

SUPPORTING HER SAFETY

Lessons Learned from a Culturally - Integrative Peer Support
Program for Newcomer Arabic - Speaking Communities

Taghreed Al -Soumairy, PhD
Coordinator, Public Education &
Community Programs
Muslim Resource Centre for Social
Support & Integration (MRCSSI)

Yasmin Hussain
Community Development
London InterCommunity Health Centre
(LIHC)



Key Questions

- What made the program culturally integrative?
- What made the SHS program a safe space where women felt motivated & committed to participate?

Learning Objectives

- Gain valuable understanding of the culturally integrative Supporting Her Safety curriculum and program impacts.
- Learn key insights and guidance on developing culturally relevant public education curricula and strategies to address IPV and GBV in newcomer communities through collaborative community engagement.

Overview of the Presentation

1. Setting the context & sharing background information about SHS
2. Building the program: Our approach & key principles
3. Creating a safe space for participation & learning
4. Strengthening skills: Practice & practical tools
5. Program Impacts & Reflections
6. Resources
7. Q&A

SUPPORTING HER SAFETY

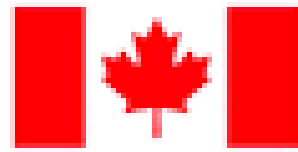
A program providing participants with valuable knowledge, skills & strategies on how to support a loved one experiencing abuse with confidence and compassion.

Participants will strengthen your knowledge & skills to:

1. **RECOGNIZE** different forms & warning signs of a abuse
2. **RESPOND** in ways that challenge harmful norms & offer compassionate care
3. **SUPPORT** a friend or loved one using the 5 Alif's -a trauma & culturally informed guide to providing peer support
4. **Practice self -care** while providing ongoing support



funder acknowledgements



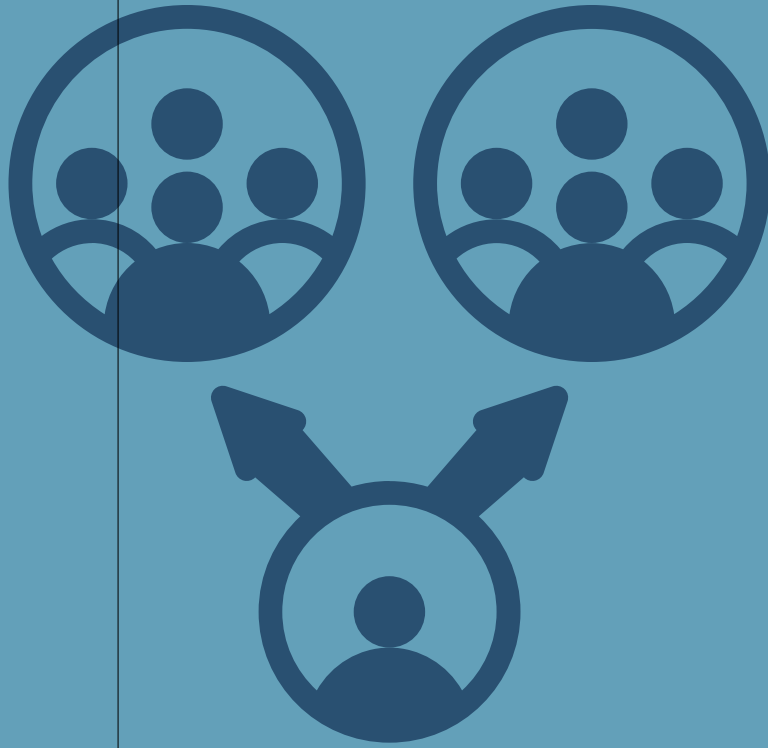
Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



LONDON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

groups
facilitated
between
January 2021
and May 2024



total # of
groups facilitated

21



total # of
sessions facilitated

234

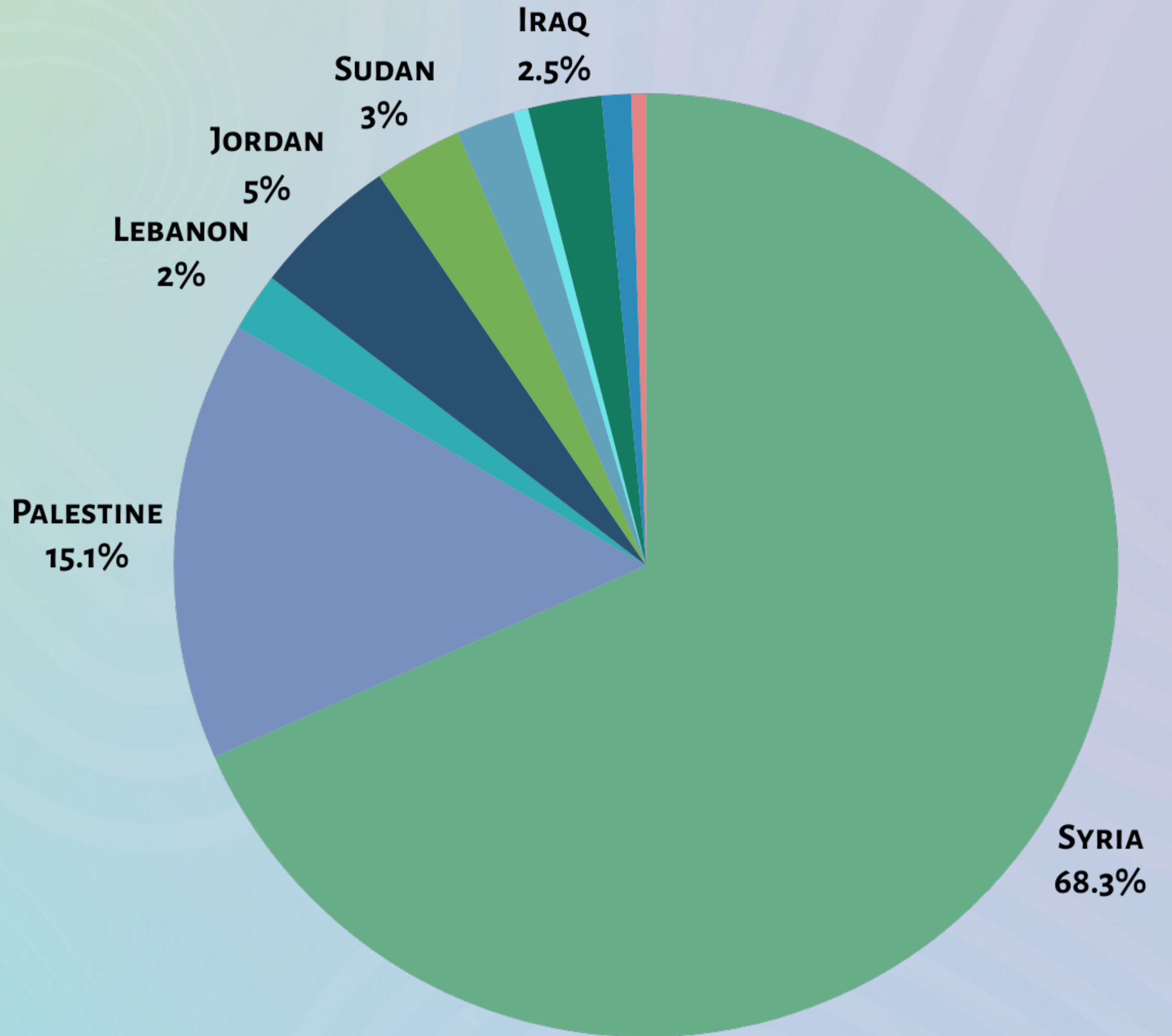
total # of women who completed the program



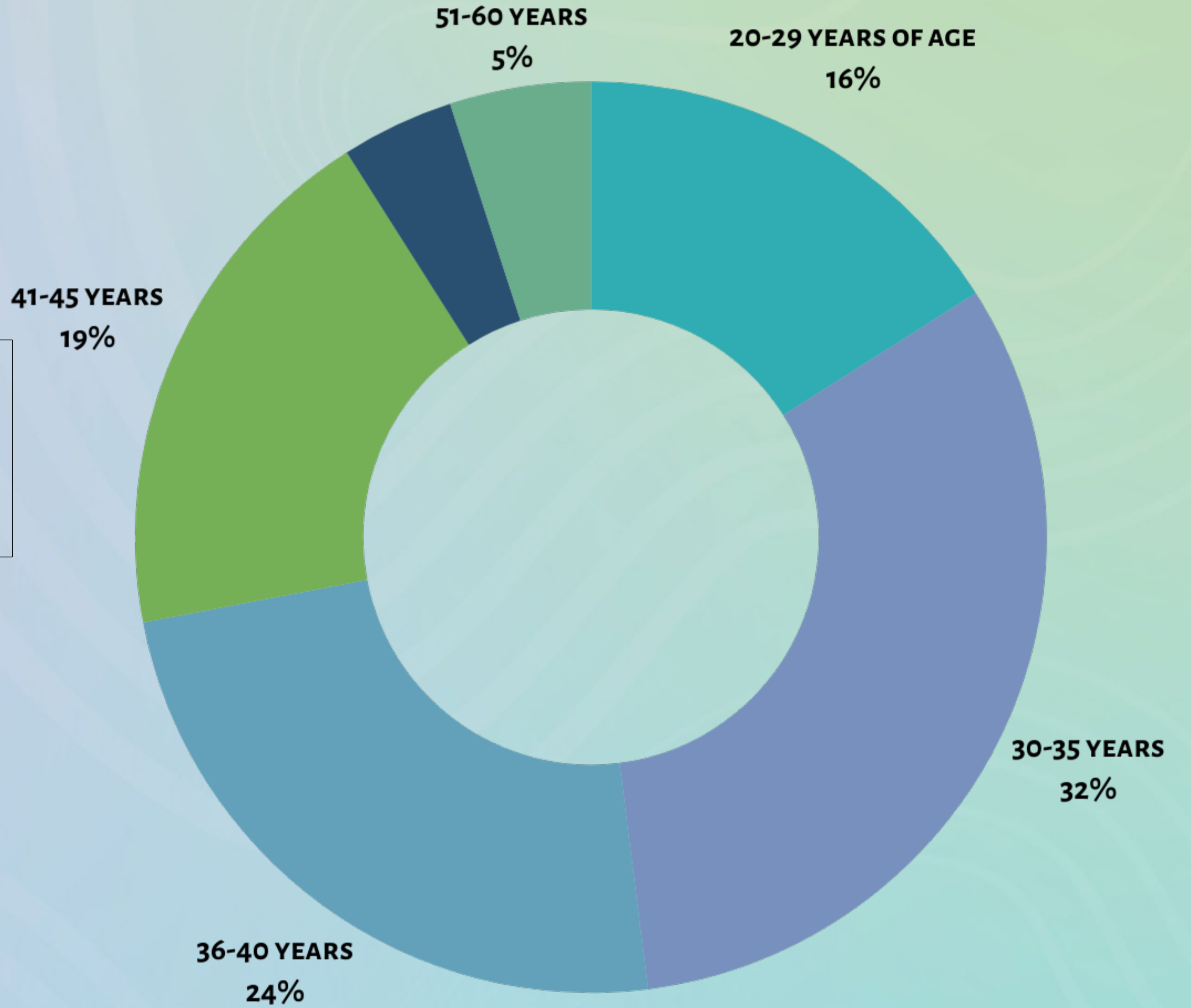
200

Note: 221 women signed up and attend at least 3 sessions; 21 women did not complete the program.
90.5% completion rate.

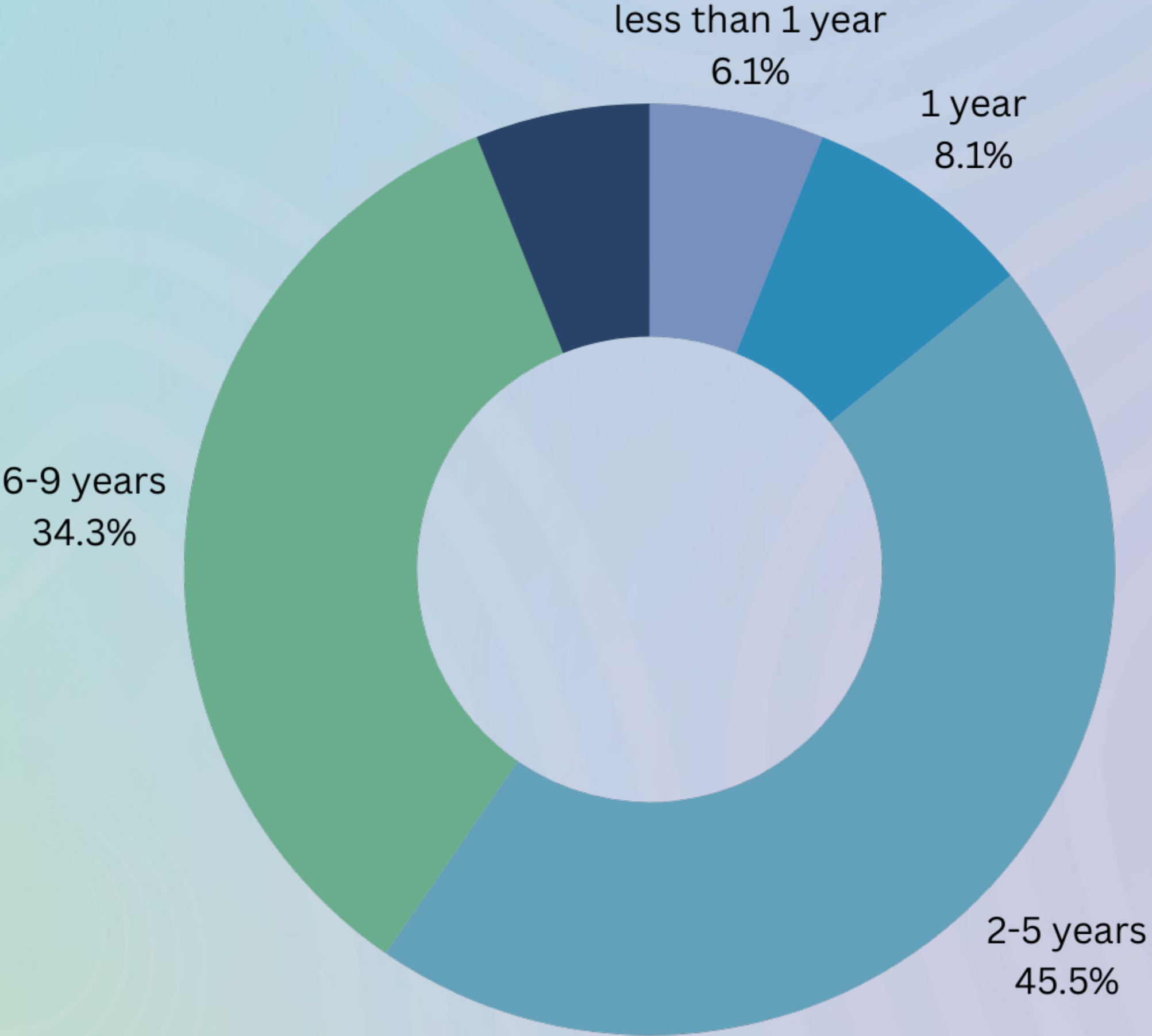
countries of origin



age range of participants



length of time in canada



Overview of the Program Delivery

- It was delivered in Arabic & English
- The program was virtual & delivered on Zoom
- Multi-session program; 10–11 sessions
- Each session was 1.5 hours in length
- Other than the pilot; 3–5 groups would run simultaneously
- Identified key “seasons” to the run the program
- Identified 3 times during the day that worked well for women during the week (*10:30 am to 12 pm; 1 to 2:30 pm and 6 to 7:30 pm*)

Overview of the Curriculum

1. Welcome (*intro to the program, expectations, group values*)
2. Continuum of Relationships & Abuse vs Conflict
3. Introduction to 6 Forms of Abuse (2 sessions)
4. Understanding Impacts of Abuse (Noor's Story)
5. Recognizing helpful vs harmful responses (We're Making It Worse)
6. Reaching out to a loved one you're worried about (Salamah graphic story)
7. Responding to disclosures – the 5 Alif's (2 sessions)
8. Providing peer support
9. Integrated review & discussion

"We're Making It Worse"

Forum Theatre Video



"It can't be that bad. He hasn't even hit her."



لا يمكن أن تكون الأمور سيئة
لهذه الدرجة. فهو حتى لم
يضر بها

My friend Aisha

زارتني صديقتي عائشة مع ابنها أحمد للغداء. و للمرة
الثالثة ألاحظ أن مكياج عائشة يغطي كدمات على
وجهها. أدرك أن زوج عائشة كان عنيفاً في الماضي ،
لكن عندما سألتها إذا كان كل شيء على ما يرام الآن ،
قالت "ليس الأمر بهذا السوء" وغيرت الموضوع



Building the program: our approach & guiding principles

taking a culturally integrative approach

- Moving beyond taking a “universal program” and layering in a cultural adaptation
- Using a critical and anti-oppressive lens
- Recognizing the realities of how imperial & Islamophobic understandings establish “culture” as the problem to correct
- Working with and within culture(s) and the socio-cultural contexts rather than against it or taking culture to task

locating ipv in canada

How many Canadians know someone who experiences abuse?

22%

46%

64%

78%

being mindful of the starting point & tone

- Wanted women to find a place for themselves in the program: starting with women seeing themselves as individuals who offer peer support
- Starting from a place of the role they can play, rather than being talked to as a potential victim/survivor
- Invitational tone: we are here to learn & grow together
- Making clear the “why” of the program

Who do you think women who experience violence are most likely to turn to for help?



Friends and/or family members

Professional organizations

Faith Leaders

برأيك ما هو الأكثر شيوعاً أن تلجأ المرأة
المعنفة أولاً إلى



لأهل والأصدقاء

الأخصائيين والمنظمات

الشيخ أو رجال الدين

having conversations with

- Highly interactive and discussion-based
- Identified that their active participation was desired
- Learning together & from one another
- Integrated a variety of strategies: poll questions, scenarios, videos, graphic story etc.
- Created intentional space for and affirmed the perspectives & experiences of participants
- Through conversations we layered in key points to grow their knowledge

☰ من الصعب التحدث عن قضايا العنف الأسري في مجتمعنا

أوافق

لا أوافق

Agree

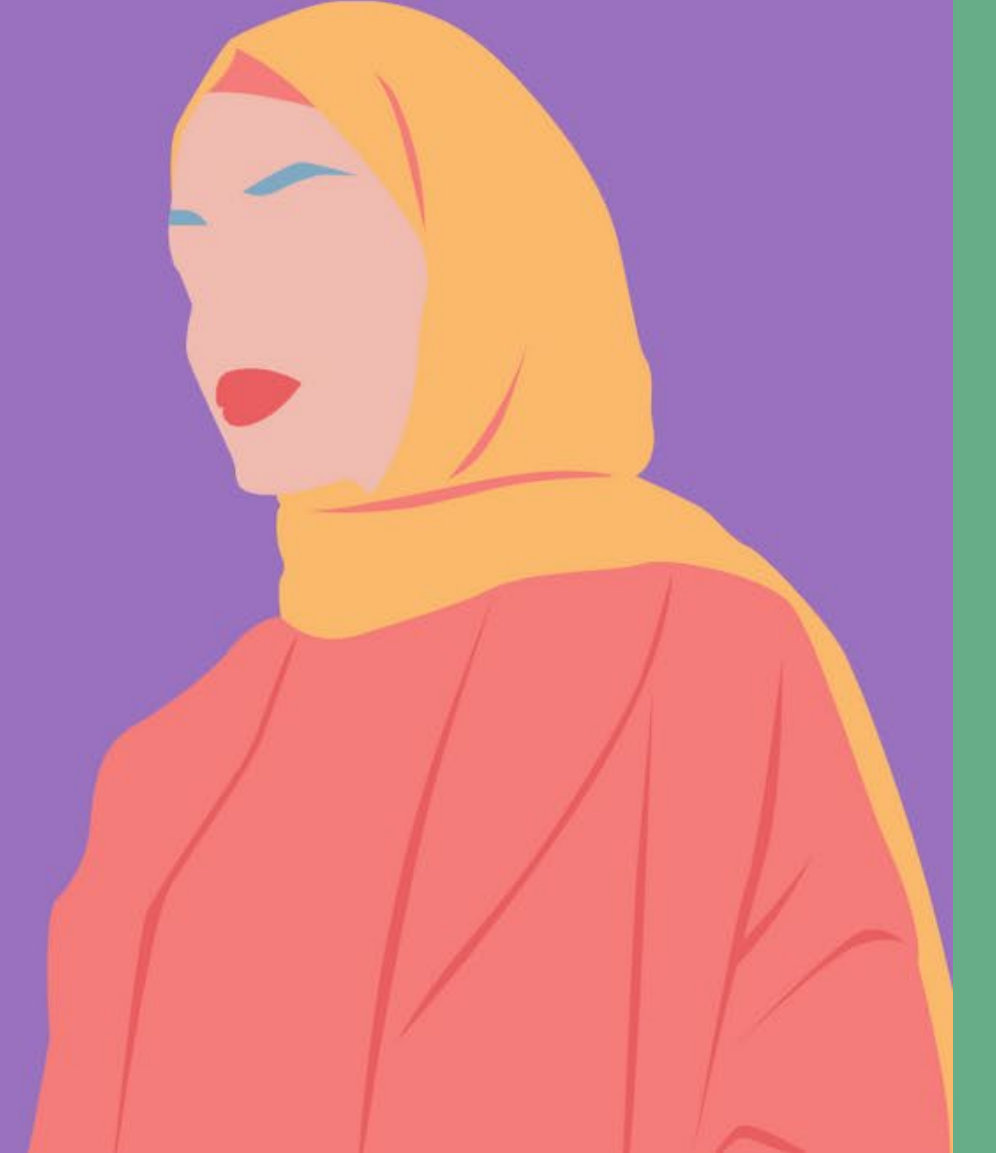
Disagree



Family violence is a difficult issue to talk about in our community

في كل مرة تدعو فيها بشري أختها للغداء، يعاقبها زوجها بعدم التحدث إليها والبقاء صامتاً ليومين.

Every time Bushra invites her sister over for lunch, her husband gives her the silent treatment for 2 days.





1. ليس من شأني ولا يجب أن أتدخل
2. سوف تغضب مني إذا تدخلت
3. سأجعل الأمور أسوء في حال تدخلت
4. لا أعرف ماذا يجب أن أقول أو أن أفعل
5. على الأرجح ليست الأمور سيئة لهذه الدرجة
6. لو كانت تحتاج المساعدة لكانت طلبتها
7. يجب عليها أن تتحدث مع عائلتها وليس معي

ما الأسباب التي تقف وراء خوف سلمى لقول أي شيء؟ ما الذي يمكن أن تفكر به سلمى؟

Why might Salma be afraid to say something to Nada? What might Salma be thinking?



Why might Salma be afraid to say something to Nada? What might Salma be thinking?

1. It's not my business to get involved.
2. She is going to get angry at me if I get involved
3. I'll make things worse if I get involved
4. I don't know what to say or do
5. It's probably not so bad
6. If she wanted help she would ask for it
7. She should be speaking to her family not me
8. I don't want to be responsible for her (coming up with a solution)
9. I don't want to put her in an uncomfortable position
10. I don't want to be held responsible for their divorce
11. I don't have enough information
12. Other



making adaptations along the way

- Adaptations to the curriculum:
 - strengthening the flow of sessions
 - strengthening impacts of the program; adding new content or strengthening content
 - responding to areas of participant interest
- Being responsive to what groups reflect back to us in sessions
- Responding to group needs
 - Slowing down the pace of the curriculum (spending more time on certain areas)

Continuum of Relationships





Creating a safe space for participation & learning

language: a cultural adaptation

- Language is not about translation or interpretation
 - Not a word to word translation
- Thinking about language as a cultural expression and cultural translation
- Integrating language with respect to diverse participant literacy levels
 - Adjusted aspects of the curriculum to ensure everyone was included and could participate

investing in relationships

- Intentionally creating a strong foundation for relationships
 - Responding to needs of each group
 - Responding to the needs of individuals (check-in's)
- Providing participants with different pathways to participate & contribute (chat, if unable to speak)
- Acknowledging & speaking to the impacts of global and local events impacting them, their families, their sense of safety
- Adjusting sessions or group timelines to accommodate religious holiday's or other important dates

“you understand us”

- It's about more than being able to communicate in a shared language
- Involves understanding the multiple socio-cultural contexts participants inhabit and their journeys
 - Understanding & validating fears, concerns & the context of choices
- Creating curriculum content that resonates with their experiences (for example, scenarios)
- Recognizing that how participants can use and act on what they learned in the program is influenced by their social context

يجب عليها التحلي
بالصبر والصلاة أكثر. هذا
اختبار من الله سبحانه
وتعالى.



"She should be patient and
pray more. This is a test from
Allah (swt)."

growing edges

- Facilitated and created a space that invited critical reflection & some discomfort.
- Participants “stretched” their knowledge, awareness and perspectives
 - Growing their awareness of abuse, different forms and tactics of abuse
 - Confronting norms – common ways that IPV is minimized or normalized; common responses that blame victims
 - Reflecting on the impacts of abuse
- Encouraging the group to reflect on impacts of their words & actions while providing support



ECONOMIC ABUSE

Control over a person's finances or access to economic opportunities.



SPIRITUAL ABUSE

Any use or denial of religious texts, beliefs or practices to exercise control/power over a person.



PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

Any non-physical act(s) which aims to diminish a person's sense of identity, dignity or self-worth.



SEXUAL ABUSE

Any forced or unwanted (non-consensual) contact or non-contact act(s) of a sexual nature.



PHYSICAL ABUSE

Any act(s) of physical force or confinement against another person.



VERBAL ABUSE

Any act(s) of yelling at, threatening, insulting, humiliating or denouncing a person.

العنف الاقتصادي العادي

التحكّم والسيطرة على الموارد المالية لشخص ما، ومنعه من التصرف بها



العنف الروحي

أي استخدام أو إنكار لنص أو معتقد أو شعائر دينية بهدف فرض السيطرة والتحكم بشخص ما



العنف النفسي

أي أفعال غير جسدية تهدف إلى الانتقاص من كرامة أو قيمة شخص ما



العنف الجنسي

أي فعل أو اعتداء جنسي غير مرغوب فيه باستخدام القوة أو الإكراه



العنف الجسدي

أي فعل يتضمن استخدام القوة الجسدية ضد شخص ما أو القيام باحتجازه



العنف اللفظي

أي فعل يتخلله صراخ، وتهديد، وإهانة واذلال لشخص ما



Noor's Story



خارج منزلنا، كان زوجي مثلاً للكمال. متطوع في المسجد، يساعد دائماً عائلته، وكان مثلاً للصديق والزميل الرائع

Outside our home, my husband was the image of perfection. Volunteering at the mosque, always helping his family, and an amazing friend and colleague.

we're making it worse: amna & her mother

1. لوم الضحية
2. تطبيع العنف \ جعله مقبولاً
3. الاستخفاف أو التقليل من العنف
4. تبرير العنف
5. التفاوض عن العنف
6. إنكار العنف
7. تقديم أعذار

Wife: Baba wasn't like this. Jamal can be terrifying when he's angry.

Mom: Maybe you're being sensitive. Your marriage is still young and you have time to figure out how to calm him when he's angry.



الزوجة: بابا لم يكن هكذا. عندما يغضب عبدالله يبدو مخيفاً ومرعباً.

الأم: ربما أنت حساسة. لا يزال زواجك حديثاً ولديك الوقت الكافي لمعرفة كيفية تهدئة زوجك عندما يكون غاضباً.

impacts over intentions

أمام جميع أصدقائهم قال زوج ليندا لها " دعيني أجرب أن أقول ذلك مجدداً بكلام أبسط، لعلك تستطيعين فهمه "

In front of their friends, Linda's husband said,
"Let me see if I can put this in simple terms that
even you can understand."



Strengthening skills: Practice & practical tools

The Five Alif's is a culturally integrative and trauma-informed guide or tool.

The Five Alif's are principles of peer support designed to guide community members in supporting women that are experiencing abuse.

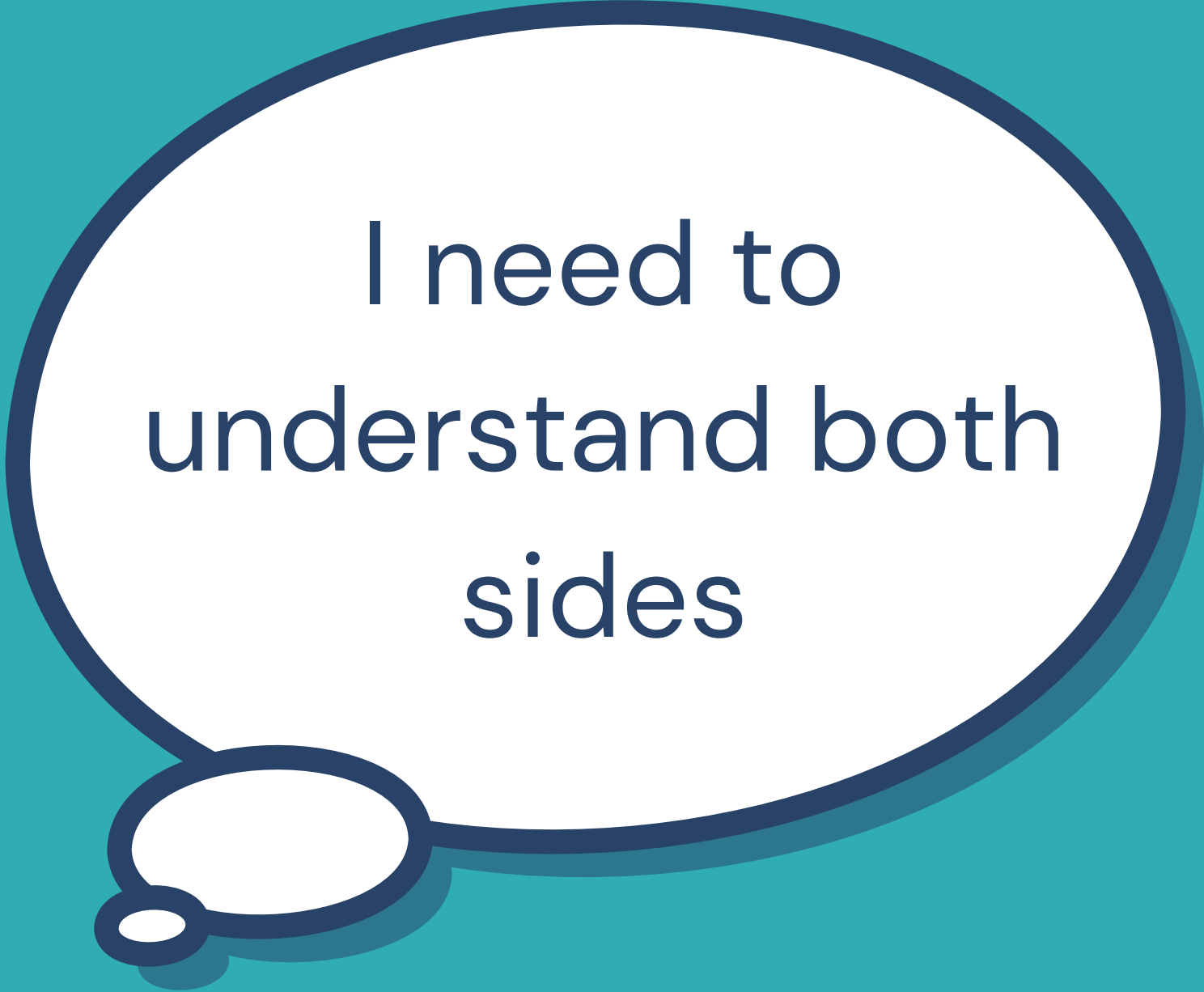
In Arabic, Alif is a letter. The Five Alif's all begin with this letter. Here are the Five Alif's in Arabic and English.




re-framing support & expanding options

- Removing the idea and weight of thinking that to support means “fixing a problem” or “finding solutions”
- Making steps of support tangible by providing a list of key principles and breaking them down
- Showing examples of how the 5 Alif’s might sound or look like

listening & validating

A large white thought bubble with a dark blue outline and a smaller bubble at the bottom left. It contains the text "I need to understand both sides".

I need to
understand both
sides

A large white thought bubble with a dark blue outline and a smaller bubble at the bottom right. It contains the text "I need to have more information in order to support".

I need to have
more information
in order to
support

What would you do?

ماذا ستفعلين لو...؟

اتصلت بك صديقتك، ومن الواضح أنها حزينة
ومتوترة. لأنها خائفة من زوجها.

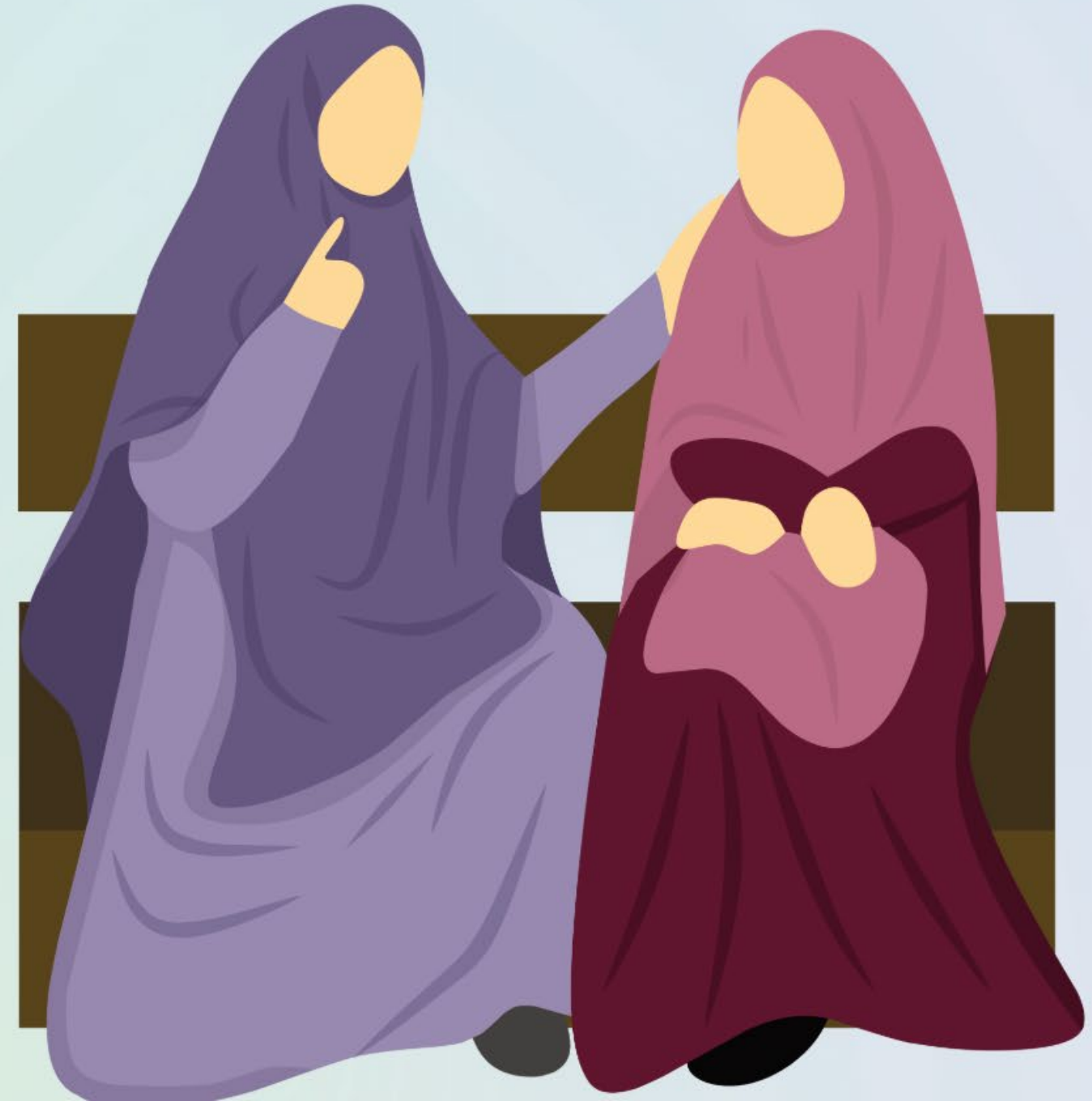
طلبت أن تأتي هي وأطفالها إلى منزلك

استدارت وسألتك: ماذا ستفعلين لو كنت
مكاني؟

She asks if she and her children can come to stay at your house.

مضى أكثر من سنة كاملة وسمية تستمع لأختها وتدعمها. , بدأت تشعر بالضييق والغضب كما أنها أحست بأن أختها ضعيفة. في أحد الأيام، قالت
سمية لأختها:

لقد استمعت إليك ونصحتك، لكنك
لم تستمعي لنصائحي، أتمنى فقط
لو أنك تقومين بشيء واحد على
الأقل



Sumayya has been listening to and supporting her sister for more than a year .Sumaya is frustrated because she feels like her sister is weak. One day, Sumaya tells her, "I've listened and given you my advice. But, you don't take my advice. I wish you would just do something."

BEING THERE:

CHECKING IN ON A LOVED ONE EXPERIENCING ABUSE

A Guide By: *it's on us*



*Remember the goal isn't
necessarily for her to open up
about the abuse to you, but for
her to feel safe.*



centering taking care of self

- Affirming their well-being & safety matters
- Exploring how our capacity for support changes and may be different from others
- Exploring other strategies of support when emotional support becomes to draining

program impacts

Evaluation

- Evaluation surveys for all 21 groups
- Focus Groups with all 21 groups
- 1 Post-Evaluation Survey (75 responses)

**External Evaluation:
Working on a Final Report**



90%

of participants who report they have a **high level of understanding** of what domestic violence/abuse is **as a result of the program**

91%

of participants feel **better prepared to identify** warning signs of abuse

92%

of participants **agree** they feel **better prepared to provide support** to a friend or family member experiencing abuse

78%

of participants **feel confident** in their **ability to support** someone who discloses experiencing abuse to them

I learned how to listen actively, not to judge, blame the victim, and to help and support the victim.

This program gives us names for abuse; if we don't have names we can't recognize it or address it.

The program helped me change my approach from giving advice to offering support.

Honestly while attending the program I was recalling incidents of domestic abuse that happened in the past with family members, friends, and now I can look at these past incidents with different lenses, and I can name what happened as well.

Before coming to the program I expected it would be really like any program that tells people you should address abuse and support victims, without telling them how to do that. What I really value is that we learned what we were encouraged to do and how we can do it correctly.

themes of what changed for participants as a result of attending the program

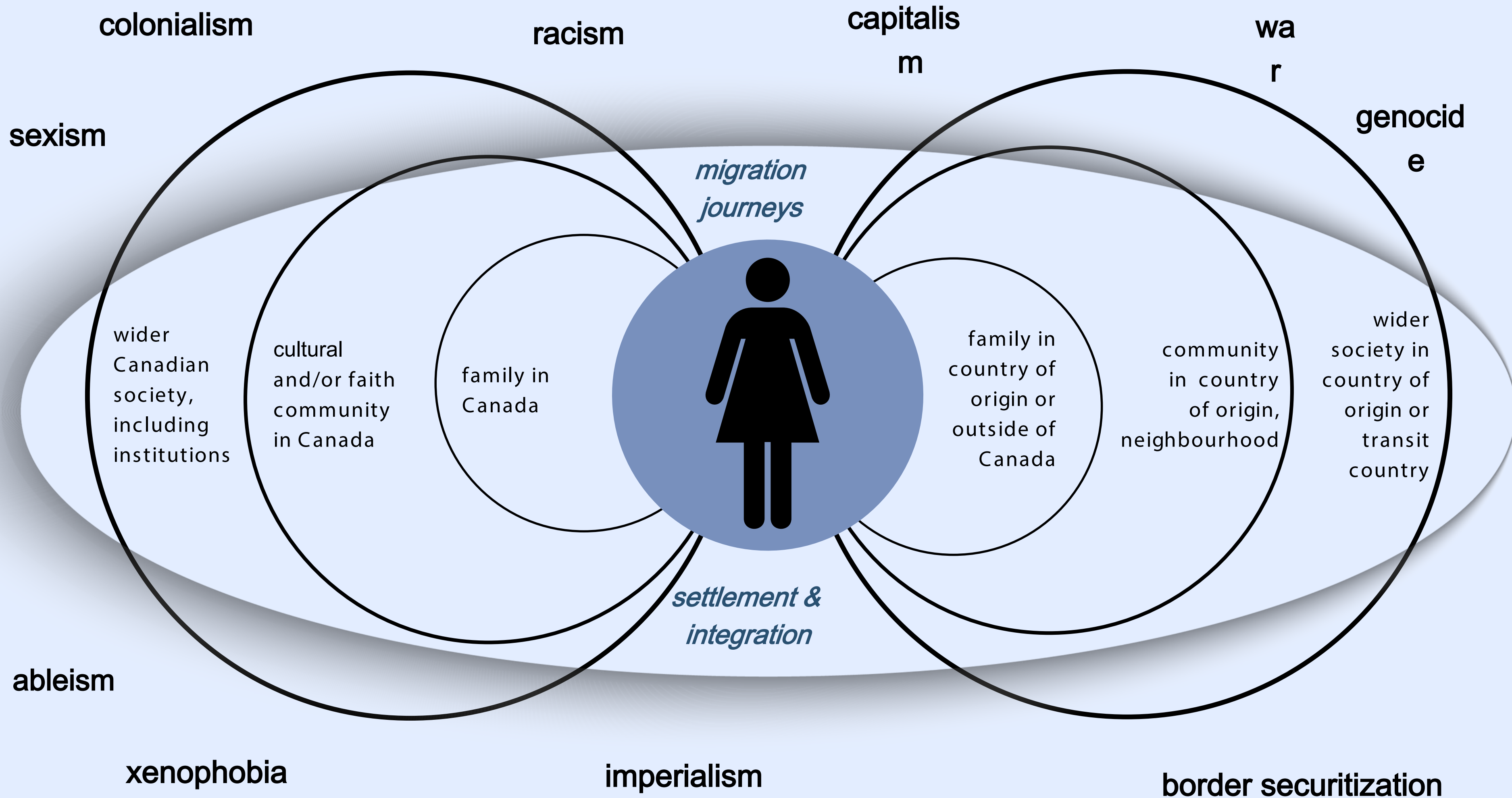
1. Increased knowledge and understanding about abuse, unhealthy relationships, and conflict, and being able to differentiate between them
2. Gaining the ability to now recognize different forms of abuse and distinguish between different types of abuse
3. Participants are changing how they respond to others who may be experiencing or discloses experiences of abuse and being more "careful in expression opinions"
4. Changing beliefs and perspectives about domestic violence and abuse and being able to address misconceptions
5. Feeling more confident and empowered to support victims of abuse

some closing reflections

Women valued
the space
because they felt
valued; their
voice was valued

The program provided
a pathway of support
to women: for women
to disclose, connect
friends to support,
or be supported in
other ways

Women's
engagement &
interest led to
the development
of another
program

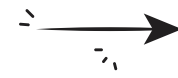




IS IT ECONOMIC ABUSE?



Do you feel stuck or trapped in the relationship?



Are you denied choice or freedom over financial or economic decisions?

Are your finances (pay cheques, credit or debit card) or economic opportunities (education or work) being restricted or controlled?



If you answered yes, then you may be experiencing economic abuse.



We acknowledge that this may be sensitive content to sit with, so we encourage you to go at your own pace.

In a Muslim or collectivist context, the person(s) using abuse within intimate or family relationships could be any of the following: a spouse, siblings, parent(s), in-law(s) or extended family.

DOES YOUR SPOUSE, PARENT(S), SIBLING(S), IN-LAW(S) OR EXTENDED FAMILY:

- Hide or withhold financial information from you while telling you it's not a woman's job to worry about finances?
- Keep track of your spending or force you to show receipts?
- Tell you it's un-Islamic to attend school or work against your father/husband's wishes?
- Force you to call in sick to work or arrive late?
- Force you to hand over child or government benefits issued in your name?

IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ECONOMIC ABUSE, YOU MAY:

- Feel anxious or afraid when you're around the person(s) causing harm
- Startle or scare easily in situations where there is no threat (i.e., if you hear any loud sound).
- Have physical injuries requiring medical attention.
- Experience panic attacks, anxiety or depression, or have trouble sleeping.
- Develop heart problems, digestive issues and high blood pressure.

YOU DESERVE TO LIVE A LIFE FREE OF ECONOMIC ABUSE. SCHOOL, WORK AND MONEY SHOULD BE A PATHWAY TO OPPORTUNITY AND GROWTH.

There are organizations who will listen, with care and confidentiality, when you're ready to talk.

Nisa Helpline:
1-888-315-6472

Muslim Resource Centre
for Social Support &
Integration (MRC), Non
Crisis Intake Line:
519-672-6000

Anova
Crisis and Support Line:
519-642-3000

Financial matters are women's matters. In Surah al-Qur'an 4:6, Allah (swt) assures women that Islam values their financial literacy and independence.

- Nisa'



Is it ABUSE?

A series of 6 culturally informed resources supporting Muslim women and girls to identify their experiences of abuse within intimate partner and family relationships.

These resources help Muslim women & girls identify experiences of abuse, validate impacts of abuse, and provide them with information about supports they can access.

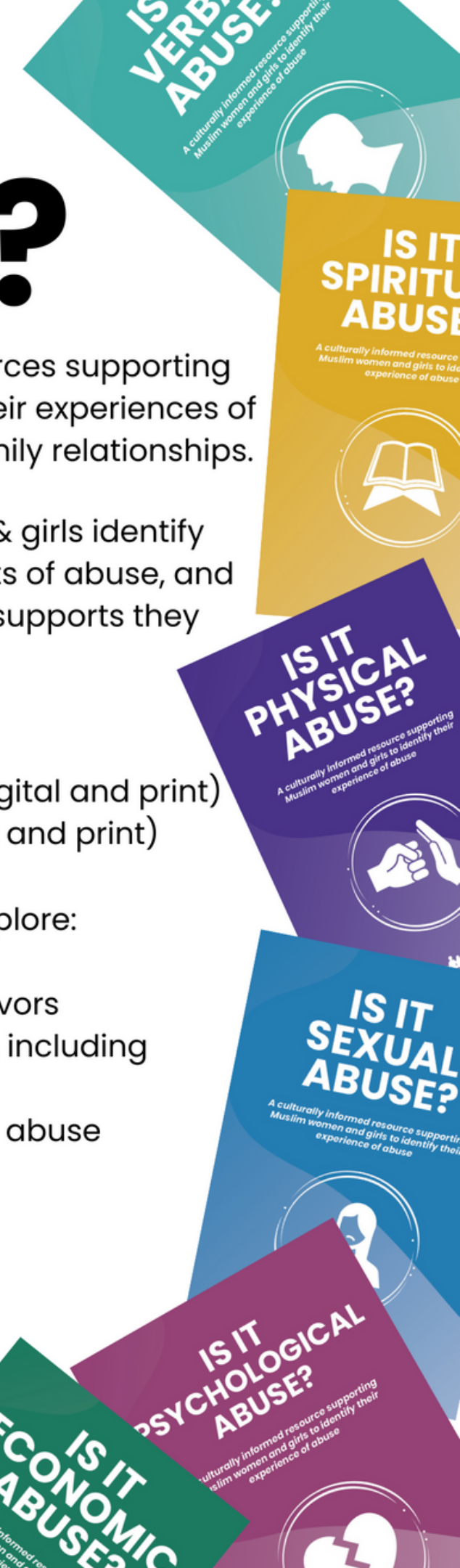
We have created :

- 6 short graphic poster versions (digital and print)
- 6 detailed booklet versions (digital and print)

The content within these resources explore:

- Identifying tactics of abuse
- Naming impacts of abuse on survivors
- Statements of validation and care, including faith-based
- What a healthy relationship free of abuse should look like
- List of supports

COMING SOON!



IS IT VERBAL ABUSE?

A culturally informed resource supporting Muslim women and girls to identify their experience of abuse



This resource helps you to identify experiences of abuse, validate impacts of abuse, and provides information about supports you can access.

We acknowledge this may be sensitive content to sit with, so we encourage you to go at your own pace.

IS IT VERBAL ABUSE?

Are you criticized, insulted or name called?



Do you feel silenced or afraid to speak up?

Are you belittled, humiliated or intimidated in front of family or in public?



If you answered **YES**, then you may be experiencing verbal abuse.



In a Muslim or collectivist context, the person(s) using abuse within intimate or family relationships could be any of the following: a spouse, siblings, parent(s), in-law(s) or extended family.

OFTEN WOMEN MINIMIZE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF VERBAL ABUSE. YET FOR MANY WOMEN THE PAIN OF VERBAL ABUSE IS DEEP AND LONG-LASTING. YOU MAY BEGIN TO CHANGE HOW YOU SEE AND FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF BECAUSE OF THE ABUSE. PLEASE KNOW THERE'S NO TRUTH TO THE ABUSIVE THINGS SAID TO YOU AND ABOUT YOU.



While verbal abuse may not leave physical scars, it is just as damaging as physical, spiritual, economic or any other forms of abuse.

COMMUNICATION IS AT THE HEART OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SHOULD BE USED TO FOSTER CONNECTION AND NOT VIOLENCE. YOU DESERVE TO FEEL RESPECTED WHEN SPOKEN TO, AND SAFE TO EXPRESS YOURSELF.



Sadly verbal abuse is also most often minimized and normalized, though it has devastating and long-lasting impacts.

Naming signs of a healthy relationship can help you recognize the strengths in your relationship and affirm what you're entitled to.



Verbal abuse is harmful. And in fact, Surah Al Hujurat teaches us that insulting, name calling or ridiculing others is forbidden (Quran, 13-49:11), and is contrary to Allah's (swt) love for gentleness and avoidance of violence.

(Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim – no.2593)

coming soon!

SUPPORTING HER RESOURCES SAFETY

3

resources that guide you on supporting
a friend or loved experiencing abuse

**BEING THERE:
CHECKING IN
ON A LOVED ONE
EXPERIENCING ABUSE**

A Guide By: *it's en us.*



**THE 5 ALIFS:
SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE
WHO DISCLOSES ABUSE**

A Guide By: *it's en us.*



**TAKING CARE OF
YOURSELF:
BALANCING CARE AND SELF-CARE
WHILE SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE
EXPERIENCING ABUSE**

A Guide By: *it's en us.*



THE 5 ALIFS:

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WHO DISCLOSES ABUSE

A Guide By: *it's on us*



BELIEVE AND VALIDATE HER آمني واعترفي

Begin from a place of **trusting her and taking the disclosure seriously**. Believing her is the ultimate form of validation. Validation means you **acknowledge her emotions and behaviours** as an understandable response to abuse.

Pro tips:

- ⊗ The vast majority of women don't lie about experiencing abuse. Yet many are met with distrust or disbelief. Not being believed is one of women's gravest concerns when reaching out for support. Questioning her claims because they don't make sense to you or because you want to know more may seem harmless but can reinforce her not feeling believed.
- ⊗ Most forms of abuse (i.e., psychological, verbal, spiritual and economic) don't leave physical scars. This may make it harder to believe what you can't see. Believing her means you trust what she says as sufficient proof.
- ⊗ It's common for survivors to internalize blame for the abuse. This isn't something you want to validate. You can gently reframe when appropriate, without judging her or invalidating her.

While you may want to offer your friend or loved one the world, you owe it to yourself and her to recognize there are limitations to what you can and should do.

ASK HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT HER إسألني

Withhold assumptions about what you think she needs, and recognize she knows what's best for her. Recognizing **she knows what's best for her** is in line with the fundamental principle of respecting her choices.

Pro tips:

- ⊗ Don't ask about details of the abuse. You don't need to know all the details to support her. Ask instead about her safety needs. It can be common for women to not know exactly what they need at that moment. Remind her there's no rush and encourage her to take time to consider her options.
- ⊗ If appropriate, help her articulate her needs by asking clarifying questions such as **"What are you most concerned about now?"** or **"How can I best support you right now?"** Take these concerns seriously.
- ⊗ If she asks for something you're not able or comfortable doing, be honest and let her know that.

AVOID:

Trying to 'fix the problem' for her. This can be especially tempting when she's unsure of what to do.

INSTEAD TRY:

"You don't need to make any decisions right now, but if you're open to it I can help you explore some options for support."

AVOID:

Playing detective and trying to uncover the details of the abuse. It's not your role to be the judge and jury. Your role is to provide her support as she sees fit, and to the best of your ability.

INSTEAD TRY THIS:

"You don't have to tell me anything you're not comfortable with. I'm here to support you."

acknowledgements

Support with groups:

Afnan Almusned

Maya Almasalmeh

Naimat Almasri

Fawziah Almalki

Co-creators of resources:

Najla Kanaan

Afnan Almusned

Zahara Sheikh

Quds Siam (Graphic Designer)

Thank you

Taghreed Al -Soumairy, PhD

Email: talsoumairy@mrcssi.com

Yasmin Hussain

Email: yhussain@lhic.on.ca

QeA