Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence and Mental Health: Perceptions of Racialized Youth Living in British Columbia

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Introduction

Mental health issues continue to be a growing crisis, and are exacerbated in racialized groups. Racialization refers to individuals impacted by discrimination on the basis of ethnic or racial characteristics (1). Those who identify as a racialized individual have been found to behave in less help-seeking behaviour compared to white individuals, which is rooted in institutional and structural racism (2).

Youth are a vulnerable group that continue to be impacted by situational and environmental factors such as development in climate, global unrest, technology, and racial inequality as examples. Research has further confirmed that racial discrimination increases youth experiences of sadness, depression, and suicidal ideation (3).

TFSV is the experience of online sexual violence with physical and psychological effects, with almost 8 to 18% of adolescents and adults experiencing TFSV (4). This is compounded with over 1 in 10 people acting as perpetrators (5). This impacts youth experiences of mental health by worsening depression, anxiety, and self-esteem, and causing social and professional consequences such as withdrawal from school, work, and community life (5).

Objective

The goal of this research is to engage racialized youth in British Columbia (BC) to gather evidence that will inform ways to support youth who experience TFSV and mental health consequences.

Methods

In collaboration with youth representatives, a semi-structured interview guide was created to identify existing sexual and mental health services and programs for racialized youth who experienced TFSV or are aware of someone who experienced TFSV, and obtain youth's perspectives on barriers and facilitators in accessing and utilizing the identified services and programs.

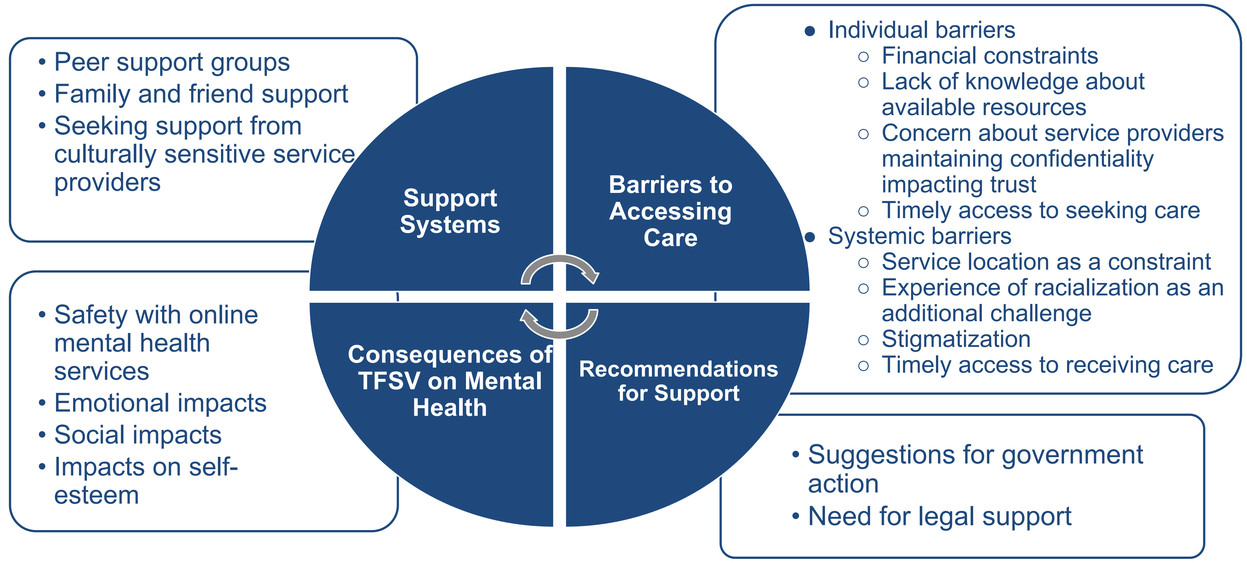
- Participants were recruited through sharing of study posters via social media and community partner organizations in BC.
- 15 virtual semi-structured interviews were conducted with racialized BC youth, aged 15-24 who identify as members of ethnic or visible minority groups.
- Interviews, ranging from 45 - 90 minutes, were conducted. We explored participants' experiences, perspectives, challenges and needs when coping with the TFSV and related mental health impacts.
- Data was analyzed with six-step thematic analysis (6), and then compared comprehensively. The analysis included deductive and inductive approaches to generate themes by summarizing findings within and across transcripts.

Results

The mean age of BC participants is 21.9 years. For gender distribution, 73.3% (n = 11) of 15 participants identify as male and 20% (n = 3) as females, and 6.67% (n = 1) did not answer. 86.7% (n = 13) identify as African and 13.3% (n = 2) as South Asian. 46.7% (n = 7) are Canadian citizens, while 53.3% (n = 8) are permanent residents. Participants indicated country of birth as Canada, India, Nigeria, South Africa, South American, and Uganda, with average living time in Canada at 13.5 years. 60% (n = 9) acknowledged yes to awareness of sexual health resources, 33.3% (n = 5) indicated no awareness, and 6.7% (n = 1) did not answer.

Figure 1

Four main themes were highlighted with semi-structured qualitative interviews, including (1) support systems, (2) barriers to accessing care, (3) consequences of TFSV on mental health, and (4) recommendations for support.



Discussion

- Our findings confirm that racialized youth experience a wide array of mental health consequences and barriers to accessing the necessary care to effectively cope with their experiences (7).
- This study builds on limited literature available around racialized youth experiences with TFSV and the mental health consequences.
- The study's community-based participatory approach which incorporated youth voice representatives in co-developing the study design and interview guide strengthens the study methodology.
- Limitations include low levels of ethnic and gender diversity.

Future Implications

Future studies may consider youth insights in developing more effective resources that can be accessible to youth from racialized communities, and focus on raising TFSV awareness in racialized communities.

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