



Online Survey Results

Enhancing Wellness and Crime Prevention
in the Pandemic among Immigrant Youth
and Women Survivors of Violence:
Development of an Interactive Mentoring
Application (APP)

*Vancouver and Lower Mainland
Multicultural Family Support
Services Society*



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As an immigrant, refugee and visible minority serving agency, we offer our solidarity and support as we strive for a more respectful collaboration and partnership with all peoples towards our collective path for Truth, Healing and National Reconciliation.

Ethics Review

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Community Research Ethics Board (No. 431). The approval applies to all research data, excluding the initial round of the online survey.

Review

Members of the Enhancing Wellness - M4Y Project Team conducted and provided reviews and feedback to assist with the development of the Online Survey Results:

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

This report is part of the 5-year research initiative (2023-2028) titled *Enhancing Wellness and Crime Prevention in the Pandemic among Immigrant Youth and Women Survivors of Violence: Development of an Interactive Mentoring Application (APP)*. Led by the Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society (VLMFSS), the research delves into the unique challenges faced by immigrant women and youth who have experienced violence and abuse before and/or during the COVID-19 pandemic in British Columbia, Canada. Consisting of four data-collecting phases, the research seeks to collect data within six cultural communities amongst two demographics from four research regions of British Columbia and conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis to inform a web-based application development.

The research study seeks to connect with participants that meet the following eligibility criteria:

- a resident of British Columbia, Canada
- an immigrant woman or an immigrant youth (ages 19-25) of any gender identification
- impacted by violence and abuse before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (family violence, intimate partner violence, gender-based violence)
- from Chinese-speaking, Eastern European, Filipino, Persian/Afghani, South Asian, or Hispanic communities.

Through an intersectional mixed-methods approach, the Enhancing Wellness-M4Y project provides substantial data analysis to inform the development of an interactive web app that emphasizes security, engagement, well-being, and equity. The research aims to center the perspectives of immigrant women and youth and build individual and organizational resilience within the diverse immigrant communities in responding to relationship violence through improved pathways to safety, resources, and self-empowerment.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Community Research Ethics Board (No. 431). The approval applies to all research data, excluding the initial round of the online survey.

1.2 Data Collection Phases and Security

The research data collection phases consist of 2 rounds of online surveys and 2 rounds of semi-structured focus groups. Each data collection phase is built upon the results of the previous round of research findings based on participants' inputs and experiences. Below outlines the four data collection phases and their corresponding research purposes.

- i. Online survey (August 2024-January 2025). This survey invited immigrant women (age 26 and up) and young adults of any gender identification (age 19-25) from 6 cultural communities from BC and impacted by family violence before and/or during the COVID-19 pandemic to participate in the survey. The online survey was conducted via the secure Qualtrics platform. The purpose was to identify the strategies used during the pandemic to combat relationship/family violence and to measure respondents' comfort level with the use of digital tools.
- ii. Semi-structured focus group (May 2025-December 2025). This phase involves participants of the same eligibility criteria. The focus group is designed to seek the lived experience of immigrant women and youth survivors of violence and to gain a better understanding of the coping strategies, support systems, and tools in response to violence before and/or during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions will be focused on immigrant women and youth's personal experiences, ways of coping with perceived challenges before and throughout the pandemic, and insights into safety features for app development.
- iii. Semi-structured focus group (May 2026-December 2026). This round will involve participants who meet the same eligibility criteria. The purpose is to gather feedback and user experience during the testing stage of the APP. Focus group questions will be developed to assess the usability of the app including navigation and functions, and to what extent participants improve their knowledge and confidence in enhancing safety, coping, and resilience-building with the aid of the application.
- iv. Online survey (expected mid-late 2027). The purpose is to gather feedback and user experience after the app is made available to a wider audience. The goal is to assess whether the app increases personal and community knowledge and resilience in dealing with family violence among diverse immigrant communities.

Information collected for this research will be stored in digital format. It will be kept on a secure internal server located at the VLMFSS office in Burnaby, British Columbia or on a secure server in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. A copy of digital data is stored offsite on a secure and encrypted backup server. All recordings and paper data will be destroyed by the end of this project, anticipated to be March 31, 2028. Recordings on computers or external

hard drives/USB's will be electronically shredded using one of the service providers for secure data destruction.

1.3 Phase One: Online Survey Design and Recruitment Method

To identify barriers, challenges, and strategies used during the pandemic to combat relationship/family violence and to measure respondents' comfort level with the use of digital tools, an online survey was distributed via the Qualtrics platform between August 2024 and January 2025. The survey contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Survey results are used to inform focus group questions that aim to gain a deeper understanding of the themes and concerns unidentified in the survey.

The project recruited online survey participants via emails to community partners and educational institutions, attending provincial training forums and setting up information booths, posting flyers in community locations such as public libraries, social media engagement, hosting cultural groups, and word-of-mouth throughout British Columbia with assistance from universities, colleges, and local community-based agencies that provide settlement, youth, and gender-based violence services. In collaboration with VLMFSS, their staff relied on communication strategies such as texting or verbal communication for recruitment. Immigrant women or youth interested in participating answered screening questions to determine their eligibility. Only participants who met eligibility requirements proceeded to complete the survey.

The survey contains 33 questions. The set of questions falls into 5 types of questions: demographic, yes/no, multiple choice, Likert 5-point scale, and open-ended questions. The questions in the survey are organized around three main themes. One group of questions assesses users' accessibility and barriers to technology or online resources. Another group of questions focuses on the impact on wellness, privacy, and safety, particularly concerning abuse and the ways in which individuals navigate these challenges. The third group of questions helps determine how participants evaluate the importance and relevance of potential app features that would improve awareness, safety, and crime prevention.

1.4 Data Demographic and Analytical Methods

A representative sample of the immigrant population was recruited. 286 individuals who met the eligibility criteria completed the online questionnaire. Descriptive statistics of the considered sociodemographic variables are: age categories 19–24 (120/42%), 25–34 (68/24%), 35–44 (55/19%), 45–54 (25/9%), 55–64 (15/5%) and 65 and above (4/1%); first language categories Chinese (44/16%), Punjabi/Hindi (106/39%), Spanish (51/19%),

Eastern European (Russian/Ukrainian/Polish)(12/4%), Filipino (24/9%), Farsi (18/7%) and Other (19/7%).

Responses to closed-ended survey questions were described using frequencies and percentages. Responses to open-ended survey questions were coded into similar categories and these categories were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights. As this survey was designed as an exploratory study, no hypotheses associated with these research questions were made.

2. Survey Results

2.1 Demographics

Participant demographics (age, marital status, education level) were summarized using descriptive statistics. Table 1 provides the demographic breakdown. In addition, the data gathered that 43% (n=123) of participants have children. Out of 123 participants who have children, 69% (n=85) have minor children, and 31% (n=38) have adult children. Out of 123 participants who have children, 79% (n=97) live with their children, while 19% (n=23) do not live with their children (2% unknown).

Table 1

Demographic breakdown according to respondent's age, marital status, and education level

Age	Count	%
19-24	120	42%
25-34	68	24%
35-44	55	19%
45-54	25	9%
55-64	14	5%
65 or above	4	1%
Grand Total	286	100%

Marital Status	Count	%
Divorced	37	13%
Married or domestic partnership	71	25%
Other (please specify):	4	1%
Separated	54	19%
Single, never married	119	42%

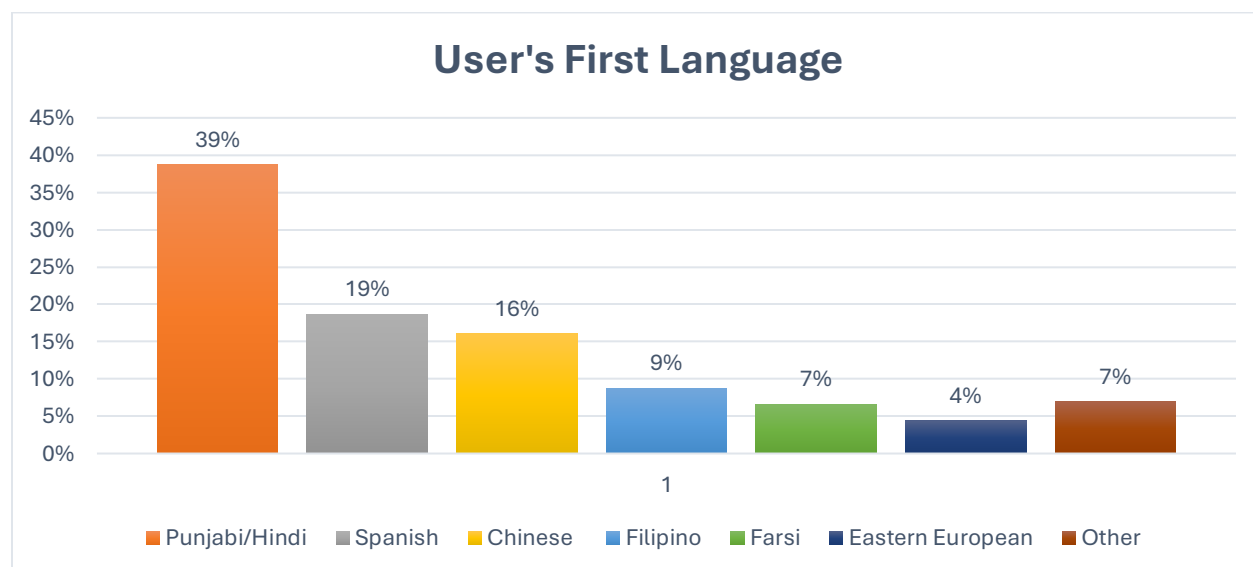
Widowed	1	0%
Grand Total	286	100%

Education Level	Count	%
High school graduate	104	36%
Less than high school	7	2%
Post graduate degree	55	19%
Some college / Associate degree	120	42%
Grand Total	286	100%

In terms of user's first language (Figure 2), 39% (n=106) of respondents speak Punjabi/Hindi. 19% (n=51) of respondents are Spanish-speaking, whereas 16% (n=44) of respondents are Chinese-speaking. 9% (n=24) of respondents speak Filipino. 7% (n=18) of participants speak Farsi, and 4% (n=12) of respondents speak Eastern European languages (Russian/Polish/Ukrainian).

Figure 2

The percentage of the first language that survey respondents speak



2.2 Digital Fluency and Online Experience during the Pandemic

According to the survey, 96% (n=274) of respondents owned their devices. Around 10% of the total respondents identified that they are somewhat or not familiar or comfortable with

technology, whereas 68% reported very or extremely familiar and comfortable with technology (neutral=22%). On the other hand, 78% of youth participants (ages 19-24) feel very or extremely comfortable about navigating and using mobile applications.

76% (n=217) of participants reported their online activity change during the pandemic. Among these, 67% reported an increase in usage. 11% of respondents reported an online activity decrease, while 22% of respondents reported they used different types of apps while in isolation.

When it comes to their experience of online resources or digital tools, less than 1/5 of the respondents (n=49, 17%) indicated that they ever used online safety self-assessment tools or apps. 74% (n=212) of respondents have never used online resources, whereas 21% (n=61) indicated that they have some experience with online resources. This signals that despite the popularity of personal devices, very few people are aware of or have accessed digital tools and/or online resources.

2.3 Violence Prevention and Awareness

The identification of gender-based violence remains imperative to safety and seeking services and resources. The survey further gauged whether respondents were aware of the different types of intimate partner violence and abuse (physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, digital abuse, stalking, cultural/identity-based abuse). 34% (n=95) responded that they are very or extremely aware of different types of violence. 24% (n=67) are moderately aware and 27% (n=77) are somewhat aware. 7% (n=15) indicated that they are not at all aware of different types of violence. Based on a scale of 1-5, (The importance of the features is assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not at all aware" and 5 being "Extremely aware"), the median for the answer is 3.

In addition, only ¼ of the respondents (27%, n=75) feel confident about what to do during an emergency. On the other hand, 21% (n=57) reported that they do not feel confident. 46% (n=128) of respondents are somewhat confident but would like more information.

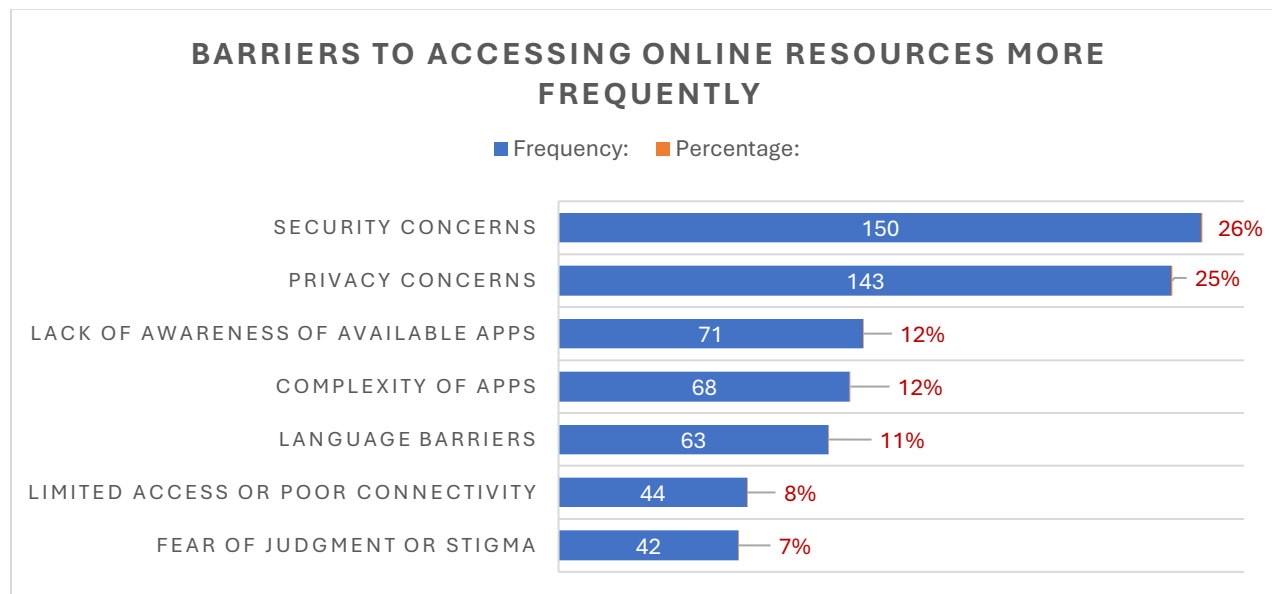
How participants acquired violence prevention knowledge is nearly equally distributed between online resources (32%), support organizations (30%), and friends/family (36%) while 2% is unspecified. 45% (n=126) of respondents are aware of the nearest support services. Yet, nearly 50% of participants are either not aware of services available or not sure what services are available.

2.4 Barriers to Accessing Digital Tools More Frequently

According to the data, 48% (n=136) of respondents reported having experienced barriers to accessing support, and 56% (n=160) of respondents faced challenges implementing strategies in response to stalking behaviours. Respondents identified several barriers that kept them from using digital tools more frequently (Figure 3).

Figure 3

The frequencies and percentages of barriers to accessing online resources more frequently



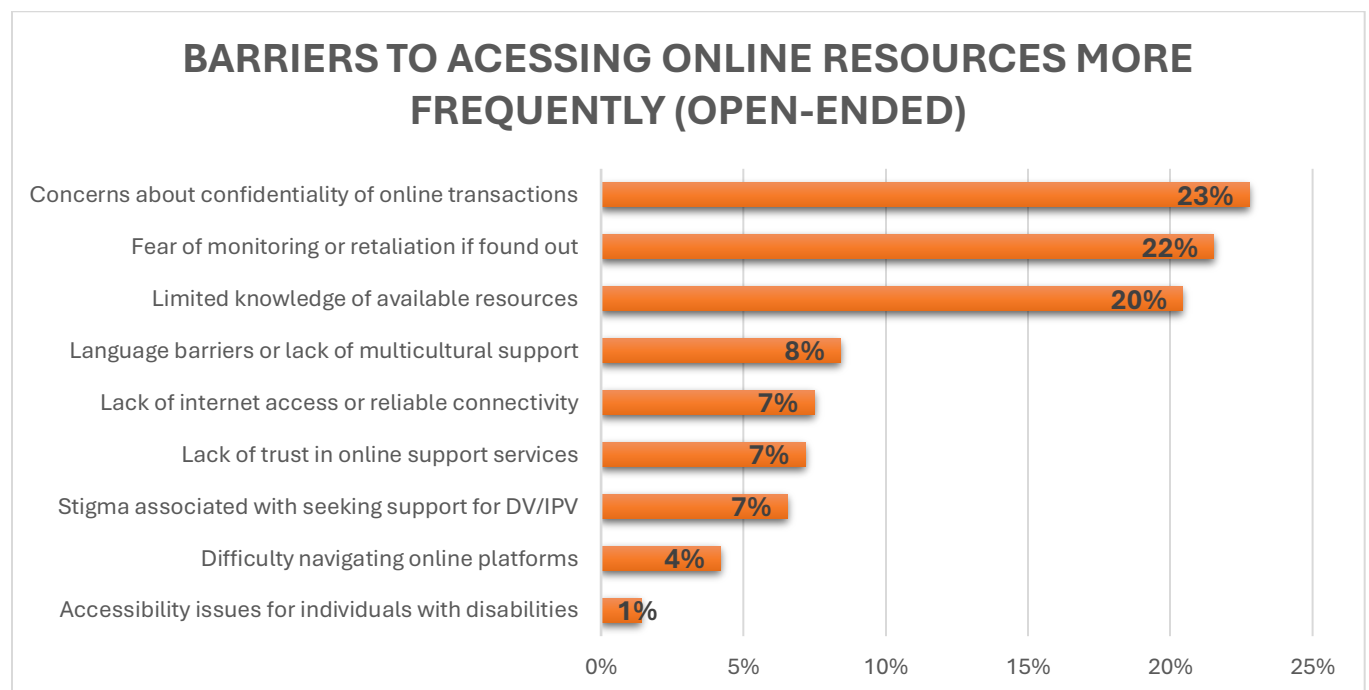
As indicated in Figure 3, privacy (25%) and security concerns (26%) are the top two reasons why participants did not use online resources more frequently. Lack of awareness of available apps (12%) and the complexity of apps (12%) also present as barriers to accessing online services more frequently. In addition, 11% of participants experienced language barriers. Fewer participants indicated that limited access (8%) and fear of judgment or stigma (7%) also prevented them from accessing online resources more frequently.

An open-ended question ensues to allow participants to provide more details about their experiences (See Figure 4). Eight thematic categories emerged, and the results are as

follows. 23% of respondents are concerned about privacy and confidentiality of online transactions. 22% of respondents fear of monitoring or retaliation if found out. 20% of respondents identified that they either lacked knowledge of available resources or lacked awareness of seeking support online. 8% of respondents identified language as a barrier and found limited resources in their preferred languages. 7% of respondents face cultural or societal stigma associated with seeking support for domestic violence, and 7% of respondents experienced poor internet connectivity. Another 7% of respondents identified that they lacked trust in online support services or organizations. 5% found it difficult to navigate online platforms or websites, including disability-related concerns. The open-ended survey responses underscore the persistent fear and anxiety experienced by survivors of family violence. Many expressed constant fear of being discovered and retribution. As one participant shared: “I worried about him finding out I was looking for help, which made me super cautious about what I accessed on shared devices. It was a constant struggle.” This testimony illustrates how mental resilience is not merely an internal strength. It is a dynamic process that relies heavily on external supports and safe environments. Survivors often navigate a complex web of emotional strain and digital insecurity, where even seeking help can feel perilous.

Figure 4

The frequencies and percentages of barriers to accessing online resources more frequently

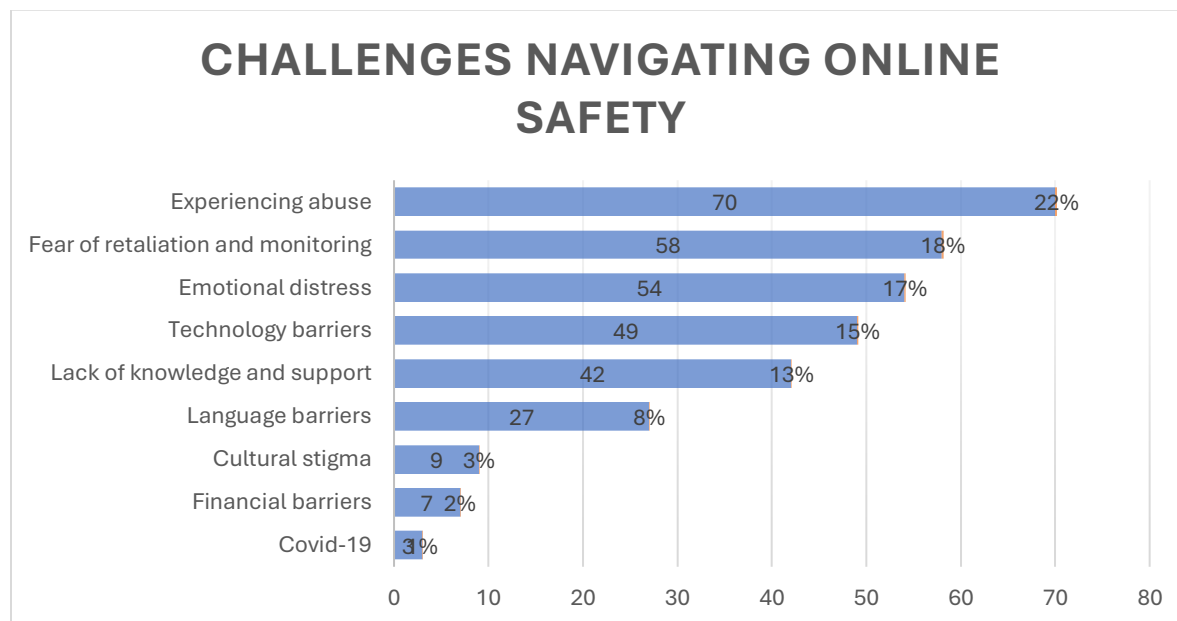


Cyber security and privacy concerns remain the most significant barriers to accessing online services. More than half of the respondents (n=145, 51%) do not feel knowledgeable about how to protect their online privacy. Moreover, 56% (n=160) of respondents faced challenges implementing strategies in response to stalking behaviours. Security concerns stem from distrust in online transactions and the sharing of personal information. In addition, fear of abuse through monitoring or retaliation adds to security and privacy vulnerability.

Respondents also elaborated on the challenges that they faced when implementing strategies that would keep them safe in specific terms (See Figure 5). The biggest challenge experienced by the respondents is experiencing abuse (22%). Living in an abusive relationship significantly impacted their physical and psychological well-being and hampered their ability to implement or stay on top of safety measures. Types of abuse that were experienced include isolation that leads to dependence on the abuser, the abuser's control and constant monitoring, and the inability to set boundaries. This brings up the second biggest challenge, which is the myriad of controlling behaviors that instill fear in survivors worrying about worsening controlling behaviors, restrictions, or retaliation (18%). Many respondents reported that they experienced emotional or physical distress that impacted their decision-making ability or were worn out. Many pointed out that time pressure added weight to psychological and physical distress. Additional barriers include technology barriers (15%), language barriers (8%), and financial barriers (3%). Technology barriers included distrust in technology, poor connectivity, iOS updates that overwrite original privacy settings as well as password autosave or SMS confirmation codes revealing suspicious activities sensed by the abuser. Financial barriers also kept survivors from updating to better phones, increasing data storage, purchasing burner phones, or updating APPs that require subscriptions or purchases. In general, 13% of respondents feel that they lack the knowledge and support to navigate online safety. A small number of respondents reported that family dynamics were exacerbated due to COVID-19 as conflicts escalated (1%).

Figure 5

Challenges respondents faced while navigating online safety



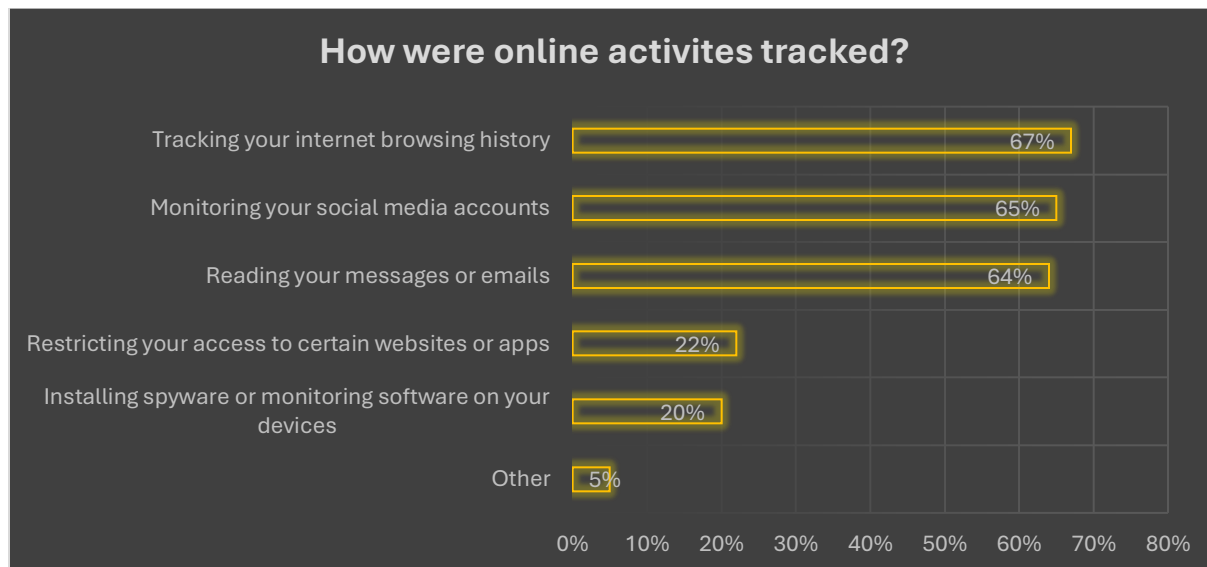
2.5 How Online Activities Were Tracked

51% (n=147) of respondents reported that their online activity was tracked, monitored, or controlled. 31% (n=90) didn't experience controlling behaviors through tracking or monitoring online activity. Among these, more than half of the respondents (n=81, 55%) developed strategies to protect their online privacy and activity. Yet, about half of the respondents (n=145, 51%) do not feel knowledgeable about how to protect their online privacy.

Among those who have experienced abuse of tracking (Figure 6), 67% have had their internet browsing history tracked. 65% reported experiencing abusers monitoring their social media accounts, whereas 64% have experienced abusers reading their messages or emails. 20% (n=39) reported experiencing abusers installing spyware on their devices. 22% (n=42) experienced abusers restricting their access to certain websites or APPs. 20% of respondents experienced their abusers installing spyware or monitoring software on their devices. 5% (n=9) reported different types of tracking mechanisms. Other tracking methods include moving funds from the survivor's bank account to the abuser's, installing cameras at home, and tracking both landlines and mobile phones.

Figure 6

How online activities were tracked

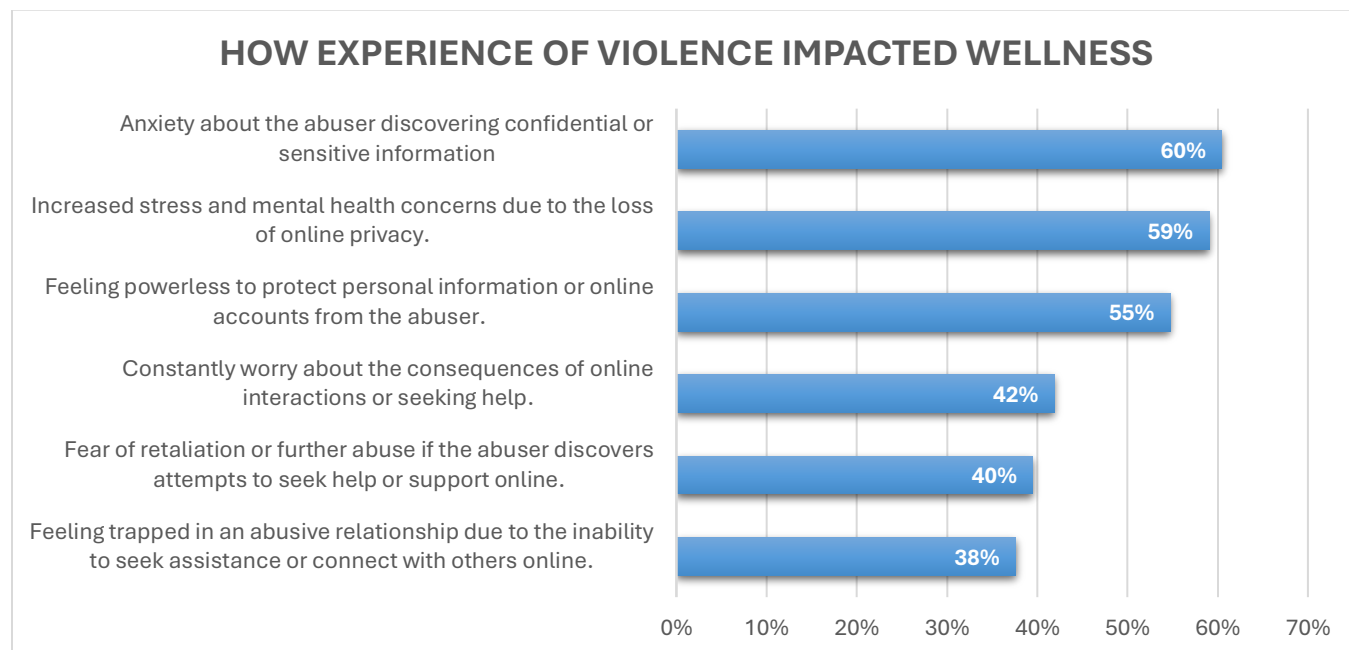


2.6 How the Experience of Violence Affected Wellness

When describing how monitoring affects the survivors' wellness (Figure 7), 60% of respondents are anxious about the abuser discovering sensitive information. 59% of respondents suffer from increased stress and mental health concerns due to the loss of online privacy. 55% of respondents felt powerless to protect private information or online accounts from the abuser. 42% constantly worry about the consequences of online interactions or seeking help. 40% fear retaliation or further abuse if the abuser discovers attempts to seek help or support online. 38% feel trapped in an abusive relationship due to the inability to seek assistance or connect with others online. Other participants mentioned how misusing personal information on social media as well as taunting to use the survivor's phone are factors that influence one's wellness.

Figure 7

How the experience of violence impacted wellness



2.7 Strategies Responding to Online Activity Controlling Behaviors

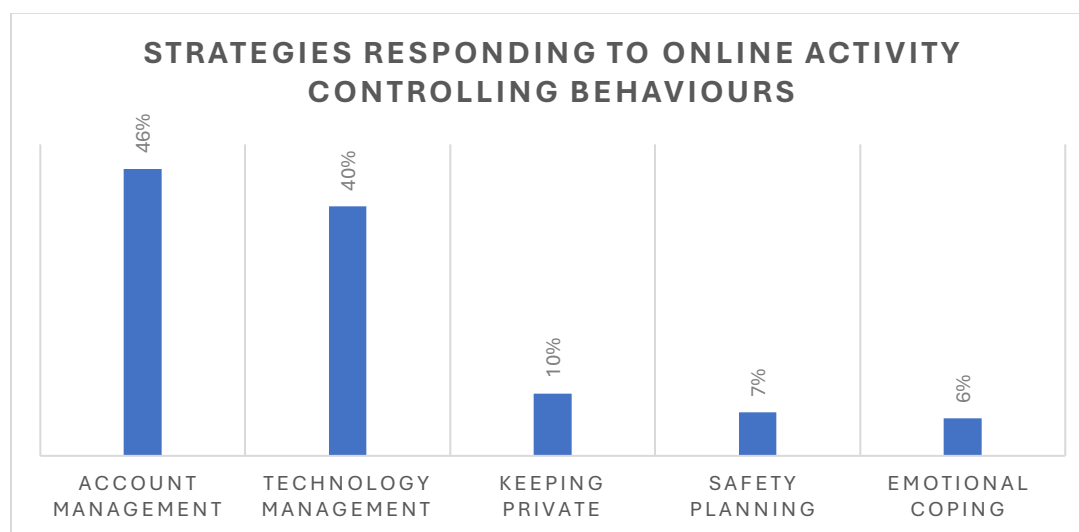
The survey further inquired about the different types of assistance or resources respondents have accessed regarding online safety. 39% of respondents referred to websites and YouTube videos for tutorials and guidance. These websites include Canadian Women's Foundation, Access to Justice BC, BC Society of Transition Houses, Canadian's Center for Cyber Security, Google Safety Center, Shelter BC, VictimLink BC, NEVR Safety Net, and the Canada.ca website that provides resources in other languages about family violence. 20% of respondents received support through their access to local community organizations such as Battered Women Support Services (BWSS), Multicultural Facebook support group, and/or local immigrant organizations. Many benefited from free workshops offered by the public library or multicultural associations such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S. that offered workshops in their first languages. Specifically, respondents benefited from the resources that were discreetly handed out without giving or collecting personal information. 14% of respondents have used digital tools such as APPs for support. Specific helpful APPs that were mentioned include Aspire News App, MyPlan, Divya, Bright Sky, DuckGoGo, and Signal. 1/10 of respondents relied on family and friends.

6% of respondents accessed online counseling and/or therapy. 5% of respondents accessed hotline services and 3% relied on discreet connections.

31% (n=89) of respondents also developed strategies in responding to online activity controlling behaviors. Amongst them, 75 respondents (26%) shared what strategies they implemented that they found effective in keeping their online activity safe (See Figure 8).

Figure 8

Respondents developed strategies to maintain online privacy or respond to online activity controlling behaviours



Effective strategies implemented included account management (46%), technology management (40%), keeping private (10%), safety planning (7%) and emotional coping (6%). Specifically, account management strategies range from using different email addresses for different accounts, setting stronger passwords, changing passwords/numbers/devices, deleting browsing history, using a two-factor authentication method, safeguarding passwords, or creating fake or harmless social media accounts. Keeping private refers to strategies implemented to keep personal information and belongings private. This includes keeping devices at a close distance, using online tools while abusers are asleep, keeping personal contacts private, hiding social media pages, limiting contact with family and friends, using friend's phones and accounts, etc. Technology management involves active strategies that engage the technological aspects of management. This includes avoiding using the cloud drive, disabling GPS/location services, hiding apps/folders/albums in confidential online locations, using

biometric/facial identification lock, recovering evidence deleted by the abuser, using public computers to hide IP, using APPs, using private windows or guest mode, enabling "Guided Access" on iPad, etc. 7% of respondents also relied on online tools for safety planning such as using code words to signal danger, memorizing key crisis hotline numbers instead of saving contacts, leaving home to seek transition housing, or using social media to learn about relationships and abuse. Some respondents (6%) resorted to emotional coping by reconnecting with family and friends far away, listening to music, silently enduring abuse or scolding, or limiting the usage time to prevent provoking the abuser or confronting them.

2.8 Recommended Features to Enhance Safety for Online Platforms

Unanimously, app features such as a friendly interface, privacy, hotline access, self-assessment tools, safety planning, and education resources are all highly desired. Based on a scale of 1-5, (The importance of the features is assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not important" and 5 being "Extremely important"), the median for the answer for all listed features is 5. Privacy ranks no. 1 of the most important and desired features (86%) and safety planning runs second (78%). The rest of the order is hotline access (69%), friendly interface (66%), education (63%) and self-assessment tool (63%).

Respondents also provided several recommendations for making online platforms safer for people experiencing domestic violence (See Figure 9). Six themes emerged from the responses: 1) Safety features (30%), 2) Privacy setting enhancement (26%) 3) Multicultural and user-friendliness (21%), 4) Resources and education (13%), 5) Accessible and Timely support (6%), and 6) Institutional changes (4%). Safety features are functions that enhance the safety of users. Safety features are most desired, and they include features such as the panic button, easy and discreet safety planning and assessment, regular safety audits, anonymous reporting and/or suspicious activity alerts, and ways to limit hacker/abuser access. Some other recommended features that would enhance safety include the ability to share safety plans with a trusted third party, auto-delete online activity history, camouflaging or autoblock local resources, disabling password saving unless approved by the user, auto session time-out, fake login-screen, fake search history, and abuser phone detection. On the other hand, privacy enhancement refers to built-in functionality or designs that safeguard the privacy of users. This may include disguised app name, stealth mode, end-to-end communication encryption, 2-factor authentication method, minimizing private data collection and storage, encrypted cloud storage, built-in spyware detection, and guest profiles.

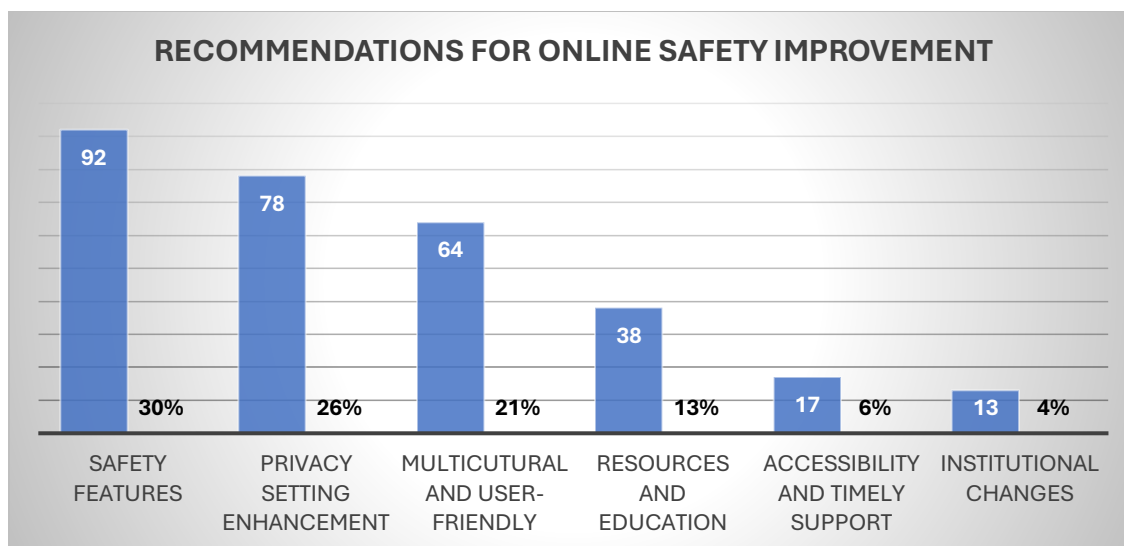
21% of respondents point out the need for the platforms to be user-friendly and this includes functions and designs that target immigrant communities. In addition to an easy-to-navigate and adaptive interface, many mentioned they would benefit from language and translation support, a multicultural audio/visual guide, quick and clear translation for crisis situations, a discreet and quick connection to multicultural resources, and a multi-lingual chatbot on the APP. Other functions that would remove cultural barriers include voice-command help, offline guide download in different languages, and a lightweight design to avoid data overuse.

13% of respondent seek more educational opportunities and resources. One of the biggest recommendations for resources and education is disguised and simple digital safety tutorials. What follows is the collaboration between local DV agencies to gather user feedback and for safety planning enhancement. Many also recommended better accessibility to safe homes, community resources, legal resources, government programs, and to have the opportunity to learn about tech terms and awareness of different types of violence including stalking and technology-facilitated abuse.

A smaller number of respondents (6%) demanded easily accessible and timely support such as discreet community support during emergencies, 24/7 chatbot, reducing time pressure by quick and safe connection, emotional support, and reducing the amount of time consumed by self-translating. 4% of respondents point out the need for institutional changes and/or inter-sectoral collaboration such as a hidden code or auto alert to authorities during emergencies, friendlier and prompt RCMP services, training violence-informed support workers, and changing the wording of abuse.

Figure 9

Respondents identified ways to enhance safety for online platforms



The survey received overall positive responses toward the prospect of the development of a mentoring app and its potential impact. The survey results demonstrate that 63% of the respondents are likely or very likely to use an app for violence prevention and intervention. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents are likely or very likely to use the app for safety assessment. In addition, 3 out of 4 respondents (75%) either agree or strongly agree that an app for violence prevention will empower them.

2.9 Key Differences between Youth and Women Respondents

Immigrant women and youth both faced challenges in navigating abusers' controlling behaviors, but their comfort levels and coping mechanisms vary slightly (See Figure 10.1, 10.2, 10.3).

- i. Barriers to Support during COVID-19
 - A higher proportion of women reported difficulty accessing support during the pandemic (55%).
 - 39% of youth respondents reported that they experienced difficulty in accessing support during COVID-19.
- ii. Online Privacy & Safety Strategies
 - 68% of youth said they had no challenges implementing online safety strategies.
 - In contrast, only 48% of women reported the same level of ease.
- iii. Knowledge of Online Privacy Protection
 - 51% of youth felt confident in their ability to protect their online privacy.

- Only 40% of women felt similarly knowledgeable.

To briefly summarize, youth (ages 19–25) generally showed greater ease with mobile technology. Women (ages 26+) appeared to face more barriers in accessing support services.

iv. Coping Strategies: Women vs. Youth Respondents

Many women likely faced heightened surveillance and control and developed stealth-based strategies to protect their privacy:

- Created decoy accounts or folders to hide sensitive information
- Used apps that auto-delete browsing history or messages
- Accessed support services discreetly, often during brief windows of opportunity such as cooking or shopping

However, some women reported feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of these strategies and gave up due to persistent barriers.

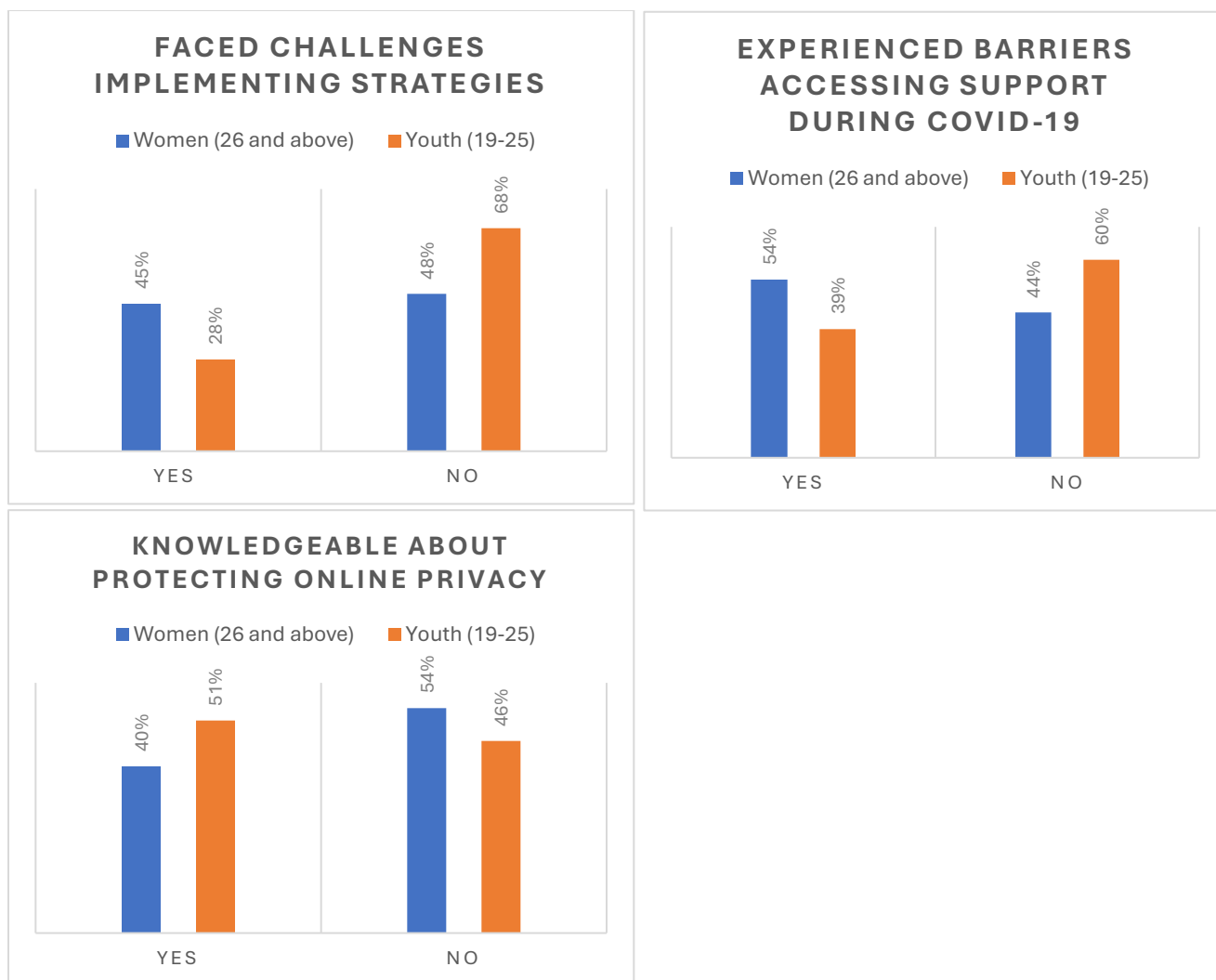
On the other hand, youth respondents (19–25) demonstrated assertive and tech-savvy approaches:

- Confronted abusers more directly
- Relied on end-to-end encrypted platforms for secure communication

Despite their confidence, some youth faced financial constraints that limited their ability to leave or seek help.

Figure 10.1, 10.2, and 10.3

(Left to Right) The three charts below indicate the percentage differences between women and youth respondents in terms of barriers, challenges, and perceived knowledge



3. Discussion

The results of the survey showed that 1 in 2 immigrant women or youth faced challenges when trying to implement strategies in response to violence or abuse in average, and 1 in 2 are not aware of support services available in British Columbia. It is reassuring that there are high levels of likelihood for immigrant survivors to use digital tools for violence prevention and safety assessment. Since approximately half of the respondents are not aware of different types of violence and nearby support services, a safe and reliable app could be beneficial for immigrant survivors of violence who are less knowledgeable about gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, or family violence and to seek nearby support services.

As illustrated above, the survey results are reflective of the three larger themes that the survey set out to explore: 1) Users' accessibility and barriers to technology or online resources, 2) The impact on wellness, privacy, and safety associated with the use of

technology due to abuse and how they navigated these challenges, and 3) How participants evaluate the importance and relevance of potential app features that would improve awareness, safety, and crime prevention. Below provides discussion in relation to the three main themes.

3.1 Accessibility and Barriers to Digital Tools or Online Resources

The survey results show that despite that a high percentage of respondents owned their device and indicated that they are very or extremely familiar and comfortable with technology, nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents never used online resources and only 17% of the respondents have ever used online safety self-assessment tools or apps. This suggests that despite the widespread use of personal devices, very few people are aware of or have accessed digital tools and online resources.

Furthermore, 48% of respondents reported experiencing barriers to accessing support, while 56% faced challenges when trying to implement strategies in response to stalking behaviors. When examining the list of challenges that include fear of retaliation or abuse (22%), concerns about privacy or confidentiality (22%), a lack of knowledge about available resources or an awareness of how to seek online support (20%), language barriers (9%), cultural or societal stigma (7%), poor internet connectivity (7%), a lack of trust in online support services or organizations (7%), and difficulties navigating online platforms or websites, including issues related to disabilities (5%), it is evident that fear of retaliation, lack of knowledge or support, and maintaining privacy are major concerns. Similarly, more than half of the respondents (51%) do not feel knowledgeable about how to protect their online privacy and encounter difficulties in implementing strategies against stalking behaviors. Acknowledging the importance of primary and tertiary prevention strategies (Kirk et al., 2017), both education and early intervention that aims to circumvent the progression or recurrence of violence through providing information, knowledge, and adequate and timely support will greatly enhance wellness and safety for immigrant women experiencing violence.

Security concerns arise from distrust in online transactions, lack of relevant information, and the sharing of personal information. Additionally, fear of monitoring or retaliation exacerbates vulnerability related to security and privacy. Several issues of digital tool usability have emerged, including user having a hard time navigating digital tools, mistrust of the technology or data security, and poor connectivity. This resonates with Alqahtani & Orji (2020)'s survey in which they identified the most complained weaknesses of the mental health apps and those included usability issues, poor customer services,

unaffordability, lack of data security and privacy, as well as the lack of variety of options, personalization, control, and trust. In turn, apps offering adaptive functionalities received high ratings, and in contrast, poor usability is found to be the most common reason for abandoning mental health apps, which leads to poor user retention (Baumel et al. 2019).

This result also aligns with the open-ended questions in which respondents shared their challenges in implementing safety strategies (See Figure 11). While there are some overlaps, the combination of emotional distress and experiences of abuse stands out as a prominent challenge. Common issues include limited knowledge and resources (26%), activities compromised by software (25%), abuser monitored or hacked devices (24%), emotional stress (18%), lack of control (3%) and time pressure (3%). Additionally, respondents provided valuable insights into other challenges. According to Figure 11, 1/4 of respondents experiences online activities leaked or compromised due to various software-related settings. These include but not limited to shared devices or accounts leaked private information, iOS updates erased previous privacy settings, pop-up SMS notifications revealed suspicious activities, biometric lock unsafe while victims are asleep, and the use of VPN drained device battery.

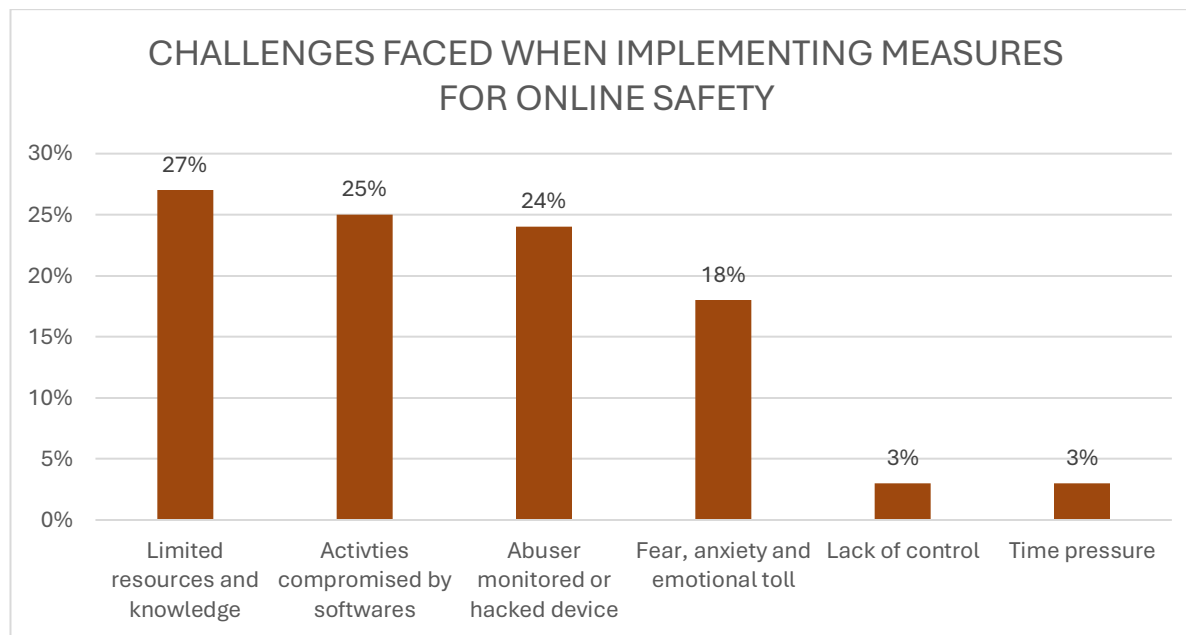
In addition, 18% indicated that emotional distress that includes fear, anxiety and emotional toll because of abuse significantly impacted their ability to make sound decisions or implement safety measures. The findings suggest that emotional stress in abusive relationships hinders individuals from making prompt decisions or effectively enacting strategies. One respondent describes this experience as follows:

The biggest challenge was the constant fear of my abuser monitoring my every move online. It was emotionally draining to constantly worry about deleting browsing history, logging out of accounts, and avoiding leaving any trace of my online activity. – *Anonymous Participant 01*

In addition, 27% identified experiencing limited knowledge and resources. This includes restricted internet connectivity, complex tech terms, restricted access to devices, lack of knowledge as to hiding online activity or deleting history and financial constraints. Lastly, a smaller portion of respondents identified time pressure and pandemic-related reasons as barriers to implementing safety measures.

Figure 11

Challenges or barriers to implementing measures for online safety



3.2 Impact on Wellness

The survey evaluates the impact of abuse on the wellness of respondents, focusing on how these experiences affected their privacy, mental health, and overall well-being.

Participants reported various wellness concerns, including anxiety about the abuser discovering sensitive information (60%), increased stress and mental health issues resulting from the loss of online privacy (59%), and feelings of powerlessness to protect their private information or online accounts from the abuser (55%). Additionally, 42% expressed worry about the potential consequences of online interactions or seeking help, while 40% feared retaliation or further abuse if the abuser learned of their attempts to seek support online. Furthermore, 38% felt trapped in their abusive relationships due to their inability to seek assistance or connect with others online. Other participants noted that the misuse of personal information on social media and the manipulation of the survivor's phone were factors that negatively impacted their wellness. It is important to recognize the connection between mental health and the ability to think clearly and take steps to keep oneself safe in abusive relationships. To quote another respondent:

Time and emotional stress are also significant barriers. The constant vigilance required to hide online actions can be mentally exhausting, especially when living under the threat of immediate violence. Fear of

making a mistake such as forgetting to clear history or leaving digital traces creates immense pressure, which can lead to errors. – *Anonymous Respondent 02*

Researchers point out that coping is dynamic and ongoing, and survivors rely on both psychological and social resort to minimize impact of stressful situations on self and others (Compas et al., 2001; Taylor & Stanton, 2007). It is important to make note of the dynamic and compounded stress and barriers faced by immigrant survivors. Given the intersectional challenges encountered by immigrant survivors, each additional barrier or challenge could further undermine their coping resilience. This is evident in the quote below:

I struggled with finding reliable information on how to effectively clear browsing history and manage app permissions without raising suspicion. The emotional toll of living in a volatile situation made it even harder to focus on maintaining my online safety while seeking help and support discreetly. – *Anonymous Respondent 03*

As such, privacy, wellness, and mental health are interconnected indicators that application design and development should prioritize.

3.3 Desired app features to enhance safety, knowledge, and inclusivity

The survey further explores the significance of various functions related to digital tools for preventing IPV, GBV or family violence. To better understand this, it is helpful to first examine the strategies that respondents developed in response to online activity-controlling behaviors (as shown in Figure 12) and their suggestions for improving safety on online platforms. Respondents shared several effective strategies, including account management and technology management. These skills are particularly relevant for individuals who have developed a certain level of digital literacy. For those who are less skilled with technology, keeping private and relying on emotional coping strategies remain effective during stressful situations. A small number of respondents have also resorted to crisis intervention as part of their safety planning.

Given the high rates of privacy and safety concerns, along with the effectiveness of account and technology management, we can see a clear demand for privacy enhancement technologies (PETs). Improving safety measures and offering customizable privacy settings could encourage survivors to use technology as a valuable source of support and resources.

Many respondents also emphasized the importance of education and resources especially on tech safety. Moreover, improving accessibility by providing clear, simplified explanations of complex technical terms and offering linguistic support will help reduce barriers, allowing for more frequent use of digital tools. In addition, discreetly incorporating information or connecting to local organizations is one key resource feature that is frequently discussed.

From a culturally sensitive perspective, 1/5 of respondents emphasized the importance of making platforms user-friendly, particularly for immigrant communities. Benjamin et al. (2021) point out that virtual care may offer opportunities to reduce transportation costs, provide timely access, and connect patients to other virtual resources and as a result, may yield equitable outcomes. Researchers further emphasize the importance of providing equitable technology-facilitated care and services. This is in line with survey responses that expressed the need for an easy-to-navigate and adaptable interface. Features such as language and translation support, multicultural audio/visual guides, and quick, clear translations during crises would be beneficial. Additionally, a multilingual chat box within the app and other features aimed at reducing cultural barriers—such as voice-command assistance, the ability to download offline guides in various languages, and a lightweight design to minimize data usage—were highlighted. These improvements align with the theme of providing timely support, as they would help reduce the time, energy, and stress experienced by immigrant youth and women survivors, allowing them to better manage challenging situations.

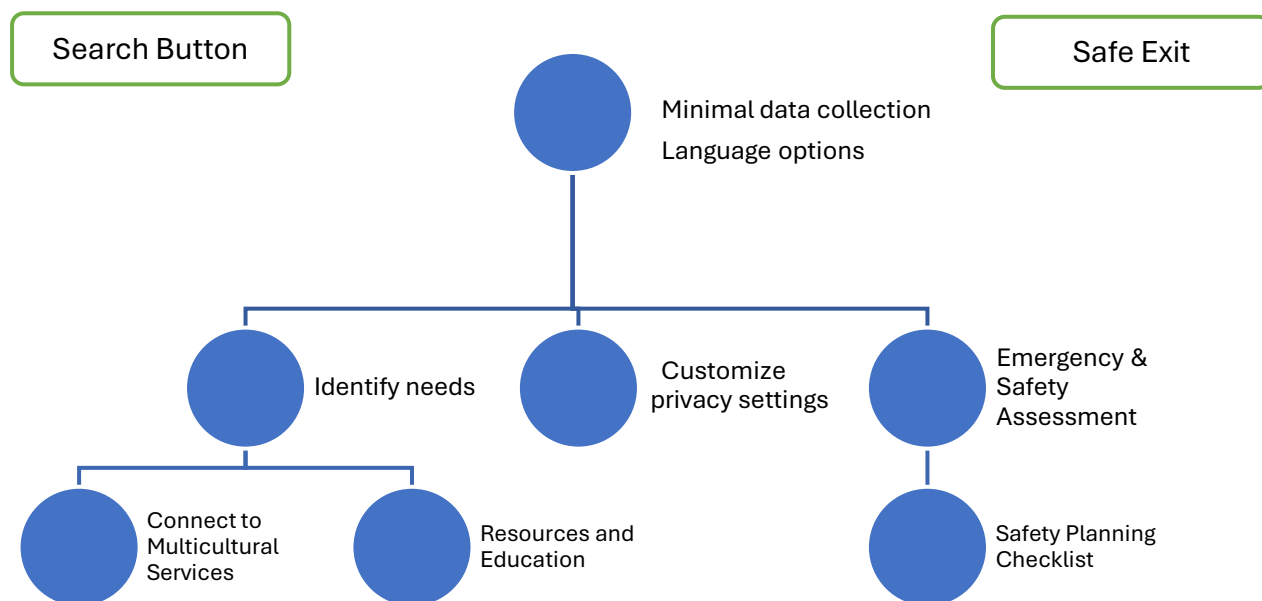
3.4 Recommendations

The online survey results enable a consideration of several interconnected factors when developing a web-based application to support immigrant communities experiencing violence. According to Singh et al. (2015), simplicity, along with timely and appropriate access to information, resources, and services through online tools, plays a critical role in reducing the incidence of domestic violence. To create an intuitive and accessible app with strong user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) design, it is important to incorporate core features while integrating essential UI elements such as buttons, icons, and typography. Figure 12 illustrates the preliminary layout for the app's development phase. A key insight from the survey highlights the importance of removing language and translation barriers by offering content in users' preferred languages. The design also reflects two recurring themes identified in the data: privacy and simplicity. To address these concerns, each homepage includes a clearly visible safe exit and search button, allowing users to quickly navigate or exit the app as needed. The overarching goal is to

promptly identify users' needs and connect them with appropriate resources in a secure and user-friendly environment.

Figure 12

Visual layout for app development



Specific features required to strengthen multicultural support, resources and education include:

Multicultural Support	Resources and Education
Language and auto-translation support	Education in digital/ technology safety
Multicultural audio/video guide	Awareness of signs of abuse and safety planning
Discreet and quick connection to multicultural resources	Resources of eligible government welfare programs
Multi-lingual chatbot	Free or affordable legal and counselling support
Multicultural voice-command	Discreet connection to multicultural resources

Offline guide download in different languages	Housing
Anonymous multicultural support forums	Training or job opportunities

Based on our discussion, the key areas for further exploration during the next research phase would be safety, knowledge, and inclusivity. We may incorporate questions such as: 1) What app features are essential for you to feel secure? 2) What information do you need urgently during a crisis, and how would you prefer to access it? 3) Building on the previous questions, as an immigrant, what types of resources would be helpful in response to violence? In addition, conducting separate focus groups for women and youth will expand our knowledge on age-specific coping strategies and help-seeking behaviors. The goal is to tailor app features and strategies to each distinct group's needs.

4. Limitations

The first phase of data collection involved an anonymous online survey designed to assess participants' comfort levels with digital tools, the impact on their privacy and wellness, and suggestions for enhancing safety on online platforms. This report does not include statistical testing to explore the correlation between different respondent types based on demographics or technology comfort level to assess the impact on wellness or barriers to technology use. The focus of the survey is on the general accessibility of online resources and concerns related to the use of digital tools. As a result, we have yet explored individuals' coping strategies at various stages of experiencing violence.

5. Conclusion: Mental Wellness, Resilience and Crime Prevention

The findings from the survey responses strongly align with the three foundational pillars of the research project: resilience, mental wellness, and crime prevention. It is observed that mental wellness was significantly compromised when experiencing abuse and that fear, anxiety and emotional strain hinder respondents' capability to maintain secure online communication or activity. Despite these challenges, immigrant women and youth exhibited various forms of resilience and developed strategies to safeguard their online privacy and safety. Participants' recommendations for app development based on their lived experience lend various features and functions and actionable insights into crime prevention. These suggestions will not only inform research outcomes but also signal

a call for institutional change, urging community partners and stake holders to adopt more inclusive and trauma-informed digital safety measures to enhance safety and wellness for diverse immigrant communities impacted by violence.

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