



# Police understandings of and responses to a complex vignette of “honour”-based crime and forced marriage

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Article abstract

Police understandings of honour-based crimes (HBCs) and forced marriages (FMs) vary in terms of an individual officer’s level of expertise, knowledge, and experience in handling such situations. This study applied constructivist grounded theory approaches to analyze individual interviews with 32 police officers and 14 civilians in police agencies operating in urban and rural settings in Alberta, Canada. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer how police officers and civilians who work in police agencies experience, make sense of, and understand HBCs. Participants received a hypothetical vignette about a young woman who had reached out to the police. The vignette illustrated various forms of abuse by the woman’s father, the involvement of other actors (mother, brother, family friend) and the culmination in an FM. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to respond to six questions. Analysis revealed that both police and civilians recognized the need in the vignette scenario for intervention, while experiencing uncertainty about how to respond. The findings showed that not everyone in policing would be able to identify reliably the need for police intervention, and that investigations could proceed differently depending on the investigator’s level of knowledge and awareness of HBCs and FMs. Police have achieved some successful interventions, but still lack sufficient guidance on how to respond to these crimes. Clear, appropriate policies regarding which cases need to be directed to specialized domestic violence units for follow-up are needed. A significant finding points to the importance of considering cultural sensitivity discourses as well as the impact of cultural and racist stereotypes when responding to situations like the one outlined in the vignette.

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## **POLICE UNDERSTANDINGS OF AND RESPONSES TO A COMPLEX VIGNETTE OF “HONOUR”-BASED CRIME AND FORCED MARRIAGE**

**Wendy Aujla**

**Abstract:** Police understandings of honour-based crimes (HBCs) and forced marriages (FMs) vary in terms of an individual officer’s level of expertise, knowledge, and experience in handling such situations. This study applied constructivist grounded theory approaches to analyze individual interviews with 32 police officers and 14 civilians in police agencies operating in urban and rural settings in Alberta, Canada. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer how police officers and civilians who work in police agencies experience, make sense of, and understand HBCs. Participants received a hypothetical vignette about a young woman who had reached out to the police. The vignette illustrated various forms of abuse by the woman’s father, the involvement of other actors (mother, brother, family friend) and the culmination in an FM. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to respond to six questions. Analysis revealed that both police and civilians recognized the need in the vignette scenario for intervention, while experiencing uncertainty about how to respond. The findings showed that not everyone in policing would be able to identify reliably the need for police intervention, and that investigations could proceed differently depending on the investigator’s level of knowledge and awareness of HBCs and FMs. Police have achieved some successful interventions, but still lack sufficient guidance on how to respond to these crimes. Clear, appropriate policies regarding which cases need to be directed to specialized domestic violence units for follow-up are needed. A significant finding points to the importance of considering cultural sensitivity discourses as well as the impact of cultural and racist stereotypes when responding to situations like the one outlined in the vignette.

**Keywords:** “honour”-based crimes, forced marriages, vignette, constructivist grounded theory approaches, policing, perceptions of the police

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In response to growing concerns over “honour”-based killings (HBKs) and over inadequate interventions in the initial responses to such cases from Canadian police, school officials, and child protection services, this paper details the findings of a research study that examined how police respond to “honour”-based crime<sup>1</sup> (HBC) and forced marriage (FM; Keeping, 2012; MacIntosh & Keeping, 2012). I use HBC as an umbrella term to include FM and HBKs as forms of gendered violence within the broader spectrum of violence against women and girls (VAWG; Mucina, 2018). I highlight the gendered context of HBCs as the rates of victimization are higher among girls and women, although boys and men can also be victims (Korteweg, 2012). “In the conceptualization of family honour that informs honour-related violence and honour killing, honour inheres in women but is the property of the family, including the women of the family” (Korteweg, 2014, p. 188). In this view, women are responsible for maintaining “honour”, and the family must punish them if they are viewed as having injured the family’s “honour”. Behaviours associated with a woman’s sexuality or body can lead families to trigger the process of an FM or to commit murder (HBK) to restore family “honour” (Gill, 2009; Gill et al., 2012; Gill et al., 2018; Idriss, 2018; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010).

HBCs are often carried out by the victim’s family members (fathers, mothers, brothers, uncles) and community members may play a role in executing an FM or HBK. These crimes are premeditated, planned, and motivated by the commitment to defend family “honour” (Gill, 2009; Korteweg, 2014). MacIntosh (2012) pointed out that “the extent to which [FM] is associated with ‘honour’-based violence merits further investigation” (pp. 49–50). Such an association may be seen in the case of 16-year-old Aqsa Parvez in Toronto, who “was very likely facing [an FM] when she was murdered” by her father and brother (MacIntosh, 2012, p. 49).

As a feminist scholar, I conceptualize FM as a form of VAWG. FM violates human rights and is considerably different from an arranged marriage<sup>2</sup> (Chantler, 2012; Chantler & McCarry, 2020; Gill & Anitha, 2011) in that an FM is entered into without the full and free consent of one or both parties, and duress is involved (Anis et al., 2013; Chantler, 2012), including emotional or physical threats and coercion (Anis et al., 2013; Esthappan et al., 2018). FM is a hidden problem: its warning signs are often missed by professionals (see Anis et al., 2013; Chantler & McCarry, 2020).

Thus, given the nature of FMs and HBKs, it is important to ensure that service providers in Canada react with informed actions rather than naïvely refraining from action, especially in the case of police officers who face a challenging task as first responders and investigators. Police play a crucial role in responding to these complex calls for service and are often the last resort for

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<sup>1</sup>The quotation marks around the term “honour” are intended to reflect the problematic nature of this term; without them, the term could be perceived as justifying violence or murder as honourable (see Aujla & Gill, 2014; Korteweg, 2014).

<sup>2</sup>In an arranged marriage, the families introduce the couple, who then decide for themselves whether to accept the arrangement.

victims when other professionals have failed to intervene appropriately. I argue that police can do their work effectively only if they are aware of the challenges victims experience in seeking help from law enforcement, and must learn from the ways victims have been denied adequate protection by other professionals (e.g., school counsellors, school teachers, social workers, child and youth protection workers) who have failed to understand the risks those victims faced. Korteweg (2014) stated that:

Often we see that in cases of honour killing service providers misrecognize the danger — girls are told that their brothers will not kill them when they tell school teachers in fear or social workers call in entire families to discuss family problems. (p. 187)

Service providers may misinterpret or struggle with the complexity of these cases and may find themselves ill-prepared to grasp the challenging issues (e.g., identifying multiple intersecting levels of risk). Awareness of these issues and their implications for improving supports may aid law enforcement agencies to improve their practices and formal systems.

Looking at findings from a larger study that explored how Alberta policing agencies conceptualize, understand, and respond to HBCs within the context of domestic violence (DV), also called family violence (FV)<sup>3</sup>, this paper specifically focuses on the following research questions from that study: “How do police officers and civilians who work in police organizations experience, make sense of, and understand HBCs?” and “How do policing agencies intervene to prevent, protect, and investigate an HBC?” It seeks to fill a research gap by drawing on in-depth subjective interviews with participants who discussed how they would respond to a situation described in a written vignette. Numerous cases in Canada have included features similar to the vignette, and actual cases of girls and women murdered in the name of “honour” shaped the construction of the vignette (Aujla, 2020b). The vignette does not point out that in those cases elements of risk were missed by service providers, which resulted in the deaths of girls such as Aqsa Parvez in 2007 and the Shafia sisters in 2009. Instead, I designed the scenario to explore how participants perceived certain behaviours that escalated into an FM threat. The participants’ responses shed light on police interventions and the actions needed to help prevent an HBK or FM in the situation described in the vignette.

### ***The Scope of the Phenomenon***

Canada does not maintain official national statistics on HBC and FM, although policy reports estimate that a dozen cases of HBK have taken place across the country since 2000 (Keeping, 2012; Muhammad, 2010; Papp, 2010). A survey of 32 agencies (30 in Ontario and 2 in Quebec)

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<sup>3</sup>DV, like its near-synonym family violence (FV), refers to violence in the home. DV and FV include not just intimate partner violence, but any pattern of abusive behaviour (e.g., physical or psychological) in any familial relationship (involving, e.g., partners, parents, children, or siblings). I use the term DV broadly to refer to one or more abusers exerting control over a victim in an intimate partner relationship or other family relationship (Aujla, 2020a).

showed that they dealt with 219 cases of FM between 2010 and 2012, with 202 of the victims identifying as female, 13 as male, 3 as transgender, and 1 unknown (Anis et al., 2013). Of all victims, 81% were between the ages of 16 and 34, 8% were older, and 10% younger, with 1% unknown (Anis et al., 2013). The FMs occurred across different communities, including many cultures from several continents and various religious backgrounds.

Unlike the United Kingdom and Scotland, Canada and Alberta did not track or release police data on HBC and FM at the time of this study (Chantler & McCarry, 2020; Gill et al., 2018; Hague et al., 2013; Hall, 2014). The Calgary Police Service (CPS) did collect such data for a short period prior to the study; approximately 40 “honour”-based violence (HBV) victims came forward in 2012 (Quebec Council for Women, 2013). However, it is largely unknown how frequently or to what extent Canadian police see HBC and FM cases. The few cases reported in Canada have included girls being confronted about boyfriends, removed from school, and flown back to their country of origin (MacIntosh, 2012; MacIntosh & Keeping, 2012). FMs may also be underreported because some victims do not understand what is happening (Chantler et al., 2009; Chantler & McCarry, 2020); moreover, families may also attempt to cover up HBVs by reporting them as suicides (Hall, 2014; Korteweg, 2012; Roberts, 2017). This paper does not attempt to establish the prevalence of HBC and FM in Alberta; instead, it highlights challenges for police in situations similar to the one described in the vignette.

In Canada, the majority of HBV victims are racialized women, and HBC and FMs are mainly reported in certain communities (e.g., South Asian and Kurdish; Chantler et al., 2009; Gill et al., 2012; MacIntosh, 2012). However, HBC should not be regarded as intrinsically a cultural problem (Olwan, 2013) since it occurs in a range of cultures (Chantler, 2012; Gill et al., 2018; Hall, 2014): it does not support the designation of any particular culture, ethnicity, or religion as “barbaric” (Gill, 2006; Hall, 2014; Jiwani, 2014; Olwan, 2014). All cultures are complex and nuanced, and most — including Euro-Canadian culture — have been impacted in various ways by patriarchy and misogyny. Abuse and violence manifest differently in different cultural groups because of patriarchy (Aujla & Gill, 2014). As Korteweg et al. (2013) argued, VAWG is shaped by many individual and structural forces that intersect with culture, which “informs all forms of violence in all groups that make up society” (p. 4). HBC is one manifestation of VAWG and is the focus of this research project.

Racism and discriminatory practices can result in animosity between the police and racialized communities, whose members may feel too vulnerable to report their concerns. Racialized immigrant women suffering DV are doubly victimized when they encounter discrimination from the police service (Aujla, 2020a; Belur, 2008). Such institutionally racist practices make victims “vulnerable to accepting abuse and retracting their statements” because they lack trust and confidence in the police (Belur, 2008, p. 440). The available research indicates that victims of HBC and FM are usually reluctant to report their experiences to the police, give statements, or criminally charge or testify against family members (Blum et al., 2016; Chantler & McCarry, 2020; Gill, 2009; Gill et al., 2018; Hall, 2014). Previous negative experiences in countries of origin also

influence certain communities' perceptions of police intervention (Chan, 1997). These barriers to reporting cannot be separated from the multiple and interlocking oppressions victims experience from police officers' attitudes, racial stereotypes, and ethnocentrism that result in missed or unsatisfactory interventions (Aujla, 2020a; Hague et al., 2013; Hall, 2014).

### ***Shortcomings of Interventions that Failed to Protect Victims***

A discussion of police failure to protect victims of HBC, mainly in the Shafia case, has been noted in the literature (Aujla & Gill, 2014; Korteweg, 2012, 2014; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010; Olwan, 2014). In 2009, the bodies of the three Shafia sisters and that of their father's first wife were found in the Rideau Canal in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. All four had been murdered by the Afghan father, his second wife, and the brother (Olwan, 2013; Schliesmann, 2012): the father had disapproved of the girls wearing makeup, skipping school, and dating boys (Aujla & Gill, 2014; Muhammad, 2010; Schliesmann, 2012). The victims had feared for their lives, opposed the violence, and actively reached out for support from the police, teachers, youth protection services, and other social service agencies (Fournier, 2012). In covering the murders, the media criticized professionals for mishandling the case and ignoring potential indicators of the emotional and physical violence the girls were experiencing, including attempts to run away, depression, and self-harm (see Jiwani, 2014; MacIntosh & Keeping, 2012; Olwan, 2014). A careful analysis of evidence at the murder trial concluded that:

Both social services and the police have been blamed for the Shafia murders and for their failure to act in the interest of the children who had appealed to them for protection and care. To explain their inaction, state services have noted that while trained in confronting patriarchal violence, they had no experience with the particular type of violence to which the Shafia girls were subjected. (Olwan, 2014, p. 224)

Research on this case and others has assessed interventions and noted that school counsellors and social workers often do not adequately respond to victims' needs or are reluctant to involve the police (Blum et al., 2016; Keeping, 2012; Korteweg, 2014). These professionals and the police have been criticized for their adherence to stereotypes, inadequate responses, and failure to protect vulnerable victims (Keeping, 2012; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010; MacIntosh & Keeping, 2012). In addition, research has shown that victims experiencing HBV and FM are likely to run away, to self-harm, or to attempt suicide, demonstrating the severe implications of HBC (Belfrage et al., 2012; Chantler, 2012; Chantler et al., 2009; Chantler & McCarry, 2020; Hague et al., 2013; Jiwani, 2014; Khan, 2018; Khan et al., 2018).

Law enforcement agencies need to be prepared to respond adequately to victims who come forward to report their HBC experiences. Some researchers, mainly in the United Kingdom, have examined victim and survivor interactions with police and encouraged the improvement of services to ensure safety from HBV (Gill et al., 2012; Idriss, 2018; Khan et al., 2018) and FM (Idriss, 2018). While strategies have been implemented in the United Kingdom to assess risk, train



police officers, raise public awareness, and collect national police data to support victims of HBC, police remain inconsistent in responding to HBV (Gill & Harrison, 2016; Idriss, 2018) and scholars continue to focus on the need to improve the criminal justice system response (Gill, 2009; Gill et al., 2012; Hague et al., 2013; Hall, 2014). Existing scholarship has focused on the variations in victims' and survivors' lived experiences of HBV (Gill et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2018; Withaeckx & Coene, 2014), FM (Chantler et al., 2009; Chantler & McCarry, 2020; Esthappan et al., 2018; Gill et al., 2018; Jaspal, 2014; Samad, 2010). Interviews with women impacted by these acts of violence help us better understand the experience of reporting them to the police, whose responses vary unpredictably and may even do further harm (Gill et al., 2018; Idriss, 2018; Mulvihill et al., 2019). Victims of HBCs may suffer for years before they seek help; if, when they eventually do so, police do not assist them, victims are less likely to reach out again and more likely to return home to their abusers (Aplin, 2018; Gill et al., 2012; Idriss, 2018).

Little practical information is available regarding how police can prepare to detect red flags and support victims of HBC and FM (Roberts et al., 2014). Research suggests that police should avoid assuming that all individuals from the same culture will adhere to the same “honour” codes or norms (Roberts, 2017; Roberts et al., 2014), and should consider the perceptions and meaning of “honour” for victims, offenders, and witnesses in their risk management strategies (Roberts, 2017). This is important because individuals who accept “honour”-based norms might be uncooperative, and perpetrators may mislead police into accepting their interpretation of the situation (Aplin, 2018). Police may not recognize how the “honour”-related beliefs of victims, offenders, and witnesses impact their investigations. Police perspectives on these crimes are rarely examined; relatively few police officers, and those mainly in the United Kingdom, have been included among the frontline professionals interviewed in research studies (see Aplin, 2017, 2018, 2019; Gill et al., 2012; Gill & Harrison, 2016; Gill et al., 2018; Hague et al., 2013; Idriss, 2017, 2018). It is crucial for policing professionals to grapple with how best to investigate HBC cases and meet victims' need for protection.

### **Research Design and Methods**

A constructivist approach to grounded theory was best suited for this study because I was interested in gaining new insights into the meaning-making process police use to make sense of an understudied phenomenon (Birks & Mills, 2015; Creswell, 2013). Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) is different from other versions of grounded theory since it views reality as socially constructed in multiple ways and allows for reflexivity during the research process (see Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2006). CGT focuses on multiple meanings and social processes that are co-constructed between the researcher and the participants to interpret the relevant phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Importantly, it considers researchers to be “part of the world we study and the data we collect” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). My knowledge, assumptions, and preconceptions informed the research questions I asked and how I approached data collection and analysis. As a second-generation Punjabi Sikh woman from the South Asian diaspora, my identity and

experiences shape my research process and academic interest in this topic, which I came to through my research and advocacy work on VAWG. Various conferences and workshops challenged me to think critically through an antiracist feminist lens. My views did not align with training that emphasized cultural explanations for HBC and HBKs, as these further racialized and stigmatized girls and women for the violence they experienced. Even the very term HBK reinforces racism, as opposed to terms like “femicide” and “patriarchal homicide”, which focus on the gendered violence of the crime (Aujla & Gill, 2014; Grewal, 2013; Korteweg, 2014). After all, Canadian women of all ethnicities are victims of DV and homicide (Razack, 2004). In addition, what is “dishonourable” in one family may not be so regarded in another family from the same community (Hall, 2014; Korteweg, 2014). “Honour” is a socially constructed system, and its meaning varies according to individual interpretations, social context, and complex meaning-making processes in different communities (Gill et al., 2012; Idriss, 2018; Withaekx & Coene, 2014).

As an antiracist feminist sociologist, I situate my study within my preconceived notions of a police culture under which systemic racism exists in all societal institutions. Although a complete analysis of racism in policing is beyond the scope of this paper, the brief discussion that follows reveals how privilege and oppression operate in the process of “othering”. Scholars have examined racist policing practices and culture, specifically how police often treat individuals differently based on their cultural or racial backgrounds. Police officers are socialized into a subculture in which biased policing occurs, and share membership in an institution that reinforces White supremacy, racial bias, and discrimination towards Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities (Chan & Chunn, 2014; Henry & Tator, 2010; Tator & Henry, 2006). As Chan (1997) argued, “police are acting as agents of an essentially racist or oppressive system” (p. 28). Individual police officers and civilians working within police services may not be racist, but they are part of a powerful institution that has oppressed racially diverse groups in Canadian society. Belur’s (2008) study on policing in the United Kingdom demonstrated how racialized victims of DV encounter discrimination and institutional racism. She explained that DV is overlooked in discussions of institutional racism and policing, particularly when victims are part of racialized groups. Nevertheless, police interventions are needed until society develops better options for combatting gendered violence across diverse cultural communities.

Policing is a male-dominated field based not just on the need to maintain public order but also on power relations mediated in part by race and gender. I was aware of my identity as a woman of colour entering a police milieu, and it was apparent that my race, ethnicity, and gender, as well as my civilian status, made me an outsider. This required me to think about whether participants might not trust me, which could potentially have impacted the interview dynamics. I expected that I would mainly be speaking to White male police officers and civilians, and that power relations and racial differences could potentially make it challenging to conduct cross-racial interviews. I had to consider the race and gender dynamics as well as the research process and design so that participants would feel comfortable sharing their perceptions and experiences. CGT is a flexible process that enables researchers to use multiple methods to collect data (Charmaz, 2006), and I



constructed the vignette as a method of complementing the semi-structured interviews. The vignette allowed me to establish rapport with my participants and explore the meaning they attributed to it (see Aujla, 2020b for details about the development of the vignette, its use of language, and why all reference to culture and ethnicity was omitted). The vignette allowed me to obtain data and insights on a sensitive topic, which may not have been possible without gaining participants' trust (Aujla, 2020b).

### ***Data Collection***

This paper focuses on the qualitative data findings from six semi-structured in-depth interview questions that participants answered after the presentation of a vignette related to HBC and FM. Having received approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta and from the law enforcement agencies, I began recruiting participants from police services in different regions of Alberta using gatekeepers, snowball sampling, and word-of-mouth techniques. Knowledge of or exposure to HBC and FM was not required. Potential participants were identified by gatekeepers, who in some cases made a general announcement of my appeal for volunteers and in others contacted potential participants directly or furnished me with their contact information. For example, one gatekeeper sent out my invitation as a listserv announcement and also posted the request on a bulletin board in the policing organization. In all of these instances, once potential participants were identified, I would follow up with an email inviting them to participate in the research study. After recruitment, participants assisted with contacting colleagues they thought might be interested in participating.

I made initial contact with potential participants through email and telephone. Then, in an email message, I informed them about the study and provided a consent form, instructions for reading the vignette, and an interview guide. Participants could choose to be interviewed either by telephone or in person. Telephone participants returned signed consent forms via email before the scheduled interview time. In-person participants provided written consent during their face-to-face interviews. I informed each interview participant that they could opt out of answering questions or decline to respond to the vignette. However, the vignette technique and its application were central to the interviews, and data collection would have been adversely affected had not all participants been prepared to discuss it. In the event, all participants did read and respond to the vignette, which helped me understand the cultural framing and the racist and privileged perspectives that some participants held. For example, some participants were quick to stereotype marginalized communities and blame certain cultures for the violence depicted in the scenario. The rich data that emerged show that the vignette method was successful (see Aujla, 2020b). Participation was voluntary, and I assured participants that their responses and involvement would be kept confidential so as not to affect their employment.

Between 2015 and 2017, I conducted 46 interviews with 32 police officers and 14 civilians from five law enforcement agencies across Alberta in rural and urban settings. The officers were employed by Calgary Police Service (CPS; 8 participants), Edmonton Police Service (EPS; 11),

Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) “K” Division (9), Integrated Threat and Risk Assessment Centre (I-TRAC; 3), and the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General of Alberta (1). The civilians were employed by CPS (3), EPS (7), RCMP “K” Division (1), I-TRAC (1), and the Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General (2). Pseudonyms are used in this paper to ensure participant confidentiality and preserve anonymity. Sociodemographic information is grouped (police officers and civilians), and quotes are identified with the assigned pseudonym and type of participant (police officer or civilian). With direct quotes, I do not disclose the law enforcement agency (e.g., specific division, detachment, unit) or position the participant represented.

This study’s sample of police officers and civilians was diverse, aside from ethnicity, in contrast with the lack of diversity generally found in policing (Henry & Tator, 2010). The sample included White (38), South Asian (5), Indigenous (1), and mixed-race (2) individuals. In 2019, there were 68,718 sworn police officers in Canada, of whom 8% identified as a visible minority and 4% as Indigenous; female police officers numbered 15,268 (22%), and their representation in all ranks has continued to increase (Conor et al., 2020). Police services such as EPS and the RCMP have made progress with their efforts to attract females recruits. Despite the growing number of women entering law enforcement, however, there is evidence that retention of female officers is still a challenge and that policing remains a male-dominated profession (Government of Manitoba, 2014). Even though there are still many fewer female police officers than male, I was able to recruit 20 male and 26 female participants, who ranged in age from 25 to 68 years; most (37) were 36 or older. The participants were highly educated: their level of education ranged from high school (3) to some post-secondary classes (2), completed college diplomas (12), or undergraduate (22) or graduate-level (7) degrees. Most police officer participants had received certificates in leadership or police academy training.

All participants had worked in policing for several years. The 32 police officers had from 3 to nearly 30 years of service, including some international policing experience. Some came from the lower or junior ranks (3 frontline patrol officers, 3 general-duty officers, and 8 constables from specialized units); others were of upper or senior rank (7 sergeants including staff sergeants, 5 detectives, 1 investigator, 4 corporals, and 1 detachment commander). The 14 civilians had experience in DV and policing that ranged from a few months to 28 years. The civilian positions varied (e.g., frontline victim service advocates, intake and threat assessors, outreach and crisis workers, social workers, psychologists, senior advisors, project coordinators, supervisors, managers of specialized units, and 911 call operators) across the law-enforcement agencies.

All of the interviews were face-to-face except four conducted by telephone to reach participants in rural parts of Alberta. The face-to-face interviews took place in Edmonton and Calgary or their surrounding communities, in spaces where participants felt comfortable: at their office (11), in an interview room or boardroom within their workplace (26), or in a seminar room at the University of Alberta (5). After the 46 interviews were completed, theoretical saturation was reached, and no new data were collected (Charmaz, 2006). The interviews varied in length from 1.5 to 4 hours. I opened the interviews using the vignette technique as a data collection tool;

discussions about it lasted from 20 to 30 minutes. I also asked participants a number of unrelated but complementary research questions, data from which will be published in future papers.

### *The Vignette and Accompanying Questions*

A vignette is a short descriptive story with hypothetical characters in a scenario to which participants are invited to respond (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014; Finch, 1987; Hughes & Huby, 2004). Participants were asked to read this vignette and respond to the hypothetical call for service:

Nina, age 17, is seen by a close family friend kissing her boyfriend on a movie date. Usually she is careful to tell lies, such as “I am going to work,” to hide the relationship. Her father often asks the brother to follow her places, and he constantly checks on her whereabouts.

When the family friend reports the kiss, Nina’s father confronts Nina for the behaviour and then blames Nina’s mother for failing to keep an eye on her own daughter. The father starts yelling about his daughter wearing makeup and running around with boys, and claims that this western lifestyle brings shame. Nina’s brother agrees with their father and threatens to kill the boyfriend. The father slaps Nina across the face saying, “What kind of daughter are you; how will I face the community? You have disrespected me and disgraced this family. I wish you were dead.”

Out of fear Nina escapes to a friend’s place where she is encouraged by the friend’s parents to report the incident to the police instead of eloping with her boyfriend. When the police arrive at her family’s home, the brother says there should be no concerns as the family is discussing preparations for his sister’s wedding. The mother calls Nina’s cell phone and begs her to come home to avoid further community accusations. The mother tells her to end the current relationship because her father is planning her marriage to another man from a conservative family. Under pressure, Nina agrees to the forced marriage, and tries to defend herself by saying everything is based on rumours.

Participants received the written narrative and accompanying questions a day before the scheduled interview and were given specific instructions not to feel pressured to prepare, but to expect to answer the questions below. During the interview, some participants were given time to reread the vignette before responding to the questions. Participants were invited to think out loud as they offered their responses to the following questions:

1. Describe your initial thoughts about what is happening in the scenario.
2. What parts of the vignette stood out to you, and why?
3. How would the police respond to the scenario, and what influences this response?

4. How comfortable would law enforcers (police officers) feel in investigating and reporting similar situations?
5. What experiences or situations have you heard of that are similar to the one presented in the scenario? If so, tell me more about this.
6. What else concerns you about this scenario? Any other comments?

### ***Data Analysis***

All 46 interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for coding and analysis. I reviewed all transcriptions for accuracy and analyzed the data using the guiding principles of CGT (Charmaz, 2006). I entered the written data (transcripts, field notes, and memos) into NVivo 11 and began organizing the initial codes from the vignette into emerging conceptual categories as I continued collecting data (Charmaz, 2006). This iterative cycle and non-linear coding process was flexible, making it possible to pursue topics and themes as they emerged. I reexamined my earlier data to develop additional questions or insights while still conducting interviews with participants.

Themes were identified and labelled with *in vivo* codes — that is, using the exact words or phrases provided by participants — which gave meaning to the data and prevented me from imposing my own ideas on the codes, letting the data speak for themselves. I used constant comparative techniques (Charmaz, 2006), as outlined by grounded theorists, to compare and contrast the data across the interview transcripts before finalizing the coding scheme. Throughout the data analysis process, I remained grounded in the data, reviewing the relevant literature later to make connections. The data analysis and interview processes took place simultaneously, so they informed one another. Through this inductive approach, my aim was not to develop a theory, but to use the CGT coding approach to understand the connections within my data. CGT acknowledges that literature and existing theories can help explain concepts or categories that emerge from data. The coding process allowed me to identify four main themes that demonstrated how participants interpreted and responded to the vignette scenario.

Because of the prior knowledge I brought to the study, the lens through which I interrogated the data and interpreted the emergent themes originates in antiracist and feminist theoretical frameworks. I drew on critical race feminism, also known as Canadian antiracist feminist thought (Dua, 1999) and Canadian feminist antiracism (Razack et al., 2010), as a conceptual framework to analyze the findings and to theorize from an antiracist perspective. The central focus of critical race feminism is race, which contributes to feminist theorizing of gender oppressions as it interrogates broader issues of migration, integration, settler colonialism, discriminatory immigration and citizenship policies, and racism (Dua, 1999; Razack et al., 2010). Critical race feminism scholars have examined violence against racialized women, and noted that the dominant discourses of “othering” in mainstream society shape racist stereotypes. For example, in the period since the terrorist attack on the United States of September 11, 2001, Arabs and Muslims have been subject to Islamophobia and institutional racism by state, media, and criminal justice systems that see them as alien to Western culture (Chan & Chunn, 2014; Jiwani, 2014; Razack, 2004).

Scholarly work has deconstructed the Canadian media and state discourse, which portrays immigrant communities as “backward” and as outsiders importing “barbaric” practices into the country (see Jiwani, 2014; Korteweg, 2014; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010; Olwan, 2013, 2014). I add to this work by analyzing the emergent themes in policing and paying attention to how racism in policing reinforces marginalization and “othering”, similar to the state and media discourses that perpetuate stereotypes. I examine the gaps in knowledge and cultural understanding that underpin the problematic institutional responses of the police to HBCs and FMs. My research builds upon the foundational work done by other sociologists, social workers, and activists in the DV sector to challenge the dangers of culture talk and to approach culture as a meaning-making process (see Abji et al., 2019; Korteweg, 2012, 2014; Korteweg et al., 2013; Razack, 1994).

## Findings

The findings speak to the ongoing challenges police have to grapple with in situations like the one presented in the vignette. Four main themes emerged consistently.

### *Theme 1: Preparation through Experience and Exposure*

Participants discussed at length how prior knowledge and understanding shaped their perceptions of the vignette and influenced how they understood it. The majority of the participants discussed Nina’s experience through their understanding of cases they had followed in the media, relevant training, and past involvement in or awareness of similar situations. Except for two police officers, all participants had some working knowledge and awareness of the topic. Participants recognized that police response to the vignette was challenging, were reminded of past cases with missed opportunities for intervention, and feared that police would continue to overlook the possibility of early intervention in future cases.

When examining the vignette, participants tended to reflect on the Shafia murders, other HBKs, specific HBV, and FM cases (whether carried out or only attempted) they had assisted in or heard about in their work. Some participants recalled details about Canadian and international cases, such as who was involved and how the victims were killed. The vignette allowed participants to openly reflect on the painful nature of past incidents and their desire not to hear about another case of professionals failing victims. A civilian member, Judy, explained:

Those Shafia girls had been signal[ling] [for help] to the community in a lot of ways and nobody realized the extent of the danger they were in. If you or I interviewed her, we would know. That, um, she would not be safe going home. And there was ample information there, ample, but people weren’t well enough trained in diversity to pick them up. And that’s, like that’s the biggest thing. Is understanding these so-called honour-based issues. And the depth that they go to.

Judy highlighted the problem with interviewing girls in front of their parents: victims often retract their statements, reconcile with family members, and return home, only to later be murdered.



Judy's concerns around the seriousness of taking action suggest that service providers are not looking or listening for evidence that might indicate the level of risk facing young girls. She also stressed that not being trained in diversity means professionals are more likely to gloss over critical details. It is important to note that diversity and cultural training may not be the most appropriate way to confront these problems. While diversity training focuses on cultural awareness and sensitivity to potential biases toward people who do not share a similar background, it may fail to take into consideration how to look at forms of gendered violence without racializing women and girls.

Elizabeth, a senior police officer, was first exposed to an HBK during training on the Banaz Mahmud case in the United Kingdom. She described how Mahmud had contacted police multiple times, but officers did not take her pleas for help seriously. Mahmud's family disapproved of her boyfriend and after they witnessed her kissing him, she was killed. Her body was stuffed into a suitcase and buried (see Gill, 2009; Idriss, 2017). Elizabeth explained:

So ... when I read this [vignette], that was exactly what I thought was that, yeah, it's ah ... an honour-based issue. For sure. Because, I mean, family values and the reputation of the family is paramount. Right? To these families.

Having undergone some specialized training, Elizabeth perceived the vignette context as escalating and potentially progressing to an HBK. She expressed concern for Nina and was conscious of the potential danger if the police did not follow up on the case. Similarly, Sarah, a civilian member, reflected on how she understood the situation presented in the vignette:

Instantly when I read it, it reminded me of the Shafia case, so I thought honour-based violence, [and] the complexity, right? Very, very complex situation, and with people that had less knowledge in the area, it would look more complicated and messy.

Sarah's comment shows how challenging she thought it would be to effectively take on a case like the one described in the vignette with no understanding of HBV.

In general, due to their exposure to other HBC cases, participants understood the vignette and did not seem to underestimate the severity of the potential consequences or danger to victims if police did not follow up on the case. Most participants felt the situation could prove complicated to respond to and that Nina was vulnerable. Very few perceived the risk as low; most referenced well-known cases of HBK in which there had been a professional failure to safeguard victims. A civilian member, Amy, explained: "There's enough here saying this is high enough risk that somebody needs to be, like, intervening and trying to prevent her from being married or possibly killed." However, despite their awareness that the danger described would merit police involvement, several participants worried that a lack of knowledge and training could prevent police from responding appropriately. Angie, a junior police officer, suggested that officers who

are unaware of the complexities of the issue would probably use mediation strategies with the family, and that this approach might not address Nina's needs or resolve the potential for an FM:

These situations, I guess, can come across to some, you know, as maybe not too high risk and maybe there just needs to be a bit of intervention on how to have the family work better together, as a unit, and understand each other. But, clearly, you know, when you look a little further and have a little more information about these types of crimes, they are actually quite high risk. You know, they're looking at her having a forced marriage, so, clearly that's going to escalate things. They wouldn't want her to disgrace the family or not follow through on the forced marriage and, to the point where, you know, could it escalate that they would rather have her be dead than to follow through with this other boyfriend and not follow through on the marriage? So, definitely, you know, extremely high risk.

Like Angie, several participants highlighted how the vignette situation could escalate, so police must be prepared to assess and respond appropriately. Effective intervention strategies could help protect Nina by preventing the escalation to FM or homicide that has occurred in many real cases. As participants noted, a lack of awareness prevents officers from immediately taking action, identifying risk factors, and protecting Nina.

### ***Theme 2: Making Sense of Individual-Level Interventions***

Most participants had not only heard of similar cases, but had actually handled them, assisted with investigations, or provided advice on them. Patrick, a senior police officer, shared, "I've seen that situation countless times, when I was with the Domestic [Violence] Team, that was a very common call that we would receive." Some participants told me about responses that were helpful to the victims who reached out. Such intervention strategies at the individual level relied on a police officer's ability to detect and investigate a potential HBC, and in many cases, to help victims receive support. Bryan, a senior police officer, commented on the similarities between the vignette and a case where specialist knowledge was required to further the police investigation:

I've seen these things where we had a girl [who] ... wanted to marry her boyfriend. Father didn't want anything to do with it... I think she was assaulted, just a minor assault. But she was kept in the house by her mother and sat on, I think, actually... I think they held her down while the dad and the brother went off to kill the boyfriend, which was in another part of [the city]. And, she, I think she managed to break free, call the police and initially, with that, the police arrived, and the mother was at the door, "Oh! No problem here, no problem here," and they could hear some disturbance, so they went in, and the girl said, "No. They're threatening to kill my boyfriend." So they ended up sending some police. So, and really, when you've got something like that ... you're not going to treat that any different, to a regular threat's file. You're gonna — "Hang on a sec, they're on their way to try and kill somebody? We need to get somebody, you know, some officers there to stop them."

... Thankfully there were a couple of guys in [the DV unit], one of them used to work with me ... [and] he's got a knowledge of it and it helps a heck of a lot because you do need key people that have had knowledge and interest in particular areas to highlight the fact that, hey, we need to look at this differently. This isn't a standard, one person against one person. This could be distant family members from other countries, from other provinces. You know, causing serious, serious issues. Something that we just think is really minor.

Bryan's comments reveal the importance of the identification and recognition of multiple perpetrators. For example, the mother supported the father and son threatening to kill the boyfriend, but this role is often underinvestigated (Aplin, 2017). Bryan stressed that addressing family dynamics and the roles played by extended family members requires cultural sensitivity. Most importantly, police officers took actions to ensure protection, and this case did not progress to an FM or HBK.

Civilians also noted that similar cases come up regularly, particularly those involving girls being taken abroad to carry out an FM, and reflected on their involvement in related police files. Eve, a civilian member, explained, "The last one I can remember is where we did get a [DV] Team involved. And they actually had to go to the airport and pull the girl off the plane." I refer to this well-known FM situation as the "airport case" (see MacIntosh & Keeping, 2012; Quebec Council for Women, 2013): a 16-year-old girl was nearly forced to take "a family holiday" to the Middle East because her father disapproved of her having a boyfriend. Many participants spoke about the CPS investigation of this case. After a family friend alerted police about the risk to the girl's life, CPS took proactive steps to rescue her. CPS also turned to Child and Family Services (CFS) for assistance, but they refused to cooperate. The investigating officer on the airport case, who was a participant in this study, explained,

There was no risk assigned by CFS, who really, they're the ones — it's not really a police issue, now, to protect this girl.... [However] we took her back to the police station, [and the] social worker left us, left us just pfft [dismissal of seriousness], "Oh, we got another call. Bye." And they left.

This officer expressed frustration with the CFS worker, who minimized the risk level and left the police to deal with the situation. At the time, the investigating officer was relatively new to the police service, but managed to apply for an emergency protection order under the Protection Against Family Violence Act. The investigating officer explained, "I actually got that emergency protection order not to protect her from her dad; it was to protect her from CFS." This comment speaks to the system-level barriers and differences in perspective across social service agencies that ideally should work in cooperation with police.

The airport case and others described by participants demonstrate the importance of paying attention to the needs of girls who share potential FM threats with authorities. These crimes are

not straightforward, and police have to be prepared to investigate them expeditiously. These examples illustrate one-off interventions that were successful because of decisions made by individual police officers. However, these successes do not mean that police and social supports such as CFS are always ready to act; as described above, the responses were inconsistent depending on whether the officer had the necessary understanding and expertise.

Similarly, in a few negative case examples, participants indicated that they have no experience of individual-level interventions. Rebecca, a junior police officer, said:

You know, this type of situation, like, with regards to honour-based, we don't see those. We don't have these happening very often here [in a small rural community]. In fact, I actually was asking some of the members, and ... they've never investigated one.

Comments like this highlight the difficulty of determining the occurrence levels in rural areas, where there are likely fewer reports. However, some participants noted that they may have missed signs of potential HBCs due to lack of knowledge. For instance, Steven, a senior police officer, said:

I could think of like maybe five cases that I investigated and maybe another, um... 10 or so cases where I, maybe, advised on.... I'm sure there's been a lot more where we just didn't, I just didn't respond in, with the understanding that it was an honour-based violence situation.

His comment again highlights how individual interactions are closely tied to experience and prior knowledge.

### ***Theme 3: Implicit Cultural Bias and Policing***

Implicit cultural biases can influence police officers' actions. Some participants associated the vignette with certain cultures or ethnicities. Nathan, a senior police officer, shared the thought that popped into his head when he read the vignette:

I immediately, after reading this, just based on the scenario, based on the information presented, I immediately went to the thought that it was East Indian. Indian culture. And, I mean, it could be a different culture.... I already, in my mind, formulated that it was an East Indian family. Without even knowing that.

Nathan's comment illustrates how he associated this type of violence with South Asian culture. When I asked him to share more, he explained:

The name, ... the actions and the statements of the brother. The actions and statements of the father. The actions and statements of the mother. The [forced] marriage. Yeah. That's — because, I'm not super worldly, but, I don't know too many other cultures.

These attributes led Nathan to view Nina as the racial and cultural “other” who suffered from a culture of violence, as opposed to a girl suffering from gendered violence.

Another senior police officer, Sandra, explored these ideas further:

You want to treat everybody the same ... but if somebody's of a certain culture, is it wrong to say I'm going to treat them a bit differently because I think they need a little more help or it needs to be approached differently? So there's that stigma, right away, where you don't want to do anything wrong by trying to do something right, if that makes any sense. So, if I were to, because if I were to read this ... and assuming that it was a White family, brought up in Canada or in [the city], then maybe I wouldn't have as many red flags, because maybe I might think that the threats were just a, “you're an idiot and I'm going to kill you”, and they don't really mean anything, but, because you kind of have a vague understanding of a certain culture, it means a little bit more and you have to take it more seriously.... It's so awful, because I don't want to sound like I'm racist, because I'm totally not. But you have more red flags if it's an ethnic family as opposed to not, even in the first paragraph, right? Even if it wasn't and the father was a little bit upset, if he's going to get mad at his daughter, I'm not going to have these red flags going off that is, maybe serious and we might need to take a really close look at this.

Sandra's comments reinforce how challenging it can be for police to determine what actions to take, especially when they don't have a solid understanding of HBC or FM. Police need to be culturally aware and sensitive in their approach because HBC victims may require different supports depending on the intersections of race, ethnicity, culture, sex, gender, and caste. Sandra did not want to seem prejudiced towards the actors in the vignette, but she made generalizations about an entire group of people based on their race and ethnicity. Simplistic views and racial biases can impact police perceptions about who is affected by this form of violence. Identifying and questioning these biases, assumptions, and stereotypes will help police improve their response not only to HBC and FM, but also to other types of crime in racialized communities.

Police officers who are familiar with the way family dynamics, patriarchy, and the larger community contribute to this type of violence may be more inclined to help Nina, as opposed to those who do not understand family structures in collectivist cultures. The vignette was designed to alert officers to the role of multiple perpetrators at the family and community level in collectivist cultures when interpreting and making sense of the scenario. Officers also need to understand that the involvement of the family friend and the father's reaction are important in this case. A few participants did identify how the father has involved family (e.g., brother and mother) and community members in keeping a watchful eye on his daughter. The control and surveillance of young girls like Nina is seen as protecting the value and belief system within the family and community. The “honour” of the family and their social standing in the community are seen as resting on her behaviour. The father believes that she has engaged in dishonourable behaviour that



has brought shame upon the family, and that the FM is needed to cleanse the family's reputation. To cope effectively in such circumstances, officers must be willing to improve their understanding of how patriarchy intersects with the preservation of family and community "honour" (see Gill, 2009; Mucina, 2018). Conversely, an officer who does not understand these family dynamics, patriarchy, and the community context may dismiss this call and normalize the violence as being "part of their culture". The outcomes range widely depending on the investigating officer, and many police officers are not specifically trained to recognize complex forms of DV.

#### ***Theme 4: Police Beliefs and Meaning-Making***

In Alberta, police guidelines inform the response to DV, FV, and intimate partner violence calls. The mandatory Family Violence Investigation Report (FVIR), which is an investigation checklist rather than a risk assessment tool, was produced to assist with investigations and lines of questioning. Since 2008, all municipal police services and the RCMP "K" Division have been required to use the FVIR, which asks critical questions about relationship history (Alberta Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General, 2020, pp. 38–42). Police officers use the FVIR card to remind themselves to ask specific questions, and several participants mentioned that they might use the FVIR as they considered Nina's situation. However, not all participants viewed it as a valuable tool for HBV and FM cases, because "the FVIR is strictly for DV. It's for intimate partner [violence]. So you're missing a lot of the nuances of this", according to Jackie, a senior police officer. The tool has limitations for collecting information on other forms of violence, and while it can be applied to all families and cultures, it is not culturally sensitive to HBV. Some frontline patrol members were candid about feeling pressure to use the FVIR even in circumstances where it is not effective, and thus feeling less motivated to complete it.

Participants suggested revising the FVIR with culturally sensitive questions to address family members other than partners, or developing a similar tool for HBV. Nancy, a civilian member, explained the need for questions that focus on "specific threats, by her parents to, you know, harm her or harm a boyfriend, etc. Something like that. Because it's not always what's just on the surface. Like, you know, they have to be able to dig deeper." Some participants raised concerns about adding questions to the FVIR because the tool already has so many, and instead suggested developing a specific HBV-FVIR. However, Cathy, a civilian member, shared concerns about this approach because "it could, feed into bias, ... make it so people get missed, and investigations are done one way for some people and another way for other people and that's concerning on a professional and personal level." She noted that violence happens in all communities, and worried that developing an HBV-FVIR tool could contribute to or perpetuate police officer beliefs, attitudes, and racial biases.

Other concerns included the language used to label the incident. Participants repeatedly discussed the meanings and understandings of "honour", HBV, and HBK; whether to use the term "honour"; and how to describe the context within which these behaviours occur. It is crucial to

understand how each term is or is not used in policing and what informs those decisions, since unclear terminology and inconsistent definitions could potentially hinder interventions.

There is no universally accepted way to respond to HBC and FM, partly because no standard definitions of DV and FV exist across all police services. For example, some definitions used by police services and specialized DV units do not include people who are not in intimate relationships but are instead related by blood. EPS uses the term “domestic violence” where the RCMP uses “relationship violence”. The narrow definitions in use are unclear about the possibility of physical or emotional abuse from family members or how to properly categorize the varieties of DV. While participants recognized the gaps within their police service, they acknowledged that other law enforcement agencies, such as CPS, do employ inclusive definitions of DV<sup>4</sup>. Thus, participants’ understandings of the vignette varied significantly because of their meaning-making processes. Amy, a civilian member, expressed how it is difficult to know what to do when approaching a case:

Like, in this situation, it’s more than domestic violence. There’s absolutely like cultural implications happening and whether or not, and this is the part where I’m not an expert, but, you know, like taking it that extra step to being honour-based, I don’t know if I know where — or if anybody knows — fully, where that line is, right? But this is definitely more than just domestic violence.

Amy’s observation illustrates the process of “othering”, where certain cultures are racialized as “backward”, with the use of HBV terminology focused on ethnicity instead of gendered violence rooted in patriarchy. She elaborated on how the behaviour is outside the power and control dynamics usual to “common” DV. She felt that, “This kind of situation is not something we would commonly see from like European or North American cultures, right? It’s going to be more like, you’re East Indian or Asian.” She implied that the West is relatively free from HBV compared to regions that immigrants come from. This “us versus them” comment did not surprise me after I learned from her that she had attended training on how cultural practices motivate HBV in South Asian communities. It had influenced her lens on DV cases and reinforced a monolithic understanding of culture, which could negatively impact her interactions with South Asian women who managed to overcome their hesitation and approach the police with DV concerns. Later in the interview, she shared her response to a Facebook post from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in which Trudeau opposed the previous government’s characterization of HBV as a “barbaric cultural practice” and touted the withdrawal of this phrase in new legislation. This made

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<sup>4</sup>See <https://www.calgary.ca/cps/Pages/Community-programs-and-resources/Crime-prevention/Domestic-Violence.aspx> for the extended definition of DV used by CPS. CPS describes DV as “physical violence, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, stalking and harassment between family members or persons in a relationship or related by virtue of children, marriage, or adoption. It can happen in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, and both men and women can be victims.”

her angry: "...If you don't think, like, strangling your daughter because she wore makeup is not barbaric, then I think that's crazy."

Moreover, her comment connects to wider discourses, associated with the federal government (2006–2015) of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, that targeted racialized people for allegedly bringing harmful cultural practices to Canada. The government used racist rhetoric to emphasize the protection of "Canadian values" of equality and freedom; for example, the warning for Canadian newcomers against certain "barbaric cultural practices" such as HBK and FM in "The Equality of Women and Men" section of the revised Citizenship Guide<sup>5</sup> (Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). In 2015, the government passed Bill S-7, an amendment to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code*, giving it the short title of *Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act*<sup>6</sup>. The term "barbaric" invokes a racist and xenophobic discourse to discriminate against non-White people. Amy's comment above takes a similar position to that of the government, one implying that racialized people commit "barbaric" acts of violence that conflict with a civilized society. This "culture clash" discourse dismisses both the fact that many forms of VAWG are found in Canada across cultures, and the effects of colonial history, especially the tragedy of the many missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (see Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010; Olwan, 2013; 2014; Razack, 2004).

Other participants highlighted the range of elements that are unique to HBC (including FM) and categorized the crime under the umbrella of FV. Angie, a junior police officer, said:

I think, generally, people think about honour-based crimes, they do think about domestic violence and inter-partner relationship violence. But I think that, at least in what I've seen or heard and read, that a lot is directed towards the female children in the family. So, in this case, it wouldn't fit [our] definition of domestic violence but definitely, it's [FV]. That being said, we definitely take any kind of [FV], you know, just kind of to the next level, because we know that the end result in a lot of family conflict can be death, homicide, suicide.

Though the vignette didn't quite fit her agency's definitions, Angie believed police would intervene in any family relationship to prevent death.

Many participants shared frustrations with narrow definitions of DV used within police services and specialized units, definitions that may not include FV and other complex forms of

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<sup>5</sup> The 2009 publication Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship can be accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/discover.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> *Bill S-7: Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act: An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to Make Consequential Amendments to Other Acts*, assented to June 18, 2015, 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> session. Retrieved from the Parliament of Canada website: <https://www.parl.ca/documentviewer/en/41-2/bill/s-7/royal-assent>

violence like those in the vignette. Trina, a civilian member, suggested police services must address this gap without reinforcing racist stereotypes, and recommended ongoing conversations to understand these behaviours as “complex forms of [FV], or community violence, or community-involved violence”. She identified a danger in dominant media narratives and HBV terminology that categorize behaviours to specific racialized communities, whereas a similar situation in a White, Catholic, Anglo-Saxon family would be defined as FV. The biases and stereotypes deflect attention away from understanding family dynamics or gendered explanations of violence. However, a few White participants suggested the vignette scenario could happen in families of any race, ethnicity, or religion. Kyle, a senior officer, explained that he had “seen similar things in non-ethnic families as well ... by ‘non-ethnic’ I guess Caucasian”, where a father didn’t like his daughter’s boyfriend and decided to arrange an FM. Instead of the family’s ethnicity, Kyle focused on the gendered context of VAWG and how the father’s actions emerged from patriarchal values. In addition, CPS participants explained that their DV policy includes an “extensive” list of family members (“grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, parents, boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, common laws. And then same-sex.”), and this broad approach helps them better consider situations like the vignette.

Another example of the confusion and lack of policy is the question of whether or not participants believed Nina required attention from CFS. While most police officers were aware of their duty to call CFS because Nina is a minor, not all were sure whether CFS would support her to prevent the FM. Nina is 17, a child, but close enough to the age of majority that this fact may be overlooked. Timothy, a senior police officer, said:

This is just going to be left with a patrol member ... he should call Children’s Services ... and I can’t answer what Children’s Services would do in this. It’s so minor. On the face of it. But knowing what I know, this is not minor.... But, if I were to see this, as a supervisor, on my desk, I would be like, OK. We’ve got some issues, and we need to ramp up this investigation.... This doesn’t fit under any unit. This is — because she’s 17 [and] it’s not a spousal. So, if it’s domestic violence, it has to be [a] spousal relationship — we don’t have a [FV] unit.... So if you are a child that’s 16, or older... end up having a problem with the family — whatever.... If she was 15 and the assault was serious enough, it would come to [a child protection unit].

Timothy’s concern that CFS might not help Nina echoed the airport case, where CFS failed to work closely with the police to protect a 16-year-old. A coordinated response with CFS and police should consider the risk of FM threats and DV involving young women under the age of 18. However, it can be extremely frustrating if an agency is unwilling to cooperate.

### **Discussion and Conclusion: Implications for Policing Practices**

Critical race feminism provides a lens to conceptualize how racism operates in policing. From an antiracist feminist perspective, I was able to critically examine the participants' conceptualizations of the vignette and how these influenced their responses to my questions. As my findings illustrate, we must challenge racism and implicit bias within institutions that are designed to intervene, such as law enforcement and other helping professions. The notion of “us” (Whiteness, with “Canadian values”), and “them” (cultural, “backward”, “Other”) is undesirable as it separates certain groups from the rest of society and perpetuates racist stereotypes (Korteweg, 2012). The discourse of “otherness” does significant harm to communities: professionals working to understand the unique challenges facing young girls and women need to adopt a stance of cultural safety and cultural humility<sup>7</sup> (Rossiter et al., 2018). Much more needs to be done to challenge racism within law enforcement and other social services. Police services have implemented initiatives such as cultural sensitivity training and diversity hiring practices to recruit ethnic officers, but these responses are not sufficient to deal with institutional racism in policing policies and practices (Belur, 2008; Chan, 1997; Henry & Tator, 2010; Reiner, 2010; Stenning, 2003). While it is important to consider cultural differences, such measures do not support the police in conceptualizing DV across cultures. The underlying issues left unaddressed by cultural sensitivity training and diversity hiring are that neither reduces discriminatory policing practices or allows for trust to be built with racialized communities. These measures do not deter a police officer from stereotyping HBCs and FMs as a cultural or religious issue. Thus, communities will continue to be stereotyped for HBCs and FMs until police examine their policies and include mandatory education about racism and institutional discrimination as a part of DV training.

These findings shed light on the challenges participants foresaw in their responses to the vignette. The participants' concerns varied by gender and illustrated the difficulties associated with these complex investigations. The quotes from female participants seem qualitatively different from those of male participants. In interviews, the female participants were more reflective, contemplative, and empathetic; they took these cases quite seriously. This is not surprising given that DV calls are seen as “rubbish” work in policing and female officers are more likely to take on this type of emotional labour (Belur, 2008; Reiner, 2010). However, regardless of gender, participants who were parents showed empathy and wanted to support Nina. Implementing a comprehensive response strategy between police and other services requires that attention be paid

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<sup>7</sup>Cultural safety and cultural humility extend further than cultural sensitivity. These concepts are relevant tools for police and can help with responding to DV in racialized communities (Rossiter et al., 2018). Cultural safety is present when racialized people receive a safe service free from discrimination. A focus on cultural safety encourages police officers and civilian members working within police services to question their own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes. It means having a deeper understanding of systemic racism in police institutions and in police officers' attitudes that prevent safety. Cultural humility requires self-reflection and awareness. For instance, police officers' “own cultural values impact the services they provide” (Rossiter et al., 2018, p. 10). Cultural humility suggests that police officers recognize power differences and see themselves as learners when interacting with people from other cultures.



to these varied perspectives. Overall, this study demonstrates that police lack the resources to support victims at risk. Blum and colleagues (2016) highlighted that “service providers [must] understand this possibility as they ponder interventions to help these young people” affected by HBV to avoid a fatal outcome (p. 146).

The critical insights obtained in this study add to a growing body of knowledge and understanding of HBCs and FMs. It is important to highlight the extent to which participants’ perspectives on HBVs, like those of the community at large, relied on media coverage. As Jiwani (2014) argued, the media reinforces racist and xenophobic perceptions of communities. However, participants seemed to care about Nina’s safety, feared for her life, and tried to help even if they did not know exactly what to do next. It is important to have consistency in policing practices, but a lack of consistent policy and training continues to be an often-unrecognized issue within police agencies.

Additionally, gaps in the system ignore the needs of vulnerable victims. Minors are somewhat covered by DV policies, as are married women, but what about unmarried women who have reached the age of majority? Even younger unmarried women may not be helped; a few participants doubted that CFS would have helped in Nina’s case, as she was 17, just a year away from the age of majority in Alberta. A lack of cultural understanding, and racist discourses that stereotype and stigmatize racialized communities, can also lead to inaction. This study confirms that police still struggle with appropriate responses to HBCs and FMs despite the insightful discussions and policing initiatives that have taken place since the Shafia murders in 2009 (MacIntosh, 2012; MacIntosh & Keeping, 2012; Quebec Council for Women, 2013). Building on previous work (Gill et al., 2012; Idriss, 2018), the findings presented here may allow police to respond more proactively and less reactively.

Rather than suggesting responses that they felt were both practical and achievable within their police service, participants identified challenges, including the need for collaboration across service providers. Policing these crimes is a complex task requiring a multidisciplinary approach, and specific actions must be taken by all partners to improve the ways in which support is offered. Appropriate processes need to be set out for a consistent multiagency response (e.g., police and CFS). For example, if a person is under 18 years of age, like Nina, should a referral be made to CFS? If the person is 18 years or more, should the police enlist the support of a social worker? Should the police be called to address a case like Nina’s at all, especially if they feel ill equipped to understand family dynamics and violence? This concern is consistent with Blum and colleagues’ (2016) study, where conflicting mandates and a lack of a coordinated response were correlated with HBV. Policing practices seem to be more advanced in some other countries; for example, the United Kingdom has multiagency policies and interventions such as the Forced Marriage Unit, which investigates cases and protects victims. There is also literature that discusses survivor accounts of feeling betrayed by professionals who could have prevented an FM, but instead denied them help or missed opportunities to ask why they were removed from the education system (Chantler & McCarry, 2020). Canada must establish a policy, similar to Scotland’s, to take action

when young girls are removed from school by parents and pressured into an FM (Chantler & McCarry, 2020). Their disappearances should not go unnoticed, and police should be notified. Social workers, health professionals, police, and teachers need education on how to provide adequate support in identified FM cases (Anis et al., 2013). Police should prioritize community-based strategies to extend services and build trust; for example, improving relationships with racialized communities will help reduce levels of fear and distrust (Chan, 1997). School resource officers are visible and accessible (see Broll & Howells, 2019, on the importance of relationship building with youth in Canadian schools), so they may be able to help facilitate the early detection and prevention of HBCs and FM.

To the best of my knowledge, this paper is the first to explore the perspectives of police officers and civilians employed in law enforcement agencies with the use of a vignette. While the vignette helped me understand how police would respond, more work is needed to prepare supports for these situations, whether formal (e.g., teachers, social workers, and CFS workers) or informal (e.g., community leaders, system navigators, and advocates). The findings also highlight the need to go beyond cultural sensitivity training and diversity hiring practices and specifically educate and train the police and other professionals on investigating HBV and FM. Training in the “one-chance rule”, as outlined in the United Kingdom’s strategy to train police officers, must be taken in order to ensure appropriate responses (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2010, p. 378, as cited in Eshareturi et al., 2014)<sup>8</sup>. This training is vital because, given the complexity of these situations, the police may be the first and only responders. Education and training programs can be developed to increase awareness and identify strategies to detect situations similar to Nina’s. Acknowledging the problem is one thing, but organizations need to give police officers the appropriate tools to investigate what is really going on. For instance, responders to the situation in the vignette would ideally ask the right questions, separate Nina from her family to allow her to open up, and involve a trained social worker to support the required intervention.

Police services should monitor cases and offer practical information to inform best practices and identify areas for improvement. The information collected could inform the development of a policing protocol for handling HBCs and FMs in Alberta, which could then be shared with police in other jurisdictions. At the time of this study, EPS had introduced interactive web-based training to increase knowledge of HBV, although it was not mandatory for all members. The RCMP has also developed online training on HBV and FM for frontline officers, and CPS trains police officers and new recruits on HBV and cultural diversity (Quebec Council for Women, 2013). Despite this progress, access to training tends to vary across police services; it needs to be mandatory to ensure that all police officers are prepared to deal with these cases. Police services that have designed training initiatives should evaluate both the content and the delivery method, since any improvement to the training will assist prevention and intervention strategies to protect victims. A

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<sup>8</sup>The “one-chance rule” indicates that a police officer and other professionals need to be aware that they might only have one opportunity to speak to an HBV or FM victim. Therefore, an officer’s initial interaction with a victim is crucial, and could even save a life.

few studies have shown that despite training initiatives, police officers do not always respond compassionately to victims of HBCs (Gill, 2009; Gill & Harrison, 2016). Victims may feel more comfortable coming forward if police officers avoid judgement, take statements seriously, and remember that each victim has different needs and safety concerns. Taking this approach will also help reduce underreporting and minimize harm to the victims.

As these findings illustrate, there is a need to better understand HBC and FM and how they fit within the context of DV. Additionally, my research reveals that the police agencies in this study do not have guidelines that direct their actions with HBCs and FMs. Some participants felt that the broad questions in the mandatory FVIR did not apply to these situations, while others felt they might. It is essential to reconsider the FVIR tool and determine whether it applies to incidents like Nina's and, if not, what could be improved or developed. Additionally, this research suggests that clear, appropriate policies would allow police officers and civilians to use their judgement to decide which cases need to be directed to specialized DV units for follow-up.

At the time of the interviews, the police services included in this study did not collect data on the prevalence of HBCs and FMs. While participants referenced cases and interventions they had seen or heard of, without the data, it is not possible to assess the number of cases that have been responded to in Alberta. Studies in the United Kingdom have shown that police and other organizations have failed to accurately track the number of reported HBV and FM cases (Hague et al., 2013; Samad, 2010; also see Chantler, 2012; Gill et al., 2012). For example, Gill and colleagues (2018) found that police reported certain incidents as cases of DV rather than HBV, and when HBV was linked to DV, it was not flagged as both. It is important to have clear guidelines on how to classify cases of HBV and FM — as “honour”-related, or DV, or both — to ensure accurate data collection. If the police keep statistics, it is worth asking why and how the process works as labels such as HBV can lead to stereotypical assumptions and racial profiling. Thus, police must be sensitive not to reinforce racism as it can affect victims reaching out for help.

This paper makes a unique contribution by identifying gaps related to HBCs and FMs in policing from the perspectives of both police officers and civilian members. However, research studies are needed that take into account the unique perspectives of professionals of other types (e.g., child, youth, and family protection workers; school counsellors; school teachers; and social workers). Limited information is available in the Canadian context on the legal duty of schools and other service providers to report these cases or make referrals to appropriate authorities (Blum et al., 2016). It is hoped that the present research will help service providers in various sectors (e.g., social service, education, and law enforcement) to mount a coordinated response that considers preparedness, prevention, and protection. Cases can escalate quickly. Future research should focus on early intervention strategies with a view to forestalling tragic outcomes.

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