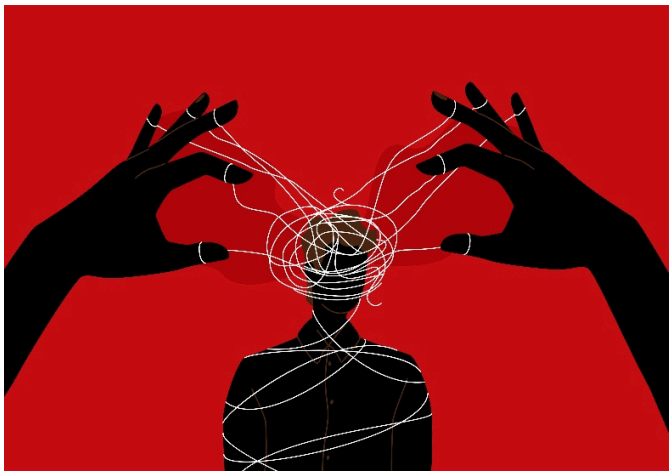
(f) whether the family violence causes the child or other family member to fear for their own safety or for that of another person;

(g) any steps taken by the person engaging in the family violence to prevent further family violence from occurring and improve their ability to care for and meet the needs of the child; and

(h) any other relevant factor.

The Divorce Act now requires FV to be considered a factor in determining the best interests of the child. As a result of s. 16(4)(g), the courts are required to consider what steps a perpetrator or person engaging in the FV has taken to *prevent* further FV from occurring.

For over a decade, FV researchers have identified safety as a priority in deciding the best interests of the child in FV and high conflict cases (Lucas-Thompson et al., 2020). "High conflict" is a term that applies to separation/divorce cases where one or both parents exhibit high degrees of discord, including anger at and blame of the ex-partner, undermine the ex-partner's parenting and parenting time, and reduce their capacity to cooperate on parenting issues in a child-focused manner (Bauserman, 2002; Johnston, 2000).



Coercive, controlling violence is when the abusive party engages in a pattern of coercive behaviour directly targeting the other parent's capacity to make independent decisions through tactics of physical abuse, degradation, intimidation, threats, and isolation to gain and maintain control of their partner (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Indicators of coercive, controlling violence are relevant in a family law context because the abuse is part of an ongoing pattern that will likely continue, and the children could become a means for a controlling person to intimidate their former partner throughout the divorce proceedings (Government of Canada,2023). In other words, a parent who uses tactics to maintain power over their former partner might focus on pursuing care of the children to control or punish the other parent rather than focusing on the children's needs (Elizabeth, 2017).

Professionals working with women and children affected by FV stress that separation and divorce are risk factors as the violence continues and can escalate. The separation and divorce process may become a new venue for violence, threats, and intimidation (Archer-Kuhn, 2018a; Elizabeth, 2017). Researchers and mental health professionals working with FV cases assert that shared parenting/shared decision-making exposes women and children to further risk in cases where the other spouse has a history of coercive control (Jaffe, 2014).

The Compounded Impact of Systemic and Structural Violence

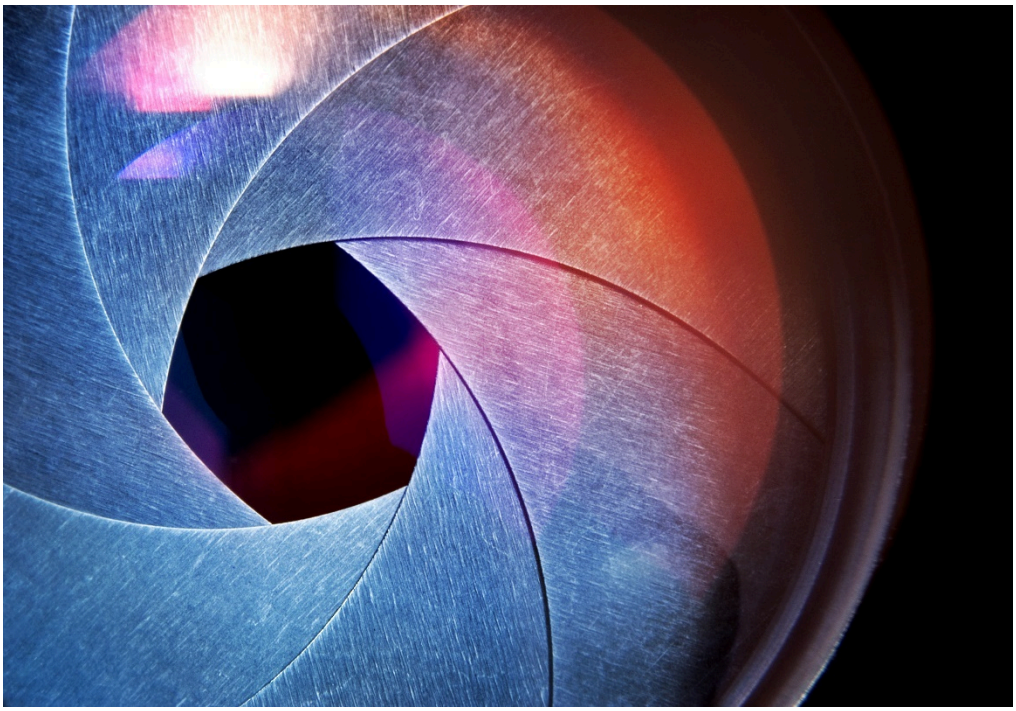
Galtung (1969) defined systemic and structural violence as "violence [that] is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (p. 171). The structures are violent because they result in a greater risk of harm, illness, injury, and death to a class or group of people (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017).

Structural and systemic violence such as living in poverty or an extreme precarious situation such as with scarce food and clothing on a regular basis, growing up in poor neighbourhoods and living with the fear of being attacked, fear of accessing services based on racial identity and lack of availability of culturally informed services, compounds victims' lives as additional trauma (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017). While some parenting studies have included racialized participants, explorations of the intersection of racialization and immigrant status are rare (Overlien, 2017). Community workers and scholars working with racialized families challenge mainstream feminist approaches to FV which are based primarily on the needs of white, middle-class women and may misidentify specific forms of violence and their impact as well as specific needs of marginalized women

and their families (George et al., 2022; Kulkarni, 2019). Scholars and community workers working with South Asian women recommend critical analysis of uninterrogated assumptions in research, such as attributing FV in racialized immigrant families due to their culture (George & Rashidi, 2014; Razack, 2003; Volpp, 2011). Culturalization scripts about immigrant norms and traditions construct frozen, one-dimensional portrayals of immigrant families leading to the perpetuation of harmful stereotyping by professionals and the erasure of survivors' experiences (Volpp, 2002). Using Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality and interlocking oppression, Kulkarni (2019), Razack (2003), Thobani (2000), and Volpp (2002, 2011) identify a need to reconceptualize FV in immigrant families who experience multiple, interlocking forms of violence. Such analyses are crucial for working effectively with racialized families and dismantling policies and practices that create unnecessary suffering from unnecessary complications.

As we can see in the literature review, few studies focus on children's voices and none on racialized children's voices. Our research fills this gap in knowledge by providing insights directly from the voices of racialized immigrant youth who experienced FV in their childhood. Because parents may be unaware of the scope and impact of their child's experiences of violence, it is critical to ground research in children's perspectives (Overlien, 2010). This study explores participants' experiences and interpretations of FV and the impact of those experiences on their lives. It explores their experiences of accessing institutional supports and gathers recommendations on the supports needed for children experiencing FV. Lastly, the research critically examines FV as it impacts the *Best Interest of the Child* principle.

SECTION 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS INFORMING ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Anti-colonialism

Anti-colonialism challenges the structures that uphold systems of oppression and marginalization while promoting notions of universality and equality (Smith, 2012). Specifically, an anti-colonial lens interrogates dominating power relations structured along race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, language, disability, and sexuality (Dei, 2000; Dei & Ashgarzadeh, 2001). Colonization involves nation-building that categorizes people based on race, gender, religion, class, age, ability, and gender (Thobani, 2007). This categorization and racialization rationalize the othering and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, Black people, and non-white migrants, producing unequal social relations (Dua, 2007; Thobani, 2007). Even liberalizing policies for immigrants and refugees and the promotion of multiculturalism and diversity in the latter half of the 20th century have led to a "colour-blindness," or de-politicizing of social relations that ignores how systemic racism and colonial structures continue to impact racialized people, albeit in a more nuanced way (Pon, 2009; Thobani, 2000; Williams, 2011).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is rooted in the belief that race and racism are intricately related to power relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda et al., 1993). CRT has been defined "as a framework or a set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of people of colour" (Solorzano, 1997, p. 6). CRT challenges dominant perspectives and re-centres marginalized perspectives by valuing experiential knowledge shared as narratives or counter stories of social inequality experienced by racialized people (Crenshaw, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2003). In its orientation, CRT goes beyond providing a theoretical understanding of the impact of racism by supporting social justice and equity for racialized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda et al., 1993). Racism complicates and shapes the social realities of racialized communities, especially their children and youth. CRT is relevant for this study as it brings to centre stage the marginalized and silenced voices of racialized immigrant youth and the implications of witnessing and experiencing FV.

A Rights-Based Approach to Children

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (2007) has advocated a rights-based approach to children. In this approach, children have the right to be treated not as objects that need to be cared for, protected, and have their basic survival needs met but respected and treated as human beings. This perspective makes it obligatory for states to ensure children's rights and develop programs for their protection. In the Senate Standing Committee, Vandergrift, from World Vision Canada and at the time the Chair of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, spoke of the additional advantages of this approach:

> The rights-based approach adds real value because it puts the whole child in the centre and then looks at all components and all factors that can impact that child's situation. It is not just addressing one need—food, water or some of those things—but it looks at the whole child and treats that child as an actor in the situation, not just as a passive recipient. (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2007, p. 26)

The rationale for this approach is rooted in the realization that children constitute one of the most vulnerable groups of people, and their rights are often compromised when they compete with adults' rights. Additionally, it has been argued that this framework is significant because although governments' actions impact children, their perspectives rarely influence government decision-making (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2002; UNICEF, 2001).

The rights-based approach is relevant both in the Canadian context and the topic of this study, FV and racialized immigrant youth. Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991, and the following articles of this convention are particularly significant in the context of this study:

- Article 9 – respect the right of the child not to be separated from parents against their wish except in circumstances that go against the best interests of the child;
- Article 12 – a child's right to express views, including in legal proceedings;
- Article 16 – protection of a child's privacy from indiscriminate and illegal intervention;
- Article 18 – upbringing and concern for the best interests of the child to be the responsibility of parents or legal guardian;
- Article 19 – the government is responsible for protecting children from physical or mental violence, including sexual abuse, injury, neglect, maltreatment, or exploitation, even when the child is in the care of parents or legal guardian (United Nations, 1989).

The UNCRC emphasizes that children's rights are inherent and do not depend on their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, national, or social origin, disability, property, birth, or other status.

Further, the UNCRC requires the state to recognize the right of every child to life and respect and ensure the right of every child without discrimination, and in case of an action by a societal institution, to protect the best interests of the child.

In 2015, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations Member States, including Canada. The SDGs are a call to action with the goal that *no one is left behind*. In 2017, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presented a report on the protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It established the linkage of the rights of the child and the 2030 Agenda, highlighting that all SDGs and targets, while not explicitly naming children, protect and promote children's rights (United Nations, 2017). There is a growing awareness within the international community that fulfilling children's rights is a prerequisite for realizing the 2030 Agenda. A systematic child-rights-based approach is necessary to ensure that children are not left behind in implementing the SDGs.

Anti-oppressive Practice

Anti-oppressive practice (AOP) is centred around three concepts: oppression, power, and intersectionality (Frazer & Seymour, 2017). As a critical component of AOP, oppression focuses on the unfair, cruel exercise of authority over marginalized groups by subjecting them to negative stereotypes and other processes of inferiorization (Ferguson & Lavalette, 2006; Nzira & Williams, 2009). From this perspective, power and inequality affect various aspects of the lives of marginalized individuals, resulting in their oppression (Ferguson & Lavalette, 2006; McLaughlin, 2005, 2016).

Associated with oppression is intersectionality, which was conceptualized by Crenshaw (1991). Intersectionality highlights the multiple and interlocking natures of discrimination, disadvantage, privilege, and oppression. According to Collins (2015), "intersectionality refers to the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2).

Galtung (1990) elaborates on the concepts of oppression and violence and describes three types of violence—direct, structural, and cultural—that marginalized groups are subjected to. Direct violence refers to acts of interpersonal or collective violence exercised by one group against another for political, economic, and social reasons. Structural violence refers to "social arrangements" that are "embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world (Farmer et al., 2006, p. 1686), which places some individuals and groups at an advantage over others. According to Galtung, cultural violence is those aspects of culture, including religion, ideology, language, and dominant knowledge, that are "used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (p. 291). Finally, cultural violence makes "exploitation and/or repression [seem] . . . normal and natural" or not seen at all (p. 295).

This understanding of AOP and violence is critical for this study as experiences of oppression and violence originate in structures (Frazer & Seymour, 2017; McDonald, 2005; Morley et al., 2014). Additionally, direct violence against individuals and groups often has roots in structural and cultural violence and the experience of disadvantage for the marginalized multiplies depending on the intersections where individuals are situated. Consequently, any response to problems requires multi-dimensional solutions that help the affected individuals recognize their rights (McLaughlin, 2005, 2016) and engage with systems that contribute to or perpetrate violence (Baines, 2017; Morley et al., 2014).

SECTION 4: METHODOLOGY

This study uses Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological approach to inquiry, which focuses on obtaining the description and the meaning of the participants' experiences by engaging with the data interpretively. According to Van Manen (2014), phenomenology re-evokes an experience of a particular moment and the meaning people give to their experience as they share it. This approach was considered appropriate for this study as it combines phenomenology's descriptive and interpretive aspects. As participants recalled their childhood experiences of FV, they simultaneously reflected on and made meaning of those experiences.

The Research Ethics Boards (REB) of Toronto Metropolitan University and Sheridan College reviewed and approved the study. As per the REB protocol, the participants were recruited through the social media postings of each researcher. The recruitment flyer was also sent to community agencies that serve women and children experiencing FV, Sheridan College, and Toronto Metropolitan University's Faculty of Community Services' listserv of students. Efforts were made to recruit racialized youth of diverse gender, education, culture, country of origin, and immigration status (Kall & Zeiler, 2014). Participants were purposively selected according to the following eligibility criteria: a) have directly or indirectly experienced FV in childhood; b) self-identify as a racialized immigrant; c) were between 21 and 29 years of age at the time of their interview; d) not have serious mental health challenges that prevent them from articulating their experiences, and e) FV-related formal/institutional intervention in their life should have ended three years before participation in this research.

Based on these criteria, 13 participants contacted the researcher, Purnima George, and expressed interest in participating.

Upon receipt of their email, the participants were sent the consent form to review, and all questions were clarified. The consent form outlined the purpose of the study and the data collection procedure, including a discussion of risks, benefits, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and access to research findings. A signed consent form and a pseudonym were required before finalizing the date for an interview.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted virtually on Zoom. We used in-depth, semi-structured interviews as our method of data collection. Interviews lasted between 90 and 180 minutes. In keeping with the phenomenological approach, the interviews captured participants' experiences and interpretations of FV, the response of societal institutions to their situation, and the impact of these experiences on their lives. Additional questions emerged during the course of the interviews. The participants shared their rich, insightful experiences and interpretations. One of the participants also shared the artwork they had created while experiencing severe stress from violence. All participants were provided with an honorarium for their participation. At the end of the interview, participants were reminded about counselling services they could access if they felt re-traumatized in recounting their stories. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the software Otter AI.

The data analysis strategy was based on the method provided by Moustakas (1994). As per this method, data analysis began with a close reading of transcripts to identify all statements that reflected participants' perceptions of FV and its impact. Statements reflecting similar perceptions and ideas were clustered together and repeated reading of the clusters led to the development of themes. The themes developed present a composite description and context of the phenomenon and its impact. The study's preliminary findings were shared with the participants for feedback on the accuracy and representation of the information they shared (Padgett, 2017). At this stage, one participant withdrew from the study and all their data was deleted from the research.

Limitations of the Study

The participants were youth recalling childhood experiences of abuse and were in the process of understanding it. As a result, their experiences were based on their perception of what occurred when they were younger. Their perceptions are important but may not accurately reflect the function of support and interactions with service providers, policing, and the criminal justice system.

As with any research study, the sampling of the youth does not represent all their experiences, but the themes that emerged from our data analysis provide a snapshot of the experiences of racialized immigrant youth as they navigate their experiences of violence in their homes, interacting with service providers, policing, and the criminal justice system.

In the next section, we present the profiles of the 12 racialized youth aged 21–29 and describe the types of violence and experiences these diverse youth underwent.

SECTION 5: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

In this section, Table 1 provides demographic and FV information on the participants, followed by a short profile of each participant and a summary of their experience of FV.

Table 1: Profile of Participants

Participant	Cultural Identity	Immigration status	Age	Gender	Type of Violence Experienced	Impact of Violence
Abi	Sri-Lankan Tamil	Canadian Citizen	29	Female	Observed mother being physically abused by father	Struggles with mental health
Adriana	Syrian-Arab	Permanent Resident	21	Female	Spiritual, psychological and physical abuse and stalking by father resulted in forced migration	Struggles with Complex-PTSD
Anita	Bangladeshi	Canadian Citizen	21	Female	Psychological abuse	Struggles with mental health
Chiairo	Indian	Canadian Citizen	25	Female	Observed mother being physically abused and controlled by stepfather	Struggles with anxiety
Jasmine	Bangladeshi	Canadian Citizen	29	Female	Physically abused and coerced by father	Struggles with physical health issues and debt
Jay	Sri-Lankan Tamil	Canadian Citizen	28	Male	Observed mother being physically and verbally abused by father	Struggles with family relationships
Maria	Guyanese	Guyanese Citizen	23	Female	Observed mother being physically, emotionally and financially abused by father	Struggles with anxiety
Maya	Sri-Lankan Tamil	Canadian Citizen	22	Female	Mother experienced verbal abuse, had addictive behaviour and was verbally abusive	Struggles with anxiety
Samantha	Pakistani	Canadian Citizen	25	Female	Observed mother being abused by father	Struggles with depression
Sandiran	Sri-Lankan Tamil	Canadian Citizen	26	Non-binary	Observed mother being abused by father	Struggles with mental health
Sonia	Indian	Canadian Citizen	26	Female	Observed mother being abused by father	Struggles with mental health

Viktor	Pakistani	Canadian Citizen	21	Male	Observed mother being abused by father	Anxiety and concern for mother's well-being

Abi

Abi is a 29-year-old female who identifies as a Sri Lankan Tamil Canadian. Abi lives with her parents and siblings in a city in Quebec. She is the middle child of three. As a child, Abi witnessed her father physically abusing her mother, who lives with schizophrenia and alcoholism. Abi herself has been living with schizophrenia for the past ten years and is currently accessing the counselling program through her university while she works to complete her undergraduate studies. Abi had an unstable relationship with her mother and siblings as a child and teenager, which she has worked to mend in the past few years.

Adriana

Adriana is a 21-year-old female who identifies as a Syrian-Arab permanent citizen living in an Ontario city. Adriana's parents moved to China from Syria when Adriana was 12 years old. Adriana's experience of abuse began soon after moving to China when she resisted wearing a hijab. What began as spiritual abuse from her parents evolved into severe physical and psychological abuse. At the age of 18, Adriana escaped from home and attempted to live on her own. She was unsuccessful, and when law enforcement officers and the Syrian Embassy in China supported her parents, she decided to leave the country. Seeking support from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), she has come to Canada and lives in an Ontario city since 2021. Adriana has Complex-PTSD and is receiving mental health support. She is also pursuing undergraduate studies at a university.

Anita

Anita is a 21-year-old female who identifies as Bangladeshi Canadian. She is pursuing her undergraduate degree in nursing. Anita has two parents and an older and younger sister. They immigrated to Canada from Saudi Arabia and settled in an Ontario city. After they immigrated to Canada, her father expected his daughters to attend an Islamic school. Anita and her sister convinced him they should attend a public school. The agreement was that they would attend an Islamic school if they did not perform well in public school. They both worked extremely hard to remain in public school. Due to performance anxiety, Anita is currently in an undergraduate program and experiences excessive stress before every exam. In addition to school, Anita takes care of her younger sister and struggles to balance her studies and family responsibilities.

Chiairo

Chiairo is a 25-year-old female who identifies as Indian with Canadian citizenship and is pursuing a professional degree. Chiairo lost her father, and her mother remarried a Polish man. Chiairo did not have a good relationship with her stepfather, and throughout the interview, she referred to him as her mother's husband. She saw him controlling who her mother socialized with to prevent her from working outside the home. He also physically abused her mother. This abuse made Chiairo anxious. After her stepfather died, her mother connected with another man, and she was anxious that her mother might make the same mistake again. Chiairo is currently accessing mental health support through the university.

Jasmine

Jasmine is a 29-year-old female who identifies as Bangladeshi Canadian. She has completed her undergraduate degree and is currently pursuing a college diploma. Jasmine was unaware of any violence before the family's immigration when she was ten years old. After immigration, she witnessed arguments between her parents. Her father spanked Jasmine and her brother when they did not receive good grades in school. The father was very strict and did not allow Jasmine to go to friends' homes and socialize with children from the community. After completing high school, Jasmine left home for university. In her first year of university, Jasmine did not get good grades and developed severe somatic complaints, later diagnosed as related to stress. Due to low grades, Jasmine's parents refused to let her find a summer job. That was the last summer Jasmine spent at home. Jasmine completed her undergraduate studies with much debt. After much work on both sides, Jasmine has reconciled with her parents and regularly visits them.

Jay

Jay is a 28-year-old male who identifies as a Sri Lankan Tamil Canadian. He has completed a diploma in criminal justice and is working while living with his parents. As a child, Jay often experienced small physical fights between his parents, and he assumed that it was normal. However, when Jay was in grade five, he witnessed his father seriously physically abuse his mother resulting in a head injury. Jay asked his father to call 911, and when he refused, he called. According to Jay, this incident taught his father a lesson, and he has not repeated the physical abuse. Jay believes the incident has not affected his relationship with his father. However, their relationship deteriorated because of his brother's and sister's refusal to support him when he tried to support their mother.

Maria

Maria is a 23-year-old female who identifies as Guyanese and is an international student. She lives in an Ontario city and is doing a college diploma in social service work. Maria has two stepsisters from her mother's earlier marriage, but there is a significant age gap between them. In childhood, Maria witnessed physical, verbal, and financial abuse committed against her mother by her father. Maria's parents eventually separated, after which Maria lived with her mother. Her father violated the parenting court order several times, and the ensuing conflict has impacted Maria. Despite interventions, she began to self-harm and didn't stop until she had some distance from her family and found resources at the university. She maintains an inconsistent relationship with her father, but his health is a source of anxiety for her.

Maya

Maya is a 22-year-old Sri Lankan Tamil Canadian female pursuing an undergraduate nursing degree. Maya is the oldest of three children. From a young age, Maya witnessed frequent arguments and physical fights between her parents, often alcohol-related, which resulted in her mother throwing things. The fights would result in her father leaving home, and on one occasion, he left home for almost two years. During his absence, Maya's mother developed a gambling addiction and spent much of her salary on gambling. Her mother verbally abused Maya and her siblings and was often absent. Maya sought support from her uncle (mother's brother), aunt (mother's sister), and grandmother when the need arose and kept them informed about what was happening at home. The abuse Maya experienced from her mother has profoundly impacted her relationship with her. While Maya has mended her relationship with her father, who is currently old and ill, she does not relate to her mother as she believes she will never change.

Samantha

Samantha is a 25-year-old female from Pakistan and a Canadian citizen. To escape from her husband's abuse, her mother came to Canada from Pakistan with five-year-old Samantha. After a three-year stay, they returned to Pakistan. The reunion with the abusive husband/father did not go well for either of them, and after two or three years in Pakistan, Samantha and her mother immigrated to Canada (leaving behind three children). Her mother's inability to bring all her children to Canada impacted her mental health, and eventually, she was hospitalized and diagnosed with schizophrenia. This left Samantha navigating housing, school, Child Protective Services (CPS), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and mental health systems. When Samantha was 12/13, she had to manage her mother's hospitalizations with the help of her maternal uncle. When she was 18, Samantha sponsored her siblings, who were approved for immigration in 2021, fulfilling

her mother's dream. Over the course of her life, Samantha has frequently experienced depression and has not found the resources to support her healing.

Sandiran

Sandiran is 26-year-old non-binary Sri Lankan Tamil Canadian. Sandiran is the youngest of three siblings. All family members lived together in a city in Quebec until Fall 2020, when Sandiran moved to Ontario to study medicine. Their father suffered war trauma and developed schizophrenia. He controlled his hallucinations through drinking which led to severe physical abuse of their mother that was often witnessed by the children. The children worked together to protect their mother. Despite a chaotic home environment, Sandiran did well in school and university. While in school, Sandiran experienced suicidal ideation, and in the first year of university, Sandiran had a psychotic episode. Sandiran and their elder brother have been contributing to the household income since the age of 16. The severe violence they experienced affected the relationships between the siblings significantly, but they have mended their relationship over the years.

Sonia

Sonia is a 26-year-old Indian Canadian female living in Ontario. She is currently pursuing a career in healthcare. From childhood, Sonia knew that her parents did not get along, but this escalated in 2020 when her father physically abused her mother, followed by police involvement. The incident impacted Sonia negatively; she lost her hospital internship. It took some time for Sonia to emerge from this trauma and reroute her life. She saw a counsellor for some time but discontinued this as she did not find it beneficial. The incident of abuse has impacted her parents' relationship, and her father does not live with the family anymore. Her mother hopes that her husband will reconcile with her. Even though her father does not live at home, he pays the house mortgage. After the incident, Sonia began to support her mother financially. She also remains in touch with her father and supports him by doing his laundry and other chores.

Viktor

Viktor is a 21-year-old male who identifies as a Pakistani Canadian. He is currently pursuing his undergraduate degree. Viktor's mother left her husband when Viktor was five years old. He had witnessed his father physically abusing his mother. When he misbehaved, his father would sometimes discipline him physically. His mother began an independent life with Viktor and his two siblings. Viktor has been sensitive to his responsibility in caring for his mother since that time. He tries to support his mother by taking care of his siblings.

SECTION 6: MAJOR FINDINGS

The key findings that emerge from this study are presented as the following themes: Direct and indirect experiences of FV, Roles played by participants during violent incidents, Differential experience, engagement and role of participants' siblings, Accessing supports during FV, and The impact of FV on children.

Direct and Indirect Experiences of Family Violence

We use the terms *direct* and *indirect* to describe different types of violence experienced by participants. Direct violence connotes violence that participants were subjected to in their childhood, and indirect violence connotes participants witnessing violence directed toward their mothers. The findings revealed that while some participants experienced direct violence from either or both parents, others experienced indirect violence, their mothers being the target of direct violence.

Participants experienced many forms of direct violence: verbal, physical, psychological, sexual, and religious. The following excerpts describe acts of violence participants experienced and their impact on them.

Adriana recounted how acts of direct violence, in the form of verbal abuse, emerged:

> *It would happen mainly when there [was] something . . . I have done something that they might not have approved of, and thus they would react to my actions with, you know, physically beating me and then my father would go on to blame my mother for my actions, and thus they would start an argument because*

of me. . . . I come from a very conservative family . . . and they would use a lot of things like "you will burn in hell" and that sort of thing to sort of scare me into, you know, obeying what they believed was acceptable into their culture; everything in my life was controlled.

Adriana experienced verbal abuse when she acted in ways her parents felt were contrary to their religion. Her mother was the source of much of the verbal abuse:

She said that I was the child of the devil and that my head was being controlled with demons, and that would be used a lot . . . beating me and my mother brutalizing me emotionally with words such as, you know, "I hope you burn in hell." It's very important to understand that in that family's cultural set[ting], it's like the use of fear technique was very much used in things like, "I hope you burn in hell, I don't understand why God even created you; you are a disgrace to us" . . . in this scenario, it's mostly the use of religion, you know, the comparison between the disobedient child and demons, and saying that demons are controlling my head and that sort of thing.

Adriana's father stalked her and even controlled her while she was living away from home, attending school:

I was constantly [terrified that my father would find me]. . . . There was one incident that . . . happened. . . . I was getting off the school bus, and I was walking home, and then obviously he had found out from somewhere that I was taking this school bus. . . . Anyways he was hiding in a bush. I did not see him, I put on my headphones, and I was walking home, and then all of a sudden, I start hearing my friend calling my name and shouting, and then I take off my headphones, and I look back and I [saw] my dad running towards me and my friend [was] running after him trying to . . . stop him. And then I just start[ed] running, I [froze] for a second, I think, because I just panic[ed], and then he catches up to me, and then he starts holding me and pulling me and saying let's go home. . . . They took away my phone, they took away my case, they took away everything, and they took away my passport.

The psychological violence transitioned into physical violence on another occasion when both parents attacked Adriana in her new home:

There was one time in December 2018 . . . I opened the door [to my room] . . . and [my parents] grabbed me, and then they start[ed] . . . dragging me from the seventh floor to the first floor. I tried to run, but I couldn't. I was wearing a necklace . . . around my neck, so my mother starts pulling the necklace around my neck, almost choked me, and I realized, you know what, they're not gonna let me go. I'm not gonna be able to escape because two of them are pulling me and dragging me, so I just didn't move, I just played dead, you know, and I started screaming, I started screaming, "Help, help, call the police" and my neighbours were obviously all very, you know shocked . . . my neighbours gathered around us, you know Chinese people, they gathered around us, and obviously none of them understood, you know, the swearing was in Arabic, you know, so none of them understood what was going on so I was always screaming in Chinese, you know, "Call the police, call the police," and one of them finally, I'll never forget this, one of them, you know, held my father's arm as he was, you know, hitting me, and told him, you know, "You can't do this." . . . And for a while, for about a month after that or two weeks, I was living at different people's houses because I was too scared to go back to my place. I would eventually, after a month, find a new place to live, and I would

> *go back and sleep at night to my old place just in case anyone was watching the place. So I would pack all my things, empty the place, and return the keys to the landlord, and go to [a] new place.*

Adriana's narrative provides a glimpse into the severe physical, emotional, verbal, and religious abuse and coercive control she experienced from her parents. The father exercised his influence and power in many ways to control and abuse Adriana, and her mother colluded with him. Her mother desperately tried to convince Adriana to change her path, citing religious teachings and expressing fear of the eventual damnation of Adriana's eternal soul.

Maya shared her experiences of both direct and indirect violence:

> *They [parents] came to Canada when they were like teenagers . . . that's how they met, then they got together so for them it was like a choice to get married, rather than they were compelled to. My mom's family didn't want her to get married, and my dad's family didn't want him to get married . . . there were like multiple issues. So mostly, it was caste issues, and then it was financial issues. . . . Both of them graduated high school, but neither of them went to college or post-secondary . . . there were still arguments because of things like caste. . . . My dad would hit my mom, right, so hitting, using like whatever he had in his hands, kicking her. . . . I remember seeing him jump on her . . . so I stopped him, and I pushed him off . . . sometimes, like when there was a fight, he would be escorted off by officers. And, or, like, I think only once he actually got arrested, but then other times he would just leave.*

Maya's excerpt reveals several factors contributing to a strained relationship between her parents. First, they were from different castes. Second, the excerpt highlights the struggle of new immigrants caught between attaining a higher level of education and earning income for survival.

In addition to witnessing violence, Maya talked about her experience of being abused by her mother. Recalling her situation, she said,

> *I didn't like my mom, either, growing up, I guess, because she would say emotionally manipulative things like, Oh, "if I didn't have you guys, and you know I'd be free." All this stuff, which I remember vividly, and she still says stuff like that nowadays. . . whatever abuse she got from my dad, she would just throw it back at us. So she was physically and emotionally abusive, and then it just got worse in high school . . . because that's when the gambling happened . . . it made it worse because she would leave me alone to watch my siblings, so I had to like, leave school; I couldn't hang out with friends or anything, or I couldn't do extracurriculars. . . . I don't remember there being a key . . . so I would have to go through the window first . . . then open the door so then when my siblings came home . . . I had to learn how to start cooking [and] things like laundry and cleaning the house so it looks proper.*

The above excerpt highlights the physical and emotional abuse Maya experienced at the hands of her mother, the downloading of the responsibility of looking after her siblings and its impact on her academics. It also reveals the pattern of abuse as a transfer of abuse.

Chiairo watched her stepfather abuse her mother physically and emotionally. In addition, his controlling and abusive behaviour also jeopardized Chiairo's safety:

> *I think probably the most obvious way early on to notice was, was that he was very controlling. . . . He didn't like when my, my mom, you know, left the house without him, knowing where and who she was with, and didn't want her to drive. . . . At one point, he really got upset when, when she wanted to go anywhere by herself, or when my mom spent time with friends, he would get upset . . . a lot of isolating behaviour. . . . When he was upset, he would act in ways that sometimes jeopardized our lives . . . he would drive, really, really dangerously. About a decade into their relationship . . . my mom finally told me that he sometimes hit her and grabbed [her]. My elder sister once witnessed him dragging her out of a room.*

This excerpt illustrates aspects of Chiairo's stepfather's coercive and emotional control by isolating her mother and family members from their networks, his physical abuse, and his reckless behaviour to instill fear in family members. Chiairo's mother kept the physical abuse a secret for a long time until Chiairo was older.

In addition to the impact of interpersonal violence, Chiairo's story offers a glimpse of how racism played a role in family violence:

> *I think part of the reason that I was so adamant about no one knowing that he [stepfather] existed, let alone what was happening . . . my mom's husband . . . was White . . . and I think race also played . . . a role . . . in that relationship of control and violence. He did say a number of racist things throughout our lives . . . comments about . . . the way my grandparents spoke, or comments about family members, and like the observance of certain cultural traditions, or comments [about] my mom's friends or relationships within the community. . . . I think part of it was born out of like this feeling of exclusion . . . he sensed a sense of community and connection there, he wanted to isolate her from it, and so he was like incredibly critical*

> *of a number of people in the community and some of that was under-handed comments about people's . . . education . . . and intelligence.*

Viktor is the eldest of three siblings. His mother escaped from their home with three children when he was very young. As a child, Viktor witnessed verbal and physical violence directed toward his mother and sometimes toward himself and his siblings. Talking about the violence, Viktor said,

> *I feel that [FV] always causes a sense of unease because you never know when the next event is gonna blow up. You feel like it's sort of like a time bomb or like it's only a matter of fact, the next incident occurs. . . . I forget exactly when we actually left, like the exact year, but [I remember the violence] . . . it would be arguments and physical. It was not uncommon for him to get physical at all, be it on either my mother or any of me and my siblings. . . . Those arguments and fights and all that stuff have stemmed from other things that weren't really related to us usually, but it did spread to us as well, and as a child, it did change our sort of mindset to be like I don't want to get punished.*

Viktor's experience captures a child's emotions and fears when navigating an abusive environment. He talked about his feelings of uncertainty, of always feeling uneasy and on edge, of never really knowing when the next incident would occur. Viktor's story draws attention to the harm caused to children who live in constant fear in an abusive home; it highlights how fear and abuse rob children of their childhood.

Jasmine recounted that while growing up, there were often verbal arguments between her parents. Their frustration and anger were not only directed toward each other but also at Jasmine:

> *Once we came to Canada, we were in close quarters, I also have a younger brother, and we lived in a small apartment, the four of us together, and I remember that's when it became extremely difficult because I would see them fighting and everything . . . mostly petty arguments. Sometimes it would get very loud. I would say verbally violent. . . . I remember before we came to Canada . . . I remember my dad's side of the family. They were very controlling of my mother. . . . My father also had a habit of trying to buy our love, you know. If he would really attack my character or make me feel terrible, I remember one day, both my mom and my dad were scolding me so much about my grades that I was literally covering my face in a corner in the fetal position, just crying, asking them to stop like I was begging them to just stop.*

Many of the participants in this study witnessed severe violence between their parents. In every case, the father directed this violence toward the mother. Two participants, Abi and Sandiran, interviewed individually, are siblings, with Abi three years older. After having a very rocky relationship while growing up, they have realized the reason and are now rebuilding it. Interestingly, even though they witnessed the same violence, their perspectives differ. As indicated in the excerpt below, while Abi shares her mother's response to the abuse by her husband, in Sandiran's narrative, this information is missing. Abi recounts witnessing the violence:

> *My father has an illness . . . because of his illness, he kind of . . . took out his [fears] . . . on my mom. And my mom didn't have anybody. . . . She was also angry at my father for not doing his role as a husband and father, so there was tension in that sense, so my father was angry with my mother for something, and my mother was angry with my father. . . . I think what happened was upon arriving in Canada . . . his*

illness either got worse or was to the point where it was identifiable. I think in Sri Lanka, maybe he already had the illness, but he was able to suppress it, and he was able to go on being pretty functional. But upon arriving in Canada, and I guess with the different stressors, he ended up, he ended up not doing as well.

Abi's experience shows how her father's battle with a mental illness strained his relationship with his wife and children. Abi's parents' relationship seems stressful because her father did not fulfill his family role. Abi speculated that her father's illness became identifiable upon their arrival and settlement in Canada as different stressors were introduced in his life. Abi hinted at the settlement challenges experienced by racialized immigrants in this country, which her father could not manage, exacerbating his mental illness.

While Abi shed light on the causes of FV, Sandiran provided a graphic picture of the nature of the violence in their home:

> *My dad has paranoid schizophrenia . . . because of the traumas he'd gone through during the war and how that affected his life. That's why he would go to beat my mother, and so we would have to kind of, like, pull him out. Like, harm him in some ways so that he could stop harming my mother. . . . My dad also has another co-morbidity that's related to his schizophrenia, and he was at least a very, very heavy alcoholic, and we took his alcohol away from him because we had no other option. He also became violent because he didn't have access to money. . . . [My mom] would sleep in our bedroom because at night my dad would come in to beat her . . . taking my mom's head and slamming it. . . . I'm sure I had a heightened sense of stress, and I think I'm bringing in my medical background here and a heightened sense of a heightened level of cortisol . . . it was just normalized over the course of our lives.*

The above excerpts highlight the importance of support for people who have experienced war trauma and new immigrants who have settled in Canada. Sandiran's reference to the normalization of violence, when it occurred regularly at home, signals the importance of preventive services for immigrants from war-affected

regions. Sandiran's description also highlights the significance of taking proactive steps to minimize and respond to the physical violence of her father.

Maria shared her experience witnessing physical, verbal, and financial abuse towards her mother while growing up. Maria was very aware that her father was violent towards her mother:

> *He used to beat her [or] hit her. . . . For the verbal abuse, he used a lot of bad words—cursing, yelling, degrading who she was as a woman. Financially, he was never a good provider . . . and if it wasn't for her having a place [that she rented], she wouldn't have had an income.*

Maria's father's violence had a negative impact on multiple aspects of her life. She witnessed her father degrading and disrespecting her mother and abusing her verbally, physically, and financially. Like other participants' fathers, Maria's father left it to Maria's mother to provide for the family.

Samantha's mother escaped from Pakistan with Samantha as an infant and sought refuge in Ontario. However, the mother returned to Pakistan when Samantha was five years old and escaped again three years later when their domestic situation did not improve. Samantha recollected witnessing violence while they were in Pakistan:

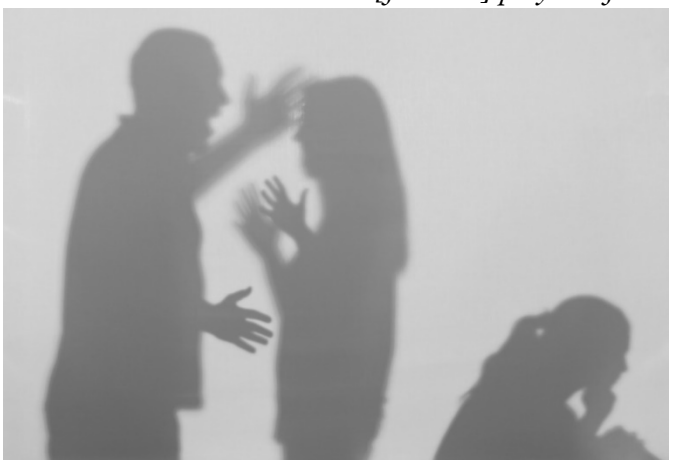
> *My mother, she tried to again and again to go back and live with my father [because of financial and cultural pressures], but she was unable to . . . establish [a] relationship with him . . . or the brief amount of time that we lived with my father, there was always a lot of financial, physical, emotional abuse. . . . The yelling and fighting would start in the morning . . . because my father was very short-tempered. . . . I think the physical [abuse] . . . when I would see it happen was difficult. . . . My parents only lived together . . . for three years in total . . . [and] have four children together . . . All of the domestic violence and the custodial issues took place in [Pakistan], but there were a lot of implications that happened in Canada. . . . I lived in [Pakistan] till I was about four or five, and then I came to Canada with my mother and all my siblings were left behind in Pakistan because of the custody issue. . . . To this day, all three of my siblings still live in[4] [Pakistan], and I grew up here [in Canada] . . . we don't really know each other or anything. They have no relationship with my mother because they've always been taught to be against her. . . . It's not their fault; it's just what they've been taught over the years . . . it's a very fractured dynamic in our family, resulting from the domestic abuse, the very controlling nature [of] my father.*

The "fractured dynamic" Samantha described is present in several participants' stories wherein FV has impacted relationships between family members – parents and children and also among children. Samantha's story highlights the long-term impact of abuse and separation from her children on her mother's mental health, who developed schizophrenia later in life. Samantha has played a caretaker role for her mother, while her siblings live with the misunderstanding that their mother abandoned them. From Samantha's point of view, her mother could not bring her siblings to Canada because of custody issues and immigration policies and procedures.

Samantha also suggests that the factors that pushed her mother to reunite with her husband after deciding to leave were financial and cultural. This points to the stigma and isolation experienced by divorced/separated women in certain cultures. 3

Sonia described witnessing verbal, emotional, and physical violence directed toward her mother by her father and his family. She recalled the relationship between her parents, who immigrated from India, as follows:

> *My parents have always not really gotten along. It was an arranged marriage, so it wasn't by choice; they didn't really know each other. And since day one, my mom has always had conflicts or tensions with my dad's side of the family. When they immigrated to Canada, those tensions . . . just got worse. I was around 10 when I saw a physical event happen between them . . . my dad pushed my mom down the stairs . . . she had rug burns, all the way down her arms, her forearms. . . . When they came to this country, they didn't really have anything to get good jobs with, and my dad started off as like a cab driver and then made his way into trucking, so he's a truck driver now, and my mom, she's primarily worked in like factories her entire life. . . . And I think that I'm sure [finances] played a factor.*



Although her parents did not explicitly say so, Sonia knew that her parents had conflicts from her childhood. Like Samantha, Sonia stated that her mother faced emotional abuse from her father's family. Similar to Maya's situation, Sonia's case also highlights how financial stress increased tensions at home that contributed to transforming a home into a violent space.

Anita witnessed verbal arguments between her parents that often revolved around their daughters' futures. Her parents lived in a Middle Eastern country and decided to immigrate to Canada. Anita described the situation as follows:

> *The fights I've seen were more about our future, about moving, about giving us a better life. My mom wanted to come here because we still lived in [a Middle Eastern country], and my mom saw that there's no future for [her daughters]. My dad did not like the Western culture, so [he disagreed]. [Friends and relatives] would tell both of my parents that Western culture isn't good, your daughters are, in fact, not kids, your daughters, and I'm emphasizing daughters because there is always a gender difference. Their fights would end up [with them] not talking to each other for a few days or even weeks.*

Anita's experiences reveal a cultural factor that can lead to tension in immigrant families—the fear of daughters assimilating into western culture. The tension between Anita's parents reflects gender-based discrimination in many cultures, where girls are expected to carry the burden of cultural preservation. Anita's mother fought to get her daughters out of a constraining environment to an environment that provided more opportunities for them. Her mother sought help from her sister, who lived in Toronto and supported their

immigration plan. The father's side of the family was resistant to the idea of immigration and influenced the father negatively. The resulting FV in Anita's family manifests the dynamics in many family-oriented cultures where extended family members play an essential role in decision-making for other members.

Jay described the violence between his parents that was both physical and emotional. The violence was physical, as the father threw and broke items around the house, and these actions had an emotional impact on Jay:

> *A lot of things broke up and like, you know, furniture, glasses, tumblers . . . it was just over some small little funny things between my mom and dad, things that kind of annoyed my mom like she'll kind of like just hold it in and then like once or twice, she'll say certain things. . . . For me, it was just more like things that I saw; there was no actual harm that was actually done to me like, like physical harm or anything. . . . I just saw my dad kind of get like, you know, roughed up or not roughed up like you know, loud and stuff, and things might break but nothing where anything comes into harm, so everything like no. . . .[until] I saw harm done to my mom. . . . I kind of noticed something, witnessed something, and then I told my dad, I'm like, "Listen, either you call, or I'm going to call [the police]."*

Jay's experience provides insight into the reality of a home where abuse is normalized; it is not spoken about. In such contexts, it is challenging to act until the situation worsens. Jay's action demonstrates his agency in standing up against such normalization of violence at a young age.

This section looked at the direct and indirect FV experienced by the participants. Their experiences uncovered the personal, cultural, religious, and systemic factors that converge to complicate FV for racialized immigrant families. The following section provides insight into the roles the participants played as children at the time of FV.

Roles Played by Participants During Violent Incidents

During the interviews, participants were asked to speak about their role when tension escalated between their parents. The interviews revealed that participants felt compelled to take on demanding roles often at a young age: Protector and provider, Peacemaker, and Challenger. The data revealed that some participants played multiple roles fluidly at different times, and their roles varied depending on the context and their age. However, the analysis below focuses only on the dominant role(s) the participants identified they had played within their families.

Protector and provider

Maya, the eldest child in her family, found herself having to act as a protector of her siblings and be their provider and caregiver while her mother was absent because of her gambling problem:

> *I'm the older sibling, so I had to take on a protector role at a young age. . . . I had to worry about whether my siblings [were] home and whether they [could] get into the house because [my mother] . . . said she'd leave a key, but I don't remember there being a key . . . so I would have to go through the window first . . . then open the door so then when my siblings came home. . . . I had to learn how to start cooking.*

While Maya automatically took on the role of protecting her siblings, Viktor was conscious of the need to fill the same role to alleviate his mother's responsibilities but was reluctant to take it on:

> *I actually kind of [had] to act . . . like a parent to the other two kids . . . and well, I [didn't] really feel like I [had] a choice in the matter. I . . . saw . . . how my mother had to take on three of us to provide for us but to raise us as well. . . . Even if it's something as simple as just taking my sister to work, that makes my mom's life easier.*

Interestingly, Maya and Viktor were subtly pushed into taking this role at a young age when they were least prepared for it.

Some participants were forced to intervene physically to protect their mother from their father's abuse. Sandiran spoke about their and Abi's collective efforts:

> *My sister and I, sometimes we would put our bed in front of the door . . . so we would know when he would come in. Sometimes, my mom would sleep right next to us . . . once we woke up to him like beating on her, and so we would have to get him and . . . pull him out.*

Samantha shared how she navigated playing a similar role in Pakistan and Canada:

> *There was always like a severe fear of my father growing up . . . because I could tell he controlled everything . . . like every day you know he would come home around 7 pm . . . we all have to be quiet and be very careful, you know, like a walk on eggshells around him, because, you know he could be very nice, but it was just like a matter of seconds when his temper went off, and then he would like lose it completely right, so it was a lot of fear. . . . I would try to . . . intervene, to stop him, but he would continue. . . . I was . . . very protective [of] my mother, and especially because [of] her mental health, I could tell from . . . a very young age [that there were] issues. We came back [to Canada] when I was ten [and] were living in . . . a shelter as well, and we stayed there for a few months. My mother . . . she's a very . . . affectionate, loving person and . . . I've seen her repeatedly in very bad situations with my father and her own family. . . . I feel protective of her now, trying to help her be in a better place and . . . the impact of all that on me is that a lot of times, one, you build a lot of patience, so you have severe patience, two is like learning how to deal with . . . continuous setbacks or problems . . . and it's exhausting at times but . . . you get better at dealing with like little crises, over and over again.*

Samantha's narrative highlights the complicated role she played in different situations. Even though she intended to protect her mother, she could not do much to protect her mother due to her father's fear. However, she became her sole caregiver and protector through her challenging physical and mental health problems, such as liver failure and schizophrenia.

These excerpts reveal the incredible responsibilities Maya, Viktor, Samantha, and Sandiran shouldered at a young age, whether willingly or not; they accepted their expected roles. As children, they were called upon to not only deal with the impact of violence on themselves but to think beyond themselves and protect their siblings and mothers.

Peacekeeper

Apart from taking care of her mother and her brother, Sonia found herself having to be a peacekeeper in her home:

> *I got involved to de-escalate that situation for sure. I've never been hit or anything like that. That's never happened, but like I've definitely been like the peacekeeper if that makes sense. . . . I have no problem yelling at my dad. . . whether I'm getting mad at her for bringing up something that she shouldn't be bringing up and causing a fight about something that's irrelevant, whether I'm trying to de-escalate him . . . I'm always the person that de-escalates. . . . And as I've gotten older, like I do everything for my parents. Anything financial-related, I'm now the "go-to." I've always filled out my brother's school forms, I've always, I've gone to my brother's parent and teacher conferences because my parents don't understand what's being said properly, and so I've always taken care of my mom, and that responsibility has pretty much exponentially grown as I've gotten older.*

Challenger

Participants shared the way they challenged their abusive parent/s either overtly or covertly.

Jay overtly challenged his father's decision not to seek medical help after he hit his wife and she was injured. As a child, Jay was not sure of the severity of the wound and requested that his father call 911. His father refused to do so, so Jay called 911 based on his concern for his mother's safety. According to Jay, his intervention was successful as it made his father cautious about not repeating such behaviour in the future.

Maria remembered being very young and screaming at her father to stop the abuse. She would *"scream and tell them, stop. . . . I was young; I was like 5-6-7. . . . So when I see her screaming, or I see those kinds of stuff, all I would cry and scream and tell him, stop, like you know, beg.*

Chiairo's tactic of challenging looks different. She used the covert strategy of convincing her mother to leave her abusive husband.

Adriana shared her story of overtly challenging her parents' expectations of wearing hijab as per their religious norm:

> *When I leave the house, I would be dressed as my mother wished, you know, a long shirt like down to my knees, and then hijab, and then once I leave, I would have like a change of clothes in my backpack. . . . I would change my clothes on the staircase. . . . Also, other times I would wait till I go to the subway and then change my clothes in the subway bathroom and then before coming home, I would do the same thing and change back into like clothes. So, it always felt like Cinderella, you know.*

Most excerpts in this section demonstrate participants' agency in playing different roles and accepting new ones per the situation's demands.

Differential Experiences, Engagement, and the Role of Participants' Siblings

It is crucial to emphasize that the participants acknowledged that their experiences and roles differed vastly from those of their siblings. The intersectional analysis below presents siblings' engagement and roles based on their age and gender intersections.

Intersections of gender and age

Sandiran is the youngest child in their family. However, they made significant efforts to protect their mother and navigate the violence that was going on at home. Talking about their experience, they shared that their experience of FV at home differed from their older brother's and sister Abi's experiences:

> *Throughout the course of my life, my brother was always the one to take more action because he was a*

> *male, male child and he was also the oldest. I think, once, I was getting older, I had more sort of control to be able to yell at my dad and to essentially threaten him if we ever heard him threaten my mom if you ever sort of raised a hand to try to hit her.*

Sandiran continued:

> *My mum was very strict with my brother and my sister when they were growing up, but as I was the last child in the family . . . I had a lot more privileges, and a . . . lot less of this affected me compared to how it affected my older two siblings who had to take on like [the] role of the father or this mother-role when my parents couldn't, or were there. . . . And he taught me, and he was a really good big brother like even when I got bullied in school, he would come in and he would yell at the kid who bullied me. . . . I have a lot of respect for just what he went through because I don't know what I would have done as a first-child, as a first-male, having so much of that pressure on him.*

Sandiran's experience sheds light on how siblings experience the same situation differently based on age and gender. Sandiran's brother, the only male child in the household, had to take on much more responsibility because of his gender. Sandiran was sheltered and protected as the youngest in the family but took more responsibility as they got older.

Viktor is the eldest of three siblings; his parents separated when he was five. Because of this, he felt he had to help his mother and take on the responsibility of looking after his younger siblings, even if it was as simple as taking his sister to work, to make his mother's life "easier." Viktor also felt that sometimes his mother relied on him to support her. This family dynamic made him a critical link between his siblings and their mother.

The excerpts also highlight that gender and age played a significant role in expecting the oldest male child to take on the responsibility and fill in the void created by FV. The relationship between the first child and the parent seems much more potent based on how the child supports and stands with the parents during the separation phase of a divorce. However, in the case of some participants, the families did not adhere to gender and age-based role expectations. The discussion below provides insight into the role expectations of some participants.

Looking beyond intersectional analysis

Sonia's and Anita's reflections challenge the gendered and age-based intersectional analysis provided above.

Sonia, the eldest of two siblings, stated that her younger brother does not engage with what happens at home. Even though he is expected to take on responsibility as a male child, he has not taken any, leaving Sonia to manage.

Anita, the middle child of three sisters, reflected on her situation. She and her sister did not try to control the violence as children. Her elder sister lives on campus, but Anita lives at home. She has taken on the responsibility of collecting her younger sister (who is 11 years younger than her) from school. Being in a university, Anita has to navigate the stress of managing her classes and arriving at her sister's school in time

to take her home. As the middle child, she finds herself trapped by having to meet many of her parents' expectations.

Accessing Supports During Family Violence

This section shares participants' perspectives on accessing the services of social institutions such as the Child Protection Services (CPS), known as the Children's Aid Society (CAS), teachers, doctors, law enforcement officers, and counselling services. We discovered that many participants had accessed few or no institutional supports and that most had maintained secrecy about the violence they were experiencing at home.

Child Protection Services (CPS): Fear and secrecy about violence

Findings revealed that a few participants kept the FV a secret because of fear of CPS. According to Abi, keeping the violence a secret impacted her relationship with people outside the family.

> *It was very important that we kept my dad's illness and everything that happened at home very private. So I know that I never, like in my experience, I never got close to anyone until maybe the past, like until maybe I hit age 20.*

Sandiran confirmed Abi's perspective on the need for secrecy:

> *Over the course of our childhood, at least, my mum was very adamant on teaching my brother and my*

sister, and me to not utter a word about what was happening at home to anyone. And I'm, you know, the more I grow up, the more I'm so thankful that she did that because I think we would have ended up in foster care. So, I think she knew exactly what she was doing.

Chiairo knew that there was a negative perception of racialized immigrants in society and did not feel comfortable talking about her abuse to counsellors and other professionals for this reason:

I probably would not have talked to a counsellor about it before . . . at an earlier point in my life. I know CAS would have been called on my family . . . and I think that's a traumatic experience, and I think that especially the way it's wielded against immigrant families and families of colour, especially in like small, mostly white communities, which is, it's a community where I grew up. Yeah, I think that that is, is traumatic, and often doesn't help. . . . I'm not an immigrant, I'm the child of immigrants, but I do identify quite strongly . . . with my community. I think that the way immigrant communities are treated within the justice system and . . . social work as well . . . I think often those systems that other people might see as people who can help, are people who might disrupt our lives, or harm us. . . . In my childhood, CAS [CPS] was called on my mother; it's because, like we did karate. At one point, my sister got a bruise from karate, and somebody thought that my mother did that. And I think a huge part of that was because of my mom's identity . . . that people think that . . . [South Asian] people are . . . violent against their children, and those types of stereotypes. . . . When you grow up as one of the few families of colour . . . in a white community, I think that there's an added layer that like you're being watched and judged. . . . I have had a number of therapists and care practitioners. I think only one of those people has ever been a person of colour. . . . The advice that a therapist gave most of the times like didn't always feel very relevant or appropriate.

Maya compartmentalized her school and home life. While she saw school as a place of escape from the realities of home, she also knew that it was not safe from the point of view of CPS. So, she was cautious and said,

School is a place where I can like to get away from my parents. That's why I didn't feel the need. Also, I knew that if I told them something, they might call CAS, and I already had that happening anyway, so then there was no point.

Because of her mother's mental health, Samantha had to access services from several institutions over the years. She recalled her numerous interactions with CPS, Ontario Works (OW), Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Talking about her experience with CPS, Samantha said,

Unfortunately, from a young age, we had a lot of involvement with CAS . . . for example, you know my mom, sometimes she would say if you don't want to go to school, you don't need to go to school. . . . The school called CAS because they're like she's just not coming to school . . . and that gave a fear in my head of like being taken away from her. . . . So, I would be very careful to not speak out at all. . . . I was just so fearful of this, like if I'm not with her, then I am with my dad. When I was in grade eight . . . she was evaluated by a family doctor. . . . They figured out it was schizophrenia, and then she was hospitalized for about three months. . . . My mum's brother, who lives in the US . . . he came and stayed with me for a little bit [of]

time. . . . It was a difficult time with CAS . . . because they said that if I was not with him, I think I would have to go to a foster family. . . . This one time, the social worker was to just actually come by for visits, and so he literally, like that night, he booked a flight from the US to be available for the visit.

Participants' reflections reveal an overwhelming fear and apprehension of being surveilled and judged by CPS. Grounded in Eurocentric practices that look down on collectivist and family-oriented values, CPS can end up separating children from their parents; hence, racialized immigrant families do not fit the mould of CPS and its services.

School: From a place of guidance and inspiration to erasure of experience

Sandiran, Chiairo, Samantha, and Maria shared their experiences with the school and teachers.

Sandiran's apprehension about the response of CPS also carried over to schooling:

I didn't talk about this with teachers because I went to an elementary school, a public school that was located in the richest neighbourhood in Montreal, whereas I and some of my peers were living in one of the most racialized low-income neighbourhoods in Montreal . . . and one of the best indications to me was when my teacher would ask me to tell the class . . . every year where I went [for vacation] . . . it would be go ask your, go ask your parents for help on this. I was like, I would remember, I remember just laughing and thinking to myself, well, these people don't have any idea. . . . And I guess during those actual times I . . . would just need to put on like a smile and then go into school and do the things that I needed to do. . . . In high school, it was the same thing, I went to high school where it was more students from different backgrounds, but there as well there was never a time where I felt like any teacher had proven themselves to be trustworthy.

However, Samantha, Maria, and Adriana had different experiences with their teachers. While Samantha's teachers complied with the Duty to Report procedure that leads to CPS involvement, Samantha also commented positively about the school and teachers:

Over the years, my teachers always could tell that things are off when my mom would show up at odd hours at school like it was a lot of eccentric behaviour. So, the school could tell there were issues going on . . . they were kind of empathetic . . . they did a good job of dealing with it. I think my interactions, like I'm still good friends with that one teacher for many, many years later because we lived in the same community.

While Maria kept the violence in her family a secret from her teachers in Guyana, her school eventually found out what was happening, which made her feel ashamed. This is indicative of the stigma associated with FV. Adriana talked about the tremendous support she received from her teachers in China. Her teachers were observant and noticed that Adriana was experiencing trouble in her home because of her subdued nature and artwork. Adriana felt comfortable talking about her abuse to one particular teacher. Though the teacher was on the safeguarding team at school and empathized with her, Adriana felt there was little the teacher could do.

Adrianna shared a story of what happened to her in the year 2018 on the last day of school before Christmas break. Adrianna's parents stormed her home and dragged her down the stairs. One of the neighbours called the police at Adriana's request. When the police refused to support Adriana, she reached out to her teacher:

> *I had my school laptop in my backpack. That's how I was able to link it to the police station's Wi-Fi. And, you know, I sent out SOS emails to everyone in my contact list, and luckily, one of my teachers checked her email before she boarded on the plane. Then she made a few calls, and then one of the administrators, you know, workers, you know, she came with her husband, late at night and picked me up. . . . I did receive a lot of support from that particular teacher; she would later on become, you know, a very important person in my life, both, you know, throughout my studies and personal life. But the school's official position at the time was to take no sides because they didn't want to be involved, you know, they couldn't afford to be involved in a lawsuit. So, you know, the school's official position was that they would not be involved. So whatever that teacher or other teachers helped me with was on their own, you know, responsibility.*

The above excerpts reveal participants' contrasting experiences with teachers. While Sandiran's and Samantha's experiences were in schools in Canada, Maria's and Adriana's experiences were based in Guyana and China, respectively.

Adriana's narrative reveals the positive contribution a teacher can make in a child's life. It is noteworthy

that even though the school and teachers could not do anything officially, the teacher's compassion, concern, courage, and empathy played an important role in creating a safe space for Adriana.

Social service organizations and professional supports: Lack of outreach, engagement, and surveillance

It is not that participants didn't want to access support, but that the supports available failed them. Sandiran painted a picture of the challenges of seeking support:

> *Like in my neighbourhood[a city in Quebec], it was, it's a neighbourhood where there's a lot of community organizations, a lot of mobilization, a lot of mutual aid taking place. Because of our background as South Asians, we didn't really receive any support from these organizations. We were always othered in the neighbourhood. It was primarily Anglophone and Francophone way, and the Caribbean or people of African descent neighbourhood. And so, that's whom the community organizations cater to as well . . . and then in CEGEP [college]after I think I had spoken to a physician at the adolescent health clinic who for the first time confided in . . . she really encouraged me to start talking to a counsellor . . . and then that's when I started talking to a counsellor. . . .This counsellor was a white middle-class, great lady but didn't understand the realities. And so I spoke to her here and there. And I think the very first thing I told her when I went in was that my father has paranoid schizophrenia, and I saw him beat the crap out of my mother throughout my life. So, it just came pouring out . . . but everyone at* [the University] *was very trauma uninformed . . . catered to the typical, the default student, someone who has privilege, was upper-middle class, didn't come from a migrant community. I also had quite a few bad experiences with them.*

Sandiran's negative experiences with community-based organizations speak to the preference and limited scope of specific ethnic neighbourhood organizations, excluding other ethnic communities.

Samantha shared her experiences with a major mental health organization in Ontario and other organizations:

> *Well, I think that the [a major mental health organization in Ontario] . . . they had her [Samantha's mother] in this new treatment program, so then they would come and verify with me and talk to me, and that provided a lot of stability because I found it easier to connect with them because their approach was like concrete, and to help me. So I had a lot of support from them. Initially, it was Ontario Works for my mother, and then after her diagnosis with schizophrenia and liver failure, it was to ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program). So, and you know, the region that we live in is not very ethnically diverse. . . . And I think there was some tension between the social workers . . . and my mother would always be fearful . . . a negative relationship between them. I couldn't figure out what it was . . . that was a very, very challenging, turbulent experience, and I know they also came and visited her quite often in person and things like that.*

Government departments: Mismatch of service delivery models

Sonia and Jay shared their experiences with government departments, such as law enforcement services.

Being an immigrant to Canada, Sonia's mother lacked the traditional support of the elders she would have had in her home country to intervene when her husband got violent. Sonia shared an experience when her mother called 911 for support, which resulted in her father's arrest. According to Sonia, there is a need for law enforcement to understand the reason for the call rather than administer a uniform protocol.

> *This is probably the first time in like a year that he [father] ever did anything, but he like pushed my mom forcefully and then slapped her across the face and like started becoming more physical with her. So she got quite afraid because he's never acted like, to that extent before. So the first thing she did was call 911. And that was the very first time the justice system has ever been involved in anything relating to our troubles. . . . I get home, and you see police cars, and you're like I can't describe that feeling . . . it's just horrible, and anyways, so my dad was handcuffed and taken away because he was still quite angry he wasn't coming down. So the police said, "Well, you're obviously showing signs of aggression; we're going to take you away." . . . He can't just go because she didn't understand this when she called 911. . . . And if they hadn't, if they just brought the police to the house and de-escalated him, I think we would have been like, wow, she called cops like I need to get my shit together, so this doesn't happen again.* And *he wouldn't have done that again; I know my dad . . . and everything would have been resolved without this legal piece, which has really messed with all of us.*

Jay called 911 when his father hit his mother, and she was injured in the head. However, Jay appreciated the intervention by the law enforcement officers and EMS. In Jay's opinion, his action has changed the dynamics between his parents:

> *They came, they checked . . . to see if the person is responding . . . they just checked, my mom's good*

okay, they left it, and since that day I always ask my dad, I'm like, "So how was your experience?" So after that, my dad is kind of very like, I would say not controlled, but the way how he would articulate certain conversations with my mom and myself, like despite the age difference, right, is very like respectful, even thought process, right, not only like physical behaviour, just like thought process.

The participants' reflections on institutional supports reveal that, in most cases, the supports fell short at the most critical time for them. Instead of supporting the participants, the services of institutions such as CPS were negatively perceived and not accessed. Other societal institutions such as schools, counsellors, and law enforcement failed to adopt a trauma-informed, needs-based, culturally informed approach. There is also a critical need for increased awareness of FV as a social issue that moves away from pathologizing families and cultures.

Since the participants rarely accessed social services, we asked what informal supports these families and children accessed to address FV. The following section highlights the informal support received by participants and their families.

Accessing informal supports during family violence

While some participants only accessed support later in life, others sought support from extended family members.

Chiairo, Jay, Maya, Sonia, Samantha, and Viktor received support from their mother's side of the family. Chiario's maternal grandparents played a significant role in raising her and her sister and provided stability and security. Maya's grandmother, mother's sister [aunt] and brother [uncle] played a vital role by paying their bills, sheltering Maya, and guiding her in her career. Similarly, Sonia also found unconditional support from a maternal uncle and his daughters, with whom she got along very well. Sandiran and Abi, too, spoke of support from their mother's family. Samantha's maternal uncle helped; he stayed with Samantha when her mother was hospitalized. Like Sonia, Jay and Anita had a solid support system in their cousins with whom they shared about their family situation.

However, a few participants sought support from friends at varying stages of their life and for various reasons. As a child, Sonia did not seek support from friends, but now that she is older, she feels comfortable talking about her family. Adriana did not confide with most of her school friends, as they were from culturally diverse backgrounds and hence would not understand her situation. She only confided with one friend, who, after learning about her situation, stood by her through all her struggles. Jasmine, who had an intense fear of her father, sought help from her friend to forge a report card to help avert her father's anger:

> *Like my friend was actually the one who helped me forge the report card, she's [South East Asian], and she also has had that experience of having strict parents, so she was like, I'll help you with this, you know, I'll help you. And she helped me because I was like, I have no idea how to forge a report card. I have no idea; help me. And she's like, don't worry, "I'm gonna Photoshop, I'll help you," and she actually helped me make it look pretty legitimate. I was like, wow, you should make a career out of this.*

Except for Abi, none of the participants received any support from their father's side of the family. While Abi stayed at her cousin's (paternal uncle's daughter) when she and her mother had a misunderstanding, her sibling Sandiran felt the uncle's family did not support their family despite being very well off.

Impacts of Experiencing Family Violence

In keeping with the phenomenological approach to inquiry, we focused on gathering information from participants about the impact of FV on their lives. The findings revealed that for each participant, the impact of FV extended to their physical, emotional/psychological, financial, and social dimensions. It impacted their educational prospects, careers, social relationships, and relationships with siblings, parents, and communities. Most participants demonstrated great agency in overcoming the consequences of FV, and a few are still dealing with the fallout. For clarity, we analyze each dimension of the impact separately; however, it is essential to remember that participants were impacted in several ways simultaneously.

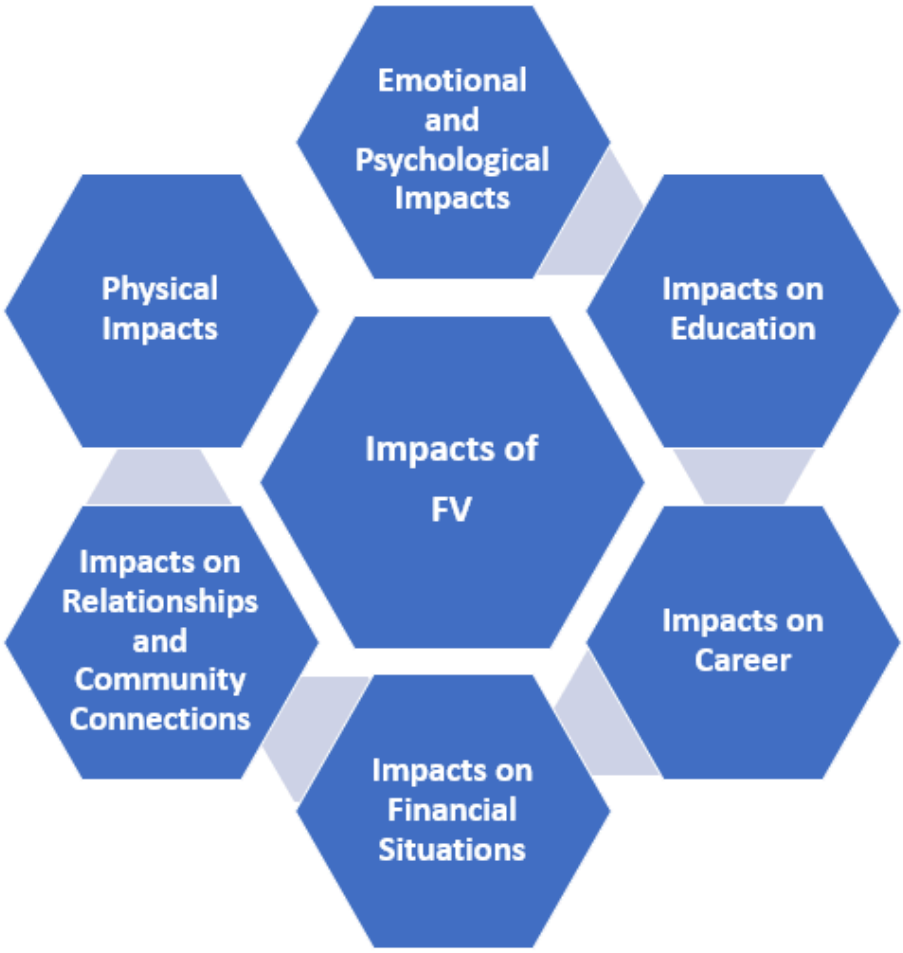


Figure 1: Impacts of Experiencing Family Violence

Physical impact

Anita talked about noticing stress lines on her forehead due to the stressful environment in which she was living. She felt that the constant stress, pressure, and anxiety caused premature wrinkling and aging:

> *Yes, so I feel like I am getting lines on my forehead, and because I'm only 21, I feel like that's not normal, especially because I'm seeing within my friend circle, my older sister, no one has that except for me, so I felt like I took in a lot of stress, especially because I lived at home. . . . I have more responsibility.*

Anita's statement highlights how siblings experience the home environment differently and are thus impacted differently. Though the middle child, Anita bore the brunt of the situation by taking on more responsibilities, pressure, and stress than her elder and younger sisters. When we think of the impact of FV on

a person, we think of mental health, relationships, careers, and the like. While these are real, we often overlook the bodily changes associated with living with constant stress. When one constantly compares oneself to others, the lower confidence and negative self-image that comes with it further impact mental health. Anita's narrative emphasizes the reality of FV and how this can impact every aspect of one's mind, body, and spirit.

Jasmine talked about the physical impact of living in perpetual stress due to family violence, compounded by the stress of attending university.

> *I've had stomach problems pretty much since I started university. I would say maybe a year or two into university [it] got worse. I was in and out of hospitals a lot, emergency clinics. .. They could not figure out for the life of them what was going on. I did an endoscopy, and they didn't find anything physically wrong at the time, and the doctor attributed it to stress. Which I definitely would agree with because I had a lot of pressure with the school. Especially after the first year doing so badly, I wasn't able to stay in that co-op program, which was the main reason that I wanted to go there in the first place, and that definitely took a toll on my physical and mental health. . . . And I feel like physically. It made me feel more tired, not wanting to do things. . . . And even now, I still have the same issues with my stomach. I did an endoscopy last year, and they found my stomach was inflamed. I have a hernia on my esophagus. So physical issues, I've had for years and a lot of it. I would definitely attribute my stress and just my inability to like. I don't know. I think it's just me wanting to delay things a lot. Like even seeing a doctor, I delay it because I'm scared to go see the doctor; I don't want to hear what they have to say to me.*

In Jasmine's case, we can see how discouraging it was for her always to feel physically unwell and her lack of motivation to visit a doctor because of the fear of more bad news. Jasmine struggles with her physical ailment, emphasizing the long-lasting impact of being in a stressful setting.

Emotional and psychological impact

This section presents the multiple emotional and psychological impacts participants experienced consistently and concurrently. Rather than organizing the impacts thematically, we have presented below the actual impacts for each participant to provide an insight into their compounded effect on these individuals.

Self-harm

Witnessing FV impacted Maria's mental health as a teenager. She described episodes of physical self-harm:

> *I used to cut myself. My outburst in high school used to be me cutting myself . . . and no one understood it, I didn't even understand why, but when I was angry, I couldn't feel anything. And I used to literally just take the razor blade and cut. . . . I never used to feel that much pain when doing it, or maybe it's just a mind thing. But I used to only cut this hand [left hand], and I tried cutting my foot once because I didn't*

want people to see it . . . and then after doing it, I would just feel a sense of relaxation, but it never used to pain me that much like I don't know why.

Maria was also rebellious in her teenage years:

I think it was me being on the phone, me being rude. I used to have outbursts. I would cry. Like, if they [parents] don't agree with anything . . . say if I wanted to do something, and they don't agree, and I don't get my way, I used to just cry, and rebel like in a rude way. But I think that was me just rebelling in general, yeah.

As an adult, Maria has stopped harming herself but continues to experience anger, disappointment, dejection, and helplessness when she regards her parents' situation:

I get angry when my mom and dad cannot see eye to eye because I look at other people. I'm like, their family can see eye to eye. Their kid is not involved. They do it just for the kid. And, you know, it's okay, like . . . before the day before I left Guyana to come here to study, it was the last day I saw my father. He came, and he said he wants to drop me into the airport, but my mom, she's like no. . . . And then, they had their outbursts. . . . We have a house. He's outside of the house sleeping in the vehicle. I'm inside the house with mommy sleeping. . . . Now, I'm in a position where I have to choose. And I chose Mom because she's the reason like she financially did everything for me, and if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't even be here studying, and at the same time, I feel sorry for my father. And it was the worst situation . . . that was hard.

Maria vividly described the mixed emotions she has experienced throughout her life for her parents. She struggles with balancing her love for her mother and father, resulting in an emotional challenge.

Stress and anxiety

Chiairo has always experienced stress and anxiety, and these continue even after she has left home for the university:

I was under a lot of stress most of the time because of the way he [stepfather] behaved and also worried about my mother, worried about her wellbeing, her life. . . . I lived in a lot of anxiety because of the situation for a very long time, that persisted even when I left home for school. I think sometimes it even was worse afterwards because I wasn't close and didn't always know what was going on. So I think psychologically, there was a lot of stress, I think, physically I reacted to that stress. . . . I think that I don't totally understand the way that particular experience impacted my mental health because things are always complexly intertwined, but I have struggled with mental health for quite a while.

Chiairo's excerpt highlights the interrelatedness of physical and emotional/mental health. Hence, the excerpt highlights the need for a holistic approach that responds to all areas for total recovery for individuals affected by FV.

Schizophrenia and low self-esteem

Abi, who experienced severe emotional and physical abuse as a child, has struggled with acute anxiety, schizophrenia, and low self-esteem. Abi felt that her mental illness affected her academic success and employment prospects:

> *I don't know if it's because of what happened in the past. But I'm more than the average person. I'm anxious. . . . And I also have a diagnosis of a mental illness as well. I also have schizophrenia. . . . And if I compare myself to somebody my age, I'm not as functional as somebody else my age would be, and I'm a lot more stressed. I have more barriers. And so, like life is a lot harder to live. . . . I have very low self-esteem. . . . I know that I have insecurities about being a racialized individual and, you know, as a woman as well . . . like, it has impacted my self-esteem to the point where I'm not . . . able to ask for my needs as, as clearly as I would like to. For example, accessing healthcare services . . . I don't put my foot forward . . . I'm more of a passive person. . . . It all has contributed to the person that I've become . . . I do feel inferior, and I do feel like I'm, I'm viewed a certain way. . . . With my education, with my anxiety, like, it's so much harder. . . . I started university ten years ago, and I'm still doing my undergrad.*

Abi revealed how mental illness has impacted her life and made her dependent on her already overstretched mother and brother. The excerpt also reveals Abi's awareness of racism in healthcare and other services discriminating against racialized individuals.

Depression, fear, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

At a young age, Samantha had to take on the multiple responsibilities of caring for her mother, who is living

with schizophrenia and liver failure. She has dealt with CPS, OW, a major mental health organization in Ontario, and immigration lawyers, besides financially supporting household expenses in Toronto and sending a monthly allowance to her siblings in Pakistan. Until her immigration status was stabilized, she experienced intense fear of being sent back to her father or foster care. The impact of this stress, navigating various institutions, and caregiving has impacted Samantha, who has recently been diagnosed with depression, fear, and PTSD.

Lack of trust, social isolation, depression, and mental health diagnosis

Childhood experiences of abuse caused Sandiran to become distrustful of people. They experienced severe mental distress in their childhood and have experienced suicidal thoughts since childhood.

> *Constant, constant isolation. And, you know, I don't remember telling myself anything in particular, apart from don't trust these people, as in, don't trust everyone who essentially fails you. . . . It was more so how I constructed the world around me and how I understood it. I understood it as a place where people didn't give a shit. I understood it as a place where . . . no one was there to help; no one was there to support. . . . I understood it as a cold place . . . over the course of my life, over the first 17 years of my life . . . I experienced severe forms of mental distress. I was heavily, heavily, heavily depressed, suicidal as well. There essentially was no day over my 17 years, honestly like it's not even to over exaggerate, but never a day when I wouldn't think about jumping off the balcony, throwing myself in front of like a car or bus or the metro. And I also tried to take my own life a couple of times as well. And this was . . . as young, as eight, nine. . . . I responded in sort of internalizing a lot of that and wanting to self-destruct in many ways.*

Sandiran continued:

> *And then, I think, just over the course of my university. . . I was also going through like quite a bit of mental health challenges, internally. Tried to get help in different ways, but it's, it's, I think a lot of our mental health structures just don't understand the interplay of trauma, structural and social factors. . . . I visited [Sri Lanka] because I wanted to essentially go and listen to people's stories. . . . I wanted to know about my parents prior to them being my parents too. But what ended up happening was that it was a very stressful environment . . . and that really set me off. And I essentially like developed like very harmful thoughts that were pre-sort-of psychosis and like had some forms of delusional thinking as well. And, you know, it's, and then I reacted in ways where I was very aggressive, not physically, but more emotionally like with my mum. I was very impatient; I was yelling, you know, internalized a lot of the ways. . . . I saw my parents react to their mental health; I repeated that in my own circumstances, and . . . after coming back, I developed some worse situations of psychosis and ended up like almost taking my life as well. . . . As a person, I was disintegrating, and it was like, I could feel the devil within me . . . I could see myself change in the mirror; I could see, like, when I was walking through the world, it was like I had holes in me where things were passing through.*

Sandiran's narrative paints a vivid picture of the impact of experiencing FV and the incremental worsening

of the impact over time. Sandiran's construction of the world and isolation from others indicates the meaning they made from the lack of support their family received from extended family members, the ethnic community and the larger society. The excerpt also shows that their mental health challenges magnified and took a much more severe form without timely support. Sandiran's reflections on the lack of mental health services that address the impact of war trauma and structural and social barriers are significant if individuals and families like Sandiran's are to be supported.

Suicide attempts, nightmares, panic attacks, depression, and PTSD

Adriana described repeated suicide attempts and the panic attacks she suffered while living with her abusive father, and her ongoing battle with depression as an outcome of the trauma she experienced:

> *For me personally, as a result of this, I considered suicide multiple times. I felt like there was no escape, you know, even if at that time when I was 16 years old, it felt like even if I managed to run away from home, where would I go. . . . I had no one to trust, no one who could help me, you know, the law wasn't going to protect me in that case; they would return me to him [father]. And I felt very hopeless, I felt very helpless, and so I considered suicide. . . . I tried to burn myself on the radiator. I tried to swallow toothpaste to make myself sick to go to the hospital because going to the hospital was like a holiday to me. . . . I would have nightmares. . . . In my nightmares . . . my father would abuse me or my mother, my nights would be very restless, I would not be able to get enough sleep, and then second of all, the sleep quality wasn't that good either, even if I managed to get some. . . . In my nightmares, I'm always being chased by my family, I'm always being stabbed by my father. There were multiple occasions in my nightmares where my father stabbed all of my friends whom he believed that has helped me, and I saw all of my friends get killed because of me. . . . For a long time after I left and after that incident where they dragged me from this seventh floor to the first floor, every time I opened the door afterwards, I would pause for a second . . . I would take a deep breath. I would stop breathing actually until I open the door and make sure that no one is in there, then I would be able to take a deep breath. . . . Whenever I saw a car in the street that looks like my father's car I would, you know, stop for a second, you know, and think "Do I need to run, should I run?" . . . So I would say the most severe impact is definitely mentally. Even though I'm physically removed from that situation, however, the psychological damage is very hard to repair, especially when it's a sensitive person. I still experience nightmares. I do have panic attacks and mental breakdowns sometimes. I am currently waiting to have a psychological evaluation, and I am taking antidepressants, yep.*

This excerpt reveals how an individual's experience and perceptions affect the impact of FV on their physical and emotional/mental health. The excerpt also conveys the significant impact of FV on the participants regardless of when and for how long the FV lasted. Its impact persisted as they grew into adults, and in some cases, this is when the impact became more vigorous because they were more conscious of the reality of events. The findings also demonstrate the urgent need for trauma-informed mental health supports and redressal of structural and social barriers experienced by racialized immigrant families like Sandiran's.

Supports accessed for emotional and mental health

The interviews revealed that several participants accessed counselling services to address the continuing impact of FV. Chiairo, Sandiran, Abi, Samantha, and Jasmine accessed counselling services at their universities, and Maria and Sonia accessed private counselling services. While in high school, Maria went for counselling, and Sonia went for counselling after her father's arrest in the recent past. Jasmine was satisfied with the counselling she received. Abi and Chiairo are still going for counselling, and for Abi, counselling has helped re-establish her broken relationship with her mother. Chiairo is accessing various types of psychiatric treatment for her depression.

Despite her diagnosis of depression and PTSD, Samantha has not accessed any support, as she does not feel the need. Maria, Sonia, and Sandiran accessed counselling services but found them unhelpful and discontinued them. For Maria, counselling did not help her with her self-harming behaviour, and for Sonia, it did not offer anything beyond a cathartic release, which she felt she could do on her own. Sandiran found that counselling is designed on the cultural norms of the dominant western society and did not acknowledge war trauma and structural and social barriers experienced by racialized immigrants in Canada.

Impact on education

Several participants spoke about the impact FV had on their education. While some participants struggled to focus on their education, others used school as an escape and a coping mechanism.

A rocky, evolving journey towards success

Jasmine talked about her difficulty focusing on her education. She felt that she did not experience a normal childhood in her home:

> *When I was in university . . . I chose to distract myself with life, other things, fun things, parties, friends. Things that I probably should have focused on when I was younger. But when I was younger, I didn't really have a chance to do that, you know. I was sheltered; I wasn't allowed to go to parties, or sleepovers or hang out with my friends every weekend. I didn't have those normal childhood experiences. I was home a lot . . . school was the least of my worries. . . . My grades only got better once I left university and started the [*attending an assaulted women's support program*]. I had a better handle of myself and my mental health, and my parents were also communicating with me better.*

Jasmine's experiences reflect that of many racialized immigrant communities where parents want their children to focus on education. Sandiran referred to this as "model-minority pressure," which we discuss below.

In her interview, Chiario stated,

> *I still worry about her [mother] a lot . . . you know she's dating again. And I'm, I'm constantly worried . . . it's gonna happen again, and I think that that is distracting, and that does sometimes make school quite hard.*

Samantha's journey in education evolved over the years. As a student in Canada, she started from a low point

but excelled over the years when she realized that her school was the only source of stability and refuge. She narrated her journey thus:

> *I was a very bad student. You know my report cards, they are like Cs and Bs cuz I was out of school. You know I had very bad English surprisingly . . . I had to repeat kindergarten like one year because . . . they said that she's just so lagging, mentally, like let's put her through one more year . . . then I moved back to Canada. I could not directly talk to other people normally, right, because the kids that their worries were like video games, and I was like, you cannot connect with them. So I think academically I was challenged at that point because of the social environment. . . . And then, throughout until grade eight, I started getting really good grades, and in grade eight, I actually ended up being valedictorian, so it was like, the top academics, like everything right and from math and science specifically. And I was surprised. I got this like award for leadership, and like, I got to give a speech and stuff for my class, right? And you have to understand, like that same year, like I had been staying with family friends and trying not to get in foster care and stuff, right? So for me, like, it [school] provided a lot of stability. I liked it, I loved reading and stuff, so I think once that happened, academically, and so I thought I found a lot of refuge in school personally. I continued to do well in high school. I got a full scholarship to [name of the university in Ontario].*

Contrary to Samantha's description of the school as a source of stability and refuge, Maria talked about teachers who judged her and discouraged her from becoming a nurse. This caused her to lose her focus and motivation to study. It was not until Maria switched to psychology and found nonjudgmental professors that she began to excel in school. As she described, studying psychology allowed her to fall in love with herself and understand those around her more.

Unlike Samantha and Maria, Maya's performance in school was affected by her caregiving responsibilities toward her siblings, which curtailed her opportunities to focus on her studies and take up extracurricular activities. However, Maya realized the negative consequences of not doing well in school. On receiving advice from her grandmother, a nurse herself, to pursue nursing, she found a goal and direction to do well in school. She also found ways to engage in extracurricular activities and transition to becoming an academically strong student.

This theme highlights the factors contributing to participants' motivation to study and succeed academically. Even though their journey was difficult, they succeeded by using their capacities of critical thinking and reframing, openness and receptivity towards others' ideas, and creativity in developing conducive conditions for their success.

Goal-directed journey towards success

Sandiran spoke of their focus on academics amidst the challenges posed by FV:

> *I remember this, like, very clearly, I had a biology test right before the first crisis with my sister, and she had tried to hurt my mom, and I was terrified. I called the cops, you know, gotten her to the emergency. . . . I had spent the night with her at the emergency, and the next day I went in to write my bio test and . . . it was so seamless in a way just because it was such a constant in my life to have to do that, to have to deal with something so chaotic in my home life and then be able to go to school and then, it was all normal, it was okay. It was . . . ridiculous in some ways, but it, I think, it affected my school to a certain degree where I was able to have the language now, like I was able to use these lived experiences to enhance my learning . . . There was just a dissonance between academic life and life in reality.*

Sandiran elaborates further on the challenges of studying during the pandemic:

> *During the pandemic, that's when things came back again. So, with . . . my father being violent again, me being stuck at home, my mom not being able to go to work, my brother and my sister being stuck at home, everything's up again. And so it was, I had to write my thesis because it was coming to an end. . . . I was dealing with a lot of challenges with my supervisors, who didn't understand the realities. They were all like white middle to upper class also very just ignorant people I was working with. And so I wasn't able to talk to them about the realities that my family was facing like whether that be violence or illness . . . for the last couple of months of the pandemic, . . . it was very nerve-wracking because I lost my, my space, my space to do work in. So now I was back home, and I no longer had that ability to compartmentalize, so I*

> *wasn't able to really do any schoolwork. I was always on edge; I was so stressed, dealing with my father, who was becoming more violent, dealing with health conditions that were bubbling up, my mum, who I knew was more in danger, me, who was like deteriorating. It was just like layers of just challenges, and I wasn't able to essentially do any schoolwork, but I did have a desk at school . . . and so I would go in there and essentially run from security, trying to evade them. . . . When they left, I would go in. I would do my data analyses; I would write my thesis. Eventually, I got kicked out because . . . one of the professors found out, and he told me that . . . I couldn't stay in, even though I had told them that I was facing violence at home.*

Sandiran's story provides an insight into the "dissonance" between their two worlds, home and school. While the context of violence could have been extremely overwhelming for some, for Sandiran, as they described earlier, the context of violence was "normal." Sandiran used this term a second time in their interview—while describing the violence at home and again while talking about daily navigating the two worlds, indicating that the violence and dealing with its aftermath was a regular feature of their life. However, their narrative demonstrates their agency and survival skills in getting through school and performing exceedingly well.

Sandiran's experience also draws attention to navigating academics and home life during the pandemic. The excerpt highlights that the academic programs are generally not structured for students whose context and reality are shaped by innumerable personal struggles such as Sandiran's. Very few students such as Sandiran can survive in such a context and thrive by completing the program and successfully getting admission to a competitive medical program in another Ontario city.

Adriana also spoke about navigating the dissonance between her school and home life. She felt that she was living a double life, one at home and another at school, and these two lives were entirely different. She felt overprotected and controlled at home, but school allowed her to reinvent herself as a new person. For these reasons, she loved going to school.

Anita and Sonia also spoke of their success in school, and Anita, Sonia, and Sandiran were expected to perform well by their parents. According to these participants, this is a standard expectation for immigrant parents. Anita described it as "*invisible pressure,*" Sonia called it "*to upkeep their reputation by being a good kid and proving herself to others."* Sandiran spoke of fitting into the stereotype of being a "*model minority.*"

Mental health as an impediment to education

Abi struggles with schizophrenia, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Her mental health has significantly hindered her education as she has been working on her undergraduate degree for the last ten years. She regretfully said,

> *I'm pretty sure like, you know, part of my illness is that . . . I can't discern reality with my mind, sometimes my, I get some paranoid thoughts and stuff. And that's a huge limitation sometimes. But another thing is, like, with my education, with my anxiety, like, it's so much harder . . . for me, I started*

university ten years ago, and I'm still doing my undergrad. I took some time off. I went back. I wasn't sure what program to choose. Everything seems so impossible to do.

With mental health support, Abi is working to repair the broken relationships with family members, focusing on studies and looking for a job.

Overall, the findings in this theme reveal that most participants, except Abi, have done well in academics. While the journey for some was smooth and focused, it was rugged and challenging for others. It is significant to remember that, unlike other children, excelling in school was complicated as they had to navigate the stress from home and academics. The situation called upon their extraordinary agency, steel determination, focus, adaptability, and capacity to reframe a problem in their favour.

Impact on career

While the impact of FV on a career was not relevant for most participants, as they were still pursuing post-secondary education, for Sonia, it was. She talked with great emotion about her experience of FV in the recent past, which led to the arrest of her father, and its subsequent impact on her hospital internship:

Stuff like fell apart, for sure. I wasn't doing well. . . . It's like a big deal to like to have a hospital job, they're very difficult to get, I was very grateful . . . and that on top of like everything that was going on at home, it was too much, and I actually lost my residency, so they fired me. And because they said that I was too stressed out and it was too emotional. . . . So not only was I dealing with all of this stuff going on at home. I was now jobless, and I was feeling like I have no career left because how do you come back from losing that, and how do you explain that at future job interviews, and it wasn't my fault? So I was just really angry, and I didn't mean to be angry at my mom. But I was really angry at her for calling 911 and ruining my life. And I was really angry at my dad for even doing that in the first place. And I was just angry at God, I guess, for putting me in this household. So I didn't deal with it. I didn't deal with it at all, and I had to get a therapist because I was feeling increasingly like suicidal. I've never felt that way before. It was just a lot.

This excerpt reveals the significance Sonia attached to her job, which she thought was "untouchable." FV impacted an aspect of her life that was so significant for her.

Impact on financial situation

The interviews revealed that participants experienced different levels of financial challenges due to FV.

No financial stress

Five participants, Jasmine, Maya, Jay, Anita, and Sonia, felt that FV had not affected their financial situation. Jasmine talked about her financial dependency on her father and how she felt this was justified because of the trauma he had put his family through:

> *I think what's interesting for me, something that I've been more aware of now, is that, especially in university and once I left home, I feel like I was very dependent on my father to take care of me, extremely dependent. . . . I felt like he owes me for all those years of harm that he caused us—to me, my mom, my brother, and our family, making us feel like we're not worth it, like we're not good enough. I wanted to make him pay for almost growing up. So for me, me asking him for money, I never felt shame.*

Like Jasmine, Maya, Jay, and Anita also did not experience any financial stress. Maya was not in a financially difficult situation because she had the support of her extended family. Jay, too, had the support of both of his parents.

Although Sonia did not experience financial stress growing up because her parents always cared for her, the situation changed after her father got arrested. This was when Sonia had to share the financial responsibility of managing the household. Since Sonia found an alternate job, she was happy taking on this responsibility and did not struggle with paying any bills but said that she could not save money.

Experienced financial stress

Viktor, Chiairo, and Maria spoke about experiencing financial stress. Viktor never considered how not having a father at home impacted his family financially:

> *So, financially, obviously, it would because having that main income in the house was tough because my mom basically had to go to university or to get an actual job to provide for us; that was her motivation for going to university. My mom definitely did more than she should have, or she did more than what would have ever been asked of her. I never really thought of finance, how not having a father in the home affects it because, at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. It's better to have a home that doesn't have a problem and not as financially secure than one that is financially secure.*

Viktor's reflections reveal not only his awareness of the financial burden his mother carried but also his value system of placing greater importance on peace at home than on the financial security that the presence of his father would have provided. While Maria's mother provided for her while growing up by "*put[ting] herself out there,*" her father never contributed to their basic needs, which impacted her mental health. Much of the financial difficulty Chiairo faced was because her mother did not have a stable job, which impacted her family financially at different times. For these three participants, the financial stress of living on the income of a single parent, specifically their mother, was a common thread in their experiences.

Lived in severe poverty: Compounded trauma

Four participants, Samantha, Sandiran, Abi, and Adriana, spoke about extreme poverty. They experienced violence both inside and outside the home. Samantha talked about the intense poverty she and her mother faced after coming to Canada:

> *The financial, that was like very unstable for us all the way through right especially until I was in grade eight where my mother pushed ODSP . . . when I was younger, [the situation] was severely bad to the point where, you know, like my mother, tried to ask people for help for money and things like that because you know, the Ontario Works people paid the rent. And then we would wait it out until the 20th, where the child benefit will come in. Every month it was just trying to like hang on to like literally $50 or something to have groceries or something right, so it was very painful, and I think that continued. . . . We got the subsidized housing. That was one turning point. But even then . . . I don't understand exactly like, so it was subsidized to some degree but not fully. So, you know, even then, like there were severe shortages. . . . So, like I would always know, like okay if I need something, you cannot ask for it. . . . I know once it was this $700 cell phone bill . . . she was not equipped to deal with that. . . . It went to our credit rating, and then, like, it was very difficult going forward from that. . . . As soon as I turned 16, I started working.*

Like Samantha, Sandiran and Abi also experienced intense poverty. Their poverty was further complicated by the violence they witnessed in the public housing building where they lived. Sandiran described the living conditions and the fear associated with that:

> *So we grew up in a neighbourhood that had quite a bit of gang violence, and then in our building, it was a public housing building . . . I was terrified all the time that when I was sleeping in the living room that, I was already on edge because of just like the family situation, but then added to that there was the dynamic of my neighbours . . . and then like there were days when there were fights in the middle of the night, you would start hearing pounding on our front door, and every time I thought someone was gonna break in and kill us. . . . I just want to go back to the financial well-being part because I think so, because my, my father had schizophrenia, and he wasn't able to work, and he made my mom go to work. . . . So we were on welfare, and then eventually, ten years later, once he was forced into the psychiatric institution, we got him, or he ended up being on psychosocial disability and received a bit more money [through ODSP]. But, so over the course of my life, my mom had to go to work. And so, we always knew that we were in a very financially precarious situation. . . . As soon as my brother could, he started working, and then as soon as I could, I started working and then during my master's, I was finally able to like financially support my family to some respect.*

Adriana's situation was slightly different from others. When living with her father, she did not experience financial stress, but after moving out and living on her own, she experienced severe financial stress:

> *Very unstable employment. My income was not stable at all. Sometimes, you know, I would have income, sometimes I would not have income, and that's when I would rely on my friends. . . . It was very stressful; however, I was very lucky that, you know, I had friends who were supportive and would say you know if you don't have money to go eat, then you can come to our house to eat, and they would help me out. . . . I tried to diversify my sources of income I was teaching. I was teaching English to younger Chinese students. I was helping with homework. I was modelling. I was translating; I was working as a personal assistant. I was working in a bakery. I did a lot of things . . . to keep it going. . . . I was living in a small attic that I was able to rent at the time and, you know, I was working, I was going to school, I was working during the weekends, teaching English, I was teaching English to children, helping them with their homework, that sort of thing, that's how I was able to survive at the time.*

Impact on social relationships

While a handful of the participants felt that they generally had good social relations and that the impact of FV on this aspect of their lives was not as much, for others, FV had a negative impact due to mental illnesses, overwhelming responsibilities, and pressure to keep the violence a secret.

According to Viktor, witnessing violence between his parents has made him sensitive to other's emotions:

> *It's also sort of taught me to be more, I guess, detail-oriented in this regard when it comes to any kind of interpersonal relationships, whether it's friends or family, looking in signs not just for others but for myself*

as well, because I feel like I do try to make an effort, whatever, because arguments are only natural, in any kind of relationship, family or friends or relationship.

Like Viktor, Maya also felt that she was more aware of other people because of her experience of FV. This allowed her to identify "*red flags*" and be strategic about those she let into her life. Several other participants, Jay, Anita, Jasmine, Maria, and Adriana, felt that they generally had good social relations, and this aspect of their life was not seriously impacted due to FV. Adriana had a lot of supportive friends who knew about her situation. Her friends checked in on her, and many provided her a place to stay when she needed to escape her abusive home. She loved going out with her friends and being a typical teenager.

There were various reasons why other participants could not develop strong social relationships. These ranged from mental illness to family responsibilities to maintaining secrecy related to the FV.

Mental illness

Abi's challenges with her mental illness caused social anxiety, making it difficult for her to build and maintain social relations:

In terms of my social situation, I don't have many friends. I know growing up, I never got close to people. But then at the same time, like now, especially . . . for the past ten years, at least, like I had, I kind of had a breakdown . . . and since then, I haven't made any new friends. . . . Even now, I'm socially . . . I guess I have a certain degree of social anxiety as well.

This excerpt reveals how Abi's mental illness impacted her social relationships and created anxiety while meeting others. Abi's situation also raises the urgency of supporting youth severely impacted by FV in childhood.

Family responsibilities

Samantha shouldered much responsibility as a child. Although she had a few friends, she felt that her friendship was "superficial" because it was hard for her to connect with people: *"it's hard for me to connect with people because they don't understand these problems. Their problems are very different."* She felt she also lacked social skills and did not know how to interact with people: *" Like I just did not know how to talk to people or anything for a very long time ... I had a sick parent but what's worse is that I had no family in Canada, right so no cousins, nobody. Like for every birthday or every celebration, there was nobody at home ... I was a very shy person ...*

This excerpt demonstrates that children often lose the critical milestone of childhood when they have to shoulder responsibilities at a young age. While their contribution benefits others and their family, it tends to impact them negatively as individuals. The loneliness that Samantha experienced highlights the significance of

providing support and a safe space for children to talk to someone who can understand their situation and be a source of strength and security.

Needed to maintain secrecy

Chiairo and Sandiran both felt pressured to keep the violence in their family a secret. They could not trust others, confide in others, and build relationships like others could. Chiairo said:

> *[The situation at home] affected my relationships with others. . . . I think that also like affected friendships. For me, there was always like a certain amount of secrecy. I felt some fault that I didn't; I didn't tell many of my friends that my mom was, was married after my father died. Um, and so that was a lot of my childhood and adolescence that I just completely did my best to hide that he existed. And so that involved, you know, not having people over, not really discussing a lot of my personal life with people.*

Like Chiairo, Sandiran kept the violence secret, even from their closest friends, maintaining a "*stern barrier*" between themselves and everyone else. These excerpts highlight the fear racialized immigrant families experience in revealing FV. As discussed earlier, secrecy is maintained to keep CPS away. In other words, the negative reputation of CPS has a far-reaching negative effect on other aspects of these children's lives.

Impact on sibling relationships

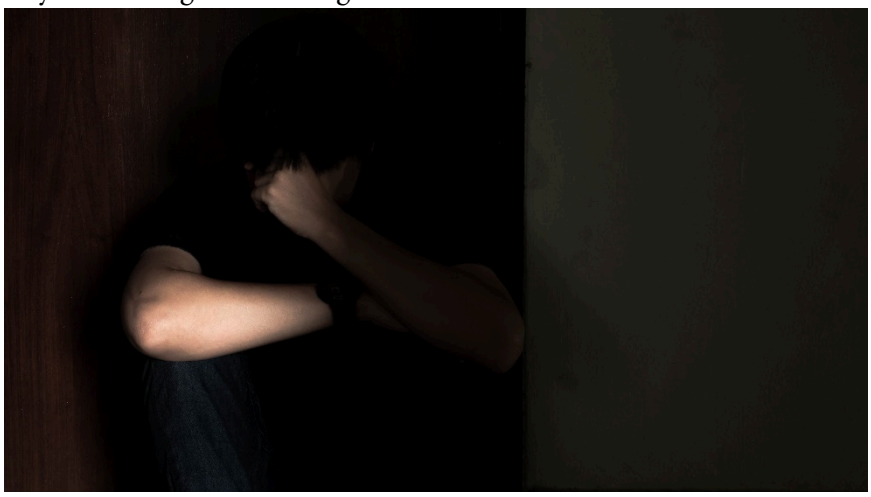
FV impacted the participants' relationships with their siblings in various ways. In some families, the violence created a division between siblings, and in others, the shared traumatic experience led to stronger bonds among siblings.

Divisive influence of trauma on sibling relationships

Abi, Sandiran, Samantha, Maria, and Jay discussed FV creating a divide between them and their siblings. Abi talked about the dynamics between her, her sibling, Sandiran, and their brother, who was very violent towards Abi for several years:

> *My siblings, and I, we witnessed my parents' violence, and then I think . . . we became violent as well. When I was like 14, maybe like 13 to 16, or something like when my brother, like, would get angry for a lot of things and . . . he would just take it out on me. . . . My mom didn't have time to deal with . . . the situation because she was busy with everything that she had to deal with. . . . So I just had to continue experiencing that for a number of years. And it just made me like . . . very defensive . . . around that time from like 14 to maybe 20, where I kind of blocked out all my emotions. . . . It backfired and had like, a number of years . . . we didn't talk at all. It was like we were strangers. And then now it's like, we talk here and there . . . it's not that we're strangers now it's more like we're kind of like, acquaintances. . . . [With] my sister growing up, like . . . I was violent with her sometimes, but it wasn't like a repeated thing. . . . I was always closer to my sister anyway. Like, when we were younger, we would play together . . . we used to spend summers together.*

Abi's sibling Sandiran described how, as the family's first and only male child, their brother felt the brunt of the FV and the caretaking responsibilities at home. Abi and Sandiran's brother internalized and mirrored many of his parents' ways of relating and reacting.



Sonia felt her relationship with her brother was on a "*surface level*." Despite sharing a traumatic experience, they continue their life without discussing it.

> *Me and my brother [grew] up quite physical with each other like always like fighting. . . . But other than that, no, and we've grown out of that too. . . [Currently] I feel like he doesn't really talk to me about personal things, but we're . . . cordial. Like I talk to him when I go home to visit, and he messages me when he needs something or needs help with something . . . like it's very like, light and airy it's all very surface level with him; it's not deep. Like we don't really talk about what happened [father got charged and was*

taken away by police], you know, even if he's going through things and I asked him about, he won't really get deeper with me, not really with anybody. He just kind of like he just personally just holds it in.

Sonia's relationship with her brother reflects a change in relationship from when they were children. Abi and Sandiran have mended their relationship as adults, and in Sonia's case, her relationship with her brother deteriorated after the serious FV incident.

Maria mentioned that it was difficult for her to see eye to eye with her stepsisters, who were much older than her. Her experience made her angry with a need to control relationships.

Jay stated that although his relationship with his siblings was generally good, things changed after the FV incident that resulted in him calling the police. The siblings disapproved of Jay calling 911. Hence, it created a divide between them.

Samantha also discussed the divisive influence of FV on herself and her siblings. Samantha and her mother were physically separated from the rest of Samantha's siblings after they escaped from Pakistan. The father prevented any relationship building between the twin sisters and Samantha till they matured and continues to prevent any communication between Samantha and her brother. The coercive control of the father has affected their relationship. Samantha said:

When I was there [Pakistan], of course, I was eight to 10. They were five to seven [years old] during that period. And we were pretty close friends. We got along very well. . . . But . . . you know like leaving them was very difficult because . . . I still remember . . . when we left, we had to go to the shelter . . . and she [mother] had to tell them that we're just going to a store, but you know like they were just screaming, crying. So, I remember, like, difficult to think of it, but after that, we got cut off from them. He [father] cut off contact for many, many years between me and my siblings . . . and from that time [time] for almost 11 years, there was no contact at all. . . . We connected when they [two sisters] turned 18, and this is in 2017, you know, and very completely different people. . . . I've only spoken with them through social media . . . but I'm still not allowed to talk to my youngest brother.

Samantha continued,

Yeah, so about four years now, and I send like monthly, like, maybe it varies, how much I can do, but I usually try between $200 to $300 every month. . . . I've just continued doing that because . . . where are they going to get that and they never really had like a mother to turn to . . . so I thought, you know just alleviate a little bit of the suffering that they have. And you know that relationship with them now it's for me it's a very difficult one. From their end, you know they have endured a lot . . . so that's why, even when they're disrespectful, or they're angry, or rude, I've always been as calm and kind as I can throughout it and just not respond to the disrespectful part. But it's like, I don't think there's any way it can get better. I think it will just stay where it is, unfortunately.

The excerpt reveals Samantha's strategic efforts to overcome her father's control over her sibling relationship. These efforts reveal Samantha's love, unconditional acceptance of their behaviour and concern for providing a secure future for her siblings (as mentioned in the interview), a role often adopted by the eldest child in family-

centric cultures. Samantha took the bold step of sponsoring them, and at the time of the interview, Samantha's application was approved.

The analysis of this theme has also revealed how their siblings' perceptions of and responses to trauma have impacted their relationships. In some cases, based on their realizations of its negative impact on their relationships, siblings have worked to restore their relationships. However, the narratives demonstrate the need for professional intervention and support for siblings to recover and heal.

Sibling relationships when a sibling reflects a parent's personality

Several of the participants shared that seeing their parents' personalities reflected in their siblings impacted their relationship with them. Maya talked about the difference in her relationship with her brother and sister based on their personalities:

> *I'm okay with my sister. Me and my sister growing up never really got along because we had very differing personalities. I think my sister adopted more of my mom's personality of being very direct, not in the same way as I am. Still, like she's kind of more, I think, less emotional, emotionless, and less empathetic about doing certain things. And then my brother, he's the most emotional one out of all of us, so I get along with my brother the most obviously. . . . I'm much closer to my brother than my sister.*

Although Jasmine and her brother have a good relationship, she feels like he is a lot like their father. Jasmine describes him as being "*too serious and stubborn*." Children who experience FV seem to notice qualities in their parents that they dislike and become increasingly conscious of these qualities in their siblings.

Varying bonds of attachment with siblings

Trauma seems to bring or separate siblings. Anita and Adriana discussed their different bonds with their siblings based on closeness in age and their experiences of facing FV together. Anita, the middle child among her siblings, is very close with her elder sister as they are close in age and grew up together watching their parents arguing. However, she is not close with her younger sister, who is 11 years younger than her and has not gone through the FV trauma Anita and her elder sister experienced. Anita also finds it difficult to accept that her parents hold different standards in raising her younger sister from how they raised Anita and her elder sister.

Similarly, Maya also talked about her closeness with her sibling brother based on her closeness of age to him than to her sister, who is the third sibling.

Adriana, who has several siblings, also talked about the difference in her relationship with them:

> *The relationship would differ, first of all, according to the age. It would differ; for example, I am the eldest, and there's another boy who is two years younger than me. Then there was the third girl, she is about five years younger than me, and then there is number four, number four is in fifth grade, primary school*

at the moment and number five, she just finished kindergarten, so she's going to go into primary school. Number six is a boy who is going to be turning four this year. . . . Because of how you know when you pressure a child, the more you pressure a child, the more pressure the child will feel, and in that case, you know, my siblings, we're all . . . at least me and the one who is two years younger than me and the one who's five years younger than me, the three of us are all dysfunctional, in one way or another. All [of us] have our . . . unique problems. . . . I still communicate with my siblings, you know, my younger brother and my younger sister [the two siblings immediately after her]; they have their separate phones, so I'm able to connect with them. Occasionally, every now and then, we would message just to check up on them, and I would be able to connect with my younger siblings [the two youngest siblings] through them.

The excerpt reveals that a small age gap, growing up together in the same context of FV, plays a significant role in their bonding as siblings. Even though Anita and Adriana do not live with the sibling/s they get along with, they maintain the relationship with them.

Taking on the role of a parent for siblings

Viktor felt he needed to be a father figure and care for his siblings. Viktor saw how many responsibilities his mother juggled and felt obligated to help her:

My mom says that my sister and my brother . . . look up to me or something along those lines. . . . I feel like because my mom's relationship with my siblings isn't good . . . I need to help my siblings out, to be a father to them. . . . Even if it's something as simple as just taking my sister to work, that makes my mom's life easier, right? Like I do these things more because . . . I feel like I have an obligation to just make it easier for her as much as I can and help her out as much I can because she feels like I'm the only one that can really reach out to my siblings. That there's some kind of a disconnect between parent and child, and that I can really feel that I am sort of the connection between my siblings and my mom.

During his interview, Viktor said he would not assume this role if the situation differed. However, he felt that he had to do this for his mother. Samantha played a similar role with her siblings.

Several factors impacting siblings' relationships are evident in this theme. Based on varied factors we have seen that influenced sibling relationships among participants, it can be said that each family's context could be unique and needs to be considered before working with siblings. However, as Sandiran suggested (elsewhere), trauma-informed counselling focusing on healing should be offered to all family members to recover from the impact of FV, as FV impacts all family members.

Impact on relationship with parents

During the interviews, we asked participants to speak about their relationships with their parents and how their experience of FV impacted their relationship with them. While some participants had good relationships with their parents, others had unconventional relationships, and a few resented their parents. Some participants also spoke about their past relationships with their parents, while others discussed their current relationships.

Good relationship with both parents

Sandiran, Sonia, Jasmine, and Anita described good relationships with their parents. Sandiran talked about their relationship with their father and how they felt much empathy for their father despite the abuse:

> *I think, even from a younger age, because my dad was someone who was not afraid to show love to me, I developed a lot of empathy for the experiences that he was going through. . . . So I think, even at a young age . . . I was very much able to maintain a very balanced relationship where I, I knew it was unacceptable for him to treat my mother the way that he was treating her, but I was still able to love him as a person . . . and it became more challenging when I had to be the person to establish the boundaries when my brother left that role. . . . These days . . . it's a lot more challenging to maintain a relationship with him, especially with the alcohol stuff, but he still . . . expresses his love for me and tries to get me to come back home. . . . When I reflect on the way he treated my mother . . . I have a lot of anger, but it's not anger towards him; it's anger towards the situation. So I think that has allowed me to navigate my relationship with my father.*

Sandiran also described their relationship with their mother:

> *Then with my mother . . . She is the strongest person I have met to date. And so for her like just an incredible . . . sense of admiration . . . what a strong like an incredibly resilient woman with, with so many layers to her and I think like, I can write poems about my mom for days. . . . From the get-go was very strict, but also just very loving in many different ways and . . . she taught me so much. . . . It's been a privilege to be able to defend her and to protect her. . . . When I was 17, when I, like, got out of the depression and when I stopped wanting to take my own life . . . I realized that holy shit, like this woman, is the only person*

who was fighting for me throughout this whole time. And I think just being able to now, in various senses like financially, now in my role as a physician . . . I feel like physically being able to protect her, but also just protect her in a way where I'm like, Mom, what you went through . . . it wasn't in vain like it paid off . . . in ways you'll never know.

Sandiran's narrative reflects unconditional love for both parents despite their bitter experience of FV that is still with them. As mentioned elsewhere, they attribute FV to their father's internalized war trauma, for which they received no trauma-informed mental health support. This analysis seems to have facilitated Sandiran's ability to separate the behaviour from the person. On the other hand, Sandiran's immense admiration and gratitude for their mother comes from a keen awareness of her strength in surviving the violence, protecting, guiding, and providing for her children. Her mother was Sandiran's source of inspiration for surviving trauma and excelling in academics.

Like Sandiran, Sonia has a good relationship with her parents. She takes care of their needs:

I do everything for my parents. . . . I am always taking care of my parents. . . . I'm also the same support for my dad . . . if there is anything he needs, that goes through me. I'm supporting my mom; obviously, what happened to her wasn't right. But I also understood my dad's point of view of what happened.

Sonia has maintained a relationship with her father even after he moved out following his arrest. Sonia felt indebted to her dad because despite living apart, he still paid her bills and student loans and supported her in every way he could.

Jasmine and Anita also have a good relationship with their parents. Despite the tension Anita experiences, she still loves her parents for giving them a promising future. Jasmine's relationship with her father is good because she worked towards transforming him. A good relationship is something that Jasmine and her brother worked for and not something that came naturally. Jasmine had to build her relationship with her father, and her efforts were successful because her father also loved and cared for them. He worked to mend their relationship because he did not want to lose his children. Anita's and Jasmine's experiences reveal that parents' desire and efforts to be a part of their children's lives are essential in shaping their relationship with their children. Efforts to maintain a good relationship must happen from both sides, the children and the parents.

Unconventional relationship with mother

Because of the FV that they had witnessed between their parents, Chiairo's and Viktor's relationships with their mothers are a little non-traditional. "Non-traditional," or unconventional, in this context, means that the relationship resembles an adult-to-adult relationship rather than a child-parent relationship.

Chiairo felt that her non-traditional relationship with her mother was primarily due to her stepfather's behaviour towards her mother:

It was pretty hard . . . he [stepfather] was really rude and petty to my older sister. So he had some grudge against her. . . . I don't know that I would call it abuse. Mostly, he just didn't like her. Would often instigate a bunch of nonsense fights with her. And that was very stressful for me, and that was something

> *that I tried raising with my mother. . . . I think that for a lot of our childhood and adolescence, too, we would want to do stuff with our mom so, but not with him. But he, he sort of was everywhere she was. And so I think . . . we avoided it like suggesting doing things because we didn't want to do it with everybody. And I think that time sort of degraded our relationship too. . . . [With my mother], I think that . . . we don't have, like, what a lot of people would say as a traditional relationship. I love her, and I respect her so much. I think that for some time, there was some resentment, and I felt like I had to assume a lot of the parenting relationship . . . especially . . . as she started dating again . . . and didn't want to engage with my concerns. I think that I had a really hard time with that.*

Chiairo's reflections reveal her mixed feelings of disgust towards the stepfather, regret for missing good family time, and a deep concern and responsibility for her mother. Like Chiairo, Viktor had a similar unconventional relationship with his mother. Earlier, we shared an excerpt in which Viktor talked about caring for his siblings to help his mother. Neither Chiairo nor Viktor had a relationship with their mother in which they could be a child. Instead, they both had to take on adult roles at a young age,

Relationship with parents: A work in progress

Abi, Maria, and Samantha described their relationship with their parent as a work in progress. They continue to face ongoing struggles in their relationship with their parent and are currently working at mending these relationships. Abi spoke about the misunderstandings between her and her mother when she was growing up that tainted their relationship and how she is slowly restoring this relationship:

> *Actually, growing up, I had a really bad relationship with my mother. . . . I am also the middle child, so I thought . . . she didn't love me. . . . I was also the child between the three of us to kind of talk to my mom a little bit more and . . . always asked for . . . trouble . . . she kind of took out her anger on to me. But I think I just I didn't see what I was doing wrong. I just thought that I was being targeted, and she . . . ill-treated me. But then, like, over the past ten years, I think, since my diagnosis and since I started dealing with things I've had, like, I have improved [my] relationship with my mom.*

The excerpts reveal that children have different relationships with their parents based on their perception of that relationship and their position (eldest child, middle child, youngest child) in the hierarchy of children. Today Abi critically looks back at the reasons for her stormy relationship with her mother and is trying to improve it.

Maria shared similar emotions about her relationship with her father. In her interview, Maria said she does not like what her father did but still loves him. She also said, "*I was perfectly fine with them [parents] not being together because I did not like to see . . . him hitting her.*" Maria's father suffered a heart attack, and now he feels farther away from her than ever (because of COVID-19), creating a fear of losing her father. Maria is currently working towards mending their relationship.

Samantha talked about her relationship with her father, which was based on fear when she lived with him in

Pakistan. Still, her concern for the well-being of her younger siblings, who currently live with him in Pakistan, motivated her to work towards restoring that relationship:

> *There was always like a severe fear of my father growing up. . . . But the thing is, like, over the years, like I . . . figured it was like if I build a good relationship with him that he'd be more likely to, like, listen to me. And so over the years since 2015 or so, I've been continuously trying to like talk to him and be kind of bite my tongue and just cooperate with him and build a good rapport with him. And ultimately, I sold him [on] the idea that you're getting elderly, and if something happens to you, these three kids will not have anyone. And so I've kind of like got into his head, and he ultimately he was like okay . . . And so we did file the case in 2019 winter . . . actually, it is kind of a little strange, but literally yesterday morning, I found out that the paper was approved after a year and a half.*

Samantha's relationship with her father was based on fear. Today, she has earned her father's trust and acquired permission to sponsor her three younger siblings to come to Canada and live with her and her mother. Her experience reveals how frequently children who grow up fearing their parents develop strategies to navigate their parent's moods. They continue to use these strategies to their advantage as they get older.

Resentment towards parent(s)

Maya, Adriana, and Jay carry feelings of resentment toward their abusive parent/s. Maya talked about how growing up, her mother took the frustration of her abuse out on Maya and her siblings. This experience continues to influence her current relationship with her mother:

> *Even now, I'm not talking to her at all. Like, I don't talk to her unless she calls me . . . it's not like I actively try to have a relationship with her because she's very meddling, she'll meddle in your life, and she did that a lot with me . . . yeah definitely it's not good with my mom.*

Growing up, Maya constantly advised her mother not to get back together with her dad, but her voice went unheard. The cycle of abuse continued when her mother returned to her husband, which further triggered the mother's abuse of Maya and her siblings. Maya felt they were in that situation because of her mother, and she

still carries this resentment. Maya also resents and is bitter towards her father for what he put them through. However, she feels it is better to interact with him than ignore him because he is getting older and not keeping well.

Jay also revealed that he still carries some resentment towards his father. Since witnessing his father abuse his mother, Jay has kept a mental tally of his father's good and bad behaviour. This shows that experiencing abuse can taint children's image of their parents, leading them to over-analyze their parent's actions and behaviour as they grow older.

The experiences of abuse and the hardships Adriana has experienced are still fresh in her mind. Even after her forced immigration to Canada, the tension continues between them.

As findings portray, FV significantly impacts the relationships between children and parents. All participants have explicitly denounced their parent's abusive behaviour. However, Sandiran, Abi and Sonia see a connection between FV with systemic factors such as a lack of trauma-informed mental health service or culturally appropriate law enforcement service for racialized immigrant women. In their opinion, these factors are foundational contributors to the FV in their families and need redressal for addressing FV in racialized immigrant families.

Impact on community connections

In the interviews, we explored the impact of FV on participants' relationships with their communities. Sonia, Jasmine, Samantha, Chiairo, and Sandiran felt that FV did impact their relationships with their community members. Whereas in the case of other participants, their relationships were not affected. We present below the voices of participants who expressed that their relationships were affected.

Well-connected to the community

Sonia made a conscious effort to continue to be involved in her religious community. After the serious abuse leading to her father's arrest, Sonia found comfort in volunteering and getting involved with ethnic and religious community institutions. As she got older, she felt more connected to her ethnic roots. Involvement in their communities and the sense of connectedness this brings was something that Sonia sought out and pursued.

Could not build community connections

Jasmine and Samantha felt that because of their parents, they could not build strong connections with their communities. Jasmine talked about her lack of contact with her ethnic community because her father discouraged it. She often felt excluded but could not express it to her father:

> *Growing up, I will say that my father discouraged connecting with the Bangladeshi community. Especially when we moved to Canada, he was very against it. So we didn't really have many Bangladeshi friends or Bangladeshi community connections, and I do feel like that affected my connection with my community now because I don't really have any Bangladeshi friends. It makes me sad when I see other people and, like, they'll have [ethnic] friends, and I'm like, what's wrong with me? And you know, I've been through the instances of Bangladeshi people calling me a coconut because they think I'm whitewashed and not cultural enough because I'm not as into the culture. It's not because I don't love our culture. I love it; I'm just not as well versed. . . . But to me, I do feel like that keeps me from connecting with other people in my community because I do feel judged by them.*

Jasmine felt excluded and judged by her ethnic community. Jasmine's father's control over whom she could interact with resulted in her isolation from her community. On the other hand, Samantha could not connect with her community because her mother's mental illness, physical condition, and hospitalization did not leave her with options to maintain a community connection. As discussed earlier, Samantha also did not have the privilege of pursuing community connections because of the need to maintain the secrecy of her family situation and keep CPS away.

"Ostracized by the community"

Chiairo, Sandiran, and Abi talked about how they felt ostracized by their communities. Chiairo talked about how her stepfather's nature stopped community members from connecting with her family:

> *I think a lot of people didn't like him and just stopped inviting us . . . stopped interacting with the family. I think part of that too was . . . that he didn't want to go somewhere and didn't like my mom going places without him, and so I think that really destroyed a lot of social and community, family relationships.*

Chiairo's excerpt reveals the controlling nature of her stepfather that led to the community breaking ties with the family. Additionally, being from a different cultural background, his connection to his wife's community was fragile; he disliked that community. Unfortunately, all these factors led to the family's loss of connection with their ethnic community.

Sandiran also talked about how their community ostracized their family due to their father's mental health and poverty. They said:

> *I have a lot of strife with the rest of the community just because we grew up very actively being ostracized by the rest of the community because people . . . didn't know exactly what like father had, but they knew that there was some sort of a mental health issue, and they knew we were poor . . . they didn't want to associate themselves with us, everyone from distant relatives to friends to my dad's own younger brother and his family. . . . Essentially a background where community members tend to want to assimilate . . . because we're so fearful of what the consequences are in the way that I saw it take place within me and my own family. . . . Always focus on your studies, don't worry about what's going on outside. Keep doing what you're supposed to do . . . and sort of hold your head down, type of thing . . . don't get together with groups of people that have been deemed as dangerous or not part of this model-minority . . . but also from the outside, people don't expect us to speak up in group settings, we're often expected to not have issues, to not . . . cause conflict, to not raise our voice, to not take up space. So, you know that space thing, mentally and physically, we are in terms of not just model-minority women but the model-minority community.*

Sandiran said their community members wanted the children to focus on academic success and material advancement. Hence, they did not associate with those families that did not meet those standards. According to them,

> *I have so much bitterness, and I know it's not, it's not the best, but I, it's a form of protection, and I hold that bitterness. I hold it in a way where I'm now claiming my own agency that even though you put us in the situation you ostracized us, our families still remain resilient. And so it's a sense of pride for me to not want to take their shit. . . . I don't like a lot of the people, a lot of the youth in the community just because a lot of them grew up with privileges that made . . . them . . . not necessarily attuned to the realities that marginalized people in the community face, so I'm very apprehensive about interacting with them. . . . I think, for my family . . . I don't . . . engage in any other like [religious] interactions or any functions. I keep to myself, and . . . don't want to form any relationship. But then here I'm like . . .I'm really keen on*

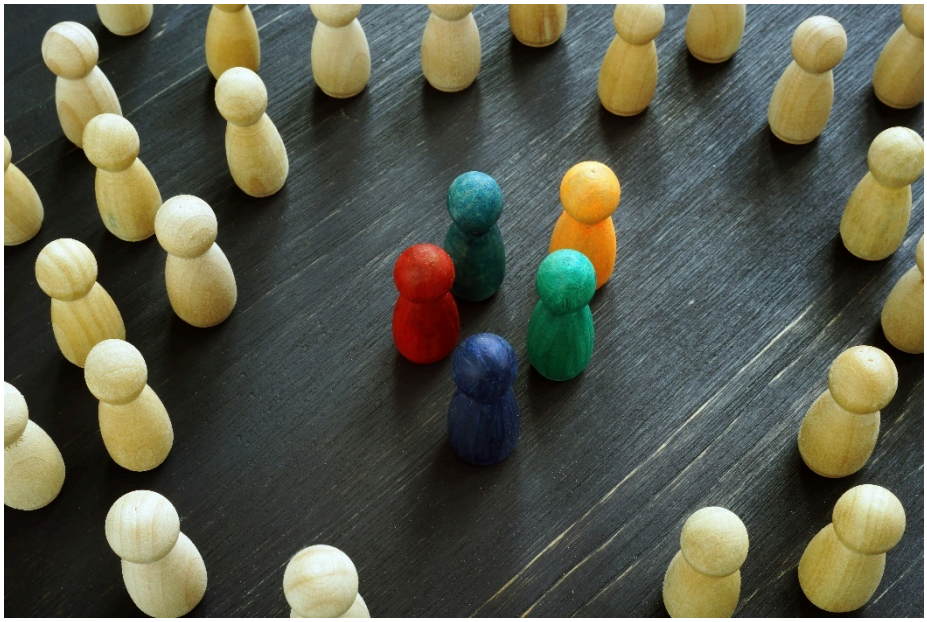
> *getting to know the community better. That being said, I did a project . . . on environmental conceptions and concerns within the community, where I actually reached out to community members . . . walked up to men and asked them . . . if they could provide their insights on a survey. I had a conversation with elderly women, asking them about stories about how they interacted with the land back home . . . when it comes to the informal sphere, I will keep an arm's length distance. In professional spheres, I will engage.*

Sandiran's discussion reveals how the pressure of fitting into the image of a model minority community often deters its members from extending their support to fellow community members who might be vulnerable. Such experiences of rejection by one's community can further aggravate their loneliness and helplessness without state support. However, in the case of Sandiran, their awareness of the model minority pressure got them to move beyond their subjective experience and find ways to rekindle that connection with community members professionally.

fAt the time of the interview the sponsorship was in progress

SECTION 7: SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE AGGRAVATING THE STRESS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

Systemic discrimination can be experienced as violence. We see it in its many forms in society when a dominant group or class perpetuates the marginalization of other populations through forms of social exclusion (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017) such as colonialism, racism, anti-Black racism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, ageism, and ableism (Perez & Salter, 2019). Systemic discrimination can take the form of aggression, such as overt discrimination, or subtler forms, such as exclusion from career opportunities through "de-skilling," or non-recognition, of qualifications and work experience from the country of origin (Guo, 2015; Thobani, 2000, 2007). In this section, we look at how the data explicates this type of experience, examining how support-seeking and accessing service provision were negatively influenced by systemic factors.



Models of Service Delivery that Disregard Racialized Immigrants' Realities

Sandiran discussed how gaps in community services and healthcare failed their family but also pointed to how culturally inclusive programming can profoundly impact the treatment experience.

> *Our healthcare and social structures, and our community structures have failed us profoundly. . . . What my father was going through . . . so much pain . . . because our healthcare system had failed him, our community had failed him. . . . [He also] harmed the relationships that he had. Schizophrenia [is] a psycho-social disability. It's one that's so relational. . . . [This is why] I was very adamant on getting him into [a] transcultural care [program] in Montreal.*

Sandiran also contacted a mental health service provider for assistance with the trauma created by FV and the stress of their father's and sister's mental health. The service provider did not provide culturally appropriate, trauma-informed service. However, when their family got into a program that had a transcultural focus, they saw positive changes on a relational level.

> *I fought at the emergency to get him in, and to get our family into family therapy. . . . We essentially go in as a family . . . and we speak to a transcultural psychiatrist, and there are people on the team who are professors, social workers, all of whom take a transcultural [psychiatric] approach to understanding the dynamics in our family. We bring in situations of domestic violence, especially the most recent thing that happened. . . . There's a lot that needs to be changed about that program, but essentially that could be a model where we're supporting the well-being of the family as a unit.*

As the policing and justice systems respond to reports of FV, their approach does not always include a recognition of the impact of the violence on all family members. In Sonia's family, the police arresting and charging her father had a negative effect on all family members:

> *It was the arrest that sparked all this. If he didn't get arrested . . . and my mom never made a police statement [it would have been better]. [My mom] just wanted the situation to de-escalate, and she was begging and pleading with the police officers [to not] take him away. . . . Maybe if they were brown [it] would have de-escalated because [when you have] people that are similar to you, who are your equal [it is different] but . . . if you have two white men, who are coming in, protecting the person that you just fought with obviously you're gonna have your defences up.*

Sonia's excerpt highlights several issues. First, it speaks to the possibility that the situation would have been de-escalated if police officers were South Asian and spoke their language. Second, the resulting arrest of her father and charges laid against him had devastating implications for the family, raising questions about the arrest policy for FV cases. Total disregard for Sonia's mother's request (who could not speak English) and enforcement of the stipulated protocol demonstrates the colourblind and racist law enforcement approach.

Fear and Distrust of Social Institutions

Some participants shared that they feared or did not trust educational and social institutions to respond to a disclosure of abuse in a way that was helpful to the family. Sandiran described how their family was concerned about accessing support when the children were younger because of the possible involvement of CPS, resulting in the separation of family members:

> *I think over the course of our childhood, at least my mum was very adamant on teaching my brother and my sister and I too . . . not utter a word about what was happening at home to anyone. And I'm, you know, the more I grow up, the more I'm so thankful that she did that because I think we would have ended up in foster care.*

Sandiran's assessment hints at the history of CPS separating racialized children from their parents and the gratitude that their mother gave instructions and ensured that it did not happen to them.

Samantha's family became involved with CPS because her mother was a sole parent and lived with physical and mental health issues and trauma. Samantha described how as a 12-year-old, she had to strategically navigate her interaction with CPS when her mother was hospitalized. Child welfare policies of having a family member as Samantha's primary caregiver conflicted with the realities of how Samantha's uncle and trusted family friends collectively provided care so that Samantha could live with as little disruption to her life as possible.

Living and Growing Up in Poverty

Sandiran shared how poverty compounded the impact of FV:

> *My father had schizophrenia, and he wasn't able to work, and he made my mom go to work like I think*

within the first two years he was on heavy medication . . .he just couldn't work. . . . And so, we always knew that we were in a very financially precarious situation.

Sandiran discussed the trauma of growing up in a low-income neighbourhood:

We grew up in a neighbourhood that had quite a bit of gang violence . . . there was a lot of violence already in the neighbourhood, and then in our building, it was a public housing building . . . we had neighbours. . . who were dealing with substance-use challenges . . . mostly alcohol, and there was so much noise so much I was terrified all the time . . . but then added to that there was the dynamic of my neighbours. . . . You would hear pounding on the walls and our front door. . . . I thought someone was gonna break in and kill us.

The excerpts demonstrate the trauma of systemic violence Sandiran, their sister Abi, Samantha and Sonia experienced besides FV. The systemic violence they experienced created an additional layer of trauma they had to deal with, further complicating their experience of FV. While the current strategies of addressing FV focus only on domestic issues and their impact on children, based on what these excerpts have shown, there is a need to include systemic violence for an effective resolution of FV in racialized immigrant communities.

SECTION 8: PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Below we provide a model for holistic, trauma and culturally informed services for racialized immigrant children living with FV. We have conceptualized the recommendations of participants under three themes: Individualized support for children impacted by FV; Going beyond the individual: Community-wide support; and Transforming the practices of sectors that deal with FV. Work at all levels, including transforming practices needs to happen simultaneously for sustainable impact on the lives of children experiencing FV. This holistic model is summarized in Figure 2 below.

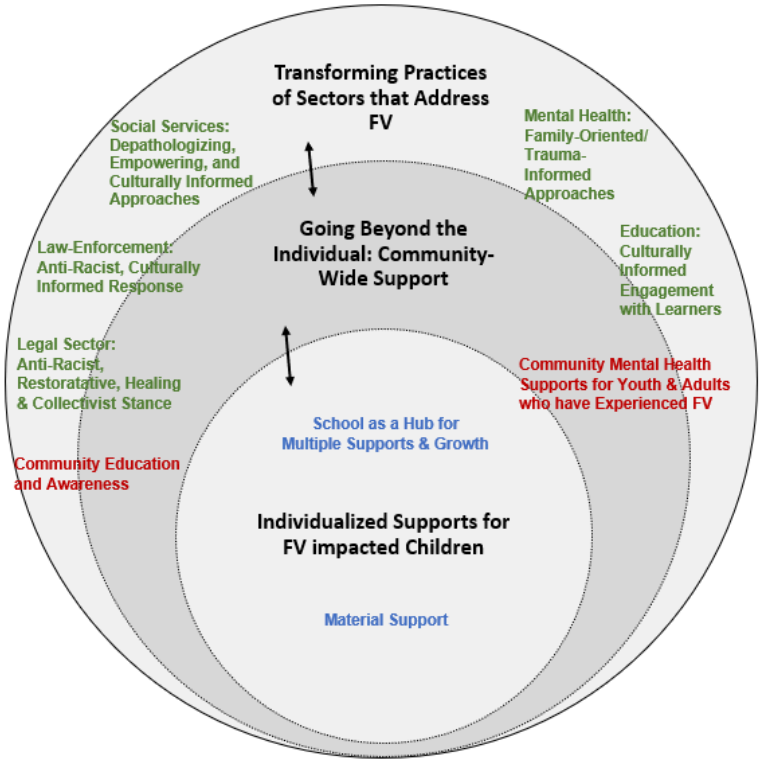


Figure 2: Participants' recommendations: Holistic, trauma-informed, culturally informed services for racialized immigrant children living with FV (Adapted from George et al., 2022, p. 9)

Individualized Supports for Children Impacted by Family

Violence

Jasmine, Maria, Viktor, Sonia, Anita, and Sandiran discussed schools' critical role in their lives. Some participants described the school as a place of refuge and stability amid chaos.

Viktor, Sonia, and Anita discussed the need for the school to be a safe space for children to discuss challenging issues. Sonia suggested creating opportunities for children to share what is going on in their lives and process their emotions without any dire consequences on their lives:

> *If you make it voluntary and anonymous so that nobody knows that they're accessing this information, nobody knows that they're using this information, maybe it's online, maybe it's like workbooks that they work through whatever it is. Maybe that could help, but it's so tricky.*

Maria also talked about the need for teachers to engage with children who are quiet or falling behind:

> *I think it's more about acknowledging, too, because, for me, I was quiet. No one was even understanding. And in order to have the support, you have to see what's happening and beyond . . . like in school systems. If a student is falling behind, at least question it, and then you will be able to have the right supports for that kid.*

Maria and Jasmine also suggested counselling support for children in school. Sandiran discussed the importance of providing culturally and trauma-informed counselling support, which is discussed further in the Transforming the Practices of Sectors that Address Family Violence section. Jasmine discussed the importance of helping children with guilt and self-blame they might experience due to FV.

Viktor and Abi recommended recreational programs such as sports or art that facilitate channelling children's energy or diverting their attention from experiences at home. Abi felt art would have helped her make friends, and Victor found sports helped him channel his aggression.

Along with managing the trauma of FV, Maya and Samantha shouldered the responsibility of running their homes without any skills. Based on their experience, they discussed the need for schools to provide academic and life skills to prepare children for such roles. Maya wished that someone had taught her about finances, how to clean the house, do laundry, and wash dishes, as these were things that she faced when her mother returned to work.

Participants also recommended school supports for children to develop academic skills and help with homework for children without support or with extraordinary responsibilities at home. Jasmine recommended that schools train children in effective communication, anger management, and self-care and encourage them to access supports when needed.

Based on Adriana's experience, she recommended material support such as shelter and financial assistance for teenagers who may be forced to leave home to escape the toxic environment.

Going Beyond the Individual: Community-Wide Support

This theme looks at participants' perspectives on going beyond providing support at the individual level to working at the community level, focusing on remedial and preventive aspects of addressing FV.

Participants recommended counselling and mental health supports for racialized immigrant youth where FV was not identified or occurred late in childhood.

Based on the multiple mental health challenges they experienced, Maria, Chiairo, Adriana, and Anita discussed the importance of community mental health support for youth and adults who have experienced FV. Based on her experience, Adriana talked about the significance of mental health support for children: "Definitely *mental health support [for children], a method to express themselves as they would have an identity crisis on top of the abuse that they're experiencing at home . . . and they have nowhere else to go*."

Unfortunately, none of the participants except Maria (who was in Guyana then) could access counselling support while in school, as OHIP does not cover it. They accessed it only while in the university, where free counselling is available for students. Sonia accessed counselling support privately as she was out of university then.

Sonia and Samantha discussed the importance of providing mental health support to adult men and women involved in FV. However, Sonia drew attention to the stigma of mental health in ethnic communities that might prevent individuals like her father from accessing counselling, even though they needed it.

The participants discussed the criticality of community education and awareness to address the stigma

related to FV, make community members realize that FV is not a personal/familial but a social issue and encourage them to access community supports. It took Chiairo a long time to find the language to speak about FV and understand the patterns of abuse and control she was experiencing. Based on her experience, she suggested community-specific education on identifying FV and intervening when it happens.

Sonia lamented that her father, who needs mental health support, does not avail himself of counselling services because of the stigma of counselling in the community:

> *And I wish that maybe he saw that on . . . a billboard at the [place of worship] one day and was like, oh, this talks about how I can manage my anger, maybe I'll . . . call them and do it. But there's nothing . . . that's also in* [City in Ontario]. *It's nowhere else.*

Maria added that in Canada, where immigrants come from a context without enough mental health support, educating immigrants and addressing the stigma of mental health before expecting them to access support is essential.

Transforming the Practices of Sectors that Address Family Violence

Moving from support at the individual and community levels, this section provides participants' insights on how sectors such as healthcare, including mental health, education, social services, law enforcement, and the justice system could respond more appropriately in the context of racialized immigrant children experiencing FV. Participants made recommendations based on their struggles with the services provided by these sectors. This theme highlights the essential work that needs to be done to support people experiencing FV and take preventive action to address FV. The recommendations call on governments to increase resources for remedial and preventive work.

Mental health sector: Adopting family-oriented and trauma-informed approaches

Abi talked helplessly about the inappropriate mental health support her father, who suffers from war trauma and developed schizophrenia. She said, "*My dad . . . had a language barrier, my sister or I have to translate at appointments, and just the healthcare that he receives, [the] medication . . . it's not really . . . helping him deal with anything . . . it hasn't resolved anything.*" She felt more appropriate services could have helped her father recover and for them to function as a family.

Abi's disappointment in her father's current mental health treatment was echoed by her sibling, Sandiran,

who felt that the Canadian healthcare system was too narrowly focused on the individual. They recommended a family-oriented, trauma-informed approach to addressing FV:

> *So, I think like, like a family approach to domestic violence, a family approach to abuse is so necessary . . . and I also expand that outward to . . . community approaches to healing . . . you know what does it mean when a war afflicted family, a war afflicted community is now in a region where they, they're not, no longer in that war but that war remains in a lot of internalized ways and so what does it mean to provide proper community services that link, individual to family to community, especially in communities where that trust has been eroded because of the political, social tensions.*

Abi also spoke of the importance of intervention to keep the family together while working with all members. This intervention should support all individuals caught in the violence with their best interests in mind and support them living as a unit rather than isolating family members from each other and eventually breaking the family apart.

Chiairo recommended making mental health supports affordable and accessible so that they could be widely accessed by children and youth when needed:

> *I think that if mental health care was just more widely available and potentially free or very low cost or subsidized, getting that support would probably be a lot more feasible, a lot earlier.. . . because you know therapy isn't covered by OHIP . . . I've gotten most of my therapy through the schools that I've gone to and then ... my partner was working at a place that had like health benefits ... that is like ... a privilege*

Education sector: Offering culturally informed engagement with students

Sandiran discussed that racialized immigrant children may not display typical signs of abuse and suggested that teachers need to be able to have conversations with students about FV and identify a child living with FV, even if these children are not demonstrating disruptive behaviour or showing signs of abuse:

> *It could be a child who was like myself, my brother and my sister and many of the people I know. We are quiet children who go through our school systems, and the signs aren't clear. To be able to recognize that, especially for model-minority communities, where we're taught in collectivist cultures to be more quiet or keep to ourselves like the signs are not the same. We need . . . people in [the] educational sector . . . to ask different questions, to look in different ways.*

Sandiran also recommended a bottom-up approach that taps into community expertise to develop services. This would mean including racialized immigrant communities in designing support for their children and vesting resources in their hands to implement this work. It also calls for transforming the current education sector by training teachers to be culturally informed and support racialized immigrant learners experiencing challenging circumstances in their homes.

Justice System: Embracing a restorative and holistic approach

The participants discussed the need for the legal sector to take a holistic approach. Based on their personal life experiences, their narratives reveal various factors that aggravated FV. They recommended a holistic approach to addressing FV and provide healing for all family members, implying a complete transformation in the functioning of the legal sector.

Sandiran shared their perspective on the violence in their home, the factors that aggravated the situation, and how it could be addressed using a restorative justice approach and with an understanding of collectivist worldviews.

Chiairo shared her perspectives on the discrimination against racialized children and men by the justice system and challenged it to change its approach:

> *I think . . . we need alternatives from the justice system that is punitive as systems that . . . take away children of colour . . . at exorbitantly disproportional rates. I think that there's a lot of fear of those systems and a fear of interacting with them. . . . Violence is often cyclical, it's often trauma-based, and I think a lot of other people who actually get support in those, those cycles of violence and are treated through less punitive measures are our white folks . . . mainly [White] Canadians and not, not men of colour.*

Chiairo's reflections highlight the disproportionate rate of racialized children taken away by the State (through CPS) and the criminalization of brown men, especially after 9/11. Chiairo points to the limitation of such a punitive approach without support for families that are trapped in it:

> *We need our Children's Aid Services [CP] to be restructured . . . starting to look at forms of justice that are . . . restorative and transformative justice. So, a child's aid service[CPS] that is rooted in that form of justice that acknowledges that violence towards someone is unacceptable. It means healing those relationships. So, I'm thinking about very large principles . . . premised on this idea of restorative practices, and also collectivists practices.*

Law enforcement sector: Adopting a culturally informed response

The participants recommended a de-escalation versus arrest approach by the police, listening and respecting the parties involved, and a more culturally informed approach to address most FV cases among racialized immigrant families. Participants called for a reassessment of the law enforcement sector to empower police to better assess risk to family members, to listen and respect the parties involved, and to use a culturally informed and victim-centered approach to address most FV cases among racialized immigrant families.

Based on the experience Sonia's mother had with law enforcement officers, Sonia shared an approach that would help racialized immigrant women:

Yeah, I don't know if this is relevant, but the police officers that came to my home were white. I don't know if they were brown, would it have been different, like would they have been able to talk to my dad in Punjabi and calm him down? Would that have worked? I don't know. He didn't have to get arrested that day. It was the arrest that sparked all this. . . . My mom . . . just wanted the situation to de-escalate.

Social service sector: Embracing culturally appropriate approaches that do not stigmatize and that facilitate freedom from oppression

Chiairo and Samantha reflected on alternative ways of supporting racialized immigrant families. Chiairo discussed the need for culturally informed support to preserve the family and establish a healthier, healing relationship between members. She felt that "*an alternative system of care and practitioners within those systems who have a greater understanding of some of the social and cultural dynamics that might be at play*" would be helpful. She also suggested that resources and supports from outside the community would be particularly beneficial to persons from small towns to avoid gossip. She also shared the need for societal and religious support for women who do not want to leave their abusive spouses but have healthier relationships with them

I don't think my mom would have ever left [my stepfather]. So [if] there was a way that I could engage somebody else to support . . . help them have a healthier relationship, and that can be like, through our religious community, or through our broader social net.

Similarly, Samantha talked about the importance of de-pathologizing families requiring support and transforming social services from a surveillance-based institution to an empathetic and emancipatory one:

More training for some of the staff and the institutions who are coming into contact with the kids. Just to give me a bit more empathy on what's going on or more understanding because I can imagine honestly like if I don't come from the background if I come from a very stable, different background . . . I would react the same way they did, right. But I think, for them to best support those people . . . it might benefit them to have more information and training . . . more knowledge and empathy. . . . Even . . . Ontario Works, like, you know, I think it's harder for them, but you know I imagined they meet many people, you know if you don't have your things together and struggling, I think half the time it's not because you're lazy, it's because there's a lot more going on right. And I think having that approach . . . maybe more empathetic approach, or more empowering approach at every step of the way.

This section brings forward the voices of participants who recommended fundamental transformative changes in various sectors of our society. These recommendations are invaluable as they are grounded in the personal life experiences of participants and, hence, offer us immense insights into responding to FV in racialized immigrant communities. These voices call for a paradigm shift that acknowledges children who have experienced FV as valuable stakeholders and experts who deserve to be heard while deciding on family law matters that affect them profoundly.

SECTION 9: DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings and participant recommendations from this research in light of the existing literature. With each of these recommendations, we provide a series of responses based on tangible actions that service providers in the social, community, and justice sectors can take.

RECOMMENDATION #1

Focus on the strengths of children who have experienced FV and provide them with support to bolster their strengths

The findings of this study have highlighted the profound impact FV has on participants' lives, which partially aligns with findings in other FV research grounded in children's perspectives (Arai et al., 2021). Much of the literature focuses on the adverse outcomes of exposure to FV on children's mental health, behaviour, education, and physical health (Arai et al., 2021). Similar to Overlien (2017), we suggest that focusing only on the negative impacts in cases of FV is limiting.

We believe that children who have experienced FV should not be seen as damaged (Tuck, 2009) but as individuals who have demonstrated multiple strengths beyond the trauma and "damage" they have experienced. Many of the participants of this study, including Sandiran, Adriana, Maria, Sonia, Samantha, Jasmine, and Maya successfully overcame difficulties of their lives. Most participants in our study demonstrated

marked capabilities despite FV and systemic barriers. All of our study participants completed secondary education and accessed post-secondary studies. Adriana escaped the coercive controlling violence in her home, sought help from the UN, and relocated to Canada, despite a lack of support from police and immigration services in China. Maya juggled the multiple roles of caring for her siblings, doing extra chores at home, attending school, and attending to her personal development as a young person. Samantha supported and advocated for her mother, provided financial assistance to her siblings in Pakistan, attended school (and ultimately post-secondary school), and completed the complex and laborious process of sponsoring her siblings to immigrate to Canada. In keeping with Overlien's (2017) argument regarding the agency of children who experience FV, participants had a high level of knowledge and skill in assessing and responding strategically to violence and coercive control and taking on more responsibilities in the home compared to their peers. While this discussion on strengths does not negate the importance of services and supports such as those recommended by the participants, it bolsters the argument that the participants could have avoided the setbacks they experienced with the right type of support.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #1

- Create opportunities within curricula for children in elementary school to learn about violence, the impact of violence, and safe options for discussing the experience of violence. Normalizing the occurrence of violence but not normalizing the violence is important for reducing the stigma associated with FV
- Conduct strengths-based assessments of children's skills and interests and design programs and activities in consultation with children

RECOMMENDATION #2

Recognize siblings as unique individuals with different ways of interpreting and responding to FV

In some cases, findings demonstrate that the age and gender of children play an important role in how they experience FV, though in other cases, the findings have challenged these intersections. The findings of this study warrant recognizing siblings as individuals with unique ways of responding to a FV event based on their interpretation of that event and their individual strengths and vulnerabilities. Interventions such as counselling support need to go beyond a universal approach for siblings to an individualized approach that respects the right of each sibling to receive individualized services based on the impact of FV on them.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #2

- Instead of developing common supports for all the children in a family, conduct an individual

assessment of their experiences of the FV and its varied impact, including changes in family relationships. Based on this assessment, plan individualized support for each child in consultation with the child.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Provide community-wide education to create more awareness about FV

The participants' stories highlight the need for community-wide education about and awareness of FV and the nature and location of supports available for persons experiencing FV. Community education on the impact of FV on children and subsequent mental health issues could lead to the development of innovative community-based supports and intervention strategies (Ahmad et al., 2009; Mehta et al., 2021; Thandi, 2012). Such efforts at education and awareness building are needed in various languages and made available in multiple media such as radio, TV, and social media (Ryan, et al., 2012).

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #3

- Establish rapport with community members and community and religious leaders and gain the trust of community members
- Create audio-visual educational materials highlighting the negative impact of FV on children in the languages spoken in the children's community
- Develop support groups for men, women, and youth (boys, girls, non-binary youth) and offer safe space for discussion and finding pathways for resolving tensions
- Challenge mental health and FV-related stigma in ethnic communities
- Provide free community-based, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate counselling services for anyone affected by FV
- Engage community members in designing and implementing services

RECOMMENDATION #4

Schools need to play an essential role in supporting children who experience family violence

The participants of this study provided many suggestions on the potential of schools to be safe spaces to support and educate children experiencing FV. Their recommendations portray a broad vision of schools expanding their focus beyond imparting knowledge to nurturing and developing children's capacities as individuals (Mehta et al., 2021). However, this concept of safe space does not align with the current "Duty to Report" expected of teachers. This points to the need for CPS and schools to think of ways that offer opportunities for children to talk without fear of the implications of doing so and reimagine culturally appropriate ways of supporting children (Ettinger, 2022; Lester et al., 2020; Maiter & Stalker, 2011; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018).

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #4

- Organize after-school homework sessions to support children who do not have parental support due to FV or poverty
- Provide training in effective communication, anger management and life skills
- Provide sports and arts-based activities as an outlet
- Support teachers to develop pedagogical strategies that engage quiet and withdrawn children
- Offer a safe space for children to share their experiences and responses with either a teacher or a guidance counsellor without fear of being uprooted from their family
- Increase counselling support in schools

RECOMMENDATION #5

Acknowledge how systemic violence intersects with and exacerbates experiences of family violence

Systemic violence that is built into structures should be considered violent as they result in harm to the individual and groups of people (Galtung, 1969; Phillips & Pon, 2018; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017).

While the participants in our study did not downplay or excuse a parent's violent behaviour, they reported that their family's situation was complicated by systemic violence in the form of racism, colonialism, poverty, violations of children's rights, trauma from systemic racism, trauma from war in their country of origin, and gaps in community and mental health services.

The narratives of Samantha, Sandiran, and Abi provide insight into the challenges of people living in intense poverty. Waiting for welfare cheques, asking others for financial assistance, waiting for child tax benefits, living from cheque to cheque, and living in low-income neighbourhoods are all forms of systemic violence committed by the State.

It is essential to reflect on the implications of deprivation on a growing child (Hillel & Sarangi, 2020). As reflected in the stories of Sandiran and Samantha, children living in poverty suffer deprivations and forced to contribute financially to their household at a young age.

Further, Sandiran's description of life in a low-income neighbourhood is a reality for many racialized immigrant families (National Council of Welfare, 2012). It highlights the absence of support for families that are left to survive or succumb to their realities. It calls upon us to expand the conceptualization of FV beyond what occurs between family members to how racialized immigrant families that are vulnerable and need support get treated by the State.

RECOMMENDATION #6

Examine and rectify policies that maintain systemic inequity for racialized immigrants

Canada's social welfare policies were developed with a white Eurocentric lens to assist families in need. However, in their development, many policies effectively ignored the challenges of racialized families (Thobani, 2007). Canada's move towards public policies to promote multiculturalism in the late 20th century did not address the systemic racism in service delivery of income support programs or eliminate stereotypes of racialized and immigrant families (Thobani, 2000). Poverty is a form of systemic violence. Neoliberal and racist policies create economic inequalities, exclusionary practices, de-skilling of immigrant workers (Guo, 2015), workplace racism, and a lack of safe, affordable housing (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017). Similarly, Overlein (2017) and Callaghan et al. (2018) research has focused on experiences of White families and their research does not focus on the experiences of racialized children.

In our study, racialized participants had to deal with FV and resist the intersecting oppression of race, class, and their construction as immigrants. As Crenshaw (1991) and Galtung (1990) noted, the experience of FV is complicated by structural violence. This calls for a transformation in how service providers conceptualize, envision, and address the diverse needs of racialized immigrant children.

As we consider this recommendation in light of the justice system, the importance of understanding the social context – the lived reality and the cultural context of the family, in particular children, emerges. In the words of the Chief Justice of Canada, Beverley McLachlin, the evolving role of judges is to exercise "informed impartiality" (Martison & Jackson, 2017, p. 69), which requires judges to be introspective, open, and empathetic and appreciate the social context within which the matters at issue arose. We hope that the rich narratives in this research will help judges understand the social context for racialized families experiencing FV.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS #5 AND #6

- Recognize the role systemic violence plays in exacerbating FV and provide supports to families that are experiencing systemic violence
- Recognize that systemic violence such as racism, exclusion, poverty, unsafe neighbourhoods, and escaping war creates trauma and children and individuals who have experienced such violence need trauma-informed mental health supports
- Provide funding and engage community-based organizations to address FV in communities.
- Provide holistic supports for all family members tailormade to their unique needs with a focus on their recovery and healing
- The trauma-informed supports should focus on removing the guilt, shame, and low self-esteem experienced by children experiencing FV by establishing a connection between their plight and systemic factors
- Provide material support beyond minimum wage, child tax benefits, and welfare support to families facing systemic violence for equity and social justice
- Establish breakfast clubs in schools for children from low-income families

- Offer cost-free programs for children to channel and enhance skills and interests
- Support and initiate a broad-based opposition/coalition that cuts across sectors and disciplines to advocate for systemic change.

RECOMMENDATION #7

Ensure that children are informed of and have a voice in the decision-making that is part of the family court process

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990) establishes the rights of children as knowing persons to live without discrimination (Article 2), that legal decision-making must be in their best interests (Article 3 (1)), the child's right to life (Article 6), and the child's right to state their opinions in all matters that affect them and to have their voices given weight (Article 12). Children exposed to FV have the right to access appropriate support and have their voices heard. We found that the youth in this study could not access adequate services to support them; their voices were erased because institutional racism and colonialism are embedded in the dominant structures of services. Participants described how their experiences with police, child welfare, school counsellors, and social workers aggravated and complicated their lives. This multi-layered trauma occurs when the trauma of FV intersects with the trauma of systemic violence.

RECOMMENDATION #8

Canada's child welfare system must interrogate the racism, colonial bias, and classism inherent in its practices

A number of the research participants reported an increased precarious financial status upon settling in Canada. Past research has shown that racialized families in Canada experience inequitable power relations through workplace discrimination, de-skilling, restrictive immigration policies, workplace harassment, and lack of safe, affordable housing due to gentrification and residential segregation of racialized families (George & Rashidi, 2014; Hochstenbach & Musterd, 2018). Immigrants are overrepresented among people living in poverty. Just over half of all immigrants in Canada are from racialized groups. However, they make up just under two-thirds of all immigrants living in poverty (National Council of Welfare, 2012). Living in poverty is counter to children's best interests (Kim & Drake, 2018). This necessitates a critical review and restructuring of restrictive policies for racialized immigrants, income support programs, and housing policies to assist racialized immigrant parents in meeting their children's needs.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS #7 AND #8

- Because the child is not a passive witness, their insights into how the child welfare system should be designed would positively impact the experience of future children experiencing FV. Including the voices of racialized immigrant children would contribute to reducing the racism, colonialism, and

classism that are inherent in its practices

- Training practitioners in the social, community, and justice sectors should include introducing supportive ways to interact with children and youth, with a focus on ensuring that their voices are included in the process

RECOMMENDATION #9

Expand the current understanding of the *Best Interest of the Child* as outlined by the Divorce Act and recognize the impact of systemic violence on children

One of the participants in our study stressed the need for children to be informed about and have input into decision-making in the family court process. According to this participant, children's perspectives are valuable in detecting and validating the presence of FV. Samantha's recommendation aligns with legal professionals who highlight the necessity of including the child's perspective in the decision-making process (Birnbaum & Bala, 2009), either through a culturally informed social worker or culturally informed children's lawyer or through direct participation such as meeting the judge.

In family law, the child's best interests must be primary and further harm must be prevented. However, children's voices and wishes are negated when adult perspectives are privileged in post-separation decision-making or when jurisdictions lack the infrastructure to ensure meaningful child participation (Martinson & Tempesta, 2018). The rights of racialized children are more likely to be erased due to gaps in culturally appropriate means to include their voices (Caxaj & Berman, 2010). Family law and justice systems based on white European values and norms do not necessarily result in the best outcomes for racialized families (Soglin et al., 2019).

Participants in our study accessed few or no institutional supports, and most maintained secrecy about the violence they were experiencing at home. Participants feared significant harm to the whole family if CPS became involved. Participants spoke of direct experiences with CPS or had been warned through their communities that police and CPS interventions would be unhelpful, if not harmful, to the family because of a lack of culturally appropriate supports for racialized families and the tendency to problematize racialized parents (Phillips & Pon, 2018). This bias also exists in the family court community (Maldonado, 2017). This questions the value of existing services for racialized immigrant families meant to help families experiencing FV.

The participants' voices are a call for service providers to challenge their assumptions of a society that is a safe space beyond FV. Service providers must re-think and broaden their understanding of the violence racialized children are exposed to daily and reconcile the family law and community services approaches to protect children from harm due to FV and the systemic violence of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization.

Our findings reveal that the participants in this study were not passive witnesses but had impressive insights into their families and the systemic violence they experienced, as well as highly knowledgeable insights about what was best for them. The study participants critiqued the policies and practices of CPS and questioned whether they acted in the child's best interests (Ma, 2021). Racialized parents should not have to educate their children to protect themselves from CPS scrutiny. CPS must interrogate the structural racism and classism inherent in viewing poverty as an individual client problem independent of systemic factors (Kim & Drake, 2018). It is necessary to critically analyze how white European norms about good parenting practices can be problematic when employed by institutions and actors that evaluate parenting in non-white families (George et al., 2022). The participants' accounts validate Phillips and Pon's (2018) analysis of how white, colonial norms and biases inherent in CPS are privileged over the child-rearing practices of Black, Indigenous, and racialized immigrant families, resulting in over-representation of Black, Indigenous, and racialized children in the care of CPS (Kim & Drake, 2018; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018).

The findings of this research highlight how varied forms of systemic violence aggravated and complicated the impact of FV on these children. In March 2021 the amendments to the Divorce Act introduced an enumerated test of the *Best Interest of the Child*. Divorce Act 16(3)**(f)** includes as best interests factor the child's cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual upbringing and heritage, including Indigenous upbringing and heritage.

Moreover, s. 16 (3) (j) states that

> In determining the best interests of the child, the court shall consider all factors related to the circumstances of the child, including any family violence and its impact on, *among other things*, the ability and willingness of any person who engaged in the family violence to care for and meet the needs

> of the child, and the appropriateness of making an order that would require persons in respect of whom the order would apply to cooperate on issues affecting the child (emphasis added).

The words "among other things" can be interpreted to mean that judges are to consider other factors that may be relevant to the impact of violence, in addition to the enumerated *Best Interest* factors that are relevant to the impact of violence. It is important to note that what constitutes FV in the Divorce Act is expansive but non-exhaustive.

S. 16(4) of the Divorce Act lists seven specific factors that are in the best interests of the child and lists "any other factor" as well. However, it falls short of expressly recognizing systemic factors in determining the best interests of the child, and not only personal/family factors, specifically for children from racialized and marginalized families. Expanding the understanding of the child's best interests in family law is needed. This expansion necessitates going beyond responsibility for the child's best interests in court-involved FV cases to recognizing systemic violence when considering the child's best interests. It is not in children's best interests to live with poverty, racism, or social exclusion. We must listen to children's and youth's voices and consider FV and systemic factors to determine what is necessary to meet individual children's needs. There is a growing acceptance of children's human rights, which begins with treating them as holders of their legal rights. By improving our understanding of the intersectional vulnerabilities of racialized youth and the impact of multiple systems, we can strengthen prevention and improve responses.

The research participants reported that they were impacted by FV and living with day-to-day systemic violence in the form of personal, structural, and institutional violence. Systemic violence compounded the participants' lives as additional trauma. Family violence disclosures can lead to contact with services and resources—family, schools, CPS, police, health services, legal aid, family law, criminal justice, housing, immigration services, and counselling services—and this involvement with services increases the likelihood of systemic violence. Hence, until there is a recognition of the systemic violence of racism and poverty and a response to end it and until there is a genuine commitment to address issues faced by racialized immigrant children and, above all, respect the rights of these children as individuals, their future remains bleak. Anti-FV policies and practices must include eradicating the systemic violence and inequities impacting racialized children in Canada.

Emerging from the findings, we strongly argue for expanding the elements of the enumerated *Best Interest of the Child* test in the Divorce Act to specifically include a consideration of the compounded effects of structural and systemic violence that complicate the experience of FV for racialized immigrant families and their children. The enumerated factors in s. 16 (4) of the *Best Interest* test were included in the legislative amendments of the Divorce Act based on the growing evidence that each type of violence has a unique impact and effect. To determine which parenting arrangement is in the best interests of the child, the court must consider the

particular nature and impact of the FV (https://justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/cfl-mdf/dace-clde/div62.html). The authors of this report are mindful that the enumerated factors listed in s. 16 (4) are not exhaustive, and the court *may* consider factors that are not on the list. However, express inclusion of structural and systemic violence as an additional factor would make it *mandatory* to take it into consideration for the *Best Interest* analysis.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #9

- The *Best Interest of the Child* is determined not only by personal/family factors but also by systemic factors, specifically for children from racialized and marginalized families. What it means to be in the best interests of a child needs to be expanded to include systemic violence (i.e., it is not in children's best interests to live with poverty, racism, and social exclusion)
- Children and youth need to be involved in discussions about what is in the best interests of the child. We must consider not only FV but also systemic factors to determine what is needed to meet individual children's needs
- Anti-FV policies and practices must become more responsive to the systemic inequities impacting racialized children in Canada. Until there is a recognition of the systemic violence of racism and poverty and a response to end it and until there is a genuine commitment to address issues faced by racialized immigrant children, and above all, until the rights of these children as individuals are respected, these inequities will persist

RECOMMENDATION #10

Provide anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-based, and culturally appropriate training for educators, social, community, and justice practitioners.

The participants in our study could not access culturally appropriate support in schools and counselling services. Our findings reveal that a significant number of responses from professionals were unhelpful and even harmful in some cases. Teachers and mental health professionals were often white and middle-class and unfamiliar with the child's reality.

The excerpts from Sandiran's and Abi's interviews point out the limitations of Eurocentric mental health practices in addressing FV and war trauma in racialized immigrant families (Kanagaratnam et al., 2021). Their reflections highlight the need to reimagine mental health interventions that keep families together instead of the current emphasis on separation and divorce. Their reflections emphasize healing and recovery from FV for all family members, hence the necessity of family-oriented interventions (Mehta et al., 2021) that provide opportunities to work with all family members.

Participants' reports of suffering from FV, systemic violence, and war trauma highlight the need for culturally appropriate, trauma-informed programs for children. These findings support the urging of many scholars to expand concepts of trauma to include trauma from systemic violence (Clark, 2016; Craps, 2014).

As part of Canada's and Ontario's anti-racism strategies (Canadian Heritage, 2019; Government of Ontario, 2021) and equity and anti-discrimination policies for schools and mental health services, implementing anti-racist and AOP training is vital to better outcomes for racialized children.

The participants in our study made valuable recommendations for supports, grounded in their lived experiences. The recommendations identified a new role for schools and called for re-envisioning how schools can be hubs for providing services that racialized immigrant children often do not access because of their familial and immigration context. Participants recommended trauma and culturally appropriate mental health services for children, youth, and adults.

Similar to the findings of past research (Ahmad et al., 2009; Thandi, 2012), our study identifies cultural values and family relationships as positive factors for addressing systemic racism and exclusion, low income or dependence on parents as providers; lack of affordable, culturally appropriate services; and families' fear of CPS intervention if the children reach out to a teacher or counsellor (Maiter & Stalker, 2011). In keeping with George and Rashidi (2014) and Mehrotra et al. (2016), who point out the culture-blaming discourses that disregard systemic factors in relation to FV in South Asian communities and have criminalized brown Muslim men after 9/11, participants of this research expressed concern about the unintended consequences of stigmatizing and criminalizing their fathers because of their race or culture. Interventions with individuals involved in FV reflect dominant culture's norms (Riel et al., 2016), and do not address the experiences and multi-dimensional needs of racialized immigrant men and women engaging in abusive behaviour (Thandi, 2012). Based on these considerations, a nuanced, anti-essentialist approach (Wing, 2015) that recognizes every family's unique circumstances is needed when deciding on children's future.

Effective implementation of our recommendations requires anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-based, and cultural sensitivity training for service providers and a greater allocation of funds for sectors dealing with FV. The recommendations call for expanding the focus of current services for racialized families from remedial to including preventive supports. The successful development of culturally and trauma-informed services can only happen by engaging racialized immigrant communities in the design and management of services. Above all, these changes call for the sectors that provide services to these families to be open to transforming their services. Only when this happens will the UN Convention on respecting children's rights as individuals be truly implemented.

IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATION #10

- Prioritize training for service providers in anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-based and culturally informed practice, conducted in collaboration with community partners.
- Train professionals to focus on early intervention and prevention of FV.
- Train professionals to assess the connections between personal and systemic risk factors as they contribute to FV and respond appropriately using culturally appropriate approaches.
- Train professionals to include practices that focus on recovery and healing from the trauma of FV.

SECTION 10: CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate the impact of experiencing FV on children. The participants in this study shared their knowledge and insights about being marginalized as children and navigating socio-economic marginalization as racialized immigrants by the dominant culture. The recommendations from participants show the need for subsidized, individualized, holistic mental health supports and practical assistance for children. The tangible ways that those recommendations can be enacted provide opportunities for service providers working in the social service sector to work collaboratively with partners in the community sector to deepen their knowledge and engage in advocacy in areas such as immigration, housing, income support programs, education, and trauma-informed, culturally appropriate services to meet the needs of racialized immigrant children (Kulkarni, 2019).

In addition to developing services for the specific and multi-layered needs of racialized immigrant children experiencing FV, we can transform the sectors of education, health, family law, and the justice system to include culturally appropriate, trauma-informed services. Our previous research on domestic violence in immigrant communities discussed how the social and community sectors could work more effectively with the justice sector to provide a better, more responsive system for people who have experienced domestic violence (Chaze et al., 2021; George et al., 2022). The current research has emphasized this need, as the voices of youth who had lived through domestic violence as children contributed their experiences to deepen our understanding. Additionally, we need to bolster funding for community-based services for families experiencing FV informed by knowledge grounded in that community (Kanagarathnam et al., 2021; Kulkarni, 2019).

As we learn to be more responsive researchers and social service, community, and legal professionals, we can contribute to changing the landscape for people who experience FV. In the words of our research participant

Chiairo, "*alternative systems of care and practitioners within those systems who have a greater understanding of some of the social and cultural dynamics that might be at play*" are important if we are going to see improvement in the experiences of immigrant racialized families who find themselves in situations of FV.

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