An Interview with Survivors: Finding Our Voice in Our Experience of Family Violence

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There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. – Maya Angelou

May these stories continue to motivate all practitioners to be compassionate witnesses; to listen to all stories, told and untold.

Abstract

It is important for social service practitioners to engage in theory-informed practice and critical that we gain knowledge and understanding about the individuals and families we work with; for them to have a meaningful experience in the help process that is based on human dignity and worth, and can effect change. In this exploratory study, we sought to glean an understanding of how survivors of family violence were impacted by their experience of violence in spousal relationships, and their experience of navigating the help system, using the concepts of fundamental human needs (security, autonomy, competency and belongingness); whether their unmet needs were addressed as they navigated through the help process, both formal and informal. To build on existing research regarding restorative justice and family violence issues, we obtained the perspectives of survivors regarding the use of restorative process in their journey and factors that would motivate and/or deter survivors from participating in a restorative process. The narratives of survivors of the impact of family violence on their fundamental needs and their help navigating experience provided insights into assumptions for good practice in this area: importance of empathic responses, widening support circle, giving voice space to children, and having a safe space for a restorative dialogue that respects individuals' autonomy. Further insights on how practitioners can critically reflect on their practice are discussed.

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Introduction

The relationship between theory and practice has been the focus for social service interventions. As social service practitioners, it is important that we engage in theory-informed practice. Considered as scientific knowledge, theories seek to explain the phenomena of psychological, interpersonal, and societal issues and therefore provide the assumptions and hypotheses for purposeful interventions. As practitioners too, we realise the importance of applying theories in relation to context. In this endeavour, it is critical that we gain knowledge and understanding about the individuals and families we work with, so that they have a positive experience in the help process, one that is meaningful to them to effect change. In this process of applying theories in relation to context, practitioners need to engage in critical reflection on their practice assumptions and desired outcomes. According to Fook (2016), this is a deconstructive process necessary for a reconstructive process, where practice can inform theories.

This perspective of practice guiding theory prompted this study. The intent of this study is to glean an understanding on what contributes to a positive help experience for women who experience family violence and to obtain their perspectives on use of restorative process for family violence issue. Restorative process stems from restorative practice which is defined as a "social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making" (Wachtel, 2016, p. 1). Restorative practice is "a way of thinking and being, focused on creating safe spaces for real conversations that deepen relationships and build stronger and more connected communities" (Vennen, 2016).

Literature has indicated some promise in the use of restorative processes for family violence issue. Studies have found that victim-offender mediation through a facilitated restorative dialogue was effective in reducing the occurrence of violent behaviours (Dissel & Ngubeni, 2003; Pelikan, 2010). A study on the use of family group conferencing found a reduction of violent behaviours and child abuse (Pennell & Burford, 2002). Restorative circle

processes have also been found helpful in intervening in family violence concerns (Coker, 1999; Couture et al., 2001). A randomized controlled study has found that restorative circles, together with a batterer intervention programme resulted in statistically significant reductions in family violence incidents by the perpetrators over a 24-month period, compared to a batterer intervention programme only (Mills et al, 2019). In its process to stop family violence, a restorative process can bring about widening the support circle, increasing access to needed resources, and a change in the balance of power when the conditions for safety and voluntary participation are satisfied (Edwards & Sharpe, 2004), thereby creating a positive experience for women who experienced family violence. Currently, restorative practice is not the mainstream approach in the area of family violence.

It is hoped that the findings of this study can add to the phronesis knowledge, where knowledge is applied "in a reasoned way, based on values and in relation to context" (Fook, 2016, p. 51) to enable a positive navigating experience for women experiencing family violence. Therefore, this study seeks to gain an appreciation of the context of the family violence issue, that is the impact of family violence on women, and insight into their help navigating experience in their environment. This knowledge of context can inform a practice that is relevant and helpful; a practice that meets the fundamental human needs of these women and based on the values of restorative justice, which are anchored in the fundamental human rights (Braithwaite, 2002).

Methodology

Interview Process

This study was conducted in the period of September 2019 to February 2020.

This study used a structured interview approach to obtain the narratives of survivors of family violence on their help navigating experience, as well as their perspectives on the use of restorative process to address family violence issue. The interviewees were residents of Star Shelter at the point of interview. Whoever agreed to participate in the study was

interviewed. Where necessary, a translator was present to assist in the interview (refer to Appendix A for the interview questions).

A video on a restorative process between a couple facing family violence issue was shown before participants' views on use of a restorative process for family violence were gathered from the participants. The video was used after the conduct of two interviews where the restorative process was verbally explained to the participants by the interviewers instead. The video was used upon realising that it would better illustrate the restorative process to the participants and to facilitate a discussion on use of a restorative process to address the issue of family violence. Conducted on an individual basis, the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Profile of Interviewees

All nine participants were residents of the shelter who had experienced family violence participated in the study. Amongst the nine residents, four of them were divorced whilst the remaining were separated from their husbands, with two having filed for divorce.

The nationality, residency, and employment status of the interviewees are reflected in the tables below.

Table 1: *Nationality of Interviewees*

Nationality	Indonesian	Vietnamese	Thai	Filipino	Singaporean
Number	2	1	2	1	3

Table 2: *Residency Status of Interviewees & (Ex) Spouses*

Residency Status	Singapore Citizen	Singapore Permanent Resident	On Visit Pass
Interviewees	3	1	5
(Ex) Spouses	7	2	0

Table 3: *Employment Status of Interviewees*

Employment Status	Unemployed	Employed (Cook/Kitchen Assistant, House-Keeping, Sales Assistant, Hair Stylist)
Number	3	6

The number of children that the interviewees have and their age range are indicated in tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: *Number of Children*

No. of Children	0	1	2	3
Interviewees	2	1	2	1

Table 5: *Age Range of Children*

Age Range	0-6	7-12	13-17	18-20	21 & above
Number	4	4	2	1	4

Framework for Analysis

The interviews focused on three areas:

i. Impact of family violence

ii. Experience of navigating support systems

iii. Participation in a restorative process

The findings on the impact of family violence and the experience of support systems navigation were analysed using the concept of fundamental human needs: security, autonomy, competency, and belonging (Russell, 2011). The participation in a restorative process were categorised as what they liked about the process and their views about participating in a restorative process.

The need for security can be understood using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), where security is referred to as safety needs. According to Maslow (1943), being prevented from fulfilling a basic need provides a psychological threat that leads to psychopathy. As the need for safety is the second most basic need after physiological needs in the hierarchy, it is important that the safety needs of an individual are met. When safety needs are unmet, an individual faces difficulty moving up to the next level of needs (Poston, 2009) or concentrating on anything else due to the presence of fear (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017).

The need for autonomy, competency and belonging can be understood using the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) asserts that all individuals strive towards growth and better self-awareness through connection with their environments and making meaning of their experiences (Legault, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, this innate need for growth may be challenged and stunted when one's basic psychological needs are not met, thus affecting one's functioning and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals are in constant interaction with their context to meet their individual needs, with the conditions of either a supportive or restrictive context as determinants (Legault, 2017). When one's basic psychological needs are unmet in their environment, an individual can feel demotivated, alienated, depressed and fragmented (Legault, 2017). According to the Basic Psychological Needs Theory, which is one of mini-theories referenced by the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the three fundamental psychological needs – relatedness, competence, and autonomy are necessary for an individual's well-being and psychological growth (Chen et al., 2015; Legault, 2017).

Definitions of the Fundamental Human Needs

The definitions of the four fundamental human needs were adapted from various theories. The definition of security was derived from the concept of safety as detailed in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). The definitions of the concepts: autonomy, competency, and belonging were mainly derived from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which was constructed with reference from other mini-theories; the Basic Psychological Needs Theory

and Cognitive Evaluation Theory were mainly used as references in defining the concept of autonomy, competency, and belonging.

(i) Security

The concept of security for this paper included three different aspects: physical safety, emotional security, and financial security (Kaur, 2013; Maslow, 1943; Russell, 2011).

Physical safety was referenced from the concept of safety as described by Maslow (1943), where safety refers to the need for a secure environment that is free from dangerous physical and social situations such as natural disasters and crimes (Kaur, 2013; Onah, 2015, as cited in Aruma & Hanachor, 2017).

Emotional security refers to the need for a sense of security from being accepted by the people one is surrounded by and having confidence to use internal resources to cope with danger (Davies & Cummings, 1994, as cited in Zotova, 2015).

Financial security refers to the need for finances and/or employment to ensure survival and stability (Kaur, 2013; Poston, 2009). This is with reference to Maslow's (1943) description of safety as the need for sufficient resources to ensure survival.

(ii) Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the need for agency and freedom to make self-directed choices about one's life (Legault, 2017; Russell, 2011). People who perceive that they have autonomy see that they have the choice and freedom to make their own opinions and decisions (Blustein, 2006). An individual's need for autonomy can be met through the provision of choice and acknowledging one's voice in decision-making processes in areas of interpersonal relationships and other aspects of the individual's environment (Legault, 2017).

According to the Relationship Motivation Theory referenced by the SDT, when people's reasons for being in the relationship were self-directed and autonomous rather than forced or obligatory, they reported better satisfaction with their relationships and overall well-being and functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2014, as cited in Legault, 2017). When an individual's

need for autonomy is met, one is able to discover and tap on their inner resources and intrinsic motivation to achieve their goals (Legault, 2017). People thrive when they perceive their choices and decisions are their own, rather than imposed by an outside force (Neighbors et al., 2008).

(iii) Competency

Competency refers to the need to experience efficacy and mastery in the tasks and goals in one's life (Dehaan et al., 2016; Legault, 2017). An individual desires to feel effective through their ability to perform tasks, achieve goals, and contribute (Blustein, 2006; Russell, 2011). According to Cognitive Evaluation Theory, "competence underlies the seeking out of optimal challenge and the development of capacities" (Legault, 2017, p. 2), which suggests that individuals strive for growth through seeking challenges in their environment (Neighbors et al., 2008). The Basic Psychological Needs Theory asserts that an individual is satisfied with one's sense of competence when one is provided with sufficient challenge as well as support to allow one to grow in skills and abilities (Legault, 2017).

The need for competency is best met when an individual is in an environment that provides opportunities for one to perform, be supported, and to receive feedback to improve and progress (Dehaan et al., 2016; Bandura, 1997). Conversely, one can feel inferior and inadequate when the need for competency is not met through their experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000, as cited in Chen et al., 2015).

Women's need for competence can be portrayed in their various identities, such as a mother, a daughter, a person, and a wife. When one does not feel competent in the roles that they are playing or there are few opportunities for them to be successful, they may not believe in their own ability to change or improve their well-being (Neighbors et al., 2008). In the situation of women in abusive relationships, when their need for competence is not met in their role as a wife or a mother, they may develop a sense of hopelessness in their situation and may not have the motivation to leave an abusive relationship.

(iv) Belonging

Belonging refers to the need for acceptance in a community with reciprocal and healthy relationships that are caring, supportive, respectful, and nurturing (Legault, 2017; Neighbors et al., 2008; Russell, 2011). When an individual cares for and is cared for by others in one's life, the individual will feel worthy and connected to others (Dehaan et al., 2016). The need for belonging not only includes the individual's need to feel accepted and regarded by one's community; it also includes the individual's experience of being able to make others feel accepted and cared for (Ryan & Deci, 2006). One's need for belonging can be unmet due to experiences of isolation and disconnection (Dehaan et al., 2016).

In the following two sections (*impact of family violence and experiencing in navigating support systems*), the unmet needs of the participants were considered according to the needs mentioned above. Subsequently, through certain help navigating systems employed by the participants when they were experiencing family violence, we looked at how their unmet needs were met and how a restorative intervention could potentially benefit both survivors and perpetrators of family violence from the perspectives of the participants.

Impact of Family Violence

This section described the impact of the family violence experienced by the participants and areas of unmet needs.

Security

(i) Need for Physical Safety

Results showed that the majority of the survivors experienced physical violence from their partners. According to the participants, some of them experienced physical violence in the form of choking, slapping, kicking, throwing of objects, and more. One of the participants said, "*I don't like to get hurt. But he hurt me so that's one of my difficult moments".*

Some of the participants also had difficulties ensuring they had a house to live in. These participants were either Singapore Permanent Residents (PR) or Long-Term Visit Pass holders (LTVP) and their partners were said to have either threatened to terminate their permanent residency in Singapore, told them to leave their houses, or took away their rights to their houses. A participant reported, "*My husband asked me to go out from the house. Then… me and my daughter stay at seaside, for few weeks"*.

From these responses, it was observed that the physical safety for most of the survivors were not met as their environments were neither secure nor free from dangerous situations that could cause them harm. Having a lack of shelter also contributed to their lack of safety due to the exposure to potentially dangerous situations. The uncertainty caused by the lack of physical safety could also lead to psychological distress.

(ii) Need for Emotional Safety

Another area of security needs that were unmet for the survivors of family violence was emotional security. Some of the participants expressed the fear they had towards their ex-partners. For example, one of the participants said, "*Last time... when I wake up, I am very scared of him, when not asleep yet, I will take the mop and broom, mop and sweep then I brush my teeth, cook for baby to eat, wake up and before I go toilet, I clean the house*

quickly before I go to the toilet because I'm scared of my husband". Another participant shared, "*Every time I hear the voices… voices like beating me… all these sounds make me very bitter, very fearful*".

For some participants, the hardest part of their journey was coping with the emotional stress. One of them said that she developed depression and sometimes thought that "*if [she] could kill [herself], everything [would] be okay"*. Some participants found it hard to accept that their ex-partners had extra-marital affairs, and some felt it was "*torturing*" to let go of their love for their ex-partners.

Additionally, there were other unsaid factors that might have impacted these participants' ability to fulfil their emotional security. For example, many of these participants had children who witnessed family violence, with some of these children becoming survivors of the violence themselves. Though unmentioned, survivors of family violence who played the role of a parent might also feel insecure because of their inability to protect their children from family violence. Moreover, being foreigners and coming from a less favourable financial background could have also contributed to their emotional insecurity.

Putting all these factors together, it was evident that it was difficult for survivors of family violence to fulfil their need for emotional security as they often lived in fear and had no sense of security. Most of the time, these survivors also might not know how to cope with the danger presented to them. This might lead to adverse effects such as their stress levels accumulating and resulting in depression, as it did for one of the participants.

(iii) Need for Financial Safety

One other area of security needs that was unmet for the survivors of family violence was financial security. All participants faced financial struggles in their journey and one mentioned that she "*tolerated*" the violence because her partner was able to financially support her and her children. The rest of the participants were unsupported by their partners in the financial aspect, with some facing financial difficulties because of their partners.

Amongst those who were unemployed, majority of them lived in rental homes and had partners who were unemployed as well. One participant who was unemployed had a partner whose salary was high but withheld money from her and due to the family's high household income, she was unable to obtain financial assistance or subsidies to support her children's education. This participant cited this as the "*biggest source of stress*" for her and said that "*when [she asks] for money, he would get angry with [her]*". Being a housewife for many years to take care of her children, she decided to seek employment to earn money but when she sought employment, she was rejected each time due to her lack of working experience.

Amongst the participants who were working, one mentioned that she had to depend largely on her partner's income to support herself and her children. Other employed participants faced financial difficulties because their partners were either unable to work or exploited their finances. One participant had all her savings in her bank account taken by her partner, leaving her with insufficient money for food and rent. Another participant shared that her partner would not provide the family with any money, so she rented out one of their rooms in order to support herself and her children. However, her partner took away the rental income. Although she started working part-time, she mentioned that it was a struggle having to pay for her children's education and raising them.

Therefore, the participants had financial needs that were not met as they did not have stability in terms of having employment or having sufficient finances and this could have been due to financial abuse by their partners or having difficulties finding employment.

Autonomy

A couple of participants expressed frustration and unhappiness about their lack of freedom and autonomy in their marital relationship. They shared that their partners restricted their freedom and wanted to know and control their movements. They expressed feelings of

frustration and were aggrieved that they were not accorded the same respect and freedom to do what they wished to do, just as other human beings.

> *"Last time when I wanted to go find my friend, message my husband that I want to visit my friend, my husband answer then I can go. Sometimes when I want to go out to eat or play, message already, if he doesn't see my message, I will call my mother-in-law, let her know then I can go out." – Participant 4*

> *"Family [in home country] and Singapore not same. Yah, I can feel like that...Because family husband don't help anything. I just follow her [mother-in-law], follow her anything. Because when I fighting, she don't care anything...Then ask for maid or everyone keep the key, cannot, I cannot run, go away, cannot go out like that." – Participant 6*

> *"So I purposely went all the way there to report so because I don't want the distance to be nearer because my daughter is going to school, so I am afraid he will tail her. I have to go to work. I was doing a freelance nanny and housekeeping job, mine is an island-wide job so I am afraid that he will tail me." – Participant 7*

However, the idea of autonomy and agency in the context of a relationship plagued by family violence had to be understood with a broader perspective that considered various complicating factors. "A more complex conception of agency, together with an understanding of the control-based nature of family violence, should caution against easy assumptions that women's capacity to exercise choice is unconstrained" (Stubbs, 2002, p. 45). It was not as straightforward as upping and leaving a marital relationship when women faced family violence, as observed in the journeys of all nine participants. Women's autonomy was limited by various complicating factors, such as their immigration status, their need to nurture and protect their children, and the lack of shelter if they chose to leave their spouses. Choosing to stay in an abusive relationship could be the best possible way to survive and to provide

and meet the needs of their children (Stubbs, 2002). This sentiment was shared by one of the participants:

> *"I cannot voice out… my children are still small and I need to support them, I need to grow them, I need to give them education all these. Then when years go by, I don't know how 26 years passed." – Participant 7*

For some of the participants who were not Singaporeans, choosing to stay in the relationship could be the only way for them to maintain the physical connection with their children, who were Singapore citizens, as there was a risk of them not being able to be around their child should their immigration status be revoked.

> *"My husband always every time every day… threaten me like want to take back my PR. Because I'm here PR that's why I scared… how ah my PR, how my daughter, how my children?" – Participant 1*

> *"[My husband] knows that when I stay here, I need long-term visit pass to stay here. If not I cannot stay here. Baby he will take. He knows this and wants to use this against me… forcing me to go back home. Listen to everything he says and wants me to do." – Participant 2*

There were many considerations participants had prior to their decision to leave an abusive relationship. As much as they wanted more freedom, respect, and autonomy in making their own decisions in the marital relationship, many of them made choices to remain in the relationship as much as they could withstand the abuse in order to protect their children and parent-child relationships.

Some participants expressed that they were able to meet their need for autonomy after leaving the abusive relationship. They were able to find their voice and self-efficacy. They felt that they had more power to make their own decision as to how to survive, raise their children, and live a more fulfilling life.

"…now she feels hopeful that I can single-handedly bring the kids up, I am able to go to work and support them. So she feels like that is one good thing she has gained out of this whole experience." – Participant 9 (through a translator)

"Actually when he started to treat me badly, it made me realized that I must be 'the head', I must be in charge of everything. Let me make my own decisions." – Participant 8

"At that time, I told myself…I will see and slowly I learn about things, I tell myself, if I want to walk out of this situation, I cannot depend on anyone, I have to depend on myself." – Participant 3

However, some participants also shared that despite leaving the relationship, they continued to find it difficult to have the sense of choice and autonomy over their own life, especially pertaining to divorce and housing issues. They expressed feeling aggrieved that they had yet to find control over their own environment despite making the stand to leave their abusive relationships.

"Worried he don't want to divorce…until when I want to stay at shelter? Because, if he still don't want to divorce me, 1 years 2 years, I still waiting. HDB need certificate of divorce, if can, then I can get the house. If, until now I still waiting, I still pray to god, please help me." – Participant 1

"I tried to apply for maintenance in family court but it takes a while, and he can always change, cancel the hearing, he can always say he is unable to attend so postpone again and postpone again so it takes a while." – Participant 4

Competency

(i) Need for Competency in Family Relationships

Participants in this interview expressed the motivation and effort to make their marital relationship work despite challenges such as their spouses' extramarital affairs, unemployment matters, and financial issues that stressed the marital relationship.

> *"I do all the service. Like when I cooked, I served him. I washed his clothes... All the services been done to him. He made me a spare tyre there. He will go to the partner which is very new to him. He will go and try the relationship there. If the relationship doesn't work, he is willing to come back to me. So that's how he treated me."– Participant 7*

> *"Because I kept obeying him, because I love him... whatever he says I just let it be... From the beginning, he never really loved me. He only treats me like an object... that must do whatever he demands or instructs."– Participant 8*

A couple of participants expressed that they tried to help out with financial burden by working but were not encouraged or supported by their spouses.

> *"He said we didn't have enough to cover our family expenses... I said since the children are older now, I can go out to work part-time. He said when I work part-time, I did not take good care of the family... if he needs to eat something, he can go outside to buy…, it's not like he cannot cook. He was just looking for trouble with me."– Participant*

With the exception of one participant, all the participants had children with their partners and the desire to be a competent mother who could protect their children was strong. Most of them expressed that they only decided to leave the abusive relationship when encouraged by their children or when their children were exposed to harm as well. The stereotypical image of a good and competent mother is one who is nurturing, loving, able to

protect her children at all costs and provide a stable family for their children to flourish. Most of them believed that staying in the relationship would be the best option to allow their children to be raised in a nuclear family.

> *"[Husband's family] thought I like to come here to stay. My father in [home country] has been ill for a long time. I need to take care of my father. I don't have time to come to Singapore. I wanted to give my baby a complete family, that's why I'm living with you...Do you know that I was very happy in [my home country]? Why did I come here to have such a hard life and feel so stressed? It wasn't because I want to stay here." – Participant 2*

When their partners were abusive towards them or have failed them in their marital relationship (i.e. through extramarital affairs), participants did not consider leaving the relationships. However, when their partners were abusive towards their children or their children witnessed the violence and encouraged their mothers to leave the relationship, participants made the decision to leave the abusive relationships.

> *"[My children] know my sacrifice is towards my children plus my husband... my younger daughter called me, she said: "I know why are you not leaving the house, it's because of me. So I am telling you, I will follow you. Let's leave." So I immediately also packed all my things and just left... If I were to think now, I was thinking how stupid I can be to tolerate all these years but I have a reason to tolerate so I find it ok, it's alright." – Participant 7*

> *"...when the kids tried to stop the father from hitting her, that's when he ended up hitting the kids as well... that was when it got unbearable and then she decided that she would come to the shelter with her children." – Participant 9 (through a translator)*

Despite leaving the relationship and separating from their husbands, most of the participants continued to express the desire for their children to have a relationship with their father and feelings of sadness and regret that their children did not see their father as a

fatherly figure. As participants witnessed the impact of family violence and the breakdown of their marital relationship on their children, they expressed the unmet need of being a competent mother to their children; one who was able to ensure that the children have a good relationship with their fathers as well.

> *"I... talk with my daughter and my son, important thing for me... he is still your father... the important still respect him. Please, if you love me, means you respect your father... actually my 3 children miss their father." – Participant 1*

> *"... what I want now is the children can be more understanding toward their father, and also hope that their father can reflect on himself, I don't hate him as much now. Although he wants to restore, I don't see the need to anymore." – Participant 3*

> *"I really don't like my daughter develop such anger to the father because she will grow up with a burden in her heart... so that's why even up to now, I'm really still trying to emphasise to her the importance of respect and love even though the father make mistake." – Participant 4*

Some participants expressed the negative impact of family violence on their children's relationship with other men and their apologetic feelings about how things have panned out for their children.

> *"[My daughter] said, If I meet someone like my father, my youth will be gone forever. She said, after all she is financially stable, she can be independent, then I told her, don't have such thoughts, she doesn't listen to me. Men cannot be trusted." – Participant 3*

> *"...whenever [the children] see someone gets angry, they will get very scared... when he sees the friend's father, [my son] would want to go home, because he would think that the boy's father is just like his father." – Participant 5 (through a translator)*

(ii) Need for Personal Competency

The need for competence asserts that people look for challenges in their environment to increase skill development and assist in personal growth (Neighbors et al., 2008). This was evident in the participants who strived to meet their need for competence through work and pursuing their interests and passion. For some of the participants who were on LTVP, they continued to find employment to earn an income for themselves and their families. Two participants highlighted that they continued to engage in acts of helping and giving despite their own circumstances. Engaging in such acts satisfied the need for competence as it allowed one to feel effective in one's actions (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Participants continued to want to grow and find competence and fulfilment through their own actions and efforts.

> *"I still... do charity... go to Cambodia, Vietnam... What happen to me, they all don't know."– Participant 1*

> *"I was working in a school as a cleaning supervisor. I will meet... families, broken families, you know, family violence all that... Even that time also, I had my own family violence, but still I will help them."– Participant 7*

One of the participants expressed that experiencing family violence affected her relationships but she continued to have the need to be a competent person who could earn money for her family and that motivated her to find employment.

> *"It has affected me that I do not want to see people... I don't feel like seeing anybody and also don't want to get to know people... I used to do business in Thailand, then I got to know him, he caused me to become a different person... At the age of 15, I already started working to help my family expenses. Got my parents a big house. Gave them a good life. Ever since I knew my husband, there is no money… everyone is living miserably. I cannot continue with such life. So, I thought about how I can earn money."– Participant 8*

Belonging

(i) Need for Belonging with Immediate Family

In terms of the fundamental need to belong, survivors of family violence may not be able to fulfil this need with their immediate family (e.g. spouse and children). Even though participants with children were able to establish relatively strong relationships with them, all participants faced difficulties feeling a sense of belonging to their partners as a result of family violence. Participants reported feeling stressed out, unsupported, and unappreciated by their partners. One of them stated, "*Actually, all this while, he like never loved me. He like only treated me like a thing or object. He treats me as an object that must do whatever he demands or instructs"*.

Some of the participants' partners engaged in extra-marital affairs. This caused the participants to feel uncertain and angry. One of them said that she "*[could not] take it*" after giving her ex-partner many chances to terminate the affair during the course of five years.

These issues highlighted by the participants allowed one to deduce that these participants were not involved in reciprocal and healthy relationships with their partners as those relationships were not caring, supportive, respectful, nor nurturing. Thus, belonging was an unmet need that the participants have in their relationships with their partners.

(ii) Need for Belonging with Extended Family

Another form of support where survivors of family violence might not be able to fulfil their belonging needs was with their extended family (e.g. parents, in-laws, relatives). Some of the participants who were Singapore PRs or LTVP holders shared that they did not confide in their family members back in their home country about the family violence and this could be attributed to participants not wanting to worry their family members. One participant who was Singaporean shared that her family was very conservative and traditional, and she did not share about the violence she experienced with her family members as they would not be able to empathize with her.

"I not share with… my family, until now. They all don't know I stay here, they all don't know what I doing until now but I try myself to like I don't want to trouble people la." – Participant 1

"I have my siblings but I don't talk to them…[siblings] put me aside, saying that I will talk so much. So they will talk less to me." – Participant 7

Participants also brought up issues with their in-laws that could have made it difficult for the participants to fulfil their belonging needs. Though one of them only mentioned being distant with her in-laws, most of the participants had unpleasant experiences with their in-laws. One said, *"[My husband's family], I have difficulties speaking with them. I must… be careful… I don't dare to speak about things"*. A participant said that in addition to not having her family in Singapore, she was also restricted from contacting her own family by her in-laws. Another participant also mentioned that her ex-partner's family arranged for a matchmaking session for her partner despite their marital status then because the other woman was wealthier than her and her in-laws favoured her.

From these experiences shared by the participants, it was observed that many of them did not have healthy and reciprocal relationships with their extended family members. Therefore, their need to belong was unmet in their relationships with these extended family members.

(iii) Need for Belonging with Friends

With friends, some of the participants were able to meet their belonging needs while some faced the issue of not having a community in Singapore due to having moved here from their home country, being held back by certain reasons such as an ex-partner's controlling behaviour, or a personal preference of not confiding in friends about problems.

Those who did not have a community in Singapore mentioned that they "*didn't know Singapore*" and that they "*felt very alone [in a] foreign land*". The participant who could not reach out to her friends due to her ex-partner's controlling behaviour disclosed that her ex-

partner frequently accused her of engaging in certain actions such as flirting with her co-workers. This led her to drift away from her friends. The other participants said that they did not reach out to their friends for support because they did not want to "*disturb*" them. One eventually sought support from her peers.

Once again, it is evident that most of the participants were not able to reach out to their friends for support. Although reasons differed for each participant, the need to belong to a peer group and form healthy and reciprocal relationships with friends might have been difficult for the participants to meet.

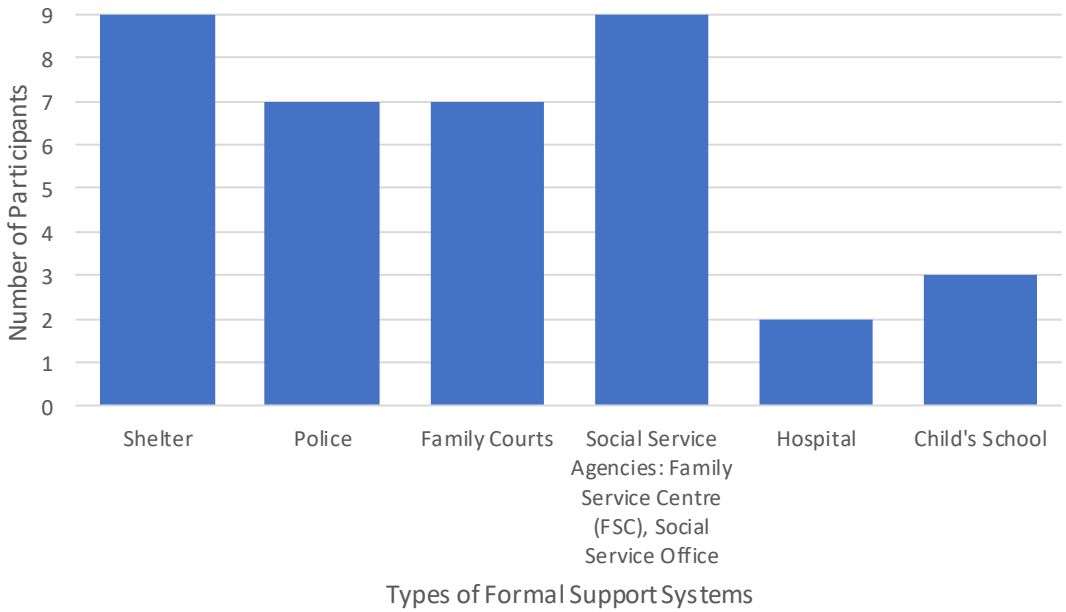
Experience in Navigating Support Systems

Support systems are people or institutions where individuals go to obtain assistance to cope with practical, relational, or emotional issues. This section describes the participants' engagement with various formal and informal support systems and their experiences in navigating these systems; whether their experiences with them responded to their fundamental needs.

Formal Support Systems

Formal support systems are formal service providers, such as police, hospitals, social services, and shelters, that provide help and support for survivors of family violence (Bouhours et al., 2013). All participants in this study sought help from formal support systems (see Figure 1). They were provided assistance in areas such as temporary refuge, emotional support, financial assistance, and legal and administrative assistance. The following sections explored how the help provided by the formal support systems led to participants' security, autonomy, competency, and belonging needs being met or unmet.

Figure 1: *Types of Formal Support Systems Engaged*



Needs Met Through Formal Support Systems

Majority of the participants delayed reporting or seeking formal help after the onset of family violence, ranging from 3 to 26 years. However, all participants sought help from the formal support systems when they perceived that their lives were endangered, and they wanted to protect their lives and their children's lives.

> *"So firstly, is I don't want to die. Scared he throw me out of the window. Secondly, that is my child. I thought about my child. Got child, got a mother. I need to take care of them. I cannot let anything happen to me." – Participant 8*

(i) Need for Security Met

Participants had their physical safety needs met when the perpetrators were arrested by the police or sent to the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) swiftly after they called for help. One of the participants shared that she would call the police whenever her husband acted violently and it helped to stop the violence. Some also had their physical safety needs met when being attended to at hospitals.

> *"I called the police because he was so drunk and he put knife on my neck. It's very scary for me so I called the police. ...he was arrested and they bring him to Changi for three days." – Participant 4*

> *"They found this disorder on him that they told me, they encouraged me to leave the house. So I told them my situation that my daughter, my children… I need a father role for it and the doctors advised me that all these can be done without him but my life is important. It really wakens me up… and issued me a PPO." – Participant 7*

Amongst the formal support systems, family court and social service agencies also played a role in meeting the participants' physical safety needs through lawyers and social workers who aided them in the application for a Personal Protection Order (PPO). One participant shared that her lawyer provided good information on the process of filing for divorce and her social worker provided directions on obtaining the PPO and getting to the

Legal Aid Bureau for assistance. With help from the formal support systems, the participants could then take actions to be physically safe, feel emotionally secure, or leave their abusive relationships.

Help provided by shelters also allowed participants to meet their physical safety needs. Some participants shared that staying in a shelter had taught them ways to keep themselves safe, such as knowing when to call the police. Besides that, shelters also had procedures, such as home leave forms, that some participants felt were helpful safety measures that protected them.

> *"She feels safe. She feels like, for example at Star Shelter what we have is called like a home leave form where if they go on extended periods of time, they have to fill up a form to inform us. So she feels like even that is a safety measure to protect her, so we know where is she going and protect herself and the kids." – Participant 9 (through a translator)*

Social workers were deemed instrumental in bridging and meeting the physical safety and financial security needs as they provided advice and assistance to participants in various areas, such as linking up with lawyers to facilitate divorce procedures, and connecting them to shelter including extension of stay, financial assistance and work opportunities. These matters were important to participants as their need for physical safety and financial security were at stake after leaving an abusive relationship and they needed practical support and help to move forward in their lives. With the help of social workers, their need for financial security and other forms of resources such as information and material resources were met, creating a positive experience for them.

> *"The social workers are here to help her with resources, so she is able to learn or ask. ... she said [the social worker] was very encouraging, connected her with resources so even when she was trying to switch jobs, she was the one who helped her to apply… her worker was very helpful." – Participant 9 (through a translator)*

> *"The shelter social worker has been very supportive… with her helping the welfare, food, shelter and everything else. Then the FSC social worker has been helping with like, bring her to ICA, court, letters, if she needs to go places, then the social worker will always help her." – Participant 5 (through a translator)*

Another aspect of security that was met by the formal support systems was emotional security. Some ways social service practitioners supported the survivors emotionally included providing a safe space for the survivors to talk, listening to them, and accompanying them to court. Participants who attended counselling or therapy sessions at the shelters felt that they were able to share their thoughts and feelings, which were validated and acknowledged. One participant shared that counselling helped her when she was "*having a difficult time and [when she needed] to let it out, there is someone who gives you a listening ear, it is very important".* Another participant also expressed she felt "*relieved when [she] talked to her (counsellor)".*

In addition, support was also provided to children who were staying at the shelter. One participant shared that her 10 year-old daughter was affected by the family violence and felt stressed out having to travel frequently between two countries (Singapore and her home country), and to relocate from crisis shelters to rental apartments multiple times before eventually settling down at one of the shelters. Her daughter became emotionally withdrawn due to the upheaval and transitions she experienced. However, the situation improved after attending art therapy at the shelter.

Participants also shared positive experiences where social workers intervened in a timely and consistent manner when participants were facing difficulties and were emotionally overwhelmed with what was happening in their lives.

> *"When I was in the shelter there was a social worker helping me out. She even followed me to the courts. When the divorce didn't take place because he didn't agree, we were sent to a mediation. So…my lawyer was there to know what is*

happening there… to see whether I'm safe, she followed me all the way to the court." – Participant 7

"I am very grateful to the hospital social worker. She helped me a lot. Because at my most difficult time, my mental state was breaking down… because (the social worker) was on leave, and I didn't know what to do (when) my ex-husband was not wanting to get a divorce because there were a lot of obstacles, so I called her and asked her what I should do next, how I cope with the stress. Then she taught me some ways, and I did it." – Participant 3

(ii) Need for Autonomy Met

Participants reported positive experiences with the formal support system when they had the space to carefully think through their decisions and the freedom to exercise their own choices confidently. For example, one participant shared that the shelter she and her daughter were residing at gave them the opportunity and freedom of choice to try out living in the shelter before deciding to stay. Another participant shared that she was brought up in a family environment where she had no voice-space and autonomy and that led to her lack of confidence to speak up for herself and make the decisions she believed were right in her troubling marital relationship. After many years of experiencing violence, she finally felt able to make the choices she needed to keep herself safe. This was attributed to encouragements and advice given by the formal support systems she engaged with that gave her a space to think through her issues and make her choices. Thus, participants had their autonomy needs met through their experiences with formal support systems.

"I come back to the same old situation which I was facing with my family - cannot voice out. I cannot voice out… Then when years go by, I don't know how 26 years go… So, the police were there, he was arrested [and] brought to IMH to diagnose… the doctors … encouraged me to leave the house [that] my life is important. It really wakens me up." – Participant 7

(iii) Need for Competency Met

Through the participants' sharing, it was apparent that the support they received from the formal support systems helped them feel more competent and empowered to change or improve their situations. For example, one participant went through counselling and the counselling had helped her to be more assertive in the relationship as she shared that she was able to voice out her needs to her husband. He became supportive in various ways, such as helping to make milk for their child and applying for their child's passport to allow her to bring their child back to her home country for visitation. Another participant shared similar thoughts about her experience with counselling at a social service agency and how it empowered her to make the decision to stay in the marriage as her husband expressed his willingness to change.

In addition, support given to one of the participants by the social workers at the FSC and shelter also contributed to her feeling competent as she was able to handle difficult situations better now compared to her previous state:

> *"Before I came to a shelter, I didn't know a lot of things. Don't understand what is happening. After I stayed in a shelter, when I went back home, my husband chokes me or bullies me, I know to call the police." – Participant 2*

(iv) Need for Belonging Met

Many participants were foreigners with their families not living in Singapore. Despite that, they shared positive experiences of finding a community in the shelter they were residing at and that connection helped them to meet their belonging needs as they were able to form friendships with other residents.

> *"So from October, we are here (Star Shelter). They are very good. Before my daughter really don't mingle with other kids, and only few weeks then she started to warm up. Though I'm a foreigner, they still help me and my daughter, accepted us to stay and… Yes, we developed friendship with other residents... yah. I mean it's common that there are, in community like this there are misunderstandings. So, the*

staff also are very good. They also mediate if there are conflict, misunderstandings." – *Participant 4*

Participants' sense of belongingness might have also been met through support given by their social workers; one participant expressed her gratefulness and keenness to "*remain as friends*" with her social worker as the social worker helped her immensely during her "*hardest times*".

"I am very grateful to the hospital social worker. She helped me a lot. Because at my most difficult time, my mental state was breaking down and I didn't know what to do, then my ex-husband was not wanting to get a divorce because there were a lot of obstacles, so I called her and asked her what I should do next, how I cope with the stress. Then she taught me some ways, and I did it. ...I hoped that even if the case is closed, we could still remain as friends. Because I think that in my hardest times, you helped me, I am very thankful to her for her help and I would also think about the times when she helped me and would like to ask her out to have a chat, have a meal together." – *Participant 3*

Needs Unmet Through Formal Support Systems

Although formal support systems played an important role in many of the participants' lives, there were inevitably gaps in the systems that were unfavourable to meeting the participants' needs.

(i) Need for Security Unmet

At least half of the participants reported negative experiences with formal support systems as they perceived that their need for safety was not taken seriously when they sought help. They shared frustration towards professionals in formal support systems making decisions based on their systems' protocol and disregarding their voice and situations.

"I even begged her, them, if they can let us stay for 1 night only, or 2 nights until I can find a place but they refused. I'm very upset that time and my daughter were there and she was very tired and I get so angry. And, I even told them, can you please don't go by the book, I mean, just a compassionate grounds, 2 nights, But still they won't."– Participant 4

"I emailed ICA about my situation and all these. But after that they extended [my husband's] PR period for 6 months, which I am shocked because I am telling you I am not safe."– Participant 7

"When I went to that department, they said I don't have help from [some designated agency], don't have the [required] letter, I can't help you. He also didn't tell me what to do. When I asked what can I do next, he just told me to go back to the person who referred me to there. I was thinking to myself, I called in, where can I go?" – Participant 3

One participant mentioned that she has "*never activated*" her PPO despite having obtained it as she felt that her safety would still be compromised when she had to return to the same environment. This can be attributed to uncertainty, lack of information given to the participant, or a lack of faith the participant had towards the formal support systems in ensuring her safety.

"She got a PPO in 2011. She said that she had a PPO from 2011 but she never activated it because she was afraid, let's say she goes to the police, she activates the PPO, she's going to come back to the same house and she's afraid that the problem will just get worse."– Participant 9 (through a translator)

Furthermore, participants reported that they faced challenges seeking security and moving forward in life after leaving their circumstances because of the constraints in the systems, policies, and the long waiting time required to obtain practical help.

"Because that time though my husband still working, he didn't give us anything, and I tried to apply for maintenance in family court but it takes a while..." – Participant 4

"Because I call you (social worker) no respond, I message you also no respond. Then after that I call office, they say you on leave. Oh okay, then I go direct lah. Because I cannot wait." – Participant 1

Limitations in the formal support systems also left some of the participants' security needs unmet. One participant was unable to obtain housing as she still had her matrimonial home under her name due to her husband's unwillingness to proceed with the divorce. Some of the participants also faced difficulties securing accommodation and financial assistance as they either did not qualify for the schemes or had insufficient resources to access the services.

"If I wanted to apply for financial assistance or subsidy for the children, I couldn't find any because they said that our household income is sufficient to give the children… They look at the total household income. But if his money is not given, even if your total household income is high… Nothing you can do. The children will have to suffer." – Participant 3

"I mean seek help, there are so many rules and regulations I don't know. So that is where the rules and regulations I sometimes don't want to seek help." – Participant 7

"Limitation in the sense like you know when she introduced the lawyer to me, I have to pay them a lump sum of money. So I was asking to break down the fees, so that I can pay them monthly, they are unable to help me in that… maybe family service centre to help me first. Maybe I will pay back to family centre, they are unable to help me in that. I am mostly stuck in financial." – Participant 7

(ii) Need for Autonomy Unmet

For some participants, help from the formal support systems could have been better if they were given the opportunity to clarify and relate their perspectives, and given the capacity to exercise agency in terms of being part of the decision-making process. One of the participants called a helpline and was given direct instructions without engaging her first to understand the situation. Another participant shared that when she tried to seek information about applying for a divorce, she was unable to comprehend the procedures and it was a frustrating experience for her. The lack of clarity and understanding in the information provided might negatively affect participants' ability to make informed choices.

> *"That person's tone was very hurting. I was hurt by what that person said, because they don't know your situation and he said you do this, do this, do this, and I was thinking to myself, you don't know my situation and you ask me to do all of these things." – Participant 3*

> *"Also went to a place to apply for divorce, I didn't know what it was talking about…" – Participant 2*

(iii) Need for Competency Unmet

Regarding participants' competency needs, participants were not able to feel competent with the help of the formal support systems as they faced uncertainty and perceived insufficient resources were provided to meet their needs. These participants also faced difficulties answering questions from the police and court officers.

> *"Things that she doesn't like, for example the police will constantly ask her questions, like so many questions and then that's where she gets super stressed. They ask, like the one thing, she asking 3 or 4 times like this." – Participant 5 (through a translator)*

> *"My husband also found a lawyer. Now he cancelled the lawyer. He asked me to cancel everything. I told the lawyer to give me till tomorrow, to cancel the divorce… I am very stressed out. If I cancel wrongly, my life in the future will be very tough. If I*

get a divorce, what will happen to my baby? If I don't get a divorce, my future will be very tough. I don't know what to do." – Participant 2

(iv) Need for Belonging Unmet

Some participants were unable to meet their belonging needs at the shelter as they did not feel accepted in the community. One participant felt that her stay at the shelter was not welcomed and had difficulty adapting as the other residents displayed displeasure when her children cried. Another participant expressed her hesitancy to share her problems with the community in the shelter as she perceived their advice to be unhelpful for her situation and she was concerned about feeling more overwhelmed with different opinions and advice.

"I solve myself. The problem is, that's why when I hear got group work, I tell them, the important is your life is don't hear what people say… you don't divorce lah later you got problem, you PR ah, later ah … You cannot take children, cannot take care.' Wah then become you mad, like your mind like stress." – Participant 1

Participants also shared that when the formal support systems intervened in some of their situations, it triggered their ex-spouses to behave in a more controlling and harsher manner towards them. This further strained their relationships with their ex-spouses and affected their relationships with other involving parties, such as their friends and family members.

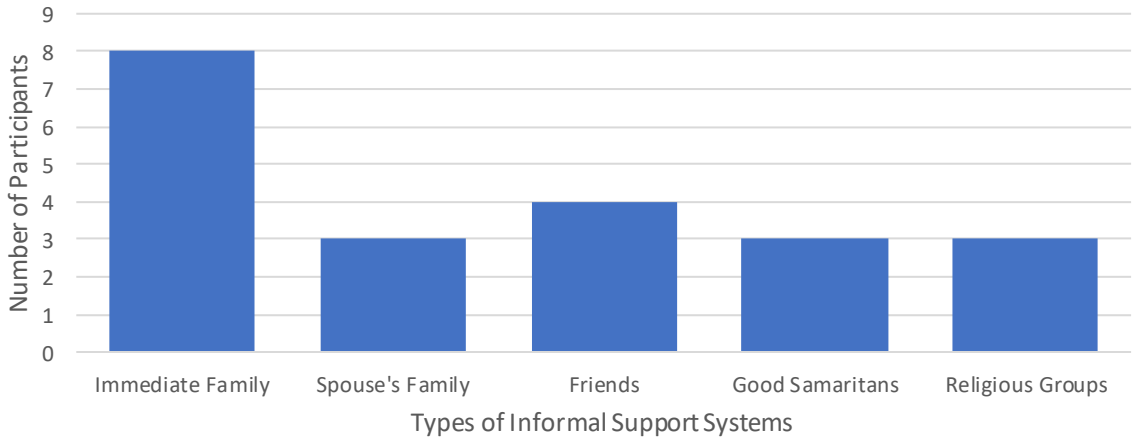
"Want to talk to him nicely, no point. Because he always blame people…Then the counsellor asked him, starting blame me, blame the family…" – Participant 1

"Last time the FSC helped me, my husband said a lot. Email, call… Did a lot of things… complained. Went to courts, put our names, take picture and complained, who helped me to do what, said un-nice things. I was very stressed. Last time my phone, my husband paid for it and he knows my password. He called everyone and scolded all my friends. Now my friends don't talk to me." – Participant 2

Informal Support Systems

Informal support systems are groups of people who provide support outside formal settings such as social service agencies or healthcare systems (Campbell et al., 2011). Some examples of informal support systems are friends and families. Majority of the participants in this study approached their informal support network for help (see Figure 2). Through the support given, participants received information, advice, and support that enabled them to meet their security, autonomy, competency, and belonging needs. Likewise, the needs remained unmet in some cases.

Figure 2: *Types of Informal Support Systems Engaged*



Needs Met Through Informal Support Systems

(i) Need for Security Met

Informal support systems helped many of the participants ensure their safety and protection during times where they were physically unsafe. One participant shared that her colleagues protected her when her ex-spouse went to harass her at her workplace and her boss provided her with temporary accommodation when she had to get away from her ex-spouse's violence. Another participant shared an incident when her husband threatened to hurt the family with a knife and she immediately called her friend who was also her neighbour. Her friend called the police and allowed the participant's children into her apartment, to safeguard their physical safety.

"It was the point when he started to threaten her with the knife… she got scared, she called her friend to come up and then the husband was chasing after them, then that's when the friend called the police. ...But when the police took him away, the husband away, the children were not there, they did not see that whole process. Because they were already at the friend's house." – Participant 5 (through a translator)

Participants whose family resided in their home country shared that it was comforting to know and be assured by their family that they could return home if they chose to leave their spouses. One participant disclosed that throughout her marriage, she had returned to her hometown several times when she needed to get away from her abusive spouse.

"My mother said: 'if you are having a hard time, I am able to support you with my two hands, come back home, protect you.'" – Participant 2

"I mainly go back home [to hometown] then come back. I want go relax, relax first. I stay here cannot think. I want go relax then think," – Participant 6

Informal support systems related to faith and religion also provided physical safety and emotional security to the participants. One participant whose parents were no longer around and had no family to return to in her hometown when her social visit pass expired, had no place to stay in her hometown with her 10-year-old daughter when their social visit pass expired. A pastor whom she got acquainted through one of the shelters she stayed at in Singapore referred a place for her to stay in her home country before she returned to Singapore to settle her divorce.

Participants' financial security needs were met through help provided by family members and their employers, who gave them stability through jobs. One participant shared that her employer helped her to secure the employment pass while her brother sent her money so that she could provide for her daughter.

> *"It's my brother, my third brother. He's the only one who knew. Sometimes if I don't have financial, like to buy food or something, though there is food but my daughter has certain allergies and very picky so I asked him if he can send money to me. He can send 50 dollars, nothing more. Because it's a lot of money compared to [the currency back home]." – Participant 4*

(ii) Need for Autonomy Met

Participants' need for autonomy was met through their informal support systems as they received support and guidance from their family members, churchmates, and friends, whom empowered them to make their decisions. For example, when one participant shared about her problems to her family members as she was concerned about her children's well-being, her family members gave her the autonomy to make her own choices. A participant also shared that she had a friend who gave her advice but left her to make the final decision. Reassurances from participants' informal support systems, like the one given by one of the participant's daughter as shared below, also played a part in giving participants the strength and confidence to exercise their choices.

> *"'Mama, please don't come back to the house again. We can live without my father, I still can go to school. You don't worry, my principal… school help me.' Then my daughter like give me energy to be okay." – Participant 1*

> *"When it started affecting the kids and all that, the family said you know yourself best so you should do what is right for you la." – Participant 9 (through a translator)*

> *"[Her friend] also recommend me come here and start new. Don't worry, don't scared new like that. You come here already you can go make the PPO." – Participant 6*

(iii) Need for Competency Met

A couple of participants shared that they were better able to take care of their children or perform their daily chores with the help from their family members. One

participant expressed relief when her family in her home country took care of her young child for her, thus allowing her to work and support herself in Singapore. Other participants shared similar experiences of support rendered by their informal support network in childminding, which helped them to be less worried about their children's well-being and focus on earning a living to raise the family. This gave them the sense of competency as individuals and as mothers.

> *"The family has helped her, like her father, brother-in-law bring the kids out, you know, just spend time with them, just be like a source of comfort." – Participant 9 (through a translator)*

One of the participants shared that her mother-in-law had barred her from contacting her daughter who was in her home country and she was worried about her daughter's well-being. With help from her sister and friends in her home country, she was able to get in touch with her daughter's teacher and became aware of her daughter's situation which was worrying. Concerned about her daughter, she pressured her ex-husband to apply for a LTVP for their daughter so she could bring her daughter back to Singapore and take care of her. The help rendered to her by her daughter's teacher gave her the knowledge that she needed to take control of the situation and take care of her daughter herself. Being able to do so contributed to her perceived sense of competency.

> *"So what I did was I searched for the teacher in her school and tried to communicate with them, and asked my friend to go to her school, and my sister. So there is one advice from the teacher that it's better that (my daughter) is with me… that time she's thin and she's not eating well, which is very hard to hear for the mother because I know we are sending 1000 dollars every month for her maintenance and she don't have enough food to eat in school… So it's very disturbing to hear that. So I keep nagging my husband to bring back my daughter and apply her LTVP." – Participant 4*

Participants were also able to seek help from informal support systems to gather more information about what they could do in their situation. Prior to seeking help from the social service agencies, most participants asked their friends about matters concerning their situations. One participant shared that she went on Facebook and spoke to an individual who gave her advice on how to file for a PPO. The support rendered by friends also included giving them more information on divorce procedures and ancillary matters, finding legal assistance, and filing for PPO. Another participant shared that her friend's church pastor provided her the impetus to seek a lawyer to deal with her situation.

(iv) Need for Belonging Met

Feeling a sense of belonging to immediate family members appeared important to the participants. When their family members were present to support them during their times of difficulty, they felt comforted and supported. One participant shared that in the midst of her divorce, her father and brother-in-law brought her two children out and spent time with them. She said that the "*source of comfort*" was important to her and her children. Another participant expressed that she felt understood and was heartened when her ex-spouse's brother and sister did not side with her ex-spouse but supported her instead during the couple's conflicts and disagreements. Another participant shared that her mother-in-law did not follow her spouse's directives to keep her away from her baby and stepped in to do what was right.

> *"Sometimes when I am at home, he would call his mother to come and take the baby away to her house. Lock the door and don't let me see my baby. His mother didn't. She told him to open the door." – Participant 2*

Participants who found support in religion shared that they felt a sense of belonging to their church community as their churchmates supported them in many ways to help them get through their difficult moments. This appeared particularly important for participants who were foreigners and did not have family members in Singapore they could rely on.

"Because in the church, my friends, I have two elders who really help me in everything... They just transfer (money) for me. I don't ask. Maybe they know how I feel. I'm very shy also to ask, especially money." – Participant 4

"I only felt very alone because I am from foreign land; Only got church. I attend church." – Participant 8

Another participant shared that when she was depressed and had almost wanted to give up on her life, her churchmates were there for her. That led to her return to church, where she found hope and healing through the care and support of her churchmates and her pastor. The relationships she formed with her church community also helped her to develop an alternative narrative about her situation and to find meaning in her journey.

"The sisters from church help me in my toughest moments, God answered me and gave me these sisters, who suddenly contacted me again and asked me how I am, and brought me out to have coffee. [With] their encouragement and support, I started going back to Church… A pastor from Taiwan came over, helped to cure my depression… I was cured by God and I'm also thankful to the pastor who taught us how to relax, how to resolve our difficulties, not avoid or hide when we encounter problems, get a few people to pray and to express what we hold in our hearts." – Participant 3

In addition, for participants who were foreigners, it was especially important for them to have informal support systems to reach out to. Some participants mentioned them having encountered difficulties seeking help from formal support systems due to language barrier or lack of understanding of the formal systems' protocols as mentioned above. Compared to formal support systems, the informal support network might have given participants experiences that were more compassionate and less confusing as they shared similar cultural backgrounds. One participant who found herself denied accommodation by a formal

support system found that she could rely on her friend to provide her a rented room for shelter.

Another form of informal support that possibly contributed to participants' sense of belonging to the country, especially for foreigners, was help given by good Samaritans. One participant shared when she escaped from her spouse during a violent episode to call for help, she stumbled upon three helpful individuals who called the police for her.

Needs Unmet Through Informal Support Systems

From the above, it was evident that informal support systems had helped many of the participants greatly. However, there were also incidents where participants' needs could not be met through help from informal support systems.

(i) Need for Security Unmet

Some participants were unable to fulfil their physical safety needs through their experiences with their informal support systems as the people they engaged were sometimes unable to help or were unconcerned with the participants' situations. A participant did not reach out to her neighbors for help as they were elderly men in their 60s and she perceived that they would not have the ability to help when her husband was violent towards her and her child. Another participant shared that her mother-in-law witnessed the violent incidents but "*she also don't care like that, everyone (ex-spouse's family) know but they don't care"*.

Financial security was important to many of the participants, especially for those who were Work Pass or LTVP holders. One of the participants felt betrayed when her colleague reported her to the Ministry of Manpower for working when her employment pass was being processed, causing her employment pass to be revoked. It affected the participant greatly as she needed to provide accommodation for her daughter. Furthermore, she was barred from working in Singapore for a year. This greatly affected her financial security and she had to

seek help from an FSC and sell her personal items to sustain her living and support her daughter.

(ii) Need for Autonomy Unmet

In terms of participants' autonomy needs, some of the participants' informal support systems did not give the participants opportunity to make their own decisions while some of them criticised the participants' decisions. These would have led to the limitation of participants' freedom of choice. One of the participants shared that her sister's comment about her needing to get married due to her pregnancy was imposed on her. Prior to knowing that she was pregnant, she wanted to call off the marriage as her spouse had previously bullied and took advantage of her. However, her sister told her she must not abort the child and that she must give the child a father. The participant said, "*I didn't have a choice".* Another participant made the decision to leave her spouse and was faced with unfair judgements from her sister. These incidences showed that the participants did not always have the autonomy or support to do what they preferred or wanted and the pressure they faced from family members did not help them.

> *"Now currently my situation, my sister also doesn't want me to divorce. When she come and talk to me saying that why you can make this type of harsh decision, I said don't talk, don't talk to me, what do you know? What do you know that is happening in my house? What do you know what emotion I am going through, what do you know my children what is she what are they going through, what they went through, how hurt we were, how humiliating it was. You didn't follow me in my journey right?" – Participant 7*

(iii) Need for Competency Unmet

For some participants, their inability to connect with and care for their children, due to interference from their parents-in-law, could have caused them to face feelings of incompetence in their roles as mothers. For example, a participant shared that she did not

have "*proper communication*" with her daughter while her daughter was in her home country with her in-laws as they restricted the participant from having regular contact with her child.

Participants could also have felt incompetent as they were unable to fulfil their other roles in life. For example, one participant shared that she could not fulfil her role as a daughter as she was not able to visit her ill-stricken father. She faced such restrictions because her spouse had refused to help their child apply for a passport and she was unwilling to leave her infant with her spouse alone in Singapore. She was worried that her spouse would not be able to take care of their child and she might risk not getting her child back if she were to leave the country to visit her father.

(iv) Need for Belonging Unmet

Amongst the nine participants, six of them were foreigners and the majority of them did not have family members residing in Singapore. New to Singapore themselves, most of them did not have a local community that they could seek help from. Thus, their belonging needs were already unmet. They were also hesitant to reach out to their family members as they feared that they would be burdening their families with their problems.

> *"No, I never tell anything. I don't want them (family) to sad or worry about me like that." – Participant 6*

> *"Last time no, because for me I'm the oldest, I'm the one who always find ways and I don't want them (family) to get worried or sad." – Participant 4*

Furthermore, their belonging needs could not be met with their in-laws either as many of their in-laws were unsupportive. One participant reported that her mother-in-law was protective of her ex-spouse and did not listen to her. Similarly, other participants faced similar predicaments where their in-laws disregarded their needs.

> *"She only see her son correct. Anytime I wrong. Only her son correct. What her son do correct, correct." – Participant 6*

"I tried to ask my in-laws if I can bring K (daughter) here, just for the holiday, because it's the school holiday in the [home country], for a week. But they refused. And they kept her passport." – Participant 4

A few of the participants reported that they were being taken advantage of by their informal support systems although the community knew of their situations. This would have prevented the participants from feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance in the community.

"And since I'm new there, I tried to please everybody and so... it ended up I cooking for everybody, 3 meals a day. Sometimes with snack. And they still did bad to me and my daughter… They take advantage of me, financially - they borrow everything… and never returned. ...My daughter told me that they spent all her money and all her food, they are the ones eating. I didn't know that until a few weeks after. So, it's a really bad experience." – Participant 4

Notably, one of the participants shared that she did not have a community to reach out to, thus her belonging needs were not met by any informal support systems. This could be the result of her being brought up in an environment where she was not allowed to voice out her thoughts and opinions. When she made the decision to leave her ex-spouse, her family members were not supportive as they could not empathise with her and agree with her decision. This caused further tensions in their relationships. This participant did not have a community of friends either, as her ex-spouse was controlling of her social life and caused her to drift away from her friends.

"I actually don't have friends. ...My siblings yah, I have siblings but I don't talk to them. … My sisters support my husband, saying that because he earned, physically earned and give the family. ...So to them, it's logic. I mean no need to understand the wife, no need to treat a wife well, just earn and give." – Participant 7

Participation in a Restorative Process

This section highlights the participants' view on the use of a restorative process to address the issue of family violence, including its potential benefits, concerns and motivations to participate in a restorative process.

What Participants Like About the Restorative Process

Participants mentioned that a restorative process could provide a platform for parties to come together, where they had a space to engage in dialogues to mediate and resolve issues through expressing and listening to each individual's needs and perspectives to uncover the main issue of the problem. This would facilitate mutual understanding which could help to settle the issue in a calm manner and possibly facilitate change.

> *"There is communication being done, like he, she knows what the problem, he knows what's the problem and then they can talk and discuss about it. Both parties can know what is each other's mistake, what have each other done to each other, like what is the problem going on so that he or she can make the changes to do better."– Participant 5 (through a translator)*

> *"You open all anything that we understand what you want to, what you need to change, what I need to change." – Participant 6*

Some participants thought that involving other concerned stakeholders such as extended family members and friends could allow their spouses, especially the person using violence to hear others' perspectives of the situation. The involvement of children, which was strongly encouraged in a restorative intervention, could allow them to express their feelings about the situation and raise their needs. This could enable the affected parties to resolve issues while taking the children's needs into consideration as well. Persons using violence might be more receptive to the perspectives and suggestions of other important people in

their lives such as close friends, family members, and their own children, thereby creating the impetus for change.

> *"因为当局者迷，旁观者清 (Because when you are involved in the situation, you might not be able to see as clearly as outsiders). The suggestions they made, we have to change and accept our own weaknesses, to change." – Participant 3*
>
> *"Can help both parties to identify and acknowledge their mistake and can work it out by seeking professional help and changing their approach." – Participant 4*
>
> *"Both parties can know what is each other's mistake, what have each other done to each other, like what is the problem going on so that he or she can make the changes to do better." – Participant 5 (through a translator)*
>
> *"I think the family also together understand, what you wrong or what he wrong like that." – Participant 6*
>
> *"Got help from others, better…the husband recognises he needs to change." – Participant 8*

Talking through the issues then enabled parties involved to reflect on the impact of their actions on each other, which would be of help in the healing process. One participant shared that "*if you kind of reflect on what you did and somehow realise you have a fault as well, then I believe they can heal the pain"*.

Finally, the participants felt that a restorative process could be an attempt to restore the relationships of the family, which could be beneficial especially for families with children so that "she *grows up with not a broken family".* One participant acknowledged that she was also responsible for the breakdown of her marital relationship when she used a verbal "*attacking*" stance to respond to her spouse and "*instead of solving the problem together, [the couple] drifted apart*." She would have appreciated the opportunity to talk things through

amicably rather than employed an attacking stance which did not help the marital relationship and her young child was affected in the process. One participant shared that a restorative process was akin to giving the marital relationship "*a chance to try*" before the decision to separate is made.

Concerns Regarding the Restorative Process

Despite the articulated benefits of having a restorative process, the participants had also identified their concerns regarding this process.

(i) Lack of emotional security

One concern was the lack of emotional security for participation in a restorative process. According to one participant, she felt that her husband's remarks towards her would be harsh, that he would sound blaming, "*he always blames people…blame me, his family"*. She also mentioned that this had happened during a counselling session where her husband "*blamed me, blamed the family"*. She also cited the incident when she requested for him to proceed with the divorce since he was the one who mooted the idea, he expressed that, "*I want to me you suffer until you come to me ask forgiveness"*. One participant cited examples where her ex-husband would hurl vulgarities at her each time she sought assistance regarding family matters, including at the counsellor and housing agent

Another participant who also mentioned the lack of emotional security to participate in a restorative process, shared that she would be "*stressed*" as her husband ever got upset with her seeking help from others and called to scold her friends, resulting in them distancing from her. Therefore, she felt that her husband would be upset about her sharing with other people about her family issue. She seemed concerned about this despite having acknowledged that her husband needed counselling. This might stem from her desire to stay in the marriage for her child's well-being, including being loved by both natural parents and having the opportunity to receive a better education than in her home country, despite the fact that her mother had requested for her to return home with her child.

One participant seemed to suggest that there needed to be emotional safety for children's participation in the process, so that they would not get overwhelmed or confused by the conversation:

> *"If the kid is not able to digest what is the conversation all about then what is the point of them being there?"– Participant 5 (through a translator)*

(ii) Lack of physical and psychological safety

Another participant mentioned that physical and psychological safety must be considered before convening a restorative process so that the victim would not feel at risk of danger. She opined that the severity of the abuse was important and had to be considered first "*because it really puts the other member in a very dangerous position, then I don't think it's a good thing".* Children also needed to feel safe to voice their thoughts and feelings and not be caught in a conversation where her parents would not speak well of each other.

The consideration of physical and psychological safety needs was extended to spouse's possible negative reaction after the restorative process. One participant shared that the husband might seem to be listening to other parties' viewpoints in the process but might hurt the wife after he gets out of the conversation. This was echoed by another participant.

> *"If what happens if in the group, the husband is just silently going to listen to what the wife says and he's going to harm outside, it is not safety for the wife right?...As much as when [we] are there, nothing can happen but the moment [we] leave, anything can happen."– Participant 7*

One participant mentioned that having the presence of a social worker during the process might mitigate the safety concern.

(iii) Spouses' commitment to change

Participants had mentioned that it was necessary for one to acknowledge the wrongful actions and to have the desire to change for a restorative process to take place.

Three participants shared that a restorative process would not be helpful for them since their ex-husbands were not committed to change, including getting gainful employment, which to them was a source of the marital conflict.

> *"I tell him like this. Please, you change, now you 56. Maybe next year or 4 years ago, again, I say, you cannot work. Who want to take care you? Please you change. Not for me. Maybe for your new wife. Please, I just tell him. I know what to do, he says."* – *Participant 1*

> *"It can be helpful for people who wants to change."* – *Participant 6*

> *"His side of the family have spoken to him, you know, go find a job and don't be like this and everything and he has said, said that, like yah ok I'll go find a job… countless times but nothing has changed."* – *Participant 9*

It seemed like feeling the lack of motivation to reconcile with one's spouse could deter one's desire to participate in the restorative process. According to one participant, her husband remarried without her consent, "*before I go out from the house, he [re]married already…without permission from me"*. This might have led her to feel a lack of respect in the relationship, resulting in disappointment and hurt. She added that her husband gave all his CPF savings to his new wife and the participant expressed, "*I give up already*". For a restorative process to be effective, one participant mentioned that both parties needed to desire the marriage to give them the impetus to work things out, where "*if only one party is working hard to make it work, then it's not helpfu*l".

(iv) Connectedness with other family members

The level and strength of connectedness with other family members was also a consideration to widen the circle for participation in a restorative process. One participant shared that she and her husband were not close with her in-laws, stating that "*they like don't care about my husband"*. She also added that her in-laws did not intervene despite

expressing their disapproval of her husband not supporting her and their children financially. To her, it seemed that they did not care much. She also felt that his family was "*fed up*" with him and had "*give up*" on him. This was echoed by another participant who shared that she "*don't really see*" her in-laws, and each family had their own concerns to attend to, "*they have their own family matters. We have our own family matters. They also have to work, take care of baby, don't have time"*. She also felt that her husband's family would "*protect*" him. Another participant shared that her in-laws were aligned with her ex-husband:

> *"The family all think I wrong then ask him outcast me already also. I think maybe they don't like me already. Then I scared talk, to contact." – Participant 6*

In such circumstances, the presence and contribution of the in-laws would not be helpful in a restorative process, unless they were able to appreciate the impact of the violent incidents on the women.

Willingness to Participate in a Restorative Process

(i) Motivating factors to participate

One motivation cited by the participants for their willingness to participate in a restorative process was the desire to keep the marriage. One participant expressed her willingness to in a restorative process if she had known about this approach prior to her divorce. Her motivation for participation was to keep the family together, for the child to have the love of both parents, and the family members to support and "*treasure one another*". However, she was reluctant to participate in a restorative process now that she was divorced and was looking forward to a new life in a new environment with the children.

Another motivation to participate in a restorative process was the desire to maintain a positive parent-child relationship. One participant expressed that despite the divorce, she and her ex-husband still had a parent-child relationship with their child. Therefore, she was willing to participate in a restorative process to "*start developing a new start….as effective parents for our child*". Another participant shared that she desired for her children to restore

their relationship with their father but the children were not willing to see him presently, "*没有功劳也有苦劳 (one has put in hard work even if there is no meritorious deeds); when you were younger, you also received your father's help, then you could grow up"*.

Having the opportunity to gain perspectives of each other to work through issues was mentioned by one participant for her willingness to participate in a restorative process. She mentioned that she would like to participate in a restorative process as it would be "*helpful…that each party knows what's going on and is informed what is right and what's wrong*". This was echoed by another participant who would like to use this platform to express her thoughts and feelings as well as to gain insight into her spouse's thoughts and feelings. Having this conversation would be helpful to her to make a decision about her marriage.

> *"I only need to have a dialogue that will help me make decision; really can help me think through [the matter]." – Participant 8*

(ii) Lack of motivation to participate

For participants who were unwilling to participate in a restorative process, they cited the main reason as having no desire for reconciliation and wanting to disconnect with their ex-spouse. One participant shared that she would not participate in the restorative process since she no longer desired to reconcile with her ex-husband whom she had experienced violence from him for more than 20 years:

> *"Like I know the wife still wants the husband back, the husband still wants the wife back. So they are…they want each other, they still want to go along with life. So not like me. I have already ended, I am like had enough, just let me off. Because now my mindset all has been changed. If yah I love my husband, but if somebody is to go and tell me that go and stay back, live a life with your husband, cannot. I have already made up my mind." – Participant 7*

Another participant expressed her feeling that she had demonstrated her competency by "*singlehandedly taking care of the kids*" and realized that she no longer needed her husband. Therefore, there was no need for a restorative process to address issues. She also mentioned her children had come to a point that they no longer could live with their father and desired not to speak to him.

In relation to involvement of other family members in the restorative process, one participant mentioned that she would not want her family members to be part of the conversation. This is because her family members held the conservative belief that one should stay "*married to one person, stay with one person, die with that person*", which made her feel that her family members were apathetic to her situation and experience. She shared that her sisters had chided her for wanting to divorce her ex-husband. She also shared that her sisters continued to stay with their husbands and even brought up their husbands' children from their previous marriages, despite having suffered from their violent and cheating behaviours.

Discussion

Practitioners' Involvement

In this exploratory study, we sought to understand how survivors' needs were impacted by the experience of violence in spousal relationships and whether the help process provided for their unmet needs. Everyone has fundamental needs, which are security, belonging, autonomy, and competency (Russell, 2011) and in this study, it is shown that these needs are often unmet while experiencing violence in spousal relationships. "Acute disconnections" are commonplace in relationships when an individual misunderstands, hurts or violates another person, whether knowingly or unwittingly (Jordan, 2004). Individuals can work through their relational conflict with one another when given a chance to share their needs and feelings and perceiving that they are being responded to respectfully (Jordan, 2004). This type of relationship cultivates empathy and self-awareness, allowing individuals to grow in self and in the relationship and be more relationally confident and competent.

In relationships fraught with violence, acute disconnections are habitually left unresolved. Violence in relationships is about power and control and relationships involving family violence is often characterised by men exerting control over women, leaving women in a less privileged and powerful position and with few opportunities to address relational conflicts in the relationship. This perpetuates the cycle of violence and "chronic disconnections", as coined by Jordan (2004), are formed. "Chronic disconnections occur when in an important ongoing relationship, the less powerful person is not responded to or is unable to present his/her needs and feelings" (Jordan, 2004, p. 23). Participants in this study shared about the chronic disconnections that they suffered over the years in their spousal relationship but many only decided to leave the relationship when their physical safety was compromised and they feared that something bad would happen to them. As with most research on family violence and narratives of survivors, this study showed the far-reaching negative impact of violence on women and their families such as mental health distress

experienced by women and children due to the fear and anxiety of being in a violent relationship, the multiple transitions, and lack of safety in one's life. However, when taking a closer look at the unmet needs of the survivors who narrated their stories, one question to be posed is, can the cycle of violence be broken if these unmet needs were responded to during the help process?

Many survivors expressed that their voices were not heard while in a violent spousal relationship and also during their experience of navigating the help process. Even after leaving the relationship and being physically safe and away from the abuse and violence, survivors continued to express that their needs were unmet, and voices were unheard by formal and informal help systems. Not many survivors sought help from informal help support systems and this was not surprising as survivors were often concerned whether their supporters would also get into trouble or seeking help would exacerbate their daily challenges and physical safety in their violent spousal relationships. Kelly (1996) also expressed that support from informal help support systems typically provided temporary respite for survivors but seldom resolved the problem of violence.

Survivors who are feeling disempowered, insecure, and choiceless often trust helping professionals from formal help systems to guide them through this tumultuous period. While some participants expressed that the help provided by professionals gave them the confidence to gain back their power with the pragmatic assistance offered to them to help them regain stability, many expressed that their process of navigating help systems had not always been smooth. In a formal helping relationship, professionals, such as police officers, social workers, counsellors, and medical officers, are often perceived to be in a more powerful position as they are in the position of providing resources, assistance, and support to survivors. Some professionals even have the power to enforce certain actions such as restraining the commission of act of violence as prescribed in a PPO. One can then also assume that chronic disconnections can continue to happen for survivors if they perceive their unmet needs are not responded to by helping professionals in formal help systems or in

certain cases, neglected and dismissed. The inability of formal systems to provide what is necessary to meet the fundamental needs of the survivors may be due to systemic processes that obstruct the timeliness of help that survivors need or insensitivities of the practitioners who are unaware of the needs of survivors. Such relationships are not growth-fostering and it does not lead to survivors feeling more empowered or relationally competent to break free from their situation and move forward in their life. Survivors who encounter multiple chronic disconnections in various relationships, be it with their spouse, family members, or helping professionals, may not feel relationally competent to seek further help and support for their situation or believe that they are able and empowered to make their own choices.

In this study, participants expressed the fear and emotional stress they experienced whilst in the relationship and the dilemmas and constraints they struggled with before making a choice to leave the relationship. Not only are survivors' needs violated, their sense of self as an "autonomous individual in a predictable world" is threatened (Zehr, 1989, p. 5). With the knowledge that survivors' sense of autonomy and agency is complicated by the control-based nature of family violence, professionals working with survivors and their informal help systems must be sensitive to their needs and the complicating factors that affect their choices and not make assumptions about their decisions. What relational stance can practitioners take to be attuned to the voices of the survivors and to provide help that meet their needs at the present moment they are interacting? What awareness or knowledge is required of practitioners to be better able to meet the needs of survivors?

Participants shared they were able to find comfort and calmness when they perceived that helping professionals were compassionate to their plight and were attuned to their emotional state. One way of respecting the survivors is listening to them and acknowledging their story (Shenk & Zehr, 2001). How can practitioners provide a safe space for survivors to share their voice and tell their story?

Survivors often depend on informal supports (i.e. family, friends, religious groups) for emotional support and to provide temporary respite such as caregiving for their children, seeking temporary shelter, and providing a listening ear. Oftentimes, the hesitation to reach out to informal supports can be due to the shame survivors experience when they perceive that they are troubling their informal support persons with issues that are burdensome or difficult to address. Survivors also experience shame when they feel blamed for their predicament by informal support persons. How can professionals work together with survivors and their informal support systems to further strengthen survivors' support network and widen the circle of support for survivors with limited social support?

Restorative Approach to Family Violence

Restorative practice/justice is relationally focused in both its process and desired outcomes. Through bringing affected and concerned persons together to talk through their thoughts, feelings, and issues, the desired outcomes are to restore, build, and strengthen relationships. How is restorative justice relevant to addressing family violence?

Family violence happens in the context of close and trusting relationships and therefore when violence happens, it is considered a violation of relationships. Participants in this study had shared the following as their experience of family violence:

- Fear for physical safety
- Lack of emotional security
- Financial challenges considerations
- Efforts to maintain the marital relationship
- Concern about children's well-being
- Concern about children-father's relationship
- Limited informal support

Being a relational approach to facilitate restoration and healing of self and relationships through relational connectedness, restorative practice/justice can be an alternative way to address this issue. Participants opined the following with regards to a restorative process:

- A platform to share thoughts, feelings and perspectives to promote change in behaviour
- Facilitates reflection on impact of the actions to begin a healing process
- A space for dialogue to uncover the main issues for resolution
- A platform to express personal needs to facilitator mutual understanding for resolution of issues
- Facilitates restoration of relationships

At the same time, participants raised the following conditions for an effective restorative process:

- Need for physical and psychological safety
- Need for acknowledgement of wrongful actions
- Motivation for change (either behavioural change or reconciliation of relationships)
- Alignment of goal (e.g. parenting)
- Level of connectedness and strength of relationship with extended family members

How will a restorative process look like in addressing the issue of family violence? Restorative practice/justice is a values-based practice. The values are anchored in the fundamental human rights (Braithwaite, 2002), which states that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world" (United Nations, 2015). The values of

dignity, equality, inclusion, shared responsibility, and justice are expressed in the following definitions:

> Restorative justice is "fundamentally concerned with restoring social relationships, with establishing or re-establishing social equality in relationships; relationships in which each person's rights to equal dignity, concern and respect are satisfied." (Llewellyn & Howse, 1999, p. 1)
>
> Restorative justice is an "approach to achieving justice that involves, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offence or harm to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible." (Zehr, 2015, p. 48)

With reference to the above definitions, two assumptions can be said about restorative practice/justice.

1. Individuals are "profoundly relational" (Pranis, 2007) and it is a human fundamental need feel connected with others. It is this connectedness that enables individuals to experience healing and growth.
2. Individuals are connected to one another and therefore our actions or lack thereof have positive and negative impact on others, whether directly or vicariously (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2015).

Based on the values of restorative practice/justice, individuals affected by family violence can experience a restorative process through encounter, reparation, and transformation (Leonard, 2011). LCCS (2019) had established a set of working principles to guide fidelity in a restorative process. The encounter phase is about providing a platform for engagement for involved parties where they can express their needs and concerns in relation to the violent situation (Leonard, 2011). For this phase, it is important that the principle of 'willing participation' is adhered to, where individuals only participate when they appreciate the purpose and process of the engagement and that they feel physically and

psychological safe. It is also important that everyone involved in the restorative process has the equal opportunity to speak and the respect for each individual's 'voice space' can be safeguarded by adherence to the structure of a restorative process, as well as co-creation of guidelines to foster safety to express one's opinions. It is through listening to each individual thoughts, feelings, and perspectives that empathy can be cultivated and the main issues uncovered.

The reparation phase in restorative practice/justice perspective focuses on the needs and obligations of involved parties. The principle of active responsibility is key here, where involved parties co-create solutions to achieve the identified common goal, such as co-parenting if reconciliation between the couple is not desirable. In situations where there is motivation to keep the marital relationship, it is important that perpetrator takes active responsibility by acknowledging his/her wrongdoing and committing to taking steps to make things right.

The transformative phase is concerned about fundamental social change (Leonard, 2011). A restorative process seeks to widen the circle of support for affected parties, victims and perpetrators alike, through 'relational inclusion' to promote support and accountability (LCCS, 2019). In addressing the issue of family violence, it is important to send the message that abusive behaviours are wrong and it is the responsibility of related parties, including relatives, friends, and neighbours to step in to stop the cycle of violence through providing practical and emotional support to both victims and perpetrators. Through a restorative process, there can be a transformative change in the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator where there is equality and respect, recognising that both have dignity and worth.

Recommendations

From the observations and discussion of the findings, we suggest the following ways to journey with persons experiencing family violence to enable their needs met so they may grow and thrive personally and relationally.

Expressing Empathy

Practitioners who seek to journey with women experiencing family violence can be attuned to their needs through empathy. Rogers defined empathy as the "ability to perceive accurately the internal frames of reference of others in terms of their meanings and emotional components" (1965, as cited in Watson, 2002, p. 446). The positive relationship between empathy and therapeutic outcomes is evident, especially when clients feel understood both at the affective and cognitive levels, including their aspirations, intentions, and values (Watson, 2002). Through empathic responses, practitioners can create a positive working alliance where women experiencing violence feel safe to disclose their fears, concerns, and needs to explore their goals, which can include reconciling with their spouse, ensuring children's well-being, and living independently from their spouse. It is important not to assume what the women need and instead to ask about what they need. Practitioners can also validate the women's perspective of their experiences and their worldviews through empathic affirmations to work with them to restore their self-concept to experience competency and autonomy.

Empathic individuals are perceptive of interpersonal cues, have personal insights, have awareness of their impact on others, and consider other people's intent when interpreting situations (Hogan, 1969). Therefore, it is critical that practitioners have an acute awareness of self, especially their personal vulnerabilities. The insights they gain through these vulnerabilities can enable the practitioners to have empathy for themselves. These can serve to connect themselves with the individuals they work with through their ability to appreciate and feel the hurt the individuals experienced (Aponte & Kissil, 2017). The

connection conveys compassion which can enable women experiencing violence to feel heard, respected, and validated, and to mitigate self-blame for their situation.

Being empathic to self and others can promote practitioners' authenticity and presence. Authenticity and presence help to create a relational context where clients can see the impact of their stories and responses on others to foster connection and growth (Jordan, 2010). For women experiencing violence, they tend to disengage in view of shame. Shame can inhibit connection and the withdrawal can result in isolation. When practitioners use a relational stance to create a safe space for mutual empathy and mutual vulnerability to take place, individuals are able to experience genuine connections and work through the chronic disconnections and experiences of shame that hinder their growth (Jordan, 2010). These women can then feel their self-worth, enabling them to have the confidence to build their relational competence and capacities to develop equitable and nurturing relationships.

Widening Support Circle

Informal support networks can provide both instrumental and emotional support to individuals. Such support is equally important for women experiencing family violence to obtain either temporary relief or longer-term assistance in areas of finance, employment, childcare, and housing to promote their mental and physical well-being (Goodman & Smyth, 2011). Formal support systems such as the social service agencies, crisis shelters, and the police are not able to provide long-term support. Also, neighbours, friends, colleagues, and family members are the people who know these women better than the practitioners and other professionals. They are therefore in a better position to respond in ways that are appropriate to their needs, strengths, and circumstance (Budde & Schene, 2004).

It is therefore important for practitioners to identify individuals in the women's informal support networks who can provide the support they need. It is important for practitioners to note that individuals can be helpful in some areas but not others. For example, the survivor's sister can help in child-minding but not emotional support as she may not appreciate the hurt

that the individual is going through. It is also equally important for practitioners to identify informal network that the women are currently contributing to. This can help them feel a sense of competence as they are receiving help at the same time.

For women who have limited informal support networks due to their residency status, as well as actions by their abusive spouses to limit their contacts, practitioners would have to work with them to create new informal support networks. One way of creating a new informal support would be peer support group amongst survivors of violence. Another way is to have survivors be involved in interest groups, so that they can get connected to diverse individuals. Lastly, women experiencing violence can be connected to the people living in their community who can offer practical or emotional support. Their presence can also mitigate the violent behaviours of their spouses.

Finally, practitioners can tap on the experiences of the survivors who had overcome family violence. Besides opportunities to share their stories to raise awareness of the impact of family violence and their needs, these survivors can be invited to existing regional and national family violence networks to contribute ideas to co-create solutions to address systemic issues in the management of family violence. Whilst practitioners can have the needed perspectives on how to deal with the systemic issues to enable the responsiveness of the help systems, these survivors can enhance their sense of competency through such contributions.

Using Restorative Process as a Platform for Mutual Dialogue

Restorative justice practice can be a platform to address violation of relationships. However, as some scholars have pointed out, safety and autonomy of survivors, and not reconciliation, must be the main priorities of any intervention for family violence issues (Busch, 2002). The suitability of a restorative process for family violence issues have to take into consideration the domination of persons using violence over survivors in various ways and power-control relational dynamics. A risk assessment needs to be conducted by

facilitators prior to engagement and conducting a restorative process between all parties involved in family violence. This does not suggest that restorative processes will resolve family violence nor should restorative processes be used with the intent of reconciliation. However, through a facilitated and safe platform, it is possible that a restorative process can bridge the imbalance of power through allowing all individuals to have a voice in mutual dialogue, especially allowing survivors to express their unmet needs and address the chronic disconnections they have faced in their violent relationships. If a restorative process with the agreed intent of reconciliation or alignment of parenting takes place, it is imperative that there is follow-up by professionals and facilitators to ensure active responsibility by all parties and to guide and provide support for parties to work towards the agreed goal.

Survivors often only decide to seek help or leave a violent relationship when they believe that there is nothing left to salvage of their relationship or their physical safety is severely threatened. Based on the interviews and experiences of the survivors at the shelter, it appears that survivors appreciated the possibility of a restorative process for them to have mutual dialogue with their spouses, to express their unmet needs, and to work towards some resolution or agreement for the welfare of themselves and their children. However, they attested to the need for it to happen earlier, that is, before the violence gets pervasive and they get caught in a cycle of violence, making the relationship beyond salvageable.

Be it for reconciliation of relationship or healing for the individual, timeliness of intervention is key. Restorative process can be an empowering approach for survivors with the acknowledgment of hurt by perpetrators and the experience of survivors having their needs, feelings, and voices acknowledged and responded to by perpetrators and support persons. With the inclusion of support persons in a restorative process, survivors can find the needed community intervention that strengthens their social support to meet their unmet fundamental needs. The idea of bringing the family violence issue out in the open is also important for survivors to connect with support persons who condemn the act of violence and are willing to be safety nets and form part of the collective process of problem-solving

and action. The meeting of fundamental needs is necessary for survivors to break out of the hurt cycle and to become agents of change in their own lives.

Giving a Voice Space to Children Impacted by Family Violence

One group that particularly needs a voice is children who have witnessed and been affected by the violence between parents. While survivors may not wish to reconcile their relationship with the perpetrator, they often continue to hope that their children can have a stable parent-child relationship with their spouse as they believe that this is essential for their child's well-being and internal working model of developing relationships. As children may have witnessed the escalation of violence, survivors are often hesitant to allow children to participate in restorative processes for fear of re-victimising them. However, research has shown that when children were given a choice to participate in a family restorative process, they appreciated that they felt listened to and that their opinions mattered to the family (Bell & Wilson, 2006). There are various ways where children can be given a say in terms of how they want to participate in such restorative dialogues to share their voice and to help them to heal. Having a child advocate to consult and speak with children who may be hesitant to express their voice personally in the process can be one option offered to children to decide how they will like to be involved in the process.

In cases where there is fear of power imbalances or re-victimisation happening, it is the role of professionals to prevent and to step in when certain decisions or opinions that are voiced out are at odds with protecting the well-being of the child. Diligence by professionals to prepare children before the process or exploring alternative ways to participate is important in helping children to find and share their voice when impacted by family violence. It is beneficial for children to witness parents taking active responsibility in problem solving and aligning their co-parenting expectations and responsibilities in mutual dialogue with one another. It will help children to see that despite the breakdown of their parents' relationship,

parents still love them and are willing to do their part to provide the care and support for their children as one unit.

Conclusion

The narratives of the survivors on the impact of family violence and their help navigating experience have provided some insights into assumptions for good practice in this area. These include expressing empathy, widening the support circle, and considering the use of restorative interventions. These assumptions can contribute to meeting the fundamental human needs of the women experiencing violence – security, autonomy, competency, and belonging, through making sense of their experience within a safe and trusted relationship and connecting them to a wider network to receive and offer help and support. This will guide survivors to grow and thrive personally and relationally. Despite concerns raised regarding the use of restorative process to address the issue of family violence and that most participants in this exploratory study were not interested to participate in the process, the general consensus is that a restorative approach, at the right time, can be helpful to enable the couple to engage in conversations to work towards reconciliation, healing, and mitigating the impact of witnessing or experiencing violence on their children.

It is the authors' hope that through this report, practitioners will critically reflect on their practice through challenging their practice assumptions to enable their practice to be contextually relevant. Also, practitioners will bring to their awareness of how they perceive and use their power in their position as professionals, as well as how they navigate their 'professional boundaries' to connect with women experiencing violence. Most importantly, the authors hope that the practitioners will reflect on the meaning of their work in the area of family violence. Undoubtedly, family violence is a complex issue and practitioners will need support to effectively journey with individuals experiencing violence. Therefore, the authors encourage practitioners to ponder about the type of support they need for themselves in their work.

The authors acknowledge that the small sample size of nine female participants is a limitation of the study and the authors are mindful about generalising the results of this study. Also, 75% of the participants were migrant spouses and experiences of local women

experiencing violence might be different. Possible inconsistencies, such as the depth of the participants' sharing, the interviewers' order of questioning, language barrier, and differences in translation and/or interpretation of the participants' recount of their experiences, were also limitations of the study. However, the suggested assumptions for good practice can be relevant for women who are experiencing violence in a different context as the premise of these assumptions is about the need for a positive and equitable relationship to effect change.

The authors hope to extend this study to include more participants and future studies can look into the experiences of male survivors in navigating the help system and in-depth case studies of outcomes of the use of a restorative approach to address the issue of family violence.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions	
Introduction	➢ The focus of this interview project is to gain insights of the help and support journey of survivors of family violence. ➢ We would also like to explore what would be some of the key concerns about the possibility of a process where a space for healing of survivors of family is created.
Their Story	Questions asked: 1. Please introduce yourself. [Basic demographic information] 2. Tell us more about yourself in any way you wish to. 3. Can you share with us about your journey as a survivor of family violence? What are some of the gains in your life at your current stage? Will you be comfortable sharing about some of the losses? *Clarify years in abusive relationship and number of shelters one stayed in* *Up to the participant as to whether they want to share with us about the incident of family violence. There is no need for us to know the details of the experience.*
Experience of Support	Questions asked: 1. What was the impact of family violence on your life and the people around you? a. Did children witness the violence? 2. What has been the hardest thing for you? 3. When you encountered family violence, what kind of help and support did you seek and receive (both formal and informal)? a. If they have individual social workers, what is their relationship with social worker like? What do you like about it? What do you not like? b. Social workers at FSC/shelter – what is their follow-up and their journey with you like? Do you still talk to them? 4. What made you decide to seek/ accept the help/ support?

	a. Before you took any actions or made any decision, what areas were you most concerned about? (e.g. situation with other family members / children's custody) b. What matters to you most when you seek help? c. What outcomes you had in mind when you sought help? d. How did that affect the way you decide on the type of help/support you need? 5. How did you perceive this type of support? How had the support been helpful? What did you like about it? What did you not like? What could be better?
Engagement in a Restorative Process	Many studies with survivors of family violence have shared that the survivor's perspective and voice is often missing from the help process. Restorative Justice is a process that focuses on the harm done to relationships, the accountability of offenders/perpetrators, participation of all people affected and the sharing of needs by victims. This approach is not about problem solving or conflict resolution. Family violence is a violation of people by people. The impact of violence extends to a broader range of relationships, including the family of both perpetrator and survivors and perhaps the community. During a restorative process, participants will have the opportunity to share their voice, express their concerns and needs, and how people have been affected by the violence at home. The process ensures that all voices be heard in a safe platform that is provided for victim-survivors to speak up and share their feelings. Victim-survivors' safety and wellbeing will be safeguarded. Participants were shown a video on restorative process involving affected parties. Questions asked: 1. How do you feel about the video clip? 2. What are your thoughts about a restorative process based on the description and the video? 3. What do you like about the process? 4. How do you think this process might be helpful for a person experiencing or using violence?

	5. Would you consider participating in such a process? What makes you want to participate in such a process? 6. What do you need to participate in such a process? *Seek elaboration e.g. how does safety looks like.* What are some of your concerns and/or reservations about the possibility of meeting the perpetrators? 7. What would you like to get out from participating in such a process? What would be useful for you?
Additional Questions	1. What made you decide to participate in our interview? 2. How has the experience been for you?

Appendix B

Journeying Through Family Violence with Compassionate Witnessing

Ann (pseudonym) is a foreigner and was a victim of spousal violence for nine years. Using the narrative of Ann's experiences in navigating the formal and informal support systems, the authors share the concept of how effective compassionate witnessing (Weingarten, 2003) can contribute to a supportive and empowering helping relationship with individuals experiencing violence to effect change.

When working with individuals experiencing violence, practitioners are akin to witnesses to their situations that are disturbing and traumatic. According to Weingarten (2003), there are four witnessing positions that one can take (refer to figure 1), which are based on the concepts of awareness and empowerment. Awareness refers to having the knowledge of the situation, as well as well as the needs of the parties involved. Empowerment refers to one's perception of his/ her ability to act on the situation.

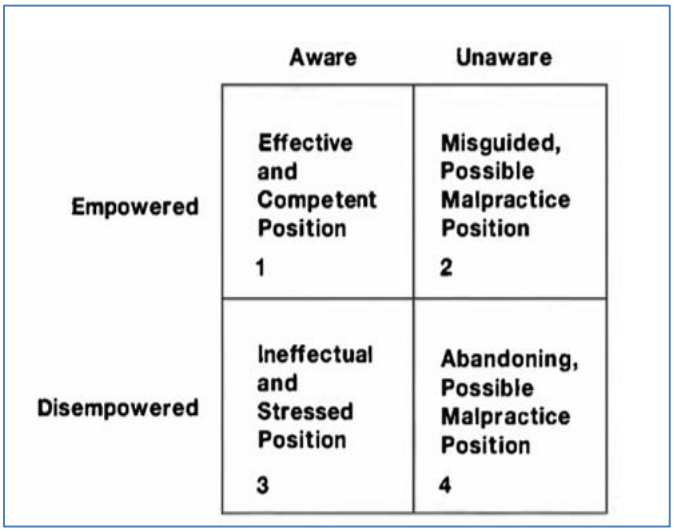

Figure 1: The Witness Positions (Weingarten, 2003, p.95)

According to Weingarten (2003), an effective and competent witness position happens when the practitioner is both aware of the violence situation, needs and desires of the victim, as well as the ability to provide appropriate support, both instrumental and emotional, to meet the needs. When the practitioner is unaware of the situation, needs and desires of the victim of violence but has the power and capacity to intervene, the intervention

may be misguided. A practitioner who is aware of victim's situation, needs and desires but found him/ herself unable to provide the appropriate assistance will find themselves ineffectual and stressed. Finally, the practitioner may be deemed as abandoning when he/ she is in the unaware and disempowered position, where he/ she is unable to appreciate victim's narrative and at the same time perceives him/ herself as unable to provide the necessary support.

Ann started to experience emotional abuse when she confronted her ex-spouse about his extra-marital affair. She obtained a Personal Protection Order (PPO) immediately for fear of her safety. The verbal abuse in their frequent conflicts evolved into threats of physical harm and eventually physical violence by her ex-spouse. Ann's daughter, a teenager now, had witnessed two episodes of physical violence between her parents at the age of 5 and 6 respectively. With family violence, Ann and her daughter experienced instability and uncertainty where they struggled to meet basic physiological needs and cope with the emotional distress. Through the interview, Ann shed light on how compassionate witnessing by individuals could make a difference in her journey to find stability for herself and her daughter.

As a foreigner without permanent residency and employment, Ann had difficulty providing a safe and stable environment for her daughter and herself after separating from her ex-husband. To Ann, being a competent mother was very important; a competent mother is someone who can provide a safe and nurturing environment for her child. However, she found herself ineffective and powerless to be a competent mother.

Some of her experiences with the practitioners left her distressed. Ann recalled an incident where she found out that her social worker from a Social Service Agency (SSA) had closed her case upon her return to Singapore from her home country, despite her having explicitly informed the social worker that her circumstances for leaving the country was that her social visit pass was expiring and she had assured the worker that she would be back in Singapore within a week. With the case closed, Ann and daughter found themselves unable

to return to the shelter they had resided in prior to leaving Singapore; they were stranded without a safe refuge.

> *"… But my social worker discharged us… which means the (SSA) also closed my case … so after a week, we came back… we stayed at the airport for 2 nights, because I don't have a place to stay. They don't want to accept me but on that 2nd day, I'm already so frustrated because of my daughter… I just go down to (SSA) and I talk to my social worker there. That I told her, why did they discharge me? I informed them that I am coming back in a week, because they thought I cannot come back, the ICA won't allow us. That's their reason. So, anyway I cannot do anything because we are holding social visit pass. They said we are not Singaporean or PR so definitely they cannot help us to stay there. And I went there about 5, around 4 pm, and it's still, they cannot accept. I even begged her, them, if they can let us stay for 1 night only, or 2 nights until I can find a place but they refused. I'm very upset that time and my daughter were there and she was very tired and yah, I get so angry. And, I even told them, can you please don't go by the book, I mean, just a compassionate grounds, 2 nights, it's not by enough for us to stay there. But still they won't, so, one of my bad experiences here. So I contacted my friend and asked if we could stay in her rented room."*

Which witness position do you think Ann's social worker was in? Could she have been a witness who was unaware of Ann's needs and desires as a foreigner experiencing family violence and made the assumption that either the Immigration Control Authority (ICA) would not allow their return to Singapore or she would have preferred to live in her hometown and therefore made the decision to close her case? In this scenario, the practitioner could be in witness position 2 where she was unaware of Ann's needs but has the ability to allow Ann and daughter access to alternative accommodation. The practitioner could also be in witness position 3 where she was made aware of Ann's situation but found herself powerless to link Ann to the appropriate resources. Finally, the practitioner could be

in position 4 where she was neither aware of Ann's needs nor felt empowered to provide the necessary assistance. As practitioners, it is important to ask ourselves what had contributed to our witness positions? Our practice experience in family violence? Our values? The impact of this experience to Ann was distressing as her perspective and needs were not acknowledged, validated and addressed. Consequently, it left Ann feeling helpless and powerless as well when she expressed, *"Really don't know where to go. Who to ask for help. And the first thing that maybe even in others, the first thing they will hear is it's not possible because you are not PR or you are not Singaporean so it's, in the crisis like that and you hear negative, negative statement, it's more traumatic".*

Ann's encounter with two other SSA social workers were in contrast, empowering. With those social workers, she felt listened to, as well as enabling her to gain access to shelter to meet her security needs. To Ann, an empowerment process has occurred which is when ''one person experiencing another person as accepting and elaborating what she has to say" (Cobb, 1992, as cited in Weingaten & Cobb, 1995, p3).

> *"…He's really very good. Because I keep mentioning him that, we are not Singaporean or PR but I don't need, I don't, I'm not going to ask for financial help. I ask for shelter and he said he will try his best to help us and true to his word, he really fight my case and he get another social worker because he said it's better to have a lady social worker. So they are both very good. They really help us a lot."*

What do you notice about this social worker's response to Ann? Was he attuned to her feelings and needs? It appeared that while he was aware of the constraints of her immigration status, he was still attuned to her unmet need for physical safety and tried to allay her fears while advocating for her to get a shelter, which was Ann's pressing need. It was also noteworthy that he connected her to a female social worker. Why do you think he did that? Was the intent to make it easier for connection or could it be that he was aware of his limitations and therefore recommended someone who could better support Ann? This

social worker could be considered an effective and competent witness when he was able to match his interventions with both short-term and longer-term needs of Ann.

Ann shared about her positive experience at Star Shelter where she last resided at and had felt accepted by the community there. Ann appreciated the opportunities to bond with others and how differences and conflicts were managed by the staff.

> *"Because in here, they, though I'm not a Singaporean or PR, I'm foreigner, they still help me and my daughter accepted us to stay and… we develop friendship with other residents... we have breakfast buddy ... Christmas party…They are very good... Before my daughter really don't mingle with other kids, and only few weeks then she started to warm up… She's engaging with other activities and making friends, playing with them now… that's the good part."*

> *"In community like this there are misunderstandings. So, the staff also are very good. they also mediate if there is conflict, misunderstandings."*

This narrative illustrated that the staff at the shelter took the witness position 1. They were aware of the needs of foreigners experiencing violence and the challenges of persons of different cultures living together. Based on these needs, they provided the necessary support and interventions, including managing conflicts to maintain the harmony of the shelter.

Being a fervent believer, Ann sought spiritual support from her religion, and she got connected to her church during one of the stays at a shelter. Ann described the church members who journeyed with her as being effective compassionate witnesses who were aware of the needs, feelings, and fears of survivors and reached out to them in sensitive ways. She highlighted that the church took initiative to reach out to her when they were aware of her hesitation to reach out for help as she was shy.

"I have 2 elders who really help me in everything. I don't ask… they just transfer budget for me…. I'm very shy also to ask, especially monetary… Maybe they know how I feel. I'm very shy also to ask, especially monetary."

Besides practical help, the church community had also provided her and her daughter with emotional support. She shared how the chaplain of the church engaged her daughter sensitively through therapeutic activities that helped her daughter to feel safe to voice out her feelings and progressively work through her trauma.

Ann esteemed the efforts of the church community to connect with her as genuine compassion at work where they would see through their efforts to have the individuals' needs met.

"In my church, they are very reliable in giving this support. I also can see their help is genuine with other ladies also… compared to other experience, their help is really come from the heart. That they really connect, and they will not leave you until you are really standing up on your own because I saw that to other ladies, they help them until they have their own flat."

With reference to the concept of compassionate witnessing, the church community were also considered witnesses. Through their effective and competent witnessing (position 1), they contributed to Ann's growth in competency, enabling her to feel effectual as she continued her journey as a survivor of family violence

In a complex issue such as family violence, both formal and informal support are important to the sustained well-being of individuals experiencing violence. Survivors most probably encountered numerous acute disconnections in their relationships, be it with their partners, family members or helping professionals. As illustrated above, an effective and competent witness can provide a different relational experience for persons experiencing violence by responding to their needs sensitively and fostering a sense of agency that propels survivors to move forward in their journey with a sense of hope.